The Name-Day Scene in Čajkovskij's *Evgenij Onegin*: Symphonic Dramaturgy on the Operatic Stage

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The significance of *Evgenij Onegin* within Pëtr Il′ich Čajkovskij's operatic output has often been noted by critics and commentators. After the failures – real or imagined – of his earlier works for the lyric stage, *Evgenij Onegin* marks both a rejection of existing genre conventions within Russian opera, and a complex dialogue with a number of contemporary European models (Georges Bizet, Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner most particularly). Alongside its musical innovations, it also constitutes one of Čajkovskij's most famously productive and influential engagements with the literary field. With its subtitle of 'lyric scenes', *Evgenij Onegin* aspires to a kind of emotional sincerity and psychological verisimilitude that were the touchstones of Russian literature at that time. As Boris Gasparov has argued, for instance, Čajkovskij reads Aleksandr Puškin's Romantic-era novel-in-verse through the prism of the realist aesthetics of Lev Tolstoj and Ivan Turgenev.[1] It achieves all of this through its prominent and self-conscious evocation of songfulness, such as Tat′jana's 'letter scene' in Act 1, Triquet's couplets and Lenskij's aria in Act 2, and Gremin's aria in Act 3. Each of these lyric moments functions as an instance of the opera's socially inflected verisimilitude, as well as constituting a key emotional moment in its respective act or scene. These moments are, moreover, juxtaposed with the more dialogue-based sections of the dramatic action, often involving secondary or incidental characters (Filip′evna, Larina, Ol′ga, and perhaps even Onegin himself, who has surprisingly little extended lyric music of his own, especially given that the opera is named after him). One consequence of this emphasis on

[1] Boris Gasparov, *Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture*, New Haven and London 2005, p. 58–94.

lyricism and conversational dialogue is that *Evgenij Onegin* appears to lack is the kind of symphonic structure that had characterised his earlier operas and which, in the eyes of some critics, and even the composer himself, had been a prime factor in their failure.

This seeming absence of symphonic ambition also sets the opera apart from Čajkovskij's later works from the stage (not just his opera, but also – perhaps especially – his ballets) which are characterised by an advanced form of musical dramaturgy that has sometimes been seen as analogous to, or at least in dialogue with, elements of Wagner's practice. If aspects of such an approach are already evident in the writings of Boris Asaf′ev, a more sustained analysis of Čajkovskij's handling of musical dramaturgy can be found in Boris Jarustovskij's *Opernaja dramaturgija Čajkovskogo*.[2] Here, Jarustovskij argues that the greatest influence on Čajkovskij was the 'well-made play' ('pièce bien faite') associated with Eugène Scribe and the French opera tradition (itself interpreted as a fusion of elements of romanticism and nascent realism). At the same time, however, he invites comparisons with Wagner's stage works, carefully teasing out the complex interplay between the practical demands of the stage and the seemingly more abstract search for symphonic form that is a hallmark of Čajkovskij's mature operas. In particular, Jarustovskij argues that many of the key scenes in Čajkovskij's stage works are constructed around a principle of emotional and dramatic conflict, and that this principle has two major features:

> firstly, it lends the tableau or scene a great sense of completeness and integrity, and, secondly, it is unusually close to the individual features of Čajkovskij's *symphonism*,

[2] Boris Jarustovskij, *Opernaja dramaturgija Čajkovskogo* (*The dramaturgy of Tchaikovsky's operas*), Moscow and Leningrad 1947. For a reading of *Spjaščaja krasavica* drawing on the Wagnerian inflections in the writings of Boris Asaf′ev, see Tim Scholl, *'Sleeping Beauty', A Legend in Progress*, New Haven and London 2014, p. 64-101.

> particularly the main principle of his symphonic development, which is also based on the alternation of several successively intensifying emotional waves.[3]

Jarustovskij pays particular attention to Čajkovskij's handling of choruses and ensembles, as well as to individual character and motivation. Here, his concern is less with the advancement of individual psychology (arguably a feature of any opera's more 'lyric' moments), than with the underlying structural requirements of a given scene. He also argues that a number of Čajkovskij's operas contain elements of 'through-composed' musical form, something which is in dialogue with their more obvious use of operatic 'numbers' such as arias, ariosos, choruses, dances, and so on.

Jarustovskij's study offers a powerful and potentially productive framework for interpreting Čajkovskij's operas. Strikingly, his emphasis is primarily on the dramaturgical achievements of the post-*Onegin* operas, especially *Mazepa*, *Čarodejka* and *Pikovaja dama*. The latter opera is, in his view, the culmination of Čajkovskij's ability to fashion a form of through-composed musical dramaturgy that borders on the symphonic and a work which he describes as his 'most perfect and exemplary opera in this regard'[4]:

> In this opera, the through-composed development of the idea is achieved with maximum consistency, and this constitutes one of the conclusive markers of its genuine symphonism. All of opera's means of musical expression – melody,

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[3] '[...] во-первых, он придает картине или сцене большую законченность, целостность и, во-вторых, он необычайно близок индивидуальным особенностям *симфонизма* Чайковского, в частности главному принципу его симфонического развития, основанному также на смене нескольких последовательно возрастающих эмоциальных волн.' Jarustovskij, *Opernaja dramaturgija Čajkovskogo* (see note 2), p. 17.

