

A Critical Re-Evaluation of Taneyev's *Oresteia*

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
School of Music

May 2009

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been written had it not been for two people—Professor Heath Lees and Martin Anderson. Heath Lees, a now retired professor at the University of Auckland, supervised my Honours dissertation on Vasily Kalinnikov with a gentle, almost unnoticeable guidance and unending support. His extreme professionalism and ability to convey a genuine passion for music inspired my decision to become a musicologist, and he also instilled in me a passion and love for Wagner’s music. To him I am thankful for reading my final drafts and giving me useful advice and constructive criticism. To Martin Anderson I am grateful for suggesting in 2003 that I should write a thesis about Taneyev, an idea I liked immediately. Without him, this thesis most certainly would have been about a different composer.

I would like to thank Professor David Fanning, who selflessly gave his time and invaluable practical advice along with moral support whenever it was most needed. Every paper given by him inspired and encouraged me to continue my research in the hope that one day I might know even a small part of what he knows about music. Professor Michael Ewans provided invaluable insight into Greek drama, Aeschylus, and read my drafts, offering helpful and constructive criticism. I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Stephen Muir for reading my preliminary drafts, scrutinising the final version of my thesis, and providing helpful comments and encouragement, and my second supervisor Professor Clive Brown for his comments on my writing. Dr. Clive McClelland kindly offered his help and expert advice when it was needed. I am extremely grateful to George Kennaway, who literally saved me from making a great mistake at the very end of my writing-up period by offering one piece of advice that proved to be indispensable, and for proof-reading a draft of one of the chapters of this thesis. Dr. George Rodosthenous offered practical advice and encouragement in the two months leading up to my submission date.

Without the help of the people in the Russian archives in Moscow—GDMTch, RGALI, GTsMMK—I would not have been able to conduct my research with the same results. I would like to express my utmost gratitude to Polina Yefimovna and Ada Vaidman who made any materials I wanted to see at the Tchaikovsky archive in Klin available immediately, and for subsequently sending me sources that I did not see at the time. Yelena Fetisova kindly showed me a number of interesting documents in the Glinka Museum, and the staff of the Taneyev Library in the Moscow Conservatory facilitated a day of fruitful research there. In the UK, the staff at the British Library and Leeds University Brotherton Library were always helpful, friendly, and reliable.

I must thank Nektarios Rodosthenous, who gave much of his time to create musical examples for my dissertation, and for always making sure that I had a plan to follow, and achieved all my deadlines. Martin Pickard graciously helped with German translations, played through the vocal score of *Oresteia* with me, giving a multitude of valuable insights and suggestions, and commented on my writing. Yelena and Valery Kiselyov translated German articles and book chapters for me whenever the need arose. Grigory Moiseyev, Lidia Ader, Sergey Sokurenko, Lyudmila Kovnatskaya, and Leonid Tumarinson all provided enormous help with finding and sending Russian books, articles, and other sources that I needed in order to continue my research. I must also thank Mani Malagón for reading the entire draft

of the thesis and helping me shape its various parts and sharpen my critical viewpoints.

I would like to express my gratitude to my “second family”—Professor Paul Garner and Louise Gibbs, for taking me into their home and providing me with a comfortable place to live and work in while I was writing my PhD. My friend Dr. Nir Arielli always made sure that I knew where I was with my research and writing up, and read and commented on various parts of my thesis. His support was invaluable in the final stages of my writing-up. Vania Celebivic was a constant support during the times when my work was not going well, and shared all my difficulties by always being there when I needed someone to talk to. I am also grateful to Kerry-Anne Kubisa and Sue Miller for always being supportive of my work and for offering wonderful respite from my writing-up by playing piano and flute duets with me. My mother Lyudmila and sister Marianna waited patiently for the completion of this thesis, which would allow me to finally return to New Zealand and see them after a parting of more than six years. I am also indebted to David Braithwaite for his help during my research and for his guidance in all things surrounding it.

I am grateful to the Leeds University School of Music for giving me a number of conference grants and a grant towards my research trip to Moscow. The following awarding bodies also offered financial support: Edmissions UK and the Royal Music Association for archival research in Russia; BfWG Main Foundation Grant for the academic year 2007-08; and the Brotherton Foundation Scholarship for research in the British Library and the Brotherton Library Special Collections. In my writing-up year I was given my own private study room, which proved to be truly the best gift offered by the University of Leeds Brotherton Library. It has become my academic abode, where I have spent almost every day of the past year, and where I wrote almost every word of this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank posthumously my father Aleksandr Belin, who told me shortly before he died that I must not fear anything in this life. To him I am eternally grateful for giving me the gift of believing in myself, and to him I dedicate this thesis.

Abstract

The musical trilogy *Oresteia* (1894, revised 1900), written by Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev (1856-1915) after the eponymous drama by Aeschylus, is a unique work, one of the masterpieces of Russian opera, which continues to stand alone in the Russian operatic repertoire of the nineteenth century, and even the entire Russian operatic output. No other composer in Russia completed an opera of this kind based on a Greek drama, and in Europe, only Berlioz's *Les Troyens* could be compared to *Oresteia* in scope. At a time when Russian composers based their operas predominantly on Russian sources—literary, folk, or historical—Taneyev's choice of an antique tragedy immediately placed him outside the 'nationalist' genre explored by his colleagues.

Oresteia is an opera very rarely performed, and this thesis sheds light on the possible reasons why it did not become more successful on the stage. These include the classical subject, lack of local colour in the music, absence of love element, and unsympathetic first revival. But while in 1895 *Oresteia* was criticised for not bowing to nationalist demands, in 1917 such an approach was considered to be one of the opera's strongest points.

This thesis is based on examination of primary and secondary sources such as letters, diaries, manuscripts, the score, and the 1976 recording of *Oresteia* by the Belorussian State Theatre of Opera and Ballet. A number of archival materials relating to Taneyev's opera are here published for the first time, such as the correspondence between Taneyev and his librettist Aleksey Venkstern, which has been neglected for over a century. The study of these materials addresses several issues pertaining to the opera's composition, production, stage history and reception that have not been investigated before, such as Taneyev's interest in Wagner, and Taneyev's collaboration with the Russian Imperial Theatres. Taneyev's diaries show that, although he has often been viewed as a staunch anti-Wagnerian, his interest in that composer was extensive and serious, as demonstrated by the presence of Wagnerian influences in *Oresteia*. The link between Taneyev and Wagner contributes to a greater understanding of Wagner's reception in nineteenth-century Russia.

Finally, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the workings of Russian Imperial Theatres and their treatment of Russian composers. It also offers new insights into the critical reception of operas that did not fit into the desirable and popular 'nationalistic' category. The history of the reception of *Oresteia* reveals the changing tastes of both public and critics from the end of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth centuries.

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Notes on the Text

Dates

All dates in this thesis before 1 February 1918 are given according to the Old Style (Julian) calendar. All other dates are given according to the New Style (Gregorian) calendar. All attempts have been made to find the birth and death dates of musicians, singers, composers, and other relevant persons listed in this thesis. In cases where dates are unavailable, they appear as: (dates unknown), and when only one date has been obtained, it appears as (?-1942), or (1942-?). In some cases the birth and death dates of persons referred to in the thesis were omitted because they can be obtained easily from widely available sources such as music dictionaries or online publications.

Translations

All translations from Russian are by the author of this thesis unless stated otherwise. Russian language does not have a definite article, therefore the title of Taneyev's opera appears as *Oresteia*, but Aeschylus's work will be referred to as *The Oresteia*. Richard Taruskin transliterates the title as *Oresteya*, which appears in all his references in this format.

The following Russian periodicals have been used in this dissertation, and will be referred to by their first, Russian titles, only:

Birzheviye vedomosti [Exchange Gazette]
Den' [Day]
Grazhdanin [Citizen]
Izvestiya [News]
Muzika [Music]
Novosti dnya [Daily News]
Novoye vremya [New Age]
Novosti [News]
Novaya zhizn' [New Life]
Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta [News and Exchange Gazette]
Peterburgskiy vedomosti [St. Petersburg Gazette]
Peterburgskaya gazeta [St. Petersburg Newspaper]
Pravda [Truth]
Peterburgskiy listok [St. Petersburg Pages]
Russkiye vedomosti [Russian Gazette]
Russkaya muzikal'naya gazeta (RMG) [Russian Musical Gazette]
Russkaya mysl' [Russian Thought]
Russkoye obozreniye [Russian Survey]
Rus' [Russia]
Rech' [Speech]
Ranneye utro [Early Morning]
Russkoye slovo [Russian Word]
Sovetskaya kul'tura [Soviet Culture]
Sovetskaya muzika [Soviet Music]

Sin otechestva [Son of the Fatherland]

Svet [Light]

Teatr [Theatre]

Teatr i muzika [Theatre and Music]

Vechernyaya Moskva [Evening Moscow]

Belorussian periodical below will also be referred to in the text by its original title:

Litaratura i mastatstva [Literature and Arts]

Transliteration

The transliteration system adopted in this thesis is based on the system used in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 1980, vol.1, xvi-xviii), with some alterations. In all endings of Russian names, English letter *y* replaces Russian sound *й*, but in all other words it appears as *iy*. Russian *ѐ* is represented by English *yo*. In all other cases, *y* stand for Russian *ѣ*. The symbol *ř* replaces Russian sound *ь*, and diacritics are used for Russian *ъ* (but not for *ы*), which makes all preceding consonants softer. Only where there is a more commonly established spelling exists, such as Mariinsky, Tchaikovsky, Goldenweiser, and Chaliapin, exceptions have been made to the rules. All titles and names in footnotes and bibliography are given exactly as they appear in the original publications and/or language.

Musical Examples

Musical examples used in this thesis are a combination of scanned, Sibelius-produced, and photographed archival copies. All scanned examples are taken from: Sergey Taneyev, *Oresteia: muzikal'naya trilogiya* [*Oresteia: Musical trilogy*] (Leipzig: M. Belyaev, 1900), and its reprint (Moscow: Muzika, 1970). Archival copies are taken from the lithograph edition: Sergey Taneyev, *Oresteia*, (St. Petersburg: I. N. Kushnerev, 1894), kept at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg (M 4/581-44727). The full score of the opera was available for use only in re-printed version by Elibron, whose scanned pages of the music are not always perfectly straight. Therefore, some of the pages in Appendix C, which is a scanned version of the *Entr'acte* to Act 3, scene 23, appear as they do in the score.

Abbreviations Used

<i>Materiali</i> 1925	<i>Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev: lichnost', tvorvhestvo i dokumenti ego zhizni: k 10-ti letiyu so dnya ego smerti</i> [Taneyev: Personality, Works and Documentation of his Life: Ten Years Since His Death], ed. by Konstantin Kuznetsov (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzsektor, 1925).
<i>Materiali</i> 1947	<i>Pamyati Sergeya Ivanovicha Taneyeva 1856-1946: sbornik statey i materialov k 90-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya</i> [In Memory of Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev 1856-1946: A Collection of Articles and Materials for the Ninetieth Anniversary of His Birth], ed. by Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1947).
<i>Materiali</i> 1952	<i>S. I. Taneyev: materialy i dokumenty</i> [Materials and Documents], ed. by Vasily Kiselyov, Tamara Livanova, and Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952).
<i>Pis'ma</i>	<i>P. I. Chaykovsky, S. I. Taneyev: pis'ma</i> [P. I. Tchaikovsky, S. I. Taneyev: Letters], ed. by Vladimir Zhdanov (Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951).
<i>Dnevniki</i>	<i>S. Taneyev: dnevniki</i> [Diaries], ed. by Lyudmila Korabel'nikova (Moscow: Muzika, 1985), 3 volumes.
ed. khr.	edinitsa khraneniya.
GTsMMK	Gosudarstvenniy tsentral'niy muzey muzikal'noy kul'tury im. Glinki [Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture, Moscow].
RGALI	Rossiyskiy gosudarstvenniy arkhiv literatury i iskusstva [Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow].
GDMTch	Gosudarstvenniy dom muzey Chaykovskogo ¹ [Tchaikovsky State House Museum, Klin].

¹ Here, 'Tch' has been kept as the commonly used abbreviation in order to avoid any possible confusion.

Preface

The aim of this thesis is a critical re-evaluation of the Russian nineteenth-century opera *Oresteia* (1894) by Sergey Taneyev (1856-1915). After graduating from the Moscow Conservatory in 1875, Taneyev remained there until 1905 as a teacher, and held the post of Director between 1885 and 1889. Taneyev's importance in Russia has been acknowledged by his students, contemporaries, and later generations of musicologists, while in the West his name and most of his works until very recently remained largely unknown. Even scholars of Russian music most often referred to Taneyev in connection with Tchaikovsky, his teacher and later close friend, and no one has produced an extensive study about Taneyev or his works. But since 2000 the recordings of Taneyev's more substantial compositions were released, and his name slowly began to appear in concert programmes. And in 2007 Naxos embarked on a project that eventually aims to record Taneyev's complete output.

This dissertation was commenced at the very outset of Taneyev's discovery in the West, which is still in its initial stages. Its originality lies in the fact that, to the best of available knowledge, it is the first large-scope study of Taneyev's *Oresteia* in any language, which examines its complete history. For the first time, all the materials relating to the opera's history of composition, content, stage productions, and critical reception are presented in one volume. This work contributes to knowledge in a number of areas of Russian nineteenth-century opera, and illuminates Taneyev's activities as a Moscow composer, music scholar, and pedagogue.

Chapter One presents a brief portrait of Taneyev as a man, composer, pianist, and teacher, and introduces the literature and sources, relating to his *Oresteia*, which consist of mostly Russian and a small number of English and

German publications. The survey of the existing literature suggests that the amount of writing about Taneyev does not correspond to his standing as an important figure in nineteenth-century Russian music. One of his most important works, *Oresteia* has attracted little interest or research largely due, it seems, to a number of negative and subjective critical reviews published after its première in 1895.

Chapter Two offers analysis of all available information about the composition of *Oresteia* in Taneyev's letters, diaries, and contemporary writings. The examination of these sources draws attention to the possibility that Taneyev carried out his plan to write the opera over a much longer period of time than has been usually thought. A thorough study of archival materials and primary sources was necessary to present a full history of the opera's genesis, from the first ideas to the last revisions made by the composer in 1900. A small but nevertheless important collection of letters to Taneyev from his librettist Aleksey Venkstern, which seems to have been either unnoticed or ignored by Taneyev scholars, helps to illuminate the process of the opera's creation further. These unpublished letters are made available in print here for the first time in any language.² Chapter Two also covers another important aspect of Taneyev's biography that has been largely ignored—his interest in Wagner.

Chapter Three is a detailed comparison of the libretto and the original *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus. Although Taneyev enlisted the help of a librettist, his letters and diary entries show that he contributed greatly to the creation of the text. In the course of this chapter all the changes to the text and storyline made by Taneyev and Venkstern are examined within the cultural and historical context of nineteenth-century Russia. Overall, this chapter is a reflection on the dramaturgical imperatives

² All existing letters are given in full in English translation in Appendix B.

that shaped the operatic libretto, supported by selected musical examples that show how the music articulated the impetus of the drama.

Chapter Four continues with the exploration of music and text through the examination of musical motifs. Although Russian and Soviet musicologist Boris Asaf'yev [pen-name Igor' Glebov] counted forty-six leitmotifs in *Oresteia*, thirty-nine of them cannot be accepted for such, and this chapter focuses on seven true reminiscence and anticipation motifs. The course of motivic examination shows that like Wagner, Taneyev viewed leading motifs predominantly as building blocks of musical material, as well as tools of musico-dramatic recollection. The origins of one of the most salient elements of Taneyev's compositional language—thematic derivation—can be found in his earliest works, and *Oresteia* is as a good example of how Taneyev achieved organic growth of musical material with the help of a modest store of melodic resources. Although the music forms a large part of the discourse in this chapter, it is not intended to constitute a detailed musical analysis of the opera.

Chapter Five provides an extensive overview of *Oresteia*'s stage history. It covers the process of preparation of the opera for production, paying particular attention to the conflict between Taneyev and the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres concerning the length of the work, which eventually resulted in its removal from the repertoire. This discussion highlights the position of a Russian composer within the Imperial Theatres and the problems associated with finding suitable singers, despite substantial support from the treasury. Extensive use is made here of primary sources such as the correspondence between Taneyev and the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres, as well as published documents relating to this part of the opera's history.

Chapter Six deals with the critical reception of *Oresteia*, mostly concentrating on its post-première reviews. The reviews published in Russian

periodicals and magazines provide first-hand accounts of the opera's performances and further highlight problems and limitations faced by Russian composers whose works were also being staged at that time. An examination of the critical comments made after subsequent revivals of *Oresteia* shows the changing course of the opera's reception and the evolving taste of Russian and Soviet opera-going public.

Finally, a summary of the findings and issues put forth in the thesis points out other aspects of the opera that need further analysis and study, and to which this work began to contribute. Some of these are a thorough examination and comparison of the two existing editions of *Oresteia*, and the differences in their instrumentation; a separate comprehensive treatment of the opera's music and its harmonic language; the consideration of the state of music criticism in Russia in the nineteenth century; and the issues surrounding operatic reception in Taneyev's Russia at the turn of the twentieth century.

Most of the research materials consulted during the research for this thesis fall into three main categories. The first consists of primary sources such as Taneyev's diary entries and letters to his colleagues, family, and friends, in which he discussed his work on the opera. Letters from people directly and indirectly involved with or linked to the composition and production of the opera have also been studied. Examination of these materials helps to address several issues pertaining to the opera's composition, production, stage history and reception that have not been dealt with before. Published accounts such as monographs, biographies, concert reviews, and studies of Taneyev's music constitute the second category, while the third includes manuscripts, sketches of the libretto and music, and the published vocal and orchestral scores. While it has been possible to find many of the published sources in the UK or European libraries, an extended trip to Moscow in 2006 was necessary in order to examine certain archival documents.

Most of Taneyev's documents and manuscripts are held in the GDMTch archive in Klin, while a small portion is divided between GTsMMK and RGALI. The Moscow Conservatory library holds all of Taneyev's books and scores.

Chapter One

Taneyev and *Oresteia* in Musicology

Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev (1856-1915) was a stalwart of Russian music. An accomplished pianist, theorist, composer, and pedagogue, he is still considered a pillar of Russian music education. The circle of Taneyev's close friends, colleagues, and acquaintances included the brothers Pyotr and Modest Tchaikovsky, Hermann Laroche, Anton Arensky, the brothers Nikolay and Anton Rubinstein, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, Aleksandr Glazunov, Lev Tolstoy and his family, Pyotr Boborikin, Ivan Turgenev, Nikolay Zhilyaev, Camille Saint-Saëns, Gabriel Fauré, César Franck, Henri Duparc, the Viardot family, Emile Zola, and many other well-known Russian and European musicians, conductors, composers, performers, artists, philosophers, and writers.

Taneyev's students included Scriabin, Medtner, Glière, Rachmaninov, émigré music critic Leonid Sabaneyev, the prominent pianist Aleksandr Goldenweiser—a founder of Central Music School in Moscow—and many other excellent musicians. Despite never being wealthy, Taneyev refused to take payment from his private students; it made no difference if they came from a well-to-do or poor family. Because the lessons were not a source of income, it enabled Taneyev to hand pick students based on their musical abilities, and not the size of their fortunes.¹ Taneyev is perhaps one of the very few Russian composers who could lay claim to being a complete teetotaller and non-smoker. He made Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Arensky, and Nikolay Rubinstein smoke through a chimney in his kitchen, next to

¹ For Taneyev's career as a pedagogue, see Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, *S. I. Taneyev v moskovskoy konservatorii* [Taneyev in the Moscow Conservatory] (Moscow: Muzika, 1974).

which he placed a sign about dangers of smoking.² If Tchaikovsky happened to walk in while Taneyev was teaching one of his private students, he was unceremoniously asked to leave the room and wait outside.³ Taneyev addressed everyone—children, adults, and even animals—in the same formal manner, using the Russian *Вы*, the equivalent of the French *Vous*. He was always brutally honest and never withheld his opinion, thus inspiring Rachmaninov to name him ‘the musical conscience of Moscow’.⁴

Being a favourite pupil of Tchaikovsky, Taneyev spent most of his life in close contact with the composer, becoming not only one of his closest friends, but also one of the very few people to be allowed to criticise his works.⁵ So great was Tchaikovsky’s trust in his pupil’s opinion, that he destroyed a score of his early opera *Voyevoda* because Taneyev did not think it good enough. Fortunately, despite Taneyev’s criticism, which he regretted later, the score was restored later from the orchestral parts.

Even before reaching ten years of age, Taneyev entered the newly opened Moscow Conservatory in 1866 to study composition under Tchaikovsky and piano performance under Nikolay Rubinstein. Rubinstein immediately decided that Taneyev would grow to be ‘an excellent pianist and a great composer.’⁶ After only a few years, while still a student at the Conservatory, Taneyev became known as one of the best performers of his generation. He made his professional debut in 1874 performing works by Liszt and Chopin, and a year later gave the Russian premiere of

² Leonid Sabaneyev, *Vospominaniya o Taneyeve* [Reminiscences About Taneyev] (Moscow: Klassika - XXI, 2003), p. 66.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 61. Sabaneyev was Taneyev’s private pupil, and his accounts of Taneyev’s at home and his interaction with friends and colleagues paint a bold, interesting portrait of the composer.

⁴ Svetlana Savenko, *Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev* (Moscow: Muzika, 1984), p. 166.

⁵ Letters between Taneyev and Tchaikovsky document Taneyev’s criticisms of and suggestions for a number of Tchaikovsky’s works, including the famous remark about ‘ballet music’ in Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony. *P. I. Chaykovsky, S. I. Taneyev: pis'ma* [P. I. Tchaikovsky, S. I. Taneyev: Letters], ed. by Vladimir Zhdanov (Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951), letter dated 18 March 1878, p. 32.

⁶ Savenko, p. 20.

Brahms's Piano Concerto in D Minor with brilliant success. When Nikolay Rubinstein refused to learn Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, calling it 'unplayable', it was premiered in St. Petersburg by Gustav Kross. Tchaikovsky, unhappy with Kross's performance, entrusted Taneyev with the Moscow premiere of the work, after which Taneyev premiered all Tchaikovsky's pieces for solo piano and orchestra and chamber works with piano.

After graduating from the Conservatory with the highest distinction—two gold medals in performance and composition—Taneyev was asked to replace Tchaikovsky, who no longer needed to teach for his living because he was supported financially by his long-term benefactress Nadezhda von Meck (1831-1894). In 1881, after the death of Nikolay Rubinstein, Taneyev took over his piano class, and from 1885 to 1889 held the post of the Director of the Conservatory, single-handedly rescuing it from ever-threatening financial collapse, establishing a higher level of entrance requirements, and making it easier for poor but talented Russian students to study there. He incorporated more Russian music into the performance syllabus and introduced the new works of his contemporaries and former students in harmony and analysis classes.

Taneyev's influence on Russian composers is far-reaching. He recognised musical talent in the young Prokofiev, and recommended that his parents hire Glière (then his student at the Conservatory) as a teacher of music theory and composition. Another one of Taneyev's students, Nikolay Zhilyaev (1881-1938), became a respected teacher at the Moscow Conservatory and taught such composers as Vissarion Shebalin (1902-1963), Aram Khachaturyan (1903-1978), Il'ya Ginzburg (b. 1930), and Dmitry Kabalevsky (1904-1987). Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), in his conversations with Robert Craft, said that he valued Taneyev's treatise on

counterpoint as ‘one the best books of its kind’ and ‘respected him as a composer for certain passages in his opera *Oresteia*, and admired him greatly as a pianist.’⁷ Taneyev’s influences are heard in the harmonic language of Scriabin’s early piano pieces, in the complex contrapuntal textures of piano concertos by Glazunov and Medtner, in well-crafted chamber compositions of Shebalin, and in revolutionary string quartets of Shostakovich.

Taneyev’s creative output was prodigious, especially considering his demanding commitments as a teacher and Director. He wrote in almost every genre, but is best remembered in the West as a composer of symphonies and chamber music. For a virtuoso pianist it would be only natural to showcase his own works, like Chopin, Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, Scriabin, Rachmaninov, and Medtner did, before and after him. Somewhat of an anomaly in that respect, Taneyev composed only a handful of pieces for solo piano—24 out of over 270 compositions—and he did not perform them at concerts. However, Taneyev composed a piano Trio, Quartet, and Quintet, where the piano part displays his mature and more sophisticated style, and where, being true to the pianist composer spirit, Taneyev always played the piano himself.

While Moscow was getting over the sudden death of forty-three-year old Scriabin in April of 1915, Taneyev was suffering from a severe cold, which he caught at Scriabin’s funeral. Two months later, he died from heart complications exacerbated by the cold. Rachmaninov, shocked by Taneyev’s death, wrote an article, in which he expressed the loss of Taneyev as a tragedy for the entire musical world of Russia.⁸

⁷ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2002), p. 68.

⁸ Savenko, pp. 166-168. For a further overview of Taneyev’s life and works in English see David Brown’s ‘Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev’ in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by

Taneyev and *Oresteia*

Among a great number of works composed by Taneyev there is one that stands out from the rest—his musical trilogy *Oresteia* (1894, revised 1900), written after the eponymous drama by Aeschylus. At a time when Russian composers based their operas predominantly on Russian sources—literary, folk, or historical—Taneyev's choice of antique tragedy immediately placed him outside the areas explored by his colleagues. Only Musorgsky attempted to write incidental music to a Greek tragedy, choosing Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, but he did not complete it, and reused the musical material for his later project *Salammbô* (also incomplete).

In the year of Taneyev's death a study of the opera and its music by Igor' Glebov (1884-1949) was published in the journal *Muzika*.⁹ 'Taneyev is not an operatic composer', Glebov stated boldly at the beginning of his study.¹⁰ He viewed Taneyev as a symphonist who succeeded in expressing and developing abstract ideas in music, but who had no affinity for the musical stage. Glebov's authority in Russia and later in the USSR was so great that practically every scholar who wrote about Taneyev and his *Oresteia* took his view as immune from questioning. Often, Glebov's dismissive remark was treated as a point of arrival in explorations of the opera, rather than a point of departure.¹¹ Western scholars have also believed that the

Stanley Sadie, 2nd edition (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2001) vol. 25, 66-71. See also Anastasia Belina, 'The Master of Moscow', *The International Piano Magazine*, January-February 2007, 62-65. In Russian a number of biographies are available. See, for example, Grigory Bernandt, *S. I. Taneyev: monografiya* [Taneyev: Monograph] (Moscow: Muzika, 1983), and Svetlana Savenko, *Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev* (Moscow: Muzika, 1984).

⁹ Igor' Glebov, '*Oresteia*: muzikal'naya trilogiya Taneyeva' [*Oresteia*: The Musical Trilogy by Taneyev], *Muzika* 1915, Nos. 233 (pp. 492-503), 235 (539-548), 236 (555-572), 237 (579-587). It was published the following year as *Oresteia: analiz muzikal'nogo sodержaniya* [*Oresteia*: An Analysis of the Musical Content] (Moscow: Rayskiy, 1916).

¹⁰ Glebov, *Muzika*, p. 492.

¹¹ See, for example, Nadezhda Tumanina, 'Muzikal'no-dramaturgicheskaya kontseptsiya trilogii Taneyeva *Oresteia*' [Musical and Dramaturgical Conception of Taneyev's trilogy *Oresteia*] in *S. I. Taneyev i russkaya opera: sbornik statey* [Taneyev and Russian Opera: Collection of Articles], ed. by Igor' Bel'za (Moscow: Vserossiyskoye teatral'noye obshchestvo, 1946), p. 73; 'Muzikal'naya trilogiya *Oresteia*' [Musical Trilogy *Oresteia*] in *Pamyati Sergeya Ivanovicha Taneyeva 1856-1946: sbornik statey i materialov k 90-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya* [In Memory of Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev 1856-

musical stage held very little attraction for Taneyev, and for various reasons, including the language barrier and archival difficulties, they neglected to examine Taneyev's opera. The complete absence of *Oresteia* from the operatic stage in Russia and abroad and difficulties in obtaining either of only two known recordings are also factors that have prevented Taneyev's opera from being properly examined. Svetlana Savenko noted in her monograph on Taneyev that

A researcher who attempts to write about *Oresteia* is in a difficult situation. It is not easy to discuss an opera that practically no-one, apart from the specialists, knows. An opera must be not only heard, but also seen.¹²

The situation Savenko described remains unchanged today. *Oresteia* has not been seen in theatres for forty-five years, and remains a work for study in theory and not in practice. Still, it has been viewed by the few who have taken the trouble to examine it as one of the masterpieces of Russian opera, which continues to stand alone in the Russian operatic repertoire of the nineteenth century, and even the entire Russian operatic output.¹³

The first publication of compiled materials on Taneyev appeared in 1925 in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of his death.¹⁴ It included many previously unpublished sources, but *Oresteia* was reduced to a few scattered references. An obvious reason for this was that the authors simply dismissed it as an anomaly in the

1946: A Collection of Articles and Materials for the Ninetieth Anniversary of His Birth], ed. by Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1947), p. 109; and Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, 'Oresteia' in *Tvorchestvo S. I. Taneyeva: istoriko-stilisticheskoye issledovaniye* [Taneyev's Works: Historico-Stylistic Investigation] (Moscow: Muzika, 1986), p. 98.

¹² Savenko, p. 91.

¹³ *S. I. Taneyev: materialī i dokumentī* [S. I. Taneyev: Materials and Documents], ed. by Vasily Kiselyov, Tamara Livanova, and Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952), p. 293; Korabel'nikova 1986, p. 98; Tumanina 1946, p. 61.

¹⁴ *Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev: lichnost', tvorchestvo i dokumentī ego zhizni: k 10-ti letiyu so dnya ego smerti* [Taneyev: Personality, Works and Documentation of his Life: Ten Years since his Death], ed. by Konstantin Kuznetsov (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzsektor, 1925).

output of a composer who was thought to be best at writing instrumental music.¹⁵ In addition, *Oresteia*'s librettist was criticised for lack of dramaturgical skill, and the composer himself was charged with absence of inspiration or originality. Even his choice of antique tragedy was viewed as merely an attempt to be as different as possible from Tchaikovsky. In the most extreme case, Pavel Kovalyov branded *Oresteia* as Taneyev's 'weakest work.'¹⁶ In a sweeping comment, he declared: 'One assumes that Taneyev would not have got it into his head to write an opera if Tchaikovsky's operatic work had not unfolded before his eyes.'¹⁷

In fact Taneyev was interested in writing an opera before he even met Tchaikovsky. He planned to compose an opera on the subject of *Danton und Robespierre* with the help of his older brother Vladimir. Grigory Bernandt quoted a letter from Vladimir to Sergey, dating it to 1871: 'The libretto for your future opera is already written by a German [...]. I ordered it, and we will work on it together.'¹⁸ Vladimir himself, however, dated the letter as 1865-66.¹⁹ If the latter's dates are correct, that means that Taneyev was only nine years old—the age at which he was accepted to the Moscow Conservatory. This refutes Kovalev's comment concerning Taneyev's supposedly copying Tchaikovsky, whom the young student met only in 1869. Regardless of whose dates are correct, both reveal that Taneyev's interest in writing for the stage began well before Tchaikovsky produced his first successful attempt in the genre, *Yevgeny Onegin* (1879).²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁶ Pavel Kovalyov, 'Tvorchestvo S. I. Taneyeva' in *Dokumenty 1925*, p. 42.

¹⁷ Many Russian scholars, who saw the subject choice as very characteristic for Taneyev, have repudiated this later. See, for example, Tumanina 1946, p. 62, and Korabel'nikova 1986, pp. 106-107.

¹⁸ Bernandt 1983, p. 98.

¹⁹ Vladimir Taneyev, *Detstvo, yunost', misli o budushchem* [Childhood, Youth, Thoughts About the Future] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959), p. 84.

²⁰ Taneyev's earlier operatic projects and ideas would form an interesting topic for further study. See Korabel'nikova 1986, p. 109, and Bernandt 1983, pp. 98-100.

In 1946, an edited volume by Igor' Bel'za of materials on Taneyev and Russian opera appeared.²¹ This collection of articles included a survey of *Oresteia's* stage history by Vasily Yakovlev, who gave an account of its time on the Russian operatic stage, drawing extensively on his own memories of its performances and a small number of critical reviews.²² Yakovlev gave the wrong name for Taneyev's librettist, who was Aleksey Alekseyevich, and not Aleksandr Afanas'yevich Venkstern.²³ He also displayed what might have been an attempt to "protect" Taneyev from the stigma of being related to Aleksandr Taneyev (1850-1918), a St. Petersburg composer and court official. Such a relationship was undesirable in the Soviet era, and the St. Petersburg composer has thus been relegated to the rank of Taneyev's *odnofamilets* [a person simply sharing his surname].²⁴ A chapter by Nadezhda Tumanina attempted a short summary of the opera's compositional history and musical style,²⁵ but the scope did not allow for extensive exploration of any one particular aspect of the opera, and the rather generalised discussion seems to have been based on already published sources.

A collection of materials edited by Vladimir Protopopov was published in Moscow in 1947, in which the majority of sources were similar to Kuznetsov's edition, apart from three unpublished letters of Glazunov to Taneyev, and reminiscences of Grechaninov and Eiges.²⁶ A brief discussion of *Oresteia's* history of the composition is based on a study of Taneyev's letters to Tchaikovsky, and a

²¹ *S. I. Taneyev i russkaya opera: sbornik statey* [S. I. Taneyev and Russian Opera: A Collection of Articles], ed. by Igor' Bel'za (Moscow: Vserossiyskoye teatral'noye obshchestvo, 1946).

²² Vasily Yakovlev, 'Oresteia S. I. Taneyeva v teatre' [Taneyev's *Oresteia* in the Theatre] in Bel'za 1946, pp. 99-158.

²³ Yakovlev 1946, p. 114.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109. In the publication *Novoye o Taneyeve: k 150-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya* [New Materials about Taneyev: Towards the 150th Anniversary of His Birth], ed. by M. Yesipova and Marina Rakhmanova (Moscow: Deko-BC, 2007) Aleksandr Taneyev is presented as a member of the family, pp. 23-24.

²⁵ Nadezhda Tumanina, 'Muzikal'naya trilogiya Oresteia' [Musical Trilogy *Oresteia*] in *Materiali 1947*, pp. 102-120.

²⁶ *Materiali 1947*, pp. 222-226, 261-263, and 269-273 respectively.

very short overview of the opera's music highlights one of its most prominent characteristics: organic development of musical material and thematic derivation.²⁷

The final collection of documents was published in 1952, edited by Vasily Kiselyov.²⁸ It is the most detailed and informative of the three collections, and presents a large amount of previously unpublished material, including Taneyev's correspondence with Rimsky-Korsakov and his family, with his student Aleksandr Goldenweiser, and with his friend and colleague Anton Arensky. The editor claims that the correspondence of Taneyev and Arensky has been published in its entirety. In this edition, Soviet interference is evident everywhere, from the editors' introduction to the extensive censorship of letters and documents. Many of the letters from Taneyev to Arensky have been censored in places that appear to be of a personal nature (marked <...>), while apparently "safe" letters to the composer and pianist Nikolay Amani (1872-1904) contain extensive discussion on musical and theoretical themes, and are provided in full.²⁹

Valuable material in this collection includes Taneyev's correspondence with the directors of the Imperial Theatres in St. Petersburg, which sheds light on the reason for the opera's withdrawal from the repertoire—an ongoing disagreement on both sides over cuts. These letters have been used extensively in Chapter Three of this thesis. The collection also contains a number of reviews by Glazunov, Glebov, Kashkin, and other music critics, which are difficult to obtain otherwise.³⁰

One of the last accounts of Taneyev's *Oresteia* by one of his contemporaries is also the first English-language source on Russian opera and Russian composers. It

²⁷ Ibid., p. 70-78.

²⁸ *Materiali 1952*.

²⁹ *Materiali 1952*, pp. 67-198.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 286, 289, and 292 respectively.

is Rosa Newmarch's *The Russian Opera*.³¹ Newmarch labelled the opera 'somewhat cold and laboured', though 'not wanting in dignity', and concluded that it was 'obviously the work of a highly educated musician.'³² Newmarch could not have heard the opera, because it was not in repertoire at the time of her visit to Russia, so she must have relied on her examination of the score and the opinions of others, including, perhaps, her mentor, Vladimir Stasov. She viewed *Oresteia* as 'in many respects a purely Wagnerian opera', where '*leitmotifs* are used freely, though less systematically than in the later Wagner music-dramas.'³³ A year following the publication of her book, Glebov presented his study of *Oresteia* based on an examination of the leading motifs, although he stopped short of admitting any extensive Wagnerian influences in the opera.³⁴

Newmarch was not the last to comment on Wagner's influence. Abram Gozenpud wrote an important work on Russian opera theatre of the nineteenth century, in which he covered *Oresteia* in a necessarily concise section of a chapter.³⁵ The author hailed the opera as 'one of the most original creations of Russian musical culture,' stating that Wagner's influences only went as far as orchestration, but that one of the strongest influences was that of Glinka.³⁶ As the following chapters of this thesis will show, Wagnerian influence has been understated and Glinka's most certainly over-emphasised. This publication gives a brief history of Taneyev's interest in Greek antiquity, an overview of *Oresteia*'s performances in its first

³¹ Rosa Newmarch, *The Russian Opera* (London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1914).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 377.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Taneyev's use of motifs will be discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

³⁵ Abram Gozenpud, *Russkiy operniy teatr na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov i F. I. Shalyapin 1890-1904* [Russian Opera Theatre on the cusp of XIX-XX centuries and F. I. Chaliapin 1890-1904] (Leningrad, Muzika, 1974), pp. 97-105. Gozenpud was also the author of the only biography of the opera singer Ivan Yershov, who appeared in the première of *Oresteia* as its first Orestes, and consequently became the most prominent Wagnerian singer in Russia. See Abram Gozenpud, *I. V. Yershov. Zhizn' i stsenedeskaya deyatel'nost'. Issledovaniye. 2-e izdaniye* [I. V. Yershov. Life and Theatrical Activity. Investigation. Second edition] (Leningrad: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1999).

³⁶ Gozenpud 1974, p. 98.

season, and the question of cuts demanded by the chief conductor of the Imperial Theatres, Eduard Nápravník. Gozenpud's work, although not offering anything new in terms of the opera's history of composition or performance, has a number of references to sources previously unknown, such as, for example, Nápravník's letters and diaries, which still await publication.³⁷

As Gozenpud wrote prolifically and influentially about Russian opera, so did Lyudmila Korabel'nikova about Taneyev and many aspects of his life and music. In 1985 she edited and published one the most important sources, a three-volume edition of Taneyev's diaries.³⁸ Taneyev kept them for fifteen years from 1894 to 1909, and the entries from 21 December 1894 to 28 June 1895 were written entirely in Esperanto, which he studied at the time.³⁹ The Esperanto entries were translated into Russian by the Soviet musicologist B. A. Yerokhin, and reveal a large amount of information about *Oresteia*'s rehearsal and performance issues, and Taneyev's ever-growing interest in Wagner. The diaries provide an excellent opportunity to learn about the composer's thoughts and activities during the period and also offer a glimpse into his private life and the quirks of his personality. Only after the publication of these diaries could the true extent of Taneyev's study of Wagner be appreciated.

Korabel'nikova published four journal articles and three books dedicated to Taneyev and his musical output, the most substantial of which after the *Dnevniki* is her 1986 investigation of Taneyev's music.⁴⁰ A chapter on *Oresteia* is an almost unchanged version of her earlier article, which presents the opera as an unusual

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁸ *S. Taneyev: dnevniki* [Diaries], ed. by Lyudmila Korabel'nikova (Moscow: Muzika, 1985).

³⁹ *Dnevniki*, vol. 1, pp 49-109.

⁴⁰ Korabel'nikova 1986.

phenomenon in the history of Russian music of the time.⁴¹ It appears that Korabel'nikova was influenced by Glebov's writings, basing her investigation on his statement 'Taneyev is not an operatic composer'.⁴² She does not write about the opera's history of composition in more detail, and music analysis is kept to a minimum.⁴³ Most of the chapter on *Oresteia* is taken up with a discussion of antiquity and its representation in Russian art, which lead to the possible reasons behind Taneyev's choice of the text for his opera. Korabel'nikova also notes Wagnerian influences, although she does not examine them fully.⁴⁴

A recent monograph on Taneyev by Galima Aminova continued the work begun by Korabel'nikova in the area of his vocal and choral compositions.⁴⁵ However, Aminova has failed to correlate historical events with her musical analysis. Despite Taneyev's own admission of complete atheism,⁴⁶ the author based her thesis on the assumption that Taneyev was religious. Taking the triad as a representation of God and everything connected with the deity, she quotes various sources completely unrelated to Taneyev to prove her theory.⁴⁷ In reaching these conclusions she does not use Taneyev's own letters and diaries, because these would falsify her theory. Crucially, a seminal work on the musical language of Taneyev's choral works, published in 1991, is not quoted at all, although various references to the same

⁴¹ Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, 'Oresteia S. I. Taneyeva. Antichnyy syuzhet v russkoy khudozhestvennoy kul'ture vtoroy poloviny XIX v' in *Tipologiya russkogo realizma vtoroy poliviny XIX veka* ['Taneyev's Oresteia. Antique Subjects in Russian Art and Culture of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century' in *Typology of Russian Realism*], ed. by G. Y. Sternin (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), pp. 79-128.

⁴² Ibid., p. 98.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 117-118.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

⁴⁵ Galima Aminova, *Otechestvenniye istoki tvorchestva S. I. Taneyeva* [The National Origins of Taneyev's Works] (Krasnoyarsk: Krasnoyarskiy Gosudarstvennyy Universitet, 2006).

⁴⁶ See, for example, *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, entries dated 1-7 January 1899, pp. 5-7.

⁴⁷ Aminova, pp. 103-127.

compositions discussed in that work are made.⁴⁸ Aminova also searched for the origins of Taneyev's melodic and harmonic language in Russian folk music, apparently completely disregarding his Western-style music education. Perhaps a fashionable tendency in musicology to address the influence of national identity on composers was one of the driving forces behind this work, but it failed to present Taneyev objectively, having already chosen a narrowly religious frame in which to place his portrait.

Taneyev's eclectic style, in which counterpoint plays an important role, demonstrates his allegiance to Mozart, Handel, Gluck, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, and his broad knowledge of various European composers. This strikingly cosmopolitan profile is perhaps the reason why Western musicology has so far failed to produce a substantial study about the composer and his opera: it is difficult to place Taneyev's work within a specific context, especially Russian.⁴⁹ The style of *Oresteia* is not easy to define either, and has been viewed outside Russia as 'monumental but rather static', with an 'extremely schematic' libretto where, as Peter Burian suggested, 'Taneyev's lucid and harmonically conservative idiom wraps the story of murder, revenge, and resolution in beautifully controlled and accomplished lyrical tableaux. The result is a kind of dramatic pageant, statuesque in its mythic impersonality, a reassertion of classical measure in the face of late Romantic excess.'⁵⁰

Richard Taruskin's short article in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* gives the main details of the composer's life, and likens Taneyev to Brahms (a comparison that

⁴⁸ Yury Gen-Ir, *Cherti stilya khorov S. I. Taneyeva* [Stylistic Features of Taneyev's Choruses] (Petrozavodsk: n/p, 1991). Also available on www.ugenir.narod.ru [Accessed 1 March 2009]. This author analyses Taneyev's music without attempting to connect it to any religious ideas.

⁴⁹ In Russia, Korabel'nikova and Tumanina kept musical discussion to a minimum, and both largely based their assumptions on by then outdated Glebov's study. See Tumanina 1946, pp. 59-97 and Tumanina 1947, pp. 102-120; and Korabel'nikova 1986, pp. 98-121.

⁵⁰ Peter Burian, 'Tragedy Adapted for Stages and Screens: the Renaissance to the Present' in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. by Peter Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 267.

is certainly not without foundation, but one that Taneyev himself vehemently opposed). Taruskin states that both composers were united by the fact that neither was interested in writing for the musical stage.⁵¹ This statement can easily be challenged: Taneyev treated the composition of his *Oresteia* extremely seriously, even resigning from the post of Director of the Moscow Conservatory in order to complete the opera. Taruskin's identification of Taneyev as an 'idealist who felt little attraction to the musical stage'⁵² runs counter to the evidence of Taneyev's early operatic ideas, his many years of intensive work on *Oresteia*, and further operatic projects. At first glance it may indeed seem that Taneyev was far removed from the world of music theatre, but his letters and diaries show that opera was on his mind practically all his life, from boyhood until his last years. While it is true that *Oresteia* is Taneyev's only completed opera, it was neither the first nor the last operatic project that he worked on.⁵³

Taruskin's dismissal of Wagner's influences on *Oresteia* appears to echo the views of Grigory Bernandt, who expressed an identical belief in his otherwise informative and thoroughly researched monograph on the composer.⁵⁴ As will be seen in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Taneyev's interest in and study of Wagner was serious and extensive. Rosamund Bartlett was the first Western historian to write that Wagner was a 'frequent topic of his [Taneyev's] conversations,' thus pointing out the need for further study.⁵⁵ Taneyev's *Oresteia* shows that Wagner's influence is

⁵¹ Richard Taruskin, 'Taneyev, Sergey Ivanovich', *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.grovemusic.com [Accessed 3 April 2006].

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ After *Oresteia*, Taneyev worked for many years on his next operatic project *Hero and Leandros*, contemplated writing an opera *Donna Diana* on the libretto by Modest Tchaikovsky, and considered Gogol's *Portrait* as a possible source for an opera.

⁵⁴ Bernandt 1983, p. 101.

⁵⁵ Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 115.

certainly present in such areas as orchestration, use of musical motifs, form, subject-matter, and vocal writing.⁵⁶

In Germany, Lucinde Braun included a chapter about Taneyev's *Oresteia* in her doctoral dissertation on Russian opera.⁵⁷ She attempts to define Taneyev's style and influences, but focuses only on Tchaikovsky and Mozart, at times turning to Gluck, and did not make any connections with Wagner.⁵⁸ One of her first statements is that Taneyev was concerned more with structure than orchestral colour, despite his extensive letter to Tchaikovsky about instrumentation of the opera, which she quotes in her work.⁵⁹ When Taneyev prepared the second edition of *Oresteia*, instrumentation was one of the areas that underwent most revisions. Braun focuses only on the quartet of Orestes, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, and Electra (Act 2, scene 19) and does not discuss their characterisation throughout the opera.

One of the most recent explorations of *Oresteia*'s stage history in English appears in a book chapter by Dmitry Trubotchkin.⁶⁰ Trubotchkin expresses the opinion that Taneyev's opera actually enjoyed considerable success, and, in his view, the number of performances it received, both stage productions and concert performances, was sufficient to deem it successful. Trubotchkin concludes that *Oresteia* did not disappear from the stage, but merely moved from the theatre to the concert stage, owing to the fact that all its post-1918 revivals were concert

⁵⁶ Chapter Three will address the similarities of the sources for Wagner's music dramas and Taneyev's *Oresteia*, while Chapter Four will examine Taneyev's use of the system of musical motifs.

⁵⁷ This chapter was later published in Lucinde Braun, 'Taneyevs *Oresteja*—eine klassische Oper für Russland' in *Studien zur russischen Oper im späten 19. Jahrhundert*. Mainz, Schott: 1999.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Discussion about Mozart and Taneyev are on pp. 357-369, Taneyev and Tchaikovsky on pp. 369 and 377-8.

⁵⁹ Braun 1999, pp. 370-371. See the full text in *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 3 July 1887, p. 145.

⁶⁰ Dmitry Trubotchkin, 'Agamemnon in Russia' in *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to AD 2004*, ed. by Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall, and Oliver Taplin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 254-271.

performances, with the one exception of the Belorussian production of 1966 [*sic*].⁶¹ While it is true that between 1939 and 1950 *Oresteia* was frequently heard in concert, after 1964 thirty-four years passed before it was given in concert in Moscow in 1990. Only two concert performances in 2001 and 2004, in Moscow and New York respectively, have occurred more recently, making it no longer possible to talk about *Oresteia* simply moving from the operatic onto the concert stage.⁶²

Although many archival sources that pertain to *Oresteia* remain unpublished, some recent publications have helped with fuller reconstruction of the historical context of operatic life in Russia. One such useful body of documents was published in its entirety: the diaries of Telyakovsky, the Director of the Mariinsky Theatre from 1901.⁶³ Another useful source still awaiting publication is the correspondence between Taneyev and his publisher Mitrofan Belyaev, which contains 300 letters in total.⁶⁴ Its existence is briefly acknowledged in Zhdanov's 1951 edition, without references to the content, and in Taneyev's *Diaries*, where certain letters, relating to the second edition of *Oresteia*, published by Belyaev's firm in 1900, are referred to by Taneyev himself and their archival details are given by Korabel'nikova in her editorial notes.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 257. The correct dates of this production are 1963-64.

⁶² The concert performance of *Oresteia* was given at the Major Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, performed by the Russian National Orchestra, two Moscow Chamber Choirs and soloists, conducted by Mikhail Pletnev. On 16 June 2004 Act 1, *Agamemnon*, was performed at Carnegie Hall. Peter Tiboris directed The Manhattan Philharmonic and three choirs: the Russian Chamber Choir of New York, the Connecticut Choral Society, and the New Jersey Choral Society. See the review by Allan Kizinn, 'Murder in Ancient Greece, Accompanied by Chorus', *New York Times*, 22 June 2004.

⁶³ Vladimir Telyakovsky, *Dnevnik direktora imperatorskikh teatrov: 1898-1901* [Diaries of the Director of the Imperial Theatres: 1898-1901], ed. by M. Svetaeva (St. Petersburg: Artists. Rezhissyor. Teatr, 1998); *Dnevnik direktora imperatorskikh teatrov: 1901-1903*, ed. by M. Svetaeva (St. Petersburg: Artists. Rezhissyor. Teatr, 2002); and *Dnevnik direktora imperatorskikh teatrov: 1903-1906*, ed. by M. Svetaeva (St. Petersburg: Artists. Rezhissyor. Teatr, 2006).

⁶⁴ Moscow State Central Museum Archive (GTsMMK, fond 41), and (GDMTch, fond B 11). During a research trip to Moscow I was not able to access these materials because, apparently, they were in preparation for a publication. They still remain unpublished to the best of my knowledge.

⁶⁵ *Dnevnik*, vol. 1, pp. 217, 267, 373; vol. 2, pp. 180, 184, 191-3, 222, 240.

As becomes evident from this survey of existing literature on Taneyev's *Oresteia*, it is difficult to glean a unified, structured picture of its history and music. This thesis aims to gather all relevant sources together in order to re-visit various aspects of the opera and for the first time make all such data available in coherent study. The next chapter will provide a synthesis of all the information relating to the genesis of Taneyev's opera, in order to present a complete and detailed overview of *Oresteia*'s composition history.

Chapter Two

Oresteia: Genesis

Composing an opera is the most intelligent and interesting activity.¹

S. Taneyev.

Taneyev spent the greatest part of his professional career as a teacher and composer: between 1875 and 1905 he taught piano performance, music theory, and composition at the Moscow Conservatory. He devised courses on musical form, counterpoint, and free composition, teaching formally at the Conservatory and also privately.² One of his best-known passions was early music and counterpoint, which he studied with painstaking attention and ardour. In his archive in Klin (GDMTch), countless surviving fugues, canons, and contrapuntal exercises show his methodical and conscientious approach to musical research.

Taneyev, although believing that composition was his calling, was in the unusual position of a composer who did not have to make a living from his works (at least until 1905, when he left the Conservatory and became more prolific as a composer). Because he did not compose after any particular fashion and rarely wrote on order, he was not under pressure to compose to please his public. In this sense, *Oresteia* is a work that reflects Taneyev's desire to write only for the sake of his art. Many of his early works originated as exercises in re-creating the style of Bach, Mozart, or early Netherlands

¹ *P. I. Chaykovsky, S. I. Taneyev: pis'ma* [P. I. Tchaikovsky, S. I. Taneyev: Letters], ed. by Vladimir Zhdanov (Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951), letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 3 July 1887, p. 145.

² For Taneyev's teaching career, see Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, *S. I. Taneyev v moskovskoy konservatorii* [Taneyev at the Moscow Conservatory] (Moscow: Muzika, 1974); and Fyodor Arzamanov, *S. I. Taneyev: prepodavatel' kursa muzikal'nikh form* [S. I. Taneyev: Teacher of a Course in Musical Form] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye Muzikal'noye Izdatel'stvo, 1984).

composers in multiple canons, fugues, and chorales. Because of this, even later in his career, Taneyev was often viewed as a music scientist and theorist whose attitude to composing music resulted in 'dry', 'academic', 'professorial' works,³ and Russian critic Vyacheslav Karatigin even wrote that Taneyev was a composer 'who was born a few centuries too late.'⁴

Taneyev's first written account of his wish to write an act of opera was proposed as an exercise in the style of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.⁵ While such an approach might be useful and even fruitful when writing instrumental music, writing opera requires passion and inspiration, and these two qualities must translate into music powerful enough to elicit an immediate response from an audience. Maybe this is the reason why Taneyev never actually wrote an act of an opera using Mozart's model as a mere exercise. While composing his *Oresteia*, Taneyev was certainly methodical and at times detached in his creative process, but he was also deeply passionate about his work, its characters and, as it will be seen later, its fate.

Taneyev was not drawn to early music in isolation; ancient history and literature also proved to be a life-long fascination for him. He was the only Russian composer of the second half of the nineteenth century who completed an opera based on Greek tragedy. The antique subject of the opera baffled critics, who believed that it would only

³ Nikolay Findeyzen, 'Oresteia, muzikal'naya trilogiya. Muzika S. I. Taneyeva.' *RMG*, November 1895, No. 11; Vladimir Baskin, 'Oresteia', *Peterburgskaya gazeta*, 19 October 1895, No. 287; Pavel Veyarn, *Sin otechestva*, 18 October 1895, No. 291. For a further discussion of this side of Taneyev's musical career see Leonid Sabaneyev, *Vospominaniya o Taneyeve* [Reminiscences About Taneyev] (Moscow: Klassika - XXI, 2003).

⁴ Vyacheslav Karatigin, 'Pamyati S. I. Taneyeva' [To the Memory of S. I. Taneyev], *Muzikal'niy sovremennik* [The Musical Contemporary], 1916, No. 8, p. 86. Also quoted in Korabel'nikova 1986, p. 14.

⁵ *S. I. Taneyev: Materiali i dokumenti* [Materials and Documents], ed. by Vasily Kiselyov, Tamara Livanova, and Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952), p. 76.

dampen audiences' interest.⁶ Antiquity was highly prominent in Russian culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and until 1848 every college or university student was expected to learn Greek and Latin, and to take a course in ancient history. But after the reactionary events in Europe in 1848 Greek language was removed from the curriculum, and the candidates to the universities were no longer required to know or study it. Only in forty-five out of seventy-nine gymnasiums at the time, for example, Greek language was taught.⁷ The control over the universities was tightened, and students were no longer allowed to study abroad.⁸ The teaching of classical languages in selected schools and institutions did little to inspired students, because it was confined only to pedantic study of grammar. In the 1870s new study books appeared, but they were either translations or adaptations of the already existing manuals. Only the works of the 'good' Christians and Church fathers such as Eusebius, Basil, and John Chrysostom were taught in order to instil respect for religion and avert any interest in liberal ideas and ideals.⁹

Classical influence in Russia can be found in architecture, particularly in St. Petersburg, literature and poetry, and visual arts. Ancient themes proved to be a rich source of inspiration for colourful, impressive paintings, elaborate sculptures, and a

⁶ A detailed exploration of the critical reception of Taneyev's *Oresteia* is presented in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

⁷ Marinus A. Wes, *Classics in Russia 1700-1855: Between the Two Bronze Horsemen* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), p. 117.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 249. For a further account of classicism in Russia see the rest of the book by Marinus Wes, as well as: Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, 'Oresteia S. I. Taneyeva. Antichnĭy syuzhet v russkoy khudozhestvennoy kul'ture vtoroy polovini XIX v' in *Tipologiya russkogo realizma vtoroy polivini XIX veka* ['Taneyev's *Oresteia*. Antique Subjects in Russian Art and Culture of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century' in Typology of Russian Realism], ed. by G. Y. Sternin (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), pp. 79-128; also by the same author: 'Oresteia' in *Tvorchestvo S. I. Taneyeva: istoriko-stilisticheskoye issledovaniye* [Taneyev's Works: Historico-Stylistic Investigation] (Moscow: Muzika, 1986), pp. 101-113.

multitude of poetic and literary works.¹⁰ Music, however, had remained almost untouched by it. In opera, stage action was one of the most important elements, the demand that could not be easily supplied by classical literary renditions of myths and legends. Russian audiences, who were brought up on Italian and French operas, would notice it immediately. Indeed, as it will be seen later, this criticism about the lack of stage action applied equally to Taneyev's *Oresteia* and Wagner's music dramas. Another explanation is the widespread belief among Russian musicians that the ancient myths about distant gods and kingly humans could not interest modern audiences, since such characters were usually too immortal or too regal or too exotic to evoke sympathy from listeners. Tchaikovsky, for example, wrote to Taneyev just after completing his *Yevgeny Onegin*:

I assure you that I would not have written an opera with this kind of subject [*Aida*] for all the riches in the world because I need people, and not puppets. [...] I do not know or understand the feelings of Egyptian princess, a pharaoh, or a mad Nubian. Some kind of instinct is telling me that these people moved, spoke, felt, and therefore expressed their emotions in a manner, different from ours.¹¹

Tchaikovsky believed that he was not capable of depicting truthfully the lives and emotions of the people who were historically so far removed from his own times. Were he to attempt to use such characters, it would be 'A lie. And I abhor this lie.'¹² He never

¹⁰ Both Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837) and Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841) wrote poems in style of Greek classical authors. Other poets, such as Vasily Zhukovsky (1783-1852), Afanasy Fet (1812-1892), Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873), and Apollon Maykov (1821-1897), displayed influences of classicism in their poetic style. Nikolay Gogol's *Myortviye dushi* [Dead Souls] (published in 1842) was an attempt at creating a literary work using Homer's *Odyssey* as a model. In art, Karl Bryullov's most famous work, *Posledniy den' Pompei* [The Last Day of Pompeii] (1833), was based on a classical theme. These are only a few examples found in Russian literature of the nineteenth century.

¹¹ *Pis'ma*, letter from P. Tchaikovsky to S. Taneyev dated 14 January 1878, p. 23. Anton Rubinstein held similar views to Tchaikovsky on the use of the stories from distant past in music.

¹² *Ibid.*

changed his opinion, writing to Taneyev thirteen years later that he could only warm to subjects where ‘real people are present, who feel in the same way as I do.’¹³ He referred to Wagnerian subjects as completely foreign and inaccessible to him.

Lev Tolstoy also believed that ‘works written 2500 years ago, cannot interest us. We cannot enter into the soul of a person who sacrifices his own daughter’—a remark made about Taneyev’s opera in one of their conversations.¹⁴ To this Taneyev replied: ‘Apart from questions that can interest modern people, there exist other aspects, and music is not concerned with questions.’¹⁵ Indeed, there are no programmatic works in Taneyev’s output except the *Oresteia* Overture, which had to have a programme because it presented a summary of the opera’s events.¹⁶ Thus, a subject that did not simply pursue a storyline but could also offer a number of opportunities to represent in music human universals, such as wrongdoing, thirst for revenge, justice, repentance, and forgiveness—the main ideas of the opera—greatly interested Taneyev. This chapter will begin by exploring why Taneyev chose an ancient literary source as a text for his opera *Oresteia*, and present a detailed summary of its genesis.

But before the discussion can move forward, an important issue must be considered. In recent years, a particularly strong emphasis has been made on the study of Russian composers of the nineteenth century and their works in the context of their

¹³ *Pis'ma*, letter from P. Tchaikovsky to S. Taneyev dated 13 January 1891, p. 169. A number of *Oresteia*’s reviewers agreed with Tchaikovsky, as can be seen in their published accounts in *Grazhdanin*, 21 October 1895, No. 294 (P. Veymarn); *Russkiye vedomosti*, 24 October 1895, No 294 (N. Kashkin); and *Novoye vremya*, 30 October 1895, No 7066 (V. Ivanov). These reviews will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

¹⁴ *S. Taneyev: dnevniki* [Diaries], ed. by Lyudmila Korabel’nikova (Moscow: Muzika, 1985), 3 volumes. Entry dated 18 June 1895, vol. 1, p. 105.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ The overture will be discussed later in this chapter.

‘Russianness.’¹⁷ For over a century, from Glinka to Stravinsky and beyond, Russian music has been, in the words of Marina Frolova-Walker, ‘regarded as a separate tree, with its roots firmly planted in Russian soil. It had its own, internal network of references and its own value system.’¹⁸ Composers who did not fit into this nationalistic context, such as Cui and Taneyev for example, were simply left out of the discussion, and the demystification of ‘Russianness’ in music has begun only relatively recently.

The case of Taneyev’s obvious non-‘Russianness’ is intriguing: his extensive study of early European music has been noted above; his life-long fascination with classical history and antiquity will be explored below. Taneyev did not display any considerable interest in politics, and did not hide his disrespect for the tsar Aleksandr III. Taneyev’s resignation in 1905 from the Moscow Conservatory in protest over the authorities’ unfair treatment of the students who supported revolutionary movement was not a political statement. It was a protest based on the moral ground, by the person who believed in equal right of every person to be treated without prejudice and with utmost justice. Taneyev’s involvement with the People’s Conservatory after 1905 reflected his life-long dedication to making sure that those who were interested in learning music were given an opportunity to do so.

Leonid Sabaneyev studied with Taneyev privately and was well acquainted with his nurse, Pelageya Ivanovna, who looked after the composer from his birth and until her death in 1910, liked to recount the following story. ‘[Taneyev] conducted [...] in the

¹⁷ The following authors are the established authorities nationalism in Russian music: Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007) and ‘On *Ruslan* and Russianness’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (1997), 21-45; Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) and *On Russian Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Frolova-Walker 2007, viii.

presence of Aleksandr III in the pavilion in Sokolniki during the celebrations of the tsar's coronation. Sergey Ivanovich was a great free-thinker and an enemy of any "reigning persons", to whom he experienced either contempt or aversion.' Pelageya Ivanovna remembered that she came to the concert to watch Taneyev conduct, and when he stepped onto the podium, she saw that he wore a boot with a hole in its sole. Sergey Ivanovich told her that he wore that boot 'especially for the tsar' and 'laughed wildly' when he remembered the occasion. The tsar gave him a rouble, and Taneyev said that he 'immediately gave it to the tsar's servant, so that he could buy himself some tea.'¹⁹ This story is one of only a few connected to any political or state occasions and imperial persons mentioned in sources relating to Taneyev. His diaries contain only a few references to political events, mostly in passing, and often in connection to Taneyev's friends and acquaintances who were either affected by or interested in them.

