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GEOFFREY CHEW — ROBERT VILAIN

EVASIVE REALISM: NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION IN DOSTOYEVSKY'S AND JANÁČEK'S 'FROM THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD'

Tolstoy famously regarded *The House of the Dead* (1860–61) as Dostoyevsky's finest work; indeed, he elevated it to a supreme position among nineteenth-century books written by Russian authors:

I have read *The House of the Dead*. I do not know a book better than this in all our literature, not even excepting Pushkin. Not its tone, but its point of view is admirable: sincere, natural and Christian. A good, instructive book.¹

This verdict significantly makes no reference to *The House of the Dead* as a novel; and George Steiner has indeed suggested that it reflects the fact that the book is the least 'Tolstoyan' of all Dostoyevsky's works — not really a novel at all, but 'plainly an autobiography'.² In this he takes his cue from Tolstoy himself, for in a postscript to *War and Peace*, Tolstoy categorized both *The House of the Dead* and Gogol's *Dead Souls* as works that cannot properly be called novels.³ The work's full title, *Notes from the House of the Dead*, itself in some respects confirms the work's distance from the novel genre, and in his massive biography of Dostoyevsky, Joseph Frank is (significantly) content to use *The House of the Dead* as a primary source for the sections on the author's imprisonment.⁴ Thus, at the outset, there are some uncertainties attaching to *The*

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1. Letter to N. N. Strakhov of 1880; quoted by Jaromír Hrubý in the introduction to his translation of *The House of the Dead*, a copy of which was owned by Janáček (F. M. Dostoyevsky, *Zápisky z mrtvého domu: přeložil H. Jaroš*, Ottova ruská knihovna, vol. 9 (Prague: J. Otto, 1891), p. 341); see Jaroslav Procházka, 'Z mrtvého domu: Janáčkův tvůrčí i lidský epilog a manifest', *Hudební věda*, 3 (1966), p. 474.
 2. George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, revised edition (London: Faber, 1967), pp. 293, 102.
 3. 'Some Words about *War and Peace*' (1868), in vol. 16 of the Soviet Academy's edition of the Complete Works; for an English translation of this text, see Henry Gifford, ed., *Leo Tolstoy: A Critical Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 39–40.
 4. Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850–1859* (London: Robson Books; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983). See especially pp. 69ff.

House of the Dead. These include the genre to which it belongs; the degree to which it agrees with, and depends on, the aesthetic and moral principles cited in Tolstoy's verdict, especially the 'sincere' and the 'natural'; and, implicit in these, the respective parts that are played in it by the 'realistic' and the 'fictive', in the various ways in which these categories might be defined. And, as we shall see, some of the same questions may be raised in relation to Janáček's reworking of Dostoyevsky's text, in the medium of opera. Janáček's work is a *Literaturoper*⁵ — in other words an opera created directly, in prose, from a literary original, rather than a setting of a generic libretto; even this genre, however, is arguably compromised, because the literary model is both highly compressed and manipulated in certain significant ways. And the manipulations have, once more, to do with constructions of truth and fiction, and their representation in terms of music theatre.

Dostoyevsky's *House of the Dead* is certainly heavily autobiographical, and is based on the author's exile at the age of 28 to the *katorga* or prison camp at Omsk in Siberia between January 1850 and February 1854. He had been sentenced to hard labour, to be followed by a period in the Russian army as a private, for his part in the Petrashevist conspiracy. During a spell in the prison hospital, Dostoyevsky made notes on sheets of paper sewn together into a booklet, kept for him secretly by one of the medical officers and returned to him on his release. This 'Siberian Notebook', added to subsequently, eventually consisted of 522 jottings (songs, individual turns of phrase, folk-sayings and idioms) of which more than 300 were to find their way into the finished work.⁶ Of the completed work, the introduction and the first chapter were originally published in *Russkiy Mir* on 1 September 1860, but publication was suspended until early 1861, when the introduction and the first four chapters were published in the same journal. The censors had publication suspended again, but the full text was first printed in *Vremya* in 1861, chapters 1–4 in April, the rest between September and December (with the exception of chap. 8 of Part II, which was suppressed).⁷ The work was so powerful a human document, it was said, that the Emperor himself was moved to tears.