[4] 'наиболее совершенную и показательную в этом отношении оперу' Jarustovskij, *Opernaja dramaturgija Čajkovskogo* (see note 2), p. 66.

> harmony, meter and rhythm, orchestration, etc. – are employed in this work extremely laconically and organically, with a view to achieving through-composed development.[5]

By contrast, Jarustovskij has comparatively little to say about *Evgenij Onegin*. Indeed, it is characteristic that his most extended discussion of the opera focuses on the relatively familiar question of Čajkovskij's musical expression of character through the use of melodic phrases and motifs, rather than questions of the opera's underlying structure.[6] Likewise, Asaf′ev's interpretation of *Evgenij Onegin* focuses on its lyricism – a topic to which we shall return – and in doing so, overlooks something significant about its mastery of form and structure.[7]

As I have suggested elsewhere, however, the opera contains at least one scene that hints at Čajkovskij's command of symphonic dramaturgy:

> It is […] Tatyana's name-day party that is the most extraordinary compositional *tour de force* in the whole opera. Composed as a sequence of old-fashioned dances redolent of the Larins' provincial mores, it intertwines these with Monsieur Triquet's cod verses in praise of Tatyana's beauty, Onegin's flirtation with Olga, Lensky's challenge and a whole gamut of society gossip. One early critic faulted the scene, in which the composer saw 'in the words and action only a pretext for his creative

[5] 'В этой опере сквозное развитие идеи проведено максимально последовательно, и это является одним из решающих признаков ее подлинного симфонизма. Все музыкально-выразительные средсвта оперы – мелодия, гармония, метро-ритмика, инструментовка и др. – используются в этом произведении исключительно лаконично и органично именно для проведения сквозного развития.' Jarustovskij, *Opernaja dramaturgija Čajkovskogo* (see note 2), p. 66.

[6] Jarustovskij, *Opernaja dramaturgija Čajkovskogo* (see note 2), p. 105–11.

[7] Boris Asaf′ev, '"Evgenij Onegin": liričeskie sceny P. I. Čajkovskogo' ('"Evgenij Onegin": Lyric scenes by P. I. Čajkovskij', in: *Izbrannye trudy* (*Selected works*), 5 vols, Moscow 1952–7, II, p. 73–141.

> ardour as a symphonist'. Designed to wound Tchaikovsky, who was always sensitive to the accusation that his operas were insufficiently dramatic, this comment is, in fact, entirely apposite. The scene is a glorious piece of through-composed drama that subtly and unexpectedly brings all of Tchaikovsky's skill as a master of complex symphonic structure to the operatic house. It is here that one hears the lessons learnt during the composition of the Symphony No. 4; not until Act 3 of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* – a similar scene of tense expectation that takes place in the context of a series of dances – would a Russian artist produce anything so architecturally satisfying for the stage.[8]

Drawing on the work of Soviet scholars such as Asaf′ev and Jarustovskij (whose analytical insights remain invaluable, despite their more obvious ideological limitations), this chapter will argue that there is indeed a hidden symphonic construction underpinning the name-day scene in *Evgenij Onegin*. Whilst the opera's intimacy certainly appears to constitute an explicit and successful rejection of the symphonic baggage of Čajkovskij's earlier operas, its lyricism does not preclude an equally important structural element which may, in fact, go some way to explaining why the work is so intuitively satisfying. Interpreted in this light, *Evgenij Onegin* no longer seems to stand apart in Čajkovskij's *oeuvre*, instead prefiguring some of the formal achievements of his later stage works.

To gain a sense of the inventiveness and originality of *Evgenij Onegin*, one need only look back to Čajkovskij's first attempts at opera, as well as to key moments in their critical reception. Take, for instance, his first opera, *Voevoda*, written in 1867–68 and eventually premiered in early 1869. Rather to Čajkovskij's surprise, his friend and colleague, German Laroš, was sharply critical of his first stage work, arguing that its symphonic form overwhelmed its dramatic impact:

[8] Philip Ross Bullock, *Pyotr Tchaikovsky*, London 2016, p. 99–100.

> Mr Čajkovskij shares with the most recent German composers a predilection for the orchestra and indifference towards the human voice: the former is treated with care, with subtle deliberation and kindly love, whereas the latter is treated casually and indifferently. Very often the lush, beautiful orchestration almost entirely drowns out the performers' voices, and the spectator obliged to look at his libretto and to guess what they are singing about.[9]

Laroš's claims stem, at least in part, from his ambivalent attitude to the music dramas of Richard Wagner.[10] At the same time, however, he perceptively identified a feature of Čajkovskij's operatic writing that would persist for some time, and with which the composer himself – often his own harshest critic – was in partial agreement. Thus, looking back from *Voevoda* a decade later, Čajkovskij would echo Laroš's sentiments in a letter he wrote to Nadežda fon Mekk towards the end of 1879:

> *Voevoda* is without any doubt a very bad opera. […] Firstly, the plot is no good at all, i.e. it lacks dramatic interest and direction; secondly, the opera was written too hastily and flippantly, as a result of which its forms are not operatic enough and do not match the demands of the stage; I simply wrote the music to a given text, without

[9] 'С новейшими немецкими композиторами г. Чайковский разделяет пристрастие к оркестру и равнодушие к человеческому голосу: первый обработан со тщанием, с тонкой обдуманностью, с теплой любовью, второй — небрежно и незначительно. Густая, красивая инструментовка весьма часто почти совсем заглушает голоса действующих лиц, и зрителю остается смотреть в либретто и догадываться, о чем поется.' Cited in Modest Čajkovskij, *Žizn' Petra Il'iča Čajkovskogo, po dokumentam, chranivšimsja v archive v Klinu* (*The Life of Pjotr Il'ič Čajkovskij, on the basis of documents preserved in the archive at Klin*), 3 vols, Moscow 1997, I, p. 295.

