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“*Two Worlds*”

Tchaikovsky’s *Iolanta* as a Symbolist opera

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*Mil'iy drug, il' ti ne vidish',
Chto vse vidimoye nami —
Tol'ko otblesk, tol'ko teni
Ot nezrimogo ochami?*

*Mil'iy drug, il' ti ne slishish',
Chto zhyteyskiy shum treskuchiy —
Tol'ko otklik iskazhenniy
Torzhestvuyushchikh sozvuchiy?*

*Mil'iy drug, il' ti ne chuyesh',
Chto odno na tselom svete —
Tol'ko to, chto serdtse serdtsu
Govorit v nemom privete?*

Dear friend, see'st thou not,
That whatever we see here
Is but a flicker, shadows only
Of a world hid from our eyes?

Dear friend, hear'st though not,
This jarring tumult of life
Is but a far discordant echo
Of heaven's triumphant harmonies?

Dear friend, feel'st thou not,
That the only truth in the world
Is what one heart telleth another
In speechless greetings of love?

Vladimir Solovyov, 1895

Introduction

“In my view everything in the opera is unsuccessful – from the barefaced borrowings . . . to the orchestration, which Tchaikovsky did this time somehow the wrong way round: the music suitable for the strings was entrusted to the wind and vice versa, so that sometimes it actually sounded fantastic in thoroughly inappropriate places (for instance, in the introduction, written for some reason for wind instruments alone).”¹ Thus is the view of Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) on the opera *Iolanta*, Op. 69 (1891), the last stage work of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893). More than a century later Richard Taruskin repeats these observations, arguing that Rimsky-Korsakov misunderstood Tchaikovsky’s innovative way of orchestration: “This remark chimes tellingly with the way in which the novels of Tolstoy were often misunderstood by contemporaries,” he claims. “Both [Tc]haikovsky and Tolstoy habitually violated the normal obligations of genre, but with such art-concealing art that their supreme sophistication was often misread as naivete.”² Surprisingly, Taruskin is not referring to *Iolanta*, but to its operatic predecessor, *The Queen of Spades* (*Pikovaya dama*, 1890), as he aims to point out that the “timbral grotesquerie” of the opera’s orchestration creates a hallucinatory atmosphere which “presages the incipient Russian Symbolist movement.”³ In his attempt to use Rimsky-Korsakov’s observations in support of his argument about *The Queen of Spades*, Taruskin completely neglects to mention *Iolanta*. Moreover, he simply omits all indications that point to this opera from the citation, and claims that Rimsky-Korsakov’s remark referred to the music of Tchaikovsky’s “late period.”⁴ Without considering if the orchestration of *Iolanta* can be attributed a similar Symbolist interpretation, Taruskin indifferently pushes *Iolanta* to the side, awarding the prize of Symbolism to *The Queen of Spades*.

Taruskin’s neglect is emblematic of *Iolanta*’s unfortunate fate to always be in the shadow of that “Great Symbolist opera” *The Queen of Spades*.⁵ Indeed, Simon Morrison considers *Iolanta* to be its “shadowy successor,” a comment just worthy enough to be mentioned

¹ David Brown, “Double Bill: *The Nutcracker* and *Iolanta*,” in *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study*, vol. 4, *The Final Years (1885-1893)* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), 335. Translated from Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moyei muzikalnoy zhizni* [My musical life], 9th ed. (Moscow, 1982), 235.

² Richard Taruskin, “The Great Symbolist Opera,” in *On Russian Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 119-20.

³ Ibid., 119-120.

⁴ Ibid., 119.

⁵ Ibid., 114 (Quoted from the title).

in a footnote.⁶ However, his comment can be interpreted as more than just a mediocre qualification. It not only points at the marginal position that *Iolanta* has been given in scholarship compared to *The Queen of Spades*, but it also suggests that *Iolanta* may have inherited the Symbolist aspects of its predecessor. Morrison devotes one sentence to this link, in which he merely quotes a part of the observations that Arkadiy Klimovitsky already made in 1993.⁷ Klimovitsky considers *Iolanta* to be Tchaikovsky's "first real interaction with the emotional and physical atmosphere of [S]ymbolism," as the opera possesses "characteristics of singular spirituali[s]ation, sublime intensification, and meaningful obscurity . . . situations with no external action . . . a poetry of the 'not spoken,' the 'intimated,' the 'penumbral,' and at the same time of an ecstasy and a religious/pantheistic Utopia."⁸ Several publications entirely devoted to *Iolanta* mention or describe aspects of the opera that support Klimovitsky's Symbolist reading, but do not relate these elements to Symbolism at all. Sergei Alekseyevich Borodavkin, for instance, observes the peculiarity of the opera's orchestration, following Rimsky-Korsakov, but attributes it to Tchaikovsky picking up on the trend of Impressionism rather than Symbolism.⁹ Natalya Tambovskaya recognises symbolic elements in *Iolanta*, as does Henry Zajaczkowski in exploring the opera's "richly allegorical character."¹⁰ Perhaps Detlev Quintern and also Tambovskaya, who respectively observe that the opera has a "pronounced mystical strand" and a greater degree of spiritual content than Tchaikovsky's other operas come closest to relating *Iolanta* to Symbolism.¹¹ In contrast to the detailed arguments of these scholars, the remarks by Klimovitsky and Morrison that do refer to Symbolism were never more than suggestions, as no one has yet assumed the task of investigating them extensively. Therefore,

⁶ Simon Morrison, *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 110.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸ Arkadiy Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky and the Russian 'Silver Age,'" in *Tchaikovsky and His World*, ed. Leslie Kearney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 325. Originally published in *Čajkovskij-Studien I: Internationales Čajkovskij-Symposium Tübingen 1993*, ed. Thomas Kohlhase (Mainz: Schott Musik International, 1995).

⁹ Sergey Alekseyevich Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo v orkestronom stile *Iolanti* [Innovations of P. I. Tchaikovsky in the orchestral style of *Iolanta*]," *Izrail' XXI* 41 (2013), <http://www.21israel-music.com/Iolanta.htm>.

¹⁰ Henry Zajaczkowski, "Culminating Allegory: *Yolande*," in *An Introduction to Tchaikovsky's Operas* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 100; Natalya Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoty: Nekotoriye intonatsionno-poeticheskiye osobennosti operi *Iolanta*" [The illusion of simplicity: Some intonation-poetic peculiarities of the opera *Iolanta*], in *P. I. Tchaikovsky: Zabitoye i novoye [P. I. Tchaikovsky: The forgotten and the newly discovered]*, vol. 2 (Klin: Gosudarstvenniy Dom-Muzei P. I. Tchaikovskogo, 2003).

¹¹ Detlev Quintern, "The Cosmos of Yolande: Knowing Without Seeing," in *Analectica Husserliana*, vol. 116, *Phenomenology of Space and Time: The Forces of the Cosmos and the Ontopoietic Genesis of Life; Book One*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Springer International Publishing, 2014), 136; Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoty," 2.

Iolanta is also a shadow in the sense of the poem before this introduction: the image of the opera that has been created so far is merely a shadow of a world of symbolic meaning, invisible to us for over a century. Thus, the suggestions make one thing clear: it is high time to acknowledge that *Iolanta* is not merely a shadow by writing the missing chapter of *Iolanta* as a Symbolist opera.

Before the opening lines of this chapter can be written, it is necessary to know *Iolanta*'s plot. The opera is situated in the fifteenth century in the mountains of the Provence. In a house in a secluded and paradisiacal garden, only accessible through a barely visible door in a cave, lives the blind princess Iolanta with her carers Brigitta, Laura, Martha, and her husband Bertrand. The secret location is chosen so that Iolanta's fiancé, Robert, the Duke of Burgundy, does not know of her impairment until she is cured. By order of her father, King René, Iolanta has never been told that she is blind for the sake of her happiness, and has been kept in ignorance about everything related to sight and light. However, the princess senses that she is missing something, and keeps wondering in a melancholic state without finding answers. Then, the King's messenger Alméric appears at the door to announce the arrival of King René and the famous Moorish physician Ebn-Hakia. The physician believes that Iolanta can only be cured if she knows that she is blind, and has a desire to see, a condition King René refuses to meet. One day, Robert and his friend Count Godfried Vaudémont discover the garden by accident, where they find Iolanta asleep and alone. Robert, unaware that she is his fiancé, thinks she is a sorceress and runs off to get help, but Vaudémont falls in love with her immediately. After Iolanta has awoken, Vaudémont asks her to pluck him a red rose as a memento of their meeting. He grows weary when Iolanta offers him a white one instead, oblivious of her mistake. After discovering Iolanta's blindness, Vaudémont teaches his beloved about the jewel of God's creation, sight and light. They fall in love just before everyone returns to the garden. All are shocked by the disclosure of the secret to Iolanta, but Ebn-Hakia cherishes hope that his requirements for the cure are fulfilled. However, Iolanta's budding understanding of sight is not enough to evoke the desire to see, so King René concocts a ruse: he pretends to execute Vaudémont as a punishment for his actions if the treatment does not succeed. Fearing for the life of her beloved, Iolanta now desires to see. While everyone is anxiously awaiting the outcome, Robert returns with his troops. He and Vaudémont discover the identities of King René and Iolanta, upon which Vaudémont begs Robert to break his engagement to Iolanta and confess his love for Mathilde to King René. The

King consents, promising Iolanta to Vaudémont. Then, to everyone's joy, Ebn-Hakia comes out of the house with a cured Iolanta. She is frightened by the overwhelming impression of seeing, but is calmed when Ebn-Hakia shows her the sky, God's heaven. In gratitude, all sing a prayer in praise of God and light.

To use some words from the poem again, this dramatic surface is what we see, but below that, there is a hidden world of meaning. This is suggested by the opera's obscure elements: the hidden and secret garden, Iolanta's ignorance of her blindness and its implications, the obscurity of blindness itself, Iolanta's numerous unanswered questions, the game of identities, and the unfamiliarness of Ebn-Hakia and his treatment. They give the opera, as Klimovitsky has recognised, a penumbral and intimated quality that invites us to look beyond the dramatic surface. There, we discover that the obscurities are indeed – to stay with Klimovitsky – meaningful: not only do they evoke symbolic and allegorical connotations, an effect already noticed by Tambovskaya and Zajaczkowski, but they also constitute significant dichotomies which drive the opera's narrative. The core of the drama is formed by the characters' experiences during transformations between dichotomies: by going through a door, being cured, or looking at the sky they make transitions between body and spirit, earth and heaven, light and dark, (in)sight and blindness, knowledge and ignorance, the Oriental and Occidental, and the world in and beyond the enclosed garden.¹² The pairing of two worlds or concepts is at the heart of Symbolism: the movement's art is characterised by an interplay between the world of reality and *inoy svet*, literally, the “other world.” This striving to grasp the flickers from the world beyond, and achieve insight into that world is apparent in the poem, which was written by the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900). His religious and mystic philosophy was of great importance to the mystic Symbolists.¹³ As both Klimovitsky and Quintern have observed, *Iolanta* is permeated with mysticism: Ebn-Hakia and his philosophy have a sublime quality, Iolanta's cure and perception of heaven seem to indicate spiritual awareness, and the collectivity of the final hymn in praise of God reflects a religious Utopia. All in all, *Iolanta* embodies the central Symbolist aspects of the dichotomy of reality and *inoy svet* in combination with mysticism, which evokes layers of connotations in the minds of the audience. It is as Stefan

¹² Borodavkin mentions a few of these worlds, but does not link them to Symbolism. See “Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo.”

¹³ Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 121, and Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 70.

Jarocinski describes the function of the symbol: “[E]verything it contains is left to the imagination of the spectator who must respond very actively if [they want] the work of art to yield up all its secrets and all its values.”¹⁴

The question remains, then: what secrets and values are hidden in *Iolanta*? How are the Symbolist concept of *inoi svet* and the Symbolist ideas of mysticism reflected in the opera, and how does that support a Symbolist reading of *Iolanta*? Before we can answer this question, it is important to make clear in what way the term Symbolism will be used in the present thesis. Tchaikovsky never experienced the Silver Age, the heyday of Symbolism, himself: he passed away before the movement was fully flourishing. Still, the development of Symbolism was not a change that occurred from one day to another: in the 1880s and early 1890s, ideas that would become central to the Symbolist movement were already emerging. Because of this “proto-Symbolism” Boris Gasparov calls the period before the Silver Age the “Twilight Age,” a term that aptly captures the transitional character of the period.¹⁵ As it was in the Twilight Age that Tchaikovsky created *The Queen of Spades* and *Iolanta*, he undoubtedly picked up on the proto-Symbolist trends for these works. Indeed, in 1891 he wrote that “in my [operatic, sic] compositions I am as God created me, and as I have been made by my education, circumstances, the characteristics of that century and that country in which I live and work.”¹⁶ Because of the fact that proto-Symbolism and Symbolism so subtly merge with one another, for the ease of reading the term Symbolism is also used in the present thesis in the context of the proto-Symbolism of the Twilight Age or Tchaikovsky. Another terminological distinction has to be made here. The Twilight Age anticipated both the so-called “decadent” and “mystic” branch of the Symbolist movement.¹⁷ As Morrison writes, the two are respectively distinct by “an interpretation of the symbol as a device for suggestion and allusion on the one hand, and, on the other, as a device for disclosure and revelation.”¹⁸ *The Queen of Spades* has mainly been linked to decadent Symbolism, but *Iolanta* seems to have more in common with mystic Symbolism: although the opera has the decadent characteristic of “invoking ancient times,” in this case, the Middle Ages, it is stronger related to the goal of the mystic Symbolist Andrey Beliy (1880-1934)

¹⁴ Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1976), 25.

¹⁵ Boris Gasparov, “Lost in a Symbolist City: Multiple Chronotypes in Chaikovsky’s *Queen of Spades*,” in *Five Operas and a Symphony: Words and Music in Russian Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 153.

¹⁶ Brown, “Double Bill,” 371-2. Letter to Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev (1856-1915), written on 26 January 1891 in Frolovskoye, Russia.

¹⁷ Jarocinski, “Debussy,” 31.

¹⁸ Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 4.

of “summoning different worlds into being.”¹⁹ Having said that, it is important not to generalise by stating that a work is either Symbolist or not at all: for instance, Romanticism was still topical in the Twilight Age, but rather than being excluded by Symbolism, the elements of both movements are synthesised in *Iolanta*.²⁰

Let us now explore the secrets and values of the world below the dramatic surface by analysing *Iolanta* from the perspective of Symbolism. In order to fully assess the diversity of this perspective, it will be constituted from four different angles, creating an interdisciplinary view on *Iolanta*. Chapter 1 (“Tchaikovsky and the Twilight Age”) provides a historical perspective, from which the relationship between Tchaikovsky and Symbolism is explored. The genesis of *Iolanta* will be discussed in relation to relevant aspects of the Twilight Age by outlining the significant influence of the operas by Richard Wagner (1813-1883) on the Symbolists. Special attention will be given to medievalism, because, as Tambovskaya notes, *Iolanta* is focused on medieval Christian mystery.²¹ Following up on a brief outline of the influence of Tchaikovsky’s works on the Symbolists, an examination of Tchaikovsky’s first encounters with Symbolism will reverse this perspective by answering to what extent Tchaikovsky himself was interested in Symbolism. Klimovitsky has noted that Tchaikovsky was drawn to Solovyov’s philosophy and the comparable philosophy of Boris Chicherin (1828-1904).²² By means of a hitherto uninvestigated and not fully translated letter, we discover the identity of these works – Solovyov’s “A Critique of Abstract Principles” (*Kritika otvlechennikh nachal*, 1877-80), and Chicherin’s book *Science and Religion* (*Nauka i Religiya*, 1879) – and look into Tchaikovsky’s opinions of these. Tchaikovsky’s interest in Solovyov is a virtually unexplored area of the composer’s life. Not only this notion makes the letter significant, but also the fact that the central elements of the discussed works appear to be applicable to *Iolanta*. Moreover, Tchaikovsky noted precisely these aspects. Another significant encounter of the composer with Symbolism is manifested in two songs based on poems by the Symbolist author Dmitriy Merezhkovsky (1865-1941): “Usni” (Go to sleep) and “Smert” (Death), No. 4 and 5 from the collection of 6 *Romances*, Op. 57 (1884). As a basis for the musical focus of chapter 4, the portrayal of sleep in the poem “Usni” will be briefly examined.

¹⁹ Ibid. For more on decadent Symbolism and *The Queen of Spades*, see Morrison, “Chaikovsky and Decadence,” and Gasparov, “Lost in a Symbolist City.”

²⁰ Jarocinski, *Debussy*, 159.

²¹ Tambovskaya, “Illyuziya prostoti,” 7.

²² Klimovitsky, “Tchaikovsky,” 324.

The second part of the historical perspective examines the sources that underlie *Iolanta*, in particular the play on which Tchaikovsky based his opera, *King René's Daughter* (*Kong Renes Datter*, 1845) by the Danish writer Henrik Hertz (1798-1870). Commencing on hitherto unexplored suggestions of the play's origins, mystic character of *Iolanta* will be illuminated by comparing it to the fairy tale *The Philosopher's Stone* (1859) by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), as well as to medieval medicine and religion, following up on the earlier discussion of medievalism. Fragments of the fairy tale will illustrate the argument in the next chapters. The latter comparison is at the basis of the argument that the portrayal of Ebn-Hakia in *Iolanta* is focussed more on mysticism than Orientalism, which provides a new perspective on the debate about Tchaikovsky and Orientalism: Taruskin argues that "the East did not beckon Tchaikovsky" as much as it inspired his Russian colleagues, but it will become clear that Tchaikovsky innovatively incorporated the Oriental into the mystic.²³ A source that will be examined throughout this thesis is the basis of *Iolanta's* libretto, the adaptation of *King René's Daughter* by Vladimir Zotov (1821-1896). Tchaikovsky's choice for this version instead of the original play is significant, as, in Tambovskaya's words, Zotov's version is more "mysterious" and "surreal" than Hertz's play.²⁴ Tchaikovsky's choice suggests that these elements of the story appealed to him, as well as that Tchaikovsky may have transformed the story in the direction of Symbolism for his *Iolanta*. As this source has not been translated into English, most Anglophone sources compare *Iolanta* to *King René's Daughter*, but a comparison to Zotov's adaptation reveals much more about Tchaikovsky's ideas behind *Iolanta*.²⁵

Despite the fact that blindness is one of the most central themes of *Iolanta*, it has not yet received a full-scale analysis: the significance of the use of blindness and its connotations in the opera has been overlooked. After an exploration of the use of senses in Symbolist poetry, the missing interpretation of the opera's portrayal of blindness will be constructed in chapter 2 ("The blind saint Iolanta") from the second and theoretical angle: the relatively new field of cultural disability studies. By applying a number of its theories to *Iolanta*, it will be illuminated how the

²³ *Grove Music Online*, s. v. "Iolanta," by Richard Taruskin, accessed 9 February, 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/subscriber/article/grove/music/O902323?q=Iolanta&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit. I have explored the relation between the portrayal of Ebn-Hakia and Orientalism in *Iolanta* in a course essay "'Two worlds': Orientalism in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* (essay, Imagining the Self and the Other, Huizinga Instituut, Amsterdam, 2015).

²⁴ Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti," 3.

²⁵ Comparisons between *Iolanta* and Zotov's adaptation have been made in Kadja Grönke "Tschaikowskys Einakter *Iolanta*: Verwandlung durch Liebe," *Tschaikowsky-Gesellschaft: Mitteilungen* 5 (1998): 17-25; Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti."

opera's symbolic and elusive use of visual impairment supports a Symbolist interpretation, in particular the idea of a mystic "inner" sight. Leading will be the "metanarrative of blindness" theory as formulated by David Bolt, which examines stereotypical connotations of blindness (metanarratives) in twentieth-century Anglophone literature.²⁶ Although Bolt is hesitant to state that his theory is applicable to all literature, not to mention other cultural forms of expression, this analysis shows that the theory can be applied in an interdisciplinary way. In order to link blindness in *Iolanta* to mystic Symbolism and the Middle Ages, a metanarrative of blindness related to sanctity will be added to Bolt's set of metanarratives. Through a comparison of blindness in *Iolanta*'s libretto with the blindness of the medieval saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) as described in hagiographies, in particular *The Assisi Compilation* (1311), it will be shown that blindness enables *Iolanta* to approach *inoy svet* and achieve a higher state of being. The theory of the "cure-or-kill paradigm" will explain the narrative development of blindness in *Iolanta*.²⁷ In general, this analysis of blindness in the opera realises one of the main aims of cultural disability studies: it shows that "disability is endowed with meaning" in a cultural sense, and it provides insight into the cultural manifestation in which the disability is portrayed, in this case, Symbolism.²⁸ This notion will be supported by a few comparisons of the analysis with the symbolic use of blindness in Symbolist poems and in two Symbolist operas, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893-1902) by Claude Debussy (1862-1918), and *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya* (1905) by Rimsky-Korsakov, which, just like *Iolanta*, revolves around two worlds, Greater Kitezh and Lesser Kitezh. This analysis also aims to heed Bolt's wish for readings that are characterised by an appreciation of disability rather than critical avoidance of disability, which may be a cause of the absence of a full-fledged analysis of *Iolanta*'s blindness.²⁹

Elaborating on Tchaikovsky's encounter with Solovyov's philosophy, chapter 3 ("Solovyov's philosophy and *Iolanta*'s *inoy svet*") will provide the third and philosophical angle on *Iolanta*. An analysis of the plot, Zotov's adaptation, and the libretto through the perspective of Solovyov's philosophy illuminates how the Symbolist ideas about mysticism and the concepts of

²⁶ David Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-Reading of Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

²⁷ Blake Howe et al., ed., "Introduction: Disability Studies in Music, Music in Disability Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2016), 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 1; Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 4.

²⁹ Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 11.

inoy svet and *a realibus ad realiora* are reflected in *Iolanta*, especially through the reasons behind Iolanta's cure and her awareness of her blindness. The analysis of Solovyov's philosophy by Jonathan Sutton will be a leading source in this chapter for Sutton's focus on religious aspects of Solovyov's philosophy.³⁰ The philosophical consideration will be introduced by a further exploration of *inoy svet* and the use of God-light synonymy in Symbolist thought. Subsequently, an explanation of the metaphysical and epistemological discussion of reality and absolute reality, and matter and spirit in Solovyov's "Critique" will be related to the manifestations of *inoy svet* and God-light synonymy in *Iolanta*. Although Solovyov does not consider blindness in this work, it appears that his ideas about the functioning of the senses in relation to absolute reality support the symbolic use of blindness in *Iolanta*. Furthermore, the mystic portrayal of Ebn-Hakia will be examined as well based on the "Critique" and ideas about mysticism and religion by Solovyov and other philosophers. Solovyov's concept of Sophia will be compared to the character of Iolanta. Although there are no accounts of Tchaikovsky reading more of Solovyov than the "Critique," the fact remains that the concept of Sophia was of central importance to the mystic Symbolists, and that it can be related to *Iolanta*. The philosophical analysis is supported by comparisons between the libretto and Zotov's adaptation, which shows that *Iolanta* is much closer to Symbolism than the original story.

The angle in the fourth and final chapter ("The transitions between reality and *inoy svet*") will move the thesis, to use Taruskin's words, "from the visible dramatic surface to a contemplation of the hidden musical depths," in other words, to music analysis.³¹ In line with the Symbolist aesthetics of the symbol as a tool of disclosure and revelation, the point of departure is the assertion that what is left out of the libretto is suggested by the music, with the findings of other three chapters at the basis. As the plot of *Iolanta* develops from darkness to light, so will the analysis, clarified by libretto citations and music examples from *Iolanta* and other musical works. In particular Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* (*Shchelkunchik*, 1892) will be compared to *Iolanta*, as the two works were written at the same time and the similarities are revealing. Indeed, Herman Laroche (1845-1904) emphasised the interdependence of the two

³⁰ Jonathan Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: Towards a Reassessment* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988).

³¹ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 328.

works, as they were designed to be premiered on one and the same evening.³² Starting in *Iolanta*'s dark world of blindness and the unknown, we explore how the metanarrative of blindness-darkness synonymy is echoed in relevant passages of the opera, especially in the theme that signifies blindness and its orchestration. Darkness, desire, and *inoy svet* will be analysed particularly in the introduction in relation to the prelude from Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1865). Departing from the world of darkness, an analysis of *Iolanta*'s sleep, its transitional aspects, and the lullaby that lulls the princess into sleep will be given, supported by the musical manifestation of sleep in "Usni!" and similar portrayals of sleep in the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty, and the character of Brünnhilde from Wagner's opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1876). The analysis of Ebn-Hakia as a mystic figure, situated between earth and heaven, is completed by an analysis of his aria-monologue "Two worlds" (*Dva mira*) and his leitmotif, which will reveal how Tchaikovsky transformed Ebn-Hakia into a Symbolist character by incorporating the Oriental into the spiritual aspects of his music. Lastly, an analysis of *Iolanta*'s cure as an achievement spiritual awareness will be provided, based on the concept of *inoy svet*, the earlier analysis of *Iolanta* as a saint-like figure, and Solovyov's argument about the senses and absolute knowledge.

Now we return to the visible world above the dramatic surface, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Prof. Marina Frolova-Walker for her valuable support and wonderful inspiration during the research project for the present thesis, as well as to Dr. Olga Panteleeva for her fantastic supervision and help with the translations from Russian to English. We arrive again at Rimsky-Korsakov's puzzlement about *Iolanta*'s topsy-turvy orchestration and Taruskin's criticism of that remark. The scholar also complains that Tchaikovsky did not "respond in any special way to the libretto's metaphysical trappings" of *Iolanta*.³³ It seems that Taruskin has fallen on his own sword: he complies with his own criticism of Rimsky-Korsakov by misunderstanding the intended metaphysical effect of the "topsy-turvy" orchestration. In order to discover this and many other secrets and values, it is time we bring *Iolanta* out of the shadows, and, as Lydia Goehr aptly phrases, "listen beyond the surface" of the opera.³⁴

³² Roland John Wiley, "Nutcracker," in *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 204-5.

³³ Taruskin, "Iolanta."

³⁴ Lydia Goehr, "Radical Modernism and the Failure of Style: Philosophical Reflections on Maeterlinck-Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*," *Representations* 74 (2001): 68.

Chapter 1 – Tchaikovksy and the Twilight Age

Evening has fallen
The edges of the clouds have grown dark,
The last ray of the sunset dies on the towers;
The last shiny stream fades in the river
with the darked skies.
How the fragrance of the plants
merges with the cool air,
How sweetly the streams ripple
at the banks in the silence
How soft is the breath of air on the water
and the trembling of the supple willow
in the nightly silence.

*Uzh vecher
Oblakov pomerknuli kraya,
Posledniy luch zari na bashnyakh umirayet;
Poslednyaya v reke letyashchaya struya
s potukhshim nebom ugasayet.
Kak slit s prokhladoyu
rasteniy aromat,
Kak sladko v tishine
u brega strui pleskan'ye,
Kak tikho veyan'ye efira po vodam
i gibkoi ivi trepetanye
v tishi nochnoy.*³⁵

On the evening of the premiere of *The Queen of Spades*, Tchaikovsky was walking through Saint Petersburg, when he suddenly heard these lines sung in the streets.³⁶ They were from the duet between Liza and Polina of his just performed opera. Stunned by the singers' extraordinary memory, the composer of *The Queen of Spades* approached the creators of the nightly street singing, and so he met his admirers Alexandre Benois (1870-1960), Sergey Diaghilev (1872-1929), and Dmitriy Filosofov (1872-1940).³⁷ In 1898, not even a decade after this remarkable meeting, the three were united in founding the magazine *Mir iskusstva* (*World of Art*), which would reflect the vibrant artistic developments of the Symbolist movement.

This anecdote originates from a 1912 article published in the Moscow newspaper *Teatr* (Theatre).³⁸ Although Morrison considers it unlikely that the event is true, Klimovitsky argues that the meeting could really have taken place, since the three young artists did attend the premiere of *The Queen of Spades*, and had familiarised themselves with the piano reduction beforehand.³⁹ In either case, the meeting is an anecdotal illustration of the influence of Tchaikovsky's late stage works on the artists of the Russian Silver Age. *The Queen of Spades* is a transitional product of the Twilight Age: it is based on a story by Alexander Pushkin (1799-

³⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Russian to English are my own.

³⁶ The premiere of *The Queen of Spades* took place on 19 December 1890 in the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg.