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5. Carl Dahlhaus, *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper: Aufsätze zur neueren Operngeschichte* (Munich and Salzburg: Emil Katzschichler, 1983), pp. 46–7: 'The „Literaturoper“ depends from a technical compositional point of view on the principle of „musical prose“, which was recognized by Schoenberg in the essay „Brahms the Progressive“ as one of the fundamental presuppositions of the New Music of the twentieth century: the regular, „foursquare“ structure in periods, which formed the basis of operatic melody and the principal feature of popular singing style, was jettisoned and dissolved into fragments of unequal, irregular length, whose inner coherence was no longer guaranteed by the rhythmic correspondence of the syntactic units, but by motivic relationships or by the sense of the literary text'.
 6. Cf. John Jones, *Dostoyevsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pbk. 1985), p. 137, where the figure is put at 306, disputing the total of nearer 200 quoted by the Soviet editors of the Complete Works. The 'Siberian Notebook' was first published in *Zven'ya*, 6 (1936), pp. 415–38.
 7. See Edward Wasiolek, *Dostoyevsky: The Major Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964), pp. 201–2.

Such a response is not dependent on the degree of autobiographical veracity in the work, but the assumption that *The House of the Dead* is essentially a personal diary has led to its neglect in the standard works on Dostoyevsky's fiction.⁸ Whether as novel or autobiography, very little attention is devoted to it in Steiner's book, for instance; yet *The House of the Dead* serves as one of the chronological cornerstones of Steiner's thesis, a thesis which complicates the generic uncertainty of the work still further. Steiner aims to show the incompatibility of Tolstoy's and Dostoyevsky's art, representing the two great Russian 'realists' as rationalist and visionary respectively, an opposition which he develops in terms, respectively, of the epic tradition headed by Homer, and the dramatic tradition headed by Shakespeare.⁹

A similar view of Dostoyevsky as 'visionary', 'epiphanic', is developed also by Thomas Mann, this time in terms particularly of the lyric:

[Dostoyevsky's novels] are only apparently concerned with objective, quasi-clinical inquiry and analysis — in reality they are more concerned with psychological *lyric* in the broadest sense of the word, with confession [*Bekanntnis*] and terrible admission [*Gestehen*], with the unsparing revelation of the depths of his own criminal conscience.¹⁰

Mann is here using 'lyric' to point up the difference between the characteristic novelistic method and the typical lyric mode. The novel, or epic, is the genre of detail, narrated in the past, often with a third-person narrator gifted with some degree of insight into the workings of the protagonists' minds, dependent for its effect on time, in terms of sequence, simultaneity and consequence; it depicts, presents, explains, demonstrates and makes clear. The lyric voice, on the other hand, is that of epiphanic insight, most characteristically in the first person, without the need for a chronological framework, and presupposing for its full effect the existence of a sympathetic spirit in the reader. This is not to say that, according to this view, Dostoyevsky's novels would ideally all be first-person narratives. Rather, they are seen to possess a confessional dimension

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8. With the exception of Jones's highly coloured account of *The House of the Dead* in his *Dostoyevsky*.
 9. Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky*, p. 131: 'Dostoyevsky's relation to the dramatic is analogous, in centrality and ramifications, to Tolstoy's relationship to the epic. It characterized his particular genius as strongly as it contrasted it with Tolstoy's. Dostoyevsky's habit of miming his characters as he wrote was the outward gesture of a dramatist's temper. His mastery of the tragic mode, his „tragic philosophy“, were the specific expressions of a sensibility which experienced and transmuted its material dramatically. This was true of Dostoyevsky's whole life, from adolescence and the theatrical performance recounted in *The House of the Dead* to his deliberate and detailed use of Hamlet and Schiller's *Räuber* to control the dynamics of *The Brothers Karamazov*.'
 10. Thomas Mann, 'Dostojewski — mit Maßen', written as the introduction to an American edition of Dostoyevsky's stories, first published in *Die Neue Rundschau*, September 1946, then in *Neue Studien* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer, 1948), and quoted here from Thomas Mann, *Schriften und Reden zur Literatur, Kunst und Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1960), pp. 7–20 (here p. 17).

(‘Bekentnis’, ‘Gestehen’), whereby even events retold from the point of view of a third party are felt to be shared as the self-revelation of a common humanity.

