

MARINA RITZAREV

  
ASHGATE

TCHAIKOVSKY'S  
*Pathétique* AND  
RUSSIAN CULTURE



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AND RUSSIAN CULTURE

*For Sergei Abir*

# Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* and Russian Culture

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ASHGATE

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Published by

Ashgate Publishing Limited

Wey Court East

Union Road

Farnham

Surrey, GU9 7PT

England

Ashgate Publishing Company

110 Cherry Street

Suite 3-1

Burlington, VT 05401-3818

USA

[www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com)

### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

### **The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:**

Ritzarev, Marina.

Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* and Russian Culture / by Marina Ritzarev.

pages; cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4724-2411-2 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4724-2412-9 (ebook) –

ISBN 978-1-4724-2413-6 (epub) 1. Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilich, 1840–1893. Symphonies,

no. 6, op. 74, B minor. 2. Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilich, 1840–1893—Criticism and interpretation.

3. Music—Social aspects—Russia (Federation) I. Title.

ML410.C4R57 2014

784.2'184—dc23

2013039367

ISBN 9781472424112 (hbk)

ISBN 9781472424129 (ebk – PDF)

ISBN 9781472424136 (ebk – ePUB)

Bach musicological font developed by © Yo Tomita

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# Preface

This book offers a new hypothesis for the enigma presented by Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*, and joins a long list of interpretations that may be found in Tchaikovsky historiography. Like many other authors, my hypothesis is based not merely on the score, but also on Tchaikovsky's literary legacy. Tchaikovsky took good care to document all the complexities of his nature and personality. He is not responsible for the fact that his human image has been simplified and adapted to one extremity or another, depending on the part of the world, historical developments and fashion. His image was polished and bowdlerized even by his own pen, in his letters to his major addressee – his great benefactress Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck,<sup>1</sup> who fundamentally supported Tchaikovsky's existence as a full-time composer during the years 1878-1891 – and also to other correspondents; later in the first biography written by his brother Modest;<sup>2</sup> and, eventually, in official Soviet culture, which eagerly adopted the ready myth. In the West, in contrast, following Havelock Ellis's comment about the Sixth Symphony, which he 'should be inclined to call the Homosexual Tragedy',<sup>3</sup> Tchaikovsky's homosexuality has been pinpointed as a cornerstone of his personality and creative work.<sup>4</sup> While this source was mentioned rarely in Tchaikovsky Gender Studies of the 1990s,

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<sup>1</sup> Their correspondence was published in various forms: in excerpts (Modest Chaikovsky, *Zhizn' Petra Il'icha Chaikovskogo*, 3 vols (Moscow-Leipzig, 1900–02)) and 'in full', in fact censored (*Chaikovsky P.I., Perepiska s N.F. fon Meck*, 3 vols (Moscow, Leningrad: Academia, 1934–36; reprinted in 2004, Moscow: Zakharov); and in *Chaikovsky P.I., Polnoe sobranie sochineniy: Literaturnye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, Vols. 2, 3, 5–17 (Moscow: Muzyka, 1953–81). Based on these editions, their selected letters were also assembled in various combinations and translated into English. It is only recently that this correspondence has been published in full, supplemented by detailed historiographical comments: *P.I. Chaikovsky – N.F. fon Meck, Perepiska*, 4 vols (Vol. 4 forthcoming 2014), 1876–90. Collection, editing and commentary by Polina E. Vaydman. (Chelyabinsk: Tchaikovsky's State Memorial Museum in Klin, Tchaikovsky Academic-Editorial Board/Music Production International, 2007, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Modeste Tchaikovsky, *The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head; New York: John Lane Company, [1906]; reprint Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Impressions and Comments* (London: Constable & Company, 1921), 136; quoted in Vladimir Volkoff, *Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait* (Boston: Crescendo Publishing Company, 1975), 322.

<sup>4</sup> See Malcolm Hamrick Brown, 'Tchaikovsky and His Music in Anglo-American Criticism, 1890s–1950s'. In Alexandar Mihailovic (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His Contemporaries: A Centennial Symposium* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 61–73.

it appeared to have been seminal. (Beethoven was more lucky, and Ellis's no less offensive conclusions about his Fifth Symphony seem not to have affected its reputation.)

These attitudes are in discord. When one reads the highly personal, uninhibited version that this great composer consigned to paper, in full awareness that it would be in the public domain quite soon after his death, one is tempted to perceive his individuality through this reflection. Moreover, when imagining, for example, within the same session of letter-writing somewhere in Venice or Paris in the period from 1877 to 1880, and working on the Fourth Symphony or *The Maid of Orleans*, how he wrote to his brothers about his exciting pursuit of, and rendezvous with, Italian or French male prostitutes, at the same time as writing to von Meck about his creative experiences, we are left with a somewhat uncomfortable feeling. Indeed, much depends on what one reads first. However, we also have the score of his *The Maid of Orleans*, and need to remind ourselves that the scenes of mass prayer, on the one hand, and the accepted-forbidden love pre-dawn duet of Joan and Lionel – on the other, were composed by the same person.

Fortunately, for the purpose of our present discourse, the author does not depend on this split in historiography of censored (self- or social) and full versions of Tchaikovsky's human portrait. Nor was there a need to read between the lines: all quotations are well known and often used. It is the matter of their contextualization that perhaps casts a new light on the *Pathétique*.

Marina Ritzarev  
March 2014

# Acknowledgements

The present book, though initiated, conceptualized and composed by the author, is, nevertheless, the product of discussion with, encouragement from and a great deal of help on the part of friends and colleagues who, generally, have approved the hypothesis presented below. Emerging eight years ago from a highly unexpected source, the idea seemed impossible to develop at the time. I therefore turned to Esti Sheinberg, who supported me in developing a semiotic approach, greatly helped with materials and from whom I learned a lot during the work on our first article on Tchaikovsky. I then shared it with Sergei Ritsarev-Abir, my husband, a universal musician and a symphony-score man, who knows how to guard music from musicologists but who, nevertheless, kept the idea alive throughout the years of my doubts and added many precious comments. It was very rewarding to receive positive responses from some of my colleagues from my native Saint Petersburg: Lyudmila Kovnatskaya, my basic authority on the Saint Petersburg historical tradition, who would be unforgiving where tempting stretches of the imagination were appeared; Arkady Klimovitsky, my life-long inspiration regarding the universality and artistry of musicological thought and writing, and a profound Tchaikovsky scholar (among his other fields), whom I quote at length in this book; Anatoly Milka, whose methods and revelations I never tire of learning, and whose vast combination of experiences, including his fundamental Bach expertise, knowledge of Tchaikovsky's life in Klin, and Ukrainian realities, project some crucial points into the present narrative; Aleksey Vulfson, my conservatoire peer, whose knowledge and critical thinking scared me in our student days – and even more so after a half century – who sacrificed his own research interests for the career of an editor and to whom – not just as editor but also and always as a co-thinker and co-writer – many of us St Petersburgian scholars are greatly indebted for our own books. All the above scholars contributed their knowledge and insights to this project, and supplied me with sources. In this connection, I particularly note down the contribution of one of our teachers, Elena Mikhailovna Orlova (1908–85) who, when initiating her students into research methods, began directly from draft copies of the Sixth Symphony, and taught her students about archive practices in the Klin Museum. Her book, *Petr Il'ich Chaikovsky* (Moscow, 1980) was one of the first attempts to draw a portrait of Tchaikovsky-the-intellectual.

I also cordially thank my Jerusalem colleague Elena Abramov-van Rijk, the first reader of the draft, for her keen comments and additions that I incorporated in the text, and my sister Nina Libin for reading the draft and making valuable suggestions. My warm thanks also to Natalia Kalinichenko, Semion Schreiber, and Vadim Zhuravitsky for help with materials, as well as to our patient Bar-Ilan

music librarian Efrat Mor and to the Toronto University Music library in general, where the beautiful collection of Russian music sources in many languages is assembled. I am especially indebted to my editors Naomi Paz and Marilyn Ohana who did their best to anglicize my English. My wholehearted gratitude goes to an understanding and cooperative Ashgate team in general and especially to editors with whom I was in contact: Senior Commissioning Editor Laura Macy for her courageous and effective support of the book, to Emma Gallon for her caring and helpful assistance along the way, to Sarah Price for her shrewd and uncompromising copy-editing, and to Senior Editor Barbara Pretty for providing the most reliable operative support on the exciting stage of production. Needless to say how grateful I am to two Ashgate readers who enthusiastically endorsed the book and offered their creative comments.

The present study would hardly have been possible without the Tchaikovsky State House-Museum in Klin and its Principal Researcher Polina Vaydman,<sup>1</sup> whose constant help and initiative were of great support and – much more importantly – whose personal contribution to the study and academic publication of the *Sixth's* draft and score (in cooperation with the editor Thomas Kohlhasse), to publication of an urtext of the composer's literary legacy, and to the post-Soviet presence of Tchaikovsky in Russian and world culture in general, is enormous. I also express my gratitude to Ada Ainbinder, the Head of Manuscripts & Printed Materials Department, who was of great help with her own works on Tchaikovsky.

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<sup>1</sup> Since Polina's surname is spelled differently in various sources, and is familiar to readers as Vajdman, Waidman, and so on, I spell it in accordance with the source cited, but 'Vaydman' in my text, as agreed between us.

# Notes on Abbreviations, Transliterations, Translations and Dates

## Abbreviations

*ADF* (*Autograph Draft Facsimile*) – Petr Il’ič Čajkovskij, Symphony No. 6 in B Minor ‘Pathétique’, Op. 74 (ČW27). Autograph Draft Facsimile. New Edition of the Complete Works, Series II: Orchestral Works, Volume 39a, edited by Polina Vajdman (Moscow–Mainz: Muzyka–Schott, 1999).

Laroche/Campbell – G.A. Laroche, ‘The First Symphony Concert of the Musical Society on 16 October’. Musical Chronicle in *Theatre Gazette*, 22 October 1893, no. 18. Laroche 2, 159–61. In Stuart Campbell (ed.), *Russians on Russian Music, 1880–1917: An Anthology*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 37–8.

*PB* – Zhdanov, Vladimir (ed.), *P.I. Chaikovsky, Pis'ma k blizkim. Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1955).

*P.I.–N.F.* (Tchaikovsky – von Meck correspondence) – Vaydman, Polina (ed.), *P.I. Chaikovsky – N.F. fon Mekk, Perepiska*, 4 vols (Vol. 4 forthcoming 2014): 1876–90 (Chelyabinsk: Tchaikovsky’s State Memorial Museum in Klin, Tchaikovsky Academic–Editorial Board/Music Production International, 2007, 2010).

*PSS* (full collection of works) – *Chaikovsky P.I., Polnoe sobranie sochineniy: Literaturnye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, Vols 2, 3, 5–17 (Moscow: Muzyka, 1953–81).

## Transliterations

From many transliterations reflecting different traditions, such as Čajkovskij or Tschaiikowsky, I chose the most common today, *Tchaikovsky*. With all due respect for the academically accepted spelling *Chaikovsky*, which indeed transliterates the Russian Чайковский better, I will adopt that transliteration when we start transliterating Bach and Mozart *Bakh* and *Motsart*.

## Translations

Translations of Russian sources are mine if not otherwise indicated.

**Dates**

The dates are quoted according to the sources. Since the Russian (Julian) calendar was 12 days later than the Gregorian calendar in Tchaikovsky's time, the dates of the events abroad are given with slash (i.e. 12/24 February 1878).

# Chapter 1

## Secrecy<sup>1</sup>

Please, don't tell anybody about this, except Modest; I am purposely sending it to the School, so that nobody else will read the letter.<sup>2</sup>

The above sentence, which tends to go unnoticed among the more mundane details at the end of the letter (regards to friends and associates, and so on), is taken from Tchaikovsky's well-known letter to his nephew Vladimir (Bob) Davydov of 11 February 1893. The composer writes here about his conception of the Sixth Symphony, the chief point of which is the existence of a programme, which he will never reveal:

During my journey, the idea of another symphony visited me, this time programmatic but with the programme that will remain a riddle for everybody – let them guess [‘who can’, adds Modest in his brother's biography];<sup>3</sup> and the symphony will be entitled: Programmnaya simfonia (No. 6); Symphonie à Programme (No. 6); Eine Programm-Symphonie (No. 6).<sup>4</sup>

The contents and the tone of the letter indicate its high importance. The reasons for such secrecy remain unknown and could range from the most trivial to the most serious.

To begin with the simplest possibility, it is well known that people (at least in the Russian culture) are often superstitious when something important is about to happen, and they tend to conceal their intentions in order to protect them ‘from the evil eye’. On 29 March 1887, for example, the composer Sergei Taneyev, Tchaikovsky's former student and then friend, asked him to keep secret the fact that he had begun working on his opera *The Oresteia*.<sup>5</sup> Tchaikovsky, who had

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<sup>1</sup> The first two chapters, analysing the period when the *Sixth* was conceived naturally parallel a very similar but much more detailed account of the events presented by Polina Vaydman in her commentaries to the volume with the facsimile, *ADF*.

<sup>2</sup> Пожалуйста, кроме Модеста, никому об этом не говори; я нарочно адресую в училище, чтобы никто не прочел письма. *PSS*, 17: 42.

<sup>3</sup> Modeste Tchaikovsky, *The Life and Letters*, 704.

<sup>4</sup> Во время путешествия у меня явилась мысль другой симфонии, на этот раз программной, но с такой программой, которая останется для всех загадкой, — пусть догадываются, а симфония так и будет называться: Программная симфония (No. 6); Symphonie à Programme (No. 6); Eine Programm-Symphonie (No. 6). *PSS*, 17: 42.

<sup>5</sup> Svetlana Savenko, *Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1984), 79.



rung around to tell everybody about writing his own symphony in E<sub>b</sub> major (*Life*), which he eventually discarded in complete disappointment, may perhaps have learned to be a little more circumspect about his creative plans. Whatever the reason, this was the first time that he kept his brainchild hidden from his milieu. Considering the mysterious aura surrounding this work, its double protection – in content and in the way of conveying the quoted message – deserves our attention.

Indeed, this special precaution to conceal the very existence of the programme is reflected in the composer's decision to send this particular letter not to Fontanka 24, St Petersburg, where Bob then lived with Modest (uncomfortably close to the St Petersburg Police Department at Fontanka 16), but to Bob's place of learning. Deliberately available in this way to any curious gaze, as if of little importance, it would have been ignored by secret police agents; whereas had it been sent to Modest–Bob's home address, there was a good chance that it would have been opened and read on its way to the addressee. The manoeuvre, thus, was to outsmart the house-owner or the secret police, who monitored intellectuals in nineteenth-century Russia only a little less diligently than in the century that followed, especially after the Tsar Alexander II's assassination in 1881.

If it was such a secret, however, why mention it at all? It is possible, of course, that the simple human temptation to share the excitement was irresistible. Moreover, his decision to initiate his nephew into this secret had its history: a month and a half earlier (16/28 December 1892), Tchaikovsky informed Bob that he had decided 'to throw out and to forget' the previous symphony (*Life*). Besides, in addition to giving Bob financial help, Tchaikovsky was granting him the privilege of being the first to know about this very important creative project. In so doing, he was perhaps trying to balance their asymmetrical relations, for the uncle received less attention from his beloved nephew than he would have wished. His letter begins:

If only you would spit on notepaper and send it to me in the envelope!  
Zero attention! Well, God bless you, I just wanted to receive a few letters  
[characters] from you.<sup>6</sup>

A third possible explanation is that of the gambler's calculated risk: a hint, thrown to a curious audience (whom, he knew, it would reach sooner or later); a small taste, nothing vital, just to intrigue, to whet the appetite.

The paradox is that in this letter Tchaikovsky does in fact give the symphony a title and, just to be sure, he gives it three times: in Russian, in French and in German: 'Программная симфония (No. 6)'; 'Symphonie à Programme (No. 6)'; 'Eine Programm-Symphonie (No. 6)'. This suggests that he himself was about to publicize the existence of the programme, and as openly as possible. To ask

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<sup>6</sup> Хотя бы ты плюнул на почтовую бумагу и прислал мне в конверте! Ноль внимания! Ну, Бог с тобой, а мне хотелось хоть несколько букв от тебя получить. *PSS*, 17: 42.

his nephew to keep it secret in the very same letter, and not to notice such an obvious contradiction, was probably related to the state of high excitement that possessed Tchaikovsky in those early days of sketching out the score, especially on 11 February, by which date the main ideas had mostly been drafted and the rest was firmly entrenched in his mind.

Again, it remains unclear why was it so unusual that the symphony had a hidden programme. His Fourth and Fifth Symphonies had working programmes, though these were not emphasized by the composer – nor were they kept secret. Tchaikovsky described the *Fourth* only to N.F. von Meck<sup>7</sup> and the programme of the *Fifth* remained as draft notes.<sup>8</sup> The composer qualified the new symphony as this time programmatic. One could ask, however, whether *Life*, the abandoned symphony, was not also programmatic; moreover, with a hidden programme mentioned in his letter to Alexander Ziloti, that he had never asked the latter to keep secret?<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps, however, the core of this letter was not a *title* aimed at demonstrating the programme's existence. As we know, this title was later dropped, and remained in history merely as a working title. Could it have been something else, expressed, for example, in the following words:

Of all my programmes, this is the one most imbued with subjectivity. I wept many times, during my travels, while composing it in my mind.<sup>10</sup>

Why should subjectivity be concealed, however profound it might be? Was it not a primary attribute of the composer in the Romantic era? Or perhaps he was ashamed of his tears? Hardly. Tchaikovsky cried a lot and rarely failed to report it. He mentions tears or crying in his diary at least 30 times, and even more so in his letters.

Since, for the composer, the issue of programme was both essential and sensitive in regard to the *Sixth*, it is worth reviewing his attitude to this kind of music. Programme music, as the term was coined by Liszt and, in all probability, in the same sense used by Tchaikovsky, implied an objective narrative, popular among the reading public: a plot, a *sujet*. Of course, landscapes and genre too, like his own first symphony *Winter Dreams*, relate to programme music, though free from dramatic narrativity. By the 1890s, the pantheon of classic literature had been exhausted, including by Tchaikovsky himself, who by 1893 had completed all his programme compositions.

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<sup>7</sup> Letter to von Meck from 17 February/1 March 1878. *P.I.–N.F.*, 2: 83–7.

<sup>8</sup> Transcribed in his 1888 notebook, the programme of the *Fifth* is often quoted. The first quotation is in Budyakovsky, Andrei, *Chaikovsky: Simfonicheskaya muzyka* (Leningrad: Filarmonia, 1935), 145–6.

<sup>9</sup> *ADF*, 83.

<sup>10</sup> Программа эта самая что ни на есть проникнутая субъективностью, и нередко во время странствования, мысленно сочиняя ее, я очень плакал, *PSS*, 17: 42–3.

Tchaikovsky's relationship with programme music was one of 'love-hate.' Positively established after the success of his Overture-Fantasy *Romeo and Juliet* (1869–80) and his symphonic poem *Francesca da Rimini* (1876), it reached its peak and crisis in the mid-1880s, triggered by his unwilling creation of *Manfred*. As he confessed to Hermann Laroche on 3 July 1885:

I am finalizing a very big symphony, alas, with the *programme*, namely on *Manfred*. Balakirev stuck so close to me with this *Manfred*, that [I] almost gave up; I tried, then I began, – and, like a snowball turning into a huge avalanche, from this attempt, an enormous symphony à la Berlioz later emerged. *I swear that is the last time in my life that I write a programme symphony* [my italics – M.R.]: how false, how much conventionality, bureaucracy [red tape] in the spirit of the mighty handful [sic, neither capitals, nor quotation marks for *The Mighty Handful*] how cold and spurious it is, in fact!!!<sup>11</sup>

It is true that Tchaikovsky never returned to the same format of programme symphony. However, he was prepared later to broaden the programmatic approach to encompass a more ambitious philosophical meaning, as the title of his discarded project *Life* suggests. Fortunately, however, his delusion of presenting this pretentiously entitled work to the public was abandoned over time.

What perhaps continued to distance him from programme music was the issue of objectivity, which remained its principle feature. Subjectivity, on the other hand, finds a secure refuge in 'pure' instrumental genres. Everything is open to the fantasies of composers and their interpreters. This means that if subjectivity had been more important to Tchaikovsky, he would have left this symphony with the single number 'Sixth' as its title, as was the case with the *Fourth* and the *Fifth*.

The composer had to undergo an arduous journey in order to find his solution. Seven years after his apparent farewell to the programme symphony, exemplified in *Manfred*, and only a few hours after bidding farewell to his *Life* symphony, on 16/28 December 1892, he said something completely opposite to what he had said to Laroche. This time he addressed Bob and not Laroche, who might

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<sup>11</sup> Я ... заканчиваю очень большую симфонию, увы, с *программой*, а именно на *Манфреда*. Балакирев так приставал ко мне с этим *Манфредом*, что [я] имел слабость дать слово; затем попробовал, начал, – а потом как снежный ком обращающийся в огромную лавину, из этой попытки вылезла на свет огромная симфония, à la *Берлиоз*. Клянусь, что в последний раз в жизни пишу программную симфонию: какая фальшь, сколько условности, казенщины в духе могучей кучки, как все это холодно и ложно, в сущности!!! Alexander Poznansky. 'Tchaikovsky's Letters in the Yale University (USA)' [in Russian]. In Tamara Skvirskaya, Larisa Miller, Florentina Panchenko, and Vladimir Somov (eds), *Tchaikovsky: New Documents and Materials. Essays*. Saint Petersburg Music Archives, Vol. 4 (St Petersburg: St Petersburg State Conservatory/Compozitor Publishing House, 2003), 95.

have remembered his old vow and been surprised at seeing his friend now at the opposite pole:

I am still sitting in Berlin. I haven't got enough energy to leave – especially as there is no hurry. These last few days I have been considering and reflecting on matters of great importance. I looked objectively at my new symphony and was glad that I neither orchestrated nor launched it; it makes quite an unfavorable impression. I mean, the symphony was written just for the sake of writing something – there is nothing attractive or interesting in it. I have decided to throw it out and forget it. The decision is irrevocable and I am glad I made it. But, does this mean that I am completely dried up? This is the question that has been worrying me for these last three days. *Maybe I could still summon up inspiration to write programme music but pure music – i.e. symphonic and chamber music – I should not write any more* [my italics – M.R.]. On the other hand, to live without work that absorbs time, thoughts and strength, is very dull. What should I do? Forget about composing? Too difficult to say. So here I am, thinking, thinking, and thinking, and not knowing what to decide. Whatever the outcome, these last three days have been unhappy ones ...<sup>12</sup>

The addressee's response seems to have had a healing effect. Bob, who replied at once, certainly merited Tchaikovsky's dedication to him of his last symphony:

Reading your letter, overwhelmed with the *self-disappointment*, I, first was not in the least surprised that you write it *to me*. Then, I smiled – both concerning its contents and about your not being able to write unless inspired artificially by *sujet*, *libretto* etc ... . Your state would perhaps trouble me, if it were not a result of moral fatigue, caused by your staying in Petersb[urg]. I, of course, feel pity

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<sup>12</sup> Я до сих пор сижу в Берлине. У меня не хватает мужества тронуться, – благо, торопиться не нужно. Эти дни я предавался важным и чреватым последствиями помышлениям. Просмотрел я внимательно и, так сказать, отнесся объективно к новой своей симфонии, которую, к счастью, не сумел инструментовать и пустить в ход. Впечатление самое для нее не лестное, т. е. симфония написана просто, чтобы что-нибудь написать, – ничего сколько-нибудь интересного и симпатичного в ней нет. Решил выбросить ее и забыть о ней. Решение это бесповоротно, и прекрасно, что оно мной принято. Но не следует ли из этого, что я вообще выдохся и иссяк? Вот об этом-то я и думал все эти три дня. Может быть *сюжет* еще в состоянии вызывать во мне вдохновение, но уж чистой музыки, т. е. симфонической, камерной писать не следует. Между тем жить без дела, без работы, поглощающей время, помыслы и силы, – очень скучно. Что же мне остается делать? Махнуть рукой и забыть о сочинительстве? Очень трудно решиться. И вот я думаю, думаю и не знаю, на чем остановиться. Во всяком случае невеселье провел я эти три дня... *PB*, 523–4. The translation, slightly altered, is borrowed from Galina von Meck (trans.), Percy M. Young (additional annotations), *Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Letters to his Family. An Autobiography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 525.

for the Symphony, which you tossed off a cliff, as they did it in Sparta with the children, because it seemed to you a freak. In the meantime, perhaps it is just a similar work of genius to the first five. Your efforts *to objectivize yourself* are in vain, you will never succeed in this.

It is true that the *people's voice* cannot serve as judgement today, since any work under your name will be liked, but when was this opinion right?! Write as you want, since, if you want to, it means that there is a need, and the need is given to you – for your genius to be realized. The syllogism is quite wild, but this is what I believe!<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the reason, Tchaikovsky managed to liberate himself from his dilemma regarding programme and *pure* music. When the new conception matured, the composer probably realized that he needed to incorporate both in one genre: an objective programme and its super-subjective implementation. Their combination made it too programmatic for a symphony and too subjective for a tone-drama. This new, unfamiliar genre demanded a new dramaturgy (or form, as he put it further in the letter quoted earlier from 11 February 1893):

The symphony will have many innovations in its form. Among other things, the Finale will not be a loud allegro, but the opposite, the most lingering [stretchy, sticky] *adagio*.<sup>14</sup>

The idea, thus, seemed to be to imbed some drama of a non-symphonic nature within the form/genre of a symphony, which would thereby change the nature of symphony itself.

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<sup>13</sup> Читая твое письмо, переполненное *саморазочарования*, я, во-первых, несколько не удивился, что ты *мне* это пишешь, а во-вторых, улыбнулся – как и вообще его содержанию, так и тому, что ты не можешь писать иначе, как возбуждив себя искусственно сюжетом, либретто и пр., точно Скобелев в старости! Твое состояние само по себе меня бы обеспокоило, если б оно не было следствием нравственного утомления, вызванного пребыванием в Петерб[урге]. Жаль, конечно, Симфонию, которую ты, как в Спарте детей, бросил со скалы, потому что она оказалась тебе уродом. Между тем, наверное, она так же гениальна, как и первые 5. – Тщетно ты будешь стараться *объективиться*, тебе это никогда не удастся.

Правда, что теперь *глас народа* не может служить оценкой, т. к. заранее всякое произвед[ение], носящее твое имя, будет нравиться, но когда это мнение было верным?! Пиши, пока хочется, т. к., если тебе хочется, то, значит, есть потребность, а потребность тебе дана – для того чтобы твой гений имел реальное бытие. Силлогизм довольно дикий, но таково мое убеждение! Valery Sokolov, 'Letters of V.L. Davydov to P.I. Tchaikovsky.' In Tamara Skvirskaya et al. (eds), *Tchaikovsky: New Documents and Materials*, 285–6.

<sup>14</sup> По форме в этой симфонии будет много нового, и, между прочим, финал будет не громкое аллегро, а наоборот, самое тягучее *adagio*. PSS, 17: 43.

The question of secrecy remains, however, and why it had to be hidden? Could it be the concern that somebody might steal the idea, even unwittingly? This explanation cannot be excluded, considering the groundbreaking innovation in constructing the cycle. However, there was nobody else around at the time who could compose a symphony of a dramatic nature. The only candidate, though absolutely far-fetched, would have been Anton Rubinstein, but might Tchaikovsky really have expected this from his highly respected tutor, an embittered and ill maestro who was escaping to Germany? (The influence could be rather from the opposite side, as one might perhaps guess in the course of reading this book.)

The content of the letter, read at face value, does not suggest any rational reason for the composer's apprehension and for his shrouding himself in mystery. Tchaikovsky was serious nonetheless, and asking his addressee for confidentiality perhaps implied what might be deduced from between the lines. As to what might have lain behind this clumsy (though successful!) attempt at mystification, I suggest that the reason was neither the hidden programme nor the highest subjectivity but the very controversial relationship existing between the programme (objective material) and its being imbued with extreme subjectivity. This might be considered to be the most sensitive point of the composer's message.

To bestow some objective plot with a deeply subjective interpretation suggests a kind of personal identification with the protagonist, who might feature as an historical figure or a *belles-lettres* character. Tchaikovsky was probably now ready to accept that he understood, from his own life experience, how this protagonist might feel and – at the same time – how he, the composer Tchaikovsky, personally felt toward the protagonist. He must have felt that the way it should be presented to the public was crucial for the fate of the symphony; and he had to pass between the Scylla of necessity to give life to this creation and the Charybdis of spoiling it if he were to reveal all his cards through its title. Hence this secrecy; and there was no power on earth that could make him disclose it.

Diligently self-documented, though disarmingly admitting his own posturing,<sup>15</sup> Tchaikovsky has left us vast possibilities regarding where this protagonist should be sought, both in his correspondence and in his diary. A scholar's only dilemma is where to look – at the lines or between them. An enigma that envelopes this symphony, compounded by the combination of the hidden programme and the composer's sudden death shortly after its premiere – has made some researchers look mostly between the lines, in search of this great man's sins and vices; though today, with publication of the uncensored Tchaikovsky, little remains to be peered at through the keyhole. Perhaps some might ascribe this subjectivity to the 'vice' of the composer's homosexuality, but this is highly unlikely. What would have been the point of hiding so deeply in the programme of instrumental music what

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<sup>15</sup> Diary 8, 27 June, 1888. Wladimir Lakond (trans. with notes), *The Diaries of Tchaikovsky* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, [1945] 1973), 249–50.

was on view so openly in his real life with the same 'fourth suite' of Bob's peers<sup>16</sup> to whom he sent his regards? Nor does homosexuality look like the reason for 'the imbued subjectivity' that made him weep.

'Between the lines', of course, can never be excluded, but there are enough documented sources that, if gathered and viewed from a certain angle, can support many other hypotheses, including the one offered in the following chapters.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Fourth suite' was Modest's joking name for the group that included Vladimir Davydov, Vladimir Svechin, Rudolf Buksgevdn and Boris Rakhmanov, whose company Tchaikovsky enjoyed.

## Chapter 2

# Before 4 February 1893

One might well assume that the idea of the *Sixth* began to crystallize at some time between the tribulations Tchaikovsky suffered with his *Life* symphony in Berlin, in mid-December 1892, and 4 February 1893, when the first sketches of the *Sixth* appeared. During the period of a month and a half the composer experienced one of the creative crises all too familiar to him. This time, however, it had been characterized by vastly contrasting emotional experiences that could have contributed to the maturation of the new conception. In his letter to Bob (11 February 1893) Tchaikovsky had mentioned some moments during his travels when he was composing the new work in his mind. It is therefore worth tracing his impressions and self-reflections as featured in his letters to other addressees during this period (they remain the only source, since his diary ends in 1888).

After spending a few days in Berlin, Tchaikovsky's stops included Basel, Montbéliard (Switzerland), Paris, Brussels, Paris, Odessa, Kamenka and Kharkov, before his return home to Klin. (It was initially also planned to make a detour to St Petersburg at the end of the trip, but this was later cancelled. Kharkov, on the contrary, had not been planned.) Of this 50-day period, he spent at least 10 days on the road. Time passed in a carriage sometimes offers rewarding privacy for creative individuals, who, suddenly disconnected from their daily routine, find it an excellent opportunity to abandon themselves to daydreaming.

Basel was a short transitional stop before the exciting destination of Montbéliard, beckoning in its very uncertainty, where he was to visit Fanny Durbach, the governess to the Tchaikovsky children from 1844 to 1848. They had lost connection after several years of correspondence, mostly due to Mrs Tchaikovsky's death, but Fanny had remained a precious memory. It was not until about 40 years later that the knowledge of her whereabouts reached the Tchaikovskys. Peter Ilyich began to write to Fanny in April 1892 and used his European trip to visit her. The anticipation of this meeting greatly moved him – not only with the joy of seeing this beloved person once more, but, perhaps even more so, with the reminiscences of his own early years. Attaching too much emotional stress to this event, he wrote to Modest from Basel on 19/31 December 1892:

Tomorrow I go to Montbéliard and, to tell the truth, with some painful *fear*, almost *horror*, as if to the realm of death and of people who have long disappeared from the scene of life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Завтра еду в Montbéliard и, признаюсь, с каким-то болезненным *страхом*, почти *ужасом*, точно в область смерти и давно исчезнувших со сцены мира людей.



After the visit, he wrote to his other brother, Nikolai, in a similar vein:

Time and again I was transported to this distant past, which made me feel terrible, but at the same time sweet, and all the time we both could hardly hold back our tears.<sup>2</sup>

Following this nostalgic journey to the past was a return to the whirlpool of his mundane present. Publicity and socializing were a necessary condition for survival in the now modestly subsidized life of the composer, who became more dependent on his royalties and honorariums.<sup>3</sup> Not that Tchaikovsky was a complete stranger to this sphere. On the contrary, his manners, effortlessness and communication skills made him quite a charismatic and very welcome social figure. He knew the effect he had on people, he enjoyed it, and it was a necessary element of his life – as was the time he spent alone. He felt truly comfortable, nonetheless, only in rare moments of peace of mind, when he was satisfied with his work. In those other moments of creative vacuum, uncertainty and vanity, he could not bear to be alone, suffering from depression, lack of confidence, fear for the future, and so on; nor could he endure any but the most necessary social contact. At such moments, his attitude to social life became conflicted: he needed to escape from his loneliness, but it was generally tiresome and annoying. This is what awaited him during his tripartite Gallic sojourn: Paris – Brussels – Paris, a week in each.<sup>4</sup> ‘Then, in Paris, I will carry out official visits to the co-academics and, probably, whirl in a whirlwind of hustle and bustle. Still, it is better [than loneliness – M.R.]. In Brussels, again, there will be no time to feel lonely.’<sup>5</sup>

Paris served Tchaikovsky as a kind of home from home, where he usually felt good and always had something to learn from its culture. This time it was a transitional stop before and after the chief event – his monograph concert in Brussels, where he presented his gorgeous Third Suite, an international favourite the First Piano Concerto, the suite from *The Nutcracker*, *Walse* and *Élégie* from the Serenade

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Letter to Modest, Basel, 19/31 December 1892. *PB*, 525.

<sup>2</sup> По временам я до того переносился в это далекое прошлое, что делалось как-то жутко и в то же время сладко, и все время мы оба удерживались от слез. Letter to Nikolai, Paris, 22 December 1892/3 January 1893. *Ibid.*, 526.

<sup>3</sup> By this time Nadezhda von Meck had discontinued her sponsorship. Although Tchaikovsky received quite a respectable pension from the Tsar, his lifestyle, his travels and the support he gave his relatives made any income he received insufficient.

<sup>4</sup> The dates of this trip were: Paris – from 22 December 1892/3 January 1893 to 28 December 1892/9 January 1893; Brussels – from 28 December 1892/9 January 1893 to 3/15 January 1893; and Paris again – from 3/15 January 1893 to 9/21 January 1893 when he departed for Odessa.

<sup>5</sup> Затем в Париже буду делать официальные визиты соакадемикам и, вероятно, заверчусь в вихре суеты. Это все же лучше. В Брюсселе опять будет не до тоски. Letter to Modest, Basel, 19/31 December 1892. *PB*, 525.

for Strings, his always well received *1812*, as well as several romances and piano pieces. Having by then acquired self-confidence in conducting, he conducted it all by himself. Brilliant success was a matter of course, quite predictable after his sensational concerts in Prague, Berlin and New York. *Noblesse oblige*, however, and on receiving the honorarium at the end of the event, Tchaikovsky immediately returned it as a charity donation, demonstratively conveying the cheque to the orchestra musicians for whose benefit the concert had been organized. It was impossible to do otherwise – the status of celebrity dictated this, after Liszt and Jenny Lind had set the standard with their innumerable charitable performances throughout Europe.<sup>6</sup>

True relaxation came only in Paris, where Tchaikovsky breathed a little more easily, seeking to remain incognito and seeing only a few close friends. Those were easy days of well-deserved leisure before the pleasant though very intensive Odessa tour.

After three days of travel, Tchaikovsky arrived in Odessa, where he was to conduct several concerts and the newly mounted *The Queen of Spades*. He was in a good mood (as far as possible), knowing that it would be less tense for him than abroad: ‘Odessa is already home ...’.<sup>7</sup>

Odessa symbolized home in its best sense. It was a geographically remote cultural centre, where the enlightened public embodied the achievements of Russian musical education since the 1860s. In 1859, the brothers Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein had founded the Russian Musical Society, with branches all over the country and, soon afterwards, the two conservatories – in St Petersburg and Moscow. In the 1890s, musical life in Russia flourished: every musical institution had highly skilled musicians that served an educated public in many cities. The Odessa public thus demonstrated a genuine people’s love, sincere and convivial, for Tchaikovsky’s music, without the snobbism and prejudices of the audiences in the capital cities of St Petersburg and Moscow.

The two-week Odessa experience is well known and well documented. The success exceeded all Tchaikovsky’s expectations and elevated his public stature to a new level. Being too busy to write much from Odessa, it was only on 24 January, his last day in the city, that he managed to reply to his St Petersburg cousin, Anna Merkling, whose four letters reproachfully awaited a response. Excusing himself for his long silence, he wrote:

But try to imagine my position: never have I experienced anything like what is going on now. They honour me as if I am some great man, almost a redeemer of the fatherland, and they fuss over me from every side so that I can’t breathe freely. I have been here already for about two weeks, and, during this time, I have succeeded in conducting five concerts, holding innumerable rehearsals, and eating the multitude of lunches and dinners given in my honour. All this

<sup>6</sup> Paul Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso: Spectacle, Skill, and Self-Promotion in Paris during the Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Но Одесса это уже дома .... Letter to Modest, Basel, 19/31 December 1892. *PB*, 525.

fatigues me greatly, but it would be ridiculous to complain, because in the end, it will be a pleasure to recollect these unprecedented ovations and admiration.<sup>8</sup>

In a similar mood he wrote to Modest four days later, on 28 January, already from Kamenka:

I was never so tired from conducting as I was in Odessa, because I had to conduct five concerts there. At the same time, however, no one and nowhere did they laud and fete me more than there. It is a pity that you do not have Odessa newspapers to hand, you would learn to what an exaggerated degree Odessa related to my merits. There were many unbearably hard hours (for example, a celebration dinner in the English Club), but many rewarding ones as well. If only, some day, I could be honoured in the capitals at least one tenth of what I was in Odessa! But it is impossible, and, indeed, needless. What I do need is to believe in myself again, since my self-confidence is severely damaged; I seem to have reached an end.<sup>9</sup>

These words could well illustrate the portrait of Tchaikovsky painted by Nikolai Kuznetsov during this time in Odessa. Since Odessa was a part of his motherland, and those around him forced him to feel like a prophet, he could not help but realize, unwillingly, that there *was* ‘a prophet in his own land,’ and that that prophet was he, Peter Tchaikovsky. (God forbid if he had been received in the same way in the two capital cities, as he might have wished; he would simply not have survived his own fear of heights.) He had long ago known, since the late 1870s, that his hour

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<sup>8</sup> Но нужно войти в мое положение; никогда я не испытывал еще ничего подобного тому, что теперь происходит. Меня чувствуют здесь как какого-то великого человека, чуть ли не спасителя отечества, и тормозат во все стороны до того, что я не имею возможности свободно вздохнуть. Вот уже почти две недели что я здесь, и за это время успел дирижировать в пяти концертах, сделать бесчисленное количество репетиций, съездать массу обедов и ужинов, даваемых в мою честь. Все это меня очень утомляет, но жаловаться было бы смешно, ибо в конце концов мне приятно будет вспомнить эти небывалые овации и восторги. Letter to Anna Merkling, Odessa, 24 January 1893. *PSS*, 17: 24–5.