³⁷ Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky," 324.

³⁸ Anonymous, "From the Past," *Teatr* 1017 (February 12-13, 1912), 13.

³⁹ Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 48, and Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky," 324.

1837), a writer from Russia's so-called "Golden Age," but Tchaikovsky transformed it towards the aesthetics of the Silver Age. This way, the opera forms a bridge between the Romantic and Realist period on the one hand and the Symbolist period on the other. As a result of the premiere of *The Queen of Spades*, Klimovitsky argues, a "Tchaikovsky cult," consisting of artists of the Silver Age, came into existence.⁴⁰ Morrison explains how "the opera became a source of inspiration for the leading Symbolist poets." In the article "A Pendant on a Poet" ("*Pendant o poete*," 1906), for instance, the poet Alexander Blok (1880-1921) quotes Tomskey's ballad from *The Queen of Spades* to indicate Tchaikovsky's influence on the Symbolists.⁴¹ Not only this opera, however, but more of Tchaikovsky's late stage works influenced the artists of the Silver Age. Klimovitsky argues that "Stravinsky, Fokine, Benois and Nijinsky could never have created *Petrushka*, the work that most effectively realized the ideals of Mir [i]skusstva," if Tchaikovsky had not written *The Nutcracker*.⁴² The interplay between the human and toy world in this ballet captivated the imagination of Blok and another leading Symbolist figure, Andrei Beliy (1880-1934). Klimovitsky also recognises elements of neoprimitivism in the "Chinese Dance" which would later characterise Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (*Le Sacre du printemps*, 1913).⁴³ All in all, Tchaikovsky's later stage works inspired the artists of the Silver Age, and epitomise the transition of the Twilight Age into the Silver Age that was taking place around the time of the premiere of *The Queen of Spades*. The duet mentioned in the anecdote almost seems to symbolise this transformation, as it describes how twilight makes way for the period of the night, which causes everything to start a new, nocturnal life.

One main element that also formed a bridge between nineteenth-century art and works of the Silver Age was an interest in medievalism. In this sense, *Iolanta*, with its medieval setting, is a product of its time. Indeed, Klimovitsky considers the medieval setting and philosophical content of Blok's drama *The Rose and the Cross* (*Roza i Krest'*, 1913) to be anticipated in *Iolanta*.⁴⁴ Earlier, in the visual arts, the interest in medievalism was central to the works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.⁴⁵ This group rebelled against the what they recognised to be

⁴⁰ Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky," 322.

⁴¹ Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 49-50.

⁴² Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky," 324. The artists mentioned by Klimovitsky are the composer Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), the ballet choreographer Michel Fokine (1880-1942), and the dancer Vaslav Nijinsky (1889-1950).

⁴³ Ibid., 323.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 327.

⁴⁵ A group consisting of the English poets and painters William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), John Everett Millais (1829-1896), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, (1828-1882), founded in 1848.

insincerity and theatricality in contemporary paintings, which they believed to be a direct consequence of the paintings by Raphael Santi (1483-1520).⁴⁶ Aiming to create an art of sincerity and innocence that focused on the glory of God instead of an earthly glory, the Brotherhood looked at the “unspoilt art of the ‘Age of Faith,’” that is, the Middle Ages.⁴⁷ If we consider Rossetti’s paintings of innocent young maidens, often portrayed amidst exuberant flowers and fruits, it is hard not to be reminded of *Iolanta* and her paradisiacal garden.⁴⁸ As we



Figure 1. “My Sweet Rose” by Waterhouse.

will see later, the religious devotion that characterised the Brotherhood’s ideas is vital in *Iolanta*, too. The elements of Rossetti’s medievalism also found their way into the twentieth century, in particular into the paintings of John William Waterhouse (1849-1917). His painting “My Sweet Rose” or “The Soul of the Rose” (1908) is even more reminiscent of *Iolanta* than Rossetti’s paintings. It is almost as if Waterhouse really painted *Iolanta*: a young maiden finds her way through a medieval-looking enclosed garden, touching the wall with her hand, and smelling and touching a rose, the central flower in *Iolanta*, with her eyes closed as if she is blind. Francis Maes notes that the theme of dying young

maidens that often determined the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites also influenced art works of the Silver Age, as it can be found in literature and paintings of the French Symbolists, as well as in *The Rite of Spring*.⁴⁹ The Russian Symbolists, especially the mystic Symbolists, were greatly

⁴⁶ Ernst Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 16th ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 511.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 512, 551

⁴⁸ Incidentally, Rossetti was inspired by the imagined scenes of King René’s honeymoon as described in the story *Anne of Geierstein* (1829) by Walter Scott (1771-1832).

⁴⁹ Francis Maes, “Imagination and Renewal: The Silver Age,” in *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 226. For an overview of the influence of French Symbolism on Russian Symbolism, see Georgette Donchin, *The Influence of French Symbolism on Russian Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1958).

influenced by the way medievalism influenced Wagner's works and ideas.⁵⁰ Rosamund Bartlett observes how both Wagner and Beliy, for instance, relied on medieval or mythological settings for their works, such as *Tristan und Isolde* and "The Jester" (*Shut*, 1911), Beliy's ballad about a king's daughter who is kept imprisoned in a castle by a hunch-backed jester.⁵¹ The intrinsic symbolic character of Wagner's mythological opera subjects captivated the Symbolists, as well as the composer's methods: they believed that the famous leitmotif could become a symbol because of its endless amount of layers of meaning.⁵² This led the Symbolists to consider Wagner's works as a fundamental pillar of the Symbolist movement, as they felt that Wagner's ideas resembled "their own attempts to reveal the deeper realities behind the world of appearances," the main objective of Symbolism.⁵³

It was in the midst of these developments and transitions of the Twilight Age that Tchaikovsky made his first encounters with the early manifestations of Symbolism. Just like he suddenly heard the duet between Liza and Polina in the air after the premiere of *The Queen of Spades*, he picked up on the developing elements of Symbolism that were figuratively "in the air," not yet concrete or united by an established movement. This is the atmosphere in which Tchaikovsky became inspired to compose his last stage work, *Iolanta*, which can be deduced from for instance the influence of Wagner on *Iolanta*. Just like the Symbolists, Tchaikovsky was fascinated and influenced by Wagner's techniques and methods. Tchaikovsky wrote much about Wagner as a music critic, including a report of the premiere of *Der Ring* and an article titled "Wagner and his Music," and was particularly enthusiastic about *Parsifal* (1878) and the prelude of *Lohengrin* (1850).⁵⁴ Just like Wagner's *Tristan* and Beliy's "The Jester," the setting of *Iolanta* is medieval, and the main elements of the story – a king's daughter living in an enclosed environment – are rather similar to the setting of Beliy's ballad. Especially Tchaikovsky's symbolic use of Wagner's leitmotif technique forms a crucial element of *Iolanta*, which we will explore in chapter 4. For now, it is important to note that both Tchaikovsky and the Symbolists were interested by the same elements of Wagner's ideas and works, notably the symbolic possibilities of the leitmotif.

⁵⁰ Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, 2-3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 190-1.

⁵² Ibid., 69, 128.

⁵³ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3-4, 41. The article in question was written for *The New York Morning Journal* and published on 3 May 1891. For an English translation of the entire article, see "Wagner and His Music," Tchaikovsky Research, last modified 21 May 2016, http://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Wagner_and_His_Music.

Whereas Tchaikovsky's interest in Wagner was broad and almost life-long, his first encounters with Symbolism can be traced back to specific moments in a short period that is centred around his discovery of the story of *Iolanta*. In 1883, Tchaikovsky came across the play *King René's Daughter* in the magazine *The Russian Messenger* (*Russkiy Vestnik*) in a translation by a certain F. B. Miller, which immediately gave him the idea for a new opera. "The story had charmed me by its poetry, originality, and an abundance of lyrical scenes," the composer explained in an interview in 1892. "I then made up my mind to set it to music. Due to various obstacles, however, it was only last year that I could realise my decision."⁵⁵ Around the same time as his discovery of *King René's Daughter*, Tchaikovsky composed the two songs "Usni" (*Go to sleep*) and "Smert'" (*Death*) of *6 Romances*, Op. 57 (1884). These are settings of poems written by Merezhkovsky, who would become one of the founders of the Symbolist movement. Only a few years earlier in 1879, Tchaikovsky read Solovyov's "A Critique of Abstract Principles" in *The Russian Messenger*, and the book *Science and Religion* by Chicherin, whose philosophy is similar to that of Solovyov.⁵⁶ Despite the fact that Tchaikovsky started to compose *Iolanta* only in 1891, the short period of time in which he made his first encounters with Symbolism suggests that he had a genuine interest in the movement's developing aspects. Tchaikovsky read these works immediately after they were publicised, which shows how he was picking up on this newly developing trend.

It is very interesting that Tchaikovsky chose to compose two songs based on poems of an artist who would grow to be a significant Symbolist figure. Indeed, Klimovitsky argues that the significance of the songs "dare not be underestimated, as they are the first musical interpretations of poetry by one of the most renowned of the Russian [S]ymbolists."⁵⁷ Together with the Symbolist authors Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945) and Filosofov, one of the nightly singers of the duet between Polina and Liza, Merezhkovsky was part of the religious group *Troyebratstvo* (The Brotherhood of Three). However, he is most known for his lecture "The Causes of the Decline of the Contemporary Russian Literature and the New Trends in it" (*O prichinakh upadka i novikh techenyakh v sovremennoy russkoy literature*) which was published in 1892. It is usually considered as the start of the "Silver Age," as it captured into words for the first time the main

⁵⁵ The interview in question is "A Conversation with P. I. Tchaikovsky," written by a certain "G. B." for the newspaper *Peterburgskaya zhizn'* (Petersburg Life), published on 24 November 1892. For an English translation of the entire interview, see http://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/A_Conversation_with_P._I._Tchaikovsky.

⁵⁶ Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky," 324.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 325.

Symbolist ideas that had been developing in the Twilight Age.⁵⁸ In his lecture, Merezhkovsky argues that art had the ability to come close to expressing “the dark ocean that is outside the borders of our knowledge,” which is not only close to Romantic aesthetics of the sublime, but also to the Symbolist objective of revealing this other world of the “dark ocean.”⁵⁹ It is remarkable that Tchaikovsky chose to set two poems that show this yet to be formulated new aesthetic of art to music, especially “Usni,” which describes the transition between reality and the world of sleep and dream. It conjures up a picture of falling asleep, during which the rays of the sun, and the colours and sounds of the surrounding trees and birds seem to become surreal and guide the protagonist towards a world of sleep “that is outside the borders of our knowledge”: “And the colourful wings of flies with capricious patterns tremble on the flower petals, like fires. And the sound of the trees seemed like a wonderful story. They lulled, cherishing my sleep with soft tenderness: ‘Go to sleep, go to sleep!’” (*I kril’ya pestrikh mukh s prichudlivoy okraskoy na venchikakh tsvetov drozhali, kak ogni. I shum dyerev kazalsya chudnoy skazkoy. Moy son leleya, s tikhoy laskoy bayukali oni: «Usni, usni!»*) The transitional element of sleep will be musically explored in chapter 4, as well as how Tchaikovsky’s “Usni” musically evokes a sleep that hovers between dream and reality.

Tchaikovsky’s enthusiasm for one of the most significant elements of the Symbolist movement, Solovyov’s philosophy, is evident from the fact that he mentioned in three letters that he was reading the “Critique” with great interest. In one of these letters, the one to his patron Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky wrote down his observations:

Have you read, my dear friend, the philosophical articles of Vladimir Solovyov (the son of the late historian and rector) in *Russkiy Vestnik*? They are *excellently* written in the sense that they are perfectly accessible for a non-specialist, and composed with great talent and humour. I do not know at what final conclusions the author will arrive, but in the previous (August) book he proves with exquisite persuasiveness and acuteness the untenability of positivism that denies speculation, [and that] calls metaphysics a fabrication – but is unable to dispense with philosophy. Very aptly, Solovyov expresses the delusion of the materialists,

⁵⁸ Arthur Langeveld and Willem G. Weststeijn, *Moderne Russische literatuur: van Poesjkin tot heden* (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2005), 132.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

who believe that they, disavowing metaphysics, deal only with what actually exists, that is, with matter, whereas matter does not have objective existence and is only a phenomenon, that is, the result of the workings of our senses and intellect. *In reality, there only exists* our cognitive power, that is, *reason*. I express his thought only badly. When you feel completely rested, I advise you, my dear friend, to read these articles – if you have not read them already. In addition, I have started to read the book *Science and Religion* by Chicherin, which I bought back in the spring. As you can see, I have ventured into philosophy. My mindset is entirely unphilosophical, such readings cost me some difficulty, but in those periods of time I do not have difficult work that consumes all my attention – I like to philosophise.

Even though Tchaikovsky is convinced that he is not explaining the content of the “Critique” very well, his letter shows understanding of the main elements of Solovyov’s articles. For instance, from his judgment of Solovyov’s writing style it appears that he was aware of Solovyov’s goal to make religious philosophy available and accessible to a broad public.⁶⁰ More importantly, however, the aspects that Tchaikovsky singled out to mention to Von Meck and apparently interested him the most, summarise precisely the metaphysical part of the “Critique” that is strikingly similar to the philosophical content of *Iolanta*. As Tchaikovsky writes, Solovyov argues that matter does not exist objectively, but only through the senses that reach our brain, which creates an image of matter. This is the place where “absolute reality” can be perceived. As we will see in chapter 3, this argument plays a vital role in *Iolanta*’s perception of reality and *inoy svet*. Chicherin’s *Science and Religion* echoes these aspects of Solovyov’s “Critique,” but, unfortunately, no documents have survived in which Tchaikovsky expressed his opinion of Chicherin’s book. The similarities between the philosophers’ works suggest, however, that the topics that Tchaikovsky mentioned in his letter to Von Meck were also the topics that interested him in *Science and Religion*, especially considering that Tchaikovsky was reading both works at the same time. Chicherin also describes the way in which human beings can perceive absolute knowledge, but his focus lies on the relationship between science and religion, as the title of his book indicates. Chicherin makes a distinction between internal and external

⁶⁰ Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 39, 42.

experience, reserving the internal experience for the absolute, just like Solovyov. Chicherin relates the absolute to religion. As Alexander Vucinich summarises Chicherin's argument: "Science is only a first step towards the absolute; philosophy, by contrast, can achieve a full understanding of the absolute, and religion is 'living communication with the absolute.'" In other words, the absolute is a direct link between man and God.⁶¹ As we will see in chapter 3, this argument about the absolute as religious was important to the mystic Symbolists and also returns in *Iolanta*. For now, let us look into the stories and historical facts on which *King René's Daughter* and thus *Iolanta* is based, as science and religion play a vital role here as well.

The origins of Iolanta

Since medievalism and metaphysics received increasing attention in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is no surprise that *King René's Daughter*, a play about metaphysical matters in a medieval setting, was enormously popular.⁶² The play was translated into almost every European language, including English and German, mostly with a goal to adapting the play for non-Danish audiences.⁶³ Translator Theodore Martin described the character of Iolanta as "one of the most exquisite creations of modern poetry" and another translator, Jane Frances Chapman, noted how already within a month after the first print of the drama a fourth edition was published.⁶⁴ The widespread popularity of *King René's Daughter* is also evident from the fact that several artists, have been creatively inspired by it, enabled by these translations. The British composer Henry Thomas Smart (1813-1879) composed a cantata for female voices based on Hertz's play in 1871. Another, rather obscure composer, Johannes Hager (year of birth and death unknown), had his opera *Jolanthe* (1848) ready just three years after the premiere of *King René's Daughter*.⁶⁵ Translations of the play also brought about creative inspiration in Russia: as we know, Miller's translation gave Tchaikovsky the idea for his opera, as well as Zotov's adaptation of *King René's Daughter*. Likely, the play captured the imagination of all these artists because of its Romantic lyricism and "atmosphere of poetry and old romance by which it is

⁶¹ Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture, 1816-1917* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 235.

⁶² Quintern, "Cosmos of Yolante," 135.

⁶³ Ibid., 135-6.

⁶⁴ Theodore Martin, trans., Note on translation of *King René's Daughter: A Danish Lyrical Drama by Henrik Hertz* (Boston: William Crosby and Henry P. Nichols, 1850); Jane Frances Chapman, trans., preface to *King René's Daughter: A Lyric Drama* (London: Smith, Elder and Co. 65, 1845), iv.

⁶⁵ Sigrid Neef, "De klank van het licht [The sound of light]," in *Pjotr Iljitsj Tsjaikovski: Iolanta*, ed. Klaus Bertisch, trans. Janneke van der Meulen (Amsterdam: De Nederlandse Opera, 2004), 12.

pervaded.”⁶⁶ Although these aspects also appealed to Tchaikovsky, it is revealing that of all artists he was the only one to pick up on the story’s metaphysical aspects.

The fact that Hertz’s *King René’s Daughter* is the common source of all these works suggests that the story of Iolanta was created by Hertz. However, it has been argued in several sources that he based his play on an older story written by Andersen.⁶⁷ Curiously, none of these sources make clear to which story they refer. It could very well be, therefore, that the authors all derived this link to Andersen from the 1911 edition of Zotov’s adaptation of *King René’s Daughter*: on its title page it is stated that the adaptation is based on “verses by Andersen.”⁶⁸ However, this appears to be a mistake: we know that Zotov adapted Hertz’s play, and not one of Andersen’s stories.⁶⁹ Besides, none of Andersen’s tales from before 1845, the year of the premiere of *King René’s Daughter*, is in any way similar to the play, and thus cannot be a possible candidate for its origins. Still, the mistake appears to be not so far from the truth. Andersen’s tale *The Philosopher’s Stone* or *The Stone of the Wise Man* is strikingly similar to Hertz’s play, but was written only in 1859. As this is more than a decade after the premiere of *King René’s Daughter*, this tale cannot have been one of Hertz’s sources, but is probably at the basis of the incorrect link with Andersen.

The discovery of this mistake leaves two possibilities: either Andersen based *The Philosopher’s Stone* on Hertz’s play, just like Hager, Smart, and Tchaikovsky based their works on the play, or both Andersen and Hertz independently based their works on the same older material. The latter possibility seems to be the most likely, because the two stories are too similar to be completely unrelated. Quintern suggests that *King René’s Daughter* might be based on a “scarcely documented narrative of Provencal-Arab origin/nature” or other sources from the Middle Ages.⁷⁰ Considering the fact that Hertz based his play on real medieval figures – the Duchess of Lorraine and Bar, Yolande (1428-1483), her husband Count Frederick II of

⁶⁶ Martin, note on translation of *King René’s Daughter*.

⁶⁷ Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for The Inner Man* (London: Lime Tree, 1993), 539; Franklin Mesa, *Opera: An Encyclopedia of World Premieres and Significant Performances, Singers, Composers, Librettists, Arias and Conductors, 1957-2000* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2007), 131; Anthony Peattie and George Henry Hubert Lascelles Earl of Harewood, ed., *The New Kobbé’s Opera book* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1997), 817.

⁶⁸ Vladimir Zotov, title page of *Doch’ korolya Rene (Iolanta)*, ed. S. F. Razsokhina (Moscow: Litografiya Teatral’noi biblioteki, 1911).

⁶⁹ Indeed, in the copy from the Russian State Library in Moscow – the copy I have been working with – the name “Andersen” has been scratched out and replaced by “Henrik Hertz.”

⁷⁰ Quintern, “Cosmos of Yolante,” 136.

Vaudémont (c. 1428-1470), and her father René of Anjou (1409-1480), who was King of Naples, Duke of Anjou, Bar and Lorraine, and Count of the Provence – supports the assumption that Hertz used more medieval sources besides the facts about these historical figures.⁷¹ For instance, Hertz seems to have conceived the character of Ebn-Hakia himself, but probably looked for inspiration in Arab medieval history.

If we compare *King René's Daughter* and Zotov's adaptation of it to *Iolanta*, we discover that much more is known about Ebn-Hakia than is revealed in the opera, from which we only know of his Moorish origins and Islamic religion. The physician comes from Córdoba, a city in Spain that was the capital of the Islamic empire during the Middle Ages.⁷² It was located in the region of Al-Andalus (711-1492) – close to the South of France where *King René's Daughter* is situated – a region where different cultures and religions coexisted peacefully, which contributed to the region's "significant developments and breakthroughs in the sciences, medicine and philosophy."⁷³ It is not surprising, therefore, that Ebn-Hakia, famous for his miraculous skills and performed miracles, comes from this city, and that none other than the King of Castilian recommends him to King René.⁷⁴ In Zotov's adaptation, the Moorish physician is actually the last in a series of doctors summoned by King René from many different places to cure Iolanta, but so far without success.⁷⁵ In Hertz's play, however, Ebn-Hakia plays a larger role: he had already paid a visit to the infant Iolanta shortly after she became blind, during which he read her horoscope and predicted that she would be cured in her sixteenth year.⁷⁶ He remained her tutor in the intervening period, teaching her in natural sciences.⁷⁷

Details about Ebn-Hakia's abilities as a physician are given in the plays as well. Not only is Ebn-Hakia highly intelligent, but he is also familiar with the physiology of the body and the eyes and its corresponding sciences, particularly eye surgery. This is evident from his explanation of the connections between the brains and the senses, and from his reference to the instruments needed for eye surgery.⁷⁸ Quintern identifies this as ophthalmology, "a medical

⁷¹ The blindness of Iolanta seems to have been Hertz's own addition, as it has never been proved that the real Yolande was blind.

⁷² Martin, *King René's Daughter*, 6.

⁷³ Quintern, "Cosmos of Yolante," 136.

⁷⁴ Martin, *King René's Daughter*, 3, 6.

⁷⁵ Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 7.

⁷⁶ Martin, *King René's Daughter*, 7, 19.

⁷⁷ Martin, *King René's Daughter*, 57; Quintern, "Cosmos of Yolante," 137.

⁷⁸ Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 11, 13; Martin, *King René's Daughter*, 18; Quintern, "Cosmos of Yolante," 140.

branch dealing with the anatomy, physiology and diseases of the eye.”⁷⁹ Interestingly, the Arabic-Islamic sciences of the medieval Al-Andalus were particularly advanced and groundbreaking in this area.⁸⁰ This historical background suggests that Ebn-Hakia is not just a physician, but in fact the leading eye surgeon of his time. Not only this science links Ebn-Hakia to the Middle Ages, but also the medieval ideal of the physician. In *Ecclesiasticus*, which was considered to be a fundamental text about medicine in the Middle Ages, it is stated that physicians are to be respected and honoured to the maximum, since the physician is a creation of God through which He can perform the Godly act of healing.⁸¹ This notion gives a new dimension to Ebn-Hakia’s multiple references to Allah and God in the plays and *Iolanta*. Also, the “perfect physician” (*perfectus medicus*) was required to have knowledge of astronomy, and his treatment was supposed to be directed particularly at finding the cause of the disease.⁸² In their profession the physician did not separate medicine and theology, body and soul, and consequently medicinal and spiritual cures, which describes precisely Ebn-Hakia’s approach to curing *Iolanta*’s blindness.⁸³ A part of this religiously influenced medieval medicine were healing amulets, which were part of a widespread practice.⁸⁴ These could be pieces of parchment or stones on which a healing or protective formula was written, sometimes reinforced with magic, and which had to be in constant contact with the body in order to be effective.⁸⁵ Posed on a sleeping person, they could be used against insomnia.⁸⁶ In this context, it is interesting that Ebn-Hakia poses an amulet on *Iolanta*’s chest to make the princess sleep in *King René’s Daughter*, which is in accordance with the medieval amulet practice, and the insomnia remedy in particular.⁸⁷ When Tristan and Geoffrey (Vaudémont and Robert in *Iolanta*) meet the sleeping *Iolanta*, they cannot wake her until Tristan removes the amulet from her chest.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ Quintern, “Cosmos of Yolanthé,” 136.

⁸⁰ For more on the history of science in this area, see Quintern, “Cosmos of Yolanthé,” 136, 140.

⁸¹ *Ecclesiasticus* 38, 1-15. Quoted in Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler, introduction to *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), 3-5.

⁸² Biller, introduction to *Religion and Medicine*, 6-7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁴ Susanna Niiranen, “At the Crossroads of Religion, Magic, Science, and Written Culture,” in *Mental Health, Spirituality, and Religion in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge, ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 291, 296.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 290-292, 300.

⁸⁶ Several descriptions of such amulets can be found in *ibid.*, 292, 302, 304, 308-9.

⁸⁷ Martin, *King René’s Daughter*, 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

All in all, rather than an Oriental stranger, Ebn-Hakia is in fact a very accomplished physician who is in close relation to God. His practices are in line with those of the ideal medieval physician. He does have Oriental origins, but these form merely one of his facets instead of his main determining feature. As his origins from the Al-Andalus explain his profession as an advanced physician, the medieval facts do not exclude Ebn-Hakia's Oriental aspects, but rather incorporate them into a more metaphysical portrayal. As Zajaczkowski observes, "[t]he dramaturgic advantage of the distinction (clearly observable in Hertz's play itself) between a group of characters whose name is of Moorish derivation (i.e., Arab-Berber), is of the familiar, set against the potentially mysterious unfamiliar, the latter as metaphor for the healing doctor."⁸⁹ Instead of portraying Ebn-Hakia in a characteristically Orientalist way, Tchaikovsky emphasises the metaphysical features of the physician in *Iolanta*. In chapter 3 we will see how this historical outline supports the application of Solovyov's philosophy to the opera, and how this supports a Symbolist reading of *Iolanta*.

As regards *The Philosopher's Stone*, it is hard to be more specific about its origins, but its similarities to the story of *Iolanta* remain relevant for comparison: the key elements of Andersen's tale are used in a Symbolist way in *Iolanta*.⁹⁰ *The Philosopher's Stone* tells the story of the wisest man on earth and his five children, who live in the Tree of the Sun, an enormous tree that almost reaches up to heaven and is the habitat of trees and animals from every corner of the earth. In the summit of this wondrous creation stands the home of the family, a castle of crystal in a large garden. In a secret room in the castle the wise man keeps the Book of Truth, a mysterious object of which the readability of the pages depends on the amount of wisdom of the reader. Despite his wisdom, the final page about life after death remains unreadable for the wise man. Then, his four sons all have the same dream in which they go out into the world to look for the good, the beautiful, and the true, unified in the Philosopher's Stone, of which the light would be bright enough to reveal the hidden contents of the Book's last page. One by one, they confidently start their quest, relying on their extraordinary senses, of which they each have one, to guide them. But one by one, the countless impressions of the world become too much for their sensitive perception. Lastly, the wise man's blind daughter experiences a dream vision in which she is holding the Philosopher's Stone. Some time later she also goes out into the world to find

⁸⁹ Zajaczkowski, "Culminating Allegory," 123.

⁹⁰ Whether Tchaikovsky knew of *The Philosopher's Stone* and used it as one of his sources for *Iolanta* is unknown.

the stone, and succeeds. Finding her way home by means of a thread she had attached to it, she brings the stone to her father. Finally, the last page of the Book of Truth is illuminated, upon which only one word appears: “believe.”

Several main aspects of this story are so similar to *Iolanta* that a common origin of *The Philosopher’s Stone* and *King René’s Daughter* becomes a very likely possibility. For instance, the wise man and his daughter resemble the opera’s character pair of King René and Iolanta. Especially Iolanta resembles the girl, not only because of her blindness, but also as regards character: the wise man’s daughter is described as “fair, gentle, and intelligent,” with “sincere affection” for her father.⁹¹ Also the garden in *The Philosopher’s Stone* is comparable to the garden in *Iolanta*: both are reminiscent of the Garden of Eden in their paradisiacal appearance and remoteness. The tree that surrounds Andersen’s garden offers a home to all possible organisms, and the garden in *King René’s Daughter* similarly contains a huge variety of flowers and tropical plants: indeed, Almeric, Robert, and Vaudémont describe the garden as a “paradise.”⁹² Also, Andersen’s garden is remote and situated right beneath the sky in close proximity to heaven. The similar location of the garden in *Iolanta* in the high mountains evokes this image as well, which is interesting considering that Iolanta finally perceives God with her eyes by looking up to the sky. Interestingly, the other main similarities between *The Philosopher’s Stone* and *King René’s Daughter* are related to symbolic connotations that constitute the Symbolist reading of *Iolanta*, as well as anticipate the content of the next chapters. The enclosed and remote garden symbolises both the girl’s and Iolanta’s ignorance of the outside world. Just like Iolanta, the girl has never left the garden, as a result of which “the wide world . . . never entered her mind. Her world was her father’s house.”⁹³ In this sense, the garden also symbolises Iolanta’s blindness and emphasises the otherworldly character of the garden, which constitutes several vital musical elements that are analysed in chapter 4. The metaphysical and religious elements of *The Philosopher’s Stone* can also be found in significant aspects of *Iolanta*. The search of the brothers and the girl for the good, beautiful, and true through their senses anticipates Solovyov’s notion of the perception of absolute knowledge through a collaboration of the senses, which will be discussed in chapter 3. As we will see in the next chapter, the strong

⁹¹ Hans Christian Andersen, *The Philosopher’s Stone* (1859, Project Gutenberg, 2008), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27200/27200-h/27200-h.htm#ph_stone.