For Janáček, the significant differences between Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky outlined above may very likely have seemed unimportant, as we shall note below, though we may note immediately that his method is allusive and ‘lyrical’, not rational. Both authors are included in the list of the sources on which Janáček drew for material for his works; he had developed an amateur’s interest in their thought, well-known in Bohemia and Moravia in the second half of the nineteenth century, and he played an enthusiastic and active part in the activities of the Russian circle in Brno (as chairman, he may personally have been responsible for drafting the telegram of condolence addressed by the circle to Tolstoy’s family in 1910¹¹). It was the serious commitment of both writers to morality, humanity and truth that appealed to him; and it seems possible, through considering some of Janáček’s remarks over the years, together with some aspects of the libretto and its musical setting, to arrive at some understanding of these elusive qualities, as the composer understood them.

As John Tyrrell has shown, there is no evidence that Janáček was working on *From the House of the Dead* at all before 1927;¹² and even in the well-known open letter to Max Brod quoted in this article below, which was published in February 1927, which makes specific reference to *The House of the Dead*, Janáček may not yet have formulated any clear plans for using the Dostoyevsky book as the basis for a new libretto. Nevertheless, by the second half of February he had made his choice and begun sketches; he possessed two copies of Dostoyevsky’s novel, one in the original Russian and one in the Czech translation by ‘H. Jaroš’ (Jaromír Hrubý), though, from the evidence of the annotations, he hardly used the latter.¹³

Structurally, Janáček’s principal task was obviously condensation; and the first stage in writing the libretto was to mark his choice of passages of dialogue and narrator’s text in the Russian version, and extract them. He translated them into Czech as he went along, often very quickly (indeed the whole opera was

11. Jaroslav Procházka, p. 474.

12. John Tyrrell, *Janáček’s Operas: A Documentary Account* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 327, 330–31. There is evidence of a violin concerto, called ‘Putování dušičky’ (‘The Pilgrimage of a Soul’), on which Janáček worked in 1926, part of which is embedded in the overture to *From the House of the Dead*. For an argument strenuously championing this piece, see Miloš Štědroň and Leoš Faltus, ‘Janáčkův houslový koncert: torzo nebo vrcholné dílo posledního údobí skladatele?’, *Opus musicum*, 20 (1988), pp. 89–97; see also Jarmila Procházková, ‘Duše v očarováném kruhu’, *Opus musicum*, 21 (1989), pp. 200–207.

13. Janáček possessed a copy (preserved in the Janáček Museum in Brno) of a Russian edition of Dostoyevsky (Berlin, 1921), besides the Hrubý translation already noted (see above, n. 1); see Marina Melnikova, ‘Interpretace Dostojevského textu v libretu poslední Janáčkovy opery’, *Hudební věda*, 23 (1986), pp. 43–55 (here referring to p. 45).

written at extraordinary speed), sometimes merely transliterating rather than translating, and occasionally leaving Russian words in the Cyrillic alphabet. This was no doubt to give himself the freedom to maintain the differences in speech register which he had exploited much earlier in other works as a means of abrupt contrast, paralleling his musical techniques of sudden shifts *B la Debussy* from one tonal world to another — diatonic, modal in the folk style, highly chromatic, and so on. In *From the House of the Dead*, he uses dialect Czech at one end, and formal liturgical Old Slavonic at the other, of a wide spectrum of speech ranging from the most familiar to the most formal, archaic and 'poetic'; this spectrum here incorporates sections or fragments of Czech, Ukrainian, Russian, Church Slavonic, and text that is (whether by ignorance or design) macaronic and 'pan-Slav', precisely conforming to no 'national' rule.¹⁴ By so doing, Janáček succeeds very conspicuously in adding a further level of variety to a work which, with its lack of female characters (with the exception of the small part for the Prostitute in Act II and the breeches role of Aljeja¹⁵), notoriously lacks the diversity of vocal type normally essential to the success of an opera.

The ordering of the libretto, in its final form, in fact corresponds fairly closely to that of Dostoyevsky's original. Marina Melnikova's study provides a diagram to illustrate Janáček's deployment of Dostoyevsky's material over the three acts of the opera. She is concerned particularly to trace the ways in which Janáček sets about constructing direct speech when this is absent in his model, and the particular constraints under which Janáček was working in his threefold role as translator from a foreign language, librettist and composer.