In his early career, Taneyev left two written attempts at considering the values of nationalistic Russian music. The first was a short entry in his notebook entitled *What Should Russian Composers Do?*²⁰ in which he concluded that 'We do not have our own national music',²¹ based on the brief examination of the European qualities of Glinka's and Tchaikovsky's works. The young composer was clearly inspired by the heated debates about the national character of Glinka's two operas and the attempts to create a typical Russian style of music by the composers of the Mighty Handful. The second discussion came from Taneyev's letter to Tchaikovsky, where he outlined a deliberate

¹⁹ Leonid Sabaneyev, *Vospominaniya o Taneyeve* [Reminiscences About Taneyev] (Moscow: Klassika - XXI, 2003), pp. 65-66.

²⁰ *Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev: lichnost', tvorchestvo i dokumenti ego zhizni: k 10-ti letiyu so dnya ego smerti* [Taneyev: Personality, Works and Documentation of his Life: Ten Years Since His Death], ed. by Konstantin Kuznetsov (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzsektor, 1925), pp. 73-74. Notebook entry dated February 1879, Moscow.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

nationalist project, based on seeking to establish national 'Russian' harmony through the study of ancient Russian chant.²²

But even if Taneyev attempted to follow through his ideas in his early compositions, by simply harmonising Russian folksongs he created no particular Russian style. Instead, he re-emphasised his establishing assimilation of European musical style, particularly influenced by his studies of counterpoint. Frolova-Walker has summarised some of his achievements thus: '...his quartets, as many have observed, are Mozartian, while his final monumental work, the cantata *Upon Reading a Psalm* [1915], provides Russia with its own Handelian oratorio.'²³ His opera *Oresteia* was inspired by a classical tragedy, was begun by a composer educated in the Western tradition, and completed by a revered master of counterpoint, equalled only by Brahms in Europe, and, as Hermann Laroche believed, unrivalled in Russia.²⁴ Taneyev's music speaks for itself—it is firmly rooted in European traditions and it is impossible to consider Taneyev in any other context than that of a cosmopolitan, or even universal, composer. It will become clearer further in this thesis that, like its composer, *Oresteia* exists outside the nationalist discourse, and will therefore be considered purely on its own merits. As for Taneyev's consideration of ancient Russian chant, his interest in early music and antiquity indicates that it was the chant's ancient provenance and not its distinctly national character that interested the young musician the most. The explanation lies in the nature of Taneyev himself—a man who was open to different cultures and their music, and who embraced European music and history with unending passion and

²² *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 10 August 1881, pp. 74-76.

²³ Frolova-Walker 2007, p. 256.

²⁴ German Larosh, 'Oresteia Taneyeva', *Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta*, 20 October 1895, No. 288. *Izbrannyye stat'i*, also published in: German Larosh, *Vipusk 3: opera i operniy teatr* [Selected Articles. Volume 3: Opera and Opera Theatre], ed. by Abram Gozenpud (Leningrad: Muzika, 1976), p. 344-346.

interested. The narrow confines of any one specific movement or style would be too constricting.

Antiquity in Taneyev's life

Taneyev was introduced to ancient Greek history and literature at an early age. His father Ivan Il'ich (1796-1879) graduated from Moscow University in three disciplines: languages, medicine, and literature. He spoke German, Latin, and French, and wrote a dissertation about the development of tragedy.²⁵ He accumulated a substantial library, filled with books by Greek authors and on ancient sources and history, and encouraged his children to read any of them as soon as they were able. It seems that Greek antiquity, history, and music existed in the Taneyevs' household side by side—the serfs were given Greek names, the horses were named after historical heroes, and the family pets were given musical terms for names.²⁶ There were frequent house performances of Greek tragedies, in which all the children took part.²⁷ Taneyev's older brother Vladimir recalled that when he turned eight, his father handed him *Oedipus in Athens*,²⁸ instructing him and his four-year old sister to learn one of its scenes. The tragedy had a terrible influence on Vladimir—he imagined his fate to be the same as that of Oedipus, later writing: '[I felt I was] destined to kill [my] father and marry [my] mother. This thought for many years disturbed me. I suffered from insomnia and was terribly

²⁵ Il'ya Taneyev, *O tragedii voobshche, o yeyo nachale, proiskhozhdenii, kachestvakh, i usovershenstvovanii u noveyshikh narodov: rassuzhdeniya* [Thoughts on Tragedy in General, its Beginning, Sources, Characteristics, and Evolution in New Cultures] (Moscow, Selivanov, 1827). Held at the Russian National Library. NLR 18.52.4.54

²⁶ Vladimir Taneyev, *Detstvo, yunost', misli o budushchem* [Childhood, Youth, Thoughts About the Future] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959), p. 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁸ The drama by Vladislav Ozerov (1769-1816), written in the style of Greek tragedy in 1804.

miserable.²⁹ Sergey Taneyev had no similarly traumatic experiences in his childhood, and actually benefited from an early intense exposure to Greek history and literature, which influenced his life-long interest in antiquity and played an important part in the future choice of subject for his opera.

At nine years of age, Taneyev was accepted into the Moscow Conservatory where, parallel with music studies, he took a course in ancient history. After graduation in 1875 his teacher, Nikolay Rubinstein, took him on a European holiday, part of which was spent in Athens, where the Acropolis left a great impression on the younger musician. Indeed, the image of the Parthenon adorned the first edition of his opera, despite being chronologically inaccurate.³⁰

Before Taneyev embarked on his professional career as a teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, he spent eight months in Paris, from October 1876 until June 1877. He passed most of his time practising the piano, meeting French musicians, visiting art galleries, and attending concerts and theatrical performances. At exactly the same time, Parisian stages underwent a renaissance in antique tragedy, with the tragic actor Jean Mounet Sully (1841-1916) its driving force.³¹ The actor was greatly successful as Orestes in Racine's *Andromaque* in 1872, the play that was performed in the Comédie-Française fifty-eight times between 1871 and 1880, including the time of Taneyev's stay.³² This Parisian Renaissance became one of the most important impressions from Taneyev's time in France, and five years later, when he conceived his *Oresteia*, it would

²⁹ V. Taneyev 1959, p. 89.

³⁰ The Parthenon was built between 447-438 BC, while Aeschylus wrote his tragedy in 458 BC.

³¹ Mounet Sully performed Sophocles' tragedies *King Oedipus* and *Antigona*, which became firmly established in the repertoire of the Comédie Française largely because of his success in these roles.

³² A. Joannidès, *La Comédie-Française de 1680 à 1920: Tableau des Représentations par Auteurs et par Pièces* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1921), p. 86.

support the young composer's belief that ancient tragedy could be brought onto the operatic stage. Twenty years later it also served as an argument with which Taneyev defended the choice of *Oresteia*'s subject before the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres in 1895.³³

The Russian musicologist Vladimir Protopopov addressed the question of Taneyev's interest in antiquity and how it may have influenced his choice of the text for his opera, and summarised it thus:

Judicial problems, so widely present in Russian post-reform social life, were usually reflected upon in liberal noble circles as the problems of all humanity, also linked to abstract ideals and moral laws. Particularly symptomatic in this ideological atmosphere was an increase in interest towards classical art and philosophy, which were treated not as products of concrete historical reality, or a particular period in humanity's development, but as manifestation of humanity's laws and ideas, free from changeable modern historical views. It is not a coincidence that in the second half of the nineteenth century a larger number of courses in classical literature appeared in Russia than ever before: art, philosophy, translations of works by antique authors, specialists-Hellenists, and so on. Taneyev's use of the subject of *The Oresteia* was deeply symptomatic of his own persona, time, and those social circles with which he was connected. That is why the words from the *Oresteia*'s finale are very typical where, as a reflection of the main idea of the opera, a new court is founded, which brings truth, justice, and peace under the 'protection of law'. These ideas 'floated in the air' among the liberal nobility of Taneyev's times. Thus, the idea of *Oresteia* was a reflection of one of the aspects of the whole *époque* of Russian life of the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁴

This quotation represents a general overview of the discussions and social climate in the circles into which Taneyev was born. The prominent Taneyev scholar Lyudmila Korabel'nikova examined these same tendencies in the circles of liberal nobility in order

³³ *Materiali 1952*, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Napravnik dated 9 March 1895, p. 441.

³⁴ *Pamyati Sergeya Ivanovicha Taneyeva 1856-1946: sbornik statey i materialov k 90-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya* [In Memory of Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev 1856-1946: a Collection of Articles and Materials for the Ninetieth Anniversary of His Birth], ed. by Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1947), p. 45.

to delve more deeply into the events and atmosphere of Taneyev's life. She noted that there was a 'tradition of Russian revolutionary-democratic criticism that found in ancient Greece the characteristics of an ideal social order', which resonated with the social and judicial changes Russian was undergoing at the end of the nineteenth century.³⁵ Korabel'nikova proceeded to discuss the idealised level of democracy achieved in ancient Greece, whereby every citizen was granted the right to appeal to and take part in the civic court. She wrote that Aristotle's *Politics* became widely cited in Russia in 1891, eliciting great interest from historians.³⁶ One such historian was V. Maklakov, a famous lawyer, and a close acquaintance of Taneyev. Taneyev himself liked to proclaim that 'right is that which is allowed by law'—a remark he once made in a conversation with Lev Tolstoy.³⁷ Two out of three Taneyev brothers—Pavel and Vladimir—became lawyers, and through them Taneyev met many of their prominent colleagues. Korabel'nikova concluded that 'in general, in Taneyev's family and other circles, law was represented quite widely.'³⁸ In her opinion, Taneyev's choice of an antique tragedy, one that made such a deep exploration of questions of morals and ethics, was not arbitrary, but a natural product of the composer's surroundings and personal beliefs. Finally, antique myths and stories are universal because 'they contain both concrete characters and abstract notions about humanity distilled in such a way that they resist the march of millennia' and appear as new discoveries for young generations and complex problems to be explored by older generations.³⁹

³⁵ Korabel'nikova 1979, p. 100.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.101.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Harry Graf Kessler and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Legend of Joseph*, tr. by Alfred Kalisch (Berlin and Paris: Fürstner, 1914), p. 11.

Taneyev found in *The Oresteia* timeless questions posed by its author, and attempted to present his own interpretation of the Aeschylean myth in the operatic context. The mythic status of the work gave it universal values, which Taneyev articulated further with powerful and expressive music. This brings *Oresteia* closer to Wagner's music dramas, whose Norse mythological texts were set even further back, but in which Wagner emphasised universal values even more by using the emotionally charged and compelling music.

Taneyev and Wagner

Wagner's music did not only influence Taneyev's *Oresteia*—it was the impetus Taneyev needed to finish his opera. Taneyev's interest in Wagner is one of the least addressed aspects of Taneyev's biography, and this dissertation begins to explore this aspect in depth. Although Taneyev's contemporaries all noted an obvious influence of the German composer in his *Oresteia*, Soviet scholars did not pick up the thread and investigate it further. Korabel'nikova and Gozenpud both mentioned Wagnerian influences in Taneyev's opera, but did not analyse or examine them in great detail because Wagner and his music were outlawed in Stalinist Russia.⁴⁰

Taneyev's first documented reference to Wagner dates from 1877, when he wrote down a plan for future self-education on his way back to Russia after his eight-month stay in Paris. He wrote that he wanted to study Wagner and 'learn *by memory* one of his

⁴⁰ Korabel'nikova 1986, p.100; Abram Gozenpud, *Russkiy operniy teatr na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov i F. I. Shalyapin 1890-1904* [Russian Opera Theatre on the Cusp of XIX-XX centuries and F. I. Chaliapin 1890-1904] (Leningrad, Muzika, 1974), pp. 4-5; Abram Gozenpud, *Rikhard Vagner i russkaya kul'tura: issledovaniye* [Richard Wagner and Russian Culture: Investigation] (Leningrad, Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1990), pp. 207-209.

[operas from *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and travel to Germany to hear it.’⁴¹ Until 1889, no such study took place. In 1886, Taneyev was still quite hostile to Wagner, and when his close friend Anton Arensky joined the Wagner Society in Moscow, Taneyev wrote to congratulate him, but expressed his lack of understanding: ‘When there is Mozart, how is it possible to pay attention to Wagner?’⁴² He informed Arensky that he was working on a translation of Handel’s *Israel in Egypt*, which is ‘better than your *Meistersinger*’, and rehearsed *Don Giovanni*, ‘also no comparison with your Wagner’, with the singers from the conservatory.⁴³

The year 1889 proved pivotal for Taneyev’s composition of *Oresteia* as much as it did for the dissemination of Wagner’s music in Russia. In April, the German theatre troupe headed by Wagner’s friend, the impresario Angelo Neumann, performed the complete *Ring des Nibelungen* for the first time in Moscow. After seeing the *Ring* in its entirety, in the production that had used the authentic stage sets from the Bayreuth festival, and the original singers, Taneyev was inspired. He wrote to Tchaikovsky: ‘Wagner interested me in the highest degree, particularly in respect of harmony and instrumentation. One can learn a lot from Wagner, including how not to write operas.’⁴⁴ This comment became one of the most frequently quoted whenever the question of Taneyev and Wagner arose, and most often it was presented as ‘Taneyev’s final judgement on Wagner.’⁴⁵ But Wagner always maintained that he was writing not operas,

⁴¹ *Materiali* 1925, p. 76.

⁴² *Materiali* 1952, letter from S. Taneyev to A. Arensky dated 8 October 1886, p. 133.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 11 April 1889, p. 158.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Richard Taruskin, ‘*Oresteya*’, *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.grovemusic.com [Accessed 3 April 2006]; Bernandt 1983, p. 120; and Korabel’nikova 1986, p. 120. All authors refer to the comment Taneyev made about Wagner in the letter to Tchaikovsky.

but music dramas, because for him, opera was finished as an art form.⁴⁶ Taneyev may have had this in mind in the context of his comment—something to which none of Taneyev scholars have hitherto paid attention. Taneyev finished the paragraph about Wagner with the words ‘One day I want to speak with you about him in detail.’⁴⁷

Taneyev was often secretive about his works and thoughts. He once wrote to his friend and colleague Arensky:

I am always embarrassed to talk about my impressions, and even in the theatre I do not like to sit with my acquaintances because I cannot bear to show and talk about something that has touched or greatly affected me.⁴⁸

This comment could be indicative of the fact that Taneyev showed his interest in Wagner much less than a more extrovert person would have done, and makes his statement in the letter to Tchaikovsky all the more significant. After seeing the *Ring*, Taneyev asked Tchaikovsky for his advice and assistance in resigning from the post of Director in order to devote himself to what he wanted the most: composition. He wrote that the pinnacle of his desires ‘would be to attain real power and authority in music’, and that he wished to ‘perfect himself in the art.’⁴⁹ It is obvious that the performances of Wagner’s music dramas in Moscow gave Taneyev an impetus to free his mind from ‘various rubbish that has nothing to do with art’, and start working on his opera seriously.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, tr. by Edwin Evans (London: W. Reeves, 1913), pp. 26-28.

⁴⁷ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 11 April 1889, p. 158.

⁴⁸ *Materiali 1952*, letter from S. Taneyev to A. Arenski dated 15 December 1882, p. 80.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

In the following year Taneyev gave two piano recitals in Kharkov, including on the programme Wagner's *Feuerzauber* (*Die Walküre*, Act 3, Finale), *Siegmunds Liebesgesang* (*Die Walküre*, Act 1, scene 3), and *Einzug der Götter in Walhall* (*Das Rheingold*, scene 4) from the *Ring*, all in Brassin's arrangement.⁵¹ The concerts were a brilliant success, as witnessed by excellent press reviews, of which Taneyev, usually so humble, informed Tchaikovsky with pleasure and pride.⁵² A year later, in 1891, Taneyev wrote to Tchaikovsky about his desire to travel to Vienna to a musical exhibition; he said that it was not the exhibition itself that interested him, but the possibility of hearing music that could not be heard in Russia. He wrote: 'Mozart and Wagner interest me above all else'.⁵³ For an unknown reason this trip to Vienna never took place, but Taneyev continued to study Wagner. On 29 June 1892 Taneyev wrote to Tchaikovsky from his holiday in Pyatigorsk, saying that every day he composed his opera and read the score of *Siegfried*.⁵⁴ Thus, his work on *Oresteia* went hand in hand with the study of Wagner's music dramas.

In the midst of his intense work on *Oresteia*, Taneyev organised gatherings at which he played and discussed Wagner's music with his friends or students. Rachmaninov, Scriabin, Konyus, Igumnov, Goldenweiser, and Catoire (the only "proper" Wagnerian at the time among them) were frequent participants.⁵⁵ At first Taneyev found only 'foul chromaticism', but soon he began to discover in Wagner

⁵¹ *Aus Richard Wagners Der Ring des Nibelungen, für das pianoforte frei übertragen von Louis Brassin* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n/d). *Feuerzauber*, *Siegmunds Liebesgesang*, and *Einzug der Götter in Walhall*

⁵² *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 24 March 1890, p. 163.

⁵³ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 14 July 1891, p. 176.

⁵⁴ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 29 June 1892, p. 184.

⁵⁵ Leonid Sabaneyev, *Vospominaniya o Skryabine* [Reminiscences About Scriabin] (Moscow: Klassika - XXI, 2000), p. 133.

beautiful places where he recognised ‘wonderful music.’⁵⁶ In 1903, Taneyev was included in a committee that was sent to the unveiling of Wagner’s statue in Berlin, where he attended some performances of Wagner’s music dramas.⁵⁷ By 1907, Taneyev deemed Wagner’s *Parsifal* as ‘excellent music [...], written so well and so thoroughly, without any “dirt”’⁵⁸

In his library, Taneyev collected Wagner’s *Beethoven* and *Oper und Drama*, and Hans von Wolzogen’s *Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Music des Parsifal*.⁵⁹ *Oper und Drama*, translated into Russian in 1906, contains many pencil marks made by Taneyev in the process of reading and studying, and the chapter on the role of poet in regards to composer was particularly well scrutinised. Among seventeen books about Wagner and his music only two are in Russian and the rest are in German, such as the correspondence between Wagner and Liszt,⁶⁰ studies of Wagner’s harmony by Bussler,⁶¹ studies of *Rienzi* and *Parsifal*,⁶² the *Ring*,⁶³ and *Tristan und Isolde*.⁶⁴ In Russian, there is an article on Wagner and his artistic reform,⁶⁵ and a guide to all Wagner’s music dramas.⁶⁶ Many of the books contain notes in the margins made by Taneyev while reading and studying. As well as books, Taneyev also collected the scores of Wagner’s music dramas, and his library collection includes *Tannhäuser* (two volumes—one with

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

⁵⁷ *Dnevnik*, vol. 3, entries dated 20 September 1903, p. 71, and 25 September 1903, p. 73.

⁵⁸ Sabaneyev 2000, p. 138.

⁵⁹ These and other books are kept at the Taneyev Library in the Moscow Conservatory.

⁶⁰ *Briefwechsel zwischen Wagner und Liszt*. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1887).

⁶¹ L. Bussler, *Partitur-Studium. Modulation der klassischen Meister* (Berlin: C. Habel, 1882).

⁶² Judith Gautier, *Richard Wagner und seine Dichtung von Rienzi bis zu Parsifal* (Bonn, 1893).

⁶³ Karl Köstlin, *Richard Wagner's Tondrama: der Ring des Nibelungen: Seine Idee Handlung und musikalische Komposition* (Tübingen: H. Laupp'schen Buchh, 1877).

⁶⁴ Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1908).

⁶⁵ K. Eiges, ‘R. Vagner i ego khudozhestvennoye reformatorstvo’, *Russkaya mīsl'*, 1913, No.6.

⁶⁶ Ivan Lipayev, *Vagneriana: sputnik oper i muzikal'nykh dram R. Vagnera* (Moscow, P. Jurgenson, 1904).

the Overture only, the other of the complete opera), *Lohengrin*, two editions of *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Parsifal*, and *Kaiser-Marsch*. *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Walküre*, and *Parsifal* all bear hand-written notes made on the margins by Taneyev while scrutinising the scores. Although some of the books and scores acquired by Taneyev are dated after *Oresteia*, he would have had full access to Tchaikovsky's library from the very beginning of their friendship. Among Tchaikovsky's music scores there survive *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*, all arranged for piano by Klindworth in 1861, 1865, 1871, and 1875 respectively.

The amount of time Taneyev spent on studying Wagner came second only to his study of counterpoint and early music. *Oresteia* is in many ways a Wagnerian opera, and although Taneyev did not use and develop Wagner's devices to the same extent, their influences are obvious throughout the whole work. Chapter Four will focus on these issues, Taneyev's treatment of musical motif, more closely.

Period of Composition

Generally, Taneyev scholars identify the periods of either twelve or seven years, 1882-1894 or 1887-1894 as the time during which Taneyev composed his *Oresteia*. The present study introduces a set of different boundaries, 1878-1900, and divides this period into four stages. The first stage, 1887-1882, is a probable, and yet impossible to prove, period when Taneyev might have conceived an opera on the myth of *The Oresteia*. The second stage, 1882-1887, belongs to the period during which Taneyev himself admitted having conceived his opera, and embarked on the composition of the initial musical material. Although these two stages proved to be the least productive, they must

nevertheless be considered as the beginning of *Oresteia*'s creation. During the five years 1882-1887 Taneyev thought about his future opera and formulated his approach to presenting a Greek tragedy on the operatic stage. During the third period, 1887-1895, the opera was composed and completed for its première in 1895. The fourth stage, 1895-1900, was dedicated predominantly to preparing *Oresteia* for its publication in 1900.

1878-1882: Prelude

According to the catalogue of the Russian National Library, the first Russian translation of *The Oresteia* did not appear until 1883,⁶⁷ but translations of *The Oresteia* in full or in parts were widely available in the 1880s in German and French.⁶⁸ However, Aeschylus' tragedy, although not completely unknown in Russia in Taneyev's time, was not as popular as other antique myths.⁶⁹ This is why the following point in this discussion is significant. Tchaikovsky, in one of his letters to Taneyev from the beginning of 1878, made a passing remark about the futility of using ancient subjects, writing that music could never truthfully depict such characters as Orestes.⁷⁰ It is interesting that he chose Orestes as an example—there was no precedent for the use of this myth in Russian opera before Taneyev's *Oresteia*, and Tchaikovsky himself never considered *The Oresteia* as a subject for any of his operas.

⁶⁷ *Eskhil: Oresteia*, perevod s Grecheskogo N. Kotelova [*Aeschylus: Oresteia*. Translated from the Greek by N. Kotelov] (St. Petersburg: tipografiya V. S. Balasheva, 1883).

⁶⁸ The following examples include: *Aeschylus: Agamemnon*, ed. by Schneidewin, F. W. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1856; and *Aeschylus: Agamemnon*, tr. by Walther Gilbert. Leipzig: Druck Und Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1874. More titles are available at the British Library Integrated Catalogue and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. *Eschyle: Agamemnon, Édition classique avec sommaire et notes*, par ed. Prieur (Paris: J. Delalain, 1847); *Eschyle: Les Choéphores, traduction française, avec le texte en regard, suivie de notes et d'un lexique*, par A.-L. Vendel-Heyl (Paris: A. Poilleux, 1834).

⁶⁹ The stage drama *The Oresteia* was première in Russia only in 1926. See Dmitry Trubotchkin, 'Agamemnon in Russia' in *Agamemnon in Performance 458BC to AD 2004*, ed. by Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall and Taplin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 255.

⁷⁰ *Pis'ma*, letter from P. Tchaikovsky to S. Taneyev dated 14 January 1878, p. 23.

It seems probable that the twenty-two-year-old Taneyev mentioned the myth to Tchaikovsky at some point in one of their conversations. That, in turn, may indicate that Taneyev considered the myth of *The Oresteia* as a subject for his future opera as early as 1878. The history of his upbringing and the availability of the vast selection of books on Greek antiquity at his familial home make this possibility not at all unlikely. And Taneyev could have seen Racine's *Andromaque* with Mounet-Sully as Orestes at the Comédie-Française. The fact that no sources about Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* (or, indeed, the work itself) would have been available to Taneyev in Russian until 1883 is of no consequence—he had a working knowledge of both French and German, in which the tragedy was available. The book might even have been present in his father's library and it is possible that the tragedy might have been read at one of many family readings, or have been narrated to the children.

***Oresteia* Overture (1889?)**

There exists a discrepancy concerning the date of composition of the *Oresteia* Overture that supports the hypothesis that *Oresteia* was conceived as early as 1878. After the première of the opera *Oresteia* in the Mariinsky Theatre an article '*Oresteia: Musical Trilogy*' appeared in *Russkaya muzikal'naya gazeta (RMG)* in 1895.⁷¹ It was written by Nikolay Findeyzen (1868-1928), a Russian music historian, journalist, critic, and founder of the *RMG*, which existed from 1899 until 1917. His article will be discussed further in Chapter Six of this dissertation, but here an intriguing discrepancy will be addressed, which occurred when Findeisen mentioned Taneyev's *Oresteia* Overture.

⁷¹ Nikolay Findeyzen, '*Oresteia: Muzikal'naya trilogiya*', *RMG*, No. 11, 1895, columns 727-735, St. Petersburg.

As stated by Korabel'nikova, the overture was completed and premièred in 1889, and was conducted by Tchaikovsky.⁷² Findeyzen, however, wrote in his article that the overture was premièred in 1880, presented as the music 'to the tragedy *The Oresteia*',⁷³ which, according to the dates given in the *Dnevnik*, is impossible. Findeyzen wrote that four years later [1884], the overture was repeated at a concert in Moscow, but this time presented as belonging 'to the opera *Oresteia*.'⁷⁴ This is intriguing. Findeyzen, an educated, well-rounded critic, writer, and editor, is very unlikely to have made such a mistake, particularly because he gave not one, but two dates.⁷⁵ What is more intriguing is that Taneyev did not correct this mistake anywhere, or at least did not react to it in any way in his diaries or letters. It seems highly unlikely that both men—one an experienced editor, and the other a painstakingly conscientious academic—would have missed this important point. Taneyev's failure to react is all the more suspicious because when Findeisen wrote about *Oresteia* in 1900,⁷⁶ and made a comment with which Taneyev disagreed, the composer duly logged it in his diary.⁷⁷ Another point that may prove Findeyzen to be correct about the dates is his statement that Taneyev conducted at the première of the *Oresteia* Overture, a statement that was, once again, not corrected by the composer when he read the article.

⁷² Korabel'nikova 1986, p. 111. Also in *Dnevnik*, vol. 3, p. 536. The overture was performed on 28 October 1889 under Tchaikovsky, in the second (No. 374) symphonic gathering of the Moscow section of the Russian Musical Society (RMS).

⁷³ Findeyzen, *RMG* No.11, column 729.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Findeyzen, 'S. I. Taneyev i ego muzikal'naya trilogiya *Oresteia*' [Taneyev and His Musical Trilogy *Oresteia*], *RMG*, No. 47, column 1143-1145, and No. 52, column 1297-1301.

⁷⁷ *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, entry dated 22 November 1900, p. 211. Taneyev reacted angrily to Findeyzen's statement that he left the post of the Director of the Conservatory because he had no administrative skills, writing that 'apparently, these skills were enough to sort out the conservatory's money problems', and perform rarely-heard works by Handel.

The last, and more minor, discrepancy in Findeyzen's article concerns the text of the preface to the overture. The *Oresteia* Overture was published by the Belyaev firm in 1897,⁷⁸ and the programme note in that edition appears only slightly changed in Findeyzen's article. It is almost the same in both sources, apart from the line 'This is a dark and bloody story', which is absent from the article but present in the preface to the score. Yet another discrepancy that may prove the earlier composition date of the overture is a short article about *Oresteia* written by Aleksandr Glazunov (1865-1936) in 1922.⁷⁹ There, Glazunov wrote:

I heard excerpts from this opera [*Oresteia*] first at Rimsky-Korsakov's [house] in St. Petersburg and then in Moscow in 1887. There, in a concert of the Russian Musical Society, an overture to *Oresteia* was performed; Tchaikovsky was also present at that concert, and he was enchanted by Taneyev's music.⁸⁰

Glazunov's date of 1887 confirms the earlier composition of the overture, and the fact that he mentions Tchaikovsky's presence in the audience (not conducting), is significant. Therefore, it is possible that Taneyev conceived his *Oresteia* much earlier, which would explain Tchaikovsky's reference to Orestes in the letter written to Taneyev in 1878.⁸¹ If Taneyev indeed started the work in 1878, it would explain the possibility of the overture being written in 1880, two years after Tchaikovsky's letter.

Thus, Taneyev may have conducted at the première of the *Oresteia* Overture in 1882, then repeated it in 1884 and 1887, and in 1889 Tchaikovsky conducted the performance in Moscow. Taneyev, often secretive about his new works, and highly

⁷⁸ *Overture de L'Orestie, trilogie d'Eschyle pour orchestre composée par S. Tanéiev. Op. 6* (Leipzig: M. P. Belaieff, 1897).

⁷⁹ Aleksandr Glazunov, 'Oresteia Taneyeva.' *Teatr i muzika*, 1922, No. 10, 166-67.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Pis'ma*, letter from P. Tchaikovsky to S. Taneyev dated 14 January 1878, p. 23.

demanding to the extent of keeping many of his compositions locked in his drawer because they were deemed not worthy of publication, could in fact have done the same to his *Oresteia* Overture.

Although initially Taneyev planned it as part of the opera, the overture always remained an independent work. This was partly because Taneyev finished the overture before the opera, and at the time of preparing the *Oresteia* for production he realised that its grandiose sound and elaborate instrumentation did not correspond to the opening scene of the opera.⁸² More likely, however, it was a result of Taneyev's exploration of Wagner's music and ideas that he immediately decided to replace it with a short prelude. Wagner believed that an overture must not to set out all the important themes of the opera, but to create a distillation of the work in advance, so that people had a sense of clairvoyance that helped them to react more fully to the course of the opera. Taneyev's overture, apart from being too long and grandiose, contained almost all the important leitmotifs and themes of the opera in their original forms, and the composer may have deemed it unsuitable also for this reason.

Taneyev based the musical language of the *Oresteia* Overture on the opera's main musical themes of Wrongdoing, the Furies, Apollo, and the material from the duet of Aegysthus and Clytemnestra. The music embodied the content of the opera, and Taneyev organised the thematic material in accordance with the opera's storyline. Lyudmila Korabel'nikova believed that such a way of composition was highly unorthodox for Russian composers, characterising Taneyev's opera *Oresteia* as the

⁸² Letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 28 February 1895, GDMTch, fond B2, ed. khr. 27.

‘drama of ideas’, and juxtaposing Taneyev’s method with that of Tchaikovsky, whose operas she called ‘the dramas of characters.’⁸³

The critics greeted the *Oresteia* Overture favourably. Hermann Laroche (1845-1904) was taken aback by the presence of Wagnerian influences in Taneyev’s music:

In the whole of Russia we will be hard pressed to find a single Parsifal, and we thought that this one [Taneyev] was surely immune from the temptations of the gardens of Klingsor. But when we discover that the most virtuous of us has fallen under the spell, that in *Oresteia* rages the same Wotan, reigns the same legend, that Aeschylus’ ‘good’ was glorified with the same colors in which luxuriated Edda’s criminal Gods, when we discover that Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev is a Wagnerite, we say: no, it is not possible!⁸⁴

Laroche’s surprise is legitimate: Taneyev’s interest in early music and counterpoint, and his initial abhorrence of Wagner were very well known in Moscow.

Another critic who reviewed the overture was Semyon Kruglikov (1851-1909), a proponent of the New Russian School of composers, who wrote critical articles for Moscow and St. Petersburg newspapers. He wrote in his review: ‘Taneyev the admirer of Mozart and Taneyev the author of *Oresteia*—the figures that are absolutely incompatible. Taneyev, I cannot say temporarily or forever, has completely changed: in his new overture he is no longer a Mozartian—he is a Wagnerian!’⁸⁵ Kruglikov mentioned the use of four harps, piano, cymbals, bells, tam-tam, plus other ‘extra’ instruments. ‘His overture—is a good work, undoubtedly and absolutely positively. There is passion, striving, expressive colourful music, in addition, of course, to the usual

⁸³ Korabel’nikova 1986, p. 111.

⁸⁴ German Larosh, *O ‘Val’kirii’ Rikharda Vagnera i vagnerizme* [About Richard Wagner’s *Die Walküre* and Wagnerism], cited in Bernandt, p. 121. Note 36 gives the original source as *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov* [Yearbook of the Imperial Theatres] Season 1899-1900, Appendix 1 ‘Ob *Oresteie*’ [About *Oresteia*]. (Published by the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres, St. Petersburg, 1897), p. 68.

⁸⁵ Semyon Kruglikov, ‘Dva pervikh simfonicheskikh sobraniya IRMO’ ‘The First Two Symphonic Gatherings of the IRMO], *Artist*, 1889, vol 3, 135-137.

Taneyev's complex, academic work.'⁸⁶ The critic admired the dark mood of the introduction, and the wildness and musicality of the *Allegro* and noted the overture's great success with the public.

On 2 and 3 December 1889 the overture was performed in the fourth and fifth orchestral concerts of the St. Petersburg section of the RMS under Taneyev.⁸⁷ This time, Laroche presented the work as an overture 'to Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia*, familiar to Muscovites, thanks to its grand success under Tchaikovsky's inexperienced, but talented conducting.'⁸⁸ Once again, a reference is made to an earlier existence of the work, which supports the evidence of Findeyzen's and Glazunov's accounts. Laroche wrote:

Constructed from the most solid contrapuntal material, full of the most delicate thematic work, symbolically reminiscent of the main idea of *Oresteia*, the overture of the first Russian master of canon and fugue is so complex in its construction that his "aims" even for a professional musician would not be clear after two, but three or four performances; for the public the witty play of the imitations, often hiding in the middle voices, is more unnoticeable, and will remain so even after a hundredth performance. The public reads the programme that summarises one of the greatest creations of poetry, and listens to beautiful booming chords, for most part loud, but also considerably tender. This solid contrapuntal basis did not make it impossible for the appearances of harmonies, influenced by either Wagner of his middle period, or his *Nibelungen*. We note a bold and interesting instrumentation of S. I. Taneyev, in which there are completely new effects, and risk to propose that this kind of Wagnerism, suddenly shown by the distant descendant of Handel and Bach, is not more than a transitory stage, presently only deepening the mystery of his complex, but purely artistic nature.⁸⁹

Laroche's critical opponent, César Cui, in a rare case of agreement with his rival, warmly received Taneyev's new overture. He wrote:

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Bernandt 1983, p. 120.

⁸⁸ *German Larosh: Izbranniye stat'i. Vypusk 4: simfonicheskaya i kamerno-instrumental'naya muzika* [Selected Articles. Volume 4: Symphonic and Chamber-Instrumental Music], ed. by Abram Gozenpud (Leningrad: Muzika, 1977), p. 264.

⁸⁹ Ibid., also cited in Bernandt 1983, p. 121.

The *Oresteia* Overture is a programmatic work. It begins with depiction of a number of terrible crimes in the house of Atreus and ends with the victory of light over a chaos of tyranny and revenge. This is a colourful and powerful work. Dark, ominous, and pessimistic sounds pervade its first half. Wild sounds of the cymbals, harsh trills of the woodwind, exclamations of the trombones, and fateful muted sounds of horns are the background against which quickly flash and change, or incessantly repeated, as an inconsolable cry of the heart, typical, characteristic phrases. After this unstoppable tempest of passions a pause arrives, after which we hear a peace-making, peaceful, quiet, not without antique colour music (harp and woodwind scales), beautifully finishing the overture. In general, this is a work of an excellent musician, seriously conceived and excellently performed.’⁹⁰

Three of the most prominent critics, Laroche, Cui, and Kruglikov, admired Taneyev’s *Oresteia* Overture, but only Laroche subsequently reviewed Taneyev’s opera. His review, among others, will be discussed in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

1882-1887: First Sketches

Immediately after conceiving *Oresteia*, Taneyev immersed himself in the study of Greek language, literature, and history in order to obtain a greater understanding of Aeschylus’ source. Exercise books kept in the Klin archive, show Taneyev’s dedication and hard work devoted to the study of the language.⁹¹ In 1883, Taneyev attended the lectures in ancient history given by his colleagues at the Moscow Conservatory, M. Korelin and S. Yur’yev, the notes from which also survive in his archive.⁹² He continued to study ancient history and literature for the rest of his life, and his diaries show that he

⁹⁰ Tsezar’ Kyui [César Cui], ‘Pervyy russkiy simfonicheskiy kontsert: Glazunov, Chaykovsky, Taneyev, F. Blumenfield’ [The First Russian Symphonic Concert] *Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta* 10 February 1897, No 41. Also cited in *Tsezar’ Kyui [César Cui]: izbranniye stat’i* [Selected Articles], ed. by Izrail Gusin (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye Muzikal’noye Izdatel’stvo, 1952), p. 461.

⁹¹ GDMTch, fond B 7, ed. khr. 9, 119, 122.

⁹² GDMTch, fond B 12, ed. khr. 105.

consistently collected books by such authors as Aeschylus, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Homer, Sophocles, and Euripides, as well as books on ancient history and culture.⁹³

Taneyev noted that the idea of writing *Oresteia* came to him in the summer of 1882, when he set off for his customary summer holiday in the country at his friends'—the Maslov family—estate in Selishche.⁹⁴ Just before his departure he bought Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* in a Russian translation. He thought that the second part of the trilogy, *The Libation Bearers*, was a perfect subject for an opera, and began to compose every day. The work progressed up to the appearance of Orestes, the protagonist of the opera, but Taneyev said that he discarded all the musical material, deeming it unsuitable for the final version.⁹⁵ None of this material survives in his archive.

Taneyev did not mention the composition of his new opera in his letters from the summer 1882. On the contrary, Taneyev was so busy translating a textbook by Bussler that, as he informed Tchaikovsky, by the middle of July he had 'absolutely no time for composition.'⁹⁶ In the summer of 1883 Taneyev sent only one letter to Tchaikovsky, dated 5 July, in which he informed him that he 'had written a little.'⁹⁷ It is possible that the date given in the catalogue of the NLR is incorrect. It is equally possible that Taneyev made a mistake when he noted his initial interest in Aeschylus' *The Oresteia*—for almost two decades had passed since the summer of 1882 before he noted the date.

⁹³ *Dnevnik* contain numerous entries on books by the above author bought or read by Taneyev. These books were not only in Russian, but also German and French languages.

⁹⁴ *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, entry dated 6 June 1900, p. 175.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated middle July 1882, p. 81.

⁹⁷ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 5 July 1883, p. 99.

Librettist Aleksey Venkstern (1856-1909)

It has not been possible to locate any comprehensive biographical data about Venkstern; details of his life, activities, and professional career are very few and far between. What is certain is that Aleksey Alekseyevich Venkstern was a writer, poet, translator, and literary historian, and a graduate of Moscow University. Just before beginning to collaborate with Taneyev, he left the post of Secretary of the Association of Admirers of the Russian Language, which he held between 1884-1887, and through which he had been commissioned to write a *Biograficheskiy ocherk o A. S. Pushkine* [Biographical essay on A. S. Pushkin].⁹⁸ Venkstern wrote for *The Russian Gazette* and *The Russian Review*, where he published poems and translations. He was also a member of the Moscow Shakespeare Society. The only published account of Venkstern's life can be found in an obituary written by Sergey Solovyov. It is given here almost in full as the only document in which a picture of the life of Taneyev's librettist can be gleaned.

Many Muscovites remember the happy and wonderful time of the *Shakespeare Circle*. At the head of this circle stood the late Lev Ivanovich Polivanov. It promoted the names of Pushkin and Shayek, and its soul was Aleksey Alekseyevich Venkstern.

The *Shakespeare Circle* was a union of people, young and burning with life, passionately defending the sacred aspects of pure aesthetics, excellently educated and cultured, dividing time between literary work and theatre, dedicating their leisure time to cheerful parties and communication with friends. [...] Close to this circle were: Vladimir Solovyov, F. Korsh, and Pavel Bakunin. The presence of Ivan Turgenev often lit up the atmosphere in which the [Shakespeare's] plays were performed.

Against this background of bustling cultural life clearly stands out one inexpressibly beautiful character: a careless jovial fellow and a proud prince of the

⁹⁸ Aleksey Venkstern, *Biograficheskiy ocherk o A. S. Pushkine* [Biographical Essay on Pushkin], included as a supplement to the 'Albom moskovskoy pushkinskoy v'stavki' [Album of the Moscow Pushkin Exhibition] in 1880 and 1882, and published in 1889; The firm of Kushnerev published a second edition in 1909.

kings' blood, the character of the Prince Henry V, lean and elegant youth with a feather in his hat.

The role of the prince was the crown role of Venkstern. Aside from this, he successfully played Hamlet, Coriolan, and Mercuzio.

Venkstern began to write poems early on. His holy of holies was the poetry of Pushkin, but all around him was the ever-present *Nekrasovshchina*.⁹⁹ The only poet of the noble blood, Fet, was persecuted and shamed. Not seeking popularity, faithful to Pushkin's legacy "You are the king: live alone", Venkstern wrote for the small circle of friends, the true treasurers of his muse. [...]

For the opening of the Pushkin monument Venkstern created the only full biography of the poet at the time, which was included in the album of the Pushkin exhibition.

Venkstern translated in verse the Spanish play by Moreto *Spes na spes*; from Musset: *October night, May night, August night, Reminiscence*, and a number of other small things. He also translated Byron's *Today I am Thirty-Six*. The majority of these translations were published in *Russkiy vestnik*.

Venkstern's translations from Musset deserve special attention. They are often far removed from the original, and are rather poetical re-creations, and not merely translations. Venkstern translated Musset like Zhukovsky translated Schiller, and Lermontov Goethe. Feminine and gentle, not very confident, written in a more graceful language than that of Musset, they were touched by the metallic brilliance of Pushkin's style, strictness, plasticity, and majestic presence.

But not only as a brilliant youth, nor as the enticing prince Henry do I remember Aleksey Alekseyevich Venkstern. I see him ageing, but still a man full of energy and strength, with clear blue eyes, with long greying beard: the complete look of the powerful Northern Viking.

I see him in a cosy environment of his Moscow cabinet, with a soft sofa and frescoes of Pompei on his walls. I see him on a crisp October day, youthful and fresh, in hunting jacket and with a rifle, carrying a recently shot hare. I see him on a balcony, in the circle of family and friends, where all idolise him, where his every word is law, where he jokes kindly and inoffensively, as did Pushkin's followers. He was elegant to the last detail, everything was artistic around him, in his estate, with hills, overgrown by young silver birches and nurtured by playful brooks, with a flowerbed of roses, surrounding a statue of his favourite Pushkin. But the years advanced. Illnesses undermined the strength of Aleksey Alekseyevich. The shame of the Japanese war, the decay of social life, the crushing of sacred ideals—all this worsened the illness. With sadness he turned back to the golden stories of his splendid youth.

His body grew weak, but the soul remained that of a young prince Henry. To the end he loved life, gladly greeting everything truly new and beautiful. Thus, during our last meeting, he delighted at Bryusov's *Fiery Angel*.

⁹⁹ Nikolay Nekrasov (1821-1877), a Russian poet, who often portrayed scenes from peasant life.

Aleksey Alekseyevich Venkstern died. He died as a person of Pushkin time. The ‘sweet sounds and prayers’ grow quiet, but louder and louder is the dance of the dark-skinned¹⁰⁰ above the remains of the hero.¹⁰¹

This obituary allows a glimpse into what Venkstern’s contemporaries thought of him as a man and a writer. But because there has been no published research about Venkstern, there is a certain amount of confusion among those scholars who have studied Taneyev’s *Oresteia*. A different writer, Aleksandra Venkstern (1843-1914), has sometimes been mistaken for Aleksey Venkstern because of the close similarity of name, and because they both lived and worked during the same historical period. Out of all the surviving correspondence between Taneyev and Venkstern only twelve letters by Venkstern to the composer survive in Taneyev’s archive.¹⁰² It is an important, although very brief, document of the two men’s collaboration that sheds light onto their professional relationship.

Taneyev noted in his diary that when he mentioned the wish to write an opera based on Aeschylus to his colleague at the Moscow Conservatory, S. Yur’yev, the latter immediately suggested a librettist—Venkstern.¹⁰³ Taneyev played a leading role in the creation of the libretto, and assumed responsibility for all the major changes, alterations, and additions to Aeschylus’ tragedy. He carefully planned every scene, informing Venkstern about the smallest details, and waited for the completed text before he started to set it to music. As he read the text, he wrote down the musical ideas between the lines.

¹⁰⁰ This is a reference to Pushkin’s roots—his great-grandfather was an Abyssinian who was in service of Peter I.

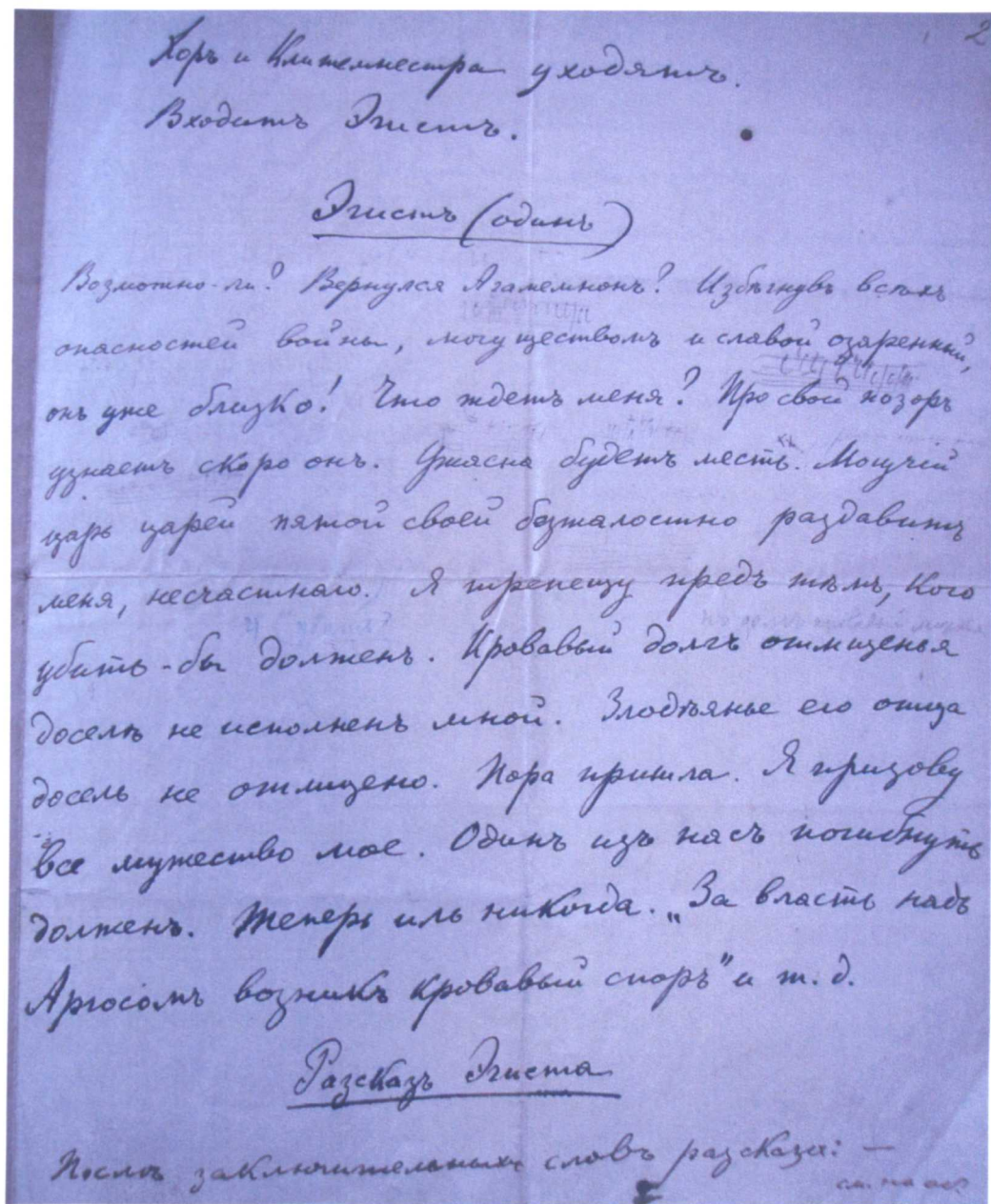
¹⁰¹ Sergey Solov’yov, ‘Aleksey Alekseyevich Venkstern’ *Vesi*, 1909, No 6, June, 89-92.

¹⁰² GTsMMK, fond 85, RGALI, fond 880, and GDMTch. Fond B11, ed. khr. 763. These letters can be found in Appendix B of this dissertation. Venkstern’s daughter Natal’ya Alekseyevna (1893-1957), a Russian and Soviet writer, was interviewed by Lyudmila Korabel’nikova in 1957 (Korabel’nikova 1986, p. 112). Unfortunately, the details of this interview have not been made available.

¹⁰³ *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, entry dated 6 June 1900, pp. 175-176.

One of such surviving documents shows his work on the scene of Aegysthus (Figure 2.1).¹⁰⁴

Figure 2.1. A page from Venkstern's letter dated 25 October [1887-89].



¹⁰⁴ A page from the letter of A. Venkstern to S. Taneyev dated 25 October [1887-189] GDMTch, Fond B 11, ed. khr. 763. The full letter can be seen in Appendix B, No. 2, p. 288.

Faded with time and now barely visible, the pencil marks made by Taneyev are shown in the Example 2.1a, b, c, and d. The notes in brackets are the possible variations of the notes on their left. Taneyev did not use any of this early material in the final version of his opera.

Example 2.1a. Music Sketch for the First Line of Text.



Voz-mozh-no- li?Ver-nul-sya A-ga-mem- non.

(Possible text: Is it possible? Agamemnon is back).

Example 2.1b. Music Sketch for the Second Line of Text.



Pro svoy po - zor uz - na - et sko-ro on.

(Possible text: He will soon discover his shame).

Example 2.1c. Music Sketch for the Third Line of Text.



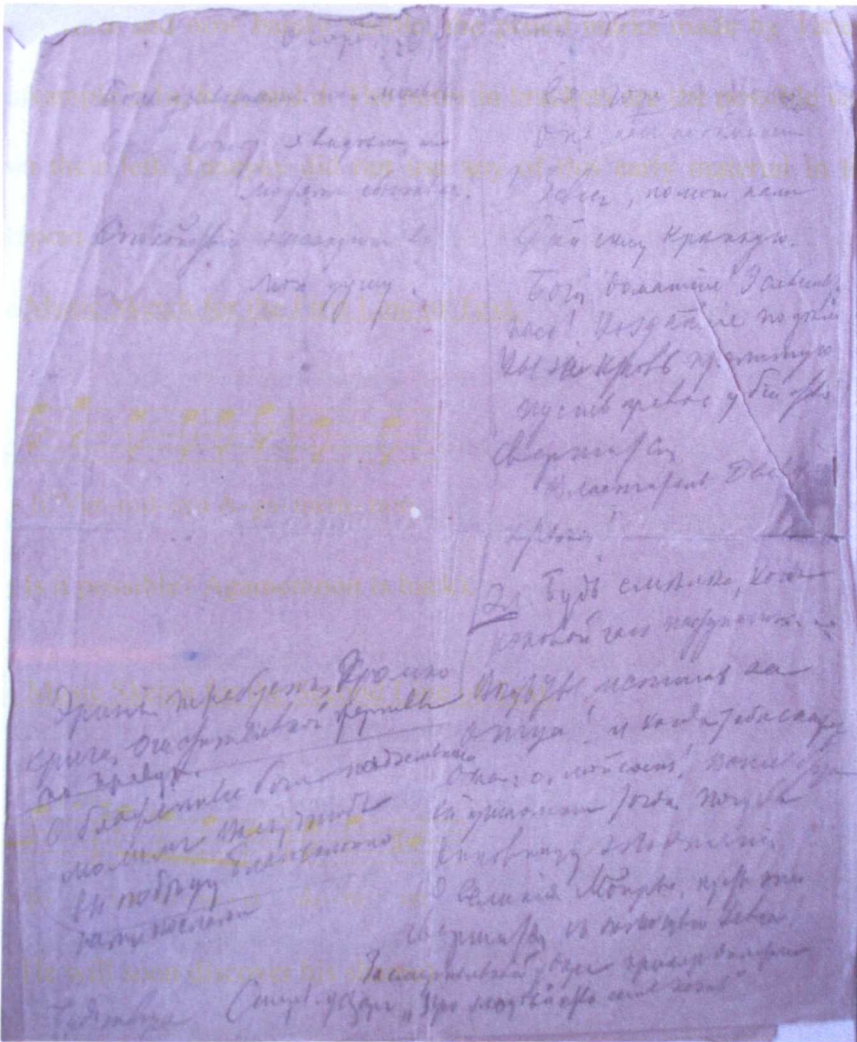
(Possible instrumental line, no text matches this sketch).

Example 2.1d. Music Sketch for the Fourth Line of Text.

U - zhas - na bu - det mest!

(Possible text: His revenge will be terrible!).

Figure 2.2. Sketch of the Scene of Orestes and Electra.¹⁰⁵



¹⁰⁵ GDMTch, fond B 7, ed. khr. 3.

The first version of the libretto was ready in 1887, but it did not satisfy Taneyev, who thought it did not correspond sufficiently to the original source.¹⁰⁶ A surviving sketch, corresponding to the scene of Orestes and Electra,¹⁰⁷ shows that Taneyev considerably changed the first version of the libretto (Figure 2.2).¹⁰⁸ None of the text seen here was included in the final version.

In order to improve the libretto, Taneyev read and studied various interpretations of the tragedy in order to gain a better knowledge of the myth and create a text that would narrate the tragedy in the best possible way for people who had not read it before. He wrote that he studied ‘Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and also specific writings about their works in general, and about Aeschylus in particular.’¹⁰⁹

Work progressed slowly because Venkstern was a sickly man plagued by illness, and during his frequently long periods of inactivity Taneyev was forced to suspend his composition too. Venkstern was also somewhat disorganised, and did not always have the work with him even when he did have time to do it. Thus, in one letter to Taneyev he wrote: ‘Although during my journey I have a lot of free time, it is somewhat difficult to work on the text of *Oresteia* because I have no printed text, nor my sketches with me.’¹¹⁰

While Taneyev still wanted to get his opera finished as soon as possible, he remained loyal to Venkstern and never considered reassigning the job to another collaborator. Instead, he did a great deal of work himself:

¹⁰⁶ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 21 June 1891, p. 172.

¹⁰⁷ Act 2, Scene 17.

¹⁰⁸ GDMTch, fond B 7, ed. khr. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 3 July 1887, p. 145.

¹¹⁰ Appendix B, No. 1, letter from A. Venkstern to S. Taneyev dated 4 August 1890, p. 288.

Apart from reading and thinking about the tragedy, I had to translate whole pages of some scenes from French, in order to see clearly the thought processes of the author, and select only that, which was necessary for the drama [...]. It was difficult because the original text had many words, possible for ancient drama but impossible for modern opera.¹¹¹

Taneyev even thought that their collaborative method had its merits, writing to Tchaikovsky that had he worked faster, the opera would have been written with the first version of the libretto, 'quite imperfect and only remotely reminiscent of Aeschylus' tragedy.'¹¹² Indeed, the final version contained all the events outlined in Aeschylus' story, and any person who was not well acquainted with the original would miss very little by seeing the opera.

1887-1895: Completion

One of the reasons for Taneyev's failure to proceed with the composition of *Oresteia* after the summer of 1882 lies in his teaching commitments at the Moscow Conservatory, where he began work in 1877. The following table (Table 2.1) shows all documented reference to the composition of *Oresteia* made by Taneyev since 1877.

Taneyev approached his duties and responsibilities seriously, spending the majority of his time developing his teaching practice, and had little time to work on such a large-scale project as an opera. Only in 1887 did Taneyev return to his *Oresteia*. In the middle of the summer he informed Tchaikovsky: 'Every day I compose my future opera [...], and this activity gives me great pleasure.'¹¹³ He enjoyed composition and thought

¹¹¹ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 21 June 1891, p. 172.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 3 July 1887, p.145.

that it was ‘the most intelligent and interesting activity.’¹¹⁴ For a long time Tchaikovsky was the only person to be aware of his friend’s new project, and was presented with the results of Taneyev’s labours at every meeting.¹¹⁵

Table 2.1. Composition of *Oresteia*.

Work done	Date	Source
Worked on libretto and projected instrumentation.	3 July 1887	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 3 July 1887, p.145.
Worked on opera—no details.	29 July 1887	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 3 July 1887, p.145.
Began duet of Clytemnestra and Orestes (<i>The Libation Bearers</i>).	13 June 1888	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 14 June 1888, p.152.
Hoped to complete Act 2 by the end of summer 1888.	Summer 1888	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 14 June 1888, p.154.
Worked on opera—no details.	March-April 1889	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 11 April 1889, p.158.
Worked on opera, but slow progress.	6 July 1889	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 6 July 1889, p.162.
Finished scene 1 of <i>The Libation Bearers</i> .	29 November 1890	Manuscript score of Act 2, scene 1, GDMTch, fond B1, ed. khr. 145.
Worked on <i>Agamemnon</i> and <i>The Libation Bearers</i> , hoped to finish <i>Agamemnon</i> in the next few days. Finished four out of seven tableaux, and only three were left to compose.	21 June 1891	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 21 June 1891, p.172.
Completed <i>Agamemnon</i> .	14 July 1891	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 14 July

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ P. I. Chaykovsky: *dnevnik 1873-1891* [Diaries] (Moscow-Petrograd: Muzikal'n:iy Sektor, 1923), entries dated 29 March 1887, p.136; 5 and 6 April 1887, p.137; 5 September 1887, p. 176 contain direct references to *Oresteia*, while many others just record Taneyev’s visits.

		1891, p.175.
Received the libretto of <i>The Libation Bearers</i> .	Beginning of August 1891	Letter from Venkstern dated 30 July 1891, unpublished. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152. (Appendix B, No. 7, p. 293)
Finished <i>The Libation Bearers</i> .	2 March 1892	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 2 March 1892, p.180.
Worked on opera—no details.	29 June 1892	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 29 June 1892, p.184.
Almost finished the last scene of the opera.	24 July 1892	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 24 July 1892, p.185.
Planned to finish the whole opera by the end of August.	24 July 1892	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 24 July 1892, p.185.
Referred to the opera as complete, aside from a small chorus consisting of eight lines of text.	24 January 1893	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Nápravník dated 24 January 1893, p. 429.
Completed the opera in piano reduction. Played it for the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres.	19 March 1893	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 20 March 1893, p.191.
Began orchestrating the opera. Orchestrated the last scene during the summer 1893.	End of summer 1893	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Tchaikovsky dated 7 august 1893, p.197.
Made cuts to the opera and sent a new piano reduction to Nápravník.	18 February 1894	<i>Pis'ma</i> , letter to Nápravník dated 18 February 1894, p. 431.
Changed harp parts.	20 March 1895	<i>Dnevnik</i> , entry dated 20 March 1895, p. 79.
Changed harp parts again.	24 March 1895	<i>Dnevnik</i> , entry dated 24 March 1895, p. 81.

The composition work during summer 1887 must have proved quite productive, for Taneyev wrote to Tchaikovsky: 'I think that in three years I will finish all, and if it

will be possible to get leave for at least three months, even sooner.’¹¹⁶ He soon wrote another letter, in which he told Tchaikovsky that by the end of August Act 2 should be finished, and added: ‘I think about the opera so much that it would be most regretful if it turns out unsuccessfully. I put all my effort towards writing it as well as I can, and treat it very seriously.’¹¹⁷ However, teaching and other commitments proved too demanding to enable the composer to accomplish his plans by the self-imposed deadline of 1890. The completion of the opera was further delayed because when Tchaikovsky persuaded Taneyev to take the post of Conservatory Director in 1885, the twenty-nine-year-old Taneyev, with a characteristically diligent and conscientious approach to his new responsibilities, set about improving the institution’s reputation. His hard work ensured that the Conservatory, for the first time since its inception, was freed from financial debt. Taneyev developed a new syllabus, created new courses, implemented more stringent entry requirements, and made it easier for poor but talented Russian students to enter. But being the head of the Conservatory meant that he had to sacrifice time for composition.

In 1889, as a result of the great inspiration derived from seeing Wagner’s *Ring* in Moscow, Taneyev resigned from the Moscow Conservatory and devoted himself entirely to his *Oresteia*. Another event helped strengthen Taneyev’s desire to resign—the death of his mother less than a month before he saw and heard the *Ring*. He suddenly decided to rid himself of ‘the people, in whom I have little interest’, to ‘be alone’ and get busy with the most important thing—composition.¹¹⁸ Taneyev had always lived with his family, but after his mother’s death he finally moved to separate accommodation, and

¹¹⁶ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 3 July 1887, p. 145.

¹¹⁷ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 18 August 1887, p. 154.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

was pleasantly surprised to find how much easier it was for him to compose while living alone, with no distractions, and complete silence whenever he required it.

In June 1891, Taneyev wrote to Tchaikovsky: 'I compose very diligently – writing every day in the morning and in the evening. [...] Any day now I will finish Act 1.'¹¹⁹ In July the music for Act 1 was completed, and Venkstern completed the text for Act 2.¹²⁰ Taneyev eagerly waited to see Tchaikovsky after the summer break to play the music to him.¹²¹ At one of his visits to Tchaikovsky's residence in Maydanovo in December 1891, Taneyev must have been encouraged to finish the opera as soon as possible, because he wrote three months later: 'Being in Maydanovo affected me in a good way, stimulating my desire to advance the opera. I am using all my spare time to tidy up Act 2.'¹²²

Taneyev continued to work on the opera as often as he could, even during his holidays, and with varied success. He spent the summer of 1892 in the Caucasus with his friend and colleague Anton Arensky trying to compose, continue one of his usual activities—writing contrapuntal exercises—and attempting to study the score of Wagner's *Siegfried*.¹²³ But because he was often more concerned with excursions into the mountains and exploring the Caucasus's natural environment, work did not proceed very quickly. He wrote to Tchaikovsky: 'I cannot say that I was diligent. However, I

¹¹⁹ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 20 June 1891, pp. 172-173.