⁹² In scene 4 and 6 of *Iolanta*. For an elaborate description of the garden, see Martin, note on translation of *King René’s Daughter*; Zotov, *Doch’ korolya Rene*, 2.

⁹³ Andersen, *The Philosopher’s Stone*.

“inner sight” of the girl, her dream vision, and her ability to find the Philosopher’s Stone not despite but because of her blindness, that is, are aspects that determine the symbolic connotations of blindness in *Iolanta*, as well its metaphysical and religious narrative.

Chapter 2 – The blind saint *Iolanta*

One aspect of Symbolism that has become a key element in *Iolanta* are the senses, in particular the sense of sight and its counterpart blindness. The senses were an ubiquitous part of Symbolism, in particular Symbolist poetry.⁹⁴ This is evident in one of the perhaps most frequently cited Symbolist poems, *Correspondances* (1857) by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), in which the much used concept of synaesthesia is the guiding principle. Synaesthesia is a process during which senses are associated, or indeed, correspond with one another in the mind. Similarly, the poem conjures up a picture of nature as “forests of symbols” (*forêts de symboles*), in which “perfumes, colours, and sounds correspond” (*les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se respondent*). The title of the poem became a self-contained Symbolist concept. “For the [S]ymbolists,” Goehr explains, “*correspondances* linked the senses to spirit . . . *Correspondances* fused and infused all the senses – hearing, sight, smell, and touch – with mystery.”⁹⁵ The poem is emblematic of a tool used in Symbolist poems in general that appeals to the senses of the reader, requiring precisely such a corresponding of the senses, so that the reader engages with the poem.⁹⁶ Through this method, which Lauren Silvers describes as “cenesthetic,” the poem made the reader aware of its own body through the invocation of synesthetic imagery.⁹⁷ Not only Baudelaire, but many other nineteenth-century writers and poets made sensory experience a major aspect of their works.⁹⁸

Whereas a poem such as *Correspondances* focuses on the workings of the five senses, disabled senses were also explored by the Symbolists. For instance, the concept of blindness frequently appears in the poetry of Blok, one of the major Russian Symbolists of the mystic movement. Considering the dichotomies that drive the narrative of *Iolanta*, mentioned in the introduction, it is revealing that one of those dichotomies, light and darkness, are associated with blindness in several of Blok’s poems. Consider the following lines from a poem Blok wrote in 1901, in which he links blindness to a sense of dark depression: “Even the hottest fire will not burn the blind eyes with a past dream. Even the brightest day is darker than for someone whose soul is asleep.” (*Samiy ogn’ – slepiye ochi; ne sozhzhet mehtoy biloy. Samiy den’ – temneye*

⁹⁴ Lauren Silvers, “Beyond the Senses: The Cenesthetic Poetics of French Symbolism,” *Modern Philology* 112 (2014): 382.

⁹⁵ Goehr, “Radical Modernism,” 64.

⁹⁶ Silvers, “Beyond the Senses,” 394.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 382. For more on this method, see this article.

nochi usiplennomu dushoy.) In the poem “Rally” (*Miting*, 1905), he calls pupils without shine “blind lights” (*slepiye ogon’ki*). In an earlier poem, written in 1899, Blok opposes blindness to a sunrise and a sacred fire that is burning somewhere, as a metaphor for a spiritual guide or source of inspiration that remains out of reach: “And for me, a blind one, somewhere shines a holy fire and the sunrise of a youth!” (*I dlya menya, slepogo, gde-to bleshchet; Svyatoy ogon’ i mladosti voskhod!*)

Clearly, not only the senses themselves, but also its impairments captured the imagination of the Symbolists. As the above examples of Blok’s poetry show, blindness can invoke notions as diverse as light, darkness, day, night, depression, or a look without shine, which allowed the Symbolists and the reader of their poems to make synesthetic associations in their mind and subsequent interpretations. This chapter will explore how several of such synesthetic associations of blindness are at the basis of the cultural representation of blindness in *Iolanta*. Bolt grouped these connotations with the umbrella concept “metanarrative of blindness,” which he defines as “the story in relation to which those of us who have visual impairments often find ourselves defined, an overriding narrative that seems to displace agency.”⁹⁹ These metanarratives come into existence because “blindness is always a mediated experience, informed, even defined by language and culture.”¹⁰⁰ Through this theory, we explore the metanarratives that link blindness to darkness, sin, and the “fifth-sixth sense,” and how they support a Symbolist reading of *Iolanta*. To the latter metanarrative we will add a metanarrative of blindness and sanctity through the writings about the blindness of Francis of Assisi. In combination with an explanation of the “cure-or-kill paradigm” as formulated by Blake Howe and others, the reasons behind *Iolanta*’s cure will be discussed.¹⁰¹

The most common and frequently used metanarrative in cultural representations of blindness also plays a large role in *Iolanta*. Bolt calls this metanarrative the “blindness-darkness synonymy”: it is based on one of the synonyms of blindness, namely that of being in the dark.¹⁰² This synonym is derived from the general assumption that a visually impaired person can only perceive complete darkness with their eyes, which leads to symbolic and metaphorical connotations of blindness as darkness. This emerges from several literary examples that Bolt

⁹⁹ Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Howe, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁰² Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 21.

provides, in which blind people are believed to be “in the dark” or “wander alone in the dark.”¹⁰³ Texts in which blindness is equated to “the darkness of an eternal night” are also an example of the blindness-darkness synonymy.¹⁰⁴ We can find exactly such remarks in the libretto of *Iolanta*. In his aria, King René expresses his sorrow about how his “child is enveloped in darkness” (*moye ditya ob'yatim t'moyu*), and wonders in despair why “You [God] cast her radiant look into darkness” (*poverg . . . vo t'mu ti v'zor yeyo luchistiy*). In the hymn to God and light in the opera finale, which is sung after Iolanta's cure, everyone exclaims: “Thou has taken Your servant out of the darkness!” (*Ti svoyu rabu iz mraka t'mi isvl'ok!*) The synonym of blindness and eternal night is echoed by Vaudémont, who sorrowfully states that the melancholic Iolanta has “to cry in the eternal darkness of the night.” (*Plakat' v vechnom mrake noch.*) The sadness that characterises Iolanta until the missing knowledge of sight is revealed to her reflects an additional aspect of the blindness-darkness synonymy: melancholia, a spiritual darkness, can characterise visually impaired characters as a result of their mourning for the loss of sight.¹⁰⁵ As Iolanta was not born blind, but lost the sense of sight during her infancy, the blindness-melancholia synonym could very well be the basis of her sadness. The fact that Iolanta does not know why she is feeling sad can be explained from this synonymy as well, as she lost her sight at too young an age to remember it. Blok's description of a look without shine as pupils with “blind lights,” as well as Vaudémont's description of Iolanta's blind eyes as “lifeless eyes” (*bezzhiznenniye ochi*) reveal the use of an image of extinguished lights as a metaphor for the loss of sight, which leaves nothing but darkness and melancholia in the eyes. Logically, the blindness-darkness synonymy implies a sight-light synonymy, which is also used in *Iolanta*. For instance, King René wonders several times if Iolanta shall see light, instead of if she will just see. In response to Almeric's exclamation “The daughter of the King is blind?” (*Doch' Korolya slepa?*) Bertrand answers, as if to define blindness: “She does not know what light is” (*Ona ne znayet sveta*). In contrast to what these libretto fragments imply, Bolt argues that “no degree of visual impairment can place the bearer in a world of endless darkness.”¹⁰⁶ This interesting remark creates the possibility that blindness in *Iolanta* is perhaps also not as binary as the libretto suggests. For instance, we do not know if Iolanta has any visual perception of the world, and if so, what she perceives exactly.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 92. For more examples, see this book.

¹⁰⁴ Stephan Sunandan Honish, “Moving Experiences: Blindness and the Performing Self in Imre Ungár's Chopin,” in *The Oxford Handbook*, 254.

¹⁰⁵ Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 114.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 21.

Tchaikovsky did not include the cause of Iolanta's blindness in the libretto, nor when Iolanta became blind, or what her age is: it gives Iolanta's blindness an obscure and mysterious character. Although her questions "What is red?" and "What is light?" seem to suggest that Iolanta perceives according to the blindness-darkness synonymy, her questions also stem from the fact that she has been kept in ignorance about all concepts such as red and light. Indeed, as Bolt observes, "for people who have no experience of visual perception, darkness, by definition at least, is no more relevant than light."¹⁰⁷ Iolanta's ignorance of her blindness combined with the blindness-darkness synonymy make blindness an ambiguous concept about which much is and remains unknown. Like in Blok's 1899 poem, the obscurity of blindness stimulates the recipient to conjure up connotations in their mind.

However, the metanarrative of blindness does not only reveal – or make obscure – connotations as regards Iolanta herself: as Sherry D. Lee remarks about modernist opera, "characters who are physically marked are clearly made to function symbolically, as stand-ins for, or reflections of, seemingly physically 'whole' characters who yet bear other, less visible afflictions or stigmas."¹⁰⁸ The same symbolic use of blindness can be found in *Iolanta*. As Sigrid Neef observes about Tchaikovsky's opera: "The blind girl sees, whereas those who see are blinded by the apparent."¹⁰⁹ This description applies the most to Robert and King René. Indeed, both are associated with blindness once by another character. When Robert coldly describes the beautiful Iolanta as "a young girl" (*moloden'kaya devochka!*) Vaudémont shouts out in amazement: "Blind man!" (*Slepets!*). Later, Ebn-Hakia tells King René that he was "blinded by a false idea" (*osleplenniy mīsl'yu lozhnoy*) in his decision to keep the knowledge of Iolanta's "misfortune" (*neschast'e*) from the princess. Robert's description of Iolanta shows that he is blinded by the apparent, as he does not see the Godly beauty that Vaudémont perceives. Indeed, Tchaikovsky departed here from *King René's Daughter* and Zotov's adaptation, as Robert acknowledges Iolanta's divine beauty in those plays.¹¹⁰ Instead, Tchaikovsky emphasised Robert's fear of Iolanta: the Duke is afraid that the princess is a sorceress, and Vaudémont one of her next enchanted victims. He gets more and more afraid as he notices something unnatural about the sleeping Iolanta that seems to affect Vaudémont, as he becomes increasingly captivated

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Sherry D. Lee, "Modernist Opera's Stigmatized Subjects," in *The Oxford Handbook*, 665.

¹⁰⁹ Neef, "Klank van licht," 14.

¹¹⁰ Martin, *King René's Daughter*, 28-9; Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 20.

by the princess. This is an example of the “extreme anxiety” that often accompanies an encounter between someone who is visually impaired and someone who is not, as well as an example of the associations of blindness with witchcraft.¹¹¹ It even invokes the association of blindness with contagiousness, as Robert demands to his friend “I do not allow you to touch her!”¹¹² Again, a metanarrative points out that blindness in *Iolanta* is obscure, as it cannot be seen that Iolanta is blind, even when her eyes are open. We will elaborate further on Robert’s fear, and how this constitutes his mental blindness, in the next chapter, but will now examine King René’s mental blindness, as this brings forward another metanarrative.

The central aspect of King René’s emotions revolves around a very old metanarrative of blindness: in a religious context, blindness was and can still be regarded as a punishment for sin, or, more generally, as a result of sin.¹¹³ This metanarrative appears most clearly in King René’s aria. Begging for God’s compassion, he desperately asks why Iolanta is surrounded by darkness because of him. He continues: “My Lord, if I am sinful, why does my pure angel have to suffer?” (*Gospod' moy, esli greshen ya, za chto stradayet angel chistiï?*) Note how the dark and low timbres in the accompaniment of the aria, in which the lower strings, bassoon, and trombones prevail, not only mirror King René’s emotions but also the blindness-darkness synonymy that characterises his worries. When Iolanta finally discovers that she is blind, he considers this as another punishment from God: “Lord, why have You sent this punishment?” (*Bozhe, za chto poslal Ti eto nakazan'e!*). In line with his traditionally religious idea of blindness, King René also seems to act according to societal conventions in what concerns blindness. Lee observes how in modernist opera, impaired characters suffered from the fact that their impairment is and must remain hidden according to societal constraint.¹¹⁴ Also, several literary works contain notions along the lines of “no one marries a blind girl.”¹¹⁵ Not only does King René lock Iolanta into a garden as remote from society as possible – indeed, in Zotov’s adaptation it is revealed that King René created a house and a garden in this place especially for

¹¹¹ Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 7; Brian Hogan, “‘They Say We Exchanged Our Eyes for the Xylophone’: Resisting Tropes of Disability as Spiritual Deviance in Birifor Music,” in *The Oxford Handbook*, 113. For more on blindness and witchcraft in Birifor culture, see this chapter.

¹¹² Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 14.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Lee, “Modernist Opera’s Stigmatized Subjects,” 668.

¹¹⁵ Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 40.

hiding Iolanta – but he also hides blindness from Iolanta herself and everyone in the outside world, especially her fiancé Robert.¹¹⁶

So far we have discussed the use of negative connotations of blindness in *Iolanta*. According to Bolt, however, there is one “so-called positive stereotype” with “all its cool mysteries.” He refers to the stereotype that considers the other sense of blind characters to be extraordinary or superhuman.¹¹⁷ It is based on the assumption that the remaining senses must be more developed or sensitive to compensate the missing sense of sight. An especially interesting metanarrative that is derived from this assumption is the “fifth-sixth sense” that is often attributed to blind characters. Remarks in literary examples that blind characters can hear across enormous distances or thick surfaces is often combined with the notion that they have developed “some sort of different sense-organ.”¹¹⁸ Thus, a traditional sixth sense substitutes the missing fifth sense in the fifth-sixth sense paradigm. Although Bolt discusses this stereotype separately, it is actually closely linked to another metanarrative of blindness, one that attributes a divine or metaphysical quality to the impaired body.¹¹⁹ This stems from the portrayal of blindness as disorder or dissonance in relation to an assumed ideal of order, such as a body without impairment or an order that is “thought to lie elsewhere,” that is, a religious or Godly order.¹²⁰ Although Bolt does not classify this metanarrative as a positive stereotype, when applied to *Iolanta* it becomes clear that this metanarrative actually can become a positive stereotype: Iolanta’s blindness is not portrayed as deviant from a Godly order, but as a condition that allows the princess to come closer to that ideal than would have been possible without impairment. Indeed, the princess is the most venerated and religiously devoted character of the opera. Here we reach an intriguing question about Iolanta’s cure. In his duet with Iolanta, Vaudémont informs her that “they who do not know the blessing of light, cannot love God’s world darkly veiled, and cannot honour God in darkness like [they can] in light!” (*Kto ne znayet blaga sveta, tot ne mozhet tak lyubit' Bozhiy mir vo mrak odetiï, Boga v t'me, kak v svete chtit'!*) However, Iolanta claims that she is already able to honour God without the need of light. The question remains, then, why does Iolanta need to be cured if she can already honour God and his creation, indeed, more than the other characters? The metanarrative of blindness as sanctity in

¹¹⁶ Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 6.

¹¹⁷ Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 12, 72.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

combination with the cure-or-kill paradigm will provide the first part of the answer to this crucial question. The second part will be provided in chapter 3.

Above the dramatic surface of *Iolanta* the cure of Iolanta's blindness can be explained from two theories about the relationship between narrative and disability. Firstly, the plot is determined by the "narrative prosthesis." As defined by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, the narrative prosthesis is usually a disabled character in a story, which provides the plot with a direction: "it gives the story a problem to solve," that is, a disability to overcome, "and it defines by counterexample the desirability of the subsequent resolution."¹²¹ Secondly, this overcoming of disability usually follows one of two fixed patterns, which Howe has denoted as the cure-or-kill paradigm. As this designation indicates, the resolution is either a cure of the disability, or the end of the impaired person's life.¹²² This is usually suicide, which is portrayed as the only logical outcome of the visually impaired person's unrealisable desire to see.¹²³ Both the narrative prosthesis and the cure-or-kill paradigm are recognisable in *Iolanta*, as the plot revolves completely around the search for a "resolution" (Iolanta's cure) which is the counterexample of the "problem" (Iolanta's blindness). However, there are more motifs behind Iolanta's cure under this theoretical surface. If we look at *Iolanta* from the angle of the main aims of disability studies, a focus on achievements not *despite* but *through* and *because of* disability, it becomes clear that Iolanta's blindness enables rather than prevents her achievement: through and because of her blindness the princess has the opportunity to be and become closer to God. Rather than normalising blindness, which is implied in the narrative prosthesis and cure-or-kill paradigm, this angle shows how Iolanta's blindness is actually idealised and sanctified in combination with the fifth-sixth sense. We will explore this addition of sanctity to the metanarrative of blindness by going back again to Iolanta's time of the Middle Ages, namely to the last years of the life of the saint Francis of Assisi.

Something that is not well-known about Francis of Assisi is that he appears to have suffered from a gradual loss of sight during the last seven years of his life.¹²⁴ One of the surviving records of the life of the saint, *The Assisi Compilation*, provides an account of this

¹²¹ Howe, "Introduction," 3.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ For more about the relationship between blindness and suicide in literary representations of blindness, see Bolt, "Culturally Assisted Suicide: The Mourning and Melancholia of Blindness Deconstructed," in *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 111-125.

¹²⁴ Scott Wells, "The exemplary blindness of Francis of Assisi," in *Disability in the Middle Ages: reconsiderations and reverberations*, ed. Joshua Eyler (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 69, 80.

period written by witnesses. Although it is presented as a factual account, Scott Wells notes that it was written to portray Francis's sanctity through an idealizing description of his blindness.¹²⁵ As sanctity was the prototypical idealisation in Medieval Europe, observes Wells, "Francis needed to be portrayed as reali[s]ing that ideal, with or without the incorporation of his *infirmities oculorum*."¹²⁶ Thus, this part of *The Compilation* is perhaps closer to a story about rather than an account of blindness. For the present thesis this critical note is not problematic, however, but revealing, as *The Compilation* contains a very early metanarrative of blindness that idealises and sanctifies blindness rather than normalises it, like the other metanarratives we have seen.¹²⁷ It can be considered as a positive departure from the negative side of the metaphysical and divine metanarrative as noted by Bolt. The negative side can be found in another account of Francis's life, *Life of Saint Francis* (1228-29), written by Thomas of Celano (1200-1270), who considered Francis's impairment as incompatible with the ideal of living sainthood. He therefore portrayed Francis's blindness as a symptom of mortal illness rather than as a sign of sanctity, an association that has even percolated into twentieth-century biographies.¹²⁸ A comparison of the two sources shows that ocularnormativism has a negative side, portrayed in *Life of Saint Francis*, and a positive side, portrayed in *The Compilation*: in the latter source, Francis's blindness as described as an "exemplary blindness," an "opportunity for the embodied human being to demonstrate how close or far he or she is from reali[s]ing the transcendent ideal of living sanctity."¹²⁹ This idealising approach to blindness is reflected in *Iolanta*, which will become clear through a comparison between some aspects of *The Compilation* and the character of Iolanta. Just like Francis, the princess approaches the ideal of living sainthood through and because of her blindness.

One of the aspects of Francis's blindness that emphasises his sanctity is the way in which he endured all its challenges: the saint accepted his suffering, which was equated with that of Christ, with the same degree of humility as Christ.¹³⁰ Both *Life of Saint Francis* and *The Compilation* describe how Francis first refused treatment of his ailments despite his discomfort of the pain they caused, as he believed that his suffering would set him free and would enable

¹²⁵ Ibid., 72.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 69.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 67, 70.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 72, 75.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 72.

him to be with Christ.¹³¹ Thomas also describes how the saint, when he finally accepted a therapy, endured the most painful treatments again with humility and gratefulness.¹³² Indeed, Thomas and an account by Bonaventure (1221-1274) describe how Francis did not feel pain during a treatment of hot iron on his eyes because of the purity and harmony of flesh and spirit he had achieved.¹³³ During these years of pain and visual decline the saint also followed Christ's footsteps in what concerns the degree of devotion.¹³⁴ As Wells points out, an impairment was often regarded as a lack of physical wholeness in the Middle Ages – an idea which is at the basis of the negative side of the divine and metaphysical metanarrative of blindness – which was supposed to signify a lack of spiritual wholeness or health.¹³⁵ However, the above examples from sources about Francis show how this particular metanarrative portrays blindness as a way to improve spiritual health and come closer to Christ. In the context of the metanarrative of melancholia and Iolanta's sadness, it is interesting to note that there are also notifications of Francis cleaning "the eyes of his soul," that is, his interior vision, by crying, so that he could see God with his inner eye.¹³⁶

If we compare these accounts to *Iolanta*, it becomes clear that they are not only similar to Iolanta's story, but also point out the Symbolist aspects of the use of blindness in the opera. The princess follows the same path as Francis. Both endure a period of blindness before a resolution of a religious order: through his death, Francis finally achieves his desired union with Christ, and through her cure, Iolanta finally perceives the entirety of God's creation through sight. The princess also suffers, though not physically but mentally, of her blindness, and also tries to endure that through her religious devotion by appreciating every for her perceivable aspect about God's creation, as she tells Vaudémont in Scene 7. Remarkably, this comparison also makes clear that Iolanta, in contrast to Francis, does not know what she is suffering from, and consequently, what the resolution is. This evokes many questions for Iolanta with which she tries to grasp that what is unknown to her. It also intensifies the elusiveness of blindness in *Iolanta* and conjures up many associations for the audience. And yet, it seems that Iolanta intuitively knows the nature of the approaching resolution: considering that Francis wept in order to

¹³¹ Ibid., 70, 72, 74.

¹³² Ibid., 71, 75-6.

¹³³ Ibid., 77.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 68-9.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 77.

perceive God mentally, it is interesting to observe that crying is the only function of eyes known to Iolanta, and that she herself cries several times in the opera, as if she is also clearing her inner eye so that she cannot only perceive God inside now, but is also prepared for seeing God when the time of her cure comes.

Interestingly, for both Francis and Iolanta their most important sense remains sight, albeit a different kind: both have an extremely well developed inner eye. This is in line with the metanarrative of blindness regarding what Bolt calls the “fifth-sixth sense.”¹³⁷ This metanarrative involves visually impaired people having another sense instead of sight, a fifth sense, that would usually fall in the category of the so-called sixth sense. It is for this reason that blindness often appears together with prophecy, visions, or a strong intuition. We have already encountered an example of this in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, in which the blind girl experiences a premonition in a dream. In *Oedipus Rex* (1927) by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), this metanarrative is manifested in the character Tiresias, a blind seer.¹³⁸ Blindness and prophecy are also related in in Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh*, though in a different way. Morrison observes that the character of Grishka Kuterma is a counterbalance of the princess Fevroniya: he characterises Grishka as blind because he is faithless, betraying the people of the city of Greater Kitezh to the Tatars, as opposed to the faithful Fevroniya, who experiences several “radiant visions” throughout the opera. For this reason, Grishka can merely perceive the reflection in the water of the city of Greater Kitezh, which was made invisible by a prayer of Fevroniya for protection. In this sense, it could be said that the “divine maiden” Fevroniya resembles Iolanta, whereas Grishka might be a grotesque and diabolic version of the mentally blind Robert, who will not perceive the other world of *Iolanta*, as we will see.¹³⁹ Francis experienced a vision of the promise of eternal life in heaven during a period in which the physical pain of his impairment reached such pitch that it forced him to stay out of the daylight for fifty days.¹⁴⁰ The vision made him realise the goal of his sufferings and transported him to a state of exaltation.¹⁴¹ The fifth-sixth sense metanarrative also appears in the story of the saint through his prediction of the death of a man he had cured from a severe illness. If the man would return to his sinful habits,

¹³⁷ Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 69.

¹³⁸ Howe, “Introduction,” 5.

¹³⁹ Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 131. Interestingly, the opera is also similar to *Iolanta* in what concerns the first act: Fevroniya is equally close to nature as Iolanta, and also falls in love with a man who got lost during hunting in the area in which she lives.

¹⁴⁰ Wells, “Exemplary blindness,” 75-6.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

“things worse than the first will come upon you,” Francis prophesied not long before the man did indeed return to his old habits and subsequently perished under a collapsing roof.¹⁴² Iolanta has a similar prophetic experience in her arioso: she does not only sense that something is missing, but also that something is about to be revealed to her. This is suggested especially musically, which we will see in chapter 4. This link between blindness and prophecy is perhaps not as conventional as the other examples, but this shows precisely the suggestive and elusive way in which blindness functions in *Iolanta*. A similar elusive use of this metanarrative of blindness is the Blind Man’s Well in Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*. It is a forgotten well in the forest that surrounds King Arkel’s castle, about which we only get to know the story that the water used to cure the blind. The water in this spring is extraordinarily clear. Although the clarity of the water suggests the equal clarity of vision that it can restore, it also seems to refer to the clearness and depth of the inner eye of the blind: indeed, as Pelléas informs Mélisande, the bottom of the well has never been seen.

Just like blindness enables Tiresias and Francis to have a fifth-sixth sense in the form of an inner eye, so does Iolanta see more than the other, physically “whole” characters of *Iolanta*. As Neef summarises, the princess sees the “essence of things,” that is, the meaning below the surface of matter, glimpses of the beyond which are overlooked by the other characters. In other words, “the blind girl sees, whereas those who see are blinded by the apparent.”¹⁴³ To find out what Iolanta perceives, we have to compare *The Assisi Compilation* to *Iolanta* one more time. Francis is believed to have said that he did not “need to read Scripture with his physical eyes or have the word of God read to him by others because he ha[d] already more deeply understood and incorporated the Gospel message into his memory.”¹⁴⁴ As he explained himself: “[E]very day I find so much sweetness and consolation in my memory from meditating on the humility of the footprints of the Son of God that, if I were to live until the end of the world, I’d have no great need to hear or meditate on other passages of the Scripture.”¹⁴⁵ Francis’s statement shows how blindness has brought the word of God much closer to him than it would have been without his impairment. Iolanta makes a statement that is strikingly similar to that of Francis. When Vaudémont informs the princess that God cannot be honoured as much in

¹⁴² Ibid., 75.

¹⁴³ Neef, “Klank van licht,” 14.

¹⁴⁴ Wells, “Exemplary blindness,” 73.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

the dark as in the light, she answers that she does not need light in order to honour God. As Iolanta tells Vaudémont, she recognises the reflection of the Creator in the scents and sounds around her, in everything that is created, but moreover, in herself: just like Francis, Iolanta is already familiar with God's goodness, indeed, even more than the visually able. At that moment, the princess convinces Vaudémont of the unlimitedness of God's goodness: he affirms Iolanta's words by realising that "in your chest shines the torch of truth" (*v tvoey grudi siyaet pravdi svetoch*). With her clear inner sight, Iolanta can perceive the light of the torch of truth in her chest, which brings her closer to the Godly ideal of living sainthood than the other characters can ever be.