Janáček supported this process of excerpting the model by drawing up 'scenarios', brief synopses for the sake of orientation, with lists of principal characters, episodes, stage settings, and so on, together with page references to his copy of his Russian model, which represented his selection of the material available to him in it. (The earliest dated synopsis of this sort was sketched in late February 1927.¹⁶) These synopses, as we shall argue, provide useful evidence for Janáček's interventions in the structure of his original. And they assisted him in a further aim: to arrive at an idiosyncratic style of dialogue, which is not merely in prose (the hallmark of the *Literaturoper* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) rather than traditional verse, but in a highly con-

14. For the purpose of representing Russian phrases realistically, according to his own principles of musical prosody, he possessed his own 'Russian Notebook', since he had made notes of the intonation of Russian speech as he had heard it travelling to St Petersburg decades earlier; cf. Melnikova, 'Interpretace Dostojevského textu', p. 54.

15. Note that all names of characters in the opera are given here in Czech spelling, and those in the novel in English transliteration of Russian, as a convenient means of distinguishing them from one another.

16. These synopses were variously published by L. Firkušný, in 'Poslední Janáčková opera Z mrtvého domu', *Divadelní list*, 12 (1936–7), pp. 358–68, 386–400, and in Procházka, 'Z mrtvého domu: Janáček vytvořil i lidský epilog a manifest'; for English translations, see Tyrrell, *Janáček's Operas*, pp. 328–30.

centrated and laconic style, with many abrupt sentences often comprising only one or two words. In this manner he broke conspicuously free of the usual rhetorical style even of other *Literaturopern* of the time with prose librettos; his libretto is full of short, disjointed sentences, whose effect is sometimes familiarly colloquial, sometimes comic and sometimes threatening. (Janáček himself claimed to have been influenced in his prose style by that of Viktor Dyk, with whom he had previously collaborated.) The individual character of his prose emerges very clearly, for example, if one contrasts it with that of the libretto of the closest contemporary parallel to *From the House of the Dead*, Otakar Jeremiáš's setting of another Dostoyevsky text, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1922–7, premiered in 1928); a glance at its highly rhetorical prose style shows its distance from that of Janáček, even though parts of this opera illustrate brutal conflicts quite similar to some of those in *From the House of the Dead*.

Janáček's prose style supplies evidence of his desire increasingly (and particularly in this, his last opera) to strip away conventional rhetorical effects and replace them, or at least give the effect of replacing them, with a new kind of 'raw' rhetoric, based on lived experience. As early as 1918, he writes in a letter to F. S. Procházka of his aim to turn the theatre stage into a 'stage of life'; and his commitment to 'truth' understood in this sense of social and human engagement was very clearly expressed in an open letter to Brod which was published in February 1927:

In a similar case, if I were thinking in terms of composition, I would incline right to the *truth*, right to the harsh speech of the elements, and I would know how to advance a little by means of art. On this path I do not stop at Beethoven, nor at Debussy, nor at Dvořák, nor at Smetana, because I do not meet them there. I do not borrow from them, for it is now impossible to repay them. Here I am close to F. M. Dostoyevsky. In *The House of the Dead* he discovered a good human soul even in Baklushin, even in Petrov, even in Isay Fomich. 'Good man, Isay Fomich!' Dr Brod, you have observed supreme depth of expression there.¹⁷

A year later, when the second version of the opera had been completed, Janáček repeated very similar views on Dostoyevsky's *House of the Dead*, adding some comments positioning himself with regard to other contemporary opera; despite Janáček's usual disjointed prose, these again assist materially in arriving more precisely at his idea of 'truth':

Wrong, wrong! Wrong is done to Wozzeck, wrong was seriously done to Berg. He is a dramatist of astonishing consequence, of deep truth. Have his say! Let him have his say! Today he is torn to pieces. He suffers. As if he had been cut short. Not a note. And every note of his was soaked in blood! Look, art in the street! The street produces art. *Jonny spielt auf* produces the houses! Boredom, sir, boredom!¹⁸

17. These two sources are quoted from Procházka, 'Z mrtvého domu: Janáček vytvořil i lidský epilog a manifest', pp. 475–6.