¹²⁰ Appendix B, No. 5, Letter from A. Venkstern to S. Taneyev dated 30 July 1891, p. 293.

¹²¹ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 14 July 1891, p. 175.

¹²² *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 2 March 1892, p. 180.

¹²³ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 29 June 1892, p. 184. Taneyev was working simultaneously on his treatise *Podvizhnoy kontrapunkt strogogo pis'ma* [Invertible Counterpoint in Strict Style] (Leipzig: Belyaev, 1909, English translation 1962).

have almost completed the last tableau of the opera, and think that approximately in one month—at most—will finish the whole opera.’¹²⁴

It is difficult to say how much longer it would have taken Taneyev to complete his opera had Tchaikovsky not directly intervened by speaking to the Director of the Imperial Theatres in St. Petersburg, Ivan Vsevolozhsky (1835-1909), about *Oresteia*, and if Vsevolozhsky in turn had not expressed interest. He was excited about having an opportunity to stage an opera that dealt with Greek antiquity, something he had not done before. Vsevolozhsky became the director of the Imperial Theatres in 1882, and attempted to elevate Russian opera ‘to European level.’¹²⁵ Although he spared no expense on productions and made sure everything was as lavish and extravagant as possible, his favourite operas were by French composers, particularly Gounod and Massenet, and he did not always appear to appreciate new Russian operas.

Tchaikovsky enthusiastically wrote to Taneyev that Vsevolozhsky and the chief conductor of the Theatres Eduard Nápravník (1839-1916) wanted to hear *Oresteia*, and coaxed Taneyev into going to St. Petersburg to play the opera for the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres.¹²⁶ It took Taneyev four months to complete the opera and to make a piano reduction, which was necessary for presenting the work to the Imperial Theatres. He wrote to Tchaikovsky about his first visit:

Yesterday I arrived from Moscow and [...] played my opera to the Directorate. It was a huge effort for me to prepare a complete piano reduction. I used the services of four copyists, for whom I, by my own timetable, was preparing the work. In the

¹²⁴ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 24 July 1892, p.186.

¹²⁵ Olga Levasheva, ‘Muzikal’niy teatr (1870-1890)’ in *Istoriya russkoy muziki v desyati tomakh* [History of Russian Music in Ten Volumes], ed. by Yury Keldish, Lyudmila Korabel’nikova, Marina Rakhmanova and others (Moscow: Muzika, 1994), vol. 8, p. 279.

¹²⁶ *Pis'ma*, letter from P. Tchaikovsky to S. Taneyev dated 3 November 1892, p. 188.

last few days one of them stayed with me without going out, and to him I passed leaf after leaf. Rachmaninov spent up to four hours a day with me, correcting the written material, for which I did not have time. I do not remember that I ever had to work that hard. I went to bed late, got up at six, and in the last day even at four in the morning. For my departure, the piano reduction was copied, apart from a few bars, which I wrote out when I got to Petersburg.¹²⁷

The hard work paid off, and when Vsevolozhsky, Nápravník, his two assistants, and Tchaikovsky's brother Modest Il'ich heard the opera, they immediately decided to produce it in the following season 1894-95.¹²⁸

1895-1900: Second Edition

For the first production of *Oresteia* in 1895, Taneyev published the opera using a lithographic process, and meeting all the expenses himself.¹²⁹ Only a hundred copies were produced, many of which Taneyev presented to his friends and colleagues. After the première of *Oresteia* in 1895 at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg Mitrofan Belyaev (1836-1904) offered to publish the opera. Taneyev immediately began revisions, making some major changes in orchestration, and even completely re-writing one of the scenes.¹³⁰ A short review of the 1900 edition of the opera appeared in German, which is given here in full.

A group of composers belonging to the new Russian school has appeared in recent times. It is not unknown that Sergey Taneyev is one of the most prominent among them. He also seems to be the most serious, which is shown by his remarkable choice of text that demonstrates in advance his voluntary renunciation of individual self-expression (as demanded by antique subjects in general). Great composers have already been defeated by this text because they did not manage to

¹²⁷ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 20 March 1892, p.191.

¹²⁸ *Materiali 1952*, letter from V. Pogozhev to S. Taneyev dated 24 April 1893, p. 252.

¹²⁹ Sergey Taneyev: *Oresteia*, (St. Petersburg: I. N. Kushnerev, 1894).

¹³⁰ The scene of Aegysthus and Clytemnestra (Act 1, scene 4) was completely re-structured.

find a suitably serious style for this alien sensibility of the classical frame of mind [...].

So it is amazing that Taneyev has been able to adapt himself to his mammoth antique work, and to the musical expressions and frame of mind of the most modern musical achievements. The purely melodic line is pushed into the background in his music, which is motivated not only by the text but also by the fact that the composer, because of his strongly dramatic nature, was concerned not to endanger the development of the plot with long drawn-out lyrical melismas. He compensates us for this with a rich hoard of original sound combinations and modulations, which in a network of leitmotifs allow us to get a glimpse of a pure and beauty-loving soul. Within this framework, the composer demonstrates a careful workmanship corresponding to the content of the often distressing story and a noble, often classical taste which gives expression to the purely human emotion with delicate poetry and in distinguished musical language. The choice of a historical Greek poem for his work is not to be seen as mere dilettantism, but can be explained by an inner urge to show heightened human destinies, in which his effort can be compared with that of Richard Wagner. He gives his themes effective weight and real power, themes which he manages to weave together in an unbroken stream and to develop psychologically. We can expect great and important things from his talent, to which new Russia looks up with justified pride.¹³¹

Another review, written by Findeyzen, appeared in the *RMG* in the same year, in time for the publication of the score.¹³² Prior to writing it, he asked Taneyev for some manuscript pages from the opera.¹³³ The article began: 'Probably only very few people know about the existence of professor Taneyev's musical trilogy *Oresteia*, given with some success in the Mariinsky theatre in 1895.'¹³⁴ Findeyzen lamented that *Oresteia*, like so many other Russian operas were taken off the stage before their time and forgotten, listing Rimsky-Korsakov's *Pskovityanka*, *Mlada*, *Noch' pered rozhdestvom*, Tchaikovsky's *Maid of Orleans*, *Charodeyka*, *Mazeppa*, and operas of Rubinstein, Musorgsky, and Cui. The author wrote that it was not Taneyev's fault that the opera did not have a long presence on stage, or that the public was not aware of the new edition of

¹³¹ B. W., *Deutsches Blatt*, Brunn, Donnerstag, 5 Rebelmonds 1900, No. 253, tr. by Martin Pickard.

¹³² Findeyzen, *RMG*, Nos. 47 and 52, columns 1143-1145 and 1297-1301.

¹³³ *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, entry dated 8 February 1900, p. 137.

¹³⁴ Findeyzen, *RMG* Nos. 47 and 52.

the opera. He put it down to the fact that in Russia no one knew how to promote Russian music.

Fifteen years after the première, Findeyzen wrote that the public and critics treated the opera ‘not only sternly and strictly, but also in many ways unjustly’ in 1895.¹³⁵ He then said that Venkstern’s adaptation was quite successful, and proceeded to recount the events that take place in the story. ‘In the thematic material, *Oresteia* presents a very interesting score, as well as beautiful scenes and separate themes.’¹³⁶ Findeyzen thought that Clytemnestra, Orestes, and Cassandra were the most successful characters of the opera, and that Cassandra’s character was one of the most beautiful not only in Russian, but also in world operatic literature.

Taneyev spent three years preparing the new version of *Oresteia* for publication, which made the 1894 score obsolete. However, the differences between the two versions reveal Taneyev’s compositional process, and show the parts of the opera he deemed necessary to improve. Some of these differences are mentioned or discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, and a further comparison of these two editions is necessary today, but falls outside the scope of this thesis.

Compositional Method

Because *Oresteia* took Taneyev so long to complete, it marked an important stage in his life as a composer during which he developed his own, unique compositional technique. From a young musician just beginning his career, Taneyev matured into a respected, skilled composer through the work on his opera. One of the most important discoveries

¹³⁵ Ibid., column 1297.

¹³⁶ Ibid., column 1298.

he made in his youth was a book that described Beethoven's method of composition, of which he wrote to Tchaikovsky in 1879.¹³⁷ Using Beethoven's method and adapting it to his own needs and skills, Taneyev's technique resulted in his being methodical and clear, which suited his creative personality. He described it to Tchaikovsky thus:

[My] system ensures that no number is completely finished before the draft of the whole work is ready; one may say [I] compose concentrically, not by building a whole work from a sequence of parts, but by going from the whole to details: from the opera to acts, from acts to scenes, from scenes to separate numbers. This method enables [me] to note in the early stages those important points of the drama upon which the composer must concentrate his attention. The method also allows [me] to decide on the length of scenes and numbers in proportion to their significance, to work out a tonal plan of all the acts, arrange the orchestral sound in the whole work, and so on.¹³⁸

As is apparent from his explanation, Taneyev did not work on the scenes of *Oresteia* in the order of their appearance in the opera, but went from the most important to the less significant numbers. His approach demonstrates clearly with what logic and detachment he worked on a musical genre that is possibly the most demanding of all in the sense of emotional involvement.

Owing to this system, Taneyev's choice to compose first the scene of Orestes and the Furies from the final act was very logical because it was

the culmination of those elements of terror that are found in the preceding parts of the trilogy [...]. This scene [...] was for me a kind of measure by which I was guided while composing the preceding parts, which I made less interesting particularly because of this scene.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 28 December 1879, p. 45. Taneyev did not give any further details about the book.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Napravnik dated 18 February 1894, p. 432.

Work on *Oresteia* proceeded extremely slowly owing to a combination of several factors: Taneyev's professorial toil and the duties of the Director of the Conservatory, his librettist's frequent illnesses and absences, and a compositional method that required time and patience. There was another reason for *Oresteia*'s slow progress: preparatory work. Taneyev wrote to Tchaikovsky that he spent

...a terrible amount of time on preparation and incomparably less on the actual writing. Some numbers I leave unfinished for years but continue to work on them. The themes that are most important in the opera, I often take out of context and write on them various etudes-cansons, imitations, and so on. With time, from all this chaos of separate ideas and drafts something more defined and harmonious begins to emerge, all insignificant things fall away, and I am left with only that which is definitely useful. Comparing the later numbers with the earlier ones, I am delighted that the early material did not find its way into my opera—all my initial ideas were completely unsatisfactory.¹⁴⁰

Taneyev lamented that composition did not come easily to him, but he concluded the letter optimistically: 'I still think that composition is my most important vocation, and I would never want to replace it with anything else.'¹⁴¹ Tchaikovsky replied with an encouraging letter, in which he expressed his conviction that Taneyev would write an excellent opera. He even conveyed envy of his friend's slow and methodical approach, which appeared to afford Taneyev great enjoyment from composition, while Tchaikovsky was often feverishly trying to complete his works, and finding it highly stressful.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 21 June 1891, p. 173.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Pis'ma*, letter from P. Tchaikovsky to S. Taneyev dated 27 June 1891, p.173.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the history of *Oresteia*'s composition, drawing extensively on primary sources such as Taneyev's letters, diaries, and notebooks. The letters from Taneyev's librettist Aleksey Venkstern have been examined, translated, and published here for the first time. Although they constitute a modest body of research material, they help illuminate the genesis of *Oresteia* and the way the composer and librettist collaborated on their project. The letters where Venkstern refers to his illness and/or inability to work explain some of the reasons for the slow progress of the opera's composition.¹⁴³

The research about another aspect of Taneyev's biography, his interest in Wagner, was long overdue. The discussion in this chapter contributed towards a fuller understanding of Taneyev's enigmatic statement 'One can learn a lot from Wagner, including how not to write operas',¹⁴⁴ which Taneyev scholars perceived predominantly as negative. The entries cited or referred to from Taneyev's diaries have shown that he was serious about his study of Wagner's music dramas, particularly later in his life. It is hoped that through the case-study of Taneyev's interest, a contribution towards a greater understanding of Wagner reception in Russia has been made.

This chapter has demonstrated that Taneyev's *Oresteia* was a product of eighteen, or possibly even twenty-two years of work and thought, in the period 1882-1900 or 1878-1900. During the time it took Taneyev to complete his musical trilogy, the Russian operatic repertoire also saw the appearance of such operas as Borodin's *Prince Igor*, Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, *Mazeppa*, *Charodeyka*, *Iolanta*, Rimsky-Korsakov's

¹⁴³ Appendix B, letters Nos. 1 and 2, p. 288, and 5 and 7, pp. 293.

¹⁴⁴ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 11 April 1889, p. 158, quoted on p. 30 of this thesis.

Mlada, *Snegurochka*, *Noch' pered rozhdestvom*, and Musorgsky's *Khovanshchina* and *Boris Godunov* in Rimsky-Korsakov's editions. The majority of these operas took their inspiration from Pushkin's dramas or Russian history, fairy tales and epic stories, and all but one (*Iolanta*) deal with Russian people or themes. Against this very nationalistic background of subject matter *Oresteia* definitely stands out as unusual and even odd, and its source is the first element that separates it from its counterparts.

But for Taneyev, the adaptation of Aeschylus' tragedy was a natural manifestation of his own fascination with Greek culture and history. His interest in it was cultivated from his childhood, and it seems that for Taneyev antiquity and music were inextricably linked. Because Taneyev was the only Russian composer in the nineteenth century to complete an opera based on a Greek tragedy, it is not surprising that the critics had difficulties with evaluating it in the context of the operatic scene of the time. Their reactions will be examined thoroughly in Chapter Six of this dissertation. The next chapter will compare the original tragedy with the version by Venkstern and Taneyev. It will consider the order of scenes, their context and content, examine the way the characters are presented in the opera, and how they differ from or are similar to their representation in Aeschylus.

Chapter Three

From Tragedy to Opera

...[*Oresteia*] is my most significant work, on which went most of my time and labours.¹

S. Taneyev.

Taneyev's and Venkstern's libretto rearranged significant parts of Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* to adapt it to the operatic medium and to ensure that nineteenth-century Russian audiences would find it easier to engage with story. But it was more than a mere act of interpretation. The libretto recast the drama in a powerful exploration of the tragic elements of human existence with the emotional undercurrent of music. Taneyev's music enhanced and voiced the emotional turmoil experienced by the individual characters as they were buffeted by fate and made decisions they had to live with for the rest of their operatic lives. And, though the libretto was made more understandable for a modern audience, it still maintained the powerful majestic sweep of epic events and the awe of human existence in an unfathomable universe.

Classical texts were not used in Russia as the sources for operatic librettos when Taneyev worked on his *Oresteia*. Although Russian audiences were familiar with some ancient Greek tragedies and myths, Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* was one of the least known because it did not appear on the stage until 1926.² Until then, it remained in the domain of those who could read the work in either French or German translations, or original Greek. A Russian critic Mikhail Ivanov, whose review of *Oresteia* will be discussed in Chapter Six, wrote:

¹ *S. Taneyev: dnevniki* [Diaries], ed. by Lyudmila Korabel'nikova (Moscow: Muzika, 1985), 3 volumes, vol. 2, p. 372.

² For more information see Dmitry Trubotchkin, 'Agamemnon in Russia' in *Agamemnon in Performance 458BC to AD 2004*, ed. by Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall and Taplin, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 254-271.

Despite our classical education, the classical world is not held in favour: not many people are interested in it and even fewer people know it. [...] Only very few people read in full, at least in translation, at least one of a small number of surviving tragedies by Aeschylus and, of course, no one read the complete tragedy, which Taneyev used as material for his opera.³

By choosing Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* as a subject for his opera, Taneyev knew that he would have to adapt its text not only to turn it into an operatic libretto, but also to make it more accessible to his listeners. Although Taneyev and Venkstern attempted to follow the original as closely as possible, they nevertheless made a number of important changes and even additions to the story in their own libretto.⁴ No detailed comparison of the two texts and the differences between the stage and operatic versions has been done until now. The purpose of this chapter is to outline and comment upon the changes made by Taneyev and Venkstern to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. The analysis will take into account the cultural context of late nineteenth-century Russia, which shaped their interpretation and adaptation of the tragedy. The discussion will examine the texts of the tragedy and opera by acts and characters in order of their appearance within the acts.⁵ Changes made to the original text by Taneyev and his librettist are examined in order to determine what effects they had on creating or increasing the sense of drama on stage and bringing the work closer to nineteenth-century emotionally charged romanticism, as opposed to the less demonstrative "classical" drama of the ancient Greeks. Selected examples will be

³ Mikhail Ivanov, 'Oresteia, muzikal'naya trilogiya. Slova A. A. Venksterna. Muzika S. I. Taneyeva. 1-e predstavleniye 17-go Oktyabrya.' [*Oresteia*, Musical Trilogy. Libretto by A. A. Venkstern. Music by S. I. Taneyev. Première on 17 October] *Novoye vremya*, 30 October 1895, No. 7066.

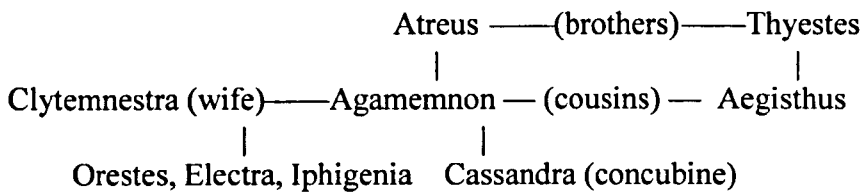
⁴ As Chapter Two of this dissertation has shown, Taneyev created the structure of the libretto for his *Oresteia*, and Venkstern provided the text, which the composer then either edited himself or put suggestions forward to Venkstern. Therefore, this chapter often refers to Taneyev as the creator of the libretto when it discusses the structure and content of the scenes.

⁵ All translations of Aeschylus are taken from: *The Oresteia*: Aeschylus, tr. by Michael Ewans (London: Everyman, 1995). All translations of Taneyev's *Oresteia* are from S. Taneyev, *Oresteia*: Muzikal'naya trilogiya [*Oresteia*: The Musical Trilogy] (Leipzig: M. Belyaev, 1900).

used to demonstrate how Taneyev used the music to strengthen the impact of the text.

Synopsis of Taneyev's *Oresteia*⁶

Figure 3.1. Relationships in the House of Atreus.



Act 1. The Watchman sees the fires announcing Agamemnon's return from the Trojan War. Clytemnestra informs the people of Argos that their king, her husband, returns victorious. Aegisthus, Agamemnon's cousin, is in turmoil—he is afraid that Agamemnon will kill him when he finds out that he has been having an affair with Clytemnestra. Aegisthus recounts how Atreus, Agamemnon's father, killed his own nephews and fed their roasted flesh to their father, Thyestes, who had had an affair with Agamemnon's wife. Aegisthus, the son of Thyestes and his daughter, was the only surviving child of Thyestes, and was duty-bound to kill his uncle, Agamemnon, to avenge the deaths of his siblings.

Clytemnestra enters when Aegisthus, overcome with fear, decides to flee and she convinces him to stay, saying that she has a plan to kill Agamemnon to avenge the death of her daughter Iphigenia, whom Agamemnon sacrificed to propitiate the goddess Artemis before going to war in Troy. When Agamemnon returns, Clytemnestra executes her plan, and begins to rule Argos with Aegisthus. She also

⁶ The complete libretto of the opera is included in the Appendix A.

kills Cassandra, Agamemnon's concubine, whom he brought back from Troy. Before her death, Cassandra prophesied Orestes' return and promised the people of Argos that he would avenge Agamemnon's death and expiate the House of Atreus from its sins.

Act 2. Clytemnestra wakes up in her bedroom from a terrifying dream. Agamemnon's phantom appears and prophesies her imminent death at the hands of Orestes. Orestes returns and meets his sister Electra at Agamemnon's grave, telling her that Apollo sent him to avenge the death of their father. Orestes, though horrified at the thought of committing matricide knows that he is bound to avenge his father's murder and willingly accepts the curse of his actions,—he kills both Clytemnestra and Aegysthus, but his mother's Furies, the spirits of retribution, begin to pursue him in punishment.

Act 3. The Furies relentlessly pursue Orestes and almost drive him to suicide, but do not let him die, thus exacerbating his sufferings. He decides to go to Apollo's temple in Delphi and ask the god for protection. Apollo drives the Furies away, and sends Orestes to Athens, where Athena summons the court of the Areopagus to decide Orestes' fate. The court's votes divide equally for and against Orestes, and the goddess casts her vote in his favour because he acted with the conscious knowledge of the evil that he was committing, but acted in the only manner he considered honourable. Orestes is freed from his sin through his willing acceptance of suffering and repentance, and Athena bequeaths a new law to the Athenians—brotherly love and compassion.

Act 1. Agamemnon

Act 1 of the opera, entitled *Agamemnon*, condenses the first part of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Although the action in the libretto of Taneyev and Venkstern closely follows that of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, they unfolded the story in a different sequence of events. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* there are eight scenes, and five episodes where the Elders comment on past and present events. Taneyev increased the number of scenes to ten. A comparison of the order of the scenes in Taneyev's libretto compared side by side to the original tragedy is shown in Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1. Aeschylus' and Taneyev's *Agamemnon*.

Aeschylus		Taneyev	
Scene 1	The Watchman	Scene 1	The Watchman
Choros 1	The Elders of Argos	Scene 2	Women's Chorus
Scene 2	Clytemnestra and the Elders	Scene 3	Clytemnestra and people
Choros 2	The Elders of Argos		
		Scene 4	Aegisthus and Clytemnestra
Scene 3	The Elders, Herald, and Clytemnestra		
Choros 3	The Elders	Scene 5	March and chorus
Scene 4	The Elders, Agamemnon	Scene 6	Agamemnon and The Warriors
Scene 4 (continued)	The Elders, Agamemnon, and Clytemnestra	Scene 7	Clytemnestra and Agamemnon
Choros 4			
Scene 5	Clytemnestra and Cassandra	Scene 8	Clytemnestra and Cassandra (beginning)
Scene 6	The Elders and Cassandra	Scene 8 (continued)	Cassandra and the people
Choros 5			
Scene 7	The Elders and Clytemnestra	Scene 9	Clytemnestra and chorus
Scene 8	Aegisthus, Clytemnestra, The Elders, and Bodyguards	Scene 10	Aegisthus, Clytemnestra, Bodyguards, and the people

One of the significant differences in Taneyev's *Agamemnon* is the early appearance of Aegisthus (marked by the arrow in the table above), whose role was developed and lengthened. Taneyev discarded the character of the Herald, who appeared in the original tragedy with the news of the King's return, replaced the chorus of the Elders with the chorus representing the people in general, and added the chorus of Agamemnon's warriors and Aegisthus' bodyguards. Taneyev's Clytemnestra was given more authority and influence over the people, and, as will be seen later, her character unfolded more gradually than it did in the original source.

The Watchman

In the opening of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* his Watchman tells the audience that he is waiting for the beacon of fire to signal Agamemnon's return from Troy. But there is something else he knows that he cannot tell: at night 'Fear stands beside [his] bed/ and stops [his] eyes from closing safely into sleep' (14-15; 3).⁷ He sees the fire as release from suffering—not only from a yearlong watch of restless nights, but also from the suffering of the household 'once tended with care and labour—now no more' (18-19; 3). There is something he cannot speak about: 'upon my tongue/ a great ox sits. The house itself, could it take voice,/ would tell most clearly. I prefer to speak only for those/ who'll understand; to those who don't, I haven't said a word' (37-39; 4). Aeschylus' audiences knew the previous versions of the myth, and with the unspeakable events that the Watchman did not dare to utter.

The Watchman created by Taneyev and Venkster, however, was used to inform the Russian audience that Agamemnon went to Troy to avenge the abduction of Helen and his words do not contain any allusions to dark or ominous elements. In

⁷ Numbering in parentheses refers to Ewans, 1995 in the following manner: line number(s); page number(s).

fact, those who do not know the story of the *Oresteia* would not guess that there is more to Clytemnestra's eager anticipation of her husband's return. But Taneyev, as will be seen in Chapter Four of this thesis, opened the opera with a gloomy Prelude that created a sense of foreboding and unease that enabled his audience to be aware of darker dramatic undertones of the unfolding story. However, the innocuous words uttered by Taneyev's Watchman immediately after the Prelude create a false sense of security that increases the dramatic tension later, when Clytemnestra's deceitful character and insidious deeds unravel in front of the audience.

Clytemnestra and Aegisthus

Aeschylus' Clytemnestra possesses masculine qualities and is compared to a strong animal. When she informs the Elders that Agamemnon is returning victorious, they remark that she speaks 'graciously and wisely, like a man' (351; 12), and Cassandra calls Clytemnestra a 'double-footed lioness' (192; 38). After Agamemnon's murder, Clytemnestra comes out to the Elders to explain that she killed him because 'He took my own child I brought up, /my much-lamented Iphigenia, and for what/ he did unjustly to her he now suffers/ justice' (1527; 46). Aeschylus' Elders deemed Agamemnon's choice 'impious and unholy and impure', and his thoughts 'reckless'. Their verdict on Agamemnon's deed is: 'shameful are the counsels of that wretched mania/ which gives men courage to embark upon a chain of miseries' (222-223; 9). Here, Aeschylus clearly tells his audience that Agamemnon's choice was wrong, and that it brought a curse and further tragedies on the house of Atreus. Aeschylus shows the process of Iphigenia's sacrifice and her father's moral dilemma, which carries in itself an element of choice for Agamemnon. Clytemnestra does not deliberate: she acts. The question of choice between avenging her daughter and killing her husband

does not come into the equation, and her conviction and drive for revenge are unshakable.

Aeschylus counted on his audience's previous knowledge of the myth. Agamemnon's imminent murder would be in the minds of the spectators, and Clytemnestra's chaste words about her faithfulness would certainly provide the feeling of duplicity and deceit that Aeschylus wanted to create. For ancient audiences, the knowledge of the characters' doomed fate was part of the tragic experience, whereas audiences in the nineteenth century were more interested in dramatic tension and the surprise of events unfolding in unanticipated ways. Taneyev and Venkstern therefore counted on the audience's lack of knowledge in some parts of the opera to create more dramatic impact with unexpected revelations such as Clytemnestra's hidden agenda to murder Agamemnon and her affair with Aegisthus. But they also had to inform Russian viewers of important elements to the understanding of the story such as the reason for Clytemnestra's wish to kill her husband.

Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is clearly audacious. She sends a messenger to Agamemnon to tell him that when he comes back

He will find a faithful wife
 just as he left her, watchdog of the house,
 loyal to him, an enemy to those who wish
 him harm, and as she was in every way; through all
 this time she's broken not one seal.
 Of pleasure from another man, or rumoured scandal,
 I know less than how to temper bronze.
 Such is my boast; brimful of truth—
 And one a noble woman may proclaim without disgrace.
 (606-614; 19)

In fact, Clytemnestra openly challenges her listeners, but they do not dare to react to her provocative words. She had been openly living with Aegisthus as her lover, and the people know that her boastful speech about faithfully waiting for Agamemnon is untrue. Their refusal to challenge her shows the respect and even fear that Clytemnestra commands from her people. In the same manner, Taneyev's Clytemnestra represented the kind of ruler that was more familiar to Russian audiences: ruthless, bold, and fearsome.

The character of Taneyev's Clytemnestra develops slowly. Initially, she enters the stage as a faithful wife, rejoicing at the thought of seeing her husband again, and nothing suggests her infidelity. News of the king's return had reached Argos, and the slaves, bearing flowers, incense, and the bodies of sacrificed animals, sing 'Glory to Zeus'. Clytemnestra enters with the words 'Oh powerful, mighty God, Zeus the protector of wedlock, the judge of the sinful, accept our gifts of gratitude.'⁸ This is sheer hypocrisy—she has not been faithful to her husband, and she will soon murder him. The gratitude she expresses to Zeus is for bringing Agamemnon back alive, so that she can have the pleasure of killing him herself. Her words are charged with hidden meaning, but outwardly she still appears as a wife who is ready to greet her husband after a ten-year absence. At this point, Taneyev did not give anything away and even the music is peaceful and majestic, if Clytemnestra's words are to be taken at face value (Example 3.1).

⁸ 1; 2; 14. All references to the opera are taken from the score S. Taneyev, *Oresteia* (Leipzig: M. Belyaev, 1900) in the following manner: Act; scene; rehearsal number(s); bar number(s) (where appropriate).

Example 3.1. Entry of Clytemnestra (1; 2; 14-15).

14 Moderato. $\text{♩} = 80$

Clytemnestra
 Bog mo - gu - chiyt, bog vse - sil' - niy, Zevs blyu - sti - tel' brach - nikh uz, ne-pod-

Piano
p *mf*

Clytemnestra
 kup - niy, i su - ro - vty, ne-ches - ti - vikh su-di - ya, _____

Pno.
cresc.

15

Clytemnestra
 bla - go - dar - stven - ni ye zhert - vi ti pri - mi na svoy al -

Pno.
f

Clytemnestra
 tar, _____ ty pri - mi _____ na svoi al -

Pno.
p *cresc.* *cresc.*

Example 3.1 continued.

Clytemnestra
tar, pri - mi - na svoy

Pno.
f
dim.

Ped. *

Clytemnestra
al - tar,

Pno.
p
pp

Clytemnestra and the chorus depart and her lover Aegisthus appears on stage alone.⁹ This is a significant departure from Aeschylus, where Aegisthus appeared only at the end of the first part of the trilogy, after Agamemnon's death (as seen in Table 3.1, p. 69). This change was necessary in the Taneyev and Venkstern libretto since Aegisthus is their necessary informant, who narrates the story of the House of Atreus,—a tragedy of abominations which culminated in the fight between the brothers Atreus and Thyestes for the throne, and Thyestes' feast after his deception of Atreus. Bringing Aegisthus on the stage early gave Taneyev the chance to tell the epic tragedy in movingly mournful and heroic music, thus turning a dramatic necessity into a musical opportunity.

⁹ In the first edition of the opera, Clytemnestra remained on stage after the chorus departed, and greeted anxious Agamemnon. Taneyev completely re-structured the scene and re-wrote some of its music.

Example 3.2. Entry of Aegisthus (1; 4; 28).

28 Allegro. $J = 108$

Aegisthus *f* Voz-mozh-no- li? — ver-nul-sya A - ga - mem - non, iz -

Piano *f* *dim.* *p*

Aegisthus *p* beg - - nuv vsekh o - pas - nos - tey voy - ni, mo

Pno. *cresc.* *sf* *p*

Aegisthus *cresc.* *f* gu-shche-stvom i sla - voy o - za - ryon - niy, on u - zhe

Pno. *sf* *cresc.*

The musical score is set in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of four systems, each with a vocal line for Aegisthus and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Allegro' with a metronome marking of 108. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *f* (forte), *dim.* (diminuendo), *p* (piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), and *sf* (sforzando). The lyrics are in Russian and describe the entry of Aegisthus, questioning the gods and the fate of the king.

Example 3.2 continued.

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Aegisthus and Piano (Pno.). The Aegisthus part is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. It features the lyrics "biiz - - ko!". The Piano accompaniment is in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. It includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte), *dim.* (diminuendo), and *p* (piano). The score consists of three measures, with the first measure containing the lyrics and the piano accompaniment.

Taneyev set Aegisthus' opening words 'Is this possible? Agamemnon is back' and the closing words 'He is already close' to the tritone. And thus, symbolically and musically closed the circle of doom and evil by using the augmented fourth, or 'diabolus in musica.'¹⁰ (Example 3.2, bars 3 and 14).

The tritone also reflected the instability, turmoil, and agitation that Aegisthus experienced. What Aeschylus expressed in words, Taneyev was able to underscore with the emotional power of the dissonant augmented fourth to strengthen the dramatic impact. Aegisthus' early entry in Taneyev's opera also allowed the composer to develop his role and disclose another part of the history of the House of Atreus—Thyestes' feast—a macabre act during which Atreus used severed feet and hands of his nephews to taunt Thyestes. In the face of such a vile act, Aegisthus knows that he must kill Agamemnon, but his resolve is not strong enough, and he succumbs to fear, deciding to flee.

After the monologue of Aegisthus, Taneyev further surprised the audience by unexpectedly revealing another side of the story—the relationship between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, a love triangle similar to the one that had spurred

¹⁰ Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Second Edition (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 868.

Atreus to murder his nephews. Aegisthus hurries to the exit, but suddenly the agitated music slows down, and Clytemnestra enters, calm and composed, singing ‘Oh my Aegisthus, my love, the dawn of our bliss is rising.’¹¹ She looks at Aegisthus with tenderness, and establishes a serenity that was absent in his preceding musical characterisation, which portrayed an anxious, terrified, and unsure Aegisthus in doubt of the course of action to undertake.

Taneyev reflected this emotional instability by avoiding the tonic throughout the whole episode, and by using chromatic harmony and diminished chords—musical elements that help increase the sense of tension. Clytemnestra’s entry in this scene coincides with the first appearance of stable, tonal harmony (Example 3.3).

The ensuing duet shows in the interplay of the two parts how Clytemnestra managed to easily overwhelm her lover with her power and influence over him and persuades him to stay. She told Aegisthus about her plan to kill Agamemnon, revealing another detail—the sacrificial murder of her daughter Iphigenia. Taneyev made his Clytemnestra impart this information, thus giving more weight to her motives for killing Agamemnon, and making the tragedy more intimate.

¹¹ 1; 4; 39; 1-7.

Example 3.3. Clytemnestra Calms Aegisthus (1; 4; 38; 6-10, 39; 1-7).

39 Moderato. $\text{♩} = 76$

cresc. *ff*

Aegisthus

Od - no o - sta-los' mne: be zhat! —

Piano

sf sf sf sf f ff

Aegisthus

Pno

dim. mf dim. e rit. *ten.*

Clytemnestra

p espress.

O, moy E gist! O, moy E -

Pno

p espress.

Clytemnestra

gist, lyu - bov' mo - ya! Bla - zhen - stva na - she - go zhe -

Pno.

Example 3.3 continued.

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Clytemnestra (voice) and Piano (Pno.). The Clytemnestra part is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are: lan - na - ya za - rya vzoy-ti go - to - va. The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. It includes dynamic markings for 'cresc.' and 'p'.

Taneyev and Venkstern did not present their Aegisthus as a strong character, but he was nonetheless sympathetically portrayed. Taneyev showed a man in turmoil—his entrance is hurried, dramatic, and dark. He had learned of Agamemnon’s arrival, and had to fight his own moral dilemma—whether to assuage his thirst for vengeance over the deaths of his siblings, or to flee from his own imminent death. Tumanina believed that Taneyev’s Aegisthus was weak and easily manipulated by Clytemnestra, who quickly convinced him to remain.¹² Korabelnikova described him as ‘the evil, cowardly, boastful lover of the queen’, who ‘takes a large amount of guilt onto himself.’¹³ While it is true that Clytemnestra seemed to have no difficulties in making him stay, this is just what Aegisthus needed—a kind of reassurance and reminder of what had to be done.

Taneyev’s Clytemnestra announced Agamemnon’s death to the people, appearing joyous, victorious, and satisfied. She recounted exactly how she killed Agamemnon, and how his blood ‘sprinkled her as if it were heavenly dew’.¹⁴ The process of Clytemnestra’s talking and thinking about murder is different in

¹² Nadezhda Tumanina, ‘Muzikal’naya trilogiya *Oresteia*’ [Musical trilogy *Oresteia*] in *Materiali* 1947, p. 110.

¹³ Lyudmila Korabel’nikova, *Tvorchestvo S. I. Taneyeva: istoriko-stilisticheskoye issledovaniye* [Taneyev’s Works: Historico-Stylistic Investigation] (Moscow: Muzika, 1986), p. 117.

¹⁴ 1; 9; 113; 1-4.

Aeschylus' tragedy. There, she actually derived sexual pleasure from the act of murder, and described in detail every blow she delivered to her husband's body (1384; 42, and 1446-7; 44). Taneyev's Clytemnestra, although overjoyed at exacting revenge for her murdered daughter, treated Agamemnon's murder strictly as a necessity, and any satisfaction she received originated from an accomplished deed, rather than the process of killing itself.

Taneyev and Venkstern succeeded at developing their powerful queen into the anti-heroine, a masculine female, who desired revenge and murdered her husband in cold blood. Clytemnestra's musical characterisation changed dramatically from an initial diatonic make-up as seen in Example 3.1 (pp. 74-75). Her lines, at first gently and smoothly flowing, become angular, more chromatic, and full of large leaps (Example 3.4). Here, Taneyev's vocal writing was given instrumental characteristic, and this is perhaps the reason why at the time of the opera's premiere Clytemnestra's part was considered to be lacking in expression.¹⁵

¹⁵ Almost twenty years later, when Strauss's *Elektra* was premiered in St. Petersburg on 18 February 1913 in Mariinsky Theatre conducted by Alfred Coates, it was not considered so unusual. Still, *Elektra* was given only three times and did not receive critical acclaim. The critical reception of *Oresteia* will be discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Example 3.4. Clytemnestra Announces the Death of Agamemnon (1; 9; 111).

Clytemn.
Клитемн. Moderato. (♩ = 84)

Кро - ва - во - е, дав - но въ-ду-ман-но - е дѣ - ло свер - ших - хосы! Онъ
De - puis longtemps dé - jà ma hai - ne me dic-tait la ven - gean - cel Ouf,
Die bin - ti - ge, seit lan - ge schon be-*schloss*-ne That, sie ist ge - sche - hen! Бъ

мерть, вашъ царь, су - пругъ мой не - на-вист - ный, онъ мертвъ и з - то
vo - tre roi, l'é - poux que je dé - te - ste est mort et il est
starb der Kö - nig, mein ter - han - ter Gat - le, er starb und dan durch

дѣ - ло рукъ мо - ихъ. _____ Прѣжъ ва - ми, гражд - да - не Ар -
mort de ma main. _____ Long - temps j'ai mé - di - té ce
me - ne eig' - ne Hand. _____ Vor euch, ihr Ein - woh - ner von

3104

The sexual element was completely absent not only from this aspect of the characterisation of Taneyev's Clytemnestra, but also from the whole opera, partly because of the outwardly conservative morality of nineteenth-century Russia, the standards of the censor, and partly because of Taneyev's own views on propriety. Tchaikovsky described Taneyev as a 'person of unusual moral nature',¹⁶ and Sabaneyev even believed that Taneyev and sexuality were mutually exclusive. Sabaneyev wrote that Taneyev did not like 'any intoxication—physical or emotional. Just as he did not like wine and narcotics, he also hated intoxicating ecstasies of

¹⁶ *Chaykovsky and Nadezhda Filaretovna von-Mekk: perepiska* [Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda Filaretovna von-Meck: Correspondence] (Moscow: Zakharov, 2004), 3 volumes, letter from P. Tchaikovsky to N. von Meck dated 2 June 1885, vol. 3, p. 1717.

mysticism and was afraid of ecstasies of love and lust.¹⁷ Even in the only surviving draft copy of a love letter from Taneyev to Maria Benois, there is a level-headed and logically presented refusal to connect his life with hers.¹⁸ This surprising avoidance of love in Taneyev's own life, mirrored in the abandonment of the love element in his opera, was not a mere embarrassment or disinclination, however. The composer worked with the drama of *The Oresteia* in a manner that created an emotional distance for the sake of dramatic purity, resulting in the Classical "sheen" seen in *Oresteia*. The critics, whose comments are examined in Chapter Six of this thesis, accused Taneyev of a lack of human feeling in his opera, shielded behind a cloak of Classical rectitude, and found it uninspiring.

Agamemnon and Clytemnestra

Agamemnon's arrival had been expected from the very beginning of both the tragedy and the opera. In the latter, Agamemnon arrived at Argos as a victor, to the sounds of a celebratory march, respectfully greeting his homeland. Everyone was overjoyed at his return, and even Clytemnestra seemed to be overcome with happiness at seeing her husband again. Taneyev's Agamemnon has two contrasting sides to his character. He appeared as the long-awaited king, customarily glorified by his people who extolled his achievements and merits far beyond what was allowed for a mere mortal in Aeschylus' time. But this official, kingly presence could not be more different from his personal characteristics as a weak and vain man: Agamemnon conquered Troy, yet he was easily swayed by Clytemnestra's unreasonable demands that led to his death.

¹⁷ Sabaneyev 2003, p. 43.

¹⁸ A draft copy of a letter from S. Taneyev to M. Benois dated 1886, GDMTch, fond B 11, ed. khr. 8.

Taneyev further emphasised Agamemnon's weaknesses of character by Clytemnestra's unbending strength, conviction, and unmasked disobedience. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra obeyed her husband when he ordered her to welcome his mistress Cassandra. Clytemnestra appeared to be kind towards her, trying to make her feel less apprehensive about entering their house as a slave. When Cassandra did not reply to Clytemnestra's greeting, she wondered if Cassandra did not speak their language, and remarked: 'I'll reach/ inside her mind and win her over with my words' (1051-52: 32). Taneyev's Clytemnestra demonstrated that she would not do what she is told. Right from the outset she let the young woman know where she stood: 'Get down from the chariot. Do not be proud. A slave has no right to be proud'.¹⁹ When Cassandra responded only with silence, Clytemnestra did not disguise her direct threat: 'You do not want to obey? You are annoyed that you arrived here as a captive, as a slave. Give me time. I will teach you obedience'.²⁰

Taneyev clearly wanted to make his Clytemnestra more assertive and more ruthless towards Cassandra. His Clytemnestra did not feel any natural warmth or affection for her husband's concubine, and she did not waste time on trying to calm her down and make her feel welcome. This reflected Taneyev's desire for a more realistic depiction of a woman who, although she did not stay faithful to her husband, still experienced jealousy and naturally rejected his mistress.

After successfully concealing the true reason for her joy at seeing Agamemnon again, Taneyev's Clytemnestra proceeded to lead him inside the palace, inviting him to walk on the rich red fabric. This was an insult to the gods: only they possessed the right to walk on richly embroidered red cloth, Agamemnon reminded her. But Clytemnestra said that a man who conquered Troy should not be ashamed to

¹⁹ 1; 8; 78.

²⁰ 1; 8; 79; 8-14.

make such privilege his own. Once again she exercised her power of persuasion, and the king began his entrance to the palace, accompanied by her words ‘Let this path, red as blood, be the last path you take’. Her vocal line was set to funeral-like music with sinister, sliding chromatic bass that complemented her darkly ominous words (Example 3.5).

Example 3.5. Agamemnon’s Walk (1; 77; 5-8)

Meno mosso. ♩=72

Clytemnestra
Pust' e - tot put', bag -

Piano

Clytemnestra
r'an - nly bud - to kro' tvo -

Pno

Clytemnestra
im pu - tyom pos - led - - - - nim

Pno

Clytemnestra
bu - det.

Pno

5

Agamemnon knew that he should not have walked on the red cloth offered to him by Clytemnestra, but he nevertheless succumbed to her pleas. His agreement to indulge Clytemnestra's whim was the last link in the chain of his decisions that eventually led him to his own death. Although Agamemnon's role is short and not as significant as that of other characters in the opera, he made an unexpected re-appearance as a ghost to Clytemnestra in Act 2. In the tragedy by Aeschylus, Agamemnon did come back to haunt Clytemnestra, but only in her dream, without returning to the stage. The music contributed another dimension to this character in this typical *ombra* scene, as will be seen further in this chapter.

Cassandra as a Prophet

As will be seen in this section, Cassandra's varied and expressive musical and dramatic portrayal in Taneyev's *Oresteia* shows that she was one of the composer's favourite characters. In both versions of the tragedy, Cassandra's divine character is inextricably linked to the tragic element in the opera. She sees the gruesome events of the past and Clytemnestra's intention to kill Agamemnon almost immediately after her arrival in Argos. All her visions are traumatic: the butchered children, Agamemnon's murder and her own death, and the death of Clytemnestra at the hand of her son Orestes. Aeschylus' Elders do not believe her prophecies, and the chorus in Taneyev's opera realise that Cassandra can see the sinister past of the house of Atreus, but they are too terrified to act upon her predictions for the future. Their inability to take action deepens the sense of tragedy, particularly for those members of the audience who know that her prophecies will come true.

Cassandra's first words in the opera 'Oh, woe is me! This wretched country!' sound like a piercing shriek (Example 3.6). This corresponds well with Aeschylus'

description of her ecstatic speech that is moulded ‘to a melody of dissonant and piercing strain’ (1152; 35).

Example 3.6. O, Woe is Me! (1; 8; 82)

Throughout the episodes of Cassandra’s visions, Aeschylus makes her burst into ‘agonised, energetic dance and song’²¹ but Taneyev simply requires her to be agitated, leaving it up to the music to supply the other elements—a resource Aeschylus did not have.²² Venkstern made a slight but important change to Cassandra’s words ‘a house that hates the gods’ (1090; 33), altering them to ‘a house that gods hate.’²³ Venkstern’s words are more blasphemous, their meaning haunts the House of Atreus to the point where everyone appears forever doomed—there is apparently nothing that can help lift the curse.

The defining moment for Cassandra is the vision of Orestes’ arrival, at which point her character begins to transform—for she knows that her own death, and that of Agamemnon, will be avenged. In both versions, Orestes’ name is not mentioned, and he is referred to as a wanderer or an exile. Cassandra predicts the arrival of a hero, Orestes, whose leading motif appears for the first time in her vocal part,²⁴ in a similar way Wagner’s Brünnhilde foretells the arrival of Siegfried, whose motif is

²¹ Ewans 2005, p 32.

²² 1; 8; 80.

²³ 1; 8; 83.

²⁴ 1; 8; 104.

also presented for the first time in her voice.²⁵ When Cassandra realises that Orestes will expiate the House of its sins and avenge his father's murder, she is ready to accept her fate. She breaks her prophetic emblem—her sceptre—and bravely faces death. In Aeschylus' tragedy, Cassandra merely throws away her sceptre and the woollen bands around her neck—the symbols of prophecy—but by making her break the sceptre, Taneyev imbues her character with decisiveness and defiance.

When Taneyev re-worked his opera for publication in 1900, he altered the ending of Cassandra's scene. In the first edition of *Oresteia* Cassandra walks into the palace to a very short orchestral accompaniment, immediately after her words 'Now I will go to meet my death. I greet you, gates of hell!', and shortly before Agamemnon's voice, calling for help, is heard (Example 3.7, bars 4-13).

Example 3.7. Cassandra's Walk, First Edition (1; 8; 106-107).²⁶

The image displays two systems of handwritten musical notation. The first system features a vocal line with lyrics in Russian: "теперь кончу на время у sceptру а ну —". Below it is a piano accompaniment with chords and some melodic lines. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: "временно а вась бо по ма а — да". This system includes a tempo marking "Allegro (♩ = 112)" and a key signature change to three flats. The piano accompaniment continues with chords and a more active bass line.

²⁵ *Die Walküre*, Act 3, scene 1. Taneyev's use of musical motifs will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

²⁶ *Oresteia* 1894, pp. 153-154.

Example 3.7 continued.

The image shows three systems of handwritten musical notation. The first system is marked '157.' and '(introduzione to the piece)'. The second system is marked 'A.' and 'tranne un momento.' and includes the instruction 'cresc.'. The third system is marked 'ch.' and includes the instruction 'Presto (♩ = 92)'. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

In the second edition Taneyev expanded the orchestral episode in order to increase the energy of Cassandra's gesture of throwing away the symbols of her prophecy and walking into the palace to die, and to make it more "operatic." Example 3.8 shows that this orchestral episode contains most of the melodic material found in the middle section of Cassandra's *arioso*, where she remembers her childhood. By bringing back Cassandra's happy memories, this time only in the orchestra, Taneyev achieved greater intensity in the ending of this scene in his 1900 edition, and provided a worthy ending to Cassandra's stage life. The changes made to this scene show that Taneyev was concerned with reaching greater levels of dramatic impact and used the music to re-emphasise what was stated earlier in the text.

Example 3.8. Cassandra's Walk, Second Edition (1; 8; 106-107).

106 Allegro moderato (♩ = 92)

а - да! - lu - е! Pfor - ten!

dolente

espr.

sf *p* *cresc.* *mf*

107

cresc. *ff* *rit.*

a tempo *espr.* *p* *cresc.* *dim.*

Входит во дворец.
Elle entre dans le palais.
geht in den Palast.

Presto
(♩ = 92)

pp *f*

Cassandra and the Human Element

Aeschylus laid great emphasis on Cassandra's prophetic visions, and in his tragedy she is presented first and foremost as a seer, which elevates her above ordinary human status. Although delivery of prophecy to the people of Argos is the main

function of Cassandra in Taneyev's *Oresteia*, it is still only one side of her role. As well as being a prophetess, she is also a human being—afraid, uncertain, and vulnerable. Her human side is shown in the *arioso* section that contrasts lyrically with her earlier, dramatic side. But, instead of offering respite from her highly charged emotions, the *arioso* only strengthens the tension and increases the drama by underlining her poignant situation. In this short number, Cassandra laments her death, which, as she comes to realise, is imminent. She begins to prepare for it with the words 'The will of Fate cannot be changed, and there is no hope for me' (Example 3.9).

Example 3.9. Cassandra's *arioso* (1; 8; 90-94).

90 Andante. $\text{♩} = 72$

Cassandra *p espress.*
Ne-iz-men-na vo-ly-a

Piano *p*

Cassandra *cresc. mf*
ro-ka, dlya nes-cha-stnoy net na-dezh di Smert nim snom somk-nyt-sya vezh-dy, ot ro-

Pno. *poco cresc. mp*

Cassandra *dim. p*
di mikh mest da-lyo-ko.

Pno. *dim. p*

Taneyev conveyed Cassandra's uncertainty about her future musically by using a progression from a half-diminished seventh chord to the dominant of A minor (Example 3.9, bars 1-5), and withholding the arrival of the anticipated tonic. In the *arioso* Cassandra laments her pitiable fate and reminisces about her happy past. Aeschylus' Cassandra remembers her homeland with the words: 'Skamander, river of my native land—/beside your banks I once was nursed and grew/ unhappy' (1158-59; 35), but in Taneyev's *Oresteia* her childhood memories are happy and she treasures them. Cassandra's reference to her homeland forms the middle part of the *arioso*—the only part of the whole scene written in a major key—which makes remembrances of her past happiness touching and poignant, and highlights her plight even more.²⁷ Undeniably, it also strengthens the drama and gives more weight to Cassandra's laments about dying alone 'under foreign skies' without being properly mourned by her family.²⁸ Cassandra concludes her *arioso* by reiterating her opening words about Fate's will. She sings again that she will die alone, without family and friends around her. Her heartfelt farewell to home and family lends even more contrast to the following part, where her character undergoes transformation and where she becomes ready to die.

Russian Cassandra ends the scene differently from her Aeschylean counterpart, who decides that she has 'had enough of life', and makes her final speech about the fate of human beings, whom she pities (1322-1330; 40). Taneyev's Cassandra says: 'I will go and meet my death now. I greet you, gates of hell!'²⁹ 'Gates of hell' seems very much a reference to the palace's entrance; Cassandra knows that inside one evil deed is taking place, and another will follow. As in

²⁷ For a further detailed discussion of Cassandra's scene see Belina 2008, pp. 72-77.

²⁸ 1; 8; 93; 7-11.

²⁹ 1; 8; 105; 9-12, and 106; 1.

Aeschylus, she walks into the palace composed and dignified, and no longer fighting her destiny.

Taneyev and Venkstern showed Cassandra's evolution from the status of a frightened and helpless prisoner of war to that of a tragic prophetess, and finally to a person who is ready to face death in the confidence that it will be avenged. When Cassandra first appears on stage, her character is not yet known to the audience, and it only begins to unfold after the visions of the past atrocities make her see what is in store for her. The two outer parts of the scene alternate Cassandra's visions with her own reflections about them and her own terror; this principle increases the dramatic impact in a wave-like pattern. When she walks into the palace to meet her death, her divine and human elements are fused together, and she becomes a person who tragically sacrifices her life through understanding and acceptance of her fate.

Taneyev reflected the evolution of Cassandra's character in the music by alternating tonal centres of her scene: D minor, C-sharp minor, B minor, A minor, C-sharp minor, C minor, C-sharp minor, D minor, E-flat major, and D major. The scene itself began in D minor and ended in D major. There, D minor was the key in which Cassandra's sorrow was portrayed, C-sharp minor is the key of her prophetic visions, A minor of the human side of her character, the heroic E-flat major of prediction of Orestes' return, and D major is the key which reflected Cassandra's final acceptance of her fate.

Operatic Cassandra is presented not only as a seer but also as a young defenceless maiden, who evokes sympathy from the audience. In Aeschylus, she is viewed largely as a prophetess, as a semi-divine creature. Cassandra arrives in Argos in the least favourable role: Agamemnon brings her as his mistress, and calmly asks Clytemnestra to welcome her, only further fuelling his wife's already raging hatred.

Both Aeschylus and Taneyev confine Cassandra's role to one scene only, but it is an important scene, which not only explains the past tragedies of the house of Atreus, but also foretells the key events of the future.

With a more developed human element, enhanced by the musical characterisation, Taneyev's Cassandra becomes easier to relate to for the modern audiences. Her character is in consonance with a number of female roles in contemporary Russian opera: she can be compared to Tchaikovsky's Liza from *The Queen of Spades*, Tat'yana from *Yevgeny Onegin*, and *Iolanta*, as well as Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mlada*, and even Rubinstein's Tamara from *The Demon*. Like Liza and *Mlada*, Cassandra dies tragically and undeservedly, and while Tatiana lives, she agrees to marry to save her family from poverty, which results in her complete emotional shutdown.

Act 2. The Libation Bearers

In the second part of the trilogy, *The Libation Bearers*, Orestes returns from exile, and delivers punishment to Clytemnestra for killing Agamemnon. Taneyev made significant changes in this act, particularly in the opening scene, which shows Clytemnestra's altered emotional state. He also discarded the characters of Pylades and Orestes' nurse. Table 3.2 below shows the difference between the structure of the libretto and that of the original drama, and the new scenes added by Taneyev and Venksterm.

Table 3.2. Aeschylus' and Taneyev's *The Libation Bearers*.

Aeschylus		Taneyev	
		Scene 1	Clytemnestra alone in her bedroom (new scene)
		Scene 2	Agamemnon's phantom, Clytemnestra, Clytemnestra's slaves (new scene)
		Scene 3	Clytemnestra, Electra, women slaves (new scene)
Scene 1	Orestes, Pylades	Scene 4	Orestes alone
Choros 1	The Libation Bearers	Scene 5	Orestes and women's chorus
Scene 2 and Choros 2	Electra, Libation Bearers, Orestes, and Pylades	Scene 6	Electra and women's chorus
		Scene 7	Orestes, Electra, and women's chorus
Choros 3	Libation Bearers		
Scene 3	Orestes, Pylades, Servant, Clytemnestra, and Electra	Scene 8 Scene 9	Orestes and slave; Electra, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Aegisthus
Choros 4	The Libation Bearers		
Scene 4	The Libation Bearers and Nurse		
Choros 5	The Libation Bearers		
Scene 5	Aegisthus and Libation Bearers		
Choros 6	Libation Bearers		
Scene 6	Aegisthus (remote cry), Libation Bearers, Servant, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Pylades	Scene 10 Scene 11	Slave and Clytemnestra; Clytemnestra and Orestes
Choros 7	Libation Bearers		
Scene 7	Orestes, Pylades, Electra, Libation Bearers	Scene 12	Orestes and chorus
Choros 8	Libation Bearers		

Clytemnestra

Clytemnestra's appearance in Act 2 of the tragedy is very different from that of the original text. It is inconceivable to think of Aeschylus' Clytemnestra as weak and frightened. She does not regret killing her husband and she displays no remorse. She is 'terrified by dreams and roving horrors' after killing Agamemnon, and dreams of giving birth to a snake that bites her breast (523-524; 70). She screams in terror when she wakes up, but she does not repent.

Taneyev and Venkster attempted to develop this aspect of Clytemnestra's character in a way that was typical of psychological drama of the nineteenth-century opera, not only Russian. They opened Act 2, *The Libation Bearers*, with a scene that is absent in Aeschylus. Here Clytemnestra is portrayed as a vulnerable and frightened woman. Her opening words 'Oh, I am a hapless sinner, and my soul's peace is gone forever!' show her suffering after the murder.³⁰ She appears dishevelled, and her face is pale, in contrast to her composed and confident self in Act 1 (Example 3.10). Taneyev created an eerie comeback scene for Agamemnon: his ghostly figure, wrapped in blood stained clothes, emerges from the night fog and predicts Clytemnestra's imminent death. This scene was written in the typical style of *ombra*, described by Clive McClelland below:

[*Ombra* is] A term used for an operatic scene[s], involving the appearance of an oracle or demons, witches, or ghosts. [...] Operas based on the legends of Orpheus, Iphigenia and Alcestis provide numerous examples [...]. *Ombra* scenes proved popular with audiences not only because of the special stage effects employed but also because of the increasing use of awe-inspiring musical effects. an elaborate set of musical features including slow sustained writing (reminiscent of church music), the use of flat keys (especially in the minor), angular melodic lines, chromaticism and dissonance, dotted rhythms and syncopation, pauses, tremolando effects, sudden dynamic contrasts, unexpected harmonic progressions and unusual instrumentation, especially involving trombones.³¹

³⁰ 2; 11; 129; 3-5.

³¹ Clive McClelland, 'Ombra' in *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.oxfordmusiconline.com [Accessed 1 February 2009].

Example 3.10. Clytemnestra's Remorse (2; 11; 128-129)

КАРТИНА ПЕРВАЯ

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PREMIER TABLEAU

ERSTES BILD

Комната на женской половине дворца Атридов. Стены обиты медными листами. Слева ложе. Ночь. Полумрак.
 Une chambre dans le gynécée du palais des Atrides. Les murs sont recouverts de feuilles de cuivre. A gauche une couche. Il fait nuit. Dans la chambre règne une demi-obscureté.
 Frauengemach im Palast der Atriden. Die Wände mit Kupferplatten ausgeschlagen. Links ein Lager. Nacht. Halbdunkel.

№ 11. Речитатив и ариозо Клитемнестры

№ 11. Récitatif et Arioso
de Clytemnestre№ 11. Rezitativ und Arioso
der Klytämnestra

128 Allegro appassionato (♩=188)

Piano

Занавес
Rideau
Vorhang

Входит Клитемнестра. Одежда ее в беспорядке,
 лицо бледно. В руках светильник.
 Clytemnestre entre, les vêtements en désordre;
 elle tient à la main un flambeau.

129
Klytämnestra tritt ein. Das Gewand in Unordnung,
 das Antlitz bleich. In den Händen eine Leuchte.Клитемнестра
Clytemnestre
Klytämnestra

0 го - ре мне, пре - ступ - ни - це не -
 Oh! la ter - reur pé - né - tredans mon
 0, we - he mir; ver - bre - che - ri - schen

Example 3.10 continued.

146

Meno mosso

p *cresc.*

- счаст - кой!
à - ме.
Wes - be!

По - кой ду - ши у - тра - чен на - всег -
D'A - ga - mem - non le spec - tre me pour -
Der See - le Frie - den floh auf im - mer -

dim. *p* *poco cresc.*

130 (♩=96) *pp*

- да.
- suit!
- dar!

Лишь
La
So -

The image shows a musical score for Example 3.10 continued. It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts at measure 146 and features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Meno mosso'. The vocal line has lyrics in Russian and French/German. The piano part includes dynamic markings like 'dim.', 'p', and 'poco cresc.'. The second system starts at measure 130 (with a tempo marking of ♩=96) and continues the vocal and piano parts. The vocal line has lyrics in Russian and French/German. The piano part includes dynamic markings like 'mp', 'p', and 'pp'.

As the following Example 3.11 demonstrates, most of the *ombra* style characteristics are present in Agamemnon's scene. The tempo is slow, the rhythmical features include pauses, dotted notes, and sudden dynamic contrasts and harmonic dissonances contribute to the aim to disturb and unsettle the audience. The flat minor keys were traditionally associated with ghostly appearances,³² and Agamemnon's vocal part is written in B flat minor. The trombones feature prominently, supported by the woodwind and brass (bars 3-4, 19-21, chords on the top staff), the tremolandi strings represent Clytemnestra's inner terror, and timpani rolls allude to the general atmosphere of eerie darkness.

³² Clive McClelland, 'Mozart's *Ombra* Music: Context, Style and Signification' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2001), pp. 26-34.

Example 3.11. Agamemnon as a Ghost (1; 12; 137).

Тень Агамемнона
Le spectre d'Agamemnon
Der Schatten Agamemmons

137 Andante (♩. 44) *p* (♩. ♩ предыдущего) *cresc.*

Кли - тем - не - стра! Кли - тем - не -
Cly - tem - ne - stre, Cly - tem - ne -
Kly - tām - ne - stra, Kly - tām - ne -

- стра! У - зна - лась ты ме - ня? Из - мра - ка пре - не - под - ней
- stre! E - cou - te mon ap - pel! Fan - tō - me des té - nè - bres
- stra! Ver - nimmst du mei - nen Ruf? Aus dem Dun - kel mei - nes Gra - bes

mf
твой смерт - ный час при - шел я воз - ве - стить.
je viens i - ci pour t'an - non - cer ta mort!
komm ich dei - nen Tod, o Weib, zu kün - den dir!

poco cresc. *dim.* *pp*

Example 3.11 continued.

151

138

f

Над пре-ступ - ной го - ло - во - ю за - не.
 Sur ta tē - te cri - mi - nel - le luit dé -
 Die - se Son - ne im Er - he - ben, sieht den

- сен ка - ра - тель меч. Тот, кто был рож - ден го -
 - ja le fer ven-geur! Fruit mau - dit de tes en -
 Rā - cher wal - ten hier; dem das Le - ben du ge -

- бо - ю, дол - жен жизнь тво - ю пре-сечь, дол - жен
 - trail - les, il vien - dra pour me ven-ger! Il vien -
 - ge - ben, soll das dei - ne neh - men dir! Soll das

жизнь тво - ю пре - сечь. Будь го -
 - dra me ven - ger! Cly-tem -
 dei ne neh - men dir! Mach be -

p³ *f* *cresc.* *dim.* *p* *pp*

Although Taneyev and Venkstern create this scene anew, they did not add completely new material, but dramatised Clytemnestra's dream that was already present in Aeschylus. By doing so, they introduced a psychological element, which

related Taneyev's *Oresteia* with a number of its Russian contemporaries.³³ In narrating Clytemnestra's dream, Aeschylus employed symbolism to foretell the return of her son who would kill her—the dream snake that bites the queen's breast. But Clytemnestra chooses to ignore this powerful image and only when Orestes decides to kill her does she understand the meaning of the dream. Taneyev and Venkstern were very direct with Orestes' delivery of the prophecy in the opera, and their Clytemnestra had to live with the knowledge that her son will return and kill her—a strong dramatic detail to suit a tragic operatic libretto.

