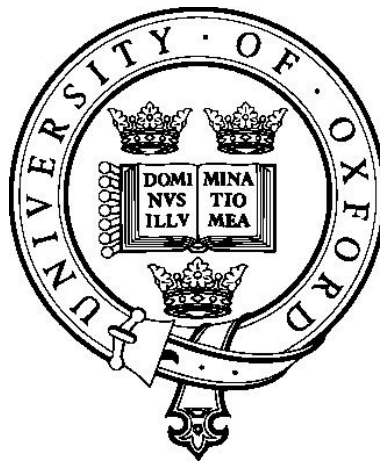


The Russian Opera Libretto as Preached and Practiced in the Nineteenth Century



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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval and Modern Languages
Trinity Term 2021

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Front Matter

Transliteration:

I transliterate Russian words using the British Standard system (BS 2979:1958, as modified in Oxford Slavonic Papers), omitting diacritics and – in the main body of the text – using -y to express -й, -ий, and -ый at the end of personal names, e.g. Andrey, Dargomyzhsky, etc. Where there are well-known examples with established spellings in English such as Tchaikovsky (rather than Chaikovsky), these have been retained in the main text, although strict transliteration is applied in bibliographical entries in the notes.

Archival Sources:

Because the COVID-19 pandemic cancelled a planned six-week trip to Russia in spring 2020, the majority of archival sources in this thesis were consulted virtually, either through established online portals through library catalogues such as those of the Russian National Library or through video calls with archivists. I cite specific physical holdings and conversations with archivists together in the appropriate section of the bibliography.

Translation:

All sources originally in Russian are cited as in the original. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French, Italian or German are by the author.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Philip Bullock, who supervised this thesis, for his many ideas and generosity with his time, and for his support throughout a very difficult final year and writing-up.

My research was also shaped by the knowledgeable input of many other scholars in Slavic Studies and in Music. Marina Frolova-Walker supervised my MPhil dissertation and encouraged the development of my DPhil project. Julie Curtis and Andrei Zorin provided astute commentary on the thesis-in-progress during my Transfer and Confirmation of Status periods. For other valuable advice and assistance, I would like to thank Anna Berman, Emily Frey, Anna Giust, Rutger Helmers, Inna Naroditskaya, and Daniil Zavlunov. Ada Aynbinder deserves particular acknowledgement for her enthusiasm and archival support for the Tchaikovsky chapter, as does Peter Budrin for hunting down manuscript items in Russia for me during the COVID-19 border closures.

I would like particularly to thank my ‘Oxford family’ – Beth MacLean, Paul Fendley, Jemma Fendley, Isabel Fendley and Tushar Mittal, and Neil Fendley. I have no words to express my gratitude for their many kindnesses during my time in the UK and I am proud to be their unofficial sister and daughter. Heartfelt thanks also to the Merton Chapel gang, especially Leah and Jack Collins, for their encouragement as well as many pizza nights and cocktail hours. Mary Anne Clark has been a generous listener, Rachael McCririck an enthusiastic cheerleader, Sasha Rassmussen an honest confidante and kind Parisian hostess, and Audrey Southgate an indefatigable walking companion. A special thank-you to Julia King and Noah Fram for always picking up the phone no matter what the time was in Norway or California. The friendships I am fortunate to have found have kept me going when I otherwise would have given up.

Despite being thousands of miles away for the majority of my DPhil, the loving support of my family has been with me throughout. They have watched an awkward, bookish, and solitary child grow into a slightly less awkward, even more bookish, and improbably sociable adult; they have encouraged my many and varied enthusiasms over the years; and they have always given me the freedom to pursue my dreams, from Arizona to Montreal to Cambridge and Oxford and back again. I owe them everything and more.

May 2021

For Albert Frainier (1920-2015). Thank you for giving me music. Je t'aime toujours.

Short Abstract

This thesis analyses the formal qualities of the nineteenth-century Russian opera libretto and its status as neither a literary nor musical object in order to consider broader questions that can help rethink how to write the history of Russian opera. Such questions include the nature of operatic authorship, collaborative partnerships during the creation of the libretto, the use of Western European models and forms in Russian opera, and the use of anthropological or folkloric sources. I use four specific case studies drawn from across the century, allowing the development of these broader questions to be traced over roughly ninety years of Russian cultural history. Building on existing interdisciplinary scholarship on Russian opera, this thesis seeks to argue that scholars need to look beyond a prevalent ‘page-to-stage’ model of operatic adaptation and explore instead a more multifocal and collaborative approach to the history of Russian opera and its relationship to literature.

In the Introduction I outline my aims and methodology, while also providing an account of the interdisciplinarity of the subject and a brief history of the institution of Russian opera in the nineteenth century. In Chapter One I discuss *Ivan Susanin* (1815) by Aleksandr Shakhovskoy and Catterino Cavos, examining the prevalence of a particularly eighteenth-century model of operatic adaptation and nationalist sensibility in the decades before the rise of Romanticism. Chapter Two explores the institutional barriers against the development of new Russian opera and the continued influence of European formal models through an analysis of Dargomyzhsky’s *Rusalka* (1856). Chapter Three explores Tchaikovsky’s *Charodeika* (1887), adaptation as a composer’s personal reading of a literary text, and the influence of prominent singers on operatic development. Chapter Four positions Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sadko* (1895) as a collaboratively produced work of operatic ethnography, tracing a history of folklore-inflected opera. Throughout, I position each as members of a ‘problematic’ tradition of Russian opera as opposed to the canonical page-to-stage paradigm, discussing how each pushes against a particular assumption about the genre.

Long Abstract

Two discourses have long been prominent in the study of Russian opera. The first is a widespread perception of Russian culture as particularly logocentric, which favours histories of Russian opera featuring a paradigm of page-to-stage translation in which a canonical literary work is adapted for the operatic stage, with the composer functioning as the ‘author’ or ‘translator’ figure. The second is the dominant influence of a nationalist narrative that prioritises particular mid-century works written outside institutional purview as emblematic of Russian opera as a genre, despite ample scholarly evidence of vibrant operatic production in the early nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century. However, a more collaborative and ‘problematic’ paradigm – less conducive to a nationalist analysis and not based on a strict page-to-stage adaptation – has been accorded relatively little academic attention. Few of these ‘problematic’ operas have been granted the status given to canonical page-to-stage adaptations such as Petr Tchaikovsky’s *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78) or Modest Musorgsky’s *Boris Godnuov* (1869 and 1872).

This thesis, therefore, seeks to subject four individual operas from across these periods to the kind of structural analysis that might bring to light the complex connections between the formal features of a particular work and larger debates like the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the arts, the status of composers versus writers, the role of singers in operatic creation, and folk ethnography. I use each opera’s libretto – its textual component – as the field through which such debates entered into the musical world. I argue that the circumstances surrounding the development of each libretto crystallises these debates for a particular point in Russian cultural history, each libretto marking a moment in the development of this second, ‘problematic’ paradigm of Russian opera. None would survive into the regularly

performed repertory of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries despite being written by major composers (Dargomyzhsky, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov) in three out of the four case studies. Their absence from the repertory speaks to the kind of narrative Russian opera sought to tell about itself: a Romantic narrative in which individual composers, moved by the spirit of their people, established a uniquely nationalist form of the genre.

Another consequence of analysing these four works is that they constitute a challenge to the prevalent Romantic narrative of Russian opera, in which page-to-stage operas tend to represent a particularly nationalistic approach. The idea of a ‘problematic’ paradigm as the unifying theme of this thesis emphasises that the nationalist narrative is a reflexive stance promoted by those seeking to distance Russian opera from its European counterparts. By studying works that push against this narrative either by the nature of their source material or the circumstances of their creation, I acknowledge that Russian opera is far more entangled with its continental counterparts than has often been appreciated. Yet I am not primarily concerned with dismantling the nationalist narrative altogether; rather, I am interested in the nineteenth-century Russian opera libretto as a means through which to explore heterogeneous modes of collaboration, far more common to the genre than the linear page-to-stage narratives would suggest.

A specific feature of my approach is the attempt to situate Russian opera libretti within developments taking place simultaneously in Western Europe. In particular, I examine the enduring impact of an eighteenth-century practice that sent aspiring Russian composers to receive education abroad. By the time the institutions of musical education in Russia – the conservatories – were founded in the middle of the nineteenth century, this practice had become less prominent, but its legacy affected the development of works foundational to the page-to-

stage paradigm. My analysis of Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka* (1856) in particular complicates a work that at first glance fits within the page-to-stage/nationalist purview, exploring a long chain of adaptation and interaction that reaches as far back as eighteenth-century Austria, and as far afield as French grand opera of the 1820s and 30s. I argue that works like *Rusalka* were in fact more influenced by Western Europe than even their composers would own to. The erasing of Western influences, therefore, speaks to the anxiety of certain Russian composers and critics to promote the nationalist narrative. By confronting the more complicated histories of supposedly nationalist works head-on, I seek to shed light on the question of operatic authorship, which has implications beyond the Russian sphere.

Needless to say, many scholars have examined various aspects of operatic creation beyond the page-to-stage model that has been predominant in Russian studies, as in the work of Caryl Emerson and Boris Gasparov. Technology, feminist studies, and performance practices are just some of the prisms through which nineteenth-century opera has been viewed within musicology. Richard Taruskin, one of the most prominent musicologists working within the Russian tradition has long advocated for more socioculturally-inclined analyses of Russian opera, and scholars like Emily Frey, Rutger Helmers, and Inna Naroditskaya take a more holistic approach to the genre. Yet broader 'sociocultural' methodologies remain insufficient for the study of the libretto, which poses a unique scholarly problem as a work neither wholly literary nor wholly musical. While separate studies of the libretto exist, these tend to either treat the libretto as a genre alongside other forms of printed literature, or in connection with spoken theatre and stage drama. I position the libretto instead as a literary work written for an expressly musical purpose, and therefore the field in which the diverse inquiries of literary and musical studies meet and interact.

Behind the question of the libretto's status as a quasi-literary, quasi-musical artifact lurks the broader issue of institutionalisation within the context of nineteenth-century Russia. In each chapter, the problem of institutionalisation has a direct impact on the development of the case study at hand. This thesis thus indirectly provides a history of the institution of Russian opera, which is as little-studied as the libretto itself. Further work needs to be done on the impact of the Russian opera institution on the development of the nationalist narrative: as will be seen, the two operas studied here that engage most directly with nationalist debates – *Rusalka* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* (1895) – were written without institutional support. The implication that the dominant nationalist narrative emerged outside of institutions theoretically designed to promote Russian opera provides a tantalising field for future research.

In this thesis, the libretto takes its place within an inclusive critical approach which is informed by traditions within both musicology and literary studies. I treat the question of operatic authorship as evidence of a continued critical engagement in musicology with uncovering the histories of groups underrepresented in the musical canon, and with dismantling Romantic conceptions of composer-as-author. In particular, my Chapter Three examines a case in which a prominent female singer emerges as an active co-creator of the work, whose collaboration with the composer is more egalitarian and mutually influential than the collaboration between composer and librettist. The role of women, and men from outside traditional 'musical' spheres, is a secondary theme of this thesis. My analyses of the networks of influence and support involved in the creation of each of my case studies undercuts the idea of the composer as sole 'author' of an operatic work.

If this thesis seeks to disrupt the composer-as-author narrative by examining collaboration and networks, I also employ a literary-studies discourse exploring the social

structures surrounding opera and how these larger bodies influenced the development of the operatic libretto. I continue a tradition of literary scholarship exploring Russian opera as a cultural force in tandem with printed literature and social practices, answering calls for a ‘sociocultural musicology’ that broadens a discipline which had formerly been concerned more with immanent analysis. Opera studies, as has been amply demonstrated, is particularly useful area to combine the tandem approaches of musical analysis and wider cultural studies, but my work takes this approach further by its focus on the libretto as opposed to the musical score.

The structure of this thesis reflects a movement from works completely outside the canon towards non-canonical works by canonical composers, by which I mean less-performed and under-studied operas by composers such as Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. Though often studied within the page-to-stage / nationalist paradigm, these composers also actively participated within what I identify as the more collaborative, ‘problematic’ paradigm. Chapter One begins with *Ivan Susanin* (1815) and Russian opera before Romanticism, exploring the origins of the composer-librettist debate and the roots of the Russian operatic institution. *Ivan Susanin* emblematises an approach towards Russian operatic nationalism more concerned with giving European conventions a Russian gloss than with promoting an authentically ‘Russian’ genre. A further theme of this chapter is the situation of Russian-language opera in relation to other European genres within the capital of St Petersburg, and the technical capabilities of Russian performers in comparison with their Western counterparts.

Chapter Two continues to examine the impact of the institutional separation of Russian-language opera from other European genres. I explore Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky’s *Rusalka* (1856) within an environment that was indifferent to the development of new Russian works, examining the opera’s libretto not merely as a near-verbatim adaptation of an unfinished text by

Aleksandr Pushkin, but as one in a chain of re-adaptations of the same material linking back to a Viennese original. I analyse how Dargomyzhsky similarly adapted European operatic conventions in *Rusalka*'s score, continuing the theme of proving Russian opera's equal technical capabilities to the West. Chapter Three turns away from questions of nationalism, focusing on the uneasy, hierarchical collaboration between writer and composer in Tchaikovsky's *Charodeika* (1887) in contrast with the more egalitarian and mutually influential collaboration between composer and star soprano Emiliya Pavlovskaya during the course of the same opera's development. Chapter Four expands this question of collaboration in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* (1895), further examining the issue of adaptation within the context of oral folk literature and ethnography and re-invoking the spectre of nationalism within the context of folk operas from earlier in the century.

The emphasis on interconnections and interdisciplinarity throughout this thesis reveals important features both of the operas I study in particular, and of the Russian operatic tradition more broadly that would not be visible if I focused solely on the score, the libretto, or the process of adaptation. My account does examine key scenes from each opera to support the broader questions I address in more typical close-readings of text and score, but this is not my primary goal. Neither does my analysis extend to the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, where nationalist narratives became more prominent in political discourse, and which continue to be important to Russia's self-presentation on the global stage. My Conclusion, which introduces many avenues for further research, draws together some of these themes.

Introduction: How Do You Solve a Problem Like an Opera?

Name a Russian opera. Most opera lovers would name Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78), the most commonly performed Russian opera by the only Russian composer within the top twenty most performed composers worldwide.¹ Others might cite Tchaikovsky's *Pikovaya dama* (1890) or Modest Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (1869 and 1872).² Besides the frequency of performance, these three works share something else in common: they were composed to libretti written or closely monitored and controlled by their composers.³ Furthermore, all three of these operas were adapted from literary works by Aleksandr Pushkin, the protean writer and dramaturgist considered by many to be the father of Russian literature. Even a well-versed opera lover might find it difficult to think of a Russian opera that does not follow this model of composer-centred, Pushkin-adapted opera unless she were to move into the

¹ Between 2004 and 2019, *Onegin* received 3501 performances worldwide, making it the sixteenth most commonly performed opera in the world. Tchaikovsky ranks as the ninth most commonly performed composer, behind Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Richard Wagner, and Giacomo Puccini, but ahead of Georg Friedrich Handel and Benjamin Britten. Statistics taken from <https://www.operabase.com/statistics/en> (accessed 26 November 2020). Though a useful guideline, OperaBase statistics are not comprehensive.

² *Pikovaya dama* received 1394 performances worldwide between 2004 and 2019, meaning that it was just within the top fifty most commonly performed operas in the world. In the same period, *Boris Godunov* received 1066 performances (presumably counting both complete versions, or the various hybrid editions that have been proposed), placing it fifty-third on the same list. Statistics taken from <https://www.operabase.com/statistics/en> (accessed 26 November 2020).

³ In the case of *Pikovaya dama*, Tchaikovsky's brother Modest is the accredited librettist, but analysis of their correspondence shows that Pyotr was closely involved in the process and authored texts for several key scenes in the opera.

twentieth century and name a work by Dmitry Shostakovich or Sergey Prokofiev, the most commonly performed Russian operatic composers of that era.⁴ Yet in general, the nineteenth century's influence seems too strong to overcome, and thus the three Pushkin adaptations retain their grip on the minds of the opera-going public.

If audiences tend to fixate on this 'Sacred Triad' of Russian operas, scholars have also perpetuated a critical approach to the Russian opera canon which is in keeping with the wider issues raised by the three: namely, operatic adaptations of canonical works of literature and composers who write their own libretti. Outside of the popular works, operas such as Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky's *Kamennyi gost'* (1872), based on a play of the same name by Aleksandr Pushkin, have received significant scholarly attention, both for its influence on the group of Russian musical nationalists later known as the *moguchaya kuchka* and because it set the full text of the Pushkin play verbatim. But the simple fact remains that the model of page-to-stage, verbatim adaptation is not representative of how the majority of operas in Russian were written. Relatively little attention has been paid to works whose creative genesis followed a more collaborative process. This may be in part because such works generally exist on the fringes of both the performed and scholarly canon: while there are studies of Tchaikovsky and Musorgsky, for example, that deal with the full range of their operatic works, works by non-canonical composers receive relatively little attention.

More precisely, works that do not fit the paradigm of 'canonical literary work adapted into canonical opera' receive relatively little attention, regardless of whether a canonical composer

⁴ All three sit comfortably within the top hundred most commonly performed composers between 2004 and 2019, though surprisingly Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov is ranked higher than all three, and indeed higher than Musorgsky. Statistics taken from <https://www.operabase.com/statistics/en> (accessed 26 November 2020).

wrote them. Musorgsky's unfinished *Khovanshchina* (1886) is considered problematic not only because it had to be orchestrated after the composer's death, but also because its plot and libretto were formed through an assemblage of historical and entirely invented characters and scenes that Musorgsky developed in close collaboration with Vladimir Stasov.⁵ While its unfinished nature means there is no authoritative version of the opera, its plot – highly nationalistic (it is referred to as a народная музыкальная драма), historical in nature, and dealing with the fundamental question of whether Peter I's European reforms were the best or worst thing to ever happen to Russia – would seem to categorise the opera alongside *Boris Godunov*, yet it is rarely performed and less thoroughly studied. Similarly, Musorgsky's *kuchkist* comrade Aleksandr Borodin's (1833-1887) *Knyaz' Igor'* (1890) was also left unfinished at the composer's death and its libretto similarly made use of non-traditional sources, in this case, twelfth-century epic poetry and two Kievan chronicles. Both of these operas, which are otherwise situated under the banner of musical nationalism, represent a second tradition working against the dominant *Boris Godunov* – *Onegin* – *Pikovaya dama* paradigm: a tradition of 'problematic' works that are either more collaborative in nature or not based on standard, printed literature.

Thus while there is scholarly literature dealing with individual operas from this 'problematic' tradition, it has not been systematically surveyed as a mode of operatic creation. The idea of a

⁵ The extent of Stasov's influence on Musorgsky is contested, but he was undoubtedly a major collaborator on *Khovanshchina*. See Richard Taruskin, 'The Power of the Black Earth: Notes on *Khovanshchina*', *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 313-28. See also Boris Asaf'yev, 'V rabote nad "Khovanshchinoy"', in *Izbrannye trudy*, ed. Tamara Livanova et al., 5 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1952-57), III (1954), pp. 160-67; Abram Gozenpud, 'V bor'be za nasledie Musorgskogo', *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, 3/207 (1956), 88-93; and A. Vul'fson, 'K problemam tekstologii', *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, 3/508 (1981), 103-10.

canonical Russian opera having some kind of page-to-stage adaptation component is difficult to shake. Yet canonicity is not the only issue at stake in identifying and tracing the history of the ‘problematic’ tradition of Russian opera: there is also the matter of disciplinary boundaries.

While Russian opera as a field is populated by a relatively diverse body of academics working across both historical musicology and literary studies, their scholarly approaches have remained fairly entrenched. Until very recently, studies of Russian music and opera have rarely crossed disciplinary boundaries, and none as yet have focused on an aspect of operatic production that neatly sits at the very border of the literary and musical fields and which lies at the heart of the ‘canonical’ / ‘problematic’ paradox – the libretto.

This thesis will use the nineteenth-century Russian opera libretto as the means through which to explore the heterogeneous modes of collaboration and support involved in operatic creation: a mode that for the majority of nineteenth-century composers was the de facto way of writing an opera, not the linear page-to-stage narrative that has received the most scholarly attention. In the four works I study – *Ivan Susanin* (1815), *Rusalka* (1856), *Charodeika* (1887), and *Sadko* (1895) – the status of the libretto and the processes of its production are rich and fascinating and open up an approach to the study of Russian opera which challenges the dominant figure of the composer. By rejecting the assumption of composer-as-author, my work sheds a new interpretive light on the hoariest of Russian operatic myths. Even *Zhizn’ za tsarya* (1836) and *Ruslan i Lyudmila* (1842), the two operas by Mikhail Glinka canonically considered the ‘birth pangs of Russian opera’,⁶ take on new significance when considered from the complex and multifaceted evolution of their libretti, which involved multiple contributors and collaborators.

⁶ Richard Taruskin, ‘Glinka’s Ambitious Legacy and the Birth Pangs of Russian Opera’, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 1/2 (1977), 142-62.

Central Questions and Institutions

What can the status of the libretto tell us about the relationship between word and music in nineteenth-century Russia? How does the libretto mediate between the literary and musical spheres, and between other aspects of cultural life? What does control over the libretto tell us about authorship of an operatic work, if indeed there is such a thing as ‘the author’? These are the central questions of this thesis. In answering them, I set opera in dialogue with aspects of Russian literary and cultural history, envisioning opera not as a purely musical pursuit but as a meeting point between wider socio-cultural, literary, musical, and, in some cases, political or ethnographic debates. Each of the case studies I have chosen interact with these broader debates in different ways. Some, like *Ivan Susanin* and *Charodeika* are representative of a particular type of opera more generally, and I examine these with regard to where and how they push against a set of norms, particularly as regards the question of authorship. They engage less with the question of Russian opera *qua* ‘Russianness’ than with a set of generic values and standards of operatic production. Others, like *Rusalka* and *Sadko*, represent the nature of the idea of ‘Russian opera’ in itself, and I examine these with regard to interrogating (and in the case of *Rusalka*, dismantling) the structures of nationalism that support a claim of inherent and essential operatic Russianness. Such operas engage deeply with the question of Russian culture’s relationship to the West, yet respond to the call for a particularly Russian form of opera in very different ways to the well-studied musical nationalists from the middle of the century.

All of these questions are grounded in analysis of each opera’s libretto: not simply the finished words on the page, but in the circumstances and collaborations involved in each libretto’s production. My focus on the libretto is not merely one of convenience, however, but takes an interpretive stance towards an often-overlooked element of operatic production. The

operatic libretto is very rarely an object of study in and of itself,⁷ though textual analysis does have its place within an operatic musicologist's toolkit. It is often seen on the musicological side as too *literary* an artifact to be worthy of independent investigation. Yet on the literary side, the libretto is often seen as too *musical*: as a literary artifact stripped of its musical context, the libretto can be dismissed easily as a work of bad poetry, and indeed, to read the text of a libretto as a piece of poetry can be an excruciating task.⁸ I argue that the libretto needs to be considered

⁷ See Patrick Smith, *The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1977); Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, *Reading Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Sabine Lichtenstein (ed.), *Music's Obedient Daughter: The Opera Libretto from Source to Score* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2009). Studies less focused on the libretto itself, but on the nature of operatic drama include the now-classic Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), and Peter Kivy's response *Ossin's Rage: Philosophical Reflections on Opera, Drama, and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). These studies either (in the case of Smith, Groos/Parker, and Lichtenstein) treat the libretto as a literary object and a genre worthy of separate consideration with regard to printed literature, or (in the case of Kerman and Kivy), explore the relationship of opera as a genre connected with spoken theatre or other forms of staged drama. For the purposes of this thesis, I borrow more heavily from this first model, but instead of considering the libretto as a separate genre of literature I theorise it as the meeting point around which opera's multimedia dialogue is situated (that is to say, written text versus sung text, adaptation and collaboration, stage drama, and larger sociocultural debates that enter the operatic stage through the medium of the libretto).

⁸ To use a famous example from the Russian repertoire, writer Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) was horrified by the libretto for Tchaikovsky's *Evgeny Onegin*. In a letter to Lev Tolstoy, Turgenev pointed out how several of Pushkin's verses describing the main characters were 'put into the mouths of the characters themselves' – a common practice in page-to-stage adaptation, but clearly not to Turgenev's taste. See I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 28 vols (Moscow: Akademii nauk SSSR, 1961-68), 12/1 (1966-7), pp. 383-4. Vladimir Nabokov was another *Onegin* sceptic, denigrating 'ordinary Russian bourgeois [...] the type that admired Pushkin on the strength of Tchaikovski's vile librettos' in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*. See Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: a*

as both a literary and a musical work, by which I mean that the libretto is a *literary object* written for the express purpose of a *musical expression*. It is the clearest field in which the diverse strands of inquiry within the separate disciplines of musicology and literary studies collide, and as such is the ideal area for these two disciplines to interact.

The status of the libretto is the main paradox this thesis attempts to address, but a larger question lurks behind and unites my individual case studies – the question of the institution of opera within nineteenth-century Russia. Many of the issues thrown up by the study of each individual libretto have to do with the status of Russian opera within Russia itself at a particular point in the century. Indeed, behind the debates each libretto addresses with regard to Russian musical nationalism lurks the issue of institutionalisation, and the two operas that engage most directly with nationalist debates – *Rusalka* and *Sadko* – were also written outside of and unsupported by the institutional structures that directly benefitted *Ivan Susanin* and *Charodeika*. Thus, this thesis also indirectly is a history of the Russian operatic institution, which in the nineteenth century was made up of the all-powerful Imperial Theatres Directorate and its two locations in the twin cultural capitals: St Petersburg and Moscow. Because the Directorate is so important to this thesis and is as little-studied as the libretto, I will now provide a brief history of the institution below in order to fully contextualise the following four case studies.⁹

memoir (London: Gollancz, 1951), pp. 192-3. Nabokov made similar comments about Tchaikovsky's adaptation in the commentaries to his idiosyncratic word-by-word translation of Pushkin's novel-in-verse. See Vladimir Nabokov, trans. *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse*, 4 vols (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964), pp. 2-3.

⁹ The most comprehensive work on the history and activities of the Directorate in the nineteenth century is Baron Nikolay Drizen's *Stopyatidesyatiletie imperatorskikh teatrov* (St Petersburg: Direktsiya imperatorskikh teatrov, 1906), which was commissioned and published by the Directorate at the turn of the twentieth century. As such, it is of course not the most impartial source towards its subject, but it remains the only full-length study of the

The Imperial Theatres Directorate: Shaping Russian Opera from the Administrative Desk

While some form of state-sponsored theatre had existed in Russia since the seventeenth century,¹⁰ the Imperial Theatre in St Petersburg was formally founded by imperial *ukaz* in August 1756, under which several pre-existing performance troupes were consolidated into a single state-controlled apparatus under the direction of playwright Aleksandr Sumarokov.¹¹ A decade later, under Catherine II, the Directorate was founded as an administrative body to organise and manage the theatrical establishment, which now included troupes for French theatre, Italian opera and chamber music, ballroom music, ballet, and Russian theatre. The Directorate was also to administer the education and pension system for the artists and artisans employed by the theatres, and to manage public performances by the troupes. A parallel administrative system was established in Moscow in 1806, operating under similar conditions to its Petersburg counterpart.

Notably, while the Directorate of 1766 did include a troupe for performances of Russian works, its primary concern involved performances of Western European works. The French and

Directorate to my knowledge in Russian or English. Murray Frame's scholarship engages frequently with the question of institutions, and his two excellent volumes, *School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) and *The St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres: Stage and State in Revolutionary Russia, 1905-1917* (London: McFarland, 2000) are the first port of call in English for questions of the Russian stage institutions.

¹⁰ For an excellent study of theatrical culture before the eighteenth century, see Claudia Rae Jensen, *Musical Cultures in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

¹¹ 'Imperatorskie teatry', in P. A. Markov (ed.) *Teatral'naya entsiklopediya*, 5 vols (Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1961-7), II (1963), pp. 867-69.

Italian troupes, and much of the ballet troupe, were formed by European artists who had been invited by the imperial state to take up residency in St Petersburg. Great emphasis was placed on training Russian performers to European standards,¹² and the Directorate was also responsible for artistic exchange systems through which Russian composers, particularly, would study for a time in Germany or Italy.¹³ But for the most part, European imports were the bread-and-butter work of the Imperial Theatres during the first several decades of its existence. It was only around the turn of the nineteenth century that actively participating in theatrical life (as opposed to the dilettante dabbling here and there by well-educated aristocrats) began to be seen as an acceptable pursuit for the highborn Russian gentleman. As I will illustrate in Chapter One, these pioneering Russian *teatraly*, as they were known, worked alongside their European counterparts to lay the foundation for what would eventually become known as a particularly Russian model of opera, though the nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century would have been a foreign concept to them.

The idea of ‘Russian theatre’ as something distinct from its European counterparts was baked into the Imperial Theatres’ mandate from its very establishment, which kept troupes separated by national origin. However, it cannot be overstated that up until roughly the 1830s, ‘Russian’ was

¹² See Richard Stites, *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts in Imperial Russia: The Pleasure and the Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), for an excellent study of the aristocrats and gentry who sought to establish provincial theatres and train their serfs to perform on their stages. While Stites focuses on the last decades of serfdom, the training systems described in this volume had been established in the late eighteenth century by the Imperial Theatres Directorate, and the majority of Russian performers up until the establishment of the conservatories were either serfs or descended from serfs.

¹³ Among the earliest Russian-born composers who benefitted from the Directorate’s exchange systems are Dmitry Bortnyansky (1751-1825), Evstigney Fomin (1761-1800), and Vasily Pashkevich (1742-1797).

simply a designation of language rather than of a unique, nationalist musical style or theatrical genre. Indeed, the Directorate could be said to have actively discouraged the development of a Russian operatic corpus. Operas such as Glinka's pioneering *Zhizn' za tsarya* (1836), the starting point for most contemporary histories of Russian musical nationalism, were performed by the Imperial Theatres only because an insider – in Glinka's case, Venice-born Kapellmeister Catterino Cavos – approved and promoted the new work.¹⁴ But these were outliers, and as I will explore in Chapter Two, by the 1840s and 1850s the Directorate was distinctly hostile towards new Russian opera. It could be argued that part of the impetus for the Russian musical nationalist movement was this lack of administrative support for homegrown works, and as I will posit in my analysis of Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka* (1856), the burgeoning *kuchka* wanted to prove that Russian-born composers and performers were as technically capable as their institutionally-supported European counterparts. Yet the Directorate controlled a monopoly over public theatre in Russia from 1827 until 1882,¹⁵ and the musical nationalists had to find private support for their endeavours.

If the Directorate itself was not interested in promoting new Russian opera, the singers of the Directorate were. Russian-born singers had been critical allies in the development of Russian

¹⁴ Cavos, as I will explore in Chapter 1, was surprisingly magnanimous towards Glinka's work, which was based on the same historical material used for Cavos's highly successful collaboration with *teatral* Aleksandr Shakhovskoy from 1815. Before Glinka, Cavos and Shakhovskoy's *Ivan Susanin* had been one of the most-cited titles as the 'first truly Russian opera', and Glinka indeed chose to title his opera *Zhizn' za tsarya* to avoid overt comparisons with its predecessor.

¹⁵ 'Imperatorskie teatry', p. 868. The 'New Rules for Management of the Imperial Theatres' were published in 1882, following a report on theatrical reforms developed by an internal commission including theatrical luminaries like Aleksandr Ostrovsky and Eduard Nápravník.

opera from the very beginning, but their status as official employees of the Directorate (a status composers did not enjoy) gave them particular powers to keep the genre alive during the fallow period of the mid-century. By the time the Directorate's monopoly was abolished, a new generation of performers had benefitted from an established Russian conservatory system, and had caught up with their European counterparts in terms of technical skills. These singers wielded incredible influence within the Directorate even after the abolition of the monopoly, and composers knew that having the name of a top-tier Directorate singer attached to their project guaranteed its acceptance for performance. As I will explore in Chapter Three, these singers in many ways operated as co-authors of new operatic works and were solicited assiduously by composers for their input and support.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Directorate did not control the same influence over Russian opera as it had in earlier decades and other companies, most notably Savva Mamontov's Private Opera in Moscow, had made it their particular business to promote new Russian operas and perform a now-established repertory.¹⁶ These 'Moscow Medici' were part of a larger cultural wave in the latter half of the nineteenth century that sought to re-evaluate pre-Petrine (that is, non-European-inflected) Russian culture, political structures, and religious beliefs. The Russian musical nationalists, who had previously struggled to find performance venues and some of whom had already passed away, slotted in perfectly with this larger movement. Thanks to the continued critical promotion of their work by influential writers like Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906), nationalism in opera became particularly important in these final

¹⁶ See Olga Hadley, *Mamontov's Private Opera: The Search for Modernism in Russian Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) for a history of the company and its influence on Russian modernism, including serving as the model for Sergey Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

decades of the nineteenth century, even after the death of leading members of the *kuchka* such as Musorgsky and Borodin. Yet the model of ‘Russianness’ in music was once again beginning to change. As I will explore in Chapter Four, tendencies and trends from the early decades of the century were revived in the work of composers like Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, and presaged the innovations of turn-of-the-century composers like Igor’ Stravinsky (a former student of Rimsky-Korsakov’s). These works were written for and performed by private companies like Mamontov’s – the final blow to the Directorate’s authority over opera in Russia.

Because it held a monopoly over Russian theatrical life for so long, and because it enjoyed imperial favour for seventy years before the granting of the monopoly, the Imperial Theatres Directorate is the most important institution in the history of Russian opera. In the nineteenth century, Russian operas were defined by the support they received or did not receive from the Directorate. The continued prioritisation of a Russian operatic canon taken for the most part from the nationalist movement ignores the fact that this movement existed entirely outside the purview of the operatic institutions of their time.¹⁷ If the main focus of this thesis is the operatic libretto, its secondary concern is to address the neglected impact of institutions on the development of Russian opera. My case studies divide in alternating pairs: *Ivan Susanin* (Chapter One) and *Charodeika* (Chapter Three) were supported, promoted, and performed by the Imperial Theatres; whereas *Rusalka* (Chapter Two) and *Sadko* (Chapter Four) were not. It is perhaps not strange

¹⁷ Even non-*kuchkist* canonical operas like Pyotr Tchaikovsky’s *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78) were not created under the Directorate’s purview. *Onegin* was originally written for and performed by students of the Moscow Conservatory at the Maly Theatre. It did not receive a performance under Imperial Theatres management until 1881, when it premiered at the Bol’shoi in Moscow. Following further amateur performances, it finally received its premiere at St Petersburg’s Mariinsky Theatre in 1884.

that the pair unsupported by the Directorate could be put under the umbrella of ‘nationalist opera’ as understood by modern critics. Yet I do not intend this thesis to redefine Russian musical nationalism; rather, I aim to broaden the understanding of how this definition of musical Russianness came to be, and reveal unexplored connections with less-nationalist or even Western counterparts.¹⁸ This process is, I maintain, most profitably achieved using the libretto as its point of departure, while understanding that institutional structures lent a great deal of influence over how these libretti were developed.¹⁹

Disciplinary Divisions in Russian Opera Studies

My interests in the Russian operatic libretto and in the institution of opera in the nineteenth century for the purposes of this thesis bring a new focus to a field of study that is already highly interdisciplinary. The presence of so many literary scholars in Russian opera as a field is distinctive and highly productive, and while they are frequently interested in the libretto, it is

¹⁸ In this task, I follow a model set by Rutger Helmers’ excellent *Not Russian Enough? Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), which surveys precisely this question of ‘Europeanness’ in Russian opera.

¹⁹ While beyond the scope of this thesis, censorship had a significant impact on the development of opera libretti, since all new operas produced by the Imperial Theatres Directorate had to pass the censors before being accepted for performance. For instance, *Boris Godunov* was rejected by the Imperial Theatres selection committee in February 1871, preventing its performance until Musorgsky could revise the opera (the original, censored version would not be performed until 1928). Tchaikovsky’s *Orleanskaya deva* (1881) similarly went through several passes with the censors following a premiere at conductor Eduard Nápravník’s benefit performance. The impact of the Directorate censors on Russian operatic development would be a stimulating topic for further research, especially in comparison with literary censorship.

usually from the perspective of adaptation. Literary scholars have also provided critical context around the social structures of opera, as I will demonstrate in the following. My interest in this thesis is to combine these two threads: using the libretto as an object through which to examine how larger social structures and movements influenced its genesis, and this study has benefitted from literary scholars who examine Russian opera as a cultural force in context with printed literature, theatrical practice, and social institutions.

Caryl Emerson is the Russian literary-operatic scholar *par excellence*, and I cite her work throughout this thesis. Her careful mapping of confluent literary, musical, historical, and political trends that informed three cultural artifacts – including an opera – in *Boris Godunov: Transpositions on a Russian Theme* (1986) marked the arrival of Slavists within a more traditionally musicological area.²⁰ Emerson has since worked productively alongside musicologists and continued to publish work examining the broader literary and cultural contexts in which opera participated.²¹ Similarly, Boris Gasparov's *Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture* (2005) situates each of his titular case studies as a snapshot of a particular moment in Russian history 'add[ing] up to a coherent story of ideological and aesthetic trends as they evolved over more than a century'.²² Gasparov's structure in this volume, in which individual works act as the meeting point for broader sociocultural trends, is the main inspiration

²⁰ Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions on a Russian Theme* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

²¹ See Caryl Emerson and Robert William Oldani, *Modest Mussorgsky and Boris Godunov: Myths, Realities, Reconsiderations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²² Boris Gasparov, *Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. xxii.

for the structure of this thesis, as is his methodological stance in examining works of music from a wider literary-cultural studies perspective.

Other Slavists interpret opera even more broadly, examining literature and culture not within their operatic contexts but opera within its literary and cultural contexts. Julie Buckler's *The Literary Lorgnette: Attending Opera in Imperial Russia* (2000) is the best example of this type of study, examining the parallel Golden Ages of Russian prose literature and Russian opera and arguing that both literature and opera provided a cultural theatre in which social identity could be constructed, performed, and contested.²³ More recently, Luba Golburt's *The First Epoch: The Eighteenth Century and the Russian Cultural Imagination* (2014) discusses opera and theatre as part of a larger project repositioning the long eighteenth century's impact on Russian cultural life well into the nineteenth and even the twentieth centuries, 'a century that was continually being resurrected in order to be pronounced dead'.²⁴ My Chapter One focuses some of Golburt's arguments more narrowly on Russian musical theatre in the early nineteenth century, examining particularly how the rejection of eighteenth-century aesthetics in the 1830s affected the canonisation of early nineteenth-century opera.

Exploring Russian opera before the era of Romanticism is particularly tricky, because the generic boundaries that differentiated opera from spoken theatre were far more porous in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Simon Karlinsky's *Russian Drama from Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (1985) positions opera and musical theatre of this period within theatre history

²³ Julie Buckler, *The Literary Lorgnette: Attending Opera in Imperial Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

²⁴ Luba Golburt, *The First Epoch: The Eighteenth Century and the Russian Cultural Imagination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), p. 5.

more broadly, exploring how many of the writers of this period worked within both spoken and sung drama and how the theatrical stage was also a stage for playing out new national and political identities.²⁵ Catherine Schuler takes up this theme in *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia* (2009), discussing how by the reign of Alexander I (1801-1825) ‘theatre not only entered into a conversation about identity that had already begun among Russian literati but also began to play an active role in bringing Russians back to Russia’.²⁶ While Schuler does not turn her analytical lens to the genre we would call ‘opera’ today, her examination of theatrical life in the early decades of the nineteenth century has particularly strong implications for the development of Russian opera later.

These volumes are only a sampling of the many works by Slavists in which opera (or musical theatre more generally) plays a prominent role, which begs the question: why is there so much crossover between studies of Russian literature or theatre and Russian opera? It is true that Russia is a particularly logocentric culture, and literature enjoys a high prominence in Russian culture more generally: this is certainly one reason for the number of literary scholars interested in Russian literature and operatic adaptation. But another key reason for their presence in a traditionally musicological topic has to do with ideological divisions within the field of historical musicology that date back to the 1980s and continue to affect opera studies, particularly within the Russian context.

In a recent collection of essays and keynote addresses, Richard Taruskin characterises this divide as a remnant of the culture wars that divided Western European and North American

²⁵ Simon Karlinsky, *Russian Drama from Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

²⁶ Catherine Schuler, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia* (Des Moines: University of Iowa Press, 2009), p. 3.

scholars from their Eastern European (or more accurately, Soviet) counterparts.²⁷ While necessarily simplifying an extremely complex situation, Taruskin describes the Western approach to musicology in this period as one concerned with poetics and immanent analysis in contrast with a Soviet interest in social and political concerns. By the time the Soviet Union began to fall, musicologists in the West were beginning to reconsider their former position towards music as an object distinct from its sociocultural contexts, and their Soviet counterparts grew increasingly confident in providing analyses of musical form stripped from any ideological gaze. ‘With the passing of the Cold War, as if by a wave of a magic wand, [...] each side was now free to revel in what had formerly been stigmatised or forbidden’,²⁸ Taruskin notes. Yet while Taruskin claims that contemporary musicologies East and West ‘don’t have to be regarded as rigidly antithetical’,²⁹ he claims the ‘sociocultural turn’ *à la* Soviet-era scholarship never truly developed in Western Europe. This assertion, unquestioningly given, is in fact undercut by many scholars, particularly in opera studies, whose work combines what might be considered ‘purely analytical’ approaches to music and what Taruskin (ironically paraphrasing critics of Soviet musicology) refers to as ‘vulgar sociology.’³⁰

Indeed, Taruskin’s early work emblematises a blend of the sociocultural and analytical that has become relatively common in musicological studies of Russian opera. Taruskin’s volume

²⁷ Richard Taruskin, ‘A Walking Translation? On Musicology East and West’, in *Cursed Questions: On Music and its Social Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), pp. 400-36.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

³⁰ Rossini’s operas seem a particularly fertile field for this kind of scholarship. See Emmanuele Senici, *Present Tense: Rossini’s Italian Operas in their Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); and Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Opera and Drama in Russia as Preached and Practiced in the 1860s (1981), developed from his doctoral work, arguably inaugurated a more wide-ranging methodological approach in Western work on Russian opera.³¹ Taruskin asserts outright that his aim in this volume is to situate ‘the emergent Russian operatic school and its aesthetic moorings within the broader context of Russian intellectual history’, undercutting his argument forty years later that such studies do not exist in Western musicology.³² Taruskin’s body of work could be called the most significantly impactful on Russian music studies in the West, and his attention particularly on the nationalist school has been responded to by many musicologists. Among these include Marina Frolova-Walker, whose *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (2007) benefits from her dual perspective as a musicologist trained in the former Soviet Union but currently teaching in Europe, and artfully dismantles the larger cultural mythologies (some of them literary) that led to the ossification of a nationalist mythology during the Soviet period.³³ More recently, Rutger Helmers takes a broader stance on cultural essentialism in *Not Russian Enough? Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera* (2014), which plays a similar role to Schuler’s *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia* in its challenging of a particular narrative of Russian identity as constructed by and disseminated through opera.³⁴ My work takes up the mantle of Helmers and Walker by applying the same analytical approach to the operatic libretto,

³¹ Richard Taruskin, *Opera and Drama in Russia as Preached and Practiced in the Nineteenth Century* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1981).

³² *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

³³ Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

³⁴ Rutger Helmers, *Not Russian Enough? Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014).

and the title of this thesis is meant as a deliberate response to Taruskin's singular focus on the 1860s.

Nor is the Taruskinian sociocultural approach to Russian music limited to studies of nineteenth-century musical life. Pauline Fairclough has vividly cut through hoary legends about Dmitry Shostakovich in her wide-ranging studies of that composer's legacy, pointing out the fallacies of Western wishful-thinking that sought to characterise Shostakovich as a secret Soviet dissident and manning the trenches for a more complicated reading of his work during the 'Shostakovich Wars' of the 1990s.³⁵ Her recent study *Classics for the Masses: Shaping Soviet Musical Identity Under Lenin and Stalin* (2016) similarly complicates Soviet cultural policy, seeking to chart the evolution of 'the "appropriation" of older Russian and Western culture by the Soviet sphere, and the concurrent "rebranding" or marketing of selected composers to the Soviet public'.³⁶ In a more philosophical vein, Simon Morrison's *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement* (2002, revised 2019) explored Symbolist undercurrents in four operas spanning the Silver Age, and, of more critical importance to this thesis, their 'thickly textured' literary references and allusions.³⁷ Indeed, the revised edition only sparingly dips into rigorous musical analysis of the type more frequently found in musicological studies of opera, and is far

³⁵ The best representatives of Fairclough's work on Shostakovich reception are her article 'Facts, Fantasies, and Fictions: Recent Shostakovich Studies', *Music and Letters*, 86/3 (2005), 452-60; and her 2019 biography of the composer for Reaktion's 'Critical Lives' series. See Pauline Fairclough, *Dmitri Shostakovich* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019).

³⁶ Pauline Fairclough, *Classics for the Masses: Shaping Soviet Musical Identity Under Lenin and Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 7.

³⁷ Simon Morrison, *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), p. 2.

more concerned with mapping the varied and often conflicting philosophical and aesthetic goals of the Russian Symbolists.

Thus, Taruskin's assertion that a sociocultural musicology does not exist for the Russian repertoire is curiously unfounded for a scholar who has been so deeply embedded and influential in the promotion of Russian music in Western musicological departments. While I am not aware of Taruskin's thoughts on Helmers's work, Taruskin has written warmly about Frolova-Walker's and Fairclough's,³⁸ and the field is so small that disputes are more frequently debated in conference halls and faculty receptions rather than across the pages of the academic press. Yet, though I disagree with Taruskin's claim that the sociocultural turn has yet to permeate Russian music studies, I do believe that there is significant room to widen its scope and bring together the parallel strands of inquiry humming through Slavic and musicology departments that sometimes briefly touch but have yet to be completely integrated.

Russian opera studies is a particularly interdisciplinary field, and the list of noted scholars working on Russian music and opera stretches from traditional music departments, Russian literature or Slavic studies, and even comparative literature departments.³⁹ Furthermore, Russian cultural studies more widely generously applies theories and techniques derived from other fields

³⁸ See Richard Taruskin, 'Play It Again, Stalin', *Times Literary Supplement* (4 August 2017), p. 3 for an enthusiastic review of Fairclough's *Classics for the Masses*, in which he also writes approvingly of Frolova-Walker's *Stalin's Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

³⁹ To name a few: Caryl Emerson (Slavic Studies), Richard Taruskin (musicology), Marina Frolova-Walker (musicology), Rosamund Bartlett (Russian language and literature), Boris Gasparov (Russian and East European Studies), Simon Morrison (musicology), and Philip Ross Bullock (Music and Russian).

– anthropology, sociology, politics, or economics, for example – and has done so for decades.⁴⁰

While this scholarly broad-mindedness could be due to the demands of examining Soviet culture particularly, it gives scholars of Russian music an already-proven foundation of interdisciplinary scholarship upon which a response to Taruskin’s call for a ‘sociocultural musicology’ can be drawn. The paradox of opera composition is that it is at the same time a musical and a literary endeavour, regardless how many people are involved in the process. Too often, scholars tend to focus on either the musical or the literary aspects of operatic production, and textual adaptation remains the main concern of the literary side of the equation.

While many of the scholars cited above use opera as a means to question notions of nationalism, the influence of literary and philosophical movements, and the impact of a composer on Russian artistic culture more generally,⁴¹ none of these have yet provided a satisfactory substitute for the page-to-stage adaptation model of studying individual operas.

While such studies provide a rich picture of the deeply interconnected spheres of Russian cultural life, not enough has been done to illustrate how Russian opera as a genre in and of itself benefitted from a networked model of collaboration throughout the process of operatic creation. This thesis explores how the networks and collaborations involved in the writing of most Russian opera libretti allowed larger sociocultural debates to enter into the operatic genre. Pinpointing where and how these debates influenced a libretto’s genesis knits together the strand of research

⁴⁰ For one excellent example, see Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴¹ See Helmers, *Not Russian Enough?*; Morrison, *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement*; Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

producing vibrant studies of Russian cultural life with the strand of research providing penetrating analysis of particular works.

By theorising the libretto as the nexus through which opera's multimedia dialogue flows, and because of the established relationship between musical and literary studies in Russian culture particularly, I mean to answer Taruskin's call for a 'sociocultural musicology'. As part of this process, this work envisions operas not as autonomous cultural artefacts (*à la* immanent or analytical musicology) nor as discrete embodied performance experiences (*à la* 'new musicology'), but positions operas as syntheses of larger social, philosophical, political, and even economic debates. Indeed, using the libretto as the means to navigate these debates allows me to position this work as a scholarly middle ground between what might be considered a traditional 'musicology' thesis and what might be considered a traditional 'Russian studies' thesis: it is both yet neither, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of opera itself. This study employs two kinds of analysis, employed in tandem. The first is a wide-lens, Taruskinian approach to the sociocultural mores that influenced operatic creation and which opera influenced in turn. The second is a focused, close reading of the operatic libretto and the collaborative models of its genesis. In each of the four case studies presented here, I employ both types of analysis freely, not only providing a historiographical analysis of each opera's creation and reception but also setting each opera at the nexus of larger sociocultural movements.

Only one scholar, to my knowledge, is currently working on Russian opera with similar interdisciplinary ambitions. Emily Frey has published articles on the literary and historical roots

of terrorism in *Boris Godunov*,⁴² on the nature of ethics and identity in *Evgeny Onegin*,⁴³ Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snegurochka* and the populist movement of the 1870s,⁴⁴ and is currently finishing a volume on the impact of psychological prose on Russian opera. Her interdisciplinarity is most obvious in that she has studied and taught in musicology, Russian, and comparative literature departments and parallels my own background in literary studies, musicology, and operatic performance. Alongside Helmers', Frey's work provides the most immediate influence upon my own, representing a new generation of scholars influenced by the broadly sociocultural studies of Russian music and opera cited above. Their multifaceted approaches, less easily situated in a single university department, are to my mind the only way to fully arrive at an understanding of opera's particular status at the nexus of various strains within Russian culture.

The Libretto and the Nature of Operatic Authorship: Authority and Identity

The four operas I have chosen to examine in this thesis are decidedly not canonical, though in two cases were written by canonical composers. Nor would any be considered 'good operas' (though they enjoyed reasonable, and in some cases significant, critical and commercial success) in a strictly formal sense, for reasons that will be explained in each chapter. Nevertheless, each case study is significant in a larger sociocultural sense because each synthesises a particular set of questions, and each responds to the concept of musical nationalism in a different way.

⁴² 'Boris Godunov and the Terrorist', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 70/1 (2017), 129-69.

⁴³ 'Nowhere Man and the Politics of Reflection in Nineteenth-Century Russia', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 36/3 (2013), 209-30.

⁴⁴ 'Rimsky-Korsakov, *Snegurochka*, and Populism', in *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World*, ed. Marina Frolova-Walker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 63-96.

Furthermore, the circumstances around each libretto's genesis raises yet another critical point as yet unaddressed in scholarly literature: that of authorship. The libretti for the operas I have chosen were often written collaboratively, and in such cases it is difficult to give one contributor the title of 'author' of the libretto. Nor does the question of authorship end with the opera's text. In the case of one work – *Ivan Susanin* – the librettist was given authorship over the opera as a whole, cited in contemporary reviews as its creator despite the prominent presence of the composer's name on the title page.⁴⁵ Yet the presence of so many contributing voices to these libretti raise the issue of overall ownership of an operatic work – is the composer the 'author' of an opera in the same way a writer authors a novel, or does the often-collaborative nature of the libretto's genesis complicate the composer's generally-assumed authority?

Libretti have regained some sense of status within the musicological world, yet at the same time, the questions they can raise about operatic authorship have yet to be fully explored. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker are correct in the introduction to their ground-breaking collection *Reading Opera* (1988) that the focus on particular types of libretti 'certainly suggests the growing ability to extend new methods of literary analysis to unjustly neglected texts and problems', yet they leave the question of authorship out of the topics covered by their contributors.⁴⁶ So too have more historical volumes such as Patrick Smith's *The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto* (1970), which is primarily concerned with the question of libretto-as-literature and the debates around word versus music. Even more recent studies like Sabine Lichttenstein's edited collection *Music's Obedient Daughter: The Opera Libretto from*

⁴⁵ Much of this literary-centredness has to do with the relative status of composer and librettist at the turn of the nineteenth century, as will be discussed in Chapter One.

⁴⁶ *Reading Opera*, p. 11. The volume focuses mainly on late-nineteenth century *Literaturoper* – i.e., page-to-stage.

Source to Score (2014) are positioned to ‘provide insights into these diverse limitations and necessities that librettists had to face’ in terms of the word-music debate, even if they are broader in historical scope than *Reading Opera* or *The Tenth Muse*.⁴⁷ Thus while ‘librettology’ has emerged as a productive field of inquiry in English-language musicology, it is still somewhat limited in scope due to the ongoing focus on the text’s relationship to the music.⁴⁸

Other European-language publications envision the libretto more theoretically, if still within the context of either the eighteenth-century debates about poetic register and style or the late nineteenth-century debates about the interrelationship between opera and literature. There is a robust scholarly literature on the libretto during both these periods in Italian, yet it is focused mainly on the typology of the operatic genre and the position of the operatic text within it,⁴⁹ or it focuses on the output of a single composer or composer-librettist duo.⁵⁰ In German, the scholarly

⁴⁷ *Music’s Obedient Daughter*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *Grove Music Online* contains two separate chapters for ‘Libretto’ – one surveying the libretto as a printed object, and one dealing with the libretto as the verbal text for an opera. The second article is particularly extensive and well-sourced, yet its bibliography devotes a significant percentage of the discussion to ‘comparative studies’ (i.e. adaptation and revision) and lists of catalogues and anthologies of libretti. While there are section headings for ‘the libretto and society’ and ‘libretto as literature’, these lists are not as well-populated as the ‘comparative’ section, illustrating the dominance of the libretto-as-adaptation model. The category of ‘libretto as literature’, which could usefully encompass the question of operatic authorship, is more devoted to literary academies and forms that affected operatic development. See Richard Macnutt, ‘Libretto (i)’, *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 12 April 2021. See also Brian Trowell, ‘Libretto (ii)’, *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 12 April 2021.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Daniela Goldin, *La vera fenice: Librettisti e libretti tra Sette e Ottocento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), and Ulderico Roldandi’s classic study *Il libretto per musica attraverso il tempo* (Rome: Roma, 1951).

⁵⁰ See Francesco Degrada, *Il palazzo incantato: Studi sulla tradizioni del melodramma dal Barocco al Romanticismo* (Fiesole: Dacanto, 1979), which, despite its title, spends much of its time discussing Giuseppe Verdi

discourse has to situate itself around Richard Wagner's monumental *Oper und Drama* (1851), and tends therefore to discuss the nature of opera and literature.⁵¹ French scholarship seems less concerned with the nature of the libretto, and has historically classified libretti alongside spoken drama, as in Théophile Gautier's six-volume *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans* (1858-1859). The French tradition's lack of interest in distinguishing libretti from other forms of drama has particular significance for early Russian opera, as will be seen in the first chapter of this thesis, though the Italian tradition's interest in genre was also relevant to early nineteenth-century Russian debates.

It becomes apparent, then, that while the libretto is and has been of interest to scholars across Europe, the tricky question about the nature of operatic authorship has yet to be thoroughly explored. Plenty of contemporary studies have unpacked opera's multimedia status,⁵² yet it is still common practice to identify operatic works as 'by' their musical composers. My interest in the libretto as the field where multidisciplinary debates could be staged also encompasses the

and Arrigo Boito's adaptations of William Shakespeare. The Verdi-Boito collaboration is the most well-studied composer-librettist relationship in any language, probably because of the corresponding status of William Shakespeare in the literary world.

⁵¹ See Jens Malte Fischer (ed.), *Oper und Operntext* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1985), and Albert Gier (ed.), *Oper als Text: Romanistische Beiträge zur Libretto-Forschung* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1986). Both of these volumes are publications of conference proceedings.

⁵² For three prominent examples of studies examining opera within wider cultural industries, see John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry from Cimarosa to Verdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); David Trippett and Benjamin Walton, *Nineteenth-Century Opera and the Scientific Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Alexandra Wilson, *Opera and the Jazz Age: Cultural Politics in 1920s Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

issue of operatic authorship, and I am particularly interested in questions of collaboration, which are most easily addressed within the context of the libretto. Each of my case studies addresses the question ‘who is the author of this opera?’ according to the evolving understanding of which collaborator could even stake a claim to that title, though for brevity and stylistic purposes I refer to each of my case studies except for the first chapter as ‘belonging’ to its composer. By rooting my investigation in the Russian operatic tradition, and in particularly understudied exemplars, I am able to negotiate the extremely broad question of operatic authorship within a specific time and place. I hope to prove that such methodologies can productively be applied to address the authorship debate within the nineteenth century more broadly, when the concept of operatic authorship was reframed from an earlier, more literary approach to the issue.

Each of the four operas I discuss responds to a specific set of broader cultural concerns, and as I shall prove, the ways in which these questions and concerns interact can be most easily traced through the operatic libretto. The libretto is not only the crux around which collaboration occurs during the process of operatic creation, and thus the stage for the authorship debate, but it also functions as a literary work in and of itself. Though a libretto stripped of its musical setting does not represent a literary object in the same way a novel or play would, the act of writing it is of course a literary process. This may seem simplistic, but understanding that an operatic libretto is by its very nature a work of literature allows for a repositioning of the libretto within a wider literary context. Indeed, most Russian opera libretti were adapted or synthesised from other forms of literature, and all four of my case studies interact with such antecedents. This intertextuality necessarily places libretti within a literary framework, following along from the many studies of Russian opera’s particular links with Russian literary tradition. But this work is not interested in intertextuality *qua* intertextuality: instead of focusing merely on the *how* of

literary-operatic adaptation, I want to draw attention to the *why*. Choice of subjects for operatic adaptation in and of itself reveals deeper truths about how Russian cultural creators envisioned themselves, and indeed what kind of image of Russia and ‘Russianness’ they wished to present to the rest of the world.

The question of identity is also of key importance to this study. As Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis note in their preface to *National Identity in Russian Culture*: ‘Much discussion of Russian identity is driven by the belief, or at least by the assumption, that Russianness is a “thing” to be located, described, and explained [...] *Identity is not a “thing” to be objectively described. It is a field of cultural discourse.*’⁵³ Rather than debate what ‘counts’ as Russian musical nationalism and why, this study is interested in the shifting understanding of Russianness in music throughout the nineteenth century. The ‘Russian music’ of Cavos and Shakhovskoy in the early nineteenth century is not the same as the ‘Russian music’ of Rimsky-Korsakov at the turn of the twentieth. Instead of arguing which version of Russian music is the most ‘authentic’, this thesis seeks to examine why each version was considered ‘authentic’ in its period, and the broader cultural concerns that engendered such perceptions of Russian identity. I will use the libretto for each of my case studies as the primary means of focalising these wide-ranging questions through a tangible artifact. By describing the ‘thing’ of the libretto and the modes of its creation, I hope to root more ephemeral cultural discourses in a solid foundation.

⁵³ Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, ‘Introduction’, in Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (eds), *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. xi-xvi (p. xii, emphasis mine).

Four Case Studies and a Soviet Paradox

The themes and aims of this thesis are incredibly broad and complex, and I use my four chapters to root these wide-ranging questions within the stable frame of a particular work, at a particular point in Russian operatic history. I have chosen operas that span roughly ninety years of the nineteenth century, focusing particularly on the first four decades and the last two decades of the century. Notably, I do not analyse works from the 1860s and 1870s. This is a deliberate decision. The middle of the nineteenth century marks the milieu out of which many of Russian opera's canonical works emerged, and has been richly studied by scholars on either side of the Slavic studies-musicology divide. However, it is not my intention to suggest that the libretto played a less significant role during this period: it certainly did, as scholars such as Caryl Emerson have demonstrated. But libretti of this middle period often represent the traditional page-to-stage model of operatic adaptation, which dominates the narrative of Russian opera history. Instead of staking a new claim within an already crowded field, this thesis instead seeks to illustrate just how polyvalent a Russian opera libretto could be while at the same time illuminating the understudied periods of the century in which the vast majority of Russian operas were written. I believe the history I sketch out over these four chapters provides a clear narrative, into which the well-studied 1860s and 70s can be neatly fitted.

The four operas I have chosen for this study represent four diverse takes on the nature of the operatic libretto as well as the nature of operatic collaboration. Each in its own way also addresses the question of institutionalisation, though in some chapters this theme is more relevant than in others. None are commonly-performed in the repertory today, though the final two operas were written by canonical composers. Nor were all of these operas popular in their own time: this is especially the case with Chapter Three and *Charodeika*, and *Sadko* in Chapter

Four enjoyed reasonable if not notable success. However, *Ivan Susanin* in Chapter One was a significant hit during the first few decades of the century, only to be superseded by Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsarya* in 1836. *Rusalka* in Chapter Two was a flop at the time of its original premiere, for larger cultural reasons that will be elaborated in the chapter, but was revived nine years later to enormous fanfare and enjoys a historic importance in the musical nationalist movement, even if that importance does not translate to contemporary programming. Regardless of any of these operas' status in the canon, this thesis seeks to illustrate how diverse Russian nineteenth-century opera really was, contra many scholarly works that unintentionally imply only page-to-stage works were created. Each case study, therefore, illustrates exactly how wrong that implication is.