18. The interview was printed in *Literární svět*, 1 (1927–8), no. 12, of 8 March 1928, with this

Clearly, then, Janáček was prepared to overlook the formal, generic and technical aspects of operas as different from his own as Berg's *Wozzeck*, if he regarded them as exemplifying his own commitment to 'truth', something he could not discern in Ernst Křenek's 'boring' *Jonny spielt auf*, however much its runaway success might have seemed to have eclipsed the achievement of Berg in those years.¹⁹ Nevertheless, his idea, expressed in the first of the two quotations above, that truth depends on the progressive stripping away of romantic bombast, has much in common with the attitudes of other composers of the time, including Křenek himself, even those working in other countries and in rather different styles — though Janáček's isolation from German-speaking and western culture, and his preference for models and ideas drawn from the eastern and Slav sphere, mean that a direct influence is hardly to be expected from any of his western contemporaries.

Yet, however 'modern' Janáček's music may sound, he seems not to have wished to respond to contemporary ideas in Russia either; the influences in terms of thought do not come from the composers, writers and thinkers of the first Soviet decade, but from the great nineteenth-century figures such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. And even here, he seems to have preferred to ignore the generic differences between Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky: all the texts he selected from them (as from others, such as Ostrovsky) were such that could easily, and uniformly, be read as social criticism — even though Tolstoy's critique of marriage in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (supplying a narrative basis for Janáček's First String Quartet), for instance, is distinctly different from Dostoyevsky's of prison life in *The House of the Dead*. Yet the final choice of Dostoyevsky for what is arguably his greatest opera seems hardly coincidental: the epiphanic mode of Dostoyevsky had by 1928 become Janáček's preferred vein. He feigns an absence of formal artifice, and a naked directness of expression, in order to create empathy for his moral stance in the listener. It is, very precisely, the musical equivalent of the confessional dimension of Dostoyevsky — and thus one finds in this work a distinctly nineteenth-century style of thought, paradoxically wedded to a distinctly modernist style of musical expression.²⁰

quotation reprinted in Procházka, 'Z mrtvého domu: Janáček vytvořil i lidský epilog a manifest', p. 482. It is somewhat ironic that Ernst Křenek, the composer of *Jonny spielt auf*, should have written a glowing programme note for the performance of Janáček's *From the House of the Dead* at Munich in 1961, at which a first attempt was made to eliminate the modifications to the opera by Bakala and Chlubna.

19. Berg's *Wozzeck* was premiered in 1925 at the Staatsoper in Berlin, and first performed in Prague in 1926; Křenek's *Jonny spielt auf* was premiered in 1927 at the Neues Theater in Leipzig, and performed in its first season in more than 40 opera houses (with more than 400 performances in Germany that year). It remains unclear, of course, how well Janáček knew *Jonny spielt auf*.
20. Perhaps one may suggest that the same concern on Janáček's part for directness of expression, most effectively constructed when springing from personal experience, lay behind Janáček's continual recourse to Kamila Stösslová as his inspiration, rather than a purely erotic concern, as emphasized, for example, in Tyrrell's 'Janáček, Leoš', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980, vol. 9, p. 479).

In this respect, Janáček is also not far removed from that other Russian, Mussorgsky, who, like him, often seems at odds with the mainstream development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century music. Indeed, the obvious similarities have given rise to a whole literature of support — and opposition — for the possibility that Janáček was able to become sufficiently familiar with the music of the Russian master to have been influenced directly by him.²¹ (But in making comparisons between the two composers here, no assumption is made about any direct connection in terms of such traditionally conceived 'influences'.)

Carl Dahlhaus has written on the similarities between Janáček and Mussorgsky, and it may be useful to examine his line of argument. He writes:

The aesthetics that [Janáček] espoused: the proposition that music must above all be 'true' and ought not to flinch at the reality of ordinary life, agrees in almost every respect with the convictions formulated in letters by Mussorgsky. And Janáček's practice of composing prose and developing melody from the rise and fall of speech is reminiscent of the 'realistic' dialogues in the inn scene from *Boris Godunov*.²²