<sup>9</sup> Никогда мне не приходилось так уставать от дирижирования, как в Одессе, ибо мне пришлось дирижировать в пяти концертах, но зато никогда и нигде меня так не возносили, не фетировали, как там. Жаль, что ты не можешь иметь под рукой одесских газет, – ты бы узнал, до чего преувеличенно Одесса относилась к моим заслугам. Много было невыносимо тяжелых часов (например, торжественный обед в Английском клубе), но и много отрадных. Если б когда-нибудь хоть десятой доли того, что было в Одессе, я мог удостоиться в столицах! Но это невозможно, да, впрочем, и не нужно. Нужно бы мне снова поверить в себя, ибо моя вера сильно подорвана; мне кажется, что я покончил свою роль. Letter to Modest, Kamenka, 28 January 1893. *PB*, 529.

of glory would come, but he had been certain that it would come posthumously.<sup>10</sup> He was by no means ready to experience glory in his lifetime, being truly modest and severely self-demanding. On the other hand, ‘the fear and almost horror’ (to use his own words written before visiting Fanny Durbach in Montbéliard) can be openly felt in his gaze, as if directed at the looming chasm between the rising status of the celebrity and the inner emptiness. He believed that his creative bankruptcy, for the present known only to himself, would soon become obvious, and that the hour of exposure was inexorably drawing closer. In his agonizing, the composer could well have imagined how the laurel wreath that he had received, perhaps for the only time in his life (*received* and not purchased by means of a personal assistant, as nineteenth-century celebrities sometimes did), could turn into a crown of thorns if he were to reveal his sorry state.

In this state of suspension between the greatest possible satisfaction and utter blankness, he departed for Kamenka: ‘I will spend three or four days here and then – to Klin, without stopping on the way.’<sup>11</sup> At Kamenka there was Davydov’s estate where Tchaikovsky’s late sister, Alexandra, had settled after her marriage to Lev Davydov. For Tchaikovsky, homeless and often penniless for most of his life, the place had served for many years as a welcoming summer refuge, a kind of family home. By 1893, not just Alexandra but also her eldest daughter Tanya had died, and Lev had re-married. Since Lev’s ability to support his children was not sufficient, Tchaikovsky felt obliged to help them. He entrusted Tanya’s illegitimate child ‘Georgic’ into the care of his brother Nikolai’s family. The main object of his care, however, was Alexandra’s youngest son, Vladimir – Bob, whom Tchaikovsky supported and sponsored to a degree.

The Kamenka estate was still a working estate maintained by old Davydov’s aunts and several other relatives. Tchaikovsky had not seen these people for a long time, and probably felt the need to pay his respects to them as well as the simple human desire to be in the warm bosom of a loving family. This relaxed visit corresponded to his visit to Fanny Durbach. He derived great joy from arriving enveloped in fame to see those who might well have thought that he had become arrogant, and to reassure them – to show that neither he, nor his love for them,

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<sup>10</sup> At one of these moments, preparing himself for the cold reception of his *Tempest* in Paris, Tchaikovsky wrote to Modest: ‘There is nothing to be done. I’ll have to squirm a little on Sunday, but a little indeed, because I am already a *beaten* bird and I know all too well that my time is in the future, and so far ahead that I will not see it in my life.’ (Но нечего делать, придется немножко потерзаться в воскресенье, впрочем именно немножко, ибо я в этом отношении *стреляная* птица и знаю очень хорошо, что мое время впереди, и до такой степени впереди, что я не дождусь его при жизни. Paris, 22 February/6 March 1879). Valery Sokolov (ed.), “‘От памятки к человеку”. Избранные пис’ма Чайковского без купюр.” In Polina Vaydman and Ada Aimbinder (eds), *Neizvestnye Chaikovsky* (Moscow: P. Yurgenson, 2009), 231.

<sup>11</sup> Я проведу здесь дня три или четыре. В Клин проеду, не останавливаясь. Letter to Modest, Kamenka, 28 January 1893. *PB*, 529.

had changed. He could be honest with himself that he had successfully passed the hardest of the tests – by ‘copper trumpets’ (a metaphor of glory, apparently of Russian origin, added to the ancient symbols of going through fire and water in the process of self-identity). Besides, he was generally at a stage of closure.

In Kamenka, he had already known that there was no need to visit St Petersburg as he had planned earlier that month. There were no royalties awaiting him there since there were no performances, and he had nothing to give to Bob.<sup>12</sup> From Kamenka, therefore, he intended to travel directly to Klin. The journey however, turned out not to be so direct after all.

The night on the train was a nightmare. Overfed by his hosts (hospitality in Russian households often means a variety of dishes, and Tchaikovsky probably did not wish to offend the old people), he suffered a severe bout of indigestion, with a high fever, headache, nausea and delirium. Perhaps he should not have boasted to Modest two days earlier (in the same quoted letter) that only his robust health had enabled him to get through those tense days.<sup>13</sup> His health was no longer that robust! He had enough self-possession nonetheless to correctly assess the situation and get off the train in Kharkov. Castor oil, quinine, and a good sleep restored him. Staying at the Grand Hôtel, however, left him penniless and forced him to turn for help to people he knew – the amiable family of Ilya Ilyich Slatin, director of the Kharkov branch of the Russian Musical Society. To repay the Slatins’ kindness, he promised to come and conduct a concert during the current season, and left for Klin. The night train from Kharkov to Moscow was no great comfort either: a boorish conductor treated him as a nonentity, twice attempting to turn Tchaikovsky out of his first-class carriage, and finally making him sit in the crowded common carriage. On stopping in Moscow, Tchaikovsky cabled his publisher and friend Peter Yurgenson, asking him to come to the station. Yurgenson came, bringing with him the mail that had arrived for Tchaikovsky (containing, among other things, an invitation to an honorary doctorate award ceremony from Cambridge University – alas, too late for him to show it to that conductor on the night train). On Thursday night, 3 February, Tchaikovsky arrived home; on Friday 4 February, he began to write the draft of the first movement.

The period of the initial conception of the symphony thus narrows down to six–seven days: from 28 January, the peak of his crisis, when he wrote that he ‘had seemed to have reached an end’, to 4 February. We should keep in mind, however, his phrase ‘I wept many times, during my travels, while composing it in my mind’, which suggests a longer period, sometime from mid-December, in Berlin. We also know that he longed to be back home in Klin, where he never stayed for long, but where he had a safe refuge and could work at peace; perhaps he hoped to finally concentrate in his seclusion. As he wrote on 4/16 January to K. von Ledebur from

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<sup>12</sup> Tchaikovsky postponed this visit until Lent at the end of February.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Paris, he was going ‘dans un mois rentrer chez moi et vivre quelque temps dans une retraite absolue’.<sup>14</sup>

Earlier ideas for the new conception that had been crystallizing in his mind for years also cannot be excluded. It would be safer, thus, to suggest that some general idea might have occupied his imagination for an indefinite period, but the idea of its implementation sparked in him at some moment between that horrible night on the train from Kamenka and sitting down at the table in Klin.

As which of the events it could be related to, I suggest that it might have been less a specific event and more the combination, variety, contrasts and intensity of those experiences, which had slowly come together in his mind. This is especially true for the last two weeks, in which he had plunged from the highest expressions of glory to the most vivid awareness of his own mortality. If, by that time, he indeed possessed any profound, mandatory and daring ideas, without which he would not consider his earthly mission to have been completed, the night train episode could have pushed him into realizing that he could not afford to postpone their embodiment. Any delay could have been ‘too late’.<sup>15</sup>

The clarity of the new idea in his mind instantly recharged his creative potential. Incomprehensibly, within the three days when he composed the first movement he wrote several substantial letters, rested and strolled. The very next day, on 5 February, he wrote to Modest that he had to write the new symphony and that he was still (as always, especially being elated by the success of *The Queen of Spades* and *Iolanta*) looking for the perfect plot for an opera – and with this he would complete his career as a composer. Such declarations, of course, should never be taken seriously. Artists are the first to forget them the moment a new idea arises. Still, he already felt that this one was *the* symphony for which he had long sought a solution, and which he himself would be unable to surmount.

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<sup>14</sup> Letter to K. von Ledebur from 4/16 January, *PSS*, 17: 15.

<sup>15</sup> ‘I hope I shall not die without having implemented this intention of mine,’ wrote Tchaikovsky to the Grand Duke, Constantine Romanov on 29 October 1889, implying some grandiose symphony that would crown his career and be dedicated to the Sovereign (‘Надеюсь не умереть, не исполнивши этого моего намерения’. *Ibid.*, 15A: 205).

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## Chapter 3

# Mood Very Close to Requiem, but for Whom?

Apart from mentioning it in that letter to Bob, Tchaikovsky never spoke of the working title for his new symphony. In the programme of its premiere on 16 October 1893, it appeared simply as Symphony No. 6. Nevertheless – albeit reluctantly – he once again had to acknowledge the existence of the programme. Rimsky-Korsakov, with his experienced ear, immediately perceived the hidden narrative and, during the intermission, when he went to the green room to shake hands with Tchaikovsky, he asked him directly whether it existed. Tchaikovsky's reply, however, differed little from that of his letter of 11 February: of course it did – but he had no wish to reveal it.<sup>1</sup>

At some moment during the nine months between conceiving the symphony and its premiere, Tchaikovsky also needed to explain its general mood of lament. Reflecting on the Grand Duke Constantine Romanov's suggestion to compose music to the poem *Requiem*, written by the recently deceased poet Apukhtin, Tchaikovsky expressed his being:

disturbed by the circumstance that my last symphony, just recently written and scheduled for performance on 16 October (I would *terribly* like Your Highness to hear it), is imbued with a mood very close to that of the *Requiem*. It seems to me that I succeeded with this symphony, and I am afraid of repeating myself if embark at once on a new work, close in spirit and character to its predecessor ... Without exaggeration, I put my whole soul into this symphony ...<sup>2</sup>

A few days later, writing to the same addressee (from Klin, 26 September), the composer further developed his argument: 'The general mood of this

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakoff, *My Musical Life* (trans. Judah A. Joffe, ed. Carl von Vechten) (New York: Tudor Publishing, [1923] 1935), 287–8.

<sup>2</sup> Меня немного смущает то обстоятельство, что последняя моя симфония, только что написанная и предназначенная к исполнению 16-го октября (мне *ужасно* бы хотелось, чтобы Ваше Высочество услышали ее), проникнута настроением, очень близким к тому, которым преисполнен и 'Реквием'. Мне кажется, что симфония эта удалась мне, и я боюсь, как бы не повторить самого себя, принявшись сейчас же за сочинение, родственное по духу и характеру к предшественнику ... В симфонию эту я вложил, без преувеличения, всю свою душу ...<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Grand Duke K.K. Romanov from Moscow, 21 September 1893. *PSS*, 17: 186.



piece [Apukhtin's *Requiem* – M.R.], of course, is subject to be reproduced musically, and this mood imbues my last symphony (especially the Finale) in a significant measure.<sup>3</sup>

We have, thus, three components voiced by the composer himself: a programme, a funereal mood and 'extreme subjectivity'. These three components might perhaps seem enough for those who arrived at the conclusion that the symphony was a 'requiem for himself', reinforcing their opinion with the various circumstances of Tchaikovsky's life and death, as well as allusions to Mozart's *Requiem* symbolically coinciding with the end of his life. Moreover, this widespread qualification receives an interesting interpretation, as presented by Roland John Wiley.<sup>4</sup> There are, however, nuances that contradict this notion.

Later in the quoted letter Tchaikovsky wrote: 'For [composing] music that would turn out to be worth the poem you like, it [the poem] needs to possess a property that will fire my author's feeling, touch, excite my heart, stir my imagination.'<sup>5</sup> We know, and Tchaikovsky knew, that the source of inspiration for the music of the *Sixth* surely possessed all the properties he mentioned. Another important point is that the image of Tchaikovsky, as reflected in his literary heritage and documented behaviour, does not represent a person who would have derived inspiration from his own life, even if it were as fabulous as it really was. He was a truly great man, who kept a tight rein on his ego and retained his modesty. At this point, I turn to the search for an external object.

This could be an image, the protagonist of some drama, an historical figure, or a cultural hero highly esteemed by Tchaikovsky and whose personality could lead the composer to put his 'whole soul' – and he meant it – into this symphony. Many times during that nine-month period, he wrote to his friends and relatives that he valued and loved it more than anything he had written before. ('Rarely did I write something with such love and fondness.')<sup>6</sup>

There are plots where the general outline, or the interplay of ideas, can be superimposed on the score, if we relate to the symphony as a tone-drama. A. Budyakovsky drew attention to the possible influence of Tolstoy's *Confession* (1935).<sup>7</sup> Dmitry Shostakovich in 1943 noted a certain parallel between the

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<sup>3</sup> Общее настроение этой пьесы, конечно, подлежит музыкальному воспроизведению, и настроением этим в значительной степени проникнута моя последняя симфония (особенно финал). *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>4</sup> Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 421–31.

<sup>5</sup> Дабы музыка вышла достойна нравящегося Вам стихотворения, нужно, чтобы оно имело свойство согревать мое авторское чувство, трогать, волновать мое сердце, возбуждать мою фантазию. *PSS*, 17: 193.

<sup>6</sup> Редко я писал что-нибудь с такой любовью и увлечением. Letter to Slatin, 23 September 1893, *ibid.*: 188.

<sup>7</sup> Budyakovsky, *Chaikovsky*, 154.

*Sixth* and Anton Chekhov's *The Black Monk*, although not as a literary source.<sup>8</sup> M. Tcherkashina, in her study of Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orleans*, hints at its notable narrative similarity to the *Sixth*.<sup>9</sup> Alfred Musset's play *André del Sarto* (once considered by Tchaikovsky as source for opera) could probably, by some stretch of imagination, fit the symphony. Scholars of literary narrative and *sujet* would probably find other suitable stories, perhaps even more fitting than those just quoted.

As for historical personalities or cultural heroes, there are many great individuals, including composers, whom Tchaikovsky admired. However, there are only two he had worshiped throughout his life. He left many lines in his letters and diary to prove it. He idealized these two figures, though not blindly, seeing parallels between them, and perceived them, in some ways, through their popular in the nineteenth-century literary images. The two were Mozart and Jesus Christ:

Mozart I love as the musical Christ. I think that there is nothing sacrilegious in this comparison. Mozart was a being so angelic, so childlike, so pure; his music is so full of unapproachable, divine beauty, that if anyone could be named with Christ, then it is he ... . In Mozart I love *everything*, for we love *everything* in a person, whom we love truly. Above all *Don Juan*, or thanks to it I learned what *music* is ... . Of course, loving everything in Mozart, I shall not start asserting that every insignificant work of his is a *chef-d'oeuvre*. Yes! I know that none of his sonatas, for example, is a great work, and *still* I love every one of his sonatas because it is *his*, because this musical Christ imprinted it with his serene touch.<sup>10</sup>

To strengthen this parallel, Tchaikovsky compared his heroes with their predecessors and opposites, first – God the Father and God the Son:

What an infinitely deep abyss between the Old and the New Testament! ... David is entirely *worldly* ... . Upon the godless, he invokes in each psalm divine punishment, upon the godly, reward; but both punishment and reward are earthly ... . How unlike Christ, who prayed for his enemies and to his fellow man promised *not earthly blessings* but the *Kingdom of Heaven*. What eternal poetry and, touching to tears, what feeling of love and pity toward mankind in his words: 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden.' All the Psalms of David are nothing in comparison with these simple words.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Rosamund Bartlett, 'Tchaikovsky, Chekhov, and the Russian Elegy.' In Leslie Kearney (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 314.

<sup>9</sup> Marina Tcherkashina, 'Tchaikovsky, *The Maid of Orleans*; the Problem of the Genre and the Specific Treatment of the Subject'. *International Journal of Musicology* 3 (1994): 175–85.

<sup>10</sup> Diary No. 8 (special, for important thoughts), 20 September 1886. Lakond, *The Diaries of Tchaikovsky*, 247–9.

<sup>11</sup> 22 February 1886. *Ibid.*, 244.

Tchaikovsky also juxtaposes two pairs of antinomies:

I bow before the greatness of some of his works – but I do not *love* Beethoven. My attitude toward him reminds me of what I experienced in childhood toward the God ... [the Name]. I had toward Him (and even now my feelings have not changed) a feeling of wonder but at the same time also a fear. He created Heaven and earth, He too created me – and still even though I bow before Him, there is no *love*. Christ, on the contrary, inspires truly and exclusively the feeling of love. Though He was *God*, He was at the same time man. He suffered like us. We *pity* Him, we love Him, His ideal *human* side. And if Beethoven occupies a place in my heart analogous to the God ... [the Name], then Mozart I love as the musical Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Mozart was the personality Tchaikovsky loved most profoundly and for the longest time, to whom he felt he owed his own becoming a musician, and whose image he perceived through (probably) Pushkin (*Mozart and Salieri*, a ‘little tragedy’) and certainly through Otto Jahn. ‘The more one learns Mozart, the more one loves him! Ideal of Artist and Man!!!’, wrote Tchaikovsky among his marginalia on Jahn’s book.<sup>13</sup> His letters to von Meck are full of delightful epithets on Mozart’s soul purity, radiance, angelically chaste personality, ideal of composer who created according to unconscious call of genius, and so on. Mozart indeed received Tchaikovsky’s musical tribute, as reflected in his *Mozartiana* suite (1887). Perhaps his choosing to quote *Ave verum corpus* (K. 618) as a theme for the third movement, an angelic prayer – *Preghiera. Andante ma non tanto* – was not incidental, but was intended to convey the image of purity so loved by Tchaikovsky; that same *serene touch* of this *musical Christ*, as if metaphorically embodying Jesus’ *corpus* into the human flesh of the divine and ever-young musical genius.<sup>14</sup>

While Mozart’s death was exceptionally tragic, it was not the kind of event to cause generations of humanity to mourn worldwide. What we all hear in the *Sixth*’s Finale, however, is a *lamento* of such a monumental and historic scale, as proved

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 247–8.

<sup>13</sup> Чем больше узнаешь Моцарта, тем больше любишь его! Идеал художника и человека!!! – Tchaikovsky’s note on the edition from his personal library: Otto Jahn, *W.A. Mozart*, Vol. I (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1856), S. 489. See Nina Viktorova, ‘Biblioteka Petra II’icha Chaikovskogo’. *Muzykal’naya zhizn’* 12 (1979): 23.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Mikhail Mishchenko notes that the mutually exclusive motifs of *immortality* and *humanness* reconciled in some way in the historiography of the New Time and got along exceptionally harmoniously in Mozart’s case, and that one of the reasons contributing to their amalgamation was the image of the *eternal child*. Mishchenko, *Iz istorii Mozartovedenia*. Lectures in the Course of West-European Musical Historiography. (St Petersburg: St Petersburg State Conservatory, 2005), 14. One could add that the unity of *immortality* and *humanness* deifies Mozart’s image, and facilitates its parallel with Christ in the nineteenth-century cultural consciousness.

by its being played throughout the Western world at funerals of national heroes. The following chapters therefore are dedicated to introducing facts and evidence, though mostly indirect, in support of the hypothesis that the image that might have served as the source of inspiration for Tchaikovsky's masterpiece was that of Jesus Christ, his life and death, transformed into a general imagery of the *Passion*.

This hypothesis is not entirely original, even if I arrived at it independently. Budyakovskiy's vague mention of Tolstoy's *Confession* clearly refers to the winning Christian argument that the author associated with the *Sixth*. David Brown tactfully explains his use of the Gethsemane and Calvary metaphors in his analysis of the first movement:

How Tchaikovsky, the doubter who longed for faith, would have responded to that metaphor cannot be said. Whether he saw the destiny-controlling agent in which he so fervently believed as the executor of divine judgement, and whether, more specifically, the less brutal image Fate had seemed to present in the Fifth Symphony signified that he could now equate it with the stern redeeming power within Christian belief is impossible to say. What follows in this symphony suggests otherwise, for the crisis of suffering leads not to a resurrection, but to final extinction. Whether such speculations can have any validity – whether, indeed, they should be made – each must decide for himself. What cannot be questioned is that this monolithic section of new music, which with such labour heaves itself aloft, embodies the crisis of the experience made incarnate in this movement, and the gigantic slow scalic descent through more than two octaves leaves no question about what power is controlling destiny.<sup>15</sup>

Leon Botstein writes:

[the artist Nikolai] Gay painted a shocking portrait of Christ in *Calvary* (1893 ...); here the horror, terror, and anguish of the son of God burst out of the painting's nearly expressionist surface. If there were a visual equivalent to the *Pathétique*, Symphony No. 6, it might be this painting. Christ becomes an ordinary individual experiencing profound suffering ...<sup>16</sup>

In the above-mentioned article, Tcherkashina indirectly touches on a similar idea, leaving the conclusion to be read between the lines. Finally, Christ as an object of Tchaikovsky's self-identification appears in Timothy Jackson's discourse.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study*: Vol. 4: *The Final Years (1885–1893)* (London: Gollancz, 1991), 450–51.

<sup>16</sup> Leon Botstein, 'Music as the Language of Psychological Realism: Tchaikovsky and Russian Art'. In Leslie Kearney (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy L. Jackson, *Tchaikovsky. Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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## Chapter 4

# Tchaikovsky and Christ

The question of one's relationship with Christ is inseparable from the question of religious belief. Tchaikovsky left many statements on both these issues. The general picture is that, being a rational and critically thinking man, he was more of a doubter, though he did try hard. He was too much a product of the Age of Reason to be a wholehearted believer, but at the same time he was also too much a product of the Romantic era with its devotional longings. His at times desperate need of support from some metaphysical being only got stronger as he grew older, lost relatives and friends, and increasingly had to struggle with his own fear of death. Perhaps the best way to put it is that his desire to believe was greater than his ability to do so. He needed belief to support his spirit, but the belief he needed demanded the type of support that could not satisfy his rational mind.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, he warmly encouraged Modest (in 1876), when the latter was going through one of his waves of religious mood:

I thought about you in the night and today. I am very glad that you are religious. Theoretically, I do not agree with you in anything, but if my theories would shake you in your belief, I would be angry with you. I am as much ready to argue with you ardently on the questions of belief as fervently I wish that you remain with your religious beliefs. Religiousness in the form as it is manifested in you, indicates a high *probe* of the metal from which you are minted.<sup>2</sup>

As for himself, he wrote to von Meck a year later:

I fail to find enough strength in my soul to develop some firm beliefs, because I, like a weather vane, am spinning between traditional religion and arguments

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed summary of Tchaikovsky's religious views can be found in Volkoff, *Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait*, Chapter 11: 'I am learning to love God'.

<sup>2</sup> Я много думал о тебе ночью и сегодня. Я очень рад, что ты религиозен. Теоретически я с тобой ни в чем не согласен, но если б мои теории тебя пошатнули в твоей вере, то я бы на тебя разозлился. Я столько же горячо готов с тобой спорить о вопросах веры, сколь горячо желаю, чтобы ты остался при своих религиозных верованиях. Религиозность в том виде, как она проявляется в тебе, свидетельствует о высокой *пробе* металла, из которого ты отчеканен. Letter to Modest, Berlin, 11/23 January 1876, *PSS*, 6: 16.

of reason ... I forgot then that there can be such people as Spinoza, Goethe, Kant, who managed to do without religion.<sup>3</sup>

He good-naturedly envied Balakirev, who had become a profound believer, and wrote to him on 31 October 1884:

La conversation que j'ai eue hier avec vous m'a beaucoup touché. Comme vous êtes bon! Quel ami authentique vous êtes pour moi! Comme je voudrais que ce rassérènement que s'est effectué dans votre âme descende aussi sur moi. Je puis dire, sans forcer aucunement la vérité, que j'aspire plus que jamais à trouver un apaisement et un soutien dans le Christ. Je vais prier pour que la foi en lui s'affirme en moi ...<sup>4</sup>

Leo Tolstoy's *Confession* probably offers the most precise model of Russian God-seeking in the last third of the nineteenth century, which – in many ways – is applicable to Tchaikovsky. Reading this work shortly after its appearance in the *samizdat* of the 1880s,<sup>5</sup> Tchaikovsky fully subscribed to its very clear and simple idea, and even wrote to von Meck (13 March 1884) that he had come to a similar solution independently, even before he had read it in Tolstoy:

But my illumination came much earlier than Tolstoy's, probably because my brain is constructed more simply than his, and, moreover, it is my constant need to work, for which I admit that I suffered and tormented myself less than Tolstoy! Every hour and every minute I thank God for giving me belief in Him. With my faint-heartedness and ability to despair from every single blow, to the

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<sup>3</sup> Я не нахожу в своей душе силы выработать какие-нибудь прочные убеждения, потому что я, как флюгер, верчусь между традиционной религией и критическими доводами разума ... Я и забыл тогда, что могут быть люди, как Спиноза, Гете, Кант, которые сумели обойтись без религии. Letter to von Meck, 6/18 December 1877, *PI-N.F.*, 1: 120. It is interesting how close this idea is to Vladimir Stasov's, expressed in his letter to Leo Tolstoy seventeen years later (9 June 1894): 'Almost always you are relying on the thought of Christ, of God. What is this? Why do we need either one or another, when it is so easy and so reasonable to do without them at all ... . I wish and I feel able to be independent and to go to good and truth without 'highest', fantastic and imaginary creatures.' (Почти постоянно вы опираетесь на мысли о Христе, о Боге. На что это? На что нам и тот и другой, когда так легко и разумно — вовсе обойтись без них ... Я желаю и чувствую себя способным быть самостоятельным и идти к добру и правде без 'высших' фантастических, выдуманных существ. Boris Modzalevsky and Varvara Komarova-Stasova (eds), *Lev Tolstoy i V.V. Stasov. Perepiska 1878–1906*. Trudy Pushkinskogo Doma Akademii Nauk SSSR (Leningrad: Priboi, 1929), 126.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to M. Balakirev, 31 October 1884, *PSS*, 12: 470.

<sup>5</sup> Tchaikovsky read Tolstoy thoroughly, appreciating him as one of the world greatest writers and thinkers. See Ada Ainbinder, 'P.I. Tchaikovsky – L.N. Tolstoy's reader' (2009). [http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/Soc\\_Gum/Chasopys/2009\\_4/4.pdf](http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/Soc_Gum/Chasopys/2009_4/4.pdf) (accessed 14 December 2012).

desire for nonexistence, what would I be if I did not believe in God and did not give myself to his will?<sup>6</sup>

The dates of the above quotations demand a comparison: he expressed his uncertainty to Balakirev *after* his frank report to von Meck. However, he was candid with both. Despite this inconsistency, we see here, as in his many other statements, the typical Tchaikovsky struggling at self-deception, in which he sometimes succeeded more and sometimes less. Tchaikovsky's deliberations, hovering on the outskirts of his spiritual citadel, coincide with Tolstoy's metaphorical recipe for such 'under-believers', to which this great God-seeker arrives at the end of *Confession*:

It appeared that at my head there was a pillar, and the security of that slender pillar was undoubted though there was nothing to support it. From the pillar a loop hung very ingeniously and yet simply, and if one lay with the middle of one's body in that loop and looked up, there could be no question of falling. This was all clear to me, and I was glad and tranquil. And it seemed as if someone said to me: 'See that you remember.'  
And I awoke.<sup>7</sup>

There was yet another factor that contributed to Tchaikovsky's views: the nineteenth-century trend in Christology, known as the third wave of *religious rationalism*, which interpreted Jesus Christ as an historical figure. Two books denying his divine nature and with the same title – 'The Life of Jesus' – one by David Strauss (*Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*, 1835–36) and the other by Ernest Renan (*Vie de Jésus*, 1863), both scandalized the believing world and influenced thinking readers in Europe. Tchaikovsky's personal library held a

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<sup>6</sup> Но у меня просветление пришло гораздо раньше, чем у Толстого, вероятно, потому, что голова моя проще устроена, чем у него, и еще постоянной потребности в труде я обязан тем, что страдал и мучился меньше Толстого! Ежечасно и ежеминутно благодарю Бога за то, что он дал мне веру в Него. При моем малодушии и способности от ничтожного толчка падать духом до стремления к небытию, что бы я был, если б не верил в Бога и не предавался воле Его? *PSS*, 12: 336.

<sup>7</sup> Оказывается, что в головах у меня стоит столб, и твёрдость этого столба не подлежит никакому сомнению, несмотря на то, что стоять этому тонкому столбу не на чем. Потом от столба проведена петля как-то очень хитро и вместе просто, и если лежишь на этой петле серединой тела и смотришь вверх, то даже и вопроса не может быть о падении. Всё это мне было ясно, и я был рад и спокоен. И как будто кто-то мне говорит: смотри же, запомни. И я проснулся. Lev Tolstoy, *Isповед'*. *V chem moya vera?* (with commentaries by G. Galagan) (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1991). Also available at [http://az.lib.ru/t/tolstoj\\_lew\\_nikolaewich/text\\_0440/shtml](http://az.lib.ru/t/tolstoj_lew_nikolaewich/text_0440/shtml) (accessed 28 June 2012). Quoted from Leo Tolstoy, *Confession* (Trans. by Louise and Aylmer Maude) (Eastford, CT: Martino, 2012, reprint from 1921 edn) Also available from <http://www.online-literature.com/tolstoy/a-confession/> (accessed 28 June 2012).



copy of Renan's third edition, much used and with many underlinings.<sup>8</sup> In 1878, he discovered Louis Jacolliot's book, *Voyage au Pays des Perles* (1874), which develops the idea of a close relationship between Christian and Hindu mythologies, thus broadening the idea of the origins of Christianity.<sup>9</sup> For people belonging to the educated intelligentsia like Tchaikovsky, maintaining Christian belief *after* reading these books became harder.

Tchaikovsky thus made his own way through the controversy of these different attitudes, and chose to focus on the image of Jesus Christ in the vein of Thomas Aquinas's medieval approach to the perfection of Christ's human attributes. He constructed an image of Man rather than of God: his own, personal, intimate cult, his cultural hero whom he could love infinitely, and by whom he could measure his own earthly deeds, to whom he could give his compassion, and whom he could pity and lament. As early as 1877, he wrote the lines suggesting Renan's influence:

Jesus Christ is the only genius on the Earth I recognize. I hold him in reverence as a man of ideas, and greatly esteem his teaching, though I find much in it unnatural, and, therefore, impossible, but it is clear that he had to demand too much in order to achieve a little. Christian martyrs, I rapturously worship them.<sup>10</sup>

Is this not like Dostoevsky's line 'For me, there is only one moral model and ideal, Christ,' written in the last month of his life (d. 28 January/9 February 1881)?<sup>11</sup>

The waves of belief repeatedly ebbed and flowed. Tchaikovsky, however, never defined his religious conclusions, at least not in words. In 1887, he wrote:

It is exactly one year since I have touched this diary and how many things have changed! How strange it was for me to read, that 365 days ago I was still afraid

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<sup>8</sup> Ada Ainbinder, Letter to the author (30 December, 2009). It can be added that the place that Renan occupied in Tchaikovsky's thoughts was confirmed somewhat by his dream featuring Renan in a political conversation and described in the letter to Anatoly of 21 January 1879 (Sokolov, "'Ot pamyatnika k cheloveku'", 211; the letter is translated and published by Alexander Poznansky, 'Unknown Tchaikovsky: A Reconstruction of Letters to His Brothers (1875–1879)'. In Kearney (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World*, 87–8). Henry Zajaczkowski analysed the letter from a psychoanalytical approach in 'Tchaikovsky: The Missing Piece of the Jigsaw Puzzle'. *The Musical Times* 131:1767 (May 1990), 238–42.

<sup>9</sup> The letter to N.F. von Meck of 12/24 March 1878. *P.I.–N.F.*, 2: 118.

<sup>10</sup> Иисуса Христа я признаю единственным гением на земле, почитаю его как человека идеи и высоко ставлю его учение, хотя многое в нем нахожу противостоестественным, следовательно, невозможным, но понятно, что он должен был требовать слишком многого для того, чтобы достигнуть не многого. Мученикам христианства я восторженно поклоняюсь. Letter to N.F. von Meck from Clarens, 12/24 November 1877. *P.I.–N.F.*, 1: 91.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from: Joseph Frank, 'Dostoevsky and Anti-Semitism'. In *Between Religion and Rationality. Essays in Russian Literature and Culture* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 165.

to acknowledge that, despite all the fervor of sympathetic feelings awakened by Christ, I dared to doubt His Divinity. Since then, my religion has become infinitely more clear; I thought much about God, about life and death during all the time, and especially in Aachen<sup>12</sup> the vital questions: why? how? wherefore? occupied and hung over me disturbingly. I would like sometime to expound in detail my *religion* if only for the sake of explaining my beliefs to myself, once and for all, and the borderline where, after speculation, they begin. But life with its excitement rushes on, and I do not know whether I will succeed in expressing that *Creed* which recently has developed in me. It was developed very clearly, but still I have not adopted it as yet in my prayers. I still pray as before, as they taught me to pray. But then, God hardly needs to know how and why one prays. God does not need prayer. But *we need it*.<sup>13</sup>

Here, again, one can find a certain parallel to Dostoyevsky's thoughts expressed many years earlier:

I shall tell you about myself, that I am the child of the Age, the child of unbelieving and doubt – until now and even (I do know it) until my coffin cover. This thirst to believe, what terrible torments it cost me in the past and costs me today! And it gets stronger in my soul as far as I find arguments opposite to it. And, however, God sometimes sends me minutes when I am absolutely quiet; at these minutes I love and I find myself loved by others, and these minutes were precisely those when I formed in myself the symbol of belief, where everything is clear and sacred for me. This symbol is very simple, here it is: to believe that there is nothing more fine, deeper, more sympathetic, wiser, braver and more perfect than Christ, and not only this, but I tell myself, with a jealous love, that it cannot be. Moreover, if somebody would prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and it *indeed* would be that the truth is outside Christ, I would prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Tchaikovsky spent August 1887 in Aachen, with his dying friend Nikolai Kondratyev.

<sup>13</sup> 21 September 1887. Special, 8th diary (Lakond, *The Diaries of Tchaikovsky*, 249).

<sup>14</sup> Я скажу Вам про себя, что я — дитя века, дитя неверия и сомнения до сих пор и даже (я знаю это) до гробовой крышки. Каких страшных мучений стоила и стоит мне теперь эта жажда верить, которая тем сильнее в душе моей, чем более во мне доводов противных. И, однако же, Бог посылает мне иногда минуты, в которые я совершенно спокоен; в эти минуты я люблю и нахожу, что другими люблю, и в такие-то минуты я сложил в себе символ веры, в котором всё для меня ясно и свято. Этот символ очень прост, вот он: верить, что нет ничего прекраснее, глубже, симпа[ти]чнее, разумнее, мужественнее и совершеннее Христа, и не только нет, но с ревнивою любовью говорю себе, что и не может быть. Мало того, если б кто мне доказал, что Христос вне истины, и *действительно* было бы, что истина вне Христа, то мне лучше хотелось бы оставаться со Христом, нежели с истиной. Letter to N.D. Fonvizina, Omsk, January–February 1854. Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *Sobranie sochineniy v pyatnadsati tomakh*, Vol. 15 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1996), Letters of 1834–81,

Tchaikovsky worked intensively to make himself a true believer or at least to clarify his relationship with Christianity, as Olga Zakharova established from studying the copies of his Bible among the family heirlooms. One of these Bibles is of particular interest.<sup>15</sup> This copy is in Russian, printed in Vienna in 1878. Probably deciding to read it through systematically, the composer for a while marked with an 'x' the places where he had stopped reading. It was not until November 1885, when Tchaikovsky finally felt himself settled (in Podmoskovie) that he started noting the dates of his reading, from which we know that he turned to the Bible seventy-five times over the course of seven years, until 3 February 1892, with one exception: the year 1891 remains unmarked.

As the dates and two bookmarks show, the reading of the Old and New Testaments went in parallel; Luke was read twice. The general period, the 1880s, of course suggests Tolstoy's influence. Tchaikovsky's marginalia often show evidence of a constant comparison between the Old and New Testaments, attesting to the attentive reading of both. He underlined Matthew 19:14: 'But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these"', with his note on the bottom margin: 'This and also "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden" etc. touch me most of all in the gospel'. The latter (Matthew 11:28) and the two following verses (11:29: 'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls'; 11:30: 'For My yoke is easy and My burden is light') are underlined three times. It is also worth noting his comment near John 12, narrating three episodes: The Anointing at Bethany, the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem and The Coming of the Hour of Jesus: 'How moving this chapter is.' This chapter in particular attracted his attention. Although he would usually continue to read from where he had left off, in 1890, stopping at Chapter 7, he skipped directly to John 12. It was probably the moment of Jesus' passage from preaching to action that Tchaikovsky perceived as charged with a special inner tension, conveying Jesus' firm determination to sacrifice his earthly life for the sake of an idea. It would be a fascinating project to compare the marginalia of Tchaikovsky's and Dostoevsky's<sup>16</sup> gospels, not to mention Tolstoy's theological laboratory ...

Tchaikovsky was an avid reader.<sup>17</sup> His huge home library and correspondence reflect the thoughtful and critical reading of many thinkers, including Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Spinoza and Tolstoy, studies in history, Renan of course (four books),

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no. 39. <http://ruslit.traumlibrary.net/book/dostoevsky-pss15-15/dostoevsky-pss15-15.html> (accessed 24 June 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Olga Zakharova, 'Chaikovsky chitaet Bibliu.' *Nashe nasledie* 2 (1990), 22–4.