[10] Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, Cambridge 1995, p. 40–43.

> considering the infinite distinction between operatic and symphonic styles. In writing an opera, a composer should constantly consider the stage, i.e. remember that the theatre requires not just melodies and harmonies, but also action; that one should not abuse the attention of the operatic spectator, who has come not just to listen, but also to watch, and finally, that the style of music for the theatre should correspond to the style of decorative art and should therefore be simple, bright and colourful. […] In *Voevoda*, I was too preoccupied with the filigree development of its themes, having completely forgotten the stage and all of its requirements. To a certain extent, these requirements paralyse a composer's purely musical inspiration, which is why symphonic and chamber music stand so much higher than opera.[11]

Čajkovskij was, of course, looking back at *Voevoda* from the vantage point of having composed not only four symphonies, a series of orchestral tone poems (*Romeo i Džul'etta*, *Burja*, and *Frančeska da Rimini*), and three string quartets, but also a further five operas (*Undina*, *Opričnik*, *Kuznec Vakula*, *Evgenij Onegin*, and *Orleanskaja deva*). Yet it was

[11] '«Воевода» без всякого сомнения очень плохая опера. […] Во 1-х, сюжет никуда не годен, т. е. лишен драматического интереса и движения; во 2-х, опера была написана слишком спешно и легкомысленно, вследствие чего формы вышли не оперные, не подходящие к условиям сцены; я просто писал музыку на данный текст, нисколько не имея в виду бесконечное различие между оперным и симфоническим стилем. Сочиняя оперу, автор должен непрерывно иметь в виду сцену, т. е. помнить, что в театре требуются не только мелодии и гармонии, но также действие; что нельзя злоупотреблять вниманием оперного слушателя, который пришёл не только слушать, но и смотреть, и, наконец, что стиль театральной музыки должен соответствовать стилю декоративной живописи, следовательно быть простым, ясным, колоритным. […] Я же в «Воеводе» хлопотал именно об этой филигранной разработке тем, совершенно забыв сцену и все её условия. Условия эти в значительной степени парализуют чисто музыкальное вдохновение автора, и вот почему симфонический и камерный род музыки стоят гораздо выше оперного.' Letter of 27 November 1879 (o.s.), in ČPSS VIII, p. 444–445.

precisely this critical and creative distance that allowed him to see what Laroš had originally identified as flaws at the time of the opera's première.

For all Čajkovskij's growing confidence in the structural and stylistic distinctions between opera and symphonic music, the stage works which immediately followed *Voevoda* continued to display many of its perceived failings. During rehearsals for *Opričnik* (written 1870–72, premiered April 1874), its conductor, Eduard Nápravník, made a series of tactful suggestions aimed at lightening the orchestration and tightening the opera's dramaturgy.[12] Then, in a review of *Kuznec Vakula* (written 1874, premiered in late 1876), Laroš returned to some of the criticisms he had originally voiced about *Voevoda*:

> Time and again in the new opera you sense how the opera's invention outstrips the requirements of character and situation, how it distracts him, makes him write a phrase longer or shorter, louder or softer, softer or slower, in greater or lesser relief than appropriate to the person of the situation. The composer's lack of stage flair is chilling, though at the same time one continues to sense the beauty of the musical thoughts and their development, irrespective of the drama.[13]

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[12] David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study*, 4 vols, London 1978–91, I (1978), p. 226.

[13] 'То и дело в музыке новой оперы вы чувствуете, как музыкальное изобретение композитора перерастает потребность характера, потребность ситуации, как это изобретение увлекает его в сторону, заставляет писать фразу длиннее или короче, громче или тише, быстрее или медленнее, рельефнее или стушёваннее, чем следует по характеру лица или по ситуации. Это отсутствие сценического чутья в композиторе вас охлаждает, хотя вы продолжаете в то же время чувствовать красоту музыкальных мыслей и их развитие, независимо от драмы.' German Laroš, *Izbrannye stat'i v pjati vypuskach*, vol. 2: *P. I. Čajkovskij*, Leningrad 1975, p. 89. English translation cited from Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, Oxford 2009, p. 96.