Dahlhaus argues that Mussorgsky's particular search for 'truth' was one that led him down the path of realism in music. This path, he maintains, was one that predominated in literature, but hardly in music, in the late nineteenth century (despite the presence of realistic traits in many operas from several different national traditions), and not only for coincidental reasons. Since nineteenth-century idealist aesthetics gave a special place to music 'as „by nature“ a romantic, non-realistic art, whose realm is the „strange“ — E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Dschinnistan* or *Atlantis* — not the „prose of common life“ (Hegel)',²³ it may be seen that realism in music is precarious, and that the unusual qualities in Mussorgsky, often branded 'amateurish', arise as a natural consequence of the attempt to impose realism on music. They are in the nature of the case, so to speak, a price the composer has to pay. (We shall argue below that Dostoyevsky's and Janáček's brands of realism themselves require some refinement of this argument.) And Dahlhaus then proceeds, on the basis of a few examples, to suggest that Mussorgsky's realism depends on an undermining of traditionally accepted conventions of hearing — and that this process, giving rise to Mussorgsky's realism, is best understood in terms of the 'defamiliarization' (*ostranenie*) principle of the Russian Formalist school. Paradoxically, realism and Formalism are thus seen to depend, believes Dahlhaus, on the same principles, rather than being opposed to one another as Marxist critics have usually maintained.

For example, the central section of the monastery scene of *Boris Godunov* (Act I, scene 1) comprises a monologue by Pimen in which he refers to the fre-

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- 21 See, in particular, A. A. Gozenpud, 'Janáček a Musorgskij', *Opus musicum*, 4 (1979), pp. 101–9; 'Musorgskij a Janáček', *Opus musicum*, 5 (1980), pp. 1–8.
- 22 Dahlhaus, *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper*, p. 39. (Note that this chapter was omitted from the later revised edition of this book, Munich and Mainz: Piper / Schott, 1989.)
- 23 Dahlhaus, *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper*, p. 41.

quent custom of the tsars of renouncing the crown in favour of a monk's habit; this is illustrated, says Dahlhaus, by a harmonic caesura at this point in the monologue (the abrupt though not entirely unmotivated juxtaposition, at rehearsal number 25 in the score, of two primarily diatonic sections in E flat and G, whose surprising effect is reinforced by the sudden drop to pianissimo coinciding with the harmonic change). Dahlhaus claims this represents *ostranenie* at work, and gives us a clue that Mussorgsky was adhering to the aesthetic principles represented by the Russian Formalists. And he adds that one should not be misled by the opposition of realism (espoused by Marxist aestheticians) and Formalism (attacked by them), since 'the formalism of Viktor Shklovsky in his *Theory of Prose* was grounded and developed as an aesthetics of the realistic narrative technique of Gogol and Tolstoy'.²⁴

So for Dahlhaus the technique of Mussorgsky, and by extension that of Janáček, is grounded fundamentally in the aesthetics of Russian realism — but a kind of realism that is articulated through the techniques of 'defamiliarization' (*ostranenie*) described by Shklovsky and other Russian Formalists. This places the weight of the characterization of both the libretto and the music on those techniques, already mentioned, of abrupt juxtapositions of style and matter, rather than in homogeneous unfolding or *unendliche Melodie*, in the manner of Wagner. Such an account of Janáček's music of course immediately identifies, even though in relatively crude terms, one of its principal 'modernist' features, which he shares also with such other composers as Debussy, Stravinsky and Messiaen.

The possibility of interpreting these features in terms of theory worked out in the Slav world in the early years of the twentieth century is naturally tempting, but it should immediately be recognized that the theoretical agenda of the Russian Formalists was only in a very general sense aesthetic, and was not even specifically modernist. *Ostranenie* is the process of defamiliarization by which the literary is made literary, and by which it is sharply divided from the rest of existence (as happens also when an author deliberately draws the reader's attention to the techniques by which fiction has been constructed, as for example in *Tristram Shandy*). This occurs, in principle, in art works of every period, for it is what makes them art works, even though twentieth-century techniques of defamiliarization (like those of the eighteenth century) are often particularly striking. Thus for the Formalists Mussorgsky and Janáček would no doubt have exemplified *ostranenie*, but could not have claimed kinship with them on this basis any more than Bach, Beethoven, Mozart or Wagner could have done. More seriously, Formalism implied a radical rejection of referentialism in art; in his critique of Formalism, Bakhtin points out its roots in the aesthetic writings of Eduard Hanslick.²⁵ And the aesthetic of both Mussorgsky and Janáček, with

24. Dahlhaus, *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper*, p. 43.

25. P. N. Medvedev / M. M. Bakhtin, trans. Albert J. Wehrle, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 41–2: 'Our formalism was formed in the same

their toleration of programmatic traits of every kind, is clearly very remote from Hanslick's in a number of respects — and equally remote, we would suggest, from the more specific aesthetic preferences of the Russian Formalists of the second and third decades of the twentieth century.