Clytemnestra's Death

Clytemnestra's last appearance on stage occurs at the end of *The Libation Bearers*. She greets a wanderer who brings her the news of Orestes' death. When Taneyev's Clytemnestra replies to the sad news, which should plunge her, as a mother, into despair, she displays none of the emotion that is expected in such a case. Her stage directions read 'with false sadness',³⁴ and her vocal line confirms an absence of grief by being measured, controlled, and without any exaggerated sentiment (Example 3.12). In fact, the orchestral accompaniment, based on fast figurations of demisemiquavers, shows that Clytemnestra is actually excited and is glad to hear of Orestes' death because it means that she can live without fear for her own life. It also questions her remorse in the bedroom scene, and points to the fact that she was mostly worrying about Agamemnon's prophecy coming true.

³³ Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* is tormented by the spectre of his nephew, whom he killed in order to inherit the throne, and whose bloody apparition eventually drives him to madness. Rimsky-Korsakov's *Voislava* is tormented with guilt after killing Mlada, and his Salieri also experiences emotional anguish after poisoning Mozart.

³⁴ 2; 19; 208.

Example 3.12. Clytemnestra's False Remorse (2; 19; 208; 1-5).

With false sadness:

208 Andante. ♩=88

Clytemnestra *f*
O, go - - re

Piano *mf* *p*

Clytemnestra
mne! O - rest moy sin lyu - bi - miy,

Pno. *mf*

Clytemnestra
skon - - chal - - sya

Pno. *p*

Clytemnestra
on! O, go-re, go - re mne!

Pno.

The scene of Clytemnestra's confrontation with Orestes changes everything. She finds out that the wanderer is her son, and that he has already killed Aegisthus. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is almost certain that she will die: 'Now/ we die by treachery, just as we killed.' (886-887; 82). But she still does not give up, saying 'Let's see if we are finished, or still have a chance' (890; 82). When Orestes decides to kill her, she warns and threatens him with her 'angry, hounding Furies' (924; 83).

Taneyev's Clytemnestra is in turmoil after hearing the news of Aegisthus' death. Although her stage directions require her to 'stand still, struck by terror', the agitated semi-quavers in the string section reflect the frenetic activity that goes on inside her mind.³⁵ Her terror lasts for a very short time, and she very quickly regains her composure. She is determined to fight for her life and when Orestes appears before her, she attempts to stop him by reminding him that she is his mother, that she gave birth to him, she nursed him, and most of all, that it was not she that killed Agamemnon, but Fate that guided her hand.

The music accompanying Clytemnestra's vocal part is as changeable as her approach to attempting to prevent her death. At first, she pleads for her life, and the music conveys her impassioned entreaties with the melody that moves with great flexibility within the range of the minor-ninth interval. Clytemnestra's voice is heard against the orchestral accompaniment featuring a range of seventh, ninth, and diminished seventh chords that emphasise the tension of the situation (Example 3.13, bars 1-10). When Clytemnestra refers to Orestes' childhood, the accompaniment changes to gentle rocking-motion and lullaby-like textures, alluding to her words 'I carried you under my heart' (Example 3.13 bars 11-15).

³⁵ 2; 20; 215.

Example 3.13. Clytemnestra Pleads Orestes (2; 21; 219-220).

219 *Andante espressivo.* ♩=80

Clytemnestra
 O, po - shcha - di! Mo - lyu, po - shcha - di! U -

Piano

Clytemnestra
 zhe - li - ti ru - ku pod - ni - me - sh' na mat' O, moy sin!

Pno.

Poco più mosso.

Clytemnestra
dolce
 Te - bya ya pod serd - tsem no - si - la.

Pno.
> dolce

The final change in the musical language of Clytemnestra's characterisation occurs when she realises that Orestes will not change his mind. Her voice hardens, and its flexible, flowing lines are replaced by rigid and almost military-like phrases (Example 3.14).

Example 3.14. Clytemnestra Curses Orestes (2; 21; 227; 2-14).

227 Allegro risoluto. *p*

Clytemnestra

Piano

Tak pro - klyat' - ye

Clytemnestra

Pno.

shlyu te - be ya! Mest' E -

Clytemnestra

Pno.

ri - - niy zhdyot zlo - de - - ya!

Clytemnestra

Pno.

Be - re - gis! Ikh

Clytemnestra

Pno.

groz - - no mshchen' - ye!

Clytemnestra's characterisation in these last scenes of Taneyev's opera is the most varied—she appears as a welcoming host, a falsely grieving mother, a resolute fighter, a woman desperate for survival, and lastly, as an angry female who lost everything she loved, and will soon lose her life. Clytemnestra meets her death with a curse and resentment, having exhausted all possible ways of avoiding it. Taneyev presented his Clytemnestra as a strong woman, self-centred, and absorbed in the idea of revenge. But she only mirrors Agamemnon's heartless deed—killing his daughter Iphigenia despite her pleas to spare her life. Taneyev's Clytemnestra provokes mixed emotions: the sin she committed is too grave to be ignored, but the reason behind it is too serious to be discounted. It is difficult not to admire her resolution and strength in carrying out something she believes in.

Clytemnestra evokes sympathy from the audience. She finds herself isolated and remorseful, and she is afraid to die. This aspect of her characterisation makes her role close to that of Cassandra, who finds herself in a similar situation. But while Cassandra dies with the confidence that her death will not go unpunished, Clytemnestra leaves this world with resentment and a curse. Taneyev also shows Clytemnestra to be capable of love and affection: she displays real warmth and care when she is with Aegisthus. Although Aeschylus also shows Clytemnestra's loving side when she is with Aegisthus, Taneyev was able to enhance it with musical illustration, as was seen in Example 3.3 (pp. 79-80). By adding the bedroom scene, Taneyev and Venkstern focussed attention on the consequences of Agamemnon's murder, bringing an element of psychological drama to his opera.³⁶ The scene also gives the audience another reason to feel sympathy for Clytemnestra and believe in

³⁶ Verdi's *Macbeth* (1846-47, revised 1864-65), along with numbers of other operas, is an excellent example of a composer's attempt to portray the consequences of murder for a stage character.

her remorse, even if it becomes clear that her regret has perhaps not been very sincere.³⁷

Electra and Orestes

The siblings Electra and Orestes are the two new characters that appear in *The Libation Bearers*, and are reunited at the burial mound of their father. Aeschylus' Electra is ordered by Clytemnestra to go to Agamemnon's grave and plead for his forgiveness. But Electra hesitates and questions the libation bearers: 'What shall I say, as I pour these libations at his grave? / How can I please him? What should I ask of my father?' (87-88; 57). When she asks whom else she should include in her prayer, the libation bearers have to remind her: 'do not forget Orestes, even though he is no longer in the house.' (115; 58). Her protracted hesitations show her as a meek, indecisive young woman, who needs to be reassured and guided by libation bearers to ask Agamemnon to punish the murderer.

Electra as presented by Taneyev and Venkstern is very different from her counterpart in Aeschylus' story. She knows exactly what she will say at the grave of her father when Clytemnestra sends her there:

I will go to my father's grave to ask
Not forgiveness, but punishment.
The just council of unbiased gods
Will not want to forgive the murderer.³⁸

She continues in the same manner throughout the scene with Clytemnestra, during the libation ritual, and in the scene with Orestes.

³⁷ For a detailed discussion of Taneyev's Clytemnestra and Cassandra see Belina 2008.

³⁸ 2, 13, 152-155.

Taneyev's Orestes appears alone, without his friend Pylades, who plays a very important role in Aeschylus. Although he has only one line in the original tragedy, it is significant because his words give confidence and assurance to Orestes, who is plagued by indecision and is almost convinced by Clytemnestra not to kill her. He says: 'would you destroy the standing of Apollo's oracles / for all the rest of time, and of his solemn oath? / Count all men hateful to you rather than gods' (900-902; 82-83). By removing Pylades from the opera, Taneyev made Orestes stronger by forcing him to make his own decisions. Thus, when the moment comes for Orestes to break away from Clytemnestra's powerful persuasive speeches, the drama is heightened because he has to make the choice between two equally terrifying deeds without any emotional support. If he kills his mother, her Furies will persecute and torment him for the rest of his life, and if he does not kill her, the wrath of Apollo, who ordered Orestes to avenge his father's death would be deadly.

Taneyev does not disappoint when he creates not only a deeply expressive entrance for his title hero, but also writes one of the most impressive and demanding tenor parts in operatic repertoire. Orestes' vocal line is abundant in top notes such as g, a, and a-flat, and in the most dramatically charged moments he reaches b-natural. Doubling as a mourning tribute to his father, Orestes' entrance leaves no doubt that this was one of the composer's favourite characters. His entry is preceded by a short instrumental prelude, which paints a sombre, mournful atmosphere at the grave of Agamemnon. The harmony of this opening scene, saturated with chains of seventh, diminished, and half-diminished chords, reflects the emotional state of Orestes even before he appears on the stage (Example 3.15).

Example 3.15. The First Entrance of Orestes (2; 14; 156).

№ 14. Сцена (Орест)

№ 14. Scène (Oreste)

№ 14. Szene (Orest)

156 Adagio (♩ = 80)

Входит Орест в дорожном плаще, с посохом в руках.
Oreste entre en habits souillés par le voyage, un bâton à la main.
Orest tritt auf im Reisckleide, mit dem Stab in der Hand.

Занавес
Rideau
Vorhang

Орест (подходит к колонне Гермеса)
Oreste (il s'approche de la colonne d'Hermès)
Orest (tritt zur Hermessäule)

157

Гер - мий! Во - ли - кий
Grand dieu! Grand dieu Her -
Her - mes! Ge - walt - ger

Example 3.15 continued.

174

бог, хра-ни-тель стран-ни-ков, хва-ла те-бе, хва-ла те-
 -mes, pro-tè-ge moi, je te va-lu-e, gloire à
 Gott, du Schutz der Rei-sen-den, dir Lob und Dank! Dir Lob und

mf

poco espr.

dim. 158 *poco più mosso*

-бе!
 toi!
 Dank!

О-кон-чен дол-гий путь; счуж-би-ны я при-
 A-près un long ex-il je ren-tre dans Ar-
 Aus frem-dem, fer-nem Land zur Hei-mat es mich

dim. *sfp*

cresc. *sf* *rall.*

-шел в ро-ди-мый край свер-шить свя-щен-ный дол-г от-мище-вья.
 -gos ar-pè-lé rag le saint de-voir de la ven-gean-се.
 trieb, daß ich er-ful-le hier die heil-ge Pflicht der Ra-che.

sfp *cresc.* *sf* *ff*

As he returns to avenge Agamemnon's death, at his grave Orestes meets his sister Electra, who mourns the death of her father, and supports Orestes in his duty to punish the murderer. In all three main sources of Oresteian myth—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—Electra takes a long time to recognise Orestes in wanderer's clothes, whom she does not readily accept as her brother. In Aeschylus she only believes that he is Orestes when he shows her that the lock of hair, which he placed on his father's grave as a token of his love, resembles her own hair, and he shows her some weaving done by her own hand. Taneyev studied all three versions

of the tragedy while working on the libretto, but perhaps did not deem this event as significant in the overall scheme of the opera, or sensed that modern audiences would perhaps find it difficult to believe that Electra could not instantly recognise her brother. Taneyev's Electra recognises Orestes almost immediately. Orestes only needs to call out to her: 'Sister!' and she replies with the cry of recognition: 'My brother!'³⁹

Orestes and Electra are reunited, mourn their father, and reminisce about their past. Rather surprisingly, they do not mention their sister Iphigenia, who was killed by their father. They do not even mention her name—a smart decision on the part of Taneyev and Venkster, as it could weaken their drive for revenge. Aeschylus' Electra says: 'My sister-love for her/ who was so mercilessly slaughtered—all is yours' (241-242; 63). She also adds that she hates her 'so-called mother', who 'filled her heart with godless hatred for her children' (190-191; 61). The only evidence of Clytemnestra's alleged mistreatment of her children is Electra's words. But Clytemnestra's resolve to kill her husband for sacrificing their daughter certainly speaks of love, and not hatred, for her offspring: she would do the same for Orestes and Electra. In both the original tragedy and the opera, the thirst that Orestes and Electra feel for Clytemnestra's death is rather disturbing, and they do not seem to feel any affection for her. It is difficult not to feel sympathy for the two siblings who call themselves 'orphans', and yet it is hard to understand how their complete devotion to their father is not at all marred by the fact that he took away the life of their sister. Taneyev and Venkster chose to leave out Iphigenia's name completely from the scene to remove any possible incongruence that could lessen the dramatic impact on an audience.

³⁹ 2; 17; 172, 14, and 173, 1-2.

In both Aeschylus and Taneyev, Orestes delivers a powerful speech about Apollo's will that required him to avenge his father's murder. Orestes derives his strength from this speech when he tells Electra that Apollo guided him so far, and will not forsake him. But the god also prophesied that terrible sufferings would be inflicted by Agamemnon's avenging Furies on Orestes should he fail to accomplish the deed. Thus, Taneyev's and Venkstern's Orestes, like his Aeschylean counterpart, is much more afraid to disobey Apollo than to become the murderer of his own mother.

Orestes enters the palace disguised as a wanderer, and is greeted hospitably by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, who do not recognise him. He then tells them that he is a messenger who is bringing the news of Orestes' death. As was seen from the discussion earlier in this chapter, Clytemnestra reacts to this news with false sadness, and Orestes is now convinced that she is actually glad that the only person who would have to avenge Agamemnon's murder is no longer alive. When Clytemnestra and Aegisthus leave Orestes the wanderer to rest, he goes to find Aegisthus and kills him. The penultimate scene of *The Libation Bearers* shows the struggle of Orestes who, despite Apollo's support, still finds it difficult to kill his mother. But the guidance of Apollo eventually helps him accomplish the task and, after a long confrontation with Clytemnestra, Orestes delivers a deadly blow with his sword. In the closing scene of Act 2, Orestes sees the Furies, who begin their relentless persecution and inflict great moral torments on the unfortunate son of two murderers.

Act 3. Eumenides

The third part of the trilogy is a summary of the consequences of the previous events in the house of Atreus. Orestes is the last link in the chain, and the consequences of killing his mother reach their most punishing stage. Taneyev and Venkstern considerably condensed the action of *Eumenides*. They streamlined the action, and discarded the characters and scenes that were not important for their libretto.

Aeschylus opened Act 3 of his tragedy with a scene where a Priestess at Apollo's temple is terrified by her vision of Orestes' killing Clytemnestra, and is mortified by the Furies who are waiting for him. Then Clytemnestra's dream-like image appears and she scolds her Furies for not being persistent enough in their pursuit of her son. Taneyev and Venkstern changed the opening of *Eumenides*, the discussion of which follows. Table 3.3 below shows the changes made by Taneyev and Venkstern to the libretto, the most significant of which are the absence of the Furies from the last tableau, and the alteration to the ending of the tragedy. These will be discussed below.

The Role of the Furies

In *The Libation Bearers* Orestes appears confident in his resolve to avenge his father's death, and accomplishes the task successfully. Act 3 *Eumenides* shows him as the victim of Clytemnestra's Furies. Taneyev and Venkstern created a new scene to open *Eumenides*. Orestes appears tormented by his guilt—a clear parallel to the appearance of his mother in the first scene of Act 2. The role of Taneyev's Orestes is very close to that of Aeschylus', and there are no significant changes to his character. However, there is a Christian dimension, which is naturally absent from Aeschylus:

Orestes repents for what he did, he suffers the consequences of his actions, and he believes that his sufferings and repentance earned him the right to be forgiven.

Table 3.3. Aeschylus' and Taneyev's *Eumenides*.

Aeschylus		Taneyev	
Scene 1 (a) Scene 1 (b) Scene 1 (c)	Priestess; Clytemnestra's dream- image, the Furies; Orestes, Apollo		
Choros 1	The Furies	Scene 1	<i>Entr'acte</i> and Orestes and the Furies
		Scene 2	<i>Entr'acte</i> <i>The Temple of Apollo at Delphi</i>
Scene 2 Scene 3 Choros 2 Choros 3	Apollo and the Furies; Orestes and the Furies; Orestes and the Furies; the Furies	Scene 3	Orestes, the Furies (behind the stage), and Apollo
		Scene 4	<i>Entr'acte</i> and chorus of Athenians
		Scene 5	Orestes and the chorus
Scene 4	Athena, the Furies, and Orestes		
Choros 4	The Furies		
		Scene 6	Procession of Areopagus
Scene 5	Athena, the Furies, Apollo, Orestes, citizens of Athens	Scene 7	Orestes and the Areopagus
Scene 6 (Finale)	The Furies, Athena, Women and Girls of Athens, Citizens of Athens	Scene 8 (Apotheosis)	Orestes, Athena, Areopagus, and the people

The Furies, or *Erinias*, are the outside power that punishes a person after committing a grave sin. Aeschylus' Furies are present on stage throughout the final part of the tragedy; Taneyev's appear only in the first three scenes and when Apollo banishes them from his temple, they disappear forever. The reason for that is clear. As will be seen below, Taneyev's Athena granted people the freedom to make their own choices and judgements, the Furies will no longer be responsible for punishing

criminal humans, and people would be guided by their own conscience. Aeschylus' Furies remain as powerful deterrents to those who find themselves facing moral dilemmas.

Only Apollo has the power to relieve Orestes from the Furies' merciless persecution. Taneyev's Apollo does not appear until the second scene of *Eumenides*, where he saves Orestes from the Furies by ruthlessly driving them out of his temple. Taneyev and Venkstern significantly changed Apollo's character, presenting him as a god who is absolutely pure, powerful, and is beyond any reproach, as opposed to Aeschylus' Apollo who is far from being god-like when he banishes the 'courteous, calm, and logical' Furies away from his temple. This unlikely role reversal is completely absent in Taneyev's *Oresteia*, and Apollo gracefully and authoritatively frees Orestes from their intense persecution.

An important difference between Aeschylus' and Taneyev's Furies is their gender. The former presented them as all female, while the latter portrayed them with the help of a mixed chorus. While abandoning all-female Furies cast carried the risk of greatly reducing the gender antagonism present in the original tragedy, with the help of the music Taneyev's Furies appear considerably more powerful and threatening. They are represented by two leading motifs, the functions of which are examined in Chapter four of this thesis. By augmenting the Furies into more powerful forces, Taneyev further elevated Apollo's majesty in his confrontation with the formidable and terrifying source of Orestes' heightened torment.

Athena and the Resolution of the Conflict

Although every event in both the original tragedy and the opera is the consequence of Atreus' bloody revenge for his brother Thyestes' adultery with his wife, the gods are actually responsible for most of the characters' actions. And ultimately, it is again the divine being who puts an end to the horrors in the house of Atreus.

Aeschylus' Athena, like his Apollo, has some human qualities. She is a goddess, and yet she does not know why Orestes is there to see her. The Furies, who still accompany Orestes in the original tragedy, inform her of his crime. She asks them: 'Was he forced to do it? Did he fear the anger of some god?' They reply: 'Where is the god sufficient to compel the crime of matricide?' (426-427; 106) Aeschylus thus challenges the right of the gods to order a murder, even if it was needed to avenge the death of another person. Taneyev's and Venkstern's Athena is the goddess who knows all about Orestes' plight by virtue of her divine being. She does not need to speak with Orestes because she is already aware of his predicament and orders a number of citizens to form a civic court—Areopagus—to decide his fate. In the opera, Athena never addresses Orestes directly. She casts her vote in his favour when the votes of the twelve members of the Areopagus are divided, and then bequeaths a new law to the people:

I put a stop to the blind vengeance of the Furies.
 I give to people pity and forgiveness as new laws.
 From now on, let not struggle,
 Nor bloodshed in revenge,
 But love and justice be new law!
 (2; 30; 327-330)

Aeschylus' Orestes is forgiven because in Athena's eyes matricide was a less serious crime, and she was biased in favour of the male. She says:

The person called the mother is no real parent of a child;
 She simply nurses foetuses once they've been sown.
 The parent is the man, who mounts;
 The woman is a hostess who preserves
 A stranger's offspring [...].
 (658-661; 113).

Taneyev's and Venkstern's Athena, by a complete contrast, forgives Orestes because he repents and through his suffering is purified of his guilt:

Every mortal who repented
 And washed his sin with tears,
 Who was purified by suffering,
 Deserves forgiveness.⁴⁰

The concepts of repentance and purification through suffering simply did not exist in the fifth-century Athens, and are therefore absent in Aeschylus. Taneyev and Venkstern offer other new ideas: love of man for man and pity—also commodities in short supply in Aeschylus' world. Michael Ewans believes that the appearance of these values in Taneyev's opera point to Christian origins and allow the composer and his librettist to resolve the tensions of the *Oresteia* in a completely different manner.⁴¹

Taneyev was indeed brought up on these values and upheld them throughout his life despite being a self-confessed and staunch atheist.⁴² The notion of brotherly

⁴⁰ 3; 30; 326.

⁴¹ Belina and Ewans 2010.

⁴² *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, entries dated 1-7 January 1899, pp. 5-7.

love, repentance, pity, and forgiveness were a part of his psychological makeup.⁴³ He also lived in a society where Christian ideals were strongly encouraged, at a time when the influence and power of the Church was very strong. His contact with Lev Tolstoy, who was an active promoter of brotherly love and compassion, must not be forgotten.⁴⁴ Taneyev made Tolstoy's acquaintance in the 1890s, but he became particularly close to the writer and his family in the last year of his work on the *Oresteia*. Although Taneyev did not always agree with Tolstoy's views on art and music, his influence might have nevertheless played a role in the treatment of the last part of the opera.⁴⁵ Finally, one of Russia's greatest writers, Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), was an equally ardent promoter of such Christian values as repentance, forgiveness, and humility in such works as *Unizhennīye i oskorblyonnīye* [The Insulted and Humiliated] (1861), *Prestupleniye i nakazaniye* [Crime and Punishment] (1866), and *Brat'ya Karamazovī* [The Brothers Karamazov] (1881).

Aeschylus' original tragedy ends with the Furies being honourably housed in Athens because they prove to be invaluable to the citizens. Because they are so terrifying, they serve as a reminder and encouragement to the people to be just with each other and prevent crimes. Taneyev and Venkstern simply banish the Furies from the temple of Apollo, and they disappear forever from his opera, taking no part in the finale.⁴⁶ As a result of this change, Taneyev and Venkstern were able to revolutionise

⁴³ Practically all published monographs, memoirs, or biographies of Taneyev describe him as a compassionate, polite person who inspired humility and understanding in those surrounding him.

⁴⁴ Although by 1901 Tolstoy was proclaimed a heretic and was no longer a member of the Church, during Taneyev's work on *Oresteia* he was still a respected figure in Russian literature and culture.

⁴⁵ For more information about the contact between Tolstoy and Taneyev see: 'Taneyev and Tolstoy' in Sabaneyev 2003, pp. 107-115; also Sof'ya Tolstaya, *Dnevnik v dvukh tomakh: tom perviy 1862-1900*, and Sof'ya Tolstaya, *Dnevnik v dvukh tomakh: tom vtoroy 1901-1910* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1978). The entries are too numerous to list individually here. Also Lev Tolstoy, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy v 90-tomakh*. [Complete Editions in 90 volumes] (Moscow, Goslitizdat, 1928-1958).

⁴⁶ Sources on Aeschylus scholarship and interpretation are very extensive. For further reading, refer to the Bibliography section 'Aeschylus, Sources on Greek Drama, and Studies on Greek Antiquity', pp. 322-324.

the reading of the tragedy: Athena founded law-courts that became a standard in the nineteenth century, replacing personal revenge. This brings *Oresteia* close to the operas of Taneyev's contemporaries, and the general ethos of nineteenth-century art. It also relates the resolution of the Taneyev's *Oresteia* to Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, the ending of which has been excellently summarised by Slavoj Žižek as a call to act, where the composer is essentially saying to the people: 'It is your age now, you are the masters of your destiny. There are no gods now, everything is up to you.'⁴⁷ Although they do not eliminate gods, Taneyev and Venkstern eliminate the need for their guidance and give the power to determine what is right and what is wrong to the people.

Oresteia and the Ring

After the discussion presented in this chapter, it is now possible to note not only similarities between the two texts—the original tragedy and the libretto—of *Oresteia*, but also between *Oresteia* and Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. One of the first similarities is the mythical origin of their sources, where the stories unfolded thousands years ago. There, gods are easily accessible to humans: Orestes knows that he would find Apollo at his Delphi Temple, and is able to meet Athena who frees him from his sin. Wotan's frequent interactions with mortal women even produce the race of the Walküries—half humans, half goddesses.

Both Taneyev and Wagner make their audiences sympathise with the characters who committed moral sins: Clytemnestra who kills her husband and Orestes who kills his mother stand side by side with the twins Sieglinde and Siegmund who fall in love illicitly and produce a child. All these characters break

⁴⁷ Statement made Žižek at a public lecture 'Brünnhilde's Act or why was it so Difficult for Wagner to Find a Proper Ending for his *Twilight of the Gods*?' at the Howard Assembly Room at the Leeds Grand Theatre on 10 March 2009.

some fundamental universal laws, but both composers make it difficult for their listeners not to feel sympathy for them. Taneyev's Aegysthus and Clytemnestra are committing adultery, but they have been brought together by a common goal, revenge, and their love for each other is genuine and touching. Wagner's twins have found in their love for each other escape from suffering and hope for happiness, however short-lived or doomed.

In contrast, the characters who should elicit sympathy fail to do so: Sieglinde's husband Hunding is not at all likeable, and the audience would not find it displeasing if he lost the duel with Siegmund instead of it being otherwise. Agamemnon, although appearing as a victim—a cheated husband who is killed by his wife—does not make the audience sympathise with him. For modern audiences in particular, sacrifice of his own innocent daughter in order to be allowed to wage war makes little sense.⁴⁸

Like Wagner, Taneyev had to deal with an ancient text in translation, and the libretto of *Oresteia* is written mostly in prose. This affected the form of the opera's scenes, which are largely through-composed, and the small numbers of traditional arias and ensembles are masterfully interwoven into the music without breaking continuity of the action. Act 1 serves as the introduction to the trilogy and sets the stage for further events in the opera. Its form is the most traditional and least through-composed out of the three acts, but even here much of the action is flowing from one number to another as, for example, in scene 4, which contains the entry of Aegysthus, his monologue, Clytemnestra's entry, and their duet. The same principle can be seen in Cassandra's scene, which is constructed with three sections and an introduction that are tightly connected. The action in Acts 2 and 3 flows almost

⁴⁸ For a well-researched and detailed discussion of the *Ring* and *The Oresteia* see Michael Ewans, *Wagner and Aeschylus: the Ring and The Oresteia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).

uninterrupted, and the boundaries between many of the scenes are seamless. This treatment of form in *Oresteia* was one of Wagner's influences that allowed Taneyev greater freedom of expression. Kashkin believed that this aspect of Wagner's writing, adapted by Taneyev, was also assimilated by a great number of other Russian composers in the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ It must be added that that not only Russian composers benefited from Wagner's treatment of operatic form, but their European counterparts too.

Although there are more general outward similarities between *Oresteia* and the *Ring*, it is *Parsifal* that is closer to Taneyev's opera in its main idea: both works explore the notion of purification from sin through suffering, and redemption. Wagner's last opera was the one Taneyev admired the most, and although he may have conceived his *Oresteia* as early as 1878, he began writing it in 1882, the year when *Parsifal* was premiered. Wagner's last music drama could have inspired Taneyev to start composition of his opera, while his the *Ring* encouraged him to complete it.

Conclusion

Taneyev and Venkstern made alterations to the text of Aeschylus' tragedy, which were necessary for a number of reasons. Firstly, not all members of Russian audiences would have had a detailed knowledge of the story of *Oresteia*. The creators of the opera and its libretto clearly wanted to ensure that every important nuance was noticed and understood by their listeners. This explains why Taneyev and Venkstern decided to bring Aegisthus on the stage much earlier than he appeared in the original tragedy, why their Watchman imparts extra information, and why their

⁴⁹ Nikolay Kashkin. *Russkaya konservatoriya i sovremenniye trebovaniya* [Russian Conservatory and Modern Demands] (Moscow: Jurgenson, 1906), p.12.

Clytemnestra informs the audience of Iphigenia's sacrifice herself. All these characters disclose the events that took place in the past history of the House of Atreus.

Secondly, some changes were necessary in the operatic libretto of the nineteenth century. These included the new scene created for the opening of *The Libation Bearers*, where Clytemnestra must undergo moral torments after murdering her husband. Psychological revelations were an integral part of every dramatic stage work in Taneyev's Russia and contemporary Europe, and Clytemnestra's torments come as a result of another nineteenth-century ideological element—personal freedom. Taneyev and Venkster wanted to show that with personal freedom come great responsibility. Orestes kills his mother because Apollo orders him to avenge his father; Agamemnon kills Iphigenia because he wishes to appease the goddess Artemis; and even Cassandra is led to her death by Apollo. Taneyev's Clytemnestra, therefore, appears to have the most freedom out of all the characters in the opera, both male and female. She was not ordered by a god to kill Agamemnon, and although she claims that Fate was guiding her hand, it is only to make Orestes forgive her. Agamemnon's execution was planned and carried out by her alone, guided only by her own free will. This is the reason why Taneyev and Venkster chose to concentrate on the consequences of her deed and show her suffering after the murder. By making Clytemnestra free to choose whether to kill or forgive Agamemnon, Taneyev and Venkster are able to make a moral statement about responsibilities inherent in such a choice.

Thirdly, with the help of the music Taneyev was able to achieve a greater dramatic impact on the audiences as, for example, in the scene of Agamemnon's walk into the palace, Cassandra's farewell to her life, or the mental anguish of the

two murderers, Clytemnestra and Orestes. In the two latter cases, the orchestra served as a powerful tool with which the emotional world of these characters was portrayed to the audience. In these places in the tragedy, Taneyev had the advantage of achieving such enhancement of dramatic effects with the aid of the descriptive, evocative music, something that was out of Aeschylus' reach.

However, the limitations of operatic libretto must not be underestimated. Where Aeschylus had the space and opportunity to extend and elaborate his commentary of the events or their description, they are more convincing and have greater power to touch the audience. Two examples of this are the story of Iphigenia's sacrifice, written in an evocative fifty-five-lined chorus, which would have been impossible in opera, and an extensive scene of Apollo and the Furies at the beginning of *Eumenides*.

Having conducted a preliminary observation of how Taneyev's music articulated the impetus of Venkstern's libretto, the discussion in the next chapter will concentrate on the system of leading motifs used by Taneyev to further enhance the dramatic impact of the text.

Chapter Four

Representation and Motif

To this day, *Oresteia* remains my favourite work.¹

S. Taneyev.

Chapter Three began to explore how Taneyev's music enhanced the effects of drama, and this chapter will continue such exploration further by focusing on Taneyev's use of motifs in *Oresteia*. It was seen in Chapter Two that Taneyev was studying Wagner's music dramas during the composition of his opera. He noted that he was most interested in Wagnerian harmony and orchestration—the two topics that deserve a separate extensive study that is outside the scope of this thesis.² While examining the music dramas of the *Ring*, Taneyev would undoubtedly have paid attention to how the German composer used his principal motifs to develop the musical structure, and consider how he could use them in his own opera. Like Wagner, Taneyev never referred to his reminiscence motifs as 'leitmotifs' but unlike his German counterpart, he did not leave in writing any discussions about the use of this technique. Any references to the use of motifs considered in this chapter were found in the accounts of Taneyev's students at the Moscow Conservatory.³

Rosamund Bartlett wrote that the reminiscence motifs in Wagner's music are 'forever recurring, but endlessly developing—both harmonically and thematically—and interweaving with other motifs to create a complex, multi-layered and unified

¹ Letter from S. Taneyev to N. Findeyzen dated 8 February 1900. Quoted in Nikolay Findeyzen, *Dnevnik: 1892-1901* [Diaries] (St. Petersburg: "Dmitry Bulanin", 2004), p. 398, Note 1570. The original is kept at the Russian State Library in Moscow, fond 816, op. 2, ed. khr. 1905, Nos. 1-3.

² Wagnerian influences can be seen in Taneyev's similar approach to the use of progressive tonality in *Oresteia*, whose every act begins and ends in a different key. Within the scenes, which also rarely begin and end in the same key, Taneyev changed the tonal centres freely, as seen, for example, in Cassandra's scene as discussed in Chapter Three, p. 92.

³ Fyodor Arzamanov, *S. I. Taneyev: prepodavatel' kursa muzikal'nikh form* [S. I. Taneyev: Teacher of a Course in Musical Form] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye Muzikal'noye Izdatel'stvo, 1984).

artistic structure.⁴ Bartlett's definition reflects precisely the function of Wagner's motifs as he himself considered it. He lamented that too often leading motifs in his music dramas were viewed as devices of musical illustration and effect rather than elements of musical structure.⁵ Wagner's motifs, as outlined in his *Opera and Drama*, have two defining characteristics: they appear as either motifs of anticipation or reminiscence.⁶ As will be seen further in this chapter, Taneyev shared similar views on the use of his musical motifs.

Barry Millington defines the anticipation motifs as those that refer 'to musico-dramatic ideas presented by the orchestra but not yet heard in conjunction with the relevant text.'⁷ And the reminiscence motifs 'In their purest form [...] were heard for the first time as a conjunction of musical and textual reference. Later recurrences would serve to recall that original conjunction. Such motifs were not uncommon in later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century operatic practice, but Wagner was the first to codify the procedure.'⁸ As this chapter will show, Taneyev also used both kinds of motifs in his *Oresteia*. Although Taneyev's treatment of leading motifs is less extensive and systematic than Wagner's, it is nevertheless very prominent. But most importantly, the motifs in *Oresteia* are the building blocks of organic musical development. As a teacher of musical forms, Taneyev devoted a great deal of attention to definition of a motif and its role in the development of large-scale compositions.⁹ He viewed a motif as a 'small musical and thematic cell,

⁴ Bartlett, 1995, p.144

⁵ Arnold Whittall, 'Leitmotif', *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.oxfordmusiconline.com [Accessed 20 March 2009].

⁶ *Opera and Drama*, pp. 378-379.

⁷ Barry Millington, *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and his Operas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 171.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁹ Arzamanov, p. 19.

containing, as a rule, one strong beat.¹⁰ This kind of cell was to him one of the most important constituents of musical structure.

Glebov counted forty-six reminiscence motifs in Taneyev's opera, but his count must be challenged. He included motifs that occur only once, giving them names and functions, but because they do not recur in the music they cannot be associated with any kind of recollection of ideas they apparently convey.¹¹ In *Oresteia* there are only seven true leading motifs (both reminiscence and anticipation): the Wrongdoing, the Killed Children, the two motifs of the Furies, and the motifs of Cassandra, Orestes, and Apollo. Some are confined to one scene only; others occur a limited number of times throughout the opera but are strongly associated with a character they represent; and some are heard throughout *Oresteia*. The discussion will unfold in three stages. The first stage will consider the motifs of Wrongdoing, the Killed Children, and the Furies as referring to the dark and tragic elements of the tragedy; the second will concentrate on the motifs of Cassandra and Orestes as representations of the will of Fate or gods; and the third will be dedicated to Apollo's motif, which embodies the positive side of the drama.

Although music forms an important part of the discourse, analytical exhaustiveness is not the focus of this chapter, which instead relies on descriptive and contextual analysis. This thesis views the music as a descriptive tool that can enhance the understanding and perception of ideas expressed by the accompanying text.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Glebov, Igor'. 'Oresteia: muzikal'naya trilogiya Taneyeva' [*Oresteia: The Musical Trilogy by Taneyev*], *Muzika* 1915, Nos. 233 (492-503), 235 (539-548), 236 (555-572), 237 (579-587). The following motifs appear only once, defined by Glebov as Agamemnon's power (Glebov 1915, p. 540); Aegisthus' anxiety about his power (p. 546); Clytemnestra's despair (p. 556); Clytemnestra's terror (p. 556), to give but a few examples.

The Wrongdoing

Taneyev's opera opens with a dark orchestral prelude, which from the very beginning sets the gloomy tone for Act 1. Like in Wagner's music dramas, where the tonal centres are often a third apart,¹² the key centres in Taneyev's opera are frequently found to be on major or minor third axes around D.¹³ Some of the most important events in the opera occur in the keys of D and those a minor or major third away from it: D minor is present in the introduction; Cassandra's *arioso* and parts of her scene; the scene where Slave informs Clytemnestra about Aegisthus' death; Clytemnestra's attempts to dissuade Orestes from killing her; and the *Entr'acte* to the scene of Orestes and the Furies, which is a culmination of all dark elements in *Oresteia*. B-flat major is found in the parts of scene 4 where Aegisthus and Clytemnestra prepare to exact revenge on Agamemnon (1; 4; 44), of the Quartet of Orestes, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, and Electra (2; 19), and when Agamemnon calls for help (1; 8; 108). B-flat minor is the key of Agamemnon's comeback as a phantom (2; 12; 137), and B minor is present in Cassandra's scene (1; 8) and the Duet of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (1; 4). F minor is the key in which Clytemnestra sends Agamemnon to his death (1; 7; 77), when she comes out to the people and recounts how she killed him (1; 9; 113), the scene of Clytemnestra, Electra, and chorus (2; 13), and the scene of Orestes' and Electra's reunion (2; 17; 177-179).

The first evidence of third-relations is found in the opening of the Prelude, in the first and main motif of the opera. The ending of the first segment of the motif is

¹² The Prelude to *Parsifal* is a good example of such tonal relationships, where the opening theme relates to both C minor and A-flat major.

¹³ This is true not only of Wagner, of course, but of other nineteenth-century composers, and the emphasis on chords and keys a third apart was often made in order to open up broader tonal possibilities than dominant and subdominant relations could provide. For a further discussion see Arnold Whittall, 'The Music', in Lucy Beckett, *Richard Wagner: Parsifal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 61-86.

in D minor (bar 2), while the ending of the second in B-flat major (bar 5), as seen in Example 4.1.

Example 4.1 The Wrongdoing Motif, Prelude.

The descending minor second and minor third (f-e-c-sharp, bar 1) become a building block for musical material of the opera, also appearing in a slightly changed intervallic form in the second half: descending major second and minor third (d-c-a, bar 4). The variations of these two cells appear throughout *Oresteia* when references to sin and evil are made, as shown in Table 4.1 below, which presents a summary of the appearances of the Wrongdoing motif throughout the opera.

Table 4.1 The Wrongdoing Motif in *Oresteia*.

Location ¹⁴	Key	Drama	Scoring
1; Prelude; 1-3; (9-11, segments).	d	Symphonic prelude alluding to the dark history of the house of Atreus and the future events in the tragedy.	All strings (I; 1; 1-6), bassoons and horns (I; 2; 4-26).
1; 5; 59; 1,2, 16, 20, 21.	c#	Agamemnon's greeting to his homeland.	Celli and Basses (1-2; 16); all strings (20-21).
1; 8; 98; 1-10.	f	People understand Cassandra's visions of the murdered children.	Trombones, bassoons, tuba, and basses in the choir (1-10).
1; 9; 111; 7-11.	Bb	Clytemnestra announces to the people Agamemnon's	Oboes, clarinets, trumpets, horns,

¹⁴ Location of motifs will be given as seen in Chapter Three: Act; scene; rehearsal number(s); and where appropriate, bar number(s).

		death.	bassoons, tuba, celli and basses (111; 7-14).
2; 19; 205; 13.	d	Orestes appears disguised as a wanderer.	Orestes' voice and violin.
2; 21; 229; 1-13.	a	Orestes drags Clytemnestra to the palace where he kills her.	Flutes, oboe, clarinet, cor anglaise, bassoon, horns, and trombones.
2; 22; 240; 258.	c	The people of Argos call for an end to the crimes.	Trombones, clarinet, and strings.
2; 23; 246-249.	d, c	Symphonic <i>Entr'acte</i> to scene 23.	246—all woodwind and brass; 247—flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons; 248—violins, clarinet (bb. 13-14), 249—flutes, piccolini, bassoon, clarinet, horns.

Glebov believed that the first motif in the opera referred to the crimes in the story, both those that already happened and therefore cannot be undone, and those that are imminent.¹⁵ It is re-defined here as a representation of Wrongdoing because the motif is clearly associated with the actions that breach universal laws and moral boundaries. After its initial appearance in the Prelude, the Wrongdoing motif is heard throughout the work in key moments: when people realise that Cassandra could see the past crimes in the House of Atreus (Example 4.2, scored for bassoons and tubas, here seen in the bass line in the piano and basses in the chorus); before Clytemnestra's speech about Agamemnon's murder (Example 4.3, scored for clarinets, oboes, bassoons, horns, and tubas, here seen in the bass line in the piano); in the vocal line of Orestes as he greets unsuspecting Clytemnestra and Aegisthus

¹⁵ Glebov, p. 497.

(Example 4.5, p. 134); and in the symphonic *Entr'acte* to the *Eumenides* that paints a scene of terror and moral torment endured by Orestes (3; 23; 241; 9-16, basses; 243, solo violins; 244, bassoons, Appendix C, pp. 298-303). These and other appearances of the motif are discussed below.

After its first appearance in the strings, the Wrongdoing motif is presented further in the Prelude in bassoons and horns (1; Prelude; 2). The motif is heard in full in the Prelude; and in segments in the duet of Clytemnestra and Orestes (2; 21) but its significance as a building block of musical material is seen throughout the opera. Taneyev used its minor second-minor third cell (which at times also appears as minor second-major third) as a 'fertilising seed' out of which musical material organically grew and developed.¹⁶

Example 4.2. The Wrongdoing Motif in Cassandra's Scene (1; 8; 98, basses and piano, from upbeat to b. 6).

The image shows a musical score for Example 4.2. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Basses, labeled 'CORO Bassi'. The middle staff is for the Piano, labeled 'piano'. The bottom staff is for the Basses, labeled 'Bassi'. The score shows the Wrongdoing Motif in both parts, with dynamics markings like 'p' and 'pp'. The lyrics 'Kor - Du Ver -' are written below the piano staff.

¹⁶ Wagner discussed the function of a musical motif as 'fructifying seed' in his *Opera and Drama*, tr. by Edwin Evans (London: W. Reeves, 1913), vol. 2, p. 668.

Example 4.2 continued.

98 Adagio (♩ = 92)

Sopr.

Kor. да ты го-во-ришь о ги-бе-ли де-тей, по-
 Du meur-tre des en-fants quand tu nous dis l'his-toi-re
 Ver-ständ-lich ist dein Wort vom grau-sen Kin-der-mord; was

Alti

Ten.

Kor. да ты го-во-ришь о ги-бе-ли де-тей, по-
 Du meur-tre des en-fants quand tu nous dis l'his-toi-re
 Ver-ständ-lich ist dein Wort vom grau-sen Kin-der-mord; was

Bassi

- да ты го-во-ришь о ги-бе-ли де-тей, по-нат-ны нам тво-
 - meur-tre des en-fants quand tu nous dis l'his-toi-re nous te com-pre-
 - ständ-lich ist dein Wort vom grau-sen Kin-der-mord; was wei-ter du ge-

Adagio (♩ = 92)

Кассандра
 Cassandre
 Cassandra *pp*

Тем.
 Ob-
 Ver-

- нат-ны нам тво-и у-жас-ны-е сло-ва, а про-че-е тем-но!
 nous te com-pre-tons; le re-ste semble ob-scur, peux-tu nous l'ex-pli-quer?
 wei-ter du ge-sagt, wir hör-ten's schreck-er-füllt, der Sinn blieb uns ver-hüllt!

- нат-ны нам тво-и у-жас-ны-е сло-ва, а про-че-е тем-но!
 nous te com-pre-tons; le re-ste semble ob-scur, peux-tu nous l'ex-pli-quer?
 wei-ter du ge-sagt, wir hör-ten's schreck-er-füllt, der Sinn blieb uns ver-hüllt!

- и у-жас-ны-е сло-ва, а про-че-е тем-но!
 - nous; le re-ste semble ob-scur, peux-tu nous l'ex-pli-quer?
 - sagt, wir hör-ten's schreck-er-füllt, der Sinn blieb uns ver-hüllt!

rit.

Example 4.3. Clytemnestra and the Wrongdoing Motif (1; 9; 111).

111 Allegro (♩ = 126)

Клитемн.
Clytemn.
Klytämñ.

Moderato (♩ = 84)

Кро - ва - во - е, дав -
De - puis long-temps dé -
Die blu - ti - ge, seit

This development reaches its apex in the symphonic *Entr'acte* to the *Eumenides*, where it becomes the main source of thematic material. The Wrongdoing motif appears complete in basses (3; 23; 241; 9-16), violins and bassoons (3; 23; 243-244), trombones (3; 23; 246; 18-19), and woodwind (3; 23; 237; 2-8). It develops whirlwind, demonic-like characteristics when it appears in flutes and piccolis juxtaposed with the trilling violins (3; 23; 246). The downward cell of the motif (minor second-minor third) appears throughout the whole *Entr'acte*, and the inverted cell is present in bassoons (3; 23; 241; 3), and as part of semiquaver figurations in clarinets and bassoons (3; 23; 244; 7-8, and 245; 3-4, 7-10).¹⁷ By taking the Wrongdoing motif as a whole, or by using its segments, Taneyev was not only able to keep it in the minds of his listeners and utilise its emotive qualities; he also explored its possibilities as a generator of melodic richness in the opera.

¹⁷ All these references are for Appendix C, pp. 298-314.

The music in opera can convey messages that are heard simultaneously by the protagonists and audiences and if the former do not recognise these messages the drama of the situation is immediately increased. Taneyev used the ‘fertilising seed’ of the Wrongdoing motif not only in its recognisable form, but also in ‘disguised’ version. One such example is the short orchestral introduction to the scene of Agamemnon and the people of Argos. When Agamemnon arrived and greeted Argos again, his words were presaged by four ascending rhythmical semi-quaver figures minor/major third-minor second (Example 4.4). These figures are the inversion of the Wrongdoing motif, and although most of the audience members would not consciously discern Taneyev’s musical riddle, it is possible they might sense it on subconscious level.

Example 4.4. Entry of Agamemnon (1; 5; 59; 1-3).

Glebov believed that this short motif represented the King’s power,¹⁸ but closer inspection shows that it is the King’s doom that is expressed here with more certainty. Everything points toward Agamemnon’s bad luck: the inverted motif and its ending on a half-diminished chord, and the associations of the motif itself. Here, Taneyev clearly makes a subliminal reference to the dark outcome of Agamemnon’s arrival. Another use of a disguised Wrongdoing motif is in the scene where Clytemnestra greets a wanderer who tells her that he is a tired traveller. Just as the

¹⁸ Glebov 1915, p. 540.

wanderer's clothes hide the real Orestes, his vocal line hides the Wrongdoing motif. The orchestra plays the part of the motif, and Orestes repeats it immediately in his seemingly innocuous words 'I got tired along the way, and am looking for rest. I have no strength to walk on; my body wants rest' on the notes b-flat-a-f (bars 1-2) and e-flat-d-b-flat (bar 4) in the Example 4.5 below:

Example 4.5. Orestes as a Wanderer (2; 19; 205; 12-13).

Andante. ♩ = 63

Orestes

v pu-ti ustal i ot-dy-kha i-shchu. Net sil id-ti; po-ko-ya te-lo pro-sit;

Piano

p espress.

As the two examples above show, Taneyev employed the main cell of the Wrongdoing motif to inform Agamemnon and Clytemnestra of their impending deaths, but neither recognised its meaning. Richard Strauss used the same method to tell his Clytemnestra that she will soon die, and similarly, she did not recognise, or chose to ignore the warning signs.¹⁹ Operatic composers often use this kind of dramatic effect because it enables them to increase the sense of drama by involving audiences into the emotional world of the stage characters using musical motifs that have been defined within the dramatic context of the opera.

One of the last appearances of the Wrongdoing motif can be seen in the opening *Entr'acte* and scene of *Eumenides*. As in *The Libation Bearers*, Taneyev and Venkstern created a new scene with which to begin the final act of the opera where, like his mother in Act 2, Orestes appeared in a tormented, almost suicidal state. His

¹⁹ Richard Strauss, *Elektra* (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1916), pp. 118-120, rehearsal number 181, 'Ich habe keine guten Nacht.' The woodwind section enters with a funeral-like, mournful and dark chordal progression. Like Taneyev's Clytemnestra, her counterpart in Strauss' opera also suffers from sleeplessness and guilt.

entry was preceded by a whirlwind *Entr'acte* (Appendix C) that painted a gloomy fate for the opera's title hero. In the *Entr'acte* a plaintive violin solo evokes Orestes' terror of the Furies over a rushing semiquaver ostinato, which symbolises their pursuit; this is followed by a vigorous stretto. The violins play the Wrongdoing motif, reflecting the fact that Orestes is already suffering in punishment of his mother's murder.

This powerful introduction takes the audience into the inner world of the tormented protagonist, who is now on his journey to Delphi. When Orestes rushes onto the stage in terror, he is far from the valiant hero the audience met earlier. The scene of Orestes and Furies that follows is one of the most demanding for the singer portraying Orestes, but it is also one of the most effective scenes in the opera. As will be seen in Chapter Five of this thesis, Taneyev wrote this scene first, and used it as a gauge with which to measure the dramatic impact of all the preceding material in the story. He wanted it to be the most powerful, and was able to achieve his goal because by the arrival of Act 3 the Wrongdoing motif was firmly associated with the imminence of death. Thus, the composer needed only the main cell of the motif to suggest the nearness of his characters' demise. By repeating, re-using, and varying the appearances of the same short cell Taneyev was also able to convey musically the sense of relentless psychological stress experienced by Orestes.

The Killed Children

Like the Wrongdoing, The Killed Children is an anticipation motif. Both appear in the Prelude before they become associated with musico-dramatic ideas in the text. Example 4.6 (viola section) shows the development of the falling minor second-minor third motif from the very beginning of the Prelude (Example 4.1, p. 128),

which undergoes transition into what becomes The Killed Children motif in Example 4.7.

Example 4.6. The Killed Children Motif Juxtaposed with the Wrongdoing Motif (1; Prelude; 2).

2 Allegro. (♩ = 108)

Flute *pp*

Clarinet in B \flat *pp*

Bassoon *pp*

Horn in F

Solo Viola *pp* con sord.

Viola *pp* con sord.

Viola *pp* con sord. divisi

Fl. *pp*

Cl. *pp*

Bsn. *sfpp*

Hn. *sfpp*

S. Vla. *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vla. *pp* divisi

In Example 4.6 it is juxtaposed with a rhythmically augmented Wrongdoing motif in bassoons and through its repetition and striking sound combination becomes firmly established in the minds of the listeners. Here Taneyev anticipates one of the main ideas of *Oresteia*: all past crimes will have to be avenged, expiated, or forgiven.

Example 4.7. The First Appearance of The Killed Children (1; Prelude; 3).

The musical score for Example 4.7 is presented in four systems. The first system begins with the tempo marking "Poco meno mosso." and the dynamic "pp". A box containing the number "3" is positioned above the first measure. The second system is marked "m.d.". The third system is marked "p". The fourth system is marked "dim." and "poco cresc.". The score is written for piano, with a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with various ornaments and dynamics, while the bass staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes.

The Killed Children motif becomes fully formed in the twelve last bars of the Prelude, played by solo violin (Example 4.7, top voice on the treble stave). Even if the audience members do not know the exact meaning of the Killed Children and the Wrongdoing motifs at this stage, they will recognise them in the monologue of Aegysthus (1; 4; 35), and in the scene of Cassandra's visions (1; 8; 84. Example 4.8a,

Cassandra's voice and violins, here seen in the top line of the piano, and 1; 8; 96-97, Example 4.8b, scored for violins, here seen in the top line of the piano) and attribute their functions to the notion of past crimes at the House of Atreus. When Clytemnestra tells the people about Agamemnon's death, this Killed Children motif which appears in the chorus and the string section leaves no doubt as to where the dark story of the family originated (1; 9; 115-116). Because the Killed Children motif is a direct and very close descendant of the Wrongdoing motif, even when Clytemnestra tells people that it was Fate's hand that killed Agamemnon, it is clear that her revenge is viewed as sin.

Example 4.8a. The Killed Children Motif in Cassandra's Visions (1; 8; 84).

84 Andante ($\text{♩} = 56$)
 Кассандра
 Cassandra
 Kassandra

p *mf*
 Вот ви-жу я де-тей за-ре-зан-ных. *mf* Зн-
 J'en-tends des cris d'en-fants, des cris stri-dents! Je
 Ich se-he Kin-der, hin-ge-schlach-te-te. *mf* Von

pp *espress.*

p
 -я-ют ра-ны их кро-ва-вы-е, кро-ва-вы-е.
 vois cou-ler leur sang. Je vois leur père man-ger leur chair.
 Wun-den graus ent-stellt, weit-klaf-fen-den, blut-strö-men-den...

Example 4.8b. The Killed Children Motif in Cassandra's Visions (1; 8; 96-97).

Около дворца появляются тени убитых детей.
 Les spectres des enfants égorgés surgissent.
 Neben dem Palaste erscheinen die Schatten der getöteten Kinder.

96 **Allegro** (♩ = 108) *pp*

Там, на ии - ро - ге, вы не ви - ди - те
 Là, là dans l'om-bre voy - ez vous là - bas
 Dort auf der Schwel - le seht ihr lie - gen sie,

ма - лю - ток за - ре - зан - ных? Вот,
 ces té - tes en - san - glan - tées? Ah!
 die ar - men Ge - mor - de - ten. Dort,

The Furies

The Furies motif always begins with the falling minor second-minor third cell of the Wrongdoing motif, thus clearly emanating from it, and belonging to the 'evil', or 'dark', group that also includes the Wrongdoing and the Killed Children motifs. It appears in different guises: for the first time its minor second-minor third cell is heard in Cassandra's voice, accompanied by a shrill trilling of the flutes, when Cassandra sees the Furies waiting for further blood (Example 4.9). When Orestes sees the Furies (Example 4.10), they are still represented only by the orchestra. The *Entr'acte* to *Eumenides* is an instrumental depiction of the torments experienced by Orestes, and it is based almost entirely on this minor second-minor/major third cell (3; 23; 241, 244, and 251).²⁰

²⁰ See Appendix C, pp. 298-314.

Example 4.9. Cassandra Sees the Furies (1; 8; 88-89).

88 Allegro vivace con fuoco (*d* = 104)

- tu!
 - le!
 - de!

До - бы - ча
 Je vois les
 Der Fu - rien

фу - рий
 fil - les
 Bei - te

в
 tot la nuit
 ist dies Haus,

дав - гует - schon

- no o - ni гнес - дат ся в нем.
 - ter dé - ja le sang ver - sé.
 lang gehn drinn sie ein und aus.

Example 4.10. Orestes Sees the Furies (2:22; 238-239).

Внутренняя часть дворца освещается красным светом. Видна толпа фурий.
 La partie intérieure du palais s'illumine d'une clarté rouge et l'on aperçoit la horde des furies.
 Das Innere des Palastes erhellt sich rot. Die Furien erscheinen auf der Schwelle gelagert.

238 Ореcт
 Oreste
 Orest

Allegro agitato ($J = 120$)

Вот, вот о-ни!
 Ah! voy-ez!
 Seht, seht ihr sie!

Тор-на Э-
 Les E-rin-
 Dort die E-

ри-ний! Во-деж-дах тем-ных озне-
 -пу-ес! Gor-go-pes noi-res! Coif-
 -гун-ни-ен! Im dunk-len Klei-de, die

The Furies' initial appearance in a chorus that is set to a single pitch reflects Cassandra's vision of them as singing a 'tuneless melody' (110; 36). Taking the description of the Furies' monotone chorus as guidelines from Aeschylus, Taneyev set the first words of the Furies to pitch d-flat. The Furies sing:

There, there he is! We have found him!
 The bloody traces show us
 Where he made his path.
 We will not lose him from our sight (Example 4.11):

Example 4.11. The Chorus of the Furies (3; 23; 257).

257 Moderato.

pp

Sopr. e Alti.
 Vot on! E-go nas - tig - li mi. Kro-va vity

Ten. e Bassi.
pp

Piano
sfpp
pp *pp*

S. e A.
 sled u - ka-zy-va-et nam, ku - da beg - lets svoy na-prav-lya-et

T. e B.
pp

Pno.
pp

S. e A.
 put'. Iz vi - du mi te - bya ne po-te - rya - em.

T. e B.
pp

Pno.
pp

Taneyev musically enhanced the characterisation of the Furies' relentless, obsessive persecution. This kind of part-declamation part-chant is similar to Taneyev's word-setting in Example 3.5 in Chapter Three (p. 85), where Clytemnestra literally sent Agamemnon to the 'other world.' Here, the changing time-signatures contribute to the unsettling effect made by the Furies, compounded by the d-flat written against a chromatic F minor in the orchestra. The basses play the Furies motif against the background of tremolandi strings, adding further to the musical tension.

Highly charged exclamations of Orestes continue to depict the terror he experiences, and the tension finally resolves with the appearance of the motif, this time sung by the Furies themselves (Example 4.12). But the underlying harmonic relationship between the Furies' monotone d-flat chorus and the G minor one seen in Example 4.12 is based on the tritone, signifying that there is no respite for Orestes yet.

Example 4.12. The Furies Motif (2; 23; 261).

261 Allegro feroce ♩ = 144

SOPRANO
Noch'-nas tyom na - ya ro - di - la, mest' zlo - ve shcha-ya vskor - mi - la.

ALTO
Noch'-nas tyom na - ya ro - di - la, mest' zlo - ve shcha-ya vskor - mi - la.

TENOR
Noch'-nas tyom na - ya ro - di - la, mest' zlo - ve shcha-ya vskor - mi - la.

BASS

The three motifs considered in this section—the Wrongdoing, Killed Children, and the Furies—are closely related. They all share the single three-note minor second-minor (major) third cell, which appeared at the beginning of the opera in the Prelude, as seen in the Example 4.1 (p. 128). They also share the dramatic

associations with the tragic and dark elements of the Aeschylean myth. Taneyev had shown his predilection for using a limited store of melodic material, with which he created either musico-dramatic associations (the Wrongdoing and Killed Children), or complete portraits (the Furies) of ideas or characters in his *Oresteia*. However, the composer successfully avoided falling into the trap of repetitiveness that such a narrow arsenal of melodic means can pose by limiting the use of these motifs only to the places of dramatic importance. The culmination of his skilful use of the main minor second-minor/major third cell from the Wrongdoing motif can be seen throughout the aforementioned Appendix C.

Cassandra and Orestes

The motifs representing Cassandra and Orestes symbolise the will of gods, or fate that govern the actions of the title hero and determine the death of Cassandra. Both motifs undergo little transformation for reasons which will become clear in the following discussion. Because Cassandra's stage life is contained to one scene only, her identifying motif also exists within that single scene and is connected solely to her character. Her first appearance is immediately acknowledged with a plaintive, gentle motif in the oboe (Example 4.13):

Example 4.13. Cassandra's Leading Motif (1; 8; 79; 4-5).



Taneyev strengthened the power of this reminiscence motif by presenting it throughout the scene exclusively in the oboe, thus making not only its musical

quality but also instrumental colour firmly associated with Cassandra. Taneyev used Cassandra's motif in the opening and closing orchestral episodes of the scene (Example 3.8 in Chapter Three, p. 90), and in her *arioso* (Example 3.9 in Chapter Three, p. 91). By doing this, Taneyev achieved a musical unity of the scene, where one musical idea served as a constant reminder of Cassandra's fate. As was stated above, this motif remains unaltered, and the reason behind it becomes clear at the beginning of Cassandra's *arioso*, which starts with the words 'The will of Fate cannot be changed.' The melancholic oboe captures in its poignant tones the irony of Cassandra's ability to foresee the future and inability to change it. The words are set to her reminiscence motif, which thus musically embodies the notion of Cassandra's imminent and certain demise.

But before she dies, Cassandra predicts Orestes' return to Argos as a saviour of the House of Atreus. His motif is heard in full when it first appears in Cassandra's voice (Example 4.14); its second section appears in the vocal part of sopranos, and in flutes and violins at the close of Act 1, where the people call to Orestes as their protector (1; 10; 126); and finally, it sounds heroic, powerful and ominous when Orestes decides to kill his mother Clytemnestra (2; 21; 217). This motif remains unchanged throughout, and the explanation behind it is obvious: Orestes is the only character who is present either musically or in person in all three acts, and he is the one constant, positive power that can lift the curse off his family, but is inextricably bound to continue the bloodletting.

Example 4.14. Orestes' Motif (1; 8; 104).

104 Moderato. ♩ = 76

Cassandra

Piano

ff

mf

iz dal' - nikh stran iz -

Cassandra

Pno.

gnan - nik pri - dyot, za krov' olsa ot - mstit on

Cassandra

Pno.

krov' - yu iz - ba - vit sem' - yu svo-yu ot bed.

When Orestes enters the stage after killing Aegisthus, the horns play the first part of his motif, in the same key of its first appearance, C minor (Example 4.15, top voice):

Example 4.15. The Orestes Motif in *The Libation Bearers* (3; 21; 217; 1-11).

217 Moderato. ♩ = 108

Piano *ff* *mf*

Orestes *ff*

Pno. *cresc.* *ff*

Te - bya i - shechu!

As the example above shows, this time the motif does not end on the tonic. Instead, the music stops on the diminished seventh chord built on f-sharp—a tritone apart from the tonic of C major (Example 4.15, bar 11). The G in the bass functions as a pedal note that prepares the arrival of the dominant in the succeeding bars. As will be seen later in the chapter, Taneyev employed the tritone in traditional way, in dramatic situations that call for heightened tension or tragedy, and the interval is strongly associated with elements of emotional distress (see Table 4.2, p. 151). Taneyev used the tritone to convey the poignancy and difficulty of Orestes's situation by setting his opening words 'Tebya ishchu' [I am looking for you!] to the descending tritone f-sharp-c. Soon, he will be faced with the task of killing his own mother, and his incomplete representation motif forecasts the lack of resolve that Orestes demonstrates at the horrific choice between dishonour and matricide. But there is one power Orestes will draw on: Apollo.