Chapter One examines the collaborative relationship between Italian-born composer Catterino Cavos and aristocratic Russian playwright Aleksandr Shakhovskoy and considers their most popular work, *Ivan Susanin* (1815) within the context of the changing perceptions of operatic authorship in the early Romantic period. In doing so, I bring together debates on the professionalisation of theatrical culture and the role of foreign émigrés in that process against a backdrop of rising nationalism and the continued presence of dilettante amateurs in the cultural sphere, the transition from understanding an opera as a literary text with music to a work of music with a text, and Russia's reconsideration of its relationship to Western Europe during and after the Napoleonic Wars. This chapter is arguably the most 'sociological' in nature, in that I engage very little with textual analysis of the libretto and instead use its published edition and the critical reception of the opera as a jumping-off point to explore the exciting period of flux in definitions of operatic authorship, the nature of Russianness in cultural production, and the emergence of the Russian-born professional theatrical class. The Cavos-Shakhovskoy partnership also provides the most egalitarian example of the composer-librettist dynamic in this

thesis, and I trace the burgeoning Romantic composer-as-author narrative in Russian theatrical life within the context of Cavos and Shakhovskoy's collective work. *Ivan Susanin* as an opera, I argue here, is not necessarily 'groundbreaking' in that it changed much about the understanding of Russian opera's position in the cultural sphere, but is the best representative of what the label of 'Russian opera' actually signified in the pre-Glinka period. Importantly, Cavos and Shakhovskoy were instrumental in the formation of the Imperial Theatres Directorate and wielded significant power within it. Thus they and their work, particularly their pedagogical efforts, embody the institution of Russian opera as it was formally codified and practiced in the early decades of the nineteenth century. As a cultural artifact, *Ivan Susanin* both embodies the tradition of opera in Russia as it was practiced from its roots in the mid-eighteenth century, and, because it is based on the same historical material as Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsarya*, it is also prescient of the cataclysmic impact the Romantic turn would have on this still-developing institution of Russian operatic practice.

Chapter Two questions the narrative of Russian operatic creation as adaptation of a canonical literary work through Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka* (1856), which was adapted from Aleksandr Pushkin's unfinished, posthumous play of the same name. Both works were hailed as masterpieces of Russianness in the Romantic nationalist sense, but this chapter positions both works instead as part of a process of adaptation and re-adaptation of a larger European trend for tales of water maidens in literature and opera, and as conscious responses both literary and musical to the popularity of Western European works in Russia. In this sense, they are strongly connected to the institutionalised understanding of Russianness in art as introduced in the previous chapter, even as Dargomyzhsky composed and produced *Rusalka* outside the purview of the Imperial Theatres Directorate. This chapter deploys granular textual and musical form

analysis of Pushkin's and Dargomyzhsky's work in order to expose their co-opting of Western traditions – not to out them as secretly non-nationalist, but to complicate the accepted understanding of their nationalism as rooted in traditional (i.e., peasant) Russian cultural practices. I suggest that rather than lionise their interest in folk culture as a reaction against the dominance of European models in Russian culture, Pushkin and Dargomyzhsky instead used folk practices to subsume their own use of European forms. This process of co-opting European tradition ties them again to understandings of Russianness discussed in Chapter One. What made Dargomyzhsky's work in particular seem revolutionary was its status outside the operatic institution, and its insistence that Russian art could attain similar technical capabilities to its European counterparts through its deployment and enhancement of European formal models. Dargomyzhsky's innovations and particularly his choice to adapt Pushkin, the father of Russian literature, would then be seized upon by the rapidly-growing Russian musical nationalists - the *moguchaya kuchka*.

Chapter Three leaves the well-documented *kuchkist* period behind and instead explores Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Charodeika* (1887). Instead of the Dargomyzhskian idea of adaptation as fidelity to a source text, this chapter examines the concept of operatic adaptation as a composer's personal reading of a text, the libretto as a revision of a stage work by its original author, the role of historical drama in Russian opera more generally, and the influence of singers on the development of operatic characters. This chapter is the most engaged with the issue of the composer-as-author, in that it both explores Tchaikovsky's adaptation of the original play as his re-authoring of the material and examines how this re-authoring was accomplished through a close collaboration with a particular singer. I analyse how Tchaikovsky depended on the input and support of star soprano Emiliya Pavlovskaya both to refine and enhance his vision of the

opera's titular heroine and to promote the new work within the Imperial Theatres, of which she (and not Tchaikovsky) was a direct and influential employee. This chapter relies heavily on correspondence between Tchaikovsky and Pavlovskaya on the one hand, and Tchaikovsky and Ippolit Shpazhinsky – his librettist and the author of the original play – on the other. If the Tchaikovsky-Shpazhinsky correspondence re-situates the composer-librettist hierarchy as introduced in Chapter One for the late-century period and supports the composer-as-author concept, the Tchaikovsky-Pavlovskaya correspondence illuminates just how much control over the scope of the project an influential and respected singer could have. Though *Charodeika* was not a successful opera, and its poor reception ultimately ruined Tchaikovsky and Pavlovskaya's once-close friendship, the circumstances of its creation pose fascinating questions about the nature of operatic authorship in the late Imperial period and establish an even more under-explored side of Russian opera history that deserves further research.

Chapter Four positions Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* (1895) as a late-century re-working of earlier trends for Russian oral folk literature in operatic adaptation, investigates the libretto as an ethnographic and literary endeavour to reconcile fragmented and contradictory folk literary sources, and libretto-writing as a collaborative effort rather than the work of a single writer. This chapter employs the most interdisciplinary methodology, pairing a textual analysis of the *Sadko* libretto alongside a musical analysis of key moments from the score in order to trace the opera's richly intertextual and inter-musical references. In my reading, *Sadko* emerges as both a culmination of the nineteenth-century tradition of folk-inflected opera, and as an innovative redevelopment of that same tradition that is prescient of further boundary-pushing work from the turn of the twentieth century. I explore *Sadko*'s wealth of musical citations from earlier folk operas like Aleksandr Serov's *Rogneda* (1865), a work anathema to Vladimir Stasov and the

kuchka of which Rimsky-Korsakov was nominally a member, and Borodin's *Knyaz' Igor'* (1890). I also examine how Rimsky-Korsakov's libretto – a collaborative, multi-year effort – is equally populated with references to Russian oral folk literature beyond the two *byliny* from which the opera takes its title. I argue that *Sadko*'s multifaceted intertextuality illustrates the depth of research Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators conducted on Russian oral tradition, takes advantage of late-century developments in anthropological and folkloric research, and quietly pushes the boundaries of traditional operatic form to more accurately reflect folk literary and musical practices. *Sadko*, therefore, marks the beginning of Rimsky-Korsakov's break with *kuchkist* principles of operatic nationalism, heralding a new approach towards Russian folk traditions that would be developed by later composers while at the same time acknowledging the century of folk opera that preceded him.

While opera libretti are the main objects of study in this thesis, other primary sources provide crucial details on the wider sociocultural milieu in which the libretti were written. Of particular interest for my purposes are periodical series such as the *Ezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov*, the *Repertuar russkogo teatra*, and the *Panteon russkogo i vsekh evropeiskikh teatrov*, all of which were produced by the publishing arm of the Imperial Theatres. These journals functioned both as record-keeping for the Directorate and as a stage for debate. The institutional side of the story would become particularly important from about the middle of the century, as the war of words between Vladimir Stasov – who represented the *kuchkist* form of musical nationalism – and Anton Rubinstein, the founder of the Moscow Conservatory and representative of the 'Europeanist' side of musical expression heated up in the wider press.⁵⁴ The institutionally-

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that the Stasov-Rubinstein antagonism provides a musical parallel to the Slavophile-Westerniser debate taking place in literature during the early to mid-nineteenth century. The canonical study of this

supported periodicals also provide critical historiographies of the early decades of Russian opera, about which the Stasov-controlled arm of the press was happy to forget. Indeed, one of the only biographical sources for Italian-born composer Catterino Cavos is a forty-page article in the 1896-7 edition of the *Ezhegodnik*. This article and others from the turn of the twentieth century speak of the ‘forgotten’ composers and writers, seemingly in an attempt to correct the critical course from the dominant Stasovian narrative that attempted to erase the history of ‘Europeanised’ works in Russia. That such detailed and well-cited resources on early Russian opera exist at all gives the lie to the assertion that such composers were well and truly forgotten, and suggest that the institutions supporting the periodicals themselves wished to provide a fuller account of the development of their repertoires over the course of the century.

Though not every chapter makes use of the periodicals, particularly as the case studies move into the latter half of the century, it is important to note that the periodical sources I cite in the earlier chapters were in many cases published contemporaneously as were staged the operas I discuss in the latter chapters. For example, articles on Aleksey Verstovsky and Aleksandr Serov by composer and music historian Nikolay Findeizen were published in the 1896-7 and 1897-8 editions of the *Ezhegodnik*. They would have been researched and planned well before publication, and these two articles are particularly notable because their research and draft periods would situate them during the same early 1890s period in which Rimsky-Korsakov was working on *Sadko*. *Sadko*, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, references the ‘forgotten’ work of Verstovsky and Serov in a subtle nose-thumbing at the narrative promulgated by Rimsky-Korsakov’s former mentor Stasov. The artistic and critical worlds, therefore, were perhaps much

rivalry is Robert C. Ridenour, *Nationalism, Modernism, and Personal Rivalry in Nineteenth-Century Russian Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981).

more closely intertwined than might be immediately obvious. There is no evidence to support a claim that Rimsky-Korsakov and Findeizen ever met or corresponded about Verstovsky and Serov, yet it is notable that a new opera citing their work would emerge around the same time as two lengthy articles attempting to rehabilitate their reputations. Again, such correspondences give the lie to the idea that all Russian opera pre-Glinka had completely disappeared from view by the end of the nineteenth century.

If the Imperial Theatres-published periodicals provide a tantalising glimpse into the critical motivations of the institution supporting Russian opera in the nineteenth century, then more traditional primary sources like letters and diaries provide accounts of the often-complex process of developing an operatic work. While such sources are minimal (in the case of Chapter Two) to nonexistent (in the case of Chapter One) from the first half of the century, correspondence and autobiography become crucial to the latter two chapters, covering the 1880s and 1890s. Much of the preservation of this material is due to the status of the composers covered in these chapters: Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, both of whom have been lavishly published in multiple, multi-volume editions. In particular, their correspondence allows for a reconstruction of the process of libretto-development, though there are naturally gaps when the composers and collaborators would meet in person. Additionally, neither the complete editions of the letters of Tchaikovsky or Rimsky-Korsakov publish their correspondents' replies, only the letters written by the composers, though fortunately these letters have been collected and published by other scholars.⁵⁵ Though I reference at points the autobiographies and diaries of these composers, I do

⁵⁵ Here, I owe a debt of gratitude to the archival staff at the Tchaikovsky House-Museum and Archive in Klin, Russia, and the Russian National Library in St Petersburg. Following the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown of archival travel and research, they were enormously helpful in following up my queries on primary-source holdings and in

so with caution, as both Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov wrote knowing their words would be on record and accordingly sometimes rearranged or edited the narrative to suit their own agendas.

Because none of the four operas examined in this study are part of the main Russian operatic repertory, contemporary secondary literature in English is scarce. English-language sources on individual operas are limited to a journal article or chapter here and there (such as Simon Morrison's analysis of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko*),⁵⁶ or a brief discussion within a larger biographical work. However, the purpose of this study is to situate the operas in question within a broader set of cultural debates, and therefore much of the English-language secondary literature I consulted address these larger concerns. Russian-language secondary literature beyond the periodicals cited above is surprisingly plentiful, particularly from the Soviet period and the 1950s-60s. English-speaking scholars tend to treat Soviet scholarship with caution, probably as a hangover of the Cold War, and while I do not deny that these sources do occasionally digress

some cases making digital copies available to me. I would also like to thank Peter Budrin for on-the-ground assistance with tracking the current location of manuscript materials in Russia, particularly for the playwrights Aleksandr Shakhovskoy and Ippolit Shpazhinsky. Although the letters from some of Tchaikovsky's correspondents were published in the notes to the full *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. Literaturnye proizvedeniia i perepiska*, ed. B. V. Asafev, L. V. Muzyleva and S. S. Muravich, 18 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1959-1981), Pavlovskaya's and Shpazhinsky's side of their correspondence with Tchaikovsky on *Charodeika* were published in *Chaikovskii na moskovskoi stsene. Pervye postanovki v gody ego zhizni*, ed. V. V. Yakovlev (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1940). Correspondence between Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators on *Sadko* were published more recently in full in *Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov. Perepiska s V. V. Yastrebtsevym i V. I. Belskim*, ed. L. G. Barsova. (St. Petersburg: Sankt-peterburgskaya gosudarstvennaya konservatoriya, 2009).

⁵⁶ Simon Morrison, 'The Semiotics of Symmetry, or Rimsky-Korsakov's Operatic History Lesson', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 13/3 (2001), 261-93.

into politicising or fetishising a particular definition of Russian nationalism, such moments are obviously signposted and do not detract from the overall quality of the work. Writers who lived through the late-Imperial period such as Nikolay Findeizen and his protégé Boris Asaf'ev lived into the Soviet era and published monumental histories of Russian music alongside penetrating single-composer biographies.⁵⁷ Later historians such as Yury Keldysh and Abram Gozenpud wrote wide-ranging histories of Russian music and opera, using and updating many of the nineteenth-century sources. Their work is thorough, informative, and as far as I have been able to follow up with my own archival research, scrupulously accurate. Indeed, the Soviet scholars situate opera and music within broader culture in precisely the 'sociocultural' manner which Taruskin calls for, and Taruskin cites the Soviet musicological tradition as an example of the type work he would like to see gain momentum in the West, though without the ideological slant necessitated by the Soviet state.

In my selection of these four works, and in the availability of scholarly resources on these works, this thesis argues for the inclusion of resources both musical and scholarly that do not fit

⁵⁷ Findeizen's *Ocherk po istorii muzyki v Rossii s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XVIII veka*, 2 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo 'Muzsektor', 1928-9) was for many decades the only comprehensive history of Russian music pre-1800, and his *A. S. Dargomyzhskii (1813-1869): avtobiografiya, pis'ma, vospominaniya sovremennikov* (St Petersburg: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1921) is the only collection of primary materials on Dargomyzhsky, who has yet to receive a *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* edition. Boris Asaf'ev is considered the founder of Soviet musicology and was a well-regarded composer in his time. His bibliography includes traditional biographies of Mikhail Glinka (1942) and Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1944) and histories of Russian music as well as more theoretical works like *Muzykal'naya forma kak protsess* (1930). James Robert Tull's brilliant English translation of the latter (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1976) provides critical commentary and is a major work in its own right.

in with established histories of Russian opera. While plenty of scholars cite Soviet sources, there is still an uneasiness about their ‘impartiality’ towards their subjects. It is unfortunate that an entire literature, often the only available sources on non-canonical operas, must be tarred with the brush of their politics. Just like any opera, any work of scholarship emerges out of a particular set of sociocultural concerns, including political leanings as well as methodological techniques. We should not demean our own work by affecting an impartial stance when impartiality is impossible. I have chosen the four operas in this thesis because I believe them worthy of scholarly attention, and therefore my analyses necessarily seek to prove that point. If we are to answer Taruskin’s call for a truly sociocultural musicology, then we must acknowledge our own sociocultural circumstances.

Conclusion

Studying the opera libretto as the meeting point for broad interdisciplinary concerns has the potential to yield far-reaching insights into Russian nineteenth-century culture beyond the spheres of music and literature. Opera has served and continues to serve a unique purpose in Russian cultural life: leaders from Catherine II to Vladimir Putin have recognised it as an art form with the potential to aid in the construction and support of mythic narratives about the nature of Russianness itself.⁵⁸ To understand why and how opera gained such prominence in

⁵⁸ Richard Wortman’s *Scenarios of Power, Myth, and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995-2000) examines this process from the age of Peter I to the 1917 Revolution. Inna Naroditskaya’s *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) examines the mythos of the tsarina both on and offstage, and how Russia’s female rulers used opera to cement and illustrate their political power.

Russian society, it is essential to understand where opera intersects with other aspects of culture. This can be traced back beyond the borders of Russia, into the Italian Renaissance and French Enlightenment debates about the status of opera as a purely literary or a purely musical concern.⁵⁹ Merely illustrating these Western European connections problematises the narrative of Russian opera as a uniquely nationalist project.

The nature of Russian operatic creation in the nineteenth century involves the telling of a story. The often-collaborative group involved in the development of an operatic scenario and libretto debate how to encapsulate this story: whether to embellish a semi-historical legend, to adapt closely a pre-existing literary text, to prioritise a particular reading of a text, or to reconcile competing versions of an oral tradition. The composer then either concurrently, in advance of,⁶⁰ or following the creation of a libretto must decide how to musicalise that text, if the music will support or contradict the context of the text, how the orchestra will interact with the vocal music, and the pace of textual delivery. At any point in this process outside agents can apply influence on the opera's development: administrators, singers, critics, even public opinion and taste. The final product – a libretto set to music – is then evaluated by an administrative body and in some cases referred to the censors before it is handed over to a conductor and stage director for rehearsals. At last, the work is performed, but it then enters fully into a larger cultural dialogue that interrogates how much of the story the opera's creators sought to tell actually made it to the spectators via performance. An opera's reception can often override its creator's intentions, even if those intentions are made clearly and widely known.

⁵⁹ I gloss these debates and their significance for Russian culture in Chapter One.

⁶⁰ Glinka is famously said to have composed music for *Zhizn' za tsarya* before having a text to set.

Thus, no opera can be considered the work of a single hand. It is not ‘authored’ in the same way a work of written literature is, and neither should it be received in the same way even if it is based on a literary work. In order to understand the enormous significance of opera to the Russian cultural context, the complex processes of operatic genesis must be more fully explored. I hope that this examination of the Russian opera libretto and in particular the questions it raises about authorship will spark new investigations from scholars working across disciplines interested in the nineteenth century. More importantly, I hope it will broaden understandings of Russian opera beyond the canon, which has long deserved to be freed from the dynamic of page-to-stage analysis.

Chapter One: *Ivan Susanin* (1815), The Composer-Librettist

Debate, and the Emergence of Romanticism in Russia

If general audiences believe that Russian opera began in 1836 with the premiere of Mikhail Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsarya*, recent scholarly works have challenged that view, particularly with regard to the eighteenth century. Following the early twentieth-century critic Nikolay Findeizen, twenty-first century scholars such as Marina Ritzarev and Inna Naroditskaya, among others, have examined the institution of opera in Russia in the eighteenth century, when theatrical performances of all kinds were mainly produced and controlled by the Imperial court.¹ Yet for all that the eighteenth-century roots of Russian opera have now been studied in some detail, very little attention has been paid to Russian opera in the early decades of the nineteenth century, leaving a gap roughly between the end of the eighteenth century and 1836. The reason for this gap seems to be twofold. Firstly, influential critics from later in the century like Vladimir Stasov condemned the proliferation of foreign models in the pre-Glinka period and argued that all works from this period were tainted by foreign influence: Russian opera simply was not 'Russian' enough.² Secondly, the formal characteristics of Russian-language operas during this period –

¹ See Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006); Nikolay Findeizen, *Ocherk po istorii muzyki v Rossii s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XVIII veka*, 2 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo 'Muzsektor', 1928-9); and Inna Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

² Stasov (1824-1906) was an influential critic and a champion of Russian musical nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century. He coined the phrase *moguchaya kuchka*, and was the *kuchka*'s most prominent critical champion. While his influence began to wane at the fin-de-siècle, his writings found a new audience with the rise of Socialist Realism.

not entirely sung, but inclusive of spoken dialogues – means that in contemporary eyes, they are not ‘operatic’ enough.³

This chapter will explore how the first decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a profound shift both in perceptions of Russian national identity and in the position of opera and music within the hierarchy of the arts. Central to my argument is the opera *Ivan Susanin* (1815), a work emblematic of the anxieties of its time and of the forgotten decades in Russian operatic history. *Ivan Susanin* was written to the same subject as Glinka’s *Zhizn’ za tsarya*, and has been persuasively shown to be a model for Glinka’s later treatment.⁴ Its two co-creators – Prince Aleksandr Shakovskoy, librettist, and Catterino Cavos, composer – each represent a way of understanding Russian arts and culture in this period: on the one hand, the aristocratic Russian writer who was among the first of his class to make the leap from amateur writer to professional dramatist and pedagogue, and on the other hand, the Venetian-born composer who followed an eighteenth-century model of musical emigration to Russia but would contribute more than any of his predecessors to what would become Russian national opera. As the century progressed, both of these models would be rejected in favour of a greater professionalism (that ironically both men strove to institute), and thus this more amateur-centred period was subsequently overlooked.

See Tamara Livanova, *Stasov i russkaya klassicheskaya opera* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1956) and Abram Gozenpud, ‘Velikii pobornik realizma’, in *Kritika i muzykoznanie* (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1975), pp. 220-41.

³ Alessandra Tosi explores a similar gap in Russian literary history in her book *Waiting for Pushkin: Russian Fiction in the Age of Aleksandr I (1801-1825)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

⁴ See Anna Giust, ‘*Ivan Susanin* by Catterino Cavos and *A Life for the Tsar* by Mikhail Glinka: Comparing the Incomparable’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 30/1 (2018), 60-102.

In contemporary scholarship, Anna Giust has championed Catterino Cavos as the direct artistic ancestor of Mikhail Glinka. Thanks to her efforts, Cavos's name has been revived in the discourse around early Russian opera, and her volume *Ivan Susanin' di Catterino Cavos: un'opera russa prima dell'opera russa* is the main secondary source for this chapter.⁵ Giust's scholarly aims differ from mine, however, in that I seek to situate Cavos's work both within the context of his long collaborative partnership with Shakhovskoy and within the broader cultural dialogue around the relationship between librettist and composer and the status of the operatic libretto in this period. While Giust acknowledges Shakhovskoy's contributions as librettist for *Ivan Susanin*, her work is musicological and biographical in scope and focuses on Cavos's life, milieu, and creative process.

This chapter will build further on Giust's work and discuss Cavos in the context of his collaboration with Shakhovskoy, situating both men within a multimedia network of music, text, cultural history, and performance. First, I will examine eighteenth and early-nineteenth century views on the authorship of a collaborative work of music theatre and the recalibration of these views during the early Romantic period. Then, I will discuss the proliferation of genres and Western European models within the Russian theatrical world, and how these reflected understandings of authorship. I will discuss the libretto for *Ivan Susanin*, exploring the significance of Cavos and Shakhovskoy's choice in subject and how generic restrictions affected the historicity of the finished work. Moving from the textual to the metatextual, I will next examine each man's status within his respective fields, positioning both as key drivers in the establishment of a professional, homegrown stable of performers that would begin the process of

⁵ Anna Giust, *Ivan Susanin' di Catterino Cavos: un'opera russa prima dell'opera russa* (Torino: De Sono Association, 2011).

putting Russian opera on equal footing with its imported competitors. Next, I will turn to the question of Russianness, examining Cavos and Shakhovskoy's reputation as 'Russian authors' with their counterparts for *Zhizn' za tsarya*, foregrounding Shakhovskoy's particular philosophy of Russian national expression in theatre and music. Finally, I will return to the problem of genre by discussing the strikingly different finales to the two operas and examining how the most famous music from *Zhizn' za tsarya* was not revolutionary in its form or content, but rather in its deployment within the larger work.

Close-reading of the *Ivan Susanin* libretto and its musical setting does not comprise a major portion of this chapter, because *Ivan Susanin* is not particularly innovative in terms of operatic form and structure. Instead, I use the 'ordinariness' of *Ivan Susanin* within this period in Russian opera history to pinpoint the stark differences in perceptions around what counted as Russian opera in the decades before 1836. If the premiere of *Zhizn' za tsarya* marked a critical shift in understandings of Russianness as expressed in opera, then *Ivan Susanin* symbolises what Russian opera was beforehand, and also symbolises the early nineteenth-century repertory which could never be considered part of the canon in a post-*Zhizn'* landscape. Where I do discuss *Ivan Susanin*'s textual and musical features, it is part of this larger goal of describing the main features of pre-*Zhizn'* Russian opera.

Overall, opera in Russia before 1836 is broadly characterised by a developing dynamic between librettist and composer leading to questions as to who ultimately is the 'author' of an operatic work. This is a product of a proliferation of influences and genres that emerged in the vacuum between the slow decline of Classicism and the rise of Romanticism as wider trends in Russian culture. A lack of structure in the institution of Russian theatre also contributed to the problem, as there were no centralised standards or common practices by which to delineate one

genre from another. Cavos and Shakhovskoy's collaborative works exemplify the development of Russian music theatre out of the more clearly-defined generic categories of the eighteenth century and into a maelstrom of co-existing and competing new categories of genre.⁶ Their relationship illuminates the changing role of the Russian upper classes in the professional creation and dissemination of theatrical culture, and the role of foreign émigrés in that process of professionalisation. The opera libretto thus represents the transition in emphasis from librettist-as-author to composer-as-author that was beginning to take place in this period. As we shall see, where in the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century the libretto stood for the operatic work as a whole, by the 1830s and the rise of Glinka the libretto represented the textual scaffolding on which the music expanded and developed. That is, where the libretto was once seen as a work of musical drama's primary means of expression, by the 1830s it had shifted into a linguistic shorthand for the superior mode of expression found in the music itself.

Authorship and Authority

Over the first decades of the nineteenth century, conceptions of who counted as the 'author' of an operatic work shifted profoundly from a model based on Enlightenment-era text-focused principles to a model rooted in Romantic views of the composer as a solitary creative genius.

⁶ William Edward Brown's *A History of Russian Literature of the Romantic Period*, 4 vols (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), maps this process in prose literature from the sentimentalist era to the age of Gogol' and includes some discussion of musical works where they intersect with traditional literature. See also Elizabeth Cheresch Allen, *A Fallen Idol is Still a God: Lermontov and the Quandaries of Cultural Transition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) for an excellent survey of this issue as it applies to the works of Mikhail Lermontov, although focussing on the transition out of Romanticism into Realism.

The published libretto for Cavos and Shakhovskoy's *Ivan Susanin* provides a glimpse into how these questions of authorship shaped the composer-librettist relationship, at least on the printed page. Strangely, the title page for the *Ivan Susanin* libretto (published 1815) does not give Shakhovskoy's name, but only notes 'музыка Капельмейстера Г. Кавоса'.⁷ Indeed, Shakhovskoy's name does not appear in the libretto at all except at the bottom of a poetic dedication of the work to the Emperor, where he is named as 'верноподданнейший Князь Александр Шаховской'.⁸ Perhaps Shakhovskoy's authorship of the work is implied enough to make a traditional title page irrelevant. Indeed, when looking at the libretto alone, it would seem to identify Cavos as the primary author of the work and gestures towards a period of transition and ambiguity in the librettist-composer dynamic at this point in the early nineteenth century. However, the Russian National Library's catalogue listing for the original libretto names Shakhovskoy as sole author of the work, as do my citations below. Notwithstanding what is surely a subsequent bibliographic convention, the identification of Shakhovskoy as primary author of *Ivan Susanin* would have been reflected in contemporary critical thought, despite the ambiguity raised by the published libretto itself. That this ambiguity in the primary source exists, though, does suggest that the shift in priority from librettist to composer may have begun earlier than previously assumed.

The dynamic of librettist as the controlling personality in the creation of a musical drama was widely understood and accepted in contemporary writing, especially in reviews. A contemporary source refers to *Lyubovnaya pochta*, Cavos and Shakhovskoy's first collaboration from 1806, as

⁷ [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Shakhovskoy], *Ivan Susanin, Opera v dvukh deistviyakh* (St Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskikh Teatrov, 1815).

⁸ Ibid.

‘Опера князя Шаховского’ and comments that ‘по всему видно, что он [Cavos] хотел угодить князю Шаховскому: все мотивы очень веселы, приятны и, сверх того, согласуются с словами, что редко удается слышать в операх, особенно русских’.⁹ The commentary reveals much about how the public perceived the authorship of musical dramas: the librettist was the primary creator of the work, the role of the composer was to fit tuneful music to the words without obscuring the text, and that a successful union of the text and music was rare to Russian opera of this period. In fact, a large factor in *Lyubovnaya pochta*’s warm reception by Russian audiences of the time was attributed to the sensitive handling of text-music relations. Grigory Blok writes in his 1896 biographical sketch of Cavos that ‘в те же времена очень мало внимания обращали на соответствие музыки с текстом’ in Russian-language music theatre.¹⁰

The roots of this belief in music’s ability to enhance but not overpower text lie with the very beginning of opera as a genre in seventeenth-century Italy. Music-text relationship was part of the larger debate between *prima prattica* and *seconda prattica* taking place around the turn of the seventeenth century,¹¹ wherein many composers adhered to the Platonic idea that text is more important than music.¹² Still, librettists for early operas were cautious in defence of their work,

⁹ Cited in Yu. V. Keldysh et al., *Istoriya russkoi muzyki 1800-1825*, 2nd edn (Moskva, Muzyka, 1985), pp. 133-4.

¹⁰ Grigorii Blok, ‘К. А. Kavos. Ocherk ego deyatel’nosti v Rossii’, *Ezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov, sezon 1896-7*, 2 (1898), 1-40 (p. 11).

¹¹ For more on this debate and for a detailed investigation of seventeenth-century Italian opera, see Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹² The extent to which composers actually followed this stricture varies. For example, Claudio Monteverdi writes in the preface to his eighth book of madrigals that he carefully adhered to Platonic philosophy, but this book of madrigals is not typical of his wider compositional output, which often emphasized dissonances and complicated harmonies in the music over strict compliance with the text. See ‘109: Preface to ‘Madrigali guerri et amorosi’,

which was often seen as unnatural and a disservice to poetry.¹³ But as opera became more widely popular, librettists realised their work could compete with more conventional forms of literature; Ellen Rosand notes that published libretti of the mid-seventeenth century ‘represented the authors’ investment’ and ‘frequently fail even in prefatory material to provide the names of composer and scene designer.’¹⁴ This trend would continue throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Emphasis on text over music can be seen in the early generic designations for opera libretti, few of which mentioned music at all, and by the mid-seventeenth century, the popular designation *dramma per musica* still enforced the prevalence of drama over music, albeit uniting the two ideas.¹⁵

A parallel debate on the relationship between text and music ignited in eighteenth-century France, which had a significant impact on the practices of early Russian musical drama. The second part of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues* argues that melody, with its emphasis on expressing the meaning of language, was far more important than musical

Claudio Monteverdi’, in *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. by Oliver Strunk, revised edition ed. Leo Treitler. (London: W.W. Norton, 1998), pp. 664-5.

¹³ For example, Francesco Sbarra writes in the preface to the libretto for *Alessandro, vincitor di se stesso*: ‘I know that musical recitation is improper altogether, since it does not imitate natural discourse and removes the soul from dramatic compositions, which should be nothing but imitations of human actions’. Quoted in Rosand, *Opera in Venice*, p. 45 (emphasis added). Originally published in ‘Lettera dell’autore al signor Michel’Angelo Torcigliani’, Lucca, 29 December 1650.

¹⁴ Rosand, *Opera in Venice*, p. 87.

¹⁵ Other early genres of opera include ‘favola’, ‘opera scenica’, ‘festa teatrale’, ‘opera drammatica’, ‘tragedia musicale’. Rosand notes the designation of ‘dramma per musica’ emphasizes that libretti ‘had to be judged by the efficacy of the musical setting they inspired, the dramatic conviction of the combination: libretto plus music, a combination that, ideally, would exceed by far the simple sum of its parts.’ Rosand, *Opera in Venice*, p. 34.

harmony.¹⁶ This was a direct attack on the musical philosophy of Jean-Philippe Rameau, whose emphasis on harmony had made him a popular composer in early eighteenth-century France. Nonetheless, it was Rousseau's philosophy that proved more impactful in late eighteenth-century opera, and that which was circulated in Russia by one of Enlightenment philosophy's leading exponents in the empire, Catherine II. Catherine herself would use musical theatre as a way of expressing her philosophical views, writing libretti for nine operas. While her name would not be affixed to the libretti until after her death, her authorship and involvement in the works' production was well known: 'Catherine not only wrote libretti, but immersed herself in operatic production [...] she undertook the creation of opera as a highly collective affair.'¹⁷ The empress, however, was not solely responsible for the writing of her libretti, though only her name would appear on the eventual publication: 'She devised the plots, outlined the operatic structure, and wrote the spoken dialogue, but the lyrics of the songs, arias, and choruses – though defined and approved by her – were selected, solicited, or written by [her advisor] Khrapovitsky.'¹⁸ Music for Catherine's operas was composed by several different composers, most of whom were foreign émigrés serving at the Russian court, but it is difficult to trace exactly who was responsible for each opera.¹⁹ Much as in seventeenth-century Venice, Catherine's and other early Russian

¹⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues: où il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale*, ed. Jean Starobinski (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

¹⁷ Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, p. 85.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ A few of Catherine's operas are attributed to specific composers, such as *Gore-bogatyř' Kosometovich* (1789, music by Vincent Martin y Soler), *Fevey* (1786, music by Vasily Pashkevich), and *Novgorodskii bogatyř' Vasily Boleslavovich* (1786, music by Evstigney Fomin). Whether these scores were written entirely by the composers they are attributed to is, however, unclear.

musical dramas are mainly remembered as works of their librettists, and only rarely can scholars definitively credit the composer of their music. The same was true for early nineteenth-century *vaudeville*, which developed out of the legacy of the eighteenth century. Critics writing as late as 1840 regularly referred to the librettist as ‘автор водевиля’, and in the case of Cavos and Shakhovskoy’s works regularly cite these as by Shakhovskoy, with Cavos’s name mentioned in passing or not at all.²⁰

Emphasis on the text and its clear understanding by the audience makes sense considering the generic tenets of Russian musical theatre at the time; there was no such thing as a through-composed opera in early nineteenth-century Russia, and Russian-language musical drama of the period descended from the French tradition. In fact, the term *vaudeville* itself originally referred to the vocal music found in French grand comedy of the eighteenth century, and developed into a generic offshoot of these comedies over the last quarter of the eighteenth century.²¹ Eighteenth-century values were still highly prominent in the culture of the early nineteenth century, particularly with regard to an Enlightenment emphasis on the role of literature and written culture within a hierarchy of the arts.²²

²⁰ R. M. Zotov, ‘Iz moikh vospominanii o teatre, period vtoroi (1812-yi god.)’, *Repertuar russkogo teatra*, 2/7 (1840), 40-55 (p. 25 and p. 33). Interestingly, the same author would write a laudatory biography of Catterino Cavos in the same year – indeed, in the same volume of the *Repertuar* – and defended the composer’s legacy in later writing.

²¹ For more on French grand comedy, vaudeville, and its influence on Russian theatre, see Simon Karlinsky, *Russian Drama from Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 116-47.

²² For a clear analysis on the eighteenth century’s impact on nineteenth-century thought, see Luba Golburt, *The First Epoch: The Eighteenth Century and Russia’s Cultural Imagination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

Within this context, it is not surprising that the librettist would be considered the driving force behind the composition of a musical drama. In fact, this tendency in musical theatre was part of a wider line of thought, in which poets asserted the importance of their work over that of musicians in a perceived competition for prestige. Though he would later collaborate with composers like Glinka, the young Aleksandr Pushkin scoffed at the idea of a poet's work serving a composer's in a letter to Pyotr Vyazemsky following the disastrous reception of the latter's 1824 vaudeville *Kto brat, kto sestra?*: 'Что тебе пришло в голову писать оперу и подчинить поэта музыканту? Чин чина почитай.'²³ The attitude that poets outranked composers can be found as late as the 1830s in Vladimir Sollogub's brief collaboration with Mikhail Glinka on *Zhizn' za tsarya*. Thomas P. Hodge asserts that the failure of Sollogub to work well with Glinka on the libretto was in part due to 'the poet's implicit opinion that music should be at the service of poetry, and not vice versa.'²⁴

While the librettist was generally considered the primary author of a work of musical theatre in the early nineteenth century and poets of the period asserted their authority and rank over musicians, the 1820s saw the emergence in Russia of Romantic ideas that the composer, whose genius would be considered to have inspired the work, had primacy over the writer of the mere text. Romanticism reversed the Enlightenment hierarchy of text over music, instead lauding music as the most important of the arts. One of the most vocal exponents of Romantic philosophy in opera was the German critic E. T. A. Hoffmann, who believed librettists were the

²³ Quoted in Thomas P. Hodge, *A Double Garland: Poetry and Art-Song in Early-Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), p. 168. Originally published in Aleksandr Pushkin, *Pism'a*, commentary B. L. Modzalevskii, 3 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1926-1935), I (1926), p. 58.

²⁴ Hodge, *A Double Garland*, p. 152.

cause of what he perceived as a failure of opera to reach its full potential as an art form.

Hoffmann argued in his imagined dialogue *The Poet and the Composer* that ‘most so-called operas are merely inane plays with singing added, and the total lack of dramatic force [...] is entirely attributable to the dead weight of successive scenes with no inner poetic relationship or poetic truth that might kindle the music into life’,²⁵ and that the librettist must ‘inwardly compose everything in musical terms’.²⁶ The role of the librettist, as Hoffmann perceived it, was to write simple texts free of complicated poetic structure so that the composer could then express the text’s poetic idea through music without being obstructed by the language. Hoffmann’s belief that complex versification hindered music’s superior capabilities of expression found a home in Russia through the writings of Prince Vladimir Odoevsky, who would become a leading proponent of Russian musical Romanticism. In a review of composer Aleksey Verstovsky’s early cantatas, Odoevsky would argue

Наш молодой музыкант [...] одухотворил своєю гармониею пиитические произведения, им избранные, дал им новую жизнь, открыл в них оттенки, совершенно потерянные при чтении, словом, возысил сии произведения к чистому, невещественному идеалу, каковым был он первобытно в воображении поэтов, еще не подчиненный механизму стихосложения.²⁷

The introduction of Romantic philosophy into Russian musical theatre led to a reversal of the librettist-over-composer dynamic, and indeed permeated more widely into literary culture as a whole. Thomas P. Hodge asserts that during the 1830s, following the death of Pushkin and the premiere of *Zhizn’ za tsarya* ‘the prestige of poetry would steadily decline, whereas that of music

²⁵ ‘The Poet and the Composer,’ in *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings: ‘Kreisleriana’, ‘The Poet and the Composer’, Music Criticism*, ed. David Charlton, trans. Martyn Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 200.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²⁷ V. V. Odoevskii, ‘Neskol’ko slov o kantatakh G. Verstovskogo’, *Vestnik Evropy*, 1 (January, 1824), 64-9 (p. 65).

would steadily increase.’²⁸ This reversal is reflected in contemporary criticism. In 1840, Rafail Zotov would praise Glinka alone for heightening audience expectations for Russian opera and cementing their desire for nationalistic art with *Zhizn’ za tsarya*: ‘Дай Бог, чтоб талант Глинки создал новыя произведения, подобныя первой его опере.’²⁹ Whereas Zotov in the same piece credits Shakhovskoy alone for his and Cavos’s successes in the 1810s, he now credits Glinka alone for the success of *Zhizn’ za tsarya* and does not mention a single one of the writers who collaborated on the libretto for that opera. By the mid-century, the composer had become firmly entrenched as the author of an opera, and while there are instances in later operatic history where librettists would be given due credit for their work, this would never be the case in Russia.

Genre Trouble at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century

Though the ‘author question’ is crucial to understanding how attitudes towards Russian opera in general changed in the first quarter of the century, the main problem for pre-*Zhizn’* works like *Ivan Susanin* is the question of genre. The idea of opera as a genre in Russia during this period was still in flux as eighteenth-century conventions gave way to new forms that had not yet stabilised. Rather, forms of music theatre that would by mid-century coalesce into what is now conventionally defined as opera were deeply entwined with spoken theatre and literature more generally. The close relationship between theatre – including music theatre – and literature in this period makes for a scholarly puzzle, made more difficult because few scores from this period are familiar or were preserved in archives. Another problem has to do with the modern understanding of opera as a genre that is completely sung-through, with no spoken dialogues.

²⁸ Hodge, *A Double Garland*, p. 182.

²⁹ R. M. Zotov, ‘Iz moikh vospominanii o teatre: period tretii’, *Repertuar russkogo teatra*, 2/9 (1840), 40-55 (p. 47).

Even Richard Taruskin falls prey to this trap, arguing that in this period ‘opera performed in Russia to Russian texts (even if composed by Cavos) meant only *Singspiels* or *comédies mêlées d’ariettes*’.³⁰ Despite current perceptions of opera as genre, this anxiety about sung-through opera versus opera with interpolated dialogues did not exist in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and ‘Russian opera’ could mean any number of types of work, so long as the text was written in Russian. What would come to be known, albeit retrospectively, as a specifically Russian model of opera, arguably inaugurated in 1836 by *Zhizn’ za tsarya*, did not emerge from a vacuum but is rooted in this broad theatrical tradition which developed alongside and within a Russian literary school.

As late as 1841, critics were aware of how the mutual relationship between theatre and literature contributed to the ‘великолепное начинание’ of improving Russia’s cultural position in the world, but were deeply critical about how much further both Russian theatre and literature needed to develop to reach equal footing with Western Europe. An essay by theatre administrator and critic Rafail Zotov in the journal *Panteon russkogo i vsekh evropeiskikh teatrov* acknowledges the importance of contemporary Russian theatre and literature, while still regretting their shortcomings in comparison with the West, especially Germany and Britain.³¹ Although literature and theatre ‘принадлежа[т] к самым могущественным двигателям гражданского общества’, promoting Russian values and patriotism, Russia cannot truly claim to possess ‘свой театр, своя литература’ because the two genres are heavily influenced by other

³⁰ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 227.

³¹ R. M. Zotov, ‘O nyneshnem sostoyanii sanktpeterburgskikh teatrov’, *Panteon russkogo i vsekh evropeiskikh teatrov*, 1/2 (1841), 43-61 (p. 43).

European traditions.³² In particular, Zotov laments Russia's perceived lack of an equivalent figure to Schiller and Shakespeare, and argues that until such a figure emerges Russia will not be able to claim equal cultural prestige to Germany and Britain.³³ The themes Zotov raises in this essay – the interrelationship of theatre and literature, Russia's reliance on foreign models to develop its theatre and literature, and the search for a single figure around which to create histories of the two fields – are all centrally important to this chapter. Indeed, Zotov's concerns strikingly mirror Taruskin's quoted above from a century and a half later. Both the *Singspiel* and the *comédie mêlées d'ariettes* cited by Taruskin are Western European forms of opera, so any Russian-language work modelled after them is 'only' a poor foreign substitute for a truly 'Russian' opera.

Early nineteenth-century Russian culture existed under the influence of a range of foreign models imported from Western Europe. In music, scholars tend to assert that Russian music theatre in the early nineteenth century developed mostly out of the French tradition, like its equivalents in literature,³⁴ but this is only partly true. Both Italian *opera seria* and *opera buffa* had been performed in Russia since the 1740s, and salon music including the developing genre

³² Ibid.

³³ It is interesting to note that by the time Zotov published this article in 1841, Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsarya* had been in the repertory for five years, and Aleksandr Pushkin's novel-in-verse *Evgeny Onegin* had been available in full publication for eight years. Both of these men would respectively be considered the founding fathers of their fields, and Pushkin would eventually be hailed as 'Russia's Shakespeare', not least for his play *Boris Godunov*.

³⁴ Among many examples, see particularly Abram A. Gozenpud, *Muzykal'nyi teatr v Rossii: ot istokov do Glinki* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1959); Simon Karlinsky, *Russian Drama from its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); and R.-Aloys Mooser, *L'opéra-comique français en Russie au XVIIIe siècle* (Geneva: Éditions René Kister, 1954).

of the Russian *romans* was highly influenced by Italian vocal music.³⁵ The existence of both Italian and German opera companies within the St Petersburg Imperial Theatre also speaks to Russian interest in the wider continent. Nonetheless, decades of Francophilia among the Russian aristocracy and the Russian imperial family had indeed left an indelible mark on broader Russian culture, which was controlled and promoted by the upper classes. French influence on burgeoning Russian-language music theatre was significant, which led some authors to assert that Russian music theatre of this period developed directly and solely from French *vaudeville* and *opéra-comique* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ignoring the impact of Italian and Austro-German elements.³⁶ But Russian writers would acknowledge their debt to Western Europe: as late as 1840, Aleksandr Shakhovskoy himself would cite classical Greek tragedians like Euripides, French satirical comedians like Molière, and the works of Shakespeare as the main influences on the development of Russian theatre.³⁷ Given that generic classifications would become much more broad and varied in the first decades of the nineteenth century, it will first be useful to explore briefly French antecedents for Russian music theatre and provide a general definition of what a work of Russian music theatre consisted in this period.

³⁵ See Mooser, *L'opéra-comique*, pp. 171-9. For more on salon music, see M. G. Dolgushina, *U istokov russkogo romansa: kamernaya vokal'naya kul'tura aleksandrovskoi epokhi* (Vologda: Knizhnoe nasledie, 2004).

³⁶ Alexander V. Tselebrovski's 2003 dissertation on the history of Russian vaudeville asserts this without qualification. See Alexander V. Tselebrovski, *The History of Russian Vaudeville from 1800-1815*. PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2003. For background on the French language's impact on Russian cultural life beyond the musical sphere, see Derek Offord, Vladislav Rjéoutski, and Gesine Argent, *The French Language in Russia: A Social, Cultural, and Political History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

³⁷ A. A. Shakhovskoi, 'Letopis' russkogo teatra', *Repertuar russkogo teatra*, 1/6 and 2/11 (1840) 1-7 and 1-18, (1/6, p. 3).

In contemporary French theatre, the eighteenth-century term *vaudeville* had been replaced by *opéra-comique* as a catch-all definition for any musical work with spoken dialogue or recitative, but many French *opéras-comiques* of the early nineteenth century were never referred to as such by their creators; rather, librettists and composers often borrowed terms from spoken theatre to provide greater precision in their generic definitions. To give examples from two composers popular in both France and Russia: Luigi Cherubini's *Les deux journées* (1800) was called *un opéra en trois actes*, and Étienne Méhul's *Joseph* (1807) was called *drame mêlé de chants*. This was done in order to distance what composers considered more serious works from earlier *opéras-comiques*, which were traditionally much lighter in tone. The term *comique* or *comédie* as used in France, however, did not signify a comic plot: Marmontel's entry in the *Encyclopédie* for *comédie* defines it as "staged mores" designed to portray the human condition and human frailty while entertaining.³⁸ It is likely that this definition of *comédie* would have applied also to the Russian term *komicheskaya*, as in *komicheskaya opera*.³⁹

Like their French contemporaries, what would later be designated as Russian *opera-vaudevilles* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were light in plot, and often

³⁸ M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet and Richard Langham Smith, 'Opéra-comique', in *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 12 November 2020.

³⁹ Several early Russian-language works were direct adaptations of French *opéra-comique* originals, such as *Derevenskii vorozheya* (1777, music by Johann Kerzelli and libretto by V. Maikov), a Russian adaptation of Rousseau's *Le devin du village*. Other works were referred to directly as *opéras-comiques russes*, such as *Dva okhotnika* (1780, libretto by I. Dmitrevsky, composer unknown). See R.-Aloys Mooser, *Opéras, Intermezzos, Ballets Cantates, Oratorios joués en Russie durant le XVIIIe siècle. Essai d'un répertoire alphabétique et chronologique*. (Geneva: Éditions Rene Kister, 1955). As French works decreased in popularity with the turn of the century, it would seem the generic terminology was translated directly from French into Russian.

satirical or comic rather than serious. However, when reduced to a set of basic features, Russian *opera-vaudevilles* also seem to possess traits common to Italian operas of the period. The use of individual songs as modes of introduction and characterisation, as well as a way for characters to comment on the action of a preceding scene, holds much in common with the strict rules for arias in eighteenth-century Italian *opera seria*, which as noted above had a long pre-history within elite circles in the capital.⁴⁰ Ensemble numbers were often used to increase dramatic tension by effectively slowing down and ‘freeze-framing’ the action before bringing the number to a rapid conclusion: an identical technique was used by contemporary Italian *bel canto* composers like Rossini.⁴¹ On the other hand, the use of satire in Russian *opera-vaudevilles* follows from eighteenth-century French *vaudevilles*: the presence of *kuplety* (spoken rhyming couplets as opposed to free-verse dialogues) indicated a satiric effect, and inserted topical songs – often based on popular melodies rather than original compositions – were usually entirely irrelevant to the broader plot and were strictly satirical, as in their French counterparts.

It would seem, therefore, that Russian *opera-vaudevilles* took their musical cues from Italian opera and their dramatic cues from French *vaudeville*. While there are strong elements of French tradition in Russian *opera-vaudeville*, it is inaccurate to claim that French theatre was the sole guiding influence on the development of Russian-language music theatre. Indeed, the diverse European influences at work within the Russian *opera-vaudeville* genre are a fundamental factor

⁴⁰ While not as popular as French musical theatre, Italian *opera seria* and *opera buffa* was well-represented in Russian musical life of the eighteenth century, especially works by Italian émigré composers such as Paisiello. See Mooser, *Opéras, Intermezzos, Ballets Cantates*. Chapter Two will explore in more detail the impact of Italian opera, particularly *bel canto*, on Russian culture during the 1840s-50s.

⁴¹ The ‘Rossini crescendo’ or ‘Rossini rocket’ is an expansion of this technique.

behind why the genre is so difficult to define, and also why it was discounted as properly Russian by later music historians. In this sense, the development of Russian *opera-vaudeville* during this period parallels that of literature, where multiple literary tendencies and ‘new’ trends co-existed and were rapidly absorbed into Russian literary culture.⁴² Interest in foreign works remained strong throughout the first half of the nineteenth century: between 1826 and 1840, the two most commonly cited composers in the Russian periodical press were Gioachino Rossini and Niccolò Paganini, and many of the most popular theatrical works were not original Russian pieces, but translations from French and German originals.⁴³ The continuing presence of foreign works and their popularity would become a sore point for early musical nationalists, as will be explored in the next chapter.

Russian music drama of the early nineteenth century also mirrored its French contemporaries in terms of the wide variety of generic descriptions used by librettists and composers. This process likely began around the turn of the century but seems to have become more widely practiced around the 1820s. The development of such a proliferation of genres can be clearly seen through the Cavoš-Shakhovskoy partnership as detailed in the following chart:

⁴² See Tosi, ‘Contemporary Literary Influences: Pre-Romantic and Romantic Trends’ in *Waiting for Pushkin*, pp. 297-364.

⁴³ Hodge, *A Double Garland*, p. 16. Zotov complains about the proliferation of translated works in ‘O nyneshnem’, p. 57.

Cavos-Shakhovskoy Collaborations⁴⁴

Date	Title	Genre
1805 ⁴⁵	<i>Rusalka</i> (fourth part)	Comic-fantastic opera
21 Jan 1806	<i>Lyubovnaya pochta</i>	One-act comic opera
1806 [?]	<i>Lyubovnoe zel'e</i>	
18 Apr 1806	<i>Beglets ot svoei nevesti</i>	Three-act comic opera
15 May 1812	<i>Kazakh-stikhotvorets</i>	Opera-vaudeville
31 Dec 1814 ⁴⁶	<i>Lomonosov, ili rekrut-stikhotvorets</i>	Opera
17 Feb 1815	<i>Otkupschik Brazhkin, ili Prodazha sela</i>	Comic opera ⁴⁷
19 Oct 1815	<i>Ivan Susanin</i>	Opera in two acts
16 Apr 1819 ⁴⁸	<i>Personyak Falaley, ili Rochus Pumpernikel' v novom vide</i>	Vaudeville
21 Sept 1820 ⁴⁹	<i>Novaya sumatokha, ili Zhenikhi chuzhikh nevest'</i>	One-act comic opera
21 Jan 1821 ⁵⁰	<i>Ivanoi, ili Vozvrashcheniye Richarda L'vonago Serdtsa</i>	Five-act romantic comedy w/ song and dance
29 Apr 1821 ⁵¹	<i>Zhenshchina-lunatik</i>	Opera-vaudeville

⁴⁴ Modified from Appendix II (complete works of Catterino Cavos) in Giust, *'Ivan Susanin' di Catterino Cavos*, pp. 352-73. All dates Old Style.

⁴⁵ Composed by Stepan Davydov; Cavos contributed one aria.

⁴⁶ Collaboration with F. Antonolini (orchestration).

⁴⁷ Giust comments: 'probably scenic music for a comedy in two acts' (Giust, *'Ivan Susanin' di Catterino Cavos*, p. 363).

⁴⁸ Collaboration with L.V. Maurer, F. Antonolini, A.D. Zhilin, and N. G. Lyadov. Libretto adapted from play by Eugène Scribe.

⁴⁹ Pastiche of music by Cavos, Rossini, Mozart, Paisiello, Nasolini et al.

⁵⁰ Adaptation of Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*.

⁵¹ Adaptation of play by Eugène Scribe.

28 Sept 1821 ⁵²	<i>Burya i korablekrusheniye</i>	Magical-romantic spectacle (scenic music)
26 Sept 1822	<i>Printsessa Trebizondskaya, ili Ostrov nemykh</i>	Magical-comic balletto
8 Jan 1823 ⁵³	<i>Liliya Narbonskaya, ili Obet rytsarya</i>	Romantic comedy-balletto
19 Sept 1823	<i>Aleksandr i Sofiya, ili Russkie v Livonii</i> ⁵⁴	National drama with song
18 Oct 1823	<i>Sokol Knyazya Yaroslava Tverskogo, ili Suzhyenyi na belom kone</i>	Scenic music
3 Nov 1824	<i>Finn</i> ⁵⁵	Magic comedy in three acts after Greek tragedy
28 Sept 1825	<i>Kerimi-Girey, ili Krymskii khan</i> ⁵⁶	Romantic trilogy
29 Oct 1825 ⁵⁷	<i>Batyushkina dochka, ili Nashla kosa na kamen'</i>	Ballet-comedy
19 Nov 1825	<i>Aristofan, ili Predstavlenie komedii 'Vsadniki'</i>	Historic comedy in the ancient style (scenic music)
17 Dec 1827	<i>Fyodor Grigor'evich Volkov, ili Den' rozhdeniya russkogo teatra</i>	Opera-vaudeville

The generic descriptions of their collaborative works run from the simple *vaudeville* and *komicheskaya opera* to the quite specific 'magical-romantic spectacle', 'magic comedy after Greek tragedy', 'national drama with song', and 'historic comedy in the ancient style'. The collaborative works all share the implication of a light subject, but Cavos and Shakhovskoy's output, particularly after 1820, shows an interest in broadening earlier categories of genre. More precisely defined generic categories also reveal a shift in the relationship between Shakhovskoy-

⁵² Adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

⁵³ Collaboration with A. Berton

⁵⁴ Rafail Zotov may have collaborated on the libretto.

⁵⁵ Adapted from scenes in Aleksandr Pushkin's *Ruslan i Lyudmila*.

⁵⁶ Adapted from Aleksandr Pushkin's *Bachisaraiskii Fontan*.

⁵⁷ Collaboration with D. A. Shelichov and P. F. Turik.

as-librettist and Cavos-as-composer: while the generic categories for the pre-1820 works seem to emphasise the musical nature of these works (consider the recurrence of the terms ‘opera’ and *vaudeville*), the categories for the post-1820 works tend to reverse this dynamic and highlight more prominently the dramatic aspect (‘comedy’, ‘spectacle’). At first sight, this would appear to suggest a movement from an emphasis on the ‘music’ aspect of ‘music theatre’ to the ‘theatre’ aspect, but, as I will elaborate later, this is a product of the individual circumstances shaping the Cavos-Shakhovskoy collaboration rather than a generic development. Instead, the rapid expansion and proliferation of generic categories from about 1820 as seen in the Cavos-Shakhovskoy collaborative output gestures towards a state of confusion as to how to define works of musical theatre during this period, and moreover seems to indicate a corpus located somewhere on the boundary between music and literature rather than securely in one field or the other.⁵⁸

Ivan Susanin: Myths and Manifestations

The case of *Ivan Susanin* is especially interesting in light of the very specific generic descriptions Cavos and Shakhovskoy would apply to their collaborative works: it is simply called ‘an opera in two acts’. Although the more elaborate generic descriptions do not begin to appear until five years after *Susanin*’s 1815 premiere, this very basic generic designation is still unusual. Perhaps the description of *Susanin* as ‘an opera in two acts’ was a conscious effort on the part of Cavos and Shakhovskoy to have the work taken more seriously than might be granted

⁵⁸ Hodge argues persuasively that ‘the proximate cultural occupations of literature and music overlapped in actuality’ in art song of the 1820s and ’30s; given that music theatre of the period still consisted of plays with interpolated music, the same hypothesis can be applied. See Chapter 7 of Hodge, *A Double Garland*, pp. 221-43.

a traditional *vaudeville* or *komicheskaya opera*, much as French composers of the period attempted to distance themselves from the preconceptions assumed by a designation of *opéra-comique*. By calling *Ivan Susanin* simply an opera, however, Cavos and Shakhovskoy confused critics both contemporary and modern, who alternately describe Susanin as a *vaudeville*, a comic opera, a *tragedia in musica*, or in one instance as ‘a rescue opera owing much to the French example’.⁵⁹ Anna Giust notes that the work exists ‘in a sort of limbo’ and posits that Cavos and Shakhovskoy ‘intended to compose a French-style *opéra-comique* [...] however, considering the subject matter, they lost the “light” connotation conferred by the appellation *komicheskaya opera* in the Russian language, and thus the genre became progressively obscured.’⁶⁰

Considering the subject matter of *Ivan Susanin*, as Giust suggests, several possibilities emerge for the genre confusion amongst the critical literature. The plot for *Ivan Susanin* is drawn from an incident in Russian history during the Time of Troubles (*Smutnoe vremya*, roughly 1598-1613): a succession crisis ensued following the death of Tsar Fedor I, and after a period of civil unrest, famine, and occupation by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Mikhail Romanov ascended to power, establishing the Romanov dynasty that would rule the Russian empire until the 1917 revolution.⁶¹ During the later years of this crisis, it was said that a peasant named Ivan Susanin guided Polish troops seeking to kill Mikhail Romanov deep into the forests near the Romanov estate, thus saving the future tsar’s life. A charter dated 1619 donating lands to a

⁵⁹ John Warrack, ‘Russian Opera’, in *A History of Russian Theatre*, ed. by Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 199-218 (p. 201).

⁶⁰ Giust, *‘Ivan Susanin’ di Catterino Cavos*, p. 299 and p. 156.

⁶¹ For more information on the Time of Troubles, see Chester L. Dunning, *Russia’s First Civil War: The Time of Troubles and the Founding of the Romanov Dynasty* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

Bogdan Sobinin as reward for his father-in-law Ivan Susanin's bravery seems to bear out at least some of this legend, and subsequent charters in 1641 and 1693 dutifully repeated the tale.⁶² By the turn of the nineteenth century, the legend of Susanin became extremely important as part of the Russian literary elite's growing national consciousness, leading many to mine Russia's pre-Petrine history in search of national heroes.⁶³ The Susanin legend would become especially pertinent following the invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte, and would become identified in the aristocratic milieu with the patriotic peasant soldiers they commanded during the war.⁶⁴ The operatic *Ivan Susanin* thus emerged at the height of this Napoleon-induced burst of patriotism within Russian culture, and the way it portrays the Susanin legend speaks to the emerging tension between this newfound national consciousness and a culture that up until this point had happily borrowed from Western European, and particularly, as we have seen, French forms and models.

The plot of Cavos and Shakovskoy's *Ivan Susanin* takes some liberties with the historical record, and does not so much adapt Western European operatic models as subsume Russian history within them. The opera follows the family of Ivan Susanin and their village of Domnino

⁶² Giust, 'Ivan Susanin' di Catterino Cavos, p. 260.

⁶³ Nikolay Karamzin's ten-volume *Istoriya gosudarstva rossiiskogo* (1816-26) contributed significantly to the highlighting of pre-Petrine Russian history and folk heroes.

⁶⁴ An anecdote concerning Prince Sergey Volkonsky, future Decembrist revolutionary and model for Tolstoy's Prince Andrey Bolkonsky in *War and Peace* (1869), well illustrates aristocratic shock at the patriotism of the peasants. At the height of the invasion in August 1812, Volkonsky claims to have reported to Alexander I that 'каждый крестьянин - герой [...] Государь! Стыжусь, что принадлежу к нему [the aristocracy]. Было много слов, а на деле ничего.' See S. M. Volkonskii, *Zapiski Sergeya Grigor'evicha Volkonskogo - dekabrista* (St Petersburg: Sinodal'naya tipografiya, 1901), p. 193.

near the Romanov estate, and illustrates how Susanin and future son-in-law Matvey work together to lure a group of Cossacks away from the residence of their liege-lord, Mikhail. Romantic tension is present in the character of Susanin's daughter Masha (an entirely fictional character), who yearns to marry Matvey but accepts there will be no peace until Mikhail sits on the throne. Where Cavos and Shakhovskoy diverge sharply from history, however, is with Susanin's fate: unlike other literary sources based on the legend, in the opera Susanin is saved from death at the hands of the Polish troops by a last-minute *deus ex machina*. The opera ends with the wedding of Susanin's daughter and Sobinin as all rejoice in the tsar's salvation.