Again, Čajkovskij was inclined to agree with such negative, yet well-meant and fundamentally perceptive observations. When *Vakula* was revived in 1878, he again took the advice of Nápravník and made a series of cuts and other changes to lighten the orchestral texture and strengthen the opera's dramatic logic. Nonetheless, he remained anxious about their ultimate impact:

> Apart from these insignificant corrections, I could do no more. Wherever I wanted to substantially change the orchestral accompaniment in order to set the voices in greater relief, I encountered insuperable obstacles, i.e. it was necessary either to change not only the orchestra, but the music itself, or just to leave it was before. In the end, it had to be the latter. For example, in the scene between Vakula and the Devil after the court dances, the words are completely inaudible because the complex orchestral figurations prevent the singers from speaking freely – but how else could I have helped matters without radically altering the music?[14]

Around the same time, Čajkovskij expressed his dissatisfaction to fon Mekk:

> *Vakula* went off as it did on its first production, i.e. smoothly and neatly enough, but routinely, pallidly, and without colour. There is one person who makes me cross whenever I listen to this opera. That person is me. Lord, how many unpardonable

[14] 'Кроме этих незначительных поправок, я ничего не мог сделать. Везде, где мне хотелось существенно изменить аккомпанемент оркестра, дабы выдвинуть голоса, я встречал неодолимые препятствия, т. е. приходилось или изменять не только оркестр, но и самую музыку, или же оставлять по-старому. Приходилось решаться на последнее. Напр[имер], в сцене Вакулы и Беса после танцев во дворце слов совсем не слышно, потому что сложные фигуры оркестра мешают певцам говорить свободно, — но как, я мог тут помочь делу, не изменив радикально музыки?' Letter of 7 November 1878 (o.s.), in: ČPSS VII, p. 453.

> errors in this opera were made by none other than myself! I did everything to impede the positive impression of those parts which might have given pleasure of their own accord, if only I had inhibited more the purely musical inspiration and forgotten less the requirements of theatricality and decorativeness which are inherent in the operatic style. The entire opera suffers throughout from a surfeit and a superfluity of detail, the tiresome chromatic harmonies, and a lack of shapeliness and fullness of its individual numbers. *C'est un menu surchargé de plats épicés*. There are many tasty morsels in it, but little plain and healthy food. I understand very well all the deficiencies of my opera, which are, unfortunately, irreparable. But listening to it again has taught me a fine lesson for the future. I think *Evgenij Onegin* is a step forward. I am terribly pleased that you liked it. I wrote it with sincere enthusiasm.[15]

There is, then, a repeated pattern in which Čajkovskij's creative imagination, skilful orchestration, harmonic invention and growing confidence in the handling of long-range form, paradoxically, militated against the dramatic coherence of his operas, overwhelmed the

[15] '«Вакула» прошёл так же, как и в первое представление, т. е. гладко, достаточно чисто, но рутинно, бледно и бесцветно. Есть один человек, на которого я во все время сердился, слушая эту оперу. Этот человек — я. Господи, сколько непростительных ошибок в этой опере, сделанных никем иным, как мною! Я сделал все, чтобы парализовать хорошее впечатление всех тех мест, которые сами по себе могли бы нравиться, если б я более сдерживал чисто музыкальное вдохновение и менее забывал бы условия сценичности и декоративности, свойственной оперному стилю. Опера вся сплошь страдает нагромождением, избытком деталей, утомительною хроматичностью гармоний, недостатком округлённости и законченности отдельных номеров. C'est un menu surchargé de plats épicés. В ней много лакомств, но мало простой и здоровой пищи. Я очень чутко сознаю все недостатки оперы, которые, к сожалению, непоправимы. Но из нового прослушания я вынес хороший урок для будущего. Мне кажется, что «Евгений Онегин» — шаг вперёд. Я ужасно рад, что он Вам нравится. Я писал эту вещь с искренним увлечением.' Letter of 30 October 1878 (o.s.), in: ČPSS VII , p. 440–441.

clear projection of the vocal lines and distracted audiences' engagement with the stage action. Like Laroš, he was fully aware of this, and like Laroš, he could sympathise with the implicit comparison between himself and Wagner, however ambivalent his attitude to his music dramas could be (and however distant their aesthetics ultimately are). As he had written to fon Mekk in the late 1870s, '*Wagner's* orchestra is too *symphonic*, too *plump* and *heavy* for vocal music. And the older I become, the more I become convinced that these two genres, i.e. *the symphony and the opera*, are in all respects the complete opposite of each other.'[16]

This was an insight borne of the experience of writing his first four operas, of course, and would transform his handling of operatic form in his subsequent works for the lyric stage, especially *Mazepa* and *Pikovaja dama* (*Iolanta* belongs to a different category entirely). The work which seems to mark a break with this state of affairs is, of course, *Evgenij Onegin*. Here, through a self-conscious repudiation of both the techniques of Wagnerian music drama, and the formulae of Italian opera (particularly Verdi), Čajkovskij explored instead a kind of dramaturgy which was simple, naturalistic, sincere and direct (the example of Bizet's *Carmen* proved to be crucial here). The opera's early performances by students from the Moscow Conservatory, and its subsequent staging at Moscow's Malyj Theatre, had the effect of rebalancing the relationship between orchestra and voices in favour of the latter, thereby privileging the clear delivery of the sung text, liberating the score from some of the musical conventions which had so irked the Čajkovskij in the work of other composers (especially Italian ones), and engaging the audience in a new form of operatic dramaturgy. The score's often delicate, chamber-like orchestration also contributed to this shift of emphasis.

[16] '[...] оркестр Вагнера слишком симфоничен, слишком упитан и тяжёл для вокальной музыки, а я чем становлюсь старше, тем более проникаюсь убеждением в том, что эти две отрасли, т. е. симфония и опера, составляют во всех отношениях две крайние противоположности.' Letter of 5 May 1879 (o.s.), in: ČPSS VIII, p. 198.