Apollo

Apollo's motif appears for the first time in the scene of reunion of Orestes and Electra, where Orestes delivers a powerful speech recounting how Apollo's will required him to avenge his father's murder. Orestes derives his strength from this speech when he tells Electra that Apollo guided him so far, and will not forsake him. Orestes' account of Apollo's appearance, 'Crowned with the rays of sun', is set to the motif that becomes immediately associated with Apollo and his glory (Example 4.16). The flutes and violins double the part of Orestes, and two harps and undulating celli and violas provide harmonic support.

Example 4.16. The Apollo Motif (2; 17; 182).

182 *Andante ma non troppo.* ♩ = 72

Orestes
V ven - tse iz sol-nech-nikh lu - chey i v bles-ke-div-nom

Piano
f *dim.* *p*

Orestes
on, si - yan' - yem o - za - ryon, pred - stal mne v sla - ve vsej svo - yey.

Pno.
cresc.

When Orestes explains the murder of his mother to the people, he decides immediately to travel to the temple of Apollo in Delphi to seek protection from the Furies that are already waiting for him. The first part of the Apollo motif appears in Orestes' voice in F minor, sounding quietly optimistic, supported by solid chordal

textures in the orchestra (2; 22; 236). On his way to the Temple, after the Furies exhaust Orestes mentally and physically, he once again calls to Apollo, but this time the motif sounds different, reflecting Orestes' weariness, and diminishing belief, perhaps, in the possibility of relief of his guilt at having murdered his mother. Before now, the motif always began with an upward fourth leap from the dominant to the tonic (g-c and c-f), but here it appears on the third degree of the A major scale and, as if Orestes is too exhausted to sing an ascending fourth, the first three notes of the motif are the same (Example 4.17).

Example 4.17. Orestes' Last Call to Apollo (3; 23; 255).

255 Moderato. ♩ = 110

Orestes

Piano

Orestes

Pno.

be vzy - va - yu A - pol - lon,

K te

12 12 12 12

The tension of the scene of Orestes and the Furies finally resolves with the appearance of the symphonic *Entr'acte The Temple of Apollo at Delphi*, immediately preceding the god's first stage entry in the *Eumenides*. The *Entr'acte* has become the most popular excerpt from the opera, often performed both in Russia and abroad during the composer's lifetime. The music presents Apollo in the full power of his

idealised character. Michael Ewans wrote that Taneyev ‘decisively tilts his opera in favour of Apollo’, and that his musical characterisation

Compellingly establishes the radiant strength of the god, in preparation for the moment when Apollo himself appears [...] and drives the Furies from his temple, firmly and with dignity. This is a total divergence from Aeschylus; in his version of the confrontation between Apollo and the Furies [179-231; 99-100] the words of the two sides are in total contrast to their appearances. The radiant young Olympian male god of Delphi is petulant and blusters under questioning, while the old, hideous, female goddesses of the Night are courteous, calm, and logical.²¹

Powerfully optimistic, glorious, and sublime, the Apollo motif stands for everything that is good, humane, and positive in the opera. Melodically this motif is related to that of Orestes, as it appears in Cassandra’s part, shown in Example 4.14 (p. 146). Both motifs are written in quadruple meter, both begin with the same rhythm and on the same pitch G, and both move toward the higher register of their ranges. But Orestes’ motif is written in C minor, and Apollo’s appears in C major. In fact, both are different sides—positive and negative—of the same idea, or fate.

The motif of Apollo is more than just his musical representation. It appears as a guiding light for Orestes, who draws strength and courage from the knowledge that Apollo will protect him. Apollo’s music in the *Entr’acte* is decidedly the most glorious, scintillating and life-affirming in the entire opera because only he could free Orestes from the Furies and enable him to reach Athens, where the eponymous hero finally was freed from his sin.

²¹ Belina and Ewans 2010.

Tritone as Reminiscence Motif

Leitmotifs are not confined to the area of melodic domain. The function of reminiscence and anticipation motif is an ability to draw attention to the same idea, character, or mood. In other words they are powerful descriptive tools that can be used in several ways: in melody, rhythm, harmony, orchestral colour, and intervallic make-up. Taneyev unequivocally used the latter to draw his audience's attention to some important ideas of the opera. The 'seed' of the Wrongdoing motif, for example, has been seen in various roles and places in the opera.

One of the most prominent and striking intervals that appear frequently in *Oresteia* is the tritone, which is clearly connected to the ideas of sin, terror, and distress. Of course this association of the tritone was not new, but for Taneyev the tritone was important not only as an expressive device, but also, as he stated in one of his letters to his colleague Nikolai Amani (1872-1904), as the basis of his harmonic system.²²

Although Taneyev did not endow his tritones with any particular radical functions, the fact that he discussed the interval in his writing indicates his close attention to and consideration of its use. As well using the tritones in a traditional way by resolving them immediately after their appearance, Taneyev often used them as independent harmonic elements, without resolution, or resolved them into other dissonant chords or intervals. The following Table 4.2 shows the selected places where the tritone interval appears in *Oresteia* connected to its important ideas.

²² S. I. Taneyev: *materiali i dokumenti* [Materials and Documents], ed. by Vasily Kiselyov, Tamara Livanova, and Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952), letter from S. Taneyev to N. Amani dated 8 November 1903, p. 230.

Table 4.2. Tritones in *Oresteia*.

Location	Instrument or character in whose line the tritone appears	Words (where appropriate) ²³	Stage Action
1; 4; 28; 3- 5.	Aegysthus's vocal line.	'Is this <i>possible?</i> Agamemnon is back.'	Aegysthus attempts to summon his courage to kill Agamemnon, and agonises whether to avenge the deaths of his siblings or to flee the wrath of the King.
1; 4; 29; 1.		'He is already <i>close!</i> '	
1; 4; 29; 11.		'To <i>kill?</i> '	
1; 4; 38; 4.		'Will I be brave enough to lift my trembling hand at the <i>angry king?</i> '	
1; 4; 40; 1-2.		' <i>I tremble, death awaits me!</i> '	
1; 7; 70; 1-2.	Tritone appears twice in Clytemnestra's voice and violins.	'Oh, do not <i>resist</i> my wishes!'	Clytemnestra is trying to persuade Agamemnon to walk on red tapestry into the palace.
1; 8; 78; 2 and 4.	Violins, clarinet, and bassoon.	'I address you, Cassandra.'	Clytemnestra invites Cassandra into the palace.
1; 8; 82; 14-15.	Cassandra's vocal part.	'Oh Apollo, where have you <i>led</i> me?'	Cassandra realises that the house of Atreus has sinister secrets.
1; 8; 84; 2.	Cassandra's vocal part, violins.	'I see the killed <i>children.</i> '	Cassandra tells people that she can see the visions of past events in the house of Atreus.
1; 8; 86; 17-18.	Cassandra's vocal part.	'New sorrows, new misfortune, terrible, <i>imminent, and irreversible,</i> threaten the house of Atreus.'	Cassandra foretells the death of Agamemnon
1; 8; 87; 3-4.	Cassandra's vocal part.	'A terrible <i>murder</i> is	Cassandra foretells the death of Agamemnon.

²³ The words in Italics are set to the tritone interval.

		brewing...'	
1; 8; 96; 6.	Cassandra's vocal part.	'...do you not see the murdered <i>children</i> ?'	Cassandra tells people that she can see the killed children.
1; 8; 100; 12-13.	Cassandra's vocal part and the Chorus.	Cassandra: '...the murderer's hand will strike the King.' The Chorus: 'Your words are <i>terrible</i> .'	Cassandra foretells the death of Agamemnon.
1; 8; 101; 1.	Cassandra's vocal part and the Chorus.	'Oh, woe!'	Cassandra realises that she will also die with Agamemnon.
1; 9; 111; 1-5.	Trombones, timpani, and horns.		<i>The curtain covering the middle part of the palace opens. The bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra are visible.</i>
2; 11; 129; 3.	Clytemnestra's vocal line.	'Oh, <i>woe</i> is me, hapless sinner!'	Clytemnestra is tormented with Agamemnon's visions after the murder.
2; 12; 139; 18.	Agamemnon's vocal line, violins.	'In the coming day you will <i>pay</i> with blood for blood and with death for death.'	Agamemnon's phantom appears to Clytemnestra and prophesies her imminent death.
2; 16; 165; 5.	Electra's vocal line, violins.	'In the land of the <i>shadows</i> '	Electra appeals to her father Agamemnon.
2; 20; 212; 5.	The Slave's vocal line, celli, and violins.	'Oh, woe!'	The Slave cries out about Aegysthus's death.
2; 21; 217; 11.	Orestes's vocal line.	'I am looking for you!'	Orestes tells Clytemnestra that he came to avenge Agamemnon's death.
2; 21; 218; 3.	Clytemnestra's vocal line.	'Aegysthus is <i>dead</i> !'	Clytemnestra mourns the death of Aegysthus.
2; 22; 230; 2.	Orestes's vocal line.	'I delivered the punishment!'	Orestes appears after killing Clytemnestra.
2; 22; 232; 2.	Orestes's vocal line.	'While I still have <i>not lost my mind</i> '	Orestes justifies Clytemnestra's murder to the people.
2; 22; 238; 3.	Orestes's vocal line.	'Here they are!'	Orestes sees the Furies for the first time.

As the above table shows, all the appearances of the tritone in *Oresteia* naturally occur in connection to sinister and terrible elements of the story. Taneyev used the tritone to increase the tension by delaying resolution, by resolving the tritone into another tense interval or a chord, often a diminished seventh (1; 4; 29; 11), or by not offering the resolution at all. Taneyev exploited this association of the tritone with unstable, unresolved harmonies, but he used it sparingly, only in the scenes where such use would increase the dramatic impact on the listeners.

Conclusion

The principle of using a limited number of themes or melodic cells to create symphonic, instrumental, and vocal works was a practice that developed in Taneyev's compositional practice as early as 1873.²⁴ The above discussion demonstrated how Taneyev, using one motif as a building block, created two other motifs that helped develop the symphonic and melodic structure of the *Oresteia*. This relates the application of motifs in *Oresteia* to Wagnerian interpretation of motifs as 'fertilising seeds' that give birth to other motifs that contribute to the richness of musical material and texture. Taneyev was interested in the opportunities afforded to him by motif-building blocks, rather than their use as purely descriptive and expressive musical interludes. Although Taneyev's system of motifs in *Oresteia* exists on a smaller scale than that observed in Wagner's musical dramas, his understanding and interpretation of motifs was very similar.

²⁴ Yury Gen-It presented a thorough study of Taneyev's choral compositions, where this principle often plays a prominent role in *Cherti stilya khorov S. I. Taneyeva* [Stylistic Features of Taneyev's Choruses] (Petrozavodsk: n/p, 1991). Taneyev's Overture in D minor (1875), First Symphony (1873-74), and String Quartet in D minor (1874-76) are further examples where Taneyev demonstrated how a small number of themes were used to create large-scale structures and develop musical material. For further information, see Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, *Tvorchestvo S. I. Taneyeva: istoriko-stilisticheskoye issledovaniye* [Taneyev's Works: Historico-Stylistic Investigation] (Moscow: Muzika, 1986), pp. 22-37.

In his *Oresteia*, Taneyev established an observable division of dramatic ideas and musical dualities: contrasting motifs of dark and light, negative and positive, and good and evil elements were used to develop the musical and dramatic ideas of the *Oresteia*. The murders that took place in the House of Atreus are an ‘evil’ that can only be overcome by the ‘good’ of Apollo’s power, Orestes’ repentance and suffering, and Athena’s forgiveness. The three ‘dark’ motifs—the Wrongdoing, Killed Children, and the Furies—are the opposite of the ‘light’, positive motif of Apollo, who symbolises the victory of good over evil that finally lifts the curse of the House of Atreus, banishes the Furies from his temple and protects Orestes from their pursuit.

Out of seven leading motifs in *Oresteia*, two of them (Cassandra’s and Orestes’) appear a limited number of times, although Cassandra’s motif contributes to the development of other musical material in her scene. Orestes’ motif does not change because it reflects the title hero’s strong and unchanging purpose of the expiator of his family’s sins, and Cassandra’s represents the ‘will of Fate’ that ‘cannot be changed.’ The three motifs—the Wrongdoing, the Killed Children, and the second motif of the Furies—provide multiple opportunities for thematic derivation and organic development of the musical material.

The characteristic seed of the Wrongdoing motif (Example 4.1, p. 128) is used as the main building block of all musical material in the scenes of Orestes and the Furies. The D minor *Entr’acte* is an excellent example of Taneyev’s skilful use of a short melodic seed for melodic and motivic development.

By using the principal motifs in the opera as anticipation and reminiscence motifs, Taneyev guided his audience towards a greater engagement with the drama. The Wrongdoing motif is the most important of the series of three ‘dark’ motifs not

only because of its symbolic meaning, but also because it creates the other two motifs of the group. After the gloomy and ominous opening of the Prelude the next appearance of the Wrongdoing motif creates an association with the dark, sinister elements of the story. Taneyev was careful with the use of the Wrongdoing motif by employing it in its pure version only a limited number of times, in the pivotal moments in the drama—after the Prelude it appears only at the time of Clytemnestra’s death (2; 21; 229; 1-13) (Example 4.3, p. 132) and in the scene of Orestes and the Furies (Appendix C, 3; 23; 246-249, pp. 304-311). But by constructing the greater part of the musical fabric of the opera from the ‘seed’ of the Wrongdoing motif, Taneyev maintained the sense of a gloomy and tragic atmosphere full of pessimistic foreboding. The symbolic musical embodiment of the curse at the House of Atreus disappears only at the end of the drama with Apollo and Athena’s intervention.

The light begins to shine in the darkness of the Oresteian tunnel with the appearance of the positive, empowering, and life-giving Apollo motif in the scene of Orestes’ and Electra’s reunion. From that moment, despite the torments that the title hero still has to go through, the audience can sense that the tragedy is moving out of the gloom into the light and freedom. The apotheosis of *Oresteia* is the powerful victory of good over evil—a centuries-old, universal theme—and a decisive establishment of the new social order that brings empowering freedom not only to citizens of Argos, but to the entire humanity.

Having observed in the previous and present chapters how Taneyev unfolded the drama and re-emphasised the ideas expressed in the text with the help of the music, the discussion will now move to towards the issues concerned with production and reception of *Oresteia*. It was seen that as a stage work, *Oresteia* was

both unusual and traditional: unusual in its choice of the subject, traditional in its treatment as expected by the nineteenth-century operatic standards. The case of Taneyev's *Oresteia* also offers another viewpoint through which a fuller picture of reception of Wagnerian ideas in Russia can be gleaned. The next two chapters will continue the exploration of the opera's historical aspects and consider the long journey of *Oresteia* towards its stage production, its uneven stage history, and evolving critical reception. In this way, a fuller understanding of the musical and theatrical issues faced by the composer will be achieved.

Chapter Five

Stage History

I think that an artist must serve not the taste of listeners, or the taste of the persons, in whose power it is to produce his works, but only his own taste.¹

S. Taneyev.

Performance and reception histories can reveal a great deal about the success of an opera. Not every opera becomes immediately popular with the public—some of the more prominent operas of today had difficult and long journeys to widespread acceptance. Musorgsky's operas, most of Wagner's music dramas, and the works of such composers as Anton Rubinstein and Rimsky-Korsakov were all subjected to negative reviews and rejection in various degrees. But there are also operas that have stormed into popularity with such power and certainty that nothing could seemingly remove them from their prominent place in operatic repertoires, and yet, in the short space of a few decades some of them disappeared almost completely from the stage. Among such examples are Aleksey Verstovsky's *Askol'dova Mogila* [Askold's Grave] (1835), Serov's *Judith* (1863) and *Rogneda* (1865), and Cui's *William Ratcliffe* (1861-68). Taneyev's *Oresteia* cannot be placed in either of these two extreme categories. Although it had considerable success in its first season, and a very successful revival in 1917-18, for a number of reasons that will be examined in the following discussion, it did not establish itself in the operatic repertoire. This chapter examines the stage history

¹ P. I. Chaykovsky, S. I. Taneyev: *pis'ma*, ed. by Vladimir Zhdanov (Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951), letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 27 October 1895, p. 442. Taneyev's student K. Saradzhev wrote: 'I never observed that Taneyev was interested in other people's opinions about his works' in his 'Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev: listki vospominaniy' [S. I. Taneyev: Pages of Reminiscences], *Muzika* 1915, No. 233, p. 507. In fact, Taneyev was interested in opinions of one person only—Tchaikovsky—by playing and discussing with him excerpts from his opera.

of Taneyev's *Oresteia* from its first rehearsals to its last concert performance, and gives the fullest account to date of its productions and their casts.

Oresteia was premièred in the season 1895-96 and repeated in 1915-16 at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, and in 1917-18 at the Theatre of the Soviet Workers' Deputies in Moscow. In 1963 it was given at the Belorussian State Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Minsk, which took *Oresteia* on tour and performed it once at Moscow's Kremlin Palace of Congresses in February 1964. After the Minsk production of *Oresteia* only concert performances of Taneyev's opera were given in Russia and abroad. This chapter deals exclusively with full stage productions of *Oresteia*, which all occurred in Russia.

Although all his life Taneyev lived in Moscow, the city's Bolshoy Theatre did not have the necessary resources to produce an opera as grand as *Oresteia*. German Laroché wrote about the Moscow Russian opera that it was 'artificially kept by the Directorate [of the Imperial Theatres] in a state close to death.'² It was very difficult for a Russian composer to get his work performed there, and the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg offered more opportunities.³ Also, as was seen in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Tchaikovsky, through his contacts at the Mariinsky, helped Taneyev to stage his opera there.

The practical difficulties encountered by Taneyev during the opera's production were not specific to him and his opera, but were encountered by many Russian composers whose stage works were produced in the second half of the nineteenth

² German Laroché, *Izbrannīye stat'i. Vypusk 3: opera i operniy teatr* [Selected Articles. Volume 3: Opera and Opera Theatre], ed. by Abram Gozenpud (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1976), p. 163.

³ For more information about Bolshoy Theatre in Moscow and the quality of its productions see Gozenpud 1974, pp. 14-21.

century. Rimsky-Korsakov's *Noch' pered rozhdestvom* was premièred at the Mariinsky Theatre in the same season as *Oresteia*, and the St. Petersburg composer faced similar problems.⁴ While examining the process of *Oresteia*'s preparation for the stage, this chapter also sheds light on the workings of the Russian Imperial Theatres, on their inefficient bureaucracy that hampered and distorted many productions, and the disrespect with which the works of Russian composers were treated. It also highlights the problem of unsatisfactory resources in one of the main theatres in the country, which meant that the production of *Oresteia* had to be postponed because no suitable tenor could be found.

Negotiation of Cuts and *Oresteia*'s Rehearsals

Taneyev submitted his opera to the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres on 19 March 1893, and a month later he received a letter, informing him that *Oresteia* could be included in the repertoire of the Mariinsky Theatre if he made some cuts to the libretto and simplified the piano score. Taneyev waited ten months after the letter to start working on the score, but then took only a month to finish it, and by mid-February 1894 dispatched tableau 1 to Nápravnik to be used in rehearsals. The cuts proved more problematic. The Directorate of the Imperial Theatres outlined the suggested cuts as follows:

⁴ Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, tr. by Judah. A. Joffe (New York: Tudor Publishing Co, 1935), p. 302-303. Henceforth this edition will be referred to as *My Musical Life*. Also see: Olga Levasheva, 'Muzikal'nyy teatr' (1870-1890) in *Istoriya russkoy muziki v desyati tomakh* [History of Russian Music in Ten Volumes], ed. by Yury Keldish, Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, Marina Rakhmanova and others, vol. 8 (Moscow: Muzika, 1994), pp. 246-335.

Act 1 must be shortened by approximately a third, which is easily done by shortening the monologues, and by ending it with scene 3 of tableau 2. In Act 2, tableau 3 [must be] cut. Act 3 is to begin straight with tableau 2.⁵

Thus, the Directorate wanted to remove the last three scenes from the Act 1,⁶ shorten five scenes in Act 2,⁷ and remove the scene of Orestes and the Furies from Act 3.⁸ As the last two chapters demonstrated, these scenes were not only effective dramatically, but also necessary for the storyline. Without Cassandra's scene important elucidation of the history of the house of Atreus would be lost, and the arrival of Orestes would not be foreshadowed, to say nothing of the development of Cassandra's character. This scene is one of the most impressive in its force and impact in the whole opera. The removal of the scene of Orestes and the Furies would greatly reduce the tension in the opera, and an Orestes without suffering would be dramatically ineffective as a character. His pardon would be unnecessary.

Taneyev talked to the Director of the Theatres Ivan Vsevolozhsky about the cuts proposed by the Directorate.⁹ Apparently, Vsevolozhsky informed Taneyev that he was free to shorten the opera in any way he saw fit, for Taneyev wrote in pencil on Vsevolozhsky's letter: 'Saw Vsevolozhsky in Moscow. I can make any changes without following the suggestions of the committee.'¹⁰ Taneyev wrote a detailed letter to Nápravník, where he described the cuts he had made:

⁵ *S. I. Taneyev: materialī i dokumentī* [Materials and Documents], ed. by Vasily Kiselyov, Tamara Livanova, and Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952), letter from Vladimir Pogozhev to S. Taneyev dated 24 April 1893, pp. 252-253.

⁶ These scenes included Cassandra's scene with the chorus (1; 8), Clytemnestra's scene with the chorus (1; 9), and the scene of Clytemnestra, Aegisthus and the chorus (1; 10).

⁷ 2; 18-22. In these scenes, Orestes arrives at Argos, confronts Clytemnestra, and delivers his punishment.

⁸ 3; 23.

⁹ Vsevolozhsky held the post of Director of the Imperial Theatres from 1881 until 1899.

¹⁰ *Materialī* 1952, p. 253.

At the end of Act 1 [I cut] a considerable part of Clytemnestra's recitative (all the details about Agamemnon's murder) and a fugato, which was sang by the chorus in response to her. In tableau 2 of the *Choephoroe* [I cut] the repeats sang by the chorus before the duet of Orestes and Electra. In tableau 3 [I cut] considerably all that was sung by the slave regarding Aegysthus's death, cut out the appearance of the women's chorus before Clytemnestra's entry, and made small reductions in the closing scene of this tableau (Orestes and chorus).¹¹

The composer explained that among the cuts suggested by the Directorate, there were two with which he could not agree. He wrote that to cut the end of Act 1, namely the scene in which Aegysthus becomes a king, would mean that his future actions would not make sense to the audience; and that it would be impossible to cut the scene with Orestes and the Furies owing to its significance in the opera. Taneyev displayed how well he researched the subject for his opera before he started writing it, and how little it was understood by the members of the Directorate:

With regard to cutting the scene where the Furies follow Orestes it is necessary to note that it would be strange to see Orestes not followed by them. In the tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides, in the tragedies of the later authors—Crébillon (*Electre*), and Racine (*Iphigenia*), in Gluck's operas based on them, in the tragedy of Leconte de-Lisle *Les Erynnys* and others—Orestes appears followed by the Furies.¹²

Further, Taneyev added:

But aside from this fact, the scene is important [...] because it is a culmination of those elements of terror that are scattered in the preceding parts of the trilogy. [...] This scene with the Furies was written before the entire opera, and served for me as a measure during composition of the preceding parts, which I made less interesting particularly because of this scene. [...] This scene, compared with the following scene in the *Temple of Delphi*, presents the biggest contrast of the opera.¹³

¹¹ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Nápravnik dated 18 February 1894, p. 432.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

The problem of cuts became the greatest issue for Taneyev not only during the final stages of completing the opera, but also until its last performance. The Directorate demanded cuts during the whole process of preparing *Oresteia* for the stage, and Taneyev tried to do his best to comply with them without compromising his artistic integrity.

Oresteia was originally planned for the season 1894-95. The preparations for the production began at the end of February 1894, and the road to its première was long and tiring both for the Directorate and the composer. By August 1894 the choral numbers were rehearsed and ready, and Nápravník wrote to Taneyev that *Oresteia*'s première in the next season 'is a done deal': the vocal score and vocal and orchestral parts were printed, and the roles were distributed.¹⁴

The only remaining issue was the absence of a singer who could sing the role of the main character, Orestes. The first candidate, Preobrazhensky, whom the Directorate tried to invite for the role, declined the invitation without giving any plausible reasons.¹⁵ Another tenor, a Czech singer Florechnok (dates unknown) agreed to sing only five performances in spring 1895, which was unacceptable.¹⁶ The only remaining option was to engage Mikhaylov (pseudonym, real name Moisey Zilbershteyn, 1855-1928),¹⁷ a tenor who was available at the time, but whom Taneyev initially did not want to cast as Orestes. Nápravník gave Taneyev a choice: to take Mikhaylov and risk the success of the opera, or postpone the opera until the following season. Taneyev wrote to Vsevolozhsky that he was grateful to the Directorate for all their efforts, and thought that

¹⁴ *Pis'ma*, letter from E. Nápravník to S. Taneyev dated 3 August 1894, p. 432.

¹⁵ *Pis'ma*, letter from E. Nápravník to S. Taneyev dated 3 August 1894, p. 433.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 537.

they had no other option but to invite Mikhaylov, despite Taneyev's reservations about his suitability for the role.¹⁸ As demonstrated by the following excerpt from Vsevolozhsky's letter, the Directorate did not place much faith in him either:

I admit that I do not trust Mikhaylov's performance—the scene with the Furies will be lost—but at least his voice sounds nice, and he would not make mistakes, and this is already a lot. *La plus belle fille ne peut donner plus qu'elle a* [sic]—and we have only Mikhaylov.¹⁹

With the large amount of money often spent on foreign stars, and generally on all productions of the Imperial Theatres, this letter shows the low standards and expectations for Russian opera. The wealthiest theatre in the country did not have a tenor who could offer more than simply singing the right notes.

In addition to this issue, the opera's length still remained a problem for Nápravnik, who exchanged a multitude of letters on the subject with Taneyev and Vsevolozhsky. The letters display the composer's exasperation at Nápravnik's resolve to shorten the opera, Nápravnik's unbending belief that the opera was too long, and Vsevolozhsky's quasi-diplomatic answers to the composer. In August 1894, Nápravnik wrote to Taneyev that after detailed study of the opera he realised that Acts 1 and 2 would need to be cut further, and that the vocal score was still too difficult for their accompanists.²⁰ In reply, Taneyev could only say that he could not do anything about the vocal score because it was already printed, and the instrumental and vocal parts were already distributed among the musicians and soloists. Taneyev could do no more than

¹⁸ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Nápravnik dated 20 August 1894, pp. 433-434.

¹⁹ *Materiali 1952*, letter from I. Vsevolozhsky to S. Taneyev dated 26 August 1894, p. 255.

²⁰ *Materiali 1952*, letter from E. Nápravnik to S. Taneyev dated 30 August 1894, p. 431.

suggest an able accompanist he had heard of, I. Pomazansky.²¹ As for the cuts, he was still prepared to work with Nápravník, and asked the conductor to supply him with a list of suggestions.

While the issue of cuts remained during the whole process of staging the opera, serious problems associated with the soloists began in September 1894 when Mikhaylov, rather predictably, found that the part of Orestes was too difficult, and said that singing it made him tired.²² Nikolay Ukraintsev (?-1909) and Nikolay Velyashev, the two other tenors suggested for understudies, did not meet with Taneyev's approval—he still wanted Mikhaylov to sing the part.²³ Tchaikovsky's brother Modest, a playwright and librettist who at the time was involved with St. Petersburg's theatres, wrote to Taneyev:

The opera is being rehearsed, decorations and costumes are being prepared with feverish hurry, but the unsuitability of Mikhaylov is showing all the more. It is your bad fortune that our troupe was never more wretched than now. There is no tenor. If they order it, and if you strongly demand it, he will sing, but indeed, would it not be better to postpone the première than to risk such a performance?²⁴

A month after Modest Tchaikovsky's letter, on 24 October 1894, Tsar Aleksandr III died, and a period of national mourning was announced. All Russian theatres were closed indefinitely, and the première of *Oresteia* was postponed in any case. But the production, however, was well on its way. Taneyev wrote to his close friend Varvara Maslova (?-1905) that he saw the sketches of the costumes, which he thought excellent,

²¹ *Materiali 1952*, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Nápravník dated 3 September 1894, p. 435.

²² *Materiali 1952*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 23 September 1894, pp. 435-436.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Materiali 1952*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 28 September 1894, p. 437.

and that the artists had already begun to work on the stage sets.²⁵ Most importantly, a new Orestes was found:

For *Oresteia* the Directorate invited the tenor [Nikolay] Gorsky, who visited me last Thursday and sang the whole evening. I like this tenor very much. He does not have a particularly brilliant voice that could enchant sensitive ladies and arouse the public's delight, but this man has a rather good voice, he freely takes high notes, his intonation is impeccable, he is very musical, and he immediately realises what it is that is expected of him, and he is very experienced: he sang in Germany, England, and America. I am extremely pleased that he will be Orestes.²⁶

At the beginning of January 1895 the Imperial Theatres reopened, and in view of upcoming rehearsals Nápravník repeated his request to Taneyev to shorten further Acts 1 and 2, presenting it as Vsevolozhsky's order.²⁷ Taneyev immediately wrote to Vsevolozhsky, and reminded him about their meeting in Moscow, in the spring of 1893, where Vsevolozhsky had assured the composer of his complete support, and said that it would be up to him to make the cuts.²⁸

Taneyev proceeded to say that he had made considerable cuts, but, according to Vsevolozhsky's promise, not the ones suggested by the Directorate. Taneyev staunchly defended his right as a composer to determine which scenes he deemed fit to change, particularly because he did not always agree with the Directorate's suggestions. Indeed, these suggestions displayed a complete lack of understanding of the opera's storyline, as seen in the Directorate's request to cut the scene of Orestes with the Furies—one of the key scenes in the opera. As Taneyev saw it, he had already complied with the

²⁵ *Materiali* 1952, letter from S. Taneyev to V. Maslova dated 23 October 1894, p. 411.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

²⁷ *Materiali* 1952, letter from E. Nápravník to S. Taneyev dated 14 February 1895, p. 437.

²⁸ Cited in Gozenpud 1973, p. 101.

Directorate's demands—he cut his opera by thirty minutes, or one sixth, and it now lasted two hours and thirty minutes instead of three hours.²⁹ In a letter to Vsevolozhsky Taneyev pointed out the inconsistency between the Directorate's demands and its actions: after requesting the scene with the Furies to be cut out, they still went ahead with ordering the stage sets for the scene. He added in exasperation:

And so, in the end, the whole thing is reduced to the fact that the Directorate is demanding of me something that has already been done, and demanding it in such a form, that can only give rise to hostile relations, undesirable in our common project, which needs unity and agreement.³⁰

Nápravník, although assertive and demanding, took care not to appear arrogant or unsympathetic in his communications with the composer. His letters display a certain amount of courtesy and good will toward Taneyev. In his role as the chief conductor of the Mariinsky Theatre, Nápravník had a great deal more experience with operatic repertoire than Taneyev. Therefore, his suggestions, although apparently ruthless, and in some cases ill-informed, still carried behind them an expertise and understanding of how drama works on stage, something about which Taneyev was only beginning to learn. Taneyev, although not always accepting of Nápravník's suggestions, did his best to shorten the opera in the way deemed appropriate from his viewpoint as its composer. Difficulties in communication must have been added to by the fact that Taneyev resided in Moscow, and meetings between him and Nápravník were not possible, and in such delicate matter letters were not a substitute for face-to-face discussions.

²⁹ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Nápravník dated 9 March 1895, p. 440.

³⁰ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 17 February 1895, pp. 438-439.

The cuts made by Taneyev still did not satisfy Nápravník. Having failed to resolve this matter with the conductor, Taneyev wrote directly to Vsevolozhsky. He compared *Oresteia* with Nápravník's opera *Dubrovsky*, which was staged at the same time, noting that the score of *Dubrovsky* was three pages longer than that of *Oresteia*.³¹ Vsevolozhsky replied three days later, after having consulted Nápravník first.³² The conductor informed him that the opera was still too long, with enough music to last five hours. Therefore, Vsevolozhsky asked Taneyev to cut the opera as much as possible. It is not clear how Nápravník arrived at the five-hour figure. Taneyev wrote to Tchaikovsky that it took him four hours to play the opera on the piano.³³ In his letter to his friends the Maslovs Taneyev wrote that he played the opera for the Directorate 'during four hours,' presumably meaning the whole meeting, not only the performance.³⁴

Taneyev conducted through the whole opera in order to know its exact duration, and informed Vsevolozhsky that *Oresteia* lasted two hours and thirty minutes.³⁵ It is possible to argue that a playthrough might have given a more accurate timing, but Taneyev's painstaking approach would have ensured that he faithfully adhered to the tempi in the score to produce precise timing of the opera. It might also be possible to suggest that perhaps Nápravník's conducting might not have followed all the correct tempi, resulting in the wrong duration of the opera. It is difficult to say whose timing would have been the more correct, although the composer's knowledge of his own work would have given him an obvious advantage. During his whole life, Taneyev never once

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

³² *Materiali 1952*, letter from I. Vsevolozhsky to S. Taneyev dated 20 February 1895, p. 258.

³³ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to P. Tchaikovsky dated 20 March 1893, pp. 191-192.

³⁴ Letter from S. Taneyev to Maslov family dated 20 March 1893, cited in *Pis'ma*, p. 430.

³⁵ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Nápravník dated 9 March 1895, p. 440.

compromised his own artistic beliefs in favour of those of the general public, and the case of *Oresteia* most clearly shows its composer's aesthetic stance.

In a letter to Nápravník dated 9 March 1895 Taneyev mentioned what seemed to be his last resort. He admitted that the constant demands to shorten the opera had prompted him to look through it one more time, and it had occurred to him that the reason for the opera's impression of great length lies in its origin. One of the characteristics of ancient drama is the fact that its characters spend a long time on stage—something that is almost absent from modern dramas. Taneyev wrote:

For example, Cassandra remains alone with the chorus [on stage] for almost a quarter of an hour, as does Orestes with the Furies. Generally, the scenes change rarely, and are prolonged. This cannot be thought to be a negative side of the libretto. It is a characteristic found in all antique tragedies and, as experience shows, it does not preclude them from being popular with modern audiences, even such demanding and spoilt as the French. I have in mind the outstanding success of Sophocles' tragedies in the Parisian Comédie Française.³⁶

Taneyev was referring to his experience in Paris in the season of 1876-77. During eight months spent in that city, Taneyev had many opportunities to witness first hand the success of Sophocles' tragedies with the French public. He believed that the lack of stage action in his *Oresteia* would not prevent audiences from getting involved with the work and giving it a warm reception.³⁷ When Laroche reviewed the opera, he touched upon the same issue, by saying that the opera's 'majestic slowness' does not preclude its success, because the public 'does not always crave eventful and fast stage action.'³⁸ The

³⁶ *Materiali* 1952, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Nápravník dated 9 March 1895, p. 441.

³⁷ Taneyev's Parisian impressions of antiquity on stage were discussed in more detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation, '*Oresteia*: Genesis.'

³⁸ Larosh, vol. 3, p. 345.

critic compared *Oresteia* in this sense to Wagner's music dramas, pointing out their similar origins.

However, Nápravník was concerned with the length of the opera, and not its stage action. He also asked Taneyev to simplify some instrumental parts—a request with which Taneyev duly complied. He wrote, possibly foreseeing another likely problem with the violin section:

I want to mention two places in my opera, which could also present some difficulties in rehearsals. One of them is the *Entr'acte* before tableau 2 of Act 3, which has fast ascending scales in violins, and which are difficult to play with correct intonation in the indicated tempo. I think it is possible to get away with approximate performance without concern for clarity of separate tones, not least because the harmony is upheld by the woodwind section at that time, and the scales carry sound-painting function: they represent gusts of wind.

Another section is the beginning of the final tableau in Act 3 (the appearance of Athena). Here the part of the first violins is written very high and often features harmonics. In the event of this place presenting difficulties with regard to clarity of intonation for two violinists playing in unison, it is possible for it to be played by one violinist only.³⁹

Taneyev took care to simplify some of the instrumental parts in order to facilitate better performance, but he did not place unreasonable demands on the performers, not least because he did not want any more unnecessary delays in the opera's production. After sending the amended parts Taneyev was ready for the rehearsals.

³⁹ *Materiali* 1952, letter from S. Taneyev to E. Nápravník dated 9 March 1895, p. 440.

The Conductor Eduard Krushevsky

The first rehearsal attended by Taneyev was held on 29 September 1895, where he met and heard the singers for the first time. He also saw Vsevolozhsky, who told him that Nápravnik had decided not to conduct *Oresteia*, due to extreme fatigue.⁴⁰ Taneyev believed, however, that the real reason for that was the result of his refusal to agree to further cuts.⁴¹ But Nápravnik was also busy with rehearsing his own opera, *Dubrovsky*, which was premièred in the same season as *Oresteia* and which demanded his attention.

On the second day Taneyev attended a rehearsal with the orchestra, and heard the entire Act 1 and the beginning of Act 2. The following day he met with Nápravnik, who introduced him to Eduard Krushevsky (1857-1916), his assistant, and the future conductor of the opera.⁴² Krushevsky was a student of Rimsky-Korsakov, who thought his student was ‘a born *assistant* conductor, and not a conductor’,⁴³ and a person to whom

Music means a series of sounds that produce melodies and chords in various tempi, with various shades of force, and so forth—not a poetic art, but a trade for which one is paid. [...] He has no aspirations, no ideals. Apparently, he has never attended any other concerts than those at which he had accompanied, either because concerts had not interested him, or because he had been busy giving lessons. He is not conversant with either Russian or foreign music literature, and hence does not know the traditions.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Dnevnik*, entry dated 6 October 1895, vol. 1, p. 130. Yury Keldish believed that Nápravnik ‘did not understand Taneyev’s *Oresteia*, a work deeply original, although created on the bases of completely different operatic and dramaturgic principles than operas of Musorgsky, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov,’ and that he was too cautious and did not like to break traditions to which he was used to. See *E. F. Nápravnik, Avtobiograficheskiye tvorcheskkiye materialy, dokumenty, pis'ma* [Autobiographical Materials, Documents, and Letters], ed. by Yury Keldish (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye Muzikal'noye Izdatel'stvo, 1959), pp. 34-35.

⁴¹ Quoted in *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to S. Tolstaya dated 4 October 1895, p. 427.

⁴² *Dnevnik*, entry dated 6 October 1895, vol. 1, p. 130.

⁴³ *My Musical Life*, p. 281.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Rimsky-Korsakov's opinion of Krushevsky as a conductor and musician was not a superficial observation: the composer had a number of years to get to know his pupil and his musical abilities while teaching at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. A St. Petersburg music critic, Viktor Kolomiytsev (1858-1936), also held similar views on Krushevsky's musical talents, writing about his impression of his conducting at the première of *Oresteia*. He wrote that Krushevsky, 'despite his outstanding technique had an extraordinary talent to freeze everything he touched.'⁴⁵ Vasily Yakovlev stated that Nápravnik's belief that *Oresteia* will be safe in Krushevsky's capable hands was 'not completely confirmed' after the première.⁴⁶ Taneyev himself thought Krushevsky to be 'very diligent and experienced',⁴⁷ and expected 'an excellent performance.'⁴⁸ He was pleasantly surprised that the cast and musicians worked together as a team, learned their parts well, and approached the whole process with great love and care. He had expected the singers to complain too, after Nápravnik's reaction to the length and difficulty of the opera.⁴⁹

On 7 October 1895 the opera was rehearsed in its entirety for the first time. Taneyev noted some mistakes in the stage sets, including the statues in Clytemnestra's room, which looked 'more like a room in a modern palace, all white, and not painted in different colours, as it was in Greek palaces.'⁵⁰ On the evening of 8 October 1896 the

⁴⁵ Viktor Kolomiytsev, 'Oresteia Taneyeva (Mariinsky teatr)', *Den*, 25 October 1915, No. 294.

⁴⁶ Vasily Yakovlev, 'Oresteia S. Taneyeva v teatre' [Taneyev's *Oresteia* in Theatre], in *Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev: lichnost', tvorchestvo i dokumenty ego zhizni: k 10-ti letiyu so dnya ego smerti* [Taneyev: Personality, Works and Documentation of his Life: Ten Years Since His Death], ed. by Konstantin Kuznetsov (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzsektor, 1925), p. 121.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to S. Tolstaya dated 4 October 1895, p. 427.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Quoted in *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to S. Tolstaya dated 4 October 1895, p. 427.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, entry dated 9 October 1895, p. 131. Taneyev mistakenly dated this rehearsal as 8 October, but it took place in Saturday 7 October 1895.

cast rehearsed *The Libation Bearers*, during which Taneyev made two short cuts in tableau 2, and in the last tableau of *Eumenides*.⁵¹ At that rehearsal Nápravník told Taneyev that the opera would be given with cuts as soon as Taneyev left St. Petersburg. The incensed composer replied that it should not be so, while Nápravník insisted that soon he would be in charge of the opera and would do what he thought was right. Glazunov, who was present at the rehearsal, found Nápravník's behaviour unacceptable.⁵²

The Contract

After the second performance of the opera, Taneyev was required to sign a contract with the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres. He immediately encountered a problem with Paragraph 5 of the document, which required him to 'Obey all the existing rules and regulations regarding performances of works on the stages of the Imperial Theatres.'⁵³ The scrupulous Taneyev desired to know what these regulations were. He was concerned by the fact that, after the exchange of contracts, the Directorate would be able to introduce changes and cuts to the score without consulting him.⁵⁴ Defending his rights as a composer, he wrote: 'I think that an artist must serve not the taste of listeners, nor the taste of persons in whose power it is to produce his works, but only his own taste. This is the matter of conscientiousness about his art.'⁵⁵ Taneyev never wrote music to

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *Materiali 1952*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 27 October 1895, p. 441. The Paragraph 5 made it obvious that all the rights to the opera go to the Directorate, who would then be in complete control of the opera.

⁵⁴ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 27 October 1895, pp. 441-443. Taneyev never received an answer to his question. The Paragraph 5, it seems, required composers to agree to all further cuts to their operas without further consultations.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 442.

simply satisfy the current tastes of the public: his music was elaborated to his own artistic and aesthetic demands. He was certainly prepared to compromise on the length of the opera, but at the same time fiercely defended his music against unnecessary and senseless cuts, only shortening those places which he deemed acceptable. Taneyev spoke not only for himself, but for all Russian composers who, in his view,

Little by little begin to fight for their independence. Until recently, there was a rule, which allowed them to receive only the most negligible compensation compared to their foreign counterparts, whose fees had no such limits. What occurred in the financial area must also happen in the creative area, which is more precious for a composer.⁵⁶

Indeed, only in the 1890s did the Russian Imperial Opera increase the fees for Russian composers and musicians, whose status, however slowly, began to change.⁵⁷ Taneyev referred to some instances where the operas of Glinka and Dargomizhsky had been maimed by cuts, which sometimes omitted one of the best and most important numbers. He also mentioned that ‘one of the most famous Russian composers, a number of whose operas were already produced, had to resort to stating in the preface to his work that the opera lasts a certain amount of minutes and that it has to be given without cuts.’⁵⁸ Taneyev had in mind his colleague Rimsky-Korsakov who, hoping to combat the problem of unauthorised cuts which he had encountered when his *Noch pered rozhdestvom* was produced at the Mariinsky, wrote in the preface to his operas *Mlada*

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the position of Russian composers at the time see Olga Levasheva, ‘Muzikal’nyy teatr’ (1870-1890), pp. 246-335; and Lynn Sargent, ‘A New Class of People: the Conservatoire and Musical Professionalization in Russia, 1861-1917’ in *Music and Letters* vol. 85, no. 1 (February 2004), pp. 41-61.

⁵⁸ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 27 October 1895, p. 443.

and *Servilia* that no cuts were allowed unless sanctioned by the author.⁵⁹ Taneyev continued:

Such control of an operatic conductor over works of other composers, as if they were his own, represents the vestiges of old attitudes of conductors towards Russian composers that appears in complete discord with the attention and prudence with which the Directorate [of the Imperial Theatres] (as I had learned from my own experience), treats the wishes and opinions of the author not only in regard to musical performance of his own work, but also to small details in the staging side, which are often outside of his competence.⁶⁰

Taneyev here referred to instances when he had been asked for his opinion in matters regarding the production side, such as stage sets, costumes, and actors' movements, which he deemed to be outside his area of expertise. His opinion in these areas was apparently treated as important, while his demands in the one area in which he was completely competent—the music—were often ignored and disrespected. He concluded the letter with a statement: 'The Imperial Theatres must not, against the will of the composer, rip out those parts of the work that are not to its taste, just like museums do not cut out the parts out of paintings which are not to the taste of its curators.'⁶¹ Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906)⁶² wrote in 1885 about the struggle of Russian composers to get their operas performed:

⁵⁹ Rimsky-Korsakov wrote in the preface to his *Servilia*: 'The author knows better than anyone else which spots in the opera will seem at first glance to be suitable for cutting. If he did not cut them himself before publication, it is because he considered that to do so would be destructive of the work's artistic form and dramatic meaning. If cuts should appear desirable to others, they may be made only with the author's permission and under his supervision. Otherwise the author does not consent to the production of his work.' Cited in Richard Taruskin, *On Russian Music* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), p. 175.

⁶⁰ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 27 October 1895, p. 43.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Stasov was a Russian art and music critic, and the aesthetic mentor of the Mighty Handful, the five Russian composers Mily Balakirev (1837-1910), Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), Aleksandr Borodin (1833-1887), Modest Musorgsky (1839-1881), and César Cui (1835-1918). For initial information and further sources see Stuart Campbell, 'Stasov, Vladimir Vasil'yevich' in *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.oxfordmusiconline.com [Accessed on 17 November 2008].

Their operas are not wanted in theatres, and even if they are accepted then, after a thousand ordeals and demands for changes, ignorant chorus masters themselves, without asking, cut and make changes in these operas, [...] as they wish, and there is no one controlling them. As a consequence, the public is bored and complains, and the theatre Directorate rushes under any pretext to take off the stage a work it has no longer use for. And after ten-twelve years, our most significant new operas do not appear in theatre, no one hears or sees them.⁶³

The plight of Russian composers was even more pitiable if Russian and Italian operas performed at the Imperial Theatres are compared: Italian composers such as Verdi had the privilege of having their operas given without unauthorised cuts. The Italian opera paid exorbitant salaries to the singers, and generally enjoyed more financial support and freedom. One of the most prominent Russian singers, Fyodor Chaliapin (1873-1938) held the same opinion about the way the Imperial Theatres were run. In his memoirs he recorded his first impression of the Mariinsky:

The first thing I noticed as soon as I started work at the Mariinsky was that control was not given to artists, as I naively imagined, but to some strange people with and without beards, in uniforms with gold buttons and blue velvet collars: clerks.⁶⁴

He was quoted saying not long before leaving the Imperial Theatres:

I am no longer proud of the fact that I am considered an artist of the Imperial Theatres. Something has disappeared from my very soul. I feel empty. [...] Civil servants in uniform carry ignorance and indifference in their very persons. [...]

⁶³ Vladimir Stasov, *Izbrannyye sochineniya* [Selected Works] (Moscow: Muzika, 1952), vol. 2, pp 572-73.

⁶⁴ Fyodor Shalyapin, *Maska i dusha: moi sorok let po teatram* [Mask and Soul: My Forty Years in Theatres] (Moscow: Moskovskiy Rabochiy, 1989), p. 87. Henceforth this edition will be referred to as *Mask and Soul*.

They know little or nothing about the demands of art, and will never know its power. Idiots! Lording it over artists.⁶⁵

The stale, bureaucratic atmosphere of the Imperial Theatres, which stifled his artistic ambitions, exasperated Chaliapin as much as it had Taneyev. Chaliapin found Nápravník to be ‘a cold, morose, and uncommunicative man, and it was difficult to know what he did or did not like.’⁶⁶ He recounted his first meeting with Rimsky-Korsakov at the same time, and echoed the words of Taneyev, remembering ‘with what ruthlessness whole pages of his opera were struck out.’⁶⁷ He also recounted that often he heard the following words from leading members of the Directorate: ‘How very dull. Russian composers are always so boring’, and noted the general lack of appreciation for Russian opera.⁶⁸ In the case of Rimsky-Korsakov, Nápravník demanded cuts, and all attempts of the composer to save his work were met with a coined, often-used line: ‘Director Vsevolozhsky is decidedly against *longeurs* in the works by Russian composers.’⁶⁹ All this shows that Taneyev was up against not only the personal attitudes of selected members of the Directorate, but also long, deeply ingrained beliefs about Russian composers and their works in general, who seem to have been treated in one similar, specific and disdainful manner. They were expected to obey the Directorate’s demands, and they were certainly not expected to have their own opinions or suggestions, or demand to be treated with artistic respect.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ *Chaliapin: an Autobiography as Told to Maxim Gorky; with Supplementary Correspondence and Notes*, tr. and ed. by Nina Froud and James Hanley (London: White Lion Publishers, 1976), p. 12.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Mask and Soul*, p. 88

⁷⁰ For more information about the differences with which Russian and foreign artists were treated by the Russian Imperial Theatres see Gozenpud 1974, pp. 7-8.

Nápravník's Cuts

Taneyev's last letter to Vsevolozhsky was left unanswered, and on 21 November 1895 the composer sent another, stating that while he was awaiting information about Paragraph 5, it had come to his knowledge that Nápravník had been performing the opera with his own incisions effected. He then proceeded to discuss these cuts, clearly showing that they made no sense and were detrimental to the opera's dramatic development. The monologue of Aegysthus, where he tells the audience about Thyestes' feast, during which Atreus feeds his brother his own children, had been omitted.⁷¹ This event had precipitated the long chain of horrors in the house of Atreus and as a consequence of this omission further references to the murdered children by Cassandra did not make sense. The composer requested that *Oresteia* be taken off the stage, and asked for the return of the original score, which was dear to him 'because it had notes made in the hand of Pyotr Il'ich [Tchaikovsky], and which is now spoilt with the notes of Eduard Frantsevich [Nápravník], and [he] would really like to save it from future damage.'⁷²

Despite Taneyev's concerns, not everyone thought that the opera suffered greatly following the cuts made by Nápravník. Pavel Taneyev (1845-1906), the composer's brother, wrote that the trims improved the opera, and that even royalty, the Grand Dukes, appeared to like it because they applauded enthusiastically.⁷³ It is difficult to ascertain whose opinion had more weight: Taneyev, who knew his work intimately, or his colleagues, who were not affected by such close proximity to *Oresteia*. Composers may not necessarily be the best judges of their operas precisely because of many years

⁷¹ Act 1, scene 4. Aegysthus' monologue can be found in Appendix A, pp. 252-255.

⁷² *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 21 November 1895, p. 444.

⁷³ *Materiali 1952*, letter from Pavel Taneyev to S. Taneyev dated 14 November 1895, p. 267.

spent scrupulously composing them. Their attachment to their creation may cause a trim to a scene to be felt as a laceration to the entire work. One source that can help determine the effect of cuts in an opera are the public's reactions and critic's reviews, which are examined in the next chapter.

The protracted conflict about the cuts in *Oresteia* came to an end with Vsevolozhsky's reply to Taneyev's last letter, where he informed the composer that the Directorate had spent a considerable amount of money on the opera, and it was now their property, as was the original score. He doubted that the score would ever be returned, as 'it would be a precedent for all other composers for breaking the accepted order.'⁷⁴ Taneyev wrote another letter to Vsevolozhsky on 3 December, further stressing the importance of getting back the original score and reiterating that he would like the opera be taken off the stage, although he had no objections to it being performed as he intended it.⁷⁵ This letter, his last to Vsevolozhsky, was left unanswered.

The above discourse shows clearly the disdainful attitudes of the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres toward Russian composers, particularly those who were less experienced. Vsevolozhsky's words are a testament to the views adhered to by the Directorate: 'Firstly, we must please the royal family, then the tastes of the public, and only thirdly the demands of art.'⁷⁶ The Directorate's behaviour towards Russian composers and their operas was only a reflection of Tsar's Aleksandr III general aversion to Russian opera—he liked only a small number of Tchaikovsky's works. The tsar approved the repertoire of the Imperial Theatres himself—a fact that explains the

⁷⁴ *Materiali* 1952, letter from I. Vsevolozhsky to S. Taneyev dated 25 November 1895, p. 269.

⁷⁵ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 3 December 1895, pp. 445-446.

⁷⁶ Gozenpud 1974, p. 5.

inclusion of a large number of Italian and French operas.⁷⁷ And of the Imperial Theatres were there to primarily please the tsar and not to make a profit, then their behaviour is completely consistent with their purpose; particularly since the Russian aristocratic class of this period all received a French based education.

The Cast of *Oresteia*

Arguably the most important role of the opera belonged to Orestes. Finding a competent, suitable tenor for this role was a serious matter, in which Taneyev was involved from the very beginning. While Orestes occupied most of his attention, he also considered the rest of the cast. In his archive there exists an undated list of the singers he wanted to have in his opera (Figure 5.1).⁷⁸ He listed the following names: Agamemnon—Podolin; Clytemnestra—S. N. Voskresenskaya; Aegysthus—Voskresensky; Cassandra—E. P. Lastochkina, L. P. Lentsi; The Watchman—V. N. Sokolov; Electra—O. M. Kolenko, Dobrodeyeva; Apollo—N. A. Popov; Orestes—L. N. Zharkov; Areopagus—B. N. Sokolov; Athena—E. I. Sdob'yeva.

None of the singers in the list were included in the final cast of *Oresteia*. At a later stage, in March 1894, Taneyev made another list of the proposed cast, which he sent to the Directorate. The draft of the list survives in the Taneyev archive (Figure 5.2).⁷⁹ The second draft of the cast did not list any of the singers mentioned in the first draft (Figure 5.1). Instead, Taneyev proposed the following names:

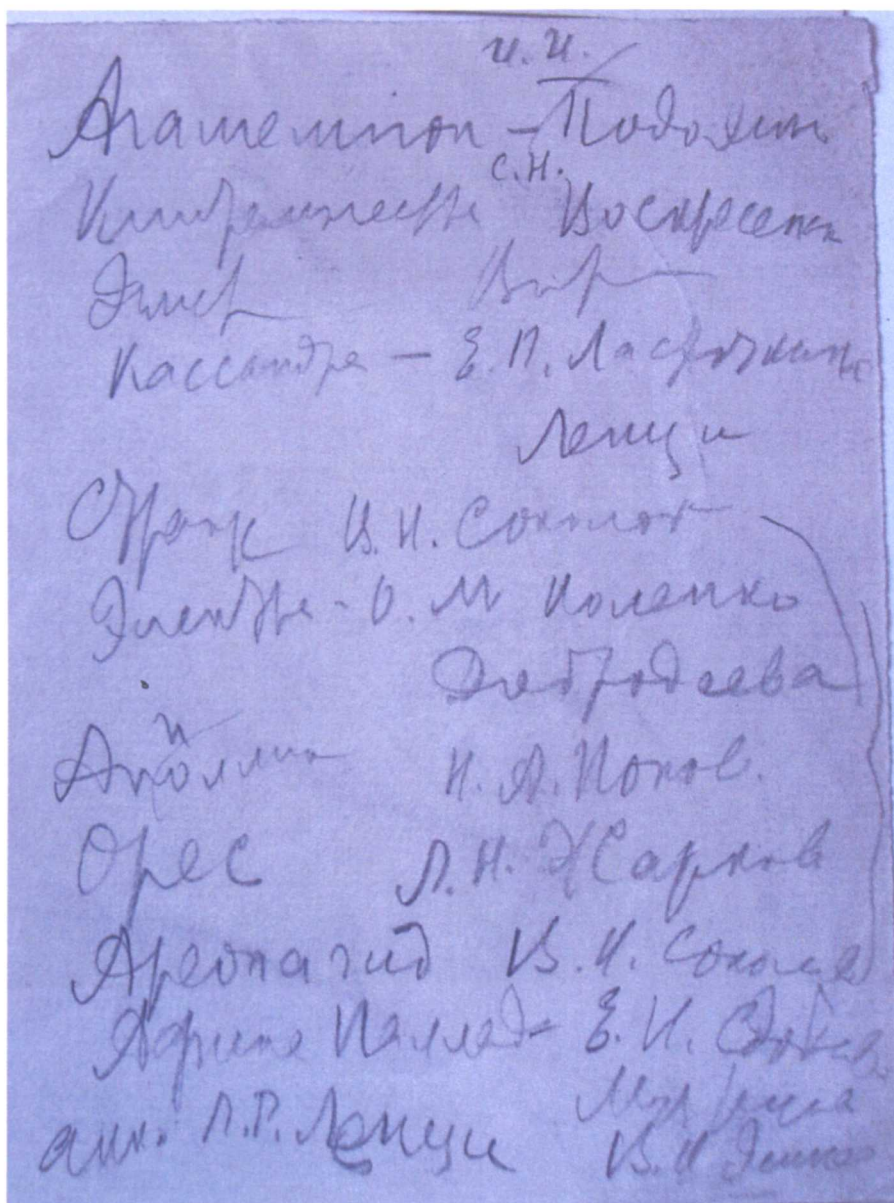
⁷⁷ Ibid. For more information about the state of Russian opera and the Imperial Theatres see Gozenpud 1974; and Olga Levasheva, 'Muzikal'nyi teatr (1870-1890), pp. 246-335.

⁷⁸ GDMTch, II, fond B 7, No. 3.

⁷⁹ GDMTch, fond B 7, No. 6.

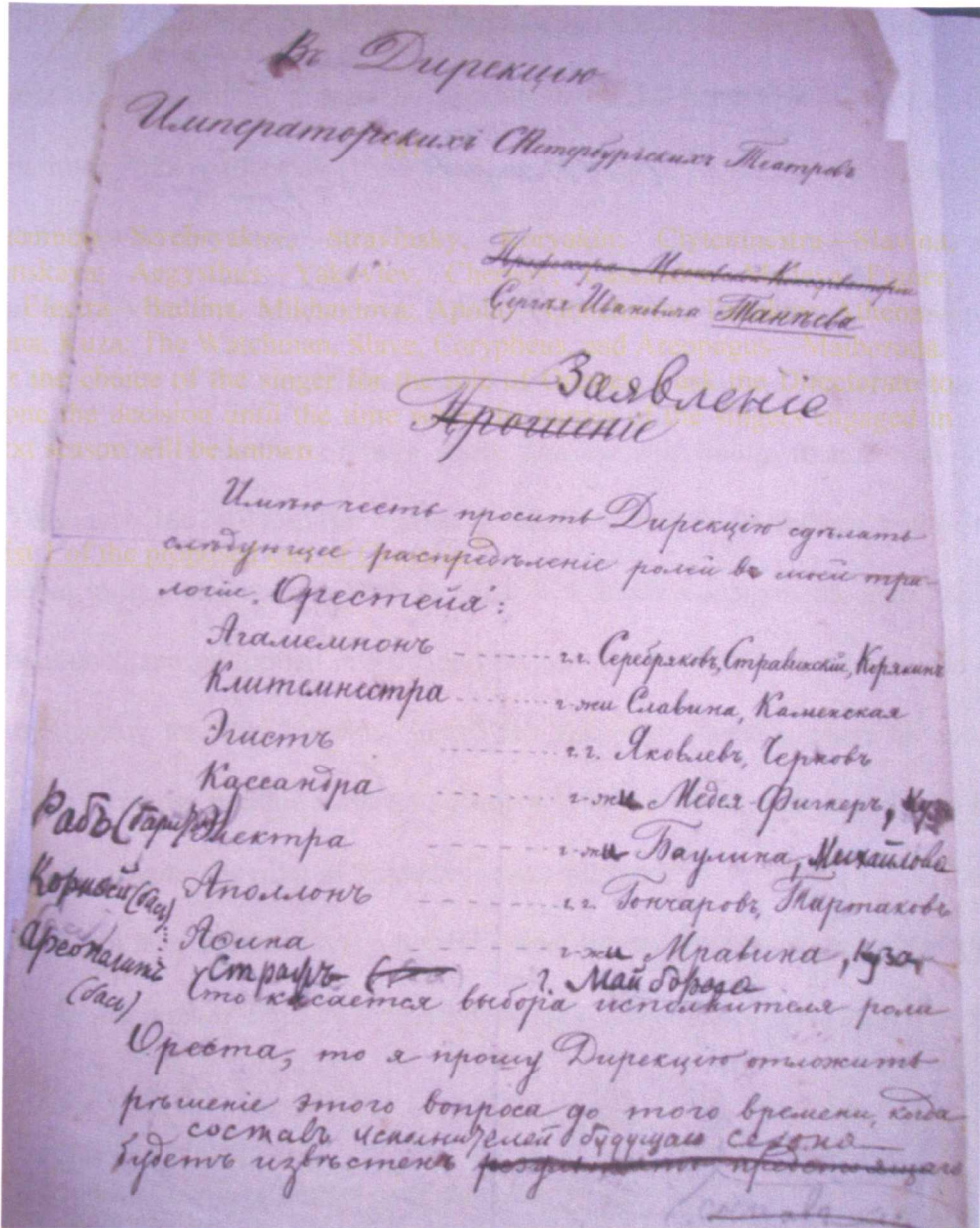
Agamemnon—Serebryakov, Stravinsky, Koryakin; Clytemnestra—Slavina, Kamenskaya; Aegysthus—Yakovlev, Chernov; Cassandra—Medeya Figner, Kuza; Electra—Baulina, Mikhaylova; Apollo—Goncharov, Tartakov; Athena—Mravina, Kuza; The Watchman, Slave, Corypheus, and Areopagus—Maiboroda. As for the choice of the singer for the role of Orestes, I ask the Directorate to postpone the decision until the time when the names of the singers engaged in the next season will be known.

Figure 5.1. List 1 of the proposed cast of *Oresteia*.⁸⁰



⁸⁰ GDMTch, fond B 7, ed. khr. 3.

Figure 5.2. List 2 of proposed cast of *Oresteia* dated 2 March 1894.⁸¹



⁸¹ GDMTch, fond B 7, ed. khr. 3.

The final cast of *Oresteia* included one name from each choice, and only the role of Athena was fulfilled by a singer not originally on the list: Antonida Tomkevich. The rest of the final cast included the tenor Konstantin Serebryakov (1852-1919) for the role of Agamemnon, a dramatic soprano Valentina Kuza (1868-1910) as Cassandra,⁸² baritone Arkady Chernov (1858-1904) as Aegysthus,⁸³ a mezzo-soprano Mariya Slavina (1858-1951) as Clytemnestra,⁸⁴ a soprano Mariya Mikhaylova (1866-1943) as Electra,⁸⁵ a bass Vladimir Mayboroda (1854-1917) as the Watchman, soprano Antonida Tomkevich (1874-?) as Athena, and baritone Ivan Goncharov (1866-1910) as Apollo.