This happy ending was controversial, and even Cavos and Shakhovskoy's staunchest critics are hard-pressed to defend it. Zotov would write, 'Смерть Сусанина принадлежит к великим и благородным явлениям русской истории. За чем же отнимать у нея подобныя воспоминания, которыми она гордится!'⁶⁵ Yet the decision to introduce a happy ending and conclude with the wedding of Masha and Matvey was part of a pre-existing generic condition: all operas were supposed to include happy endings, or to use the correct Italian term, a *lieto fine* that would unite a pair or multiple pairs of lovers.⁶⁶ Audiences expected a happy ending even when historical or mythological records disproved it; the pressures of genre seemed to trump accuracy towards the historical record. In one famous example, Oedipus does not die at the end of Vladislav Ozerov's *Edip v Afinakh* (1804). Composer and critic Aleksandr Serov would reflect on Ivan Susanin's counter-historical ending later in the century, writing,

⁶⁵ Rafail M. Zotov, 'Biografiya Kapel'meystera Kavosa (Pis'mo k I. P. Pesotskomu)', *Repertuar russkogo teatra*, 2/10 (1840), 1-10, (pp. 7-8).

⁶⁶ There are multiple possibilities to ensure a *lieto fine*, but the union of lovers is the most common device. See F. W. Sternfeld, 'Lieto fine', *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 8 November 2020.

В начале нашего века решительно не допускали возможности трагической развязки в опере. Даже самые известные всем или чисто-исторические сюжеты, поступая на оперную сцену, существенно изменялись, сообразно этому основному требованию, чтоб конец был благополучный, после всех бедствий и зол, все устраивалось как нельзя лучше.⁶⁷

Yet, as the decades progressed and especially in comparison with Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsarya*, in which Susanin does perish, the Cavos-Shakhovskoy *lieto fine* would be seen as hopelessly old-fashioned as well as ahistorical.

Cavos and Shakhovskoy's *Ivan Susanin* also eludes easy generic classification precisely because it freely mixes elements of many pre-existing theatrical genres. Much of Susanin's basic structure comes from *vaudeville*: alternating spoken dialogue with sung numbers, use of rhyming *kuplety* in the libretto, and the focus on peasant life. However, the term *komicheskaya opera* also applies in the sense that *Susanin*'s characters are much more fully developed than the stock characters one would expect to find in a vaudeville. Equally, the structure of the plot parallels the plots of French rescue operas of this period, in which the hero is saved from certain death at the last moment. Perhaps the most difficult genre to apply to Susanin is the *tragedia in musica*; apart from the *lieto fine*, the opera does not really fit with the traditional structures of a *tragedia in musica*: there are no royal characters except the tsar (who never appears onstage) and the subject is not taken from mythology as would be traditionally expected. While Cavos certainly employs elements of Italian operatic writing in *Ivan Susanin*, especially in the vocal writing, this is not enough to call the work a *tragedia in musica*.

It is probable that Cavos and Shakhovskoy called the work an opera because they wished the work, with its patriotic themes, to be taken more seriously than a *vaudeville* or *komicheskaya opera*, or perhaps they did so quite simply because they could not think of any more specific generic designation to give it. *Susanin*, as a combination of elements from various theatrical

⁶⁷ Aleksandr N. Serov, 'Zametki o peterburgskikh teatrov', *Sovremennik*, 29 (1851), 156-180 (pp. 157-8).

genres, is also indicative of the beginnings of the confusion in genre as seen more clearly in Cavos and Shakhovskoy's post-1820 works: whereas with *Susanin* Cavos and Shakhovskoy would avoid a complicated generic designation, the later works would indicate more clearly the broad range of competing genres and influences in early nineteenth-century musical theatre.

Professionalism versus Amateurism

While Cavos and Shakhovskoy's different social standing would likely have had very little effect on their working relationship, the disparity in status between the librettist of a piece of musical theatre and the composer of the music would have affected how the two related to each other. Considering the higher status afforded to the librettist, it is probable that Shakhovskoy approached Cavos first sometime in late 1805 to write the music for *Lyubovnaya pochta*, which premiered at the end of January 1806. The one-act comic opera was a modest success, and, as noted earlier, particular praise was given to the music for fulfilling its role of being pleasant to listen to without obscuring the text. Clearly Cavos's work impressed Shakhovskoy, for only a few months later in April 1806, their second collaborative work premiered: a longer three-act comic opera called *Beglets ot svoei nevesty*. Shakhovskoy's star was already rising at the time due to the success of his satirical play *Novyi Stern*, which many perceived as an open attack on novelist and historian Nikolay Karamzin and an attack on rampant Francophilia in the Russian upper classes.⁶⁸ In this light, Shakhovskoy's choice to patronise Cavos is particularly interesting: a rising playwright like Shakhovskoy could have chosen any one of the many composers in St

⁶⁸ For more on *Novyi Stern* and Shakhovskoy's role in a debate that would become the Slavophile/Westerniser dichotomy, see Catherine Schuler, 'Uncertain Boundaries: Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Shakhovskoy and the Rise of the *Teatral'*, in *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia*. (Des Moines: University of Iowa Press, 2009), pp. 79-87.

Petersburg, but time and again it was the Italian-born Cavos's name that paired with Shakhovskoy's on the title pages of his libretti.

The two men would not collaborate again for several years; they seem both to have been occupied with their individual responsibilities and with the increase in theatrical activity that coincided with the outbreak of the Napoleonic war in 1807. Shakhovskoy himself would take a leave of absence from the Imperial Theatres for two years between late 1812 and 1814 in order to play a more direct role in the military campaign against Napoleon.⁶⁹ Upon his return, Shakhovskoy went straight back to work with Cavos and the pair premiered three collaborative operas on patriotic themes in ten months, the last and most successful of which was *Ivan Susanin*. However, Cavos's duties with the Imperial Theatre had been greatly expanded while Shakhovskoy was away. Cavos now was sole Kapellmeister of the Russian and German operatic theatres, director of orchestra, and régisseur – a hybrid of stage manager, director, teacher, and producer.⁷⁰ Shakhovskoy's participation in the military campaigns against Napoleon allowed Cavos to take on a more significant role in the life of the Imperial Theatre; thus an event of monumental historical significance ushered in a seemingly small change that had a great impact in what Cavos was able to achieve within the Imperial Theatre.⁷¹ As a régisseur within the operatic-musical division of the Imperial Theatre, Cavos would be required to work closely with the commissioner of repertory: an unproblematic task given that this was his collaborator

⁶⁹ Schuler, 'Uncertain Boundaries', p. 87. See also Shakhovskoy's own wartime memoirs, 'Dvenadsatyi god, vospominania Knyazya A. A. Shakhovskogo', *Russkii arkhiv*, 11 (1886), 372-402.

⁷⁰ Shakhovskoy also occupied the role of a régisseur within his division of the Imperial Theatre.

⁷¹ Cavos's new duties may also be a reason why his role as a composer seems to have diminished with respect to Shakhovskoy's role as dramatist in their later collaborative works.

Shakhovskoy. It is possible that Cavos was given the role of *régisseur* for that very reason, for the directorate of the Imperial Theatre must have noticed how productively the two men worked together. Thus their partnership proved not only artistically fruitful, but seems to have been beneficial to both men's careers.

Given the wide variety of roles Cavos was expected to fill in the Imperial Theatre's opera division, it is no wonder that his creative output dropped off during the second half of the 1810s into the 1820s. Anna Giust notes that while Cavos was busy during the 1820s, this work was 'less significant' than his output during the war, as it was mainly re-orchestrations of other operas and scenic music for vaudevilles and plays rather than operatic compositions of his own.⁷² However, it would seem that Cavos continued to prioritise his work with Shakhovskoy: nearly every new piece of theatre Cavos worked on from 1821 to 1824 was a play by Shakhovskoy. Many of these were adaptations of contemporary literature, like Shakhovskoy's liberal interpretation of Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, and a pair of plays based on early work by the young Pushkin.⁷³ None of these works would enjoy the same success as *Ivan Susanin*, perhaps because both men were now so busy that neither had time to focus on each individual piece. Shakhovskoy's ability to churn out new plays seemingly at will meant he almost always had a new piece available for any given occasion, but the rapidity with which he wrote meant that the

⁷² Giust, *'Ivan Susanin' di Catterino Cavos*, p. 57.

⁷³ For more on Shakhovskoy's *Ivanhoe*, see Abram A. Gozenpud, 'Val'ter Skott i romanticheskie komedii A. A. Shakhovskogo', *Russko-evropeiskie literaturnye svyazi*, ed. by A. L. Lobanov (Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), pp. 38-48. Shakhovskoy would write *Finn*, a 'magic comedy in three acts' based on Pushkin's *Ruslan i Lyudmila*, and *Kerimi-Girey*, a trilogy of plays based on Pushkin's *Bakhchisaraiskii fontan*, between 1824 and the end of 1825. Cavos would write the incidental music for all three pieces.

dramaturgy of each work would not be as polished as the playwright might have liked.⁷⁴ P. A. Smirnov reminisced that Shakhovskoy would ‘постоянно садился за письменный стол с семи часов утра, и, ограничась одною чашкою кофе, не редко просиживал до семи часов вечера.’⁷⁵

There is perhaps another, more prosaic reason for the simplicity of Cavos and Shakhovskoy’s output of the 1820s: that the pair created works not merely as vehicles of personal artistic expression, but also as pedagogical tools. Both Cavos and Shakhovskoy were heavily involved teachers in their respective fields, and personally taught most of the actor-singers working for the Imperial Theatre at the time. Each man’s contribution to the pedagogy of his area cannot be underestimated. Shakhovskoy would famously coach his actors through their texts line by line, showing them not only how to declaim the text, but also which gestures and movements should accompany it.⁷⁶ Cavos introduced the first systematic vocal pedagogy in Russian theatre, teaching his singers in solfège, replacing string accompaniment with pianoforte

⁷⁴ It is this quality which lent weight to the argument that Shakhovskoy’s work was derivative and uninspired, though some of this probably also had roots in the prince’s general unpopularity amongst aristocratic social circles.

⁷⁵ P. A. Smirnov, ‘Biograficheskie ocherki: vospominanie o knyaze Aleksandre Aleksandroviche Shakhovskom’, *Repertuar i panteon teatrov*, 1 (1847), 103-124 (p. 116).

⁷⁶ Smirnov comments on the often harsh notes Shakhovskoy gave his actors, saying ‘Подобные замечания были непрерывны в продолжение всей репетиции и обращались без исключения к каждому действующему лицу, из которых большая часть были его кровные ученики. И что мне было прежде странно и непонятно, почему эти резкия и очень часто оскорбительные замечания сносились артистами равнодушно, впоследствии казалось уже очень понятным. На князя Шаховского нельзя было сердиться, во первых, потому что эти слова высказывались из единственного желания сделать добро тем людям, которых он прин[и]мал к себе, как детей.’ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

accompaniment and teaching the singers to accompany themselves, as well as providing lessons in music theory. It is important to note that up until 1833 there was no such thing as a separate Russian opera theatre, and the performers functioned as ‘actors who can sing’ rather than ‘singers who can act’. In this light, Cavos’s pedagogical efforts speaks to a desire to bring the homegrown performers up to a higher standard of vocal performance, and as I will show in the next section, Cavos’s compositions often could be said to function as exercises in vocal technique.

Programming, too, was designed with teaching purposes in mind: Rafail Zotov claims Cavos would program ‘Italian operas with recitatives’ such as Rossini’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816) and *La Cenerentola* (1817), and Bellini’s *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* (1830) ‘for didactic purposes.’⁷⁷ Furthermore, as teachers Cavos and Shakhovskoy would have been extremely sensitive to the individual capabilities of the actor-singers from which they could choose. It is therefore very possible that their collaborative works were in part didactic in function with the abilities of specific artists in mind; the vocal music to *Ivan Susanin*, for example, is known to have been written for specific singers.⁷⁸ For his part, Shakhovskoy took mainly French acting methods and applied them to Russian theatre: he believed that ‘by teaching [the actors] the mechanical skills of the French while cultivating in them the greater “naturalness” and *dusha* that was allegedly inherent in the Russian people’, Russian actors would emerge superior to all other nations.⁷⁹ Shakhovskoy would carefully evaluate each actor’s individual skills, tailor parts to suit

⁷⁷ Quoted in Giust, ‘*Ivan Susanin*’ di Catterino Cavos, p. 65. Originally published in R. M. Zotov, *Teatral’nye vospominaniya, Avtobiograficheskie zapiski* (St Petersburg: V tipografii Ya. Ionsona, 1859). Translation mine.

⁷⁸ Giust, ‘*Ivan Susanin*’ di Catterino Cavos, p. 178.

⁷⁹ Schuler, ‘Uncertain Boundaries’, p. 94.

them, and coach them through the rest, the results of which were that ‘often an actor who was considered completely inept appeared to perform his role very well’.⁸⁰ The peasants who populate *Ivan Susanin* would certainly have been easier for Shakhovskoy’s actors to embody, many of whom were originally serfs or came from peasant backgrounds; it was in the more difficult poetic meters and registers that Shakhovskoy could push his actors to an equal level of skill as their French counterparts. While *Ivan Susanin* and other Cavos-Shakhovskoy works would remain in the repertory until the mid-nineteenth century, it is perhaps not by their creative output that Cavos and Shakhovskoy should be given a prominent place in the history of Russian opera as a genre. Rather, their greatest contribution was in increasing the technical capabilities and skills of Russian performers, giving later composers a strong foundation upon which they would build in the following decades.

The libretto and score for *Ivan Susanin* seem to support both the argument that text took prominence over music in this period and that Cavos and Shakhovskoy were interested in using practical performance as a pedagogical tool. As detailed earlier, while the title page mentions only Cavos’s name in connection to *Ivan Susanin*’s musical content, it was generally understood that the librettist was the primary author of a work of musical theatre. Furthermore, unlike the later *Zhizn’ za tsarya*, *Ivan Susanin* was not entirely sung, and the musical numbers can be understood as interpolations into a stage play rather than the essential fabric of the drama. The crux of the difference between *Zhizn’* and *Susanin*, then, lies in the status of word versus music. As I will demonstrate, the text-based approach in *Ivan Susanin* illustrates the continuing

⁸⁰ Quoted in Schuler, ‘Uncertain Boundaries’, p. 95. Originally cited by Sergei Aksakov, ‘Literaturnye i teatral’nye vospominaniya’, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3 vols (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1986), II (1986), p. 417. Translation Schuler’s.

influence of French models even as late as 1815, in spite of the anti-French reaction to Napoleon's invasion.⁸¹

Masha's Act I aria in *Ivan Susanin* provides a useful starting point for understanding how Shakhovskoy's writing dictated Cavos's compositional setting. The text for the aria consists of two eight-line stanzas in trochaic pentameter, a verse form usually reserved for folksy connotation or especially for texts meant to be sung.⁸²

Скоро, скоро мы с тобою
Под венец, мой друг, пойдем,
И в любви – одной душою
Домом славно заживем!
Живучи с тобою вместе
Будут радости одне:
Сколь ты миль своей невесте,
Столько ж будешь миль жене.

Так в груди сердечко бьется,
Что не можно рассказать:
Скоро с миленьким придется
Нам на свадьбе поплясать;
Верные мои подружки,
Все соседи, вся родня,
Вся деревня, свахи, дружки
Запируют у меня.⁸³

The text is structured consistently: each line alternates unstressed and stressed endings and each stanza rhymes in quatrains AbAbCdCd. Imagery, too, is consistent, moving from Masha's focus on herself as part of the marital couple in the first stanza to expand outward to imagine

⁸¹ Edward J. Dent argues that 'whereas the Italians always pursued the idea of attractive melody above all others, the French seemed more interested in the words,' a preoccupation that can be seen in Cavos and Glinka's compositions. See Edward J. Dent, *The Rise of Romantic Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 23.

⁸² See Barry P. Scherr, 'The Classical Meters', in *Russian Poetry: Meter, Rhythm, and Rhyme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 40-126.

⁸³ Shakhovskoy, *Ivan Susanin*, pp. 5-6.

herself and her happiness as part of a larger rejoicing in nature. Furthermore, Shakhovskoy clearly thought about the clarity of the text when sung, focusing particularly on open ‘i’, ‘e’, and ‘oo’ vowels that would ring out beautifully in a soprano register. Though the text is not particularly innovative on the page, its clear imagery and attention to how it would sound when sung makes it a fine example of early nineteenth-century poets’ interest in writing texts for sung voices.

Where Shakhovskoy as a poet seems to have been working off binaries in meter and structure (two eight-line stanzas that neatly divide into four quatrains), Cavos as a composer would play with ternary musical structure in his setting. The first section of the aria roughly adheres to the ABA’ ternary structure commonly found in Italian *opera seria*, with the first quatrain of the stanza functioning as the A section (itself a smaller ternary episode moving from A major to B minor and back again) and the second quatrain functioning as the B section (working in a mix of related keys). Then, Cavos moves to the final stanza (A’ section) and adds elaborate vocal ornamentation to repeated text, highlighting especially the final couplet with its image of a happy husband and wife. Cavos repeats text in the second stanza more frequently than the first, breaking apart sections of verse to illustrate musically the beating of Masha’s heart in a more harmonically unstable section. The final two lines of the text are further broken down and repeated with increasingly elaborate ornamentation, emphasising Masha’s overwhelming feeling of happy anticipation and taking full advantage of the open vowel sounds within the lines before repeating again in a more simplified, condensed form.

The role of Masha was written for Sofiya Samoilova, a gifted soprano considered to be one of the earliest Russian-born celebrity performers.⁸⁴ The technical demands of the music – clarity

⁸⁴ See Gozenpud, *Muzykal’nyi teatr*, pp. 447-9.

of vowel expression and the ability to move the voice fluidly through increasing levels of ornamentation – function almost as a practice exercise for the singer.⁸⁵ While not outside the technical capabilities of an amateur singer, the latter half of the aria demands a level of professional vocal skill that Samoilova clearly possessed, but as a whole, the aria is not as demanding as one by a contemporary Italian composer like Rossini, whose works Cavos also programmed. If Shakhovskoy drilled his performers on proper text declamation in rehearsals, Cavos brought this pedagogical focus directly onto the operatic stage, allowing the singers both to practice and to show off their new vocal skills.

Besides the use of ornamentation as a pedagogical tool, Cavos's deployment of it in Masha's aria also reflects a rising musical trend taken from folksong: the *prot'yazhnaya*, or 'drawn-out song'. It was the *prot'yazhnaya* that later writers such as Turgenev and Gogol' would classify as containing the deep melancholy of the Russian soul.⁸⁶ Masha's longing for her upcoming nuptials fits in with this trope, but the use of ornamentation itself links Masha's aria with the *prot'yazhnaya*: *prot'yazhanaya* as sung in their original folk contexts did include extensive ornamentation and vocal decoration. Thus the ornamentation in Masha's aria serves a kind of musical double duty. On the one hand, the way the ornamentation is developed with regard to the aria's overall musical structure gestures towards eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Italian

⁸⁵ Many composers in this period wrote separate exercise books for developing singers. Rossini's *Gorgheggi e solfeggi* (1827) includes exercises in vocal ornamentation strikingly similar to Cavos's compositional method in this aria: a given melodic line repeated with increasingly elaborate decoration.

⁸⁶ See Marina Frolova-Walker, 'Music of the soul?', in *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, ed. Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 116-31.

opera, but on the other hand its usage for a peasant character singing a song of longing also gestures to Russian folk practice as understood by urban composers.

Both text and music in Masha's aria reflect a genre of music performed outside the operatic stage: the art song, performed by gentry amateurs in private salons. The first decades of the nineteenth century saw a rise in the publication and dissemination of song collections (*pesenniki*) throughout the Russian empire. Despite the expectations of the name, these were usually collections of texts rather than collections of printed music, again emphasising the status of text over music during this period.⁸⁷ As with Masha's aria, the texts in songbooks were modelled after European neo-classical models, but focused heavily on an idealised Russian countryside and peasant life. Compositional techniques inspired by folk practice like the *protyazhnaya* were enmeshed with Western-style notational and generic structure, and such features were then gestured towards as containing a particular Russian characteristic: indeed, Masha's aria is structured in this simultaneously Western and Russian way. As Marina Frolova-Walker notes, decorative effects drawn from folk practice meant that 'in the midst of a fashionable soirée, any society girl could imagine herself at one with the mysterious spirit of the Russian people'.⁸⁸ During a time of invasion and anti-French sentiment, Russian audiences could therefore point to the folksiness of *Ivan Susanin* as evidence of its specific 'Russianness', even though its music was composed by a foreigner and based on wider European practice, and its text, though written by a native Russian, also adhered closely to Western models.

While cleverly and creatively composed, the music of *Ivan Susanin* is ultimately in service to the demands of its text. By Glinka's time, not only had French *opéra-comique* fallen out of

⁸⁷ I am indebted to Philip Bullock's current work on Russian song for this observation.

⁸⁸ Frolova-Walker, 'Music of the soul?', p. 122.

favour, but also the librettist-composer dynamic had moved towards granting greater authority to the composer over the librettist. Glinka would seize this shift in authority and pursue it to the utmost – indeed alienating several librettists, some of whom were well-regarded poets, before arriving at a mutual working relationship with Baron Egor Rosen, who would ultimately take credit for the entire libretto of *Zhizn' za tsarya*. Furthermore, perceptions of ‘Russianness’ had drastically changed in the years since Cavos and Shakhovskoy’s heyday. Before examining how these drastic shifts in attitude are expressed in *Zhizn' za tsarya*, however, let us first explore via the Cavos/Shakhovskoy partnership how the early-century understanding of Russian national identity and its cultural expression were understood.

***Russitsizm* versus Nationalism: Competing Ideas of ‘Russianness’**

While the partnership between Shakhovskoy and Cavos may have been unequal in terms of how much each could be considered the author of their collaborative works, it was not as unequal in social class and standing as might be assumed. Although Shakhovskoy was a member of the nobility (albeit lower-ranked than the title of ‘prince’ might suggest), he was highly unusual among his class in his level of participation within the world of professional theatre. Catherine A. Schuler identifies Shakhovskoy as a leading member of an aristocratic social group known as *teatraly*: enthusiastic participants in amateur theatre among the salon circle, whose experiences and education gave them greater authority and theatrical expertise than the average aristocratic spectator. However, these *teatraly* never participated in professional theatre activities, hampered ‘by social custom and law’.⁸⁹ In Shakhovskoy’s time, the noble classes had distanced themselves from a model of service focused solely on the imperial court that had been

⁸⁹ Schuler, ‘Uncertain Boundaries’, p. 73.

the norm in the eighteenth century and moved towards a model of service more reliant on military service as well as participation in and encouragement of social, intellectual, and artistic pursuits. To this end, the aristocratic salon became the primary mode of cultural relations, almost entirely responsible for the encouragement of new artistic creations and functioning as a ‘school of education’ for the new generation.⁹⁰ Many of the aristocratic participants in salon culture wrote and performed in plays, musical divertissements, and chamber music, but it was a strictly private, limited pursuit. Shakhovskoy’s background therefore is not unusual for a man of his rank, but his decision to bring his theatrical pursuits to a broader audience set him apart from his contemporaries.⁹¹ Hired in 1802 by the directorate of the Imperial Theatres in St Petersburg as commissioner of repertory, Shakhovskoy by all accounts threw himself into advocating for Russian-language theatre, which had previously been looked down upon by the educated elite as only fit for the lower classes.⁹² ‘It is surely not coincidental’, Schuler notes, ‘that the quality and reputation of the Russian theatre in St Petersburg rose soon after’ Shakhovskoy took the reins.⁹³

Catterino Cavos was not at all unusual for his time in travelling from Italy to serve at the Russian court: Italian composers and impresarios had been making the journey since the first

⁹⁰ Dolgushina, *U istokov russkogo romansa*, p. 45. Paradoxically, this idea of ‘schooling’ the new generation in modes of correct behaviour and taste is a remnant of eighteenth-century conceptions of the role of the state in education.

⁹¹ It is thought that Shakhovskoy’s physical appearance – he was not handsome and rather overweight – and a severe speech impediment kept him from embracing fully the traditional military service expected by his rank. Considering what else we know about the prince’s personality, I would argue Shakhovskoy’s genuine love for theatre and belief in its ability to enact social change was strong enough for him to disregard social convention.

⁹² Schuler, ‘Uncertain Boundaries’, p. 93.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Italian theatre company arrived in Russia in 1731. Cavos's early biography is difficult to trace; even sources writing in the mid-nineteenth century shortly after the composer's death cannot agree exactly how or even in what year Cavos came to Russia. Documentary evidence suggests Cavos was hired by the Imperial Theatres in 1798, quite possibly to work in the Italian opera company that existed there at the time.⁹⁴ A contract dated 1803 made Cavos sole Kapellmeister of the Russian and Italian opera companies, and his first operatic works premiered the following year.⁹⁵ Nor was Cavos the only foreigner working at a high level in the Imperial Theatres; the director of ballet and dance, Charles Didelot, was born in Stockholm to a French family. Indeed, while the directorate of the Imperial Theatres was entirely made of up Russian noblemen, many of them close companions of the Tsar, Shakhovskoy was unique in working alongside foreign-born artists in the day-to-day running of the theatres, and in participating in all aspects of professional theatrical life in St Petersburg.

The very 'foreignness' of professional theatre employees such as Cavos likely worked against the composer's reputation in later decades, especially with regard to the rise of Romantic nationalism and its enshrining in political doctrine with the policy of Official Nationalism in 1836. Early Romantic critics like Belinsky and his circle envisioned nationalism as something found in the 'feelings of a poet who is saturated only by the spirit of his people',⁹⁶ not his adopted country. This attitude would become widespread and be part of the impetus behind the

⁹⁴ Anna Giust describes the conflicting sources and the existing documentation in *Ivan Susanin* di Catterino Cavos, pp. 51-3.

⁹⁵ See Appendix II in Giust, *Ivan Susanin* di Catterino Cavos, pp. 360-74.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Hodge, *A Double Garland*, p. 154. Original citation D. V. Venevitinov, 'Otvét k Polevomy', *Synotechestva*, 104/24 (1825). Translation Hodge's.

rise of a Russian nationalist school of music. By the 1860s, Romantic critics like Odoevsky described foreign music and particularly ‘the Italian style’ as ‘repellent to the character of a purely Russian melody’.⁹⁷ The Romantic view of nationalism as a spirit rooted in a poet’s cultural identity (usually seen as a connection with folk culture or peasant life) ran contrary to Shakhovskoy’s school of thought, which defined nationalism as ‘the description or inclusion of specifically Russian characteristics’,⁹⁸ regardless of the writer or composer’s country of origin. In this view, Cavos’s Italian origins were not relevant to his ability to write a ‘Russian national opera’.⁹⁹ This sense of nationalism was rooted in eighteenth-century modes of thought, and in theatre reflected Catherine II’s promotion of ‘Russian theatre as both Westernised and distinctly native.’¹⁰⁰ *Ivan Susanin* perhaps can be seen as the apotheosis of this kind of nationalism in Russian theatre, with its Western-style music influenced by Russian folk idioms and its storyline centred around Russian peasant life. While *Ivan Susanin* was hailed in its time as a nationalist triumph, the Romantic perception of nationalism prevailed in public discourse, so that by the mid-century no opera written by an Italian, no matter how ‘Russian’ its subject matter, could ever be called a Russian opera.

As European immigrants active in Russian cultural life and especially in the creation of works considered ‘Russian’ in the nationalist sense, both Cavos and Glinka’s primary librettist

⁹⁷ K. V. O. [Vladimir Odoevsky], ‘Starinnaya pesnya’, *Russkii arkhiv*, 2 (1863), 107-11, reprinted in V. F. Odoevsky, *Muzykal’no-literaturnoe nasledie*, ed. G. B. Bernandt (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1956), pp. 252-4. Translation mine.

⁹⁸ Hodge, *A Double Garland*, p. 154.

⁹⁹ P. V. Zlov, one of Cavos’s singers, referred to Cavos as a *narodnyi kompozitor* in V. Morkov’s *Istoricheskii ocherk russkoi opery s samogo nachala* (St Petersburg: Izdanie M. Bernarda, 1862).

¹⁰⁰ Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, p. 95.

Egor Rozen serve as examples of Rutger Helmers's claim that 'the perception of Russianness was constructed, unstable, and subject to continuous negotiation'.¹⁰¹ Both men would be identified or identify themselves as Russian artists: in Cavos's case, the success of *Ivan Susanin* meant that critics would thrust upon him the label of *narodnyi kompozitor*, whereas Rosen would self-identify as a *narodnyi pisatel'* depending on his readerly audience.¹⁰² The identification with Russianness and more specifically with the word *narod* reveals how preoccupied Cavos and Rosen's respective artistic circles were with what they perceived as establishing authentically Russian forms of music and literature. Crucially, this preoccupation would be much more intense by Rosen's critical period, as a result of the rise of Romantic nationalism in Russia that would soon coalesce into the Slavophile-Westerner debate. Rosen's self-positioning as a *narodnyi pisatel'* carried significantly more loaded meaning than critics' labelling of Cavos twenty years earlier. In the Cavos-Shakhovskoy period and especially during the first two decades of the nineteenth-century, a work could be considered 'Russian' if it included Russian elements: often merely a plot set in Russia with Russian characters and perhaps a sprinkling of folk-inflected musical techniques like the drawn-out, ornamented *protyazhnaya*. By the time Glinka selected Rosen to work on the libretto for *Zhizn' za tsarya*, this broad definition of Russianness had significantly narrowed.

¹⁰¹ Rutger Helmers. 'Introduction: The Part and the Whole', in *Not Russian Enough? Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), pp. 1-20 (p. 4).

¹⁰² Lyubov' Kiseleva. 'Strannyi russki pisatel' Baron Rosen', in *Ideologicheskie konteksty russkoi kul'tury XIX-XXvv. i poetika perevoda*, ed. Lea Pild (Vienna: Wiener Slawisticher Almanach, 2016), pp. 39-65 (p. 40).

By virtue of their status as foreigners in Russia participating in Russian cultural life, both Cavos and Rosen occupied what Lyubov' Kiseleva identifies as the liminal space between being 'fully European' and 'fully Russian'.¹⁰³ While the standards for declaring a work 'Russian' had narrowed by Rosen's time, there was no similar standard for national or ethnic identity; Kiseleva asserts that ethnic identity in Russia of the 1830s was as much a question of behaviour as birthplace or cultural background.¹⁰⁴ Thus, a Baltic-born, ethnically German writer like Rosen could self-identify as a Russian writer and craft his style and image accordingly. However, *soi-disant* 'Russians' like Rosen were still regarded by some native Russians with suspicion. Contemporary memoirs would claim that Rosen spoke broken Russian with a thick accent even during the period of time when he was writing the *Zhizn' za tsarya* libretto.¹⁰⁵ While Rosen may indeed have spoken with an accent, his grasp of the Russian language as evidenced by the *Zhizn'* libretto appears to be relatively fluent. At the same time, Rosen's contemporaries seemed unfazed by his multinational identity; Pushkin would gently rib his fellow writer in 1830 as 'славянин молодой, грех духом, родом германец'.¹⁰⁶

Though their librettists would have to negotiate the broadening European-Russian divide, neither Shakhovskoy nor Glinka had to worry about the authenticity of their Russianness. Shakhovskoy himself seems to have seen no contradiction in his embrace of French theatrical techniques and his ardent patriotism; rather, he practiced what was called *russitsizm*, recasting

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁰⁶ Cited in Ibid, p. 46.

Western plots and characters according to Russian tradition and manners.¹⁰⁷ By appropriating French theatrical frameworks and infusing them with the allegedly greater ‘naturalness’ of the Russian people, Shakhovskoy believed he would create a superior dramatic product. On the other hand, Glinka does not seem to have positioned himself as a proponent of Russian nationalism in theatre, at least in the early years of his career. The glorification of *Zhizn’ za tsarya* as a leap forward in the Russian nationalist project meant that Glinka, much like his predecessor Cavo, would have the epithet of *narodnyi kompozitor* thrust upon him. Glinka would later embrace the title, particularly in connection with his second opera *Ruslan i Lyudmila* (1842), and by the time he wrote his memoirs at the urging of his sister in 1854-55, Glinka was careful to downplay any musical influences other than traditionally Russian music. In order to maintain his image as the first truly Russian composer, Glinka would need to reject a critical phase in his musical development: his time studying composition in Italy and Germany in the early 1830s and its influence on his early compositional style, including that found in *Zhizn’ za tsarya*.¹⁰⁸

In Glinka’s youth, there would have been nothing unusual in studying music abroad; musicians and composers had been sent away for further training, mostly in Italy, since the introduction of Italian opera to Russia in 1734. Because of its long history in Russia, ‘the Italian tradition could not possibly be seen as something foreign’ to anyone in Glinka’s circle; indeed, any aspiring composer with the means to do so would probably have been encouraged to

¹⁰⁷ E. Garshin, ‘Odn iz zabytykh pisatelei’, *Istoricheskii vestnik* 7 (1883), 136-173 (p. 170).

¹⁰⁸ See Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), especially chapters 1 and 2.

undertake study abroad.¹⁰⁹ As we have already seen, Russian musical culture through the 1830s was heavily reliant on models from France and Italy, and Catterino Cavos's efforts to bring Italian *bel canto* works and techniques to the Russian operatic stage would have had a significant impact on musical trends. Seemingly following Cavos's example, the young Glinka would make Italian techniques the foundation of his burgeoning vocal pedagogy, writing variations on well-known *bel canto* arias and composing training exercises similar to those of Bellini and Rossini. During Glinka's period in Italy, he would even make contact with Bellini himself. While Glinka would later disavow his time in Italy as having any impact on his development as a composer, Anna Giust asserts that at the very least it 'showed Glinka [...] the possibility of inserting himself into the musical environment as an operator rather than a spectator'.¹¹⁰ It is this confident spirit that makes *Zhizn' za tsarya* so exciting: unlike any Russian opera up to this point, Glinka wrote an Italian-style through-composed opera, but on a popular Russian subject and critically, using enough aspects of Russian folk melody to give the music something eager listeners would grasp on as specifically Russian. It is this perceptive understanding of what the Russian opera-going public craved that helped make *Zhizn'* into the foundation stone of Russian opera it is widely considered to be.

The debate around nationalism and what counted as authentic depictions of Russianness in music was not the only debate working against Cavos and Shakhovskoy in the second quarter of

¹⁰⁹ Yu. V. Keldysh, O. E. Levasheva, and A. I. Kaninskii (eds), *Istoriya russkoi musiki*, 10 vols (Moscow: Muzyka, 1983-2011), V (1988), p. 205.

¹¹⁰ Anna Giust, 'Glinka e l'Italia: un rapporto controverso', in *Italia-Russia: Quattro secoli di musica*, ed. Margherita De Michiel and Natal'ya Vlasova (Moscow: State Conservatory of Music 'P.I. Chaikovskii', 2017), pp. 206-24 (p. 211).

the century: there was also during this period a strong backlash among the rising literary elite against what was perceived as ‘popular’ culture. This debate can be emblematised in the feuds between Pushkin and Faddey Bulgarin, a journalist and writer whose 1839 novel *Ivan Vyzhigin* was a huge commercial success, and between Bulgarin and Nikolay Gogol’. Pushkin in particular wished for authorship to be seen as a dignified career, and railed against the culture of mass-market chapbooks and almanacs, which were written for the broader public and therefore seen as less refined and in bad taste.¹¹¹ The same struggle between ‘popular’ and ‘refined’ art would reach musical theatre in the 1830s and ‘40s, and the ‘popular’ genres such as *vaudeville* would be roundly rejected as trivial and unworthy of being enshrined in Russian operatic history. The same Rafail Zotov who wrote so lovingly of his friend Cavos would dismiss the main genre in which the composer worked as ‘незаконное дитя оперы и комедии’ and ‘просто забава, шутка – а не произведение искусства.’¹¹² Shakhovskoy would be referred to not as a first-class author, ‘but one of the highest second-class’ writers of his period: a backhanded compliment that diminishes Shakhovskoy’s many accomplishments.¹¹³ Early Russian opera (by which most critics meant opera pre-Glinka) suffered from its connections to the French theatrical tradition, which was roundly dismissed as popular entertainment rather than a serious artistic pursuit. Even *Zhizn’ za tsarya* would eventually suffer criticism of being too dependent on Italian operatic

¹¹¹ Pushkin’s pseudonymous 1831 essay ‘Torzhestvo druzhbyi, ili Opravdannyi Aleksandr Afimovich Orlov’ (originally published in the journal *Telescope*) directly compared Bulgarin with the generally anonymous chapbook novelists while satirising Bulgarin’s over-refined writing style.

¹¹² Zotov, *Iz moikh vospominanii...period tretii*, pp. 44-5. Translation mine.

¹¹³ A. A. Yartsev, ‘Knyaz’ A. A. Shakhovskoi: opyt biografii’, *Ezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov sezon 1894-5*, 2 and 3 (1894-5), 102-144 and 1-46 (3, p. 45).

tradition, and thus unsuccessful in establishing a Russian national operatic tradition.¹¹⁴ Works such as *Ivan Susanin* and *Zhizn' za tsarya*, while popular amongst aristocratic circles, did not seem to have an immediate effect on the broader culture of musical theatre, which was blamed on audiences' lack of taste: 'Они [the composers and singers] все делают, что могут,' Zotov laments, 'не их вина, если публика не хочет их слушать.'¹¹⁵

These debates between popular and artistic culture were a side effect of the professionalisation of both the literary and theatrical fields, processes which occurred more or less contemporaneously. On the literary side, throughout the reign of Alexander I writing was seen as a leisure pursuit for educated nobleman, though as Alessandra Tosi comments, 'the recognition of literature as a profession in its own right was an issue amply debated in journals and literary circles.'¹¹⁶ These same journals often published music for Russian-language songs, which helped contribute to the gradual shift in emphasis on the composer's role throughout the 1830s. Thus print culture helped facilitate the professionalisation of music as well as that of literature, and represents another example of the overlapping boundaries between literature and music in this period.¹¹⁷ But it took much longer for the figure of the professional musician to emerge fully within Russian culture, partly because there were very few Russian-born professional musicians. Many of the musicians Cavos wrote for were either serfs given a rudimentary education, or international émigrés, and it was because of the pedagogical efforts of

¹¹⁴ Zotov, 'O nyneshnem', p. 60.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin*, p. 42.

¹¹⁷ See Philip Ross Bullock, *The Poet's Echo: Art-Song in Russia, 1735-1998* (book manuscript), Chapter 2, 'Romanticism'.

people like Cavos and Shakhovskoy that a class of professional Russian musicians emerged in the 1830s. Even in later decades, critics would acknowledge the skills of émigrés like Cavos, albeit grudgingly: ‘He was Italian, but at that time even among the Russians no one could compose such music.’¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, with the emergence of skilled native Russian composers embodied in the cult of Mikhail Glinka, the contributions of foreign-born forebears such as Cavos would be downplayed in later histories of Russian music.

Slava!

One of the most iconic scenes in Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar* is the epilogue: an extended choral number in which a vast crowd of peasants sing praises to the tsar and to his saviour Ivan Susanin. While this kind of *slava* (literally ‘glory’) chorus had been first used in Russian opera in the 1812 work *Staroe Rozhdestvo*,¹¹⁹ Glinka’s version turned the form into an extended scene as opposed to a brief choral finale. In its formal structure, the scene conforms to Western Classical norms: the introductory theme is developed throughout the scene in both the vocal and orchestral parts. The text for the epilogue was written by poet Vasily Zhukovsky rather than Baron Rosen, although Zhukovsky’s authorship was not recognised until several years after the opera’s premiere,¹²⁰ and centres around the following quatrain:

Славься, славься, наш русский Царь!

¹¹⁸ Blok, ‘К. А. Kavos’, p. 21. Translation mine.

¹¹⁹ Gozenpud. *Muzykal’nyi teatr v Rossii*, p. 352.

¹²⁰ The text of the epilogue and various drafts in Zhukovsky’s hand are preserved among other notes and manuscript materials at the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg, fond. 286/1/8.1-4. Zhukovsky’s authorship of the epilogue would be acknowledged by Stasov in an 1886 article commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the *Zhizn’* premiere. See V. V. Stasov, ‘Pyatidesyatiletie opery “Zhizn’ za tsarya”’, *Istoricheskii vestnik*, 26 (1886), 352-368.

Господом данный нам Царь-Государь!
Москва тебя ждет и наш Кремль святой!
Явися народу, отец наш родной!¹²¹

Glinka's setting of this quatrain owes a great deal to what Richard Taruskin identifies as 'a recognizable "period" style – that of the 17th and 18th-century *kanty*, three or four-part polyphonic songs that were the oldest of all "Westernised" Russian repertoires'.¹²² This type of composition was often used by Peter I in civic panegyrics and thus was already embedded with a pro-imperial message. Glinka's use of the form here, paired with Zhukovsky's triumphant quatrain, is an early example of what would become codified as Official Nationalism, and functions as 'a sort of ideal hymn for the Russian Empire'.¹²³ Indeed, the chorus, decontextualised from its operatic setting, would become a 'semi-official second national anthem through the reign of the last four tsars, and, after Stalin revived it, through the rule of six Soviet leaders and, finally, through the presidency of Boris Yeltsin'.¹²⁴ In many ways, the afterlife of Glinka's chorus is a symbol of how the crystallisation of perceptions of Russian national identity during the 1830s would endure well beyond the Romantic period, affecting not only Russian understanding of itself, but also Western understandings of Russia.

In contrast to the massive epilogue Glinka wrote for *Zhizn' za tsarya*, Cavos and Shakhovskoy's finale for *Ivan Susanin* provides a brief conclusion for the work that does not particularly add to its dénouement, nor does the chorus play as significant a role. Instead, the main characters sing short refrains that sum up the drama, while the chorus interjects to provide

¹²¹ Mikhail Glinka, *Zhizn' za tsarya - libretto opery* (Odessa: Tipografiya Odessogo listka, 1907), p. 44.

¹²² Richard Taruskin, 'Life for the tsar, A (opera)', *Oxford Music Online*, 1992. Accessed 9 November 2020.

¹²³ Giust, 'Comparing the incomparable', p. 100.

¹²⁴ Frolova-Walker, 'Music of the soul?', p. 119.

reaction and commentary. Unlike Glinka's epilogue, the final scene and chorus here is meant to function within the context of the larger *lieto fine* and celebrate Susanin's survival and the happy reunion of the lovers Matvei and Masha. That Susanin and Matvey have coincidentally also saved the young tsar from certain death is mentioned as part of this happy conclusion, but it is not the driving force behind the chorus's celebration.

The sudden rescue of Susanin and the structure of the finale are reminiscent of a popular French opera from the same period: *Les deux journées* (1800), with music by Luigi Cherubini and libretti by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly. Cavos and Shakhovskoy were likely very familiar with this work; Cavos was involved with the first Russian performance in 1803,¹²⁵ and it is possible that it is where Shakhovskoy got the idea of concluding *Ivan Susanin* with a wedding.¹²⁶ Structurally, the two finales are extremely similar. *Les deux journées* concludes with the peasant hero, Mikéli, exhorting the people to recognise the ultimate triumph of good over evil: 'Et qu'aucun d'nous jamais n'oublie, / Que l'premier charme de la vie, / C'est de servir l'humanité'.¹²⁷ This text is then taken up and repeated by the chorus. At the end of *Ivan Susanin*, Susanin repeats a similar sentiment: 'Пусть злодей страшится / и грустит весь век, / должен веселиться / добрый человек',¹²⁸ which is then repeated in the other solo parts and the chorus.

Ivan Susanin's finale, while typical for its period, clearly did not impress Russian critics even during its day; as we have already seen, there was general disdain over Shakhovskoy's

¹²⁵ Giust, 'Comparing the incomparable,' p. 85.

¹²⁶ The character of Susanin's daughter, whose opening aria was analysed earlier, is entirely fictional.

Shakhovskoy's libretto marks the first literary appearance of a love-plot in the Susanin tale, which would be later re-used by Glinka in *Zhizn' za tsarya*.

¹²⁷ Jean-Nicholas Bouilly, *Les Deux Journées, comédie lyrique en trois actes* (Paris: Chez André, 1800), p. 58.

¹²⁸ Shakhovskoy, *Ivan Susanin*, p. 49.

rewriting of Russian history even if it was done to serve operatic convention. But a later episode in the opera's reception shows already a desire to include some kind of panegyric to the imperial state, even before Glinka would arrive with his perfectly calibrated massive finale. *Ivan Susanin* was revived in St Petersburg in November 1834, just as Glinka was beginning work on *Zhizn' za tsarya*. But instead of merely ending with Cavos and Shakhovskoy's finale, the revival included the premiere of Aleksey L'vov's new hymn 'Боже, царя храни'.¹²⁹ While the device of including a hymn in praise of the ruler had been used in Russia previously – most notably in 1742 following the coronation of Elizaveta Petrovna – it is interesting to find it used within this particular context. A letter from L'vov addressed to Aleksey Verstovsky (then director of the Moscow Imperial Theatres) describes how the performance of the hymn was integrated into the opera and the audience reaction:

...в конце оперы когда радовались о спасении Романова, один из приверженцев приглашает всех идти на площадь и всем вместе просить бога о сохранении Царя; с сим словом подымается задняя кулиса и открывается площадь; – бездна народу всякого рода и возраста, тихим движением приближается к оркестру; Самойлов начинает петь один, с легким сопровождением оркестра, – в то же время публика встает; – выражение с которым сказал он куплет свой, произвело на слушателей сильное влияние, – потом весь народ повторил оный с полным оркестром и в третий раз к хору присоединилась военная трубаческая музыка, все же струнные инструменты придавали движение общей массе одинаким пассажим осьмушками. – Общий крих рукоплескания раздавались по Театру; – повторили еще раз, – тот же крик, те же Ура!¹³⁰

Unlike Glinka's epilogue, which focuses on the nation emblematised in the massive chorus, Cavos and Shakhovskoy's finale focuses instead on the family unit. As with the shift in power from librettist to composer that took place between the creation of *Ivan Susanin* and *Zhizn' za tsarya*, so too would Russian operatic composers shift towards use of the large chorus as representative of the nation, perhaps reaching its apogee with the massive choruses in Modest

¹²⁹ *Afishi imperatorskikh teatrov*, 18 November 1834. Russian National Library, St Petersburg, fond gazet.

¹³⁰ Bakhrushin Central State Theatre Museum, Manuscript section, Fond 53, N. 221. A. F. L'vov's letter to A. N. Verstovsky, St Petersburg, 15 January 1834. My thanks to Anna Giust for providing a scan of this manuscript.

Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. As seen above, such an interest in large choral finales celebrating Tsar and empire was already taking place before 1836, but it was not truly integrated within the opera itself until *Zhizn'*. Thus Glinka would come to be seen not only as the founder of Russian nationalist opera in the hagiographical sense, but also as having a profound effect on the dramatic characteristics of Russian opera as a genre.

Zhizn' za tsarya did not appear out of nowhere: rather, it was part of a much longer process of developing Russian national identity in opera that had begun decades earlier. Works like Cavos and Shakhovskoy's *Ivan Susanin* in their own way attempted to carve out a place for Russian national expression on the operatic stage. That these works were considered unsuccessful in doing so is not because they were not 'Russian' nor because they were not 'operatic', but because of a sea-change in critical understanding of what counted as 'Russian' and what counted as 'opera'. Re-situating Glinka's work within this broader context does not push it off its pedestal but rather gives crucial context of how that pedestal came to be built in the first place. Indeed, after the triumph of *Zhizn'*, the newly-redefined genre of Russian opera did not suddenly burst into full flower. The next chapter will explore how the Russian musical nationalist project stumbled in the decades following *Zhizn'*, and how the continued popularity of Western European operatic works inspired a new generation of Russian composers to redefine Russian opera yet again.

Chapter 2: A Tale of Three *Rusalkas*: Adaptation as ‘Russification’ from Kauer to Dargomyzhsky

Of the canonical Russian operatic works, many are adaptations of works by Aleksandr Pushkin, the early-Romantic poet, playwright and prose writer cited as the father of Russian literature. Despite Pushkin’s antipathy towards working with composers and his belief in poetry as the superior art form in the music-vs.-poetry debate,¹ musical settings of Pushkin’s poems proliferated during the poet’s lifetime and positively exploded after his death in a duel in early 1837. It took until just 1842 for Pushkin to receive operatic treatment.² Nonetheless, Pushkin’s status as Russia’s writer-in-chief makes operatic adaptations of his work irresistible objects of study for scholars in the Soviet era and beyond, particularly when these adaptations themselves

¹ See previous chapter for details of Pushkin’s letter to Pyotr Vyazemsky where he argues composers should ‘respect the rank’ and prestige of poets over musicians.

² 1842 was the premiere of Mikhail Glinka’s second opera, *Ruslan i Lyudmila*, adapted from Pushkin’s epic poem of 1820. For a list of music (including songs, ballets, incidental music, and operas) adapted from works by Pushkin, see Martin Cooper and April Fitzlyon, ‘Pushkin, Alexander Sergeyevich’, *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 27 December, 2019. For a brief survey of the vast literature on Pushkin and music, see Boris Gasparov, ‘Pushkin and Music’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin*, ed. Andrew Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 159-73; Caryl Emerson and Boris Katz, ‘Pushkin and Music’ in *The Pushkin Handbook*, ed. David M. Bethea (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pp. 634-51; I. R. Eiges, *Muzyka v zhizni i tvorchestve Pushkina* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1937); V. Iakovlev, *Pushkin i Muzyka*, 2nd ed (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal’noe izdatelstvo, 1957); *Pushkin v muzyke. Spravochnik*, ed. N. G. Vinokur and R. A. Kagan (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1974); and Ernst Stöckl, *Pushkin und die Musik* (Leipzig: Dt. Verlag für Musik, 1974).

became part of a canonical composer's wider mythology.³ These studies, however, tend to treat Pushkin's work as if it emerged out of a vacuum, focusing only on the process of adaptation from Pushkin-text to operatic-text; this focus on the dynamic between source work and its adaptation ignores the diverse sources and influences which Pushkin himself integrated into his creative process. This chapter will examine Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka* (1856) not merely as an adaptation of Pushkin in itself, but as one in a line of adaptations working from the same material. It will argue that Pushkin's unfinished play *Rusalka* participated in an ongoing process of 'Russifying' wider European trends through adaptation and translation; this process would then be transferred into the musical world with Dargomyzhsky's operatic setting of Pushkin's play. By exploring how both works participated in a larger process of adaptation and 'Russification', this will provide a broader understanding not only of the dynamic literary and musical dialogues in which Pushkin participated during his lifetime, but also of the wider European operatic trends and tendencies to which Dargomyzhsky responded in his operatic adaptation.

Pushkin's *Rusalka* functioned as Pushkin's take on the early-Romantic trend for tales of lovelorn water-maidens, and I will illustrate how it was in large part adapted from *Dneprovskaya rusalka* (1803-7), an extremely popular series of Russian-language *Singspiele* (stage plays with interpolated musical numbers) that were themselves adapted from a Viennese original, *Das Donauweibchen* (1786). This pan-European pre-history would be swept away by critics responding both to the original play and to Dargomyzhsky's operatic version twenty-four years

³ Examples include but are not limited to Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions on a Russian Theme* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); A. N. Glumov, *Muzykal'nyi mir Pushkina* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1950); and Anatolii Tsukker, *Dramaturgiya Pushkina v russkoi opernoi klassike* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2015).

later. Dargomyzhsky's work in particular was hailed as a new triumph of Russian nationalism unseen since Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsarya* in 1836, boosted by his choice in adapting a work by Russia's national writer. For critics, the comparison was irresistible: a new composer-laureate at last arrived to pick up the mantle of the father of Russian opera by adapting a work by the father of Russian literature. It would be impossible to acknowledge that either the adapted work or the adaptation was influenced by Western European works.

Yet both Pushkin and Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalkas* incorporate and adapt elements taken from wider European traditions. In the theatrical *Rusalka*, Pushkin adapted the literary archetype of the water maiden as refined by German Romantic writers such as Goethe and Hensler and promulgated in Russia both through direct translation and through Russian literary variants and imitations of the theme. In a similar fashion, in the operatic *Rusalka*, Dargomyzhsky adapted aspects of Italian *bel canto* and French grand opera traditions which were imported to Russia in the 1840s and '50s and which were promoted and popularised instead of fostering new Russian operatic works post-Glinka. However, while both Pushkin and Dargomyzhsky freely borrowed from these European imports, both of their *Rusalkas* were particularly innovative in how they shaped European forms, and ironically it would be these innovations, rooted in Western European models, that critics would subsequently emphasise as uniquely Russian.

In choosing a work by Pushkin as the main source text for an operatic adaptation and in adapting it with an eye towards refining and deepening the psychological portrayal of the four main characters, Dargomyzhsky not only inaugurates what would in the 1860s crystallise as the realist movement in Russian opera – the *moguchaya kuchka* – but also helps to promote one of the most significant trends in nineteenth-century Russian opera: Pushkinian adaptation. While *Rusalka* is now no longer widely performed, some of the most popular works in the Russian

operatic repertoire follow in Dargomyzhsky's footsteps as adaptations of Pushkin's literary works: Tchaikovsky's *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78), *Mazepa* (1882) and *Pikovaya dama* (1890) and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (two versions composed 1868-73, premiered 1874). Lesser-known Pushkinian operas include Dargomyzhsky's own second opera *Kamennyi gost'* (1872), Rimsky-Korsakov's *Motsart i Sal'eri* (1897), César Cui's *Pir vo vremya chumy* (1901), and Rachmaninov's *Aleko* (1892) and *Skupoi rytsar'* (1903). The tradition of adapting works by Russia's most beloved writer proved one of the most fruitful developments in the history of Russian opera, and the success of Pushkinian operas in the nineteenth century may have encouraged twentieth-century Russian composers to branch out into adapting other canonical works of literature.⁴

Before analysing Dargomyzhsky's adaptation of Pushkin and its European influences, I will first go back earlier in the nineteenth century and examine the roots of the water-maiden trend in literature. Then, I will examine the case of 'Russification' through *Das Donauweibchen* and its Russian descendants, and explore how Pushkin adapted these materials into his theatrical *Rusalka*. I will survey the operatic scene in Russia during the 1840s and '50s and Dargomyzhsky's emergence as a composer in an environment where Russian opera as a genre appeared to be in grave danger of extinction. Finally, I will turn to Dargomyzhsky's operatic

⁴ These operas include a parallel trend in adapting works by Gogol' that started in the nineteenth century, including Musorgsky's *Zhenit'ba* (1868) and *Sorochinskaya yarmarka* (1874), Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov's adaptations of *Noch' pered Rozhdestvom* (1876 and 1895, respectively), Rimsky-Korsakov's *Maiskaya noch'* (1880) and continued into the twentieth century with Shostakovich's adaptation of Gogol's *Nos* (1928). Shostakovich also adapted Leskov's *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uyezda* (1934). Sergei Prokofiev adapted Dostoevsky (*Igrok*, 1929), Valery Bryusov (*Ognennyi angel*, premiered posthumously 1955) and Tolstoy (*Voina i mir*, two versions, premiered 1946 and 1953).

adaptation of Pushkin, exploring how the opera's two mad scenes directly translate techniques drawn from European operatic repertory into a Russian context. I contend that both Pushkin and Dargomyzhsky's European influences were ultimately obscured – in Dargomyzhsky's case, a deliberate concealment – out of a burgeoning critical desire in the middle of the century to promote Russian literature and opera as genres unaffected by Western models, despite the obvious connections and influences.

The Rusalka: Ritual, Legend, Literary Trope

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, a collision in Russian literature occurred between elements of Slavic folklore and imported European literary models, converging on the figure of the water-maiden or *rusalka*. The prototype for these literary water-maidens, generally speaking, emerged out of ancient Greek tales of the sirens: dangerous half-fish, half-women whose voices would seduce and ultimately destroy human men.⁵ In the Western European literary tradition, water-maiden tales developed the seductive or romantic elements of the siren mythos, but their aquatic heroines possessed an innocence and naïveté unfamiliar to any Grecian ancestresses. In tales like Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* (1811) and Hoffman's *Undine* (1813), Goethe's *Melusine* (1807), Heine's *Lorelei* (1823), and Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1836), the titular water-maidens yearn to give up their aquatic selves and become fully human women out of love for a human man, generally with tragic results.⁶ In the Slavic tradition, water-maiden tales

⁵ The classic example of the Greek siren can be found in Homer's *Odyssey*, books 12-14.

⁶ In these tales, the human man discovers the water-maiden's true nature and rejects her; she either dies of sorrow or kills herself in despair. Even the act of transformation into a human causes the water-maiden to suffer: in Andersen's

emerged out of the darker and more destructive elements of the Greek legends: their *rusalki* did not have fishtails like their Western sisters but were human in appearance, ‘half-magic, half-human, formerly mortal women inflamed by love and burned by betrayal’.⁷ Though Slavic folklore did include tales of *rusalki* ‘more aquatic after the manner of Lorelei and mermaids’, on the main the Slavic water-maiden was ‘more dreaded than beautiful, and often more feared as a witch than as a seductress’.⁸ This more menacing water-maiden mythology may be linked to the word *rusalka* itself. While its exact lexical origins are unclear,⁹ one plausible connection can be made to ancient pre-Christian Slavic rituals called *rusalii*. These were exorcisms and offerings meant to offset the supposed malevolent powers of the *zalozhnye*: young women prematurely dead by suicide. This pagan, pre-Petrine connection between the figure of the *rusalka*, female suicide, and dark powers would be the key Slavic element within the broader development of the Russian literary *rusalka* as the nineteenth century progressed.

While the water-maiden as an archetype already existed in Russian folklore, the Romantic take on the water-maiden tale became popular in Russia via Western European models, both in their original languages and in translations such as Vasily Zhukovsky’s version of de la Motte Fouqué’s *Undine* (1830). These literary models inspired Russian writers to mine pre-existing

The Little Mermaid, the sea-witch warns her that ‘every step you take will be as if you were treading on a sharp knife’. Hans Christian Andersen, *Forty-Two Stories*, trans. M. R. James. (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 85.

⁷ Inna Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), p. 191.

⁸ Caryl Emerson, ‘To What End *Rusalka*? Pushkin’s Folk Tragedy and Dargomyzhskii’s Opera’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 97/1 (2019), 169-200 (p. 169).

⁹ See N. A. Borisova, ‘Liricheskaya drama A. S. Pushkina o rusalke’, *Pushkin na poroge XXI veka: provintsial’nyi kontekst*, 8 (2007), 5-107 (pp. 16-20).

Russian folklore for their own version of the trend, and by the 1820s and 1830s there were scores of original Russian poems and short stories written on or including the *rusalka* theme.¹⁰ Such works also built upon a pre-existing literary interest in water, which had been particularly associated with female suicide (minus the *rusalka* element) since the late eighteenth century in works like Ippolit Bogdanovich's *Dushen'ka* (1778) and Nikolay Karamzin's *Bednaya Liza* (1794).¹¹ Thus, an eighteenth-century Russian literary interest in water and women merged with the Western European trend for water-maiden tales and coalesced around a new Russian literary archetype for the *rusalka*, already conveniently associated in Slavic mythology with suicide. These new literary *rusalki* neatly fit within the Western literary trend, and within Slavic folklore: suicide by drowning became an essential pre-condition for becoming a *rusalka* in nineteenth-century Russian literature. Nineteenth-century tales of *rusalki*, therefore, emerged out of a strange fusion of ancient Slavic religious rituals, pre-existing folklore about Russian *rusalki*, and Romantic literary models of water-maidens imported from Western Europe. This tangled history even functioned in reverse, affecting understandings of the original Russian myths: elements such as suicide as a pre-condition for becoming a *rusalka* and a tragic romantic backstory all became an inextricable part of Russian legend.¹² This process of putting a Russian twist on a

¹⁰ Some of the most famous of these are Lermontov's and Pushkin's narrative poems, both titled *Rusalka* (1832 and 1819) and Pushkin's 'Kak shchastliv ya, kogda mogu pokinut'...' (1826).

¹¹ Russian literary heroines would continue to commit watery suicides throughout the nineteenth century in works like Aleksandr Ostrovsky's *Groza* (1859) and Nikolay Leskov's *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* (1864) – both the subject of later operas by Janáček and Shostakovich respectively.

¹² See N. I. Verba, 'Ocherk pervyi. Drama Pushkina i "rusalochiya" tematika v kul'ture XIX veka', in *Arkhetipicheskie obrazy syuzhetov o morskikh devakh v drame 'Rusalka' A. S. Pushkina i odnoimennoi opere A. S. Dargomyzhskogo* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo RGPU im. A.I. Gertsena, 2015), pp. 7-33 (p. 10).

Western European model was not unique to the *rusalka* archetype. Such *russitsizm* or ‘Russification’, as it was known, was common practice in the theatrical and musical worlds of the early part of the century, and was considered a particular tool for expressing Russian national identity.¹³ Having examined how ‘Russification’ affected the emergence of the literary *rusalka* archetype, let us now turn to a prominent example of the process in the theatrical world, and the first Russian stage appearance of the Romantic *rusalka*.

***Dneprovskaya rusalka*: ‘Russian’ Opera in Translation**

While the process of developing a Russian literary tradition for the *rusalka* continued throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the first theatrical appearance of this type of Romantic *rusalka* was the 1803 premiere in St Petersburg of *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, a work in many ways emblematic of this hybridisation of European folklore-inflected literature and Slavic mythology. *Dneprovskaya rusalka* was not originally a Russian work but rather was an adaptation of a two-part German-language *Singspiel*, *Das Donauweibchen*, by Karl Friedrich Hensler with music by Ferdinand Kauer (Vienna, 1792 and 1798). *Das Donauweibchen* appealed to the early-Romantic interest in water-maiden tales, and though the production was poorly reviewed overall, critics wrote that Hensler ‘сумел придать новую жизнь старо-немецкому фарсу, соединив его традиционную шутливость с иными литературными элементами.’¹⁴ In terms of genre, while *Das Donauweibchen* is part of the *Singspiel* tradition with its connotations

¹³ See previous chapter for more detail on *russitsizm* as practiced by its most prominent proponent, Aleksandr Shakhovskoy.