<sup>16</sup> Irina Kirillova, 'Dostoevsky's Marking in the Gospel According to St John'. In George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (eds), *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*. Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41–50.

<sup>17</sup> For Tchaikovsky's library and reading see Elena Orlova, *Peter Ilyich Chaikovsky* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1980); Ada Ainbinder, 'Lichnaya biblioteka Chaikovskogo kak istochnik

*belles-lettres*, biographies of famous people, their correspondence, memoirs, and so on. He greatly admired Spinoza's ideas and personality, possessing every book of his and about him that he could obtain in Russian and French. His marginalia, underlinings, dates in *Ethics* and *Correspondence* relate to 1891 – the year of his paused study of the Bible.

He did return to the Holy Scripture, though only once during the two remaining years of his life. As Ada Ainbinder noted, Tchaikovsky had an annual subscription to the theological journal *Bogoslovskiy vestnik*, and in 1893 wrote an indignant comment concerning a flawed critique of Renan's *Vie de Jésus* in the April issue. Later, however, he stopped reading the journal, and its summer issues remained uncut.<sup>18</sup> Had he found all the answers to his questions? Or, perhaps he had solved his dilemma regarding Christianity and his own belief? Or had he perhaps accomplished something that was the result of his spiritual soul-searching that liberated him from these dilemmas?

Abandoning the Bible, however, did not affect his views formed in the previous years. Moreover, there are traces of Tchaikovsky's interest in the musical expression of his feelings toward Christ. In the above-quoted (Chapter 3, pp. 17–18) letter to the Grand Duke, his thoughts reveal that he had played with the idea for quite a long time:

If anyway to set a *requiem* to music, then rather an authentic one, a medieval Latin text, despite the ugliness of the rhymed verse (there is no rhyme in the original Latin verse), excellently conveying melancholy and fear that we experience when death abducts our beloved. There is another reason why I am little inclined to compose music for any kind of requiem. I am afraid of indelicately hurting your religious feelings, but in a requiem, a lot is said on *God, the judge, God-punitive, the God-avenger* (!!!). Excuse me, Your Highness, but I will dare to hint that I don't believe in such a God, or, at least, such a *God* cannot cause in me such tears, such a delight, such reverence for the Creator and source of all the good that would inspire me. With the greatest delight I would try, were it possible, to set some of the gospel texts to music. How many times, for example, have I dreamed of musically illustrating Christ's words: 'Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden' and then: 'For My yoke is easy and My burden is light'. How much infinite love and pity for man is felt in these wonderful words! What an infinite poesy in this, one can say, what a *passionate* aspiration to drain the tears of sorrow and alleviate the pain of suffering humanity!<sup>19</sup>

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izuchenia ego tvorcheskoy biografii' (PhD dissertation, Russian Gnessins Academy of Music, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Ada Ainbinder, 'Lichnaya biblioteka P.I. Chaikovskogo kak istochnik izuchenia ego tvorcheskoi biografii'. *Vestnik RAM im. Gnesinykh 2* (2007), <http://vestnikram.ru/file/ainbinder.pdf> (accessed 13 December 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Уж если класть на музыку *реквием*, то скорее настоящий, средневековый латинский текст, несмотря на безобразие рифмованного стиха (рифмы в подлинном

It is true that in order to politely decline the request by His Highness, Tchaikovsky needed to produce sufficient reason. What the Grand Duke had asked him, however, was simply about composing a *secular piece* on a *secular poem*, for which the word 'requiem' merely meant a posthumous elegy. Tchaikovsky was not against Apukhtin's poem. However, using a 'modulation through a common chord', for which a requiem served as a Latin mass, and by means of this elegant substitution of the object of discussion, he left Apukhtin behind and directed his stream of consciousness at what seemed to have been occupying his thoughts for a long time. He brought up his favourite comparison between God the Father and God the Son, already familiar to us from his diary of 1886, and gave himself an opportunity to express his feelings for Christ – who was not the issue of his addressee's (the Grand Duke's) intentions at all.

His small addition 'were it possible' casts some light on the context of reality. It also points at a certain issue of conflict. Apparently, it was *not* possible, and he was not happy about this. This situation demands an explanation regarding the status of spiritual music in the secular culture of nineteenth-century Russia; to be precise, of *Russian* spiritual music. (There were fewer problems with concert performances of Western music, whether Catholic or Protestant, cantatas, oratorios, requiems, and other liturgical and paraliturgical compositions by Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Cherubini or Beethoven.)

There were at least three different factors that prevented nineteenth-century Russian culture from developing a paraliturgical repertoire in which composers could express their religious feelings. First, the Orthodox Church forbade representation of the gospel theme at the theatre or on the concert stage. Hence, cantata and oratorio were out of the question and – unlike the French, Italian, or German publics – Russians could not enjoy this genre. The Holy Synod closely watched concert life and banned any performance of Russian spiritual music outside the Church. This meant the total prohibition of the paraliturgical genre in Russia. Rimsky-Korsakov recalled how the Russian Musical Society had to

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латинском стихосложении нет), превосходно передающий томление и страх, испытываемый нами ввиду похищенного смертью любимого человека. Есть и еще причина, почему я мало склонен к сочинению музыки на какой бы то ни было реквием, но я боюсь неделикатно коснуться Вашего религиозного чувства. В Реквиеме много говорится о *боге-судии*, *боге-карателе*, *боге-мстителе* (!!!). Простите, Ваше Высочество, -- но я осмелюсь намекнуть, что в такого Бога я не верю, или, по крайней мере, такой *Бог* не может вызвать во мне тех слез, того восторга, того преклонения перед создателем и источником всякого блага, которые вдохновили бы меня. Я с величайшим восторгом попытался бы, если бы это было возможно, положить на музыку некоторые евангельские тексты. Напр[имер], сколько раз я мечтал об иллюстрировании музыкой слов Христа: '*приидите ко мне все труждающиеся и обремененные*' и потом: '*ибо иго мое сладко и бремя мое легко*'. Сколько в этих чудных словах бесконечной любви и жалости к человеку! Какая бесконечная поэзия в этом, можно сказать, *страстном* стремлении осушить слезы горести и облегчить муки страдающего человечества! Letter to the Grand Duke K.K. Romanov, 26 September 1893. *PSS*, 17: 193–4.

cheat the censors by renaming some of Bortniansky's and Anton Rubinstein's spiritual pieces for a concert programme.<sup>20</sup> We may deduce that it was the yearning for the creation of a Russian oratorio, probably in the spirit of Mendelssohn or Berlioz, that proved the last straw for Glinka, pushing him out of Russia to study counterpoint with Siegfried Dehn in Berlin, and to write about the potential of combining Western fugue with Russian chant. He never fulfilled the task. It was Anton Rubinstein, who, along with composing a series of sacred operas on narratives from the Old Testament, for decades envisioned his *Christus*, probably not without being inspired by Liszt's *Christus*, the first part of which, *Christmas Oratorio*, he conducted in Vienna on 19 December 1871. But he composed and planned it for performance and publication in Stuttgart, 1893, where Russian censorship could not reach him.<sup>21</sup> Germany seemed to be the locus of exiled Russian paraliturgical music.

Second, musical instruments are prohibited in the Orthodox Church, hence artistic means for spiritual music were very limited anyway. While this was not an obstacle for the proliferation of the huge paraliturgical *a cappella* repertoire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nineteenth-century Russian composers would probably have wished to apply more expressive musical means had this genre still been alive in their time – which it wasn't.

Third, the Russian Imperial Court Chapel had the monopoly on the publication of Russian sacred music. In 1878, when Tchaikovsky reflected on the vast artistic possibilities of religious music and thought about composing a liturgy, he realized that the only possibility would be to publish it abroad.<sup>22</sup>

Russian spiritual music, therefore, was contained within the Church, and within the Church it was limited to liturgical praxis. The huge paraliturgical repertoire that flourished in eighteenth-century Russia was subjected to censorship by the Holy Synod, mostly for its 'Italian' style, which was perceived by the Synod functionaries as being too secular. Some of compositions were forbidden for publication. The remains of this repertoire became canonized with time and

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<sup>20</sup> Rimsky-Korsakoff, *My Musical Life*, 82–3.

<sup>21</sup> In twentieth-century Russian music historiography, this work was described as not belonging 'to the history of Russian opera at all'. Richard Taruskin, 'Christian Themes in Russian Opera: A Millennial Essay'. *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2:1 (March 1990): 83–91, esp. 85. The de-sovietization of Russia, however, led to a revival of this work by Anton Sharoiev (Rubinstein's great-grandson), which, if not ensuring its becoming a classic, has at least inscribed the opera more palpably within the Russian historical legacy.

<sup>22</sup> It proved to be otherwise. Tchaikovsky's Russian publisher Yurgenson took the risk and published his Liturgy of John Chrysostom. The Chapel got the police to confiscate the entire edition; Yurgenson filed a lawsuit and won. Breaking the Chapel's monopoly enabled Yurgenson to publish a full collection of sacred music by Dmitry Bortniansky (Tchaikovsky was recruited as an editor) – the enterprise that in fact saved Bortniansky's legacy for history and culture.

became an appendage to the liturgy, completely misjudged in aspects of style and genre.

This was the background for Tchaikovsky's relationship with Russian sacred music. Being himself a product of this culture, the composer was bewildered when, as late as 1880, he opened the score of Massenet's oratorio *Marie Magdeleine* (1874, libretto by Louis Galley, based on Renan's *Vie de Jésus*) and saw the heroine singing a duet with Christ on the cross (though Tchaikovsky had no problems with Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ*, 1864, which he admired). Bewilderment, however, was soon replaced by delight and possibly even envy.<sup>23</sup>

It was with prayer that Tchaikovsky felt more secure: while his Liturgy appears to be intentionally reserved and strict, the operatic prayer scenes in *The Maid of Orleans*,<sup>24</sup> and especially *Mazeppa* (the episode before the execution) are among the best in their emotional fervour. In these prayers, however, Christ is an addressee, a patron, not someone who himself is in need of prayer, someone who is the object of compassion. In this respect, Russian music dramatically lost to its Western counterpart.

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<sup>23</sup> The book '*Beloved Friend, The Story of Tchaikovsky and Nadejda von Meck*, compiled by Catherine Drinker Bowen and Barbara von Meck (New York: Random House, 1937) and based on excerpts from the correspondence between Tchaikovsky and von Meck, contains a sentence on the impossibility of performing a similar work on the Russian stage (p. 393). The source of this sentence, however, remains obscure. As P. Vaydman attested in our correspondence, the autograph of the quoted Tchaikovsky letter located in the Klin archive contains no such notion.

<sup>24</sup> 'Yet no one can listen to the colossal hymn in the first act of *The Maid of Orleans*, or to the third act finale, and doubt that it was above all the chance for impressive religious colour that attracted Chaikovsky to Schiller's play.' Taruskin, 'Christian Themes in Russian Opera', 86.

## Chapter 5

# Russian Culture, Jesus Christ and Compassion

The scale of nineteenth-century Russian God-seeking was defined by Nikolai Berdyaev as early as 1907:

A great pining, an incessant *God-seeking* is lodged within the Russian soul, and it was expressed over the expanse of an entire century. The God-seekers reflected our spirit, rebellious and hostile to every philistinism. Almost the whole of Russian literature, the Russian great literature, is a living document, witnessing to this God-seeking, to an unquenchable spiritual thirst.<sup>1</sup>

Such reference to the literature is hardly surprising. Though not depicting Christ as an historical figure until the twentieth century (in Grand Duke Constantine Romanov's *King of Judea* (late 1880s–1911), Merezhkovsky's *Jesus the Unknown* (1932), and Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (1928–40)), Russian literature uses his image as a metaphor – first and foremost through:

Dostoevsky's great novel *The Idiot* [1868–69], one of the finest works ever written inspired by the image and the ideal of Christ ... Prince Myshkin dramatizes Dostoevsky's image of 'a perfectly beautiful man,' who comes as close as humanly possible to the Christian ideal; but for Dostoevsky there was only 'one positively beautiful figure in the world – Christ,' and the appearance of Christ had been 'an infinite miracle.'<sup>2</sup>

The whole world of Dostoevsky's characters is pervaded by imagery and allegories relating to the gospel. I will not go far into the reasons here, which are

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<sup>1</sup> Великое томление, неустанное *богоискание* заложено в русской душе, и сказалось оно на протяжении целого столетия. Богоискатели отражали наш мятежный, враждебный всякому мещанству дух. Вся почти русская литература, великая русская литература, есть жизненный документ, свидетельствующий об этом богоискании, о неутоленной духовной жажде. Nikolai Berdyaev, 'Russkie bogoisskatel'i'. *Moskovsky Ezhenedel'nik*, 28 July 1907, 36. [http://krotov.info/library/02\\_b/berdyaev/1910\\_4\\_035.html](http://krotov.info/library/02_b/berdyaev/1910_4_035.html) (accessed 10 June, 2012). Quoted from N.A. Berdyaev, 'Russian God-Seekers'. Trans. Fr. S. Janos (2001). [http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd\\_lib/1907\\_131\\_4.html](http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1907_131_4.html) (accessed 10 June 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Frank, 'The Idiot'. *Between Religion and Rationality*, 29, 41.



probably associated with his exceptionally brutal experience. He was arrested (for participation in a progressive discussion circle at the time of the 1848 European revolutions; a highly suspect activity for the Russian authorities), with subsequent sentence to capital punishment, a mock execution (the sentence was revoked at the last moment), to be replaced by four years of penal servitude.

Dostoevsky brought from Siberia his precious socio-psychological knowledge, which was to nourish his creative imagination for years, as well as the profound knowledge of the New Testament – the only book permitted to prisoners. Dostoevsky's influence on the younger generation of the 1860s was conveyed not only through his novels, stories and critiques, but also through the special (at least in a Russian context) charisma of a martyr that was superimposed on everything he wrote. His message, as an unbeliever desperately longing to believe, this very yearning (usually translated as 'pining', 'melancholy' or 'weariness'), *tomlenie*, as Berdyaev put it (a word also greatly loved by Tchaikovsky), was crucial for the rest of Russian culture.<sup>3</sup>

The tone of moral values established by Dostoevsky through the unquestionable authority of Prince Myshkin voiced compassion as the chief and perhaps the only law of all human existence. This defined his (Dostoevsky's as learned from Christ) credo that the supreme moral virtue is compassion.<sup>4</sup> Compassion (perhaps more consistently towards literary characters than to the actual people who surrounded him) was also Tchaikovsky's strongest emotion, as can be seen from his letter to von Meck in which he describes Dostoevsky's story (from *Brothers Karamazov*) of a woman who lost all her children.<sup>5</sup>

Christian values, as adopted by Leo Tolstoy, who elevated them to a philosophy and actualized them in his personal example, his social movement of pure, de-institutionalized belief and factual political defence of human rights, created new paths toward the same great purpose of achieving the moral perfection. Christian symbolism became a strong point of Russian poetry, featured in works by Alexey Tolstoy, Afanasy Fet, Lev Mey, Feder Tyutchev, and penetrating further into the Silver Age poetry of Alexander Block, Valery Bryusov, Sergei Esenin, Osip Mandelstam and many others.

Literature gave the profoundly secular Russian society a means to project Christ's image onto its intellectual life and its moral and social values. It tried to offer a *spiritual* (even if in the imagery of religious) alternative to various extremes such as socialism or *narodnichestvo*, which the generation of the 1860s joined in search of the Ideal, of some utopian way to perfect their society, to reconcile the different members of the existing order, and to bring about tolerance and peace.

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<sup>3</sup> On various aspects of Dostoevsky's elaboration of gospel motifs see Pattison and Thompson (eds), *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*.

<sup>4</sup> Frank, 'Dostoevsky and Anti-Semitism'. *Between Religion and Rationality*, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Tchaikovsky, letter to von Meck, Paris, 16/28 February–17 February/1 March 1879. *PSS*, 8: 114–18.

If, however, one is to examine how God-seeking is reflected in the visual arts, a stroll through the halls of the famous Moscow Tretyakov Gallery and the Russian Museum in St Petersburg (to name but the main collections) will be revealing; in particular with regard to the contrast between the stormy public resonance once provoked by certain paintings, now resting in silent dignity. In contrast to music, which experienced so serious obstacles that its aspirations regarding music on gospel themes were hopeless, nineteenth-century Russian painting enjoyed greater opportunities (though not without censorship, of course). This fact can be ascribed to the uninterrupted tradition of religious painting.

Canonic icon painting had been the best known, 'iconic', Russian way of depicting Christ since the Middle Ages. By the end of the eighteenth century, spiritual painting of another kind, detached from the Church, developed in Russia. Gradually becoming more Italianate and manifesting more features of individual artistic expression, the devotional visual arts reflected general stylistic changes, paralleling European trends, and sometimes considered as Catholicization.

In the 1830s, Alexander Ivanov (1806–58), following the success of his *The Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalena* (1834–35), started his two-decade-long Italian epopeia, the grandiose canvas *Christ's Appearance to the People* (1837–57, 540 × 750 cm). Two special pavilions were eventually built (in different epochs) in Moscow in order to exhibit this huge work. The painting constituted an ideological parallel to Glinka's opera *A Life for the Tsar* (1836), which responded to the Nikolaian demands for a symbolic rendering of the *Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality/peopleness* doctrine.<sup>6</sup> If Glinka epitomized *autocracy* and *peopleness*, Ivanov epitomized *Orthodoxy* and *peopleness*. The remarkable nature of this work and the surrounding circumstances made it a milestone, marking a new period in Russian visual arts. The work served as a kind of overture or springboard for a surge of spiritual painting, adopted by a new generation that bestowed this genre with the new sense and content of religious themes.

The artists of Tchaikovsky's generation set up the vast new wave of paintings on New Testament themes. Among them were Ivan Kramskoy (1837–87), Vasily Surikov (1848–1916), Vasily Polenov (1844–1927), Ilya Repin (1844–1930), Nikolai Ghe (1831–94), Vasily Perov (1834–82), Vasily Vereshchagin (1842–1904), and others. These artists were universal in their approach: portraitists, landscapists, historical, battle and genre painters. None of them dedicated himself solely to devotional path. Nonetheless, something attracted them strongly to gospel-related themes, a phenomenon that has been studied in depth.

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<sup>6</sup> The Russian word *narodnost'* in this triad has been traditionally translated as *nationality*, which does not convey the true meaning in this context. The word *narodnost'* has two meanings: as an *ethnic group*, and in this sense it indeed should be translated as *nationality*, and as *peopleness*, as follows from the context of the triad referring to populism. The latter translation is used in Josef W. Esherick, Hasan Kayali and Eric van Young (eds), *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 309.

Unhappiness has been the lot of every generation in Russia, each in its own way. The generation of the 1860s, so much written about and discussed, was full of contradictions – from which they sought a way out. The milieux were basically atheist, though not entirely happy about it. They loved Russia, the Russian people, and its culture – but its values could not satisfy their need for cultural dignity. Social solutions, though desperately needed and anticipated, remained unachieved and barely envisaged. *Narodnichestvo* brought little more than frustration. As a result of many disappointments, nihilism emerged, but it proved to be the emptiest of the trends.

In this context of uncertainty, the gospel had a sudden effect of novelty, as if a pendulum had announced its return from a long journey to another galaxy – the Age of Reason. Christ's image resounded as that of a great cultural hero, stripped of all its official Church dogma and depersonification, providing young Russians with an exciting new ideal to focus on and to which they could pay tribute. It became a movement, a type of counter-culture, in which they began to experiment with allusions to their social and ethical quests: sometimes using Christ's image for self-identification, at other times – for social or political allegory. As Olga Litvak puts it:

In the work of the Wanderers, the image of Jesus served the heroic apotheosis of Russian radicalism. During the period between the disastrous 'pilgrimage to the people' in 1873 and the wave of arrests that followed the political assassination of Alexander II in 1881, Repin in particular began to associate various stages of the Passion with the martyrdom of the Russian 'moral community', the embattled self-sacrificing rebellious children of educated society ... Russian realists of the second half of the nineteenth century were, in fact, less interested in the 'historical Jesus' than in mining the allegorical potential of scripture to provide a pictorial language for the representation of contemporary scenes.<sup>7</sup>

The most ironic reflection of identification with Christ nearly occurred during Alexander III's coronation ceremony, when 'the authorities first insisted that Repin [painting the picture for the commemoration album – M.R.] would present Alexander III as Christ preaching to the people'. The image of Christ in glory was then exploited as an allegory of the Russian victory over Napoleon in 1812.<sup>8</sup>

Two scholars were behind the new image of Christ that was to affect Russian artists so profoundly: David Strauss (1808–74), historian/theologian and writer, and Ernest Renan (1823–92), a serious multidisciplinary scholar (in Semitic

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<sup>7</sup> Olga Litvak, 'Rome and Jerusalem: The Figure of Jesus in Creation of Mark Antokol'skii'. In Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (eds), *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 242.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Wortman, 'The Coronation of Alexander III'. In Kearney (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World*, 293–94, with reference to Elizabeth Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art* (Ann Arbor, MI: Columbia University Press, 1977), 126.

languages, history and theology) and a writer. Renan's literary gift was so brilliant, and his scholarly narratives revealed his incredible breadth of knowledge in such an effortless manner, that his books instantly captivated the readers and convinced them of the authenticity of anything that his pen might describe. It is not by chance, for example, that Anton Rubinstein, in 1860, when seeking an operatic plot based on the Old Testament, wrote to his Berlin librettist Julius Rodenberg:

I tried to work on your poem *Sulamith and Solomon* several times, but I always put it aside, because there was something that wasn't quite right for me relating to plot itself. The usual interpretation of the plot, although exactly according to Scripture, lacked a logical necessity, I think. The many contradictions in time, place and personages tormented me and prevented me from liking it, which otherwise would have been typical for me when the plot so completely responds to my intentions. After much thinking and searches, I recently came across the work *La Cantique des Cantiques* by Ernest Renan. It clarified my doubts and made me feel sure that his interpretation of the plot of this mystery play would correspond with mine.<sup>9</sup>

Renan deconstructed and reconstructed the text of the *Song of Songs* in order to make it comprehensible to the rational mind of a modern reader. Whereas Rubinstein had failed to find in the Holy Scriptures the 'logical necessity' that his creative mind demanded, he saw it clearly in Renan's version.

Renan's *The Life of Jesus* (1863) offers its readers a fascinating scientific page-turner that, through the magic of its style, presents a lively, vivid and rational account of the life of the man called Jesus Christ. The narrative is flavoured with picturesque details of biblical nature and landscapes. It is appealing in its relaxed style and in the internal dynamics as the tension gradually and inexorably increases. The gospel appears orchestrated and staged here with the greatest artistry and taste. Renan made the gospel texts play *his* drama. This book constitutes an outstanding component of nineteenth-century European culture. Its impact on Russian thought and art is hard to overestimate.

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<sup>9</sup> Я несколько раз брал в работу Ваши стихи 'Суламифь и Соломон' и всегда откладывал их, потому что в них было что-то не вполне меня удовлетворявшее, – и это относилось к самому сюжету, привычное толкование которого, хотя и точно по [священному] Писанию, лишено было, по-моему, логической необходимости. Многие противоречия во времени, месте и лицах мучили меня и не позволяли увлечься, что обычно свойственно мне, когда сюжет полностью соответствует моим намерениям. После долгих размышлений и поисков в мои руки недавно попало сочинение *La Cantique des Cantiques* par Ernest Renan, и оно разъяснило мои сомнения и дало мне уверенность в том, что его [Ренана] толкование сюжета этой мистерии соответствовало бы моему. Петербург, 12/24 ноября 1860. Lev Barenboim (ed.), *A.G. Rubinshtein: Literaturnoe nasledie v trekh tomakh* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1984), Vol. 2, 108.

Two factors of the 1860s and 1870s – the socio-cultural need for an heroic spiritual model epitomized in Jesus Christ, and his human image as created by Renan – emerged simultaneously and complementarily, engendering a specifically Russian reaction. Familiar with David Strauss's book and fully prepared to be inspired by Renan's *chef-d'oeuvre*, Russian artists adopted the image of Jesus Christ the Man and the Hero, and invested great emotional force, sometimes bordering on obsession, in gospel themes. Interpreting Christ as human, they related to his thoughts, motivations, feelings, dilemmas and appearance. This was not God-seeking on their part, but rather a Christ-as-hero seeking, a fundamentally secular Christology induced by Strauss–Renan historicism, and measured according to the criteria of the contemporary and generally realistic approach. Walther K. Lang, exploring the 'atheistic' aspect of this trend, takes Ivan Kramskoy as a sample object of discussion by contemporary Russian writers:

According to Goncharov, Christ's 'superhuman exertion of thought and will' as well as his 'strength to accomplish a great deed' were Kramskoy's principal messages. In his psychological analysis of the painting, the divinity of Christ is not even an issue. In a similar vein, the young writer Vsevolod Garshin observed in the figure of Christ an inner composure: 'the expression of enormous moral strength, the hatred of evil, and a radical determination to declare war on it.'<sup>10</sup>

Besides creating an internationally recognized masterpiece, *Christ in the Wilderness* (1872–74; also known as *Jesus in the Desert*), Kramskoy left vast documentation of his thoughts and feelings about it. His letters or comments transmitted by his peers are full of contradictions about humanity and the divine nature of his protagonist, but they convey clearly his own commitment to create the most 'atheistic' image that Renan would have ever dreamed of. As Lang continues:

Tormented by doubts and troubles, the artist longed for a God who was like him, for a God who would renounce his divinity. As he explained to Repin: 'My God – Christ – is the greatest of atheists, a person who has destroyed God in the universe and shifted him directly to the center of the human spirit and who, therefore, goes calmly to his death.'<sup>11</sup> Against the objection of Repin, who did not have a high opinion of atheism, Kramskoy explained that what he meant by atheism was not what is popularly meant by the term. 'Atheism as I understand

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<sup>10</sup> Walther K. Lang, 'The "Atheism" of Jesus in Russian Art: Representations of Christ by Ivan Kramskoy, Vasily Polenov, and Nikolai Ghe'. *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* 2: 3 (Autumn 2003). <http://www.19th-artworldwide.org/index.php/autumn03/index/179> (accessed 5 July 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Ivan Kramskoy, letter to Ilya Repin, 30 January 1874. In Sofia Goldshtein (ed.), *Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoy. Pis'ma, Stat'i*, 2 vols (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965–66), 1: 230–31 (quoted in Lang, 'The "Atheism" of Jesus').

it (but perhaps that is just my personal whim) is the last and highest level of religious sentiment ...<sup>12</sup>

Was not this idea a forerunner of Tolstoy's later belief-without-church religious 'anarchism'? Lang also draws a parallel with Dostoevsky, whose text, spoken by a wide range of characters, offers an immense variety of God-seeking manifestations in Russian society:

This unconventional conception of the atheism of Christ is not without parallels in this age of religious skepticism. It shows a striking similarity with the tortuous and despairing theology that Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky puts into the mouth of his character Kirillov in his novel *Besy* of 1871 (English translations under the titles *Devils* and *The Possessed*). The existentialist dilemma of Kirillov's philosophy derived from the postulate of the inalienability of God and the simultaneous belief that he did not exist. 'For me, there is nothing nobler than the idea that there is no God.'<sup>13</sup>

The humanity of Jesus indeed found its great expression in *dilemma*, and dilemma found its expression in this canvas – Kramskoy's great artistic achievement. Lang writes:

He summed up the central idea of his *Christ in the Wilderness* with the formula 'to be or not to be.'<sup>14</sup> Rather than a psychological decline, as in the case of Hamlet, the meditation of Christ at daybreak gives rise to – as Kramskoy would have it – an invincible vigor: 'His prayer is the elemental condition of the human spirit in moments of tragedy. It is an immersion, it is God's conversation with himself. Not for nothing do people say that prayer works wonders. The state of prayer is one of the most mysterious laboratories in man.'<sup>15</sup>

Nikolai Ghe, the oldest member of the pleiad, began his gospel series as early as 1861–63, *before* Renan and based solely on Strauss's book. He started with no less a prototype of the image of Christ in *The Last Supper* than Alexander Herzen, a self-exiled conscience of the nation, whose portrait had partly served as a model for Ghe (paradoxically, the painting had been purchased by Tsar Alexander II). Becoming later one of the first members/disciples of the Tolstoy movement

<sup>12</sup> Lang, 'The "Atheism" of Jesus'.

<sup>13</sup> Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *Besy* (*The Possessed*). *Zapiski iz podpolya* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskva, [1871] 1994), Part III, Chapter 6, Subchapter II, 384. The following postulates by Kirillov are on pp. 383–5 (quoted in Lang, 'The "Atheism" of Jesus').

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from Ivan Kramskoy, letter to Alexander Chirkin, 27 December 1873, in Goldshtein (ed.), *Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoy*, Vol. 1: 219.

<sup>15</sup> (Quoted from Ivan Kramskoy, letter to Ilya Repin, 30 January 1874. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1: 231). Lang, 'The "Atheism" of Jesus'.

following the groundbreaking appearance of *Confession*, Ghe was perhaps the most profound interpreter of Christ's image in Russian painting, provoking more polemics and censorship than any other artist.

Russian painters of that period created Christ-related compositions as a result of their own psychological and spiritual needs, and seldom by commission.<sup>16</sup> Their artistic ideas sometimes remained just that – ideas, for years if not decades. Often living in communes and collectively exhibiting their works in mobile exhibitions, uniting in working guilds called 'artels' (Wanderers, *peredvizhniki*), with Kramskoy at the heart of such an initiative, the artists heatedly debated these projects. They discussed the theme of Christ in meetings and in correspondence typical of those stormy years, and received a great deal of publicity, accompanied by much harsh critique, in a large number of journals and newspapers.

The number of devotional contributions for each artist varied from just one or two, as in the case of Kramskoy, who, after *Jesus in the Desert*, worked for a long time on *Mocking Christ. 'Hail, King of the Jews!'* (1877–82), which he never finished, feeling somewhat overshadowed by Antokolsky's sculpture on the same subject,<sup>17</sup> or Vasily Perov's *Jesus in Gethsemane* (1894) – to about 60 works by Vasily Polenov, who consistently worked on them during two cycles of his creative career.

From the 1860s to the early 1870s, this wave of religious painting soon proliferated reaching its peak in the 1880s and continuing into the beginning of the twentieth century. While the first wave strongly suggests the impact of Renan, that of the 1880s indicates Tolstoy's influence. It would be surprising if these young artists' intensive approach to the Christ theme could have been developed under amicable patronage from the side of censure, whether tsarist or synodal.<sup>18</sup> To begin with, 'Russian censors of foreign print media worked tirelessly, if ultimately in vain, to bar the historical Jesus from entering the country. Renan and Strauss were banned, as was discussion of their works in the press,'<sup>19</sup> not to mention the censorship of Tolstoy's *Confession* and his subsequent religious studies, leading to his anathema in 1901.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> See Litvak, 'Rome and Jerusalem', 247. *Ecce homo. This is the Man* (1874) was also a single spiritual work by Antokolsky.

<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the regulations on religious matters, Russian censure was well known for its severity. Almost every Russian composer experienced its power. Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* is perhaps more associated with censorship than others (though more in the level of rumours), but such operas as Rubinstein's *Demon* and Tchaikovsky's *Oprichnik* were temporarily rejected (or taken off after their first performance) by the censorial committee. Similar cases abound among writers of novels and plays.

<sup>19</sup> Jefferson J.A. Gatrall, 'Polenov, Merezhkovsky, Ainalov: Archeology of the Christ Image'. In Jefferson J.A. Gatrall and Douglas M. Greenfield (eds), *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 145–72, esp. 157.

Each time they turned to this theme, the painters took the risk of their works being banned. Sensitivity to the public discussions on and interpretations of their fondest creations being exposed to a broad audience made Kramskoy, for example, identify them with the episodes of Christ's Judgment and Mockery, as the vocabulary of his comment suggests: 'they would put Him in a nationwide court, and all the slaving monkeys would poke their slobbering fingers at Him and spread their critique ...'.<sup>20</sup> The artist also complained of being haunted by the sound of Homeric laughter.<sup>20</sup>

There were few intellectuals who did not read banned Renan's *Vie de Jésus* or Tolstoy's *Confession* – similar to secretly reading Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* or Solzhenitzyn's books in Soviet times. As is well known, especially in Russia, officially suppressed ideas have an immensely powerful draw. Were it otherwise, perhaps not only painters' interest but also public attention would be less. The basic belief in dissent held by educated Russian society, first manifested in a mass participation at Pushkin's funeral in 1837, is its traditional prerogative.

The diligent (in prohibition, but lax in argumentation) censors, banning the paintings or editing the titles, only added fuel to the fire, enhancing the stirring of public interest and curiosity. Either banned or not permitted for exhibition were such late Ghe compositions as '*Quod Est Veritas?*' *Christ and Pilate* (1890), *The Judgment of the Sanhedrin: He is Guilty!* (1892), *The Crucifixion* (1894). Vereshchagin's entire 'Palestinian' series, with the best-known work *Crucifixion*, was scandalously prohibited. The censor rejected the title of Polenov's *Who of You is Without Sin* (1886–87), which had to be altered to *Jesus and the Sinner Woman* or *Jesus and the Adulteress*. Shortly after the exhibition closed, its removal from public view was cleverly arranged: Alexander III bought the painting. The constant threat of official censorship led to a tendency for self-censorship. Polenov's horrified mother seems to have demanded that the white cap on Christ's head be removed from *Jesus and the Adulteress*.<sup>21</sup>

Haunted by the image of their cultural hero, each of the artists developed his own Christ, his ethical ideal, reflecting his sense of social responsibility and the aesthetic predilections of his muse. 'I have painted my own Christ, who belongs to me alone',<sup>22</sup> stated Kramskoy. As Lang noted, 'Such claims to individual (and no longer collectively mediated) access to the person of Christ was typical of

<sup>20</sup> и потащат Его на всенародный суд и все слюнявые мартышки будут тыкать пальцами в Него и критику свою разводить. Goldshtein (ed.), *Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoy*. 1:132. Quotation from E.I. Pinzhenina, 'Etyud I.A. Goncharova o kartine Kramskogo "Khristos v pustyne"'. In *Evangel'skiy tekst v russkoy literature XVIII–XIX vekov: tsitata, reministsentsia, motiv, syuzhet, zhanr* (Petrozavodsk-St Petersburg: Aleteya, 2011), 121. See also <http://philolog.petrsu.ru/filolog/konf/2011/11-pinzhelina.pdf> (accessed 25 November 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Gatrall, 'Polenov, Merezhkovsky, Ainalov', 160.

<sup>22</sup> Ivan Kramskoy, letter to Fedor Vasiliev, 10 October 1872. Goldshtein (ed.), *Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoy*. 1:133 (quoted in Lang, 'The "Atheism" of Jesus').



the 1860's generation.<sup>23</sup> Although it was not possible to find new subjects for gospel painting, each artist tried to highlight those scenes in which he could show the greatness of Jesus in the most expressive way.

Kramskoy and Perov strove to convey a range of psychological emotions at the crucial moments when Christ took decisions. Polenov saw his artistic contribution in maintaining ethnographic and archeological accuracy. To this end, he made two pilgrimages to the Middle East, Greece and Italy, and produced highly detailed Bible illustrations. Vasily Surikov bestowed the scenes with a theatrical spectacularity. Nikolai Ghe distinguished his various styles with a psychological expressivity and an almost naturalistic form of writing. Vasily Vereshchagin applied his historical, anti-war and anti-violence approach to scenes of the Passion. Repin, whose stylistic explorations were characteristic of *fin de siècle* trends perhaps more than others, was more interested in subtextual allusions of gospel scenes to modern reality. Arkhip Kuinji, a refined landscape painter, used the Gethsemane episode as a pretext for the creation of a mysterious garden rather than focusing on the figure of Christ. Andrey Ryabushkin and Henryk Semiradsky conveyed an impressive sense of sunlight, and so on. The sculptor Mark Antokolsky, in his *Jesus before the Judgment of the People* (*Ecce homo*, 1873), presented a complex system of symbols together with an outwardly simple figure of Christ, signifying his insurmountable spiritual power, which dominated all those whose presence exists only in the imagination of the viewer seeing beyond the sculpture's title.

Although many gospel scenes were painted in those decades, most resonating were associated with Christ's trials and dilemmas, that is, highlighting his moral superiority and heroism: temptation, healing, The Last Supper, praying at Gethsemane, Judgment, Mockery. Ghe's portrayal of *Christ and Pilate* is remarkable. The composition concentrates less on the interlocutors' facial expressions and more on their general image and body language, and also on Christ's inner strength, somewhat anticipating Bulgakov's scene in *The Master and Margarita*. Some see in this message an overt threat to the existing powers.<sup>24</sup> All the episodes from The Last Supper on, when the Angel of Death had already arrived, are events of the Passion when Christ's dilemma – between living as a mortal, or dying and becoming an immortal god in the eternal afterlife – has already been solved.

Crucifixion, though not lacking interpretations, was not among the central portrayals in the Russian gallery. Ghe's naturalistic composition of the Crucifixion is regarded as the most controversial artistic representation of this scene.

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<sup>23</sup> Lang, 'The "Atheism" of Jesus'.

<sup>24</sup> As Lang writes: 'As for Nikolai Ghe, he focused primarily on the conflict between Christian teaching and worldly power. His Christ in *What is Truth?* is perhaps not as intellectual as Kramskoy's, but he has strong convictions and lacks any doubts. While Kramskoy's Christ is a prisoner of his own thoughts, Ghe's Christ is a threat to the established order, which ultimately makes of him a victim. With the help of the moral and ideological teachings of Tolstoy, Ghe acutely perceived the social dimension of Christ.' *Ibid.*

Remarkably, key female images, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, interested Russian artists significantly less, if at all. Perhaps it was thought that they added little to Christ's heroic image. While Mary Magdalene is sometimes to be seen, mostly among other figures, the Virgin Mary is hard to find. Neither her divine purity nor the Infant Jesus served as a source of artistic inspiration for this rebellious generation.