In terms of form and genre, the means by which *Evgenij Onegin* achieved this breakthrough was through its use of song forms to structure the overall musical argument, as suggested by Čajkovskij's decision to refer to it under the title of 'lyric scenes'. Here, 'lyric' suggests the presence of both poetry and song as the constitutive generic markers of the opera's style, and in almost every scene, there is a key moment of musical expression that draws on these forms. Indeed, these moments are so self-aware and self-consciously stylised (inasmuch as they refer back to the musical codes of 1820s gentry culture) that the opera begins to resemble Puškin's sophisticated, ironic, metatextual novel more closely than is often held to be the case, even if it is seldom heard as such. Scene 1, for instance, contains a diegetic setting of Puškin's 'Pevec' as sung by Tat′jana and Ol′ga and overheard by Larina and Filip′evna, Scene 5 comprises Lenskij's famous farewell aria, and Scene 6 features Gremin's hymn to Tat′jana.[17] The most famous example, though, of 'songfulness' in the opera is the 'Letter scene' (scene 2), which – as Boris Asaf′ev and Richard Taruskin have documented – is made up of four interconnected 'romances' (*romansy*), which evoke the atmosphere of domestic music-making on the Russian estate in the first third of the nineteenth century.[18] The function of such moments is twofold: stylistically, they lend the work its realistic texture; generically, they represent its departure from the conventions of grand opera, historical melodrama, or any of the other operatic genres of the day.

There is, then, something paradoxical, even eccentric, about exploring what might be *symphonic* in the construction of *Evgenij Onegin*, given that it successfully and spontaneously breaks free of the problems that had beset *Voevoda*, *Opričnik* and even *Kuznec*

[17] Kadja Grönke, 'Zur Rolle des Gremin in Čajkovskijs Oper *Evgenij Onegin*', in: Thomas Kolhase (ed.), *Čajkovskij-Studen 1*, Mainz 1993, p. 127–40, available in English as 'On the Role of Gremin: Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*', in: Leslie Kearney (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World*, Princeton 1998, p. 220–33.

[18] Asaf′ev, '"Evgenij Onegin": liričeskie sceny P. I. Čajkovskogo' (see note 7), and Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays*, Princeton 1997, p. 53–60.

Vakula – and which would, one might argue, return in *Orleanskaja deva* and *Čarodejka*. Yet there is something to be said for focusing on the symphonic structure of *Onegin* all the same, and in revisiting some of the criticisms that were made of Čajkovskij's other operas as a way of understanding elements of his compositional practice. Here, a productive comparison can be made with another stage work from around the same period, the ballet *Lebedinoe ozero*. Falling, like *Evgenij Onegin*, between the first three symphonies and the structural innovations of the final three, it too achieves a remarkable synthesis of seemingly conflicting elements and impulses. As Roland John Wiley has demonstrated, *Lebedinoe ozero* makes uses of a number of motifs determined by both characters and plot. These motifs structure the musical argument of the score and can be correlated to the stage action as traced in the libretto and perceived by the audience. Yet as Wiley also argues, there are elements of *Lebedinoe ozero* which are not readily explained in terms of their relationship to the ballet's libretto and form, instead, part of a deeper structure which can be seen as more closely related to the work's quasi-symphonic dramaturgy and which transcends its apparent debt to conventional sequences of standard dance numbers.[19] A similar claim can be made about *Evgenij Onegin* too, a work which owes more to Čajkovskij's experience of writing *Lebedinoe ozero* than is sometimes realised. Like *Lebedinoe ozero*, *Evgenij Onegin* makes use of motifs which, whilst not functioning as Wagnerian *Leitmotive* in the strictest sense, nonetheless serve to characterise particular individuals and convey moods and emotions. At the same time, the opera evinces moments where an independent form of musical dramaturgy is at work, and where individual musical features are synthesised into something grander and more structurally ambitious.

[19] Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: 'Swan Lake', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Nutcracker'*, Oxford 1985, p. 63–91. See also Ju. Rozanova, *Simfoničeskie principy baletov Čajkovskogo* (*The symphonic principles of Čajkovskij's ballets*), Moscow 1976.

To demonstrate this hidden attribute of *Evgenij Onegin*, two parallel strategies will be pursued here, one that is primarily literary in focus, and one that examines the scene's musical form. A detailed examination of the libretto as a whole reveals that just under half (47%) of the opera is based directly on Puškin, with slightly less (43%) invented and added by the composer himself, and a further 10% derived from other sources, such as the setting of Puškin's poem 'Pevets' with which the opera opens, the various folksong choruses that recur throughout Act 1, or the couplets that Konstantin Šilovskij wrote for Monsieur Triquet to sing in Act 2.[20] The balance within individual scenes varies as follows:

	Puškin	Čajkovskij	Other
Act 1, Scene 1	35%	45%	20%
Act 1, Scene 2	94%	6%	0%
Act 1, Scene 3	47%	21%	32%
Act 2, Scene 1	14%	78%	8%
Act 2, Scene 2	88%	12%	0%
Act 3, Scene 1	61%	39%	0%
Act 3, Scene 2	59%	41%	0%

The scenes with the highest proportion of lines taken directly from the novel are, predictably enough, Act 1, Scene 2 (Tat′jana's letter scene) and Act 2, Scene 2 (the duel between Lenskij and Onegin), which make ready use of some of the poetic highlights of Puškin's text, albeit