¹⁴ Quoted in I. N. Zhdanov, ‘Rusalka Pushkina i Das Donauweibchen Genslera’, in *Pamyati A.S. Pushkina: sbornik stat’ei*, (St Petersburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1900), pp. 139-79 (p. 144).

of fantasy and farce, Hensler's libretto calls it 'ein romantisch-komisches Volksmärchen', emphasising the folkloric elements of the piece. The plot, which Hensler probably based on a mixture of traditional German fairy tales, concerns a love triangle between the knight Albrecht, his human wife Bertha, and the water-maiden Hulda. Hulda has a half-human, half-water-maiden daughter, Lilli, the result of a romance with Albrecht occurring four years before the action of the play begins. The plot revolves around Bertha and Hulda's competing claims for Albrecht's sexual attention, and is resolved by the end of the second part with Albrecht recommitting his fidelity to Bertha but also spending three nights of the year with Hulda. Comedic elements are drawn out of various songs and ensembles that seem to either promote or make light of this central theme of infidelity and sexual passion. Of particular interest are a strange duet between the four-year old Lilli and an unnamed boy in the second part of the Singspiel where they joke about their eventual sexual awakening: 'We joke and make each other nervous/According to our ways/[...] Right now we are still children/We will soon be otherwise',¹⁵ and an aria, also in the second part, for the minstrel Minnewart that is essentially a reworking of Leporello's 'catalogue aria' in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Despite reviewers' discomfort with such explicit material, *Das Donauweibchen* was very successful with the Austrian theatregoing public, which did not seem troubled by the work's mixture of fairy-tale and (im)morality play.

As part of an ongoing practice in the early nineteenth century for 'Russifying' foreign theatrical works,¹⁶ the original two parts of *Dos Donauweibchen* were 'переделанная с

¹⁵Karl Friedrich Hensler, *Das Donauweibchen, zweyter und letzter Theil, ein romantisch-komisches Volksmärchen mit Gesang in drey Aufzügen* (Vienna: Johann Baptist Wallishausser Verlag, 1807), pp. 28-9. Translation mine.

¹⁶ See previous chapter for an overview of the practice of *russitsizm*, and see Schuler, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia*, pp. 65-114, for more detail on how this process worked in early nineteenth-century Russia.

немецкого'¹⁷ for St Petersburg audiences by Nikolay Krasnopol'sky with additional music by Stepan Davydov and Catterino Cavos and premiered in 1803 and 1804 respectively. These re-workings proved to be phenomenally popular with Russian audiences, to the extent that two original sequels were written in 1805 (Krasnopol'sky/Cavos) and 1807 (Aleksandr Shakhovskoy/Davydov). As a series, *Dneprovskaya rusalka* was 'the biggest theatrical hit of the decade, perhaps even of the half-century'¹⁸. The entire series continued to be programmed throughout the 1840s and proved so popular with Russian audiences that the original Hensler *Singspiele* had to be removed from the repertory lists of the German theatrical troupe in St Petersburg.¹⁹ Taken as a series, *Dneprovskaya rusalka* was perhaps the most successful example of Russian operatic adaptation in this period: since the eighteenth century, a similar process of modifying foreign works to suit Russian audiences had been common practice, but until *Dneprovskaya rusalka* such adaptations had never given rise to original work. However, despite the inclusion of Russian elements and the two original spin-offs, some critics disapproved of *Dneprovskaya rusalka*'s German roots. The novelist Turgenev complained in a letter 'жаль, что мы так близко граничим к венской публике',²⁰ and an anonymous reviewer for *Severnii vestnik* excoriated the infidelity theme as 'столько оскорбительного для зрения и слуха, для

¹⁷ N. Krasnopol'skii, *Rusalka: opera komicheskaya v tryokh deistviyakh (ch. 1)* (St Petersburg: Teatral'naya tipografiia, 1804), p. 1.

¹⁸ Simon Karlinsky, *Russian Drama from Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 185.

¹⁹ Abram Gozenpud, *Muzykal'nyi teatr v Rossii ot istokov do Glinki* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1959), p. 289.

²⁰ Ivan Turgenev, *Pis'ma i dnevniki*, ed. E. I. Tarasov, 3 vols (St Petersburg: Izdanie Imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1907-17), II (1911), p. 339.

целомудрия и невинности'.²¹ However, as *Dneprovskaya rusalka* evolved, the reviews became warmer, and the third part *Lesta, dneprovskaya rusalka* (the first of the two original sequels) received perhaps the best overall reviews of the tetralogy.

Through his 'reworking' of Hensler's originals, Krasnopol'sky aligned *Dneprovskaya rusalka* more closely with Russian folklore in a process similar to Russian literary adaptation of the water-maiden tale. Krasnopol'sky first changed the names of all the major characters to ones taken from an eighteenth-century collection of Russian folklore:²² the knight Albrecht is elevated to Prince Vidostan, his wife Berta to Princess Miloslava, and Hulda the water-maiden becomes the *rusalka* Lesta. Krasnopol'sky also includes the character of Lesta's father, further complicating the love-triangle plot, and greatly expands Lesta's role in the action. As in Hensler's original, Lesta is a *rusalka* from the beginning of the work, but Krasnopol'sky also makes her into a shape-shifter, listing twelve diverse roles for the actress playing her in the libretto for the first part of the series alone – old woman, Gypsy singer, knight, young wanderer, to name but a few – personages between whom Lesta switches at will. Unlike Hensler's Hulda, who seeks a penalty from Albrecht for his infidelity, Krasnopol'sky's Lesta is sympathetic towards Miloslava, and her goal throughout the series is not to exact vengeance, but to restore Vidostan to full harmony with his wife. Instead of a commentary on infidelity, then, Krasnopol'sky's version and its sequels find dramatic tension in the impossibility of a human-*rusalka* romance – a surprisingly interiority-oriented topic for a light theatrical genre. At its core, however, *Dneprovskaya rusalka* is still a piece about magic and the supernatural, with a happy ending restoring balance between humans and non-humans: generically, this fits within the

²¹ *Severnyi vestnik*, 4/11 (1804), p. 210.

²² See M. Popov, *Slavyanskije drevnosti, ili priključeníya slavyanskikh knyazei*, 2 vols (St Petersburg: 1770-71).

established parameters for a musical comedy. *Dneprovskaya rusalka* as a whole is neither *opera seria*, *opera buffa*, nor *Singspiel*, neither does it treat Slavic mythology or history with any fidelity or accuracy. Instead the work functions as a kind of generic invention containing elements of all these, described by later writers as: ‘совмещающ[ий] три разных плана: волшеббно-фантастический, овеянный дыханием романтизма, реально-психологический и балаганно-шутовской’.²³

With his original compositions for *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, the composer Stepan Davydov received much of the credit for the series’ success. Abram Gozenpud describes the music for *Dneprovskaya rusalka* as ‘глубже и значительнее пьесы’ and, more critically, that ‘Давыдов внес в оперу черты романтические’,²⁴ perhaps as part of a twentieth-century critical discourse that placed more emphasis on innovative music as totemic of a work’s success rather than an interesting libretto. Like *Dneprovskaya rusalka* as a theatrical work, Davydov’s music was also a hybrid of genres, emerging at a time in the early nineteenth century where ‘элементы классицизма, сентиментализма, и романтизма совмещались даже в произведениях одного художника’.²⁵ Davydov’s vocal music for *Dneprovskaya rusalka* similarly followed early nineteenth-century trends, citing authentic folksong²⁶ and using ‘интонаци[и], близкие

²³ Yu. Keldysh, ‘S. I. Davydov’, in T. N. Livanova, M. S. Pekelis and Y. V. Keldysh (eds). *Istoriia russkoi muzyki*, 10 vols (Moscow: Muzyka, 1983-94), IV (1985), p. 151.

²⁴ Gozenpud, *Muzykal’nyi teatr v Rossii*, p. 282. For example, the third part of the tetralogy opens not with a chorus as is conventional for operas of this period, but with a musical depiction of a storm on the banks of the river Dnepr – depictions of storms were highly Romantic.

²⁵ Keldysh, ‘S. I. Davydov’, p. 146.

²⁶ For example, Lesta’s aria ‘Vyi nam vernost’ nikogda ne khotite sokhranits’ uses a Ukrainian folksong as the basis for its melody. See Gozenpud, *Muzykal’nyi tear v Rossii*, p. 282.

городской народной песне чувствительно романсного типа'.²⁷ Songs from the tetralogy were wildly popular and performed in drawing-room salons so frequently they would become a cliché. One writer, reflecting on *Dneprovskaya rusalka*'s runaway success, commented: 'Несмотря на всю нелепость своего содержания, [*Dneprovskaya rusalka*] произвела фурор и в Петербуге только что и говорили об ней и повсюду пели из нее арии и куплеты'.²⁸ In the second canto, stanza 12 of *Evgeny Onegin*, Pushkin has a provincial girl warble Lesta's aria 'Приди в чертог ко мне златой' to a guitar accompaniment in a clear jab at conventional courting ritual. This is one of several references to the tetralogy in Pushkin's writing more broadly, but the closest parallels between *Dneprovskaya rusalka* and Pushkin can be found in his unfinished play *Rusalka*, a work which in many ways adapts *Dneprovskaya rusalka* and which in turn provided the source for its own operatic treatment later in the century by Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky.

Pushkin's Unfinished Dramatic Rusalka

As we have seen from the literary examples above and the huge success of *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, Pushkin's choice of the *rusalka* subject places him within a pre-existing, if still developing, system of Russian literary archetypes and plot structures; indeed, by the mid-1820s when Pushkin first began to conceive of his theatrical *Rusalka*, he had already written several variants on the *rusalka* theme in his poetry. What makes Pushkin's theatrical take on the *rusalka* tale unique, however, is how he modified the characters and settings to create a drama centred

²⁷ Keldysh, 'S. I. Davydov', p. 147.

²⁸ P. N. Arapov, *Letopis' russkogo teatra* (St Petersburg: Tipografiya N. Tiblen, 1861), p. 164.

around the human dynamic as opposed to the supernatural,²⁹ much as Krasnopol'sky's reworking of Hensler shifted the focus from infidelity to the supernatural in the first place. Pushkin's attention to the human element is, paradoxically, most visible in his *rusalka* character: 'его будущая Русалка в самом начале повествования – настоящая женщина из плоти и крови [...] Пушкин как будто выводит этот сюжет из сферы сугубо волшебной и реализует этот сюжет не только лишь в фантастическом, сказочном, а и в социально-психологическом ключе.'³⁰ Because the audience gets to know Pushkin's heroine *before* she becomes a *rusalka*, it can understand her and her motivations better *after* she is transformed into a supernatural creature, and thus relate to her more than Lesta from *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, who from the outset is already firmly located in the supernatural realm. The transformation of Pushkin's unnamed heroine from passive victim into *rusalka* – with all that *rusalka*-dom connotes as regards to powerful femininity and sexuality – marks a super-naturalised parallel to Tat'yana Larina's development from the gauche country maiden at the beginning of *Evgeny Onegin* into the cool and composed society hostess who suddenly reappears in Chapter 8.³¹

²⁹ This centralisation of psychological depth and interiority in his characters can be seen throughout Pushkin's dramatic work of this period, and can perhaps also be considered part of the early stages of the realist movement in Russian literature more broadly.

³⁰ Verba, 'Ocherk pervyi', pp. 15-16.

³¹ There are quite a few thematic parallels between *Rusalka* and *Onegin* – Pushkin uses similar language to describe Tat'yana and the miller's daughter as well as Onegin and the Prince. See Verba, 'Ocherk pervyi', pp. 15-19.

It is critical to note here that Pushkin's attitude towards the Romantic movement was ever-shifting and his statements on it often contradict themselves,³² but the heightening of psychology in *Rusalka* may be due to the writer's antipathy towards the *rusalka* archetype's lighter, more Romantic elements. Pushkin's play becomes instead both a psychological portrait answering the question of how a woman becomes a *rusalka* and a critique of the social structures that force her to make that choice. While Pushkin never finished *Rusalka*, the ordering of the materials he left behind gives a plot as follows: A Miller warns his daughter to end her relationship with the Prince or to extract material compensation from him in return for her affections. The Prince arrives to tell her of his upcoming marriage to the Princess, and bribes the daughter with expensive gifts to keep quiet about their affair. Horrified, the daughter informs the Prince of her pregnancy, rejects his gifts, and throws herself into the river by her father's mill. At the Prince's wedding, a song is interrupted by a mysterious voice describing how a drowned girl curses her lover as she sinks to the depths. The Prince sends out his guards but no one can locate the source of the voice. Seven years later, the Princess laments her barren marriage and her husband's faithlessness. The Prince lingers by the now-ruined mill where he meets the Miller, now entirely mad and believing himself to be a raven. The Prince at last feels regret for how he treated his former love, and offers to bring the Miller to live in the palace and live out his days in luxury, but the Miller rejects him. The Miller's daughter, now the queen of the *rusalki*, instructs her daughter to meet the Prince at the riverbank and tell him their story, assure him of their love, and

³² See Boris Gasparov, 'Pushkin and Romanticism', in David M. Bethea (ed.) *The Pushkin Handbook* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 580-610 for an examination of Pushkin's own 'elliptically enigmatic' statements on Romanticism and how his reception history has further clouded the question.

invite him 'home' to the water. As the daughter rises up from the water to greet the Prince, the play cuts off on his question 'Откуда ты, прекрасное дитя?'

As stated above, the theatrical *Rusalka* was not Pushkin's only foray into the *rusalka* genre: he wrote several pieces that can be described as 'rusalka imitations, or fake imitations, in non-dramatic poetry'.³³ The first of these was a long poem titled 'Rusalka' from 1819, seemingly inspired by Goethe's 'The Fisherman' and Pushkin's friend Zhukovsky's Russian translation. It is fair to say Pushkin's take on Goethe might be making fun of the original, however. While the plot of both poems revolves around a *rusalka* enticing a hermit (a hermit monk in Pushkin's version) to his watery death, Pushkin's poem is a 'стилизация на грани пародии'.³⁴ Again, Pushkin's slightly over-exaggerated re-working of Romantic tropes in this first poetic 'Rusalka' reveals his antipathy towards more overt forms of sentimentalism. Another *rusalka* plays a major role in 'Ivanish Korolevich' from Pushkin's collection *Pesni zapadnykh slavyan* (1834): the plot of this poem so closely resembles the theatrical *Rusalka* that some scholars argue it in fact serves as Pushkin's 'finished' version of the play. As far as can be guessed from the pages of undated and unordered manuscripts for the theatrical *Rusalka*, Pushkin worked on the play in fits and starts from roughly 1826 to 1832, rewriting and deleting scenes throughout this process.³⁵

³³ Emerson, 'To What End *Rusalka*?', p. 176.

³⁴ Borisova, 'Liricheskaya drama', p. 39.

³⁵ L. M. Lotman, 'Ob al'ternativnykh putyakh resheniya tekstologicheskoi "zagadki" Rusalki Pushkina', *Istoriko-literaturnyi zhurnal*, 1 (2001), 129–51.

Pushkin's *Rusalka* as Adaptation: Shakespeare Meets Singspiel

While there are plenty of intertextual references to find in the finished scenes for *Rusalka* – particularly, as I will explore, to the works of William Shakespeare – the primary model for Pushkin's drama is not the 'high art' of other canonical writers but precisely the 'popular art' of Krasnopol'sky's adapted *Dneprovskaya rusalka*. Pushkin seems to have relied heavily on *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, the libretti of which he owned, throughout the multiyear process of writing *Rusalka*. While 'Pushkin, a passionate fan of musical theatre, surely saw [*Dneprovskaya rusalka*]',³⁶ the work had so saturated St Petersburg's literary and musical culture that it would have been hard to avoid knowing about it even if he did not actively seek it out. The central characters of both *Dneprovskaya rusalka* and *Rusalka* are the same: a Prince, a Princess, an abandoned lover/*rusalka*, and her father. Pushkin pared down Krasnopol'sky's long list of secondary characters to focus on the dynamics between these main four figures. Pushkin sets most of the action of the play on or in a river by a mill and an ancient tree by the riverbank: all of these scenic features are also described thoroughly in Krasnopol'sky's stage directions.³⁷ While Pushkin heightens the human element of the *rusalka* trope by focusing on four deeply realised main characters, he also emphasises the same through the specificity of his scenic location – where there is a mill there must also be a village, as opposed to many *rusalka* tales which take place far away from human habitation, near some unnamed body of water. Each of these key aspects of *Rusalka* – main characters, location – Pushkin drew upon and developed from

³⁶ Emerson, 'To What End *Rusalka*?', p. 177.

³⁷ N. S. Krasnopol'skii, 'Dneprovskaya rusalka'. Reprinted in Borisova, *Liricheskaya drama*, pp. 109-93 (p. 137 and p. 115).

Krasnopolsky's *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, adding another link in a chain of adaptations leading back to the original Austrian *Singspiel*.

Close parallels, too, can be found in Pushkin's and Krasnopol'sky's texts, particularly with regard to the figure and characterization of the Prince and Princess. For example, in Pushkin's scene marked 'Днепр. Ночь.' – the final, incomplete scene of the *Rusalka* materials, the Prince arrives on the scene as follows:

Князь (Идет к деревьям, листья сыплются)
Что это значит? Листья,
Поблекнув, вдруг свернулись и с шумом
Посыпались как пепел на меня?³⁸

Compare this to Krasnopol'sky's libretto, where towards the beginning of the first part of *Dneprovskaya rusalka* Vidostan appears:

*Видостан (садится под дерево) - Я как будто приколдован к этому месту и не могу забыть того, что со мною приключилось. (Листья с дерева сыплются на него) Что это значит? Какое невидимое существо окружает меня?*³⁹

These, among other textual parallels, are too similar to be coincidental. Perhaps Pushkin became aware of the obviousness of such parallels through the process of revising his texts and edited accordingly; one of his earlier, deleted draft scenes increased the role of the Princess, bringing her character development much more closely in line with Krasnopol'sky's Miloslava.⁴⁰ This revision marks a significant shift in Pushkin's attitude towards his *Rusalka*. Had this scene been included, Pushkin's play would focus equally on the ways in which both the miller's daughter

³⁸ Aleksandr Pushkin, 'Rusalka', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 20 vols (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1999-2016), VII (2009), pp. 177-201.

³⁹ Krasnopol'sky, 'Dneprovskaya rusalka', p. 115.

⁴⁰ In this fragment, the Princess is aware of the Prince's relationship with the miller's daughter. See B. V.

Tomashevskii, 'Kommentarii', in A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 10 vols (Leningrad: Nauka, 1962-86), V (1978), p. 481.

and the Princess are affected by the Prince's behaviour; as we have seen, Krasnopol'sky explores how Lesta takes pity on Miloslava as an equal victim in Vidostan's infidelity. By moving the dramatic interest away from the dramatic parallels between the two women as the Prince's victims, Pushkin adroitly shifts his play out of a more direct connection with Krasnopol'sky, and instead focuses on the father and daughter as the Prince's victims. This also intentionally or not introduces an element of social criticism into *Rusalka*, given the class dynamic between the Prince and the miller's family, for which Soviet academics would particularly laud Pushkin in their criticism of the poet's work.

While *Dneprovskaya rusalka* and *Rusalka* are extremely similar in terms of location, characters, and certain textual elements, they diverge greatly in terms of genre. Krasnopol'sky's tetralogy began as an Austrian *Singspiel* and even in its adapted form exists firmly within the comedic genre. Pushkin dispenses with all comedic elements – no Mozart re-writes here – and in his obsessive focus on the four main characters turns *Rusalka* into a tragedy. While many of Pushkin's plays have drawn comparisons to the works of William Shakespeare, *Rusalka* seems particularly ripe for referencing. Of particular textual interest are the miller and his daughter's discussion of the Prince's obligations towards her, recalling Laertes and Ophelia's conversation in act 1, scene 2 of *Hamlet*, and the miller's daughter's speech when she realises what the Prince has done, similar to Cleopatra's monologue in act 1, scene 3 of *Antony and Cleopatra*.⁴¹ Other parallels include the madness of a father (*King Lear*), the drowning of a rejected lover (Ophelia), and an accusatory voice from beyond the grave (*Macbeth*). Of these Shakespearean allusions, perhaps the strongest are to *Macbeth*: in an earlier draft Pushkin has the ghost of the miller's

⁴¹ See Catherine O'Neil, 'Shakespeare and Folklore: Rusalka', in *With Shakespeare's Eyes: Pushkin's Creative Appropriation of Shakespeare* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), pp. 143-6.

daughter appear, dripping water, at the Prince's wedding feast in a direct analogue to Banquo's ghost, and the *rusalki* waiting for the Prince are reminiscent of the three witches. These Shakespearean parallels alongside Pushkin's general interest in portraying the psychological development of the conventional figures in a *rusalka* tale, move his play far away from its roots in Russian-adapted *Singspiel*. Yet, the references to another Western writer – one who was revered highly in this period by the Russian literary set⁴² – bring in another strand of 'Russification', this time from the English theatrical tradition.

Pushkin's deliberate choice to leave all his characters nameless seems to indicate an interest in bringing *Rusalka* out of the generic constraints of a typical water-maiden tale and towards a more universal study of human dynamics *à la* Shakespearean tragedy. Caryl Emerson remarks that the characters' titles particularly shift throughout the play, illustrating that 'only relationships matter'.⁴³ This is especially the case with the Miller and his daughter: the miller goes from 'Мельник' at the beginning of the play through 'Отец' and finally to 'Старик', while his daughter is alternately 'Дочь,' 'Она', or later 'Русалка' and in one pointed moment

⁴² As seen in the previous chapter, Russian critics in the early decades of the century singled out Shakespeare's status in British letters, lamenting the lack of a similar figure for Russian literature. In the decades following his death, Pushkin would be elevated to a Shakespearean status, and his writing is commonly introduced in Western university departments as the work of 'Russia's Shakespeare'. The extent to which Pushkin may have consciously positioned himself as a Russian Shakespeare is debated. David M. Bethea argues 'What Pushkin wanted to become was not a Slavic Voltaire or Racine but precisely the Shakespeare of Russian culture', but given the extent to which Russian writers revered the French tradition and the rising Romantic nationalism of the 1820s and '30s, it is difficult to imagine Pushkin defining himself in terms of any other foreign literary tradition. See David M. Bethea, *Realizing Metaphors: Alexander Pushkin and the Life of the Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 41.

⁴³ Emerson, 'To What End *Rusalka*?', p. 179.

‘Любовница’. These shifting titles emphasise these characters’ relationships towards others in a particular scene, and though an audience would not be aware of this process, the actors playing the two roles certainly would. Conversely, the Prince and the Princess remain so throughout the play, perhaps reflecting how they do not undergo the same kind of dramatic psychological and physical changes the Miller and his daughter do. As in *Evgeny Onegin*, Pushkin in *Rusalka* is preoccupied with the consequences of one action: here, in the Prince’s decision to cast off the miller’s daughter. It is difficult not to speculate on how Pushkin would have resolved the catastrophic effects of the Prince’s actions, if indeed at all. The daughter’s death and transformation into a *rusalka* and the miller’s madness are the direct result of the Prince’s carelessness, as Emerson writes, ‘our choices, more or less perceived by us as “free”, become webbed into our fate. These choices have results: beneficiaries and casualties. How does consciousness cope with them?’⁴⁴ In the case of the Miller, not at all.

Pushkin’s accomplishment with *Rusalka* is his transformation of the basic generic structure from a *Singspiel* comedy steeped in Romanticism and sentimentalism into a ‘terse, sober psychological economy’.⁴⁵ Pushkin did so by streamlining the cast and heightening the focus on relationships, borrowing themes from other Western writers like Shakespeare in a continued process of ‘Russification’. In his choice to adapt Pushkin’s *Rusalka* into an opera, Dargomyzhsky would engineer a similar process, ‘Russifying’ elements of Western European operatic genres to emphasise rather than diminish Pushkin’s psychological realism and then using them to promote a new kind of Russian musical nationalism. Dargomyzhsky’s hostility towards European influences even as he indulged in them serves both a philosophical purpose

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 182.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 170.

and as a reaction to the institutions of opera in Russia during the 1840s and '50s. Before examining Dargomyzhsky's operatic adaptation of Pushkin's *Rusalka* and its influence on the Russian nationalist opera movement, however, we should first examine what happened following the flourishing of Russian-language opera in the first decades of the nineteenth century that made Dargomyzhsky so hostile to Western European models.

Russian Opera After Glinka: Dargomyzhsky's Beginnings

Despite the great success of Russified 'translations' like *Dneprovskaya rusalka* in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and that of original Russian operas such as Aleksey Verstovsky's *Askol'dova mogila* (1835) and Glinka's two operas in the 1830s and early 1840s, by the middle of the 1840s the push for home-grown, Russian-language works had substantially faded. Much of this was due to administrative mismanagement and a lack of performance space. Budget cuts in St Petersburg forced the Russian-language opera troupe to move to Moscow in 1846,⁴⁶ but theatres in both cities were dedicated to other repertoires and troupes; for example, the Bol'shoi theatre in Moscow had been designated exclusively for performances by the Italian opera troupe. Seemingly out of a desire to keep foreign works separate from Russian works, Nicholas I released an *ukaz* in January 1849 forbidding the performance of Russian operas at theatres designed for other repertoires,⁴⁷ but since there was no designated theatre for Russian opera, the proclamation in effect prevented Russian operas from being performed at all.

⁴⁶ Walter Zidaric, *Alexandre Dargomyzski et la vie musicale en Russie au XIXe siècle. Vers l'affirmation d'une école nationale avec la Roussalka* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), p. 85.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Meanwhile, contemporary Italian opera from composers such as Gioacchino Rossini and Vincenzo Bellini filled in the gap left behind by the Russian opera troupe and became hugely popular among aristocratic circles. While Italian-language opera had been performed in Russia since the mid-eighteenth century, operas from the *bel canto* school grew in social importance from the late 1820s, making the opera house the place to see and be seen.⁴⁸ In response to public demand, the Imperial Theatres Directorate founded a high-quality Italian opera troupe in St Petersburg in 1843. This old-fashioned invitation to continental performers to reside in Russia brought a wealth of well-trained, highly-qualified musicians to the nation.⁴⁹ Thanks in no small part to their range of experience and better training, the Italian opera troupe quickly came to dominate the St Petersburg opera scene, performing popular works by Italian composers like Bellini and, to a lesser extent, works by French grand opera composers like Giacomo Meyerbeer.⁵⁰ When the Russian opera troupe finally returned to St Petersburg in 1851, there

⁴⁸ The role the opera house played in upper-class social life, for good or ill, can be seen throughout Russian literature, but two prominent examples figure in the major novels of Lev Tolstoy. In Book Two of *Voina i mir* Natasha meets and is seduced by Anatole Kuragin at the opera, and in Part Five of *Anna Karenina*, Anna is shunned and insulted at the opera house upon her return to St Petersburg with Count Vronsky. See Julie Buckler, *The Literary Lorgnette: Attending Opera in Imperial Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), for a vivid discussion of opera and literature as mutual influences on each other and on Russian social and cultural life.

⁴⁹ These performers included the mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot-Garcia, sister to the celebrated Maria Malibran. Viardot-Garcia lived in St Petersburg from 1843 to 1846, where she performed both Italian operatic roles like *Norma* and Russian chamber vocal music by composers like Glinka and Dargomyzhsky. See April Fitzlyon, *The Price of Genius: A Life of Pauline Viardot* (London: John Calder, 1964).

⁵⁰ While the Italian opera troupe, naturally, more frequently programmed Italian-language works, they also sometimes performed French operas like Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831) and Daniel Auber's *La muette de Portici* (1828). See Abram Vol'f, *Khronika peterburgskikh teatrov: s kontsa 1826 do nachala 1855 goda*, 3 vols (St

simply was no longer an audience for Russian opera, ‘in part thanks to the pressure from certain aristocratic circles’,⁵¹ who by now preferred the latest Italian works (or French in a pinch), and in part thanks to an administration that supported performers in the Italian troupe over those in the Russian troupe. Richard Taruskin summarises the effect of both Nicholas’s *ukaz* and the founding of the new Italian troupe: ‘in effect, Russian composers were barred from the country’s best venue, the Bolshoi Kamennyi theatre in St Petersburg, and from access to the best singers performing in Russia’.⁵²

Besides the lack of performance space and access to experienced performers, the Russian opera theatre faced the no less daunting problem of repertory. Abram Gozenpud reports ‘Репертуар русского оперного театра 50– начала 60-х годов состоял из немногих опер русских композиторов, в том числе написанных в начале века’,⁵³ such as those mentioned above. With no administrative support, it was impossible to commission any new works from Russian composers, who in any case were discouraged from experimentation by audience appetites for *bel canto* and grand opera. Russian operas both new and old ‘furent créés et continuèrent à être représentés exclusivement grâce à l’initiative des interprètes qui, faisant valoir leurs droits, les choisissaient pour leur bénéfice.’⁵⁴ That the Russian operatic repertory survived at all through this period is entirely due to the efforts of the performers that insisted on

Petersburg: Tipografiya R. Golike, 1877-84) for statistics of operas performed in the capital during this period, and Vasiliy Fyodorov, *Repertuar Bol’shogo teatra SSSR, 1776-1955* (New York: Norman Ross, 2001) for statistics of operas performed at the Bol’shoi Theatre during the same period.

⁵¹ *Repertuar Bol’shogo teatra*, p. 95.

⁵² Richard Taruskin, ‘Dargomyzhskii, Aleksandr Sergeevich.’ *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 13 November 2019.

⁵³ Abram Gozenpud, *Russkii opernyi teatr XIX veka, 1836-1856* (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1969), p. 357.

⁵⁴ Zidaric, *Alexandre Dargomyshki*, p. 96.

keeping it alive, rather than continued public interest in pieces that had been great successes in earlier decades.⁵⁵

The great irony of the Russian opera theatre's struggle for relevance in this period is that the 1830s and 1840s saw the emergence of the doctrine of Official Nationalism, which promoted the 'cherished triad' of orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationalism as an official policy governing all aspects of Russian cultural life. Official Nationalism was positioned as a way to define Russia's position with regard to Western Europe, and on the surface would seem to encourage the development of a distinctly Russian national art, whether in music, literature, or visual art. Indeed, it was in the decades around the introduction of Official Nationalism that Russian literature as scholars define it fully emerged, and a robust Russian-language press thrived despite imperial censorship.⁵⁶ That the same could not be said for Russian opera speaks to the contradiction at the heart of Official Nationalism: it was itself influenced by Western Europe, specifically by German Romantic writers like Friedrich Schlegel.⁵⁷ While Official Nationalism superficially seemed to promote the development of Russian culture over the unconscious copying of Western European trends, the reality was far more complicated, and untangling Russia's cultural ties to Europe, especially with regard to opera, would prove a Sisyphean task.

⁵⁵ The role of Russian singers in the development of new Russian opera was as significant as their role in preserving Russian repertory, as will be seen in the next chapter on Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Charodeika* (1887).

⁵⁶ For more on the emergence of Russian national literature before the introduction of Official Nationalism, see Alessandra Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin: Russian Literature in the Age of Alexander I* (New York: Rodopi, 2006).

⁵⁷ See Andrei Zorin, 'The Cherished Triad: S.S. Uvarov's Memorandum of 1832 and the Development of the Doctrine "Orthodoxy-Autocracy-Nationality"', in *By Fables Alone: Literature and State Ideology in Late 18th and Early 19th-century Russia*, trans. Marcus C. Levitt (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), pp. 325-58.

By the middle of the 1840s, the dominance of Italian opera seemed complete while Russian opera seemed all but forgotten, but some Russian composers refused to give up on establishing a Russian-language repertory. Gozenpud notes, ‘Для того, чтобы русский оперный театр отвоевал первенство у итальянцев, он должен был овладеть всем оперным репертуаром, а не только отведенным ему участком.’⁵⁸ In other words, Russian composers had to write new works that continued the establishment of a national repertory while simultaneously appealing to audience demand for *bel canto*-type works. Dargomyzhsky entered the compositional scene in the middle of this struggle to keep Russian opera alive. In many ways, Dargomyzhsky represents the earlier-century, Glinkian school of Russian composer. Dargomyzhsky came from a wealthy family, was exposed to European music and opera from an early age and pursued music as a gentleman’s leisure activity.⁵⁹ However, thanks to Dargomyzhsky’s important role in re-establishing Russian opera as an artistic force in the country, his image and reputation would be seized upon in later decades by the nationalist *moguchaya kuchka* and completely scrubbed of any European influences. Dargomyzhsky himself would later realise the importance of appearing a strict nationalist, and as his fame grew in the 1850s and 1860s, began the process of distancing himself from Western genres and influences.

Dargomyzhsky’s experience with his first opera *Esmeralda* proved a valuable lesson in the difficult position of Russian opera in the 1840s. The composer chose to adapt Victor Hugo’s own verse libretto to his novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* on the advice of poet Vasily Zhukovsky around

⁵⁸ Gozenpud, *Russkii opernyi teatr XIX veka, 1836-1856*. p. 365.

⁵⁹ Like many Russian composers of his generation, the young Dargomyzhsky was encouraged in his early compositional career by Glinka and other ‘gentleman composers’. See Richard Taruskin, ‘Dargomyzhsky, Alexander Sergeevich’, *Oxford Music Online*. Accessed 31 March 2021.

1837. While he originally composed to Hugo's French libretto, Dargomyzhsky eventually decided to translate the text into Russian. Perhaps he did this in order to avoid direct comparison with the 1836 French opera by Louise Bertin for which Hugo had originally written the libretto, but Dargomyzhsky's choice marks the continuation of 'Russification' via literal textual translation.⁶⁰ Dargomyzhsky completed his own take on the material by 1842, but immediately faced the problem of finding a theatre and troupe to perform it. When the opera was finally produced in Moscow in 1847, Dargomyzhsky's *Esmeralda* seemed hopelessly old-fashioned and was panned by critics, who 'особое внимание уделили вопросу о национальном стиле оперы, безмерно преувеличив воздействие французской традиции.'⁶¹ In fact, 'French tradition' was extremely important in *Esmeralda*, and critics were correct to point it out. Dargomyzhsky took a French-language libretto originally written for a French grand opera, and wrote his own musical setting of it before deciding to translate the text – but no other aspect – into Russian. Despite what Dargomyzhsky may have claimed later, *Esmeralda* was likely never written to make any kind of point about Russian national style. Dargomyzhsky's own musical education up to this point exclusively focused on Italian and French opera, and he spent 1844-45 travelling in Western Europe and meeting with the great European opera composers of the time: Gaetano Donizetti, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Fromental Halévy and Daniel Auber. His path to composition, therefore, is no more nationalist than Glinka's own.

⁶⁰ It is interesting that Zhukovsky recommended *Esmeralda* to Dargomyzhsky, as Zhukovsky was renowned for his translations of Western European literature and is probably more famous for these translations than his original literary work. Zhukovsky also contributed verses to the libretto for Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsarya*; see previous chapter for a discussion of his contribution to the opera's famous closing chorus.

⁶¹ Gozenpud, *Russkii opernyi teatr XIX veka, 1836-1856*. p. 363.

While Dargomyzhsky would later exaggerate his disdain for European opera, a growing exasperation with the operatic establishment can be detected in Dargomyzhsky's correspondence throughout the 1840s and particularly during his year abroad. Writing to his father from Paris about Donizetti's *Linda de Chamonix*, Dargomyzhsky complained,

Об этой музыке говорить нечего. Во-первых, вы услышите ее в Петербурге, а во-вторых, когда медаль, или монета отчеканены и описаны, надо ли еще описать следующие за ними медали или монеты, которые чеканятся по той же форме и тою же машиною?⁶²

Instead of admiring the grand opera scene, Dargomyzhsky turned instead to the Parisian vaudeville theatres, and became interested in their more satirical and topical elements. His vocal writing began to show a new attention to conversational speech – much as French vaudeville songs imitated regular speaking patterns – and thus the very innovations in Russian vocal writing for which Dargomyzhsky would receive so much credit later had their roots in Western Europe. Despite the aesthetic disdain for Western European opera Dargomyzhsky developed throughout the late 1840s and maintained for the rest of his career, his background and education in those very genres would be visible in his later work, and especially in his second opera *Rusalka*.

Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka*: Towards Russian National Opera

Pushkin's unfinished 'драматическая поэма' was first published posthumously in the journal *Sovremennik* in May 1837 and immediately attracted interest: a staged version premiered at the Bol'shoi the following year with a few interpolated songs written by Aleksandr Al'yab'ev.⁶³ It is

⁶² Nikolay Findeizen, *Aleksandr Dargomyzhskii: avtobiografiya, pis'ma, vospominaniya sovremennikov* (St Petersburg: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1921), p. 16.

⁶³ Mikhail Pekelis, *Aleksandr Dargomyzhskii i ego okruzhenie*, 3 vols (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966-83), II (1973), p. 191.

not clear whether Dargomyzhsky attended these performances, nor is it clear when the composer first became interested in adapting *Rusalka* into an opera.⁶⁴ In 1844, Dargomyzhsky wrote a chamber duet using the text from Pushkin's chorus of *rusalki*, so it is reasonable to assume the composer was at least familiar with the piece by then. Scholars like Mikhail Pekelis estimate that Dargomyzhsky grew interested in composing a complete operatic adaptation of Pushkin's *Rusalka* around this crucial mid-1840s period, perhaps because of his struggle to get *Esmeralda* staged. Dargomyzhsky may have decided to start afresh with new material rather than continue to pursue a clearly failing project and from roughly 1845 Dargomyzhsky's writings begin to show notes on an operatic treatment of *Rusalka*.

As complicated as the genesis for *Esmeralda* was, Dargomyzhsky's adaptation of *Rusalka* would prove even more challenging; it would take the composer roughly a decade to create his operatic *Rusalka*. The composer spent some time in the countryside in 1845-46, and from his notes it seemed he began to examine sources for Pushkin's portrayal of peasant life. Pekelis claims Dargomyzhsky assiduously studied peasant folklore and village living, compiled an early scenario and libretto and composed a few scenes while working on other compositions during his countryside sojourn.⁶⁵ While Pekelis is an excellent source on Dargomyzhsky's life and work, this claim seems suspect considering how long it usually took Dargomyzhsky to complete his compositions. Pekelis seems to also imply that Dargomyzhsky did all of this work – transcribing peasant songs, reviewing Pushkin's *Rusalka* and his other works on Russian rural life, compiling

⁶⁴ Vladimir Stasov later insisted that Dargomyzhsky chose to adapt *Rusalka* in 1843. Soviet scholar Mikhail Pekelis more broadly assumes Dargomyzhsky became interested in the adaptation at some point in the early 1840s, well after the play had first been published.

⁶⁵ Pekelis, *Dargomyzhskii*, II, p. 195.

a complete scenario including an ending for Pushkin's unfinished play, drafting a libretto and composing some scenes – entirely unaided. This implication reinforces a *kuchkist* interpretation of Dargomyzhsky: that he operated as the sole author of his operatic works, including libretti, and was inspired not by European models but by the organic and 'authentic' music of the Russian peasantry.

In fact, in the early phases of the operatic *Rusalka*'s conception, Dargomyzhsky seems to have relied heavily upon a circle of friends and confidantes from the literary world, including his brother-in-law, the poet and artist Nikolay Stepanov, and critic Nestor Kukul'nik.⁶⁶ Kukul'nik, who had assisted Dargomyzhsky with his cantata 'Торжество Вакха', was a mentor as well as a colleague, encouraged the composer as early as autumn 1845 to turn his attention to a new opera, particularly one on Russian themes: 'Но, Александр Сергеевич, мы ждем от вас оперы, оперы, оперы! Одна только опера развивает народную музыку...'⁶⁷ Stepanov would assist in writing a first draft of the opera's libretto, in which Pekelis notes 'сохранена не только сюжетная канва пушкинской поэмы, но использованы и стихи великого поэта.'⁶⁸ Thus, it appears the idea of keeping as much of the original literary material intact in adapting an operatic libretto was not originally Dargomyzhsky's idea. Stepanov had developed his literary career as a satirist and was closely connected with the radical literary fringe and the burgeoning naturalist

⁶⁶ Stepanov, a close friend of the composer's and the husband of Dargomyzhsky's sister Sofia Sergeevna, would end up moving in with Dargomyzhsky in 1852. The two shared a home until Dargomyzhsky's death seven years later. See Pekelis, *Dargomyzhskii*, II, p. 22. Nestor Kukul'nik also assisted with the libretti for Glinka's two operas, and wrote plays for which Glinka composed incidental music – because he was considered a 'reactionary', his influence on Glinka and Dargomyzhsky was later downplayed by the Soviets.

⁶⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, II, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

school. With his guidance, Dargomyzhsky began to consider the possibilities of an opera in the naturalist mode. This would mark a stark contrast to the vaudevilles, plays, and operas dominating the Russian stage, which critic Vissarion Belinsky scathingly described: ‘Действующих лиц в этих пьесах нет, нет людей, нет характеров’.⁶⁹ ‘Preservation of verses’ and naturalistic vocal declamation would become Dargomyzhsky’s compositional calling cards and his main contribution to the *kuchkist* manifesto, but neither, it appears, would have emerged without Stepanov’s collaboration and encouragement.

In the first, Stepanov-authored draft of the *Rusalka* libretto, the use of Pushkin’s ‘own verses’ were limited to a few citations rather than the majority of the text, but it is apparent from this early phase that it was a priority to use at least some of Pushkin’s original writing. However, Dargomyzhsky’s burgeoning desire to include elements of naturalism in the opera meant he spent a great deal of time researching peasant life, folk melody, and folklore, at the expense of his involvement in the literary work on the libretto. Of the four manuscripts containing early draft material for *Rusalka* – two outlines for the plot including musical numbers, one draft of a libretto following the plot outlines, and one sketch of potential act and scene divisions – none are in Dargomyzhsky’s hand.⁷⁰ These materials divided the opera into three acts and noted instances where it would be best to follow Pushkin’s original scenario; for example, a note amended to one outline advised for the duet between the Prince and the Miller that ‘надобно взять в оригинале,

⁶⁹ V. G. Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. S. A. Vengerov, 12 vols (St Petersburg: Tipografiya M. M. Stasyulevicha, 1900-1948), IX (1910), p. 278.

⁷⁰ See Pekelis, *Dargomyzhskii*, II, p. 198. Pekelis identifies at least one of the outlines and the draft of the libretto as written in Stepanov’s hand, but I was not able to verify his claim with archival research.

аранжировав только слова более удобным образом для пения и музыки.’⁷¹ Similar notes appear throughout the outlines, but in the full draft of a libretto the contrast between Pushkin’s original verses and the additional lines could not be more pronounced: the new verses are much weaker metrically and do not scan well against Pushkin’s strict iambic pentameter. The final scene in this version of the libretto was to be a full ensemble number finishing Pushkin’s play in melodramatic fashion. The titular *rusalka* (named Tat’yana in the draft) begs the Prince to love his wife and forget her, the Miller throws himself into the river in despair, the other *rusalki* drag the Prince into the river and drown him, and the hunters prostrate themselves by the riverside in fear. The *rusalka*’s daughter, who appears so enchantingly before her father the Prince in Pushkin’s play, is entirely absent in this first draft of the libretto.

By September of 1848, Dargomyzhsky had grown frustrated with the weaknesses of these materials and complained: ‘Что меня мучает – это либретто [...] Поэты у нас все гении: ни одного нет просто с талантом, как ты да я; и с ними ладу никакого нет; смотрят на тебя с высоты-высот и презирают.’⁷² From this point on, it seems Dargomyzhsky decided to write a new libretto for *Rusalka* himself, but the task proved difficult for someone with little literary experience. Besides the original adaptation, three complete or near-complete drafts of a plan for the libretto survive, all of which were eventually discarded. Pekelis shows that as work progressed on *Rusalka*, particularly during what he deems the major compositional period of 1853-55, the libretto moved closer and closer to Pushkin’s original text so that by the final version ‘сохранены в значительном количестве стихи Пушкина.’⁷³ Dargomyzhsky’s own

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 199. See also Ibid., pp. 200-203 for reproductions of the manuscripts.

⁷² Findeizen, *Aleksandr Dargomyzhskii*, p. 30.

⁷³ Pekelis, *Dargomyzhskii*, II, p. 213.

verse contributions are disguised among the citations, strictly following Pushkin's metrical scheme. Dargomyzhsky preserves the character of the daughter, and finishes the opera by having the Miller push the Prince into the river in front of the Princess and her maid, with the final stage directions instructing the chorus of *rusalki* to lay the body of the prince 'к стопам своей царицы'.⁷⁴ While it is impossible to say if this is the ending Pushkin would have chosen for the theatrical *Rusalka*, the 'salvation' of much of his original material in the operatic *Rusalka*'s libretto became a defining feature of the work, and fidelity to the source text would become a critical element in Russian operatic adaptations in the following decade, and indeed in Dargomyzhsky's later operatic work.

Dargomyzhsky makes it very clear on the title page for the published score of *Rusalka* that the opera is based on Pushkin's play and preserved 'многих его стихов',⁷⁵ but why did Dargomyzhsky decide to keep as much of Pushkin's original text as he could? Plenty of operas by this period were freely adapted from literary originals: indeed, Dargomyzhsky's *Esmeralda* was loosely derived from Hugo's *Notre-dame de Paris* and moreover originally adapted by the author himself. Why did Pushkin deserve to have his work preserved intact more than Hugo? Dargomyzhsky's 1848 letter cited above provides one clue. Pushkin was already one of the most famous writers in Russia during his lifetime, and his tragic death from duelling injuries in January 1837 caused an outpouring of grief so strong he was almost immediately hailed as the

⁷⁴ A. S. Dargomyzhskii, *Rusalka*. Libretto, p. 27. Text downloaded via web archive "Libretto vo sne i nayavu", http://www.ceo.spb.ru/libretto/classic/posle_glinki/index.shtml. Accessed 12 October 2019.

⁷⁵ A. S. Dargomyzhskii, *Rusalka: bol'shaya opera v chetyrekh deistviyakh*. Piano-vocal score. (Moscow: Gutkheil, 1885).

greatest literary genius Russia had ever or would ever produce.⁷⁶ However, there was a good deal of scepticism amongst literary critics about Pushkin's posthumous status: perhaps Dargomyzhsky belonged to the pro-Pushkin faction alongside such leading lights as Belinsky and Turgenev, and chose to set the text as unaltered as possible in order to serve as a document in the construction of a Pushkin cult.⁷⁷ Another potential reason for Dargomyzhsky's caution could have been a theory that Pushkin had intended *Rusalka* to be an operatic libretto in the first place. While this interesting claim would later be seen as unfounded, it had great currency in the press during the period in which Dargomyzhsky composed the opera.⁷⁸ Whatever the reason, Dargomyzhsky did gradually incorporate more and more of Pushkin's original material into his libretto, and made a point of mentioning it: this perhaps also allowed Dargomyzhsky to ensure part of Pushkin's sparkling reputation would attach itself to the opera and help encourage its success. Additionally, Glinka had first adapted Pushkin in *Ruslan i Lyudmila*, so Dargomyzhsky may also be aligning himself to Glinka via Pushkinian adaptation – moreover, with Glinka's more folkloric *Ruslan* instead of the overtly patriotic *Zhizn' za tsarya*.

Fidelity to a source text would become of crucial importance to Dargomyzhsky's later work, and particularly in his adaptations of Pushkin. Dargomyzhsky's final opera *Kamennyi gost'* (premiered posthumously in 1872), would take as its source Pushkin's blank-verse tragedy of the same name and set it to music almost verbatim. This resulted in an opera entirely made up of

⁷⁶ See Gasparov, 'Pushkin and Romanticism', pp. 537-8 for a brief account of the origins of Pushkin reception. The cult of Pushkin did take some time to take root, so Dargomyzhsky's use of his work was not as immediately provocative as Tchaikovsky's choice of *Onegin* would be in the 1870s.

⁷⁷ See Charles Moser, *Aesthetics as Nightmare: Russian Literary Theory, 1855-1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) for a discussion of the Pushkin debates from this period.

⁷⁸ See Borisova, 'Liricheskaya drama', pp. 83-107 for a full account of this claim.

solos given in turn by each character rather than the conventional operatic structure of arias, duets, and ensembles. While *Rusalka* is not so strict in its adherence to its source material, Dargomyzhsky's focus on 'preserving the verses' in *Rusalka* marked the beginning of an interest in realism on the operatic stage that would culminate in *Kamennyi gost'* and the works of the *moguchaya kuchka*. The *kuchka*, which was beginning to form in the 1850s, would adopt Dargomyzhsky as a father figure and hail him as Glinka's immediate successor in the history of Russian nationalist opera, and *Rusalka* would become known as 'the outstanding Russian opera of the 1850s'.⁷⁹

Re-Receiving *Rusalka*: 1856 versus 1865

The path towards *Rusalka* becoming the most standout Russian opera since Glinka was not as immediate as may be supposed from its later critical reception. When *Rusalka* first premiered in early 1856, it faced the same administrative difficulties *Esmeralda* had ten years earlier. While the Russian opera troupe had returned to St Petersburg, it still had no permanent theatre to stage performances, and the very lack of a dedicated Russian opera theatre greatly affected the theatregoing public's original reception of *Rusalka*. The Russian opera troupe had to fit in its performances around other performers' schedules at two theatres: the Aleksandrinsky, which was dedicated to Russian spoken theatre, and the Circus Theatre. It was in the 'smelly, barn-like' latter that *Rusalka* premiered,⁸⁰ where it 'was wrecked by the hall's size and acoustics'.⁸¹ While

⁷⁹ Richard Taruskin, 'Rusalka (ii).' *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 13 November, 2019.

⁸⁰ In fact, the opera premiered at a benefit concert organised by A. A. Bulakhov, and not as a work selected and vetted by the Directorate. See Pekelis, *Dargomyzhskii*, II, p. 316.

⁸¹ Taruskin, Richard. 'Dargomyzhskii, Aleksandr Sergeevich.' *Oxford Music Online*. Accessed 1 December 2019.

the hall's acoustics certainly presented a major problem, the opera was received reasonably well for a new Russian opera in this period. *Rusalka* received five performances, was attended by many of the St Petersburg literary and theatrical elite, and received kind if not overwhelmingly laudatory reviews in journals like *Sovremennik* and *Severnaya pchela*.⁸²

Perhaps Dargomyzhsky expected more outright praise for *Rusalka*, and eventually he received it in the form of a massive ten-part review in the weekly journal *Teatral'nyi i muzykal'nyi vestnik* by composer and leading music critic Aleksandr Serov. Serov singled out the opera in the very first pages of his review as 'русская опера на сюжет русской и созданный русским поэтом!', and carried on with a theoretical explication of what a good opera ought to be, a brief gallop through Russian opera history so far, and a minute analysis of Dargomyzhsky's adaptation of Pushkin's play.⁸³ Of particular approbation was how 'композитор, при переложении драматической поэмы в оперу, старался как можно ближе держаться подлинника'.⁸⁴ These two main themes: the opera's inherent Russianness and its adherence to the Pushkinian source, formed the backbone of Serov's hundred-page review, and both these themes would become critical planks in the platform of the emerging Russian nationalist school. Dargomyzhsky, downcast by the lukewarm reception of other critics, was greatly flattered by Serov's review, and wittingly or unwittingly began to echo themes from Serov in his own writing of this period. His letters from this period are full of now-famous statements casting himself as a

⁸² For example, writing in *Sovremennik*, I. I. Panaev noted the opera as being 'обстановленная очень недурно и выполненная артистами довольно удачно'. See 'Peterburgskaia zhizn'. Zametki novogo poeta', *Sovremennik*, 57/6 (1856), 176-200 (p. 195).

⁸³ A. N. Serov, 'Rusalka. Opera A. S. Dargomyzhskogo,' *Izbrannyye stat'i*, ed. G. N. Khubov, 2 vols, (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1950-1957), I (1950), pp. 254-409 (p. 254, emphasis original).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

martyr to musical realism and an iconoclast going against the ‘civilised’ European tastes of the majority of theatre-going audiences:

Я не заблуждаюсь. Артистическое положение мое в Петербурге незавидно. Большинство наших любителей музыки и газетных писак не признает во мне вдохновения. Рутинный взгляд их ищет льстивых для слуха мелодий, за которыми я не гонюсь. Я не намерен снизводить для них музыку до забавы. Хочу, чтобы звук прямо выражал слово. Хочу правды.⁸⁵

Dargomyzhsky’s new pose as a misunderstood genius weighed down by the administrative and critical barriers working against him was well-suited to the views of a group of young amateur composers forming around Mily Balakirev during this period. This group of composers would coalesce into what is now known as the *moguchaya kuchka*, and their views on what Russian opera should strive to express can be traced directly back through Dargomyzhsky’s writings to the two main themes of Serov’s *Rusalka* review. Dargomyzhsky and his work, beginning with *Rusalka*, would be held up by the *kuchka* as the example to emulate, and it was because of this – not because of any overwhelming audience popularity during its original run – that Dargomyzhsky and his work had a significant impact on the Russian opera canon in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Despite the praise Serov showered on him, Dargomyzhsky soothed his disappointment in *Rusalka*’s reception by going on another tour to Western Europe in 1864-65. To his great surprise, the composer returned home to a rapturous reception of a new production of his nine-year-old opera. This public re-evaluation of *Rusalka* can be directly credited to a shift in status for the Russian opera troupe, which had at last found a physical performance space and a place in audiences’ taste. Following a fire that razed the Circus Theatre in the late 1850s, the Imperial

⁸⁵ This particular letter was written to a female student of the composer’s, Lyubov’ Karmalina, in late 1857. Despite Serov’s warm review, Dargomyzhsky was clearly still smarting over the poor reception of *Rusalka*’s Circus Theatre premiere the previous year. See Findeizen, *Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky: avtobiografiya, pis’ma*, p. 55.

Theatres Directorate built the Mariinsky Theatre in 1860, dedicating it to performances of Russian opera. Five years later, the troupe revived *Rusalka* to enormous critical and commercial success. The new theatre's acoustics were much better suited to operatic performance than the Circus, and the singers of the Russian opera troupe had greatly improved their technical capabilities.⁸⁶ Most of the reviews from the original 1856 performances of *Rusalka* were muted because of the quality of the venue and the singing, not because of any faults in the opera's musical composition or dramaturgy.⁸⁷ Now, nine years following *Rusalka*'s premiere, the Russian opera troupe had pulled off a significant administrative coup: it finally had a dedicated home in the Mariinsky and because of this now had more time and more resources, while at the same time had undergone the difficult process of bringing its performance capabilities into direct competition with the Italian opera troupe. All of this meant that *Rusalka* could now be given a high-quality staging that would allow the public to recognise the same compositional merits Serov had in his review from nine years earlier.

Thanks to the public attention garnered by the Mariinsky revival of *Rusalka*, Dargomyzhsky enjoyed a status unparalleled among other Russian composers of the mid-nineteenth century, and was positioned as the direct heir to Glinka in the critical press. This process of canonisation had the positive effect of reviving public interest in Russian opera as a genre, but the negative effect of erasing all Russian operatic life between Glinka and Dargomyzhsky. The retrospective lauding of Dargomyzhsky as a truly 'Russian' composer by the *kuchka* and its allies in the press

⁸⁶ For a detailed explanation of how the Russian opera troupe worked on its musical training and performance capabilities, see Gozenpud, *Russkii opernyi teatr XIX veka, 1836-1856*, pp. 364-89.

⁸⁷ See Pekelis, *Dargomyzhskii*, II, p. 318 for citations from private correspondence criticising poor-quality singing, especially by those performing the roles of Natasha and the Prince.

eliminated all possibility of acknowledging European influence on Russian opera, doing the double duty of erasing a history of Russian opera more obviously indebted to European musical forms and erasing the European musical educations both Glinka and Dargomyzhsky received and benefitted from. Glinka himself had never denied the importance of his Italian training on his compositions (though he would downplay the time he spent there in later years) and his style of patronising and mentoring young Russian composers mimicked the educational mores he had taken part in abroad. Furthermore, the younger generation of Russian composers, including Dargomyzhsky, often travelled to study with European composers and attend musical performances so as to shake off the label of dilettante-composer so frequently attributed to early nineteenth-century Russian composers. Dargomyzhsky had by now gone on two European tours and had personally become acquainted with leading European composers like Halévy and Meyerbeer: even if he claimed not to like their work, Dargomyzhsky did not shun their company nor fail to seek them out on his travels. By promoting Russian music and Russian opera as something uniquely Russian, sprung up fully-formed from the musical practices of the Russian *narod* and reaching its fulfilment in composers like Glinka and Dargomyzhsky, the *kuchka* severed all obvious musical ties between Russia and Western Europe. In their zeal to individualise Russian opera as a unique genre separate to Western European opera, the *kuchka* in effect isolated it.

Of Dargomyzhsky's three planned operas to follow *Rusalka*, only *Kamennyi gost'* came to fruition, though it remained unfinished during the composer's lifetime. *Kamennyi gost'* followed the same themes immortalised by Serov in *Rusalka* but took them to their logical extreme. Thanks to Dargomyzhsky's excellent press reputation and status as Glinka's heir, *Kamennyi gost'* would be considered a triumph even as it was being composed, and the

unfinished opera would have a significant impact on the *kuchkist* composers and therefore on Russian nationalist opera. However, the technical aspects of *Kamennyi gost'* that the *kuchka* so admired were first developed in *Rusalka*. For all its lauding as 'первая русская опера после *Руслана и Людмилы*',⁸⁸ *Rusalka* owes a great deal of its musical and dramatic form, its characterisation, and its vocal writing to Western-inflected Russian opera like *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, French grand opera, and Italian *bel canto* style. In the following, I will analyse how in *Rusalka*, Dargomyzhsky did not merely adapt Pushkin's play but also positioned his opera as a response to the popularity of European opera in St Petersburg in the 1840s and 1850s. Just as Krasnopol'sky 'Russified' an Austrian work, and Pushkin further refined this process into what would later be called a uniquely Russian literary style, so too did Dargomyzhsky 'Russify' European techniques in the music for *Rusalka*, and would later elevate these translations into hallmarks of Russian musical nationalism.

***Rusalka*: Bel Canto + Grand Opera = Russian Nationalist Opera**

Much of the musical content in *Rusalka* can be directly traced back to Italian *bel canto* predecessors popular with Russian opera-going audiences in the 1840s and 1850s, but Dargomyzhsky either conceals the obvious parallels to Italian tradition or subverts straightforward *bel canto* conventions. Despite Dargomyzhsky's professed disdain for Western European and particularly Italian operatic genres, he cannot but respond to the widespread appreciation for *bel canto* opera in Russia. However, by subverting now-familiar operatic tropes, Dargomyzhsky also gently pushed his audiences beyond strict adherence to generic norms. Where overt references to *bel canto*, particularly to Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*

⁸⁸ Serov, 'Rusalka', p. 281. Emphasis original.

(1835), show Dargomyzhsky bowing to convention, unexpected twists on familiar operatic content allow Dargomyzhsky to assert his own compositional individuality. This refiguring of Western European operatic convention is what critics seized upon as evidence of a uniquely Russian operatic style even though it really belonged to a much longer history of ‘Russification’, and later composers would continue to refine and develop Dargomyzhsky’s techniques into what would be recognised as markers of Russian nationalist music. A similar process also occurred in Russian literature during this period – a transition from the German-inflected Romanticism of the first three decades of the century to a more French-inflected realist movement also marked the transition from poetry to prose.⁸⁹ As we will see, in the music for *Rusalka* Dargomyzhsky negotiates a similar transition from Italian *bel canto*-inflected writing to French grand opera-inflected writing. This process can be seen most clearly in the peasant characters of Natasha and her father the Miller, and particularly in scenes depicting madness or the supernatural.

Natasha: A Russian *Bel Canto* Heroine

Natasha’s character is perhaps the most difficult in the opera consistently to portray, because her nature undergoes a fundamental change over the course of the drama from an ingenue-like human woman in Act I, a disembodied voice in Act II, and then a powerful *rusalka* in Act IV. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus attention on the first transition from fully embodied human to disembodied voice, as it encapsulates Dargomyzhsky’s most obvious parallels to *bel canto* style. Through most of the first act, Natasha has no solo music and therefore very little

⁸⁹ See Richard Peace, ‘The Nineteenth Century: The Natural School and its Aftermath, 1840-1855’, in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, ed. Charles Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 189-247.

opportunity to be fully characterised. In her first real solo, a ten-measure lament (‘Ах, прошло то время, время золотое’), her descending vocal line is simply accompanied by a waltz-like, rippling motif in the manner of a salon romance, and is not musically distinct from the rest of the scene as a typical operatic aria would be. In this, Dargomyzhsky departs from *bel canto* practice – the heroine of a *bel canto* opera would be expected to have an introductory aria – but his vocal writing for Natasha is expressive and lyrical in the manner of a *bel canto* composition.