The polyphonic chorus of Russian writers eagerly discussed these issues in the press. While Strauss and Renan were banned, native sacred-secular painting was not. Art critiques appeared in an arena in which writers received an opportunity to express their views on Christ's image, not through (or not only through) their own creative work, but as unbiased critics, as if dispassionately exercising the sharpness of their epithets, metaphors and labels. Many, from great writers such as Dostoevsky, Goncharov, Tolstoy, Saltykoff-Shchedrin, Korolenko – to critics of different orientations such as Stasov, Suvorin or Pogodin, to mention but a few, revealed their concerns. For example, Ghe's *The Last Supper*, appearing early and drawing close public attention, received various evaluations. 'No, it's not The Last Supper but an open party', wrote historian, philologist, and journalist Mikhail Pogodin using a pun (*The Last Supper* is translated into Russian as *The Secret (Evening) Supper*, while supper (*vecherya*) and party (*vecherinka*) have a common root *vecher* (evening)).<sup>25</sup>

Stasov then wrote (later, however, ardently supporting Ghe):

His Christ has none of those high qualities that influenced such an unprecedented, unheard of coup that was accomplished in the world: what we see is a weak man, lacking character, almost lost in some imagined argument, God knows from whence aroused; what could cause such a fall of spirit and despondency in a person who sought to achieve a world coup?<sup>26</sup>

Dostoevsky commented:

Take a more careful look: this is an everyday quarrel of quite usual people ... where and what is the connection to eighteen centuries of Christianity? ... What came out of it was a false, and prejudiced idea.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Нет, это не тайная вечеря, а открытая вечеринка. М.Г. Pogodin, 'Tainaya vecherya. Kartina g. Ghe'. *Moskovskie vedomosti* 90 (2 April 1864). [http://nikolaige.ru/b1\\_p3\\_27/](http://nikolaige.ru/b1_p3_27/) (accessed 16 February 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Его Христос не включил в себя ни одного из тех высоких качеств, под влиянием которых в мире был создан переворот беспрецедентный, неслыханный: перед нами представлен лишь слабый, бесхарактерный человек, почти растерявшийся в каком-то выдуманном, Бог знает откуда взятом споре; перед чем же мог до такой степени упасть духом и уныть тот, кто явился для всемирного переворота? Natalia Zograf (ed.), *Nikolai Nikolaevich Ghe. Pis'ma, stat'i, kritika, vospominania sovremennikov* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1978), 57–8.

<sup>27</sup> Всмотритесь внимательнее: это обыкновенная ссора весьма обыкновенных людей ... где же и при чем тут последовавшие восемнадцать веков христианства?...

But many applauded the work, including Saltykoff-Shchedrin.<sup>28</sup>

A similar fate awaited Ghe's later work *Christ and Pilate*. During the 27 years that had passed since *The Last Supper*, little had changed in the basic controversy of the question of what Christ should look like. It became even more obvious that there was no way to please everyone (those who wanted him human and those who wanted him divine, revealing his suffering or not) in one and the same image.

It is now clear why Kramskoy feared the critical 'judgment' and 'mockery' of his Christ. His fears were not groundless. Some accused him of nihilism, revolution, abstractionism, sacrilege and lack of clarity in his general ideas; others, of course, praised him highly.

There is a revealing correspondence between three men who were prominent in determining the reputation and historical fate of many paintings. One was the wealthy art patron Pavel Mikhaylovich Tretyakov, who undertook the idealistic mission of creating a depository of national masterpieces and making it available to the public at large, and who indeed bought many of the paintings himself. Another was the art and music critic, best known today for being an ideologue of *The Mighty Handful* – Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov. The third was Leo Tolstoy, who could not stand aside in the religion–arts–people question (he even depicted Kramskoy as the artist *Mikhailov* in his novel *Anna Karenina*, as well as mentioned Strauss–Renan's influence on Russian painting). Tolstoy also energetically supported Ghe. Discussing the gospel paintings of Ghe, Kramskoy, Polenov and others, these three tried to bring together Christ-the-icon and Christ-the-man, the expectations of the public and the intentions of the artists, their national cultural values and those of the world.

The story of *Christ and Pilate* (1890), which appeared at the height of the Tolstoy-dominating mood of the 1880s, was an affair in itself:

Ghe's representation of Christ was classified as defamatory by the censorship authorities. The picture had to be removed from the *Peredvizhniki* exhibition and was not allowed to be shown in other cities. From then on, all further representations of Christ submitted by Ghe met a similar fate. Leo Tolstoy came out strongly in support of his friend's banned work. Through his contacts with adherents of his teachings in America, Tolstoy sought to encourage a touring exhibition of *What is Truth?* in the New World. Before the canvas was sent to America, Tolstoy urged the collector Pavel Tretyakov to buy it, telling the patron that he had overlooked 'a pearl amidst the dung.' Tretyakov replied that, though not altogether convinced, he would respect the 'important and significant opinion' of the sage of Yasnaya Polyana, and buy the painting.<sup>29</sup>

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Вышла фальшь и предвзятая идея. (Ibid., 67).

<sup>28</sup> See Svetlana Stepanova, 'Ten' materialista Yudy.' *Kul't i kul'tura*, 4 (June 2008). <http://religion.ng.ru/printed/211488> (accessed 1 July 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Lang, 'The "Atheism" of Jesus', with references to exchange of letters between Tolstoy and Tretyakov in June 1890 (Zograf [ed.], *Nikolai Nikolaevich Ghe*, 146–7).

The publicity around Russian spiritual paintings was so frenzied that one would have needed to be completely deaf and blind not to have been aware of it: new paintings, exhibitions, art deals, censorship and wars in the press. It clearly could not have passed unnoticed by Tchaikovsky. We can add to this the composer's personal connection with Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov, with whom, and (more) with whose brother Sergei Mikhailovich, Tchaikovsky socialized during his visits to Moscow, in the 1880s, mostly as part of his duties, being the head of the Moscow branch of the Russian Musical Society (RMO). Tchaikovsky also was distantly related to Pavel Tretyakov through the wife of his brother Anatoly.

What is highly surprising, however, is the apparent complete absence of these painters' names in the parts of his correspondence and diary that have been preserved. For years, the composer diligently reported to his brothers and von Meck about his experiences with the classical Italian, Flemish or Dutch painting legacy during his many trips abroad and, as we see, he developed into a serious connoisseur.<sup>30</sup> However, we find only single mentions of the Russian landscape painter Arkhip Kuinji, whom he was going to see 'because it was much talked about,' and Konstantin Makovsky, whose style he liked very much and who painted Tchaikovsky's portrait commissioned by Pavel Tretyakov (1882, now lost). These crumbs attest to the fact that Tchaikovsky was not immune to what was being talked and written about painting in Russia. Perhaps he did not value contemporary Russian spiritual painting, comparing it to the world's great masters. Was he completely indifferent or maybe even tired of all the talk around it? Did he envy the painters, who could openly express what he could not? Or was the Christ theme considered too deeply personal for him, and not a subject for mundane discussion? By avoiding this topic (at least in writings), perhaps he was silently protesting against public Judgment and Mockery, in which he did not want to

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<sup>30</sup> As he wrote to Modest from Berlin on 5/17 March 1880: 'I am convinced that I took a significant step forward in terms of understanding art. Many things gave me real pleasure, especially the Flemish School; but Teniers, Wouwerman, Ruisdael – even more than much-praised Rubens, in whose works even Christ has thick pink thighs and unnatural pink blush on the cheeks. One fact even made me start to see myself as the great expert. I identified the brush of Correggio according to his manner before I saw his name in the catalogue! What! Correggio, however, must have been a mannerish artist, for all the men's faces and figures resemble Christ in the Vatican, and all women – Danae in the Palazzo Borghese.' (Я убеждаюсь, что сделал значительный шаг вперед в отношении понимания живописи. Многое мне доставило истинное удовольствие, особенно фламандская школа, – но Теньер, Вуверман, Рюисдаль больше, чем хваленый Рубенс, у которого даже Христос имеет толстые розовые ляжки и неестественный румянец на щеках. Одно обстоятельство даже заставило меня начать видеть в себе великого знатока. Я узнал кисть Корреджио по его манере прежде, чем увидел его имя в каталоге!!! Каково!!! Впрочем Корреджио, должно быть, был манерный художник, ибо все мужские лица и фигуры напоминают Христа в Ватикане, а все женские – Данаю в палатце Боргезе. Sokolov (ed.), "“От памятника к человеку”", 233).

participate? Did he visualize *his* Christ differently, with none of *His* appearances in art satisfying Tchaikovsky (not in Western classical art either)?

While each of these suggestions may have some validity, none seems plausible enough to become a valid hypothesis. The only thing that can be stated with certainty is that there was no way for Tchaikovsky not to have been aware of contemporary Russian Christology in painting, and for not having his own attitude toward it.

We see, thus, an interesting disposition of Russian muses concerning the New Testament theme: both the visual arts and literature were deeply involved, while music stood aside, occasionally participating in this drama with liturgical pieces. True that visual arts experienced various and numerous problems with censorship, but the genre of devotional painting was not prohibited. In contrast, in the nineteenth-century Russian music, the entire genre of paraliturgical music was eliminated, leaving spiritual oratorio to be merely the object of desire. Russian musicians thus lost to literature and the visual arts as a whole. Deprived of a legal possibility to express their religious feelings in high art,<sup>31</sup> they sought release elsewhere. *The Mighty Five* chose metaphorical solutions: to deify people (*narod*), paganism, myths, folklore, Old Believers. The question is: had Tchaikovsky searched for his own path by which to contribute to this cultural-artistic movement in the context of the general trend and his own God–Christ-seeking? And, might he indeed have found the medium that would let him perform this task?

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<sup>31</sup> On single and half-hidden references to the New Testament in Russian opera see Taruskin, 'Christian Themes in Russian Opera'. See also O. Kitaeva, 'O nochi pered Rozhdestvom i religioznykh motivakh v opere P.I. Chaikovskogo "Cherevichki"' *Vestnik RAM imeni Gnesinykh* 2 (2007), 1–7. <http://vestnikram.ru/file/kitaeva.pdf> (accessed 10 December 2012); Elena Lobzakova, 'Vzaimodeystvie svetskoy i religioznoy traditsiy v tvorchestve russkikh kompozitorov XIX – nachala XX veka' (PhD dissertation, Rostov State Conservatory, 2007).

## Chapter 6

# Behind the Programme

When a composer envisions a programme for their instrumental piece, this does not necessarily mean a narrative with a beginning, development, and end, with a full set of dramatis personae. Sometimes, there are just sketchy episodes and various visual images or other types of sensations, the interrelations and sequences of which may be quite erratic, vague and indefinite. These might nevertheless be enough to fire the composer's musical imagination, eventually leading them to other artistic ideas and possibly leaving the initial programmatic impulse behind. It could well be that the 'hidden programme' of the *Sixth* comprised a handful of shreds and scraps similar to Tchaikovsky's *Fifth* and the abandoned *E♭* (*Life*) project. What was the artistic or cultural idea that lay behind these shreds and scraps, if they existed at all? What was it that defined the imagery and dramaturgy of this symphony? If the preceding chapters have been sufficiently convincing and the reader is ready to accept that Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* could indeed have been his artistic reflection of the Passion in symphonic form, my task now is to adduce the purely musical references and to demonstrate the ways in which the composer achieved it.

What is obvious is that he did not construct a grandiose *Manfred*-like tone-drama, an attempt to convey an objective narrative through the subjective world of the protagonist. On the contrary, the classically compact form of the *Sixth* shows a generalized approach to whatever the programme might have been: music takes precedence over narrative. At the same time, Tchaikovsky did everything possible to ensure that the existence of the programme would be perceived, using an 'almost constant interlacing of musical-dramaturgical and constructive-symphonic planes', as Asafiev put it.<sup>1</sup> Spectacularity and theatricality of the musical events are properties noted at once. Rimsky-Korsakov found the second movement sounding 'rather like a ballet number'.<sup>2</sup> The first critic of the symphony, Hermann Laroche noted that "the secondary section [of the first movement] itself is more in the operatic than symphonic style,"<sup>3</sup> while concerning the third movement he wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Едва ли не постоянное сплетение планов музыкально-драматургического с конструктивно-симфоническим. Boris Asafiev, 'О направленности формы у Чайковского'. In *Izbrannye trudy*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Akademia Nauk, 1954), 68.

<sup>2</sup> Vasily Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences of Rimsky-Korsakov*, ed. and trans. Florence Yonas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 166.

<sup>3</sup> Сама побочная партия более в оперном стиле, нежели в симфоническом.

There remains nevertheless the idea of something alluring and of rare beauty, but going beyond the framework of a symphony. In precisely the same way, the concluding (fourth) movement of the symphony, an Adagio ... seems to be accompanying something taking place on the stage – the slow snuffing-out of the hero's life, for example; likewise, here too, for all the melody's uncommon beauty, one detects a character which is not symphonic but operatic ...<sup>4</sup>

This theatricality is provided in the symphony with a solid margin of safety. The more clear and coloured each image is – the more contrast and sudden the following action appears. As a note-by-note comparison between the draft and the score shows, Tchaikovsky's retouches often were directed toward strengthening and sharpening the contrasts on the one hand, and smoothening the overly illustrative details on the other. It is likely that he was not unpleasantly surprised when Rimsky-Korsakov and Laroche immediately grasped the core. At least he knew that it worked.

### Onstage Visibility

One of the immanent properties of Tchaikovsky's music in general is its ability to be visualized on the stage, exactly as Laroche's review showed and as many musicians have noted since then.<sup>5</sup> To the same extent that Tchaikovsky symphonized his ballets, he theatricalized his symphonic works.<sup>6</sup> His four orchestral suites (the genre beloved by the composer) can be seen after all as librettoless and unstaged ballets, the potential gesticulation of which can be translated into the choreographic notation of Marius Petipa, with his Petersburgian Mariinsky style uniting academism and individual expression. The episodic nature of his music, with its well discussed seams, links and sections 'sewn' together,

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<sup>4</sup> Все же остается представление о чем-то заманчивом и в редкой степени красивом, но выступающим из симфонических рамок. Точно также заключительная (IV) часть симфонии, *адажио* вместо обычного аллегро или престо, начинающаяся плавной мелодией в мажоре и оканчивающаяся в миноре, глухим *trougho* в самом низком регистре оркестра, как будто бы сопровождает нечто, совершающееся на сцене, например, медленное угасание жизни героя; точно так же и здесь, при необычной красоте мелодии чувствуется характер не симфонический, а оперный. G.A. Larosh, 'Pervy simfonicheskiy kontsert Muzykal'nogo Obshchestva 16 oktyabrya' (quoted from G.A. Larosh, *Izbrannyye stat'i*, Vol. 2 (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1975), 158). Translation borrowed from Laroche/Campbell, 38.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Zajaczkowski, *Tchaikovsky's Musical Style* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987), 142.

<sup>6</sup> On features of theatrical dramaturgy see: Iza Nemirovskaya, 'Nekotorye priemy teatral'noy dramaturgii v simfoniakh P.I. Chaikovskogo'. In N.N. Sin'kovskaya, B.Ya. Anshakov, G.I. Belonovich and M.Sh. Bonfeld (eds), *Teatr v zhizni i tvorchestve P.I. Chaikovskogo* (Izhevsk: 'Udmurtia', 1985), 89–100.

albeit sometimes interpreted as the composer's inability to establish flow,<sup>7</sup> is in fact his precious gift of specific 'onstage narrativity'. As is well known, theatre and symphony have interrelated intensively since the late eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> For Tchaikovsky, a universal composer with great achievements in both, enriching approach to these genres was only natural. The idea was prevalent in France, which is of little wonder following Berlioz's contribution. Tchaikovsky was known to have been influenced by French culture.<sup>9</sup>

It is often noted about Tchaikovsky that he felt quite free in his approach to the forms considered conventional for one genre or another: 'his operas are not operas at all', metaphorically joked Laroche;<sup>10</sup> his ballets were found to be undanceable and too symphonic;<sup>11</sup> his First Suite appears in many ways close to his Fourth Symphony,<sup>12</sup> and the *Sixth*, according to Laroche, bears many features of a suite in addition to opera.<sup>13</sup> As, Iosif Kunin noted, during the ten-year interval between the *Fourth* and the *Fifth*, the composer wrote nothing more in the symphony genre. While he was contemplating a symphony, his creative muse took him in another direction and a suite or something else would appear. All the orchestral

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<sup>7</sup> Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 138–41; Zajaczkowski, *Tchaikovsky's Musical Style*, Chapters 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Valentina Konen, *Teatr i simfonia* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Although the composer socialized with his French colleagues much less than he could have done had he wished to, it is worth noting that the topic of 'the parallel between the art of symphonic and the art of dramatic music', was widely discussed in the 1870s between Bizet and Delaborde. See Mina Curtiss, *Bizet and His World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 370.

<sup>10</sup> Laroche began his review of Tchaikovsky's *Mazeppa* with the following: 'This opera, composed in 1881–3, was staged in the Bol'shoi Theatre in Moscow on 3 February 1884. Perhaps the reader will resent me telling too hackneyed an anecdote, but I cannot resist quoting an apocryphal dictum of the dying Hegel, so apt to the occasion does it seem. The philosopher – as the legend affirms – said first: "Of all my pupils there was only one who understood me". Then, after a short silence, he added: "And even he misinterpreted me". The original form in which the great writer wrapped his idea is eminently suitable to describe the state of musical drama in present-day Russia. Imitating him, we shall say that, of all present-day Russian composers, Tchaikovsky alone is capable of writing operas, and Tchaikovsky's operas are in essence not operas at all.' G.A. Laroche: 'P. Tchaikovsky's *Mazeppa*'. *Moscow Bulletin*, 2 January 1889, no. 22, 3–4. (Laroche 2, 129–35/Campbell, 18).

<sup>11</sup> Janet E. Kennedy, 'Line of Succession: Three Productions of Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*.' In Kearney (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World*, 147.

<sup>12</sup> Natalia Minibayeva, 'Per Aspera ad Astra: Symphonic Tradition in Tchaikovsky's First Suite for Orchestra'. In Kearney (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World*, 163–96.

<sup>13</sup> Arkady Klimovitsky, 'Zametki o Shestoy Simfonii Chaikovskogo (k probleme: Chaikovskiy na poroge XX veka)'. In Anna Porfirieva (ed.) *Problemy muzykal'nogo romantizma* (Leningrad: LGITMiK, 1987), 123–7.



compositions of those years are suite-like to different degrees.<sup>14</sup> Any genre frame seems too narrow for the yearning spirit of Tchaikovsky's imagination, leading him to hybridize genres<sup>15</sup> and seek new formal solutions. This generic complexity is featured in the *Sixth* even more powerfully than in his other works.

It has been noted that Tchaikovsky the man possessed a particular kinetic ability to mimic female dancers, whom he sometimes impersonated for fun and to amuse his friends.<sup>16</sup> It is probably this particular sensation of motion that makes his music so eloquent: immanent expressive human *gesticulation* magically combines with the no less immanent expressive human *vocalization*, its 'constant pronounceability'.<sup>17</sup> Motion is perceived in space, and spatiality is one of Tchaikovsky's strongest features. The range of diapason, reflecting the spatiality of an imaginary stage; the abundance of passages that suit Mariinsky's choreographic rhetoric of running, spinning and lifting; the dance-and-song periodicity and frequent use of the structural fragmentation and summation that are so natural for *corps de ballet* sections (the so-called 'dance-measures'), all confer a perfect sense of stage time and space. Periodicity of his music also strengthens his intensive climaxes, the potential infinity of which is well supported by the ultimately developed functional harmonic progressions. These constitute just a few of the means that together make his music so attuned to our sensory-motor perception, and conducive to our willingly surrendering to its flow.

Regarding the onstage visibility of the *Sixth*, it is enough to recall that, irrespective of what *sujet* might be superimposed on it, the second theme of the first movement – Andante – is clearly a *ballet Adagio*.<sup>18</sup> It includes the contrasting introduction of the *corps de ballet* section with its new theme in the middle of the scene, and leaves time for the stage lights to fade out at the end. Remarkably, when Tchaikovsky revised the draft and later when he was working on the score, his sense of stage time dictated making the transition from *Allegro* to *Andante* two bars longer (adding 87 and 88 and marking the tempo as *Adagio*)<sup>19</sup> and to ensuring the 'staging' of this episode. Similarly, irrespective of any plot, the sudden and immense rupture of the narrative, signalling the development section, startles

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<sup>14</sup> Iosif Kunin, 'Ideal'neishaya forma'. *Sovetskaya muzyka* 11 (1968), 113 (quoted in Klimovitsky, 'Zametki', 123).

<sup>15</sup> Iza Nemirovskaya, 'Vyrazitel'noe znachenie zhanrovyykh splavov i transformatsiy v simfoniakh Chaikovskogo'. In Margarita Rittikh (ed.), *Chaikovsky: voprosy istorii i stilya (k 150-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya)*. Proceedings of Gnessin GMPI, Vol. 108 (Moscow: GMPI imeni Gnesinykh, 1989), 115–34.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Poznansky, *The Quest for the Inner Man* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991), 56–7.

<sup>17</sup> Asafiev, 'O napravlenosti formy', 68.

<sup>18</sup> One can disagree with Laroche's operatic association and suggest a ballet protagonist's solo or perhaps a *pas de deux* as a genre so beloved by Tchaikovsky and often referred to in his other instrumental works.

<sup>19</sup> See *ADF*, commentaries by Polina Vajdman, 119 (English)/163 (Russian).

us, no matter how familiar we are with this symphony. The effect it creates is intentional, directly transferring the *force majeure*, with all its fatal aggressiveness and inhumanity, from the onstage situation to the symphonic score. Double bars, already introduced into the draft of the symphony, serve to separate the above episodes from the general flow and to emphasize their being designed as *scenes*, which submit themselves to symphonic conventions, but, as David Brown notes, radically redesign the proportions of the symphony.<sup>20</sup>

### Scenes, Symbols, Topics

Any listener who is inclined to imagine scenes will most probably visualize them according to their own artistic thesaurus. Laroche's impressions, for example, quoted above, may coincide with some and conflict with others. My own perception is that scenes from the gospel can be envisioned in the most theatrical and even cinematographic way in two of the movements: I – Allegro non troppo and III – Allegro molto vivace, usually mentioned as Scherzo-march.<sup>21</sup>

The first movement might refer to Christ's night, following The Last Supper; more precisely, to the state of Christ's ultimate soul-searching in Gethsemane (the Agony in the Garden): 'And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground' (Luke 22:44). The 'hour of agony' is the moment when Christ's human essence is the most revealed. Equal in tension and in the sense of irreversibility to the Crucifixion itself, this episode/scene alone might be responsible for the immense compassion and impact it made on the ethos of Christian culture. At this moment, although the reader knows that the choice is still Christ's, they also already know that the choice has been made. The more one identifies with Christ's human suffering, the more reverence Christ's decision is likely to elicit. Whatever the reason for this state of agony – human fear, as a common person might believe, or the divine resolve to undertake humankind's sins and transgressions, as theology explains – this inner struggle is one of the greatest dramatic climaxes in European culture. Without this moment there would be no Crucifixion. In the symphony – without the *passion* of the first movement – there would be no *compassion* of the Finale. The most dramatic *inner* struggle, *borenie* in the Russian spiritual literature, 'a terrible and passionate cri de coeur of a troubled heart', as Raymond Monelle wrote<sup>22</sup> – irrespective of who the protagonist is – is unmistakably recognized

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<sup>20</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 445.

<sup>21</sup> We should not be surprised by the mention of a cinematographic approach in relation to Tchaikovsky. He had spoken on the telephone and his voice had been recorded on a phonograph; he was probably aware also of the precursor to the film camera. He could have been much more ready for the new art form than his belonging to the nineteenth century suggests.

<sup>22</sup> Monelle, *The Sense of Music*, 145.

here. To arrive at such *borenie*, Tchaikovsky used many of the rhetorical and semantic devices that had accumulated in European music since even before the seventeenth century.

The third movement (Scherzo-march) in the context of a gospel can be interpreted as a festivity in bright daylight during Passover, with crowds of people flocking to the city of Jerusalem. The dominant presence of Roman soldiers controlling the situation is sensed. This tableau offers a highly contrastive *backdrop* to Christ on his last day, as the 'Man of Sorrow': the interview with Pontius Pilate, the Judgment by the Sanhedrin, and the Mockery. The effect is provided by a synergy of orchestration devices, tonal shifts, metrical stress, and increasing figurativeness, which gradually 'zoom in' during the movement. To strengthen the contrast between the beginning of the scherzo and its march climax, Tchaikovsky, working on the score, reduced the dynamics of the 'zero mark' and changed the *p* at the beginning to *pp* (against the draft).

There is not a single note in this movement, however, that could hint at the suffering of the protagonist. If this festive backdrop was indeed the idea behind the scene, it was a total inversion of Antokolsky's *Ecce Homo: This is the Man*, where the figure of Christ is the only visible object, while the crowd is imagined. The whole scene in this movement is a counterpart to *Carmen's* last act, where the magnificent feast serves as a background to the tragedy, which results, by the way, from *her*, Carmen's, choice. Again, an impressive number of resources have been mobilized here to create the imagery of objectivity, festivity, crowds and even militancy. All is earthly and common (collective), there is nothing spiritual, individual, or esoteric in this organized and manipulated crowd.

The series of gospel scenes could perhaps be extended by the Finale, which might be associated with the Crucifixion, but not directly as a scene; rather, in a semiotically more complex way – to Crucifixes as part of the Catholic mass, as an already canonic artistic *reference* to crucifixion.

These scenes, or sometimes perhaps mere allusions to scenes, do not embrace the entire symphony but appear as episodes, incorporated wherever they suit the purely musical logic. One of them – a quotation from the Orthodox funeral chorale – lasts only a few seconds.

The composer's solution to accomplishing the conceived programme in the *Sixth* was probably to combine several *scenes/episodes*<sup>23</sup> with a large number of musical allusions, such as topics, icons or other symbols, woven into musical fabric of the symphony. The following analysis of the score is an attempt to trace connections/associations between these scenes and symbols, and their meaning in the musical-cultural communication between Tchaikovsky and his audiences – both contemporaneous and contemporary. I imply here a semiotic field – a wholeness of elements – working to create an imagery belonging to the Passion, embracing

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<sup>23</sup> Choosing the principle of scenes/episodes, Tchaikovsky followed his findings in *Eugene Onegin*, created as *lyrical scenes*, where he successfully shows how one might deal with a literary work, in which the cultural significance far exceeds its plot.

not only gospel texts but also their reflection in modern culture, including such milestones as devotional paintings from the Renaissance and on, as well as Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and Mass in B minor, and Renan's *Vie de Jésus*.

Stepping into the territory of a verbal description of music imagery, we musicologists usually try to be careful not to transgress the sometimes-blurred border of objectivity.<sup>24</sup> My point of departure is that if scholars of different cultures and generations, even epochs, have perceived key musical symbols of this work in a similar way, this suggests that Tchaikovsky attained his purpose and managed to convey his programme in a programmeless way; in other words, to communicate by music alone.

Natalia Kalinichenko drew attention to the use of rhetorical formulas in Tchaikovsky's late works, and, remarkably, to the difference with the way he used them earlier: 'If in early compositions such figures could illustrate *words*, in the late ones they help to articulate a complex *idea*.'<sup>25</sup> Indeed, analysing the *Sixth* from the point of *Musica Poetica*, one might be inclined to think that Tchaikovsky wrote the score with the books of Burmeister and Kircher in hand, so intensive was his use of musical-rhetorical figures associated with affects of passion and suffering.<sup>26</sup> It is clear, however, that these figures became the flesh and blood of the common-practice European idiom long before Tchaikovsky, and, applying them to Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*, we can talk rather of his dialogue with J.S. Bach – the Bach of *St Matthew Passion* and Mass in B minor, similar to his lifelong creative dialogue with Beethoven. The message he encoded in a purely instrumental form was meant to be decoded through the turn to musical-rhetorical figures, topics and symbols established in European culture that can be related to the rhetoric of a Passion play. The medium – symphony, oratorio, opera, ballet, mystery or cinema – is not important to this end.

With the unarguable priority Tchaikovsky gave to purely musical expression and development, he generally did not neglect opportunities to use illustrative motifs when they suited the character of a particular piece. We should recall Tatyana's writing in the 'Letter scene' (*Eugene Onegin*), where the strings' figuration clearly paints her hasty script, retaining the expressiveness of her excitement; or the briefest possible reference-blink, when Tomsy in his ballad from *The Queen*

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<sup>24</sup> As Stephen Benson notes, 'Each set of verbal fixing of music forms part of a complex discourse by and according to which music is made, received, circulated and valued ... . Our aesthetic contemplation of music is never anything other than textual, not least when we feel it flies above the messy world of language. Music must first be interpreted before we can experience it as music. It is an intentional object.' *Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 3, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Natalia Kalinichenko, 'Ritoricheskie formuly v pozdnykh proizvedeniyakh Chaikovskogo'. In *Muzykal'naya semiotika: perspektivy i puti razvitiya*, 2 vols. (Astrakhan: OPOU DPO AIPKP, 2006), 1:214.

<sup>26</sup> Dietrich Bartel, '*Musica Poetica*': *Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

*of Spades* mentions Count St Germain and pronounces 'But the Count was not a coward' – a half-bar trumpet flourish (fanfare) sparks, illustrating the Count's machismo, and musically animating the balladic monotony of Tomsy's story. And, of course, Tchaikovsky's ballets offer plenty of examples. Hence, there is no reason to exclude his use of micro-rhetorical devices in the *Sixth*. As I will try to show, they serve to establish the semantic field of the Passion plot.

## Chapter 7

# Four Movements and their Interrelations

Each of the movements of the *Sixth* bears an emotional and conceptual weight, exceeding those of many other symphonies. They are more like live frescoes that can be viewed even non-chronologically. While both musically and in their imagery the movements are profoundly interconnected, they are also emphatically separated and unpredictable in character. As Klimovitsky has noted, the four-movement cycle of the symphony is distinguished by paradox in the sequence of the movements – in complete contradiction to the expectations built up by the previous movement.<sup>1</sup>

What contributes to this separateness is multi-temporality. Here is a keen sense of *eternity*, of being beyond any time frame, thus uniting past and future (Introduction, Orthodox funeral chorale and coda from the first movement; partly Finale);<sup>2</sup> there is also the *now* of the story, to which the listener (almost a spectator) is a witness (the first movement except for the second theme, the third movement in its entirety); the *past* as part of the *now* can be clearly distinguished (the second theme of the first movement, the second movement).<sup>3</sup> Finally, there is another ‘now’, the *now of the listener* – most of the Finale.

This unusual cycle has three centres of gravity, each one with its special function and unique relationship to the others: the first movement – Allegro non troppo, the third – Scherzo-march and the Finale. Their order, especially from the Scherzo-march to the Finale, is crucial. By merely imagining the opposite – one obtains a classic structure of the ‘self-becoming’ conception: some hybrid of the *Eroica* with its funereal second movement and Tchaikovsky’s own *Fifth*, with its heroic apotheosis as a conclusion. The order in the *Sixth* establishes a primary condition that questions the ethos of a classical symphony and makes this symphony ‘Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique*’. The second movement, famous for its unusual  $\frac{3}{4}$  waltz-like metre, has no action and serves as an intermezzo between the two main dramatic acts. Nor does the Finale convey any action; rather, it is perceived as resulting from something that could have happened during the Scherzo-march or immediately afterward (implied by the story but not shown on the stage). ‘A piece is patently “about” something’, notes Brown about the

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<sup>1</sup> Klimovitsky, ‘Zametki’, 110.

<sup>2</sup> Klimovitsky sees the topic of Eternity as a patently non-personificized expression featured in Baroque stylistic references, as formed among composers of the Romantic era. *Ibid.*, 112–14.

<sup>3</sup> Klimovitsky presents convincing arguments for multi-temporality.

Finale.<sup>4</sup> Echoing the slow Introduction that opens the symphony, the Finale forms an arch of *eternity*, framing the actions, events, pictures or states that pass before the audience's eyes. On the other hand, the Finale is also the *now of the listener*, a *state* of grief and compassion, even if it is a prayer that can be regarded also as action.

The abundance of artistic information in the symphony shocks the listener into a strong emotional experience. The unusual nature of the symphony was reflected in the unusual nature of its first reception. The public's reserved reaction was noted immediately by Tchaikovsky himself, who wrote that the symphony had been received with a certain bewilderment;<sup>5</sup> as well as by Laroche, who noted the unusual behaviour of the public, who had 'reacted with respect but restraint to the new score in general, the Scherzo included.'<sup>6</sup> The end of Laroche's review, while rarely quoted, is especially interesting:

I will say a few kind words about the audience. It behaved as if on *foreign* ground: it did not talk, did not make a noise, listened with the greatest attention and applauded sparingly (although *on his first appearance* it greeted Tchaikovsky with delight) ... I felt respect for the public, which, in truth, rarely inspires me. If it doesn't get to the core of Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony* today, it will come closer tomorrow, and even more so the next day, and, in the end, it will love it. In any case, the audience was busy with exactly what it had come for, that is music.<sup>7</sup>

The four movements are interconnected and correlated, forming various axes and vectors that unite this unique cycle.

### The First and Third Movements

The Allegro and the Scherzo-march constitute the main axis of a play. They both represent action or on-stage activity, and they contrast with one another in the

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 455–7. The fuller quotation reads: 'As with the opening movement, a piece is patently "about" something as this demands an attempt at interpretation, for all the danger with which this may be fraught ...'

<sup>5</sup> Tchaikovsky, letter to Yurgenson, St Petersburg, 18 October 1893. *PSS*, 17: 205.

<sup>6</sup> Laroche, 160/Campbell, 38–9.

<sup>7</sup> Скажу несколько теплых слов о публике. Она держала себя как бы на *иностранном* манер: не разговаривала, не шумела, слушала с величайшим вниманием и аплодировала скупно (хотя *при первом появлении* приняла Чайковского восторженно) ... Я почувствовал к публике уважение, которое, сказать по правде, она мне редко внушает. Если она сегодня не раскусила *Шестой симфонии* Чайковского, она завтра, послезавтра сблизится с нею и, в конце концов, полюбит ее. Во всяком случае, она была занята именно тем, для чего пришла, т. е. музыкой. Larosh, 'Pervyi simfonicheskiy kontsert', 161.

greatest possible way. Both have the properties of a thriller: the Allegro – with its sharp conflict; and the Scherzo-march – with its corybantic dynamics and ambiguity. Both these movements, and only they, have thin double bars dividing the sections/scenes. Both the first and the third movement – and only they – are comparable in their ‘structural interest’.<sup>8</sup> Both were written first (similar to the two first pictures and the fourth one in *The Queen of Spades* and the Letter scene in *Eugene Onegin*), during the week from 4 to 11 February, in an emotional state of extreme tension, on upside-down score paper. (In all three bifolios used for the draft, the imprint of Yurgenson’s firm appears on the upper left corner of each second verso. Did the composer have a special need for blank paper, with nothing to distract him?) The interconnectedness between movements I and III is confirmed by Tchaikovsky’s sudden return to the first movement in the middle of his work on the Scherzo, in order to compose a slow introduction in E minor, which now opens the symphony.

The Scherzo-march was only partly written down during that week, before Tchaikovsky’s travels to Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod and St Petersburg, but the moments of key importance had already been drafted and then left aside for further work. The composer knew that the symphony would not escape him. The rest of the symphony (second and fourth movements) was clearer, simpler, with fewer notes and less development. This is reflected in the character of their script: the handwriting becomes less agitated, more accurate and less cramped. The composer no longer needed to hurry.

### The First and Fourth Movements

Another axis connects the Allegro non troppo with the Finale; first of all through the key–mode relationship, as is natural between the first and last movements of the cycle. Both are in B minor and have D major second themes, and both are distantly reflected in the slightly melancholic D major–B minor keys of the second movement. There is also a special feature common to the Introduction and the Finale: the identical tempo signification – *Adagio* – even with the same metronomic index ♩ = 54, framing the long tension of drama and ‘returning it back to the initial destination’.<sup>9</sup> The opening and closing movements are similar in their vehemence. Undoubtedly, they are permeated with that innermost subjectivity that Tchaikovsky mentions in his letter to Bob, and which at some moments can be interpreted extrovertly as compassion. Something else that particularly connects these movements is the detailed agogics that distinguishes them not only from the second and third movements, but also from Tchaikovsky’s oeuvre in general.

Allegro non troppo and the Finale comprise the logical arch: the question to and response from the numen; a protagonist who had lost in the first act, becomes

<sup>8</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 452.

<sup>9</sup> Klimovitsky, ‘Zametki’, 122.



an object of mourning in the last. By delaying the *lamento* and transferring it from the second act, as in *Eroica*, to the Finale, the composer gave it even more power, placing it *after* the antagonist celebrates his victory in the third act. Mourning and compassion for the protagonist comes in the Finale as an ultimate conclusion, far into the hero's afterlife, when the supreme being has already condemned the antagonist's victory as vanity. Both movements concentrate on the expression of suffering, pain, grief, and sorrow – passion – on a level equal to Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, Mass in B minor and Mozart's Requiem. It is probably not by chance that the  $\frac{1}{4}$  metre of the opening and  $\frac{3}{4}$  metre of the closing movements correspond to the same metric relations between the opening and the closing movements of the *St Matthew Passion*.

### The Third and Fourth Movements

The juxtaposition of the Scherzo-march and the Finale was the most intriguing, unexpected, contrasting, programmatic and risky moment for the composer. The stronger the closing function of the Scherzo (in fact, sounding march-like by the end of the movement), the more unexpected becomes the Finale, especially for an audience in the pre-recording era that listened to it for the first and perhaps the only time. The total shock and surprise that one experiences when the Finale breaks is possible only once. What may happen afterwards, during repeating listening, is a rethinking and re-interpretation of the Scherzo-march, when its ambivalence is enhanced. The Scherzo starts as an ordinary third movement of a standard four-movement cycle, but then transforms into a triumphant March that acquires the function of a Finale (it even alludes to the Finale of the *Fifth*, possibly prompting listeners to think that the composer was varying his format). It then escalates to such a force that the listeners are supposed to forget that it was only the third of the four-movement cycle, and gradually attune themselves to the Finale mode.<sup>10</sup>

What increased the risk of its being misinterpreted was the custom of applauding after each movement. Tchaikovsky knew that the anticipated applause would partly reduce the surprise effect of the Finale. Yet he did not try to prevent this by connecting the movements by indicating an *attacca* performance: it would have been pointless to mark this in the score, as future practice only confirmed. According to concert etiquette of the twentieth century and on, applause between movements is unacceptable, but, amazingly, some audiences are still unable not to applaud in this particular place – after the Scherzo-march.

Though the function of the Scherzo-march appears to be not as important as that of a real Finale – not conclusive and, moreover, contrasting to the genuine Finale – its quasi or false finality suggests another meaning, in relation to which musicians all over the world are divided in their opinions. Some accept its festive appearance at face value, while others seek a subtext, irrespective of the symphony's possible

<sup>10</sup> The idea of two finalizing movements in the *Sixth* is promulgated and developed by Klimovitsky (ibid.).

programme. Having grown up in the St Petersburg tradition, permeated with Silver Age symbolism and mysteries of subtextuality, I spent decades pondering on this puzzling Scherzo. I conclude that the *context* created by the Finale, which infinitely overwhelms the march's victorious earthly power through the superpower of its eternal and universal compassion, is what primarily makes one look for a subtext. At that moment when the Finale erupts with its inconsolable grief, the Scherzo-march is instantly re-evaluated, even retrospectively; its power crumbles into dust and the lament of the Finale triumphs over it. It is also possible, however, as I shall attempt to show below, that not only the context in which the Scherzo is placed, but also its very music possesses certain traits that contribute to this effect of ambiguity.