After a number of false starts, Orestes was finally found: Ivan Vasil'yevich Yershov (1867-1943). He studied in Moscow and St Petersburg before making his début in St. Petersburg in 1893 as Faust in Gounod's eponymous opera. Subsequently, he trained and performed in Italy, and on his return to Russia spent a season at a theatre in Kharkov. In 1895 Yershov joined the Mariinsky Theatre, where he remained until 1929. Yershov became Russia's first accomplished Wagnerian singer, with a particular success singing the roles of Tannhäuser and Siegfried.⁸⁶

In fact, Yershov was a possible candidate for the role of Orestes in August 1894, but he was already engaged for the following season with an opera theatre in Kharkov.⁸⁷

⁸² For more information about Kuza see Gozenpud 1974, pp. 11-12.

⁸³ For more information about Chernov see Gozenpud 1974, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁴ For more information about Slavina see: David Cummings, 'Maria Slavina', *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.grovemusic.com [Accessed 8 June 2008], also Gozenpud, 1973, pp. 42-43.

⁸⁵ For further information see Harold Barnes and Alan Blyth, 'Maria Mikhailova', *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.grovemusic.com [Accessed 8 June 2008].

⁸⁶ For a detailed account of Yershov's life see Abram Gozenpud, *I. V. Yershov. Zhizn' i stsenicheskaya deyatel'nost'. Issledovaniye. 2-e izdaniye* [I. V. Yershov: Life and Career on Stage. Investigation. Second edition] (Leningrad: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1999). For an English-language source on Taneyev see J. Steane, 'Yershov [Ershov, Erschoff], Ivan Vasilievich', *Grove Music Online* ed. by Laura Macy, www.grovemusic.com [Accessed 3 April 2006].

⁸⁷ *Pis'ma*, letter from E. Nápravnik to S. Taneyev dated 30 August 1894, p. 431.

At the end of that season, in March 1895, he came back to St. Petersburg, where Pavel Taneyev happened to hear him at a house concert, and was impressed with his voice. He wrote to his brother Sergey:

Yershov has a strong voice and he studied in Italy. He caused a complete furore. When I talked to him about *Oresteia*, he said that he had heard a part of it at a rehearsal and that he would sing it with pleasure, as he is not afraid of any difficulties. I advise you to write to Vsevolozhsky about it, as I heard from many people that Gorski is not liked – he is fat and has no grace on stage, and this one [Yershov] is young and very attractive.⁸⁸

Taneyev duly seized the opportunity to invite Yershov, and the tenor began his preparation for the role of Orestes.⁸⁹ Although finding the right singers for Taneyev's *Oresteia* presented some difficulties, the final cast of the opera included at least two great artists—Yershov and Slavina—who earned the praise of the critics.⁹⁰ Yershov and Mikhailova were at the early stages in their careers, while Slavina, Serebryakov, and Chernov were already established artists. Unfortunately, not all critics thought that the Directorate made the right choices for the cast of Taneyev's opera, and many were dissatisfied with the level and quality of some of the singers' performances.

⁸⁸ *Materiali 1952*, letter from P. Taneyev to s. Taneyev dated 27 March 1895, pp. 259-60.

⁸⁹ Letter from Modest Tchaikovsky to Taneyev dated 22 April 1895. (RGALI, f 880, op. 1, ed. khr. 538, l. 20-20ob). Gozenpud gives a detailed overview of the singers employed by the Mariinsky Theatre in the second half of the nineteenth century in Gozenpud 1974.

⁹⁰ The critical reviews will be discussed in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

The Production

The stage sets from the 1895 production were prepared by a number of different artists. I. P. Andreyev (1847-1896) designed the open space in front of the palace of Atreus in Argos (Act 1, tableaux 1 and 2, and Act 2, tableau 3),⁹¹ and the inside of the Apollo temple in Delphi (Act 3, tableau 2).⁹² K. M. Ivanov (1859-1916) created the room in the palace of Atreus (Act 2, tableau 1),⁹³ and an academic M. I. Bocharov (1831-1895) was responsible for the olive grove (Act 2, tableau 2),⁹⁴ and the deserted place by the seaside (Act 3, tableau 1).⁹⁵ Professor M. A. Shishkov (1832-1897) was entrusted with a public square in Athens (Act 3, tableau 3),⁹⁶ and sculptor Kamensky designed the props and statues adorning the stage.⁹⁷ *Oresteia* also boasted new costumes, made specifically for its production after designs by an artist E. Ponomaryov.⁹⁸

A great deal of work went unto the visually impressive production, but it was still not saved from some of its biggest drawbacks noted by many critics—its anachronisms. Laroche wrote that the production in general was

Excellent, but in some details it at times resembled Greece of the classical époque of Pericles (Clytemnestra's room, Temple of Apollo), with which the half-barbarian Greece of Homer, so familiar to us now, had very little in common. The scene in Athens in the final apotheosis, of course, cannot be classed as anachronistic, as this scene shows Athena's prophetic vision.⁹⁹

⁹¹ *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov*. [Yearbook of the Imperial Theatres] Season 1895-1896. (Published by the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres, St. Petersburg, 1897), p. 186.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Larosh, vol. 3, p. 346.

Gozenpud stated that the reason the stage sets were made in the classical style was simply because the artists studied and copied the architecture of classical Greece, leading to the 'purely museum-like character of their stage sets, which did not correspond with the zeitgeist of the époque and the music.'¹⁰⁰ He thought that all decorations were aesthetically pleasing, but too plain for the events that transpired on stage. The one exception could be found in Bocharov's set for the tableau 1 of Act 3, depicting a deserted seaside, along which Orestes would be chased by the Furies.¹⁰¹ It is true that this particular design was in consonance with the protagonist's inner emotional turmoil and feelings of being abandoned.

No expense was spared: the stage scenery was newly created, something that not every opera staged at that time could boast, as there was a common practice of sharing sets between different productions. To adorn *Oresteia*'s sets, there were gold and silver vases, flowers, majestic processions, clouds, the Acropolis, the Parthenon, and a reproduction of a statue by the Greek sculptor Phidias (c. 500-432 BC). Although often criticised for their anachronisms, the stage scenery greatly impressed most of the critics and the audience.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Gozenpud 1973, p. 103.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² For a further, more detailed description of the production see Vasily Yakovlev, '*Oresteia* S. Taneyeva v teatre', in *Materiali* 1925, pp. 129-30.

The Première

The musical world of Moscow and St. Petersburg eagerly awaited the première of *Oresteia*.¹⁰³ On 17 October 1895 many of Taneyev's friends and admirers were present in the audience, some of them arriving from Moscow. Among them were Rachmaninov, Arensky, Kashkin, Konyus, Goldenweiser, S. A. Tolstaya, A. Venkstern, Brandukov, A. Blok, and the Maslovs; there were also the St. Petersburg composers Rimsky-Korsakov, Lyadov, Glazunov, Nápravník, and Laroche.

Among the earliest documents to shed light on this production of *Oresteia* are the diaries of Gennady Petrovich Kondrat'yev (1835-1905), the chief director of the Russian Opera in the Mariinsky Theatre in 1870-1900. Apart from keeping records of *Oresteia*'s every performance, he also took similar notes of every opera he attended during the fifteen years that he spent working at the Theatres, from 1884 to 1899. These diaries still remain unpublished, but all eight entries about *Oresteia*'s performances can be found in Kiselev's edited volume of Taneyev's materials and documents.¹⁰⁴ The entries describe the sums collected, as well as information about the best-received operatic numbers, and those repeated at the public's demand. Kondrat'yev's diaries show an increase in ticket sales for *Oresteia*—an indication of the opera's success with the public and its steadily increasing popularity. The following Table 5.1 shows the amounts taken after each performance of the opera.

¹⁰³ Nikolay Findeyzen. 'Oresteia: muzikal'naya trilogiya, muzika S. Taneyeva', *RMG*, No. 11, 1895.

¹⁰⁴ *Materiali* 1952, pp. 261-66.

Table 5.1. Tickets Sold After Each Performance of *Oresteia* in 1895-96.

Date	Amount in roubles
17 October 1895	3159.50
19 October 1895	2943.20
30 October 1895	2938.70
7 November 1895	1780.00
3 January 1896	2940.20
18 September 1896	959.45
23 October 1896	3595.30
24 October 1896	3595.50

After the première, Kondrat'yev wrote that Taneyev gave the impression of a talented and masterful composer, but his lack of experience was evident 'at every step.'¹⁰⁵ Kondrat'yev particularly noted the composer's unbending stubbornness with regard to cuts, of which he refused to make more despite the pleadings of the Directorate, his friends, colleagues, and the singers. Kondrat'yev stated that at the première, the opera lasted one hundred and sixty eight minutes—twenty-one minutes longer than Taneyev himself had calculated. Act 1 was given in almost complete silence, and the only short ovation was heard after Cassandra's scene. Kondrat'yev noted that after tableau 1 of Act 2 the public began to call out the singers, and the scenes that made the greatest impression were the scenes of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, Orestes, and Orestes and Electra, and the *Entr'acte The Temple of Apollo in Delphi*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ *Materiali* 1952, Kondrat'yev's diaries, entry dated 17 October 1896, p. 261.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Taneyev also wrote in his own diaries that the audience began to applaud after the scene in Clytemnestra's bedroom.¹⁰⁷ The composer was called out after several numbers, and wrote that Slavina was 'excellent', and Yershov 'sang rather pleasantly'.¹⁰⁸ After the opera, Rimsky-Korsakov told Taneyev that he admired the scene in Clytemnestra's bedroom, Apollo's music, and Cassandra's scene, but said that after Orestes kills Clytemnestra he remains on stage for too long. A few days later, the two composers discussed *Oresteia* at length, and Rimsky-Korsakov expressed his views on the opera and said that he liked it very much, and gave his opinion on certain aspects.¹⁰⁹ Taneyev entered the conversation in his diary, saying that Rimsky-Korsakov was not entirely convinced with orchestration, and found that trombones could have been used more often. But generally, his verdict was: '*Oresteia* is worth spending more time on, and it can become a mainstay of the operatic repertoire.'¹¹⁰

Performances in the First Season

The second performance, on 19 September 1895, had great success, 'against any expectations.'¹¹¹ If in Act 1 only Kuza was applauded, as at the première, then in Acts 2 and 3 the applause was heard after each tableau.¹¹² The third performance was musically and financially as successful as the second.¹¹³ Anton Arensky (1861-1906), Taneyev's close friend, wrote after this performance, confirming the success with the public,

¹⁰⁷ *Dnevnik*, entry dated 17 October 1895, vol. 1, p. 132.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Materiali* 1952, Kondrat'yev's diaries, entry dated 19 October 1896, p. 262.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 264

adding that Yershov ‘sang and acted excellently, even better than before.’¹¹⁴ Arensky also mentioned the cuts, which, apparently, had been discussed backstage, and stated that he supported the idea of shortening the opera.¹¹⁵ Arensky thought the opera would be better with cuts, and named several places: the duet of Clytemnestra and Aegysthus and the ceremonies in Act 1. Like Rimsky-Korsakov, he thought that Orestes remained on stage too long after killing Clytemnestra.¹¹⁶ He stated: ‘I advise you to agree to the cuts, if they are demanded: your opera and you will both win.’¹¹⁷

At the fourth performance on 7 November 1895 the opera appeared with Nápravník’s cuts for the first time. Although the tickets sales brought only 1780 roubles, Kondrat’yev wrote that the success with the public did not change.¹¹⁸ Pavel Taneyev wrote that Vsevolozhsky had been happy with the opera’s success, and recounted that although Nápravník was not happy with the opera during rehearsals, after the première he said it was ‘good, very good, but a little too long.’¹¹⁹ Arensky also attended this performance, writing to Taneyev:

The opera was shortened. [...] In tableau 1 of Act 1 Aegysthus’ monologue was omitted, and in tableau 1 [Act 1] Agamemnon sings only one verse of the ‘Glory to Gods.’

Tableau 1 of Act 2 was not cut and had great success, as always, [...] in tableau 2 [...] they cut the place, where Orestes and Electra mourn (in G minor) Agamemnon. In tableau 3 of this act, after Orestes kills Clytemnestra, the chorus sings a few phrases, and Orestes says that he is afraid of the Furies and runs away, [...] [the cuts are] *not particularly successful*.

As for Act 3, there are also a number of cuts, but I cannot tell you which ones exactly.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ *Materiali* 1952, letter from A. Arensky to S. Taneyev dated 30 October 1895, pp. 154-55.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Materiali* 1952, entry dated 7 November 1895, p. 264.

¹¹⁹ *Materiali* 1952, letter from P. Taneyev to S. Taneyev dated 23 October 1895, pp. 266-67.

¹²⁰ *Materiali* 1952, letter from A. Arensky to S. Taneyev dated 14 November 1895, pp. 155-56.

Arensky concluded the letter, however, by saying that the cuts, in his opinion, were necessary. But Taneyev complained to Vsevolozhsky about the cuts made without his permission, and reiterated that the low box office takings were not representative of the opera's success:

...It is important to remember that this [fourth] performance was given with higher prices and [...] it would be good to try and give it with normal prices. Some years ago, when *Siegfried* was given in Moscow with higher prices, the theatre was half-empty, but the next performance, with normal prices, was sold out.¹²¹

While the composer tried unsuccessfully to return his opera to its original state, it was continued to be given with Nápravnik's cuts. The fifth performance of *Oresteia* on 3 January 1896, given with normal prices, saw the 'outstanding success,'¹²² about which Taneyev received a letter from his colleague at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Nina Iretskaya (1845-1922). She wrote:

Although I have just returned from your *Oresteia*, I cannot stop myself from writing to you about my impression. I will not say anything about the music—my praise will not add to anything what you already know about your work, but the performance was in places truly exemplary, and, despite the third, "cold" subscription, the public apparently was satisfied, judging by the excited applause. Once again, the ignorance and unscrupulousness of your critics was confirmed for me; [it] did not, however, affect the success of the opera. I wish you all the best for New Year, and, above all, do not be lazy. Write a second *Oresteia*.¹²³

Her letter, as well as letters of Arensky, Yershov, and reviews of such critics as Laroche and Kashkin, all demonstrate that the public and professional musicians accepted

¹²¹ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 3 December 1895, p. 446.

¹²² *Materiali* 1952, entry dated 3 January 1896, p. 264. Also letter to P. Taneyev from I. Yershov dated January 1896, p. 268.

¹²³ *Materiali* 1952, letter from N. Iretskaya to S. Taneyev dated 4 January 1896, pp. 268-69.

Oresteia as a work, worthy of attention. The box office takings in the first season show that Taneyev's opera did not fall behind such popular works as Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeny Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Verdi's *Rigoletto* and *La Traviata*.¹²⁴

Performances in the Second Season

In the second season *Oresteia* was given only three times. Its sixth performance after the première was given on 18 September 1896. Kondrat'yev wrote about this performance that the theatre was almost empty. Indeed, the takings were the lowest during all performances of 1895-96 at only 959.45 roubles.¹²⁵ But the audience called out the singers many times, and generally, the opera was received well.

The seventh performance, on 23 September 1896, was very successful, and all the singers were called out a number of times. The last performance of *Oresteia* during Taneyev's lifetime on the following day earned 3595.50 roubles.¹²⁶ After this performance, still given with Nápravnik's cuts, Taneyev, upset by the treatment he received from the chief conductor and the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres, demanded that opera to be taken off stage.¹²⁷ He refused to collect his share of the ticket sales—ten per cent—as a demonstration of his dissatisfaction with the whole process.

The above discourse shows that *Oresteia* was gaining popularity in its second season, during which ticket sales increased steadily. In its last two performances, *Oresteia* equalled the ticket sales of such mainstays of the Mariinsky's repertoire as

¹²⁴ *Yezhegodnik* 1897, pp. 2-18.

¹²⁵ *Materiali* 1952, Kondrat'yev's diaries, p. 264, entry of 18 September 1896.

¹²⁶ *Materiali* 1952, Kondrat'yev's diaries, entry of 24 September 1896, p. 266.

¹²⁷ *Pis'ma*, letter from S. Taneyev to I. Vsevolozhsky dated 21 November 1895, p. 444.

Rubinstein's *The Demon*, Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeny Onegin*, and Wagner's *Tannhäuser*.¹²⁸

The last performance of the opera even earned twice as much as a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeny Onegin*, which was given in Moscow on the same day.¹²⁹ The level of the performance was also improving, reaching its peak just when Taneyev decided to take the opera off stage. Judging by more positive reviews and the public's reception, the opera could perhaps have had a greater chance to become established in the Mariinsky Theatre's repertoire, and might not have disappeared from the stage for decades.

Revivals of *Oresteia*

1915

The first revival of the opera occurred in 1915, but the possibility of reinstating *Oresteia* on stage arose as early as 1903. A prominent pianist, composer, and conductor at the Mariinsky Theatre, Felix Blumenfeld (1863-1931) met Taneyev in St. Petersburg, and mentioned a revival. Yershov also supported the idea.¹³⁰ The correspondence on this subject between Taneyev, Blumenfeld, and Vsevolod Telyakovsky (1860-1924) dates from April 1915. Telyakovsky had replaced Vsevolozhsky as the Director of the Imperial Theatres in 1895, and held the post from 1901 to 1917. As described by Keldish and Levashev, Telyakovsky was

A deft courtier, skilful diplomat, but at the same time a person sincerely devoted to the interests of Russian art, highly educated, in general objective in his

¹²⁸ *Yezhegodnik* 1898, pp. 2-26, details the box office takings for each opera performed in the season 1896-97.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³⁰ *Dnevnik*, entry dated 2 September 1903, vol. 3, p. 63.

opinions and possessing a true intuition for theatrical talents, and also often brave in his administrative decisions. [...] But even Telyakovsky, with all his influence on the Imperial Court, could not stand against, on the one side, the tastes of the royal family, and on the other—the old traditions of the theatrical business.¹³¹

The tastes of the royal family and members of the higher and influential nobility were far from progressive, and the new director had to keep this in mind. As recalled by Chaliapin, who was engaged by the Imperial Theatres at the time, Telyakovsky liked to say when he first took up the post: ‘Not artists for us, but we for the artists!’¹³² Soon, however, the singer realised that everything reverted to the old order.

Taneyev wrote a detailed letter to Blumenfield, offering the right to perform his opera, and listing a number of conditions regarding the production, the most prevalent of which was his refusal to accept any changes or cuts made without his approval. He also requested payment for the opera’s performances in 1895-96 (which he still had not claimed), and wanted the infamous Paragraph 5 to be ‘changed or excluded from the contract.’¹³³ At the end of this letter Taneyev admitted that these demands are ‘a matter of principle’¹³⁴, and he accepted the possibility of the opera never being performed again (in his lifetime) as a result of his demands.

In his correspondence with Telyakovsky, Taneyev appears somewhat stubborn and unwilling to compromise. Telyakovsky, however, agreed to the changes of Paragraph 5, amending it to state that changes will be made only with the composer’s

¹³¹ Yury Keldish and E. Levashev, ‘Imperatorskiye teatri’ in *Istoriya russkoy muziki: tom 10B, 1890-1917* [‘Imperial Theatres’ in History of Russian Music: Vol. 10B, 1890-1917] (Moscow: Muzika, 2004), pp. 50-51.

¹³² Fyodor Shalyapin, *Tom perviy. Literaturnoye nasledstvo. Pis'ma* [F. I. Chaliapin. First Volume: Literary Heritage. Letters], ed. by Yevgeniya Grosheva, (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), p. 151.

¹³³ *Materiali 1952*, letter from S. Taneyev to F. Blumenfield dated 4 September 1903, pp. 270-71.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

consent.¹³⁵ Several letters were exchanged between the parties until March 1905. Taneyev received the payment for the first production of *Oresteia*, and tried to refine the contract in his typical over-scrupulous manner. He also supplied the theatre with a new set of parts and vocal score, but negotiations suddenly stopped without any explanation. Possibly, the ongoing commitment of the Directorate to bringing the complete Wagner tetralogy to the stage for the first time in Russia made it difficult to give more attention to Taneyev's work.¹³⁶ Another likely reason could be the political climate of pre-revolutionary Russia, which was then engaged in a war with Japan, and at the end of 1904 and beginning of 1905 catastrophically lost a number of battles. Less money would have been available for subsidising the Imperial Opera due to wartime financial demands, and the Directorate wanted to stage only operas with guaranteed success.

Ten years later, in the spring of 1915, and a few months before Taneyev's death, the composer and Telyakovsky renewed their discussions about *Oresteia*'s revival at the Mariinsky Theatre. Only three letters survive from this period—the first from Taneyev to Telyakovsky, the second from Taneyev to the director Joachim Tartakov (1860-1923), and the last from Tartakov to Taneyev.¹³⁷ Again, the Directorate demanded cuts, although this time they amounted only to eight minutes in total, and Taneyev agreed only to one of them. The three cuts suggested to Taneyev were as follows:

Cut No.1—monologue of Aegysthus [...] 3 minutes.

Cut No.2—a part of [Agamemnon's] March 2 minutes 15 seconds.

Cut No.3—Cassandra's arioso, 2 minutes 45 seconds.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ *Materiali* 1952, letter from F. Blumenfeld to S. Taneyev dated 22 December 1904, p. 274.

¹³⁶ Wagner's tetralogy was given between 1901-1905. In 1903, a production of *Götterdämmerung* was in preparation.

¹³⁷ *Materiali* 1952, pp. 281-286. In his letter to Tartakov, Taneyev urged him to study the review by Shchukarev in order to correct any anachronisms in stage sets. The review is discussed in Chapter Six.

¹³⁸ *Materiali* 1952, cited in a letter to from S. Taneyev to V. Telyakovski dated 15 April 1915, p. 282.

Taneyev discussed these cuts at length, agreeing only to the second one, partly (and only if strictly necessary) to the first, and not at all to the third.¹³⁹ As in 1894 and 1895, Taneyev deemed the first and third cuts harmful to the general action, because omitting the plot information contained in these numbers would preclude the audience's full understanding of the opera. It seems that the Directorate requested these cuts on principle, and not out of any real need: eight minutes of music was a negligible amount of time compared to the duration of the whole opera.

It is not known if the Directorate agreed with the composer's reasoning, but the first performance of the opera on 23 October 1915, not long after Taneyev's death, was given with cuts.¹⁴⁰ Albert Coates (1882-1953) conducted the orchestra.¹⁴¹ Asaf'yev wrote after the performance that the *Entr'acte* in tableau 1 of Act 3 was shortened, and the scene of Orestes with the Furies was omitted.¹⁴² The opera was given seven times—one fewer than during Taneyev's lifetime.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ *Materiali* 1952, pp. 280-81. Cassandra's scene with children's visions was cut, as well as the middle of then women's chorus tableau 1 of *The Libation Bearers*.

¹⁴¹ Albert Coates was an English conductor and composer. He was the chief conductor of the Mariinsky Theatre for five years (1910-1915), and the principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra in 1919-1922, where he actively promoted the music of Russian composers and Wagner. For further information, see Albert Coates and Newman Rosenthal, *The Albert Coates Story: the Will that Found the Way* (South Yarra, Vic: Hyland House, 1977). Extensive research of Coates' time in Russia still remains to be done.

¹⁴² Boris Asaf'yev, *Ob Opere: Izbranniye stat'i* [About Opera: Selected Articles] (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1985), p. 220. Also cited in *Materiali* 1952, p. 289.

¹⁴³ *Materiali* 1952, p. 286.

1917-18

Two years later *Oresteia* appeared on the stage of the Theatre of the Soviet Workers' Deputies (former Zimin's Opera) in Moscow. It was given thirty-five times during the season 1917-18.¹⁴⁴ The first performance was given on 23 September 1917, conducted by Y. M. Slavinsky. The performance was given with cuts, one of which was the omission of the chorus of Areopagus and the *Entr'acte* to tableau 2 of *Eumenides*.

The opera was well received; the critics particularly praised the director and the stage set designer F. Komissarzhevsky (1882-1954), but thought that none of the singers suited their roles.¹⁴⁵ This production was one of the most popular, because it fitted into the political and aesthetical climate of the time. In the immediately post-revolutionary Russia personal freedom and new political orders were among some of the most important aesthetical principles, and the plot of *Oresteia* reflected that new world order.

1963-64

The last known stage performances of the opera took place in 1963 in Minsk and in 1964 in Moscow. The Belorussian State Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Minsk performed the opera forty-six years after its last performance in 1918. This production was hailed as 'One of the most important and significant stages' in the history of the theatre.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Bernandt, p. 117. The figure is also confirmed by examination of advertisements of performances in the *Russkiye vedomosti* 1917-1918.

¹⁴⁵ Bel'za, pp. 155-56.

¹⁴⁶ Galina Kuleshova, *Muzychny teatr Belarusi 1960-1990: Opernye mastatstva, muzychnaya kamediya i apereta* [Belorussian Music Theatre in 1960-1990: Operatic Works, Musical Comedy and Operetta] (Minsk: Belaruskaya Navuka, 1996), p. 86. Much later, a recording was issued with the same orchestra and conductor: Belorussian State Opera and Ballet Theatre Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Tat'yana Kolomiitseva; *Oresteia (1895): Taneyev, Sergey*; USSR, Melodiya, 1978. (This is the re-release of the

The opera was performed with cuts and one extra episode, which the Belorussian scholar Galina Kuleshova found, ‘interrupted the logical development of the storyline.’¹⁴⁷ She described these changes in greater detail:

[...] The cut in Clytemnestra’s scene with the people in tableau 2 of Act 1 resulted in the fact that Cassandra’s death remained a mystery for the audience. The interpretation of the final scene of *Agamemnon* was questionable, where an additional episode was introduced—a scene in Clytemnestra’s bedroom, where she murders Agamemnon—that resulted in a pause in the orchestra. And the episode itself, acted out at the front of the stage, was not on the level of the whole performance.¹⁴⁸

The addition of the scene of Agamemnon’s murder did not make sense, not least because, as Kuleshova noted, ‘stage murders are not typical for antique tragedy.’¹⁴⁹ It seems that the scene was simply acted out in silence, and would have taken more time to perform because it would require a change of the stage sets for the sake of a short episode. The cuts mentioned by Kuleshova included the duet of Aegysthus and Clytemnestra, Agamemnon’s March, and scene of Orestes with the Furies.

The opera was conducted by Tat’yana Kolomiýtseva (b. 1914), and directed by Dmitry Smolich (1919-1987).¹⁵⁰ Kolomiýtseva was greatly respected for her ‘artistically daring’ interpretation of the score, which was masterfully performed by the orchestra

Deutsche Grammophon recording DGG, 2709 097, 1966, and in turn, it has been re-released by Olympia in 1988 (Olympia OCD195A+B)).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Dmitry Smolitch directed operas at the Belorussian State Theatre of Opera and Ballet between 1962 and 1970. He was the son of the prominent Soviet actor and opera director Nikolay Smolich (1888-1968). Very little biographical information is available about Dmitry Smolich. One entry can be found in: *Teatral'naya entsiklopediya*, ed. by P. A. Markov (Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1965, vol. 4, column 1152).

under her guidance.¹⁵¹ Smolich attempted to find ways to escape the static quality of the stage action, and worked out a number of elegant stage movements for the cast. This, however, was met with criticism—antique tragedy was characterised by a certain stasis of stage movement, and Kuleshova deemed that Smolich's attempts detracted from, rather than added to, this antique tradition.¹⁵² The critical reception of this production will be discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

For this production, the artist E. Chemodurov (b. 1914) created stage sets that were thought to 'have shown that he studied Greek art in depth, immersed himself into the musical images, and was able to find suitable visual expression, and the colour scheme.'¹⁵³ A black staircase led into the depth of the stage, which later, clad in blood-red tapestries, became Agamemnon's final path, leading him to death. The monochrome setting of the scene in the olive grove, by Agamemnon's grave, the dark-green colours of the stage sets 'Deserted Sea Coast' (Act 3, scene 1), and the brilliant, light colours of the Delphi Temple were thought to reflect perfectly the mood of the scenes.¹⁵⁴ Kuleshova wrote that 'various antique columns and facades carried the role of a kind of visual leitmotif, evoking the images of restless night, bringing the premonition of bloody drama, or preceding the apotheosis of the people.'¹⁵⁵ Choral episodes, with a large number of singers, gave the opera 'epic monumentality', and demonstrated that the director succeeded at making the people a kind of 'collective character.'¹⁵⁶

In February 1964, the opera was performed in Moscow, at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses. For the Belorussian State Theatre this was an important event—after these

¹⁵¹ Kuleshova, p. 90.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

performances, it received a coveted title 'Academic'.¹⁵⁷ These performances elicited conflicting comments from the critics, who disagreed on the merits of the production and the suitability of the cast. The director's decision to perform the opera with cuts and the additional, seemingly unnecessary episode of Agamemnon's murder could have had a cooling effect on the Soviet audience. The critics, however, viewed Taneyev's *Oresteia* as an outstanding work. The following chapter will conclude the re-evaluation on Taneyev's opera with a survey of critical reviews.

¹⁵⁷ Kuleshova, p. 94.

Chapter Six

Critical Reception

Reproach is more interesting than praise. It is often honest and fair. If not, then why is it not possible to get over unjust reproach, when we happily accept unjust praise throughout our lives?¹

S. Taneyev

The history of music criticism in Russia has received little attention in the West.²

Only a small number of Russian critical articles have been translated into English, while over seven hundred articles by César Cui (1835-1918), as well as the essays of Hermann Laroche (1845-1905), Nikolay Kashkin (1839-1920), and Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906) still await their translators and researchers.³ As for Russia's first professional music critic, Aleksandr Serov (1820-1871), it is mostly Russian-language biographical sources that are available to researchers,⁴ with the exception of Edward Garden's and Stuart Campbell's entry in *Grove Music Online*,⁵ and

¹ Cited in *S. I. Taneyev i russkaya opera: sbornik statey* [Taneyev and Russian Opera: a Collection of Articles], ed. by Igor' Bel'za (Moscow: Vserossiyskoye teatral'noye obshchestvo, 1946), p. 147.

² Robert Ridenour's excellent study began the exploration of Russian music criticism: *Nationalism, Modernism and Personal Rivalry in Nineteenth Century Russian Music* (Ann Arbor, U.M.I. Research Press, 1981). Also, Max Graf made a brief survey of Russian music criticism as represented by Cui, Stasov, Serov, and Laroche, in his *Composer and Critic: Two Hundred Years of Musical Criticism* (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd, 1947), pp. 298-304.

³ With the exception of Cui's *La Musique en Russie* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1880), Vladimir Stasov's *Selected Essays on Music*, tr. by Florence Jonas (London: Cresset, 1968), and Stuart Campbell's *Russians on Russian Music, 1880-1917: an Anthology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *Russians on Russian Music, 1830-1880: an Anthology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), only selected excerpts from the writings of Russian critics appear in Western musicological studies. Richard Taruskin translates many excerpts from a number of critical essays in his *Opera and Drama in Russia: as Preached in Practised in the 1860s* (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1981); *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997); and *On Russian Music* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009).

⁴ See in the first instance: Marina Cherkashina, *Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov* (Moscow: Muzika, 1985), Grigory Khubov, *Zhizn' A. Serova* [The Life of A. Serov] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye Muzikal'noye Izdatel'stvo, 1950), and Nikolay Findeyzen, *A.N. Serov: yego zhizn' i muzikal'naya deyatel'nost'* [Life and musical activity] (St Petersburg, 1900).

⁵ Edward Garden and Stuart Campbell, 'Serov, Aleksandr Nikolayevich', *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> [Accessed 8 January 2009].

Richard Taruskin's examination of Serov's operas.⁶ A vast amount of work remains to be done to bring even these select few critics to the attention of Western scholarship. A comprehensive history of music criticism in Russia is outside the parameters of this dissertation, which concentrates on sources immediately relevant to Taneyev's *Oresteia*.⁷ However, these sources—the reviews, articles, and essays used in this discussion—will be made available to English-speaking readers for the first time, and will contribute to the overall understanding of Russian musical criticism of the period in question.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the critical reception of Taneyev's *Oresteia* at the time of its première and during its subsequent revivals. This will aid a greater understanding of not only how it was viewed in Russia and the Soviet Union, but also why it did not retain its place in the operatic repertoire. For the first time the reviews of *Oresteia* will be summarised and evaluated in a study, the scope of which is broader than the few paragraphs devoted to this aspect of the opera's history to date.⁸

Figure 6.1 below demonstrates graphically the fall and rise of critical acceptance the opera underwent between 1895 and 1964. The discussion will concentrate on the productions of *Oresteia* in 1895, 1915, and 1917-18 to trace an overall growth in positive reviews of the opera. The bracketed area between 1915

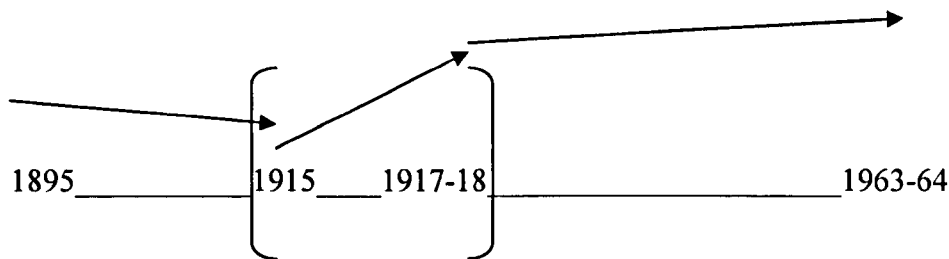
⁶ "‘This Way to the Future’": The Case of Serov's *Judith*', pp. 33-79, and 'Pochvennichestvo on the Russian Operatic Stage: Serov and His *Rogneda*', pp. 79-141, in Richard Taruskin, *Opera and Drama in Russia: as Preached in Practised in the 1860s* (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1981).

⁷ For further information on the state or criticism in Russia in the nineteenth century, see Yury Kremlyov, *Russkaya misl' o muzyke. Ocherki istorii russkoy muzikal'noy kritiki i estetiki v 19-m veke*. [Russian Thought About Music. Sketches of a History of Russian Musical Criticism and Aesthetics in the Nineteenth Century], 2 vols (Leningrad: Gosmuzizdat, 1954).

⁸ *S. I. Taneyev: materiali i dokumenti* [Materials and Documents], ed. by Vasily Kiselyov, Tamara Livanova, and Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952), p. 299; Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, *Tvorchestvo S. I. Taneyeva: istoriko-stilisticheskoye issledovaniye* [Taneyev's Works: Historico-Stylistic Investigation] (Moscow: Muzika, 1986), pp. 99-100; *Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev: lichnost', tvorchestvo i dokumenti ego zhizni: k 10-ti letiyu so dnya ego smerti* [Taneyev: Personality, Works and Documentation of his Life: Ten Years Since His Death], ed. by Konstantin Kuznetsov (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzsektor, 1925), pp.121-122, 137-142.

and 1917-18 productions is of particular interest because it saw a rapid increase in the space of only two years in the number of performances and a greater critical acclaim.

Figure 6.1. Critical Reception of *Oresteia*.



In the entire history of the critical reception of Taneyev's opera, among the most prominent themes discussed by the critics were the subject and musical style. These included, among others, the deliberations about the suitability of antique tragedy on the stage, the opera's musical origins and influences, and Taneyev's vocal writing.

Critical Reception of *Oresteia* in 1895

In the 1890s several large and small newspapers in St. Petersburg and Moscow published reviews of operas staged at the Imperial theatres. In St. Petersburg, five newspapers had permanent sections on theatre: *Birzheviye vedomosti*, *Sankt-Peterburgskiy vedomosti*, *Novoye vremya*, *Peterburgskaya gazeta*, and *Peterburgskiy listok*. In Moscow, there were four such papers: *Novosti dnya*, *Russkiye vedomosti*, *Moskovskiy vedomosti*, and *Moskovskiy listok*. In addition to these, *Sin otechestva*, *Svet*, and *Grazhdanin* often published reviews.⁹ By the middle

⁹ The translations for these of other periodicals referred to in this chapter are given in the 'Notes on the Text', pp. x-xi. For further information on these and other newspapers see Ira Petrovskaya, *Teatr i zritel' Rossiiskikh stolits: 1895-1917* [Theatre and Audiences of the Russian Capitals: 1895-1917] (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990), pp. 233-258; and Gerald Seaman, 'Nineteenth-Century Russian Music

of the 1890s Russian music criticism was still under-represented by professional critics, and many reviews were authored by amateur critics and musicians. The most prolific and prominent critics of the time were Mikhail Ivanov (1849-1927), Nikolay Solov'yov (1846-1916), Hermann Laroche (1845-1904), Arseny Koreshchenko (1870-1921), Nikolay Kashkin (1839-1920), Nikolay Findeyzen (1868-1928), César Cui (1835-1918), Pavel Veymarn (1857-1905), Vladimir Baskin (1855-1919), Semyon Kruglikov (1851-1910), and Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906).¹⁰

Mikhail Ivanov was a critic and composer, who studied composition with Tchaikovsky, and who was engaged as a permanent music critic and music editor at *Novoye vremya* from 1880 until his emigration to Rome in 1918. His ironic and often scathing reviews often alienated composers and musicians whose music he judged.¹¹ But his influence, nonetheless, was great and his reviews had the power of contributing greatly to a work's success or lack thereof. Telyakovsky wrote that Ivanov 'suffocates everything that is talented, new, and young. This scoundrel presents himself as a great musician and, surviving on blackmail, points out the direction and aims of art.' He bought the success of his own opera, *Zabava Putyatishna* (1901), 'with his own reviews', was feared by all, and wrote reviews for money.¹² Telyakovsky's accounts of Ivanov's activities as critic and composer show how little respect he had in the musical circles in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Nikolay Solov'yov was a critic, composer, and teacher, and a graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory. He was deeply saddened that he did not succeed as a composer, believing that he was not given the chance to develop his career.

Periodicals: an Annotated Checklist', *Periodica Music* 2 (Spring, 1984), 14-16 and 4 (Spring, 1986), 6-11.

¹⁰ Stasov and Kruglikov did not review *Oresteia* and will not be mentioned in this discussion.

¹¹ For an excellent account of Ivanov's career as a critic and composer see Vladimir Telyakovsky, *Vospominaniya* [Memoirs] (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 185-191.

¹² Vladimir Telyakovsky, *Dnevnik direktora imperatorskikh teatrov: 1903-1906* [Diaries of the Director of the Imperial Theatres: 1903-1906], ed. by M. Svetaeva (St. Petersburg: Artists. Rezhissyor. Teatr, 2006), entry dated 27 January 1903, p. 419; and 6 February 1903, p. 429.

Solov'yov contributed to most of the St. Petersburg periodicals from as early as 1870.¹³ The manner of his writing did not earn him friends—it was often caustic, sarcastic, and full of disdain for works he did not appear to respect. Laroche was a professional critic whose career unfolded between 1867 and 1904, during which time he wrote for a variety of publications in St. Petersburg and Moscow.¹⁴ He was an opponent of Cui and the composers of the Mighty Handful, promoting and defending a more cosmopolitan approach to music as represented by the works of Tchaikovsky and Taneyev. Arseny Koreshchenko, a pianist and composer who studied composition with Taneyev at the Moscow Conservatory, wrote almost two hundred articles for the *Russkiye vedomosti*. Kruglikov and Kashkin were respected Russian critics and the latter, also a music teacher, was one of Tchaikovsky's closest friends. Findeyzen was a historian, musical journalist, and founder and editor of the *RMG*, which he nurtured from 1899 until 1917. Critics Pavel Veymarn and Vladimir Baskin wrote reviews for several St. Petersburg newspapers, but were less influential than any of the critics mentioned above. Stasov was closely associated with the composers of the Mighty Handful in the 1860s and 1870s, and was an active promoter and defender of nationalist trends in music and art.

The critical community responded to the première of Taneyev's new opera with a large number of commentaries in all the major periodicals. Professional musicians, however, wrote only a handful of these reviews, and, curiously, Cui and Stasov did not comment on Taneyev's opera in print at all.¹⁵ After the opera's première Taneyev collected most of these press reviews and gathered them in a

¹³ For more information about the critic see Edward Garden and Jennifer Spencer, 'Solov'yov, Nikolay Feopemptovich', *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.grovemusic.com [Accessed 8 January 2009].

¹⁴ For more information about Laroche, see Stuart Campbell, 'Larosh, Herman', *Grove Music Online*, ed. by Laura Macy, www.grovemusic.com [Accessed 8 January 2009].

¹⁵ Cui reviewed Taneyev's *Oresteia* Overture, as was seen in Chapter Two.

scrapbook, which has been used extensively in the research for this chapter.¹⁶ Taneyev's objectiveness and fairness in all areas of his life are also evident in this collection. The composer included both positive and negative accounts of *Oresteia* that show how the critical community received his opera. Taneyev's view about negative criticism has been demonstrated clearly by his own words: 'Reproach is more interesting than praise. It is often honest and fair. If not, then why is it not possible to get over unjust reproach, when we happily accept unjust praise throughout our lives?'¹⁷ He believed that all reviews must be taken into account in order to achieve an objective view of the opera's reception.

Critical reaction to Taneyev's *Oresteia* in the first years of its existence was varied and at times contradictory. This was not unusual—in the whole history of opera criticism the instances of unanimous acceptance of a new work are extremely rare. Only with time can a general consensus about the status of a work be established. While Taneyev's critics agreed that he chose an unusual and even strange subject, opinions were divided about the quality of the music, influences, and the opera's potential future success. All critics thought that Taneyev's opera was too long and would benefit from further cuts, and all reviews contained discussions of the opera's subject, portrayal of its characters, and its musical language. The following section will examine reviews by Ivanov, Solov'yov, Laroche, Koreshchenko, Kashkin, Baskin, Veymarn, and Findeyzen, and explore how they viewed the new opera from these three aspects.

¹⁶ Reviews of *Oresteia*, GDMTch, fond B9, No. 1. An A4 exercise book with soft cover into which Taneyev pasted the newspaper cuttings.

¹⁷ Cited in Bel'za 1946, p.147.

Oresteia Unrecognised

‘All men crave forms and recognitions. We take delight in recognition.’¹⁸

The above statement reflects a human desire for recognition of familiar elements in unfamiliar things, and often proves to be true when a new work of art comes under review. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the music dramas of Wagner are some of the greatest examples of this need—Wagner’s new musical techniques and aesthetic principles challenged the critics and listeners alike and their novelty was often the reason for rejection. It will be seen presently that Taneyev’s opera became the victim of the very same desire for recognition—be it traditional subject, form, or musical style.

Taneyev’s opera was in many ways an unusual work for Russian audiences and critics, first and foremost because it was inspired by and based on an authentic Greek literary work. The characters of Taneyev’s *Oresteia*, along with their challenges and actions, were far removed from the usual stories found in Russian operas of the time in question.¹⁹ The nineteenth-century Russian public, in the words of one of the critics, was ‘brought up on a diet of Italian and Russian [based on Russian sources] operas’,²⁰ and of course found the subject of this new opera unfamiliar.

What the critics and the public found difficult to relate to is that the thrust of the opera’s story was not in the events themselves, but in the abstract ideas dealing

¹⁸ Robert Stallman, *The Critic’s Notebook* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1950), p. 4.

¹⁹ In itself, this fact of course is not singular, given the number of operas written on such subjects by various European composers beginning with Monteverdi’s *Orpheus* (1607) and continuing with Gluck’s *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1762), *Alceste* (1767), *Paris and Helen* (1770), *Iphigenia at Aulis* (1774), *Iphigenia in Taulis* (1779), Mozart’s *Idomeneo* (1781, new edition 1786), Berlioz’s *Les Troyens* (1856-58), Richard Strauss’s *Elektra* (1906), Igor Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* (1927), and others. But in Taneyev’s Russia no contemporary examples existed.

²⁰ Anon., *Russkiye vedomosti*, 29 October 1895, No. 299.

with universal laws such as Fate, justice, repentance, and forgiveness. The dramatic element in opera is best elicited through an emotional response from the audience and is often best achieved when it is based on a story to which they can easily relate. And, if the purpose is pure entertainment, this can be best achieved either by dramatically or light-heartedly touching plots based on familiar story lines. If the composer chooses drama, it usually must be set to events with which the audience is familiar; or deal with universal issues such as love, struggle, or death, through personal, intimate situations that can easily and swiftly make the audience relate to the opera's characters.

It is safe to propose that had *Oresteia* been written by Tchaikovsky and not Taneyev, it would have concentrated on its characters and their innermost emotions in a much more intimate atmosphere. Tchaikovsky would be most interested in creating the characters who live and feel in familiar, more personal way, while Taneyev was interested in their abstract representations as symbols of universal and enduring ideas—a concept not often seen in opera. This is why in Taneyev's *Oresteia* there is no love element or depiction of every-day life in ancient Greece, and his characters sing in unfamiliar style, clearly more instrumental than vocal.

The story of *Oresteia* shocked the critics into rejecting it at first. Mikhail Ivanov stated:

Despite our classical education, the classical world is not held in favour [in Russia]: not many people are interested in it and even fewer people know it. [...] Only very few people read in full, at least in translation, at least one of a small number of surviving tragedies by Aeschylus and, of course, no one read a complete tragedy, which Taneyev used as a material for his opera.²¹

²¹ Mikhail Ivanov, 'Oresteia, muzikal'naya trilogiya. Slova A. A. Venksterna. Muzika S. I. Taneyeva. 1-e predstavleniye 17-go Oktyabrya.' [*Oresteia*, Musical Trilogy. Libretto by A. A. Venkstern. Music by S. I. Taneyev. Première on 17 October] *Novoye vremya*, 30 October 1895, No. 7066.

Ivanov went on to say that the title of Taneyev's opera must have left many people uninterested, and even Taneyev's name was mistaken for that of Alexander Taneyev, the St. Petersburg composer.²² The critic believed that in the new opera 'almost everything was unknown to the public: the Greek world and its views, Greek tragedy and its forms, Aeschylus and his literary heritage, and Taneyev and his works.' He was convinced that by presenting an unfamiliar, or 'very well forgotten' story, Taneyev went 'right against the habits of our theatre public.'²³

This desire for the familiar also affected Nikolay Solov'yov's reception of the opera. He found himself greatly dissatisfied with the additions made to the libretto by Taneyev because they disturbed the order of the scenes and events in the original source.²⁴ Other critics thought that the lack of the usual dances was a serious omission,²⁵ and some were surprised that, against all expectations, there was 'very little local colour' in *Oresteia*.²⁶ In Russian opera, local colour was often contained in choral numbers, as seen in operas by Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Glinka, Rubinstein, Musorgsky, and Tchaikovsky, but Taneyev's choruses did not follow this tradition. He did not show the everyday life of the people in his mass scenes, which would normally feature folksong-derived material or dance-like episodes. Moreover, as one critic noted, the chorus itself was static on stage, and it was unusual to see a scene, where 'in front of the chorus Clytemnestra is killed, but not even one person moved.'²⁷ The static chorus is a feature of Greek drama as it was performed in

²² Aleksandr Taneyev (1850-1918) was a distant relative of Sergey Taneyev.

²³ Ivanov, *Novoye vremya*, No. 7066.

²⁴ 1; 4; and 3; 23. Nikolay Solov'yov, 'Oresteia—muzikal'naya trilogiya g. Taneyeva.' *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, 19 October 1895, No. 287.

²⁵ Anon., 'Oresteia', *Peterburgskiy listok*, 18 October 1895, No. 289. Although the review was not signed, it could have been written by Vladimir Frolov (1850-1915), who was a music reviewer for *St. Peterburgskiy listok* at the time. See also Baskin, *Peterburgskaya gazeta*, No. 288.

²⁶ Solov'yov, *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, No. 287.

²⁷ Anon., *Novosti dnya*, 21 October 1895.

ancient times—a running commentary and conscience on the actions being depicted on stage—that Taneyev chose to present in his opera.

Even a small number of these examples is enough to support Ivanov's statement that the public 'in all the theatres in the world likes most of all familiar names and sources, from which before its eyes this or that production was created.'²⁸ This tendency to want to hear only what is already well known, or at least familiar, often resulted in a lack of adventure in operatic repertoires, as is evident to this day in modern opera houses.

Subject

The plot of *Oresteia* immediately stood out from the customary Russian folk, literary, or historical sources Russian composers used in their operas. It was simply too new and completely unfamiliar in the world of nineteenth-century Russian opera, when the crucial search for national identity in music was in its full stride. National identity in general was an important issue for the whole country, and it was manifest in the fact that foreign subjects for the new operas by Russian composers—be they people or sources for works of art—were often viewed with suspicion.²⁹ But Taneyev's subject, in addition to being foreign, also dated too far back into antiquity, which prompted comment such as: 'Too morbid to awaken the interest of viewers and listeners';³⁰ 'a subject from ancient history, with the presence of Greek gods, brought the dangers of boredom';³¹ '[the audience's interest was cooled by] the

²⁸ Ivanov, *Novoye vremya*, No. 7066.

²⁹ For an excellent study of this aspect of Russian culture, see Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

³⁰ Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 289.

³¹ Pavel Veymarn, 'Oresteia, opera Taneyeva.' *Sin otechestva*, 19 October 1895, No. 292. Interestingly, only Kashkin thought that the subject of *Oresteia* was 'a common knowledge': Nikolay Kashkin, 'Oresteia' na stsene Mariinskogo teatra. *Oresteia*, Muzikal'naya trilogiya. Slova A. A. Venksterina. Muzika S. I. Taneyeva. [*Oresteia* on the Stage of the Mariinsky Theatre. *Oresteia*,

subject—half-history, half-myth, from the life of the dead to us ancient Greek world, shown in the tragedy of Aeschylus’;³² in short—Taneyev ‘fell prey to absolutely unnatural and unnecessary anachronism.’³³

One critic even thought that Gluck’s operas remained popular because of the composer’s talent, and not because of their subjects, which had ‘little life’ and were ‘simply tedious for our times.’³⁴ Solov’yov wrote that, beginning with Glinka, no Russian composer had touched an antique Greek subject, and that was why Taneyev’s *Oresteia* was the first opera of its kind in Russia.³⁵ Kashkin, although approving of Taneyev’s ability to present the story from an objective, and not personal, point of view—something that made the opera stand out from the operatic repertoire of the time—thought that the subject was not suitable for modern opera, because it was ‘so far removed from our time.’³⁶ Kashkin’s opinion here coincided with those of many Russian musicians, most notably Tchaikovsky, who wrote to Taneyev about his own need to write operas based on real life characters.³⁷

Not all critics, however, viewed Taneyev’s new opera and its unusual story in a negative way. Laroche, Koreshchenko, Ivanov, and Shchukarev had all welcomed a change from the usual predominance of lyrical or historical opera. Koreshchenko hailed the opera as ‘presenting an infinite wealth of true poetry and an infinite source of inspiration’, noting that Taneyev was the first composer, aside from Gluck and

Musical Trilogy. Libretto by A. A. Venkstern. Music by S. I. Taneyev.] *Russkiye vedomosti*, 24 October 1895, No 294.

³² Pavel Veymarn, ‘*Oresteia*, opera Taneyeva.’ *Sin otechestva*, 18 October 1895, No. 291.

³³ Pavel Veymarn, ‘Mariinsky teatr. *Oresteia*, opera Taneyeva’, *Grazhdanin*, 21 October 1895, No. 294.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Kashkin, *Russkiye vedomosti*, No 294.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *P. I. Chaykovsky, S. I. Taneyev: pis'ma* [P. I. Tchaikovsky, S. I. Taneyev: Letters], ed. by Vladimir Zhdanov (Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951), letter from P. Tchaikovsky to S. Taneyev dated 14 January 1891, p. 169.

Mozart, to use such a source in his new opera.³⁸ He believed that by choosing it, Taneyev ‘stepped onto a war path against habitual, vulgar routine and banal devices of the usual, traditional operatic libretti, with their obligatory operatic love intrigues, dances, written for some important character, and so on.’³⁹ Ivanov, too, supported Taneyev’s choice, because ‘Greek tragedy in its great examples always addressed humanitarian ideals.’⁴⁰ For the critic, the voice of the ancient writer was heard in harmony with the voice of Lev Tolstoy, whose drama *The Power of Darkness* was premièred at the same time as Taneyev’s *Oresteia*.⁴¹

Laroche also supported Taneyev’s choice of text for his opera, and stated that musicians ‘will never stop portraying the characters of Homer and Sophocles, Aeschylus and Virgil in vocal and instrumental works.’⁴² He continued: ‘The choice of subject—successful or not—is only one of the factors of artistic merit, along with the questions of individual talent, technique, ideological content and so on.’⁴³ Laroche believed that Taneyev’s *Oresteia* ‘creates an impression of a beautiful engraving, and its majestic slowness does not let in sudden surprises and does not give relief to idle curiosity.’⁴⁴ This slowly unfolding action did not have to preclude the opera’s success, because the public ‘does not always chase after eventful and fast stage action.’⁴⁵ Laroche was referring to Wagner’s music dramas, which were slowly gaining greater acceptance in Russian theatres.⁴⁶

³⁸ Arseny Koreshchenko, ‘*Oresteia* na stsene Mariinskogo teatra v Peterburge.’ [*Oresteia* on the stage of the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg] *Peterburgskkiye vedomosti*, 19 October 1895, No. 288.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Ivanov, *Novoye vremya*, No. 7066.

⁴¹ *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov* [Yearbook of the Imperial Theatres] Season 1895-1896. (Published by the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres, St. Petersburg, 1897), pp. 7-23.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 344.

⁴³ German Larosh, ‘*Oresteia* Taneyeva’, *Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta*, 20 October 1895, No. 288; also cited in *German Larosh: izbranniye stat’i. Vipusk 3: opera i operniy teatr* [Selected Articles. Volume 3: Opera and Opera Theatre], ed. by Abram Gozenpud (Leningrad: Muzika, 1976), vol. 3, p. 345.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For more information on Wagner’s reception in Russia during late nineteenth century see Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 59-116.

But for one critic, Aleksandr Shchukarev (1861-1900), who was a specialist in ancient history and taught classical subjects and languages in St. Petersburg, *Oresteia* had one major flaw: anachronisms in its production. He greeted the appearance of the new opera with enthusiasm particularly because of its literary origins, but various historical inaccuracies in the production overshadowed the enjoyment. He wrote:

When a first-rate theatre produces an opera based on a subject from a well-known historical époque, when the stage sets are custom-made for the production, and a lot of money is spent on it, when we see in the programme the names of famous singers and talented artists, we cannot help but expect from such a production not only splendour and artistic elegance, but, above all else, faithful depiction of the époque.⁴⁷

Shchukarev's review reflected a great need for realism in opera at the time, which the critics wanted to see in every aspect of a stage work. Shchukarev did not discuss the music or text, concentrating instead on a meticulous examination of every anachronistic error in the production.

The antique source of the libretto contributed to another factor that aroused a multitude of comments—the opera's length. A prominent characteristic of Greek tragedies was their slowly unfolding action. Many of the important events had already happened in the past, thus creating the necessity for at times lengthy monologues where the characters related the story to the audience, which in turn rendered the stage action extremely minimal.⁴⁸ Eduard Nápravník was the first person to tell Taneyev that his opera was too long, and he was certainly not the last to do so. Almost every reviewer thought that the libretto could be cut considerably,

⁴⁷ Aleksandr Shchukarev, 'Po povodu postanovki *Oresteï* opery Taneyeva.' [About the Production of Taneyev's *Oresteia*] *Novoye vremya*, 23 October 1895, No. 7059.

⁴⁸ Wagner's music dramas are good examples of this, whose characters often have long monologues containing the information about the events that happened before the beginning of drama.

and most of the suggested cuts concerned Act 1.⁴⁹ A critic of the *Peterburgskiy listok* thought that the role of Cassandra was not only lacking in interest, but also unnecessary, and could be cut from the opera without any loss to the storyline. This clearly showed his lack of understanding or knowledge of the tragedy, as Cassandra's scene is important because it encapsulated past events in the history of the house of Atreus and alluded to the key event of the future.⁵⁰ Further illustrating his ignorance, this critic thought that Aegysthus and the Watchman were also superfluous characters in the opera. He was not alone—Solov'yov had also thought that Taneyev could easily remove those characters from the libretto.⁵¹

Many reviewers, Solov'yov, Ivanov, and Koreshchenko among them, agreed that some scenes had to be cut. Koreshchenko particularly singled out the monologue of the Watchman that opened the opera, and the scene of Orestes and Clytemnestra from Act 2, 'powerfully written, but too lengthy for the stage.'⁵² Taneyev indeed shortened the Watchman's monologue, the scene of Orestes and Clytemnestra, and made a number of other cuts, but his response to the critics was still based predominantly on his own editorial decisions.

Characters

Like Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein, many of Taneyev's critics believed that antique characters were too far removed from modern times to be interesting, believable, or evoke sympathy from an audience. This may have influenced their opinions about

⁴⁹ Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 289; Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok* 19 October 1895, No. 290; Pavel Veymarn, 'Mariinsky teatr. *Oresteia*, opera Taneyeva.' *Grazhdanin*, 22 October 1895, No. 295; N. S. [Nikolay Solov'yov] *Svet*, 19 October 1895; Anon., *Novoye vremya*, 18 October 1895; and Ivanov, *Novoye vremya*, No. 7066.

⁵⁰ Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 290.

⁵¹ N. S., *Svet*, 19 October 1895.

⁵² Koreshchenko, *Peterburgskiy vedomosti*, No. 288.

the characters present in Taneyev's *Oresteia*, many of whom were believed to be no more than mere pale shadows.⁵³ One such critic, Baskin, wrote:

Let us look at the characters: not one of them has his own particular musical colouring; all speak (or, more precisely, scream) in recitatives, and it is not possible to differentiate one from another, even the 'demons' (Clytemnestra and Aegysthus) from the 'angels' (Agamemnon, Apollo, Electra, and so on).⁵⁴

To him, all the characters were given the same means of expression, of which he wrote further:

To depict passion, Taneyev turned to Wagner's method, screaming *forte*; and so, Cassandra screams about the fate of the house of Atreus, Orestes screams (always and everywhere), Electra screams when she sees her brother, Agamemnon screams when he is killed, Apollo screams his promise of protection to Orestes, in a word—everybody screams.⁵⁵

Baskin's colleague Solov'yov agreed, up to a point, with the above statement, and maintained that Taneyev had no talent for writing lyrical music. He even thought that the roles of Cassandra, Aegysthus, and the Watchman were so bland and unimpressive, as to be unnecessary.⁵⁶ Baskin's comments at times come across as unprofessional and his opinions appear to be ill-informed. But aside from being a critic, Baskin was also a member of an audience, and even his subjective views emphasised the greater need of audiences to hear music that was memorable, therefore crafted to well-known, popular operatic models. These would include not only music that was easy to sing, but also the selection of arias and solo numbers where the singers would be able to demonstrate their vocal prowess and virtuosity.

⁵³ Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok* 20 October 1895, No. 291; Veyarn, *Grazhdanin*, No. 295; N. S., *Svet*, 19 October 1895; Anon., *Novoye vremya*, 18 October 1895; and Ivanov, *Novoye vremya*, No. 7066.

⁵⁴ Vladimir Baskin, 'Oresteia', *Peterburgskaya gazeta*, 19 October 1895, No. 287.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ N. S., *Svet*, 19 October 1895.

Taneyev, however, never had such goals in his *Oresteia*, and the musical language of the opera is functional rather than decorative or exhibitiv.

But not all critics thought Taneyev's characters were plain. Kashkin, Laroche and Koreshchenko all praised Taneyev's skilful individual, bold, and colourful musical characterisations. Koreshchenko wrote that the opera consisted of many musically beautiful and expressive scenes, but the scene of Clytemnestra with Agamemnon's ghost was arguably the best in the opera:

[Clytemnestra's] recitative and arioso breathe such full dramatic truth, full of such powerful expression, that one feels literally living the same life with the heroine; the beauty of the music here and power of expressiveness cannot be described with words.⁵⁷

The critic noted Taneyev's talent as a composer, which enabled him to achieve expressive and successful portrayal of the opera's leading characters. Kashkin added to this further, writing that Taneyev 'showed great talent, particularly in regard to music drama', and created outstanding characterisations.⁵⁸ Solov'yov also agreed that Orestes, Electra, and Clytemnestra in *The Libation Bearers* were highly expressive, but viewed the rest of the opera as pale.⁵⁹ Veymarn thought that Orestes was the best character in the opera,⁶⁰ and the critic of the *Peterburgski Listok* believed all characters to be interesting.⁶¹

From the above discussion it stands to reason that those critics who did not like the individual roles, felt that Taneyev did not follow the general demands of opera such as obligatory virtuoso solo numbers and flashy, impressive vocal

⁵⁷ Koreshchenko, *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 288.

⁵⁸ Kashkin, *Russkiye vedomosti*, No 294.

⁵⁹ N. S., *Svet*, 19 October 1895; the critic of the *Peterburgskiy listok*, 18 October 1895, No. 289 agreed with Solov'yov.

⁶⁰ Veymarn, *Sin otechestva*, No. 292.

⁶¹ Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 289.

portraits. They thought that the culprits of the tedious stage action were pale musical characterisations and the slowness of the action. But here, too, Taneyev had his defenders. Koreshchenko and Kashkin believed that Taneyev showed his considerable talent in the genre of music drama, even despite a complex subject that made it difficult for modern listeners to relate to the opera and its characters.⁶² This brings the discussion to the last, and most important aspect of the critical reviews—the musical style of Taneyev’s *Oresteia*.

Musical Style

If the subject of *Oresteia* presented the critics with great difficulties, the musical style of the opera proved to be even more difficult to evaluate. Many critics thought that the opera showed Taneyev’s considerable skill as a composer, and contained many pages of beautiful music.⁶³ But skill is not the same as inspiration, and the critics called for melodic invention, passion, and creativity, which, they thought, only a natural talent could facilitate. In this respect, Baskin observed that owing to the opera’s masterful musical writing, it is only possible to call it ‘professorial’;⁶⁴ Findeyzen called it ‘academic’;⁶⁵ and Veymarn observed that ‘the opera could be accepted as the work of an excellent musician, but not an inspired composer.’⁶⁶ A critic for the German newspaper *St. Petersburger Herold* wrote that Taneyev had ‘only a limited talent as a composer’, and lacked ‘the sacred fire of the divinely

⁶² Kashkin, *Russkiye vedomosti*, No 294.