During her Act I duet with the Miller, Natasha’s emotionalism contrasts strongly with her father’s world-weary irony. In a solo episode at the midpoint of the scene, Natasha’s music is marked by a dramatic contrast between the music and text in a manner reminiscent of the famous cadenza ‘Spargi d’amaro pianto’ from *Lucia di Lammermoor*.⁹⁰ Natasha’s text reads:

Невесту! Да кто же, кто невеста?
На кого он променял меня?
О, боже, он уехал, навек меня покинул,
Зачем не уцепилась я за полы его,
Зачем не ухватила узду его коня!
Пускай отрубил бы с досады мне руки,
Пускай растоптал бы конем он меня.⁹¹

Natasha’s vocal line cuts off the end of her father’s previous comment, outlining a key change into F-sharp minor over the first two lines of text. However, neither the key change nor a tempo shift to allegro sufficiently illustrate the anger and pride in Natasha’s words. The increasing violence of her response, marked by the repetition of lines beginning with the question ‘зачем?’

⁹⁰ Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* was premiered in St Petersburg by the Italian opera troupe in 1843. It received 69 performances in the seasons between 1843 and 1855, and 86 performances in the seasons after 1855. Donizetti was the troupe’s second most-commonly performed composer (ten operas totalling 348 performances overall), behind Giuseppe Verdi (twelve operas totalling 627 performances) but ahead of Rossini, Meyerbeer, and Bellini. See Vol’f, *Khronika*, III (1884), pp. 146-7.

⁹¹ Dargomyzhsky, *Rusalka*. Libretto, p. 11.

and the declarative ‘пускай’, is softened rather than emphasised by Dargomyzhsky’s musical writing. The fourth and fifth lines of text, in which Natasha describes her regret at not forcing the Prince to remain with her, are set to lyrical vocal lines and sparse accompaniment more reminiscent of a salon romance than a heroine’s plight. Natasha’s violent declaration of her wish that her hands be cut off and her body trampled under a horse are obscured by the musical writing, which begins the Miller’s next phrase precisely underneath the verb ‘отрубил’.

Serov’s review noticed the disjunction between the jealous rage of Natasha’s discovery of the Prince’s upcoming nuptials and the lyrical accompaniment – indeed, the only musical indication of her distress is the tempo marking of *allegro animato* and shift to 6/4 meter at the line ‘О, боже, он уехал’.⁹² This same mismatch is described by Susan McClary in her analysis of a similar scene in *Lucia*: ‘the poetic text and music of the heroine’s solo do not cohere, and the spectator does not perceive “dreadful jealousy” in her vocal line.’⁹³ Though Dargomyzhsky absolutely loathed *Lucia*,⁹⁴ Natasha’s music in Act I, especially in the duet with the Miller, is extremely Donizettian in style and seems almost deliberately to invite the comparison.

If the music-text mismatch of Natasha’s Act I solo suggests an affinity with *Lucia di Lammermoor*, then Natasha’s subsequent mad scene and suicide makes those suggestions more blatant. As in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Natasha’s mad scene and suicide happen in public, with frequent interpolations by a chorus that first judges her and then pities her.⁹⁵ As Natasha’s

⁹² Aleksandr Dargomyzhskii, *Rusalka: bol'shaya opera v chetyrekh deistviyakh*. Piano-vocal score (Moscow: A. Gutkheil, 1875), p. 95.

⁹³ Inna Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, p. 196.

⁹⁴ Zidaric, *Alexandre Dargomyshki*, p. 137.

⁹⁵ Inna Naroditskaya notes such choral interpolations also occur in the mad scenes from Vincenzo Bellini’s *Il Pirata* and Adolphe Adam’s ballet *Giselle*. See Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, p. 196.

despair grows and her decision to drown herself becomes clear, Natasha sings an appeal to the Tsarina of the Dneper to take pity on her:

Днепра царица, предаюсь
Могучей власти я твоей.
Прими меня под свой покров
И научи, как отомстить за вероломство, за измену,
Научи лишь за измену отомстить!⁹⁶

Natasha's text here causes another sudden shift in tempo and key, and is broken down into a pattern of fragmented melodic phrases accompanied by ostinati rhythms and scalar sequences suggesting rushing water in the orchestra. All of these are common Western musical conventions to portray madness and occur regularly in *bel canto* mad scenes, alongside the pianissimo, equally fragmented interpolations from the observing chorus and the Miller's more expansive melody begging his daughter to reconsider her decision.

However apparent these references to Italian opera seem, Dargomyzhsky obscures his borrowings with references to Russian folksong. At the beginning of the Act I finale, the chorus's first interjection lamenting Natasha's rejection of her father is written as a folk-like song full of parallel sixth motion – stylistic markers of the 'drawing-room folk' idiom in Russian art song of the early nineteenth century. Natasha's supplication to the Tsarina of the Dneper, by contrast, is based on an actual Russian folksong,⁹⁷ albeit one that was widely published both in

⁹⁶ Dargomyzhskii, *Rusalka*. Libretto, p. 12.

⁹⁷ Keldysh, *Istoriya russkoi muzyki*, VI (1989), p. 456. Pekelis suggests this particular folksong was also known outside of Russia after being published in the anthology *The Russian Troubadour*, ed. Benjamin Beresford (London, 1816). See Mikhail Pekelis, *Dargomyzhskii i narodnaya pesnya* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1951), p. 122.

Russia and Western Europe and not one transcribed by Dargomyzhsky himself.⁹⁸ Both of these references to Russian folk music, therefore, function within the norms of early-nineteenth century Russian musical convention, not as particular innovations. In this sense, Dargomyzhsky's use of folk music fits into Serov's tripartite categorization of *narodnost'* in music:

1) значение национальности, сообразно тому, какой нации, какой земле принадлежит художник, 2) значение народности, как популярности, в зависимости от публики, на которую рассчитывает художник, от характера его таланта 3) значение национальности же, в смысле местного колорита, сообразно сюжету музыки.⁹⁹

In both cases discussed above, Dargomyzhsky's use of folk music appeals to his audience as citizens of the Russian Empire (Serov's first category), Dargomyzhsky's interest in promoting Russian opera (Serov's second category), and a depiction of peasant life (Serov's third category). In neither instance does Dargomyzhsky's use of folk music seem particularly innovative; instead, Dargomyzhsky deploys a common Russian musical convention to disguise his use of an Italian musical form.

Similarly, Natasha's song at the Prince and Princess's wedding in Act II – a completely disembodied sound – is loosely folklike in terms of its text and content, but it is written in an Italian idiom, strengthening Natasha's identification with heroines like Lucia. The song's highly metaphorical text describes a conversation between two fish discussing the death of a maiden who drowned herself upon discovering her lover's infidelity; anthropomorphic descriptions of love's trials are found commonly in folk music across Eastern Europe. Once again, however, Dargomyzhsky's music betrays the Russian veneer of the text. The lamenting nature of the song

⁹⁸ Pekelis suggests but does not outright claim that the folk music in *Rusalka* was inspired by Dargomyzhsky's own assiduous collecting of countryside singing. See Pekelis, *Dargomyzhskii*, II, p. 14.

⁹⁹ Serov, *Rusalka*, p. 275. Emphasis original.

and especially the detailed coloratura ornamentation in the melody make Natasha's song much more like a *bel canto* solo than a simple Russian folksong.¹⁰⁰ Coloratura ornamentation was very common in Italian opera from the eighteenth century on, but its usage was not as common in Russian opera even by the mid-nineteenth century and when it was used, it was used very sparingly. This technique also speaks to the vocal training and technical capabilities of Russian opera singers in comparison with their Italian counterparts, and Dargomyzhsky's heavy use of ornamentation is a stark departure from earlier Russian operatic practice.

That Dargomyzhsky writes such difficult vocal music for Natasha, redolent with borrowings from Italian convention, indicates both an acknowledgement of Italian opera's popularity with St. Petersburg audiences and an expectation of a certain level of vocal technique from his singer. At least in the first two acts, the role of Natasha can be interpreted as a Russian-language version of an Italian *bel canto* heroine: a direct transposition of Western convention into Russian art similar to Krasnopol'sky's transposition of German *Singspiel* in *Dneprovskaya rusalka*. Seen in this light, Dargomyzhsky's heroine serves almost as a political statement, in that the technical challenges of the role allow a Russian soprano to prove she is on an equal footing with her Italian counterparts. The pre-transformation Natasha, therefore, symbolises Dargomyzhsky's challenge to the Russian operatic establishment, and in a similar process of character development, Dargomyzhsky will use the character of her father, the Miller, to symbolise Dargomyzhsky's vision of a way forward for Russian opera.

¹⁰⁰ It should be noted that while coloratura ornamentation is now associated with depictions of madness or otherworldliness, this had not solidified into convention even during the *bel canto* era. Donizetti's own notation in the *Lucia* manuscripts only vaguely suggest embellishments for the now famous cadenza with flute accompaniment in the mad scene.

The Miller: Basso Buffo to Tragic Hero

The Miller's characterisation transforms over the course of the opera from an Italianate stock figure into a far less stereotypical role; like the character of Natasha, the character of the Miller at first appears to be taken wholesale from Western European operatic tropes and similarly undergoes a semi-supernatural transformation that subverts audience expectations for that character trope. In Act I, the Miller appears as a jocular, comedic bass role – a type prevalent in Italian *opera buffa* from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His first solo number and his music throughout the act is consistent with comedic bass/bass-baritone music in *opera buffa* and comedic *bel canto*: agile in rhythm, sprightly in tempo, with offbeat accented rhythms and staccato string accompaniment. None of his music in Act I suggests that the Miller is anything more dramatic than the comedic paterfamilias characters that litter operas like *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816) and *Don Pasquale* (1843).

After his scenes with the Prince and Natasha in Act I, the Miller does not appear again until Act III, and his reappearance reveals a complete transformation both in the dramatic aspect of his character and his music. Following the suicide of his daughter, the Miller has gone mad, and confronts the Prince on the banks of the river in an extended scene of virtuosic bass singing. Apart from a few interpolations by the Prince, who hopes to help the mad Miller - mirroring the chorus's role in Natasha's suicide scene – the Miller sings completely solo in an extended, declamatory style of vocal writing, 'bent towards capturing the fugitive moods and meanings underlying the individual words of the text, rather than generalising them into closed structure

governed by more purely musical exigencies'.¹⁰¹ The scene lacks the musical structure of a traditional *bel canto* scena-aria sequence and the vocal writing mirrors the contours of spoken Russian. It is the most revolutionary music in Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka*, and the clearest indication of his new attitude towards vocal declamation in Russian opera that would become iconic in *Kamennyi gost'*.

The Miller's text in this scene shifts between direct, unedited citations from Pushkin's play and additional material, presumably added by Dargomyzhsky to emphasise the character's descent into madness. In his second extended solo of the scene, the Miller describes what happened to him following his daughter's suicide:

Какой я мельник?
Говорят тебе,
Я ворон, ворон, а не мельник!
Чудный случай!
Ты помнишь,
Когда она кинулась в реку,
Я следом за нею пустился бежать,
Но только что с берега броситься думал,
Вдруг сильные крылья ко мне приросли,
Неволью меня налету удержали
И в сторону прочь от реки унесли.
С тех пор свободно летаю,
С тех пор я вороном стал.
Люблю клевать на могилах,
Люблю и каркать в лесу.¹⁰²

The vivid description in the final two lines of the Miller's transformation is accompanied by octave leaps in the vocal line on the verb 'люблю', the largest interval in the melodic accompaniment for this text. Dargomyzhsky's text-setting is otherwise undecorated, matching

¹⁰¹ Richard Taruskin, 'The Stone Guest and its Progeny', in *Opera and Drama in Russia as Preached and Practiced in the 1860s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press), pp. 249-341 (p. 252).

¹⁰² Dargomyzhskii, *Rusalka*. Libretto, pp. 20-21.

each syllable with a note and shaping melodic phrases according to the rise and fall of the spoken text.

Fig. 1 – *Rusalka*, Act III no. 17 (Duet with chorus), mm. 51-54

The image shows a musical score for a duet with chorus from Act III, no. 17 of the opera *Rusalka*. The score is written for a voice and piano. The vocal line is in bass clef and features a melodic line that closely follows the rhythm and intonation of the Russian lyrics. The lyrics are: "Ка кой я мельникъ? го во рятъ те бѣ, я во ронъ,". The piano accompaniment is in treble and bass clefs, providing harmonic support with chords and moving lines. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *ff* (fortissimo), and various articulation marks like accents and slurs.

This opening phrase illustrates Dargomyzhsky’s text-led approach to melodic writing in this scene: the notes of longest duration mark the most important syllables in each fragmented phrase and those which would naturally dominate in spoken Russian: ‘ка-КОЙ’, ‘го-во-РЯТ те-БЕ’, and so on. The orchestral accompaniment throughout the scene does not overwhelm the singer’s enunciation of the text; the orchestration is not integrated with the melody and serves to enhance the Miller’s descriptions in a text-first approach. The focus on melody functioning as a representation of accurate declamation of the text instead of as a musically independent idea as seen throughout the Miller’s mad scene marks the first instance of such a ‘nationalist realistic school’ in Russian opera, and is arguably Dargomyzhsky’s most important contribution to the development of Russian national opera in the following decades.

The Miller’s mad scene provides a prime opportunity to showcase a virtuosic bass performer,¹⁰³ another piece of evidence to make a case for the performance capabilities of the

¹⁰³ The role was premiered by Osip Petrov (1806-78), a renowned bass-baritone who premiered the title role in Cavo’s *Ivan Susanin* and in Glinka’s *Zhizn’ za tsarya*, along with many of the iconic nineteenth-century bass roles

Russian opera troupe. Musically, the scene is written with full orchestral accompaniment underlaying long, rhythmically accented vocal phrases that require excellent diction and dramatic timing. Besides this, the scene never becomes fully lyrical in the way Natasha's suicide does in Act I, and neither does it sustain a single dramatic idea throughout as would be traditional for an operatic solo. Instead, the Miller moves fluidly back and forth between despair, lucidity, black humour, and rage. In his lucid moments, the Miller vows revenge against the Prince, whom he blames for the death of his daughter: many critics would use the thematic similarities to compare the Miller to the title character in Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto* (1851).¹⁰⁴ The comparison reveals the extent of the Miller's transformation between Acts I and III – a complete about-face from stock comedy to grand tragedy – and the extent to which Osip Petrov, the singer who premiered the role, negotiated this drastic shift in dramatic intent.

It is possible to argue that Dargomyzhsky's characterisation of the Miller marks a shift in attention from Italian models to French models, as well as his changing attitude toward vocal declamation. Serov's introduction to his *Rusalka* review indicated that a 'стремление к ясной декламации и возможно большей эффектности (пикантности) ритма и оркестровки'¹⁰⁵ is a critical element for French grand opera, which he argued was Dargomyzhsky's main generic

in Russian opera. Later in the century the equally renowned singer Feodor Chalyapin (1873-1938) performed the mad scene as a showcase piece during solo concerts.

¹⁰⁴ While *Rigoletto* is now widely considered one of Verdi's masterpieces, contemporary critics were extremely harsh towards it; and the comparison between *Rigoletto* and *Rusalka* in contemporary Russian press may have been intended as a backhanded compliment, despite modern reception of *Rigoletto*. The St Petersburg Italian opera troupe premiered *Rigoletto* in 1853, performing it a total of 117 times over the course of its existence; *Rigoletto* was the troupe's fifth most-commonly performed work. See Vol'f, *Khronika*, III (1884), p. 146.

¹⁰⁵ Serov, p. 273.

model for *Rusalka*. While this is not entirely accurate for much of the opera, the description certainly applies to the Miller's mad scene in Act III. In some sense, the Miller's mad scene can also be interpreted as a combination of Italian dramaturgy with French declamation, thereby creating a new Russian hybrid model. The very assigning of a mad scene to a male character is very un-Italian. For nineteenth-century audiences, particularly ones familiar with Italian repertoire, mad scenes were 'in some way associated with the feminine, a manifestation of the mystery and the threat of feminine sexuality'.¹⁰⁶ It is unheard of to have a male mad scene in an Italian opera, and rarer still to have two mad scenes in a single opera.

Serov's claim that *Rusalka* was modeled on French grand opera is perhaps not entirely appropriate, but Dargomyzhsky was extremely familiar with the genre. As we have seen, the Italian opera troupe included French works in its repertory, and as a young composer Dargomyzhsky greatly admired Meyerbeer.¹⁰⁷ Dargomyzhsky's *Esmeralda* was written as a 'Russification' of the Louise Bertin-composed grand opera based on Hugo's novel. Perhaps because of *Esmeralda*'s poor reception, Dargomyzhsky turned violently against the French tradition in his writings; nonetheless, his compositional training was as equally influenced by French models as it was by Italian models. If we consider the ornamentations of Natasha's mad scene representative of the lingering effects of Italian *bel canto* on Russian opera, then the Miller's more speech-like declamation in his mad scene is equally representative of French grand

¹⁰⁶ Mary Ann Smart, 'The Silencing of Lucia', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 4/2 (1992), 119-41 (p. 121).

¹⁰⁷ In the same letter to his father from 1844 where Dargomyzhsky excoriated Donizetti, he praised Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (1836) to the skies. The opera was also popular in Russia: it premiered in 1850 and received 129 performances by the St Petersburg Italian opera troupe, placing it at seventh in the troupe's top ten most popular operas alongside *Rigoletto* (fifth) and *Lucia* (tenth).

opera. It is ironic that precisely this more naturalistic text-setting would be elevated by later critics to a hallmark of a uniquely Russian operatic style.

Natasha's suicide may be read as a more conventional mad scene, but the Miller's is something else entirely. Comparing Donizetti's depiction of Lucia's breakdown in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Walter Scott's original literary tale, Mary Ann Smart notes that 'compared to the alarming realism of Lucy's breakdown, Lucia is aestheticised, celebrated with tuneful music and an appealing visual portrayal'.¹⁰⁸ The same dualism applies when comparing the father-daughter mad scenes in *Rusalka*: Natasha's on the one hand is far more conventional, number-like, and Italianate in style despite its Russian folk-music borrowings, whereas the Miller's on the other hand is numberless, declamatory, and by comparison jarringly realistic. If Natasha's mad scene is Dargomyzhsky's acknowledgement of the hegemony of Italian opera in this period and his attempt to bring Russian opera on a level footing with it, then the Miller's mad scene is Dargomyzhsky's attempt to push Russian opera to a higher level of realism than its Italian counterpart.

In promoting a sense of realism in his music for *Rusalka*, Dargomyzhsky makes his most significant change to Pushkin's original drama – the genre. As Walter Zidaric notes, paraphrasing many Dargomyzhsky critics, 'En effect, *La Roussalka* de Pouchkine est un drame d'amour et d'expiation, ainsi qu'une dénonciation sociale [...] Dargomijski en fait un drame psychologique, amplifiant le côté tragique des héros.'¹⁰⁹ Serov indicated the psychological element is present in Pushkin's original, although to a lesser extent: 'как хороший «переводчик» поэтического

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁰⁹ Zidaric, *Alexandre Dargomyzski*, p. 127. The description of *Rusalka* as a psychological drama can also be found in Soviet-era criticism by Pekelis, Gozenpud, and Asaf'ev.

текста, в своем переложении не столько гонялся за «буквою», сколько за «смыслом» подлинника',¹¹⁰ he wrote. Nonetheless, whether Pushkin's drama can be considered a 'psychological drama' in the same way as Dargomyzhsky's operatic adaptation is unimportant when considering that Pushkin's work itself was an adaptation of *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, which was itself also an adaptation. In this sense, both Pushkin and Dargomyzhsky moved far beyond the original source material in terms of drama and provide a way of understanding the transition from sentimentalism to realism in both literature and opera. The realist challenge set by Dargomyzhsky in *Rusalka* and *Kamennyi gost'* would be picked up by the *kuchka* in the following decades and so overwhelm Russian opera that only a few composers would dare to defy the now-entrenched convention.

Conclusion: Re-Writing *Russitsizm* into Musical Nationalism

The history of Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka* is not merely that of another founding father of Russian opera's early work, but is part of a broader narrative around how Russian artists adapted European sources and genres in a process of 'Russification' that was extremely common in the early decades of the nineteenth century. While Dargomyzhsky established innovative compositional techniques in *Rusalka* that would become hallmarks of the Russian nationalist movement in opera, and inaugurated the trend of adapting works by Aleksandr Pushkin into operas, the compositional history of *Rusalka* is far more complicated than its seemingly straightforward page-to-stage development. Pushkin's *Rusalka* itself was adapted from *Dneprovskaya rusalka*, which was adapted from *Das Donauweibchen*: a chain of re-imaginings stretching back into the late eighteenth century. Dargomyzhsky's operatic adaptation forms the

¹¹⁰ Serov, p. 261.

final link in this chain and similarly ‘Russifies’ European musical practices. If Pushkin’s play allowed him to re-contextualise the Russian-language *Singspiele* of the 1800-10s by providing a familiar topical framework through which he could explore more modern expressions of characterisation, then Dargomyzhsky’s adaptation of Pushkin’s play allowed him to make a statement about the capabilities of Russian opera by including features of Western European operatic models popular in Russia in the 1840s.

Within this context, neither Pushkin’s nor Dargomyzhsky’s *Rusalka* can be considered straightforwardly nationalistic works, and indeed, the ‘purity’ of both works’ nationalism would not have been relevant to either Pushkin or Dargomyzhsky at the time. It was only in hindsight that critics would seek to subsume the European influences and origins in Pushkin’s and Dargomyzhsky’s *Rusalkas* under the guise of ‘realism’ so as to claim both these works as uniquely Russian. Even Serov acknowledged that the kernel of the drama in both Pushkin and Dargomyzhsky is not a uniquely Russian topic,¹¹¹ though he brushed this matter aside to hail both men’s work as triumphs of Russian nationalism. This does Pushkin and Dargomyzhsky a great disservice, because ignoring the more dynamic cultural forces at play when both conceived their works removes each from its proper context within the history of Russian music and letters. By re-examining the complicated webs of adaptation and re-adaptation out of which both *Rusalkas* emerged, we are able better to understand the vibrant history of Russian creatives working among and out of broader European genres, and grasp at the essential paradox of Russian nationalism. No matter how she sings, a *Rusalka* is not only Russian.

¹¹¹ Serov, p. 261.

Chapter Three: Readings and Revisionism – *Charodeika* and Operatic Authorship

Operatic adaptation comes in many different forms, made critically distinct by the adaptation's perceived fidelity or otherwise to a source literary text. Although many canonical operatic adaptations such as Modest Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* edited the literary text upon which they were based, a perception of close adherence to the source tends to give such adaptations their critical cachet. However, there are instances of operatic adaptations that do not closely fit with this model, and rest instead on a more complicated dialogue with their literary forebears. This chapter will explore an opera adapted according to the composer's own personal reading of a source text: Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Charodeika* (1887), widely considered one of his least successful operatic works. Despite its lack of success both in its own era and ever since, *Charodeika* provides an excellent case study by which to examine how significantly the composer's role in adaptation changed over the course of the nineteenth century. It is both emblematic of Tchaikovsky's early approach to operatic adaptation, and a rare example where a vibrant correspondence between the composer and his librettist survive. Despite the rich manuscript material for this opera, *Charodeika*'s critical reception has made it an extremely understudied work in Tchaikovsky's oeuvre, especially compared to his canonical Pushkin adaptations, *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78) and *Pikovaya dama* (1890).¹

¹ The limited bibliographies for both *Onegin* and *Pikovaya drama* on Grove Music Online contain between ten and twenty entries each spanning from contemporary critical writings through the twentieth century, whereas on the same page, the bibliography for *Charodeika* contains only four entries, one of which is an annotated general

If in 1815, the author of the libretto for *Ivan Susanin* was credited in the critical literature as the author of the opera as a whole despite being left off the title page of the published libretto, by the late 1880s the composer wielded full creative control over the development of an opera and was broadly considered its sole author. In the case of *Charodeika*, not only did Tchaikovsky infuse his own personal reading of the work into its operatic adaptation, but it also marks a rare instance where the author of the original source text, Ippolit Shpazhinsky (1848-1917), was also closely involved in adapting the operatic libretto, making changes the composer demanded seemingly without complaint. This dynamic between Tchaikovsky's domineering vision and the acquiescent Shpazhinsky stands in sharp contrast to the more collaborative dynamic between Tchaikovsky and Emiliya Pavlovskaya (1853-1935), the soprano who would premiere *Charodeika*'s main female role. Tchaikovsky consulted with Pavlovskaya about his interpretation of the source text, soliciting her particularly as he developed his vision of the opera's heroine. *Charodeika* therefore allows a unique opportunity to examine not only the now-entrenched hierarchy of composer over librettist in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but also the startling influence a singer could have over the development of a new operatic work.

The operatic *Charodeika* was based on an 1884 play of the same name by Shpazhinsky that, while highly popular in its day, is now not part of the Russian theatrical canon. The play centres around the heroine Nastas'ya, nicknamed Kuma, an innkeeper whose beguiling personality and ability to charm any man she meets lead some to call her an enchantress. Her rejection of the ardent Prince Nikita Kurlyatev ignites his jealousy and rage, while the prince's bereft wife plots revenge against Nastas'ya. Meanwhile, Nastas'ya falls in love with the Prince's son Yury. Such

discography of Russian opera. See Roland John Wiley, 'Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il'yich', *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 29 March 2021.

a love triangle could only end in one way – with Nastas’ya’s death – but Shpazhinsky heightens the drama further by having Prince Nikita murder his own son, so that the lovers Yury and Nastas’ya perish in the finale of the play in a Freudian reversal of fate. Tchaikovsky wrote the operatic role of Nastas’ya for and in consultation with Pavlovskaya, who was a star of the Bol’shoi theatre and an acclaimed interpreter of Tat’yana Larina in the 1883 production there of *Evgeny Onegin*. Nastas’ya would be one of Pavlovskaya’s last roles, and she would later become a celebrated pedagogue and a vocal coach at the Bol’shoi following the 1917 Revolution.

Tchaikovsky first encountered Shpazhinsky’s *Charodeika* in January 1885 on the advice of his brother Modest, who claims to have suggested the scene where Nastas’ya first meets Prince Yury as suitable material for an operatic adaptation.² Modest later claimed he ‘отнюдь не рекоменду[ет] самой драмы для либретто’, nor did he encourage his brother to adapt the entire play, but rather brought up that particular scene as part of a larger discussion about topics in contemporary drama that would cross over well into operatic adaptation.³ Nonetheless, according to Modest his brother ‘в тот же день купил литографированный экземпляр драмы И. В. Шпажинского и пришел в восторг от этой сцены [...] на другой день было написано письмо автору “Чародейки” с предложением переделать её в либретто’.⁴ By late January, Tchaikovsky had also reached out to Pavlovskaya, asking for her input and recounting his early discussions with Shpazhinsky on the libretto. Crucially, Tchaikovsky comments that he had not yet seen the play in live performance and his impressions were based solely on reading the

² Modest Il’ich Chaikovskii. *Zhizn’ Petra Il’icha Chaikovskogo, po dokumentam, khranyashchimsya v archive imeni pokoinogo kompozitora v Klinu*, 3 vols (Moscow: Yurgenson, 1900-03), III (1903), pp. 22-23.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*

printed script, but ‘Ну, уж это будет для Вас самой подходящей ролью!’⁵ It is essential to note here that Tchaikovsky specifically sought Pavlovskaya’s opinion on the play *before* reaching an agreement with Shpazhinsky to collaborate on the text. Pavlovskaya’s input would, as will be discussed later, significantly shape Tchaikovsky’s conception of the work as a whole and his interpretation of the female heroine, Nastas’ya. Tchaikovsky would consult with Pavlovskaya particularly during the earliest phases of drafting the libretto, confirming to her in March 1885 Shpazhinsky’s involvement in the project and claiming ‘Многое он изменит, и, если не ошибаюсь, выйдет очень хорошая канва для музыки.’⁶ Thus, from the earliest phases of work on the operatic *Charodeika*, Tchaikovsky, while establishing a primacy over Shpazhinsky in shaping the textual adaptation, also undercuts the conception of composer-as-author by involving a star singer in the development of his new work.

In *Charodeika*, as in the majority of his operatic adaptations, Tchaikovsky prioritised a depiction of a strong, fully realised female heroine. The composer had no problem changing his source material to strengthen the main female role in some way, and his operatic adaptations of Pushkin in particular feature much more fully realised female heroines than their literary source texts.⁷ *Charodeika* was composed following Tchaikovsky’s first two Pushkin operas (*Evgeny Onegin* and *Mazepa*), and engages in a similar project of strengthening the heroine, though it

⁵ Petr Il’ich Chaikovskii. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii: literaturnye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, ed. B. V. Asaf’ev, L. V. Muzyleva and S. S. Muravich, 18 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1959-1981), XIII (1970), p. 28 (hereafter referred to as *PSS*).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷ Tchaikovsky adapted three of Pushkin’s works into operas: *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78), *Mazepa* (1884), and *Pikovaya dama* (1890). It is perhaps no coincidence that the first and the last of these are the most famous of his operas.

would not succeed with either the public or with critics. Boris Asaf'ev comments: 'Судьба "Чародейки" - одно из досаднейших недоразумений в истории русского музыкального театра [...] [она] совпадает с наиболее сложным на всем развитии творчества Чайковского периодом поисков русского оперного психореалистического языка не на основе националистической исключительности.'⁸ Asaf'ev here defines Tchaikovsky's musical realism through the way the composer depicts female passion and its development, and the innate strength of women. Unlike the *kuchkist* definition of musical realism, which is driven by declamation and citation of authentic Russian folk music, Tchaikovsky's realism is rooted in female characterisation. As I will later discuss, Tchaikovsky had worked on revisions to *Evgeny Onegin* shortly before beginning work on *Charodeika*, so the issue of depicting fully realised female heroines on the operatic stage was very much on his mind.

The 'оперн[ый] психореалистическ[ий] язык' that Tchaikovsky sought to develop in his portrayal of Nastas'ya marks the composer's main departure from the source text, and the most significant problem with the opera's reception. While the operatic Nastas'ya is indeed a morally strong, realist heroine in the line of Tat'yana Larina, the characters surrounding her were transposed wholesale onto the operatic stage from the historical melodrama of Shpazhinsky's play. If Nastas'ya is vividly transformed in her operatic realisation, Tchaikovsky does very little to modify the surrounding material of the drama. Indeed, large sections of text are set to music entirely unaltered in the final libretto. Richard Taruskin has argued that the resulting wordiness of the opera and the genre of its source material makes this the most *kuchkist* of Tchaikovsky's

⁸ Boris Asaf'ev, 'Charodeika. Opera P. I. Chaikovskogo. Opyt raskrytiya intonatsionnogo sodержaniya', *Izbrannye trudy*, 5 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1952-7), II (1954), pp. 142-69 (p. 149 and p. 154).

operas and that this is the primary reason for its lack of critical and commercial success.⁹ This chapter will argue that *Charodeika* is trying to be two different operas at once, on two different levels. It is, on the one hand, a close adaptation of a source text in a nod to *kuchkist* practice, but makes significant cuts and revisions to the final half of its source text. It is adapted from a work of melodramatic historical drama in a similar nod to the mid-century and to Tchaikovsky's earlier works in a similar vein, but revises the central female role into a more nuanced and realistic character in a developing hallmark of Tchaikovskian style. This central tension between the nationalist school of opera and Tchaikovsky's own tendencies is to my reading the main reason for the opera's lack of success. In attempting to be at the same time *kuchkist* and revisionist, melodramatic and realistic, *Charodeika* succeeds in being none of these things.

This chapter will first address the Taruskinian strand of *Charodeika* reception: how its choice of text and initial approach to adaptation from play text to libretto text follows a method practiced both by the *kuchka* and by many Russian composers of this period, including Tchaikovsky himself. I will first explore the main problems in adapting plays into opera, before discussing the *kuchkist* approach to operatic realism through adapting works of historical drama. Then, I will provide a granular reading of Tchaikovsky's well-documented correspondence with Shpazhinsky, exploring the composer-librettist hierarchy and Tchaikovsky's approach towards adapting the text. Turning away from issues of page-to-stage adaptation and the composer-librettist hierarchy, I will then explore the hidden and far more collaborative relationship between Pavlovskaya and Tchaikovsky, examining the role of the singer as co-author of an operatic heroine. I will elaborate how Tchaikovsky and Pavlovskaya's understanding of the operatic *Nastas'ya* involves a more psychological approach to operatic realism, comparing *Nastas'ya*'s

⁹ Richard Taruskin, 'The Enchantress', *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 16 April 2020.

characterisation with that of Tchaikovsky's other great realist heroine, Tat'yana Larina. Finally, I will note how these two competing approaches to operatic realism and adaptation collide in the finished *Charodeika*, explaining how Tchaikovsky's cuts and modifications to an already-complete draft served to further sever rather than conjoin these disparate halves.

From (Theatrical) Stage to (Operatic) Stage: An Uneasy Adaptation

Before analysing the input and influence of Tchaikovsky's two collaborators on the *Charodeika* project, it will be helpful first to provide a broader examination of the problems involved with adapting a stage drama into an opera, and how the genre of historical drama was of particular importance to the *kuchka*.¹⁰ I will then examine the complicated reception history of *Charodeika*'s main *kuchkist* competitor, Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (1869, revised version 1872), using the two operas to explore different methodologies of adapting a text into an opera. Lastly, I will briefly sketch how issues of timing and wordiness affected Tchaikovsky's revisions to the draft of *Charodeika*, which in turn impacted the presentation of the completed work.

In his article on the operatic *Charodeika*, Richard Taruskin describes the original play as 'belong[ing] to that meretricious brand of costume melodrama that dominated the Russian stage during the culturally backwards reign of Alexander III'.¹¹ The play functions within the wider genre of historical drama, which dominated not only the theatrical but also the operatic stage during this period. While our present-day view of the canon elides this wider history,

¹⁰ *Charodeika* was not the first time Tchaikovsky attempted to adapt a play into an opera: his first opera *Voevoda* (1868) is adapted from a work by Aleksandr Ostrovsky, and *Orleanskaya deva* (1879) is adapted in part from a translation of Friedrich Schiller's 1801 *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*.

¹¹ Richard Taruskin, 'Enchantress, The'. *Oxford Music Online*. Accessed 30 March 2020.

Tchaikovsky himself began by writing historical operas like *Voevoda* (1868) and *Oprichnik* (1872) before abandoning that approach in *Onegin* (1877-78); Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov was also exploring historical topics in works like *Pskovityanka* (1873) before turning to his more well-known fairy-tale and folk subjects. Historical drama as a genre was extremely important to the *kuchkists*, who in general strove ‘that the criteria of the lyric stage approach as far as possible those of the spoken theatre.’¹² César Cui would sum up these goals for foreign audiences in his 1880 publication *La Musique en Russie*:

En outre, la nouvelle école russe s’efforce de rendre musicalement le caractère et le type des personnages avec tout le relief possible, de modeler, pour ainsi dire, chaque phrase d’un rôle dans un moule individuel et non générale; de caractériser, enfin, l’époque historique du drame et de rendre dans son sens poétique autant qu’exact la couleur locale, les côtés descriptifs et pittoresques de l’action.¹³

The prime example of historical drama on both theatrical and operatic stages is probably Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* (1831), which was adapted into a *kuchkist* opera by Musorgsky. Though both works are now canonised, their legacy is more complex than contemporary critics claim. Pushkin’s play was published as a written, experimental text in 1831 but was not approved for public performance (in a heavily censored edition) until over thirty years later, and was widely considered to be unstageable even then.¹⁴ Musorgsky wrote two different versions of the opera in 1869 and 1872, and several re-orchestrations by composers such as Rimsky-Korsakov (1896), Dmitry Shostakovich (1940), and Karol Rathaus (1952) exist. The opera was seen as an oddity, and it disappeared from the stage entirely between the 1872 version and Rimsky-

¹² Richard Taruskin, ‘Realism as Preached and Practiced: The Russian Opera Dialogue’, *Musical Quarterly* 56/3 (1970), 431-54 (p. 438).

¹³ César Cui, *La Musique en Russie* (Paris: Librairie Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1880), p. 77.

¹⁴ See Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 105-7 for a discussion of the perceptions and problems involved in staging *Boris Godunov*.

Korsakov's late-century re-orchestration. Yet *Boris* is today seen as the high-water mark of the *kuchkist* period, and because of their shared roots in historical drama, *Charodeika* has sometimes been directly and unfavourably compared to it. Critics have gone so far as to argue that *Charodeika* is Tchaikovsky's poor attempt at mimicking the *kuchkist* style, and that its failure has to do with his misapplication of *kuchkist* (by which is generally meant 'Musorgskian') techniques.

The complicated reception history of Musorgsky's *Boris* makes it not an entirely useful point of comparison with *Charodeika*. Although Tchaikovsky may indeed have been responding to Musorgsky and the *kuchka* in *Charodeika*, it is also possible that this process was mediated through his own prior experience of historical operas. By labeling Musorgsky's attempt at the genre successful and denigrating Tchaikovsky's as a failure elides the fact that it was only in the twentieth century that *Boris Godunov* achieved canonical status. Musorgsky's opera only truly becomes useful to a study of *Charodeika* when examining the scholarly literature analysing the different methods for adapting texts into operas, particularly theatrical works. In her expansive consideration of Pushkin and Musorgsky's respective *Boris Godunov*, Caryl Emerson identifies three main principles, 'linked, at their base, with the issue of authority of the source text'.¹⁵ Firstly, and the most focused on the authority of the source text, are word-for-word settings of an original literary source: the obvious example of this is Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky's *Kamennyi gost'* (1872), which sets Pushkin's eponymous play into music with no textual alterations or cuts.¹⁶ Secondly, and the least focused on the source text, are free adaptations, which use the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁶ Again, note the use of Pushkin's literary work as a source for operatic adaptation, and indeed the reverence with which the source text is treated in its operatic adaptation.

source text as a general resource for lifting elements of character and plot: a good example of this is Aleksandr Borodin's *Knyaz' Igor'* (1890), which very loosely adapts a twelfth-century epic poem.¹⁷ Thirdly, Emerson identifies what she calls operas 'organised around the principle of "scenes from classic works"',¹⁸ such as Tchaikovsky's *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78): 'the audience [is] expected to know the *from* [the source text], so evaluation always takes place against the active background of a source text that is familiar.'¹⁹

If we accept Emerson's assertion that the authority of the source text is the primary concern when approaching text-to-opera adaptation, then the comparison of *Charodeika* and *Boris Godunov* is inappropriate from its very point of departure. While *Charodeika* was a popular play, it had premiered only a year before Tchaikovsky decided to adapt it into an opera. By contrast, the theatrical *Boris Godunov* had been written in 1825 and published in 1831, giving it plenty of time to percolate into the literary system before Musorgsky was encouraged to adapt it into an opera in 1868. The heavily censored edition that eventually arrived on Russian stages in the 1860s may have paradoxically helped Musorgsky, as his libretto makes several crucial cuts to the text as originally published, going against the *kuchkist* protocol of prioritising word-for-word adaptation. Furthermore, *Boris Godunov* was linked with the name of Russia's greatest literary icon – Aleksandr Pushkin – giving the text significantly higher status than *Charodeika*.

Comparing the operatic *Charodeika* with the operatic *Boris* is truly an unequal endeavour: their

¹⁷ See the following chapter on Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* (1896) for more on operatic adaptation of folk literature.

¹⁸ Emerson, *Boris Godunov*, p. 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

source texts alone differ greatly in circumstance and status, and such differences therefore will carry over to criticism of their operatic adaptations.

Both operatic versions of *Boris Godunov* and *Charodeika* seem to exist as a combination of Emerson's first and third principles of adaptation, word-for-word setting and 'scenes from' adaptation, but they combine these strategies in vastly different ways. Musorgsky's opera includes only one scene – Boris's hallucination in scene five of the opera – that is not present in Pushkin's original play, but he did not set Pushkin's entire text word-for-word as Dargomyzhsky had with *Kamennyi gost'*. Instead, Musorgsky selected only the scenes from the play in which the title character appeared, which served both to radically condense the play, making it easier to set to music, and to promote the title character as an (anti)-heroic centre around which the action of the opera takes place. Musorgsky's priorities therefore show a favouring of the 'scenes from' technique over the word-by-word technique. By contrast, Tchaikovsky's original plan for *Charodeika* envisioned the opera as a five-act work to parallel the five acts of Shpazhinsky's play. While this is not a word-by-word adaptation *à la Kamennyi gost'*, it could be called a 'scene-by-scene' adaptation. Unlike Musorgsky, who recognised the need to make cuts to the play's text, Tchaikovsky planned to condense the text of individual scenes but keep their presentation and overall structure intact.

By early 1886, however, Tchaikovsky's other projects began to influence his conception of the *Charodeika* libretto as a kind of scene-by-scene adaptation. During this period, Tchaikovsky completed a Russian translation of the libretto to Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* for his publisher Petr Yurgenson, and the two were in touch in January 1886 about the project. Tchaikovsky's letters to Yurgenson during this time reveal a developing concern for the difference between a play script and an operatic libretto: 'Решительно не понимаю, что значит: «печатать

либретто, но без речитативов, с разговорами». Что такое разговоры? Ведь речитатив и есть разговор', he wrote.²⁰ Yurgenson's plan seems to have been to print the translated *Figaro* as if it were a script – indeed, much as Beaumarchais's original text would have looked – but Tchaikovsky does not consider there to be any difference between spoken dialogue in a play and sequential recitatives in an opera. This is particularly interesting when one takes into account how dialogue-heavy Shpazhinsky's theatrical *Charodeika* is.²¹ This discussion with Yurgenson may have inspired Tchaikovsky to reconsider the adaptation thus far. Indeed, later in the year Tchaikovsky began to realise the impossibility of adapting a wordy five-act historical drama into a satisfactory opera, and decided to compress the final two draft acts of the opera as adapted scene-by-scene from the play into a single concluding act.

Tchaikovsky wrote to Shpazhinsky in autumn 1886 to discuss a revised four-act libretto, and noted in his diary on 11 September the same year: 'Сыграл сегодня целиком все первое действие; и к ужасу вижу, что оно ужасно длинно. А длинные оперы никуда не годятся.'²² Unlike Musorgsky, who made cuts to the play before beginning his compositional work, Tchaikovsky was forced to cut scenes he had already written, which drastically affected the dramaturgy of the finished opera. As will be explored later, Tchaikovsky's cuts turned *Charodeika*, which had been proposed and drafted along the lines of a word-for-word opera, into a 'scenes-from' opera à la Tchaikovsky's earlier *Evgeny Onegin*. Unlike the literary *Onegin*,

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 252-3 (emphasis original).

²¹ The focus on dialogue as a generic marker also appears in criticism of Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. To Pushkin, 'drama was dialogue - with others, with the environment - and it develops, it is not merely acted out or willed by heroes.' See Emerson, *Boris Godunov*, p. 101.

²² Petr Il'ich Chaikovskii, *Dnevnik P. I. Chaikovskogo 1873-1891*, ed. I. I. Chaikovskii (Moscow: Gosizdat-Muzsektor, 1923), p. 94.

however, audiences could not possibly be as familiar with *Charodeika*'s original source. Even though Shpazhinsky's play was extremely popular with audiences, it had not had the time to become a canonical work like Pushkin's *Onegin* or an admired piece of experimental writing such as *Boris*. While much of this disparity in canonical status has to do with Pushkin's role as the nineteenth century's literary giant versus Shpazhinsky's status as a popular but not particularly ground-breaking playwright, the primary factor in the failure of a 'scenes-from' opera of *Charodeika* is the issue of time. The literary and operatic *Onegins* are separated by several decades during which the source text became canonised and well-known to the cultured public, while the literary and operatic *Charodeikas* are separated only by a few years, an impossibly short time for such a work to become canonical – if indeed it ever would.

Emerson's three principles of source text to operatic adaptation touch on a key issue with literary adaptation more generally: length of source text versus time limits on the medium of the adaptation. In their *Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn point out that 'usually adaptations, especially from long novels, mean that the adapter's job is one of subtraction or contraction', and that in the case of plays adapted from novels 'there was not as much time for the play's audience to piece things together as there was for those reading the novels'.²³ These points have special relevance for operatic adaptation, particularly adaptations of Emerson's first type, considering the duration of the completed opera. It takes significantly longer to sing a phrase than to speak it – even notwithstanding instrumental interludes – so an opera that takes a play's text wholesale as a libretto with no cuts or revisions will make for an

²³ Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 19. The specific play cited was Nicholas Wright's 2003 theatrical adaptation of Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000).

incredibly long opera, even by operatic standards.²⁴ In the case of *Charodeika*, Tchaikovsky struggled with timing even as he condensed the final two acts of the play and Shpazhinsky's draft libretto into a single act. In late March 1887 his diary notes 'Играл 4-ый действие «Чародейки». Целый час!! Это ужасно.'²⁵ He would later confide to the playwright's wife, Yuliya Shpazhinskaya, that 'Оно [the revised Act IV] скомкано, искусственно склеено, длинно, сложно и страшно мрачно! Ну авось я ошибаюсь...'²⁶ In attempting to correct his earlier error in timing, Tchaikovsky knew he had only succeeded in mangling the progress of the action, and indeed, from Act IV of the opera the action becomes almost comically condensed. Large gaps appear in the narrative, further problematising the audience's understanding of character motivation, let alone the unfolding plot.

The second half of *Charodeika* was a continual struggle for Tchaikovsky, and he had to make further cuts even as rehearsals began, noting in a letter to Shpazhinsky 'я отлично заметил, когда прекратилось симпатическое отношение всех присутствовавших к опере и когда началось мрачное молчание, какое-то тоскливое недоумение.'²⁷ As the scheduled premiere edged closer and closer, Tchaikovsky was still editing the score, deeply anxious about the approaching deadline. The revision process was especially tense because *Charodeika* was scheduled for a second run in Tbilisi under the baton of composer Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov. Tchaikovsky wrote to Ippolitov-Ivanov that he would have to use 'клавираусцуг с наклейками'

²⁴ This is the main reason word-by-word operatic adaptations like Dargomyzhsky's *Kamennyi gost'* and Musorgsky's *Zhenit'ba* (unfinished 1868 adaptation of Nikolay Gogol's 1842 play) were unsuccessful.

²⁵ Chaikovskii, *Dnevnik*, p. 134.

²⁶ PSS XIV (1974), p. 89.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 228. This point seems to have been the love duet between Nastas'ya and Prince Yury in Act III.

instead of a full orchestral score for the Tbilisi rehearsals, and comments that ‘Опера оказалась (за исключением 1-го и 2 действия) во многих отношениях очень непрактичною.’²⁸ For Tchaikovsky, who habitually took great pride in his finished works, the disavowal of an entire half of *Charodeika* speaks to his extreme disappointment with the finished product.

If we take at face value Taruskin’s claim that the operatic *Charodeika* is Tchaikovsky’s most *kuchkist* work, this reading is best expressed by understanding the relationship between Tchaikovsky and Shpazhinsky alongside the more theoretical concerns outlined above. Tchaikovsky and Shpazhinsky’s correspondence concerning *Charodeika* has for the most part survived intact, and provides a vivid glimpse not only into Tchaikovsky’s still-developing operatic style, but also more broadly into the composer-librettist dynamic during this period. If most *kuchkist* operas had their libretti adapted by the composer himself, *Charodeika* is the rare exception, and an even rarer instance where the libretto was adapted by the author of the original text. In order better to understand how the Taruskinian reading of *Charodeika* as *kuchkist* response emerges, let us now examine Tchaikovsky and Shpazhinsky’s rich correspondence.

Tchaikovsky, Shpazhinsky, and the Composer-Librettist Hierarchy

Before discussing his relationship with Tchaikovsky during the course of adapting *Charodeika*, it will first be useful to sketch a brief biography of Ippolit Shpazhinsky. Shpazhinsky’s biography establishes him as a literary equivalent to the autodidact ‘dilettante composers’ like Glinka and his circle that I explored in the previous two chapters. Shpazhinsky was not raised to become a professional writer; rather, he received a military education and served in a light cavalry

²⁸ Ibid., p. 233.

regiment for a few years, eventually resigning his commission to pursue his literary interests.²⁹ Shpazhinsky's first stage work, *Vopros zhizni*, premiered in 1876 and ignited a decades-long career. Shpazhinsky's works were generally very well-received, and he was highly respected as a writer, winning the inaugural Griboedov Prize in 1898 for his play *Dve sud'by*. Situated roughly mid-career, Shpazhinsky's five-act 'Nizhgorodian tale' *Charodeika* premiered in 1884 and was one of Shpazhinsky's most successful stage works, one of only two that were translated for productions in Western Europe.³⁰ Shpazhinsky worked prolifically and across many genres: his list of works includes tragedies, comedies, and historical dramas; he wrote both five-act plays and single tableaux for mixed performances. Nor did Shpazhinsky limit himself to spoken theatre: his first operatic collaboration came in 1883, when the playwright adapted Nikolay Gogol's *Taras Bul'ba* for the composer Vladimir Kashperov, also a military man turned composer and protégé of Mikhail Glinka.³¹ Shpazhinsky's eclectic mixing of styles and genres, his free collaboration with composers, and his educational background testify that the idea of the

²⁹ This focus on a more suitably 'professional' career brings about a comparison with the *kuchkist* composers, none of whom had formal musical training, and with the many amateur writers of the first half of the nineteenth century.

³⁰ The other was *Mayorsha* of 1878.

³¹ Kashperov was a member of the 'Western' circle of composers that the *kuchka* despised, spending the majority of his career in Western Europe. Kashperov only returned to Russia in 1861 at the invitation of Anton Rubinstein, becoming a professor of singing at the newly-opened Moscow Conservatory. Kashperov's 1867 adaptation of Ostrovsky's *Groza* was derided for being too obviously indebted to Western operatic genres, particularly Italian bel canto. See Vasilii Kiselev, *A. N. Ostrovskii i russkie kompozitory. Pis'ma*. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1937), pp. 67-72.

‘dilettante’ artist, while not nearly as prevalent as it was at the turn of the nineteenth century, was still clearly part of the cultural conversation in the second half of the century.³²

The Tchaikovsky-Shpazhinsky Correspondence: Realism over Melodrama

Tchaikovsky’s collaboration with Shpazhinsky follows a pattern common to the composer’s work with librettists: an early stage of collaboration marked by mutual enthusiasm and productivity followed by a distancing and cooling-off of relations. In this particular case, the collaboration between composer and librettist would break down entirely, but seemingly, as will be seen, for personal reasons rather than any dissatisfaction Tchaikovsky had with the libretto or with Shpazhinsky’s willingness to revise his text according to the composer’s demands. The pair first came into contact in late January 1885, after Tchaikovsky wrote Shpazhinsky to propose the project. Shpazhinsky warmly replied, ‘Я давно хотел познакомиться с Вами и ни с кем не стану работать с таким особенным удовольствием, как с Вами.’³³ Both were located in Moscow that spring, and met regularly in person to discuss and work on the libretto together.³⁴ However, at the same time Tchaikovsky commented to Pavlovskaya that the libretto was taking a long time to adapt, spending his time working on the *Manfred* symphony while waiting for Shpazhinsky to send completed drafts. Despite this delay, Tchaikovsky would comment that

³² Indeed, the existence of *kuchka* itself testifies to the ability of self-taught Russian artists to find success in mainstream culture of the mid-century.

³³ V. V. Yakovlev (ed.), *Chaikovskii na moskovskoi stsene* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1940), p. 426.

³⁴ See editor’s note, *PSS XIII*, p. 72.

‘лично этот либреттист мне очень симпатичен’,³⁵ and he would turn to sketches for the opera with great zeal.

The personal rapport Tchaikovsky and Shpazhinsky developed over the spring of 1885 seems to have given Tchaikovsky a great deal of confidence in the quality of the forthcoming work despite Shpazhinsky’s delays. Eventually, Tchaikovsky accepted that complete drafts of the libretto would take longer than he would prefer, and wrote to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck in July 1885 that the opera would not be ready for some time.³⁶ By the time Shpazhinsky sent a complete libretto for Act I later that month, Tchaikovsky was fully occupied with work on the symphony and could not focus on *Charodeika*. Yet his reciprocal dilatoriness in composing music to the completed Act I libretto led him to confess to Pavlovskaya: ‘Мне очень стыдно и перед Шпажинским, которого я так торопил, и перед всеми теми, которые ожидают от меня оперы.’³⁷ This comment reveals Tchaikovsky’s deep respect for the playwright at this early stage of composition, and an overall understanding of the importance of the librettist to an opera’s composition. The composer’s guilt over pressing Shpazhinsky to work faster when he himself would take some time to provide his own contribution marks the fact that although Tchaikovsky may have expected Shpazhinsky to adapt his own play according to Tchaikovsky’s own demands, he did not necessarily view the librettist as subordinate to the composer. In fact, the opposite was true: Tchaikovsky was delighted with Shpazhinsky’s libretto and reported to Pavlovskaya, ‘Ах, какой молодец этот Шпажинский, и какого хорошего сотрудника послала

³⁵ PSS XIII, p. 65.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

мне в нем судьба!’³⁸ The word choice of *сотрудник* highlights Tchaikovsky’s perception of work on the opera at this early stage as a collaborative affair.

By late 1886, however, Tchaikovsky’s relationship with Shpazhinsky began to cool, and he grew increasingly more demanding, taking greater control over the shaping of the opera’s dramatic arc. For the reasons of timing discussed earlier, Tchaikovsky had become convinced that the opera needed to be four acts instead of mirroring the play’s original five acts as previously planned. In doing so, Tchaikovsky argued, the culmination of the drama would be focused on the scene where Nastas’ya and Prince Yury decide to run away together rather than the hatching of the revenge plot against Nastas’ya by the abandoned Princess. Tchaikovsky argued the fourth and fifth acts of the play should be entirely revised and combined into a single act, making the final act of the opera a much more condensed ‘scenes-from’ adaptation of the play than the more faithfully adherent previous three acts.

Tchaikovsky also had his own ideas about the opera’s dénouement, and outlined in great detail how he imagined a concluding Act IV would play out on the operatic stage. ‘Но, во всяком случае, если Вы сдадитесь,’ he would write, after several long paragraphs describing his vision of Nastas’ya’s death scene, ‘то неизбежно придётся изобрести нечто совершенно новое, совсем не то, что в драме [...] Нельзя ли сделать так, чтобы трагедия закончилась всенародно? Как сделать, чтобы народ при этом был?’³⁹ The idea of a public tragedy goes entirely against the original text, which throughout focuses on the four main characters, but makes generic sense for an opera. By finishing the drama with public witnesses, Tchaikovsky can make use of a final chorus as was common in tragic operas of this period. Perhaps because

³⁸ Ibid., p. 167.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 264-5 (emphasis original).

he understands the generic demands of opera more than Shpazhinsky might, Tchaikovsky is convinced of the rightness of his opinion as regards to the musical effectiveness of a four-act *Charodeika*. In a sign of his knowledge that as composer he has ultimate authority over the shaping of the finished work, he is equally convinced Shpazhinsky will enact his new vision. Yet Tchaikovsky also acknowledges Shpazhinsky has the dramatic skills Tchaikovsky may lack to flesh out this new, public ending, assuring the writer that ‘На все эти вопросы только Вы сами найдёте ответы.’⁴⁰ Tchaikovsky’s implication that Shpazhinsky has creative freedom to develop a finale according to Tchaikovsky’s plan therefore gives Shpazhinsky-as-librettist at least the semblance of agency over the completed work – agency Tchaikovsky did not always provide his librettists.⁴¹

Shpazhinsky made every change Tchaikovsky suggested, both with regard to the structure and finale of the libretto and the characterisation of Nastas’ya, but despite his willingness to adapt to Tchaikovsky’s vision of the piece, Shpazhinsky’s personal conduct led the composer to completely reverse his previous good opinion of the writer. By July 1886, Tchaikovsky writes to his brother Modest that Shpazhinsky ‘настолько же упал в моем мнении (как человек, а не как писатель), насколько жена его все больше вырастает.’⁴² Tchaikovsky is referring to Shpazhinsky’s estrangement from his wife Yuliya, whom he sent with their children away from Moscow to Sevastopol because of the personal breach. Tchaikovsky had grown close to Yuliya,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Famously, Tchaikovsky would later write large portions of the *Pikovaya dama* libretto himself, or otherwise would dictate to the librettist (his brother Modest) precisely where and how many lines a new arioso or scene should take place. By contrast, his mere outlining of the events of the final act to Shpazhinsky appears positively light-handed.

⁴² Ibid., p. 381.

and took her side against Shpazhinsky in their marital discord. Yuliya from this point became Tchaikovsky's confidante about the progress of the opera, in letters full of comfort and solicitousness of her wellbeing. While acknowledging that Shpazhinsky had served him well as a librettist, Tchaikovsky was so disgusted with his personal conduct that he no longer consulted Shpazhinsky regarding the progress of the opera's composition. To Tchaikovsky, personal morals trumped professional concerns.

On top of their personal falling-out, Tchaikovsky and Shpazhinsky had an additional professional misunderstanding about rights and royalties for the operatic *Charodeika*. Shpazhinsky had written to Tchaikovsky to establish a written agreement that 'в случае моей смерти до постановки "Чародейке" условие между нами гарантирует моей семье право наследников, дает ей юридическое право перед Дирекцией [of Imperial Theatres], которая, как известно Вам, знает только композиторов, а с либреттистом в расчеты не входит.'⁴³ While the particular draft legal document Shpazhinsky enclosed with this letter has not survived, Shpazhinsky's summary of it provides a fascinating glimpse at just how far the status of the librettist had fallen in the eyes of operatic administration over the course of the nineteenth century. Shpazhinsky's concern that his legal heirs would have no right to any of the operatic royalties shows how significantly the composer had overtaken the role of 'author' of an operatic work. Of course, Tchaikovsky's success as a composer, which equalled if not exceeded Shpazhinsky's own standing as a writer, would be significant. Shpazhinsky probably assumed that the opera would be a success based on Tchaikovsky's name-recognition alone, not to mention the play's earlier popularity. His desire to secure royalties in a binding legal contract

⁴³ *Chaikovskii na moskovskoi stsene*, p. 439.

rather than a gentleman's agreement also indicates Shpazhinsky may not have trusted Tchaikovsky to allow Shpazhinsky what he perceived as his fair share of any profits.

Shpazhinsky's concern for rights, couched in concern for his family, must have grated on Tchaikovsky in light of Shpazhinsky's abandonment of that very family. In reply, Tchaikovsky sent Shpazhinsky a polite if frosty reply, assuring him that 'отлично понимаю те причины, по которым, кончивши свой труд, Вы можете и должны, ввиду непрочности всего земного, позаботиться о будущем и закрепить право своё и своих наследников', and thanking him 'за Ваше превосходное либретто, за Вашу неоцененную услугу, за то, что Вы не погнушались с любовью заняться трудом, который отвлекал Вас от Ваших новых, более интересных работ.'⁴⁴ Tchaikovsky mentions no specifics, only assuring Shpazhinsky that he would not stand in Shpazhinsky's way if the writer decided to approach the Imperial Theatres about a legally binding contract.

It is perhaps ironic that Tchaikovsky would decline to discuss financial specifics with Shpazhinsky, for it is during this period that Tchaikovsky's own finances had become much more secure. Tchaikovsky had received an annual pension of 6,000 rubles from Nadezhda von Meck since 1877, and in 1888 – the same year as *Charodeika* premiered – Tchaikovsky was granted another annual pension of 3,000 rubles from Alexander III.⁴⁵ Between 1886 and 1889, Tchaikovsky earned anywhere between 6,000 and 12,000 rubles a year, an order of magnitude

⁴⁴ PSS XIII, p. 393.

⁴⁵ See Lucinde Braun, *Studien zur russischen Oper im späten 19. Jahrhundert* (Mainz: Schott Musik International, 1999), p. 164.

greater than the 2,000 rubles a year suggested as the minimum wage for a professional writer.⁴⁶ It is unclear how much Shpazhinsky earned during this period: it is very possible he was earning significant royalties after the success of the theatrical *Charodeika*, but no financial documents exist to confirm this. Yet it seems somewhat callous on Tchaikovsky's part not to discuss the particulars of financial remuneration for the operatic *Charodeika* when he was likely expecting to earn several thousand rubles from the commission and performance fees.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Tchaikovsky's letter does at least acknowledge the role Shpazhinsky played in the development of the opera, particularly at a time when the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres was struggling with the question of author's rights that had emerged around this period in Russia and across Europe.

Tchaikovsky's letter regarding the rights distribution for *Charodeika* was not the last he would write to Shpazhinsky, but in stark contrast to their many in-person meetings throughout 1885, Tchaikovsky only contacted Shpazhinsky twice more, in late September 1887 to defend his own un-consulted cuts to the finished libretto, and again several months later to defend the poor reception of *Charodeika* and to decline to work on a proposed operatic adaptation of Pushkin's *Kapitanskaya dochka*. This second letter in particular illustrates that despite Tchaikovsky's willingness to cede Shpazhinsky a share of royalties, at least in principle, he nonetheless considers the operatic *Charodeika* his sole work. Shpazhinsky had requested, in light of *Charodeika's* poor reviews, that Tchaikovsky make further revisions to the opera, but the

⁴⁶ See Philip Ross Bullock, 'Chaikovskii and the Economics of Art Music in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia', *Journal of Musicology*, 36/2 (2019), 195-227 (p. 202).

⁴⁷ Tchaikovsky was paid 3,000 rubles in May 1887 by the St Petersburg branch of the Imperial Theatres Directorate for the opera. See Table 1 in *ibid.*, p. 204.

composer refused to make ‘каких бы то ни было переделок’, observing that ‘Не нам с Вами унижаться до непонимания публики, а пусть-ка они слушают как следует.’⁴⁸ Tchaikovsky’s unwillingness to even consider further revisions is striking: the 1880s could be called Tchaikovsky’s ‘decade of revision’.⁴⁹ The composer’s disdain for Shpazhinsky’s personal conduct, while not affecting his view of *Charodeika*, may have influenced his decision to no longer work with Shpazhinsky, either on a revised *Charodeika* or any other new work.