### First, Second, and Third Movements – Finale

The Finale stands apart from the rest of the symphony in that it belongs to some other dimension that is truly hard to define. Not only does it have no action, but it clearly takes us to a different dimension from the rest of the symphony. Not only does it allude at certain moments to *eternity*, and at others to the *now of the listener*, but it also conveys a sense of *post-everything*, of another space, of some *above-everything* in regard to whatever might have been suggested before, perhaps the best musical reference to the *afterlife*. While the material of the first and the third movements belongs to the conventional common-practice idiom of nineteenth-century symphonic music, and even the second movement, despite its exotic  $\frac{7}{4}$  time sounding contemporaneously European, the Finale's lamentous expression belongs to another world/time. If the material of other movements is basically instrumental, the Finale is essentially vocal in nature. Its intentional musical and temporal otherness refers to whatever distant events in human history the composer wanted us to think of in the first three movements. It separates the spiritual from the material, eternity from vanity, immortality from mortality, as if all the events of human life and society have descended into oblivion, while only prayer and compassion remain.

### First and Fourth Movements – Second and Third Movements

While the Allegro non troppo and Finale are connected by vehemence, subjectivity and compassion, both in the minor mode of course, the two middle movements relate to some objective reality, entering the daylight of life. They relieve the heavy emotional pressure burdening the listener, or, in Laroche's words: 'In them music lives on her own resources alone and makes an entirely aesthetic impression, not confusing and troubling the listener with the notion of a [different] sphere combined with music or bordering on it ...'<sup>11</sup> Despite their contrasts in moods and intensity,

<sup>11</sup> Laroche 161/Campbell, 39.

the two middle movements work together to present a rich backdrop to the human drama that is being played out here. This reflects an operatic tradition of the kind that so delighted Tchaikovsky in *Don Giovanni* and *Carmen*, and that he himself applied in *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades* – markedly contrasting the protagonists' crucial actions and the festive scenes of daily life.

### First to Second, Third and Fourth Movements

The internal events of the first movement are so contrastive and conflicting, and the conflict develops so dynamically, that in many ways this exhausts any plot that might exist independently of the whole story. It is perceived as a 'self-sufficient tone-poem' (Klimovitsky)<sup>12</sup> that 'completely overshadows the two [movements] that follow' (Brown).<sup>13</sup> The protagonist's struggle and defeat are transparent. Moreover, its coda, literally a sound-picture concomitantly expressing ascent (to heaven?) and descent (into the underworld?), seems to leave nothing to be continued. Until the Finale erupts, one can perceive the sequence of the second and third movements as a beautiful divertimento, unrelated to the drama of the first movement. This probably was one of the reasons behind the confusion with which the St Petersburg orchestra and public first encountered the symphony. Its dramaturgical innovation puzzled them; and who knows what might have been the fate of this strange symphony had Tchaikovsky remained alive for a few more years, and the symphony remained non-understood. However, the shocking extra-musical factor of the composer's death only nine days after the premiere made society re-evaluate the work and focus on its tragic content. He literally paid for it with his own life.<sup>14</sup>

### Third – First, Second, and Fourth Movements

The Scherzo-march stands apart from the rest of the symphony in its prevailing major mode in both the literal and the metaphorical sense, and in its exultant-triumphant nature ('*v torzhestvenno-likuyushchem rode*', as the composer defined his creative task for the rest of the movement in the score, when he had to interrupt the work). Emotionally, this movement is fully dissociated from the other three and comprises a challenging antithesis to the symphony's chief imagery. Such disposition can be perceived as concealing an additional meaning that prevents its comprehension at face value, and instead suggests the existence of a subtext.

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<sup>12</sup> Klimovitsky, 'Zametki', 112–13.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 451.

<sup>14</sup> This sad scenario somewhat resembles *Carmen*'s empowerment after Bizet's untimely death.

# Chapter 8

## ‘A Skillfully Constructed Novel’<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Tchaikovsky opens the symphony with a slow 18-bar Introduction that anticipates the tragic denouement of the story that follows, very similar to what he did in *Romeo and Juliet* and, even more so, to what Mozart did in *Don Giovanni*, from the very first moment striking the audience with the music of the Commendatore’s appearance. Such a beginning, which reflects the end, is acceptable in relation to a plot when the end is the essence of the story, and is known to all. Jesus’ story is certainly the one with familiar and invariable end that is unlikely ever to be remade with a *lieto fine*, like some ancient myths or Shakespearean tragedies in the Classical and neo-Classical eras. The closest model for Tchaikovsky, however, was the *St Matthew Passion*. Counting on the public’s knowledge, Bach and Picander opened the *St Matthew Passion* with what was to follow at its end. As Berger writes:

In the opening chorus: ‘Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen’ (‘Come, daughters, help me lament’), Zion urges her companions, even though nothing has happened yet to justify lamentation and reflection. To say what she does, she must know the story already – it must already have come to pass. And to that story lamentation is indeed the fitting response. When, in the final chorus, the Daughter and the Faithful together intone, ‘Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder’ (‘We sit down in tears’), they are responding to the most recent event of the story, the burial, but their tears are also those Zion called for at the outset. (Remember that Bach and Picander create this opening anticipation of the conclusion by giving Zion and the Faithful a shared text both in the last portion of No. 1 and in the last number of the Passion.) In the world of the story, time passed – there was beginning and, especially, an ending. In the timeless world of contemplation, beginning and end are one.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The title is borrowed from Laroche’s review (Laroche, 159/Campbell, 37).

<sup>2</sup> Karol Berger, *Bach’s Cycle, Mozart’s Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 108.

The Introduction's general and unmistakable atmosphere of gloom and obscure descent into an underworld<sup>3</sup> ('dark subterranean sounds'<sup>4</sup>) could relate to any ancient narrative, as the sense of *past* or *eternal* is signified very strongly here. Its musical text, however, contains certain symbols that quite unambiguously indicate a more specific plot (Example 8.2 opposite).

The first is a heavy ascent in melody. The gradual and sequential ascent of the short motif in the upper voice, starting from the tonic, when it contrasts either the organ point on tonic or the descending bass that weighs it down, indicates Bach's typical rhetoric signifying the *Via Dolorosa* or *Crucifixion*, which he used abundantly in his instrumental music, and of which his Prelude in B $\flat$  minor (BWV 867, WTC I) is a perfect example (Example 8.1).

Example 8.1 Prelude in B $\flat$  minor, WTC I, by Bach



The opening chorus from the *St Matthew Passion* is even closer to the Introduction to the *Sixth*, and Tchaikovsky, if not literally quoting it, obviously refers to it: there are the same E minor and sequential developments of a similarly outlined motif (Example 8.3).

The theme of the Introduction itself, sometimes mentioned as a theme of the cross<sup>5</sup> despite lacking a crucial component – a crossing line, still includes directly opposing steps around the supertonic. An accidental sharp must also be a necessary attribute of a cross-theme, as in the theme of Bach's Fugue in F $\sharp$  minor (BWV 867, WTC I),<sup>6</sup> and we indeed find it in bar 4 of Tchaikovsky's Introduction (Example 8.4).<sup>7</sup>

To strengthen the reference, Tchaikovsky adds another symbol. We find not only *passus duriusculus* in the bass, which always invites 'affective involvement

<sup>3</sup> This episode emotionally alludes to Tchaikovsky's description of his feelings before his visit to Fanny Durbach: 'with some painful *fear*, almost *horror*, as if to the realm of death and people that long ago disappeared from the scene of life' (quoted in Chapter 2, p. 9 of this volume).

<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 445.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson, *Tchaikovsky. Symphony No. 6*, 51.

<sup>6</sup> Noted by Klimovitsky ('Zametki', 112).

<sup>7</sup> For more about Tchaikovsky's use of Baroque rhetoric see Natalia Kalinichenko, 'Ritoricheskie formuly'; O. Kitaeva, 'O nochi pered Rozhdestvom'.

Example 8.2 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (Introduction to the first movement, bars 1–18)

The image displays a page of a musical score for the Introduction to the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Symphony no. 6. The tempo is marked 'Adagio' with a quarter note equal to 54 beats per minute. The score is arranged in systems for various instruments: Bassoon 1-2, Viola divisi (two staves), Double Bass divisi (two staves), Oboe 1-2, Clarinet 1-2, Bassoon 1-2, Horn 3-4, Viola divisi (two staves), Double Bass divisi (two staves), Oboe 1-2, Clarinet 1-2, Bassoon 1-2, Horn 3-4, Viola divisi (two staves), and Double Bass divisi (two staves). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *p*, *mf*, *mp*, *sf*, and *f*. A 'ritenuto' marking is present in the lower systems. Bar numbers 7 and 13 are indicated at the beginning of their respective systems.

Example 8.3 *St Matthew Passion*, by Bach ('Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen')

Coro I

Flute 1

Flute 2

Oboe 1

Oboe 2

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Org. e Cont.

8  
4  
2

7  
4  
2

7<sup>♯</sup>  
4

6  
5  
4

5  
4

3

3

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Org. e Cont.

6  
5

6  
4+

7  
4  
2

8  
3

8  
4  
2

7  
4  
2

7<sup>♯</sup>  
4

6  
5  
4

## Example 8.4 Fugue in F# minor, WTC I, by Bach



from the listener',<sup>8</sup> but the composer also presents this figure as close to *Crucifixus* from Bach's Mass in B minor as possible, in the same key and pitch. Consciously or not, he even equalizes it in length: his six bars in common time (rather *alla breve* in character), contain 12 half notes and thereby correspond to Bach's four bars in  $\frac{3}{2}$  containing the same number of half notes (Example 8.5).

Example 8.5 Comparison of the theme of the *Sixth's* Introduction with the theme of Bach's 'Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen' and its bass part with the bass of Bach's *Crucifixus*

The use of the E minor key could probably be explained by its technical-compositional suitability (in regard to the registers of the double basses and bassoon, and in its subdominant relation to the main key of B minor), and its coincidence with the original key of both Bach's pieces from the *St Matthew Passion* and the Mass in B minor could be purely incidental, but are there not too many similarities for this to be merely a coincidence?

This 18-bar Introduction (*Adagio*) has one strange, purely musical unnaturalness: its second phrase begins with the literal repetition of the first. In principle, a repetition is very typical for Tchaikovsky (too much so, some would say). Nevertheless, this particular moment sounds like a very rough join, since the beginning of the second phrase does not match the cadence of the first. The effect is similar to a sound-recording defect that interrupts the flow of music and throws it back to the beginning. What is perhaps responsible for this effect is the fact that

<sup>8</sup> Peter J. Williams, *The Chromatic Fourth during Four Centuries of Music* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1997), 225.



the composer made no effort to connect the sixth and seventh bars melodically. The harsh and painful dominant seventh chord is separated from the resolution and continuation by almost two bars, which are virtually empty; any element of responsiveness of the second phrase to the first is simply lacking here. This contrasts with Bach's *Crucifixus*, where the dominant, on which the four-bar structure ends, resolves immediately into the tonic in the following bar.<sup>9</sup> Tchaikovsky's deliberate discontinuity at this particular moment – contrasting the natural flow that he would shortly apply by smoothly connecting the second phrase with the third – seems to bear some extra-musical meaning. If we accept the suggestion that two of Bach's emblems are used in the theme, this discontinuity may be the third symbol, corresponding to the Stations of the Cross, where Jesus stumbled under the weight of the cross. If we imagine that the *sforzando* chord in the fifth bar represents Jesus' fall, the effect of starting from the beginning that is emphasized by the second phrase gains meaning. There is no other place in the symphony where the composer sacrifices a purely musical movement to a programme. By doing so here, at the very beginning, he announces the programmatic idea of the symphony, drawing the listener's attention to the importance of the following narrative. Killing thus three birds with one stone, Tchaikovsky concentrates at least three quintessential elements of the semantic field of the Passion within a very short musical space, in fact presenting the encoded programme of the symphony directly below its title.

Although the Introduction, which probes the main theme, seems to be a natural beginning for the symphony, the composer did not plan it as such when he worked on the first movement. The idea struck him while working on the Scherzo-march. The structure of the latter was clear to him from the beginning, and it was only a matter of time and technique to notate it. His imagination, however, could not wait. If the third movement was indeed conceived as a festive backdrop to Jesus' day of sorrow, Tchaikovsky's creative imagination could then progress toward the next event – the *Via Dolorosa*. Probably looking for the right place for this scene, the composer may have realized that the four-movement symphonic form could not support an additional episode. At some moment, he could have decided to relocate it as a kind of epigraph, especially in view of its obviously intentional similarity to the initial motif of the main subject.

Tchaikovsky's references to Bach's rhetoric are not surprising. Polyphonic technique and skills had always occupied him, particularly in his last years. He often had with him the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and he played it, even if only to 'kill time';<sup>10</sup> he had both the *St Matthew Passion* and the Mass in B minor in his personal library. He might have taken the opportunity to attend the rehearsal of the *St Matthew Passion* at the Lutheran Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul on 11 February 1892, during a business trip to St Petersburg. In any event, he

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<sup>9</sup> It is not always tonic, since the harmonization of this ground bass pattern varies throughout the piece.

<sup>10</sup> Lakond, *The Diaries of Tchaikovsky*, 160–61.

informed Taneyev about the rehearsal. Taneyev, in contrast, was playing with the idea of going to the capital specifically for this performance.<sup>11</sup> *Crucifixus* from the Mass in B minor was quite a popular item in the repertoire of nineteenth-century Russian choirs, and it was a resounding symbol of Russian reverence for (if not worship of) Bach. Among Tchaikovsky’s allusions to these major works of Bach, the first and general one is the choice of keys: B minor and E minor – both very important for those of Bach’s opuses that form a certain macro-cycle in the post-Bach culture, as quintessential to Christian topics in music.<sup>12</sup>

## Main Theme

The main theme of the *Sixth* is remarkably non-original in its outline,<sup>13</sup> but it possesses the greatest expressive potential. In Tchaikovsky’s hands, this theme serves as excellent material for the highly dynamic and rich, truly Beethovenian development, as becomes obvious from the first bars. Its dream-like metamorphoses range from utter misery to heroism, and present a fair spectrum of his mastership (Example 8.6).

In addition to its allusion to the semantics of the Passion through its connection with the Introduction, the main theme reveals other associations too. They are more complex and indirect, and in various ways concentrate around the name Peter.

The first relates to the Apostle Peter’s alto aria of denial from the *St Matthew Passion* (‘Erbarme dich, mein Gott,’ Teil 2/39), with which Tchaikovsky’s theme coincides in its key and in the contour of its initial motif, while its descending bass line corresponds to the Introduction, thus connecting both between themselves and generally to Passion rhetoric even more (Example 8.7).

A second possible source is of an animal nature, which is not surprising in view of Tchaikovsky’s love, like Beethoven’s, of listening to nature and taking the opportunity to stroll in nature with his notebook in hand. There is a particular rooster call (among a great variety of existing species and sounds around the

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<sup>11</sup> The letter where Tchaikovsky informs Taneyev has not been preserved, but this follows from Taneyev’s reply to Tchaikovsky from 2 March 1892. Vladimir Zhdanov (ed.), *P.I. Chaikovskiy i S.I. Taneyev, pis'ma* (Moscow: Gosudarstvenny Literaturny Muzej/Kul'tprosvetizdat, 1951), 180–81.

<sup>12</sup> Dolzhansky, analysing the tonal plan of the *Sixth*, finds a certain parallel of its B minor/D major relationships to those in Bach’s Mass in B minor. Alexander Dolzhansky, ‘Eshche raz o ‘Pikovoy Dame’ i Shestoy simfonii Chaikovskogo’. *Sovetskaya muzyka* 7 (1960), 97, n.1.

<sup>13</sup> Its resemblance to the Introduction from Beethoven’s Piano Sonata op. 13, No. 8 in C minor (*Grande Sonata pathétique*) has been often noted, first by Hugo Riemann (*P. Tschaikoffsky, VI Symphonie (H-moll), (Symphonie pathétique, op. 74), erläutert von Hugo Riemann*. (Series: *Der Musikführer*, 130; Frankfurt a.M.: H. Bechhold, 1897), S. 4.

Example 8.6 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (Allegro non troppo, the main theme, bars 19–29)

Allegro non troppo  $\text{♩} = 116$

The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number in a box:

- System 1 (Bars 19-22):** Features Violins I & II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The Violins play a melodic line with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The Viola and Cello/Double Bass provide harmonic support with chords and moving lines.
- System 2 (Bars 23-26):** Features Flutes I & II, Clarinets I & II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The Flutes and Clarinets play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Viola and Cello/Double Bass continue their harmonic roles.
- System 3 (Bars 27-29):** Features Flutes I & II, Clarinets I & II, Bassoons I & II, Violins I & II, Viola, Cello/Double Bass, and Double Bass. The Flutes and Clarinets play a melodic line. The Bassoons and Double Bass provide a rhythmic accompaniment. The Violins and Viola play a melodic line with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note.

Dynamics include *p* (piano), *pp* (pianissimo), and *ppp* (pianississimo).

Example 8.7 *St Matthew Passion*, 'Erbarme dich, mein Gott' (Teil 2/39), by Bach

Aria, Coro I.

Violin Solo

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Org. c. Cont.

6  
4  
2

globe<sup>14</sup>) that is extremely close to Tchaikovsky's theme (we will name it 'the rooster call of anxiety') (Example 8.8).<sup>15</sup>

This rooster call is well known (among other places) in the Ukrainian soundscape. There is thus a high possibility that Tchaikovsky, who visited the Ukraine many times, could have heard it. His last visit to the Ukraine, which immediately preceded the writing of the symphony, lasted two and a half weeks. Both Kamenka and Kharkov, where he then stayed, are in north-eastern Ukraine. In the mid-twentieth century, this rooster call was still heard there (in the Glukhov and Sumy regions). One might perhaps wonder why this onomatopœic component should be given such importance, but there are deep cultural connotations and at least four reasons for not neglecting this detail: emotional state, relation to the name Peter, symbolism of death and the attribute of gospel:

<sup>14</sup> See for example, P.B. Siegel, R.E. Phillips and E.F. Folsom, 'Genetic Variations in the Crow of Adult Chickens'. *Behavior* 24:3-4 (1965), 229-35.

<sup>15</sup> The following example is a transcription of rooster calls, which I recorded on 13 July 2006 in Jaffa, Israel. Since it is well known that Tchaikovsky did not visit Palestine (though he was very close to travel there as a member of the Grand Duke's entourage; the trip was cancelled, however, because of news of Alexander II's assassination), it was important to establish where else these roosters sing such songs. My own attempts to find information about rooster populations in different localities brought no results, but my colleagues, to whom I sent the recordings, identified this particular song with what they had heard in their own environments. Esti Sheinberg had heard it the same summer in Blacksburg, Virginia, USA, and Anatoly Milka, who spent his childhood in the Ukraine, not far from Kamenka, also recognized this song.

Example 8.8  
‘The rooster call  
of anxiety’

1. The prevailing feeling experienced by human beings from this rooster song is one of *anxiety*. Anxiety is certainly the strong point of this theme by Tchaikovsky, provided by its sonic and rhythmic elements. Naturally, developing this theme, the composer continues in figurations of the sixteenths (where, by the way, the cross-theme is more visible, if one still wishes to look for it). This figuration enhances anxiety, imitating a rapid pulse and thereby making this music akin to that of Hermann's state in the fourth scene (Act 2, scene 2) from *The Queen of Spades* (which served as one of the sources for many moments of this symphony). Not only did Tchaikovsky use the same pitch and viola timbre, but also the themes themselves greatly resemble each other (Example 8.9).

Trepidation, a chill in the pit of the stomach, a foreboding of trouble – all refer to the state of a lonely human soul. Its human fragility and defenselessness become more apparent through its representation by strings or woodwinds only, as contrasted to the rigid fanfare motifs of the brasses. As we will see, this contrast in timbres and topics is crucial for the symphony's dramaturgy and reflects opposing forces: the more aggressive the 'metallic' substance, the more desperate become the human emotional response.

Anxiety is associated here with the night (like the key scenes of *The Queen of Spades*<sup>16</sup>), as the time when the events unfold: cockcrow indicates the pre-dawn hours.

2. Three circumstances/connotations coincide in the Russian name Peter (*Pyotr*). The first and most obvious is that this is the Apostle's name. Second, purely Russian, is that its diminutive, *Petya*, is phonetically close to the word *petukh*, which means 'cock'. *Petukh* also has a diminutive – *petushok* (cockerel). Folklore has united both as *Petya-petushok*, and, in this form, this double name is applied to both bird and man (usually for a boy or with a sexual connotation, as in English and some other languages). Among the Tchaikovsky brothers, Peter was sometimes called this, as Poznansky writes,

<sup>16</sup> The crucial role of the night scenes in the opera has been shown in: Dolzhansky, 'Eshche raz o "Pikovoy Dame"', 88–9.

Example 8.9 *The Queen of Spades*, by Tchaikovsky (Introduction to Act 2, scene 4)

Andante mosso (♩ = 76)  
con sord.

Vla. div. *pp*

D. B. div. pizz. *pp*

3

Vln. I *2 pulti con sord. p*

Vln. I *4 pulti con sord. p*

Vln. I *4 pulti con sord. p*

Vln. II *con sord. p*

Vln. II *con sord. p*

Vla. *div. con sord. pp*

Vc. *con sord. p*

Vc. *div. con sord. p*

D.B. *pizz. pp*

with a sexual connotation.<sup>17</sup> It could be added here that the humorous association of Tchaikovsky with the cock was so popular among his relatives and friends that it was even expressed in the life-size bronze sculpture of a cock created by the famous French sculptor (of the *Animalier* school) Auguste Nicolas Cain, a gift from Tchaikovsky's friend Lucien Guitry, a French actor with the Mikhailovsky Theatre. The sculpture is now in the Klin Museum.

<sup>17</sup> Poznansky notes the sexual connotation in relation to Peter in *The Quest for the Inner Man*, 76.

Finally, this accidental Russian linguistic pairing of Peter and *petukh* eventually became superimposed on the gospel association (typical for other Christian cultures too), between Peter and the rooster in Jesus' foretelling of Peter's denial: 'And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."' (Luke 22:34).

3. In Russian tradition, at least in the twentieth century (although it is hard to establish how far back it goes), a rooster call can sometimes signify *death*, somewhat similar to the crow-cawing omen that exists in other cultures too, and may be even associated with 'three times' (although 'three times' in the gospel refers to Peter's denial, not to rooster calls). The saying '(somebody's) rooster has already crowed', probably through a distorted gospel connotation, is intended to warn that someone's life and/or activities are about to come to an end.<sup>18</sup>

4. Finally, if gospel indeed stands behind the programme, a rooster call (following Peter's denial) constituted a particular milestone on Jesus' way to Golgotha, one of the *Instruments of the Passion* (Arma Christi), and its popular semantic attribute. In addition, this particular attribute is perhaps the only one of a sonic nature, and its reproduction here seems only natural. In any case, the anxiety caused by this rooster call motif, as an emotional thrust for the main theme, and intended to express foreboding, might indeed have a place among the countless other factors behind Tchaikovsky's afflatus.

## Second Subject/Theme/Section/Image/Scene

Belonging to Tchaikovsky's many exquisite themes, this one has also been consensually qualified as a love theme. In means of expression, structure and ways of development, it naturally recalls its sister themes. All are equally cantilena-like and natural in gesture and motion; they could be equally successful as operatic arias or ballet adagios.

Although the theme fits naturally into this narrative, it would perhaps be too much to state that it is the only possible one. There are, nevertheless, certain moments here and in the whole section that suggest an interpretation in the semantic context of the New Testament.

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<sup>18</sup> Perhaps it would be overly hypothetical to suggest that when Tchaikovsky, exhausted and bewildered after the nightmare during the night of 31 January–1 February on the train, got off the train in Kharkov, early in the morning, and took a cab to the Grand Hôtel, he might have heard such a crow. If he did, he might have associated it with what had happened to him that night and related this omen to himself. On the other hand, he might have perceived the expressiveness of this motif (which could not have been a new one for him) especially keenly. But who knows?

To begin with its first statement: a pastoral pentatonic sound, first violins and cellos in octave *con sordini*, hovering over the organ point of the tonic and only reluctantly showing harmonic colours in the cadence. If this serenity expresses love (perhaps even in its resemblance to Don José's aria 'La fleur que tu m'avais' from *Carmen*), the first 12 bars are rather an ethereal *image* of a beloved object, some non-corporeal ideal (Example 8.10).

Example 8.10 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (first movement, second theme, first statement, bars 89–101)

89 **Andante** (♩=69)  
 Vln. I con sord. *p*  
 Vc. con sord. *pp*  
 Hns. & Clts. *pp* *mp*  
 Hns. & Clts. *pp* *mp*  
 Bsn. I & D.B. *pp* *mp*  
*incalzando*  
 Vla. con sord. *mf*  
*mf*

95 *ritenuto* *mf* *f*  
 Vln. II con sord. *p*  
 Vla. *mf*  
 Vln. I con sord. *p*  
 Vla. *mf*  
*come primo*  
*ritenuto* *mf* *f*  
 Vln. II con sord. *p*  
 Vla. *mf*  
 Vln. I con sord. *p*  
 Vla. *mf*  
*p*

It then acquires incarnation in its dynamic reprise, after the fiery animation introduced by the middle section. Moreover, this corporeality is at the very edge of, if not beyond, good taste (or high musical rhetoric), when the strings in three octaves pronounce the theme, spiced by chromaticism, and the additional ascending counterpoints meet with its descending melody, leading the celestial love theme to a down-to-earth love scene. Followed by an extensive slowdown,



greatly resembling that of the love theme in *Romeo and Juliet*, both exhausted and relaxed, it only increases the allusion.

It is clear that, like a good classic opera or ballet that cannot be without an impressive female role, this spectacular symphony would have had to have a strong female image at his envisioned 'stage'. Remarkably, such a figure remained Tchaikovsky's 'unsung song': always looking for a plot for an opera, with a strong female personality of Carmen's stature,<sup>19</sup> he poured all his imagination here into the creation of his *eternal feminine* musical portrait. Had he ever been allowed to write his Mary Magdalene singing on the stage, it would probably have been closer to Lloyd Webber's than to Massenet's.

If we are to connect the second section to female images of the New Testament, it would not be too great a stretch of imagination to suggest that the first and second statements refer to the Virgin Mary<sup>20</sup> and Mary Magdalene respectively; while its middle, highly animated episode suggests filling the stage with a tutu-attired fluttering *corps de ballet* or, as Laroche put it, 'a sort of dramatic seething, resembling those rhythmic and orchestral devices used in operas to depict popular agitation, a crowd rushing in, etc.'<sup>21</sup>

Raymond Monelle offers a remarkable expression of scepticism regarding the absolute beauty of this theme. The scholar relates to its quality as a product of its musical staging, somewhat parodying Oscar Wilde's revelation of the trick: "'Is she pretty?'" "She behaves as if she was beautiful"<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Such longing was reflected in his correspondence while conceiving *Charodeika* (*The Sorceress*). Tchaikovsky's admiration for this kind of woman was also displayed when he actively encouraged his womanizing brother Anatoly in his affair with Alexandra Panaeva (just search the Internet for Sandra Panaeva's portrait by Konstantin Makovsky to get an idea of her image as a heart-breaker), who eventually joined the extended Tchaikovsky family by marrying his distant nephew. In contrast, reflecting his reservations concerning the plot of *Kapitanskaya dochka* (Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*), he wrote in 1888: 'Besides, the protagonist Maria Ivanovna is not interesting and characteristic enough, because she is a faultlessly kind and honest maid and nothing more, but it is not sufficient for music' (quoted from Vasily Yakovlev, 'Chaikovsky v poiskakh opernogo libretto.' In Mikhail Ivanov-Boretsky (ed.), *Muzykal'noe nasledstvo. Sbornik materialov po istorii muzykal'noy kul'tury v Rossii*. Vol. 1 (Moscow: Ogiz-Muzgiz, 1935), 70, with reference to Modest Chaikovsky, *Zhizn' Petra Il'icha Chaikovskogo* (1903), Vol. 3, 245–6).

<sup>20</sup> Boris Asafiev associates this theme with maternal images of Madonnas of the Italian Renaissance masters. 'Kompozitor-dramaturg Peter Ilyich Chaikovsky'. In *Izbrannye trudy*, Vol. 2, 59.

<sup>21</sup> Laroche, 159/Campbell, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chapter 3. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray and Selected Stories*. The New American Library of World Literature, Inc. Third Printing (New York: Signet Classics, 1962), p. 50. Quoted from Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library. <http://web.archive.org/web/200301160115135/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=WilDori>.

It is a notable piece of sorcery that no listener ever sees the real source of this 'emotional truth'. There is nothing within the theme to draw us into the enchanted wood. The signs of intimacy, the hand that encircles our shoulder and draws us privily aside, the invitation to guilty conspiracy are all to be found in the previous twelve measures. Like a good conjurer, Tchaikovsky does the trick when our attention is distracted. Performed alone, the second subject would be meaningless. Preceded by its characteristic framing gesture, which resembles a clock running down, it is accepted as a vision of some profound truth . . . . Every conventional sign is here: slowing, softening, thematic attenuation, harmonic derailment. The listener is prepared for a numinous vision. Any tune would go. In this kind of text, 'great melody' is as much the product of context as of melodic contour.<sup>23</sup>

Seeing no reason to argue but, on the contrary, delighting in the wording of Monelle's imaginative impression, I would like merely to refocus the phrase: 'The signs of intimacy, the hand that encircles our shoulder and draws us privily aside, the invitation to guilty conspiracy are all to be found in the previous twelve measures.' Add to this the 'numinous vision', and we must ask whether it would not fit into the semantic list of consolation, forgiveness, benefaction, grace, indulgence, mercy, and so on, referring to verses from Matthew 11:

- 28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.  
 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

These are the very words so profoundly admired by Tchaikovsky, who had often dreamed of setting them to music. If we accept such an interpretation, it can be suggested that the whole second section of the exposition, as well as all the other D major music in this symphony,<sup>24</sup> can be related to the general topic of 'Come to me': an idea, atmosphere or even illustration of Jesus' daily work – his deeds, healing, teaching, miracles; Jesus among the people whom he loved and taught to love – all in its most vital Renan colours. This relates especially to the middle section, with its flying scale passages, interchanging and echoing in infinite canons, stimulated by the capriccioso rhythm (Example 8.11).<sup>25</sup>

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sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=front (accessed 24 November 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Monelle, *The Sense of Music*, 139–40.

<sup>24</sup> Dolzhansky, 'Eshche raz o "Pikovoy Dame"', 95–7.

<sup>25</sup> While Richard Taruskin relates this rhythmical figure to a polonaise 'even with four beats to the bar' (p. 304), I find a polonaise remarkably absent from this particular symphony, otherwise greatly important for Tchaikovsky as the scholar substantially showed.

Example 8.11 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (first movement, second theme, middle section, bars 101–9)

101 Moderato mosso (♩=100)

Fl.1-2 *p*

Bsn.1-2 *p*

Hn.F 1-4 *p*

Vln. I *p* saltando

Vln. II *p* saltando

Vla. *p* saltando

Vc. *p* pizz. arco

D.B. *p* pizz.

As the reader may note, I suggest here two different artistic interpretations or, rather, reflections of different kinds of love: one sexual (as a love theme) and the other general, human, spiritual (as an ‘open arms’ theme). Why should they not blend in music? It is perhaps no wonder that this D major sphere of the symphony corresponds semantically with the D major of Beethoven’s setting of Schiller’s ‘Be embraced, you millions!’, which perhaps also served as an archetype for John Lennon’s D major in his ‘Love’. Tchaikovsky himself generalized love (‘maternal, sexual – it is the same’) when he listed the dramatic motives that could attract him in an operatic libretto.<sup>26</sup> While there are those (including Russian folk tradition) who consider the Jesus–Magdalene relationship to be one of physical love, some, and perhaps Tchaikovsky among them, may have been referring to the mention of

Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 281–90.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Vladimir Stasov of 8 April 1877, cited in Yakovlev, ‘Chaikovskiy v poiskakh opernogo libretto’, 60.

The musical score is for measures 104, 105, and 106. It includes parts for Flute 1-2, Oboe 1-2, Clarinet 1-2, Bassoon 1-2, Trumpet 1-2, Trombone 1-3 and Tuba, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. Measure 104 starts with a box containing the number '104'. The woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon) play melodic lines with dynamics like *f espress.* and *mp*. The strings (Violins, Viola, Cello, Double Bass) play rhythmic patterns with dynamics like *poco più f* and *poco cresc.*. The Trombone and Tuba parts have dynamics like *p*. The Cello and Double Bass parts have dynamics like *mp* and *p*. There are also markings for *arco* and *pizz.* in the lower strings.

*continued*

Jesus' beloved pupil John, with his head on his Teacher's chest (John, 13:25) – with Tchaikovsky recalling his own feelings of tenderness aroused by his own students with their heads on his chest.<sup>27</sup> Renan avoids any fantasies on this account, stressing rather Jesus' asceticism. A universal approach thus should embrace both considerations, for a universality or generalization of various emotional nuances

<sup>27</sup> Tchaikovsky describes his relations with Iosif Kotek in 1877 in his letter to Modest from 19 January 1877. Alexander Poznansky, 'Tchaikovsky: A Life Reconsidered'. In Kearney (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World*, 22–3.

Example 8.11 *concluded*

The musical score for Example 8.11, concluding the piece, spans measures 107 to 110. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with the following parts:

- Flutes 1-2 (Fl.1-2):** Starts with a *f* dynamic, then transitions to *mf* and ends with a *p* dynamic.
- Oboes 1-2 (Ob.1-2):** Similar to the flutes, starting with *f*, moving to *mf*, and ending with *p*.
- Clarinets 1-2 (Cl.A.1-2):** Remains mostly silent, with a *p* dynamic at the end.
- Trumpets 1-2 (Tpt.1-2):** Plays a melodic line starting with *mf* and ending with *p*.
- Trombones 1-3 (Tbn. 1-3):** Plays a supporting line starting with *mf* and ending with *p*.
- Violins I (Vln. I):** Features a melodic line with a *mf* dynamic, a *p* dynamic, and a final *mf* dynamic.
- Violins II (Vln. II):** Features a rhythmic accompaniment starting with *mf* and ending with *p*.
- Viola (Vla.):** Features a rhythmic accompaniment starting with *mf* and ending with *p*.
- Cello (Vc.):** Features a rhythmic accompaniment starting with *mf* and ending with *p*.
- Double Bass (D.B.):** Features a rhythmic accompaniment starting with *mf* and ending with *p*.

(consciously or unconsciously) is the strongest attribute of this symphony, and one that has resulted in the universality of its acceptance and perception.

While speculations of this kind necessarily involve controversy, we might agree that we do not need to label every piece, and that this particular episode may play a much more important role in the dramaturgical sequence of purely musical events than in some specific meaning that one is tempted to decode. Hence the primary importance of its 'musical staging' and the long, sweet and serene lulling that offers the possibility of sinking completely into absolute beauty and happiness. Bliss. Not only does the composer extend the closing of the scene with an additional 12 bars, but he even bestows on it a little coda of its own, a seven-bar *Adagio mosso*, playing with slow tempos, with dynamic nuances of *pp*, *ppp*, *pppp* and *ppppp*, and adding the unthinkable *pppppp* and fermatas during

the orchestration later, in summer. Although we know what is going to follow, this 'piece of sorcery' indeed induces us to relax completely and, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, hope that perhaps this time the end will be a happy one.

The scene offers a sweet oblivion that for some minutes recalls the images of the *past*, completely detached from reality. Both Brown and Monelle noted its extra-temporality.<sup>28</sup> As Klimovitsky shows, the composer achieves this effect by slowing down the tempo almost two-fold, from ♩ = 116 to ♩ = 69, and making this episode:

appear not as a continuous movement 'forward,' but as a kind of retreat back from what is unfolding 'now.' The very way that the second theme is presented suits rather a closing section that sounds as a statement of some result or, even more, a trio section from a compound ternary form: it is not by chance that the whole second section is distinguished by an abundance of precise repetitions on various levels and by unusual for a sonata exposition architectural, melodic, structural and harmonic stability. The semantics of this stability offer a maximum separation from the extreme parts. Hence, the appearance of such second theme creates an effect of deviation from ongoing *now* to the *past*.<sup>29</sup>

### The Core of the Story

The awakening comes with 'the most violent music Tchaikovsky ever wrote'.<sup>30</sup> An unsurpassed effect of suddenness and the power of a bolt from the blue is produced primarily by the contrast between the serene fading diatonic *ppppp* in D major and the harsh, almost atonal (key signature is cancelled here) and a-musical strong metallic clang and clatter, *ff*, the quintessence of violence and restriction, with even a slight allusion to a saraband rhythm as a symbol of Spanish oppression in Beethoven's *Egmont* overture (Example 8.12).

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 448; Monelle, *The Sense of Music*, 144.

<sup>29</sup> Предстает не как поступательное непрерывное движение 'вперед', а как своего рода отступление от развертывающегося 'сейчас', от длящегося настоящего 'назад'... Характер изложения побочной темы много больше соответствует заключительной, семантика которой – утверждение некоего итога, и в едва ли не в еще большей мере присущ центральному разделу сложной трехчастной формы типа трио (не случайно побочная отличается обилием точных повторов на разном уровне и поразительной для сонатной экспозиции архитектурной и мелодико-синтаксической и гармонической устойчивостью), семантика которого – предельное отключение от крайних частей. Поэтому появление такой побочной темы и создает эффект переключения в иной временной ракурс, отключения от длящегося настоящего в прошлое. Klimovitsky, 'Zametki', 110–11.

<sup>30</sup> John Warrack, *Tchaikovsky* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 266.

Example 8.12 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (first movement, the end of the exposition and the beginning of the development, bars 157–64)

157 Adagio mosso (♩ = 60) ritardando molto

Cl. (A) 1-2 *pppp* *pppppp*

Bsn. 1-2 *pppppp*

Timpani *pppp* *pppppp*

Vla. *pppp* *pppppp* pizz.

Vc. *pppp* *pppppp* pizz.