When Iolanta perceives the world for the first time with her eyes, every aspect of the garden she knows so well now seems deceitful. "When she could only hear," analyses Neef, "God pervaded Iolanta, now the world pervades her." But when Ebn-Hakia advises her to look up to the sky, the princess regains her former awareness of God again in heaven.¹⁴⁶ However, Iolanta achieves more than Neef observes: she now has both an inner and an outer awareness of God and his creation. Thus, Iolanta's cure transports the princess to a higher state of being: without blindness, she could not have achieved this ideal of living sainthood, just like Francis, and could not have been this close to God. This is in a way reflected by the music critic Stanislaw Niewiadomski (1859-1936), who wrote on the occasion of a performance of the blind pianist Imre Ungár (1909-1972) that "blindness confers a freedom from the constraints of world, its norms and rules of etiquette, leaving the blind pianist to plumb hidden realms of expression."¹⁴⁷ Exploring a hidden realm is exactly what Iolanta does throughout the opera: through her fifth-sixth sense she discovers more and more about *inoy svet*. During her blindness, Iolanta dwells in the dark world of the blind, until the moment of her cure, when she fully discovers the world of light and sight that was unknown to her for so long.¹⁴⁸ In this sense, the narrative of *Iolanta* reflects "the idea that not seeing is synonymous with not knowing" on the one hand, but contradicts it on the other as Iolanta at the same time has more knowledge than the other characters.¹⁴⁹ A. Zinkova compares Iolanta to the oratorio *Paradise and the Peri* (*Das Paradies und die Peri*, 1843) by Robert Schumann (1810-1856), a composer Tchaikovsky

¹⁴⁶ Neef, "Klank van licht," 12, 16.

¹⁴⁷ Honish, "Moving Experiences," 254.

¹⁴⁸ Bolt, *Metanarrative of blindness*, 123.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

admired. She argues that the plot of both works revolves around the metamorphoses of the protagonists, but that in *Iolanta* the plot is driven by the desire to “live, love, and see the surrounding world,” whereas the plot of *Paradise and the Peri* is a search for freeing oneself from the shackles of the earth in order to find Paradise.¹⁵⁰ Contrary to Zinkova’s argument, her characterisation of *Paradise and the Peri* appears to be very much applicable to *Iolanta*: by following the path of a saint up to the final metamorphosis of her cure, Iolanta is freed from the shackles of earthly matter that is her impaired body, and perceives the Paradise that is *inoy svet*.¹⁵¹ And yet, there is still much more to discover about Iolanta’s spiritual path, which we will now follow again, but from a different perspective: Solovyov’s philosophy.

¹⁵⁰ A. Zin'kova, “*Iolanta* Tchaikovskogo i *Peri* Shumana: dve grani romanticheskogo mirooshchushcheniya [Tchaikovsky’s *Iolanta* and Schumann’s *Peri*: two facets of a romantic worldview]” (paper, Saratov, 2013), 1.

¹⁵¹ Arthur Sullivan composed a comic opera titled *Iolanthe, or the Peer and the Peri*, but the opera is not related to either *Iolanta* or *The Paradise and the Peri*.

Chapter 3 – Solovyov's philosophy and Iolanta's inoy svet

One of the leading poets of the Silver Age, Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov (1866-1949), aimed to describe the essence of Symbolism with a phrase that would become the movement's motto: *a realibus ad realiora*, from reality towards a higher reality. It refers to a vertical and hierarchical ordering of the universe in which earthly matter is located at the bottom and divine, absolute truth at the top of the spectrum. This order implies a border between matter and spiritual layers of the universe that can be crossed by striving for the absolute. A mediator between these two worlds, Ivanov thought, was the symbol. He argued that the symbol functions like a sunray cutting "its way through all levels of existence and through all spheres of awareness and on every level it bears witness of other essences, in every sphere it fulfils another purpose."¹⁵² In other words, the symbol is able to capture the facets of one world and transmit that image to another. Thus, the symbol enables us to reach a higher truth of a world beyond the earthly and matter. This realm is called *inoy svet* – literally "the other world" – which is a central concept in Russian Symbolist discourse.

It is because of *inoy svet* that Symbolist art does not deal with existing reality but focuses on the creation of a new reality. Maes describes this new reality as "the autonomous world of the imagination" that portrays neither matter nor the spiritual world in their pure form.¹⁵³ Thus, art was a means of suggesting and evoking these two worlds through *a realibus ad realiora*. Maes explains how Symbolist theories such as these are rooted in the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov, for instance in the philosopher's idea about the function of art as a synthesis of opposites.¹⁵⁴ In *The General Meaning of Art (Obshchiy smysl isskustva*, 1890), Solovyov argues that the task of art is "the transformation of physical life into its spiritual counterpart, which . . . is capable of internally transfiguring, spirituali[s]ing matter or truly becoming embodied in it."¹⁵⁵ Thus, in Solovyov's view, art realises *a realibus ad realiora* as it is able to transform aspects of the earthly world (reality) into aspects of a higher world (absolute reality). Also, the concept of

¹⁵² Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Sobraniye sochinenii*, vol. 2, ed. D. V. Ivanov and O. Deschartes (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1974), 537. Quoted in Jenny Stelleman, "The Essence of Religion in Vj. Ivanov's Concept of the Theatre," in *Theatre and Religion*, ed. Günter Ahrends and Hans-Jürgen Diller (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998), 116.

¹⁵³ Maes, "Imagination and Renewal," 201, 210.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁵⁵ Vladimir Solovyov, *Sobraniye sochenii* (St. Petersburg: 1911-14), 84. Quoted in Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman, eds., *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 14. Quoted in Maes, "Imagination and Renewal," 210.

inoy svet is noticeable in Solovyov's view on faith: regarding it in a broader way than just religion, he believed that faith was an acknowledgement of "the external world beyond the thinking, sensing subject himself."¹⁵⁶ In this way, the concepts of *inoy svet* and *a realibus ad realiora* indicate how philosophy and faith, including religion, stimulate Symbolist thought.

In this light, it is interesting to note that more than any other of Tchaikovsky's operas, *Iolanta* has a prominent religious and philosophical content. Remarkably, just like Solovyov's religious philosophy, it stimulates Symbolist connotations. This is apparent, for instance, in associating God with two significant themes of *Iolanta*, sight and light. One of the clearest manifestations of this link in the libretto is the definition of sight that Vaudémont gives Iolanta: he describes it as "getting to know God's light" (*poznavat' svet Bozhiy*). Interestingly, "svet" can also be translated as "world," which not only points at Iolanta's ignorance of the world outside the garden, but also adds a layer of obscurity to what Iolanta is missing.¹⁵⁷ However, the context of the references to "svet" that the characters of *Iolanta* make show that "light" is the most likely meaning of "svet." It shows how *Iolanta* contains a God-light synonymy, which we will explore below. Such an association of a heavenly power with light was not uncommon before and during the Silver Age. For example, the composer Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninov (1873-1943) used the image of a setting sun as a symbol for the everlasting light of Christ in the hymn "Gladsome light" (*Svetye tikhi*) from his *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37 (1915).¹⁵⁸ It is interesting to note both Rachmaninov's and Tchaikovsky's symbolic use of light: knowing that Rachmaninov experienced the Silver Age first hand, unlike Tchaikovsky, this comparison suggests that Tchaikovsky was aware of such developing Symbolist ideas. Indeed, Maes considers Tchaikovsky to be Rachmaninov's musical predecessor.¹⁵⁹ Another instance of a heavenly power with light can be found in an untitled poem written by Solovyov in 1881, in which he explored the dichotomy of light and darkness by evoking an image of how the clear shine and brilliant thunderbolts of God and the Divine word will triumph darkness and illuminate the beauty of earth.¹⁶⁰ It is revealing that the same God-light synonymy from a (proto-)Symbolist period is also used in *Iolanta*. Furthermore, the symbolic use of light and darkness as a dichotomy in Solovyov's poem also plays a significant role in *Iolanta*. Indeed, precisely the dichotomies that

¹⁵⁶ Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 49.

¹⁵⁷ Neef, "Klank van licht," 17.

¹⁵⁸ Maes, "Imagination and Renewal," 206.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁶⁰ The poem in question starts with "Oh, how pure is your azure ..." (*O, kak v tebe lazuri chistoi mnogo...*)

the philosopher mentions in explaining his idea of art as a synthesis of opposites also form pairs of worlds in *Iolanta*: earth and heaven, matter and spirit, and real and ideal.¹⁶¹ In all dichotomies *inoy svet* suggests the mystic and the religious, and at the basis of all opposites lies the larger Symbolist dichotomy of earthly reality and *inoy svet*.

Vaudémont's definition of light brings us to the crucial question asked in the previous chapter: why does *Iolanta* need to be cured if it seems that her visual impairment does not prevent her from honouring God, indeed, more than any other character in *Iolanta*? The second part of the answer to this question can be given from the perspective of Solovyov's philosophy, which will make clear that *Iolanta* cannot completely honour God while blind. Several of Solovyov's major ideas are both intertwined with and contrary to the theories discussed in the previous chapter. Firstly, the metanarrative of blindness as a fifth-sixth sense is contrary to Solovyov's argument about how human beings perceive reality and absolute truth through the senses, as blindness would be an incompleteness in this context. "A Critique of Abstract Principles" explains how a collaborative act of all senses is imperative for human beings to perceive absolute reality: being *whole* is vital for a complete perception of absolute truth. Blindness prevents the perception of absolute reality: it cannot be perceived by inner sight alone, as will become clear below. Secondly, this idea is extended in combination with the cure-or-kill paradigm: Solovyov's philosophy is rooted in soteriology, the religious theories about salvation or redemption of matter as a result of a modification in behavior, which links the idea of becoming *whole* to that of overcoming blindness by way of a cure.¹⁶² As appears from his *Lectures on Godmanhood* (*Chteniya o bogochelovechestve*, 1877-81), Solovyov believed that a human being had a natural desire to overcome their limited, finite condition.¹⁶³ With the metanarratives of blindness in mind, blindness can be considered as precisely such a material limitation of the human condition. Solovyov defines this overcoming as transfiguration, alluding to the transfiguration of Christ. This chapter will argue that, applied to *Iolanta*, these theories from disability studies combined with Solovyov's philosophy portray *Iolanta*'s cure as a transfiguration, imperative for the princess in order to become fully spiritually aware of God's creation. Through an exploration of Solovyov's concepts of objectification, imagination,

¹⁶¹ Maes, "Imagination and Renewal," 210.

¹⁶² Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 7.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 65.

transfiguration, total-unity, and Sophia, this chapter shows how Iolanta, Vaudémont, and Ebn-Hakia approach the Godly *inoj svet*.

The part of Solovyov's "Critique" that forms the basis of the present reading of *Iolanta* is the third section, which deals with epistemology and metaphysics.¹⁶⁴ Solovyov attributes a significant role to the senses as a mediator between reality and absolute truth on the one hand, and human beings and knowledge on the other. He defines reality as that which exists "objectively . . . and independently of any knowing subject."¹⁶⁵ Human beings perceive all aspects of this reality through each corresponding sense, for instance colour through sight and flavour through taste. Cognition has to interpret these aspects of reality delivered separately by each sense, which results in knowledge about that reality. Solovyov calls this process "objectification." However, as the senses are subjective and not universal, it would be false to argue that reality is the same as truth. After all, if the perception of each individual equals to truth, then multiple truths would exist, which Solovyov considers to be impossible. He therefore argues that truth is not reality, but absolute reality. In order to perceive this absolute reality, a synthesis of the senses is required to form a complete image, a process which Solovyov's calls "imagination." "For Solovyov," Thomas Nemeth summarises, "truth . . . is the whole, and, consequently, each particular fact in isolation from the whole is false."¹⁶⁶ If we now look at *Iolanta* from this perspective, we see that her blindness prevents both objectification and imagination: she perceives four instead of five aspects of reality, which prevents her from forming a complete image, and subsequently from perceiving absolute reality. In other words, it could be said that Solovyov's argument creates a new metanarrative of blindness as incompleteness. Interestingly, Ebn-Hakia's diagnose in the adaptation of *King René's Daughter* by Zotov is remarkably similar to Solovyov's concepts of objectification and imagination. The Moorish physician explains to King René how sight is not merely located in the eyes, but is a phenomenon of a cooperation of the eyes and brain, which are connected by invisible threads.¹⁶⁷ Just as Solovyov argues that objectification alone is not enough to perceive absolute reality, so argues Zotov's Ebn-Hakia that the eyes only do not fully contain the sense of sight.

¹⁶⁴ Two philosophical aspects, which consider the phenomena of knowledge and of being in the world respectively.

¹⁶⁵ *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s. v. "Solovyov, Vladimir," by Thomas Nemeth, accessed 4 March, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/solovyov/>.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 13.

So far, Solovyov's "Critique" makes it clear in what way blindness disconnects Iolanta from reality that is the earthly world and from absolute reality that is her imagination. This brings us to the fact that it is not merely Iolanta's blindness that causes this disconnection. Indeed, being kept in ignorance about everything related to sight, the princess does not know about and therefore simply cannot *imagine* things such as sight, light, and colour. Therefore, Iolanta is not only unaware of her blindness, but cannot even become aware of it if she has no knowledge of these concepts. In other words, as Solovyov summarises his argument: "To know what we should do we must know what is."¹⁶⁸

The above conclusions drawn from the "Critique," and especially this summarising sentence, are strikingly similar to the conclusion reached by Ebn-Hakia, both in Zotov's adaption and Tchaikovsky's opera: Iolanta must be aware of her blindness in order for the cure to succeed. Indeed, Tchaikovsky's Ebn-Hakia almost literally summarises the above outlined epistemological and metaphysical part of Solovyov's "Critique" in his aria-monologue "Two worlds" (*Dva mira*):

In the world there is no impression,
that only the body knows,
like everything in nature, the sense of sight
is not only enclosed in it [the body].
And before the corporeal, mortal eyes,
are opened to the world,
it is necessary, that this sense
is known to the eternal soul.

*Na svete netu vpechatleniya,
chto telo znalo bi odno,
kak vse v prirode, chuvstvo zreniya
ne tol'ko v nem zaklyucheno.
I prezhde, chem otkrit' dlya sveta
plotskiye, smertniye glaza,
nam nuzhno, chtobi chuvstvo eto
poznala vechnaya dusha.*

Whereas Zotov's Ebn-Hakia locates the sense of sight in the eyes and the brain, Tchaikovsky's Ebn-Hakia has reserved the "eternal soul" (*vechnaya dusha*) for the second location of sight. In other words, the former is cognition, whereas the latter is consciousness. Interestingly, this comparison brings forward another similarity between Tchaikovsky's Ebn-Hakia and Solovyov's philosophy. As we continue to examine the argument of the "Critique," we see that Solovyov believed that the truth, enclosed in the whole, can only exist in consciousness. He considers this consciousness as "faith or mystical knowledge, which would itself be impossible if the subject

¹⁶⁸ Nemeth, "Solovyov, Vladimir."

and the object of knowledge were completely divorced.”¹⁶⁹ In other words, if imagination and objectification are “divorced,” then a human being does not have full access to faith or mystical knowledge. This is the crucial foundation for the answer to why *Iolanta* has to be cured: if this separation remains, and if she is not aware of her blindness in her consciousness, she misses an essential part of honouring God.

This religious element of the “Critique” is reflected in another of Tchaikovsky’s additions to the words of Zotov’s Ebn-Hakia, an addition which is striking for its Symbolist colour, and which forms the essence of *Iolanta*’s Symbolism. Let us remember the main objective of Symbolist art defined at the beginning of this chapter, namely suggesting and evoking the allusive relationship between the earthly world and *inoy svet*. It is very striking, therefore, that Ebn-Hakia’s monologue starts with the mentioning of two worlds, the corporeal and the spiritual (*Dva mira: plotskiy i dukhovniy*). The first world is connected to earthly reality and the second to *inoy svet*. As will become clear in chapter 4, there are several “two worlds” in *Iolanta*, pairs of realms in which one realm is associated with an earthly world and the other with an *inoy svet*. These dichotomies are very aptly described by one line in Solovyov’s poem “Dear friend” (*Miliy drug*), cited at the beginning of the present thesis. Arthur Langeveld and Willem G. Weststeijn identify this phrase as the essence of Solovyov’s Symbolist philosophy: everything that is visible to us is just a reflection, just a shadow of what is invisible to our eyes (*vse vidimoye nami - tol'ko otblesk, tol'ko teni, ot nezrimgo ochami*).¹⁷⁰

Thus, Solovyov’s philosophy makes clear how the corporeal and spiritual world are in essence linked to the concept of *inoy svet*: for *Iolanta*, reality is the corporeal world without all that can be perceived through sight only, which links her *inoy svet* to absolute reality, the world of sight and mystical knowledge. It recalls Vaudémont’s definition of sight as “getting to know God’s light.” Thus, Ebn-Hakia’s aria-monologue seems to implicate another pair of worlds: the earthly and the heavenly world. The Moorish physician explains how the corporeal and spiritual world are “united by a higher power in every phenomenon of existence, like inseparable friends.” (*vo vsekh yavlen'yakh bitiya zdes' slilis' voleyu verkhovnoy, kak nerazluchnye druzya.*) However, not only the mentioning of this higher power suggests presence of the heavenly world in *Iolanta*: it is Ebn-Hakia himself that is portrayed as a mystic mediator between the two worlds of earth

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Langeveld and Weststeijn, *Moderne Russische literatuur*, 148. This translation is slightly different from the poetic translation of the poem at the beginning of the present thesis for the sake of being more accurate.

and heaven in *Iolanta*, which becomes clear during his aria-monologue. In this arguably most mystic moment of the opera, the Moorish physician presents his final advice about Iolanta's cure to King René. Interestingly, the mystic aspects of Ebn-Hakia and his aria-monologue can again be explained through Solovyov and his mysticism. First, Ebn-Hakia's views on his profession are similar to the philosopher's argument for a synthesis of theology, philosophy, and natural science into an organic unity as a requirement against one-sided views on reality.¹⁷¹ Indeed, Solovyov believed that the contemporary scientific developments supported religion rather than undermined it.¹⁷² As is outlined in chapter 1, the historical background of the character of Ebn-Hakia is also rooted in contemporary science, religion, and philosophy – in his case from Medieval times and Arab cultures – and the way in which the physician combines those fields in order to create a complete assessment of Iolanta's situation. Second, the mediating function of Ebn-Hakia resembles that of the High Priest as described by Solovyov. The philosopher attributes a guiding function to the High Priest, who aims to “direct the whole (*eto tseloe* [sic]) on the path to its higher purpose, indicating to it each time, at each cross-road, *where to go*.”¹⁷³ In *Iolanta*, Ebn-Hakia has been brought to the princess especially for finding a cure for her blindness. With his aria-monologue, the physician indicates the right direction on the path to Iolanta's higher purpose – her cure that allows her to be fully devoted to God. Ebn-Hakia's requirements for the cure can be explained through Solovyov's concept of “the conscious man,” whose attainment of their higher purpose is stimulated by awareness of the self and their relation to the world.¹⁷⁴ If we apply this concept to Tchaikovsky's opera, *Iolanta* has to become aware of her blindness and its limitations in relation to (absolute) reality in order to make a cure possible. According to the concept of the “conscious man,” such awareness has to be triggered by Godly intervention.¹⁷⁵ In his function as High Priest, Ebn-Hakia is “that central point at which the Divinity directly makes contact with the organism of human society.”¹⁷⁶ In other words, the Moorish physician is like a messenger from God who causes the divine intervention. Third, both Solovyov and Ebn-Hakia have mystic experiences: Solovyov had three visions of Sophia, and the way in which Tchaikovsky designed Ebn-Hakia's aria-monologue transformed the

¹⁷¹ Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 50.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷³ Vladimir Solovyov, “The History and Future of Theocracy,” in *Collected Works of Vladimir Solovyov*, vol. 4 (Brussels: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1966), 506-7. Quoted in Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 82. Italics by Solovyov.

¹⁷⁴ Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 52-3.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

physician's advice to King René into an oracle-like, supernatural trance, as we will see in chapter 4. At this point it suffices to notice that the type of language of Ebn-Hakia's aria-monologue is one of prediction, elusive at the surface but full of deeper meaning. All in all, the comparison and points of intersection between Solovyov and Ebn-Hakia illuminate precisely the Symbolist aspects of the portrayal of Ebn-Hakia in *Iolanta*.

It is important to note that Ebn-Hakia's Oriental origins are not incompatible with the philosophy of Symbolism. The presence of this personage in *King René's Daughter* and *Iolanta* can also be explained from the interest in the Orient which was reflected in art for centuries already, but the Oriental was also a part of Symbolism. Solovyov himself argued for instance for a synthesis of the Western and Oriental world.¹⁷⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Legend of the Invisible city of Kitezh* also has both a Symbolist and an Oriental colour.¹⁷⁸ In relation to Ebn-Hakia, it is revealing to see how Tchaikovsky's contemporaries represented the Orient, especially his colleague composers of the Kuchka.¹⁷⁹ Whether it was the dangerous seductiveness of the Oriental woman which Balakirev explored in *Tamara* (1867-82), the battle between the Genghis Khan and Prince Igor in Borodin's opera *Prince Igor* (*Knyaz' Igor'*, 1887), or Rimsky-Korsakov's musical version of the folk tales *One Thousand and One Nights* in his *Scheherazade* (*Shekherazada*, 1888), topics with an Oriental flavour inspired many different works of the Kuchka composers. One of those works has a striking similarity with *Iolanta* as regards Ebn-Hakia: one of the characters in Rimsky-Korsakov's Oriental opera *The Golden Cockerel* (*Zolotoy petushok*, 1907) is an Arab astrologer. According to Gerald Abraham, this character is based on the Oriental tale "Legende d'Astrologue Arabe," which Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) turned into the poem that Rimsky-Korsakov would use for his opera.¹⁸⁰ In *The Golden Cockerel* the astrologer is portrayed as a "mysterious stranger," whereas in the poem he is simply an "old friend" of the personage King Dodon.¹⁸¹ This change is very much in line with the Orientalist aesthetics, which were directed towards portraying the Orient as unfamiliar and mysterious, often accompanied with fear from the Occidental side. Interestingly, Tchaikovsky departs from this

¹⁷⁷ Marlène Laruelle, *Russia between East and West: Scholarly Debates on Eurasianism*, ed. Dmitrii Shlapentokh (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2007), 21.

¹⁷⁸ Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 182.

¹⁷⁹ A composer group with Mili Balakirev (1837-1910), Alexander Borodin (1833-1887), César Cui (1835-1918), Modest Musorgsky (1839-1881), and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) as members.

¹⁸⁰ Gerald Abraham, "Satire and Symbolism in 'The Golden Cockerel'," *Music & Letters* 52 (1971): 48-50. The poem in question is *The Fairy Tale of the Little Golden Cockerel* (1834). "Legende d'Astrologue Arabe" originates from *Tales of the Alhambra* by Washington Irving (1832).

¹⁸¹ Abraham, "Satire and Symbolism," 50.

practice in his portrayal of Ebn-Hakia. Although he does musically portray the physician's Oriental aspects, as we will examine in chapter 4, he does not create a typical Orientalistic portrayal like his colleagues of the Kuchka would have done. This is apparent from a comparison of the libretto of *Iolanta* with *King René's Daughter* in the versions of Miller and Zotov. In his opera, Tchaikovsky left out the passages that show the other characters' fear of the mysterious Moor and his unfamiliar treatment, as well as emphases on his Otherness. For instance, in Zotov's adaption King René points out that the doctor is famed (slavniy), "although not a Christian" (*khotya ne khristianin*).¹⁸² Also, Martha expresses to Bertrand her worries about the "grim, silent Muslim" (*ugryumiy, molchaliviy musulmanin*) and his treatment, indeed, in a racist way: "Think what you will, but I do not like this half-black. . . I do not like him: I am scared that his treatment will not be beneficial to Iolanta!" (*kak khochesh, a mne etot polucherniy . . . Ne nravitsya: boyus' ya, chto Iolante ne prineset ego lechenye pol' zi'*)¹⁸³ As explained in chapter 1, in *King René's Daughter* Ebn-Hakia uses an amulet to make Iolanta sleep. Bertrand expresses his worries the power of Ebn-Hakia and his amulet.¹⁸⁴ Tchaikovsky literally borrows another such line from Zotov, but takes it to another level. When King René tries in vain to read Ebn-Hakia's expression when he is about to tell him his daughter can be cured, he says: "Like your science, your face is impassive, cold and dark, and I cannot read anything from your features." (*Tvoye litso besstrastno, neprivetno i temno, kak tvoya nauka; tshchetno khochu prochest' otvet v tvoyikh chertakh*).¹⁸⁵ On the one hand this could be interpreted as an emphasis on the unfamiliarity and Otherness of Ebn-Hakia and his science, and perhaps it even shows fear of the Other and unfamiliar. On the other hand, King René's comment hints at Ebn-Hakia's mediating function between earth and a higher power that provides him with his science and philosophy. In that sense, the physician's face has become the border between the two worlds of what is known and unknown, insurmountable for King René. Also, Ebn-Hakia's position between the two worlds of the Orient and the Occident emphasises mediating function between worlds. It is an example of how Tchaikovsky takes the Oriental towards the Symbolist, a tendency on which we will elaborate in chapter 4.

¹⁸² Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 5.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸⁴ F. B. Miller, trans., "Doch' Korolya Rene," *Russkiy Vestnik* 163 (1883): 664.

¹⁸⁵ Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 11.

Having explored Ebn-Hakia in the context of Solovyov and Symbolism, we move on to the reason why the physician has been brought to Iolanta: the cure of blindness. Again, Solovyov's philosophy provides insight into the Symbolist meaning of blindness in *Iolanta*, as it shows how visual impairment is portrayed as a condition from which a human being can develop towards perceiving *inoy svet*. Also, it shows how Iolanta's cure is similar to a mystic experience. The unification of the corporeal and spiritual – which Ebn-Hakia considers to be so vital for Iolanta's cure – is associated in Solovyov's *Judaism and the Christian Question* (*Evreystvo I khristianskiy vopros*, 1884) with transfiguration. The philosopher explains this concept by way of his idea of “sacred corporeality” (*svyataya telesnost*). Solovyov believes that “physical, created matter is indeed receptive to spiritual influence,” which makes the close relationship between God and man possible.¹⁸⁶ He illustrates his argument with an example of how Judaist thought does not separate the spiritual from the corporeal, the divine from its material expression.¹⁸⁷ Elaborating on that, the philosopher argues that transfiguration (*preobrazovaniye*, or *preobrazheniye*) is a “strengthening of the spirit with a view to a transfiguration of the flesh,” rather than a weakening of the flesh.¹⁸⁸ As is described in Luke 9, 28-36, the transfiguration of Christ showed his body transfused with light, which indicated his spiritual power, and made this power known to the Apostles who witnessed the transfiguration. It is described as a light “almost too powerful for the Apostles to bear.”¹⁸⁹ The Orthodox Christian theologian Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958) argues that such a “light or effulgence can be defined as the visible quality of the divinity, of the energies or grace in which God makes himself known.”¹⁹⁰

This explanation of transfiguration can be linked to Iolanta's blindness and cure in several ways. Firstly, Lossky argues that this divine light is only revealed to the *whole* human in mystical experience, not merely to one of a person's human faculties.¹⁹¹ This is completely in line with the concepts of objectification and imagination as explained in Solovyov's “Critique,” and thus shows that Iolanta is not receptive for the mystical experience of transfiguration while visually impaired. Simultaneously, without blindness, there can be no cure, and thus no transfiguration. Secondly, the bright light that accompanies transfiguration also appears to

¹⁸⁶ Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 56.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Iolanta when she sees for the first time. At the very moment she becomes fully aware of God's creation through sight, she sees an overwhelmingly bright light, indeed, almost too powerful to bear, as she exclaims: "O, unbearable shine!" (*O, blesk nevynosimiy!*) Iolanta becomes *whole* at the moment of her cure, the mystical experience of a divine light. To rephrase Solovyov's words, the flesh is transfigured by gaining sight, and the spirit is strengthened by a mystic experience that makes Iolanta fully aware of God and his creation. The princess finally perceives *inoy svet*, which completes her transition from an earthly towards a heavenly realm.

Thus, Iolanta's cure is strikingly similar to Solovyov's mystical concept of transfiguration. However, not only this moment but in fact the whole period leading up to it is mystical: the princess can be compared with a mystic because of the spiritual path she follows. C. A. Bennett explains how being a mystic requires a moral preparation that enables them to perceive reality as it truly is.¹⁹² Appropriately, in his explanation Bennett uses imagery of sight. He explains how the moral preparation erases defects in the mystic's vision, that is, their soul.¹⁹³ Indeed, Bennett argues that the mystic "endeavours to clarify his vision not that he may escape the discomforts of blindness or defective vision, but in order to see reality as it truly is."¹⁹⁴ This path of the mystic is strikingly similar to Iolanta's story: her development towards her cure, her overcoming blindness, is in fact a moral preparation for perceiving "reality as divine."¹⁹⁵ Indeed, Tambovskaya notes how Iolanta finally perceives light as a result of a serious challenge, the undergoing of a transformation of her soul.¹⁹⁶ The metanarrative of blindness strengthens the comparison of Iolanta to a mystic in two ways. Firstly, blindness isolates Iolanta from the outside world, which is symbolised by the enclosed garden that is her home. Solovyov believed that "[i]solated individuals may be granted a privileged, but all the same fleeting, foretaste of the universal harmony to come," which he himself experienced as a mystic during isolated moments.¹⁹⁷ This analysis of Iolanta's cure as transfiguration shows that the way in which meaning is attributed to blindness in *Iolanta* suggests *inoy svet* and a transition from earthly reality to this world. Iolanta's cure is the completion of a mystic's transformation that culminates in a spiritual experience: it is a transition from inside to outside the enclosed body, from the

¹⁹² Ibid., 4.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ C. A. Bennett, *A Philosophical Study of Mysticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 26. Quoted in Sutton, "The Study of Mystical Thought-Methodology," 4.