[20] These figures were calculated by counting: a) the number of lines derived from Puškin's novel directly (or adapted minimally for sense and grammar); b) the number of lines invented by Čajkovskij with no recourse to other sources; and c) the number of lines which can be attributed to another source. Stage directions have been omitted. The small emendations to the libretto introduced over the course of various published editions of the opera do not alter this overall picture.

stripped of their ironic commentaries and presented instead as instance of direct address by the characters themselves. By contrast, the scene with the least amount of 'authentic' Puškin is Act 2, Scene 1 (the name-day scene), to which this chapter will return in due course. Other scenes fall somewhere in between, taking between 35% and 61% directly from the source text, and interweave it with a substantial amount of material invented Čajkovskij himself (between 21% and 45%) in order to take the novel's ironically detached narration and convert it into satisfying dramatic action and direct speech instead. This was, of course, what provoked Turgenev's famous dismissal of the opera ('But what a libretto! – Just imagine: Puškin's verses describing the characters are put into the mouths of the characters themselves'),[21] although this transformation was clearly imperative from a practical point of view.

So what of the name-day scene? Why does it contain so little text from Puškin's novel? The scene is certainly treated in great detail by Puškin, accounting for stanzas 25 to 45 of canto 5 of the novel, as well as the first stanza of canto 6. Indeed Puškin's description of both the ball itself, and the circumstances leading up to the duel, constitute one of the more extended episodes in the novel. Unlike the letter scene or the duel scene, however, where Čajkovskij carried over a ready-made scene more or less directly into the libretto, the name-day scene was comprehensively recast to produce a piece of extended dramatic action which would work convincingly on stage. In order to grasp why so much of the verbal material in this scene belongs to the composer and not the novelist, it suffices to reread the original novel. The name-day scene is one of the sections most obviously described form the point of view of the narrator; almost everything is filtered through his ironic gaze, something that

[21] 'Но что за либретто! – Представьте: стихи Пушкина о действующих лицах вкладываются в уста самих лиц.' Letter of 15 November 1878 (o.s.), in: Ivan Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem* (*Complete works and letters*), 2nd edn, 30 vols, Moscow 1978–2018, XVI/1 (2015), p. 206–7.

needed to be removed in the operatic libretto, where – as Turgenev lamented – characters are required to speak *in propria persona*.

Having established the peculiarity of the name-day scene in relation to its libretto (and the opera's other scenes), we can now turn to the question of how Čajkovskij deals with the compositional freedom that the scene's singular construction gave him (although as we lack any drafts relating to either the libretto or the score, it is impossible to know whether the scene's dramaturgy was worked out in advance, or whether the libretto evolved hand-in-hand with the composition of the music). Where other scenes were heavily focused on material taken directly from Puškin and which determined Čajkovskij's handling of musical form, the relative lack of novelistic material in the name-day scene means that he had correspondingly greater room for creative manoeuvre. As Asaf′ev rigtly notes, the scene is 'the most complex one [in the opera] and remarkable for how its musical dramaturgy is conceived and how masterfully this is realised'.[22] Indeed, Asaf′ev momentarily alights on the key to the scene's mastery when he refers to its 'method of psychological-symphonic contrast', yet his determination to explore the opera's pervasive lyricism means that he fails to pursue this line of enquiry.[23]

And here, then, we return to some of the ideas with which this chapter began; namely a sense that Čajkovskij's practice as an opera composer was in part dictated by his experiences in the genre of the symphony (and, to a lesser extent, the symphonic poem). As we have seen, this was often held up as a criticism of his operas, and despite its frequent recourse to lyric forms, this continued to be the case when it came to *Evgenij Onegin*. In particular, one critic dismissed the name-day scene as 'only a pretext for his creative ardour

[22] 'самая сложная и замечательная по музыкально-драматургическому замыслу и мастерству его воплощения'. Asaf′ev, '"Evgenij Onegin": liričeskie sceny P. I. Čajkovskogo' (see n. 7), p. 111.

[23] 'метод психологически-симфонического контраста', Asaf′ev, '"Evgenij Onegin": liričeskie sceny P. I. Čajkovskogo' (see n. 7), p. 113.

as a symphonist'.[24] Although this was clearly meant critically, there is a kernel of truth here, as this is the scene in the opera which has the greatest sense of through-composed musical argument, and which ultimately derives its dramatic impact from its underlying formal structure, something permitted by the fact that this is the scene with the least verbal material derived directly from Puškin's novel. Moreover, as with *Lebedinoe ozero*, Čajkovskij manages to take a series of relatively conventional dance sequences (dictated, of course, by the demands of verisimilitude, as the waltz, the mazurka, the cotillion and the ecossaise are all referred to explicitly in the libretto) and invests these with a perhaps unexpected formal ambition and quasi-symphonic coherence.[25] In this regard, Čajkovskij's sophisticated use of dance numbers to determine the structural principal underlying the name-day scene mirrors his use of lyric forms in the other scenes and provides one further example of the carefully concealed artfulness of the opera.

One way to reveal the underlying structure of the scene as a whole is to examine how Čajkovskij explicitly subdivides it into individual sections:

1. Entr'acte and waltz with scene and chorus
2. Scene and Triquet's couplets
3. Mazurka and scene –
4. Finale

[24] Nikolaj Solov'ëv, in: *Novosti i birževaja gazeta* (*News and commercial gazette)*, 23 October 1884, cited in Wiley, *Tchaikovsky* (see no. 13), p. 173.