Tchaikovsky’s absolute refusal may also have been a reaction to his own disappointment with the public reception of an opera that had meant a great deal to him during its composition. Tchaikovsky became very emotionally invested in all of his compositions, and would be devastated when they were not well-received.⁵⁰ *Charodeika*, despite being adapted from a highly successful stage play, seems to have confused the public as well as the press: ‘Рецензенты, отмечая отдельные, по их мнению, удачные отрывки оперы, в целом отрицательно оценили “Чародейку” как музыкально-драматическое произведение.’⁵¹ A dejected Tchaikovsky wrote to Yuliya Shpazhinskaya in October 1887: ‘В общем, скажу Вам, добрая Юлия Петровна, что «Чародейка» мало нравится, и вина в том как на мне, так и, главным образом, на Ип[полите] Вас[ильевиче]’.⁵² Nonetheless, Tchaikovsky goes on to lay most of the blame at Shpazhinsky’s feet: ‘Он отлично знает сцену, но к оперным требованиям ещё мало

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 410.

⁴⁹ In 1885, Tchaikovsky entirely re-wrote his 1874 opera *Kuznets Vakula*, retitling it *Cherevichki*, and throughout the decade worked on more minor revisions to *Evgeny Onegin*.

⁵⁰ Asaf’ev, *Izbrannye trudy*, II, p. 153.

⁵¹ Editor’s note, *PSS XIV*, p. 256.

⁵² *PSS XIV*, p. 250.

прилачился. У него слишком много слов, слишком преобладает разговор над лиризмом',⁵³ returning to his reflection on dialogue versus recitative from the previous year. In his final letter to Shpazhinsky from April 1888, a still-smarting Tchaikovsky wrote, 'Я считаю «Чародейку» лучшей своей оперой и ни от одной ноты не отказываюсь',⁵⁴ and was too hurt by the suggestion of revising the work to even consider it until more time has passed.

Tchaikovsky and Shpazhinsky's collaboration on *Charodeika* was dominated by Tchaikovsky's understanding of the original drama, and by his vision for the adapted work. The Shpazhinsky-Tchaikovsky correspondence is marked by Tchaikovsky's unwillingness to modify his interpretations and his continued assumption that Shpazhinsky will adapt according to Tchaikovsky's demands, thus illustrating the late-century reality for an operatic librettist. Even if, like Shpazhinsky, a librettist was adapting his own previous work for the operatic stage, it was not only expected that he cede to the composer's demands during the process of collaboration but also should seemingly demand no royalties from the operatic administration.

Drama as Text vs. Drama as Performance: Tchaikovsky's Reading of *Charodeika*

In his working relationship with Shpazhinsky, Tchaikovsky's opinions and ideas held the upper hand, yet the composer's conception of *Charodeika* was based entirely on the play as a literary object and not as a performed work. Tchaikovsky did have some experience adapting plays into operas: his first opera *Voevoda* (1868) was based on Aleksandr Ostrovsky's eponymous play of

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 410.

1865, and the opera *Oprichnik* (1874) was based on a drama by Ivan Lazhechnikov.⁵⁵ However, Tchaikovsky had seen both these plays in live performance before beginning work on their operatic adaptations. That he had not similarly attended a performance of *Charodeika* meant that Tchaikovsky's understanding of the drama and its characters was entirely based on his own personal reading of the play, uninfluenced by staging or an actor's performance. As work progressed on the operatic *Charodeika*, Tchaikovsky became even more wedded to his individual reading of the text. Tchaikovsky only attended a performance of the play in spring 1887, over two years after first reading the text, and was shocked by the differences between his reading of the work and its performed ideation. Tchaikovsky would write to Yuliya Shpazhinskaya in June of that year, wryly remarking, 'Господи, как она далека от того идеала "Чародейки", который ЖИЛ В МОЕМ ВОБРАЖЕНИИ!!!'⁵⁶ Tchaikovsky's differing reactions to the written *Charodeika* and the performed one are unsurprising, because the experience of reading any text is, as contemporary scholars of adaptation have noted, far closer to modern forms of entertainment like radio and television 'than it is to the public and communal viewing experience in a dark theatre of any kind'.⁵⁷ Tchaikovsky's problem is that his understanding of *Charodeika* was shaped by his private experience of reading it, which was never how Shpazhinsky intended his work to be consumed.

Tchaikovsky was not alone in treating a drama as a read experience rather than a performed one. The idea of the play script as a purely literary object separate from any staged version had

⁵⁵ Neither of these operas were successful; in fact, Tchaikovsky destroyed the manuscript for *Voevoda* in the 1870s and recycled much of the musical material in *Oprichnik*.

⁵⁶ PSS XIV (1971) p. 120.

⁵⁷ Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 27.

existed in Russia earlier in the nineteenth century. Most famous of these plays-as-texts is Ivan Turgenev's *Mesyats v derevne*, which was written between 1848 and 1850 but unpublished until 1855, and unperformed until 1872. Turgenev seems to have written the play as a literary exercise only, and never intended it to be staged for either public or private performances. It was actress Mariya Savina who truly brought the play to prominence in an 1879 benefit performance. Actresses, like singers, had influence over the development of 'new' theatre and programming, and this was the case with Savina and the Aleksandrinsky Theatre in St Petersburg: Savina 'continually introduc[ed] truly national and original plays as well as outstanding contemporary foreign plays which have since become classics'.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the actress 'had no hesitation about expanding the size and importance of her own part if she thought it necessary – even when this was not the author's original intention'.⁵⁹ Such was the case with *Mesyats v derevne*. Savina wrote in her memoirs that upon reading the play, she thought it 'undoubtedly deserved a production [...] but the play as it stood seemed to me boring and too long',⁶⁰ and wrote to Turgenev proposing several cuts. Turgenev reluctantly agreed, but confessed to his agent: 'I can't think what made her choose such a theatrically impossible play! One Moscow actress – Vasilyeva – attempted it a few years ago [the 1872 premiere] *in spite of my repeated warnings*

⁵⁸ Nora Gottlieb and Raymond Chapman (ed. and trans.), *Letters to an Actress: The Story of Ivan Turgenev and Marya Gavrilovna Savina* (London: Allison and Busby, 1973), p. 12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25. Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* similarly came to greater public attention as the result of a performer's benefit concert – in *Boris*' case, for soprano Yuliya Platonova. See Caryl Emerson and Robert William Oldani, 'A Tale of Two Productions – St Petersburg (1874-1882), Paris (1908)', in *Modest Musorgsky and Boris Godunov: Myths, Realities, Reconsiderations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 91-125.

and was an utter flop'.⁶¹ Despite writing *Mesyats v derevne* in the form of a play, which traditionally would be performed onstage, Turgenev clearly never intended it to be so. It was only the strength of Savina's performance that brought the author around to the play's worthiness as a performed object, and established Savina as the leading actress of her generation.⁶²

The contrast between Tchaikovsky's text-based interpretation of *Charodeika* and his experience seeing it in performance is matched by a contrast between Tchaikovsky's vision of the play and his plan to execute it as an operatic adaptation. Asaf'ev notes that throughout the process of adaptation, Tchaikovsky 'упрямо хотелось добиться реализации своего замысла' rather than adapt the play as it actually was.⁶³ But this is not entirely true, at least not as Tchaikovsky originally planned the adaptation. Tchaikovsky had first proposed to Shpazhinsky that the operatic *Charodeika* would have five acts to match the play's five acts, suggesting a more traditional page-to-stage adaptation aligning closely with the source material in the manner of the *kuchka* and praising the play as it had been originally written. Yet Tchaikovsky simultaneously wrote to Pavlovskaya that

Он [Shpazhinsky], впрочем, сам отлично сознаёт, что многое ему не удалось в исполнении замысла, и при составлении либретто оттенит действующие лица ярче, правдивее, сильнее [...] Разумеется, я говорю о том, как это будет у меня в либретто, а не так, как это теперь в драме.⁶⁴

It is likely that Tchaikovsky was being flattering towards Shpazhinsky in order to secure his consent for the adaptation and his services as librettist, but Tchaikovsky stubbornly stuck to his five-act plan long after it would become apparent that such an adaptation would be impossible

⁶¹ *Letters to an Actress*, p. 25 (emphasis added).

⁶² In an interesting coincidence, Savina would later go on to premiere the role of Nastas'ya in Shpazhinsky's *Charodeika*, and was performing the role in the production Tchaikovsky saw in 1887.

⁶³ Asaf'ev, *Izbrannye trudy*, II, p. 15.

⁶⁴ *PSS XIII*, p. 65 (emphasis mine).

for an opera. Asaf'ev's claim that the composer wished to realise his own intentions is therefore only partly true: Tchaikovsky did indeed have his own vision of the opera, particularly as applied to characterisation, but in terms of structure and dramaturgy intended to follow the original text. The disconnect marks the tension between Tchaikovsky's realist tendencies and his desire for psychological realism.

In the same letter where he assured Pavlovskaya that Shpazhinsky would be significantly changing the original material, Tchaikovsky also claims Shpazhinsky is so unhappy with the play that he himself dissuaded Tchaikovsky from attending a performance. 'да и Шпажинский очень не советует, говоря, что теперешняя «Чародейка» может озлобить меня к будущей.'⁶⁵ These are extremely odd claims, given that the theatrical *Charodeika* was by this point Shpazhinsky's most successful work. If Shpazhinsky was indeed as reluctant for Tchaikovsky to see it in performance as the composer implies, it leads to the suggestion that Shpazhinsky intended to use the process of operatic adaptation as a chance to revise his own work, treating the libretto as if it were a script for a revised play. This might explain Asaf'ev's otherwise puzzling assertion that the operatic *Charodeika* is closely interwoven with realist literature and drama of the period.⁶⁶ If Shpazhinsky did see the libretto as an opportunity to revisit his own work, and Tchaikovsky guided the revisions based on his textual interpretations, then this literariness that Asaf'ev picks up in his commentary may indeed have been an integral part of the operatic *Charodeika* from its inception.

Yet at least superficially, the reading of *Charodeika* as a realist work is not entirely correct. There is nothing realist about the play except for its historical setting, which serves not to inform

⁶⁵ Ibid (emphasis original).

⁶⁶ Asaf'ev, *Izbrannye trudy*, II, p. 143.

the drama but rather to set the action in a suitably long-ago time and place. The characters are only superficially sketched out, and function as avatars of a particular emotional arc rather than as fully realised human presences: Prince Nikita is driven by his jealous lust for Nastas'ya, young Prince Yury first out of a desire for vengeance on Nastas'ya and then his passion for her, and so on. Neither is the text itself particularly realistic. Characters speechify rather than speak, with fourth wall-breaking monologues only present to elaborate on their particular driving emotion. However, none of this makes *Charodeika* a poor play – as its success in urban settings and the provinces of the Russian Empire attest. *Charodeika* is instead a perfectly serviceable example of the trend for historical melodrama that percolated through Russia during this period, just as the transition towards more realist drama was beginning. The realist label is perhaps applied to *Charodeika* because its genre brings it in line with the *kuchkist* approach to depicting operatic realism via historically-informed libretti, yet Asaf'ev makes no mention of this in his realist analysis of *Charodeika*. Instead, Asaf'ev's claim of realism is evaluated only in relation to Tchaikovsky's adaptation of *Nastas'ya*.

The realism in *Charodeika* emerges out of the way Tchaikovsky depicts female passion and its development, and how his female heroines are often the only characters that undergo some kind of psychological development throughout his operas. 'Строго говоря', Asaf'ev writes, 'вся музыкально-драматургическая форма "Чародейка" обусловлена ритмо-мелодическим раскрытием душевной жизни героини [...] В этом смысле музыка оперы монологична'.⁶⁷ This analysis bears out how focused Tchaikovsky's correspondence with both Shpazhinsky and Pavlovskaya is on the central character of *Nastas'ya*. In an early letter to Pavlovskaya, Tchaikovsky comments that *Nastas'ya* has a 'сильная женская натура, умеющая полюбить

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 149 (emphasis added).

только раз навсегда и в жертву этой любви отдать всё',⁶⁸ and compares her to female heroines like his own Tat'yana from *Evgeny Onegin* and the title character of Bizet's *Carmen*. This vision of Nastas'ya is not at all how she is portrayed in Shpazhinsky's original play, where she seems more overtly sexualised and complicit in the tragedy of the drama. Shpazhinsky had to make serious revisions to bring Tchaikovsky's reading of the heroine to life, transforming her from a more one-dimensional character like the others in the work to a fully fleshed-out depiction of a woman caught between opposing passions. These revisions were driven by Tchaikovsky, but developed in close collaboration with Pavlovskaya. Having examined *Charodeika* through the composer-librettist lens and the *kuchkist* attention to historical drama and 'wordiness', let us now leave this Taruskinian reading of *Charodeika-as-kuchkist* response behind and turn instead to a radically new approach informed by Asaf'ev's reading of the operatic Nastas'ya. In place of the hierarchical composer-librettist relationship seen in Tchaikovsky's correspondence with Shpazhinsky, I will now examine the far more collaborative relationship between Tchaikovsky and Emiliya Pavlovskaya, positioning Pavlovskaya as the co-author of the operatic Nastas'ya, in whom Tchaikovsky's own brand of psychological realism would come to full expression.

Emiliya Pavlovskaya and Singers as Operatic Influencers

The institution of opera in the nineteenth century was as much dominated by singers as it was by composers, and new repertory was often written with a particular singer in mind, if not in collaboration with the singer herself. April Fitzlyon has described in her biographies of

⁶⁸ PSS XIII, p. 63.

celebrated early-nineteenth century singers Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot-Garcia how composers such as Gioachino Rossini and Vincenzo Bellini worked with star prima donnas to develop new roles.⁶⁹ When examining contemporary editions of vocal scores for *bel canto* operas in particular, certain vocal ornaments and cadenzas now part of common performance practice were in fact created by the singer premiering the role, and over time and repetition have become integral to modern performance. Some of this singer-centred policy came out of the way singers were educated in this period: before the institution of conservatories, singers were trained by other singers or developed their craft through performance.

In Russia of the late nineteenth century, singers had acquired a particularly strong influence on new Russian music even compared to their European counterparts. In part, this particular power of Russian singers had to do with the way cultural institutions were run: as has been seen in the previous chapter, programming decisions were centralised, and in certain instances controlled by imperial *ukaz*. As direct employees of the theatres, singers could therefore take part in the decision-making process, and were given a great deal of freedom in repertory choices for private or benefit performances. Because of this, the singers of the Russian opera troupe have been credited with single-handedly kept Russian operatic repertory alive during the fallow decades of the 1840s and 1850s, by selecting works by Russian composers for their benefit concerts and commissioning new pieces for private salon performances.⁷⁰ It was also during this middle period that the first generation of celebrity Russian singers emerged, including names like

⁶⁹ See April Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran: Diva of the Romantic Age* (London: Souvenir Press, 1987) and *The Price of Genius: A Life of Pauline Viardot* (London: John Calder, 1964).

⁷⁰ See previous chapter.

Osip Petrov and Sofiya Samoilova.⁷¹ Composers were extremely grateful for the patronage of such cultural influencers, and would in later writings credit them for their contributions to the genre. Aleksandr Serov would go so far as to argue that Petrov could be considered one of the founders of Russian opera as a genre.⁷²

The establishment of conservatories in St Petersburg (1862) and Moscow (1866) allowed for the emergence of a new generation of professionally-educated Russian singers, but the tradition of singer-as-influencer continued. One of this new generation of singers was Emiliya Pavlovskaya, a soprano who graduated from the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1873 and toured Western Europe before becoming a resident at the Bol'shoi Opera in 1883. Tchaikovsky first encountered Pavlovskaya in an 1877 performance as Violetta in Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* in Kyiv,⁷³ but the two did not connect personally until Pavlovskaya's Bol'shoi residence, when she was cast to sing Tat'yana in an 1883 production of Tchaikovsky's revised *Evgeny Onegin* from 1880. The revised opera, and Pavlovskaya's performance, made *Onegin* a massive success and greatly contributed to its later reception as one of the standout Russian operas of the nineteenth century, and the singer and composer became very close friends. When in Moscow, Tchaikovsky spent long hours at Pavlovskaya's home, and wrote to her regularly when unable to meet in person. Pavlovskaya seems to have become one of Tchaikovsky's circle of close female confidantes, including his patroness Nadezhda von Meck and other singers like Elizaveta

⁷¹ Abram Gozenpud, *Russkii opernyi teatr XIX veka: 1836-1856* (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1969), p. 366.

⁷² Quoted in John Warrack, 'Petrov, Osip', *Oxford Music Online*. Accessed 17 February 2020.

⁷³ See letter to Modest from 9 September 1877, published in full in *P.I. Chaikovskii. Pis'ma k rodnym*, ed. V. A. Zhdanov (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1940), pp. 294-5.

Lavrovskaya.⁷⁴ Pavlovskaya would later claim in her memoirs that she advised Tchaikovsky during several important moments of his life during this period.⁷⁵ Besides *Charodeika*, Tchaikovsky would also write the role of Mariya in *Mazepa* (1883) for Pavlovskaya.

There are indications Tchaikovsky thought of Pavlovskaya as more than just a friend and collaborator. In his early letters to Pavlovskaya, Tchaikovsky repeatedly refers to her as his ‘дорогая благодетельница’, the same language he uses with his financial patroness, Nadezhda von Meck.⁷⁶ This was in part due to Pavlovskaya’s enthusiastic promotion of *Mazepa*: Tchaikovsky would dedicate four songs from his *Six Romances*, opus 57 to Pavlovskaya and the other singers who premiered the main roles in *Mazepa*.⁷⁷ By naming Pavlovskaya as his *благодетельница*, Tchaikovsky gestures to the continued influence of singers – particularly female stars like Pavlovskaya – within the Imperial Theatres Directorate. This power is reflected in the salary of the Directorate-hired singers compared to the commissioned composers: while there are no records regarding Pavlovskaya’s particular salary at the Bol’shoi, soloists at the

⁷⁴ Lavrovskaya played a similarly influential role in the history of *Evgeny Onegin*: it was on her suggestion that Tchaikovsky first took up Pushkin’s novel-in-verse as a subject for operatic adaptation. See letter to Modest from 18 May 1877, *ibid.*, pp. 278-9.

⁷⁵ For example, Pavlovskaya claims she was the one to dissuade Tchaikovsky from taking up the post of director of the Moscow Conservatory. Anton Rubinstein had been pressuring Tchaikovsky to accept the post despite Tchaikovsky’s qualms, and Pavlovskaya claimed to be the one to convince Tchaikovsky of his unsuitability for the post. See Emiliya Pavlovskaya, *Iz moikh vstrech s P. I. Chaikovskim*, 4th edn (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1980), pp. 149-50.

⁷⁶ See PSS XII, p. 506 and p. 517; and PSS XIII, p. 28.

⁷⁷ The second song of the collection was dedicated to Bogomir Korsov (the title role), the third to Pavlovskaya (Mariya), the fifth to Dmitry Usatov (Andrei), and the sixth to Aleksandra Krutikova (Lyubov’).

Mariinsky of corresponding importance received around 12,000 rubles annually.⁷⁸ At the time, Tchaikovsky had not yet received his imperial pension and relied solely on commissions and royalties to top up his annual pension of 6,000 rubles from von Meck. Tchaikovsky's use of *благотельница* thus speaks to a hierarchy within the operatic institution itself: he needs a powerful figure like Pavlovskaya to support him as he promotes a new work to the Directorate.

The Tchaikovsky-Pavlovskaya Correspondence: Collaborators and Co-Authors

It thus makes sense that Tchaikovsky would ask Pavlovskaya to be part of the *Charodeika* project in early 1885. Probably because of how happy he was with her performances of Mariya and Tat'yana and because of her influence within the Directorate, Tchaikovsky clearly had Pavlovskaya in mind for the character of Nastas'ya from his earliest conception of the opera. However, Pavlovskaya was initially reluctant to play the role. It is unclear whether Pavlovskaya had attended a performance of the theatrical *Charodeika* before 1885, but she had formed a strong opinion of the play and in particular the morality of the heroine. Her initial reply to Tchaikovsky's inquiry from April 1885 reads in part:

Гулящая баба, чарующая чем? Речами, бытом? Что это значит? Говорит красно и всем в угоду. Храбра, а между тем трусит старого князя [...] мне кажется, что и Вам не может нравиться тип Чародейки. Вы слишком идеальный, слишком поэт, слишком чистые понятия у Вас о женщине, особенно героине Ваших произведениях. Вам не может нравиться Чародейка.⁷⁹

Tchaikovsky was taken aback at Pavlovskaya's negative reaction, and wrote a long letter in response that gives deep insight into the composer's conception of the heroine, while also

⁷⁸ See Nadir Shirinskii, *Bogi stseny Rossiiskoi imperii: zhizn' na podmostkakh i za kulisami* (Moscow: Red. zhur. 'Istoriya gosudarstva Rossiiskogo', 2004).

⁷⁹ *Chaikovskii na moskovskoi stsene*, p. 330 (emphasis original).

indicating his highly individualistic reading of the text. Tchaikovsky knows he needs to get

Pavlovskaya on board with the project if he plans to successfully sell it to the Imperial Theatre:

Я совершенно не так воображаю и понимаю Настасью, как Вы. Конечно, она гулящая баба, но чары её не только в том, что она говорит красно и всем в угоду. Этих качеств достаточно, чтобы привлекать в её кабачок le commun des mortels. Но как заставить только этим княжича из лютого врага, пришедшего убить, сделаться страстно преданным любовником? Дело в том, что в глубине души этой гулящей бабы есть нравственная сила и красота, которой до этого случая только негде было высказаться. Сила эта в любви.⁸⁰

Tchaikovsky notes the dramatic confusion in young prince Yury's sudden change from 'лют[ый] враг' to 'преданн[ый] любовник', but his reading of Nastas'ya as a moral heroine is somewhat naive given the context of the scene in the original text. In Shpazhinsky's play, Nastas'ya hears that the young prince is on his way to her inn in order to avenge the slight on his mother's honour and kill the woman who seduced his father. She calmly plans how she will appear and act when the young prince arrives, not directly stating that she intends to seduce him as well, but implying as much with her focus on how to use her physical charm to appeal to the young prince's better nature. In one reading, therefore, it could be argued that Nastas'ya does indeed seduce Yury. Though Nastas'ya did not deliberately set out to seduce Yury's father, and therefore does not deserve Yury's blame for his father's actions, it could be interpreted that she does deliberately use the same charm that enchanted his father to compel Yury to abandon his plan of killing her. The 'нравственная сила и красота' that Tchaikovsky identifies with Nastas'ya is entirely his own reading of the scene and the character overall, and may be influenced, as will be analysed later, by Tchaikovsky's recent revision work on a similarly moral heroine: Tat'yana Larina.

Tchaikovsky clearly understood that his reading of Nastas'ya was at odds with how she was depicted in the play, since later in the same letter he defended his interpretation:

⁸⁰ PSS XIII p. 63 (emphasis original).

Шпажинский превосходно понял, что мне нужно, и согласно моему пониманию оттенит главные действующие лица. [...] Он и я, а потом Вы [...] сделаем так, что в последнем акте все плакать будут. [...] То обстоятельство, что могучая красота женственности скрывается у Настасьи очень долго в оболочке гулящей бабы, скорее усугубляет сценическую привлекательность её.⁸¹

Again, this reading is purely Tchaikovsky's own, and less an analysis of the play as it currently existed than a vision of how the opera would portray the main female role. Tchaikovsky's statement also allows an understanding of how he envisioned the hierarchy of the collaborative roles in the creation of this opera. He and Shpazhinsky would work together, but Tchaikovsky's vision of the work would dominate the process. His solicitation of Pavlovskaya for her input also shows a trace of this dominant vision, though less categorical than his understanding of the relationship with Shpazhinsky. Tchaikovsky knew he needed the famous soprano on board with the project: it would be she who would bring this character to life on stage, and ensure that 'все плакать будут' by the opera's tragic conclusion. Therefore, he needs to persuade her not only to understand his idiosyncratic reading of the character, but be fully on board with his plan to transform Nastas'ya from the 'гулящая баба' Pavlovskaya identifies in the play to the morally strong and beautiful heroine he sees hiding under the guise of a bawdy innkeeper.

Tchaikovsky's argument seems to have convinced Pavlovskaya that the project was worth taking on, and her correspondence with him from this point attests to a growing interest in the work. The next month, in May 1885, Pavlovskaya wrote another long letter to Tchaikovsky reflecting on the role of Nastas'ya and offering suggestions for her realisation in the libretto, a draft of which Shpazhinsky was currently preparing. Pavlovskaya was also aware of the central problem posed by Tchaikovsky's idiosyncratic reading of *Charodeika* and his collaboration with the play's original author. 'Конечно, так, как Вы понимаете оперную Настасью', she wrote, 'Настасью Вашего либретто (насколько я Вас поняла), выходит нечто иное [...] Но

⁸¹ *Chaikovskii na moskovskoi stsene*, p. 330.

необходимо, дорогой Петр Ильич, чтобы и Шпажинский понял и захотел бы переделать Настасью и придал ей эту симпатичность, поэтичность и женственную духовную грацию.⁸² Pavlovskaya reveals an astute understanding of the delicate balances at work in the composer-librettist relationship, particularly in this one, as the librettist was also the author of the source text. Where Tchaikovsky seems to be blithely confident his vision of Nastas'ya will dominate any objections Shpazhinsky may have, Pavlovskaya acknowledges the need to get Shpazhinsky on the same page. Much as Pavlovskaya herself now understands 'Настась[я] вашего либретто', Shpazhinsky too must understand this radical reinterpretation of his character.

There is a respectfulness towards Tchaikovsky throughout the letter, and Pavlovskaya uses the formal second-person pronoun consistently, illustrating that where Tchaikovsky may approach Pavlovskaya for her input on a somewhat supplicatory footing, Pavlovskaya sees her contributions as augmenting the composer's overall vision. The close of Pavlovskaya's letter is particularly instructive for understanding the relationship between the singer and the composer. Pavlovskaya requests 'Пожалуйста, дорогой Петр Ильич, не говорите Шпажинскому ничего о моем мнении насчет либретто [...] Вы авторитет и автор будущей оперы на это либретто'.⁸³ Thus, while Pavlovskaya has a strong opinion on the realisation of the operatic Nastas'ya, she ultimately defers to Tchaikovsky's judgement. Tchaikovsky, for his part, greatly valued Pavlovskaya's input, perhaps because her interpretation was informed by and closely aligned with his own conception of the role. Tchaikovsky replied to this letter in early May, writing 'Спасибо Вам, дорогая, добрейшая, за Ваше письмо-monstre по поводу Чародейки.

⁸² Ibid., p. 336 (emphasis original).

⁸³ Ibid., p. 339.

Всё, что Вы говорите, чрезвычайно метко и верно и, конечно, будет принято во внимание.⁸⁴ Indeed, many of Pavlovskaya's suggestions in this letter, which will now be explored in detail, were incorporated into the final version of the opera, illustrating the often-invisible influence of singers on the process of operatic creation.

Pavlovskaya's letter to Tchaikovsky of May 1885 does not offer much in the way of textual suggestions, in that she does not advise Tchaikovsky which scenes from the play should be cut or enhanced in the libretto. Rather, the letter sets out a detailed reading of Nastas'ya along Tchaikovsky's original description of the character as a heroine with innate moral strength that does not actualise until she falls in love with the young prince. Unlike Tchaikovsky, who compared Nastas'ya to Carmen in his original proposal, Pavlovskaya identifies a critical difference between the two roles: 'В ней [Carmen] самой слишком большой запас жизненных сил; ей совсем не важен предмет её любви: она не его любит, любит свою любовь [...] Настасья же любит один раз в жизни, любит идеално'.⁸⁵ Pavlovskaya's analysis of Nastas'ya as Tchaikovsky envisions her is nuanced and psychologically penetrating: she has clearly thought deeply about Tchaikovsky's understanding of the role and seems to have a strong grasp of the original material. About halfway through the letter, Pavlovskaya stops referring to the role as 'Ваша Настасья' and begins to refer to 'моя Настасья', illustrating her newfound sympathy for the character.

Pavlovskaya points out three important aspects of the character that need to be developed in the libretto: firstly, 'обозначить момент пробуждения этой нравственной, душевной силы, которая делает эту женщину такой исключительно хорошей, делает ее головой выше всех';

⁸⁴ PSS XIII, p. 77 (emphasis original).

⁸⁵ *Chaikovskii na moskovskoi stsene*, p. 336.

secondly, determine ‘пробудилась ли в ней любовь к княжичу до встречи с князем или после оной’; and thirdly, understand that the impetus for the drama comes from her inability to pretend to return the old prince’s feelings once she has fallen in love with the young prince.⁸⁶ Pavlovskaya interprets Nastas’ya’s falling in love with the young prince as the moment that divides the character’s trajectory into two periods of ‘перед’ and ‘потом’, and ‘собственно, где начинается драма’.⁸⁷ She interprets the great ‘ужас’ of Nastas’ya’s life in her strong ability to love only one man - the young prince - and her willingness ‘умереть, но не позволить князю любовно обнять себя’.⁸⁸ This, in Pavlovskaya’s view, is the main difference between the operatic realization of Nastas’ya and the Nastas’ya of the original play: while the plot of both will be similar, the heroine’s trajectory throughout the pieces is entirely different. ‘В драме,’ she writes, ‘все эти чувства имеют совсем другие побуждения [...] Настасья все время ловкая, умная, сметливая, способная баба’ only seeking benefits to herself, and thus is entirely unsympathetic as a character.⁸⁹ Pavlovskaya finds the death of the theatrical Nastas’ya similarly unconvincing: ‘Умирает она как-то нечаянно, без малейшего проблеска даже и тут душевного благородства’.⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that unlike Tchaikovsky, Pavlovskaya by now bases her interpretation of the theatrical Nastas’ya from the experience of seeing the play performed live, as she qualifies her writing on the play by stating, ‘Такой мне, по крайней

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 336-7.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 337.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.337-8.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 338.

мере, казалась Настасья в исполнении Савиной’.⁹¹ While Pavlovskaya shares Tchaikovsky’s understanding of how the character should be in the opera, she sees clearly the stark differences between this vision and the character as she actually appears in the original play.

Towards the end of the letter, Pavlovskaya emphasises that the realisation of a more moral, spiritual Nastas’ya will be dependent on her musical depiction and specifically Pavlovskaya’s own interpretation of Nastas’ya’s death scene. ‘Наконец, теперь она поняла эту искру божью, она поняла это блаженство, она жизнь всю отдать, она жаждет этой любви’,⁹² Pavlovskaya comments, writing about Nastas’ya in particular but using an equally apt description for the many tragic opera heroines of Pavlovskaya’s repertory. The soprano makes it clear that her success in the performance of this role is entirely dependent on the collaboration between Tchaikovsky and Shpazhinsky. ‘Если либреттист даст мне такой момент, такие слова, такое положение’ to depict a woman willing to sacrifice her life for love, Pavlovskaya claims that even the coldest and most remote members of the audience will still think of her performance days after attending it.⁹³ Pavlovskaya therefore places her faith in Tchaikovsky’s good theatrical sense to make this impact on Shpazhinsky’s libretto, but at the same time asks for regular updates on the work’s progress. Pavlovskaya’s role in the adaptation process can be understood as Tchaikovsky’s confidante and co-author, supporting his loosely sketched interpretation of Nastas’ya with her own critical reading of the text, and offering reassurance that this drastic revision of the character will be a success in her performance of the new role.

⁹¹ Ibid. It is not clear whether Pavlovskaya attended the performance because of Tchaikovsky’s request for input, or whether she simply wanted to see a popular new play.

⁹² Ibid., p. 339.

⁹³ Ibid.

Pavlovskaya singles out one scene from the play to illustrate her understanding of the fundamental difference between the theatrical and operatic Nastas'yas, perhaps because Tchaikovsky himself cites it as the moment that will best illustrate Nastas'ya's particular moral strength and beauty: the scene where the young prince Yury transforms from Nastas'ya's bitter enemy to her one true love. She comments that during the Act III monologue of the play where Nastas'ya prepares for Yury's arrival, she is completely focused on her physicality and how best to influence him into taking her side against his mother. In terms of context, this scene in the play and in the opera are very similar: Nastas'ya has just been threatened by the old prince and fears reprisals for refusing to yield to him, but in the play Nastas'ya seems much more in control of her emotional reaction and in her understanding of how to manipulate the young prince to get the result she wants:

Нет, нет! Ужели княжич?.. Быть не может!
 Ревнивым наущеньем ослепленный,
 Кипить он гневом, сердце разожгли;
 Но женщину безсильную сгубить
 Не сможет он... Сробею я -- поверить
 Коварному навету. И тогда
 Презренною в его останусь мыслях...
 Да в страх и пригожества немного,
 В очах слезливых, в трепетных устах...
 Никак идут!.. Упало сердце... Он-бы,
 Сам княжич, не холопи-б только! [Подбежала к окну].
 Он!
 Он сам... Идут от берега вдвоем...
 В постель скорее! [Взобралась на постель].
 Стук... трещит запор...
 Ну, что-то будет! Господи, спаси! [Задерживается пологом]⁹⁴

Pavlovskaya notes that this text will need to be changed in order to strip this calculated aspect from Nastas'ya as a character. Rather than a woman in control of her own destiny through

⁹⁴ Ippolit Shpazhinskii, 'Charodeika. Nizhegorodskoe predanie. Tragediya v pyati deistviyakh', in *Dramaticheskie Sochineniia*, 4 vols (St Petersburg: Izdanie teatral'noi biblioteki S. Razuokhina, 1886-1890), II (1888), pp. 367-407.

Act III, sc. iv.

her control of her body, in the opera *Nastas'ya's* text is subtly altered to give an impression of an ultimately good woman resigned to a fate she did not invite and cannot control:

Так княжич смертью мне поклялся!
Наветам матери поддался,
Придет сюда, меня сгубить!
Вот до чего пришлось дожить!
Чу! тишь мелькнула...
(Встает тревожно).
Верно стали
Они высматривать – одна ли.
И нет ли лиху помешать
Кого со мной?
(С горечью.) Врасплох застать!
Во сне покончить чтоб с злодейкой,
Лихою бабой, чародейкой!
(Берет свечу.) Огонь, увидят, я задула.
Пускай подумают – уснула.
(Гасит свечи. Вид из окон ярко освещен луною.)
Никак идут! Ну да! и двое...
Ко мне, ко мне идут на двор...
(Приглядывается.)
Он, княжич, он! Скорей на ложе.
(Взбирается на постель и прислушивается.)
Стучатся... да... трещит запор...
Спаси мена, помилуй Боже!
(Задерживается пологом.)⁹⁵

As seen above, Emiliya Pavlovskaya had a significant impact on the psychological development of the heroine in the operatic *Charodeika*, but her influence and participation in the adaptation process is an understudied element of an already understudied work in Tchaikovsky's operatic oeuvre. However, Pavlovskaya may also have had a negative impact on the opera's reception when it finally premiered in late 1887: by this point, Pavlovskaya's professional career was coming to an end due to vocal problems.⁹⁶ The role of *Nastas'ya* is incredibly demanding for

⁹⁵ Pyotr Il'ich Chaikovskii. *Charodeika. Opera v chetiryokh deistviyakh*. Text downloaded via database "Libretto vo sne i nayavu", http://www.ceo.spb.ru/libretto/classic/posle_glinki/index.shtml. Accessed 2 February 2020. Act III sc. iii.

⁹⁶ Pavlovskaya was thirty-four years old at the premiere. While nineteenth-century singers did not usually enjoy long careers, Pavlovskaya's was especially short even by the standards of the time. It is unclear precisely what

the singer, and it seems that Pavlovskaya's technical difficulties with her instrument made it impossible to give the role its best showing both musically and dramatically. Pavlovskaya blamed herself for the opera's lukewarm reception, and wrote to Tchaikovsky in late November 1887 to acknowledge this:

Вы знаете, как я люблю Вас самих, Вашу Чародейку, всю Вашу музыку; мне Ваш успех очень дорог - это успех таланта, чудной музыки, правды, и мое желание и совет, как искренно Вас любящего друга, выбрать для Москвы другую Настасью, даже если на будущий год я буду служить там.⁹⁷

However, it is difficult to say for certain how much Pavlovskaya's failing voice was to blame - in the same month, November 1887, Pavlovskaya received rave reviews for her performance as Desdemona in the Russian premiere of Verdi's *Otello*, another challenging soprano role.⁹⁸ Sadly, however, the failure of *Charodeika* spelled the end of the close friendship between Pavlovskaya and Tchaikovsky, and their correspondence becomes much more infrequent after this point.⁹⁹

While Pavlovskaya deserves acknowledgement for her impact on Tchaikovsky's conception of the role – and a share of the responsibility for the opera's lack of success – neither of these was due to her influence alone. The changes made to Nastas'ya in transposition from Shpazhinsky's play to Tchaikovsky's opera all came about thanks to a consensus with the composer rather than any specific demands from Pavlovskaya. The pair's discussion of the role is always centred around Tchaikovsky's original interpretation of her as a moral heroine. Yet the stark contrast between the realist heroine Tchaikovsky presents and the generic structure of the

physiological issues caused Pavlovskaya to lose her voice, but the *Charodeika* premiere marked the beginning of her career's decline.

⁹⁷ *Chaikovskii na moskovskoi stsene*, p. 415.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 414-5.

⁹⁹ Tchaikovsky would only write to Pavlovskaya three times before his death, and never as intimately as he did before late 1887.

opera surrounding her - which was much more suited to a historical opera *à la* Musorgsky - creates a dramaturgical disjunction at the very heart of *Charodeika*.

Tchaikovsky's Psychological Realism: The 'Tat'yana Larina Effect'

The tension between a heroine characterised by the realist tradition – which emerged in literature over the 1850s-1860s and arguably reached its apotheosis in opera with *Evgeny Onegin* – and the rest of the characters in *Charodeika*, who remain relatively two-dimensional and are adapted more or less unaltered from the play, marks the central problem of the operatic *Charodeika*, even more significant than the dramaturgical issues of word-for-word versus 'scenes-from' adaptation.¹⁰⁰ Such tensions, rooted as they are in genre, leads to the question: is it possible for a work of historical drama to be realist? Realism, while primarily understood as a literary movement, was also present on the Russian stage. Aleksandr Ostrovsky (1823-1886) was realism's main theatrical practitioner, and at least some of his works were successfully adapted into operas.¹⁰¹ Ostrovsky also worked within many theatrical genres, treating realism less as a separate genre than as a set of techniques that could be applied to pre-existing genres like the fairy tale and indeed the historical drama. If Shpazhinsky's original text is part of this set of

¹⁰⁰ See Boris Gasparov, 'Eugene Onegin in the Age of Realism', in *Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 58-94 for a canonical reading of *Onegin*'s realism.

¹⁰¹ Several of Ostrovsky's plays were adapted into operas, of which the most famous is Leoš Janáček's *Kát'a Kabanová* (1921), but the most important of these in the late nineteenth century was Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snegurochka* (1882). Tchaikovsky had attempted to adapt Ostrovsky's *Voevoda* in 1869, but was unhappy with the work, destroying most of the manuscripts in the 1870s and incorporating some of the remaining material into *Oprichnik* (1872).

historical dramas, why does the injection of realism in Tchaikovsky's adaptation seem so out-of-place?

Departing from Shpazhinsky, it will be useful again to return to Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* as an example of what historical drama meant in nineteenth-century Russian theatre. Simon Karlinsky describes *Boris Godunov* as 'an instance of "adaptation to our customs" of Shakespeare's historical plays',¹⁰² implying the play functions as much as a *russitsizm* of Shakespeare as the vaudeville *Dneprovskaya rusalka* was of Hensler's *Das Donauweibchen*.¹⁰³ Historical drama had existed in Russia before Pushkin, particularly during the period of the Napoleonic wars, but to Pushkin this was 'a French form mechanically filled with Russian-language melodrama on national themes'.¹⁰⁴ Pushkin would write in July 1825 that he wished in *Boris Godunov* to combine what he termed Shakespeare's 'popular drama' with psychological portraits that would illustrate how people thought and behaved in a particular historical period.¹⁰⁵ While Pushkin never used the term 'historical drama' in reference to *Boris Godunov*, its setting in Russia's historical past allows it to be broadly characterised as such. What is particularly pertinent about *Boris Godunov* in relation to *Charodeika* is Pushkin's professed interest in presenting psychological portraits of his characters. While the term 'realism' in Russian literature

¹⁰² Simon Karlinsky, *Russian Drama from Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 322.

¹⁰³ See previous chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Emerson, *Boris Godunov*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ See Aleksandr Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 16 vols (Moscow: Izdatelst'vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1937-1959), XIII (1940), p. 188.

most obviously indicates a commitment to depicting society exactly as it is,¹⁰⁶ this often manifests as a depiction of a character's interior psyche. It seems Pushkin was interested in doing so in *Boris Godunov*, and it is the psychological aspect of realism that is important in light of Tchaikovsky's adaptation of *Charodeika*. As we have seen, Tchaikovsky was committed to portraying Nastas'ya's passions and inner morality in his adaptation of the play – an aim in line with the realist project and something he had successfully done in *Evgeny Onegin* – but in the case of *Charodeika*, Tchaikovsky creates a version of Nastas'ya that does not exist at all in the play.

While also belonging to the same overall genre as *Boris Godunov*, Shpazhinsky's *Charodeika* does not present its characters with psychological complexity and depth. In reading the script of *Charodeika*, each character seems entirely characterised by a single driving emotional state: lust, desire for revenge, desire to protect oneself at all costs. While Nastas'ya is the most interesting character, her text seems on the page devoid of depth. Any sympathy for her on the audience's part would have to be found in performance, and indeed it may be that some of *Charodeika*'s popularity had to do with the legendary actress Mariya Savina's interpretation of the role. Savina's memoirs conclude before they reach the 1880s, so unfortunately we do not have her thoughts on the role of Nastas'ya in Shpazhinsky's *Charodeika*, but she would write the following about the role of Verochka in Turgenev's *Mesyats v derevne* (the role that won her prominence and fame): 'I gave myself up entirely to the role. I did not play Verotchka - I

¹⁰⁶ Richard Freeborn, 'The Nineteenth Century: The Age of Realism, 1855-80', in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, ed. Charles Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 248-332 (p. 248).

performed a sacred rite - I walked in the clouds [...] I felt quite distinctly that Verotchka and I were one and the same person...I had no thought for what was going on in the audience!’¹⁰⁷

This proto-Stanislavskian Method of completely immersing oneself in a role must have also informed Savina’s later work, including her interpretation of Nastas’ya. It is unclear whether Savina had Shpazhinsky modify the role to suit her demands as she did with other plays, though theatre historians argue that Shpazhinsky’s sole notable feature as a writer was his ‘convenience for influential actresses and actors’ – that is to say, how readily he would agree to modify roles to suit actors’ demands.¹⁰⁸ It would make sense that the realism with which Savina portrayed Turgenev’s heroines might apply equally to her portrayal of Shpazhinsky’s heroines, but from Tchaikovsky’s reaction to seeing her performance in June 1887, Savina’s interpretation did not match up with the composer’s personal, more realist, reading of the role.

Nastas’ya as Tchaikovsky envisions her is a ‘гулящ[ая] баб[а]’ who possesses ‘нравственная сила и красота’,¹⁰⁹ and is nothing like the titular enchantress of the play. This element of morality is entirely absent in the characterisation in Shpazhinsky’s original drama. Shpazhinsky’s Nastas’ya is portrayed as highly aware of her effect on the men around her, and willing to use that effect to her benefit: she is much more contrived and coquettish than Tchaikovsky imagines her. Yet if Tchaikovsky’s Nastas’ya does not share much with her theatrical forebear, she does share a great deal with Tchaikovsky’s Tat’yana Larina, the heroine of his opera *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78). Tchaikovsky’s own writings on the two heroines bear out

¹⁰⁷ *Letters to an Actress*, pp. 26 and 30.

¹⁰⁸ Boris Varneke, *Istoriya russkogo teatra XVII-XIX vekov*, 3rd edn (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1939), p. 324. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁹ *PSS XIII* p. 63.

the idea that he may have unconsciously paired them in his mind. In his correspondence with Nadezhda von Meck in autumn 1883, Tchaikovsky uses similar language to describe Tat'yana as he would two years later describe Nastasya: Tat'yana is 'полная чистой женственной красоты девическая душа'.¹¹⁰ While Tat'yana is not a 'гулящ[ая] баб[а]' in any sense of the term, Tchaikovsky identifies both her and Nastas'ya as possessing a pure femininity that the composer seems to prize. In many ways, Nastas'ya and Tat'yana represent two approaches to the same kind of character. Nastas'ya is not a 'девическая душа' but shares in the same 'чист[ая] женственн[ая] красот[а]' which Tat'yana also possesses, but in Nastas'ya's case this beauty is hidden 'в оболочке гулящей бабы'.¹¹¹

What does Tchaikovsky mean when he identifies this 'чист[ая] женственн[ая] красот[а]' in both Tat'yana and Nastas'ya? While the composer never fully explains his use of the term, it seems to be connected to both heroines' capacity to give themselves utterly over to one everlasting love, yet possessing a moral strength that keeps them committed to their principles. In Tat'yana's case, the love of her life is Onegin, and she confesses in the final scene of the opera that her love for him has endured despite her marriage to Prince Gremin. Nonetheless, Tat'yana refuses to give in to Onegin's pleading that they begin an affair, choosing instead to honour her marriage vows: 'Нет! Нет!/Прошлого не воротить!/Я отдана теперь другому,/Моя судьба уж решена./Я буду век ему верна', she sings.¹¹² Nastas'ya is described as someone who enchants

¹¹⁰ PSS XII, p. 246.

¹¹¹ PSS XIII p. 63.

¹¹² Pyotr Il'ich Chaikovskii. *Evgenii Onegin. Liricheskie stseny v trekh deistviyakh (semi kartinakh)*. Text downloaded via database "Libretto vo sne i nayavu", http://www.ceo.spb.ru/libretto/classic/posle_glinki/index.shtml. Accessed 6 March 2020. Act III, sc. ii.

every man who crosses her path – the first time her name is mentioned in the opera is when Balakin says ‘Много пролито слез, /Много выдрано кос/За Настасью’¹¹³ – but there are clues from the very beginning of the opera to suggest that she already loves the young Prince Yury. As Yury and the huntsmen pass by the inn in Act I, scene iv, the previously vivacious Nastas’ya turns reflective: ‘Куда уж тут! Обмолвиться боишься./Хоть ласков он, а слово с уст нейдете’.¹¹⁴ While this is not nearly as apparent a declaration of love as Tat’yana’s letter aria in Act I, scene ii of *Evgeny Onegin*, it becomes obvious in Nastas’ya and Yury’s duet in Act III that Nastas’ya was in love with him all along. Nastas’ya’s love for Yury thus recontextualises her resolute refusal to have an affair with Yury’s father, Prince Nikita. Even when Prince Nikita threatens to kill her if she does not return his love, Nastas’ya declares ‘Скорей умру, чем сдамся. Так и знай’.¹¹⁵ While Nastas’ya’s situation, therefore, is not as straightforward as Tat’yana’s, both heroines share in an ability to love only once in their lives and in an inner resolve to a moral code that governs their actions above all other considerations.¹¹⁶

Over the course of *Charodeika*, Nastas’ya’s character has a much less clear trajectory than Tat’yana’s in *Evgeny Onegin*, and this lack of clarity is to Nastas’ya’s detriment as an operatic heroine. Tat’yana’s development is straightforward: she falls in love with Onegin, is rejected, has married someone else when the audience next sees her, admits her continued feelings for Onegin, but ultimately chooses what is morally right over what will make her happy. By contrast, Nastas’ya charms Prince Nikita in order to prevent the inn being shut down, then refuses to enter

¹¹³ Chaikovskii, *Charodeika*. Act I, sc. i.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ PSS XIII, p. 336.

into an affair with Prince Nikita as ‘payment’ for his support, convinces Prince Yury not to kill her by confessing her love for him, therefore decides to run away with Prince Yury, but is prevented from doing so when she is poisoned by the jealous Princess, who is convinced Nastas’ya is indeed having an affair with her husband Prince Nikita. This is a tremendously convoluted plot and difficult to follow on an operatic stage even for those familiar with the source material.¹¹⁷ The lack of clarity as to Nastas’ya’s true feelings and intentions for the first half of the opera (up until her confession of love to Prince Yury) make it a difficult prospect to ask an audience to sympathise with her in the same way as it immediately can sympathise with Tat’yana.

Tat’yana was much on Tchaikovsky’s mind in the early 1880s, and he completed a revision of the score for *Onegin* shortly before beginning work on *Charodeika*. These revisions are of particular relevance in light of the above because Tchaikovsky made a significant change to the final scene of *Onegin* that greatly strengthened Tat’yana’s character trajectory and her moral resolve.¹¹⁸ Tchaikovsky described these revisions in a letter to his brother Anatoly in October 1880 after Anatoly suggested Tchaikovsky revisit *Onegin*’s finale:

Во-1-х), на стр[анице] 242 вместо замечания, что Татьяна падает на грудь к Онегину и т. д., я написал: Онегин подходит ближе. Затем он поёт то, что написано на этой стр[анице], говоря ещё с ней на Вы; потом все идёт по-старому; в самом же конце я изменил слова Татьяны, а именно: она уж не будет склоняться и слабеть, а будет все продолжать твердить о долге; Онегин не будет её хватать, а лишь молить на словах, затем вместо: «я умираю!» Татьяна скажет: «прости на веки!» и исчезнет, а он после нескольких минут ослобнения скажет свои заключительные слова. Генерал входит не должен.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Anecdotally, upon attending a Mariinsky Theatre performance of *Charodeika* in autumn 2019, I spent at least twenty minutes after the curtain fell explaining to confused opera-goers around me what had just happened in the second half of the opera. ‘They can’t all be hits, I suppose’, grumbled one elderly Tchaikovsky-lover.

¹¹⁸ It was in this revision that Pavlovskaya sang, so her stage interpretation of the role might have reinforced this characterisation.

¹¹⁹ PSS IX, pp. 301-2.

In the original finale from 1878, Tat'yana is described as twice falling into Onegin's arms before eventually fleeing the stage,¹²⁰ and the opera was to close with Gremin appearing and, 'властным жестом', orders Onegin to leave.¹²¹ This ending would have made Tat'yana seem much more a victim of her own circumstances, losing the steely moral resolve that makes the revised finale of the opera so dramatically satisfying. Indeed, critics disparaged the original finale as completely un-Pushkinian. Hermann Laroche would remark in his review of the 1878 premiere that the 'пято минутами поцелуев и объятий' upend Tat'yana's famous declaration 'Я другому отдана;/Я буду век ему верна'.¹²²

While in his letter to Anatoly Tchaikovsky seems unconvinced that the original ending was out of step with Pushkin's novel,¹²³ Anatoly's suggestion to change it was inspired by Fyodor Dostoevsky's famous speech at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow in June 1880. Dostoevsky's speech caused a sensation – his old nemesis Turgenev reportedly embraced Dostoevsky with tears in his eyes – and Dostoevsky's interpretation of Tat'yana greatly shaped future readings of her character. Up until Dostoevsky's speech, critics like Vissarion Belinsky

¹²⁰ Some contemporary productions of *Onegin*, like Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw's 2013 production for the Metropolitan Opera, restore the embrace between Tat'yana and Onegin in the final scene.

¹²¹ The original stage directions can be found in a note in Pyotr Il'ich Chaikovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii - Muzykal'nie proizvedeniya*, 107 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1940-90), IV (1948) ed. Ivan Shishov, p. 533.

¹²² Abram Gozenpud, *Dostoevskii i muzykal'no-teatral'noe iskusstvo - issledovanie* (Leningrad: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1981), p. 167. For an excellent analysis of Dostoevsky's impact on Pushkin reception, see Marcus C. Levitt, 'Dostoevsky "Hijacks" the Celebration', in *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 122-46.

¹²³ PSS IX, p. 301.

saw Tat'yana as a victim of societal conventions that forced young women to marry men they did not love. Dostoevsky instead envisioned Tat'yana as 'апофеоза русской женщины' and remarked:

Скажите, могла ли решить иначе Татьяна, с ее высокою душой, с ее сердцем, столь пострадавшим? Нет; чистая русская душа решает вот как: "Пусть, пусть я одна лишусь счастья, пусть мое несчастье безмерно сильнее, чем несчастье этого старика, пусть, наконец, никто и никогда, а этот старик тоже, не узнают моей жертвы и не оценят ее, но не хочу быть счастливою, загубив другого!"¹²⁴

By deleting the stage instructions for Tat'yana to embrace Onegin and eliminating Gremin's appearance on the scene, Tchaikovsky's revised Tat'yana is strengthened in her morality and conscience, and much more in line with Dostoevsky's interpretation of her as one who would sacrifice her own happiness for another. While these revisions were made in 1880, a few years before Tchaikovsky started work on *Charodeika*, it is important to note that these questions of love, duty, and morality are very much on Tchaikovsky's mind in this period, and it is Nastas'ya's ability to love unreservedly and to sacrifice for her love that the composer first identified with: the same elements he so strongly portrays in Tat'yana. Tchaikovsky was so convincing in his argument in favour of this vision of Nastas'ya that Pavlovskaya would give her stamp of approval to the project despite her reservations about Shpazhinsky's much more coolly calculating Nastas'ya.

The biggest problem with giving Nastas'ya the 'Tat'yana treatment' is that the operatic *Onegin* is populated with equally well-realised characters: namely, Onegin, whose dramatic arc matches Tat'yana's even if he is not in fact at the centre of the drama. By contrast, the operatic *Charodeika* is populated with two-dimensional stereotypes. The other major characters are the spurned Prince Nikita, characterised only by frustrated lust, the bereft Princess, characterised by

¹²⁴ V. A. Bogdanov (ed). *F. M. Dostoevskii ob iskusstve* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1973), p. 360.

her sorrow and hatred for Nastas'ya, and the young Prince Yury, who wishes first to kill Nastas'ya for inflicting distress upon his mother but somehow transforms into an ardent lover over the course of a single duet.¹²⁵ *Charodeika* also features the wizard Kudma – his name confusingly only one consonant different to Nastas'ya's nickname of Kuma – whose cackling makes it seem as if he has wandered onstage accidentally from a melodrama, and whose sole role in the drama is to provide the poison that kills Nastas'ya. Therefore, while Tchaikovsky's Tat'yana could be considered a realist heroine in an opera that contains other realist elements – the countryside setting, the moral message – Tchaikovsky's Nastas'ya could be considered a realist heroine in an opera that seems to belong to an earlier time. Had Tchaikovsky written an operatic Nastas'ya exactly as she appears in the original play, she would have been less sympathetic to the audience but more suited to her dramatic surroundings. By treating Nastas'ya as if she were Tat'yana, Tchaikovsky inserts a realist heroine in a decidedly un-realist opera, and abandons her there.

Word-for-Word and Scenes-From: Course-Correcting Adaptation Styles During the Adaptation Process

Besides the dramaturgical disconnect between Tchaikovsky's Tat'yana-esque stylisation of Nastas'ya's character, the operatic *Charodeika* suffers from a disconnect between its first three acts and its last act. As we've seen, Tchaikovsky originally intended to adapt Shpazhinsky's five-act play into a five-act opera, a parallelism similar to Emerson's definition of a word-for-word

¹²⁵ That Prince Yury so rapidly revises his feelings for Nastas'ya is perhaps the best, albeit unintentional, indication that Nastas'ya may indeed possess some supernatural power of enchantment.

adaptation. Yet a year into the compositional process, Tchaikovsky decided large sections needed to be cut from the draft opera. Tchaikovsky cut out minor characters, compressing the drama and merging the play's final two acts into a single concluding act for the opera. The weight of Tchaikovsky's attention on the latter half of the opera meant that the first three drafted acts remained relatively unaltered, causing an abrupt shift in adaptation styles from three acts of a pseudo word-by-word adaptation to one act of a scenes-from adaptation. This lopsided revising is perceived most strongly in the pacing of the drama, which was already affected by Tchaikovsky's similarly lopsided revising to Nastas'ya's character as she appears in the play. A brief sketch of these structural revisions will allow for a full picture of the final nails in the coffin that would ultimately doom the operatic *Charodeika* to critical failure.

Shpazhinsky's original five-act play was filled with several secondary characters and subplots. Even in the final version of the operatic libretto traces of these characters and subplots remain, making the opera's plot very difficult to follow. Nonetheless, it will be useful to examine in more detail the way the final libretto cut down this vast quantity of theatrical material. Firstly, the opera removes four minor characters entirely: the boyar Shetnev, father of Prince Yury's fiancée (who herself never appears onstage); the old man Klyucharev; the monk Borkov; and Mosei, another worker at Nastas'ya's inn. Besides these cuts, other minor roles were combined into a single role, so in the opera there is only one merchant instead of two merchant friends, and two merchant's sons instead of three. A collection of general background characters easily transfer into the chorus, which is given a more prominent role as is expected from an opera. Though the chorus and some minor solo roles participate in the secondary action of the play, Tchaikovsky condenses the drama around the four main roles of Nastas'ya, Prince Yury, Prince

Nikita, and the Princess, prioritising the father-son love triangle and the vengefulness of the abandoned wife and mother.

In terms of plot and scenic structure, the first three acts of the opera match closely with the play while major cuts, revisions, and compressions turn the final two acts of the play into a single concluding act for the opera. Act I is mostly unchanged, apart from the compression of dialogue and scenes thanks to the removal and compression of minor characters. In Act II, a large chorus scene was added to show a popular revolt only mentioned in passing in the play, but which provides an opportunity for an operatic crowd scene along the lines of Musorgsky's large-scale choruses in the operatic *Boris Godunov*. Act III of the opera is also very similar to its theatrical counterpart, with only a few cuts in dialogue made to allow for a longer duet between Nastas'ya and Prince Yury. Act IV of the play is completely removed in the opera: this act takes place in Prince Nikita's household and is critical for a discussion there about the wizard Kudma, who lives in a hut in the forest and can prepare poison. Act IV of the play sets up crucial context for the final act of the play, much of which is missing in the opera. Perhaps Tchaikovsky hoped that audiences would be familiar enough with the theatrical *Charodeika* to supply this missing context (as would be generally expected in a 'scenes-from' adaptation), but this hope is hopelessly misplaced. Instead of using Act IV as a set-up for the opera's dénouement, the audience instead is given the dénouement with very little dramatic preparation, making the melodramatic finale appear out of nowhere.

Act V of the play became Act IV of the opera after the removal of the play's Act IV. This final act was hugely modified in setting and dramatic development from its theatrical original. In the play, the princess arrives at Nastas'ya's inn disguised as a pilgrim and poisons her there with a potion she had previously obtained from the wizard Kudma. Prince Yury arrives on the scene,

followed shortly by his father Prince Nikita. Prince Nikita is enraged at the discovery of Nastas'ya's dead body and rushes at the princess with a dagger; Prince Yury leaps to his mother's defence and is fatally stabbed. The remorseful Prince Nikita agrees to hand himself over to the tsar for trial, while outside the inn a crowd gathers to demand vengeance for Nastas'ya's death. The opera changes the setting to the woods near the wizard Kudma's hut, where Zhuran and Yury meet to discuss the latter's plan to escape with Nastas'ya. Meanwhile, the princess arrives at Kudma's hut to procure poison. When Nastas'ya arrives to meet Prince Yury, the princess offers her the poison in a glass of water, which Nastas'ya drinks, not recognising the princess for who she is. Yury arrives in time for Nastas'ya to die in his arms and he curses his mother, who departs celebrating her rival's death. Prince Nikita then arrives and refuses to believe Nastas'ya is dead, stabbing his son in his rage. The hunt arrives and bears away Yury and Nastas'ya's bodies, leaving Prince Nikita alone in the forest. Prince Nikita realises his infanticide and goes mad as a storm rages.¹²⁶

From Tchaikovsky's diary entries in September and October 1886, it is clear that even this version of the libretto underwent several revisions and cuts before it became as it appears above; this process forced the composer to make cuts to an already-completed score.¹²⁷ Most of these

¹²⁶ Shpazhinsky's manuscripts contain several draft endings for the play, one of which includes a scene in Kudma's hut in the forest. Shpazhinsky took texts from this scene to provide for the Act IV libretto, but otherwise drafted new material. My thanks to Ada Aynbinder of the Tchaikovsky State-House Museum and Archive in Klin, Russia for this information.

¹²⁷ See Tchaikovsky's manuscript for Act IV dated April 1887. Access to musical manuscripts provided by the 'Chaikovskii: Otkryti mir' project, which collates digital scans of Tchaikovsky manuscript holdings at the Russian National Library, the Rimsky-Korsakov Musical Library of the St Petersburg Conservatory, and the Glinka All-Russia Museum Association of Musical Culture. (<https://www.culture.ru/catalog/tchaikovsky/>)

cuts and revisions, which I shall briefly outline, happened to Act IV of the opera. In Act I, two extended solos for minor characters were cut in scene 3 and the finale, and an arioso for Prince Nikita was moved to Act II. In Act II, an arioso for the Princess was cut. In Act III, an extended solo passage for Nastas'ya was cut along with an orchestral interlude in scene 17. Act IV was almost completely rewritten, preserving what would become scenes 22 and 23. Even these were revised later: the princess was meant to have a long arioso and chorus scene after Nastas'ya's death, which was cut from the final version. What is interesting about these cuts to the draft of the libretto is that many were made not in the composer's hand: it seems Shpazhinsky himself made revisions to the libretto based on Tchaikovsky's cuts to the score.¹²⁸ Following these revisions, a first version of the opera was finalised, published by Yurgenson in piano-vocal reduction in April 1887 and premiered in late October of the same year to poor reviews. While a weary Tchaikovsky categorically refused to make any further revisions to the opera ahead of a Moscow performance scheduled for 1888,¹²⁹ he changed his mind later in 1888 and made several more cuts and revisions that would be published by Yurgenson in 1901 and became the definitive version of the opera.¹³⁰

Tchaikovsky had nearly finished a first draft of the complete opera before realising the need to revise the opera in order to reduce its already-long running time, but the main issue with these revisions is that they are almost entirely focused on the second half of the opera. The first half of

¹²⁸ My thanks again to Ada Aynbinder for this information.