¹⁹⁵ Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 4.

¹⁹⁶ Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti," 5.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 47-8.

corporeal to the spiritual, and from the earthly to the Godly world. Henry Zajaczkowski notes how Iolanta's "fragile sphere" is opened by three cracks, of which Ebn-Hakia's diagnosis is the middle, situated between Iolanta's own awareness and Vaudémont's arrival, with which we will continue now.¹⁹⁸ Although Zajaczkowski does not link *Iolanta* to Symbolism or Solovyov, his observation illustrates the steps on the path Iolanta follows as mystic.

Apart from becoming aware of her blindness, Ebn-Hakia requires another incentive for Iolanta's cure: a desire to see. Solovyov considered an awareness of the undesirability, that is, the limitations, of earthly existence to be a "powerful impetus" in the direction of spiritual life.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) argued that the mystic's spiritual experience (which he calls "numinous experience") cannot be taught, but must be awakened from the spirit.²⁰⁰ This is a vital component of the narrative in *Iolanta*: desire to see is awakened in the princess by her love for Vaudémont. Initially Vaudémont's love for Iolanta seems to be rooted in a conventional portrayal of love in Romantic opera – for instance, the Count pours out his heart into an aria, confesses his love passionately to the princess, and is even prepared to die for her. However, there is more to this aspect of *Iolanta* than is clear at first sight. Solovyov's philosophy brings another dimension of love to the surface: it is meant to complete Iolanta. In the second part of the "Critique," Solovyov describes love as a "total-unity," achieved by individuals working together: each person complements the other by making the other person's good their own good. Thus, the total-unity cannot be achieved individually, but only through positive interaction between two individuals.²⁰¹ As the exploration of the third part of Solovyov's "Critique" shows, blindness prevents the perception of absolute reality. Vaudémont's love for Iolanta stimulates him to make her good his own good: he removes Iolanta's worries, questions, and tears by informing his beloved of her visual impairment and by giving her the knowledge about "getting to know God's light." From that moment onwards, the lovers share their good, that is, each other's happiness. Thus, Vaudémont's love completes Iolanta with the knowledge that will also make her *whole*. Iolanta feels love that awakens her desire to see, the "powerful

¹⁹⁸ Zajaczkowski, "Culminating Allegory," 101.

¹⁹⁹ Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 44.

²⁰⁰ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 60. Quoted in Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 10.

²⁰¹ Nemeth, "Solovyov, Vladimir."

impetus” that will enable her numinous experience, her cure. Indeed, Solovyov considered the achievement of total-unity as the triumph of absolute morality over matter.²⁰²

So far, we have examined several ways in which Iolanta can perceive absolute reality and attain a higher state of being. There is one last aspect of Solovyov’s philosophy that links Iolanta to the metanarratives of blindness and Symbolism. As outlined in the previous chapter, blindness is often associated with the metaphysical in what concerns sanctity, the divine, and the mystic. The last reading of the princess is therefore one of her as a divine being. In fact, the personage Iolanta is strikingly similar to Solovyov’s mystical concept of Sophia, which was one of the most important of Solovyov’s ideas for the Symbolists.²⁰³ Langeveld and Weststeijn describe how Sophia for Solovyov symbolised the principle of the eternal feminine that governs Creation. Solovyov believed that “the time of the Holy Spirit” would start at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that moment a fusion of the Godly and the earthly, and – as if spoken from Ebn-Hakia’s mouth – the corporeal and the spiritual, would take place, symbolised by and embodied in Sophia. Through her, humanity could achieve the higher goal: Sophia would free the earth from matter and would enable the presence of God in all.²⁰⁴ For Solovyov, Sophia was embodied in a human, feminine form, which he had encountered in three visions and which he described in his poetry. She was the symbol of love and beauty, “the living connection between the earthly and the divine.”²⁰⁵ Later, Blok would write more than eight-hundred poems about Sophia. For him, she embodied purity, beauty, and love, and was like a light in the darkness.²⁰⁶

These descriptions of Sophia are quite similar to how Iolanta is viewed in the opera by Vaudémont. From the libretto it appears that he is striving to find a Godly ideal through meeting his beloved, and how he eventually achieves this higher goal through his encounter with Iolanta. It is striking how similar to Sophia Vaudémont’s dream image of his ideal love is in his aria in Scene 6. Vaudémont describes her as a “bright angel” (*svetliy angel*) in the shape of woman with a heavenly and sublime appearance, who is a “source of love” (*istochnik lyubvi*) and is of “cherubin goodness” (*kheruvimskoy dobroti*). The Count even compares his vision of her to a “bright beam, lighting up from behind slowly disappearing clouds” (*iz-za tayushchikh tuch ozari, svetliy luch*). It becomes clear that Iolanta is the embodiment of this ideal image from the

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Langeveld and Weststeijn, *Moderne Russische literatuur*, 148.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 148-9.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 149, 157.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 150.

moment Vaudémont sees the princess, as he exclaims: “O, what do I see! An angel!” (*O, chto ya vizhu Angela!*)²⁰⁷ This becomes even more clear from his first confession of love to Iolanta: “You appeared to me like a vision of a heavenly, pure beauty, like an appearance from a sweet dream, like an image of pure inspiration,” (*Vi mne predstali kak videnye nebesnoy chistoy krasoti, kak prizrak sladostnoy mehti, kak oblik chistiye vdokhnoveniya.*) he sings. “For me an angel from heaven suddenly has become earthly! But I see you are not a vision, and that you are destined to live, inspire love, suffer, and love!” (*predo mnoy vdrug angel neba stal zemnoy! No vizhu ya, vi ne videnye i vam dano sud'boyu zhit', vnushat' lyubov', stradat', lyubit'!*) In other words, Vaudémont’s love is not an ordinary passion or affection: it is an adoration of a Godly ideal, in line with Blok’s and Solovyov’s veneration of Sophia. Through Vaudémont’s eyes, Iolanta becomes the human embodiment of Sophia. Through her, the Count comes closer to the higher goal, as Iolanta convinces him of the endlessness of God’s grace and goodness.²⁰⁸ Like the Apostles experienced the light of Christ’s transfiguration as a sign of divine power, Vaudémont can see absolute reality within Iolanta. “O, you are right,” he exclaims to her, “in your chest shines the torch of truth, and compared to that our earthly light is transient and poor.” (*O, ti prava, v tvoyey grudi siyayet pravdi svetoch, i pered nim nash svet zemnoy i prekhodyashch i zhalok.*) In meeting Iolanta, Vaudémont sees his Godly ideal realised, hitherto merely a dream image to him. In this sense, the Count also undergoes a spiritual awakening in which *inoy svet* is revealed to him.

Just how perceptible Vaudémont is to *inoy svet* is made clear in the opera in a very effective way. The presence of Robert is essential for illuminating Vaudémont’s perceptibility to *inoy svet*. Indeed, this seems to be the only reason why Robert has such a relatively large role in the narrative: he is a superficial character that does not develop in any way over the course of the opera. Undoubtedly, Robert is one of the characters in which David Brown sees little “substance.” However, this analysis shows that this is not a weakness, “the key to *Iolanta*’s failure,” as Brown claims, but one of its strengths and Symbolist aspects.²⁰⁹ Vaudémont’s perceptibility for the Godly *inoy svet* is emphasised through the constant opposition of character between the two friends. The down-to-earth Robert contrasts sharply with the dreamy and

²⁰⁷ Martha, Brigitta, Laura, and King René also call Iolanta “angel” several times.

²⁰⁸ See the duet of Scene 7.

²⁰⁹ Brown, “Double Bill,” 367.

idealistic Vaudémont.²¹⁰ This emerges clearly from their diametrically opposed reactions and moods regarding the situation they become involved in. Whereas Vaudémont is full of rapture about Iolanta and the garden, Robert remains frightened and suspicious of the sight of the sleeping princess and the place they have ended up in. He fears that Iolanta is a sorceress, and Vaudémont one of her next enchanted victims. Although Robert seems to perceive Iolanta's Godly radiance that so enraptures Vaudémont, he is not perceptive at all to its meaning. Indeed, when he first sees the princess, he describes her in a cold tone merely as "a young girl." (*moloden'kaya devochka.*) When Vaudémont spots Iolanta's footprints, Robert says mockingly "probably from some kind of fairy..." (*verno feyi kakoy-nibud'...*) His superficial response is an echo of his aria in praise of Mathilde. The things he so adores about her are simply good looks: her snow white hand, her smile, and her eyes that sparkle and evoke an unparalleled passion in him. "Everything about her makes you drunk and burns like wine" (*v ney vse op'yanyayet i zhzheth, kak vino*), Robert concludes his praise of Mathilde. Nothing about the earthly pleasures celebrated in this aria is similar to Vaudémont's description of his "Sophia" in his aria, or shows anything metaphysical or spiritual. Indeed, in the passage leading up to his aria about Mathilde Robert makes fun of nuns, "with their 'benedicite' and 'amen.'" (*svoimi "benedicite" i "amen."*) Sigrid Neef regards the conventionalism of Robert's aria, which she characterises as a typical Italian bravura aria, as a way of typifying Robert's superficiality: he is and remains an "eyes man" (*ogenmens*).²¹¹ Robert's aria emphasises that Vaudémont recognises beauty not in Iolanta's looks, but in her Godly being.

It seems that Tchaikovsky noticed the effect of the contradictions between the two friends in Zotov's version of *King René's Daughter*: he removed some passages that weaken this construction. For instance, in Zotov's adaptation a passage is devoted to Vaudémont tasting the wine that Iolanta has offered the two friends. Robert immediately inquires if the wine tastes normal, alluding to poison. After Vaudémont's rapture about the wine's extraordinary quality that equals the paradisiacality of the garden, Robert has gathered enough courage to try the wine as well, and is equally amazed. He also speaks to Iolanta and asks her questions, and even comes up with a plan to free the locked up girl like real knights.²¹² In other words, Zotov's Robert is

²¹⁰ Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo." Brown notices this contrast especially in their difference in loving, that is, Robert's "unrestrained passion" and Vaudémont's slumbering love. See "Double Bill," 355.

²¹¹ Neef, "Klank van licht," 14.

²¹² Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 23.

willing to let go of his suspicions of *inoy svet*. Including this in the opera would imply a personal development on Robert's behalf towards perceiving *inoy svet*. Instead, Robert stays away from Iolanta as far as possible, and begs Vaudémont not to talk to her: "Do not tell her who we are... keep quiet!" (*Ne otkryvay ey kto mī... molchi!*) This way, Tchaikovsky shows Robert's ignorance of *inoy svet*, and consequently emphasises Vaudémont's perceptibility.

It has to be noted that Iolanta, Vaudémont, Robert, and perhaps most of all King René are still very much traditional characters rooted in Romantic opera conventions. Although the opera plots in the nineteenth century were diverse, they often dealt with emotions and personal situations which were recognisable for a broad audience.²¹³ This is certainly true for Tchaikovsky's operas. After all, a major red thread in *Iolanta* is a dramatic narrative that develops around love. We only have to look at the rest of Tchaikovsky's operatic oeuvre to discover that Iolanta is just another young maiden whose fate is determined by love, and with whose emotions we are allowed to identify: it is demonstrated by her resemblance to the narrative around Romantic characters such as Natalya (*The Oprichnik*), Tatyana (*Eugene Onegin*), Joan (*The Maid of Orléans*), and Liza (*The Queen of Spades*). "[O]nce again," observes Brown about Tchaikovsky's choice for *King René's Daughter*, "it was the young, vulnerable girl who captured Tchaikovsky's creative heart."²¹⁴ Robert's and Vaudémont's arias burst of recognisable emotions of love, the former expressing all aspects of a burning passion, the latter a longing for pure love. King René's worrying about his daughter as a parent in despair also reflects familiar emotions with which the spectator can identify. For Taruskin King René's aria apparently contains so much Romantic conventionalism that he qualifies it not only as "fairly routine," but even as "downright trite."²¹⁵ Neef also dismisses King René's music as "melodic phrases full of sentiment and conventionality."²¹⁶ Apart from the question whether this qualification is just or not, it ignores the fact that this Romantic portrayal of emotions subtly brings to mind non-Romantic aspects of *Iolanta*, such as the metanarrative of blindness as a punishment for sin, and a strong connection with God. Moreover, it can be argued that Tchaikovsky uses Romantic aesthetics in an innovative and even Symbolist sense rather than in a "downright trite" way. The opera has Romantic roots in what concerns operatic conventions, but

²¹³ Peter J. Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 8th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 663.

²¹⁴ Brown, "Double Bill," 367.

²¹⁵ Taruskin, "Iolanta."

²¹⁶ Neef, "Klank van licht," 14.

is developing towards Symbolism in its innovative use of these. However powerful the dramatic line of love is, it is merely the surface of the ocean of Symbolist suggestions.

All in all, Solovyov's philosophy in combination with the metanarratives of blindness and cure-or-kill paradigm supports a Symbolist reading of *Iolanta*. The princess needs to be cured in order to be able to fully honour God, perceive *inoi svet*, and transcend from one world to another. Solovyov's philosophy shows that there is much more to *Iolanta* than is apparent at first sight. For instance, Brown's comment that Ebn-Hakia's aria-monologue "seems to promise no more than a mild dose of musical [O]rientalism" ignores the layers of meaning below the surface of the Oriental aspects of Ebn-Hakia.²¹⁷ The departure from the Romantic towards the Symbolist is very aptly summarised by Tambovskaya, even though she fails to interpret the spiritual aspects of *Iolanta* as Symbolist. She argues that Tchaikovsky fundamentally transformed the dramatic narrative of Zotov's adaptation: the adventures and love stories within the medieval context have become a narrative in which love is not a "self-sufficient force," but something that strengthens the soul towards spiritual enlightenment.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Brown, "Double Bill," 367.

²¹⁸ Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti," 5.

Chapter 4 – The transitions between reality and inoy svet

Surrounded by darkness

Whereas Rimsky-Korsakov was puzzled by *Iolanta*'s orchestration, in particular the introduction, Brown is surprised by the thematic structure of the entire opera: "For the first time in one of Tchaikovsky's operas the introduction has no thematic connection with what follows," he argues, "and though within the opera there are a few long large recurrences of whole musical sections for dramatic reasons, there is no trace of thematic recall at the end."²¹⁹ Although Brown is right in noting the difference of the finale theme, he has overlooked the presence of thematic structure in *Iolanta*. Zinkova points out that the musical and dramatic development in *Iolanta* is based on the transformation of themes, which are presented at the beginning.²²⁰ This is a musical manifestation of the linear rather than circular structure of *Iolanta*'s plot: from beginning to end *Iolanta* is one large transition from darkness to light.²²¹ Thus, the absence of thematic recall at the end is not a structural weakness, but precisely the intention. Whereas the thematic development reflects the plot horizontally, the mystic element of the opera is reflected vertically in the "topsy-turvy" orchestration. It is in fact similar to the space created by ritual music performance, where "power hierarchies are not just established and reified but also inverted and subverted."²²² The reversed orchestration symbolises the Symbolist play with reality and *inoy svet*, the approach of the Godly realm towards earth. Thus, the plot does not only encompass a transition from darkness to light in the sense of blindness to cure, but also the mystic transition from reality to absolute reality.

The world of darkness that surrounds the blind and ignorant *Iolanta* is evoked in the introduction (Example 1): it is a striking musical representation of visual impairment through the blindness-darkness synonymy.²²³ The central element of this evocation is a four-bar motif, which recurs throughout the opera, functioning as the leitmotif of blindness.²²⁴ The orchestration of this "blindness theme" represents the obscurity and darkness of the blindness-darkness synonymy

²¹⁹ Brown, "Double Bill," 360.

²²⁰ Zin'kova, "*Iolanta* Tchaikovskogo," 1.

²²¹ Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo"; Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti," 8.

²²² Brian Hogan, "'They Say We Exchanged Our Eyes for the Xylophone': Resisting Tropes of Disability as Spiritual Deviance in Birifor Music," in *The Oxford Handbook*, 123.

²²³ Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo."

²²⁴ This is the theme that Zinkova notes. Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti," 8.

Andante, quasi adagio (♩=58)

Cor anglais

Clarinet

Bassoon

Horn

Example 1. The first part of the introduction of Iolanta.

rather literally through the low registers and dark timbres of the woodwind instruments.²²⁵ Notable is the choice for the Cor anglais, which has a lower register and darker timbre than the oboe. All repetitions of the blindness theme together form one chromatically descending line: with each darker and lower step, the blindness-darkness synonymy is emphasised more, but it also suggests the inescapability of the world of blindness. Yet harmonically and dynamically, the music of the introduction hints at the existence of *inoy svet*, the Godly world of light and sight. The blindness motif is constructed by an opening and closing harmonic and dynamic movement: a succession of a diminished triad, a major triad, and a dominant seventh suggests a development from dissonance to consonance, supported by a crescendo. Arriving at the last chord, however, we find that the harmonic line ends at an unresolved and questioning chord, emphasised by a dramatic *sforzando*.²²⁶ The unexpected climax sinks back with a decrescendo, before suddenly disappearing in a meaningful pause. It conjures up a picture of Iolanta sensing *inoy svet* and reaching out to it, but failing to reach it every time, leaving the princess with a question that remains unanswered. The for Iolanta ineffable and unknown character of *inoy svet* is reflected by a harmonically unpredictable succession of chords after the third blindness motif: the world of sight remains out of her grasp and understanding.

The image shows a musical score for the opening bars of the prelude of Tristan and Isolde. The score is written for five instruments: Oboe, Clarinet, Cor anglais, Bassoon, and Violoncello. The Oboe, Clarinet, and Cor anglais parts are in G major (one sharp) and 3/8 time. The Bassoon part is in G major (one sharp) and 3/8 time. The Violoncello part is in C minor (three flats) and 3/8 time. The Oboe, Clarinet, and Cor anglais parts play a chromatically descending line of eighth notes, starting on G4 and ending on C3. The Bassoon part plays a chromatically descending line of eighth notes, starting on G3 and ending on C2. The Violoncello part plays a chromatically descending line of eighth notes, starting on G2 and ending on C1. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *pp* (pianissimo). The Oboe, Clarinet, and Cor anglais parts have a crescendo leading to a *sforzando* (sf) marking. The Bassoon part has a decrescendo leading to a *sforzando* (sf) marking. The Violoncello part has a *pp* marking at the beginning and a *sforzando* (sf) marking at the end.

Example 2. The opening bars of the prelude of Tristan and Isolde.

²²⁵ Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo."

²²⁶ Neef, "Klank van licht," 13.

More of the introduction's meaning is disclosed by comparing it to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. In *King René's Daughter* Tchaikovsky had found the ultimate counterpart of this opera in what concerns the unfortunate fate of the lovers Tristan and Isolde, that is, their tragic deaths. Tchaikovsky was convinced that his new opera would "prove to the entire world that the lovers in final scenes of operas should live, and that this is a real truth."²²⁷ Neef argues, therefore, that the change of Vaudémont's first name, which is Tristan in *King René's Daughter* but Godfried in *Iolanta*, was a deliberate statement of Tchaikovsky against *Tristan*'s doomed finale.²²⁸ However, this appears to be incorrect: the change was already made by Zotov in his adaption of *King René's Daughter*. Besides, if Tchaikovsky really wanted to make a statement with Vaudémont's first name, he would have kept the original name and let his "Tristan" live at the end of *Iolanta*. Rather, Tchaikovsky seems to have made his statement in *Iolanta*'s introduction, as it is strikingly similar to *Tristan*'s prelude (Example 2). Brown argues that "this whole introduction is a parody of Wagner's prelude [from *Tristan*]," and Neef considers the introduction to be a "harmonic and melodic paraphrase" of the prelude.²²⁹ The famous opening music of *Tristan* expresses an unfulfilled longing through rising chromatic lines and a constantly postponed harmonic closure. Klimovitsky observes that the same use of harmony and chromaticism characterises the introduction of *Iolanta*. In combination with an unidentifiable tonic and the absence of a key signature tonal ambiguity is created in the opening movements of both *Tristan* and *Iolanta*, suggesting again the ineffability of *inoy svet*. Even their time signature and rich, colourful instrumentation are similar. The most remarkable similarity is perhaps the format of repeating sequences: each starts on the pitch which formed the end of the previous sequence, and each sequence ends on a diminished seventh chord followed by a pause.²³⁰ The only difference is the inversion of the melodic line, rising at the end of each sequence in *Tristan*, but descending in *Iolanta*.²³¹ Although Klimovitsky rightly concludes that the "unresolved and dovetailing dissonances" of *Iolanta*'s introduction are expressive, he does not further explain his characterisation, apart from arguing that Tchaikovsky inversed the melodic line to make his statement against *Tristan*'s plot.²³² The inversion of melodic lines suggests that the emotion of

²²⁷ Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky," 325-6.

²²⁸ Neef, "De klank van het licht," 12.

²²⁹ Brown, "Double Bill," 365, and Neef, "De klank van het licht," 13.

²³⁰ Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky," 326.

²³¹ Ibid; Brown, "Double Bill," 365.

²³² Klimovitsky, "Tchaikovsky," 326.

longing in the prelude finds its opposite emotion in the introduction: it comes to represent Iolanta's suffering. Indeed, Tambovskaya notes how the descending line, dotted rhythm, and the unclear ending of each sequence resembles the *lamento*, which traditionally resembles suffering and grief.²³³ Despite the contradictions between *Tristan* and *Iolanta*, the emotion of longing characterises the prelude is still also evoked in the introduction: *Iolanta* longs for the answer to her questions, for approaching *inoy svet*. The link with *Tristan* even seems to suggest that love, the other major theme of Wagner's opera, will eventually provide the answer for Iolanta. But for now, the last chord of the introduction, a diminished seventh chord, leaves the harmony unresolved: Iolanta remains lost in the dark, and the door to the world beyond closed.

The musical score is for the opening and closing motifs of Iolanta's arioso. It is written for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Double bass. The tempo is marked 'Larghetto a tempo molto rubato' with a quarter note equal to 50 beats (♩=50). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 12/8. The score shows a descending line in the violins and cellos, with dynamics ranging from *pp* to *p*. The double bass part is mostly silent, with a few notes at the end.

Example 3. The opening and closing motifs in Iolanta's arioso.

Iolanta's questions about the unknown and her longing for answers culminate at the end of Scene 1 in her arioso "Otchego?" (Why?) Zinkova's remark that a theme from the introduction partly returns in this arioso probably refers to the blindness theme: the opening motion created by the harmonic progression and crescendo is a central element of the arioso.²³⁴ Interestingly, the theme seems to have developed: it now consists of three chords, a consonant D major chord, a diminished seventh chord (C#-E-G-Bb), and again a D major chord. They create an opening and closing movement with a consonant chord at its basis, instead of an unresolved sequence of dissonant and questioning chords (Example 3). The theme's development suggests that *inoy svet* is more within Iolanta's reach, and that her awareness of it is growing. With the metanarrative of

²³³ Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti," 8.

²³⁴ Zinkova, "Iolanta Tchaikovskogo," 5.

blindness as a fifth-sixth sense in mind, the arioso resembles a premonition: Iolanta senses something is about to be revealed to her.

In the second part of the arioso, the music opens harmonically by a key change to G major. The choice for this key is not arbitrary: G major appears earlier in *Iolanta* at a moment that is associated with comfort. At the start of Scene 1, Brigitta, Laura, and Martha try to comfort the troubled Iolanta by diverting her attention with music. Instead of the entire orchestra playing, a small selection represents a chamber ensemble of court musicians playing a Mozartian melody: it consists of string instruments only, as if to oppose and take away the suffering represented by the woodwinds in the introduction (Example 4). Already in the early nineteenth century it was argued that “sound offered man a powerful refuge from disease and ill health. It had the capacity to transport the entire self into another domain of existence.”²³⁵ Also, the French author Jean-Baptiste-Louis Crevier (1693-1765) wrote in his *Rhétorique française* (1767) that “[t]he ear is like the vestibule of the soul.”²³⁶ In medieval hospitals, liturgical chant was used for medicinal purposes in medieval hospitals.²³⁷ Thus, music has been attributed a comforting, indeed medicinal power for centuries already. Even Francis of Assisi asked for music to “arouse the joy of his spirit” during his illness.²³⁸ In *Essai sur l'éducation des aveugles* (“Essay on Blind Education,” 1786), the French philologist Valentin Haüy (1745-1822), who founded the first school for the visually impaired, argues that they had a natural disposition for music “precisely because they could not see.”²³⁹ In this context, the fact that Iolanta is comforted with music, not only in Scene 1 but also in Scene 2 by the flower song, and in Scene 3 by the lullaby, both sung by Iolanta’s carers, is revealing. The string ensemble introduction is followed by a conversation in G major, in which Iolanta’s carers try to comfort the melancholic princess. Interestingly, Brown associates the key of G major with the world of sight.²⁴⁰ It complements the interpretation of G major as a comforting key: the answer to Iolanta’s questions, the world of sight, fills her with happiness later in the opera and comforts her anguish about not knowing.

²³⁵ Ingrid Sykes, “The Politics of Sound: Music and Blindness in France, 1750-1830,” in *The Oxford Handbook*, 105.

²³⁶ Jean-Baptiste-Louis Crevier, *Rhétorique française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Saillant, 1767), 4. Quoted in *ibid.*, 97.

²³⁷ Biller and Ziegler, *Religion and Medicine*, 13.

²³⁸ Wells, “Exemplary blindness,” 78.

²³⁹ Sykes, “Music and Blindness in France,” 98, 100.

²⁴⁰ Brown, “Double Bill,” 362.

Andante semplice (♩=69)

Harp

Violin 1
solo
p dolce, molto espressivo

Violin 2
solo
sempre p

Viola
solo
sempre p

Violoncello
solo
sempre p

Double bass

5

più f

p

Example 4: Scene 1, the music played by the court musicians.

The text of Iolanta's arioso shows that the princess is not only trying to find comfort in music, but also in nature. In contrast to earlier times, when nature's sounds seemed like "heavenly sounds" (*zvukov nebesnikh*) to Iolanta, she now hears an echo of her melancholy in the sounds of nature. For instance, she sings that "the choir of birds and the rushing stream send reproaches to fate" (*ukori sud'be posilayet ptichek khor i shumyashchiy potok*). Iolanta also asks: "Why do I seem to hear sobs when the nightingale sings, why?" (*Otchego ya kak budto ridan'ya slishu tam, gde poet solovey, otchego?*) This interpretation is supported by remarkable similarities with an eponymous song by Tchaikovsky, "Otchego," No. 5 from *Six Romances*, Op. 6 (1869), in which the protagonist also finds their melancholy, resulting from being deserted by their lover, reflected in nature: "Why does the song of birds, rushing into the sky, sound so sad?" (*Otchego tak pechal'no zvuchit pesnya ptichki, nesyas' v nebesa?*) and "Why is the sun in the morning sky cold and dark, as if it is winter?" (*Otchego v nebe solntse s utra kholodno i temno, kak zimoy?*) It is interesting to realise that Iolanta addresses a very specific part of nature in her arioso, namely her garden, the only place in the world known to her. The garden symbolises her ignorance of her blindness, as it was created especially for hiding the knowledge of her impairment behind a facade of lovely flowers and birds. Also, the garden symbolises Iolanta's visually impaired body itself: it is enclosed by a wall that keeps everything from the world beyond out of sight. In this sense, Iolanta's reproaches of nature not only echo her growing suspicions of something missing in her life, but also question the ignorance she has been kept in. The text in relation to the key of G major suggests that Iolanta is yearning for comfort, but that it can no longer be satisfied by the garden. Considering Iolanta's blindness, it is interesting to examine if the garden contains flowers and plants with a medicinal function: Niiranen describes how a great variety of plants was used in the Mediterranean Middle Ages for curing diseases.²⁴¹ Considering the fact that the garden's roses later symbolise the love between Vaudémont and Iolanta, as well as her awakening consciousness, the presence in the garden of the cornflower, which can be used against minor eye diseases, could symbolise Iolanta's cure. The presence of these flowers in the garden, that symbolises Iolanta's body, suggests that the princess already has the potential for the cure inside her.