[25] For brief comments on the dance numbers in *Evgenij Onegin* as both a marker of the opera's evocation of everyday reality, and as evidence of Čajkovskij's symphonic approach to opera, see Aleksandr Vasil′ev, 'Muzykal′naja dramaturgija opery "Evgenij Onegin" i postanovka tanceval′nych scen L. Ivanovym' ('The musical dramaturgy of the opera "Evgenij Onegin" and L. Ivanov's staging of the dance scenes'), in: *Vestnik Akademii russkogo baleta im. A. Ja. Vaganovoj* (*Bulletin of the A. Ja. Vaganova Academy of Russian ballet*), 3 (2015), p. 92–7.

Here, we can clearly observe the division of the scene into four distinctly marked sections, each with its own different character. Moreover, we also see a far greater integration of the chorus into the dramatic action and musical argument, as well as a use of dance forms not so much as decorative or incidental music, but as a structuring feature of the music's unfolding narrative. The form reveals itself yet more clearly when we examine the movements in greater detail, focusing in particularly on the structure of each movement individually, and the harmonic relationships with connect them into an overarching whole.

The 'Entr'acte and waltz with scene and chorus' begins with a 31-bar introduction, marked *andante non tanto* in common time. Tonally, it sits largely in the key of A major, with modulations through A-flat major, B-flat minor and then, through an enharmonic transition, back to A major. The *andante non tanto* then segues into a very substantial 448-bar section marked *tempo di valse*, whose home key of D major reveals the opening A major to have been a dominant preparation – not an uncommon strategy in Čajkovskij's oeuvre (see, for instance, the first movement of the *Patetičeskaja simfonija*). The structure of this waltz section is not immediately obvious, but the following scheme is one way of representing its place within the movement's overall form:

Bar numbers	Key	Function within the movement	Notes
1-31	A major – B flat minor – extended transition back to A major	*Andante non tanto*, serving as Introduction to main waltz theme	Frequent reminiscences of previous material and themes, particularly from the opera's introduction

			and preceding letter scene
32-73	D major	Introduction over dominant pedal	
74-142	D major – A major – D major	Waltz theme, arranged in an ABA form	Curtain; chorus, ‘Vot tak sjurpriz’
143-206	G major – B minor – G major	Development of waltz material, similarly arranged in ternary form, here CDC	Chorus, ‘V našich pomesťjach’
207-274	D major – A major – D major	Reprise of original waltz material, in ABA form	Chorus
275-337	G major, with excursions to B minor	New material, in a broadly binary structure (here EE)	Onegin and Lenskij
338-367	D major over an A pedal	Reprise of the material from bars 32-73	
368-399	D major	Heavily compressed reprise of elements of bars 74-142, arranged AA	Chorus, ‘Vot tak sjurpriz’
400-448	D major with more extensive harmonic excursions	Reminiscences of motivic material from earlier on in fragmentary form, functioned as a coda to the scene.	Chorus

What we are dealing with here is an extended piece of writing primarily for orchestra and chorus, with a middle section for the two male protagonists. One way of parsing the sequence would be as a simple rondo form, but it also potentially functions as an embryonic instance of sonata form. After an introduction, we have an extended exposition section for chorus with two contrasting tonal centres – ABA in D major/A major/D major, followed by CDC in G major/B minor/G major. The dialogue between Onegin and Lenskij performs the role of a development section, before the return of a radically condensed recapitulation and an extended coda. To be sure, it may not containe the most densely worked motivic material in the opera and its themes are primarily lyric or dance-like. Nonetheless, it does have a strikingly clear and coherent sense of structure, motivated in part by its roots in the waltz form. Indeed, the parallel here is not so much with Čajkovskij's own complex sonata-form structures (written, of course, in the shadow of Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann), but with the earlier models of, say, Mozart and Haydn, or even the accessible domestic repertoire performed in the early nineteenth-century gentry home. Read thus, the simplicity and straightforwardness of the sonata-form structure employed in this opening waltz movement function as a kind of intertextual evocation of the musical period in which the opera is set (what Asaf′ev would describe as a musical *intonacija*).

What of the rest of the scene? What symphonic principles govern its construction? The second section features Triquet's couplets, prefaced by extensive dialogue between Lenskij and Ol′ga:

Bar numbers	Key	Function within movement	Notes
1-72	Moves rapidly	*Andantino*. Harmonically unstable introduction:	Extended recitative and *parlando*

	through a range of keys	D major – G major – C major – D major – B minor, with Lenskij's sadness gravitating towards flatter keys (eventually A flat minor), and Ol′ga's cheeriness pulling things to C sharp major and B major. Onegin's intervention moves the movement to A major, before things finally settle in G major	sections involving a number of characters.
72-111	G major	Simple song form (AA, with brief chorus interjections after each verse)	Triquet's couplets

Here, the form is far clearer and distils itself as a simple strophic song form, prefaced by an extensive introduction that moves through a range of keys before settling clearly in G major. Marked *andantino*, it marks a more reflective mood than that of the energetic waltz with which the scene opens.