⁶³ Veymarn, *Peterburgskiy listok*, 18 and 19 October 1895, Nos. 289 and 290; Kashkin, *Russkiye vedomosti*, No 294; Koreshchenko, *Peterburgskiy vedomosti*, No. 288; and Larosh, *Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta*, No. 288.

⁶⁴ Baskin, *Peterburgskaya gazeta*, 19 October, No. 287.

⁶⁵ Nikolay Findeyzen, ‘*Oresteia*, Muzikal’naya trilogiya. Muzika S. I. Taneyeva.’ *RMG*, November 1895, No. 11, columns 727-735.

⁶⁶ *Sin otechestva*, 18 October 1895, No. 291. Veymarn repeated this view in a short notice ‘St. Petersburg. Muzikalnoye obozreniye 1895 goda. Mariinsky teatr. [St. Petersburg. Musical Survey. Mariinsky Theatre] *RMG*, 1896, No.1, column 98, where in one short paragraph he summed up his critical comments about the opera’s subject and musical language.

gifted tone poet'; however, *Oresteia* was 'a work of a seriously trained musician because of the treatment of form, sensitive artistic feeling and thorough desire to serve art honestly and truthfully.'⁶⁷ The critic believed that as Taneyev's first attempt in the operatic genre, his *Oresteia* should be considered successful, and only the future would tell what Taneyev could be capable of as a composer.⁶⁸ All the above comments seize upon his predilection for a logical, almost scientific approach to musical composition which, however, probably suited well Taneyev's desire to address the abstract ideas in the opera.

Most of the negative comments and opinions about the style of Taneyev's writing were based on the critics' impressions of Act 1, *Agamemnon*, and change noticeably when they discuss the other two acts, *The Libation Bearers*, and *Eumenides*. Veymarn noted that 'immediately from the beginning of Act 2 the composer changed his initial style of writing', which the public appeared to like more.⁶⁹ This is not difficult to explain: as was seen, Act 2 opens with the scene of Clytemnestra's remorse and moral torments. For the first time, the audience saw a glimpse of Clytemnestra as a human being as real as they were, and naturally they felt an affinity with her.

Veymarn compared Taneyev's musical approach in *Oresteia* with that of Gluck, in that both composers decided not to become 'musical ethnographers',⁷⁰ and did not try to depict faithfully ancient music, fragments of which survived. Taneyev focused on illustrating the story with the means afforded by contemporary music, which brought good results:

⁶⁷ E. R., 'Oresteia, musicalische Trilogie von S. Taneiew.' *St. Petersburger Herold* 19 October 1895.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Veymarn, *Sin otechestva*, No. 292. Some of his colleagues, as seen in Ivanov, *Novoye vremya*, No 7066; and Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 289 shared this view.

⁷⁰ Veymarn, *Grazhdanin*, No. 294.

It would be unfair to suppose that the music of *Oresteia* is not interesting because it belongs to a learned contrapuntist and symphonist such as Taneyev. In his opera there are undoubtedly beautiful places that attract the listeners, despite not being immediately accessible. But we must not forget that even the most perfect works were rarely easily accepted and rightly evaluated at first. The general positive qualities of Taneyev's music are nobility of style, complete absence of banality and commonplace elements; almost everywhere there is beautiful harmonic background, varied polyphony, and interesting instrumentation. The creative side, in the sense of wide melodic invention, is not the composer's strength, and this is noticed most of all in respect of the vocal parts of certain characters, such as Cassandra, Aegysthus, and the Watchman. These parts, generally less successful musically, could be completely omitted from the opera without any negative consequences. However, the parts of Clytemnestra, Orestes, his sister Electra, and partly Agamemnon, are written relatively comfortably for the singers, and musically mostly interesting.⁷¹

Veymarn thought that only with the beginning of Act 2 did *Oresteia* became significantly more interesting. He believed that the abundance of contrapuntal techniques and devices was not an impediment to listeners because Taneyev's mastery resulted in lucid, clear, and elegant writing.

Koreshchenko noted Taneyev's interest in Mozart, remembering that some of Taneyev's early works pay homage to this composer, particularly in instrumentation. The author also mentioned a connection with Wagner, saying that *Oresteia* belongs to

The period welcomed by us with particular pleasure in straight connection with [Taneyev's] noticeable interest in Wagner and, to some degree, in his reformative theories applied, however, in his own [Taneyev's] way and, of course, not exaggerated.⁷²

Like Laroche, Koreshchenko did not find the presence of Wagnerian influences in Taneyev's music unwelcome. It is interesting because despite gaining considerable success with the audiences and critics after 1889, Wagner's music was still on a

⁷¹ Veymarn, *Grazhdanin*, No. 295.

⁷² Koreshchenko, *Peterburgskiyе vedomosti*, No. 288.

rocky path to its greater acceptance in Russia, and those composers who were clearly influenced by him were still often criticised. Koreshchenko believed that Taneyev's interest in early music and Wagner could be reconciled, and added that because of the combination of these two elements in Taneyev's work his talent is evident, and that it gives his music a 'highly interesting and original colour.'⁷³ *Oresteia* was greatly praised by Laroche, who described its music as

Noble, delicate, and full of beautiful melodies, [which] could not be better suited to the character of the chosen poetry and reflects its nuances with wonderful truthfulness and warmth of character. An excellent contrapuntal education, in which Taneyev could be said to be superior to all living Russian composers today, manifested itself in his opera in the way that it is permeated with a wonderful unity of style and that this style is completely independent. Very seldom have I heard a new work with so few "reminiscences", as it is customary to call unintentional borrowings from other composers.⁷⁴

But here Laroche was almost alone: apart from Kashkin, the majority of the critics believed Taneyev's style was not only patchy, but also that the music of *Oresteia* showed a multitude of outside influences. Ivanov found that 'Generally, Taneyev's style is uneven. Despite his obvious sympathies for Wagner, there is even more sympathy towards Tchaikovsky, [...] and also towards Serov, Meyerbeer, and Verdi.'⁷⁵ Solov'yov mentioned the influences of Bach, Wagner, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, and Mozart.⁷⁶ Veymarn believed that Rimsky-Korsakov and Beethoven were some of the main influences;⁷⁷ others detected hints of Cui, Borodin, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov,⁷⁸ and more of Wagner.⁷⁹

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Larosh, 'Oresteia Taneyeva', vol. 3, p. 345.

⁷⁵ Ivanov, *Novoye vremya*, No. 7066.

⁷⁶ Solov'yov, *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, No. 287.

⁷⁷ Veymarn, *Sin otechestva*, No. 292.

⁷⁸ Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 290.

⁷⁹ Baskin, *Peterburgskaya gazeta*, No. 287.

Some of these comments were correct—indeed, the influences of Wagner and echoes of Tchaikovsky (mostly in Cassandra’s scene) are felt in the opera—while others seem completely unfounded. Thus, Veymarn’s charge that the duet of Orestes and Electra in *The Libation Bearers* was built by borrowing the main theme of the vocal part of the finale of Beethoven’s Ninth symphony cannot be supported by an analysis of the score.⁸⁰ The same can be said about Solov’yov’s completely unfounded statement about the melodic closeness of the duet of Orestes and Electra to the duet of Radames and Amneris from *Aida*⁸¹—comparison of the two duets does not confirm this relationship.

Kashkin stated that Taneyev showed his considerable talent in the genre of music drama, despite a complex subject that made it difficult for the modern listener to relate to the opera and its characters, and hoped that Taneyev would not stop, but would create many more operas. He believed that ‘*Oresteia* is an excellent work that deserves serious study, and it will not pass without influencing other composers, particularly Russian.’⁸² Baskin concluded that the opera, judging from the première, ‘has a future, because it is, undoubtedly, a solid and respectable work that shows its learned author as not only a talented symphonist, but also a talented operatic composer, not at all without the gift of melodic invention.’⁸³

Because the style of Taneyev’s *Oresteia* was so difficult to define, the critics did not draw any definite conclusions about the opera’s belonging to any particular genre, musically or dramatically. They were more united when writing about Taneyev’s significant skills in harmony and ‘magnificent’ instrumentation,⁸⁴ ‘interesting and rich harmony, clever, thought-out declamation and excellent

⁸⁰ Veymarn, *Sin otechestva*, No. 292.

⁸¹ Solov’yov, *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, No. 287.

⁸² Kashkin, *Russkiye vedomosti*, No. 294.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ E. R., *St. Petersburg Herold* 19 October 1895.

instrumentation',⁸⁵ 'very rich, even sumptuous, but at the same time clear and logical' harmony, which showed 'the hand of an excellent contrapuntist'.⁸⁶ Koreshchenko noted as very interesting 'the effects of tremolo cymbals created with kettle-drum stick in order to depict with sound the blinding light emanating from Apollo; the use of the woodwind in the depiction of fire; and the use of the harp.'⁸⁷

The critic of the *Peterburgskiy listok* noted that from a purely musical perspective, the opera contained 'many pages whose music deserves great attention for its beauty and talent.'⁸⁸ He particularly praised Taneyev's polyphonic and harmonic writing, which was most successful in the choral scenes.

Vocal Writing

The critics discussed two aspects of the vocal style of the opera: choral writing and individual vocal lines. Only the choral writing created no disagreements between the commentators, who all thought that Taneyev's most impressive music was to be found in choral scenes that were written by the hand of an excellent musician. However, individual vocal parts were often thought to be too dry and without melodic interest. This was largely because in his *Oresteia* Taneyev did not write the usual musical number-vehicles for the soloists to show their vocal virtuosity as was the case with many Italian, French, and some Russian operas. This refusal to follow the current fashion or even to make some concession to the soloists was unusual.

The best word to describe Taneyev's vocal writing would be 'instrumental', a combination of Wagnerian influence and Taneyev's own predilection for instrumental music. Most notable in this respect are the parts of Clytemnestra and

⁸⁵ Koreshchenko, *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 288.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Anon., *Peterburgskiy listok*, No. 289.

Aegysthus, and Cassandra's lines in the episodes of her prophetic visions. Solov'yov's statement reflects this well, when he wrote that '[vocal parts] consisted largely of dry intervals of a harmonic style.'⁸⁹ This was particularly noticed in the scene of Orestes and the Furies, where Solov'yov did not like the melodic line of the Furies' vocal part, labelling it 'banal.'⁹⁰ But it must be remembered that here Taneyev remained faithful to the original tragedy, where Aeschylus notes the monotonous, single-pitched tune of the Furies' chorus.⁹¹ Later, Soviet musicologists viewed it as being one of the most interesting musical portraits in the opera.⁹²

Even today, much of Taneyev's music benefits from several hearings before its true worth begins to emerge. This would have been even more important at the time when this particularly 'instrumental' style of writing was not often heard in opera. Thus, many of the critics contradicted their own comments upon hearing the opera for the second time. In one of his reviews, Solov'yov wrote that Cassandra's vocal part was completely bland, but as the discussion proceeded and the critic analysed the opera further, he added that it had lyrical moments not 'without genuine emotion,' and which 'do not suffer from false expressiveness of musical language.'⁹³

Some critics were able to perceive this different kind of expression in the vocal parts of *Oresteia* immediately. Veymarn admired Clytemnestra's opening scene of Act 2, with women's chorus and Clytemnestra's duet with Electra.⁹⁴ For him, Orestes stood out considerably from the rest of the parts by being 'very well

⁸⁹ *Sin otechestva*, 19 October 1895, No. 292.

⁹⁰ Solov'yov, *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, No. 287. The scene in question is Act 3, scene 23.

⁹¹ *The Oresteia*: Aeschylus, tr. by Michael Ewans (London: Everyman, 1995), p. 36; 110.

⁹² *Pamyati Sergeya Ivanovicha Taneyeva 1856-1946: sbornik stateiy i materialov k 90-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya* [In Memory of Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev 1856-1946: A Collection of Articles and Materials for the Ninetieth Anniversary of His Birth], ed. by Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1947), p. 116.

⁹³ Solov'yov, *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, No. 287.

⁹⁴ 2; 12; 152-157, and 2; 13; 158-171.

written for voice', and 'musically beautiful and expressive.'⁹⁵ Koreshchenko noted realism in the depiction of Clytemnestra's emotions, profound drama, and beautiful music in the opening scene of Act 2,⁹⁶ and masterful technique in writing for large vocal scenes and exemplary voice leading in ensembles. Kashkin called to attention Taneyev's skilful use of the orchestra, which entered 'into a dialogue with the singers' and at times, akin to a Wagnerian orchestra, added to what they were saying.⁹⁷

Taneyev's opera appeared as a work not written to impress the audience, but only to serve as an expressive tool with which to represent and support the events on the stage. With his refusal to meet expectations and cater to the taste of the opera-going public he stood out among his colleagues, both Russian and European, who also wrote in this genre. With his *Oresteia*, Taneyev demonstrated his true allegiance: he was an artist who created his art purely for art's sake, as a form of philosophic reflection on the human condition and universal ideals—a unique claim, particularly for an operatic composer.

Critical Reviews After the Revival of *Oresteia* in 1915

In 1915 *Oresteia* was performed on the stage of the Mariinsky Theatre, exactly twenty years after its première. Attitudes towards Taneyev's opera began to change by this time: press reviews showed increasing respect for the opera and its composer, and *Oresteia* was viewed as a serious work, deserving attention. This could be explained by what Nadezhda Tumanina called 'a widely spread interest of Russian intelligentsia in classicism', which began to develop rapidly around 1895.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Veymar, *Sin otechestva*, No. 292.

⁹⁶ Koreshchenko, *Peterburgskiy vedomosti*, No. 288.

⁹⁷ Kashkin, *Russkiye vedomosti*, No 294.

⁹⁸ Nadezhda Tumanina, 'Muzikal'naya trilogiya *Oresteia*' in *Materiali 1947*, p. 104.

If in 1895 the critics were clearly divided between those in favour and against the subject of *Oresteia*, critics in 1915 showed complete unity of opinion. All critics—Aleksandr Glazunov (1865-1936), Aleksandr Koptyaev (1868-1941),⁹⁹ Grigory Timofeyev (1866-1919),¹⁰⁰ Igor' Glebov [Boris Asaf'yev] (1884-1949), Victor Kolomiytsev (1868-1936),¹⁰¹ and Evgeny Braudo (1882-1939)¹⁰²—admired the antique source of Taneyev's opera. Glazunov wrote that '*Oresteia* belongs to a number of serious creations of art', and thought that 'Aeschylus' tragedy was understood and expressed by Taneyev excellently.'¹⁰³ Koptyaev and Timofeyev both thought that Taneyev's opera was close to Strauss's *Elektra* and *Ariadne Auf Naxos*, but only more beautiful, tasteful, and noble, and that Taneyev excelled at expressing the classical beauty of Aeschylus' drama in his *Oresteia*.¹⁰⁴ And if in 1895 the critics lamented the absence of local colour, twenty years later it had ceased to be an issue. On the contrary, with this kind of subject, Taneyev was expected only to capture the general mood and atmosphere, and not recreate ancient Greek music.¹⁰⁵

During *Oresteia*'s twenty-year absence from the stage, European composers had begun to turn to Greek tragedies in search of sources for their operas. Felix

⁹⁹ A music critic and musicologist who began writing critical reviews in 1893. For more information see *Sovetskiye kompozitori i muzykovedi: spravochnik v 3-kh tomakh* [Soviet Composers and Musicologists: Reference Book in 3 volumes], ed. by Lev Grigor'yev and Yakov Platek (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1981), vol.2, p. 84.

¹⁰⁰ A music critic Timofeyev was close to Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Stasov.

¹⁰¹ Kolomiytsev was a musicologist and critic, who also translated the texts of Wagner's music dramas in 1910-1912. In 1904-1910 he was critic and editor of the music section of *Rus'*, and in 1912-1812 wrote for *Den'*. For more information see *Sovetskiye kompozitori i muzykovedi: spravochnik v 3-kh tomakh*, vol. 2, p. 76.

¹⁰² Braudo wrote under a number of pseudonyms, including Yevgen'yev, Arsen'yev, Arkhivist, and various versions of his initials. He held a number of editorial, administrative, and teaching positions. For more information, see *Kto pisal o muzike: Biograficheskiy i bibliograficheskiy slovar' muzikal'nikh kritikov i lits, pisavshikh o muzike v dorevolutsionnoy Rossii i SSSR*. [Who Wrote About Music: Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of Music Critics and Persons Who Wrote About Music in Pre-Revolutionary Russia and USSR], ed. by Grigory Bernandt and Izrail' Yampolsky (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1979), vol. A-M, pp. 116-7.

¹⁰³ *Materialy 1952*, p. 288.

¹⁰⁴ A. Koptyaev, 'Vozobnovleniye *Orestei* v Mariinskom teatre.' [Revival of *Oresteia* in the Mariinsky Theatre] *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, 24 October 1915, No. 15167. See also G. Timofeyev, '*Oresteia* v Mariinskom teatre.' [*Oresteia* in the Mariinsky Theatre] *Rech'* 24 and 25 October 1915, Nos. 293 and 294.

¹⁰⁵ Timofeyev, *Rech'*, No. 294.

Weingartner (1863-1942) completed his *Orestes* in 1901, Richard Strauss (1864-1949) wrote *Elektra* (1906) and *Ariadne Auf Naxos* (1912), and Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) began his trilogy of operas written after Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* in 1913. Berlioz's *Les Troyens* (1856-58) was premièred in Russia in Moscow on 14 December 1899, and *Elektra* was premièred in Russia in St. Petersburg on 18 February 1909, but was unsuccessful, sustaining only three performances.¹⁰⁶ In Russia, Taneyev still remained the only composer to have used a Greek tragedy for his opera, and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1927) was still eight years away.¹⁰⁷

As *Elektra*'s lack of success in Russia had shown, Greek tragedy was still not a familiar presence in modern opera, and it still had a long road to travel to greater acceptance. It is not surprising then, that Glebov lamented that the meaning and aesthetics of Aeschylus' greatest work was completely misunderstood by the production team and some of the singers.¹⁰⁸ The critic wrote that for some, it was synonymous with 'boredom', for others, with 'effective melodrama with murders, moans, screams, thunder and lightning, ghosts, and magic.'¹⁰⁹ Braudo, too, wrote that

Oresteia was revived with the exact preservation of all those pathetic stage sets and artistic conception, which hopelessly debased the trilogy's first production twenty years ago. The same ugly cuts were preserved, against which the late composer protested so defiantly.¹¹⁰

However, the artist Allegri made two new stage sets; as for the rest, Koptyaev rightly noted that the times for opera and art in general were difficult and 'inconvenient for

¹⁰⁶ Abram Gozenpud, *Operniy slovar'* [Opera Dictionary] (St. Petersburg: Kompositor, 2005), pp. 544 and 603.

¹⁰⁷ It must be noted that some Russian composers turned to Roman or biblical subjects, such as Rimsky-Korsakov in his *Servilia* (1901), Rubinstein in *Neron* (1879) and *Die Maccabäer* (1874), and Serov in his *Judith* (1863).

¹⁰⁸ Igor' Glebov, 'Oresteia S. I. Taneyeva v Mariinskom teatre.' [Taneyev's *Oresteia* in the Mariinsky Theatre] *Muzika* 14 November 1915, No. 232, 479-482. Also cited in *Materiali* 1952, pp. 289-291.

¹⁰⁹ *Materiali* 1952, p. 289.

¹¹⁰ Yevgeny Braudo, 'Oresteia na stsene Mariinskogo teatra.' [*Oresteia* on the Stage of the Mariinsky Theatre] *Apollon* 1915, Nos. 8-9, 90-91.

completely new productions.¹¹¹ The production must have been very bad indeed because the critics discussed every aspect of the opera not from the perspective of Taneyev's skills as a composer, but from the production team's inability to rise to the task at hand. Glebov expressed his views clearly and unequivocally, writing:

One would think that beautiful music and respect for the memory of the recently deceased composer would influence those in whose hands were concentrated the responsibility of reviving Taneyev's opera that has long been absent from the stage. Alas! Nothing is capable of waking the sleeping 'artistic' conscience of the theatre's directors, and *Oresteia's* appearance in the repertoire confirmed once again that the Imperial Opera has only one tendency—towards gloomy humdrum life, and that the opera business is pushed into such a corner from which there is no escape, unless a miracle happens—the appearance of a knight of art more deserving than we see today. *Oresteia's* production shared the fate, usual for Russian operas at the Mariinsky, when an opera is thought of as failure long before its first performance, when it is doomed to be unsuccessful, without taking care to show all the treasures contained by its score. One feels wronged and bitter on behalf of Russian art! Listening to *Oresteia*, one is surprised by the listlessness of some, the lazy familiarity of others, the artistic helplessness of the conductor, the doubts of the chorus master and so on, ending with the wise inventors of lighting effects.¹¹²

The musical side of the production caused Glebov to be 'indignant, upset, and bemoan' the fate of Russian opera.¹¹³ Here the critic highlighted long-standing problems encountered by Taneyev before and after the opera's première in 1895—the lack of serious attention given to works of Russian composers. It showed that very little had changed in the twenty years since the last performance of *Oresteia*. Glebov severely criticised the conductor Albert Coates, charging that he did not succeed as the musical director of the opera either because he did not care at all about Russian music, or had no talent. Glebov lamented that Coates did not demonstrate any

¹¹¹ Koptyaev, *Birzheviye vedomosti*, No. 15167.

¹¹² Glebov, *Muzika*, No. 232, p. 479.

¹¹³ *Materiali* 1952, p. 290.

...depth, artistic toil, or desire to immerse himself in the music. [...] No love, respect for music, nor wish to show the beauty of Taneyev's score was felt. The opera is maimed by frequent unmusical cuts, senseless from the point of view of the form [of the opera], and interrupting the composer's processes of logical thinking. [...] The wonderful scene of Orestes and the Furies suffered in particular (the first tableau of Act 3) where Coates maimed a beautiful *Entre-acte*, cutting it without having understood the context of the music [...]. Gloomy masculinity, the flight of heroic will, angry revenge, heavy burden of conscience, burden of fate—all this is expressed by the composer, but not the conductor.¹¹⁴

Coates himself agreed that he did not understand Taneyev's music at the time of conducting it. He admitted that much:

I studied the score [of *Oresteia*] with great love, and Taneyev completely deserves it. While I have already overcome technical difficulties, I will only be able to feel the music and to understand its spirit after several performances.¹¹⁵

However, Coates did not have the chance to understand *Oresteia* fully, because after only seven performances it was once again taken off the stage prematurely.

But Coates was not the only member of the production team to disappoint Glebov, who thought that the director, N. Bogolyubov, did not understand 'the main simple demands, found in tragic pathos: economy of gesture and movement, and most importantly, their meaning.'¹¹⁶ The director's inability to understand the aesthetics of ancient drama, creating instead a mass of superfluous movements and gestures, resulted in scenes that lacked character, dignity, and sense.¹¹⁷ Only Yershov's performance met with Glebov's approval and praise because he went

¹¹⁴ *Materiali* 1952, pp. 290-291.

¹¹⁵ Cited in *Materiali* 1952, p. 288. Timofeyev, Koptyaev, and Glebov all agreed that Coates' tempi were too fast.

¹¹⁶ Glebov, *Muzika*, p. 480.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

[...] with all his soul to meet the composer's ideas, treasuring every phrase, every gesture. Only he did not lose the great meaning of the tragedy, he felt its eternal artistic truth, and because of that he made it possible that Orestes' torments became close, dear, and understandable to everyone.¹¹⁸

But one great artist could not have saved the opera, which was up against a much more serious problem than a bad production. It was against the persistent and stubborn 'sin of the Mariinsky theatre. This sin—lost belief in opera as a work of art, and doubting the very necessity of its existence.'¹¹⁹

In the musical sense, *Oresteia* was wholly accepted as a great work. The journal *Apollon* published a concise, but punchy notice about the revival of Taneyev's 'excellent operatic trilogy.'¹²⁰ It read:

We think that it is completely unnecessary to discuss whether the forms of this opera, containing such priceless musical treasures, are too old. The attention of the listeners must be pointed to its purely musical beauty. Then they will find the only correct approach to all that is beautiful in this trilogy: the divine monologues of Cassandra, the gloomy scene of Orestes and the Furies, unsurpassed in realism and conviction in its representation of antique "terror", the powerfully conceived scene of Orestes' return and both appearances of the Olympic gods—the beauty so elevated and profound.¹²¹

Like Glebov, who held Taneyev's opera in high esteem, Braudo deemed it to be deserving of a place in the operatic repertoire. And in contrast to earlier negative opinions about the opera's lack of stylistic unity and poor character portrayal, Timofeyev wrote that 'one of the main characteristics of *Oresteia's* music is its wholesomeness', and that all characters were 'presented in the music boldly and expressively.'¹²² This time, only Kolomiytsev invoked the twenty-year-old critical

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 482.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Braudo, *Apollon* 1915, Nos. 8-9, p. 119.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Timofeyev, *Rech'*, No. 294.

comments when he wrote that *Oresteia* was ‘pale’ musically.¹²³ But if it were viewed as a ‘number of independent “musical pieces”—predominantly musical ensembles that are connected with recitative-like episodes’—then he could see the style of *Oresteia* as clear in form and texture, and close to that of oratorio, or even cantata.¹²⁴

The Critical Reception of *Oresteia* 1917-18

The revival of *Oresteia* in 1917-18 totalled thirty-five successful performances, and marked a definitive shift toward a better understanding of Taneyev’s work. The production was very successful, and for the first time in its existence the opera happened to be given at the right time, when art was called on to address higher aesthetic and ethical values. Ira Petrovskaya quotes two journalists who discuss these issues. One was writing that

Powerful voice of truth must be heard on the stage and bring to life desires and aspirations, call forward, mock and criticise lies and cowardice, in order for the viewer to leave the theatre not feeling insignificant, but feeling energy, happiness, belief in life and hope and, feeling himself on wings, thinking himself to be the creator of life.¹²⁵

The other was saying that art had to be heroic, the kind of art that ‘would breathe into us creative spirit, teach us the great art of life—the art that could be an example and a guiding light, active power and ideal.’ He added that theatre must educate people and familiarise them with ‘the works of genius’, and not entertain the audiences with cheap ‘pyrotechnics.’¹²⁶ These two short examples show that in the beginning of the

¹²³ Kolomiytsev, *Den*’ 25 October 1915, No. 294.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ D. Rodnov [Bassalygo D. N.], *Teatralnaya khronika* [Theatre Chronicles], *Pravda*, 1912, 8 June, in Ira Petrovskaya, *Teatr i zritel’ Rossiyskikh stolits: 1895-1917* [Theatre and Audiences of the Russian Capitals: 1895-1917] (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990), p. 53.

¹²⁶ G. G., *Gastrol’ moskovskogo Malogo teatra* [Tour of the Moscow Maliy Theatre] *Novaya zhizn*’, 14 May 1917, cited in Petrovskaya 1990, p. 53.

1900s, theatre was expected to make people think, present serious works, and avoid anything that of purely entertaining nature. This was the reflection of the political and social changes before and after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

Beginning with the late 1890s the social make-up of the theatre-going public began to change. Petrovskaya presented a detailed and well-informed survey about the changes seen at this time, writing that

In the press of the 1890s-1910s frequent observations were published about the fact that theatres were undergoing a period of democratisation, and that the most receptive public consisted not of an over-sated 'average intelligent', but of a more democratic 'semi-intelligentsia', students, and 'proletariat', which included not only the workers, but also all the less wealthy circles.¹²⁷

She added that in 1905, when the private Zimin Opera made discounted tickets available to the working classes, they were all sold out.¹²⁸ In 1917, Zimin Opera became the Theatre of the Soviet Workers' Deputies, where *Oresteia* was revived and available to the wider masses. These were the people who craved and believed in freedom and equality, and who finally had the chance of taking control of their own destinies. In this environment Taneyev's opera for the very first time in its stage history became as a work that addressed a number of highly relevant and current issues, and functioned less than theatrical entertainment and more as a political statement. Antique tragedy could not be better suited to such purpose, and its elevated higher ideals and universal laws translated well into the general *zeitgeist* of Russia on the brink of the October Revolution.

Russkiye vedomosti published a review by Yury Engel' who believed that Taneyev's greatest achievement in the opera lay exactly in his ability to address

¹²⁷ Petrovskaya 1990, p. 10.

¹²⁸ For an extensive overview of the theatre-going public at the end of the nineteenth century see 'Sotsial'noye litso publiki' [Social Portrait of the Public] in Petrovskaya 1990, pp. 10-27.

musically such burning questions as repentance and justice.¹²⁹ The critic did not think that Venkstern's libretto was a particularly good adaptation for the opera, but he did approve of the story in general, and thought that Taneyev depicted realistically and successfully the inner worlds of his characters. He wrote:

When we see in *Oresteia* more inner instead of outer elements, instead of the tangible and visually observable that which could be observed only by the spirit, the more profound Taneyev becomes, the more powerfully and broadly the wings of his muse unfold. In some moments, he is able to elevate his music to the ancient power of Aeschylus, crystallised through centuries. In this respect, as in a number of others, Taneyev stands apart from the majority of ordinary operatic composers. They are better able to depict everything relating to the surface of everyday life and rituals, but his strengths are in the depiction of the opposite, more profound elements, relating to inner soul [...].¹³⁰

Further, Engel' listed the scenes where, in his opinion, Taneyev showed his talent in the depiction of inner, inexpressible elements: the scene of Cassandra and the chorus, Clytemnestra's guilty remorse, Orestes' moral torments, Orestes' persecution by the Furies, and the 'Apollonic ecstasy' in the *Entr'acte* to the second tableau of the *Eumenides*.¹³¹ However, there was one voice that did not agree with Engel'. Nikolay Kurov (1882-?), who wrote a review that looks like a series of notes, rather than a flowing account of the performance, viewed *Oresteia* as a chain of musical tableaux, 'in places beautiful and significant musically, and always interesting in texture.'¹³² He did not think that Taneyev created any boldly defined characters, and maintained that the public would not sympathise with the sufferings of the opera's heroes, even despite a great performance and an impressive production.

¹²⁹ Yury Engel', '*Oresteia* Taneyeva', *Russkie vedomosti*, 29 September 1917, No. 222.

¹³⁰ Ibid. The scenes described are: 1, 8; 2, 11; 3, 24 and 25.

¹³¹ Engel', *Russkiye vedomosti*, No. 222.

¹³² Nikolay Kurov, '*Oresteia*'. *Ranneye utro*, Moscow, 26 Septmeber 1917, No. 219.

Engel' also described the production as one that presented *Oresteia* on the stage as closely as possible to how it might have appeared in Aeschylus's time. There was no curtain, and the stage was made to look like an ancient *orchêstra*. The economy of movement, implemented by the singers and the chorus, recreated the sense of antique tragedy. However, even this production left room for improvement: the stage sets were too bulky, Apollo was not present on the stage at all, but his priest appeared and sung his lines, oddly, from the first person, and the conductor Slavinsky took slower tempi and made some senseless cuts.¹³³ But another critic wrote that the stage sets and costumes by Fedorovsky were excellent because they contained 'something from authentic Ellada', and were 'archaeologically correct,' also displaying an important and 'seldom seen harmony between stage sets and costumes. There was a complete unity.'¹³⁴

Yury Sakhnovsky reviewed *Oresteia* for *Russkoye slovo*. He agreed with Engel', saying that Taneyev expressed the abstract ideas that govern human action—fate, evil, death, power, revenge, curse, crime, justice, guilt and others—extremely successfully. He wrote:

Embodied in sound with unusual power, logic, and sequence, roughly speaking, the characters of Aeschylean tragedy were for Taneyev only marionettes, possessed and thrown into various collisions; certain ideas were expressed by bold music. And, approaching *Oresteia* from this point of view, one would be repeatedly and involuntary enticed by the power, strength, and depth of objectivity of Taneyev's art.¹³⁵

¹³³ The *Entr'acte* to the second tableau and the chorus of the Areopagus in scene 29 of the *Eumenides* were cut.

¹³⁴ Yury Sakhnovsky, 'Oresteia Taneyeva.', *Russkoye slovo*, 28 September 1917, No. 221.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Sakhnovsky noted that the music of *Oresteia*

...is cosmopolitan and even almost anti-national; it is a product of profound classicism. It truly contains a whole treasury of wise musical art of the great connoisseur and master artist. It is a grandiose monument of an artist, who studied all preceding composers so much, that every one of them, from Mozart and Gluck to Wagner and Rimsky-Korsakov, would be able to find a synthesis of his own art and learn a great deal.

That is why the critic called for a new approach to *Oresteia*, writing that it must be approached 'as a kind of liturgy, and it is not enough to hear it only once. On the contrary, hearing it again and again, the listener would only then be able to understand the true beauties that it contains.'¹³⁶ He believed that *Oresteia* was not a seasonal opera, and should be always kept in the repertoire because it did not have the power to 'create instant huge flashy success, and must be protected' in this way.¹³⁷ Finally, a short review in *Russkiye vedomosti* extolled Taneyev's 'excellent opera', which had success despite the fact that the musical side of its production was not as elevated as could be.¹³⁸

Although the reviews from the 1917-18 revival of the opera were considerably smaller in numbers than those that appeared after the première in 1895, they showed a greater unity of opinions and deeper appreciation of Taneyev's *Oresteia*. But a complete critical acceptance arrived only in 1963-64, when *Oresteia* was included in the season of the Belorussian State Theatre of Opera and Ballet.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Anon., *Russkiye vedomosti*, 24 September 1917, No. 218.

The Critical Reviews of 1963 and 1964

One of the most difficult periods of the Soviet era was the Second World War, during and after which the idea of heroism was actively developed in all areas of the arts. Although the war had ended almost two decades before *Oresteia* was produced again, the elements of perceived heroism in the opera were seen as important, and the view of it remained the same as that expressed by Tumanina in 1947:

In our époque this heroic and tragic opera-oratorio, where the main action is moved to the area of abstract ideas, gains a new meaning. High ideals of heroism, bravery, moral purity, sense of duty and justice, and intellectual victory over the dark and spontaneous passions are particularly close to us now. These prominent ideals have been fought for by our people, who overcame the enemy not only because of their giant strength, but also proud realisation of their moral righteousness and ethical power.¹³⁹

Attitudes to *Oresteia* changed dramatically during the Soviet era, when many leading Taneyev scholars recognised his work as unique and outstanding. What was deemed boring, bland, and uninventive in 1895 and to some extent in 1917, became melodious, colourful, and individual.

In the autumn of 1963, the Belorussian Theatre of Opera and Ballet staged the first production of *Oresteia* since 1917. A Belorussian newspaper *Litaratura i mastatstva* reported that the opera was premièred in Minsk on 30 November 1963.¹⁴⁰ Only one short review of this performance survived, in which the reviewer, Belta,¹⁴¹ wrote that for this occasion a new stage edition was created, using the lithographed 1894 scores held by the Mariinsky Theatre. This is unusual, since Taneyev's 1900

¹³⁹ Tumanina 1947, p. 97.

¹⁴⁰ Belta, 'Oresteia', *Litaratura i mastatstva*, 3 December 1963, No. 96.

¹⁴¹ No first name of the reviewer was given, but it appears to be a different person from Igor' Bel'za.

edition of the opera made the 1894 version obsolete. The production must have been done on a grand scale, featuring a chorus of 150 singers.¹⁴²

The Belorussian Theatre of Opera and Ballet took *Oresteia* on tour to Moscow in February 1964, performing it in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses. A review was published in *Pravda*, the main Communist newspaper, authored by Yevgeniya Grosheva, who deemed this production ‘a true event in the musical theatrical life of the country.’¹⁴³ Grosheva wrote that the performance was very successful, attended by ‘all musical Moscow.’¹⁴⁴ She continued:

It is customary to think that *Oresteia*, which is based on the great trilogy by Aeschylus, stands apart [from other operas] in the history of Russian opera. [...] But if one [...] realises how close [*Oresteia*] is to the spirit of Russian music with its grandiose mass choral scenes, if one appreciates the power of its disclosure of the bloody evil deeds of the crown-bearing rulers and their struggle for power (this is how the tragedy of Agamemnon’s family begins), then one must admit that *Oresteia* follows the traditions of our classics. And the trilogy itself—the theme of justice, retribution, crime, and punishment, did it not concern Russian artists and writers?

In this case, *Oresteia* is flesh from flesh of Russian culture, despite its antique ‘clothes’. And of course in its truly national music the great symphonic and polyphonic mastery and brilliant orchestration combine with the outstanding melodic gift of the composer, [who] created vocal characters of unsurpassed beauty and dramatic expression.¹⁴⁵

It is very surprising to see *Oresteia* suddenly being hailed as a true Russian opera. But clearly Soviet commentators found in Taneyev’s opera damning evidence against the ‘crown-bearing rulers’ and adapted the moral of Aeschylean trilogy to the principles of Soviet propaganda.

¹⁴² All attempts to contact the Belorussian Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Minsk did not bring results. Only one telephone call was answered by a receptionist, but the contact numbers obtained from this conversation were of no use: all subsequent calls did not result in any response. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to establish if any materials from this production survived.

¹⁴³ Yevgeniya Grosheva, ‘Sobitiya muzikal’noy zhizni. Gastroli Belorusskogo Bolshogo teatra oper’ i baleta.’ [Events in the Musical Life. Tour of the Belorussian Bolshoi Theatre of Opera and Ballet] *Pravda*, 7 February 1964, No. 38.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Grosheva attempts to select the most memorable parts of the opera, but admits the presence of ‘too many beauties in this music to list them all’.¹⁴⁶ She does draw attention to *ariosos* of Cassandra and Clytemnestra, a quartet of Orestes, Electra, Aegysthus, and Clytemnestra, and the duet of Orestes and Electra. The opera, true to its stage history, was also given with cuts, some of them rather large, but the performance was on a high level. Curiously, the reviewer remarked that Orestes’ role ‘does not present any specifically difficult acting problems’,¹⁴⁷ an odd statement in view of the fact that the part of Orestes has long been agreed by Russian music scholars to be one of the most difficult in the operatic repertoire. It is true of both its technical and acting demands.

An article about Taneyev’s *Oresteia* was published to coincide with the Belorussian Theatre’s tour in Moscow. Written by L. Polyakova, it set the tone by presenting Taneyev as one of the greatest Russian composers.¹⁴⁸ Polyakova wrote that the subject of the opera ‘put a “taboo” on the use of bold national images (characters)’ and made the composer turn to a “generally-tragic” and “generally-monumental” style, which is close to “generally operatic.”¹⁴⁹ She did not think that Venkstern succeeded with the adaptation of the text, reflecting the opinions of many earlier critics who commented on it after the première.

Polyakova thought that the best pages of the opera belonged to the choral scenes and symphonic episodes, and singled out the characters of Cassandra, Clytemnestra, and Orestes. But the opera suffered, in her opinion, from too many ‘unjustified longeurs’ and influences ranging from Tchaikovsky to Wagner and

¹⁴⁶ Gosheva, *Pravda*, No. 38.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ L. Polyakova, ‘Monumental’nyi spektakl’. *Oresteia* Taneyeva na stsene Belorusskogo teatra.’ [Monumental Performance. Taneyev’s *Oresteia* on the stage of the Belorussian Theatre] *Sovetskaya kul’tura*, 6 February 1964, No. 16.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

French Grand opera.¹⁵⁰ Polyakova made an interesting comment about some stage sets functioning as ‘visual leitmotifs’ that created ‘darkness of troubled night, or premonition of bloody drama, or Apollo’s brightly lit temple in Delphi.’¹⁵¹ As for the director D. Smolich, he was praised for his work in other theatrical productions, but in *Oresteia* he, in the author’s opinion, created too much mannerism—gesticulation was over emphasised, creating ‘Egyptian frescoes instead of specific plasticity of Greek art.’¹⁵²

Contradicting *Pravda*’s reviewer with more insight, Polyakova wrote that ‘The most difficult part of Orestes placed huge demand on the vocal and acting abilities of the actor’, which the tenor Babi did not possess.¹⁵³ She wrote: ‘The psychologically complex character of the Aeschylean protagonist was absolutely not felt by the artist’, the Furies did not seem to torment him at all, but just hovered above him ‘like black owls’, being the reason why the last scene of the opera did not feel like a ‘resolution of psychological conflict.’¹⁵⁴ Despite the shortcomings of the production, it was still monumental, and it ‘once again showed the untiring searches and serious, deep work of the talented artists group.’¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Polyakova, *Sovetskaya kul'tura*, 6 February 1964, No. 16.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion

The critical reception of Taneyev's *Oresteia* was not at all that different from reception histories of almost all new operas. At first, the critics showed two very characteristic stances: they divided into two camps—the supporters and those who rejected the opera—and many critics (at times in the same reviews) contradicted not only the statements and opinions of other critics, but also their own. Those who rejected the opera did so because it had many elements that were new to the operatic scene in nineteenth-century Russia, such as an antique subject, a love element that was relegated to one of the least significant places, no customary dances, no local colour, and in many places unusual vocal writing. These reasons for the opera's lack of critical acclaim in 1895 became the reasons for its success in 1917-18 and 1963-64, and Taneyev was revered for not bowing to the usual demands of the opera-going public and retaining his artistic integrity. But the greatest reason for its success in 1917-18 was the fact that it addressed the issues of higher moral laws and ethical values, and promoted the equality of brotherly love in its apotheosis—values very important for the brand new Soviet regime.

Despite the critical recognition of the aesthetic and musical values of Taneyev's opera, it failed to stay even on the periphery on the operatic repertoire. The reason for this cannot be the grandiose scale of the work, which required a large orchestra and chorus—Russian and European operas of this magnitude were and are frequently performed in Russia.

Perhaps the answer is twofold: the setting of *Oresteia* is chronologically too far removed from modern times, and its plot fails to move contemporary listeners, who are not able to relate to its characters. Although the questions of unity, guilt, repentance, and forgiveness present in the ancient sources are indeed timeless, the

causes of Orestes' or Clytemnestra's guilt are not a frequent occurrence in a modern Western society. In this sense, Lev Tolstoy was right when he remarked that it would be difficult to understand the feelings of a man who sacrifices his own daughter. Berlioz's *Les Troyens* or Strauss's *Electra* similarly did not achieve popularity in Russia, and even the prominence of Rimsky-Korsakov did not safeguard his opera *Servilia* (1902), set in ancient Rome, from sharing the fate of Taneyev's *Oresteia*. Only seven performances were given in its first season, six in the next (1904), and it disappeared from the stage thereafter; curiously, as in the case with *Oresteia*, Nápravník was also only too happy not to conduct it.¹⁵⁶

Another reason behind *Oresteia*'s lack of operatic success could very well be the fact even the public in Taneyev's time preferred the operas by Russian composers who used national subjects. Even today, operas by Russian composers are considered through the prism of their nationalist values. The majority of successful operas by Taneyev's contemporaries were based on Russian-inspired subjects. Rimsky-Korsakov's marginalized *Servilia* keeps company to his *Mozart and Salieri*, both written on non-Russian subjects, and his Mighty Handful colleague César Cui, despite writing fourteen operas, had achieved lasting success only with one—*Pir vo vremya chumy* [Feast in Times of Plague, 1890]. Needless to say, the storyline is Russian, set to the text of one of Pushkin's 'little tragedies.'

Oresteia's non-national subject was perceived as archaic or anachronistic at the time of its première, but it was in fact written twenty years too early, as the success of the 1917-18 production had shown. In pre-and post-Revolutionary Russia *Oresteia* became suddenly highly topical by virtue of its very same chronological

¹⁵⁶ *My Musical Life*, p. 339.

and emotional distance, which was a useful tool for making a statement without pointing to any particular historical person or event.

Today, Taneyev is still renowned for his achievements in counterpoint and masterfully crafted large-scale instrumental works. It seems that Glebov's statement 'Taneyev is not an operatic composer' still powerfully discourages music scholars from examining his opera properly and keeps it away from the stage. But *Oresteia* does deserve a place in theatre, and modern production would be the best way to continue research in the areas of its music and drama in practice, rather than theory.

An important point that must be stressed here is that Taneyev's *Oresteia* began to move away from traditional operatic form and representation and thus stands closer to such works as Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1927), among many others. These operas do not concentrate on the stage action and traditional set numbers. Instead, they explore an idea, a mood, a situation, just like *Oresteia* explores abstract, universal themes from a viewpoint not seen in Russian opera in Taneyev's time.

In 1895, only Laroche recognised that slow stage action was not a negative aspect in opera in general and in *Oresteia* in particular, but his was still a lone voice among those who craved stage action and eventful story. Gradually, Laroche's point of view became accepted more often, and this acceptance culminated in Bernardt's admission in 1983 that the 'static character' of *Oresteia* was 'an organic element of Taneyev's creative thought processes.'¹⁵⁷ A greater knowledge and stage presence of Wagner's operas was one of the contributing factors to acceptance of operas not

¹⁵⁷ Bernardt, Grigory. *S. I. Taneyev: monografiya* [Taneyev: Monograph] (Moscow: Muzika, 1983), p. 110.

packed full of entertaining stage events and/or set numbers such as dances, ballets, and virtuoso arias tailored to specific soloists.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Bartlett presents a table showing a steady rise in performances of Wagner's music dramas in St. Petersburg and Moscow between 1890 and 1914 in *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 304-306.

Conclusion

This dissertation has presented the detailed history of Taneyev's *Oresteia* from its initial ideas to the opera's critical reception. Chapter One has demonstrated that very little research about Taneyev's opera has been done outside of Russia, and even in Russia no extensive study covering all aspects of *Oresteia*'s history exists. This study has reviewed and re-evaluated Taneyev's biographical data and has examined a vast body of formerly unused documents, which could prove invaluable for his future biographers.¹

As was seen in Chapter Two, Taneyev conceived *Oresteia* at the very beginning of his career (as early as 1878) and began writing it seriously in 1887, while holding the post of Director of the Moscow Conservatory, which he left in order to devote his time to the composition of his opera. The impetus for Taneyev's resignation was Richard Wagner's *Ring*, the Russian première of which he attended in 1889. Despite the obvious influence of Wagner's music dramas on *Oresteia* only a few scholars in Russia and abroad have paid any attention to it. Indeed, Taneyev's early equivocal comment about Wagner's music was treated as his 'final judgement' without any questioning.² This is why no-one who took the trouble to write about *Oresteia* addressed this question in the detail it deserves.

Like Wagner, Taneyev turned to a subject set in a distant, mythical past. Both composers were influenced by Classic literature from an early age, and both greatly admired Aeschylus' arguably most famous tragedy. Taneyev's choice of the text for

¹ A series of monographs appeared during the Soviet era, which are now outdated, and a comprehensive and revised biography of Taneyev has long been overdue, both in Russia and in the West. Taneyev's archive in Klin, GDMTch, holds the majority of his private documents, letters, notebooks, photographs, and various materials connected with the composer's life.

² As was seen in Chapter Two, Rosamund Bartlett was the first scholar in the West to question Taneyev's alleged lack of interest in Wagner's music.

his opera was covered in detail in Chapter Two, which demonstrated that it was influenced by the composer's fascination with ancient history and literature that began in his childhood.³ Taneyev chose Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* because it offered him an opportunity to explore universal themes such as justice, repentance, and forgiveness, in music. But the non-Russian subject of *Oresteia* immediately made it stand apart from the majority of the operatic works produced by Taneyev's more nationalistically inclined contemporaries.

In recent years the study of nationalism has become a very important and hotly debated topic. Much has been written about the contribution of artists and intellectuals to the emergence of nationalism and to the cult of national heroes in nineteenth-century Europe, as well as about the various mechanisms the state could employ to instil patriotism in the population.⁴ Wagner most certainly hoped to use his music to encourage German patriotism, as did Verdi in Italy, and the composers of the Mighty Handful in Russia. Scholars have shown a tendency to study Russian nineteenth-century operas largely from the viewpoint of their nationalistic elements, and the works that did not fit into such a context, as was the case with *Oresteia*, were simply left out of discourse.⁵ In the early stages of his

³ This interest in classic cultures also resulted in Taneyev's life-long exploration of early music, and culminated in his monumental theoretical treatise *Podvizhnoy kontrapunkt strogogo pis'ma* [Invertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style] (Leipzig and Moscow: M. Belyaev, 1909; English translation 1962), and an unfinished *Ucheniye o kanone* [Study About Canon], ed. by Viktor Belyaev (Moscow: n/p, 1929), published posthumously.

⁴ See for instance: George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵ The operas of Anton Rubinstein and César Cui are good examples of such neglect. Out of Rubinstein's seventeen operas only his *The Demon* (1875) is most familiar. Although many of his operas were based on Russian subjects, the composer's Jewish and German background, caused critics and colleagues to view him as a foreigner, despite his dedication to and professional establishment in Russia. As for Cui, only two out of his fourteen operas were based on Russian subjects, and this is one of the reasons why the composer has been viewed as the least successful of the Mighty Handful (Kuchka). Marina Frolova-Walker deemed him to be 'not very representative of the Kuchka as a composer' in her *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 42. Richard Taruskin referred to Cui as 'a famous paradox' in his *Opera and Drama in Russia: As Preached and Practiced in the 1860s* (UMI Research Press, 1981),

career Taneyev displayed some interest in the discussions surrounding issues of nationalism in Russian music, but it was short-lived and survived only in a small number of Taneyev's early works. By the time Taneyev embarked on the composition of his opera he was firmly grounded in Western musical traditions, and achieved a considerable mastery in the area of counterpoint. Only in a small number of episodes does *Oresteia* betray Russian influences, while generally the work is much more influenced by Western European operatic traditions.

Chapter Two has also brought to light a completely unexplored epistolary source—letters to Taneyev from his librettist Aleksey Venkstern. These letters have contributed to the exploration of the compositional process of *Oresteia*, and have shown Taneyev's close involvement with the creation of the libretto. They have also indicated that some of the reasons why the composition of *Oresteia* moved along so slowly were Venkstern's frequent illnesses or long periods of absence from Moscow. Tchaikovsky, who was the first person to learn about Taneyev's composition of *Oresteia* in 1882, provided support and advice to his former student, and was instrumental in moving *Oresteia* to completion in 1894. His belief in the opera's merits and Taneyev's talent was so great that he recommended the work to the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres in St Petersburg, where the opera was premièred in 1895.

Chapter Three has presented a detailed comparison of the libretto of *Oresteia* and Aeschylus' original text. Taneyev and Venkstern made a number of alterations to the original text to make it easier for nineteenth-century Russian audiences to engage with the mythical characters of *Oresteia*. Aeschylus' *choros* narrated the story in *The Oresteia*, while Taneyev's characters had to relate the events of the past to the

p. 341. Such accounts do not encourage scholars to look deeper into the works of Cui, or other composers who are not viewed as 'nationalistic', thus preventing further research into the history of Russian opera.

audience in order to ensure they followed the storyline. This is why Taneyev's and Venkstern's Aegisthus appears at the beginning of the tragedy, unlike his counterpart, in the original text, who enters after Agamemnon's murder. The discussion has also shown that some of the changes in Taneyev's *Oresteia* were necessary for the adaptation of the text to the operatic medium. Thus, lengthy scenes had to be cut or shortened (such as the *choros* narrating the story of Iphigenia's sacrifice in *Agamemnon*, or the confrontation between Apollo and the Furies in *Eumenides*),⁶ and all auxiliary characters removed (Orestes' nanny, Pylades, the Priestess at the Temple of Apollo).

But the most important changes seen in *Oresteia* resulted from the conventions seen in operatic libretti in the nineteenth century. These were Clytemnestra's bedroom scene (Act 2, scene 11), where she appears to the audience tormented by her guilt, and Orestes' scene with the Furies, whose relentless pursuit almost drives him to madness and suicide (Act 3, scene 23). The moral torments of Clytemnestra and Orestes brought in a necessary psychological element into Taneyev's *Oresteia*, whose characters suffered the consequences of the murders they had committed. The discussion in Chapter Three was supported by musical examples that demonstrated how Taneyev enhanced and strengthened the impetus of the drama.

Like his *Oresteia*, many of Taneyev's compositions, even his large-scale works, are built on a very small number of themes. This technique is most prominent in Taneyev's mature style—thematic derivation—gestated in his early works, and developed further during the composition of *Oresteia* which, as it was seen in

⁶ *The Oresteia*, tr. by Michael Ewans (London: Everyman, 1995), pp. 8-9; 203-257, and pp. 99-101; 179-234 respectively.

Chapter Two, went along with Taneyev's study of Wagner's music.⁷ The themes with which Taneyev built much of the musical material in his opera are a core group of motifs, such as those examined in Chapter Four. Taneyev's treatment of the leitmotif technique shows that his understanding of Wagner's use of the same technique is far more profound than has been thought. It is hoped that this work has gone some way in addressing this issue and shedding new light on the reception of Wagner in Russia.

Chapter Five has shown the process which took *Oresteia* to its first stage production in 1895. It was seen that Taneyev was closely involved with the production, making decisions about cuts, choice of singers, and attending rehearsals. This chapter has drawn extensively on primary sources such as Taneyev's correspondence with the Directorate of the Imperial theatres and unpublished lists of proposed casts, and secondary sources such as *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov* and Kondratiev diaries.⁸

Chapter Five has brought the attention to the many difficulties composers in Taneyev's Russia had to face in order to get their operas staged. However, Taneyev's hardships were mostly of a technical rather than ideological nature—and he did not have to go through any censorship issues due to the opera's "safe" subject, which had not portrayed Russian tsars, a personification of the Christian god, or any current or past political issues of the country. In that respect, *Oresteia* had a much easier

⁷ Among early examples of this are Taneyev's *Adagio* (1875), and *Overture in D minor* (1875). Most of his chamber ensembles also show this technique, some of the better examples of which are *String Quartets No. 1* (1901, revised 1903), *No. 4* (1899) and *No. 6* (1905). Taneyev's *Fourth Symphony in C minor Op. 12* (1896-98) is a monumental work which is constructed entirely on the principle of monothematicism and thematic derivation.

⁸ *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov* [Yearbook of the Imperial Theatres] Season 1895-1896, (Published by the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres, St. Petersburg, 1897); Season 1896-1897, (Published by the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres, St. Petersburg, 1898); the entries in Kondratiev's diaries relating to the performances of *Oresteia* in 1895 were published in *S. I. Taneyev: material'i i dokumenty* [Materials and Documents], ed. by Vasily Kiselyov, Tamara Livanova, and Vladimir Protopopov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952), pp. 261-266.

journey to the stage than *Boris Godunov* or *Noch' pered Rozhdestvom*, for example.⁹ But the serious pressure about cuts in the opera from the chief conductor of the Imperial Theatres Eduard Nápravník proved to be detrimental to *Oresteia*'s survival on the stage. Chapter Five thus sheds light on the inner politics of the Russian Imperial theatres and the lack of respect with which their staff treated Russian composers and their works.

The critics received *Oresteia* ambiguously. Many took issue with its origins in ancient Greek tragedy, failing to understand why Taneyev would prefer it to a more nationalistically inspired source. The critical community in 1895 had not found in *Oresteia* traditional treatment of what was seen as necessary operatic features. These included obligatory local colour, dances, a love story within the libretto, and customary arias and solo numbers where the singers could showcase their technical prowess. The story of *Oresteia* was deemed to be of little interest, and the music was believed to lack inspiration and melodic invention. The revival of the opera in 1915, the year of Taneyev's death, failed to achieve adequate quality of the performance and production, causing the work to remain in obscurity.

Chapter Six demonstrated that over the course of twenty years *Oresteia* gradually recovered much of the critical acclaim it lost in 1915, greatly aided by its most successful production of 1917-18, which signified a definite shift in the critical perception of the opera. The most important reason behind *Oresteia*'s success in 1917-18 was the very same reason that was blamed for its failure in 1895: the antique

⁹ Rimsky-Korsakov's *Noch' pered rozhdestvom* was altered for the première because 'the Great Prince Vladimir was offended that a queen (Ekaterina II) appeared on the stage, and her characters was replaced by that of Svetleyshiy [Imperial Presence]. As a sign of protest, the composer refused to attend the première.' (Abram Gozenpud, *Opernyy slovar'* [Opera Dictionary] (St. Petersburg: Kompozitor, 2005), p. 368). Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* was rejected by the Imperial censors a number of times, and between its première in 1874 and its performance in Rimsky-Korsakov's version in 1898 it was consistently excluded from the repertoires of the Moscow and St. Petersburg theatres. *Boris* was particularly disliked by the Imperial family for obvious reasons—the depiction of the Tsar-murderer who loses his mind after torments of guilt was highly unwelcome.

subject. For ideological and political reasons, elevated Classical treatment of universal themes resonated with Russian revolutionary masses, who sought personal freedom and the establishment of a new world order. The performances of *Oresteia* in the 1917-18 season began in the midst of the events leading to the October Revolution, and after it had taken place, Taneyev's music and Aeschylean characters solemnly greeted the emergence of a new Communist state.¹⁰ This was the success Taneyev had desired for his opera, but it was never repeated in theatres in the same way again.

After the season of 1917-18 the opera appeared only in shortened concert performance versions, and no opera theatre in the former Soviet Union, apart from the Belorussian State Theatre of Opera and Ballet, has ever attempted to stage it. Although by the time of the last appearances of *Oresteia* in theatre in 1963-64 both critics and scholars reached a wider agreement about the opera's merits and historic significance, it is safe to say that Taneyev's opera remained and still remains a work little understood.

Oresteia did not become as successful as Taneyev had wished, but it had remained his favourite work. Abram Gozenpud, one of the leading opera scholars in Russia and the former Soviet Union, considered the music of *Oresteia* 'permeated by the spirit of elevated humanism, nobility, and ethical beauty.'¹¹ Despite the short stage life of *Oresteia*, Taneyev earned a reputation of a composer firmly associated with Greek antiquity on the stage, and influenced a number of his students who chose to write incidental music to Greek tragedies.¹² Taneyev's non-operatic status must be

¹⁰ A great number of sources about the October Revolution and issues surrounding it are available. In the first instance, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution 1900-1927* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

¹¹ Gozenpud, *Operniy slovar'*, p. 383.

¹² Clearly influenced by Taneyev's work on *Oresteia*, his student Arseny Koreshchenko wrote incidental music to Euripides' *The Trojans* (1892) and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1894). A comparison of

re-considered by examining the surviving materials for *Hero and Leander*, and comparing the two versions of *Oresteia*. This would be the first step to re-evaluating Taneyev not only as a composer of symphonic and chamber music, but also as a devoted composer of operas. The music of *Oresteia* still surprises with freshness and originality, and confirms Laroche's statement about very few musical 'reminiscences' present there.¹³ *Oresteia* awaits a careful and insightful production, dedicated singers and musicians who would bring to life the images of Greek antiquity so admired and expressively depicted by Taneyev.

these works with *Oresteia* is an interesting project that still remains to be conducted. In 1902, the Moscow actor Anatoly Lensky wanted to commission Taneyev to write music for a drama *Oedipus in Colonna*, to be performed at the Mariinsky Theatre in the same year. See Vladimir Telyakovsky, *Dnevnik direktora imperatorskikh teatrov: 1901-1903* [Diaries of the Director of the Imperial Theatres: 1901-1903], ed. by M. Svetaeva (St. Petersburg: Artists. Rezhissyor. Teatr, 2002), entry dated 30 October 1902, p. 337. Had this project taken off, and had Taneyev actually completed his next project *Hero and Leander*, it would mean he would have worked with Greek tragedy more than with any other source. Sergey Diaghilev (1872-1929) used the excerpts from *Oresteia* in a production of *Cléopâtre* premiered at the Mariinsky on 8 March 1908 as *Une Nuit d'Egypte*, and in Paris on 2 June 1909 at Théâtre du Châtelet as part of his seasons *Ballets Russes* (*Diaghilev: Creator of the Ballets Russes. Art, Music, Dance*, ed. by Ann Kodicek (London: Barbican Art Gallery and Lund Humphries Publishers, 1996), p.160). Trubotchkin also writes about 'the 1961 spectacle-concert *Medea* with Taneyev's music for the *Oresteia*', in Trubotchkin, Dmitry. 'Agamemnon in Russia' in *Agamemnon in Performance 458BC to AD 2004*, ed. by Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall and Taplin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 256. Taneyev continued to promote the use of classical texts for stage works, recommending *Oedipus* to Koreshchenko in 1902, and Aeschylus' *Prometheus* to his student Vladimir Metsl' in 1904 (*S. Taneyev: dnevnik* [Diaries], ed. by Lyudmila Korabel'nikova (Moscow: Muzika, 1985), 3 volumes, vol. 2, entry dated 9 November 1902, p. 356, and vol. 3, entry dated 20 April 1904, p. 131. Taneyev's opera also inspired the incidental music for the production of *The Oresteia* in 1926-27 at the Moscow Academic Art Theatre II, the composer of which was one of Taneyev's pupils, Valentin Smishlyaev.

¹³ German Larosh, 'Oresteia Taneyeva', *Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta*, 20 October 1895, No. 288; also cited in *German Larosh: Izbrannyye stat'i. Vypusk 3: opera i opernyy teatr* [Selected Articles. Volume 3: Opera and Opera Theatre], ed. by Abram Gozenpud (Leningrad: Muzika, 1976), p. 345.

Appendix A

Oresteia: Libretto

Agamemnon

Characters

Agamemnon, the king of Argos

Clytemnestra, his wife

Aegysthus, his cousin

Cassandra, the Trojan princess, his concubine

The Watchman

People, Clytemnestra's slaves, warriors, prisoners, bodyguards

Scene 1

An open place before the palace of Atreus. A sea and a row of mountains receding into the distance. Starlit night. A Watchman is on the roof of the palace.

The Watchman.

Oh, Gods! When will you end my continuous watch?

The siege of Troy is in its tenth year.

The son of Atreus, glorious leader of Achaians,

The King of Kings, the mighty Agamemnon,

Decided to storm the city of Priam

And avenge Elena's kidnapping.

We are eagerly awaiting the return of our army.

But the most eager of all is the queen Clytemnestra, awaiting her husband.

She ordered to place observation posts

On tops of all mountains, lying between Troy and our land.

The fires lit on their summits

Will announce the victory of our army.

But there are no desired fires.

On tops of the mountains flicker fires.

But what do I see?

The fires grow stronger. The Watchman looks more intently.

No, it is not possible!

No, it is my imagination playing tricks!

I see the fires in the darkness of the night;

They burn brighter and clearer.

Happy sign!

The fires burn brightly.

I greet you, bright fire in the night!
 You bring the news about victory.
 I will go to the queen and tell her,
 That our King is on his way to the motherland.

The Watchman leaves.