¹²⁹ *PSS XIV*, pp. 410-41.

¹³⁰ *Dnevnik*, pp. 178-80. The material cut from the first version can be found in vols. 8A and 8B of Tchaikovsky's *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii - muzykal'nye proizvedeniia*, ed. Ivan Shishov (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1948-1949).

the opera had already been relatively little changed from its theatrical source, and in fact a large chorus scene was added. By making such significant changes to the second half of the opera without similarly modifying the first half, the dramatic pacing of the opera is off-kilter, with the first half proceeding at an extremely slow pace and the second providing lots of action with very little context. Cutting the entirety of the play's Act IV eliminates crucial context, particularly the introduction of the character of Kudma; in the opera, he therefore appears seemingly out of nowhere and the audience has no idea how the Princess knows where to find him. While Tchaikovsky's finale is dramatic and provides the bass playing Prince Nikita a fantastic mad scene, it seems rushed compared to the slow unfolding of the first three acts.

Besides these structural revisions, Tchaikovsky went further in his modifications to the score itself, accommodating changes to the roles as demanded by the singers as the rehearsal process unfolded. Of these, the vast majority were to *tessitura* and vocal placement. Pavlovskaya sent Tchaikovsky at least two letters with requests for modifications to the *tessitura* of Nastas'ya,¹³¹ which the composer was at first very willing to do. Tchaikovsky also made huge modifications to the *tessitura* of the Princess's role at the request of mezzo-soprano Mariya Slavina¹³² and seems to have been much happier to accommodate her wishes in one large revision to the role as opposed to Pavlovskaya's continued requests. Pavlovskaya's particular concern with the vocal demands of the role of Nastas'ya show that she was highly aware during rehearsals that the part would be too challenging to her voice, and she seems to have been already preparing herself to be blamed when the production failed.

¹³¹ PSS XIV, pp. 173-5 and pp. 223-4.

¹³² PSS XIV pp. 184-190.

The impression one gets from this long process of modifying and revising the draft of the score is that it was done without an overall plan in mind as to how the entire opera would then appear onstage. The cuts and compressions transforming Acts IV and V of the play into a single operatic Act IV turn the finale of the opera into what Emerson would term a ‘scenes-from’ adaptation, while the first half of the opera closely resembles the play. Paired with the contrast between the theatrical *Nastas’ya* and the operatic one, we can see that *Charodeika* is in essence two different operas on two different levels. On the one hand, it presents a realist heroine in a melodramatic and fantastic opera; and on the other, it begins as a word-by-word adaptation that turns into a scenes-from adaptation. These two paradoxes could not possibly be resolved without a complete rewrite of the opera. Both are the structural reasons why the opera does not work dramatically, and explain why reception of the opera is so varied, ranging from the Tchaikovsky-as-*kuchkist* camp to the Tchaikovsky-as-realist camp. Ultimately, the operatic *Charodeika* is the way it is because Tchaikovsky from the beginning of the process determined to impose his own reading of *Nastas’ya* upon it without modifying the rest of the surrounding play. *Charodeika* provides perhaps the best illustration why a model of adaptation based on a composer’s personal reading of a text is one of the most dangerous methods for transposing a work from one genre into another.

Conclusion: Reader, Beware

Charodeika’s lack of success should not necessarily be considered a personal failing on Tchaikovsky’s part: rather, it illustrates the existence of two drastically different and fundamentally incompatible approaches to operatic adaptation in Russia during the latter half of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the word-for-word adaptation promulgated by *kuchkists*

like Dargomyzhsky and Musorgsky prized fidelity to the source text, even if, as in *Boris Godunov*'s case, the word-for-word approach was more of a guideline than a strictly adhered-to rule. On the other hand, the more idiosyncratic approach favoured by Tchaikovsky prized the composer's personal reading of a work, and a liberal approach to modification of a work where it did not align with the composer's view. Both of these approaches position the composer as the ultimate decision-maker during the process of adaptation, yet the Tchaikovskian method allowed for greater collaboration, particularly with influential singers like Emiliya Pavlovskaya.

At the heart of *Charodeika* is its mixing of these two adaptation approaches: the Tchaikovskian refashioning of Nastas'ya from calculating coquette to noble heroine alongside a Musorgskian fidelity (at least in Acts I-III) to the original pacing of the drama. Had Tchaikovsky chosen to prioritise one approach over the other, the opera may still not have become a repertory piece, but it would not be the disjointed work it is. However, Tchaikovsky's insistence on transforming Nastas'ya into a moral, pure soul along the lines of his great heroine Tat'yana Larina would always have been incompatible with the *kuchkist* attention to textual fidelity. Tchaikovsky's attention to his personal reading of Shpazhinsky's heroine proves that Tchaikovsky never intended *Charodeika* to be a *kuchkist*-style work, and any criticism of the composer's 'failure' to adhere to *kuchkist* principles is a fundamental misreading of both the opera as a finished object and of Tchaikovsky's stated intentions as he drafted it.

Further evidence against the reading of Tchaikovsky-as-*kuchkist* can be seen in his collaborative approach to the adaptation process itself. While Tchaikovsky did exert significant control over the shaping of the *Charodeika* libretto, his initial correspondence with Shpazhinsky shows a more hands-off approach than might be expected. It was in the cuts and revisions during the final stages of the compositional process that Tchaikovsky asserted the most dominance over

the libretto, which also coincided with Tchaikovsky's personal loss of respect for Shpazhinsky as a person. Yet if Tchaikovsky maintained a position of influence over his librettist, he did not take the same position with his prima donna. Tchaikovsky's courting of Pavlovskaya specifically for the project, and his receptiveness to her own reading of the character, speaks to an equalization between the roles of composer and singer. Pavlovskaya emerges not as a mere interpreter of the finished role of Nastas'ya, but as an active co-author working on the significant changes to the role as it was transposed from play to opera.

Charodeika is revealed, then, not as a failure of *kuchkist* principles, but rather as a confluence of tendencies that included the *kuchkist* approach to operatic adaptation. Though librettist and composer had long lost the equal footing seen in the early part of the nineteenth century, the singer had emerged to take on the mantle of co-author and collaborator. Though fidelity to a source text remained of interest, the rise of realism had reshaped how composers considered their operatic heroines and the role of individual readings in page-to-stage adaptation. Tchaikovsky would draw upon all the lessons learned during *Charodeika* in his later operatic compositions, and refine them to an apotheosis in his final Pushkin opera, *Pikovaya dama*, in 1890. In this final decade of the century, Russian composers at last could draw upon a rich and complex history of operatic adaptation, textual fidelity, conceptions of Russian identity, and mutual collaboration. For the fourth and final case study of this thesis, let us now turn to an opera that encapsulates all the operatic trends discussed in previous chapters, a work both emblematic of the nineteenth century and boldly innovative in a way that presages new developments in the twentieth century.

Chapter 4: *Sadko* and a Hidden Lineage of Russian Folk Opera

Russian opera scholarship tends to address the question of adaptation by examining two familiar works side by side: canonised literary works and their operatic equivalents. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to draw attention to operas where this process is disrupted or ignored altogether. Though such operas were generally popular during their time, they have remained on the margins both in contemporary performance repertoires and in opera scholarship, with only a few exceptions (such as Musorgsky's *Khovanshchina*).

This final chapter will examine Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's opera-*bylina* *Sadko* (1896), an opera deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century interest in Russian folklore and pre-Petrine history, but also strikingly prescient of twentieth-century developments in expressing folk elements in music. Not only does *Sadko* represent the culmination of a Russian folk-influenced operatic tradition, it is also unique in that its libretto and music are both based in ethnographic research into Russian folk poetry and declamation. It is further unique in that it is a Russian opera which emerges not from traditional page-to-stage adaptation by a single composer-librettist, but through a complex process of collaboration involving multiple, often conflicting, oral literary sources. Furthermore, a detailed study of Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators' creative process and the opera's many references to earlier Russian folk opera reveals the first steps towards Rimsky-Korsakov's gradual refashioning of a musical aesthetic dominant in mid-to-late nineteenth century Russian opera and in contemporary Russian operatic scholarship.

Sadko is considered generally in scholarly circles as one of the last works of Rimsky-Korsakov's operatic oeuvre to have been highly influenced by the philosophy and musical style of the *moguchaya kuchka* (as the mid-century circle of autodidact composers whose work had an

enormous impact on Russian music and Russian music historiography is known), before the composer turned to new aesthetic practices.¹ While Rimsky-Korsakov would begin to break from the group in 1871 by joining the faculty of the St Petersburg Conservatory – a project anathema to the *kuchka* – it is broadly accepted that his music and especially his operas still adhered to a loose collection of *kuchkist* practices of orientalism, the search for ‘authentic’ folk expression, self-consciously exotic harmonic devices, attention to naturalistic word-setting and striving for national plots and sources. *Sadko*, as I will demonstrate, does generally fit within these parameters, but it also gestures towards a less-renowned Russian operatic tradition: non-*kuchkist* Russian folk opera from the early and middle part of the century which arose from multiple literary sources and functioned within broader European operatic genres like *Singspiel* and grand opera. The collaborative nature of *Sadko*’s composition and the libretto’s complicated layers of references to ethnographic sources, as well as musical references to these earlier nineteenth-century works, speaks to Rimsky-Korsakov’s much deeper engagement with the tumultuous development of a Russian operatic tradition of folk-inflected opera. *Sadko*, therefore, marks a late-century meeting point between two parallel strands of Russian opera history: on the one hand, the frequently analysed single-authored page-to-stage adaptations of the Russian operatic canon, and on the other a more heterogeneous, collaborative approach whose efforts, while lauded in their day, have fallen out of the pages of Russian musical history.

In order fully to understand how *Sadko* gestures towards these twin histories of Russian opera, it will be necessary first to go back to the mid-nineteenth century to explore where this collaboratively-inclined corpus comes from, and to address the broader debates in this period

¹ Current scholarship focuses on Rimsky-Korsakov’s post-*kuchkist* period, as seen in Marina Frolova-Walker, ed. *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

about what it means to be a Russian composer. Opera in Russia through the mid-to-late nineteenth century is not merely a history of the famous ‘mighty handful’ of which the young Rimsky-Korsakov was one; rather, it is characterised by the widening divide between the autodidact ‘amateur’ composers following the footsteps of their early-century forebears and the rise of the conservatory-trained ‘professional’ composer enabled by the establishment of the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1862. This debate is rooted not only in questions of education and professionalization, but also in philosophical arguments around what counts as an authentically Russian musical style, both of which had far-reaching implications for Russian art and culture in general. Where many established narratives of Russian operatic history focus on the *kuchka* and its output, this chapter engages with a secondary, more hidden lineage of musical style and operatic ideas that stretches over six decades from the 1830s – the same period in which Mikhail Glinka emerged as an operatic composer – through to *Sadko*. This argument will connect three seemingly disparate composers from across the nineteenth century – Aleksey Verstovsky, Aleksandr Serov, and Rimsky-Korsakov – tracing links between their musical output and their engagement with developing ideologies of Russian musical life. By highlighting these neglected connections, this chapter will engage with questions of representation of Russian epic poetry in music, the creation of a Romantic pre-Petrine folk history, and the dichotomy between realism and the fantastic in operatic music.

This chapter will first explore the coinciding trends towards greater professionalisation amongst composers and the debates around ‘authentic’ Russianness in music promulgated by the *kuchka* with a parallel interest amongst ethnographers to document Russian folk practices more accurately. Both fields moved away from the model of untrained aristocratic amateurs imposing Western notations and structures upon non-Western forms of oral music and literature, and in the

case of music, critical campaigns to discredit earlier forms of folk-inflected music strictly defined what counted as Russianness in music. Then, I will turn to a granular discussion of the creation of the *Sadko* libretto, tracking how Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators worked with multiple, often conflicting ethnographic sources from across the nineteenth century. I will analyse elements of traditional folk declamation in the libretto, and explore rich intertextual references to other works of oral folk literature. Finally, I will position *Sadko*'s musical score as a parallel to the libretto, in that it also makes use of intra-musical references to both *kuchkist* and non-*kuchkist* folk operas and contains conscious attempts to mirror folk musical practices by pushing the boundaries of traditional operatic composition. *Sadko* in my reading thus functions as both a richly layered tribute to a particular genre of Russian opera and as a work of ethnography in itself: it both looks back to a history of folk-inflected Russian opera and looks forward to innovations in expressing folk musical practices within Western generic frameworks that would be taken up by composers in the twentieth century.²

Sadko: Russian Folk Opera on the Brink of Revolution

Of Rimsky-Korsakov's fifteen operas, *Sadko* is an especially useful case study for examining the continued impact of early-nineteenth century Russian operatic works at the turn of the twentieth century. The many existing primary sources related to the creation of *Sadko* also

² Igor' Stravinsky (1882-1971) is probably the most prominent example of these composers. His 'Russian phase' (roughly 1909-1920) included such works as *Les noces* and *The Rite of Spring*, which similarly sought to portray Russian folk life and practices. *The Rite of Spring* would be particularly lauded for pushing the boundaries of rhythmic structure, a process Rimsky-Korsakov also engages with in *Sadko*, as we shall see. Stravinsky was a private pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov's from roughly 1902 to Rimsky-Korsakov's death in 1908.

allow for an examination of how Rimsky-Korsakov worked collaboratively on his operatic libretti as well as solicited extensive feedback on questions of dramaturgy and musical structure. Furthermore, because Rimsky-Korsakov had a particular interest with *Sadko* in replicating traditional Russian oral poetry in operatic music and in reconciling the sometimes-conflicting source materials from which he worked, this opera was in many ways an anthropological-historical project as much as it was a creative undertaking. Rimsky-Korsakov made such links with folk practice explicit in his writings about the opera. For example, in his autobiography *My Musical Life (Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni)*, the composer claims ‘речитатив [in *Sadko*] не разговорный язык, а как-бы условно-уставной былинный сказ или распев, первообраз которого можно найти в декламации рябининских [Trofim Ryabin, a famous folk singer] былин’.³ Beyond influencing Rimsky-Korsakov’s recitative writing, the genre of *bylina*, a form of Russian epic poetry, provided the literary sources for the plot of *Sadko*. I will explore later in this chapter how Rimsky-Korsakov sought to account for the discrepancies in different variants of the ‘Sadko’ *bylina* in the libretto for the operatic *Sadko*, and examine how Rimsky-Korsakov developed a recitative style in imitation of *bylina* singing.

In choosing *Sadko*, I wish also to bring into discussion a composer whose operatic work has been marginalised in scholarly literature as well as in performance. The music of Rimsky-Korsakov has received relatively little attention in contemporary scholarship in the West, and though this tendency is changing in recent years, much remains to be done on the composer’s

³ Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni*, ed. A. N. Rimskii-Korsakov (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo muzykal'nyi sektor, 1928), p. 353.

significant operatic output.⁴ Rimsky-Korsakov's fifteen operas span four decades of Russian musical history from the early 1870s to the late 1900s, and can be grouped into a rough generic binary as follows:

Historical drama	<i>Pskovityanka</i> (3 versions: 1873, 1877, 1895), <i>Boyarynya Vera Sheloga</i> (1898), <i>Motsart i Sal'eri</i> (1898), <i>Tsarskaya nevesta</i> (1899), <i>Serviliya</i> (1902), <i>Pan voevoda</i> (1904)
Fairy-tale/fantastic opera	<i>Mlada</i> (1872), <i>Maiskaya noch'</i> (1880), <i>Noch' pered Rozhdestvom</i> (1895), <i>Sadko</i> (1897), <i>Snegurochka</i> (2 versions: 1882, 1895), <i>Kashchei bessmertnyi</i> (1902), <i>Skazanie o nevidimom grade Kitezhe i deve Fevronii</i> (1907), <i>Skazanie o tsare Saltane</i> (1900), <i>Zolotoi petushok</i> (1909)

Very few of these operas have received significant scholarly scrutiny, and in the case of *Sadko* there are no noteworthy individual studies more recent than the 1970s, and only one in English, dating from 1935.⁵

⁴ See, however, Frolova-Walker ed., *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World*, for evidence of growing scholarly interest in Rimsky-Korsakov's work, though the volume focuses on his later operas.

⁵ See Gerald Abraham, 'Sadko', in *Studies in Russian Music* (London, 1935), pp. 221-45; Boris Asaf'ev, 'Problema grada vidimogo', in *Simfonicheskie etyudy* (Leningrad, 1970), pp. 86-95; and V. Tsukkerman, 'O syuzhete i

Of particular interest for this study are Rimsky-Korsakov's seven operas in the fairy-tale/fantastic category, of which *Sadko* is one. Rimsky-Korsakov would revive this genre for late-nineteenth century Russian musical audiences, but its foundational text premiered in 1835 and remained in the operatic repertory throughout the rest of the century: *Askol'dova mogila*, by Aleksey Verstovsky, a composer whose popularity in the early and mid-nineteenth century did not prevent him from being left out of the canonised Russian operatic repertory. *Askol'dova mogila* would also inspire the mid-century composer Aleksandr Serov to compose his own adaptation of the same material; his opera *Rogneda* (1865) would also become wildly popular and propel its composer to both musical and literary fame. However, Serov's personal and critical antagonism towards the *kuchkist* movement would mean he, too, would become a marginalised figure in histories of Russian opera. Neither Verstovsky, Serov, nor indeed Rimsky-Korsakov fit the *kuchka*'s conception of a 'Russian' composer uninfluenced by European tradition and inspired solely by folk practices; through both their biographies and their aesthetic aims, all three would fail to measure up to the *kuchka*'s standards.

By situating *Sadko* as the culmination of an aesthetic lineage that includes works like *Askol'dova mogila* and *Rogneda*, this chapter seeks to complicate the binary of 'Western' composer versus *kuchkist* composer that many histories of Russian opera deploy. *Sadko*, as I will show, owes a great deal to the influence of *kuchkist* figures, particularly the critic Vladimir Stasov, yet it also engages with the work of composers like Verstovsky and Serov, who represented all that the *kuchka* stood against. While superficially Rimsky-Korsakov's work fits in with the parameters of musical 'Russianness' set out by *kuchkist* precepts, *Sadko*'s

Muzykal'nom yazyke opery-byliny "Sadko", in *Muzykal'no-teoreticheskie ocherki i etyudy*, 2 vols (Moscow, 1970-71), I (1970), pp. 441-504.

engagement with non-*kuchkist* works marks the beginnings of a new independence from the movement. Before turning to the details of how and where *Sadko* engages with and departs from *kuchkist* practices, it will first be useful to define the genre I identify as a more European-influenced form of folk opera and briefly discuss its two main proponents in Russia: Aleksey Verstovsky and Aleksandr Serov.

Verstovsky, Serov, Rimsky-Korsakov: Who Gets to be a ‘Russian Composer’?

While it cannot be said that Verstovsky’s *Askol’dova mogila* had a direct influence on Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sadko*, it can be argued that *Askol’dova mogila* influenced *Sadko* via Serov’s *Rogneda*, as I shall discuss later. This chapter seeks to engage not with direct connections but rather with subtler references that reveal a lineage of Russian folk-inflected opera throughout the nineteenth century hitherto marginalised in scholarly literature. Conventional histories of Russian opera locate two primary lineages in the repertory, each rooted in either Glinka’s *Zhizn’ za tsarya* (1836) or his *Ruslan i Lyudmila* (1842) and developed on the one hand through the supposedly ‘Westernised’ music of Anton Rubinstein and Pyotr Tchaikovsky, on the other by the composers of the *moguchaya kuchka* in the 1850s and 1860s. This chapter argues for the existence of a third genealogy of Russian opera connecting Verstovsky to Serov and through Serov to Rimsky-Korsakov, not only via a specific genre of opera but also via the development of two related concepts of the role of the composer in Russian musical life. The first is the increased tension between mainly autodidact ‘amateur’ composers in the tradition of the early nineteenth century and the first generation of ‘professional’ composers introduced with the establishment of the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, where Rimsky-Korsakov studied and would later teach. The second is the continued

influence of German Romanticism on Russian musical life and its ideal image of a composer as an iconoclastic, tormented genius utterly consumed by his art, which contrasted strongly with the reality for many Russian composers who treated music as a daily profession and led quiet personal lives outside of their employment. Both of these tendencies would be filtered through the *kuchkist* movement of the mid-century, whose influence on both the canonised Russian operatic repertory and its reception in scholarly discourse persisted decades after the group ceased to exist.⁶

Rimsky-Korsakov occupied a unique space in the Russian music scene of the late nineteenth century. Whereas other conservatory-educated composers like Tchaikovsky were shunned by the *kuchkist* circle for their presumed Western European bias, Rimsky-Korsakov navigated the tension between the continuing amateur composer tradition promulgated by the *kuchkist* movement and the rise of the conservatory-trained musician. Rimsky-Korsakov was able to deflect the criticism of his educational background other composers attracted because he paid lip service to *kuchkist* nationalist philosophies, though in private he would criticise its rigid views on nationalism.⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov would also compose pieces that fit with the artistic manifesto of the *kuchkists*, ticking most of the boxes its leader Vladimir Stasov identified as

⁶ The persistence of the ‘tormented genius’ stereotype can be seen even today in popular biographies of Tchaikovsky, which continue to posit that the composer’s death in 1893 was by suicide due to anxiety about his sexual orientation, a theory easily dismissed by even a perfunctory knowledge of the historical sources.

⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov is reported as saying that Stasov’s comparison of *Sadko* to Wagner’s *Ring* cycle proves ‘что Владимир Васильевич ничего не понял из всей оперы’, and that Stasov ‘никогда не понимает’ that other operas after Glinka’s *Ruslan and Lyudmila* expanded upon the possibilities of Russian national opera. See Vasiliy V. Yastrebtsev, *Nikolay Andreevich Rimskii-Korsakov: Vospominaniya V. V. Yastrebtseva*, ed. A. V. Ossovskii, 2 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1959-61), I (1959), p. 452 and p. 347.

comprising the national element in music: 1) the absence of preconception and blind faith in Western musical traditions, 2) a rejection of formal training and ‘dry academicism’ that would stifle true creativity, 3) the use of folklore as source material, 4) the Oriental element, 5) an extreme inclination toward program music.⁸ Rimsky-Korsakov’s operatic output, particularly his nine operas on folk or fairy-tale themes, especially fit in with Stasov’s criteria. Nonetheless, Rimsky-Korsakov felt keenly that his work was not acknowledged or understood by the critics, most of whom followed Stasov’s rhetorical lead, and Rimsky-Korsakov complained to his friend and biographer Vasily Yastrebtsev in 1895: ‘И мою музыку забудут так же всецело, как ее не любили и не признавали при жизни’.⁹ That Rimsky-Korsakov was effectively kicked out of the nationalist musical circle was probably due to his education and status as a more professionalised composer; for critics like Stasov, ‘the issue of nation was inextricably tangled up both conceptually and strategically [...] with the issue of education and professionalisation’.¹⁰ A conservatory-educated composer could never truly be considered a nationalist composer because his education would have instilled in him the rules and values of the Western classical tradition, which *kuchkists* considered antithetical to nurturing a Russian national tradition.

While Verstovsky, who received a general if not systematised musical education, would not have to navigate the debates around conservatory training in his professional career – the Moscow and St Petersburg conservatories would not be founded until the 1860s – both he and

⁸ Taruskin, Richard. ‘Non-nationalists and Other Nationalists’, *19th-Century Music*, 35/2 (2011), 132-143 (p. 137).

See also V. V. Stasov, ‘Dvadsat’ pyat’ let russkogo iskusstva’, in *Izbrannye sochineniya*, 3 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo ‘Iskusstvo’, 1952), II (1952), pp. 745-6.

⁹ Yastrebtsev, *Nikolay Andreevich Rimskii-Korsakov: Vospominaniya*, p. 324.

¹⁰ Taruskin, ‘Non-nationalists’, p. 135.

Rimsky-Korsakov would have to contend with the effects of German Romantic philosophy on ideas of what a composer should be and how his image should be portrayed in the public. The image of ‘composer as lone tormented genius’, arguably inaugurated in the reception of Beethoven, was especially pernicious in Russia and its effects can be felt in Russian music criticism to this day. To both Verstovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, composition was a job rather than the semi-spiritual all-consuming passion advocated by Romantic critics, and neither Verstovsky nor Rimsky-Korsakov fit this perceived image of the composer as a singular visionary. Indeed, both Verstovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov’s working methods would reject this lone-wolf attitude towards composition: both regularly sought out input and collaboration from poets, directors, and other composers.¹¹ Verstovsky additionally took on several other duties besides that of composing new works. He rose to the role of manager of the Moscow Imperial Theatres in 1848, was a keen pedagogue, and even performed in his own very successful vaudevilles throughout the 1820s.¹² This balance of compositional activity with other theatrical duties would, by the rise of Glinka in the 1830s, begin to seem hopelessly old-fashioned alongside the seductive Romantic ideal of a composer consumed by his art. To this end, Abram Gozenpud astutely notes that ‘хотя он был современником Глинки, всеми творческими устремлениями Верстовского неразрывно связаны с предшествующей эпохой’.¹³ While Boris Asaf’ev gives Verstovsky’s work reluctant credit for combining ‘славяно-российских

¹¹ Rimsky-Korsakov’s relationship with Yastrebtsev is one example of his tendency towards collaboration, while Verstovsky worked alongside contemporary poets to write art songs.

¹² Nikolai Findeizen, ‘A. N. Verstovsky – ego zhizn’ i muzykal’naya deyat’nost’’, *Ezhegodnik Imperatorskikh teatrov 1896-97*, 2 (St Petersburg: Tipografii Imperatorskikh Teatrov, 1898), 86-134 (p. 109).

¹³ Abram Gozenpud, ‘Moskovskii opernyi teatr’, *Muzykal’nyi teatr v Rossii: ot istokov do Glinki* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye Muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1959), pp. 658-711 (p. 663).

идей 18-ого века в патриотической окраске русской интеллигенции александровского времени’, such a focus on Slavic themes ironically would help lay the foundation for the *kuchkist* circle’s development in the middle decade of the nineteenth century, and not least for Rimsky-Korsakov himself.¹⁴ By Rimsky-Korsakov’s era, the Romantic image of the ideal composer had fully saturated musical discourse, especially following the death of Modest Musorgsky in 1881. Musorgsky, often stereotyped as a convention-defying anti-establishment alcoholic, would be canonised in the years after his decease as a giant of Russian music alongside Glinka. Rimsky-Korsakov’s lifestyle was quietly average and positively boring by contrast with Musorgsky, and according to Richard Taruskin ‘stands for everything that musicians and musicologists in the German Romantic tradition have tried to ward off’.¹⁵ Taruskin goes on to argue that twentieth-century reception of Russian music in the West is the history of ‘an implied and invidious comparison’ between Rimsky-Korsakov and Musorgsky based on their opposing lifestyles.¹⁶ A similar implied comparison between Verstovsky and Glinka, while perhaps not so charged as that between Rimsky-Korsakov and Musorgsky, would also have lasting effects on Russian music in the middle and latter parts of the nineteenth century.

Verstovsky may not have had to navigate the conservatory-trained/autodidact divide, but he did have to engage with the opposition between so-called ‘popular’ composers, usually self-

¹⁴ Boris Asaf’ev, ‘Kompozitor iz pleyady slavno-rossiiskikh bardov: A. N. Verstovsky’, in *Izbrannye trudy*, 4 vols, ed. Tamara Livanova et al. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1952-1957), IV (1955), pp. 59-63 (p. 61).

¹⁵ Richard Taruskin, ‘Catching Up with Rimsky-Korsakov’, *Music Theory Spectrum*, 33/2 (2011), 169-185 (p. 183).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

taught, and perceived ‘high art’ composers like Glinka who received some formal training.¹⁷ Verstovsky existed within the popular music sphere, and worked happily among the existing musical genres of his period. Rather than push boundaries on a generic level, as Glinka did with through-composed Russian-language opera in *Zhizn’ za tsarya*, Verstovsky experimented with styles and intonations: such work is less obviously innovative and would disappear among criticism of Verstovsky’s work as generically uninventive.¹⁸ Verstovsky himself was perfectly happy to work with pre-existing genres and conventions, claiming his goals were ‘вложить в европейскую форму характер национальной русской музыки’.¹⁹ In his efforts to create music that would express some kind of nationalist sentiment while remaining recognisable in form, Verstovsky established what Asaf’ev terms a ‘Russian-Slavonic stylistic complex’ that would last throughout the nineteenth century and ‘дал красивые отложения и у Глинки, и у Даргомыжского, и у Римского-Корсакова, да и у Чайковского’.²⁰ This Russian-Slavonic style went beyond mere citation of folk song and rather dictated certain elements in both subjects for programmed works and the music found therein: as an obvious example, Asaf’ev points out that the earliest use of the interval of a sixth as a ‘stabilising role’ in folk-like musical passages

¹⁷ Even this dichotomy is in itself problematic, because while Glinka received some brief musical training in Berlin and Italy, his biography firmly fits within the cultural codes of the Russian gentry dilettante composer. Glinka did not prioritise publication of his music, and unlike Verstovsky was not engaged with the day-to-day running of the professional music institutions of the period. It was Glinka’s admirers in the press who held him up as the first Russian composer to transcend the dilettante label rather than Glinka’s own actions.

¹⁸ Asaf’ev, ‘Kompozitor’, p. 59.

¹⁹ Quoted in Gozenpud, ‘Moskovskii opernyi teatr’, p. 663.

²⁰ Asaf’ev, ‘Kompozitor’, p. 60.

was in *Askol'dova mogila*.²¹ Nonetheless, Verstovsky's influence on later Russian opera remains relatively unacknowledged, in part because Verstovsky did not receive the same critical support his contemporary Glinka did. While Verstovsky's work, especially *Askol'dova mogila*, was hugely popular among general audiences throughout the nineteenth century, it did not gain similar support from aristocratic circles, and therefore as Verstovsky's defenders like Serov pointed out, Verstovsky's contributions to Russian music were never taken seriously.²²

In its reinterpretation of the same novel by Mikhail Zagoskin upon which Verstovsky's *Askol'dova mogila* was based and in Serov's championing of Verstovsky's compositional output, Serov's second opera *Rogneda* (1865) aligns itself with a non-Glinkian style of Russian operatic composition epitomised by *Askol'dova mogila*. In its intent to depict the conflicting ideologies of Russian pagan belief and Christianity and an interest in creating a vocal style that would mimic Russian bardic tradition, *Rogneda* provides a link between Verstovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, and looks forward to Rimsky-Korsakov's experiments with musical expressions of the natural/supernatural divide and extensive research into Russian epic poetry with *Sadko*. Through his biography, Serov in many ways embodied the mid-century polemic between the tradition of autodidact amateur composer-musicians and the growing movement for a standardised system of musical education in Russia: he was of the last generation of Russian composers to receive no formal musical training beyond a general-education standard. In this sense, Serov's life and work

²¹ Ibid., p. 61. Use of sixth intervals in folk-mimicking music can also be found in *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842), Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka* (1856), and Tchaikovsky's *Evgeny Onegin* (1877-78).

²² See Serov, A. N. 'Verstovsky i ego znacheniya dlya russkogo isskustva', in *Izbrannye stat'i*, 2 vols., ed. G. N. Khubov (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1950-1957), II (1957), pp. 44-48. Originally published in 1862.

is a critical part of the hidden lineage connecting the self-taught and largely forgotten composers of the early nineteenth century and the conservatory-educated, canonised composers of its latter decades. While Serov was a self-taught composer in the mode of Verstovsky and opposed Anton Rubinstein's establishment of the St Petersburg Conservatory, his activity as a critic played as crucial a role in the professionalisation of Russian music as Rubenstein's pedagogical efforts. Both before and during his career as a composer, Serov would publish extensively on musical topics, introduce the writings of Richard Wagner to Russia, help produce the first Russian musical encyclopaedia, and champion his own personal conception of Russian musical nationalism. 'До Серова', Findeizen reflected in 1898, 'русской музыкальной критики еще не существовало', and Gozenpud also noted how Serov's writings deftly walked an ideological line between Vladimir Stasov and the *kuchkist* circle on the one hand, and the conservatory circle of Anton Rubinstein and the Russian Musical Society on the other hand.²³ Though Serov is considered by some as 'Russia's "superfluous man" of music',²⁴ his life and work mark the turning point in nineteenth-century Russian operatic music, connecting the seemingly diametrically opposed poles of pre-Glinkian Russian folk-inflected vaudeville and late-century fairy-tale opera.

In his chapter on Serov's *Rogneda*, Richard Taruskin argues that Rimsky-Korsakov responds to Serov the composer as much as Serov the critic in his fairy-tale operas, especially

²³ Nikolai Findeizen, 'A. N. Serov. Oчерk ego zhizni i muzykal'noy deiatel'nosti', *Ezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov 1897-98*, 1-3 (1899); 79-115, 1-54 and 56-123 (2, p. 34), and Abram Gozenpud, 'Opernoe nasledie Serova', *Izbrannye stat'i*, (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo 'Sovetskii kompozitor', 1971), pp. 87-113 (p. 89).

²⁴ Richard Taruskin, 'Pochvennichestvo on the Russian Operatic Stage: Serov and His *Rogneda*', in *Opera and Drama in Russia as Preached and Practiced in the 1860s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), pp. 79-141 (p. 132).

Sadko, but Taruskin is only partly correct in this assertion.²⁵ It is true that Rimsky-Korsakov claimed to admire much of *Rogneda*'s musical features – ‘колдунья, идоложертвенный хор, хор в гриднице, пляска скоморохов, охотничья прелюдия, хор в 7/3, финаль и многое другое’ – but these were not Serov's innovations alone; rather, they connected back to musical and dramatic effects pioneered by Verstovsky in *Askol'dova mogila*.²⁶ In the following, I will explore the compositional history of *Sadko*, focusing especially on Rimsky-Korsakov's interest in the Russian *bylina* and exploring where and how *Sadko* comes into contact with this earlier tradition of Russian folk opera.

Creating a Libretto for *Sadko*: Collaboration and Control

Bearing in mind that the tendency at the end of the nineteenth century was for composers to exert sole creative control over every aspect of an opera's genesis in the Romantic formulation, I will now return to *Sadko* and examine how its compositional history defies this trend. The work that would become *Sadko* involved a long process of detailed research that could never be carried out by a single individual; the creation of the *Sadko* libretto was as much an ethnographic endeavour as it was a literary endeavour, and the composer's prefatory remarks to the published score underline the extent of the research involved. Item One of this prefatory material states outright that the construction of the dramaturgy was built ‘из различных вариантов былины «Садко богатый гость» (сборники Кирши Данилова, Рыбникова и других)’, alongside other traditional Russian folk tales like ‘The Sea King and Vasilisa Premudraya’ and the *bylina*

²⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

²⁶ Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis'*, p. 64.

‘Terentiy the Merchant’.²⁷ In brief, the opera tells the tale of Sadko, a *gusli* player and merchant from Novgorod, who with the help of a sea princess named Volkhova catches three golden fish and becomes fabulously wealthy. Sadko then leaves on a trading voyage, but as he returns to Novgorod his ships become becalmed at sea, and Sadko leaps into the water to appease the Sea-King and encourage a breeze. Having arrived at the underwater kingdom, Sadko sings to the Sea-King and wins the hand of the princess Volkhova. Their wedding celebrations cause a great storm and the destruction of the Sea-Kingdom, and Sadko and Volkhova escape on a seashell. As Sadko sleeps on the shores of Lake Il’men near Novgorod, Volkhova bids him farewell and transforms into a river that links the lake with the sea. Upon waking, Sadko believes his voyage was only a dream, but sees his ships and the new river and realises otherwise. The people of Novgorod join him and rejoice in their good fortune.

By highlighting the multiple sources used in the creation of the libretto, Rimsky-Korsakov emphasises the research effort involved in its writing, thus underscoring Abram Gozenpud’s assertion that the composer ‘предпочитал положить в основу оперы значительной литературное произведение’ as opposed to writing a serviceable text that would be subordinate to his musical aims.²⁸ Yet in order to create an operatic work of equal literary merit, Rimsky-Korsakov could not work alone, and indeed the composer generally preferred to

²⁷ Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, ‘Preface – Item One’, *Opera-bylina Sadko* (piano-vocal score) (Leipzig: M.P. Belaieff, 1897). Rimsky-Korsakov cites A. N. Afanas’ev as his source for ‘The Sea King and Vasilisa Premudraya’ (Cf. A. N. Afanas’ev, *Narodnye russkie skazki*, 4 vols (Moscow: Tipografia Gracheva i komp., 1860-1873), II (1863), pp. 96-118). The ‘Terentiy the Merchant’ bylina can be found in the Danilov collection. (Cf. Kirsha Danilov, *Drevnie russkie stikhotvoreniya*, ed. B. N. Putilov and A. P. Evgen’eva (Reprint. Moscow: Nauka, 1977), p. 15-19.

²⁸ A. A. Gozenpud, ‘Rimsky-Korsakov v rabote nad opernym libretto’, in *Izbrannye stat’i* (Leningrad, 1971), pp. 128-74 (p. 132).

work with a group of collaborators at least in the early stages of compiling a scenario.²⁹ For *Sadko*, Rimsky-Korsakov consulted with four collaborators in two pairs throughout the compositional process: firstly, with Nikolay Shtrup and Vladimir Stasov in the first phase of compiling a scenario in the summer of 1894; then in the following summer with Vasiliy Yastrebtsev and Vladimir Bel'sky while refining the libretto and composing the music.

Shtrup was an amateur musician and wrote at least two scenarios for *Sadko*: one based on critic Nikolay Findeizen's suggestions, and one in consultation with Stasov. Stasov, one of the most prominent music critics in nineteenth-century Russia, close friend turned bitter enemy of Serov, and de facto leader of the *kuchka*, greatly shaped the overall mood and dramaturgy of the finalised opera. Yastrebtsev was an amateur composer and musician, a close friend of Rimsky-Korsakov and later, one of the composer's most prominent biographers. In his later writings, Yastrebtsev would inflate his role in the creation of *Sadko* – while Rimsky-Korsakov showed him parts of the work-in-progress and discussed music with him, there is no evidence Rimsky-Korsakov ever asked Yastrebtsev for significant help with the work. Bel'sky, though professionally an economist and statistician, was a great connoisseur of Russian folk literature and helped Rimsky-Korsakov with the final stages of writing. This was Bel'sky's first collaboration with Rimsky-Korsakov; he would later write the libretti for Rimsky-Korsakov's celebrated trio of late fantastic operas: *Skazanie o tsare Saltane* (1900), *Skazanie o nevidimom grade Kitezhe i deve Fevronii* (1907) and *Zolotoi petushok* (1909).

The volume of manuscript materials related to the *Sadko* libretto emphasises how much work was involved in its composition and how thoroughly the libretto was revised and refined. These materials can be sorted into five categories as follows: 1) two undated scenarios in

²⁹ Ibid., p. 143.

Shtrup's hand for a version of the opera in six scenes; 2) two undated and un-authored scenarios in Rimsky-Korsakov's hand, one for an opera in seven scenes, and one for an opera in five acts; 3) draft materials in both Bel'sky's and Rimsky-Korsakov's hands, one undated and titled 'Садко. Опера-былина в четырех действиях', and one dated 31 December 1894/1 January 1895 titled 'Садко. Опера-былина в пяти действиях'; 4) excerpts of a libretto in Rimsky-Korsakov's hand dated 'СПбург 1895' and titled 'Садко. Опера-былина в четырех действиях и шести картинах Н. Р-Кого'; 5) the censor's copy of a completed libretto signed by Rimsky-Korsakov and dated 1896, titled 'Садко. Опера-былина в семи картинах'.³⁰ This last, complete copy of the libretto seems to be the final version, but the seven other incomplete scenarios and drafts illustrate the significant amount of time and effort it took to finalise the opera's text and plot. While the choice of labelling the opera as an 'opera-bylina' is of interest to this research because of its equal emphasis on literary and musical creation, it is the complex collaborative genesis of the *Sadko* libretto that will be the primary focus of the present chapter.

It can be assumed that the first scenarios in Shtrup's hand date to late 1893 or early 1894, as one of these is referenced in a letter from July 1894 to Rimsky-Korsakov from the critic Vladimir Stasov.³¹ In it, Stasov provides detailed commentary on a Shtrup-authored scenario sent by the composer in an earlier letter,³² critiquing not only what Shtrup had already prepared but offering also several significant changes to the opera in this earliest incarnation. These

³⁰ Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii: literaturnye proizvedeniya*, ed. V. Kiselev, 9 vols (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1955-1982), V (1963), p. 416. Further abbreviated as *PSS*. The original manuscript materials for the libretto and score are held at the Russian National Library in St Petersburg, fond 640.

³¹ *PSS* V, pp. 417-21.

³² *Ibid.* pp. 415-16. The composer comments, 'Он [Shtrup] сам покажет довольно подробный сценарий [...] и я просил его посоветовать с вами'.

suggestions, which will be elaborated later, all ended up in the finished work and represent a significant contribution to the *Sadko* libretto. Even at this early stage, Stasov's commentary indicates a focus on faithful representation of the *Sadko bylina* in the opera, for he argues that all of his additional plot suggestions can be found in variants of the *bylina*. Crucially, Stasov also suggests Rimsky-Korsakov consult the *bylina* collections of Danilov, Rybnikov, and Kireevsky; in these collections, Rimsky-Korsakov would not only find the sources for all of Stasov's additions but would also be able to compare three different variants of the *Sadko bylina*.

None of the three collections Stasov suggested were modern, but rather sources from earlier in the nineteenth century that had not previously been heavily referenced in folk-inflected musical compositions. The first collection, *Drevnie rossiiskie stikhotvoreniya*, was originally published in 1804, then reissued in 1818 with additional material. The biography of its compiler Kirsha Danilov is unknown, because the manuscript material was likely compiled in the early eighteenth century and passed through many hands before it was finally published. The second collection, *Pesni, sobrannye P. N. Rybnikovym*, was published in four volumes between 1861 and 1867 and compiled by Pavel Rybnikov, a political exile who discovered the *bylina* tradition while serving out his sentence in the far north of Russia. The third collection, *Pesni sobrannye P. V. Kireevskim*, was published posthumously in ten instalments between 1860 and 1874 and compiled by Pyotr Kireevsky, who not only collected songs but also urged his friends and relatives to transcribe any oral folk literature with which they came into contact; Kireevsky's work was the first major collection of Russian epic songs.

Stasov also emphasises the universality of the *Sadko* tale by noting in all capitals towards the end of the letter, 'Вообще говоря, наш Садко есть русское повторение греческого

странствователя Одиссея'.³³ Though Stasov's contributions to the *Sadko* libretto would end up being enormous, it appears that after this letter Stasov was not actively involved with Rimsky-Korsakov in the genesis of the opera. In another letter from August 1894, Stasov writes concernedly to the composer that he fears Rimsky-Korsakov is not happy with his suggestions and will not follow his advice, though he also mentions that he continues to meet with Shtrup to work on the scenario. In reply, Rimsky-Korsakov cautiously distances himself from Stasov's enthusiasm for the project, saying that he never envisioned an opera of such grand scale and suggesting he might drop the project altogether.³⁴ After this, the correspondence between Stasov and Rimsky-Korsakov is silent on the topic of *Sadko* until April 1897, when Stasov writes delightedly that he has read the censor's copy of the finished libretto and is thrilled with the final product. The critic's apparent surprise to find that his plot suggestions from three years earlier did in fact make it into the completed opera further underscores the idea that Stasov had not been closely involved with the final stages of the libretto-writing.

While Rimsky-Korsakov may have distanced himself from Stasov by suggesting his growing disinclination to pursue the *Sadko* project, he was much more open about his progress with other correspondents. In a letter from July 1894 – the same month Rimsky-Korsakov received Stasov's commentary on the original scenario – the composer's close friend Vasiliy Yastrebtsev writes that he is seeking out copies of the Danilov, Rybnikov, and Kirevsky *bylina* collections to forward to Rimsky-Korsakov: the same three collections Stasov recommended for

³³ Ibid. p. 421.

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 423-4.

further consultation.³⁵ A year later in July 1895, Rimsky-Korsakov confides to Yastrebtsev that composition of *Sadko*'s first scene of the Novgorodian merchants' feast is going frustratingly slowly and that 'временами я даже думал бросить Садко на неопределенный срок и уехать на несколько времени в Крым или куда-нибудь',³⁶ while also commenting that the music for the second scene featuring Sadko on the shores of Lake Il'men' came to him much more easily.³⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov continued to update Yastrebtsev throughout July 1895 on his progress, and in August hosted his friend and Bel'sky for several weeks, perhaps playing passages from the work-in-progress. Bel'sky would convince Rimsky-Korsakov to include the character of Sadko's wife – a character not present in any of the sources – and assisted in writing the text to an aria for her in tableau 3 and revising the three foreign traders' songs in tableau 4.³⁸ By October 1895, Rimsky-Korsakov again invited Bel'sky, Yastrebtsev, and other friends to listen to drafts of the first and second acts (probably tableaux 1-3) of *Sadko*, and invited Bel'sky at least once more the following summer to listen to the now-complete second and fourth acts (probably tableaux 2-3

³⁵ Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov, *Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov: perepiska s V. V. Yastrebtsevym i V. I. Belskim*, ed. L. G. Barsova (St Petersburg: Sankt-peterburgskaya gosudarstvennaya konservatoriia, 2009), p. 26. Further abbreviated as *Perepiska*.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 51.

³⁷ It is important to note that setting the first scene of the opera in the middle of a merchants' feast was Stasov's idea; though Rimsky-Korsakov has taken on at least this suggestion by July 1895, his comments to Yastrebtsev indicate he may not be particularly inspired by it.

³⁸ Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov, *Letopis'*, p. 344.

and 5-6).³⁹ Bel'sky continued to polish the libretto at the composer's request, sending Rimsky-Korsakov further corrections to the first two scenes in December 1896.⁴⁰

As his correspondence with Yastrebtsev and Bel'sky shows, Rimsky-Korsakov was solicitous of opinions on the music he composed for *Sadko* in the summers of 1895 and 1896; that Stasov and Shtруп, according to Stasov, worked on early scenarios for *Sadko* independently of Rimsky-Korsakov suggest that the composer may have had more of a hands-off approach to the early stages of libretto writing than his late nineteenth-century operatic contemporaries.⁴¹ Gozenpud cites Rimsky-Korsakov as saying 'надо написать сначала либретто целиком, а музыку сочинять и записать отдельными темами, частицами и отрывками',⁴² and that the most difficult step was coming up with a scenario, ideally to be completed as a collaborative effort, followed by the composition of the libretto, again as a group effort. Only once both were completed to satisfaction, according to Gozenpud, would Rimsky-Korsakov begin his musical composing in earnest. This seems not to have been entirely true for *Sadko*. Rimsky-Korsakov likely had a complete collection of scenarios and draft materials as he composed in the summer of 1895. Yet, he continued to solicit literary input on these from Bel'sky in particular throughout 1896 as he composed the music.

³⁹ Rimsky-Korsakov reported to Yastrebtsev that Bel'sky 'по-видимому доволен' with the music. *Perepiska*, p. 77.

⁴⁰ *Perepiska*, p. 235.

⁴¹ For one example, see the correspondence between Pyotr Tchaikovsky and his brother Modest, who wrote the libretto for the composer's 1890 opera *Pikovaya dama*. (See Pyotr Il'ich Chaikovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii: literaturnye proizvedeniya*, 16 vols, ed. Kseniya Davydova and Galina Labutina (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1953-1981), XV-B (1977).

⁴² Gozenpud, 'Rimskii-Korsakov v rabote nad opernym libretto', p. 141.

Rimsky-Korsakov's distancing from Stasov in particular seems out of character when considered in light of his lively correspondence with Yastrebtsev and Bel'sky, but this may have something to do with his desire to maintain dominant control over his project as well as the beginning of a distance from the *kuchkist* circle headed by Stasov and in which the young Rimsky-Korsakov had been an active participant. Reflecting on the relationship between Stasov and Rimsky-Korsakov, M. O. Yankovsky argues 'композитор болезненно воспринимает попытки навязывать ему точку зрения на произведение, которое им еще не создано, а в еще большей степени он протестует, когда его друзья и корреспонденты предсказывают ему грандиозные масштабы только что задуманного произведения'.⁴³ This is precisely what Stasov does in his July 1894 response to the first Shtrup scenario. Stasov's main suggestion – to balance the fantastic realm of the Sea-King with a historical portrait of ancient Novgorod – proposes a significant revision to Rimsky-Korsakov's original idea, changing the opera from the more straightforward fantasy the composer envisioned to a combination of historical epic à la Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (1874) and Russian folk-inflected fantastic legend. Stasov's promotion of the historical aspects of the 'Sadko' tale reveals his deep interest in the political structures of ancient Rus' throughout this period. Furthermore, Stasov expressed enthusiasm for such a work combining history and fantasy – he seems confident Rimsky-Korsakov will immediately accept all his suggestions – and predicts it would become the greatest triumph of the composer's career, writing that 'мне все кажется, что это будет *капитальнейшее* Ваше

⁴³ M. O. Yankovskii, 'Stasov i Rimsky-Korsakov', in *Muzykal'noe nasledstvo Rimskogo-Korsakova: issledovaniya, material'y, pis'ma*, 2 vols ed. D. B. Kabalevsky, A. V. Ossovsky, N. V. Tumanina, and M. O. Yankovsky (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1953-54), II (1954), pp. 337-404 (p. 386).

создание, Ваша IX-я симфония'.⁴⁴ In light of Rimsky-Korsakov's less-than-pleased reply to this letter, it seems very possible that the composer, on the one hand, was uncomfortable with welcoming such significant changes to his conception of the work at such an early stage, and on the other hand, was equally uncomfortable with labouring under the weight of Stasov's significant expectations. 'Я ищу того, что мне подсказывает характер моих музыкальных способностей', he replied with some loftiness, 'которые мне пора самому знать и в оценке которого вряд ли я при моем 50-лет[нем] возрасте могу ошибаться'.⁴⁵

While Rimsky-Korsakov would end up adopting all of Stasov's original suggestions into the final version of the opera, it is clear that he wished to maintain control over the project at the earliest stages of compiling a scenario and libretto. Though Rimsky-Korsakov would rely upon the collective knowledge of his collaborators throughout the process of composing *Sadko*, by shutting Stasov out of the conversation after late 1894 Rimsky-Korsakov eliminated the possibility of another person becoming the dominant voice in the conversation. While his friendly solicitations to Bel'sky and Yastrebtsev illustrate the composer's willingness to share details about the work-in-progress, the letters also show that Rimsky-Korsakov prized his own judgement above all else, particularly in musical matters. That the published scores for *Sadko* only mention Rimsky-Korsakov's name emphasises the continuing dominance of the composer as creator of an operatic work, regardless of how many other minds provided valuable – and in Stasov's case, critical – assistance, and illustrates the extent to which the composer had eclipsed the librettist(s) as an opera's 'author' over the course of the nineteenth century.

⁴⁴ PSS V, p. 423. Note the reference to Beethoven, the ultimate Romantic composer.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Dramaturgy and Sourcework in the Operatic *Sadko*

Moving on from the details of how Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators worked together on the libretto for *Sadko*, I would like now to examine how the group made use of their source materials, and reconciled sometimes conflicting materials to create a coherent plot for the opera. The dramaturgy of the operatic *Sadko* is a combination of two main storylines in variants of the *Sadko bylina*: first, Sadko the poor musician whose talent attracts the attention of the Sea-King and thus becomes fabulously wealthy; and second, Sadko the rich merchant who becomes becalmed at sea after not paying due tribute to the Sea-King and has adventures in the Sea-King's realm, marrying one of his daughters and eventually returning to Novgorod. Each of these storylines takes place in three successive scenes of the opera, with the fourth scene providing some plot connection between the two. While this structuring of the opera allows for equal representation of the human and fantasy worlds, Rimsky-Korsakov originally planned to focus solely on the underwater, fantastic aspects of the second storyline. This plan was immediately rejected by Stasov, who in his letter of July 1894 encouraged the composer to emphasise both the human and fantastic elements: 'там все время налицо седая русская языческая древность и элементы волшебный, сказочный, фантастичный [...]'.⁴⁶ Rimsky-Korsakov appears to have been initially sceptical of including historical elements but eventually recognised the dramaturgical logic of balancing the fantastic realm of the Sea-King with a depiction of ancient Novgorod.

⁴⁶ PSS V, p. 417.

The basic outline for a potential operatic *Sadko* was first prepared by music critic and historian Nikolay Findeizen, who sent it to Rimsky-Korsakov in 1894.⁴⁷ The composer must have passed along this material to Shtrup, who used it to prepare a first scenario as follows:

Картина 1: Берег озера Ильмень. Садко поет песню любовного характера, не замечая появления русалок, вышедших из озера. Среди русалок Морская царевна Василиса. Она жадно вслушивается в пение Садки и восхищается его песней. Садко кончает песню и принимается играть и петь плясовую. Приближаются русалки и начинают водить хоровод. Морская царевна рассказывает Садке, что заслушалась его песен, что ее тянет к людям, что она полюбила его. Садко отвечает ей взаимностью. Однако пора расставаться. На прощание Василиса дарит Садке три рыбы Золотого Перо. Русалки уплывают в озеро.

Картина 2: Пристань на берегу озера Ильмень. Торжище. Садко похвастается, что выловит из озера рыбу Золото-Перо. Он бьется об заклад с купцами. Начинается ловля рыбы, во время которой из глубины озера доносится любящей Морской царевны. Садко вынимает из невода золотых рыб. Став богачом, он приказывает дружине готовить пир. Народ славит Садку.

Картина 3: Середина озера Ильмень. Чудесная остановка корабля Садки. В результате жеребьевки на долю гусяря выпадает быть принесенным в жертву Морскому царю. Садку опускают на воду на шахматной доске. Идет симфоническая картина спуска Садки в Подводное царство.

Картина 4: Палаты Морского царя. Здесь идет пир по случаю того, что Царь выдает свою старшую дочь замуж за Окиян-Море. Спускается Садко. Морской царь враждебно встречает его, но за него вступает Василиса. Садко поет и играет на гусях. Все Царство подводное пляшет. От пляски начинается буря на озере, гибнут корабли. Появляется Никола Морской, велит Садке прекратить игру, объявляет Морскому царю о конце Подводного царства и велит выдать замуж за Садку Василису. Затем святой исчезает.

Картина 5: Утро на дне морском. Идет любовная сцена Морской царевны и Садки. Царевна говорит гусярю, что на смотринах невест она будет наряжена девкой-чернавкой. Фанфары Подводного царства. Садко выбирает из дочерей Морского царя Василису. Идет венчание вокруг ракового куста. Молодые прощаются с Подводным царством и поднимаются на фантастической раковине на поверхность озера под рыдания гибнущего Подводного царства.

Картина 6: Берег Волхова. Спящий Садко на берегу реки. Новгородцы поражены появлением реки. Плывут корабли Садки. Гусярь, проснувшись, рассказывает народу о своих похождениях. Хор поет славу Николе Морскому.⁴⁸

This first scenario combines the two *Sadko* storylines, though it interpolates a romance with the Sea-princess *Vasilisa* from the beginning of the opera rather than keeping it localised to the second storyline. Presumably, this was the scenario Rimsky-Korsakov had in mind when he first began planning the opera, and the scenario he sent to Stasov. Stasov's suggested changes would still make use of this first basic outline, but made some changes to the scenic content as

⁴⁷ Taruskin, Richard. 'Sadko.' *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 1 March, 2019.

⁴⁸ Yankovskii, 'Stasov i Rimskii-Korsakov', pp. 376-77.

well as adding additional scenes; while Stasov outlined these changes in his letter to Rimsky-Korsakov of July 1894, he consulted with Shtrup separately and continued to write to him throughout that summer.⁴⁹

The revised scenario engineered by Stasov made significant changes to the original Shtrup-authored scenario above, expanding the opera from six scenes to seven to include a semi-historical depiction of Sadko's Novgorod and broaden the dramaturgical content. In Stasov's scenario, the first scene depicts a merchants' feast with a recitation of a *bylina* celebrating the hero Volkh Vseslavich. Sadko refuses to sing and instead challenges the merchants, who banish him from the feast and mock him in a song-and-dance. The second scene focuses on the newly-introduced character of Sadko's wife and her attempts to soothe his anger at the merchants, but he refuses to listen to her and instead sets out to make his fortune. After this, Stasov suggests placing the first scene from the original scenario, depicting Sadko's encounter with the Sea-Kingdom and the Sea-Princess's (renamed Volkhova) promise to help Sadko capture the golden fish. The fourth scene brings back the merchants to bet against Sadko, their astonishment when Sadko does indeed capture the golden fish, and their enthusiasm to help him set off to foreign lands to gain an even greater fortune for Novgorod. Stasov's fifth and sixth scenes expand the material from Shtrup's third and fourth scenes: Sadko's ship becalmed on the seas and his adventures in the Sea-Kingdom, then his encounter with the Sea-King and marriage to Volkhova. In the final scene, Stasov proposes Volkhova return Sadko to the human world and transform herself into a river that would flow to Novgorod. Sadko's wife and the merchants find Sadko on the banks of this river, and celebrate his return.⁵⁰ Save for a few textual expansions and a swap of

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 382-83.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 380-81.

Stasov's proposed second and third scenes, this is exactly how the final version of the opera unfolds dramatically. Shtrup presumably copied out this scenario, or part of it, and sent it to Rimsky-Korsakov at some point in late summer 1894.

It seems Rimsky-Korsakov was not involved in the continued consultation between Shtrup and Stasov on the *Sadko* scenario, though he must have recognised Stasov's influence on Shtrup's revised version. Perhaps it was in reaction to this tendency of Stasov's to take charge of artistic projects, as if it were still the 1860s and Rimsky-Korsakov an inexperienced aspiring composer, that Rimsky-Korsakov wrote his last, dismissive letter to Stasov on the subject of the *Sadko* scenario in August 1894. By this point, Rimsky-Korsakov was turning away from the project, and when he resumed work on it in the summer of 1895 he appears to have only consulted Yastrebtsev and Bel'sky, both of whom were more solicitous of Rimsky-Korsakov than Stasov. That Rimsky-Korsakov invited Bel'sky to stay with him in August 1895 after so short an acquaintance speaks to how much the composer had come to respect Bel'sky's expertise in the more technical aspects of folk poetry and literature, and it is possible that many of the small changes to the scenario between Stasov's version and the final libretto were made on Bel'sky's suggestion. Nonetheless, the Stasov-influenced scenario of late summer 1894 had become by summer 1895 the dramaturgical scaffolding upon which the completed opera was constructed. This operatic treatment of the *Sadko bylina* would not only combine the two primary *Sadko* storylines, but broaden the story to include a historicised portrayal of ancient Novgorod heavily influenced by other forms of folk literature, poetry, and song.

In order to create a coherent libretto, Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators would have had extensively to research not only the many variants of the *Sadko bylina* but also *byliny* and folk tales in general. Individual collections of folk tales and *byliny* often presented variants that

were dramatically static and incoherent without a thorough knowledge of other sources. Brian Reeve comments that while these individual collections likely were faithful representations of *bylina* variants, ‘Either the original meaning of the stories had been lost in the minds of the peasant singers, or else it was assumed by the singers that the audience, through life-long exposure to these epics, would know the story in detail, and would automatically supply missing details themselves’.⁵¹ For the preparation of the *Sadko* libretto, Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators would have to ‘supply the missing details’ as much as possible by gaining a knowledge of the sources equal to a Russian peasant who had spent her life listening to these tales. Stasov’s detailed comments on the 1894 Shtrup scenario show his own familiarity with variants of the *Sadko* story in the three collections he suggested to Rimsky-Korsakov, and Bel’sky was known for his deep knowledge of Russian folk literature. Nonetheless, since there was no single ‘original’ version of the *Sadko bylina* extant, Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators must have known that their operatic retelling would not be as dramaturgically precise as a traditional nineteenth-century page-to-stage adaptation.