After Iolanta's arioso, Brigitta, Laura, and Martha try once more to console the princess by taking away her worries and sorrow, this time by using both music and nature: they sing a

²⁴¹ Niiranen, "At the Crossroads of Religion," 311.

song about one of the garden's most comforting aspects, the flowers and their wonderful textures and scents.²⁴² At first, it seems that Iolanta is finally comforted, as she becomes contently drowsy after the flower song, and asks for her favourite childhood lullaby to make her fall asleep. However, above the dramatic surface of *Iolanta*, things are never what they seem. Sleep has a meaningful and significant function in the opera: it does not keep Iolanta at a comforting distance from the knowledge of her visual impairment, but actually moves her closer to it.

The realm of slumber: Iolanta as Sleeping Beauty

Apart from *The Philosopher's Stone* by Andersen, another fairy tale is strikingly similar to *Iolanta*: the story of Sleeping Beauty, most well-known in the version written by the Brothers Grimm in 1812. Like the story of Iolanta, the fairy tale about the sleeping princess has older origins than its nineteenth-century version: *Sleeping Beauty* originates from the Icelandic prose saga *Völsunga Saga* from the thirteenth century.²⁴³ Interestingly, this saga was the inspiration behind another nineteenth-century work as well: Wagner's opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.²⁴⁴ These three stories are related by much more than their origins and historical developments, however: there are remarkable similarities in terms of narrative, which are all related to sleep. In the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, the princess falls into an enchanted sleep only to be awakened by the kiss of her true love, a prince. During her hundred year sleep, the princess is hidden in a room in the castle, which is surrounded by a thorn forest in order to protect her from harm. This narrative of a maiden sleeping in an inaccessible place, which can only be reached and ended by true love, also determines the storyline in Wagner's opera cycle: one of the protagonists, the valkyrie Brünnhilde, is brought into a magical sleep that is lifted by the kiss of her true love, Siegfried. He finds her in a remote place, on top of a tall cliff, that seems to be surrounded by sleep: the enchanted slumber of Brünnhilde and a horse fast asleep are just two signs of the unattainable realm of sleep to which the valkyrie is transported.²⁴⁵ Compared to *Iolanta*, both Wagner's and the Brothers Grimm's stories make clear that Iolanta is yet another Sleeping Beauty: the blind princess also succumbs to sleep during the lullaby in

²⁴² Taruskin, "Iolanta."

²⁴³ Grace Hogstad, "Archetypal Interpretation of 'Sleeping Beauty': Awakening the Power of Love," *Mythological Studies Journal* 2 (2011): 1.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Jeffrey L. Buller, "Sleep in the *Ring*," *Opera Quarterly* 12 (1995): 13, 16.

Scene 3, prior to being awakened by her true love Count Vaudémont in Scene 7. Like Sleeping Beauty's prince and Brünnhilde's Siegfried, he manages to penetrate the remote garden in which Iolanta is protected. As the links between awakening and true love in these stories suggest, sleep is viewed as much more than just a bodily condition: it entails an entire world of symbolic meaning, and, in the case of *Iolanta*, Symbolist meaning.

Especially the symbolic meaning of sleep in *Der Ring* provides insight into the Symbolist connotations of sleep in *Iolanta*. One of the most prominent symbolic functions of sleep in Wagner's opera cycle is an omen of death. Jeffrey L. Buller observes that in each act of *Die Walküre*, for instance, one protagonist is suddenly overpowered by an irresistible urge to sleep:²⁴⁶ Hagen falls asleep as result of a potion in Act 1, Sieglinde of exhaustion in Act 2, and lastly, the "Sleeping Beauty" Brünnhilde is punished with sleep by her father Wotan in Act 3 for defending Siegmund. Death follows sleep as Hagen is killed by Wotan in Act 2, Sieglinde sees Siegmund's death in a vision during her sleep, and Brünnhilde perishes in the devastating flames in the final act of *Götterdämmerung*. Buller locates the inspiration for this link between sleep and death in Greek mythology: in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is also overpowered several times by a sudden urge to sleep, which is described as "sweet, most like death," indicating that Odysseus must someday succumb to death in a similar way.²⁴⁷ Thus, sleep in *Der Ring* is a symbolic surrender to death in the form of sleep.²⁴⁸

This particular use of sleep in *Der Ring* brings to mind another symbolic connotation. As the plot of *Der Ring* develops from birth to death,²⁴⁹ the moments of sleep throughout the cycle are transitions from birth to death. It is this element of transition that is such a vital component of Symbolism in *Iolanta*. Similar to the overall plot of *Der Ring*, the plot of *Iolanta* progresses from one end of the spectrum to another, namely from darkness to light. Note that this is another inversion of the element of doom in Wagner's opera plots which annoyed Tchaikovsky so much. Although sleep is not at all associated with death in *Iolanta*, both sleep and death are still independently portrayed as transitions by the music. Death only appears once, and seemingly casually, in *Iolanta*. When the stranger Alméric arrives at the door of the garden in Scene 4, he informs the guard Bertrand that he has replaced Raoul, the former messenger of King René.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 3-4, 20.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

Alméric tells Bertrand that Raoul has passed away the day before. Apart from this piece of information and Bertrand's subsequent brief mourning of the death of his friend, nothing else seems to be revealed about Raoul. If we take a closer look at the music, however, this seems to be exactly the intention. Alméric's message of Raoul's death is musically underlined by a harmonically static chord that progresses after the message into a harmonically descending line of ceremonious chords. Eventually, only a significant silence remains when Bertrand prays for Raoul's soul (Example 5). Thus, the music evokes the former messenger's transition to the world beyond life. What is more revealing, however, is the instrumentation. Again we encounter the woodwind group from the introduction. The musical evocation of Raoul's death now brings something else to mind: the woodwind's blindness theme. Since the concept of blindness in *Iolanta* enables the plot development from darkness to light, from earth to heaven, and from ignorance to knowledge, the similarities between the musical portrayal of dying as transition from life to death on the one hand, and the musical expression of blindness on the other, emphasises the latter's transitional aspect. Borodavkin notes how the dark timbre of this particular instrumentation at the mentioning of Raoul's death evokes the image of the appearance of Grim Reaper, who opens a window into the world of non-being.²⁵⁰ This description is in an inverted way reminiscent of the introduction, in which Iolanta tries in vain to open a window into the world of sight. As Borodavkin concludes, Raoul and his death are only mentioned for the sake of this window, hinting at the real world outside the idyllic garden with which Iolanta will soon be faced.²⁵¹ This is a Symbolist way of portraying characters: the function of Raoul is solely to hint at *inoy svet*, as there is no depth at all on the level of personality, and so much about Raoul remains unknown and obscure. Similarly, the servants in the final scene of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* merely function as making known the presence of death: they kneel at the exact moment of Mélisande's death. Another indication and more indirect use of death as a transition in *Iolanta* will be discussed later in this chapter.

Going back to *Der Ring*, there is one more symbolic aspect of death and sleep that Wagner has explored: awakening. Whereas awakening in general can be considered as the implied end of sleep, in Wagner's opera cycle awakening is used as a synonym for death: Buller points out how an "imagery of sleep and awakening . . . surrounds Siegfried's death itself." At

²⁵⁰ Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo."

²⁵¹ Ibid.

Andante non troppo (♩=80)

Oboe

Cor anglais *colla parte*

Clarinet 1

Clarinet 2

Bassoon

p *mf*

Andante non troppo (♩=80)

Alméric

Bertrand

U - znay - sta - rik: Ra - ul' vche - ra skon-chal- sya.
You must know, old man: Raoul has died yesterday.

Recit.

Skon-chal- sya! O bed - nīy
Died! O my poor

rit.

p

rit.

drug moy, ne pri - ve-los' mne s nim v po - sled-niy chas - pro- stit'- sya! Po - shli, Gos pod' du - she e - go po - koy.
friend, I have not been able to say good - bye to him in his last hour! Lord, give rest to his soul.

Example 5: Scene 4, Alméric informs Bertrand of Raoul's death.

this moment in the opera, the motif that is heard is the so-called “Awakening” theme, suggesting that Siegfried’s death is a rebirth rather than a definite end.²⁵² What is more, awakening, just as dying, can be considered as a transition: in both situations, the consciousness of a person leaves one world and arrives in another. Buller describes Siegfried’s death as just such a transition: “In death, Siegfried leaves behind the world of falsehood and illusion that the Rhinemaidens had described in the last words of *Das Rheingold* . . . and is awakened/reborn into a world greater than the one he had known before.”²⁵³ This link between sleep and awakening, and death and rebirth in *Der Ring* creates a window between two worlds in the same way as the above described musical link between blindness and death in Scene 4 of *Iolanta*.

It is revealing to see how Wagner explores these symbolic aspects of death in his opera cycle. This becomes even more insightful when complemented with a comparison of his symbolic use of sleep with sleep in *Iolanta*. In *Der Ring*, sleep is not only a prediction of death, but also a symbol for wisdom.²⁵⁴ On several occasions in Wagner’s opera cycle, during their sleep the characters experience dreams or premonitions in which something is revealed to them – remember Sieglinde’s dream in which she foresees Siegfried’s death. Again, ancient Greek writing has found its way into Wagner’s philosophy behind the opera: as appears from writings by Homer, it was believed that in the final moments of one’s life or during dreams, wisdom or prophecies could be revealed. This belief becomes especially interesting when we consider that sleep was regarded as a transition between life and death:²⁵⁵ apparently, at this moment of transition one was in the most perceptive state for receiving a higher wisdom. The philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), which greatly influenced Wagner in composing *Der Ring*, complements this thought. The German philosopher argued that “during sleep, the spirit could grasp intuitively what the rational mind could not perceive while awake,” for instance a form of truth or wisdom revealed in a dream.²⁵⁶ This philosophy is expressed literally in the libretto through Erda’s following words: “My sleep is dreaming, my dreaming reflection, my reflection the mastery of wisdom.” (*Mein Schlaf ist Traumen, mein Traumen Sinnen, mein Sinnen Waken*

²⁵² Buller, “Sleep,” 17

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

des Wissens.)²⁵⁷ Because they have received a higher wisdom during their sleep, observes Buller, the characters in *Der Ring* “are symbolically reborn into a richer, more challenging life.”²⁵⁸

If we compare this almost supernatural and oracle-like sleep to *Iolanta*, it seems that the princess’s sleep is rather obscure: it is not made clear if *Iolanta* is dreaming. This elusiveness leaves room for all kinds of suggestions, which is a typical aspect of Symbolism. Compared to sleep and awakening in *Der Ring*, *Iolanta*’s sleep preludes her attainment of a higher state of consciousness and sensory perception: from the moment *Iolanta* awakes, the events that are vital for her cure form the sole part of the narrative. Her awakening from her sleep is at the same time the awakening of her awareness of her visual impairment. The libretto of the lullaby contains a hint that *Iolanta* will be dreaming about this: Brigitta, Laura, and Martha sing about angels who bring dreams to *Iolanta* with their wings, while the Creator lets happiness and peace descend on earth and the princess. *Iolanta*’s forthcoming transformation to a higher state of being is suggested by the fact that she is called an angel in the lullaby, equating her to the heavenly creatures and the higher power that provide her with dreams of wisdom. Remember that the girl in *The Philosopher’s Stone* also attains wisdom in a dream, in this case about the philosopher’s stone that eventually discloses the knowledge of the last unreadable page in the Book of Truth. Like Odysseus surrenders to death in the form of sleep, the sleeping *Iolanta* surrenders in the same way to becoming aware and gaining knowledge about the unknown. Thus, in her sleep, *Iolanta* is closer to the knowledge of her blindness than ever before.

A further comparison of Brünnhilde’s and *Iolanta*’s awakening reveals another striking similarity: a crucial role is reserved for light. In Brünnhilde’s awakening, the light of the sun and Siegfried play an equal part. Buller aptly describes this moment: “Both the sun and Siegfried have woken Brünnhilde, both perform their awakening with kisses, both fill her vision as she opens her eyes, and both are recipients of her most rapturous greetings.”²⁵⁹ Brünnhilde even calls Siegfried “You waker to life, victorious light!” (*Du Wecker des Lebens, siegendes Licht!*)²⁶⁰ At the moment of *Iolanta*’s final awakening, her cure, the princess is also overwhelmed by a bright light. And her “Siegfried,” Vaudémont, is the one who brings her the knowledge of light, and could just as well be her “waker to life, victorious light.” Considering this comparison, how

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 15.

fitting are the words Siegfried utters at the moment of his beloved's awakening: "The one who woke you has come. He kissed you awake . . . Ah! Those eyes! Now forever open! (*Der Wecker kam; er kisst dich wach ... Ach! Dieses Auge, ewig nun offen!*)"²⁶¹

In order to see just how Symbolist Tchaikovsky's use of connotations of sleep is, let us look at the poem "The Way of Truth" (*Put' pravdi*, 1899) by Konstantin Bal'mont (1867-1942). Not only does it express Solovyov's philosophy about perception of absolute truth by the senses, but it is also as if the poem describes four steps in the story of Iolanta: her questions about the unknown, her sleep and dreams, her becoming aware of the truth, the fire of love that is lit in her, and her cure-rebirth.

All five senses are lies. But ecstasy, but rapture, Open truth to our eyes, And without our knowing why The dark night burns with reproach.	<i>Pyat' chuvstv - doroga lzhi. No est' vostorg ekstaza, Kogda nam istina sama soboy vidna. Togda tayinstvenno dlya dremlyushchego glaza Gorit uzorami nochnaya glubina.</i>
Down the endless twilight, deep in infinite Dreams, diamonds are born out of coal. Truth flows higher than sense, but only revealed When we enter the holy glow, the gleam.	<i>Bezdonnost' sumraka, nerazreshennost' sna, Iz uglya chernogo - rozhdeniye almaza. Nam pravda kazhdïy raz - sverkhchuvstvenno dana, Kogda mï vstupim v luch svyashchennogo ekstaza.</i>
Every soul holds a world of charms, Unseen – every tree hides in its greenness An unlit fire, waiting to burn.	<i>V dushe u kazhdogo yest' mir nezrimikh char, Kak v kazhdom dereve zelenom est' pozhar, Eshche ne vspikhnushiy, no zhdushchiy probuzhden'ya.</i>
Touch secret powers, shake that sleeping world – And leaping with the joy of rebirth The unexpected will blind you with its brightness! ²⁶²	<i>Kosnis' do taynikh sil, shatni tot mir, chto spit, I, drognuv radostno ot schast'ya vozrozhden'ya, Tebya nezhdannoye tak yarko oslepit.</i>

Iolanta's sleep is musically anticipated at the beginning of Scene 3. The princess asks Martha for comfort: "Let me, like it was when I was little, lay my head on your shoulder, and sing me that song, you know, my favourite!" (*Pozvol', kak prezhdë bývalo v detstve, golovu sklonit' mne na plecho k tebe, i spoy mne pesnyu, ti pomnish', tu... lyubimuyu!*) At that moment, the tempo slows

²⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

²⁶² Burton Raffel, trans., *Russian Poetry Under the Tsars: An Anthology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971), 188.

Meno (♩=88)

Flute *mf* *pp*

Oboe *mf* *pp*

Clarinet in B♭ *mf* *pp*

Horn 3,4

Iolanta

Poz- vol', kak pre - zhde bī - va - lo v det- stve, go - lo - vu sklo - nit' mne na ple - cho k te be,
 Let me, like it was when I was little, lay my head on your shoulder,

Meno (♩=88)

Violin 1 *pp*

Violin 2 *pp*

Viola *pp*

Violoncello *pp*

Double bass *pp*

Cl.

pp

i sroy mne pe - snyu, tī pom - nish', tu... lyu - bi - mu - yu!
 and sing me that song, you know my favourite!

pp

pp

pp

pp

Example 6: Scene 3, the anticipation of the lullaby.

down (*Meno*) and the harmony becomes static on a C major chord played by the strings. Remember that the music at the start of Scene 1 was played by the strings as well, and that this music was meant to comfort Iolanta. Rather than playing a Mozartian melody, however, the strings now play a rocking motif, as if to lull Iolanta into sleep. This is suggested during the repetition of this figure in A major: both the tonality and the strings become lower, creating a warmer timbre that evokes the sensation of sinking into sleep (Example 6).

The lullaby sung by Iolanta's carers and the choir creates a warm and mysterious space between the earthly world and *inoy svet*. This floating realm of sleep is established by the warm and glowing character of the key of E-flat major, the gentle sound of the woodwinds and muted strings, and the soft dynamics. The woodwinds and horns on the one hand, associated with darkness and blindness in the introduction, and the strings on the other, which will be associated with love in Scene 7 are both present in this space of sleep, suggesting that sleep is a transition between these two worlds. Indeed, in *King René's Daughter* Iolanta sleeps one hour each day on prescription from Ebn-Hakia, after which the luster of her eyes is deepened, "as though the rays of light had found a way [i]nto their orbs, while she lay slumbering."²⁶³ On a smaller scale, this transition is evoked by several alternating motifs. Per bar, the horns and bassoon alternate, as well as the strings, that alternate their figure of semiquavers. On an even smaller scale, the semiquavers within this figure alternate as well. The cor anglais and the clarinet also play alternating notes in the first bar of their motif. Note that Tchaikovsky again used a cor anglais instead of an oboe – a sound that contributes to the dark and warm timbre, so appropriate for this lullaby (Example 7). Interestingly, the choir is not present on the stage: for the audience, their voices are disembodied, which suggests an angelic or godly presence. Further in the lullaby, the flute and bassoons take over the alternating figures of the strings and violoncellos, their timbres making the motif even more slumbering. The rocking rhythm of the alternating motifs and pitches, supported by the static harmony, creates a floating atmosphere, as if the sleeping Iolanta is suspended in the space between the two worlds of consciousness and subconsciousness, sight and blindness (Example 8).

²⁶³ Martin, *King René's Daughter*, 23.

Moderato assai (♩=84)

Cor anglais

Clarinet *pp*

Bassoon *pp*

Horn *pp* con sord.

Viola tutti con sord.

Violoncello pizz con sord.

Double bass *pp sempre*

Example 7: Scene 3, the start of the lullaby.

Moderato assai (♩=84)

Flute con. sordino

Bassoon con. sordino

Violin 1 con. sordino

Violin 2 con. sordino

Viola con. sordino

Violoncello con. sordino

Double bass con. sordino

Example 8: Scene 3, a later part of the lullaby.

But Iolanta is not merely drowsy – she eventually falls asleep. This is a remarkable musical moment in the lullaby. Brigitta, Laura, Martha, and the choir together sing “*sni*” (sleep) two times on a rising pitch. The last and highest “*sni*” resolves into nothingness by a decrescendo, as if Iolanta’s consciousness ascends into heaven and disappears out of sight. One by one the instrument groups stop playing, until only a low horn, bassoons, and eventually only the violoncellos remain. Their descending line again evokes the sensation of sinking into sleep. However, the last descending line of the violoncellos does not end with the tonic E-flat. The line merely hovers at this pitch and then unexpectedly continues with a D (Example 9, see appendix). It is reminiscent of the music that reflects the death of the Countess in *The Queen of Spades*: after the two G major brass chords, that seem to close this musical passage, a bass clarinet suddenly enters the stage with an F that is tonally out of place (especially considering the subsequent G major chord) as if this otherworldly sound originates from the world beyond. (Example 10, see appendix).

The musical score for Example 11, titled "The chorus of 'Usni.'", is presented in two systems. The first system shows the Voice and Piano parts. The Voice part is in 3/4 time and B-flat major, with lyrics: "las - koy, ba - yu - ka - li o - ni: 'U - sni, go to sleep, u - to sleep,". The Piano part is in 3/4 time and B-flat major, with a tempo marking of "poco più mosso". The Piano part features a "poco cresc." section and a "dim" section. The second system shows the Voice part continuing with "sni, go to sleep!" and the Piano part continuing with a "p" dynamic marking. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings like "pp" and "p".

Example 11: The chorus of “Usni.”

As we have seen, Tchaikovsky created a musical portrayal of sleep before in his first exploration of musical proto-Symbolism, the song “Usni.” Predictably, the exact same approach of portraying sleep is used, as the rocking rhythm of alternating musical components and soft dynamics of the lullaby appears in this song as well. What is more revealing, however, is the fact that sleep in “Usni” is also musically portrayed as a transition. Towards the chorus, a key change from C major to A major announces the approaching transition, while the triplets create an anticipating sense of an increased tempo. In the climax of the chorus, the high F in the voice part on “usni,” the piano plays an ascending line, prior to ending on a B-flat that is suspended in mid air on a fermata (Example 11). It suggests a transition into a world of intangible dreams and ambiguous consciousness, but a transition towards the Godly *inoy svet* overhead. Clearly, the Symbolist suggestions of sleep by Merezhkovsky found their way into Tchaikovsky song and subsequently *Iolanta*. Moreover, the fact that the composer musically portrayed sleep with the same musical tools twice, with a focus on floating between two worlds, and an eventual transition from one to the other, suggest that he was perceptive to the Symbolist aspects of sleep.

There are more symbolic layers behind the musical portrayal of sleep in the lullaby. The falling asleep of the princess is not the only transition that is suggested. Scene 4 begins immediately after the descending violoncello line, which is full of signifiers of mysteriousness right from the beginning (Example 12, see appendix). The low and dissonant tremolos (E-flat and D-flat) played by the muted violoncellos and double basses create a mysterious, otherworldly atmosphere. Suddenly, pianissimo horn calls sound from afar. After the upper strings have gradually taken over the tremolos, the main theme of the lullaby is played by the oboes, after which the lower strings continue the tremolo again. The sequence is repeated, although this time the lullaby theme is played by the flutes. Two harp glissandos announce the switch from the lullaby theme to the horn calls, and add a magical element to what is going on. But what is going on? The alteration of patches of the lullaby theme and the horn calls represents a transition from the peaceful and now sleeping world of *Iolanta*’s garden to the forest behind its walls, in which the horn calls announce the arrival of the messenger Alméric (who, as a messenger, is a mediator between two worlds). The music does not merely suggest a transition from inside to outside the garden, but much more: it hints at the major transformation that is about to happen to *Iolanta*. With Alméric’s arrival, the plot of the opera takes a turn: the messenger announces the arrival of the Moorish physician Ebn-Hakia, who will play a vital role

in the cure of the blind princess. Zajaczkowski aptly describes one of the meanings of this transition music: “These musical echoes have a touchingly fragrant charm because these enchantingly implausible, sleepy world surrounding [I]olan[ta] will soon be plunged into outside world’s realities, as depicted by the fanfaring horns’ warning signals.”²⁶⁴ This passage is one of several moments of transition and transformation in *Iolanta*, as will become clear later.

The mysterious and magical atmosphere that is created by the music also indicates something else. Iolanta’s sleep is not a normal kind of sleep: it is an enchanted slumber. At this point, it is revealing to make a comparison again to the previously mentioned “Sleeping Beauties,” Sleeping Beauty herself and Brünnhilde. Neither of them is succumbed to a normal night sleep: they have been magicked into sleep, only to be awoken by their true love. Sleeping Beauty is pricked by a spinning-wheel as the result of a curse, and is awoken a hundred years later by the kiss of her prince charming. As stated before, Brünnhilde’s sleep is a punishment, which is ended by Siegfried’s kiss. In *Iolanta*, it seems as if the princess falls asleep and wakes up naturally, but this is only what is perceptible above the surface. As explained in chapter 1, in *King René’s Daughter* Iolanta is put under an enchanted sleep by Ebn-Hakia’s amulet. When Vaudémont and Robert enter the garden, the former removes the amulet from Iolanta’s chest, which breaks its power, and results in her waking up. In the opera, the amulet is not used at all: Iolanta wakes up by the voices of Vaudémont and Robert. However, in both cases Vaudémont, Iolanta’s true love, is the one who wakes her. His ending her sleep, bringing Iolanta back to consciousness from the world of subconsciousness, predicts his role in the cure: through his love, he eventually completes Iolanta’s transition from darkness to light, and from ignorance to awareness, which are two dichotomies that can just as well describe waking up.

Thus, in her sleep, Iolanta comes closer to *inoy svet* and an awareness of her blindness. The absence of the amulet from the opera removes an obvious cause of her sleep, which contributes to its mysteriousness. Tambovskaya observes this is another example of the removal of information that contributes to the symbolic character of *Iolanta*, as we also do not know, for instance how Iolanta became blind.²⁶⁵ In other words, as the analysis of Iolanta as Sleeping Beauty shows, that what is left out of the narrative is suggested by the music. The inexplicability

²⁶⁴ Zajaczkowski, “Culminating Allegory,” 101.

²⁶⁵ Tambovskaya, “Illyuziya prostoti,” 3.

of Iolanta's sleep make it a Symbolist slumber *pur sang*: it could not be more elusive and symbolically suggestive.

Two worlds: the Orient and the realm of blindness

While Iolanta is sleeping, the turning point of the narrative arrives in the form of the Moorish physician Ebn-Hakia: his observations in Scene 5 bring the possibility of a cure into the story. It is no coincidence that the events turn during Iolanta's sleep: as appeared from the above analysis, in her slumbering state the princess is closer to *inoy svet* and the knowledge of her impairment than ever before in the opera. Indeed, when the Moorish doctor is told his patient is sleeping, he is relieved: "Well, even better," he replies, "I can examine her better when she sleeps." (*Shtozh, tem luchshe, ya osmotret' yeyo vo sne mogu udobneye.*) This curious remark is revealing, especially considering Ebn-Hakia's use of the sleeping amulet, and Iolanta's deepened eyes upon awakening from the prescribed one-hour sleep: Ebn-Hakia is aware of the above analysed effect of Iolanta's sleep, and therefore knows that the sleeping state is the ideal condition for finding the cure that opens *inoy svet* to the princess. Thus, straight after his entrance into the story, the Moorish physician is portrayed as a mediator between the earthly world and *inoy svet*. At the same time, he brings the Oriental world into the Occidental world by his own arrival in the Provencal garden. These aspects of Ebn-Hakia are reflected in the music that is related to him. Regarded on its own, this music has a distinct Oriental colour, but in relation to the other music in *Iolanta*, it becomes clear that Ebn-Hakia's music, and in particular his leitmotif, have an intriguing extra layer of metaphysical meaning.

Allegro moderato (♩=116)

The musical score is for the entrance of Ebn-Hakia, marked 'Allegro moderato (♩=116)'. It features four staves: Cor anglais, Violin 1, Violin 2, and Viola. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The Cor anglais part begins with a melodic line in the second measure, marked with a piano (p) dynamic and an accent (>). Violin 1 and 2 enter in the second measure with a rhythmic accompaniment, also marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The Viola part enters in the first measure with a steady eighth-note pattern, marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The score is divided into three measures, with the Cor anglais part having a melodic line in the second and third measures.

Example 13: Scene 5, the entrance of Ebn-Hakia.