Brass winds, up to now used to create a gentle effect, enfolding the listener in tranquil music of love, are now used to alert them, with an inhuman sound suppressing the human. Had Tchaikovsky written this as a ballet or an opera scene of the protagonist's arrest, he would most probably have used all these means. This crashing phrase is very close to and even similar in nature to the topic of Fate that will shortly appear (bar 190), and we recognize it (Example 8.13, p. 82).<sup>31</sup>

The difference lies perhaps in the non-musical component of noise that imitates a concrete action in the crashing/suppressing phrase, while the theme of Fate is emphatically abstract, an atonal descending scale by trumpets in octaves, crushing all in its path. This general 'metal topic' will be broadly addressed in the third movement.

Meanwhile, both these adversarial themes trigger the inner resources of the main subject, which now displays its heroic features and becomes the main substance of the development. Opposing the adversarial themes, it creates an intensive action of struggle, with a wide use of devices familiar from the fight scenes in *Romeo and Juliet*, and especially the *Mazeppa* (Orchestral Interlude 'Battle of Poltava' before the third act). Counterpoint here works well in expressing the terrified freeze and flight that lead to the collapse of the main theme (bar 230). This, however, is only to initiate the next wave of growth and – after its attenuation – the third wave that reaches the final climax (bar 284 – the core of the symphony that we will call here the 'core climax'; the definition will later be broadened). Before we focus on this, one important quotation requires analysis.

<sup>31</sup> I use here the word 'Fate' following many Tchaikovsky scholars and, broader, Beethovenian tradition, which by right of age and common use looks like nineteenth-century addition to *musica poetica*.

Allegro vivo (♩=144)

161

FL.1-2  
Picc.

Ob.1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 3-4

Tpt.1-2

3 Tbns.  
e Tuba

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Ve.

D.B.

At the beginning of the path to the core climax, the famous prayer episode appears. It is a very short seven-note phrase from the Russian funeral chant ‘So svyatymi upokoi’<sup>32</sup> (‘With thy saints, O Christ, give peace to the soul of thy servant’, bars 201–5), which in the Russian cultural context reads as a signifier of

<sup>32</sup> Со святыми упокой, Христе, душу раба Твоего, идеже несть болезнь, ни печаль, ни воздыхание, но жизнь бесконечная.



Example 8.13 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (first movement, development section, 'Fate theme', bars 189–94)

[Allegro vivo (♩=144)]  
Fl., Cl. & Vlns.

189

*fff*

Oboes & Bassoons

Oboes, Bsns., Tpts.

*fff*

Hns.

Tbns. & Tuba

*fff*

Vlas. & Vc.

*fff*

D.B., Timp.

192

death. Both musically and emotionally this quotation is unnecessary, because the agonizing death-game is already quite obvious. The direct quotation, intended to be recognized, therefore teases the listener's imagination and makes them guess: who is praying, for whom, before death or after? (Example 8.14).

The calm neat handwriting of these bars, surrounded by the intense script of the rest of the movement shows that Tchaikovsky planned this episode in his mind before he sat down at his desk to write it.<sup>33</sup> What does this quotation stand for?

It seems that by quoting a particular Russian chorale, Tchaikovsky, by then a composer of international stature, was suggesting something more universal,

<sup>33</sup> Polina Vajdman, *ADF*, English, 124/Russian, 169.

Example 8.14 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (first movement, development section, quotation of 'So svyatyimi upokoi', bars 201–7)

201 Allegro vivo (♩=144) Tpts. 1.  
*p cantabile*  
 Tbps. *p cantabile*  
 Vc & D.B. *p legatissimo*

205 Woodwinds *p*  
 Strings *p*  
 Vlns. & Vlas. *p*  
 Hns. & Tpts. *p*  
 + Bsns. *p*  
*poco a poco cresc.*  
*poco a poco cresc.*  
*poco a poco cresc.*

general and understandable to other audiences in the Western world. It is possible that he chose this specific phrase not only for its textual meaning and semantics of death, but also for its resemblance to *Dies Irae* – rhythmically and even melodically (it begins like its partially inverted statement). Moreover, a Western audience can associate it, also rhythmically, with the *Kirie eleison*. Choosing this quotation, the composer not only stressed the funereal nature of his programme, but, more importantly, he generalized the ‘topic of prayer’, so that there would be no doubt on this account among any audience (Example 8.15).

Example 8.15 Chant ‘So svyatyimi upokoi’: rhythmic projection of other suitable texts

So - svya - ty - mi u - po - koy  
 Ky - ri - e, e - lé - i - son  
 Di - es i - rae! Di - es illa

Example 8.16 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (first movement, development section, the 'ruined' main theme, bars 229–38)

229 [Allegro vivo ( $\text{♩} = 144$ )]

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tbn. 1-3

Vln. I

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

233

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tbn. 1-2

Vln. I

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

The complexity of the imagery is revealed in two parallel ways. On one hand, mostly in the first phase of development, the fusions of the main theme transformations, the 'metal topic' phrases, the theme of Fate and flashing passages together depict a struggle with some *external* force, moreover, in a highly programmatic way. On the other hand, the extremely subjective line unfolds further between the almost completely crushed but still palpitating and almost out of breath main subject (bar 230 and, further, see Example 8.16) and the ultimate climax of pain and suffering, the 'core climax' that solves the question of an *inner* struggle (Example 8.17, pp. 86–9).

236

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tbn. 1-2

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

*pp*

*p*

*ppoco cresc.*

*p*

*ppoco cresc.*

*p*

*ppoco cresc.*

*p*

*arco*

*pizz.*

*pp*

*p*

This inner line tells about the agonized soul searching. If we connect this with the prayer reference 'So svyatymi upokoi', it strengthens the possible association of the whole movement with Jesus' night in the Garden of Gethsemane. Prayer and agony meet in the Prayer of the Cup (the Agony in the Garden) scene. Whether three waves (bars 200–25; 226–58; 258–84) towards the core-climax may correspond to the three times that Jesus went to pray, or whether it is just a basic dramaturgical standard of a sonata-form development, to which the public was accustomed, is not that important. (Both reasons could well stem from the same laws of the structure of legends.<sup>34</sup>)

The entire three-phase development leads to a culmination of tremendous power, perhaps crucially triggering Tchaikovsky's artistic epiphany, his conviction that he had found the right solution. It is here, for the first time in this symphony, that he addresses its chief musical substance (*now of the story*), to which he returns in the Finale as the *now of the listener*. For those who are of a weeping nature, like Tchaikovsky himself, this is a moment to weep. But what is it that makes one cry, and what is the nature of such tears? For whom is one crying, and what about?

Noting Tchaikovsky's widest use of the *pianto* topic, Monelle remarks that the composer does not always apply half-tone steps, but often whole-tone steps that work for *pianto* too. It is an important notion that can, however, be interpreted alternatively: those whole-tone steps work not exactly for *pianto*, but for some other topic. In other words, *pianto* – with its meaning of lament of a personal nature – is only part of the matter. In order to qualify the emotions that the

<sup>34</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1968), 74.



Musical score for measures 284-287. The score includes parts for Flutes 1-2, Piccolo, Oboes 1-2, Clarinets (A) 1-2, Bassoons 1-2, Horns (F) 1-4, Trumpets (Bb) 1-2, 3 Trombones and Tubas, Timpani, Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The music features a variety of dynamics including fortissimo (*ff*), marcato, and largamente forte possibilis. There are also performance markings like 'div.' and 'a3'.

*continued*

Example 8.17 *concluded*

290

FL1-2 Picc.

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (B $\flat$ ) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
e Tuba

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

*ff*

298

Fl.1-2  
Picc.

Ob.1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (B♭) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
c Tuba

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Dynamic markings: *fff*, *p*, *ff*, *f*, *mf*, *p*, *pp*, *ppp*, *pizz.*

Rehearsal mark 298 is indicated at the beginning of the score. The score includes parts for Flutes 1-2 (Piccolo), Oboes 1-2, Clarinets (A) 1-2, Bassoons 1-2, Horns (F) 1-4, Trumpets (B♭) 1-2, 3 Tubas and C Tuba, Timpani, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic contrasts, with some instruments playing *fff* and others *p* or *pp*. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts include *pizz.* markings.



protagonist feels here, a more precise definition would be perhaps the *realization of irreversibility*, which includes its *acceptance*.

Irreversibility was one of the strongest emotional and creative stimuli for the composer, often mentioned by him. Compare, for instance, this core-climax phrase with that of the final duet from *Eugene Onegin*, 'Schastie bylo tak vozmozno, tak blizko, tak blizko' ('Happiness was within our reach. So close! So close!') (Example 8.18).

Example 8.18 *Eugene Onegin*, by Tchaikovsky (duet of Tatyana and Onegin from the final scene)

The musical score for Example 8.18 is a duet from the final scene of *Eugene Onegin*. It is in 6/4 time, key of B-flat major, and marked "Adagio, quasi Largo" with a tempo of quarter note = 58. The score includes vocal lines for Tatyana and Onegin, and a piano accompaniment for strings. The lyrics are in Russian and English. The score includes dynamic markings like "rit.", "p", and "mp".

**rit.**  
Татьяна  
Tatyana

**Adagio, quasi Largo** (♩=58)

Ах! Ah!  
Сча-стье бы-ло так воз-мож-но, так близ-ко, так близ-ко!  
Scha-stie by-lo tak voz-mozh-no, tak bliz-ko, tak bliz-ko!

Онeгин  
Onegin

**mp**  
Ах!  
Acht!

**p** Strings **p**

Or, a very similar phrase in the postlude to the Duel Scene from the same opera, following Onegin's question/statement 'Killed!' and his second's statement 'Killed!'. The phrasing is based on Lensky's premonitions of death aria, but with the changed ending: the questioning, slightly ascending gesture is replaced by stating, descending one (Example 8.19).

A descending melody with non-chordal notes on strong and relatively strong beats had been extremely common in Western music for centuries, and became very popular in nineteenth-century Russian romance music, enhanced by gypsy music and gypsy expression. It conveys an infinite melancholy and nostalgia for a loss and the sorrowful pain of irreversibility, which are so close to the world of human emotion. But this essentially human agency, personal suffering and self-pitying lamentation alone, even that of such a great cultural hero as Jesus Christ, would not give this music the power it possesses; it would be too subjective and weak. This particular music therefore also has some objective quality that makes it work as powerfully as it does.

The overwhelming might of sound and of sonic space creates the effect of the presence of the numinous, which the public has recognized unmistakably

Example 8.19 *Eugene Onegin*, by Tchaikovsky (postlude to the Duel Scene)

The musical score is for the postlude to the Duel Scene in *Eugene Onegin*. It is in 3/2 time and features two vocal parts: Onegin and Zaretsky. Both have the lyrics "У - бит! U - bit!". The tempo is marked "Allegro non troppo" with a metronome marking of quarter note = 132. The piano accompaniment is complex, with various dynamics including *f*, *mf*, *p*, and *ppp*. The score is arranged in three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

since Monteverdi's use of trombones.<sup>35</sup> The image of the core-climax is thus very complex: it includes of course some personal lament and the realization of irreversibility, and ultimately the very human fear of death; but it is also of a divine order, a *Dies Irae* of the highest power. It is thus a symbiosis (or duality) of the human and the divine in one image that St John Damascene (quoted by Vladimir Lossky) explained so expressively:

'When His human will' – said St. John Damascene – 'refused to accept death, and His divine will made way for this manifestation of His humanity, the Lord

<sup>35</sup> Discussing the supernatural trope, Bruno Forment writes: 'More than any other art, music has the deep-seated ability to evoke the aura of mystery required for theatrical representations of the mythical. When, for instance, Ferruccio Busoni wondered at what particular moments music was truly "indispensable" on the stage, his conclusion read: 'During dances, marches, songs, and – at the appearance of supernatural in the action.' Forment, 'Addressing the Divine: The "Numinous" Accompagnato in Opera Seria'. In Bruno Forment (ed.), *(Dis)embodying Myths in Ancien Régime Opera: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 97.

in conformity with His human nature, submitted to struggle and fear, and prayed to be spared from death. But since His divine will desired that His human will should accept death, the humanity of Christ voluntarily accepted the Passion.<sup>36</sup>

An incredible, superhuman tension, when bloody sweat appears and the agony is no longer bearable, is the moment when the human being gives way to the saviour deity. This is also a moment when compassion – as the purpose of this change – is born. The listener's tears here are a basic emotional reflection of the same nature as the blood and sweat of a martyr.

Jesus' *human* essence is the object of people's *compassion*; his *divine* essence is the *addressee*, the one whom people seek to give them compassion and to relieve their sufferings. Compassion is an emotion that causes tears. Compassion in itself, in its objectivity, timelessness, spacelessness and anonymity is a precious gift of the human being, making a human *being a human* being, the benefactor and beneficiary simultaneously, the object of compassion and its giver. Is this not the same dialectics of the same three quintessential for Tchaikovsky verses (Matthew 11:28–30), where Jesus suggests both to take the weight of people's sorrow and suffering upon himself and to take from him his own sweet and easy yoke?

This human (subjective)–divine (objective) duality is reflected in the interpretation of the Prayer of the Cup episode, embracing its two meanings: as a common traditional metaphor of human suffering ('bitter cup', 'cup of sorrow'); and a theological one, as Jesus' self-sacrificing commitment to drink of the Cup of God's wrath against sinners (a broad category, including all of humanity) and their judgement.<sup>37</sup> It is Tchaikovsky's secular, purely humanist disbelief in God's type of justice, and his admiration and longing instead for the mythical cultural

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<sup>36</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (trans. from French by members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius) (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002; reprint of 1957 edn published by J. Clarke, London), 147, with the reference to the De fide oath, III, 18, 1073 BC.

<sup>37</sup> Brent McGuire offers the following interpretation of The Cup: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39). And again he prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). What does Jesus mean by "this cup"?

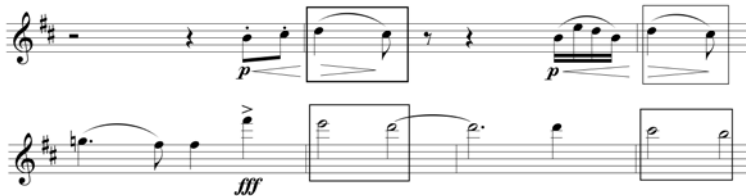
In Psalm 75 we read, 'In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.' (Ps. 75:8).

Isaiah, too, speaks of this "cup of the Lord's wrath" (Isa. 51:17) and Jeremiah of the "cup filled with the wine of My wrath" (Jer. 25:15). The cup that Christ asks be taken from him is the cup of God's judgment against sinners. Here is why the Son of God began to be sorrowful and troubled. Here is what caused Christ's sweat to fall like drops of blood to the ground. It is not at pain and death that Christ flinches. In Gethsemane Christ shudders before the cup of God's wrath upon sin.' Brent McGuire, 'Christ's Impossible Prayer in Gethsemane'. In *Christless Christianity* 16:3 (May/June 2007): 21–4. <http://www>.

hero, who strives to propitiate the Lord in his ultimate compassion for humanity, that can be imagined behind the idea of the *Pathétique*. As we remember from Tchaikovsky’s letters, he had no fondness for the punishing Lord or for the idea of punishment; and, indeed, no hint of threat from an awesome power is heard either in the core-climax, or in the entire symphony. The compassion from both sides, towards and from the sacrificing hero in his agony, is that the composer communicates to the audience through this unique music.

From the point of constructive dramaturgy, this core-climax, or may we now call it the ‘compassion theme’, is simultaneously a climax of the development, possessing all the features of the growing expectation on the dominant organ point, and a dynamic recapitulation, possessing all the features of resolving (though most painful) the tension. Although there is seemingly little in common with the main theme, it is precisely the *pianto* element that connects the question of the first theme<sup>38</sup> with the answer of this one. While in the exposition the *pianto* in melody had been resolved into the tone of the dominant chord, in the ‘recapitulation’ it is resolved into the tones of the tonic triad, notwithstanding its prominent organ point on the dominant (Example 8.20). There is no ascending element in the compassion theme: it is as straight as a ruler, descending through four octaves like an *immutable sentence* that has perhaps borrowed its inevitability from the Fate theme. This is the end and the result; the overcoming of the soul-searching opened by the first theme that will never return.

Example 8.20 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (first movement, comparison of the main theme with the ‘core-climax’ theme as two forms of the main theme – exposition and recapitulation)



The second theme, however, returns, but first barely audible, as if rising from the ashes. The section is shorter, and, of course, its sunny middle scene is omitted here. Two statements remain, but they follow in reverse order. The first presents full sound, though the diatonic clarity of the melody is coloured with despair by insistently creeping ascending chromatic lines in the accompaniment. The latter

modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var1=ArtRead&var2=4&var3=main (accessed 17 September 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Viktor Zukerman noted the questioning meaning of this particular motif, emphasizing tone c#. *Vyrazitel'nye sredstva liriki Chaikovskogo* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1971), 173.

Example 8.21 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (first movement, coda, bars 335–43)

The musical score for Example 8.21, Symphony no. 6 by Tchaikovsky, first movement, coda, bars 335–43, is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 335–338) is marked *Andante mosso* (♩=80). It features a piano part with woodwinds and strings, and a string part with woodwinds. The piano part includes dynamics such as *pppp*, *p cantabile*, *mp*, and *p*. The string part includes dynamics such as *p* and *pizz.* The woodwind part includes dynamics such as *p cantabile*, *mp*, and *p*. The second system (bars 339–343) continues the piano part with dynamics *mp*, *mf*, and *mf*, and the string part with dynamics *mp* and *mf*. The woodwind part includes dynamics *p cantabile*, *mp*, and *mf*. The score is in B major, 4/4 time, and features a variety of instruments including Tpts. & Hn., Tbn., Woodwinds, and Strings.

are especially passionate with tremolo strings and against invisibly tying them tonic organ point. The second, ethereal, statement is more of a code: it can never be the same as in the *past*, but is *now* rather a vision, reflecting its prefiguration (in a way, similar to the mirage of Hermann's love theme at the very end of *The Queen of Spades*, following his suicide and sanctifying his death). While its surreal appearance gradually materializes, the timpani *pp* over the tonic organ point insistently recall another, post-catastrophe, reality.

The final and formal code, *Andante mosso*, frames the movement, meaningfully mirroring the Introduction, as if from another, metaphysical, entity. Rather than the subterranean and earth-bound gloom and darkness of the Introduction (with its E minor key, lowest register, *passus duriusculus* in bass and bearing-the-cross phrases in melody), a timidly radiating gloriole of a new theme that has neither a source, nor a hint in the previous narrative, appears. It is a B major light chorale-

fanfare, angel-trumpet ascending and opening up phrase, proclaimed by brasses and echoed by woodwinds, with horn-calls *e-b* in bars 336–9 (Example 8.21).

The bass line differs from the Introduction respectively: chaconne-like descending B major scale pizzicato repeats, insistently returning, leaving and not leaving the stage at the same time, somewhat mysteriously stating its omnipresence: visible but untouchable, transformed into another substance. I invite the listener to visualize an empty tomb, shimmering garments, and so on.

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## Chapter 9

# Intermezzo: Mysterious Waltz

Klimovitsky writes:

A self-sufficient tone poem – as *Allegro non troppo* can be perceived – should allow for any unfolding of the plot from the first movement on, hence, the existence of music beyond its borders puts *any* continuation into question. The continuation offered by Tchaikovsky enhances the elements of retrospective narrative contained in the first movement. This impression is reinforced by another reason too. The quintuple-metre waltz – Tchaikovsky’s genial find – appears in this context as a certain deformation of the regular generic model (similar to ‘ballet Adagio’ – the second theme of the first movement), modifying familiar silhouettes through the smoke of reminiscences, bestowing the world of the usual with bizarre contours.<sup>1</sup>

The *Allegro con grazia* movement delicately merges elegance, serenity, perhaps even nostalgia (many feel some temporality of the *past*), and an almost indistinguishable anxiety, especially in the B minor middle ‘trio’ section, where a strange and restless organ point on *d* creates an elusive veil, a kind of echo of recent events. A general dynamic contrast to the first and the third movements seems to have been necessary here. As the composer progressed in writing the score, he even lowered the level of dynamics from *mf* to *p* and from *p* to *pp*, placing this movement in a certain niche in the outline of the whole symphony.<sup>2</sup>

Waltz was as spread in Tchaikovsky’s legacy as minuet in Mozart’s. It is quite expected, therefore, that a waltz-like intermezzo, contrasting the regular metres of the ‘action movements’, had been a necessary part of this symphony.

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<sup>1</sup> Первая часть как законченная сама в себе симфоническая поэма допускает любое развитие сюжета. Поэтому если самый факт наличия музыки за пределами 1-й части ставит *всякое* ее продолжение в ситуацию ‘дискуссионности’, то продолжение, предложенное Чайковским, укрупняет имевшие в 1-й части элементы ретроспективного развертывания сюжета. Это впечатление усиливается еще и потому, что пятидольный вальс – гениальная находка Чайковского – предстает в данном контексте как некая деформация устойчивой жанровой модели (‘балетное адажио’ из побочной партии первой части), меняющей знакомые очертания в дымке воспоминаний, придающих миру привычного причудливые контуры. Klimovitsky, ‘Zametki’, 114.

<sup>2</sup> *ADF*, 184.



Any ordinary waltz, however, would have been too plain and too common for this particular cycle. On the other hand, while irregularity of metre was essential, who was to say that it must be a triple metre? Tchaikovsky, by this time a virtuoso of generic hybridization, invented the charming metrical 'incorrectness' and elevated it to the rank of noble grace, concealing a waltz under the very transparent lace guise of some other dance, making it a waltz and not a waltz at the same time. Besides,  $\frac{5}{4}$  time was not that new: as Roland John Wiley reminds us, the composer had already used it in *The Sleeping Beauty* (a short, sometimes omitted *Vivacissimo* solo variation of *Sapphire Fairy* from the divertimento in the third act, in a Russian-Oriental style à la Borodin).<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the Fifth Symphony, where the second movement has the heading 'Waltz' in the score, Tchaikovsky had never mentioned this word in relation to the *Sixth*. Moreover, in his draft, he referred to the movement as a Scherzo (at least to its 'trio' section).<sup>4</sup> Since everything about this symphony was special and had some hidden meaning, the quintuple metre does not seem to have been applied here in the name of originality: rather, its unusual nature might offer a key to this movement's place in the story.

The quintuple metre was far from unknown in Russia, and was used both attached to a text (as in both Glinka's operas) and detached from it (for example, by Borodin: Scherzo from the Third Symphony). However, it was always used as a signifier of Russian paganism – as also connoted by poet Aleksey Koltsov's famous five-beat poetic metre, and which today is best known in relation to Stravinsky's metrical diversity.

However, this is hardly the case with Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. The uniqueness of this piece among Russian quintuple examples lies in preserving its mainly European character through alternating a waltz (2 + 3) with a mazurka (3 + 2), neither having anything to do with Russian paganism (Example 9.1). Paradoxically, however, if placed within the context of contemporaneous Russian music, this Europeanized piece should be referred to as Orientalism, which would explain the fanciful arabesques of its melody, as well as the numerous triplets and dotted figures variously superimposed on interchanging 2 + 3 and 3 + 2 patterns, which prove a slight syncopation.<sup>5</sup>

As Tchaikovsky's other (metrically normal) waltzes show, he was both sophisticated and generous in their rhythmical variety, as for instance in his *Walse Melancholique* from the Third Suite, with its abundance of triplets, syncopations and dotted figures. In this sense, the rhythmic design of this movement can be

<sup>3</sup> Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 423.

<sup>4</sup> See *ADF* (64 of the facsimile), 68.

<sup>5</sup> At some moments the composer applies fascinating metric discrepancies between the melody (2 + 3) and the accompaniment (3 + 2), like in bars 1 and 3. Moreover, while waltz is mostly structured in 2 + 3 metre, it can be sometimes in 3 + 2 (bars 1–4), while mazurka, on the contrary, breaks its usual 3 + 2 pattern and turns to 2 + 3 metric structure (bars 14 and 16). I am grateful to Anatole Leikin for bringing this to my attention.

considered as quite typical for Tchaikovsky, if not its  $\frac{5}{4}$  time. The  $\frac{5}{4}$  time, however, together with the melodic fancifulness do offer a qualitatively new expression. The draft reveals slight attempts to embellish the movement further. There is a single quintuplet (bar 55, p. 67 of the autograph) in the penultimate bar of the A section that, however, was abandoned during work on the score. We also find a note the composer left for himself above bar 28 (p. 66), that he should invent something for a flute (*chto-nibud' pridumat' dlya fleity*). While flutes are indeed used here, it is in the same manner within the woodwind group as used throughout the section, but no specific flute passage or embellishment finally appeared.

There is another feature that indicates the possible exoticism of this movement: its 'trio' section, with its languidly leaning gestures and the melancholic monotony of *nega*. Had it been arranged for a choir, it would have sounded naturally like a chorus of Oriental maidens in a mid-nineteenth-century opera (Example 9.2, pp. 102–3). From this viewpoint, its organ point (in addition to being a notable factor of anxiety) joins the series of held pitches used in Russian Oriental music in various textural solutions: the Arab dance from the *Nutcracker* or the Turkish element in the *Slavonic March* (op. 31), as well as Borodin's *In the Steppes of Central Asia*, or the music of the Khan domain in *Prince Igor*.

The metro-rhythmic elaboration of the Allegro con grazia nonetheless remains its main expressive and interpretable code, which registers well in the nineteenth-century signifiers of Orientalism, both in Europe and in Russia, even if been derived from different sources of identities and aesthetics.

To begin with the example closest to Tchaikovsky, his mentor Anton Rubinstein and the latter's small choral piece (1861) for Heinrich Heine's 'Ein Fichtenbaum' (1827), an extremely popular nineteenth-century poetic text. The translations of this poem were almost as popular as the psalms and, as Yulia Vorobeychik has established,<sup>6</sup> its musical settings – to both the original German text and its translations – can be counted by dozens in many European countries: in genres of lied, romance and chorus. The central topic of this poem is the opposition – in colours and moods – between pine and palm, mostly used as metaphors of north (west) and south (east), with the ethnic connotations of Europe and the Orient.

There were few pieces in the 'Ein Fichtenbaum' repertoire that did not apply respective musical topics for illustration of this antinomy. The locus of the palm in the poem is *Morgenland*, which in nineteenth-century Germany referred to the Middle East. Accordingly, the mention of *Morgenland* in the text has often been marked by an augmented second or a harmonic major to signify Orientalism – but

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<sup>6</sup> Yulia Vorobeychik, 'The Translation and Musical Adaptation of a Poem as a Key to Interpretation: A Hermeneutic Analysis of Heinrich Heine's "A Pine-Tree Stands Alone"' (PhD dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2012). I thank Yulia Vorobeychik for her kind permission to refer to her unpublished dissertation (104–11), and to quote from the following example. To my great sorrow, as a result of her untimely death, Yulia will never see this acknowledgement, but I hope that her wonderful study and lovable personality will flourish in many grateful memories.

Example 9.1 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (second movement, bars 1–16)

Allegro con grazia ( $\text{♩} = 144$ )

Cl. (A) 1-2 *mf*

Bsn. 1-2 *mf*

Hn. (F) 1-4 *mf*

Vln. I *mf* *pizz.*

Vln. II *mf* *pizz.*

Vla. *mf* *pizz.*

Vc. *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

D.B. div. *mf* *mf*

Cl. (A) 1-2 **5**

Bsn. 1-2 *f*

Hn. (F) 1-4 *mf*

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *f*

Vla. *mf* *div.* *unis.*

Vc. *ff* *V gliss.*

D.B. *f* *mf* *mf*

9

Fl.1-2 Picc. *mf* *3* *piu f*

Ob.1-2 *mf* *3* *piu f*

Cl. (A) 1-2 *mf* *3* *piu f*

Hn. (F) 1-4

Vln. I *mf* arco pizz. arco pizz. div. arco pizz. arco

Vln. II *mf* arco pizz. arco pizz. div. arco

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

D.B. *mf*

13

Fl.1-2 Picc. *mf* *3* *1.*

Ob.1-2 *mf* *3*

Cl. (A) 1-2 *mf* *3*

Bsn. 1-2 *mf*

Hn. (F) 1-4 *mf*

Vln. I unis. *sempre mf* pizz.

Vln. II unis. *sempre mf* pizz.

Vla. *sempre mf* arco pizz. arco

Vc. *sempre mf*

D.B. *sempre mf* arco pizz. arco pizz.

Example 9.2 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (second movement, middle ('trio') section, bars 57–64)

[Allegro con grazia (♩=144)]  
con dolcezza e flebile

Fl. 1-2  
Ob. 1-2  
Cl. (A) 1-2  
Bsn. 1-2  
Hn. (F) 1-4  
Timp.  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.  
D.B.

not always. Rubinstein, for example, who was tired of using this trademark of Jewish flavour in his biblical operas,<sup>7</sup> tried to avoid it, and found an alternative solution in irregular rhythmical figures. In his 'Ein Fichtenbaum' (op. 62), against the background of a  $\frac{6}{8}$  metre, with a not particularly inventive rhythm, the word *Morgenland* was marked with the sudden appearance of doublets (against a constant three-eighth pulsation) that afterwards appear with the words ... *trauert auf brennender [Felsenwand]*, relating to the palm (as a component of *Morgenland*) (Example 9.3).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In his letter to his Vienna librettist Julius Rodenberg (May 1872) Rubinstein wrote: 'Once again this Oriental colour; it is too difficult to make something Jewish in music otherwise than Persian or Arabic. I feel really unhappy about it. What to do?' (Да и колорит опять-таки восточный, так как еврейское слишком трудно сделать в музыке по-иному, чем персидское или арабское. Я чувствую себя прямо-таки несчастным в связи с этим. Что тут делать?). Barenboim (ed.), *A.G. Rubinshtein*, Vol. 3, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Anton Rubinstein, *Sechs Gesänge für Sopran, Alt, Tenor und Bass*, Op. 62 (Wien, Spina; Leipzig, 1861).

A similar metro-rhythmic pattern can be found in the Mother's song 'Dich will ich presisen in Ewigkeit' – from his *Christus* (Example 9.4). One could argue, and justly so, that such polyrhythmic figures as in the above examples, and much more complex and exquisite ones, may be found in abundance among Chopin's works (in addition to his early use of quintuple metre in C minor Piano Sonata (1828). Charles-Valentine Alkan comes to mind, with the variety of his metro-rhythmic examples, including  $\frac{5}{4}$ . If Alkan's searches can be related to his interest in Basque folklore and perhaps to his Jewish identity, then what remains for Chopin is Sarmatism,<sup>9</sup> his Romantic Polish pride that, by right of his genius, transformed some abstract Orientalism into Romantic common practice, its exotic features being an indispensable element of uncertain, dreamy and graceful nostalgia about far off and sunny lands. If we accept the idea that the deliberate metro-rhythmic irregularity or sophisticated ornamentation in nineteenth-century European music (including its use as a signifier of Russian paganism) indicated exoticism (which was also Balakirev's approach in his *Islamey*, where the composer's varying accents in a  $\frac{16}{8}$  metre were the only aspects to justify its subtitle: 'Oriental Fantasy'), Tchaikovsky could and did (as we see in the Arab dance from *Nutcracker*) apply

<sup>9</sup> Sarmatians were an ancient people that originated in Iran and settled on the northern shore of the Black Sea. Polish nobility maintained the belief that they had originated from the Sarmatians.

## Example 9.3 'Ein Fichtenbaum', by Anton Rubinstein, bars 48–53

*pp*  
Soprano Er träumt von ei - ner Pal - me die fern im

*pp*  
Alto Er träumt von ei - ner Pal - me die fern im

*pp*  
Tenor Er träumt von ei - ner Pal - me die fern im

*pp*  
Bass Er träumt von ei - ner

7  
*mf* Mor - gen - land, fern im Mor - gen land, *pp*  
*mf* Mor - gen - land, fern im Mor - gen land, ein - sam *pp*  
*mf* Mor - gen - land, fern im Mor - gen land, ein - sam *pp*  
Pal - me die fern im Mor - gen - land, ein -

Example 9.4 *Christus*, by Anton Rubinstein (Mother's song 'Dich will ich preisen in Ewigkeit')

**Allegro**  
*Die Mutter*  
Dich will ich prei - sen in E - wig - keit, Dich will ich prei - sen in E - wig - keit,

*Der Jüngling*  
Dich will ich prei - sen in E - wig - keit,

**Allegro**  
*p*

it too. Finally, its twin spectacle *Iolanta* has Magreb Doctor Ebn Hakia's aria, which, with its melismatic triplets, reveals Tchaikovsky's idea of Orientalism (Example 9.5).

Example 9.5 *Iolanta*, by Tchaikovsky (aria of Ebn Hakia)

Adagio con moto (♩=76)

Эбн Хакия  
Ebn Hakia *p*

Два ми-ра: плот-ский и ду-хов-ный во всех яв-ле-ниях бы-тия  
Dva mi-ra: plot-sky i du-chov-ny vo vsech yav-le-niach by i-ya

здесь сли-лись во-ле-ю вер-хов-ной как не-раз-луч-ны-е друз-ья  
zdes' sli-lis' vo-le-yu ver-chiv-noi kak ne-raz-luch-ny-ie dru-zya

На све-те не-ту впе-чат-лень-я, что те-ло зна-лобы од-но,  
Na sve-te ne-tu vpe-chat-len-ya, chto te-lo zna-loby od-no,

Irrespective of the *Sixth*, Tchaikovsky had good reason to think of a Caucasian soundscape. Constantly seeking an opera plot that would fire his imagination, it was in the same late years that he began to think a great deal about 'Bela', based on Lermontov's novel *A Hero of Our Time*, as a libretto, on which he planned to work with Anton Chekhov.<sup>10</sup> Playing with this idea, he could not help considering a stylistic solution for the musical characteristics of a Circassian princess. In this context, his summer 1893 piano piece with quintuple metre 'Valse à cinq temps'

<sup>10</sup> Bartlett, 'Tchaikovsky, Chekhov, and the Russian Elegy', 307.



(op. 72, no. 16) probably could have resulted from his driving creative need to develop a new 'intonational field'. To summarize Tchaikovsky's relationship with Orientalism, one can recall that there was no lack of exotic plots among the numerous operatic projects in the course of his career. One of these, for example, suggested by the outstanding Russian playwright Alexander Ostrovsky in 1868, was considered by Tchaikovsky with great enthusiasm. The protagonist there was a young Hebrew who had lost his lover to Alexander of Macedon, and became a prophet.<sup>11</sup> All this indicates that while exoticism began to be timidly displayed in his later years, Tchaikovsky had never been a stranger to this kind of expression, and his approach differed little from that of his contemporaries, both Russian and European.

Whether the Caucasus or *Morgenland* was implied as sounding background for Christ's story, it was usually some generalized Orient for nineteenth-century composers, *vostok* for Russians, which, if needed, could serve as an euphemism for *Jewish* or rather *Hebrew*, since this was usually what was intended with regard to antiquity.<sup>12</sup> Russian composers were familiar with the metro-rhythmical richness of the multi-ethnic Caucasian folklore, where the quintuple metre was not at all unusual. There were also other sources of knowledge regarding this metre. For example, nineteenth-century philology referred to the poetic metres of Ancient Greece. Anyone interested could learn, for example, how widespread the five-beat metre was there.<sup>13</sup> The prevalence of this metre in the Balkans and its existence in Spain – were also known.

If Greece (along with Palestine) had served the painter Vasily Polenov as a source of inspiration for his biblical canvases, this only confirms that, for educated Russian society, the general idea of ancient Mediterranean culture was quite widespread. Ethnographic details, although highly valued, were easily interchangeable, perhaps from an understanding of their intercultural commonalities.

If we accept that Tchaikovsky indeed intended some Oriental flavour for this movement, one can only admire the measure that he found, not transgressing its basic Western style (due to the waltz and mazurka, of course) and reducing the Orientalism to an exquisite metro-rhythm as a slight accent of the 'harem style' popular in feminine fashion, obviously as a result of Sarmatism, during the first two thirds of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>11</sup> Modeste Tchaikovsky, *Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, 95.

<sup>12</sup> Joachim Braun, *Jews and Jewish Elements in Soviet Music* (Tel-Aviv: Israeli Music Publications, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> John G. Landels notes that there was 'no particular preference for dividing into 2 + 3 or 3 + 2. It is a very versatile metre, being used for solemn religious occasions (the Delphic Hymns are in this metre) or, at the other extreme, for bawdy *choros* songs in Aristophanic comedy. It was also the rhythm of the war-chant sung by the Greek sailors as they rowed out to the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC'. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome* (London: Routledge, 1999), 121.

Tentatively speaking, it cannot be excluded that, within the suggested context of a gospel narrative, this unusual intermezzo, in addition to its delicate languor – both compatible with and yet contrasting the main acts of the drama – could hint at an Oriental overtone to the locus where the drama took place.

Considering its strong feel for surreal distance in time, the *past*, or nostalgia, were we to stage a plot from gospel episodes, the work would very naturally reflect Renan's beautifully drawn sunny Galilean idyll, the provenance and time when Christ preached, socialized with fishermen, and healed, in harmony with nature and its people.

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## Chapter 10

# Great Ambivalence

The generic definition of the third movement (Allegro molto vivace) as a Scherzo-march forms part of Tchaikovsky's working notes. It did not appear in the final score, though it is still in use among musicians. What might have stood behind this particular hybridization? The example that first comes to mind is Tchaikovsky's Valse-Scherzo (op. 23 for violin and piano). 'Scherzo' was used there partly as a genre definition, and partly as a literal meaning of the Italian word. However, the piece is a real waltz, not a hybrid, and the word 'Valse' preceding the word 'Scherzo' reflects this. In this symphony, something different is happening. The march is not a joke here; moreover, the music, without losing its primarily artistic meaning, can be understood as intentionally straightforward, functional, *gebraucht Musik* that could serve in real life to accompany or illustrate public ceremonies at any level.

The combination of Scherzo and the march was not unique in Tchaikovsky's work.<sup>1</sup> Scherzo and march alternate here (A scherzo B march A<sub>1</sub> scherzo B<sub>1</sub> march), but their functions differ. While the Scherzo starts quite neutrally as a continuation of the previous movement in its earthly character and mood, the march takes us back to the scale and seriousness of events from the first act. The fact that the movement begins as a Scherzo and ends as a march generically modifies the narrative, giving it a special meaning, and indicating a programmatic subtext. The march appears to be the focal point of the third movement, but without *this particular Scherzo this particular* march would not work.