Of the few elements in the operatic *Sadko* not originally present in the *bylina* variants, the romance with the sea-princess Volkhova is the most critical. From an operatic perspective, it makes sense to include a romance for the hero, and it is dramatically more interesting that the object of the hero’s affections be a mythical creature. Furthermore, there is precedent in both Russian and other European operas to portray a romantic relationship between a human man and

⁵¹ Brian Reeve, *Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov’s Use of the Byliny in his Opera ‘Sadko’*. PhD diss., University of Nottingham (2005), p. 141. Something similar happens with Tchaikovsky’s adaptation of *Evgeny Onegin*, which he titled ‘lyric scenes from the novel’ – an educated audience, very familiar with Pushkin’s work, would have easily filled in the dramaturgical gaps left by Tchaikovsky’s libretto.

a female water spirit or *rusalka*.⁵² One variant of the Sadko *bylina* does speak of Sadko participating in a marriage ceremony on the sea-bed, after which he awakens just outside Novgorod with either a foot or an arm in the river Volkhov. Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators, apparently on Stasov's suggestion from his revised scenario with Shtруп, enhanced the story by making Sadko's unnamed bride become Volkhova, a daughter of the Sea-King whose love for Sadko prompts her to turn herself into a river, thus enabling Novgorod to become an important centre of trade. The basic idea has precedent in other Russian folk tales, which speak of the creation of rivers out of the blood of wounded *bogatyri* warriors – Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators changed the contextual details in *Sadko*, where Volkhova becomes a river out of love rather than a *bogatyri*-like heroism.⁵³ Reeve surmises that considering the Sadko variant linking his marriage on the sea-bed to the Volkhov river, 'the original primeval tale may have concerned the marriage of a human artist or even a Russian Orpheus figure to a water-goddess, leading to the creation of a river on the physical plane'.⁵⁴

Beyond the two main storylines taken from the Sadko *bylina* variants, the operatic *Sadko* also incorporates many additional references to other Russian epic narratives and folk tales. While one such reference is outlined above in the sourcing of the river creation mythology, a thorough detailing of the many other intertextual references in the *Sadko* libretto is too complicated for the purposes of the present study, which focuses more on the creative process

⁵² See Chapter Two.

⁵³ For example, see the tales of Dunai and Don in A. N. Afanas'ev, *Poeticheskie vozzreniya slavian*, 2 vols (Moscow: Tipografiia Gracheva i komp., 1863-1868), II (1868), pp. 220-29. Volkhova's sacrifice mirrors that of an earlier Rimsky-Korsakov operatic heroine – the titular snow-maiden in *Snegurochka* (1882) melts out of love for the human Mizgir.

⁵⁴ Reeve, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 142.

behind the libretto and connecting *Sadko* to earlier Russian folk opera.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, what Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators came up with is a static-scenic plot, more interested in painting a picture of either ancient Novgorod or the fantastic realm of the Sea-King than necessarily furthering any dramatic action; indeed, the choice of describing the scenes as *kartiny* emphasises this painterly quality. To create a work of such comprehensive intertextual detail necessitates a collaborative effort, and points to a kind of levelling of the traditional nineteenth-century operatic hierarchy of music over text. Indeed, the sheer amount of references to early Russian literary and musical sources highlight not only the operatic *Sadko*'s status as a highly accomplished work of art, but equally as a significant ethnographic achievement.

Tracing a Tradition of Bylina Declamation

Having discussed the textual sources for the *Sadko* libretto, I will now examine how the opera's music and particularly its vocal writing is as equally detailed as the libretto in its references to traditional Russian music, including the tradition of *bylina* singing. Although *byliny* were traditionally transmitted via a song-like chanted declamation, it is very difficult to determine how these texts were performed in their original folk contexts. In the preface to the first volume of Rybnikov's collection, he claims he tried to capture the essence of *bylina* melodies in conventional music notation but that this method was ultimately not entirely successful, because while the singers would perform the same epic narrative several times, the melody seemed to change in each recitation. Because of this practice, Rybnikov hypothesised that there existed

⁵⁵ See Reeve, Section 7 for a thorough description. Reeve asserts 'there is hardly one line of the libretto of the opera, or one textual reference [...] that is not drawn from an extraordinarily wide number of sources – not just the epics, but almost every genre of early Russian oral and literary epic, legend, and song'. (Reeve, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 157).

only one fundamental *bylina* melody which the singer would vary depending on the main theme of the epic being sung.⁵⁶ Rybnikov also observed that since many of the best performances were improvised on the spot, not only did the singer vary the basic melody, but also would alter the text to suit the chosen melodic line.⁵⁷ These varying melodic lines could be sorted into groups of rhythmic chants called *napevy*, of which Rybnikov claimed the majority of singers knew at most three which they would sing at different tempi or vocal styles, and add a wide range of ornamentation.⁵⁸ The constantly fluctuating nature of *bylina* performance would make transcription into conventional notation incredibly difficult, and it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that collectors would attempt to manipulate conventional music notation in order more accurately to represent the nature of *bylina* singing.⁵⁹

Of the sources which Rimsky-Korsakov used for writing the music to *Sadko*, only Kirsha Danilov's collection contains musical transcriptions of *byliny* chants, but Rimsky-Korsakov likely also drew inspiration from live performances of *byliny* given in St. Petersburg in the latter third of the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ Yastrebtsev's memoirs claim that Rimsky-Korsakov attended

⁵⁶ P. N. Rybnikov, *Pesni sobrannye P. N. Rybnikovym*, 2nd edition, 4 vols, ed. A. E. Gruzynskii (Moscow: Izdanie firmy 'Sotrudnik Shkol', 1909-10), I (1909), pp. xcii-xciv.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xciii.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ See O. Kh. Agreneva-Slavyanskaya, *Opisanie russkoi krest'yanskoi svad'by s tekstom i pesnyami*, 3 vols (Moscow and Tver': 1887-91), and A. D. Grigor'ev, *Arkhangel'skie byliny i istoricheskie pesni, sobrannye A.D. Grigor'evym v 1900-1901 s napevami, zapisannymi posredstvom fonografa*, 3 vols (Moscow, vols 1 and 3: 1904, 1910 and Prague, vol. 2: 1939).

⁶⁰ Rimsky-Korsakov may have consulted Agreneva-Slavyanskaia's collection cited above, but there is no documentary evidence to prove this.

performances from *bylina* singer Irina Fedosovna in January 1895 – just before he began work on the music for *Sadko* – and transcribed at least five songs as she performed,⁶¹ but it is less clear whether the composer attended performances in 1871 by the famed folk singer Trofim Ryabinin or in 1893 by Trofim’s son Ivan.⁶² This experience of live performance, whether through second-hand reporting or personal attendance, would have given Rimsky-Korsakov a better grasp of how *bylina* singing worked in practice. Alongside the transcriptions in the Danilov collection, these live performances were the likely foundation upon which Rimsky-Korsakov would base his epic-melodic lines in *Sadko*, and which he would cite in his memoirs to underscore that these melodies were rooted in authentic *bylina* practice.⁶³

Nonetheless, there is a significant problem with asserting the authenticity of any melodies based on transcriptions taken in conventional music notation. Many of the sources used to establish ‘drawing-room folk’ style throughout the nineteenth century, such as the highly popular and regularly cited Lvov-Pratsch collection of folksongs from 1806, or even Danilov’s less-cited collection of *byliny*, fundamentally altered the folk melodies they transcribed in order to suit the demands of conventional music notation, given that Russian folk song does not conform to conventional time signatures, scales, or rhythms. Rimsky-Korsakov would claim in his *Letopis’* that the most authentically folk-inflected element in *Sadko* was the 11/4 chorus in the first

⁶¹ Yastrebtsev, *Nikolay Andreevich Rimskii-Korsakov: Vospominaniya*, pp. 252-254.

⁶² Modest Mussorgsky attended the 1871 performance and transcribed several songs, at least one of which he sent to Rimsky-Korsakov because the first two songs in Rimsky-Korsakov’s 1877 collection of folk songs are noted as either ‘*zapisana M. P. Musorgskim*’ or more specifically as ‘*zapisana M. P. Musorgskim s golosa Olonetskogo skazitelya T. G. Ryabinina*’. See Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov, *Sbornik russkikh narodnykh pesen* (St Petersburg: Bessel’, 1877), nos. 1-2.

⁶³ Cf. Rimskii-Korsakov, *Letopis’*, p. 353.

tableau, but since none of the transcribed collections from this period used irregular meters, it may be that the composer was gesturing toward the 7/4 chorus in Serov's *Rogneda*, which was written in a folk-inflected style and which Rimsky-Korsakov admired. While Rimsky-Korsakov as early as his *Sbornik russkikh narodnykh pesen* (1877) tried to represent a lack of consistent meter or conventional key signature in 'Kak vo gorod stol'no kievskom' (his re-working of one of Musorgsky's transcriptions of a Ryabinin performance), he does not maintain this style of writing in the rest of the collection and would not attempt to do so again until *Sadko*.⁶⁴ This may be because in the late 1870s, Rimsky-Korsakov was less confident in his abilities as a composer and wished to prove his capability in a more conventional idiom, but as seen with his treatment of former mentor Stasov, the Rimsky-Korsakov of the 1890s was highly accomplished as a composer and much more assertive in pushing the boundaries of conventional musical practice.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, while Rimsky-Korsakov gestures towards the constant rhythmical fluctuations of *bylina* practice in *Sadko*, his music gives these practices a more conventional 'art music' gloss.

In a similar sense, the libretto for *Sadko* employs common textual techniques found in traditional folk poetic declamation, but does not employ these techniques as regularly as they can be found in *bylina* and folk poetry anthologies. Rimsky-Korsakov notes in Item 8 of the preface

⁶⁴ Rimsky-Korsakov gives this piece no key signature or bar lines, and provides an entirely non-contrapuntal accompaniment in block chords, perhaps reminiscent of a string instrument. The rest of the collection is much more conventionally written in the so-called 'drawing-room folk' idiom, common to Russian folk-inflected art music of the nineteenth century. See Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov, *Sbornik russkikh narodnykh pesen*, no. 1.

⁶⁵ These conventions would be pushed even further by Rimsky-Korsakov's pupil Igor' Stravinsky, whose 1923 work *Les Noces* fluctuates wildly in rhythm from bar to bar (3/8, 2/8, 5/8, 6/8 among others) in a much more accurate representation of actual folk music practice. See Margarita Mazo, 'Stravinsky's "Les Noces" and Russian Village Wedding Ritual', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 43/1 (1990), 99-142.

to the *Sadko* score that he makes use of unstressed filler particles such as *ax*, *ой*, and *ай* as well as added words such as *нунь*, *тут*, *ведь*, and *да* and repeated clauses using *тот*, *та*, *то*, and *те* in order to maintain a sense of rhythm in lines of varying stress and length. For example, a choral interpolation during the song of the Indian Guest in tableau 4 repeats phrases beginning with the particle *ой*: ‘Ой, и чудна ж земля Индийская!/Ой, да не езд, гость, на ту сторону,/Ой, берегися птицы Финикса,/Ой, понапрасну не теряй головы.’ However, Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators do not use this technique as regularly throughout the libretto as can be found in the *bylina* collections they referenced. In Danilov’s transcription of the first *Sadko bylina*, paired lines beginning with the nonsensical phrase ‘*a u*’ are used for emphasis regularly throughout the entire text.⁶⁶ Another technique common in *bylina* practice is to stretch out the syllables in a name depending on rhythmical context, which also moves the stress in the name from one syllable to another. This technique can be heard in LP recordings of *bylina* singers taken as late as 1955, where in one example a singer pronounces the name ‘Alyosha’ as ‘Al-ee-ósh-ee-ya’, thus moving the stress to the third syllable rather than the second.⁶⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov may have been aware of this practice from his experience of live *bylina* performance, but used it only twice in the libretto to refer to *Sadko* as ‘Sad-Sadko’.⁶⁸ This minimal stretching out of *Sadko*’s name can also be found in Danilov’s transcription of the

⁶⁶ See Kirsha Danilov, *Drevnie rossiiskie stikhotvoreniya*, no. 26, pp. 266-75.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Byliny* (various singers), 1955. British Library, London, NSA. 2 LPs: D-024791 and D-02577-8.

⁶⁸ Cf. tableau 1, chorus of merchants: ‘Гой ты, Сад-Садко, добрый молодец!/ Полюбилась нам речь удалая’ and in tableau 7, *Sadko* himself: ‘Я-то, Сад-Садко только петь горазд, /Нет, повыше меня славный Новгород!’

second Sadko *bylina*, where Sadko describes himself: ‘Я Сад-Садко, знаю, бегаю,/Бегаю по морю двенадцать лет’.⁶⁹

The most commonly used poetic device both in Russian folk literature and the *Sadko* libretto is the use of the stock epithet, a noun paired with one or two adjectives almost always used in conjunction. While a few examples of these exist in English-language folk poetry – e.g. the use of ‘milk-white’ in conjunction with ‘steed’ – there are many dozens of stock epithets in Russian, and they are used regularly throughout all genres of folk literature. Rimsky-Korsakov clearly took note of this usage, and actually made a list of common stock epithets discovered in the course of researching *Sadko*, perhaps in consultation with Bel’sky.⁷⁰ All of the epithets from this list are found throughout the libretto of *Sadko*, though the most frequent and prominent is the conjunction *синее море* (deep-blue sea) or *океан-море синее* (deep-blue ocean-sea), which first appears as the title to the opera’s instrumental prelude. Other examples include *добрый конь* (goodly steed), *красное солнышко* (beauteous and bright sun), *звончатые гусли* (sonorous gusli), and *яровчатые гусли* (gusli of sycamore wood), all of which appear at least once in the libretto among other, less common conjunctions.

Another incredibly common linguistic device in folk poetry is the use of repeated prepositional phrases using the prepositions *до*, *в/во*, and *на(д)*, as seen in this example from an 1873 anthology of *byliny* collected by Aleksandr Gil’ferding: ‘Как **во** той ли Карелии **во**

⁶⁹ Danilov, *Drevnie rossiiskie stikhotvoreniya*, no. 44, ll. 46-47, p. 339.

⁷⁰ Gozenpud, ‘Rimskii-Korsakov v rabote’, p. 238.

упрямой/Как **во** том ли **во** городе Волынце,/Жил-был молодой боярский сын'.⁷¹ While Rimsky-Korsakov does not cite Gil'ferding's collection by name in the preface to the *Sadko* score, it is likely he at least had heard about it from Bel'sky, who would certainly be familiar with its contents. A similar construction can be found in the opening lines of Danilov's transcription of 'Terentiy the Merchant', another *bylina* Rimsky-Korsakov cites as inspiration for the *Sadko* libretto: '**В** стольном Новгороде,/Было **в** улице **во** Юрьевской,/В слободе было Терентьевской,/А и жил богатой гость'.⁷² This device is not frequently used in the *Sadko* libretto, and where it is deployed it is not done to the extravagance of the two examples cited above.

Although Rimsky-Korsakov may not have extensively used traditional *bylina* techniques in the libretto or vocal music for *Sadko*, the fact remains that he was the first Russian composer to thoroughly research and familiarise himself with authentic *bylina* practice, and he peppered *Sadko* with references to these traditions. This sets *Sadko* apart in a long line of nineteenth-century Russian folk-inflected music, both operatic and chamber vocal, in that Rimsky-Korsakov's focus on Russian epic singing was a sharp departure from the more generally inflected 'drawing-room folk' that had been the norm for cosmopolitan composers. In examining two key episodes from *Sadko*, it will become clear the extent to which Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators had not only a strong grasp of Russian epic tradition both in literary and performance settings, but also were highly aware of this earlier tradition. While contemporary

⁷¹ A. F. Gil'ferding. *Onezhskie byliny zapisannye Aleksandrom Fedorovichem Gil'ferdigom letom 1871 goda*, ed. P. Gil'tebrandt. 2nd edn., 3 vols. ed. K. N. Bestuzhev-Ryumin (St Petersburg: 1894, 1896, 1900), II (1896), no. 115 ll. 1-4, p. 284. Originally published St. Petersburg, 1873.

⁷² Danilov, *Drevnie rossiiskie stikhotvoreniya*, no. 2, ll. 1-4, p. 13.

audiences may not have been able to understand the many references in *Sadko* to both earlier Russian folk-inflected opera and traditional *bylina* performance, the scale of these small details also makes clear that Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators kept an eye on future reception of the work, carefully positioning it not only as a departure from nineteenth-century folk-inflected musical tradition, but perhaps also as a culmination of that very tradition.

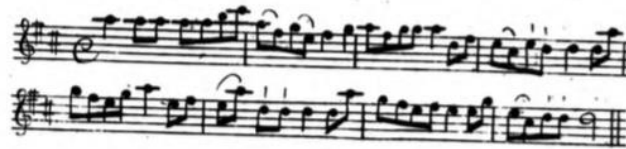
Transferring Bylina Tradition to the Operatic Stage

From *Sadko*'s first tableau, Rimsky-Korsakov aims to anchor the dramaturgy within a long historical tradition of Russian epic performance. Within the first ten minutes of the opera, the merchants of Novgorod listen to a performance of another *bylina* entirely unrelated to either of the traditional 'Sadko' storylines – the tale of Volkh Vseslavich. This text tells the tale of one of the *starshie bogatyri* from the oldest Russian epics, which unlike the 'Sadko' tales are not rooted in any particular time or place. Not only does the performance of the Volkh Vseslavich *bylina* thus give the action of *Sadko* a sense of a long prior history, but it also gives Rimsky-Korsakov the opportunity to orchestrate a kind of *bylina*-within-a-*bylina* performance. It is interesting to note that the character who performs the Volkh Vseslavich *bylina*, the singer Nezhata, is given to a mezzo-soprano *en travesti*: a very similar mezzo-soprano character, Lel', appears in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snegurochka* (1891) as a representative of folk art. The question of Nezhata's gender identity is further blurred thanks to his name. The use of an 'a/ia' ending is usually reserved in Russian for feminine names, but it is also commonly found in male epic heroes from early Rus' (e.g., the male bogatyr' Dobrynia); furthermore, as seen with Ryabinin *père et fils* and Irina Fedosova, *bylina* singers could be either male or female.⁷³ Thus within a single character,

⁷³ Reeve, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 175.

Rimsky-Korsakov gestures to both his own previous operatic output and the history of Russian folk music performance, before that character even opens his mouth to sing.

Rimsky-Korsakov adapts the vocal line and text for Nezhata's recounting of the Volk Vseslavich tale from the Danilov transcription of the same story, but adapts both text and music to suit more traditionally operatic surroundings. Rhythmically, Rimsky-Korsakov preserves the pattern given in the Danilov transcription below, but modifies the key and register:



Additionally, Rimsky-Korsakov modifies the time signature to fluctuate regularly between 6/4 and 3/2, recalling earlier assertions regarding rhythmic declamation in authentic *bylina* performance. Rimsky-Korsakov emphasises the traditional elements of *bylina* performance by accompanying Nezhata's declamation with harp and piano chords, the traditional representation of the stringed *gusli* in Russian opera.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, an authentic representation of *bylina* performance – long declamation varied only by vocal and rhythmical ornamentation – would not translate to an operatic stage, so Rimsky-Korsakov applies a traditional Western compositional technique: theme and variations.⁷⁵

The libretto splits episodes from the Volkh Vseslavich tale into four distinct verses, which Rimsky-Korsakov then orchestrates using different musical idioms while preserving the

⁷⁴ Other operas that represent *gusli* performance in this way include Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842), Borodin's *Knyaz' Igor'* (1890), and again, Rimsky-Korsakov's own *Snegurochka* (1891).

⁷⁵ Glinka's *Kamarinskaya* (1848), widely hailed as the first orchestral work based on Russian folk song, also employs the theme and variations technique.

basic vocal declamation and ornamentation of traditional performance practice. The first verse provides the most standard representation of *bylina* performance: Nezhata recounts the tale of Volkh's birth out of the marriage between a Russian princess and a serpent and the various natural disasters that accompanied the event, rhythmically imitating the Danilov chant above to a sparse harp and piano accompaniment. The second verse adds in the woodwinds and the strings to embellish Nezhata's description of all the other creatures fleeing in fear at Volkh's birth, and Rimsky-Korsakov adds some chromatic embellishment to the basic E-major tonic. Interestingly, within this verse the listening merchants are given a pianissimo interpolation in which they describe their awe at the bard's skill using a direct quotation from the epic poem 'The Song of Igor's Campaign'.⁷⁶ This not only references another unrelated epic text, but also gestures to Aleksandr Borodin's 1890 operatic setting of it, which Rimsky-Korsakov helped to complete after the composer's death: again performing the double duty of anchoring *Sadko* in a larger history of Russian literary epics and in a broader tradition of Russian folk opera. The third verse picks up on growing chromatic progressions to illustrate the hero's supernaturally fast growth and increasing power, suddenly moving to a new key and increasing a gradual musical crescendo along with a quicker tempo. In the final verse, Nezhata tells of how Volkh conquered the 'Tsardom of India', using a stock epithet to describe Volkh's *druzhina khorobraya* ('valiant retinue'). Musically, this verse increases chromaticism even further to illustrate the battle, with the vocal line stretching out and ornamenting more than the previous verse. This practice of a standard theme in the first verse and increasing variation in the following is common in Russian choral singing, but not in epic declamation, as we have seen.⁷⁷ By applying this technique to an

⁷⁶ 'Мыслью по лесу растекается/Серым волком он по земле бежит/А под облаки орлом летит'.

⁷⁷ Reeve, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 178.

operatic representation of *bylina* performance, Rimsky-Korsakov is to some extent maintaining a link with traditional folk performance, but more importantly working within conventional art music: such techniques are common in folk-inflected art song from throughout the nineteenth century.⁷⁸

The entire first tableau also seems to reference an opera traditionally cited as the first Russian folk opera: Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842), itself adapted from Pushkin's work of the same name which imitates Russian folk poetry in a more sophisticated literary idiom. Both *Ruslans* open with the depiction of a feast, in this case at Prince Vladimir's palace rather than the Novgorodian merchants' hall, and introduce a bard character named Boian who is imported directly from the 'Song of Igor's Campaign' in an explicit link to ancient epic. The lines the Novgorodian merchants quote from 'Igor' seem to link Nezhata with this bard Boian, strengthening the connection between Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* and other Russian epics. However, at the same time the scene as a whole also refers back to *Ruslan*, connecting Rimsky-Korsakov's opera from the very beginning both to literary precedents for imitation of oral folk epics *à la* Pushkin, and to musical precedents for operas based on epic or literary-epic sources. Rimsky-Korsakov's ability to reference three different literary ancestors in both authentic and 'drawing-room' folk tradition – Volkh Vseslavich, 'The Song of Igor's Campaign', and Pushkin's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* – alongside two operatic ancestors – Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* and Borodin's *Knyaz' Igor'* – speaks to the composer's deep understanding of both musical and literary traditions within which he developed as a composer and which he specifically sought out in the conception of *Sadko*.

⁷⁸ One example is Tchaikovsky's op. 47 no. 7. The main theme is taken from a Ukrainian folksong and developed through the accompaniment to each strophe of the text.

Throughout *Sadko*, Rimsky-Korsakov presents characters that serve both as references to the semi-historical, semi-fantastic world of the *byliny* and as representatives of the composer's engagement with earlier Russian folk opera. Perhaps the most obvious example of this dual engagement with ethnography and musical history is found at the end of tableau 4, in the presentation and declamation of the three foreign merchants. Such foreign visitors are commonly mentioned in Russian epic literature, and were referred to as *gosti*; a word which primarily indicated 'merchant' but could also mean 'guest'.⁷⁹ To have such persons present in the operatic *Sadko* is therefore not anachronistic, but Rimsky-Korsakov references the historical anachronisms that he notes 'the *byliny* abound in' by placing three anachronistic nationalities side-by-side in the scene: a Varangian (Nordic or Viking), a Venetian, and an Indian.⁸⁰ The composer relied upon Bel'sky's expertise in particular in the creation of these characters and the writing of texts for their songs: there are several drafts of the foreign traders' songs in Bel'sky's hand which make use of several new folk sources, though these drafts were revised before inclusion in the final opera.⁸¹ Nonetheless, the texts for the three merchant songs are derived from a non-*bylina* folk poetry source: a religious text called the *Golubinaya kniga* believed to be of Novgorodian origin and which also provided text for the wandering pilgrims' music in tableau 1.⁸² While it seems odd that Rimsky-Korsakov and his collaborators would use a Russian source

⁷⁹ Reeve, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 236. *Sadko* himself is referred to as *gost'* in the *byliny*.

⁸⁰ Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov, 'Preface – Item 7', *Opera-bylina Sadko* (piano-vocal score) (Leipzig: M. P. Belaieff, 1897).

⁸¹ Cf. A. A. Gozenpud, *N. A. Rimskii-Korsakov: temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe izdatelstvo, 1957), p. 93.

⁸² *Ibid.* Several variants of this text can be found in P. A. Bessonov, ed. *Kaleki Perekhozhie*, 3 vols (Moscow: 1861-63), I (1861), nos. 76-92, pp. 269-378.

to provide text for foreign characters, it seems that by doing so ‘the composer appears, firstly, to emphasise the all-encompassing semi-pagan universe of his opera, and secondly, to show that they are not authentic Vikings, Indians and so on but are representatives of these nations as seen through Russian peasant eyes’.⁸³ Indeed, the music Rimsky-Korsakov provides for the foreign merchants’ songs emphasises this point: it not only makes use of common orientalist practices in Russian music, but for two of the merchants’ songs deliberately cites earlier Russian folk operas – specifically Aleksandr Serov’s two finished operas. Much as the merchants do not perform traditional texts from their homelands, they also ‘do not perform the music of their homelands as they remember it, but the music of their homelands as the Novgorodians imagine it’.⁸⁴

The first foreign merchant to perform is a Viking, or Varangian as noted in the score: these Nordic travellers were present in ancient Rus’ as the early rulers of Novgorod, and later played a key role in the defence of the city of Byzantium, to which they travelled via Russian waterways. The Varangian opens his performance by declaring his faith in the Norse god Odin, not only reinforcing the pagan world of the opera but perhaps also referencing Wagner’s Ring cycle, which similarly depicts Germanic semi-historical legend though on a far grander scale than *Sadko* does with its Russian equivalent.⁸⁵ Much of the imagery in the Varangian’s song is taken directly from the *Golubinaya kniga* – specifically, the Varangian lists the strengths and attributes of his people and relates these characteristics to the natural landscape of his homeland,

⁸³ Reeve, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 240.

⁸⁴ Simon Morrison, ‘The semiotics of symmetry, or Rimsky-Korsakov’s operatic history lesson’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13/3 (2001), 261-93 (p. 285).

⁸⁵ Stasov would specifically compare the two, much to Rimsky-Korsakov’s annoyance. See Yastrebtsev, *Nikolay Andreevich - Vospominania*, p. 452.

and makes use of Russian stock epithets like *mechi bulatnye* ('of damask-steel') to describe their weapons and characters. Rimsky-Korsakov sets this text in three verses on a steady D minor tonic, using pentachordal progressions in the orchestra and rising and falling quaver patterns in the vocal line to illustrate crashing waves and the movement of ocean tides. The entire song is a near-identical setting to the title character's ballad in Act IV of Serov's *Rogneda*, which also features in the text similar imagery of storms, midnight, and the sea.⁸⁶

The second merchant to perform is an Indian, though up until the fifteenth century, the word 'Indian' in Russian seems to have indicated any kind of exotic eastern land.⁸⁷ This song is the most layered of the three merchant songs in terms of references, using imagery taken not only from the *Golubinaya kniga*, but also from two other Russian folk literary sources: 'The Tale of the Indian Tsardom', purportedly a description of the kingdom of India by the king himself, and 'The Physiologist', a kind of literary bestiary.⁸⁸ All of these texts describe the central image of the Indian merchant's song – a precious stone set in the midst of the sea. The merchant also describes how a phoenix perches upon this jewel, and covers the sea with its wings: the imagery of the phoenix is found throughout the *Golubinaya kniga*, and 'The Physiologist' describes its attributes. Musically, the vocal and orchestral lines for the Indian merchant's song are taken almost wholesale from another 'Song of India', found in Act IV of Serov's first opera *Yudif* (1863), with some small adjustments to key and rhythm.⁸⁹ Both the Viking and the Indian

⁸⁶ See Morrison, 'The semiotics of symmetry', p. 275 for a full musical comparison of the Varangian's song and Rogneda's ballad.

⁸⁷ Cf. Danilov's transcription of the Volkh Vseslavich *bylina*, where the Tsar of India is given a Tatar name.

⁸⁸ See Reeve, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 244 for further information on these works.

⁸⁹ See Morrison, 'The semiotics of symmetry', p. 278 for a full description.

merchants' songs therefore not only refer to the Russian literary past, but also to Russian operatic past. The obvious citations of Serov, a composer despised by the *kuchka* and by the late nineteenth century entirely marginalised in the repertory, allow 'one composer's orientalism [to] become another's [...] we actually *hear* his "foreign" music through "Russian" ears'.⁹⁰ Furthermore, by so blatantly including Serov's music in his opera, Rimsky-Korsakov also reveals his growing independence from *kuchkist* ideas, which scholars generally acknowledge to have been revealed only in Rimsky-Korsakov's later fantastic operas.⁹¹ Rimsky-Korsakov's acknowledgement of Serov in *Sadko* illustrates that as early as the 1890s, the composer was already beginning to forge his own path away from the dominant *kuchkist* idiom.

The third merchant to perform is Venetian, and the most historically anachronistic of the three; at the same time, the music for his song also nods to Russian rather than Western musical traditions. The idea of a Venetian merchant may come from the *bylina* of Solovei Budimirovich, which deals with the same themes as the *Sadko* tales and which Rimsky-Korsakov uses for the text of the chorus at the conclusion of this tableau: Solovei Budimirovich is described in this text as coming from *Vedenets*, the same word used to describe this merchant and which is generally understood to mean 'Venice'.⁹² The Venetian merchant's song can be divided into two halves, of which the first is the most thematically interesting. In this first section, the Venetian merchant describes his city and its traditions using imagery found in the *Golubinaia kniga* and in a way that foreshadows later events in *Sadko*. The merchant describes how every summer, a cathedral

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 280.

⁹¹ See particularly the three articles on Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* (1909) found in Frolova-Walker, ed. *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World*.

⁹² Reeve, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 239.

risers from the Venetian sea – the same concept and very similar text as found the *Golubinaia kniga*.⁹³ The merchant goes on to describe how the Doge of Venice participates in a ceremonial marriage to the sea; not only is this an authentic Venetian Renaissance-era practice, but it also foreshadows Sadko's ceremonial marriage to the sea-princess Volkhova in tableau 6. This first section is set as an arioso centered on the pitch g', which is the same pitch around which the chant for Rybnikov's transcription of the first Sadko *bylina* is based. Interestingly, in an early review of *Sadko*, *kuchkist* composer and critic César Cui singles out this song as a peculiar moment where the ostensibly Western Venetian merchant sounds, to Cui, suspiciously Russian, though Cui does not point out what specifically gives him this impression.⁹⁴ The second half of the Venetian merchant's song is much more conventionally Western, set as a sort of barcarolle with a text not derived from Russian folk sources. The barcarolle leads into a final chorus sending Sadko on his sea journey, bringing back many diverse references to Russian folk poetry and which concludes Rimsky-Korsakov's depiction of the first Sadko storyline.

While the 'historical' sections of the operatic *Sadko* weave together a tapestry of references to other Russian epics and folk literary styles, and to earlier Russian operas based on folk themes, the 'fantastic' sections of the opera are less self-consciously referential. In fact, the first half of the opera – recounting the first 'Sadko' storyline – is much more vividly detailed in such referencing; the second half of the opera, which includes far more fantastic/supernatural elements, is much more 'Western' in that it relies much more on scales and harmonies indicative in the Western tradition of the supernatural or the exotic, despite its depiction of authentic

⁹³ Bessonov, *Kalekie Perekhozhie*, I (1861), no. 92, p. 362.

⁹⁴ Tsezar' Kyui, 'Sadko – opera-bylina Rimskogo-Korsakova', in *Izbrannye stat'i*, ed. Yurii Kremlev (Leningrad, 1952), pp. 472-9 (p. 477).

Russian folk tradition. The seemingly disparate halves – a ‘historical’ depiction of the ‘Sadko’ tale filled with intertextual and intermusical references to Russian folk tradition versus a ‘fantastic’ depiction of the ‘Sadko’ tale based on more conventionally Western musical writing – contribute to the sense that the operatic *Sadko* presents a series of tableaux that form an impression of the whole tale rather than a more linear type of operatic storytelling.

Perhaps because the ‘supernatural’ sections of *Sadko* are by their very content strongly linked with Russian folk tradition, Rimsky-Korsakov’s musical writing seems less concerned with referencing Russian folk tradition. The first appearance of the Sea-Princess Volkhova in the second tableau is written almost entirely in conventional key signatures and metres coloured strongly with the octatonic scale, a technique Rimsky-Korsakov commonly uses to symbolise the fantastic.⁹⁵ In the entire tableau, there is only one musical interlude connected with Russian folk tradition: the *khorovod*, or circle dance, the sea maidens perform to Sadko’s *gusli* playing is written in traditional 2/4 meter and marked by use of a nonsense refrain common in Russian folk song. Textually, there may be an indirect reference to the opening of Glinka’s *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842) in the sea-maiden’s last line as they disappear into the mist (‘На заре в лукоморья зеленые/В тихие заводи’), but it is not as strong as other references to Glinka’s operatic oeuvre in the ‘historical’ sections of *Sadko*. This second tableau marks the only instance in the first half of the opera where supernatural creatures appear; otherwise as detailed above, the scenes in the first half are more ‘historical’ and intertextual in their construction.

The second half of the opera, which tells the second ‘Sadko’ storyline, is much more strongly marked by ‘supernatural’ elements, but also includes fewer musical and textual

⁹⁵ The orchestral writing in *Scheherezade* (1888) is one commonly-cited piece in which Rimsky-Korsakov uses the octatonic scale, though there are many others.

borrowings from folk tradition and is written in Rimsky-Korsakov's more Western-influenced 'exotic' style. As seen in the description of Volkhova's first appearance in the second tableau, Rimsky-Korsakov again relies on the octatonic scale in particular as a tag for fantastic/supernatural elements in this second half of *Sadko*. Where there are references to other operas in these 'fantastic' scenes, it seems Rimsky-Korsakov indicates his own previous work rather than that of other composers as he does in the 'historical' scenes. The strongest example of this is Volkhova's lullaby to Sadko at the opening of the seventh tableau and her transformation into a river. The lullaby is textually structured as a dialogue between the abstract characters of Sleep and Dream, with a repeated nonsense chorus again common in Russian folk lullabies. In the instrumental interlude that follows, Volkhova's figure dissolves and transforms into a river in a direct reference to Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snegurochka* (1873), where the titular character similarly melts and dissolves as a sacrifice to her love for a mortal man. Perhaps in acknowledgment of how this scene refashions musical techniques Rimsky-Korsakov developed in previous works, the composer would acknowledge in his memoirs that the pages consisting of Volkhova's lullaby and sacrifice represent some of the best music he ever wrote on 'fantastic' themes. Again, the 'fantastic' scenes in *Sadko* all seem to follow this pattern of referencing Rimsky-Korsakov's own oeuvre to this date: when combined with his references to earlier composers' work in the 'historical' scenes, the composer in a sense positions this work as both the culmination of a nineteenth-century tradition of folk-inflected opera, but also as a culmination of his own previous work in this tradition.

Conclusion: Russian Opera at the Turn of the Century

At one level, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* marks the culmination of many musical practices promulgated by the *kuchka* with its focus on folk music, exoticism and elements of Orientalism, yet Rimsky-Korsakov's detailed focus on anthropological sources and references to earlier Russian operatic tradition show the beginnings of a distance from unconscious toeing of the party line. These first steps towards independence from the dominant *kuchkist* idiom would find full expression in Rimsky-Korsakov's later fantastic operas, which receive the majority of the critical coverage out of the composer's fifteen operas. While superficially *Sadko* may seem to be solidly within the *kuchkist* camp, a deeper examination of its compositional history and its score reveal an opera both aware of its position within a tradition of canonised nineteenth-century folk-inflected opera, and also engaging with a second tradition of folk-inflected opera that had become marginalised in critical discourse both in the nineteenth century and today. Where composers like Glinka and Tchaikovsky followed along with a tradition of 'urban' folksong filtered through a Franco-Italian musical tradition established long before the Russian musical nationalist movement, Rimsky-Korsakov in *Sadko* turns towards actual ethnographic materials that – with varying degrees of accuracy – all attempted to record authentic folk practice.

Again, while this engagement with folk sources outside the dominant 'drawing-room folk' idiom is common to *kuchkist* practice, *Sadko* goes further in its attempt to create an operatic adaptation of a non-traditional, heterogeneous literary source: researching and reconciling sometimes-conflicting oral sources to provide a new reading of a Russian epic. In adapting these materials, less familiar to urban audiences than the folk-inflected works of Pushkin, Ostrovsky, and other nineteenth-century writers, Rimsky-Korsakov relied upon a group of collaborators, calling to mind an earlier period in operatic history where composers and librettists worked on a

relatively equal level as opposed to the now-entrenched tradition of composer as sole creative force. Indeed, the challenge of adapting *Sadko* requires several areas of expertise: ethnographic knowledge of original folk materials, source-work to combine variants of this material into a coherent plot, and musicological knowledge of how to express a traditional folk music style on the operatic stage. *Sadko*'s masterful expression of a deep understanding of all these areas of expertise mark it not only as the culmination of the nineteenth-century interest in literature and music for 'authentic' expression of Russian folk practice, but also as the touchstone for a more complicated understanding of operatic adaptation beyond the dominant page-to-stage tradition.

If *Sadko* marks the apotheosis of nineteenth-century interest in authentic Russian folkloric sources, Rimsky-Korsakov also acknowledges the importance of commercially popular folk-inflected operas like *Askold'ova mogila* and *Rogneda* which functioned within established European generic boundaries. Though both composers had fallen out of critical favour by the 1890s, Rimsky-Korsakov's deliberate references to Serov's operatic output, particularly in tableau 4, allow him to subtly call attention to Serov's aesthetic achievements without prompting the ire of the *kuchka*. By quietly weaving these layers of intertextual and inter-musical references, Rimsky-Korsakov shows his awareness of the pioneering developments in Russian folk opera made by the 'popular/professional' composers at whom his contemporaries sneered, and aligns himself with a marginalised lineage of Russian operatic development. Taken as a whole, *Sadko* expresses most of all the possibility for Russian opera to be undeniably 'Russian' in subject, style, and musical idiom, but to do so without rejecting its broader European heritage.

Conclusion: Нет ничего нового под солнцем

I set out to explore three primary questions: what the status of the libretto says about the shifting relationship between word and music in nineteenth century Russia, how the libretto mediates between the operatic world and wider culture, and what collaboration and control over the libretto can argue about the authorship of an operatic work. I have demonstrated that the processes surrounding libretto-creation were far more multivalent and nuanced than the traditional page-to-stage adaptation narrative would presuppose. In Chapter 1, I argued that the rise of Romantic nationalism and the critical campaign hailing Glinka's *Zhizn' za tsarya* disrupted a long and productive history of collaborative, writer-focused operatic creation. Despite the argument that *Zhizn' za tsarya* marked the 'birth pangs of Russian opera',¹ it was not necessarily Russian opera as a new genre that was born in 1836, but a new definition of 'Russianness' as applied to opera and the creative arts. This meant that the preceding century of work, which applied an understanding of Russianness more defined by language and setting rather than the amorphous 'Russian soul', had to be swept under the historical carpet. The consequences for collaborative partnerships like Cavos and Shakhovskoy's would be severe, and their *Ivan Susanin*, which had been one of several pre-Glinkian works hailed as 'the first Russian opera' would fall out of the performance repertory and critical discourse. Furthermore, the critical focus on Glinka as controlling force both in musical and literary composition would launch a new understanding of operatic authorship, in which *literati* such as Shakhovskoy could no longer claim ownership over an operatic work.

¹ As implied in the title of Richard Taruskin's 'Glinka's Ambitious Legacy and the Birth Pangs of Russian Opera', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 1/2 (1977), 142-62.

Where does the libretto enter these debates about the nature of Russianness in art and the role of the librettist as operatic author? Since *Ivan Susanin* was written at the height of the Napoleonic War, its use of a semi-historical legend from before the European reforms of Peter I in which an honest peasant saves the heir to the throne guaranteed its significance as a ‘Russian’ work. Although the structure and format of the opera both textually and musically descended from Western European models such as the *opéra-comique*, the choice of a patriotic theme and a gloss of folk musical practices were sufficient markers of Russianness for the period. Thus, rather than functioning as a divergence from operatic norms at the turn of the nineteenth century, *Ivan Susanin* represents the culmination of *russitsizm*, a nationalism motivated by the desire to elevate Russian art to the technical level of its Western counterparts rather than to depict accurately a uniquely Russian operatic sensibility. The enshrining of Official Nationalism into political practice alongside the critical success of *Zhizn’ za tsarya* would seem to deal *russitsizm* a double blow; entrenched Romantic nationalism would win out against a more pan-European Enlightenment view of national identity in art.

Yet this transition was not as smooth as conventional histories of Russian opera might seem to imply. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, Glinka’s revolutionary step forward for Russian operatic nationalism could have been a mere one-off in the history of the genre. Aristocratic tastes, a trend for Italian and French operas of the *bel canto* and grand opera schools, and Nicholas I’s 1849 *ukaz* forbidding the performance of Russian operas at theatres designated to other repertoires very nearly destroyed the development of Russian opera as a distinct genre following Glinka’s two works. Few new Russian operas were written in this period, and those that were received performances only due to the efforts of Russian singers: not for the first time, Russian works were relegated to a lower status than their Western counterparts. The formation of

a new Italian opera troupe in St Petersburg in 1843 seemed to hail the comeback of an eighteenth-century model of performance practice in which continental performers were given priority and access to the best resources the state-sponsored theatrical apparatus could offer. This trend, however, does not represent a backwards glance, but rather complicates the understanding of how Russian musical nationalism developed and came to be practiced at its heights in the 1860s and 1870s.

Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky dove into the fray with *Rusalka*, but a work that would be hailed as ‘the first Russian opera after Glinka’ did not discard European models wholeheartedly. Though Dargomyzhsky’s adaptation of a text by Aleksandr Pushkin would seem to imply a certain kind of striving for Russianness in opera via the now well-developed Russian literary tradition, both Dargomyzhsky and Pushkin engaged deeply with Western works underneath a surface of ‘authentic’ Russian art. Dargomyzhsky’s libretto, I argue, reveals rather than conceals these Western antecedents in its very highlighting of its strong relationship to Pushkin’s original text: a text that was adapted from an originally Austrian *Singspiel* that was given a Russian sheen once again by the practices of *russitsizm*. Thus while hailing himself as ‘preserving many of [Pushkin’s] verses’ in the published libretto, Dargomyzhsky would ironically participate in a continuing process of Russifying originally foreign imports. In the same way, Dargomyzhsky’s music would adapt Western models and particularly practices drawn from the Italian *bel canto* school, ostensibly much despised by the composer. Though Dargomyzhsky would style himself and be hailed as another father of Russian opera, his legacy is far more closely intertwined with the fate of Western European opera than he would or could ever admit.

Further complicating the simple family tree of Glinka as first-generation father of Russian opera and Dargomyzhsky as its second generation is the fact that *Rusalka* and its

composer did not find success until an 1865 revival production at the newly-built Mariinsky Theatre. Yet these years in commercial obscurity served to heighten the eventual prestige Dargomyzhsky found: particularly thanks to critical support from writer and fellow composer Aleksandr Serov, Dargomyzhsky could strike a pose as the previously misunderstood national hero, toiling away in compositional obscurity and devoted to the promulgation of Russian literature in operatic adaptation. This also allowed Dargomyzhsky to position himself as a father figure to a group of amateur composers, who would coalesce into what became known as the *moguchaya kuchka*. Once again, however, this practice of patronage belonged to an earlier and more openly Europeanised period in Russian operatic history. Indeed, the very status of the *kuchka* composers as amateurs with no professional training besides private lessons from well-connected mentors recalls the debates about professionalisation during Cavos and Shakhovskoy's period, where no Russian gentleman would stoop to openly seek commercial success as an artist. The concept of the libretto as a faithful adaptation of the work of a pre-canonised literary figure was Dargomyzhsky's true innovation for Russian national opera, and what would become a central tenet of the well-studied *Boris Godunov* – *Evgeny Onegin* – *Pikovaya dama* paradigm. Whether these canonical literary sources were themselves indebted to non-Russian models would be a question left unexplored.

Passing over the well-documented high *kuchkist* period in the middle of the century, I traced the continuing question of operatic authorship post-*kuchka*, bringing together the subsidiary themes of writer and singer contributions from Chapters 1 and 2. In examining Tchaikovsky's *Charodeika*, I left behind the problems of institutional access faced by Dargomyzhsky and *Rusalka* precisely because a powerful singer within the institution supported and participated in *Charodeika*'s development. I argued that the huge rise in the status of the

singer versus composer and librettist – as evidenced by the enormous sums top Russian singers claimed when compared to even Tchaikovsky’s generous private endowment – complicates the accepted understanding of composer-as-author in this period. The deference and consideration shown by Tchaikovsky to Emiliya Pavlovskaya, his singer-collaborator, particularly when contrasted with an increasingly fraught relationship with his librettist Ippolit Shpazhinsky, also problematises the *kuchkist* veneration of an original literary text. For Shpazhinsky was the author of the play upon which *Charodeika* was based, yet he continually deferred to a domineering reading of the text developed in collaboration between Tchaikovsky and Pavlovskaya.

Charodeika belongs to Russian opera’s ‘problematic’ paradigm precisely because it is not the simple page-to-stage adaptation it might superficially seem to be. While it does take a pre-existing literary work as its source, the issue of authorship is evidenced by the significant changes undertaken during the process of adaptation: changes developed and promoted by a collaborative relationship between singer and composer. The fact that *Charodeika* was a critical and commercial flop does not negate its significance as a far more complicated example of page-to-stage adaptation, more informed by collaboration and an individual reading of a work than the strict textual fidelity promulgated first by Dargomyzhsky and later by the *kuchka*. Once again the libretto is the stage for this complex negotiation. Pavlovskaya’s level of influence on the process of its creation and its institutional support for eventual performance speaks again to a continuing tradition of singers at the forefront of new Russian opera as introduced in Chapter 2, and illustrates how more ‘European’ practices from earlier in the century not only survived but thrived during the flowering of Russian imperialism.

At the end of the century, the underlying themes highlighted in each of the preceding chapters – the role of folk practice in promoting Russian national art, the influence of Western

modes and models, the institution as arbiter of operatic development, and mutual collaboration and influence – come together in Rimksy-Korsakov’s *Sadko*. As in Chapter 3, *Sadko* seems superficially to align with a more *kuchkist* mode of operatic creation, yet underneath the surface it engages deeply with questions of authorship and authentic representation of Russian folk traditions. Furthermore, its use of oral literature as source material and the libretto’s stitching-together of multiple folk literary tales and anthologies places *Sadko* firmly within the ‘problematic’ paradigm of works adapted from nonstandard forms of literature. My investigation of *Sadko*’s highly intertextual libretto and its equally inter-musical score positions the work as the culmination of the ‘problematic’ paradigm in the nineteenth century. It is, I argue, both deeply backwards-looking in its repeated citation of pre-*kuchka* and ‘problematic’ operas and highly forwards-looking in its attempts more authentically to convey actual folk musical practices within a European genre – opera itself – that does not easily lend itself to deviations from Western musical norms.

Throughout each of these four operas, the libretto is the field in which exists the idea of a ‘problematic’ paradigm of Russian opera, and through which the precise label of ‘problematic’ can be most usefully investigated. My investigation of four case studies from across the nineteenth century has provided a more complete account of the Russian operatic libretto than has previously existed. I suggest that the lack of comprehensive surveys of the libretto and its role in what I call the ‘problematic’ paradigm in Russian opera may be due to the disciplinary issues at stake with the study of operatic libretti themselves. Many questions, of course, remain unanswered, and there are plentiful opportunities for further research. First, since the institution of Russian opera in the nineteenth century is a secondary focus of my thesis, my research inevitably centred around St Petersburg, and to a lesser extent, Moscow. I touch on other cities

such as Venice and Paris briefly, if only to reveal the lively circles of Russian composers and artists who congregated there to study Western opera and learn the compositional art. Yet I do not discuss other cities in the Russian Empire except to note revivals of operas previously premiered in St Petersburg. Intriguing questions arise about operatic practice in the provinces as the nineteenth century progressed, particularly with regard to large estates where wealthy landowners had established serf theatres earlier in the century. Did such estates continue to produce opera following the abolition of serfdom in the 1860s? How did provincial capitals stay in touch with operatic developments in St Petersburg and Moscow, and did they produce their own new works?

In addition, I have only just scratched the surface of the nature of operatic collaboration, particularly among the Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky circles. My investigation of primary source materials related to *Sadko* and *Charodeika* was derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing me to rely on secondhand accounts of their contents and the visible, multiple hands involved in their creation. There remains much to be gleaned from a thorough investigation of the correspondences, diaries, and drafts involved in the process of operatic production. By giving collaborators their due attention, I imagine we would take great strides towards dismantling the composer-as-author paradigm that has been so prevalent in operatic history and particularly as regards Russian opera. Similarly, though their influence and importance for the genre has been noted since the late nineteenth century, studies primarily focused on Russian singers and their collaborations with composers would provide significant new insights both into the question of operatic authorship and into the on-the-ground functioning of the operatic institution. In discussing these contributions, another neglected aspect of Russian opera comes to the fore: that of opera's deep connections with social practice, demonstrating complex interactions with wide-

ranging cultural and political debates. It is here that Russian music scholars on both sides of the disciplinary divide can begin to answer Taruskin's call for a truly 'sociocultural' musicology.

Where does this leave the libretto? I began by claiming the libretto as neither a purely literary nor a purely musical artifact, but rather as a combination of both: a literary object designed for the purposes of musical expression. While the study of operatic libretti has made significant strides over the last several decades – namely, in that it has become worthy of academic study in itself – such studies have yet to fully explore the libretto's dynamic status or to situate the libretto at the nexus of opera's multidisciplinary nature. In the preceding chapters, I examined several methodological ways through which the libretto could be usefully reinvestigated. I combined traditional close reading of text and score with more broad analysis of larger sociocultural trends, explored the materiality of the libretto as manuscript or printed object, and investigated other primary source materials connected to the libretto's creation. I have argued that the Russian opera libretto and the circumstances of its creation deserve closer scrutiny, and demonstrated how such scrutiny opens up new and fruitful avenues of scholarly inquiry into wider Russian culture throughout the nineteenth century.

What is the libretto's status in contemporary Russian studies, and how might this status evolve? If close analysis is becoming an old-fashioned methodology, as some modern scholars have deemed,² how does this affect scholarly perceptions of what is often seen as a problematic

² The practice of close reading and commentary has a long history in hermeneutics, particularly of ancient works and scriptural exegesis, but the technique emerged in English-language literary studies roughly during the 1920s and was anchored in the practices of mid-century 'New Critics'. A prime example of this kind of criticism is Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1947), or René Welleck and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956). Yet by the turn of the twenty-first century debates about New Critical aesthetics led to a reconsideration of close reading as a critical

literary-musical object? The broadening multi-disciplinarity of an already highly interdisciplinary field may provide a solution to this paradox. Scholars of the new generation like Emily Frey, Rutger Helmers, Polina Dimova,³ and Rebecca Mitchell⁴ continue in a long history of Russian music scholars working across the disciplinary divide and in many cases, pushing the field even further towards a greater interdisciplinarity. While I recognise the need for organising principles around university departments, these more complicated negotiations of disciplinary boundaries are crucial to understanding more problematic histories of Russian musical and cultural life like the paradigm I investigate in this thesis.

As I finish this thesis in spring 2021, Russian legislators have approved amendments to the education law that would bring all forms of public outreach activity under state control to

practice – particularly, its tendency towards ‘canonical statements’. See Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism Since the 1930s* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 21-52. I believe it is this tendency of New Criticism to use formal analysis to make a universal claim that modern critics find old-fashioned, rather than the techniques of close reading itself. It should be said that close reading’s counterpart within the French critical tradition – *explication de texte* – is extremely prominent in the work of scholars like Jacques Derrida, whose influence in turn on Anglosphere criticism is immense.

³ Dimova’s work on Russian modernism intersects with sensory studies and the history of science. Her current project *At the Crossroads of the Senses* (forthcoming, Pennsylvania University Press) explores the intersection of Modernist multimedia experiments with synaesthesia – the neurological or figurative mixing of the senses, such as perceiving sound as colour.

⁴ Like Dimova, Mitchell’s work investigates multiple overlapping strands of inquiry. Her monograph *Nietzsche’s Orphans: Music, Metaphysics, and the Twilight of the Russian Empire, 1905-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016) explores a dizzying array of intersections between imperial identity, musical life, nationalism, and modernist philosophy, and her interest in the politics of music and metaphysics immediately following the 1917 revolution is to my knowledge entirely unique.

prevent ‘foreign interference’.⁵ Although this particular legislation would primarily affect scholars living and working within the Russian Federation, the Putin government’s increased attention on rehabilitating the Soviet legacy, the rise of the Orthodox Church to public prominence, and introduction of several legislative actions to promote only ‘patriotic’ narratives of Russian history paired with the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and Putin’s subsequent speeches justifying the occupation speaks to a resurrection of Uvarov’s Sacred Triad of ‘autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationalism’ within the country.⁶ If scholars within Russia are now hobbled by the requirement for state approval to continue hosting now-popular lecture series, podcasts, and YouTube channels, foreign scholars have also been subject to increased scrutiny of their research activities within Russia. (A similar law requiring organisations receiving funding from abroad to register with the Russian government as ‘foreign agents’ has recently been extended to individuals.)⁷ A prominent United States government-sponsored academic exchange program has advised grant recipients to abstain from publishing any research outcomes besides personal social media and blogposts until after they have left the country, in order to prevent an increasing number of deportations of scholars participating in events or publishing outcomes not listed on the itinerary submitted with their visa applications.⁸

⁵ Sophia Kishkovsky, ‘Russian culture figures fear new law change will require government approval for museum tours, exhibitions, and lectures’, *The Art Newspaper*, 15 March 2021, News – Russia.

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/russian-education-law>. Accessed 6 April 2021.

⁶ See Otto Boele, Boris Noordenbos, and Ksenia Robbe, eds. *Post-Soviet Nostalgia: Confronting the Empire’s Legacies* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

⁷ ‘Gosduma prinyala zakon o prosvetitel’skoy deyatel’nosti v obrazovanii’, *TASS*, 16 March 2021.

<https://tass.ru/obschestvo/10913911>. Accessed 6 April 2021.

⁸ Interview with Maya Garcia, doctoral candidate at Harvard University, 6 April 2021.

The Putin administration's interest in reviving nationalist narratives last circulated during the Soviet era stretches back into the debates around European influences that began with the eighteenth-century reforms of Peter I.⁹ A similar resurgence in nostalgia has enabled the meteoric rise in prestige of the Mariinsky Theatre under the direction of Valery Gergiev and his revivals of non-canonical Russian operas – a phenomenon enabled, if indirectly, by Putin.¹⁰ Within the Russian academic world, there is renewed emphasis on the institution of Russian music, demonstrated most clearly by the processes underway for a new complete Tchaikovsky edition¹¹ and the planned celebrations for Sergey Rachmaninov's 150th anniversary in 2023, sponsored by the Kremlin.¹² Despite the resurgence of state-sponsored nationalism, however, many Russian music scholars such as Levon Hakobian, Marina Raku, Zhanna Kniazeva, Ol'ga

⁹ Alex Trustrum Thomas has studied this phenomenon as it applies to contemporary Russian theatre in his DPhil thesis 'Experimentation in Contemporary Russian Theatre Since 2010' (University of Oxford, 2021) and more broadly in 'From Stalinist Socialist Realism to Putinist Capitalist Realism: Tracing Cultural Ideology in Contemporary Russia', in *New Drama in Russian: Performance, Politics, and Protest*, ed. J. A. E. Curtis (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 53-69.

¹⁰ See Hannah Schneider's work on Soviet composer Rodion Shchedrin and what she terms 'Russianist realism'. Hannah Schneider, 'Opera After Stalin: Rodion Shchedrin and the Search for the Voice of a New Era' (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2020).

¹¹ This ongoing edition is called the *Akademicheskoi polnoe sobranie sochinenii P. I. Chaikovskogo* to distinguish it from the Soviet edition, and is under the supervision of the State Institute of Art Studies in Moscow and the Tchaikovsky State House Museum and Archive in Klin.

¹² While Western orchestras are planning similar Rachmaninov celebrations, the Russian government has formally decreed and commissioned an organising committee for state-sponsored festivals and events. See 'Ukaz Prezidenta rossiiskoi federatsii ot 25.01.2020, no. 62 "O prazdnovanii 150-letia so dnia rozhdeniia S. V. Rakhmaninova', <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202001270005>. Accessed 14 April 2021.

Digonskaya, and Ada Aynbinder are engaged in productive collaborations with Western academics.¹³

This makes the renewed promotion of what could be stereotyped as ‘nationalist music’ by Russian performance institutions a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the Russian operatic world is at last producing revivals of particularly-understudied operas such as Tchaikovsky’s *Charodeika* and *Oprichnik* (1872)¹⁴ and Rimsky-Korsakov’s entire operatic oeuvre,¹⁵ but on the other hand the press materials around these revivals promote a highly particular take on these works. A recent article discussing the revival of Sergey Novikov’s production of *Oprichnik* (originally staged in 2015) comments: ‘Как сообщил сам Новиков, либретто оперы будет классическим [...] на сцене покажут “Москву, Александровскую слободу XVI века.” Провокационных творческих решений не ожидается.’¹⁶ The implication that a semi-historical portrayal of sixteenth-century Moscow is not a ‘provocative artistic decision’ marks a change from reviewers describing the similarly historically-informed 1993 Mariinsky production of

¹³ I have particularly benefitted from Ada Aynbinder’s generosity as an academic, archivist, and host during my research for Chapter 3.

¹⁴ A revival of the latter, in a 2015 production directed by Sergei Novikov (head of the Presidential Administration for Public Projects and something of a cultural protégé of Putin’s) is planned for May 2021.

¹⁵ Valery Gergiev seems to be a particular fan of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas; in 2019, he led a festival at the Mariinsky performing all fifteen of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas and has recorded seven of them on CD. In March 2021, Gergiev again conducted a festival weekend of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera *Noch’ pered rozhdestvom* and a symphonic programme including suites from *Scheherazade* and *Skazka o tsare Saltane* at Rimsky-Korsakov’s birthplace in Tikhvin.

¹⁶ See “‘Samyi tvorcheskii chinovnik’ postavit operu v Mikhailovskom teatre. S afishi na gorozhan smotrit Kekhman’, *Fontanka.ru*, 6 April 2021. Accessed 14 April 2021. <https://www.fontanka.ru/2021/04/06/69852716>

Sadko (which remains in the repertory today) as ‘в стиле модерн’ and described Valery Gergiev’s creative approach as ‘сочетание буквального следования источнику с новаторским режиссерским прочтением’.¹⁷ It is interesting to note the resurgence of a literal interpretation of source material within both of these productions and the touting of historical accuracy, particularly when opera houses outside of Russia have in recent decades produced highly innovative productions of similar works, especially Rimsky-Korsakov’s fairy-tale operas.¹⁸ In the face of a Kabuki-style interpretation of *Zolotoy petushok* or Dmitry Tcherniakov’s vast poppy field for *Kniaz’ Igor’*,¹⁹ to call a fairly sedate (if beautiful) production of *Sadko* ‘modern’ seems willful ignorance; to dismiss less rigidly historical productions of *Oprichnik* as ‘provocative’ implies such productions are deliberate misinterpretations of their sources.²⁰

While I applaud the end-product of widening the regular performance repertory of Russian opera, the process is by no means politically neutral. Composers like Rimsky-Korsakov are hailed uncritically as icons of nationalism when, as I have demonstrated, the historical and

¹⁷ Inna V-Tkachenko, ‘Prem’era v Mariinskoy teatre: Za “Volshebnoy fleitoy” sleduyet “Sadko”’, *Kommersant* 41 (6 March 1993). Accessed 14 April 2021. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/41141?stamp=637540332757348767>

¹⁸ Dmitry Tcherniakov has directed more contemporary takes on Rimsky-Korsakov’s fairy-tale operas, and Ennosouke Ichikawa’s Kabuki-inspired staging of *Zolotoy petushok* (originally produced for San Francisco Opera in 1984) is particularly popular with European opera audiences.

¹⁹ Produced by the Metropolitan Opera in 2013/14. This staging also reordered the opera’s scenes, which had been stitched together by Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov following Borodin’s death in 1887.

²⁰ In fact, there is a school of thought that argues any representation of 16th-century Moscow involves stylisation in some sense. Maya Garcia is currently researching productions of *Oprichnik* as part of a dissertation on artistic interpretations of the oprichnina, and her research expands upon this claim as applied to Tchaikovsky reception.

cultural contexts surrounding their work were far from straightforward. In the face of a political process motivated by nationalistic nostalgia that ironically re-establishes a kind of Russian imperialism,²¹ scholarship that complicates the ‘either/or’ assumptions surrounding Russian culture becomes ever more urgent. While the Russian opera libretto is by no means a politically sensitive topic, I believe that studies seeking to explore the tangled webs of influences and collaborations surrounding such topics, both from Western and Russian academics, are in their small way a means to counteract forces within the Russian government that seek to conjure up a manufactured nineteenth-century Russia where unproblematic patriotism, uninfluenced by the demons of the West, reigned supreme.

²¹ Yet another law was signed recently permitting Putin to run for two more six-year terms as President, potentially keeping him in office until 2036. The possibility of a Putin reign from 1999-2036 (minus the four years he nominally served as prime minister under Dmitriy Medvedev) would place Putin ahead of Joseph Stalin (1922-53), Mikhail Romanov (1613-45), and Catherine II (1762-1796) in the rankings of longest-reigning Russian officials or monarchs. See ‘Putin signs law that could keep him in Kremlin until 2036’, *Reuters*, 5 April 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-politics-putin/putin-signs-law-allowing-him-to-run-for-two-more-terms-in-kremlin-idUSKBN2BS18W>. Accessed 9 April 2021.

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