Scene 2

Chorus (*from behind the scene*)

Glory! Glory!
 Glory to Zeus Kronion. Glory!

From the palace in a celebratory procession emerge Clytemnestra's slaves with torches, carrying the bodies of sacrificial animals, incense, and flowers. They approach the outside walls of the palace, and lay the sacrifices before an altar. Clytemnestra joins them. During this chorus the stage fills with people.

Chorus

Glory to Zeus Kronion!
 The judgement of the gods took place:
 The just wrath of the immortal
 Reached the sinful city.
 Powerful God! Mighty God!
 Zeus, the protector of the wedlock!
 Incorruptible and stern
 Judge of the sinful,
 Accept our gifts of gratitude
 That we bring to your altar.

Scene 3

The people who gathered during the chorus approach Clytemnestra.

Chorus

Tell us, Queen,
 Why do the fires burn,
 And incenses and sacrificial smoke reach the sky?

Clytemnestra

I received happy news.
 The long-awaited hour has come.
 Troy is vanquished!

Chorus

Troy is vanquished! But who gave you
This news?

Clytemnestra

The fire brings me the news about victory!
Look, there on top of the mountain
Burns the sign of victory.
That fire bring the welcome news
About fallen Troy.
Troy has fallen, and on Ida's peak
The mighty fire was lit,
And on top of all nearby mountains
The fires lit up immediately.
From Ida, bringing the news,
The fire started on Athos,
Kithairon heights
Were then lit up with fires,
And from summit to summit
Of one mountain to another
The quick fire hurried
To bring the news of victory to us.

Chorus

Glory to great Zeus,
Glory to the immortal gods.
We will place rich sacrifices
On the altar of the god of Gods.

The fires gradually stop. The people leave. It is getting lighter.

Scene 4

Aegisthus (*coming out of the palace*)

Is it possible?
Agamemnon is back.
Having escaped all dangers of war,
Powerful and glorious,
He is already close!
What awaits me?
He will soon discover his shame.
His wrath will be terrible!
I tremble before the one I should kill!
Kill?
Can I fight him?

The mighty king of kings
 Will crush me, hapless, with his hand.
 But the bloody duty of revenge is not accomplished,
 The evil deed of his father has not been avenged.
 It is time! I will summon all my courage.
 One of us must die! Now or never!
 Oh, the terrible banquet of Thyestes!
 The thought of you will strengthen
 My thirst for revenge!

Aegisthus' Monologue

A bloody contest for rule over Argos
 Started between brothers: my father Thyestes,
 And Atreus, sinful father of Agamemnon.
 Atreus usurped the power from his brother
 And banished him from his home,
 And for a long time my father
 Lived in exile far away from his homeland.
 Finally, Thyestes lost all strength in this struggle.
 My poor father returned to his dear home
 With great humility,
 To make peace with his brother.
 Atreus pretended to make peace,
 And conceived a terrible revenge.
 He invited his brother Thyestes to a banquet
 As a sign of reconciliation.
 And then... He killed Thyestes' little children,
 Butchered them into pieces,
 And served them on a platter during the feast.
 Thyestes tasted the meat...
 A terrible moan issued from his chest:
 He understood everything!
 Crying, he threw himself on the ground in desperation,
 Calling to gods for revenge.
 Since then, his curse remains over
 The generations of the murderer Atreus.
 The moment has come,
 The Fate's judgement will meet the villain's son.
 Will I be brave enough to lift my hand
 At the angry King?
 I am terrified to think about it!
 There is only one way: to flee!
 But can I confront him? Will I be brave enough to lift my trembling hand at the angry
 king? A terror gripped my heart [Taneyev crossed out 'I am scared to think about it'].
 It is madness to enter into such unequal fight. There is only one way: to flee!

He goes to the exit and meets with Clytemnestra who enters.

Clytemnestra

Oh, my Aegysthus!
 Oh, my Aegysthus, my love!
 The dawn of our bliss is rising!
 But what is with you?
 I read on your face
 Worry and uncertainty.

Aegysthus

I tremble, death awaits me!
 The King is on his way.
 He will find out everything,
 Will demand explanation,
 And his wrath will be horrifying!
 The terror [has] gripped my heart.
 [I must] flee! Flee!

Clytemnestra

Do not fear, Agamemnon is not dangerous:
 The wrath of the dead cannot harm the living.

Aegysthus

What are you saying?
 Your words are a riddle.

Clytemnestra

Listen, for a long time I have been
 Carrying in my soul a bloody plan.
 Now it is ripe and must be executed.
 My hand will not tremble.

Aegysthus

What, you, yourself?

Clytemnestra

I am a woman,
 But I am brave,
 And hatred for the King will strengthen my hand.

Aegysthus

Gods desire the villain's death, he deserves punishment.

Clytemnestra

The blood of my daughter, sacrificed by him to the goddess Artemis, demands revenge.

Aegysthus

He must die.

Aegisthus and Clytemnestra

Let the judgement of the gods take place!

Clytemnestra

The moment of bloody revenge is here
And the villain will die without glory.
The judgement of Fate, just and severe, will take place,
And the sins will be washed clean with his blood.

Aegisthus and Clytemnestra

The moment of bloody revenge is here
And the villain will die without glory.
The judgement of Fate, just and severe, will take place,
And the sins will be washed clean with his blood.

Aegysthus

Under false kindness and happiness of reunion
You will hide your hatred and thirst for revenge.

Clytemnestra

He will be fooled by my false speeches,
And I will artfully hide my plan.

Aegysthus

When he fearlessly steps into the palace,
Strike him in his chest without pity.

Clytemnestra

When he fearlessly steps into the palace,
I will suddenly strike him into his chest.

Aegisthus and Clytemnestra

The moment of bloody revenge is here
And the villain will die without glory.

Scene 5

The same scene. A bright sunny day. The palace is adorned with flowers. The stage is filled with people who are dressed in their celebratory clothes. The approaching army is seen. Curtain.

Chorus (*walking and throwing flowers along the way*)

Happy, long-awaited moment!
 The heart flutters with happiness.
 The son of Atreus is coming back glorious
 From the battle!
 With him brothers and husbands
 Are returning home;
 In their homeland
 Passionate embraces await them.
 Darkness of separation
 With be replaced by the dawn of happiness.
 Sing, the sounds of hymns,
 Glory to the great King!

Agamemnon arrives on a chariot, surrounded by his bodyguards, army, and prisoners; Cassandra is also in the chariot. Towards the end of the march the procession stops before the doors of the palace.

Chorus

Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
 Leader of people, King of Kings!
 There is no leader braver than him,
 Or wiser than him.

Crushed by a powerful hand,
 The treacherous Pergamus fell,
 Tired from bloody war.
 The King came back to us.

Glory—the prize of the valiant—
 Was the gods' gift to him.
 He is the beauty of Ellas
 Our pride, punisher of enemies!

He is equal to immortal gods,
 He is like them in everything:
 Like them, he is powerful and glorious,
 Like them, he is invincible!

Scene 6

Agamemnon (*from the chariot*)

I greet you, my homeland! I greet you, my home! I have returned after ten years, crowned with glory, to my dear home. Ilion has fallen. Gods wished to deliver their judgement with my hand.

Glory to the immortal, glory!
 In the bloody battle,
 At the stormy sea,
 They protected us,
 Glory to gods!
 Priam's city
 Is in ruins,
 And fire is
 Destroying it.
 The revenge was
 The will of Fate.
 Trojans' blood
 Washes clean our shame.

(*With the chorus*)

Glory to the immortal, glory!
 In the bloody battle,
 At the stormy sea,
 They protected us,
 Glory to gods!

Scene 7

Clytemnestra hurriedly comes out from the palace, accompanied by her slaves, who carry crimson tapestries.

Clytemnestra

Oh, my husband! Is it true that I see you again? Oh, this sweet moment of reunion!

Agamemnon

I greet you, the daughter of Leda, my dear wife, and the protector of my home. Our separation was long; I am happy to see you again. But why I do not see Orestes? Tell me, why did he not come out to greet his father?

Clytemnestra

Our son is now far away.
 Strophios took him to Phokida
 Here, without you, my husband,
 I was afraid for our son.

I was afraid of the people's unrest,
 And I decided to part with him.
 I thought that far away
 He would be safe.

How I suffered!
 How I was afraid for you!
 How many nights I spent,
 Not being able to close my eyes with sorrow!
 My sufferings have ended,
 Happiness replaced sorrow.
 You came back to me
 In glory of great victory!

Get off the chariot! (*to the slaves*) And you, quickly lay the tapestries all the way to the palace! Let the conqueror of Troy walk into his palace on these crimson cloths!

The slaves rush to lay down the tapestries. Agamemnon stops them with his hand.

Agamemnon

I do not need these tapestries,
 Or the soft walk to the palace.
 This honour is for gods only.

Clytemnestra

Oh, do not resist my wishes!

Agamemnon

Do not even ask me about it, my decision is strong.

Clytemnestra

When Priam was granted victory, he did not reject honour.

Agamemnon

Let the one who is not afraid of the gods' wrath appropriate their honours.

Clytemnestra

I beg you!

Agamemnon

No, no!

Clytemnestra

Give me your consent.

Agamemnon

I will not obey your whim!

Clytemnestra

The one who conquered a mighty enemy should not be embarrassed to obey a woman's wish.

Agamemnon

Is you wish so strong that you want me to obey it so much?

Clytemnestra

Do not darken the happiness of our reunion with your refusal.

Agamemnon

I have no strength to resist you. Let Clytemnestra's wish be granted!

Clytemnestra makes a sign to the slaves who lay the tapestries on the steps to the palace. Agamemnon descends from the chariot.

Agamemnon

Someone, take off my sandals!

Slaves take off his sandals.

And you do me a favour. This is Cassandra, the daughter of the King Priam. Take her into your home and make her feel welcome. Those who treat the slaves well are treated well by the gods.

Clytemnestra

I will obey your wish.

Agamemnon

Obeying my wife, I enter the palace stepping on the tapestries.

Agamemnon enters the palace; the slaves take the tapestries away.

Clytemnestra (*stops near the entrance to the palace*)

Let this path, red as blood, be the last path you take.

The prisoners are led into the side part of the palace. Cassandra remains in the chariot on the stage.

Scene 8

Clytemnestra stops by the entrance to the palace and addresses Cassandra.

Clytemnestra

You come in too. I address you, Cassandra.

Cassandra does not answer.

Get down from the chariot! Do not be proud. A slave should not be proud.

Chorus

Do you not hear? The queen is calling you!

Cassandra does not answer.

Clytemnestra

You do not want to obey. You are annoyed that you came here as a slave, as a prisoner. Give me time. I will teach you obedience! (*leaves in anger*)

Cassandra becomes agitated.

Chorus

The poor thing is overcome by madness!

Cassandra (*in a prophetic ecstasy*)

Oh, woe is me!

Hapless land!

O, Apollo, where have you led me?

The house that gods hate,

The abode of evil deeds,

Soaked with human blood.

Chorus

She senses the evil deeds that were committed here!

Cassandra

I see the killed children.
Here are their bloody wounds.

Chorus

Prophetess! We know about your gift! But stop! We do not want your prophecies.

Cassandra

Oh, gods! New sorrows, new misfortune, terrible, imminent, and irreversible, threaten the house of Atreus. A terrible murder is brewing... A wife sharpens her knife with which to kill her husband... Look... Her weapon is ready... But what is this? The hell's web, the cover of death!

This house is the prey of the Furies;
They have been nesting here for a long time.
They drink the spilt blood
And sing hymns to the evil deeds.
Why did you bring me here, Agamemnon? To die here with you?

The Will of Fate cannot be changed—
There is no hope for me,
My eye will close with the sleep of death,
Far away from my homeland.
O, my great country,
Where I played as a child,
Where I prayed in your temples,
I will not see you again.
I will not be mourned with the tears
Of the people who are dear to me, and
I will descend into the darkness of a grave
Under these hostile skies.

Chorus

Who can look at this poor girl
Without pity?
Her suffering mind
Senses imminent sorrow.

Cassandra

Oh, woe is me!
This unhappy prophetic gift
Has awoken in my soul again,
And it follows me with its terrifying visions.

Near the palace appear the shadows of the murdered children.

There, on the threshold, do you not see the murdered children? Here they are, like phantoms. Blood is seeping from their wounds, they carry their own flesh. Oh, terror!

Chorus

When you speak about the murdered children, we understand your terrifying words, but the rest is incomprehensible.

Cassandra

Incomprehensible... Then I will lift the veil that conceals the future. Like the morning wind, or like a wave, which crashes on the shore, another misfortune rushes to meet the rays of sun. This misfortune is the King's death!

Chorus

Stop! Your words are terrifying.

Cassandra

There is no escape! The moment is near when the murderer's hand will strike the King. Oh, gods! I am burning! The fire is burning inside me; oh, woe! Woe! Oh, Apollo, I also have to perish from the hand of the two-footed lioness because the King brought me here with him. Why do I need this gift of divine prophecy? I do not need my sceptre! (*breaks the sceptre*) I do not need my flowers! (*throws away the flowers*) My blood will be spilled under the punishing knife. Agamemnon's blood will mix with mine. But gods will avenge our deaths!

From far lands a wanderer will come, he will exact payment for the spilled blood of his father, and free his family from misfortune. He will lift the curse from the family, and wash clean blood with blood. The house of Atreus will find in him its saviour. Now I will go to meet my death. I greet you, gates of hell!

Walks into the palace.

Agamemnon (*beyond the scene*)

Here! Help! I am dying!

Chorus

Who is crying out? Who calls for help? This is the voice of the King, he calls for help. Quickly, break the doors, we will defend the King! (*the people rush to the doors of the palace*)

Scene 9

The curtain covering the middle part of the palace opens. The bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra are visible. Clytemnestra with a sword in her hands. Chorus takes a step back in terror.

Clytemnestra

A bloody, long prepared plan was executed! He is dead, your King, my hated husband, and I killed him! Before you, the citizens of Argos, I announce it loudly! I am not hiding; I was hiding long enough, while waiting for the hour of terrible revenge. There, by the hearth of Atreus house, where my enemy solemnly walked, I wrapped him into a rich tapestry, like in a net. I lifted a heavy, lethal weapon and delivered a terrible blow, then another! And the enemy's blood rushed up like a fast stream, sprinkling me with heavenly dew. I am ecstatic, and you should be too: I have exacted revenge. Here is your King, and next to him is his lover; death did not part them!

Chorus

Our King,
Who will mourn you,
And who will bury you?
And with what praises should we grace you,
And with what tears should we mourn you?
You should not be lying on that bed,
Killed by a treacherous hand!

Clytemnestra

Blame me for this murder,
But I am not guilty!
Fate acted through me.
The evil demon of the house of Tantalus
Slew Atreus with my hand
As a punishment for the murdered children of Thyestes!

Scene 10

Aegisthus hurries out accompanied by his bodyguards.

Aegisthus

This was the pride of Ellas
Before whom fell Ilion.
My revenge was accomplished,
He was crushed into dust.

Chorus

This is the culprit of the murder!
 We have to punish him!
 All of you, take stones.
 Death to the villain! Death!

Aegysthus

Quiet! Otherwise I will calm you down
 With chains and jail.
 You must know—your King is before you,
 Obey your King!

Chorus

Coward! You want to steal the crown
 With your treacherous hand!
 We do not recognise
 Your stolen power.

Aegysthus

It is not fitting for me to listen to this arguing.
 I will teach you to be quiet.
 If my words are not enough for you,
 You will obey my sword.

(to his bodyguards)

Prepare your weapons!
 Bravely ahead!

The bodyguards

We are ready to fight for the King!

Chorus

Away, you hired murderers!

Clytemnestra quickly descends the stairs of the palace and with an authoritative hand gesture stops the bodyguards.

Clytemnestra

Stop! Put your swords back into the scabbards!

Aegysthus

Do I have to
 Bear their offences?
 No! the people's unrest
 Should be quashed with power.

Clytemnestra

Aegysthus! Aegysthus! Enough blood!

Master your soul's disquiet,
 My darling! The time will come
 When the agitated people
 Will calm down.

We have prepared the way for happiness.
 Under our rule
 The blood-stained Argos
 Will find respite from severe storms and tempests.

Clytemnestra takes Aegisthus into the palace. The doors of the palace close.

Chorus

The day of revenge will come.
 You both must be afraid.
 The god's punishment will strike terribly
 Your sinful heads!

O, Orestes, you are our saviour;
 We are waiting for you. Come!
 Avenge the evil deeds,
 And free the people.

The Libation Bearers

Characters

Clytemnestra

Agamemnon's ghost

Electra, daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon

Orestes, son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon

A Slave

Chorus of women

Scene 11

The room in the women's part of the palace. The walls are panelled with copper sheets. On the left is a bed. Night. Semi-darkness. Enters Clytemnestra. Her clothes are dishevelled, the face is pale. She is holding a lamp.

Clytemnestra

Oh, woe is me, hapless sinner!
 My soul's peace is gone forever.
 As soon as night clothes the world
 With its mysterious cover, before me arises
 The phantom of my husband, and this bloody ghost
 Tirelessly follows me.
 I am afraid to be in our bedroom,
 Where everything reminds me of him.
 I am tired! My eyes are closing.
 Oh, if I could fall asleep!
 Oh, hear my plea,
 Blissful god Morpheus.
 Give my soul peace
 And pour forgetfulness,
 At least for a short moment,
 Into my mournful soul.

Falls asleep.

Scene 12

The back wall comes apart. From the fog appears the figure of Agamemnon, wrapped into bloody clothes.

Agamemnon's ghost

Clytemnestra! Clytemnestra!
 Do you recognise me? From the darkness of the underworld
 I have come to you to tell you about your last hour.
 Above your sinful head
 An avenging sword is already lifted.

The one to whom you gave birth
 Will end your life.
 Be ready. Prepare the tomb
 And the burial dress!
 In the coming day you will pay
 With blood for blood and with death for death.

Agamemnon vanishes.

Clytemnestra (*cries out and jumps off the bed*)

Ah! Save me, save me! Quickly! Slaves, come to me! Here, to me!

Chorus

Queen! We heard your
 Terrible cries
 That sounded in the quietness of the night
 And scared us.
 What misfortune
 Prepares for us god's wrath?
 Tell us,
 Why your summons
 Sounded in the night?

Clytemnestra

I saw a terrible dream.
 At night, in this house
 Walks a terrifying phantom. The shadow of my husband
 Appeared before me in the night's darkness.

Electra

His look was terrifying,
 His pale face prophesises sorrow
 And in his angry eyes
 I read my sentence.

The dreams foretells misfortune
 My heart is full of terror.
 The wrath of the dead is pitiless,
 It will find the guilty.

Clytemnestra

How can I avert future misfortunes?
 How can I appease the angry shadow?

(to Electra)

My daughter, the anger of your father may soften before your pleas. As soon as the day reddens in the east, take all my slaves; fill the urns with sacrificial wine, and go to the grave of your father and there perform the libations, and plead with him to avert the wrath of the immortal from us.

Clytemnestra

Go to your father's grave
 And ask him to forgive me!
 Let him plead with the immortal gods
 To avert their just wrath from me.

Electra

I will go to my father's grave to ask
 Not forgiveness, but punishment.
 The council of impartial gods
 Will not want to forgive the murderer.

Chorus

We will go to the King's grave,
 Will present sacrifices to the gods
 And plead without holding back the gifts,
 To soften their harsh punishment.

Scene 14

Olive grove. To the right of the audience is a burial mound; to the left—the column of Hermes. In the distance the palace of Atreus is seen. Early morning. Dawn. Enters Orestes dressed as a wanderer, with a staff in his hand. He comes to the column of Hermes.

Orestes

Hermes! Great god, protector of travellers, glory to you! The long exile is over; I have returned from foreign lands to my homeland to perform the sacred duty of revenge. There is the palace of my forbearers. And here is the grave of my father (*comes to the burial mound*). Oh, father! I did not cry over your corpse, I did not pay my last respects to the great remains, and I did not sing the burial dirge. So accept now my late respects, as a sign of a deep sorrow of your son: on your grave, crying, I put a lock of my hair (*puts a lock of hair on the grave*).

Scene 15**Chorus** (*behind the stage*)

We bring the gifts from murderer to the murdered.
 The sinner wants to avert the gods' punishment
 With rich libations.

But these libations cannot wash the blood
 Off the sinful hands.

Orestes

What do these sounds mean?
 (*moves away*)

I see the procession of women,
 They are coming here.
 They carry gifts to my father's
 Burial mound.

Enters Electra and the women's chorus, carrying gifts and dressed in mourning clothes, with their hair down. The procession moves towards the column of Hermes.

Revenge preserves its victim,
 So that in fateful hour it could strike them

My sister Electra is with them,
 In tears!

With punishment from above.

Oh, Zeus, be my helper
In the business of revenge for my
father's death!

Scene 16

Electra

Hermes, herald of the gods,
Tell the gods of the underworld
About my sorrow.
In the land of the shadows,
In the dark underworld,
Let my father hear my mournful voice.

The procession moves to the burial mound.

I pour these libations
To honour the dead.

She pours the wine onto the grave from a goblet, passes it to the slave, and takes another vessel from another slave.

I plead and call my father:
Father, pity your children,
My brother Orestes and me.
Our father's legacy was taken away from him,
Help him to come back home
From exile.

Chorus

Shed your tears
For the dead ruler
And perform libations,
Pouring them onto the grave.

Scene 17

Electra (*noticing the lock of hair on the grave*)

What is this? The lock of hair! Who could bring this token of sorrow to my father's grave? Orestes!? Alas, my brother is far away! Oh gods, if he would come back soon!

Orestes (*coming out*)

The gods heard your plea.

Electra

Who are you? I do not understand your words, o wanderer.

Orestes

Sister!

Electra

Orestes, my brother! (*rushes into his arms*)
(*ecstatic*) The gods have heard my plea.

Chorus

The gods have heard your plea.

Electra

You dear face
The gods let me see again;
My dear brother,
You are our hope.

Orestes

Oh, my sister,
The long years of separation are over.
As soon as I saw you,
I no longer felt the weight of all misfortunes.

Orestes and Electra

Here we are together again,
The children left by their father.
Oh, my dear blood!
I have only you in the world!

Oh, Zeus, oh Zeus! Hear the pleas of the orphans,
Forgotten by Fate.
You are our only strength,
Will you not protect us?

Will you let, Zeus,
The family of Atreus to be extinguished?
Look at us, abandoned orphans,
From the heavens.

Chorus

Oh, Zeus, oh Zeus! Hear the pleas of the orphans,
Forgotten by Fate.

Electra (*interrupting the chorus*)

Stop! I am afraid that someone close to the murderers might hear what we are saying here, and announce Orestes' arrival.

Orestes (*decisively*)

I am not afraid of anyone!
(*mysteriously*) Apollo himself, the great god, promised to help me. He will not abandon me!

(*ecstatically*)

Crowned by the rays of sun
And in his divine brilliance,
He appeared before me
In all his glory.

In his golden robes
He was great and frightening!
And his radiant face
Shone with immortal beauty.

He threatened me with great suffering if I would not avenge father's death. He warned me about the persecution of the Furies and wrath of the immortal gods. I will obey his will, and here I am! My hand will not spare the murderers!

Electra

Oh, my dear brother! Let us shed tears above the unforgettable remains.

Electra and Orestes come to the grave and bow.

Electra and Orestes

Oh, father, hear the
Sorrowful moans,
The funeral dirge
Is for you.
From the underworld
Hear the cries of your children!
They address you
With pleading.
Avert from us
Terrible misfortunes
That are coming

From all directions!

Electra

Oh, my brother, how terrible was the bloody death of our father!

Orestes

The Gods will punish the murderer—for husband's blood—with son's hand.

Electra

With animal anger on her face
She delivered the blows!

Chorus

Our King, you were murdered,
and you died without being properly
mourned!

Orestes

Reminiscences about our father strengthened my resolve to avenge him!

Electra

She mocked the dead, the viper!
She cut off the corpse's hands.

Chorus

Our King, you were murdered,
and you died without being properly
mourned!

Orestes

My revenge will be terrible!
The suffering of the murderers will be terrible!

Electra

Oh, father, send us help from the dark underworld.

Orestes

Oh, father, hear the last pleas of your children.

Electra

Oh, father, hear the last pleas of your children.

Orestes

Help to strike the enemies in the moment of revenge!

Electra

Help to strike the enemies in the moment of revenge!
Oh, earth, bring our father from the underworld!

Orestes

Oh, earth, bring our father from the underworld!

Chorus

The hour of bloody revenge is here,
 The monsters will die soon.
 The just desserts will be delivered,
 The judgement of the immortals is right!

Scene 18

The stage is set as in the first Act, lit up by the setting sun.

Orestes (*dressed as a traveller, he knocks on the palace's doors*)

Hey! Slave! Answer my call! Hey! Slave! Quickly open the door! I call for the third time to someone to come out to me from the house.

Slave (*comes from the palace and goes to the gates*)

I hear you, hear you, and I will open the door.

Opens the door.

Where are you from? What do you want here?

Orestes

Tell your masters, that a wanderer is asking for respite here. I have an important message for them. Ask the one who rules this house come out to me. Hurry.

Slave

Wait here, and I will go and tell my masters what you said to me.

He goes into the palace. Orestes remains, in pensive mood. Clytemnestra, Aegysthus, and Electra come out of the palace.

Scene 19

Clytemnestra

I greet you, wanderer. Where are you from and what do you want?

Orestes

I have far to go. I come from Phokida. I got tired along the way, and am looking for rest. I have no strength to walk on; my body wants rest; I am asking you to offer me a bed for the night.

Clytemnestra, Aegysthus, and Electra

Enter our home. A guest is a gift of the immortal gods. You will be well received here.

Orestes

Blessed be your welcoming house.
I thank you for kind greeting.
But before I enter your house,
I have to give you bad news.

Clytemnestra and Aegysthus

What news? Oh, tell us quickly! We await bad news with worry.

Orestes

On my way I meet Strophios from Phokida.
When he heard that I am coming to Argos,
Asked me to tell the queen Clytemnestra
That her son Orestes suddenly died.

Clytemnestra (*with false sadness*)

Oh gods! Oh, woe is me!
Orestes, my beloved son, he died!

Orestes (*to the side*)

I do not believe this false sadness
She is happy to hear this news.

Electra (*to Orestes*)

Do not believe, Orestes, this false sadness
She is happy to hear this news.

Aegisthus (*with false sadness*)

Oh, woe, your son is dead!

QUARTET: all together**Orestes** (*to the side*)

She is happy to hear about
Her son's death,
The hour I waited for is here,
The hour of revenge arrived.

Clytemnestra (*to the side*)

This news has brought back
All my energy,
I will find my soul's peace
Again.

Electra (*to the side*)

She is happy to hear about
Her son's death,
The hour I waited for is here,
The hour of revenge arrived.

Aegysthus

This news has brought back
All my energy,
I will find my soul's peace
Again.

Clytemnestra (*to Orestes*)

Enter our home;
A guest is a gift of the immortal gods.
You will be well received here.

Electra

Enter our home.

Aegysthus

Enter our home;
A guest is a gift of the immortal gods.
You will be well received here.

Orestes

Blessed be welcoming house.
I thank you for your kind greetings.

All enter the palace; Orestes and Aegisthus enter through the centre, and Electra and Clytemnestra go to the wings.

Scene 20

Slave rushes out from the middle part of the palace.

Slave

Oh, woe! Aegisthus is murdered! Oh, woe! Quickly, here! Help, quickly!

Clytemnestra (*enters*)

What do these cries mean?
(*to the Slave*) Answer me!

Slave

Queen! Queen!

Clytemnestra

Speak!

Slave

The dead slay the living.

Clytemnestra (*stares at him fixedly*)

I understood the meaning of your dark words. That traveller is my son!

Stands still, struck by terror, then with energy:

But I will not succumb! I will defend myself, I will not go to meet my death obediently! (*to the Slave*) Give me the sword!

Slave runs away.

Scene 21

Clytemnestra stops, seeing Orestes, who comes out from the palace. They look at each other.

Orestes

I am looking for you! He is dead!

Clytemnestra

Aegisthus died, my darling! Aegisthus is dead!

Orestes

You love him? Then you will share the same grave with him!

Clytemnestra

Stop! My son! Stop! (*Orestes lowers his sword*)

Oh, spare me! I beg you, spare me!

How can you lift your hand against your mother?

Oh, my son!

I carried you under my heart.

Remember how often

You fell asleep at my breast,

While I was singing to you.

Have pity, I beg you, spare me!

Orestes

How can you lift your hand against your mother?
 Remember, how often
 You fell asleep at my breast.

What can I do? Will I spill her
 blood? No! (*not listening to
 her, stops as if he had seen a
 vision*) But the will of god?!

But what is with you? Your eyes are fixed! My son, come to your senses!

Orestes pushes Clytemnestra away from him sharply.

Orestes

I have decided! Follow me! You will die next to the one you loved, and whom you chose over the hero Agamemnon.

Clytemnestra

Take pity on me!

Orestes

No! No!

Clytemnestra

Be touched by your mother's plea.

Orestes

No! No! No! You will not plead forgiveness! Father will be avenged!

Clytemnestra

He did not die by my hand:
 My hand was guided by Fate.

Orestes

And now, by Fate's will,
 I will punish you severely!

Clytemnestra

In this case I curse you!
 Revenge of *Erinias* awaits you!
 Beware! Their revenge is terrible!

Orestes

No! I remain strong in my decision.

Go! Go! It is no use to plead
Go! Go! The Gods have decided your fate.

Enter Clytemnestra's slaves.

Clytemnestra

(exclaims) Ah!

Orestes drags Clytemnestra inside the palace.

Chorus

We will mourn the fate of the dead
And will pray to the immortals,
So that they might bring an end
To the misfortunes of the family of Atreus.

Scene 22

The middle wall of the palace opens. We see Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' bodies, Orestes is standing by them.

Orestes

I delivered the punishment. But I paid dearly for the victory: I spilled the blood of my mother.

Chorus

A person who kills his mother,
Will carry a heavy punishment:
He will not know happiness
And will find no peace.

Orestes

While I still have not lost my mind, I announce that I was right to kill my mother.

It was the wish of the god Apollo.
He directed me to revenge,
He lit the fire of justice in my soul
And put into my hand a bloody sword.

With a prayer I will go into the Delphi Temple.
In that temple eternal light is burning.
A radiant god reigns there,
He will save me from troubles,
And protect me from misfortunes.

Chorus

Go the Temple at Delphi,
And you will be saved.

The middle part of the palace is lit up with a red light. A crowd of the Furies is visible.

Orestes

There they are! The crowd of *Erinias*! In dark clothes, with snakes in their hair. Blood is dripping from their eyes, their number is growing.

Chorus

There is no one. You are losing your mind.

Orestes

You do not see them, but I do. They are chasing me. I will not remain here!

Runs away. The vision disappears.

Chorus

Oh, when will this accursed power
Descend into eternal sleep?

Eumenides

Characters

Orestes

Apollo

Athena Pallada

Areopagus

Coryphaeus

The Furies

People of Athens

Scene 23

An empty place on a coast. Night. Thunder and lightning. Storm on the sea.

Orestes

I have no more strength! I am spent!
 Where can I run? Here and there,
 Everywhere they find me,
 And like shadows, chase me.
 Their words and looks are terrifying,
 On their lips is a sinister reproach,
 Blood is dripping from burning eyes,
 And snakes twist in their hair.
 From land to land I run from them,
 But I cannot hide anywhere.
 I appeal to you, Apollo,
 Hear the moan of the tortured soul.

To the right on a cliff appear the Furies.

The Furies

There, there he is! We have found him!
 The bloody traces show us
 Where he made his path.
 We will not lose him from our sight.

Orestes

Again they are here! Go away!
 Vanish from my sight!

To the left a new crowd of the Furies appears.

The Furies

We will not let go of our prey,
We will drink all your blood until the last drop.

Orestes

Go away! Let hell swallow you!
Who are you? Why are you running after me?

The Furies

A dark night gave birth to us,
A sinister revenge nurtured us.
The one who is tainted by blood
Is our prey.

Orestes

A terror grips my heart!

The Furies

There is not pity for him,
There is no forgiveness.
He will not find escape from troubles
In the whole world.
The sinner will hear in terror
The cry of the Erinias,
Who drink people's blood.

Orestes

A terror grips my heart!

The Furies

But even death
Will not save the sinner from us.
In the underworld will be heard
The cry of the Erinias,
Who drink people's blood.

Orestes

My heart trembles, my blood freezes.
The deathly terror has gripped my soul.
If only I could find a moment of peace,
Hide from the eyes of these monsters,
Not hear their terrifying cries!

I will flee from them!

The Furies stop him.

The Furies

There is no place on earth where you could hide. As a pack of dogs chases a deer, we chase you, crying: you—a mother murderer!

Orestes

No! It is better to die than lead such a life!
 Open, oh sea, for me
 Your cold embrace!
 In your depths, maybe,
 I will find the end to my sufferings.
 Let the deathly embrace of the waves
 Hide me from the eyes of the *Erinias*,
 And let the roar of the waves drown out
 The monsters' threats!
 On this eternal cold bed
 I will close my tired eyes.
 You, my hateful life, goodbye!
 My life is over, this is my last hour!

Runs to the sea. The Furies stop him.

The Furies

Go back, go back!
 We require you to live.
 Live, suffer, and bear your punishment!

Orestes

Oh, woe is me! Death itself obeys the monsters that suck my blood!

The Furies surround Orestes.

Oh, how many of them!

The Furies

You committed a terrible sin:
 Your mother was killed by your hand.
 Murderer, you are damned!

Orestes

They advance on me from all sides!

I am losing my mind! I have no more strength!

Orestes, breaking away from the Furies, runs to the front of the stage.

(in ecstasy) to Delphi, to the temple of Apollo!

He runs away, the Furies pursuing him.

The Furies

After him!

They exit.

Scene 24

The temple of Apollo in Delphi. Altar. Sacrificial smoke covers the sacred place in the depth of the stage. Through the smoke shine the golden rays.

Scene 25

Orestes runs in, terrified.

Orestes

Oh, protect me, all-powerful Apollo! I cannot be safe anywhere! Night and day, on land and at sea, the horde of the Furies chase me! I am terrified!

Cries out and falls at the base of the altar.

The Furies (behind the scene)

We will find him.

We will drink his blood

Until he is dry.

Orestes

Oh, terror! I hear their voices, they are getting closer, closer...

The smoke vanishes, opening the sacred place of the temple. Apollo appears lit up by radiance, in a wreath made of golden rays.

Apollo

Go away, daughters of darkness! Do not dare to come into my temple! Your place is where blood is spilt, where murders and executions take place, where cries and curses are heard. Do not dare to disturb the sacred peace of my temple! I have listened to Orestes. I will take him under my protection. There will be a day of judgement and you and Orestes will be tried. But until then I forbid you to persecute him! Orestes! I

will not leave you. I will protect you to the end. Go to Athens, to the altar of Athena Pallada, and fall to your knees. Plead with her to call a fair hearing and look at your case. I will accompany you invisibly. I ordered you to deliver the duty of revenge, and now I want to save you.

The clouds of sacrificial fire once again hide the sacred place in the temple. Apollo vanishes.

Orestes

King Apollo! Great god! You heard me.
 A ray of sweet hope
 Has lit up the darkness of my sufferings,
 And again the happiness of the future
 Shines before my eyes.
 The day when I am saved is near.
 With the help of Apollo
 The dawn of new hope
 Arises from the darkness.
 On the wings of hope
 I fly to the city of Pallada!

Scene 26

Athens. In the depth of the stage is the hill of Areios, on its side are cut stones, on which 12 Areopagus are sitting. To the right are the olive grove and the altar of Athena. To the left are the Acropolis and a marble staircase to Propylaea. Moonlit night. When the curtain rises, clouds hide the Acropolis. The stage is filled with people. Orestes is near the altar.

Chorus of Athenians

The goddess gave us
 A new law.
 From now on and forever,
 A just court is founded.
 Unbiased, it is the
 Saviour of the innocent,
 The new court brings us
 Happiness and truth.

Scene 27**Orestes**

Now my fate is being decided. My soul trembles with the fear of anticipation.

Coryphaeus

Orestes! Do not lose hope! The goddess founded a just court. She chose the best citizens as its judges, and passed onto them her own duties. Now they are looking into your case on the hill of Areios. If you are not guilty, they will forgive you!

Orestes

Fateful moment! I await their decision. Life or death? Light or darkness?

From the hill descends the procession of the Areopagus.

Chorus

Look: the judges are coming
From the hill of Areios.
The fate of the guilty
Must be decided now.

Scene 28

The Areopagus come to the urn near the Athena's altar, and each puts a piece of clay into the urn.

Areopagus

We carried out
The wish of the goddess.
We looked into
Orestes' case.
We weighted up
The Furies' complaints,
Apollo's will,
And the defences of the murderer.
After the hearing, each of us
Gave their vote
For forgiveness
Or for punishment.

Scene 29**First Areopagus**

In this urn lie
 All the decisions of the judges.
 Count the votes!

Orestes (*with a breaking voice*)

I cannot breath.
 My blood froze in my veins.
 O, Apollo!
 Did you leave me?

First Areopagus

The numbers of votes for and against Orestes are equal!

Orestes

Oh, woe! What will happen to me? (*throws himself to the base of the altar*) Have pity on me, oh goddess, have pity on this poor sufferer! With a passionate plea, with desperation in my heart I call on you. Have pity on the one who with suffering and torment, heartache, sorrow, and tears paid for his terrible sin. Have pity!

Scene 30

Athena, in a golden aegis, in a helmet, with a shield in hand, descends from the cloud and stands behind the altar.

Orestes (*ecstatically*)

The goddess before me shines with divine beauty!

Chorus

We see Athena Pallada!

Athena

For the good of mortals
 I founded a new court.
 It must be open to compassion,
 And if the votes are divided,
 The defendant is not guilty!
 I throw my stone
 In favour of Orestes!

From now on he is free from guilt!

Areopagus

Orestes is not guilty!

Orestes

Oh, sweet moment!
I return to life again!

Athena

Every mortal who repented
And washed his sin with tears,
Who was purified by suffering,
Deserves forgiveness.
I put a stop to the blind vengeance of the Furies.
I give to people pity and forgiveness as new laws.
From now on, let not struggle,
Nor bloodshed in revenge,
But love and justice be new law!

The clouds disappear, revealing brightly lit Acropolis. Athena descends from the cloud, makes a sign to Orestes to follow her, and begins the procession. She enters into the Acropolis. The celebratory procession consists of Areopagus, priests, old and young men. Young maidens throw flowers; others carry sacrifices: gold and silver vases. A gold ship is pulled with Athena's gold emblem. The procession goes to the Parthenon.

Chorus

Glory to the goddess Athena!
Glory to Athena the wise!
Under the laws
Given by her,
Bliss and truth
Rule the world!

The End

Appendix B

Letters from Aleksey Venkstern to Sergey Taneyev

1. GTsMMK, fond 85, ed. khr. 192.

4 August 1888, Perm.

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

Your letter of 19 June, addressed to Irbit, I received only yesterday. Although while I am travelling I have a lot of free time, it is somewhat difficult to work on the libretto of *Oresteia* because I have no printed text, or my old sketches with me. However, I will work on the scene, the synopsis of which you sent me. I think I will be in Kazan around 22 August, and I ask you to address further correspondence there (agency of the society 'Moscow'). The most important thing for me is to know the sizes of the scenes. I will send them to you as I complete them. I hope to be in Moscow at the beginning of September.

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkstern.

2. GDMTch. Fond B 11, No. 763.

25 October [1887-89]¹

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

Forgive me for not sending you the corrections for so long: I was away all this time, first in Kolomna, then in Moscow. I think that this version (see 3rd page) of the scene is the most wholesome, and the awkwardness of which you write has been eliminated.

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkstern.

Plan of Scene Seven

Chorus and Clytemnestra leave. Enter Aegysthus.

Aegysthus (alone)

Is this possible? Agamemnon is returning! Having escaped all dangers of war, powerful and glorious, he is already close! What awaits me? He will soon discover his shame. His wrath will be terrible. The mighty king of kings will crush me, hapless, with his hand. I tremble before the one I should kill. Kill? ['Kill?' added by Taneyev in blue pencil] The bloody duty of revenge is still not accomplished [Taneyev added:

¹ The date has been presumed to be somewhere between 1887 and 1889, when Taneyev and Venkstern had been working on the first version of the libretto. The image of this letter can be seen in Chapter Two, p. 43.

'But the bloody duty of revenge...']. The evil deed of his father has not been avenged. It is time. I will summon all my courage. One of us must die. Now or never.

A bloody contest for rule over Argos
 Started between brothers: my father Thyestes,
 And Atreus, sinful father of Agamemnon.
 Atreus usurped the power from his brother
 And banished him from his home,
 And for a long time my father
 Lived in exile far away from his homeland.
 Finally, Thyestes lost all strength in this struggle.
 My poor father returned to his dear home
 With great humility,
 To make peace with his brother.
 Atreus pretended to make peace,
 And conceived a terrible revenge.
 He invited his brother Thyestes to a banquet
 As a sign of reconciliation.
 And then... He killed Thyestes' little children,
 Butchered them into pieces,
 And served them on a platter during the feast.
 Thyestes tasted the meat...
 A terrible moan issued from his chest:
 He understood everything!
 Crying, he threw himself on the ground in desperation,
 Calling to gods for revenge.
 Since then, his curse remains over
 The generations of the murderer Atreus.
 The moment has come,
 The Fate's judgement will meet the villain's son.
 Will I be brave enough to lift my hand
 At the angry King?
 I am terrified to think about it!
 There is only one way: to flee!
 But can I confront him? Will I be brave enough to lift my trembling hand at the angry king? A terror gripped my heart [Taneyev crossed out 'I am scared to think about it']. It is madness to enter into such unequal fight. There is only one way: to flee!

Clytemnestra enters

Clytemnestra

Oh, my Aegysthus!
 Oh, my Aegysthus, my love!
 The dawn of our bliss is rising!
 But what is with you?
 I read on your face
 Worry and uncertainty.

Aegysthus

I tremble, death awaits me!
 The King is on his way.
 He will find out everything,
 Will demand explanation,
 And his wrath will be horrifying!
 The terror gripped my heart.
 To flee! Flee!

Clytemnestra

Leave your fear, Agamemnon is not dangerous:
 The wrath of the dead cannot harm the living.

Aegysthus

What are you saying?
 Your words are a riddle.

Clytemnestra

Listen, for a long time I have been
 Carrying in my soul a bloody plan.
 Now it is ripe and must be executed.
 My hand will not tremble.

Aegysthus

What, you, yourself?

Clytemnestra

I am a woman,
 But I am brave,
 And hatred for the King will strengthen my hand.

Aegysthus

Gods desire the villain's death, he deserves punishment.

Clytemnestra

The blood of my daughter, sacrificed by him to the goddess Artemis, demands
 revenge.

Aegysthus

He must die.

Aegysthus and Clytemnestra

Let the judgement of the gods take place!

Clytemnestra

The moment of bloody revenge is here
 And the villain will die without glory.
 The judgement of Fate, just and severe, will take place,
 And the sins will be washed clean with his blood.

Aegysthus and Clytemnestra

The moment of bloody revenge is here
 And the villain will die without glory.
 The judgement of Fate, just and severe, will take place,
 And the sins will be washed clean with his blood.

Aegysthus

Under false kindness and happiness of reunion
 You will hide your hatred and thirst for revenge.

Clytemnestra

He will be fooled by my false speeches,
 And I will artfully hide my plan.

Aegysthus

When he fearlessly steps into the palace,
 Strike him in his chest without pity.

Clytemnestra

When he fearlessly steps into the palace,
 I will suddenly strike him into his chest.

Aegysthus and Clytemnestra

The moment of bloody revenge is here
 And the villain will die without glory.

3. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.1887-1889²

Your kind Majesty Sergey Ivanovich!

I am sending you three verses of the women's chorus, who scatter flowers on Agamemnon's path. If it is not sufficient, when we meet we can add to it. Please let me know if you received my previous letter, which I sent with unregistered post. I advise you to mail me with unregistered post too in order to escape delays.

Ready to serve,
Aleksy Venkstern.

On the reverse side:

Women's Chorus

Happy moment, long-awaited moment!
The heart is filled with happiness!
Atrid is coming back
In the light of military glory.
With him return from the battle
Husbands and brothers.
Fiery embraces
Await them at home.
The gloom of separation
Will be chased away by the dawn of happiness.
The sounds of hymns,
Ring glory to the great King.

4. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 41, fol. 153.

3 May 1891 [From Venkstern's wife]

Your kind Majesty Sergey Ivanovich!

My husband left Moscow today and asked me to inform you and send you his work. He expects to be back in five days, and wishes to know if will still be in Moscow then? If you leave, then please be sure to send him your summer address.

Ready to serve,
O. Venkstern.

² As in letter 2, the date has been presumed to be somewhere between 1887 and 1889, when Taneyev and Venkstern had been working on the first version of the libretto.

5. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.

30 July 1891. Nizhniy Novgorod.

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

Since our last meeting I have been constantly travelling. I could not find even three days to work on *Oresteia*, and finally somehow finished the second act, which I send you in its entirety. I hope that the letter will still find you in Pyatigorsk. Please, write (to the address of the Pravlenie) about how you find the text. Summer is drawing to a close, and I hope that we will see each other soon. Thus, until soon.

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkster.

6. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.

1895 [possibly late spring or early summer]

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

Unfortunately, I cannot see you today, as I am going to my summer residence in Petersburg. I will see you on my return.

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkster.

7. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.

1 October [1895]

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

Yesterday I sent you a telegram and waited for your reply, in order to act on it. I have been hampered by Mamontov's publishing house, with which I was dealing through an acquaintance. Imagine this: I sent the text on 15 July, and still cannot get the libretto back. I came to Moscow especially for it and arrived at your house thirty minutes after you left, which is a great pity, because I wanted to talk about a few things. In the summer I had only scant information about your whereabouts and did not know where to look for you, and now I think that you are already in Petersburg. The result of my trip is: the libretto is finally being printed, and will be ready on 4 July, when it will be immediately sent to Petersburg. Not having heard from you, I have to leave and make these arrangements: the libretto will be sent to my brother-in-law Nikolay Yegorovich Giatsintov, who will bring it to you (probably on 6 July) in order to give you the necessary number of copies, and the rest he will take to the Directorate; I ask you to tell him, to whom precisely does he need to take them. I propose to set the price at 35 kopeks. But this price is a guess, and my correspondent [Nikolay] will change it on your advice. Tell me later when the opera will be given. The papers write that the première is on 13 [October]. If this is the case, I cannot come, because on the 14 I have to be at the Nobility's Conference in Cologne. If the opera will be given later, then I will definitely be there. My address: Kashira. Village

Laptevo, Kolomna region. It would be best if you sent a telegram: letters take a long time and often do not arrive at all.

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkster.

8. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.

Telegram. 5 October 1895

I will arrive on the 16th, please take two seats in the second row. Venkster.

9. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.

Telegram. 30 December 1895

The libretto was published on 4 [December]. The publishers delayed. Telegraph today how many to send and when the opera is given. A letter is on its way. Bol'shaya Moskovskaya. V.

10. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.

8 January 1896

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

I write to you to find out where are you and how are you? In the spring we could not meet, and since then I have been ill. And now I am writing, lying in bed.

Have you worked on *Leander* and have you done anything? You said that some changes were necessary; now would be the best time to start on them. I have been ill for so long that I lost heart, and am in great need of money [the rest of the sentence is not legible]. I long for summer, for something to do.

Would you not come to see me? Now I live far away from you. I live on Pyatnitskiy, house Sokol, apartment 6.

You will not miss me, as I do not go out, but still it would be more convenient if you came at 7pm. Sometimes I read in the papers that you travel to Berlin, or Petersburg, but still I do not know anything [about you]. Have you published your book yet?³

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkster.

³ Venkster referred to Taneyev's theoretical treatise *Podvizhnoy kontrapunkt strogogo pis'ma* [Invertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style] (Belyaev: Leipzig and Moscow, 1909; English translation 1962).

11. GDMTch, fond B 11, ed. khr. 764

16 April 1900

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

I beg you to forgive me for causing delays in your work. The reason for this is my illness, which absolutely does not let me to do anything at all; on the one hand, constant pain keeps me bedridden, and on the other my depressed spirit affects all my thoughts. I am going abroad to take a cure, and the doctors promise success. If this is true, I will gladly continue your work; but if such a long delay is inconvenient for you, then I have no other option but to completely refuse to write the libretto. For now, I am going to the country, where I ask you to send your reply.

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkstern.

12. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.

22 April 1901

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

Before my leaving Moscow I had so many things to do, that I decidedly could not see you and give you the manuscript. I am sending to you the entire text to check. Around 15 May I will be in Moscow on my way to the Caucasus. Write to me to say if you will be in Moscow at that time. If yes, then I will try and catch you, if no, then send me the manuscript with your corrections here: I want to take it with me to the Caucasus. I await your reply and squeeze your hand strongly.

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkstern.

13. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.

10 May 1901

Highly respected Sergey Ivanovich!

It looks like I will not get to the Caucasus and will spend the summer, at least until 1 July, in the country. Thus, I ask you to send any material, when it is ready, to Kashira. I wish you a good summer.

Devoted to you Aleksey Venkstern.

14. RGALI, fond 880, opis 1, ed. khr. 152.13 July⁴

Your kind Majesty Sergey Ivanovich!

The problem, which you put before me in the last letter, was not easy. Concise verse, predominance of feminine endings, and an unusual alteration of rhymes has made me think a lot. I send you what I have been able to write. Let me know if it is suitable.

Ready to serve,
Aleksey Venkster.

⁴ This letter could be either dated 1887-89, or possibly 1895-1900, when Venkster was working on the libretto of *Hero and Leandros*.

Appendix C

Часть 3я
„Эвмениды.“

423

Troisième Partie.
„Les Euménides.“Dritter Theil.
„Die Eumeniden.“

PREMIER TABLEAU.

КАРТИНА Iя

ERSTES BILD.

Отменная жёсткость на берегу моря. Ночь. Гроза. молния. На моръ буря.
 L'endroit désert sur la grève. Il fait nuit, des éclairs et des tonnerres, une tempête sur la mer.
 Im Gegend am Meeresufer. Nacht. Donner, Blitz, Sturm.

№ 23. Антрактъ и сцена.

(Орестъ и Фурии).

№ 23. Entr'acte et Scène.

(Oreste et les Furies.)

№ 23. Zwischenakt und Scene.

(Orest und Furiën.)

241 Allegro. $\text{♩} = 120$.

Flauto piccolo.
 2 Flauti.
 Oboe I.
 Corno inglese.
 Clarinetti in A.
 2 Fagotti.
 I. II.
 4 Corni in F.
 III. IV.
 Trombe in B.
 Tromboni tenori.
 Trombone basso
 e Tuba.
 Timpani
 in G, D, C.
 Piatti.
 Gran-Cassa.
 Tam-tam.
 Орестъ.
 Oreste.
 Orest.
 Хоръ.
 Choeur.
 Chor.
 Arpa.
 Violini I.
 Violini II.
 Viols.
 Violoncelli.
 Contrabassi.

Allegro. $\text{♩} = 120$.

Sopr. e Alt.
 Sopr. Les Furies. Die Furiën.
 Ten. e Bassi.

241

plz.

Cor. Ingl.

Clar.

Fag.

Corn.

Viol.

arco

sp

sf

p

sf

p

242

Cor. Ingl.

Clar.

Fag.

Corn.

Tr-bno III & Tuba.

Timp.

Viol.

sf

sf

p

242

Cor. Ingl.

Clar. *pp*

Fag. *pp*

Cor. III *pp*

Tr-bno III e Tuba. *pp*

Timp. *pp*

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

243

Fl. *pp*

Cor. Ingl. *pp*

Clar. *pp*

Fag. *pp*

Coral. *pp*

Tr-bno III e Tuba. *pp*

Timp. *pp*

Gr. Cassa. *ppp*

Viol. solo con sordino *pp*

Viol. *pp*

V. lo. *pp*

Violino solo. *pp*

Violini *pp*

Cb. *pp*

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

dim.

243

244

Musical score for measures 244-248. The score consists of ten staves. The top two staves (Violin I and Violin II) feature melodic lines with dynamic markings *p* and *sf*, and a *cresc.* instruction. The third staff (Viola) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The fourth staff (Cello) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The fifth staff (Bass) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The sixth staff (Tuba) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The seventh staff (Tuba) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The eighth staff (Tuba) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The ninth staff (Tuba) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The tenth staff (Tuba) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The score includes dynamic markings *pp*, *p*, *sf*, and *cresc.* throughout.

Musical score for measures 249-253. The score consists of seven staves. The top staff (Violin I) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The second staff (Violin II) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The third staff (Viola) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The fourth staff (Cello) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The fifth staff (Bass) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The sixth staff (Tuba) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The seventh staff (Tuba) has a melodic line with *p* and *sf* markings. The score includes dynamic markings *p*, *sf*, and *cresc.* throughout. The instruction "senza sordini" is present above the sixth staff.

244

245

Musical score for measures 245-250. The score consists of six staves. The top two staves are for the vocal line, with lyrics written below the notes. The bottom four staves are for the piano accompaniment, including a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and two additional staves. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 4/4. The number '10' is written in the first measure of the fifth staff.

senza sordini
sul G
tutti

Musical score for measures 251-255. The score consists of six staves. The top two staves are for the vocal line, with lyrics written below the notes. The bottom four staves are for the piano accompaniment, including a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and two additional staves. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 4/4. The number '10' is written in the first measure of the fifth staff.

245

246

Musical score for measures 246-251. The score consists of ten staves. The top two staves are vocal parts. The next four staves are for woodwinds, including a flute (fl.), clarinet (cl.), and bassoon (fag.). The bottom two staves are for brass, including a trombone (Tromb. basso) and tuba (Tuba). The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and various articulations. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 4/4.

Musical score for measures 246-251, continuing from the previous block. This section shows the lower woodwinds and brass parts. The bassoon (fag.) and tuba (Tuba) parts are prominent. The music includes complex rhythmic patterns and articulations. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 4/4.

246

432

Fl. I

Fl. II

Viol. I

Viol. II

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

(mazurka)
(avec une baguette de timbales)
(mit Paukenschlägel.)

Viol. I

Viol. II

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

divisi

(на тарзавол.)
 (avec une baguette de timbales.)
 (mit Paukenschlägel) *mf*

This page contains two systems of musical notation for a percussion instrument, specifically timbales. The first system consists of 12 staves. The top two staves are treble clef, and the bottom two are bass clef. The middle staves contain rhythmic patterns and notes. The second system consists of 4 staves, with the top two in treble clef and the bottom two in bass clef. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as *mf*. The Russian instruction "(на тарзавол.)" and the French instruction "(avec une baguette de timbales.)" are placed above the first system, and the German instruction "(mit Paukenschlägel) *mf*" is placed below it.

This page of a musical score, numbered 434, contains measures 247 through 251. The score is written for a large ensemble, including strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. The key signature is B-flat major, and the time signature is 4/4. The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as *pp*, *mf*, and *ff*. A specific measure, 247, is highlighted with a boxed number. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 247. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, beams, and dynamic markings.

248

Fl. picc.

Fl. II. n. 2.

pp

mf

sf

rit.

pp

p

pp

pp

mf

p

sf

pizz.

pp

248

438

The musical score is written for a string quartet, consisting of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The music is in a minor key and features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Performance markings include 'p' (piano), 'cresc.' (crescendo), 'a. 2.', 'v/p', 'II.', 'III.', 'arco', and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting below the first.

249

Занавѣсъ.
Rideau.
Vorhang.

(на зовкоп.)
(avec une baguette de timbales.)
mf (mit Paukenschlägel)

атто

атто

атто

249

438

This page of musical notation, numbered 311 at the top and 438 on the left, contains a complex arrangement of music. It is organized into two main systems of staves. The upper system consists of eight staves, with the top four staves featuring dense, intricate rhythmic patterns and melodic lines, and the bottom four staves providing harmonic support with chords and bass lines. The lower system consists of four staves, continuing the musical themes and textures. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, beams, and dynamic markings like *ff* (fortissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The overall style is characteristic of late 19th or early 20th-century piano music, emphasizing rhythmic complexity and dynamic contrast.

250

Flauto III.

Musical score for Flauto III, measures 250-259. The score is written on ten staves. The first five staves are for the Flauto III part, and the last five are for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *p*, and *cresc.*. The Flauto III part features a melodic line with various ornaments and articulations, while the piano accompaniment provides a rhythmic and harmonic foundation.

250

Musical score for Flauto III, measures 260-269. The score is written on ten staves. The first five staves are for the Flauto III part, and the last five are for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *cresc.*. The Flauto III part continues with a melodic line, and the piano accompaniment provides a rhythmic and harmonic foundation. The word *divisi* is written above the piano accompaniment staves in measure 268.

Fac. *p*
 Tr-bue III e Tuba.
 Timp.
 Орсоръ. Oresto. Orest.
 МОРЪ.
 com - - - - be!
 Rast!

dolente *a = a*

pizz.
plac. *cresc.* *dim.*
pizz. *cresc.* *dim.*
pizz. *cresc.* *dim.*
pizz. *cresc.* *dim.*

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¹ Russian publishers generally initialise authors' first names, but all efforts have been made to provide the names in full where possible. In cases where publishers' names are absent, n/p stands for "no publisher."

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³ Igor' Bel'za erroneously lists this review under *Peterburgskiye vedomosti* 19 October, No. 300. In *S. I. Taneyev and russkaya opera: sbornik statey* [Russian Theatrical Association: Taneyev and Russian Opera], ed. by Igor' Bel'za (Moscow: Vserossiyskoye teatralnoye obshchestvo, 1946), p. 160.

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GDMTch fond B 7

Ed. khr. 3 Sketch of the scene of Orestes and Electra.

List 1 of the proposed cast of *Oresteia*.

List 2 of proposed cast of *Oresteia* dated 2 March 1894.

List of mistake corrections in the vocal score of *Oresteia*.

GDMTch fond B 9

Ed. khr.1 Scrapbook of reviews of *Oresteia*.

GDMTch fond B 11

Ed. khr. 763. Letter from A. Venkstern to S. Taneyev.

GDMTch fond B 12

Ed. khr. 27 *The Libation Bearers*. Printed text of Aeschylus' tragedy with handwritten musical examples.

⁴ Here, 'Tch' has been kept as the commonly used abbreviation in order to avoid any possible confusion.

GTsMMK fond 85

Ed. khr. 68. *Agamemnon*.

Ed. khr. 76. *Eumenides*.

Ed. khr. 89-127. Letters from M. Belyaev to S. Taneyev.

Ed. khr. 192. Letter from A. Venkstern to S. Taneyev.

Ed. khr. 192. Letters from A. Venkstern to T. Taneyev.

Ed. khr. 260a, b, c and 261a, b. Sketches of *Eumenides* and selected numbers of *Oresteia*.

Ed. khr. 384. *Oresteia. Eumenides* 1st tableau, photocopied excerpts.

RGALI [Rossiyskiy gosudarstvenniy arkhiv literaturī i iskusstva] fond 880 [S. Taneyev], opis' 1

Ed. khr. 700. *Oresteia*. Libretto versions (1887-1894), 4 exercise books written by Venkstern.

Ed. khr. 33. Part 1. Exercise book with sketches for *Oresteia* dated 27 July 1890 Selishche.

Part 2. *Oresteia*. Initial version of women's chorus from *Agamemnon*, No. 2. Sketches on *Eumenides*, with notes on instrumentation. In five note books and separate pages.

Ed. khr. 34. Part 1. Lost.

Part 2. Notes on the libretto written by Venkstern, with corrections in Taneyev's hand. Sketches for the scene of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Sketches for the scene of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and Orestes and Electra.

Notes on *Eumenides*.

Ed. khr. 152. 8 Letters and 2 telegrams from A. Venkstern to S. Taneyev.

Ed. khr. 153. Letter from A. Venkstern to S. Taneyev.

Scores and Recordings⁵

Aus Richard Wagners Der Ring des Nibelungen, für das pianoforte frei übertragen von Louis Brassin (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, n/d).

Gluck, Christoph Willibald. *Orpheus* (London: Weekes & Co., 1891).

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Don Giovanni* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1946).

Mussorgsky, Modest. *Boris Godunov*, ed. by Pavel Lamm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928).

Overture de L'Orestie, trilogie d'Eschyle pour orchestre composée par S. Tanéiev. Op. 6. (Leipzig: M. P. Belaieff, 1897).

Strauss, Richard. *Elektra* (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1916).

⁵ All operas are in vocal score unless stated otherwise.

Taneyev, Sergey. *Oresteia*. (St. Petersburg: I. N. Kushnerev, 1894).

_____. *Oresteia: Muzikal'naya trilogiya* [Oresteia: Musical trilogy] (Leipzig: M. Belyaev, 1900).⁶

_____. *Oresteia: Muzikal'naya trilogiya* [Oresteia: Musical trilogy] (Moscow: Muzika, 1970).

Tchaikovsky, Pyotr. *Orleanskaya Deva* [The Maid of Orleans] (Leningrad: Muzika, 1979).

_____. *Yevgeny Onegin* (Moscow: Muzika, 1959).

_____. *Iolanta* (Moscow: Muzika, 1976).

_____. *Pikovaya Dama* [The Queen of Spades] (Moscow: Muzika, 1983).

Verdi, Giuseppe. *Aida* (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1958).

Wagner, Richard. *Der fliegende Holländer* (Leipzig and London: Breitkopf & Härtel, c1914).

_____. *Das Rheingold* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2006-2008).

_____. *Die Walküre* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2006-2008).

_____. *Siegfried* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2006-2008).

_____. *Götterdämmerung* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2006-2008).

_____. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911).

_____. *Lohengrin* (Mainz: Schott, 2000).

_____. *Parsifal* (London: Schott & Co., c1904).

Belorussian State Opera and Ballet Theatre Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Tat'yana Kolomiytseva; *Oresteia (1895): Taneyev, Sergey*; USSR, Melodiya, 1978. (This is the re-release of the Deutsche Grammophon recording DGG, 2709 097, 1966, and in turn, it has been re-released by Olympia in 1988 (Olympia OCD195A+B)).

The Leningrad Radio Choir (chorus master Yury Slavnitsky), The Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Gemal Dalgat; *Oresteia (1895): Taneyev, Sergey*; USSR, Recorded on 8 and 15 January, 1958, released in 2006 by IMLab (B000FCGPMK).

⁶ Both piano and vocal scores.