In order to reflect Ebn-Hakia's Moorish origins in music, Tchaikovsky used several conventional Oriental markers from the Oriental style of the Kuchka. When Ebn-Hakia returns from his examination of Iolanta at the start of Scene 5, he is accompanied by his leitmotif: in this fragment, the prominent timbre of the cor anglais stands out as a traditional Oriental marker, accompanied by an embellished melody in the strings (Example 12).²⁶⁶ Tchaikovsky uses the same instruments and techniques to signify Oriental characters in the *Arabian Dance* from *The Nutcracker*.²⁶⁷ The melodic line of Ebn-Hakia's voice part is often chromatic, either descending or rising. The Kuchka composers signify the Orient in the same way: in Balakirev's *Tamara*, for instance, an intensely chromatic and ornamented melody played by the oboe evokes the Oriental seductiveness of Tamara, and Borodin's *In the Steppes of Central Asia* (*V sredney Azii*, 1880) evokes the picture of an Oriental landscape through a heavily embellished cor anglais melody. When the Moorish physician leaves the stage before the end of Scene 5, low pizzicato notes bring to memory those in the overture of *Carmen* (1875) by Georges Bizet (1838-1875), which finish off a menacing Oriental melody (Example 14 and 15). This opera is not only one of the most well-known musical portrayals of an Oriental character, but was also one of Tchaikovsky's favourite, even exemplary operas. Even the key of C major, in which several passages of Ebn-Hakia's music are written, is an Oriental markers: Ralph P. Locke notes that keys with few sharps or flats, such as C major, were used for Oriental music because of their "simple" character.²⁶⁸ The climax of Ebn-Hakia's role in the opera, his aria-monologue, is also full of Oriental markers. There are indications that the pentatonic and repetitive melody of the voice part is a gunsmith's tune from Constantinople, which Tchaikovsky probably heard in 1886 or 1889.²⁶⁹ For his only other Oriental piece, the *Arabian Dance* from *The Nutcracker*, the composer played the same card: he borrowed the melody for this dance from a Georgian folk song, notated and given to him by his colleague Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov (1859-1935).²⁷⁰

It is evident that Tchaikovsky aimed to portray Ebn-Hakia's Moorish origins in music by using all possible equipment of the Oriental style toolkit. This evokes a complaint of Taruskin, however: he is of the opinion that Ebn-Hakia's aria-monologue is "pretty much thrown-off,"

²⁶⁶ Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo."

²⁶⁷ Taruskin, "Iolanta."

²⁶⁸ Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 118.

²⁶⁹ Polina Vaidman, Lyudmila Korabel'nikova, and Valentina Rubtsova, ed., *Thematic and Bibliographical Catalogue of P. I. Tchaikovsky's (P. I. Čajkovskij's) Works* (Moscow: Muzika, 2003), 193.

²⁷⁰ Brown, "Double Bill," 350-1; Wiley, "Nutcracker," 234.

Adagio (♩=56)

Oboe

Cor anglais

Violoncello

Double bass

Example 14: Scene 5, Ebn-Hakia leaves.

Andante moderato (♩=58)

Oriental melody

Double bass

Example 15: the Oriental melody in the overture of Carmen.

since “the mysterious East did not beckon Tchaikovsky as it did his teacher Rubinstein or his ‘kuchkist’ contemporaries, nor did the composer respond in any special way to the libretto’s metaphysical trappings.”²⁷¹ We can already say that the last part of his criticism overlooks the world below the dramatic surface of *Iolanta*: it is somehow strongly reminiscent of Robert not being perceptive for *inoy svet*. This is also true for the entire comment: to dismiss Ebn-Hakia’s aria-monologue as merely Oriental music of a mediocre quality is to overlook the other and arguably more significant layer of meaning in the music. Compared to the rest *Iolanta*, it becomes clear that the music related to Ebn-Hakia refers to much more than his Moorish roots: his leitmotif consists of the same opening and closing movement we have encountered in the

²⁷¹ Taruskin, “Iolanta.”

blindness theme of Iolanta's arioso. Whereas Tambovskaya considers the blindness theme and Ebn-Hakia's leitmotif to be separate themes, Ebn-Hakia's leitmotif is actually the next variation of the blindness motif: the two motifs become one from the moment of the physicians arrival.²⁷²

Before we can examine this relationship, it is necessary to analyse the blindness theme at other moments in *Iolanta*. Throughout the opera, the blindness theme signals moments during which Iolanta's visual impairment is discussed or during which the princess comes close to being aware of her blindness. We have already examined the blindness theme in the introduction and Iolanta's arioso. The theme can also be heard between these two moments in the passage leading up to the arioso (Example 16). Here, it is important to note that the use of the cor anglais is prevalent, just like in the introduction and Ebn-Hakia's leitmotif. The cor anglais plays a dotted rhythm, which it also played in the introduction, again supported by the woodwinds. The meaning of these similarities becomes clear through the libretto. In this passage, Iolanta refers to her senses, through which she hopes to find comfort: "Pick me flowers... I will touch them and the scent of the cool, delicate petals will maybe give me piece of mind" (*Narvite mne tsvetov, ya budu ikh perebirat', i zapakh prokhladnikh, nezhnikh lepestkov bit' mozhет mne dast pokoy...*) Not only Iolanta's melodic line is gradually rising, but also the harmonic accompaniment, which is reminiscent of the introduction and the rising line at the end of the lullaby: with every new chord, Iolanta comes closer to *inoy svet*, but the harmony remains unstable and *inoy svet* closed to her. Indeed, harmonic imbalance, melodic can be used "to embody various disabled states."²⁷³ Her next words formulate a question that not only anticipates the questions of the arioso, but also brings her close to awareness of her visual impairment: "Are eyes really only given for crying?" (*Neuzheli glaza danі za tem, chtob tolko plakat'?*) Thus, the appearance of the cor anglais and the woodwinds again form the blindness theme that signals Iolanta's visual impairment. Iolanta's rapprochement to *inoy svet* is also reflected in the instrumentation by a soft and mysterious tremolo of the upper strings. Later, when Vaudémont reveals the secret of sight and light to Iolanta, the woodwinds use their melancholic and low timbre again to indicate that the discussed topic is blindness, when Vaudémont asks the crucial question: "Do you really not know for what [purpose] your lifeless eyes shine?" (*Neuzh li vy ne znali, dlyachego u vas blestyat bezhiznennіye ochi?*) Iolanta repeats the question she asked before her arioso, as if she senses

²⁷² Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti," 10.

²⁷³ Howe, "Introduction," 4.

Adagio (♩=108)

I

Oboe

Cor anglais

Clarinet

Bassoon

Iolanta

Nar - vi - te mne tsve - tov, ya bu - du ikh pe - re - bi -
 Pick me flowers... I will touch them and the scent

Adagio (♩=108)

Violin 1

Violin 2

pp 6 12 24 *sempre p*

pp 6 12 24 *sempre p*

p

rat', i za - pakh pro - khlad - nihk, nezh-nikh le - pe - stkov bit' mo - zhet mne dast po - koy...
 of the cool, delicate petals will maybe give me piece of mind...

24 24 24 24

Example 16: Scene 1, Iolanta senses she is missing something.

that *inoy svet* is finally about to be revealed to her: “Why have eyes been given to me? For crying...” (*Zachem glaza danì mne? Dlya togo, chtob plakat'...*). Of course, the long awaited answer, given by Vaudémont, is in the key of comfort and sight, G major.²⁷⁴

The same use of woodwinds with string accompaniment appears after Bertrand has revealed to Alméric that Iolanta “does not know light.” (*Ona ne znayet sveta.*) Here, the dotted figure is played by the oboe in B minor, the same key, notes Brown, as that of Ebn-Hakia’s aria-monologue about Iolanta’s blindness and cure. This suggests that the key of B minor is yet another signifier of blindness (Example 17).²⁷⁵

Adagio

Adagio

O - na ne zna - yet sve - ta!
She does not know light!

Example 17: Scene 4, Bertrand informs Alméric of Iolanta’s blindness.

When Martha joins the conversation and explains to Alméric that the knowledge of sight and blindness has to remain hidden from Iolanta, the opening and closing woodwind chords appear again, as if to emphasise not only Iolanta’s physical blindness, but also her mental blindness, that is, her ignorance, the topic of their very discussion (Example 18). This notion of mental blindness is also invoked during the conversation between Robert and Vaudémont in Scene 6,

²⁷⁴ Brown, “Double Bill,” 362-3.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

Example 18: Scene 4, the opening and closing movements in the conversation between Alméric, Bertrand, and Martha.

when the opening and closing chords suddenly appear again, played by the woodwinds. At that moment, Robert wishes that his fiancé could “disappear without trace. I would even be happy to get lost, only not to see her!” (*Akh, eslib ey propast' bessledno! Ya dazhe rad bīl zabludit'sya, lish' bī ne videt' mne yeyo!*) How little does Robert know of the irony of his words, as he is about to meet Iolanta, and as he wishes not to see in a way, whereas Iolanta is blind. As Zajaczkowski observes, Robert’s wish for Iolanta to disappear show King René’s “unwitting cruelty in making her spiritually invisible to herself (by denying her the due knowledge of her affliction).”²⁷⁶ Interestingly, this version of the blindness theme does not only indicate Iolanta’s mental blindness, but also that of Robert: his wish is emblematic of his inability to perceive *inoy svet* that is brought upon earth through Iolanta-Sophia (Example 19).

Yā da - zhe rad bīl za - blu - dit' - sya, lish' bī ne vi - det' mne ye - yo!
I would even be happy to get lost, only not to see her!

Example 19: Scene 6, Robert wishes that Iolanta would disappear.

²⁷⁶ Zajaczkowski, “Culminating Allegory,” 102.

These musical similarities between parts of the libretto that are related to blindness show that Tchaikovsky had a structural plan in mind for portraying blindness in music. The blindness theme functions as a bridge, not only between the opera's introduction of darkness and finale of light, but also between reality and *inoy svet*. Iolanta's condition does not make the princess fully part of either world: situated in between because of her blindness, she perceives merely fragments of both. Since Ebn-Hakia, as a mystic physician and Solovyov's High Priest, also has a position between reality and *inoy svet*, the intertwining of the blindness theme with his leitmotif could not be more appropriate. In Scene 5, the blindness theme can be heard, played by the woodwinds, when Ebn-Hakia is about to reveal the requirements for Iolanta's cure, a moment during which he opens the door to *inoy svet* (Example 20).

Allegro moderato (♩=116)

Oboe

Cor anglais

Clarinet

Bassoon

Ebn-Hakia

Da, go su- dar', voz-mozh-no is-tse-le n'ye, no tol' ko...
 Yes, lord, a cure is possible, but only...

Example 20: Scene 5, Ebn-Hakia tells King René that a cure is possible.

Also, the theme appears when Ebn-Hakia explains he cannot promise his cure will succeed: “All is in God's power. Science is not omnipotent.” (*Vse v Bozhyey vlasti. Nauka ne vsesil'na.*) The semiquavers played by the oboe create a sputtering sound, as if Ebn-Hakia receives a faltering signal from *inoy svet*'s higher power that even he cannot fully grasp (Example 21). The intertwining of the themes also indicates Ebn-Hakia's intertwining with Iolanta's fate, as he is going seal it. This becomes especially clear when Ebn-Hakia leaves to examine the sleeping Iolanta in Scene 4: the opening and closing chords of the blindness theme appear in a dramatic form, played by the strings and woodwinds. Descending figures played by the horns and

Adagio (♩=56)

Oboe

Clarinet

Bassoon

Ebn-Hakia

Vse v Bo-shyey vlas - ti. All is in God's power. Na - u-ka ne vse-sil' - na; Science is not omnipotent; o - be - shchat'ya nemo-gu. I cannot make a promise.

Example 21: Scene 5, Ebn-Hakia seems to receive a signal from inoy svet.

woodwinds pierce through the air as if to evoke Iolanta's irrevocable fate which is about to be decided, an image that is powerfully emphasised by heavy timpani beats (Example 22, see appendix). The inextricable link between Ebn-Hakia and Iolanta is emphasised even more by the fact that they can both be considered as cultural outsiders from a stereotypical point of view, the physician because of his Oriental origins, and the princess because of her disability.

Ebn-Hakia's leitmotif shows another intertwinement: that of his Oriental origins and his metaphysical position between reality and *inoy svet*. For instance, the semitone embellishments of his leitmotif are a traditional Oriental marker. This two-sided character of Ebn-Hakia's music is the most clear in the aria-monologue (Example 22). Unconsciously, Taruskin already makes this link in his description of this part of *Iolanta*: "To 'modal' oriental strains," he writes, "the physician gives the king some ancient metaphysical advice."²⁷⁷ Revolving around the tonic, an ostinato rhythm played by the strings meets the description of "modal strains," which form the background for Ebn-Hakia's pentatonic and Oriental vocal line, the tune from Constantinople. Its embellishments are echoed at the end of each phrase by the higher strings. The static harmony and ostinato rhythm reflect the two-sided character of Ebn-Hakia, as they give the aria-monologue both a "character of sweeping Eastern languor,"²⁷⁸ as well as a heavily mystic effect. The absence of harmonic development creates a floating atmosphere, as if Ebn-Hakia hovers between reality and *inoy svet*, a position which enables him to experience a mystic and oracle-

²⁷⁷ Taruskin, "Iolanta."

²⁷⁸ Wiley, "Nutcracker," 234.

like trance. Brown observes that the key of “B minor takes total possession of Ebn-Hakia’s ensuing monologue,” but rather, the key seems to signify the higher power that takes total possession of Ebn-Hakia himself.²⁷⁹ Indeed, the ostinato rhythm in the lower strings, which reflects the trance, remains static and retains its pulsating quality throughout the aria-monologue, but the other strings gradually add tension to it, firstly by playing triplets, then semiquavers. The woodwinds and brass also join the build-up. It suggests that Ebn-Hakia is more and more possessed by his trance, through which he comes closer and closer to *inoy svet*. His hypnotic state culminates at the moment when he reaches the conclusion of his prescription, emphasised by his highest note of the entire aria-monologue and the presence of every instrument (except the harp) at full strength. Afterwards, the music gradually fades away, until the ostinato rhythm eventually stops like a rotating prayer wheel that comes to a halt.²⁸⁰ All in all, the Oriental markers are used to signify Ebn-Hakia’s position as a metaphysical focal point between the two worlds of reality and the otherworldly.

Ebn-Hakia’s music is not only intertwined with the Oriental and blindness, but also with sight. Brown observes that the key of C major, in which several parts of Ebn-Hakia’s music are written, is used for passages related to sight throughout *Iolanta*: the key represents sight, “that human faculty over which Ebn-Hakia has such power.”²⁸¹ For instance, “Ebn-Hakia’s exhortation to place hope of cure in Allah” in Scene 5 is written in the key of C major.²⁸² When Ebn-Hakia explains that he can observe Iolanta better when she sleeps, a succession of chords, played by the woodwind instruments only, form a harmonic progression that opens up into a C major chord on the significant word “observe” (*osmotret*). The stabilisation of the harmony until the C major chord in combination with the libretto and the woodwind-only instrumentation, suggests that Ebn-Hakia’s observations will bring Iolanta from the blind to the sighted world (Example 23). Through the physician’s power and guidance, Iolanta is eventually cured and no longer perceives reality and *inoy svet* in a fragmented way.

²⁷⁹ Brown, “Double Bill,” 362.

²⁸⁰ Neef, “Klank van licht,” 14.

²⁸¹ Brown, “Double Bill,” 362.

²⁸² Ibid.

Oboe

Cor anglais

Clarinet 1

Clarinet 2

Bassoon

Ebn-Hakia

Chtozh, tem luch-she, ya o - smo - tret' ye - yo vo snemo gu u - dob-ne ye.
 Well, evenbetter, I can examine her better when she sleeps.

Example 23: Scene 4, the harmonic progression towards C major.

The final transition towards light

In his analyses of the twin works *Iolanta* and *The Nutcracker*, Brown fails to notice that his comments are not points of critique, but descriptions of precisely those aspects of the works that can be considered as Symbolist. According to Brown, the dramatic structure of *The Nutcracker* is not only “the least satisfactory” of Tchaikovsky’s later theater works, but even “trite . . . pointless . . . inconsequential,” and “meaningless in the profoundest sense,” as “the piece leads to no true culmination,” and as he cannot find a reason for Clara’s journey through Confiturenburg.²⁸³ What Brown criticises, in other words, is *The Nutcracker*’s static action, a characteristic that Wiley blames on the unsuitability of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s story for a ballet and a failing librettist.²⁸⁴ How different are these observations from Klimovitsky’s, who recognises aspects that appealed to the Symbolists in the ballet’s meaningful “alternation of the human and

²⁸³ Ibid., 339.

²⁸⁴ Wiley, “Nutcracker,” 197-8.

toy world,” and the phantasmagoria and tone-painting of the “Waltz of the Snowflakes.”²⁸⁵ We can find the same static action of *The Nutcracker* in *Pélleas*, a Symbolist opera *pur sang* on which Debussy started to work not even a year after the ballet’s premiere. Also, Vladimir Belsky (1866-1946), the librettist of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh*, had in mind “a static work of ideas, full of imagery and allusion” rather than an “action-packed stage work.”²⁸⁶ As regards *Iolanta*, Brown argues that Vaudemont’s pity rather than passion for Iolanta “spares Tchaikovsky the need to explore a realm of rampant masculine sexuality. . . . Had all of *Iolanta* been on this level, it would have been a masterpiece, not the slender, pretty, but also insipid piece it mostly is.”²⁸⁷ Brown’s urge to hold on to the Romantic operatic idioms of passionate love makes him unperceptive to the subtle suggestiveness of the story and music of *Iolanta*. Just like in *The Nutcracker*, the narrative is not driven by passionate love and dramatic action, but by static action in which the inner experiences of the characters are central. Indeed, Belsky expected from Rimsky-Korsakov that the “music was above all concentration on the protagonists’ states of mind, which were to be portrayed by the orchestra along Wagnerian lines.”²⁸⁸ Similarly, the dramatic narrative in *Iolanta* revolves around how the characters are affected by their transitions between the worlds of reality and *inoy svet*. Despite his criticisms, Brown does notice and analysis precisely such moments in *The Nutcracker*, which he calls “transformation scenes,” a format that appears to have a crucial Symbolist function in *Iolanta*.²⁸⁹

The first transition scene of *The Nutcracker* that Brown points out is the moment of nightfall in the first act in Scene 1, No. 6 (Example 24, see appendix). Just like *Iolanta*, Clara falls asleep right before the transition starts, accompanied by descending lines played by less and less instruments of the lower part of the orchestra. Suddenly, little musical fragments suggest that something otherworldly is going on: through a haze of a tremolos played by muted strings sunrays appear from *inoy svet*, the toy world Confiturenburg, in the form of randomly sounding motifs with many trills played by the flute, harp, bass clarinet, piccolo, and tuba in turn. As Brown describes, the main elements of this world are “tiny, often nervous melodic fragments” with “the sharpest contrasts of colour and perhaps of register.” Indeed, he could not describe the

²⁸⁵ Klimovitsky, “Tchaikovsky,” 323, 327.

²⁸⁶ Kadja Grönke, “A Deliberately Contradictory Work,” in Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya*, Kirov Chorus and Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, Philips CD 462-225-2, 10. Quoted in Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 120.

²⁸⁷ Brown, “Double Bill,” 370.

²⁸⁸ Grönke, “A Deliberately Contradictory Work,” 10. Quoted in Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 120.

²⁸⁹ Brown, “Double Bill,” 346.

otherworldly, Symbolist aspects of this scene more aptly by noting that the music “is often harmonically elusive and strange; when the normality of the triad emerges explicitly the chord is frequently static, for what it represents or suggests exists outside the changing, pressing momentum of human time.”²⁹⁰ The second transition scene has much in common with the first. (Example 25, see appendix). In the introduction of the second act, the waltz theme suddenly decreases in volume and the amount of instruments, until again only the cor anglais and lower instruments remain. Suddenly the fragmentised music from *inoy svet* that Clara and the Nutcracker are about to enter suddenly penetrates through the waltz theme, this time perhaps even more striking than in the previous transition scene because of flatter-tongue notes played by the flutes. It is remarkable that Tchaikovsky made a lot of effort for this effect, as he especially inquired with a flautist and former student of his how the effect was called, how it was produced, and what its possibilities were.²⁹¹ The harp, clarinet, and a remarkably high register of the bassoon represent the sunrays from the opening world. The music continues “the task begun in the earlier movement: to leave no doubt that Clara is entering a totally new realm,” represented by the “special sound world” of Tchaikovsky’s original orchestration.²⁹²

We can find the same fragmented sound world in *Iolanta* at moments when a transition between reality and *inoy svet* is taking place. We have already discussed one such transition scene: at the moment when Iolanta falls asleep and the scene moves from inside to outside the garden, woodwinds and string tremolos contribute to a magical and otherworldly sounding music that accompanies the transition from reality to the world of slumbering dreams. Interestingly, the same kind of music can be heard at other transition moments. For instance, the closing bars of Scene 5 pass to Scene 6 almost unnoticed: according to the now familiar format, the music seems to fade out before the fragmented music enters (Example 26, see appendix). The string tremolos smoothly transform into a pulsating rhythm that accompanies consecutive nervous motifs played by the woodwinds. The scene has again moved from inside to outside the garden, where Vaudémont and Robert are approaching the door. The music is constantly modulating, echoing the many questions of the two friends about their surroundings. Robert, unperceptive to the otherworldly transition, merely complains about the darkness, but Vaudémont confidently finds his way through it and walks through the door. This is another moment that emphasises

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 345.

²⁹¹ Wiley, “Nutcracker,” 230. The flutist in question was Alexander Vasilyevich Khimichenko (1856-1947).

²⁹² Brown, “Double Bill,” 351; Wiley, “Nutcracker,” 222.

Vaudémont's perceptibility to *inoy svet*, as Zotov describes in his adaptation just how unnoticeable the door is: Almeric states that he could not have found it by himself if King René did not tell him where it was.²⁹³ And yet, Vaudémont notices the door immediately, despite the darkness of the cave in which it is located. At the moment he goes through a transition by stepping through the door, the music makes one final modulation and then remains harmonically static. Also, the nervous figures, to which the harp contributes now too, take on a regular form. This is the music of the other, previously hidden, world, the stable atmosphere of Iolanta's regulated paradisiacal garden. Zajaczkowski notes that the woodwinds, having a prevailing role in this passage and signaling blindness throughout the opera, represent the symbolic blindness of Iolanta's garden, the "deceptive environment" that King René has set up for his daughter (Example 27, see appendix).²⁹⁴

At the moment when Vaudémont enters the second door on the house's terrace, the music suggests that he is about to go through a transition again (Example 28, see appendix). After a silence that expresses his amazement about the fact that the door is unlocked and opens at his barest touch, the high woodwinds and the harp all play motifs of a different kind, consisting of semiquavers, syncopated crotchets, triplets, and quintuplets, while constantly modulating again, giving the passage the unstableness of transition, as if the border between reality and *inoy svet* becomes porous: the woodwind fragments signal *inoy svet* that Vaudémont is about to perceive, as he will finally see it in the form of his Iolanta-Sophia. At that precise moment, the instrumentation switches abruptly from woodwinds to strings (although still accompanied by the bassoon, but this is merely a traditional doubling of the violoncellos), playing a lyrical melody that reflects Vaudémont's feelings of love.²⁹⁵

The same unstable elements of the transition music are part of the music during which Iolanta wakes up (Example 29, see appendix). From the moment Vaudémont realises she is awakening, the flutes and strings play nervous and harmonically unstable motifs that culminate in a descending line of the flutes. Important is that the cor anglais suddenly appears again, playing a rising instead of the descending line from the introduction, suggesting that this moment is vital for undoing Iolanta's blindness. This is also reflected in the motif of the clarinets that resembles the opening and closing blindness motif. After their descending line, the flutes play a

²⁹³ Zotov, *Doch' korolya Rene*, 2, 4.

²⁹⁴ Zajaczkowski, "Culminating Allegory," 101.

²⁹⁵ Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo"; Zajaczkowski, "Culminating Allegory," 102.

motif that resembles the slumbering sequences from the lullaby, but are now more nervous and harmonically unpredictable. It not only suggests the transition of awakening, but also the transformation Iolanta is about to undergo towards the unknown of the world of sight that will soon be open to her.

After Ebn-Hakia's treatment is completed in Scene 9, the key of the world of sight, C major, predominates (Example 30, see appendix). One last time, the opening and closing chords can be heard, before C major finally conquers the music of blindness with bellowing brass chords. Then, the key changes to A-flat major, half a step higher than G major, the key in which Vaudémont enclosed the knowledge of light to Iolanta in Scene 7, as if to suggest the final step towards *inoy svet* that Iolanta has now taken through her cure.²⁹⁶ Arpeggios, played by the harp and strings, reflect the magicality of the moment. The key changes back to C major at the moment Ebn-Hakia removes Iolanta's blindfold, at which the nervous transition music starts: the strings switch to tremolos, and a solo violin plays quickly rising and descending motifs, almost like a *glissando*. When Ebn-Hakia explains to Iolanta that she is seeing her garden, the horn plays a descending whole tone scale, which is later continued by the woodwinds (Example 31, see appendix, and Example 32). This scale expresses Iolanta's fear and confusion of seeing things she knows and not being able to link the two: I am afraid! . . . I perish! Doctor! Save me! (*Mne strashno! . . . Ya pogibayu! Vrach! Spasi menya!*)²⁹⁷ Note that Wagner's association of awakening with death can be linked to Iolanta's words, as she awakens spiritually but thinks she is dying. Although Zajackowski argues that this is a human use of the whole tone scale to indicate fear, the supernatural way in which it is used at the appearance of the ghost of the Countess in *The Queen of Spades* is applicable to this passage, too.²⁹⁸ Also, during Hermann's vision of the funeral of the Countess tremolos and whole tone scales indicate both the otherworldly and Hermann's fear (of the otherworldly). The transition music in *Iolanta*'s final scene reflects Iolanta's transfiguration, the unification of body and spirit that is taking place, the mystic experience of perceiving *inoy svet*. Indeed, Borodavkin observes how this music conjures up an image of opening doors to a new world.²⁹⁹ The transfiguration is completed by a final guidance of Ebn-Hakia when he points towards heaven in order to calm Iolanta. A gradually

²⁹⁶ Neef, "Klank van licht," 15.

²⁹⁷ Zajackowski, "Culminating Allegory," 103.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Borodavkin, "Novatorstvo P. I. Tchaikovskogo."

Più mosso (♩=112)
ff

Flute
 Clarinet
 Bassoon

ff

I.II a 2

Example 32: Scene 9, the descending whole-tone scale.

rising harmonic progression reflects this final transition towards *inoy svet*: Ionata sees heaven for the first time and realises God is there. The passage recalls the final resurrection of the dying soul of Francis of Assisi, which was described as a bright light ascending towards heaven.³⁰⁰ It is also reminiscent of the wise man from *The Philosopher's Stone*, who, upon asking where the soul eventually goes to, hears the answer: "Above in heaven, that is where we hope to go."³⁰¹ Finally, Iolanta's soul is spiritually awakened: she perceives the absolute reality that is *inoy svet* and has achieved a saint-like closeness to God. She kneels in reverence during prayer-like brass chords, which Neef describes as "archaic, completely strange music" that "chant a wordless liturgical strophe."³⁰² In *King René's Daughter*, the story ends after this prayer with King René giving his blessing to Iolanta and Vaudémont, but Tchaikovsky added one passage after Iolanta's prayer.³⁰³ The princess continues her prayer by starting a hymn to God and light: "Good, great, and eternal, Thou appeared to me in darkness! Let me now, Creator of Everything, get to know you in the day of light, too!" (*Blagoy, velikiy, neizmenniy, vo t'me yavlyal ti mne sebya! Day mne teper', Tvorets vselennoy uznat' Tebya i v svete dnya!*) This departure from Zotov's adaptation shows that Tchaikovsky wanted to emphasise the divine and metaphysical aspect of the plot rather than the love-story between Iolanta and Vaudémont, for which Zotov's ending would have been appropriate. Interestingly, Iolanta's transfiguration takes place at sunset, so that even nature

³⁰⁰ Wells, "Exemplary blindness," 71.

³⁰¹ Andersen, *The Philosopher's Stone*.

³⁰² Neef, "Klank van licht," 16.

³⁰³ Tambovskaya, "Illyuziya prostoti," 4.

emphasises the transition that is taking place. The sunset also brings us back to the sunset described in the duet between Liza and Polina from *The Queen of Spades*, and the transitional character of the Twilight Age that was explained after this duet. It seems that Iolanta's transfiguration does not only symbolise her completed transition to the sighted world, but also the transfiguration of the Twilight Age into the Silver Age that is embodied in *Iolanta*.

Liefde is zo duister, mij lijkt het meer iets voor blinden.

Love is so obscure, to me it rather seems to be something for the blind.