This is then followed directly – *attaca* – by a mazurka, which – like the opening section – combines dance music with a dialogue between Lenskij and Onegin:

Bar numbers	Key	Function within movement	Notes
1-76	G major	After a brief introduction over a dominant pedal, a series of iterations of the mazurka music	
76-154	E minor	Marked *molto meno mosso*, three iterations of the same material *pp*/*p*,	Encounter between Onegin and Lenskij

		with variation in the third iteration	
155-187	Rapid modulation through a range of keys	*Moderato – piu mosso – moderato assai*	Intervention of chorus, extended recitative-like material

This leads directly into the finale, which has the following formal properties:

Bar numbers	Key	Function in movement	Notes
1-19	G major – E minor – B major – B minor – heading towards E major via a Neapolitan modulation	Opening *recitative*, redolent of the use of *parole sceniche*	Begins with Lenskij's *arioso*, joined in turn by Onegin, Tat′jana, Larina and Olga (and chorus)
20-42	E major	Primary material	Chorus and soloists
43-60	F sharp minor followed by considerable harmonic	Secondary material	Onegin accepts Lenskij's challenge

	modulation		
61-96	E major	Reprise of primary material from bars 20-42	Chorus reaction (with brief exchange between Olʹga and Lenskij)

To what, then, does all of this amount? Clearly divided into four individual sections, Act 2, Scene 1 unfolds along the lines of an artfully concealed four-movement symphonic structure, with a compressed and simplified sonata-form opening allegro, a more reflective 'slow' movement in the form of Triquet's couplets, a mazurka taking the place of the customary minuet and trio, but preserving elements of that original form, and a dramatic, free-form finale with elements of rondo structure. Further examination reveals further echoes of Čajkovskij's symphonic structures elsewhere, not least the tendency to favour extended opening sonata-form movements that are much longer then the ensuing movements (as in the case of the Fourth and Sixth Symphonies, for instance, or the First Piano Concerto). We might also recall that Čajkovskij's ability elsewhere to fuse very different generic traditions within individual works. Take, for instance, the observation that his ballets apply symphonic principles to dance music – just as his symphonic works incorporate elements of dance (the substance of a famous exchange with Sergej Taneev about the Fourth Symphony, for instance).

To emphasise the symphonic ambition of the name-day scene is not, of course, to rule out other approaches to analysing the opera, or to suggest that Čajkovskij did not draw on other sources when fashioning the original, even idiosyncratic dramaturgy of *Evgenij Onegini.* Clearly, Čajkovskij's use of dance numbers is determined by the scene's literary content and the whole opera's broader interest in verisimilitude. Yet dance sequences had

long been a feature of opera itself as a genre, often providing *couleur locale* and opportunities to show of a company's ballet troupe. Čajkovskij's knew and admired the operas of Meyerbeer, for instance, and would have been familiar with the ballets written for inclusion in *Robert le Diable* and *Le prophète*.[26] Likewise, he would have known of Verdi's use of dance sequences in operas such as *Aida*, even if *Evgenij Onegin* marks an ostensible rejection of the conventions of French *grand opéra*.[27] Equally, the ensemble nature of the name-day scene means that it can be readily interpreted in terms of its debt to certain Italian operatic genre conventions. As Lucinde Braun has argued, a number of Čajkovskij's operas – namely *Opričnik*, *Orleanskaja deva* and *Evgenij Onegin* – include scenes for soloists and chorus which suggest the influence of the *pezzo concertato* form, most familiar in the work of Verdi.[28]

What makes *Evgenij Onegin* such a fascinating case study, then, is its deft and sophisticated engagement with a variety of inherited forms and operatic conventions, rather than its unreflective debt to any one particular model. The claim that the name-day scene represented 'a pretext for his creative ardour as a symphonist' may have been meant negatively, yet it accidentally reveals how Čajkovskij's growing prowess as an orchestral composer could feed productively into an opera which on the surface seems to set itself against symphonic principles and which has mainly been read in the light of its lyric expressivity. For all it is a key work in its composer's artistic evolution, *Evgenij Onegin* also represents a fascinating challenge to scholarly conventions, precisely because much of the

[26] On Meyerbeer, see in particular Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, 'Meyerbeer and Ballet Music of the Nineteenth Century: Some Issues of Influence with Reference to *Robert le Diable*', in: *Dance Chronicle*, 21/3 (1998), p. 389–410. More generally, see Mark Everist, 'Grand Opéra – Petit Opéra: Parisian Opera and Ballet from Restoration to Second Empire', in: *19th-Century Music*, 33/3 (2010), p. 195–231.

[27] Knud Arne Jürgenson, *The Verdi Ballets*, Parma 1995.

[28] Lucinde Braun, 'Das "pezzo concertato" in Čajkovskijs Opern', in: *Mitteilungen der Tschaikowsky-Gesellschaft*, 6 (1999), p. 17–26.

most revealing writing on Russian opera has tended to focus on the status of the libretto, as well as on questions of the adaptation and transposition of literary texts. Yet as this chapter has suggested, this model can be amplified and even tested against an analytical approach, however embryonic, that attends to the specificities of musical form. An opera's musical form cannot simply be seen as an incarnation of its literary source text, but instead functions as an equal – if not entirely autonomous – element within the work as a whole. *Evgenij Onegin* appeals by the force of its sincere emotion, yet equally it demonstrates the acuity of its composer's command of form. It reveals the force of Čajkovskij's mind, as well as the susceptibility of his heart.