Both Scherzo and march seem to be separate and symbiotically connected at the same time, casting the light of ambiguity one upon the other. Having their own musical material, they do not merge, but each contains basic elements of the other: the whole movement thus achieves both variety and homogeneity. As images, they might stand for contrasting groups of participants, whether on the ballet stage or in a grandiose ceremonial show. The Scherzo would be good for a crowd; the march – for some organized force. Many short but catchy themes, especially in the Scherzo, could represent various groups in the crowd. Like a modern cameraman, the composer plays with different facets, alternatively focusing on one or the other or generalizing the whole picture.

Although tonally the composition resembles a sonata form without development (A – g major, B – e major, A<sub>1</sub> – g major, B<sub>1</sub> – g major), the tonal submission of the 'second' theme does not change its real dramaturgical function as the main theme.

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<sup>1</sup> Iza Nemirovskaya traces and analyses the ambivalence of meanings in Tchaikovsky's scherzo-march examples: Andantino from the *Second Symphony*, Wedding march from *Undine*, Scherzo from the *Third Symphony*. Nemirovskaya, 'Vyzritel'noe znachenie', 116–20.

Its dynamic return ( $B_1$ ) is the aim, the climax, and the peak of the movement, and in a sense – of the whole symphony, which is comparable and indeed corresponds to the compassion-climax of the first movement. The whole Allegro molto vivace is directed toward this moment. In Laroche's words: 'The purely elemental process of gradual *thickening* (like all the processes of *mobile* elements in the highest degree akin to music) is presented here in a matching musical picture ...'<sup>2</sup>

The composer begins to build up anticipation for some climactic event, towards which the entire movement has been preparing. He starts at the lowest possible level and protracts it for the longest possible time, reaching a grandiose zoom-in and 'multidimensional' (kind of 3D?) effect in the culmination – as if inviting the listener to participate, or as if the actors have come down from the stage/screen into the audience. This climax brings ecstatic delight, close to euphoria, hysteria, or even the contagion of mass psychosis, – something frenzied,<sup>3</sup> in dangerous proximity to loss of control, and to the moment when individual consciousness dissolves into that of the conforming masses. It is probably this intoxicating Dionysian element that makes the public sometimes forget about concert etiquette and applaud after this movement. The more impressively conductors create a climax, the greater a chance that the public will release its subconscious response.

I am not the first to wonder at the strangeness of this winsome, engaging, full of pretty tunes 'with regular features', and glamorously orchestrated piece. What are the reasons for its ambiguity and for the variety of interpretations?

Accepting this 'que me veux-tu?' challenge, Alexander Dolzhanovsky wrote:

The third movement of the symphony, as is well known, lacks an enduring characteristic. What is it? Are there forces of good or evil? One is likely to think that there cannot be a straight answer to this question, because the sense of this music is of a game of passions, a game full of excitement [ardour] and risk ... . A daring and at the same time terrible test of fate awaits its protagonist, making one expect either full victory or complete defeat ... . The situation created in the third movement is similar to the one that emerges in the last tableau of *The Queen of Spades*, between Hermann's second and third bets, between Seven and Ace, which turned out to be a Queen of Spades, which is between the ecstasy of winning and the shock of defeat ... . The protagonist of the symphony is not Hermann, although he finds himself in a position similar to that of Hermann in the Casino.

Neither good nor evil, neither rejoicing nor despair; neither serenity nor anxiety – none of them taken separately exists there. But their combination, more precisely their merging, is capable of transforming one into the other, which leads to opposite results ... .

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<sup>2</sup> Чисто стихийный процесс постепенного сгущения (как все процессы подвижных стихий, в высшей степени сродны музыке) представлен здесь в соотвествующей музыкальной картине ... . Laroche, 161/Campbell, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Warrack, *Tchaikovsky*, 267.

The image of a risky game, embodied in the third movement, is not entirely new. It could have been encountered in Tchaikovsky's previous Scherzi, where an innocent, sometimes simply a fussy, provocatively playful game here and there, turns to horror, evil, and anger.<sup>4</sup>

The present author does not know the exact way out of this uncertainty of imagery, hence the heading of this section and the decision to suggest three versions, all within the gospel plot, even if two initially seem to exclude each other, and there is a risk of compromising both. The first two versions, however, have a chance to merge in the perception of this piece, and eventually I will attempt to reconcile them by presenting the third version. In any case, this entire book is an hypothesis, so there is not much that can be concretely stated. Why then not discuss various possible aspects? I begin with the interpretation, which is consonant with the St Petersburg tradition, as well as with the opinions of other scholars around the world.

### Version 1: Iron Power, Rhetoric of Violence

The entire musical substance of the movement is basically alien to all the preceding and the following material of the symphony. It is totally, emphatically and antagonistically dissimilar, a complete antithesis. Were the cycle a suite, there would be no problems with its dissociation from the drama of the first movement. But it is not. And the first movement gives no reasons for it to be ignored so defiantly. While, for example, not all the middle movements of Beethoven's symphonies directly relate to their Allegro dramas, at least they do not negate them so openly, but relate, even if indirectly, to the states of *the same* protagonist. This is not the case with the *Sixth*. The Scherzo-march is not about the same protagonist whom we see agonizing in the first movement and whom we are mourning in the

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<sup>4</sup> Третья часть симфонии, как известно, не получила устойчивой характеристики. Что это? Силы добра или зла? Думается, что прямого ответа на этот вопрос не может быть, ибо смысл этой музыки заключается в игре страстей, игре, полной азарта и риска ... Дерзкое и вместе жуткое испытание судьбы наполняет ее решительный характер, заставляет ждать полной победы или полного поражения ... В третьей части создается ситуация, подобная той, которая возникает в последней картине 'Пиковой дамы,' между второй и третьей ставками Германа, между семеркой и тузом, обернувшимся дамой пик, то есть между упоением выигрышем и потрясением от проигрыша ... Герой симфонии – не Герман, но он оказывается в положении, подобном положению Германа в игорном доме. Ни добро и ни зло, ни веселье и ни отчаяние, ни спокойствие и ни тревога, ни то и ни другое в отдельности не содержатся в ней, но их смешение, точнее – зарождение, способное превратиться в одно или в другое, то есть привести к противоположным результатам ... Воплощенный в третьей части образ рискованной игры не вполне нов. Встречался он и в предыдущих скерцо Чайковского, где безобидная, иногда просто суетливая, задорно-шаловливая игра то и дело оборачивается ужасом, злом и раздражением. Dolzhansky, 'Eshche raz o "Pikovoy Dame"', 97–9.

## Example 10.1 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (third movement, bars 1–8)

Allegro molto vivace (♩=152)

Fl. I-2  
Ob. 1-2  
Cl. (A) 1-2  
Bsn. 1-2  
Hn. (F) 1-2  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.  
D.B.

Finale. The march sounds either indifferent or hostile to the main substance of the symphony, yet the composer invested all his mastery to reach this result in an aesthetically perfect form. The scenario develops as described below.

*Scherzo, section A* – for the first time in the symphony, the music bears no traces of anxiety. On the contrary, there is an anticipation of a feast: uplifting excitement, enjoyable bustle, light and carefree (Example 10.1).

5

Fl.1-2

Ob.1-2

Cl.(A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-2

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

The non-thematic beginning of the Scherzo engages us in motion, suggesting some amorphous multitude and presenting a neutral backdrop for the thematic phrases. It also creates an environment in which the march theme crystallizes. Initially, the march's basic two-fourth motif pierces the aerated and flickering composition, flashing metallically like the blades of a weapon. Its metallic contrast to the softer timbres of the Scherzo texture is obvious (similar to the Fate-theme from the first movement, though in a very dissimilar mood). The Scherzo section thus serves as a background, a podium intended perhaps less to be remembered



Example 10.2 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (third movement, march theme, bars 71–81)

71 H

CL (A) 1-2 *p* leggieramente [non pesante]

Bsn. 1-2 *p*

Hn. (F) 1-4 *pp* leggieramente

Vln. *pp* leggieramente

Vcl. *pp*

D.B. *pp*

74

CL (A) 1-2 *p*

Hn. (F) 1-4 *pp*

Vcl. *sempre pp*

D.B. *sempre pp*

afterwards, but primarily supports and introduces the protagonist of the scene – the march.

The *march theme* (section B) appears fully shaped in bar 71. Since its main motif already featured briefly several times in the Scherzo, and the Scherzo's main feature – a triplet figuration – continues, the entrance of the march theme is perceived at first as a continuation of the Scherzo. Its exposition, 'staging', is equal in sophistication to that of the love theme from the first movement. Preparing for the march's entry at the end of the Scherzo section, Tchaikovsky creates a massive wave of sound (bars 49–70), raising our expectations for some majestic vision. First, he establishes the organ point on a supertonic  $f\sharp$ . Then he swings the motif and widens its interval from fourth to fifth. In parallel, he compresses the texture, intensifies the dynamics, and even adds wind chords reminiscent of bells or some other kind of special signal. At the height of expectation of a massive tutti one

hears, however, a hardly audible *p/pp* and *leggieramente*, approaching us from afar. This dramaturgical feint makes one focus special attention on its appearance, and eventually realize that it is a new group of personages approaching (Example 10.2).

The theme is light, lean, and muscular, ‘dandified’ (to use Laroche’s word), pretty and catchy, but with ‘false charm’ (Zajaczkowski)<sup>5</sup> and highly compressed information about its potential for development – something of unknown power. It bears connotations to the character of Bizet’s Escamillo, to whose musical characteristics Tchaikovsky probably related, as did Bizet himself: ‘Bizet is said to have remarked after composing this piece: “Well, they asked me for ordure, and they’ve got it!”’<sup>6</sup> Remarkably, the two-fourth base of the march’s initial motif bears a certain relationship to the *Carmen* Overture and the Corrida scene theme (Example 10.3).

### Example 10.3 *Carmen*, by George Bizet (Overture)

<sup>5</sup> Zajaczkowski, *Tchaikovsky’s Musical Style*, 143.

<sup>6</sup> Winton Dean, *Georges Bizet. His Life and Work* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1965), 221.

Tchaikovsky, who wrote many marches, ranging in character from the *March of the Wooden Soldiers* to the *Coronation March* (including regimental marches that he wrote under the pen-name Sinopov, not to mention marches in operas and ballets), naturally extrapolates his sensitivity to gradations of good taste and expressive properties in the march genre. Hence, for example, his doubts concerning the *Marche Miniature* (originally named *March of the Lilliputians*, composed in autumn 1878, shortly after his *Children's Album*), which became part of the First Suite (op. 43, 1879). The march is indeed provocative, and it made the composer regret that he composed it, persistently referring to it as *govnetso* (a small piece of *shit*) in his letter to the publisher (25 August 1879). Asking Yurgenson to remove the march from the cycle, Tchaikovsky even suggested paying for the engraver's work, despite the fact that he himself badly needed money. Eventually, however, he gave in to Yurgenson's pressure and left it in the suite.<sup>7</sup>

As for the march theme in the *Pathétique*, its somewhat over-popular nature would not be particularly noticeable or problematic in itself, had it not attained such enormous grandeur at the end of the movement. This particular disproportion and incongruence raises the question of how to qualify the climax in which the Scherzo-march famously results – at face value or as grotesque? Klimovitsky, seeing this march-theme's roots in the French civil march style, noted that 'the full of life character and glibness, so inherent in this prototype', are features with no pretence to such grandiose development, and this incongruence is what eventually turns the climax into a mocking unbridled orgy.<sup>8</sup> What obviously contributes to a perception of this kind, shared by many musicians, is an historiographical factor. Post Second World War perception of Tchaikovsky's *Sixth* is significantly influenced by Shostakovich's *Seventh* (1941–42), with its 'Episode of Invasion' (the attack by Fascist Germany), in which the emphatically simple and pretty theme acquires monstrous aggressiveness – which itself could well have been inspired by Tchaikovsky's Scherzo-march.<sup>9</sup> As the famous Russian conductor Kirill Kondrashin wrote, identifying the third movement of the *Sixth* (which he saw as a pivotable movement of the symphony) with the Scherzo from the Third Suite and with wooden soldiers – the battle of the rats in the *Nutcracker*, any framework of past warfare could be demonstrated under the soundtrack of this music.<sup>10</sup> It is not by chance that Andrei Konchalovsky, in his fantasy film *The Nutcracker*

<sup>7</sup> Sokolov, "“Ot pamyatnika k cheloveku”", 184. One can only wonder what the composer experienced seeing the march's particularly warm reception in Europe, in the 1880s (in London, 1889, the audience even demanded that it be played twice). See Minibayeva, 'Per Aspera ad Astra', 171; Gerald Norris, *Stanford: The Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (Newton Abbot, Devon: David and Charles, 1980), 258–9.

<sup>8</sup> Klimovitsky, 'Zametki', 118–20.

<sup>9</sup> Both Klimovitsky (*ibid.*, 120) and Nemirovskaya ('Vyzritel'noe znachenie', 120) compare these themes and movements.

<sup>10</sup> Kirill Kondrashin, *O dirizherskom prochtenii simfonii Chaikovskogo* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1977), 217.

in 3D (2010), inspired by E.T.A. Hoffman's story and Tchaikovsky's music in addition to the ballet music, uses some tunes from other works of Tchaikovsky (music score by Edward Artemiev). Among these is the march theme from the *Sixth*, which consistently shows an army of rats in Nazi uniforms (as an allegory of totalitarian society) – exactly like Shostakovich's theme of invasion in Soviet films, and in fact even blending both themes at some moments. Perhaps the inhuman feel to this march made Kurt Pahlen interpret the third movement as an invasion of the Earth by inhabitants of another planet.<sup>11</sup>

An interval of fourth is the basic melodic step in Tchaikovsky's theme. The coupling of two fourths reinforces its fanfare nature, one related to the tonic chord, and the other to the subdominant. The semantic quintessence of a (military) fanfare is more important here than the conventional and comfortable (closer to the human emotional world) basing it on a triad (as featured in Bizet's overture). 'The military topic will surface decisively in the third movement', remarked Monelle.<sup>12</sup> Warrack notes its character as 'barren, constructed out of bleak intervals, essentially empty'.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, this fourth + fourth tonic-subdominant outline, to which the third fourth (related to the dominant triad) is later added, does not downplay the sense of tonic. On the contrary, its steadiness is even stronger. The theme somehow signals a 'metallic' base to its design and the feeling that its strength lies somewhere beyond human sentiment.

Compare this to Shostakovich's 'Invasion' theme (Example 10.4). The same fourths and fifths we see in Shostakovich's theme, as well as march rhythm – all disguised in comeliness and regularity. But somehow it begins to suggest mechanicality, inhumanity and unstoppable. Moreover, the descending segment of Shostakovich's theme resembles certain motifs from the Scherzo section, and even more so the Fate motif from the first movement of Tchaikovsky's symphony. One more detail is in common: the first two beats to be shattered in the jerky chords of equal strength (*Egmont*-saraband reference) allude to the motif of 'violence' that opens the development of Tchaikovsky's first movement. These elements deserve special attention, as they together constitute a 'rhetoric of violence', to which Tchaikovsky contributed by composing this piece, and which Shostakovich developed to the highest possible level derived from the unbearable experiences of his generation. It should be added that Aram Khachaturian had perhaps also experienced the same rhetorical influence when he composed the music of the Roman soldiers in his ballet *Spartacus* (Example 10.5).

The structure of Tchaikovsky's march theme appears more complex than its simplified initial motif suggests, and it is far from the 4 + identical 4 construction that one might expect from a march theme, particularly from Tchaikovsky (so notoriously criticized for his 'measured dance' structures). The first four-bar

<sup>11</sup> Kurt Pahlen, *Tschaikowsky: ein Lebensbild* (Zurich: Schweizer Druck und Verlagshaus ag Zürich, 1960), 240–41 (mentioned in Volkoff, *Tchaikovsky*, 322).

<sup>12</sup> Monelle, *The Sense of Music*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Warrack, *Tchaikovsky*, 267.

Example 10.4 Symphony no. 7, by Shostakovich (first movement, 'Episode of Invasion', bars 43–7)

43

Picc. *ff*

Fl. 1-2 *ff* <sup>a2</sup>

Ob. 1-2 *ff* <sup>a2</sup>

E. H. (F) *ff*

Cl. picc. (E $\flat$ ) *ff*

Cl. (B $\flat$ ) 1-2 *ff* <sup>a2</sup>

B.Cl. (B $\flat$ ) *ff*

Bsn. 1-2 *ff*

C.bsn. *ff*

Tpt. (B $\flat$ ) 1-3 *ff* <sup>a2</sup>

3 Tbns, Tuba *ff* <sup>a2</sup>

Timpani *ff*

Xyl. *ff*

S. Dr. *ff*

B. Dr. *ff*

43

Vln. I *ff*

Vln. II *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Vc. *ff*

D.B. div. *ff*

Example 10.5 *Spartacus*, by Khachaturian (scene 1, ‘The Triumph of Rome’, triumphal march, rehearsal number 8)

phrase is not repeated. What repeats (variably) is its second two-bar pair, resulting in the structure: a (2) + b (2) + b<sub>1</sub> (2). The first phrase is thus extended up to six bars and developed further using its dotted micro-motif from the ‘b’ cell, which forms the second, five-bar phrase of the period. The new phrase develops as if it were picking up the song like a chorus. It summarizes, contrasts and counterbalances the preceding phrase, forming the 11-bar construction that, although ending on the tonic, seems to invite further development and looping. It is not just a march, it is a marching song for soldiers or some other armed force: its ‘goose step’ signification is more than obviously heard here.

The method by which the march theme is developed is perhaps the main factor of its aggressive power. Together with its second statement, it forms only the first section of a ternary form (with a miniature trio-like middle subsection) that constitutes the B section. The local reprise is identical until bar 130, where a transition to the reprise of the Scherzo section (A<sub>1</sub>) begins. Meanwhile, the composer maintains moderation, although the insistent presence of the march theme is already impressive – now fully stated four times, not counting its fleeting motifs in the Scherzo.

The return of the Scherzo (A<sub>1</sub>) is almost identical, until the moment when the preparation for the dynamic reprise of the march (B<sub>1</sub>) begins. Instead of the 20-bar wave described above as a massive development raising false expectations of a majestic vision, we have here the preparation of another kind, which is almost twice as long, 37 bars (191–228), for a different kind of the march-theme presentation. This time the expectations are justified, and the result is of a much higher level (Example 10.6). This moment, with its transitional character of preparation, is uniquely grandiose and much discussed. Brown offers an interesting scheme, showing how Tchaikovsky achieves this increased expectation:

The six shaded areas make three pairs of correspondences [53–70 and 195–228; 109–12 and 267<sup>14</sup>–282; 131<sup>15</sup>–8 and 301–15], the second of each pair far more extensive than the first. Between them they comprise over one quarter of the movement, and it is above all through these that it makes its critical effect. Each is a transitional section, driving the music towards a destination; each recurrence

<sup>14</sup> I believe that the author meant bar 255.

<sup>15</sup> This is probably bar 128.

is more insistent, more prolonged – the striving becomes more urgent, and a movement that had begun as carefree betrays growing anxiety, then desperation, especially when the main march theme returns for the last time, now *fff*, and without the mitigation of the triplet quavers ... .<sup>16</sup>

Klimovitsky, who detects the finalizing function of this movement, writes:

No Scherzo, even in such keen variant as the Scherzo from Beethoven's *Ninth*, has or even can have, such a developed zone of instability as this one. This type of development, combining the grand scale of unfolding with the intensive instability and a clearly preparatory character, is a prerogative of the final movements in a sonata-symphony cycle.<sup>17</sup>

I would call this fragment a 'mocking episode', because the packed atmosphere of a feast shows its truly horrendous face at a certain moment: Brown calls it 'deeply ironic', 'exuberant mockery'.<sup>18</sup> It is, at the very least, close to the limit of every possible sonic parameter. The persistent tutti sounds continuously except for the last eight bars, which I will discuss shortly. The *fff* comes as early as 16 bars before the reprise. The fourth motif receives a well-elaborated realization of its aggressive (or at least militant) potential. An ascending chromatic bass adds its own powerful tension. Virtuoso variety and an increasing compression of rhythmic figures (bars 216–21) now work at their best. The timpani mostly hold their organ point over the same supertonic, now *a*, joined occasionally by contrabasses and bassoons.

In the eight bars separating the peak of the preparatory wave from the reprise, the composer suddenly removes the tutti. What remains are swirling scale passages, *fff*, alternating in string and in woodwind, and with groups multiplying them in three octaves (Example 10.7, pp. 124–8). They curl and whip over each other from both sides, notably remaining on the same pitch of the *d* to *d* passage of the G major scale. First, they fly within five quarters, then as a *stretto* within two quarters and finally one, which is the signal for the entry of the march theme in all its might.

It is clear why the *d* to *d* G major scale is needed here: to provide a dominant anticipation. But why *only* this scale, so uncharacteristic of Tchaikovsky, who otherwise would most probably have varied it? Why are these whistling and whipping passages stuck on this pitch as if time has stopped?

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 452–3, Example 306.

<sup>17</sup> Таких развернутых зон неустойчивости не знает, да и не может знать, скерцо даже в наиболее острых своих вариантах, типа скерцо Девятой симфонии Бетховена, ибо отмеченный тип развития – сочетание масштабной развернутости с острой неустойчивостью, имеющий отчетливо направленный преддытковый характер, – prerogativa именно финальных частей сонатно-симфонического цикла. Klimovitsky, 'Zametki', 118.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 452.

Example 10.6 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (third movement, culmination, bars 229–39)

229 **Y**

Picc.

Fl. 1-2

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (A) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
Tuba

Timp.

Cym.  
B. Dr.

1  
Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

*continued*



Example 10.6 *concluded*

233

Picc.

Fl. 1-2

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (A) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
Tuba

Timp.

Cym.

B. Dr.

I  
Vln.

II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

div.

237

**Z**

Picc.

Fl. 1-2

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (A) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
Tuba

Timp.

Cym.

B. Dr.

I  
Vln.

II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

[Примеч. Тарелки не должны быть привязаны к большому барабану.  
Die Becken dürfen nicht angebunden sein]

un.

Example 10.7 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (third movement, preparation to the culmination, bars 214–29)

214

Piccolo *ff*

Fl. 1-2 *ff*

Ob. 1-2 *ff*

Cl. (A) 1-2 *ff*

Bsn. 1-2 *ff*

Hn. (F) 1-4 *ff*

Tpt. (A) 1-2 *ff*

3 Tbn. Tuba *ff*

Timpani *ff*

Cymbals *ff*

B. Dr. *ff*

I [non div.] *ff*

Violin II *ff*

Viola *ff*

Cello *ff*

Contrabass *ff*

218

The musical score for measures 218-220 of 'Great Ambivalence' features a variety of instruments. The Piccolo (Picc.) plays a melodic line with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Flutes 1-2 (Fl. 1-2) play a melodic line with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Oboes 1-2 (Ob. 1-2) play a chordal accompaniment with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Clarinets (A) 1-2 (Cl. (A) 1-2) play a chordal accompaniment with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Bassoons 1-2 (Bsn. 1-2) play a melodic line with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Horns (F) 1-4 (Hn. (F) 1-4) play a chordal accompaniment with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Trumpets (A) 1-2 (Tpt. (A) 1-2) play a melodic line with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Three Trombones (3 Tbn.) and Tuba play a melodic line with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Timpani (Timp.) play a rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Cymbals (Cym.) and Bass Drum (B. Dr.) are present but have no notation. Violins (Vln.) play a melodic line with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Viola (Vla.) play a melodic line with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Violoncello (Vc.) play a rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes. Contrabass (Cb.) play a rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and triplet eighth notes.

*continued*

Example 10.7 *continued*

221

Picc.

Fl. 1-2

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Ln. (F) 1-4

pt. (A) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
Tuba

Timp.

Cym.

B. Dr.

I  
Vln.

II  
Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

*sempre fff*

*fff*

224

Picc.

Fl. 1-2

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (A) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
Tuba

Timp.

Cym.

B. Dr.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

*continued*

Example 10.7 *concluded*

227 Y

Picc.

Fl. 1-2

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (A) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
Tuba

Timp.

Cym.

B. Dr.

I  
Vln.

II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

*mf*

There are certainly plenty of reasons for and interpretations of these eight bars; but there are also many compositional solutions of another kind, both more interesting in sound and more friendly. Yet the composer chose this one. From the point of view of construction, it is clear that this relief is highly effective in preparing for the march theme, as often used by Tchaikovsky in his culminations before the reprise. Programmatically, it could be a sound painting of some breathtaking pyrotechnical effect, illustrating clouds of smoke surrounding the magician descending from the dome of a theatre, and then dissolving to present the Master of Another World in all his shining magnificence. For a 'good' protagonist, Tchaikovsky would most probably have chosen a more noble generic polonaise base, as Richard Taruskin has convincingly shown.<sup>19</sup>

Again, such an interpretation could indeed be possible had this movement been part of a suite reflecting some fairy-tale ballet imagery. However, there is something violent in this whole section that makes some people perceive its threatening essence. The unusual severity of the unavoidable metallic knocks chanted by a multi-octave tutti with accelerated frequency that immediately precede these eight bars makes one imagine a dictator's minions dispersing the crowd with whips and forcing his subjects to prostrate themselves. Shostakovich again comes to mind, with a similar multi-octave unison of strings and woodwinds on approaching the climax in his tragic symphonies. These soundless screams of outraged and despoiled victims are another face of the 'rhetoric of violence'.

One would perhaps give a lot to hear more about Tchaikovsky's initial idea for the whole 'mocking episode' and what made him decide to use a military drum here. He noted this in his draft, at the head of the page: 'Here in the orchestra we need a military drum *cresc. poco a poco*'.<sup>20</sup> Later, however, the composer changed his mind, and only the traces of this intention remain in the score above the grand cassa staff: 'Piatti here should not be attached to the drum',<sup>21</sup> in two places (bars 238 and 292). Revising the score on the day following the premiere, hurrying to send it to Yurgenson for engraving, Tchaikovsky seemingly overlooked this. Indeed, without a military drum, his comment becomes meaningless; piatti are attached to a military drum only if one performer plays them, while the symphony orchestra normally has two percussionists.

Whatever Tchaikovsky had in mind, it seems clear that the military drum was intended to reinforce 'the military topic' and/or add a perception of violence. The reason the composer abandoned this idea was perhaps that he felt it would be a transgression of good taste, or might even be comprehended as a parody,

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<sup>19</sup> 'It [polonaise – MR] often replaced the march where a specific overtone of official pomp was wanted.' Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 284.

<sup>20</sup> Тут в оркестре нужен военный барабан *cresc. poco a poco*. *ADF*, 39: folio 8, recto; see also commentaries: Russian, 189/English, 143. Bars 196–214 of the score have a gradual crescendo from *pp* to *fff*, though there is no military drum, but a long timpani roll (crescendo from bar 197 to bar 216).

<sup>21</sup> Здесь тарелки не должны быть привязаны к барабану. In some later editions, this remark is omitted, but we intentionally included it in Example 10.6 (bars 237–8).



and therefore was undesirable. A march borders the genre of state/official/ ceremonial music, and Tchaikovsky was too loyal a royalist to provoke political misunderstanding in a period when members of the terrorist organization *Narodnaya volya* (The People's Will or The People's Freedom) were being sought by the authorities and often arrested. Even if abandoned, however, this initial intention offers strong evidence of a special programmatic interpretation Tchaikovsky attached to this episode, at the 'golden ratio' of the entire symphony, where he had something very important to say.

The episode has a continuation and development. The dynamic reprise of the march launches, and uses all possible means to reinstate the image in full force and radiance of its might: needless to say, tutti and fortissimo (with the exclusion of its 'trio' section). Even this power and magnificence, however, are exceeded when the last statement of the theme turns into the coda. The coda corresponds to the 'mocking episode' in its boisterousness: *fff*; fourths again stretch into fifths, whipping passages chaotically fly in opposite directions; triplet figurations from the Scherzo add energy; low brasses roar; trumpets blare their fanfares. Triumphantly extended, the coda seems to infract norms of noble expression and breaks out into the open air of the dissolution, permissiveness, and impunity of transitory earthly fame, trampling on everything human. Subordinated to collectivity and dissolving identity, it conduces to shedding tears of delight at being part of a great communal experience, as could be seen for example at Alexander III's Coronation ceremony (or at least as reported in the official press).<sup>22</sup> Compassion for the individual is not present in this realm.

Four bars (338–41) before the final six bars of the last tonic of the movement bear a certain element of the grotesque. The composer suddenly highlights a scale, in G major, and exposes it in a melodic line running down through two octaves, in eighths. It is the same scale that, in the bass, accompanied the march theme from the very beginning, contributing to the lightness and springiness of its 'gait'. Appearing as a melodic passage, it strikingly resembles a Can-Can (though it roots in the eighteenth-century comic idiom) and decisively negates the heroic character of the coda, concluding it with swelling and hysterical pomposity (Example 10.8).

It is hard to imagine that Tchaikovsky did not realize its reference to Offenbach, whom he considered to represent valueless music. By this sarcastic afterword the composer seems to mock all the preceding grandeur, turning it into a farce and disclosing its inner emptiness. It may possibly present the idea of the nonentity of an earthly ruler in the face of eternity and human memory, which is what the next movement reveals.

Meanwhile, summarizing this version, I cannot avoid its contextualization within a gospel narrative, and suggest its association with the end of Christ's earthly life. Soldiers and crowds accompanied him from the Scene of Mockery to Crucifixion, which, as a climax and execution of an 'act of justice' – in the

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<sup>22</sup> Wortman, 'The Coronation of Alexander III', 286.

Example 10.8 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (third movement, bars 334–47)

334 LL

Piccolo

Fl. 1-2

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (A) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
Tuba

Timpani

B. Dr.

I  
Violin

II  
Violin

Viola

Cello

Contrabass

*sempre fff*

*continued*

Example 10.8 *concluded*

337

Picc.

Fl. 1-2

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2

Hn. (F) 1-4

Tpt. (A) 1-2

3 Tbn.  
Tuba

Timp.

B. Dr.

I  
Vln.

II  
Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

*ff*

*a2*

*a2*

342

This page of a musical score, titled "Great Ambivalence" and numbered 133, contains measures 342 through 345. The score is arranged for a large orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Picc.** (Piccolo): Treble clef, playing eighth notes.
- Fl. 1-2** (Flutes): Treble clef, playing eighth notes.
- Ob. 1-2** (Oboes): Treble clef, playing eighth notes.
- Cl. (A) 1-2** (Clarinets in A): Treble clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a dynamic marking of *u2* and a triplet of eighth notes.
- Bsn. 1-2** (Bassoons): Bass clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Hn. (F) 1-4** (Horns in F): Treble clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Tpt. (A) 1-2** (Trumpets in A): Bass clef, playing eighth notes.
- 3 Tbn. Tuba** (Three Trombones and Tuba): Bass clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Timp.** (Timpani): Bass clef, playing a steady eighth-note pattern. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- B. Dr.** (Bass Drum): Percussion clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 342 starts with a *fff* dynamic marking.
- Vln. I** (Violins I): Treble clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Vln. II** (Violins II): Treble clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Vla.** (Viola): Bass clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Vc.** (Violoncello): Bass clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Cb.** (Cello): Bass clef, playing eighth notes. Measure 345 includes a triplet of eighth notes.

Middle Ages at least – was an exciting public entertainment, accompanied by trumpets and drums.<sup>23</sup>

### Version Two: Test of Fate

Many, if not the vast majority of listeners nevertheless do not perceive the hostility of this image toward the suffering protagonist of the symphony. This is an objective fact and should neither be ignored nor related to their lack of discernment. It would be safer to give full credit to Tchaikovsky and suggest that this effect on the public, taken at face value, was equally part of his intention. What then might have been the programmatic idea behind the festive and jubilant mood and atmosphere introduced by the Scherzo-march?

The chronology of Christ's story, following the serene Galilean period, suggests the growing masses of people influenced by his teachings, charmed by his personality, humanity, healings, miracles, and general radiance of hope and goodness. A social movement, a kind of Utopian counterculture, arose, grew in power, approached a climax and converted Christ's status to that of the Messiah. This course of events led him to Jerusalem, where direct confrontation with the authorities took place, making his defeat inevitable and becoming an indispensable part of the scenario without which his divinity could not have been accomplished.

We should recall now that it was precisely John 12 that narrated this particular stage of Christ's journey, with his entrance into Jerusalem and the coming of his Hour, that had so moved Tchaikovsky, making him re-read it several times and note: 'How moving this chapter is' (quoted in Chapter 4). The composer might well have thought about this musically – even more so, because this episode clearly alludes to Joan of Arc's moment of recognition and glory. It could have been an attractive challenge for Tchaikovsky to express a similar emotional uplift in symphonic music.

To continue referring to the cinematographic use of this music, this second version also finds excellent validation in Igor Talankin's film *Tchaikovsky* (1970, distinguished by exceptionally meaningful use of Tchaikovsky's music as a soundtrack). The march theme there accompanies the most glorious episodes of Tchaikovsky's earthly life, showing the whirlwind of events during which the composer almost loses control: after the premiere of *The Queen of Spades* (when the many admirers lift and carry him in their arms [in film]), and in Cambridge (where Tchaikovsky takes part in a procession, adorned in the mantle of a Doctor of Honour).

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<sup>23</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4; Tilman Seebass, 'Muzykal'nye stseny na freskakh Sofiyskogo sobora v Kieve: starye i novye aspekty interpretatsii'. *Opera Musicologica*, 2:4 (2010), 8.

What should we now say about above-mentioned ‘emptiness’, ‘metallic-base design’, ‘inhumanity’, and all the other negative definitions that we have applied to this music so far in an attempt to relate it to ‘evil’? Could it also mean ‘good’ and serve to describe a ‘good hero’? Or, should we ask ourselves even more directly: whom is it describing? Power and those who mocked Jesus; or Jesus, entering Jerusalem on a donkey, surrounded by a crowd greeting him with hosannas ‘in a solemnly (celebratory)-exulting(triumphant) character’, as the composer noted for himself in his draft?<sup>24</sup>

The answer may depend on which of Christ’s images dominates our conscious mind, or, in other words, the degree to which Renan’s *The Life of Jesus* affected readers and shattered the stereotypical ideal quite common to Judeo-Christian civilization, believers and unbelievers alike. It is not important whether a believer has derived their image of Christ from reading the gospels and being taught by a priest, or if the unbeliever has acquired it from culture in general, including baroque music and the visual arts, because the arts in many ways have substituted religion in our conscious mind. The result is the same – the ideal of a cultural hero. Hence, Renan’s image of Christ comes as a shock for both. Renan quotes Christ from the same gospels, but his discourse highlights words that might otherwise go less noticed, filtered by the selectivity of our perceptions based on an already established stereotyped ideal. The shock comes not so much from hearing about Christ’s secularity, as from learning of his extremism and adventurism. The following is an excerpt from Renan’s Chapter XIX, ‘Increasing Progression of Enthusiasm and of Exaltation’, discussing Christ’s demands of his disciples:

In these fits of severity he went so far as to abolish all natural ties. His requirements had no longer any bounds. Despising the healthy limits of man’s nature, he demanded that he should exist only for him, that he should love him alone. ‘If any man come to me,’ he said, ‘and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.’ ‘So, likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.’ There was, at such times, something strange and more than human in his words; they were like a fire utterly consuming life and reducing everything to a frightful wilderness. The harsh and gloomy feeling of distaste for the world, and of excessive self-abnegation, which characterizes Christian perfection, was originated, not by the refined and cheerful moralist of earlier days, but by the somber giant whom a kind of grand presentiment was withdrawing, more and more, out of the pale of humanity. We should almost say that, in these moments of conflict with the most legitimate cravings of the heart, Jesus had forgotten the pleasure of living, of loving, of seeing, and of feeling. Employing still more unmeasured language, he even said, ‘If any man will come

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<sup>24</sup> В торж[ественно]-ликующем роде. The memorandum on page 30 of the Autograph was written on 11 February, when the composer had to stop working, and relates to the final statement of the march theme (from bar 229) – ‘final’ny marsh’, as he noted for himself.

after me, let him deny himself and follow me. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake and the Gospel's shall find it. What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Two anecdotes of the kind we cannot accept as historical, but which, although they were exaggerations, were intended to represent a characteristic feature, clearly illustrate this defiance of nature. He said to one man, 'Follow me!' But he said, 'Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.' Jesus answered, 'Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.' Another said to him, 'Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house.' Jesus replied, 'No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.' An extraordinary confidence, and at times accents of singular sweetness, reversing all our ideas of him, caused these exaggerations to be easily received. 'Come unto me,' cried he, 'all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'<sup>25</sup>

Compare the above to the words previously quoted by Tchaikovsky:

Jesus Christ is the only genius on the Earth that I recognize. I hold him in reverence as a man of ideas, and greatly esteem his teaching, though I find much in it unnatural, and, therefore, impossible, but it is clear that he had to demand too much in order to achieve a little. Christian martyrs, I rapturously worship them.<sup>26</sup>

Add to this Christ's 'Come to me' so beloved by Tchaikovsky. Are not Tchaikovsky's words a window through which Renan can be clearly recognized?

If so, this perhaps can explain the impression of an uncontrollable centrifugal force of events during the week in Jerusalem, which Renan analyses in Chapter XXIII, 'Last Week of Jesus':

His arrival was noised abroad. The Galileans who had come to the feast were highly elated, and prepared a little triumph for him. An ass was brought to him, followed, according to custom, by its colt. The Galileans spread their finest garments upon the back of this humble animal as saddle-cloths, and seated him thereon. Others, however, spread their garments upon the road, and strewed it with green branches. The multitude which preceded and followed him, carrying palms, cried: 'Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!' Some persons even gave him the title of king of Israel. 'Master, rebuke thy disciples,' said the Pharisees to him. 'If these should hold their peace,

<sup>25</sup> Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*. Complete edition. The Thinker's Library, No. 53 (London: Watts & Co., [1935, 1945] 1947), 163–4.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to N.F. von Meck from Clarens, 30 September /10 October 1877. *P.I.-N.F.*, 1: 91.

the stones would immediately cry out,' replied Jesus, and he entered into the city. The Hierosolymites, who scarcely knew him, asked who he was. 'It is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, in Galilee,' was the reply. Jerusalem was a city of about 50,000 souls. A trifling event, such as the entrance of a stranger, however little celebrated, or the arrival of a band of provincials, or a movement of people to the avenues of the city, could not fail, under ordinary circumstances, to be quickly noised about. But at the time of the feast the confusion was extreme. Jerusalem at these times was taken possession of by strangers. It was among the latter that the excitement appears to have been most lively. Some proselytes, speaking Greek, who had come to the feast, had their curiosity piqued, and wished to see Jesus. They addressed themselves to his disciples; but we do not know the result of the interview. Jesus, according to his custom, went to pass the night at his beloved village of Bethany. The three following days (Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday) he descended regularly to Jerusalem; and, after the setting of the sun, he returned either to Bethany, or to the farms on the western side of the Mount of Olives, where he had many friends.<sup>27</sup>

It could purely be by chance, of course, that the march theme appears four times (that is, the first for Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and the remaining three for 'the three following days'). We will not count on this, not only because music has its own logic, but also because the general course of the movement is more important than moment-by-moment illustration of the event. Music conveys here what Dolzhansky defines as (if to paraphrase his words quoted above) daring risk, a terrible test of fate, creating an expectation either for full victory or full defeat ... a situation between the ecstasy of winning and the shock of defeat ... turning to horror, evil, and anger. The protagonist of the symphony is not Hermann, Dolzhansky reminds us, although he finds himself in a position similar to that of Hermann in the Casino. This complex mood indeed is shared by the march theme and Hermann's short arioso 'What is our life? A game!'. The arioso – with its fourths at the beginning of each phrase,  $\frac{2}{4}$  time, general melodic structure, triplets in accompaniment, and A major – looks like a certain prototype to the march theme.<sup>28</sup> Both Hermann's and the march themes remarkably combine the features of 'victorious exult/triumph and hidden tragic expectation, anticipation of a catastrophe' (Example 10.9).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 191.