Dostoyevsky's own brand of realism in *The House of the Dead* is, however, not completely straightforward. It may seem to depend most obviously on the characteristics of the 'Siberian Notebook', which at least ostensibly represents records of sayings and events taken from life, and which — interspersed with songs, proverbs, etc — contributes very markedly to the 'lyrical', allusive and oblique way in which the narrative is set up. But against this, apparently anti-naturalistic forces are at work in the book. Like the Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, or for that matter the series of poems by Ozeř Kalda, published in the Brno newspaper *Lidové noviny*, that served as a literary source for Janáček's own *Diary of One who Vanished*,²⁶ to cite three examples almost at random, Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead* makes use of the time-honoured fictional device of the recently-discovered document to set up a first-person narrator who is suitably distanced from the person of the author. After the death of Aleksandr Petrovich Goryanchikov, a mysterious and unsociable ex-convict who had settled in a remote Siberian town after his release from prison, a bundle of papers is found in his lodgings:

There was one fairly flat, voluminous exercise book, filled with microscopic handwriting and unfinished, perhaps abandoned and forgotten by the author himself. This was a description, albeit an incoherent one, of the ten years of penal servitude which Aleksandr Petrovich had undergone. In places this description was interrupted by another narrative, some strange, terrible reminiscences scribbled down in irregular, convulsive handwriting, as if following some compulsion. I read these fragments through several times and was almost persuaded they had been written in a state of madness.²⁷

atmosphere and appeared as an expression of the same changes in art and the ideological horizon that caused West European formalism to develop . . . The formal movement in Western art scholarship arose on the basis of the visual arts, and partly of music (Hanslick).'

26. It is probable that the text of the *Diary of One who Vanished*, first published anonymously as „From the Pen of a Self-Taught Man“ in *Lidové noviny* on 14 and 21 May, 1916, was written by Ozeř Kalda (born Nové Město na Moravě 4.8.1871; died Prague, 1.1.1921), a transport official in Prague who was well-known as the author of childhood reminiscences and stories with a regional flavour. In a letter of 8 June 1916 to the author Antonín Matula, Kalda adds a postscript, „Did you see the feature 'From the Pen of a Self-Taught Man' in the Brno *Lidové noviny* on 14 and 21 May? I allowed myself a little jiggery-pokery [eskamotage] there“ (see Jan Mikeska, 'Jak jsem přispěl k odhalení?', *Opus musicum* 29 (1997), pp. 97–100). In another article on this subject Demel adds some circumstantial evidence in favour of Kalda's authorship, mainly from the author's vocabulary and choice of theme, besides reviewing earlier alternative attempts at identifying the author (Jiří Demel, 'Kdo je autorem Zápisníku zmizelého?', *Opus musicum* 29 (1997), pp. 93–6). See also Jan Vičar, 'Autor veršů Janáčkovy Zápisníku zmizelého objeven', *Hudební věda* 34 (1997), pp. 418–22.

27. Quotations are from the translation by David McDuff (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985),

The 'terrible reminiscences' are not presented to the reader, but the text of *The House of the Dead* purports to be the other strand of notes in the exercise book, the description of ten years' penal servitude. The narrative 'I' who makes this discovery, and who is responsible for editing the notes, is therefore not the 'I' of the book proper, nor can he be identified unproblematically with Dostoyevsky himself. He vanishes after the introduction, reappearing only once in Part II, Chapter 7 to correct a misapprehension, and we are left to understand that the original experiment — which was to excerpt two or three chapters to see how the public reacted — has been allowed to proceed into the full text, propelled by its own momentum and without the need for further editorial intervention. At its most straightforward, the traditional device of the fictional discoverer of a lost manuscript is a means of enabling the story to stand on its own, of distinguishing the fictional memoir from the real thing — and the narrations of Prévost, Eco and Ozef Kalda are in no sense autobiographical. In Dostoyevsky's case, however, this feint is a double-bluff — indeed more than a double-bluff. An appeal to a well-known *fictional* strategy has enabled him to present a version of a *true* memoir; at the same time, it disguises the truth as fiction, with the advantage that it becomes more malleable and open to the full range of the other mechanisms with which fiction operates to communicate truth; and, further still, this disguise is itself a transparent device for emphasizing that the 'incoherence' and 'madness' of the narrative themselves guarantee its authenticity as reported truth.