Arthur Japin

De klap van Ediep Koning in Magonische verhalen, 1996

Conclusion

Not long after the premiere of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*, the opera also received performances in Moscow and Hamburg. In 1900 the Vienna premiere was conducted by none other than Gustav Mahler (1860-1911). The story of *King René's Daughter* continued to inspire artists in the twentieth century, though not musically, but in the new art form of film. In 1913, the American film company Thanhouser created the film *King René's Daughter*, which scrupulously follows the plot of Hertz's play. The silent black-and-white film portrays the story like a medieval fairy tale about love, an approach that probably resembles the nineteenth-century performances of *King René's Daughter*, as they were pervaded with "the atmosphere of poetry and old romance" according to Martin. As late as 1990, the story was adapted into a German children's film called *The Light of Love* (*Das Licht der Liebe*). Departing from the plot of Hertz's play, the film is situated in the Carolingian period, and focuses on the life of a boy who is bullied and mistreated because of his appearance. One day he finds the secluded garden in which he meets the blind princess, here called Reglindis. Her blindness enables her to "see" the beauty beyond the boy's appearance and they fall in love. Then, the film briefly follows the plot of *Iolanta*, as the lovers are discovered and Reglindis' father threatens to execute the boy if the eye operation fails to restore his daughter's eyesight. After the surgery, which has indeed failed, Reglindis fakes that she can see to save the life of her beloved, which she confesses to him later. Upon stating that she considers seeing with her heart to be more important than seeing with her eyes, Reglindis' sight is miraculously restored. Just as in *King René's Daughter*, it then appears that the beloved of the princess is in fact her fiancé: the boy is the son of King Slavomir, who was betrothed to Reglindis years ago.

As different as all versions of *King René's Daughter* may be, it appears that each time blindness is symbolically linked to love. In all versions, the young man who falls in love with the blind princess is willing to love her "despite" her blindness, a narrative element that symbolises the all-conquering power of love. Indeed, in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* the power of love is so strong that it is the decisive force in the process of *Iolanta's* cure. In *The Light of Love* blindness symbolises the inner sight of Reglindis that is able to fathom the essence of love and beauty, in contrast to the bullying, visually able characters in the film. It is as the Dutch writer Arthur Japin (*1956) states: "Love is so obscure, to me it rather seems to be something for the blind." Like

Reglindis is able to see beyond the boy's appearance, so Iolanta perceives the essence of things below the surface of the appearance of matter, which is invisible to those who are visually able. The obscurity of what a visually impaired person can perceive allows the artist to play with unveiling and suggesting the world behind the facade of appearance, which is full of meaningful secrets and values, in the same way as the Symbolists constructed their works of art. Having followed the path of Iolanta from her budding awareness of her blindness to the moment of her cure, what secrets and values from the world below the dramatic surface of *Iolanta* have been unveiled to us? How do those elements of *Iolanta* support a Symbolist reading of the opera?

It appears that the central element of *Iolanta*, blindness, is an appropriate tool for the manifestation of the Symbolist aesthetics of suggestion and disclosure in *Iolanta*. It is clear that Tchaikovsky picked up on this broad symbolic potential of blindness, indeed, as the only artist of all those who made their own version of *King René's Daughter*. As Japin's quote implies, there is much more to blindness than just a symbolic link with love: the quote also conjures up the blindness-darkness synonymy (in Dutch, "duister" can also mean "dark"). The absence of this metanarrative of blindness from Zotov's adaptation makes clear that Tchaikovsky himself decided to follow this symbolic path in what concerns the portrayal of Iolanta's blindness in his opera, both textually and musically. It appears that the perspectives on Iolanta's world of darkness from the theories of the field of disability studies and Solovyov's philosophical consideration of the senses complement each other: both bring forward blindness as a separation between Iolanta and the world around her and the Godly *inoy svet*. The blindness-darkness synonymy has found its way into the libretto of *Iolanta*: blindness, that is, the missing element of sight, causes Iolanta's melancholia, King René considers Iolanta's blindness to be a punishment for his sins, and the other characters believe that Iolanta is surrounded by darkness because of her blindness. Through his remarkable orchestration Tchaikovsky musically established Iolanta's world of darkness by the use of low notes, and dark timbres and registers. The blindness-darkness synonymy also constitutes the Symbolist dichotomy of reality and *inoy svet* in *Iolanta*. Through the opening and closing movement of the leitmotif of blindness the presence of the two worlds is made known: it reflects Iolanta's ungoing struggle to grasp the for her unknown and obscure world of the sighted from her position in the blind world. Indeed, it has been said that "people who have visual impairments 'dwell in a world that is apart from and beyond the one ordinary men [and women, sic] inhabit,'" and "'give the impression' of 'being in another

world.””³⁰⁴ The evolving character of the blindness theme suggests that Iolanta is slowly departing from this world and is coming closer and closer to the other world. Solovyov’s “A Critique of Abstract Principles” supports the effect of the blindness-darkness synonymy: without a collaboration of all the senses, argues Solovyov, the processes of objectification and imagination cannot take place. This prevents Iolanta from perceiving both the reality that is the visible world around her, and absolute reality that is *inoy svet*, and leaves nothing but darkness.

Japin’s quote also brings forward the fifth-sixth sense that is often attributed to people with a visual impairment: love is so obscure, that only the blind with their heightened sensitivity would be able to unravel and understand its mysteries. Again, it appears that both the disability studies theories and Solovyov’s religious philosophy bring forward the Symbolist dichotomy of two worlds in *Iolanta* as established through the fifth-sixth sense, in this case the transition from the earthly towards the heavenly world. Thus, the fifth-sixth sense is mainly linked to the religious and metaphysical aspect of the opera. The comparison between the saint Francis of Assisi and Iolanta shows that Francis’ clear inner eye, with which he can mentally perceive God, illuminates the opera’s portrayal of blindness as a condition that enables Iolanta to come closer to the Godly *inoy svet*. Iolanta is not only similar to a saint, but also to a mystic: through her growing awareness of her blindness in the period leading up to her cure, Iolanta follows the same spiritual path of moral preparation towards the achievement of a higher state of being and heightened perception as a mystic. Through Vaudémont’s eyes, Iolanta resembles Solovyov’s Sophia: not only does the princess embody the Godly ideal that Vaudémont is searching for, she also becomes “the living connection between the earthly and the divine” in her saint-like and mystic aspirations of perceiving the Godly *inoy svet*. The mystic and religious aspects of *Iolanta* culminate in the moment of Iolanta’s cure, which resembles the transfiguration of Christ and the numinous experience of a mystic. The unstable and constantly transforming character of the music of this final transition between reality and *inoy svet* resembles the music that accompanies the other transitions in *Iolanta* – going through the garden’s door, Iolanta’s awakening, and Vaudémont’s meeting with his Sophia-Iolanta – which underlines the metaphysical character of Iolanta’s cure. *Inoy svet* is finally opened when, to use Solovyov’s words from the poem of the beginning of the present thesis, “heaven’s triumphant harmonies” sound in the finale hymn of

³⁰⁴ Robert A. Scott, *The Making of Blind Men: A Study of Adult Socialization* (New Brunswick Transaction, 1991), 4; Allan Dodds, *Rehabilitating Blind and Visually Impaired People: A Psychological Approach* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1993), 36. Quoted in Bolt, *Metanarrative of Blindness*, 123.

Iolanta. Considering the fact that Morrison compares Fevroniya from *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh* to Solovyov's Sophia, it may be insightful to compare Fevroniya to Iolanta, or compare characters from other Symbolist operas to Sophia.³⁰⁵

The exploration of the origins of *King René's Daughter* has not only brought forward the likely medieval roots of the story, but has also, combined with Solovyov's religious philosophy, put the Moorish physician Ebn-Hakia into a new light. His resemblance to the medieval physician and Solovyov's High Priest shifts the focus from an Oriental to a mystic image of Ebn-Hakia as a mediator between the earthly and heavenly world. It also created a new image of Ebn-Hakia as a philosopher, as he resembles Solovyov in what concerns his philosophical thought behind Iolanta's cure. The hitherto recognised Oriental character of Ebn-Hakia's music is in fact only the surface of its true, mystic nature, as the Oriental and the mystic are intertwined in Ebn-Hakia's music: the merging of the physician's leitmotif with the blindness theme indicates his spiritual and medical power over Iolanta's blindness, and the static and trance-like effect of his aria-monologue musically portrays his metaphysical position between reality and *inoy svet*. Similarly, Iolanta hovers between reality and the world of slumber during the lullaby, which has similar floating and rocking motifs as Ebn-Hakia's aria-monologue. As mentioned before, Taruskin argues that Tchaikovsky was not as inspired by the Orient for his music as Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894) or his colleague composers of the Kuchkists. It is true that Tchaikovsky was only working with the Oriental style in *Iolanta* and *The Nutcracker*, but that low number of Eastern-oriented pieces certainly does not signify a disinterest in the Oriental style or a mediocre handling of it. On the contrary, by analysing his use of Oriental markers in comparison to the narrative and other music of *Iolanta* instead of on its own, it becomes clear that Tchaikovsky, in contrast to what Taruskin argues, *did* respond in a special way to the "metaphysical trappings" of the libretto. Rather than following the footsteps of the Kuchkists in portraying the Orient in a conventional way, Tchaikovsky followed a highly original path in using the Orient not only to signify Ebn-Hakia's Moorish origins, but moreover to emphasise his mystic character. Thus, the present thesis does not only shed a new light on Ebn-Hakia, but also on Tchaikovsky's use of the Oriental style and his innovative way of composing.

³⁰⁵ For Morrison's comparison, see the chapter "Rimsky-Korsakov and Religious Syncretism" in *Russian Opera*, 115-183.

Although the ideas of Solovyov's philosophy and the theories from the field of disability studies complement each other, they are also contradictory. The fifth-sixth sense in the form of an inner eye instead of visual perception is inconsistent with Solovyov's ideas about the perception of absolute reality: blindness leaves four working senses instead of five, which prevents objectification, and subsequently imagination, of which the latter could be equated to the inner eye. Also, Solovyov does not mention the possibility of a more developed imagination or other gradations in this process. Still, these contradictory elements do not exclude each other, nor the simultaneous use of the theoretical and philosophical perspective on *Iolanta*. Rather, it emphasises the intended effect of Symbolist art: as Jarocinski points out, the symbol's "charm is due to the fact that it is polyvalent," as it "conveys an imprecise meaning which can be interpreted in various ways."³⁰⁶ Thus, the fact that two contradictory interpretations of inner perception in relation to blindness can coexist peacefully is emblematic of this effect. Also, the contradiction brings forward one of the main objectives of disability studies: whereas blindness from the perspective of Solovyov's philosophy would be considered as an incompleteness, disability studies aims to show an entirely different image of blindness by focussing on the potential of disability rather than its impossibilities. At first, *Iolanta*'s religious and metaphysical fifth-sixth sense seems to fit in this image, but is at the same time an example of the stereotypical image of blindness that is challenged by disability studies. This is also true for the cure-or-kill paradigm, which implies a negative view on disability as something that must always be overcome or eliminated at all costs. Indeed, *Iolanta*'s blindness is still described as "misfortune" (*neschast'e*) by the other characters in *Iolanta*. Thus, it appears that a focus on abilities is not per definition a step in the direction of a more realistic and respectful image of disability. *Iolanta*, permeated with stereotypical and unrealistic ideas of blindness, shows the importance of studying cultural representations of disability from the critical perspective of disability studies. Of equal importance is the interdisciplinary applicability of disability studies, of which the philosophical and musical considerations of disability in the present thesis are examples, as it can help to reveal and critically discuss the symbolic connotations of disability in multiple disciplines. As disability studies prove to provide useful tools for revealing the Symbolist aspects of *Iolanta*, it may be a fruitful approach as well for research into other Symbolist works that portray blindness or other disabilities, either physical or mental.

³⁰⁶ Jarocinski, *Debussy*, 23-5.

All in all, the present approach of *Iolanta* as a Symbolist opera has made clear that Tchaikovsky's last opera embraces elements that would become central to mystic Symbolism. This still leaves one question to be answered, however: can we really say that *Iolanta* is a Symbolist opera? As was stated in the introduction of this thesis, assigning a Symbolist or any other label to a work of art is problematic. It is simply not a question of ticking boxes on a checklist: art movements are so diverse and overlapping that they cannot be completely described with one term or a few general characteristics. This is already evident in both *Iolanta* and *The Queen of Spades*, in which the Symbolist elements do not exclude Romantic (and Oriental) aspects, but rather embrace them. The fact that both Tchaikovsky and the Symbolists were inspired by Wagner's methods and medieval or mythical opera subjects is also emblematic of this overlap. In this sense, both *Iolanta* and *The Queen of Spades* are products of the Twilight Age, the grey area of gradual development from Romanticism and Realism on the one hand into Symbolism on the other. This allowed Tchaikovsky to already work with ideas of the Symbolist movement at a moment that it was not yet considered as such. As it has become clear that the developments of the period in which Tchaikovsky created *Iolanta* influenced the opera, it is emphasised how important and revealing it is to consider the opera and Tchaikovsky's other late works in relation to the Twilight Age. Perhaps Taruskin's characterisation of *The Queen of Spades* as a great Symbolist opera is, therefore, a little too overdrawn, as well as a similar assertion about *Iolanta* would be. Rather, it can be concluded that *Iolanta* is a proto-Symbolist opera. This is supported by the fact that elements of Tchaikovsky's first encounters with proto-Symbolism are reflected in *Iolanta*, such as the musical evocation of sleep in "Usni," and the ideas of Solovyov's "Critique." Klimovitsky and Morrison present these encounters as unrelated events, but they are in fact unified in their applicability to *Iolanta*. Whether Tchaikovsky was directly influenced for his opera by Solovyov's philosophy or not, the fact remains that its resemblance to the main elements of *Iolanta*'s narrative is striking, and that Tchaikovsky was interested in the ideas of a philosopher who would become significantly important to the Symbolists. It seems likely that Tchaikovsky's encounters with Symbolism partly caused the differences between *Iolanta* and (Zotov's adaptation of) *King René's Daughter*, as they show that Tchaikovsky transformed the story towards Symbolism. The exploration of his personal interests in developing Symbolist ideas in relation to *Iolanta* reveal that Tchaikovsky was more drawn towards this newly developing movement than hitherto assumed. Indeed, in relation to

Tchaikovsky's operatic oeuvre, *The Queen of Spades* and *Iolanta* suggest a departure from psychological realism, a style that characterises most of Tchaikovsky's operas, towards Symbolism. Would Tchaikovsky have continued to live in the Silver Age, *Iolanta* may have been a forerunner of a Symbolist opera composed by Tchaikovsky in the 1890s or early 1900s. Indeed, Taruskin believes that *The Queen of Spades* "marks the beginning of a new stage in [Tc]haikovsky's evolution as musical dramatist, one that, had he lived out a normal span of years, would surely have marked him as one of the guiding geniuses of the Russian 'Silver Age.'"³⁰⁷ Since Tchaikovsky worked closely with his librettist and brother Modest Tchaikovsky (1850-1916) on *The Queen of Spades* and *Iolanta*, perhaps something about this prediction can be revealed by exploring Modests's literary and cultural interests, perhaps in Symbolism, especially considering the fact that he did live in the Silver Age. The fact that the only two of Tchaikovsky's operas of which Modest wrote the libretto are proto-Symbolist suggests that Modest may have had progressive ideas, just like his brother, that influenced his brother's operas.³⁰⁸

The new perspective on *Iolanta* not only reveals the innovative side of Tchaikovsky's image as an opera composer, which is usually considered as conservative, but also opens up the possibility of researching other (proto-)Symbolist Russian operas that have not received (large-scale) attention before in that way, such as *Sister Beatrice*, Op. 50 (*Sestra Beatrisa*, 1910) by Alexander Gretchaninov (1864-1956). It could also be insightful to apply this perspective to *The Nutcracker* and the narratively similar opera *The Christmas Tree (Elka)*, Op. 21 (1900) by Vladimir Rebikov (1866-1920), or the portrayal of sleep in Tchaikovsky's ballet *Sleeping Beauty (Spyashchaya krasavitsa)*, Op. 66 (1889), the predecessor of *The Nutcracker*. In a more general sense, the new perspective on *Iolanta* is also relevant in the current times of social and religious divide. It is as if Solovyov's idea of a universal church, the concept of Sophia that will unify all Christians, is established in the hymn to God and light sung by all characters in *Iolanta*'s finale.³⁰⁹ Also, the finale reflects religious syncretism, as it reconciles "diverse faiths," and focuses on "common roots between these faiths:"³¹⁰ all characters of the opera, even the earthly

³⁰⁷ Taruskin, "Great Symbolist Opera," 117.

³⁰⁸ Indeed, from Tchaikovsky's letters appears that the two brothers shared their literary and cultural interests with each other. For more on Modest as librettist and playwright, see Victor Borovsky, "Modest Tchaikovsky – Dramatist, Librettist, Critic, Translator," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* (1997): 145-173.

³⁰⁹ Sutton, *Religious Philosophy*, 78.

³¹⁰ Morrison, *Russian Opera*, 118.

Robert and the Muslim Ebn-Hakia, join in singing this hymn. It shows, as Neef observes, that “the Godly is not bound to religion.”³¹¹ In the current times of political divide, ethnic discrimination, and religious extremism, *Iolanta*’s message of the all-conquering power of love and the transboundary character of religion should point everyone in the right direction in the current dark times, just like “the torch of truth” that burns in Iolanta’s heart, and just like *Iolanta* has come out of the shadows to become a new sparkling star in the night sky of Symbolism.

³¹¹ Neef, “Klank van licht,” 16.

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Appendix

Moderato assai (♩=84)

Cor anglais
Clarinet
Bassoon
Horn 1
Horn 2
Brigita
Laura
Martha
Choir
Violin 2
Violoncello
Double Bass

pp
pp
pp
pp
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf
pp

morendo
IV
II
Spil! Sleep!
Spil! Sleep!
Spil! Sleep!
Spil! Sleep!
Spil! Sleep!
Spil! Sleep!
Spil! Sleep!
Spil! Sleep!
Spil! Sleep!

Moderato assai (♩=84)

Example 9: The end of the lullaby.

Example 10: Act 2, Scene 2, the death of the Countess in The Queen of Spades.

Allegro semplice (♩=138)

Oboe *pp*

Horn 1 *mp*

Horn 2 *pp*

Harp

Allegro semplice (♩=138)
con sord.

Violin 1 *pp*

Violin 2 *con sord.*

Viola *con sord.*

Violoncello *con sord.* *pp*

Double bass *con sord.* *pp*

Example 12: Scene 4, the transition between the garden and the outside world.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system consists of five staves. The top staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The second staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The third staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The fourth staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The fifth staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The second system consists of five staves. The top staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The second staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The third staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The fourth staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The fifth staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata.

System 1:

- Staff 1: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 2: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Staff 3: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 4: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Staff 5: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.

System 2:

- Staff 1: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *f*.
- Staff 2: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 3: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *f*.
- Staff 4: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 5: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.

System 3:

- Staff 1: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 2: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Staff 3: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 4: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Staff 5: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.

System 4:

- Staff 1: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 2: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Staff 3: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 4: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Staff 5: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.

System 5:

- Staff 1: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 2: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Staff 3: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *mf*.
- Staff 4: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Staff 5: Treble clef, melodic line with a slur and a fermata. Dynamics: *pp*.

Largo (♩=92) 1

Oboe
Cor anglais
Clarinet
Bassoon
Horn 1
Horn 2
Timpani
Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Violoncello
Double bass

Largo (♩=92)

Example 22: Scene 4, Ebn-Hakia leaves.

The musical score for "The Wind" by John Williams is presented in a system of two staves. The top staff is for the piano, and the bottom staff is for the string quartet. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of 12 measures. The piano part includes a 5-measure phrase, a 7-measure phrase, and a 3-measure phrase. The string quartet part includes a 12-measure phrase, a 12-measure phrase, and a 12-measure phrase. The score is marked with dynamics such as *mf*, *p*, *pp*, and *ppp*.

pp mf p

mp pp

mp pp

mp pp

3

pp

glissando

mp

12 12 12 12 12 12

mp pp

12 12 12 12

pp mp pp

This musical score page contains measures 115 through 124. It features a brass section with four staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a woodwind section with three staves (Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

Measures 115-116: The brass section plays a melodic line starting on G4, moving to A4, B-flat4, and C5. The woodwind section provides harmonic support with sustained notes and a triplet in the bassoon.

Measures 117-118: The brass section continues the melodic line. The woodwind section features a triplet in the bassoon and a sustained note in the clarinet.

Measures 119-120: The brass section plays a melodic line. The woodwind section features a triplet in the bassoon and a sustained note in the clarinet.

Measures 121-122: The brass section plays a melodic line. The woodwind section features a triplet in the bassoon and a sustained note in the clarinet.

Measures 123-124: The brass section plays a melodic line. The woodwind section features a triplet in the bassoon and a sustained note in the clarinet.

Dynamic markings: *ppp* (pianissimo) is used in measures 115, 117, 119, and 121. *p* (piano) is used in measures 116, 118, 120, and 122. *cresc.* (crescendo) is used in measures 123 and 124.

Other markings: "Con sordino" (with mutes) is marked in measure 121. "Tuba" is marked in measure 117. "12" (12th fret) is marked in measures 115, 117, 119, and 121. "6" (6th fret) is marked in measures 123 and 124.

Andante (♩=60)

Flute 1

Flute 2

Flute 3

Cor anglais

Clarinet 1

Clarinet 2

Bass clarinet

Bassoon

Celesta

Harp 1

Harp 2

Andante (♩=60)

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

Example 25: Act 2, the transition between Scene 10 and 11 to Confituremburg in The Nutcracker.

Andante con moto (♩=72)

f Frullate 3 3

f Frullate 3 3

f Frullate 3 3

p 7

p 3 3 3 3 3 3

p 3 3 3 3 3 3

p 3 3 3 3 3 3

Andante con moto (♩=72)

pp

pp

pp

pp pizz.

pp pizz.

musical score for a piano piece, page 3. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple staves. The first system has three staves with treble clefs and one with a bass clef. The second system has three staves with treble clefs and two with bass clefs. The third system has three staves with treble clefs and two with bass clefs. The fourth system has three staves with treble clefs and two with bass clefs. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (*f*, *p*, *pp*), articulation (accents), and complex rhythmic patterns including triplets and sixteenth notes. The piece concludes with a final cadence in the bass clef staves.

Poco più (♩=60) **Allegro vivo (♩=138)**

Piccolo Flute 1 Oboe Clarinet 1 Clarinet 2 Bassoon Horn 1,2 Harp 2 Vaudémont Robert

Poco più (♩=60) **Allegro vivo (♩=138)**

Viola Violoncello Double bass

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system, titled 'Poco più (♩=60)' and 'Allegro vivo (♩=138)', contains staves for the following instruments: Piccolo, Flute 1, Oboe, Clarinet 1, Clarinet 2, Bassoon, Horn 1,2, Harp 2, Vaudémont, and Robert. The second system, also titled 'Poco più (♩=60)' and 'Allegro vivo (♩=138)', contains staves for Viola, Violoncello, and Double bass. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *pp*, *p*, and *pp simile*. The tempo markings 'Poco più' and 'Allegro vivo' are indicated above the first and second systems respectively, with the corresponding note values in parentheses.

Example 26: the transition from Scene 5 to 6 in Iolanta.

Allegro (♩=138)

Flute 1 *p* *cresc.*

Flute 2 *p* *cresc.*

Oboe *p* *cresc.*

Clarinet 1 *p* *cresc.*

Clarinet 2 *p* *cresc.*

Bassoon *p* *cresc.*

Vaudémont
ya ed - va kos - nul - sya do ne - ye.
I barely touched it.

Robert
Vzglya - ni
What do you see tam?
there?

Harp 1 *pp* *poco* *cresc.*

Harp 2 *p* *poco* *cresc.*

Allegro (♩=138)

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Double bass

Example 27: Vaudémont goes through the door of the house and sees Iolanta.

Andante (♩=69)

3

f cresc.

ff

f cresc.

ff

f cresc.

ff

f cresc. 3

ff

f cresc. 3

ff

f cresc. 3

ff

f cresc. 3

ff

f cantabile

bert!
bert!

O, chto ya vi - zhu! Net an - ge - la!
O, what do I see! No, an angel!

Vol - sheb - ni-tsu?
A sorceress?

Andante (♩=69)

sf

mf

sf

mf

sf

mf

f cantabile

pizz.

f

mf

Andante (♩=69, ♪=138)

Flute 1

Flute 2

Cor anglais

Clarinet

Vaudémont

Ro - bert!
Ro - bert!

Ro - bert,
Ro - bert,

o - na pro -
she has awoken,

Andante (♩=69, ♪=138)

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

The musical score is for a scene titled 'Example 28: Iolanta awakens.' It is in 8/8 time and marked 'Andante' with a tempo of 69 quarter notes per minute (♩=69) and 138 eighth notes per minute (♪=138). The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Flute 1, Flute 2, Cor anglais, Clarinet, and Vaudémont. Flute 1 and 2 play a melodic line with a crescendo. The Cor anglais and Clarinet play a lower melodic line, also with a crescendo. Vaudémont has a vocal line with the lyrics 'Ro - bert!' and 'Ro - bert, o - na pro - she has awoken,'. The second system includes parts for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Violoncello. All string parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in groups of three, with a crescendo. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Example 28: Iolanta awakens.

musical score for the first system, featuring a piano and vocal parts. The piano part has a melody with triplets and a dynamic marking of *f*. The vocal part has a melody with triplets and a dynamic marking of *mf*.

musical score for the second system, featuring a piano and vocal parts. The piano part has a melody with triplets and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The vocal part has a melody with triplets and a dynamic marking of *mf*.

smu - las', ti' raz - bu - dil! O - na i -
you woke her up! She is coming

musical score for the third system, featuring a piano and vocal parts. The piano part has a melody with triplets and a dynamic marking of *sempre f*. The vocal part has a melody with triplets and a dynamic marking of *mp* and *sf*.

det syu - dal
this way!

Moderato assai (♩=92) **A**

Flute 1,2 *f*

Flute 3 *mf* *f*

Oboe *f*

Cor anglais *f*

Clarinet *f*

Bassoon *f*

Horn 1,2 *f*

Horn 3,4 *f*

Trumpet *f*

Tenor Trombone *f*

Tuba *f*

Brigitta *ff*
Io-lan-ta vi - dit svet! O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
Io-lan-ta sees light! O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Laura *ff*
Io-lan-ta vi - dit svet! O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
Io-lan-ta sees light! O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Martha *ff*
Io-lan-ta vi - dit svet! O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
Io-lan-ta sees light! O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Vaudémont *ff*
O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Alméric *ff*
O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Robert *ff*
O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Bertrand *ff*
O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Choir *ff*
Io-lan-ta vi - dit svet! O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
Io-lan-ta sees light! O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Choir *ff*
O, scha - st'e, o, ra - dost', Io-lan - ta vi - dit svet!
O, fortune, o, joy, Io-lan - ta sees light!

Moderato assai (♩=92) **A**

Violin 1 *cresc.* *f*

Violin 2 *cresc.* *f*

Viola *cresc.* *f*

Violoncello *f*

Double bass *f*

Example 29: *Iolanta* is cured.

Moderato assai (♩=92)
Stringendo

Horn I
pp

Horn II

Ebn-Hakia
T'voi sad,
'Your garden,

Harp 1
pp un poco cresc.

Harp 2
pp in poco cresc.

Moderato assai (♩=92)
solo

Violin I
f

Violin I
altzi
pp un pochetto cresc.

Violin 2
pp un pochetto cresc.

Viola
pp un pochetto cresc.

Example 30: Iolanta is overwhelmed by the experience of seeing.

III

p

two - yi de - - - re - - - v'ya,
your trees,

f 7 3 9

p cresc.

p cresc.

p cresc.

musical score for a vocal and piano piece, page 3. The score is written for a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

The vocal line (soprano) begins with a half note on a whole rest, marked *mp*. The lyrics are: "two - yi tsve - - - il!" (your flowers!).

The piano accompaniment consists of several systems of staves. The first system shows the right hand playing a series of eighth notes with a slur, and the left hand playing a series of eighth notes with a slur. The second system shows the right hand playing a series of eighth notes with a slur, and the left hand playing a series of eighth notes with a slur. The third system shows the right hand playing a series of eighth notes with a slur, and the left hand playing a series of eighth notes with a slur. The fourth system shows the right hand playing a series of eighth notes with a slur, and the left hand playing a series of eighth notes with a slur.

The piano accompaniment concludes with a series of staves. The first staff is marked *div.* and *mp*. The second staff is marked *mp*. The third staff is marked *mp*. The fourth staff is marked *mp*.