<sup>28</sup> The arioso was written in A major, but at the premiere, Nikolai Figner even sang it in B major (my thanks to Polina Vaydman for this note). Both keys are close to the E major of the march theme in section B.

<sup>29</sup> победного ликования и скрытого трагического ожидания, предчувствия катастрофы. Dolzhansky, *Simfonicheskaya muzyka Chaikovskogo* (Moscow and Leningrad, [1965] 1981), 259 (quoted by Iza Nemirovskaya, 'Vyzritel'noe znachenie', 118). Klimovitsky also mentions this aria while juxtaposing two pairs of finales: in the *Sixth* and in *The Queen of Spades*, where Hermann's aria appears like a first finale, while the love theme and funereal chorale are the opera's second and true finale. 'Zametki', 128, n. 9.



Example 10.9 *The Queen of Spades*, by Tchaikovsky (Scene 7, Hermann's aria)

Moderato con moto ♩=100

*Герман*  
*Hermann*

Что на - ша жизнь? Ир - ра!  
Chto na - sha zhizn'? Ig - ra!

До - бро и зло - од - ни меч - ты!  
Do - bro i zlo - od - ni mech - ty!

Труд, чест - ность - сказ - ки для ба -  
Trud, chest - nost' - skaz - ki dlya bab -

бья! Кто прав, кто счаст - лив здесь, друзь -  
ya! Kto prav, kto schast - liv zdes', druz -

я? Се - год - ня ты, а зав - тра я!  
ya? Se - vod - nya tu, a zav - tra ya!

*un poco meno* *Tempo I*

*un poco meno* *Tempo I*

Indeed, as Renan clearly explains, the Christ arriving in Jerusalem that Passover was different from the Christ who had previously performed his deeds of grace, in the same way that the Hermann who came to the Casino was different from the one who had so passionately loved Liza. This other Christ, who had already put his life at stake, though invisible in this musical tableau, is reflected in the atmosphere of triumphant festivity entirely unrelated to the grace and humanity that were to become the core of the subsequent myth. Instead, this festivity is essentially indifferent to him as a person and to the sense of his teaching – it is something general and elemental. It can be interpreted as a neutral backdrop to the inevitable final part of Christ's story, where mockery is a programmed continuation of the exultant hosannas, and where everything represented by a wreath of laurels ('the best garments and palm branches spread on the road before him') is replaced by thorns, a purple robe and a reed as a sceptre.

As for the 'ironness', 'violence', or 'military topic' emphasized in the first version, this version does not explain them.

### **Version Three: Hosanna–Mockery Symbiosis**

The attributes of mockery are in fact the same as those of hosanna, merely inverted, in accordance with the position of their object: hero/winner or victim/loser. It is precisely the position of the protagonist that tunes our perception of the crowd's enthusiasm. In both cases, the crowd is basically indifferent rather than sincere, and hence easily manipulated and intoxicated.

An influential precedent of the symbiotic attributes uniting both scenes can be found in James Ensor's ironic masterpiece *Christ's Entry into Brussels (L'Entrée du Christ à Bruxelles, 1888–89)*. An outstanding Belgian painter, James Ensor (1860–1949), one of the founders of *Les XX* group, used to make Christ a metaphor, or rather to use him as a metaphor for a socio-cultural victim. His entry scene is predominantly one of mockery. The only, though basic, element of the entry is that the haloed Christ is free, sitting on the donkey in the middle of the picture, under the banner 'Vive la sociale'. While the crowd in the background looks at Christ, as does his immediate circle spread out before him below, the foreground is populated with figures with their backs to him: almost all the individuals in the picture are ignoring him and looking at the viewer. The faces of those in the foreground, parodying the high society of Brussels, are mocking, seemingly themselves first of all. They not only appear to be unaware of or ignoring the Messiah, but they are separated and guarded from him by men in uniform who, as Paul Haesaerts wrote, appear as:

a brass band blowing its lungs out blares its frenzied rhythms at the crowd, which is dancing, gesticulating, jostling ... We are in a world that combines

features of reality, phantasmagoria, and nightmare ... Is this a tribute to Christ or a mockery?<sup>30</sup>

An additional allusion to mockery in this canvas is created by the presence of a charismatic governing figure, with sceptre in hand, standing on the very edge (nearly falling off) of a high wooden platform that corresponds well to Pilate's entry and his declaration – 'Ecce homo'. The axis of tension and opposition is formed by the only figures wearing sashes: the governing image above and Christ (his mantle forms a similar diagonal sash).

The painting, of course, greatly scandalized the artist in the eyes of the establishment and was much discussed. In many ways similar to Russian artists, Ensor broadly exploited the Christ's image for social subtext. Although this particular painting was not on public display in Tchaikovsky's time, it does not mean that he was unaware of its existence. He read newspapers and some of the discussions related to this painting must have reached him. He also spent a whole week in Brussels before his concert on 4 January 1893, and it is possible that he may have been introduced to the artistic world of the young painter who had once created the elegant and moody picture *Russian Music* (1881).

Even if we assume that Tchaikovsky had never seen or heard of this work, he was sufficiently sensitive to the trajectories of development in the arts, and could independently have arrived at the idea of synthesizing these episodes of the last week of Christ's life, opposite in sense but similar in their phantasmagorical unnaturalness and fatal interconnectedness.

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Haesaerts, *James Ensor* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1959), 177.

## Chapter 11

# A House of Mourning

A requiem to and from both believers and unbelievers, a universal expression of sorrow and compassion, the Finale addresses the audience in the direct emotional way, bringing the listeners, especially in hard times, to a state in which tears cannot be concealed. This 12-minute musical entity stages a giant House of Mourning, where people find themselves between life and death, and even an unbeliever might be ready to accept a believer's outstretched hand participating in the same *un immense acte de spiritualité*. The experience is both intimately personal and shared.

This image of an imposing ecumenical liturgy is supported by the vocal – or, even better, choral – character of both themes: their phrases are short and singable, like lines in a church hymn, with their step-wise melodic movement.<sup>1</sup> It is not by chance that musicians tend to seek words to match this very familiar phrase and, in one way or another, refer to the Christian funeral service.<sup>2</sup> Simplicity, unpretentiousness, and sincerity set the tone for the entire range of emotions through which the composer leads the audience in purely symphonic sound, as if through the common and natural 'stages of grief'.<sup>3</sup> Amazingly, there is nothing numinous in this movement; the sounds we hear are ultimately human, and their humanness is sublime.

While the listener, at certain moments, is also ready to abandon individuality, dissolving it in a collective emotion, there is an essential difference between the two kinds of dissolving, effectively expressed in Ecclesiastes 7:2–4:

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<sup>1</sup> The smooth melodic line of the opening theme is in fact formed by the unnaturally broken lines of each instrument. This has a special expressive meaning and will be discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, Edward Garden suggests 'Requiem aeternam' (*Tchaikovsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 137); Roland J. Wiley suggests the text from the sixth ode 'Gde mirskoe pristras[tié?] ... Gde privremennykh mechtanie?' ('Where are the passions of this earth? Where are the dreamings of the moment?') (*Tchaikovsky*, 429–30); Natalia Seregina and Arkady Klimovitsky point to the troparia of the Beatitudes, the first tone of the Znamenny Chant, where cantillations of the words 'snediyu' (foods) and 'krestom zhe' (by the Cross) are used as possible melodic archetypes of this theme (Klimovitsky, 'Zametki', 129, n. 14).

<sup>3</sup> Known today as the Kübler–Ross model, or more commonly as The Five Stages of Grief, it comprises denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The model has since been expanded.

2. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.
3. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.
4. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

What perhaps contributes to the choral sound of the piece is a certain similarity between the outline of its first theme and the closing chorus from Bach's *St Matthew Passion* (Examples 11.1 and 11.2).

Despite their triple metre, the themes of both Bach and Tchaikovsky strongly allude to a procession, a slow and funereal procession. The mourning character of the Finale is enhanced especially by the consolatory sound of its second theme, in relative major, very much like middle sections of classical funeral march. Moreover, the very kinesis of the second theme – with its phrases rotating canonically in different orchestral groups, supported by an ascending chromatic bass line, as if the masses are in constant procession to the same shrine to pay tribute to their hero – adds to the allusion of a slow and mass cortege. This generic hybridization perhaps influenced scholars to perceive Tchaikovsky's first attempt to draft the Finale in a funeral march metre.<sup>4</sup> The saraband generic base, suggested by Klimovitsky, might be one of its possible elements, considering the  $f\sharp$  flutes' and bassoons' syncopated calls in bars 2 and 4.<sup>5</sup>

There are no new topics in the Finale, but a reinstatement of the main images from the first movement that emblemize the *Sixth*. The first theme of the Finale, although known and remembered for itself,<sup>6</sup> is inseparable from the shockingly unexpected beginning of the movement: it instantly reveals some tragic image of the naked wounded soul, and with totally cinematic palpability. The smooth melodic line of the theme is deceptive and in fact veils the painfully broken lines that, like a bunch of thorns, indistinguishably constitute it by the peaks of their fractures. (Given the late nineteenth-century gliding performance on string

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<sup>4</sup> The earlier notion that the composer initially intended to write this movement in  $\frac{4}{4}$  metre but abandoned the idea in order to avoid too straightforward an association to a funeral march has been proven to be erroneous by close textological analysis. The sketch is attributed now to the piece for cello and orchestra. (See: Galina Pribegina, 'O rabote P.I. Chaikovskogo nad Shestoy simfoniey: Po materialam rukopisey'. In *Iz istorii russkoy i sovetskoy muzyki*. Vol. 2 (Moscow: Moscow State Conservatory/Muzyka, 1976), 118; see also *ADF*, 109.)

<sup>5</sup> Klimovitsky, 'Zametki', 123.

<sup>6</sup> One can suggest a certain influence of the *Pathétique's* popularity behind the emergence of such a popular cultural phenomenon as the 'Adagio by Albinoni.' On the other hand, if Remo Giazotto had indeed used some of Albinoni's 'thematic ideas' as a basis, these ideas inscribe well into the Renaissance–Baroque rhetoric that served Tchaikovsky as a powerful creative incentive for this Finale.

Example 11.1 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (Finale, first theme, bars 1–12)

Adagio lamentoso ( $\text{♩} = 54$ )

Fl. 1-3  $a^3$  *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Ob. 1-2

Cl. (A) 1-2

Bsn. 1-2  $a^2$  *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

I *f* *mf* *p* *f* *mf* *p*

Violin II *f* *mf* *p* *f* *mf* *p*

Viola *f* *mf* *p* *f* *mf* *p*

Vcl. *f* *mf* *p* *f* *mf* *p*

D.B. div. *p*

6 *affrettando* *mp* *mf* *cresc.* **A** *ff* *rall.*

Fl. 1-3 *mp* *mf* *cresc.* *ff*

Ob. 1-2 *f* *ff*

Cl. (A) 1-2 *mf* *cresc.* *ff*

Bsn. 1-2 *mp* *mf* *cresc.* *ff*

I *mp* *mf* *cresc.* *ff*

Violin II *mp* *mf* *cresc.* *ff*

Viola *mp* *mf* *cresc.* *ff*

Vcl. *mp* *mf* *cresc.* *ff*

D.B. I *affrettando* *mp* *mf* *cresc.* *ff*

Example 11.2 *St Matthew Passion*, by Bach ('Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder')

instruments, this crossing of the parts sounded with even more open expression of heart-rending sobbing than today.) This is a sister theme to the compassion-core-climax theme from the first movement, bringing the listener back to an agonizing realization of the irreversibility of the moment. Stated and reinstated in its conclusive role, it becomes an emblem not only of the Finale but also of the whole symphony.

Surprising, as it may seem, this first theme was not the first to be written when Tchaikovsky began to work on the Finale. The first he wrote was the second theme, in D major – a sister to the love theme from the first movement (Example 11.3).

Similar in character, though much shorter, like everything in the Finale, this theme melodically complements its prototype: its main motif *d d c# b a* seems to fill the only melodic gap remaining in the love theme from the first movement.

It must have been something very special and important that led Tchaikovsky to start writing the Finale with this theme. Now is perhaps the time to connect its three aspects: first, the above-mentioned vocal nature; second, its highest (and finalizing) position among the love-stating images; and, third, its rhythmic suitability to Christ's key phrase, so beloved by Tchaikovsky (Matthew 11:28): 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened ...'

Notably, not only the Russian 'Придите ко мне все труждающиеся и обремененные ...' (Придите ко мне все труждающиеся и обремененные), but also, and even better, the French 'Venez à moi vous tous qui êtes fatigués et chargés, et je vous soulagerai. ...' almost perfectly fit the musical phrase. This is no wonder considering that these words could be imprinted in Tchaikovsky's mind for a long time through reading Renan's *Vie de Jésus* where they are so expressively quoted in the dramatic Chapter XIX (mentioned above in connection with the third movement of the symphony). French wording<sup>8</sup> could be also important for the

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Anatole Leikin for this notion.

<sup>8</sup> Renan quoted Gospel from the classic French translation by David Martin, the same as Tchaikovsky had in his library (Basel, 1736), see Zakharova, 'Chaikovsky chitaet bibliyu', 22).

Example 11.3 Symphony no. 6, by Tchaikovsky (Finale, second theme, bars 37–46)

37 **Andante** (♩=76) **C**

Cl. (A) 1-2 *pp* *con espressione*

Bsn. 1-2 *pp* *con espressione*

Hn. (F) 1-2 *pp*

I *pp* *con lenezza e devozione*

Violin II *pp* *con lenezza e devozione*

Viola *pp* *con lenezza e devozione*

Cello *pp*

Contrabass *pp*

42 **poco animando** **ritenuto**

Cl. (A) 1-2 *cresc.* *a<sup>2</sup>* *mf*

Bsn. 1-2 *cresc.* *a<sup>2</sup>* *mf*

Hn. (F) 1-4 *cresc.* *mf* *p*

I *cresc.* *mf*

Violin II *cresc.* *mf*

Viola *cresc.* *mf*

Vc. *cresc.* *mf*

Cb. *cresc.* *mf*



ecumenical meaning of the music itself, as well as for Tchaikovsky's desire to be understood by the international community whose lingua franca at the time was French (Example 11.4). Considering Tchaikovsky's many years of passionate longing to set these words to music, it is quite plausible that he was referring to them when composing this theme.<sup>9</sup>

Example 11.4 Finale, the second theme with the supposed inspiring text in Russian and French

Pri - di - te ko Mne... truzh - da - yu - shchi(e) -  
 Ve - nez à mo - i vous tous qui ê -  
 sya i o - bre - me - nen - ny - e  
 tes fa - ti - gués et char - gés.

Returning to the first theme, its vocality suggests that some phrase of crucial importance could exist here too, and had perhaps inspired the composer.<sup>10</sup> There are, for example, certain words that appear in both the first part of the Russian liturgy 'Glory to the Father ...' and in the Paschal (Easter) Resurrection service: 'smertiyu smert' poprav'.<sup>11</sup> The whole phrase reads:

<sup>9</sup> In the names of all those who have tried to find the suitable words, the possibly sceptical attitude to these attempts can be set at rest if we remember the origin of *ricercar* (the literal meaning of this Italian word is to search out). The *ricercar* emerged as a game of decoding the liturgical lines behind the musical subject, while the predecessor of *ricercar* – *motet* – had these lines written above the score.

<sup>10</sup> It is fair to note that neither of these themes has the slurring suitable to the words we suggest here, though the existing slurring and accent marks do imitate vocal pronunciation and, moreover, vary in the different statements of both themes.

<sup>11</sup> Father Mikhail Fortunato, who also suggests that this symphony has a devotional meaning (though his suggestion is different from my hypothesis), sees these words as key words but relates them to the march theme from the third movement. Irina Lozovaya (ed.) *Hymnology. Papers of [a] Musicological Congress, 'Rev. Dimitry Razumovsky's ad memoriam' (on the occasion of the 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Moscow Conservatory) September 3–8, 1996*, 2 vols (Moscow, Moscow State Conservatory / Kompozitor Publishing House, 2000) (quoted in Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, 423.) These words seem to be so meaningful for Tchaikovsky that Wiley convincingly suggests them as motto of the Fifth Symphony (*ibid.*, 331).

Христос воскрес из  
мертвых, **смертию смерть  
поправ** и сущим во гробех  
живот даровав.

Khristos voskres iz  
mertvykh, **smertiyu  
smert' poprav** i  
sushchim vo grobekh  
zhivot darovav.

Christ is risen from the  
dead, **trampling down  
death by death** [or in  
another translation 'by  
**death He conquered  
death**'] and upon those in  
the tombs bestowing life!

The words constitute a formula of immortality, merited by a hero who sacrifices himself for the salvation of others. In the Orthodox liturgy, the phrase is traditionally distinguished in music by its expressiveness (relative to its stylistic context). Compare the piece still popular in Tchaikovsky's time, from the eighteenth-century liturgy by Maxim Berezovsky (early 1760s), and Tchaikovsky's own Liturgy (1878) (Examples 11.5 and 11.6).

Example 11.5 Liturgy, by Maxim Berezovsky ('Slava Ottsu', bars 55–63)

Soprano  
Alto

pp f

рас - пный - ся же, Хри - сте Бо - же. Смер - ти - ю смерть по - пра - вный,  
Ras - pnyi - sya zhe, Khry - ste Bo - zhe. Smer - ty - iu smert' po - pra - vyi,

Tenor

pp f

рас - пный - ся же, Хри - сте Бо - же. Смер - ти - ю смерть по - пра - вный,  
Ras - pnyi - sya zhe, Khry - ste Bo - zhe. Smer - ty - iu smert' po - pra - vyi,

Bass

pp f

Example 11.6 Liturgy, by Tchaikovsky ('Slava Ottsu; Edinorodniy Syne', bars 18–23)

Soprano

mf

рас - пный - ся же, Хри - сте Бо - же, смер - ти - ю смерть по - пра - вный  
ras - pnyi - sya zhe, Khry - ste Bo - zhe, smer - ty - iu smert' po - pra - vyi

Alto

mf

рас - пный - ся же, Хри - сте Бо - же, смер - ти - ю смерть по - пра - вный  
ras - pnyi - sya zhe, Khry - ste Bo - zhe, smer - ty - iu smert' po - pra - vyi

Tenor

mf

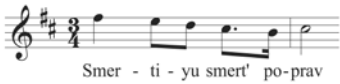
рас - пный - ся же, Хри - сте Бо - же, смер - ти - ю смерть по - пра - вный  
ras - pnyi - sya zhe, Khry - ste Bo - zhe, smer - ty - iu smert' po - pra - vyi

Bass

mf

As we can see, the poetic rhythm of these Russian words (French does not work here) ideally fits the theme of the Finale (Example 11.7).

Example 11.7 Finale, the first theme with supposed inspiring words



Tchaikovsky summarizes the features of the Introduction and the theme of compassion by reinstating the images of the first movement, though they sometimes appear as if through a world of shadows. Descent dominates as a principal melodic element, tensile linearity permeates the texture, and dissonant acerbity defines the harmony. All textures are intensively consolidated, and not a single moment might weaken the listener's concentration.

It seems that it is only during the last five bars of the Finale, when the cellos and basses die down and the pulsation slows and stops, that there are no dissonances (though even one tone in the lowest registers of these instruments sounds dissonant because of overtones). Never in the rest of his works did Tchaikovsky make so much use of non-chord tones that are accented on strong and relatively strong beats. Moreover, when the suspension or passing tone in one voice is resolved, it is immediately, in the same chord of resolution, followed by a similar occurrence in another voice, draining the listeners emotionally with the languor of sweet pain, making them drink from this bitter cup until reaching a state of acceptance and catharsis.

Once, in 1878, Tchaikovsky wrote to Nadezhda von Meck about dissonance:

Dissonance is the greatest power of music: were it not to exist, music would be doomed merely to be the image of eternal bliss, while that which is most dear to us is its ability to express our passions, our pain. Consonant chords are powerless, when one needs to touch, to shake, to thrill; hence dissonance has capital significance, but one has to use it with skill, taste, and artistry.<sup>12</sup>

The density and linear quality of dissonance in harmony of the Finale are close to Bach, but are enhanced by the possibilities of the modern symphonic orchestra and Tchaikovsky's super-expressive style of orchestration. Hence, it is impossible to miss here the reference to Bach's passions and to Baroque Christian rhetoric. Among the most notable of these references are: *heterolepsis* (the intrusion of one

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<sup>12</sup> Диссонанс есть величайшая сила музыки: если б не было его, то музыка обречена была бы только на изображение вечного блаженства, тогда как нам всего дороже в музыке ее способность выражать наши страсти, наши муки. Консонирующие сочетания бессильны, когда нужно тронуть, потрясти, взволновать, и поэтому диссонанс имеет капитальное значение, но нужно пользоваться им с умением, вкусом и искусством. Letter to von Meck, Florence, 30 November–1 December/12–13 December, 1878 (*P.I.–N.F.*, 2: 359).

voice into the range of another, which is a synonym of *metabasis* and *transressio*, denoting voice crossing); *antistaechon* (a substituted dissonance for an expected consonance); *pleonasmus* (a prolongation of passing dissonances through suspensions); *catabasis* (the same as *descendus* – a descending musical passage that expresses descending, lowly, or negative images or affections and is often associated with the words ‘I am greatly humbled’ or ‘He descended into hell’, expressing the ultimate humiliation of Christ).<sup>13</sup>

Tchaikovsky consistently constructs arches with the first movement. Besides the sister themes, there is a climax (bars 75–81) on the approach to recapitulation that obviously corresponds to certain episodes from the development of the first movement and – perhaps in a level of expression – to the preparation for the march theme dynamic reprise (the mocking episode) from the third movement. There are katabatic bassoons, descending the lowest possible register (bars 23–36) through two and a half octaves until barely performable. Their timbre reminds us of the ‘cross-bearing’ phrase of the Introduction, while the falling line refers to the end of the Introduction, in which the violas descend and even end with the similar grouplet figure. Then, there is a chorale (bars 137–46), based on the initial motif of the second theme, but unambiguously perceived as a generic counterpart to the prayer episode ‘So svyatymi upokoi’ from the first wave of the development. If ‘So svyatymi upokoi’ was unclear in its meaning, a kind of question, then this chorale is an answer, sounding against the background of a tam-tam stroke that creates the coldness and darkness (‘stygian gloom’, ‘subterranean silence’)<sup>14</sup> of the underworld. There were even four strokes of tam-tam in the draft – each tam-tam stroke lasting two bars in bars 137–8, 139–40 and 141–2, and the fourth lasting four bars, 143–6 – indicating some important special meaning for Tchaikovsky at the time of composition but later abandoned.

Despite the laconic aspect of the Finale, both themes develop and reveal their great expressive nature. The first theme – basically one of pain – always remains as such. If it changes in agogics, it varies only in its emotional overtones of shock, anger, guilt, humility, mortification or some other feeling of grief. The second theme, in contrast, does change. In the beginning, it flourishes in its solemn beauty. At the very climax, however, when it reaches passionate elation, it bursts into desperate sobs and rolls down into the bitterest anger of the first theme, which returns in recapitulation. When comes its time to return, the second theme does so, but it is hardly recognizable and it returns not as a recapitulation but rather as a coda, a final conclusion. If it was once a ‘Come to Me ...’ or some other symbol of goodness and light, this was an illusion: now it mourns its own irreversibility and faces the chilling truth of loss. It is subjected to B minor and becomes a sister of the first theme, that of pain and grief; or, could it be a distorted ‘Come to Me ...’ image, the last thought in a fading consciousness, the idea for which the suffering end of a person’s life was worthwhile?

<sup>13</sup> Bartel, ‘*Musica Poetica*’.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, 458.

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## Chapter 12

# Afterword

Tchaikovsky's worldview had a strong overtone of idealism. As an artist, he believed in the high ethical mission of arts and he perceived his own mission as a worthy contribution to this. In other words, he measured his activity according to the criterion of a cultural hero. Brought up in the belief that Beethoven's instrumentalism was the highest artistic model of the human ideal in the Age of Reason (which can be linked to Curt Sachs's use of the 'ethos' concept,<sup>1</sup> Tchaikovsky passionately desired to create 'the symphony' that would convey some great humanistic idea – philosophical or ethical. This was his concrete criterion for fulfilling his mission. His fervent desire to conduct Beethoven's *Ninth*, which he realized in 1889,<sup>2</sup> was perhaps his tribute to this ideal and to his own idealism.<sup>3</sup>

His unfinished and abandoned project, the *Life* symphony, reflected the search for his own model of ethos. At some moment, he seemed to realize and accept that he had failed to create a classic symphony of 'self-becoming' model in which he could himself believe. The truth about a hero's life demanded the truth about his death too, with all its human fear, suffering, and agony. He needed a hero for whom he and his public could feel compassion. This was what he desired, strove to achieve and knew how to express in his music.

Renan's famous statement that 'Death adds perfection to the most perfect man; it frees him from all defect in the eye of those who have loved him'<sup>4</sup> was more than familiar to Tchaikovsky. Renan's own death on 2 October 1892 (a month and a half before Tchaikovsky sentenced his *Life* project to oblivion) might have made him reconsider the significance of Renan – himself a cultural hero – and his immense influence both on Tchaikovsky's generation and on the composer himself. What seems to have happened in Tchaikovsky's consciousness – both rational and emotional – was that he reached a deep inner awareness, conviction and belief that he could not force himself to do what his earlier ideals had demanded, the ideals were no longer valid. Rather, as a member of the idealistic 1860s, who found

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<sup>1</sup> Curt Sachs, *The Commonwealth of Art: Style in the Fine Arts, Music and the Dance* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1946).

<sup>2</sup> Arkady Klimovitsky, 'Tchaikovsky's Conducting Marks in the Score of the Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.' In Tamara Skvirskaya et al. (eds) *Tchaikovsky: New Documents and Materials*, 170–90.

<sup>3</sup> In his student years, Tchaikovsky also set Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' (1865) to music. He had been unwilling to compete with Beethoven and only gave in to Anton Rubinstein's pressure.

<sup>4</sup> Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 62.

himself in the disappointing and confusing 1890s, he had to do what his present belief urged him to. Experiencing a genuine spiritual struggle, Tchaikovsky came to understand the changing epochs, and pioneered the new interpretation of the symphony genre. He came to accept the objective value of his innermost belief that tragedy and compassion were what he, as a part of society, most needed. What he required now was a hero of Pathos, with his passion and suffering, and so Pathos finally replaced Ethos in his understanding of his mission.

However, despite changing the emotional axis of the symphony genre, Tchaikovsky was not ready to diminish its socio-cultural significance as a medium to address masses. On the contrary, he was both fully aware of this and needed it for his own 'embrace, millions!' call. In the years preceding the *Sixth*, he studied religious texts closely and could well have been struck by the similarity between these key words of Schiller and the words of the Easter Resurrection service. In the Russian text, brotherhood, forgiveness and embracing one another are mentioned immediately after 'Christ is Risen from the dead: trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life'.

It is thus not purely an Enlightenment notion of common brotherhood, but an ancient one, going back at least to early Christianity. The composer could thus call upon the millions to embrace one another not in the Joy of Ethos but in the Compassion of Pathos. Compassion unites people no less than joy, and probably makes them better people, at least as far as idealistic consciousness is concerned. We should note that the idea of masses of people participating in a Mystery-like Passion Play was in the air in the 1890s. Indeed, when Laroche celebrated finalizing the Bach-Werke complete edition in 1896, he dedicated an article to the growth of Bach's presence in Russian concert practice. In his futuristic dream in the vein of the Russian Silver Age thinkers, Laroche envisioned the *St Matthew Passion* being performed in a Russian village as a grandiose Mystery – perhaps even exceeding the Oberammergau Passion Play, with a choir of 2000 people from all the surrounding villages, and an organ donated by the local mogul (alas, Laroche failed to imagine the bitterness of the real anti-Utopian events that were to happen in these villages only a few decades later).

Were it not for Mendelssohn's performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in 1829, with Bach subsequently becoming a live reality in nineteenth-century musical culture, its 'Fifth Gospel',<sup>5</sup> it is quite possible that some composers would have written Passions. But no one did, using instead peripheral plots, like Mendelssohn (*Paulus*), Berlioz (*L'Enfance du Christ*) or Massenet (*Marie Magdaleine*), or Christ's life story, like Liszt (*Christus*) – in all probability trying to avoid any possible comparison with Bach. Only in the twentieth century, when the common practice idiom changed dramatically, did this comparison become

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<sup>5</sup> This label, with its negative connotation, was coined by a Swedish archbishop Nathan Söderblom (1920) and reflects the annoyance of certain theologians with regard to Bach's emphasis on the human rather than the divine image of Christ. (See Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 112–13).

less threatening. The genre of Passion has become inseparable from J.S. Bach, however, as Krzysztof Penderecki noted by incorporating the B–A–C–H motif in his *St Luke Passion*.

We cannot also exclude the possibility that Mendelssohn's revival of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, with its emotionally powerful presentation of gospel scenes, influenced young David Strauss, a pioneer in the de-consecration of Christ's image, which eventually made Christ the most popular cultural hero of the nineteenth century. Discussing the impact of the *St Matthew Passion* on the most humanistic image of Christ in modern culture, Karol Berger reminds us, quoting Elke Axmacher:

Picander in adapting Müller's sermons chose to diminish the theological content of his models, eliminating all references to God's wrath as the reason for the sacrifice, playing down God's active role in the story, stressing Jesus's humanity over his divinity, and concentrating on the loving, compassionate heart of the individual believer . . . . It is thus thanks to Picander that the Passion participates in the gradual trend away from the Anselmic-Lutheran doctrine of atonement which set in after 1700. Characteristic of this trend is a shift in religious emphasis from God to Jesus, and from punishment to suffering, focusing less now on faith in God's redemptive actions and more on the mutual love between Jesus and humanity. Pietism, with its accent on feeling, mediates the process whereby the God-centered Orthodox vision gradually gives way to the anthropocentric vision of Lutheran Enlightenment.<sup>6</sup>

Tchaikovsky could not have said it better. It is amazing how this notion coincides with his own religious preference. Compare this with his words from the earlier-quoted letter to the Grand Duke (quoted in Chapter 4, p. 29):

in a requiem, a lot is said on *God, the judge, God-punitive, the God-avenger* (!!!). Excuse me, Your Highness, but I will dare to hint, that I don't believe in such a God, or, at least, such a *God* cannot cause in me such tears, such a delight, such reverence for the Creator and source of all the good that would inspire me. With greatest delight I would try, were it possible, to set some of the gospel texts to music. How many times, for example, have I dreamed of musically illustrating Christ's words: 'Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden' and then: 'For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.' How much infinite love and pity for man is felt in these wonderful words! What an infinite poesy in this, one can say, what a *passionate* aspiration to drain the tears of sorrow and alleviate the pain of suffering humanity!

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<sup>6</sup> Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 112 (with reference to Elke Axmacher, 'Aus Liebe will mein Heyland sterben': *Untersuchung zum Wandel des Passionsverständnisses im frühen 18. Jahrhundert*. Beiträge zur theologischen Bachforschung 2 (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler-Verlag, 1984), S. 183–4; 204–17).



What Tchaikovsky found in Bach, if he referred to Bach's Christian rhetoric not merely for its expressive power but also for embodying a programme close to Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, was its clear textual message, fully matching his own idea of Jesus Christ. This makes it thus even more plausible that Bach–Picander's gospel could have been the main model for Tchaikovsky's symphony. Thematic and metrical correspondences between Introduction and the Finale – and Bach's opening and final choruses, can hardly be purely coincidental, as well as the multi-temporality that many feel in this symphony and in the *St Matthew Passion*. Berger writes:

in the Passion, time (or, strictly speaking, the two temporalities of story and storytelling) is nested within the structurally and ontologically more primordial timeless eternity (the temporality of contemplation) embodied, as it happens, in what is musically the work's most substantial layer. Since the contemplators' role is to teach us, the audience, by example, to show us the proper hermeneutic behavior, one of Bach's aims in the Passion is to attenuate the temporal distance between the world of the story and our world. Thus not only the opening chorus but the Passion as a whole is marked by the wish to neutralize time, to render insignificant its relentless flow from past to future. More important still, the story of humanity that is the implied context of Jesus's story possesses the same complex temporality, the same embedding of the linear flow of time within the framework of eternity that we find in Bach's setting. The linear time of human earthly history is not infinite; it had a beginning and will come to an end. 'Before' and 'after' there is God's infinite time, eternity. It is this fundamental structure of irreversible time embedded in eternity, of man's time suspended in God's time, that Bach replicates in the Passion. God's time, the time without irreversibility, is better than human time because it allows permanence.<sup>7</sup>

The universality of compassion as an absolute human value, which I have sought to show in Tchaikovsky's work, reveals some similarity to Picander–Bach's approach:

the last recitative of the Passion 'Habt lebenslang vor euer Leiden tausend Dank, daß ihr mein Seelenheil so wert geacht' (Have lifelong thousand thanks for your suffering, for having considered the salvation of my soul to be worth so much)

and

Our response to Christ's Passion [which] is simultaneously sorrow at His suffering ('Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder') and consolation at our reconciliation with God

bring us to

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<sup>7</sup> Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 13–14.

the words of the final chorus: 'Euer Grab und Leichenstein soll dem ängstlichen Gewissen ein bequemes Ruhekissen ... sein' (Your grave and tombstone shall for the anxious conscience a comfortable pillow prove).<sup>8</sup>

Gratitude for salvation and consolation at reconciliation with God relieve the anxious conscience. Resolving anxiety, as one of Bach's messages, is evident in the emotional dimension of Tchaikovsky's symphony too: while anxiety permeates the first movement and remains unresolved, no traces of it can be found in the Finale.

In his extraordinary multidimensional Mystery, Bach blends the richest possible spectrum of expressive means: he uses multi-temporality and mixes genres, including opera; he retells, almost enacts the story of Christ's Passion and involves its listeners in emotional reaction. As Uri Golomb notes, Bach succeeded to turn the believers into '*dramatis personae* in their own right; in text and music alike, their reactions are often portrayed in more subjective, dramatic terms than those of the story that they narrate and enact'.<sup>9</sup> Is not this similar to Tchaikovsky, who used multi-temporality, mixed genres and applied the richest possible spectrum of expressive means in order to involve the listener in the unfolding drama and to reveal his innermost emotional reactions?

Concealing the programme, whatever the reason, is a benefit to music, audience and the composer. The music, with no programmatic catalyst attached, captivates the public much more powerfully. The listener is free to interact with the music in their fantasies and emotions. And the composer could protect and save his most precious creation from unavoidable depreciation were people to compare his tribute to this Myth of Myths with somebody else's – especially if that somebody was Bach, who was already cultural myth.<sup>10</sup> Escaping to the realm of abstract symphonic music,<sup>11</sup> Tchaikovsky applied all his spiritual and artistic power to the creation of a real Passion-symphony, his music transmitting the insurmountable power of pathopoeia, transmuting both symphony and audience.<sup>12</sup> It is only my

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>9</sup> Uri Golomb, 'Liturgical Drama in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*'. *Goldberg Early Music Magazine* 39 (April 2006), 52. (Also available on <http://tinyurl.com/golomb-smp> (accessed 1 March 2013)).

<sup>10</sup> From Laroche's review of the premiere, one can understand that there came a moment when the public had had enough of programmatic music. He wrote: 'I approached the new symphony with a sympathy formed in advance purely from the fact that it is simply no. 6, and not *The Giaour*, not *Cymbeline*, and not *Purgatory*.' Laroche, 159/Campbell 37. Tchaikovsky could well have felt the same.

<sup>11</sup> This realm was what Schostakovich, Prokofiev and the two following generations of Soviet composers knew better than anybody else, and practised widely.

<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, the Wikipedia article on concert etiquette contains three mentions of the *Pathétique*. Although the contexts vary, this indicates the symphony's special role in forming the atmosphere of reverence at symphonic concerts.

conviction that revealing the hidden programme (through the hypothesis offered here or indeed any other) cannot harm this masterpiece that has allowed me to share it with others.

If my hypothesis is true, Tchaikovsky, like a truly skilled conspirator, placed the key to his secret casket in the most visible place – in the title itself. Choosing the word *Pathétique* – even with all his reverence for Beethoven – he should have realized that such a title might appear to many to be a plagiarism caused by lack of imagination, or an undesirable confrontation with Beethoven's famous sonata. There had to have been a very strong reason for Tchaikovsky to decide on this title despite all the reservations.<sup>13</sup> In Russian *strasti* (*страсти*, passions) and *stradania* (*страдания*, sufferings) are synonyms only when associated with Christ, verbalizing in two different words the main meaning of *passionis* as both passion and suffering. Well educated and well read, the composer would certainly have known that *Pathétique* derives from Greek *páthos*<sup>14</sup> – subject to feeling, impassioned, as well as from Latin *passion* – suffering.

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<sup>13</sup> As Polina Vaydman proves, it was not his brother Modest who suggested the title, but Peter Tchaikovsky himself, and the title *Pathétique* existed from the period of orchestration (July–August 1893). See *ADF*, 20–21.

<sup>14</sup> John Warrak noted the etymological connection between the words, though he associated it with only one of its meanings – suffering, and ascribed it to Tchaikovsky's subjective tragedy of emotional suffering (*Tchaikovsky*, 269).

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