All this represents the means by which Dostoyevsky can intensify the *privateness* of the memoir — and paradoxically therefore project it successfully *publicly*, as self-revelation — and achieve the reverse of what is the case in his *Notes from the Underground*. There, the retired civil servant who is the narrator subscribes to Heine's view that true (that is, accurate) autobiography is not possible, quoting Heine's opinion that Rousseau's *Confessions* are riddled with lies, even self-accusing lies:

But Heine was passing judgment on a person making a public confession. I, however, am writing for myself alone and declare once and for all that if I'm writing as if I'm addressing readers than it's quite simply for show, because it makes it easier to write. This is mere form, empty form.²⁸

It is true that, in spite of Dostoyevsky's pretence, described here, that the events conveyed in the Notebook — and hence in *The House of the Dead* — are so urgent and convulsive as to be without order and without sense, there are some key threads which counter this and which give the book a clear logical structure on at least one level. The primary one is the slow progress that is outlined from 'death' to 'resurrection', as the prisoners' tales gradually unfold and reveal the reality of the humanity that is present even in this inhumane setting. In the course of this process, the play within the play, presented in Dos-

here pp. 25–26.

28. Quoted from the Oxford Classics translation by Jane Kentish (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 39.

toyevsky's version as part of the Christmas festivities, fulfils a key role in showing how enthusiasm at a common task can present Goryanchikov with quite a new view of the prisoners. And it is placed precisely at the midpoint of the action (the end of the first part), making a secondary (anticipatory) dénouement in which Goryanchikov perceives the possibility of the freedom which is realized in the primary dénouement at the end; in the process, it supplies a secure even if rudimentary framework to the narrative.

But, fundamentally, within this 'false fictional' framework, Dostoyevsky's narrative adaptation of the 'real' events of his imprisonment has an unexpectedly unstable quality that firmly allies *The House of the Dead* with Dostoyevsky's 'genuine' fiction — *Crime and Punishment*, *Devils*, *The Idiot* and so on. Where Tolstoy's realism is constructive and monumental, 'monologic', to use Bakhtin's term, so that all characters' voices are under the authoritarian control of the author, Dostoyevsky's is fragmented, and his novels are what Bakhtin called 'polyphonic': 'Dostoyevsky, like Goethe's Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but rather free people, who are capable of standing beside their creator, of disagreeing with him, and even of rebelling against him'.²⁹ The characters of *The House of the Dead* are so numerous, so comparatively little defined, their appearance and disappearance so beyond the control of the main character, that the effect is of an untidy, provisional collage of voices, and the framework described above supplies the justification for presenting the novel thus: one narrator has died without having made the material more presentable, the other disclaims responsibility for doing so. Dostoyevsky is deliberately evasive about providing an ordering identity for the material, as he had been in his first novel *Poor People*, an exchange of letters between a clerk and a girl who lives near him, with some letters missing yet referred to in others and no one to fill in the gaps between. *The House of the Dead* is narrated as fiction and not as straightforward autobiography or journalism because of Dostoyevsky's ambition to write 'the deeper realism'. His aim was showing the fluidity and fragmentation of reality, and his technique in fiction was not to create solid alternative worlds but to use it to subvert the apparent solidities of our own — in order that a more 'reliable' truth about humanity may be constructed. 'The need for evasion in *The House of the Dead* matches a desire to evade.'³⁰

One aspect of this evasion is description. Dostoyevsky's accounts of events and surroundings are often apparently very full: at the beginning of the episode in the hospital, for example, details are given of the striped quilt on the bed, the rest of the bedclothes, the little table with a jug and a cup, underneath which is the shelf on which patients could keep teapots, and so on.³¹ Patients were officially not allowed to smoke, and in consequence they had to hide their pipes and

29. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1973), p. 4. First published in Russian in 1929. These terms do not designate the presence or absence of stylistic variety but refer to the relationship of characters' and authors' voices.

30. John Jones, *Dostoevsky*, p. 154.

31. *The House of the Dead*, p. 209.

tobacco under their beds. But the thrust is not to illustrate the external world so as to make it more precisely perceptible to the reader's imagination as it would be in the traditional nineteenth-century realist novel. Like Kafka, Dostoyevsky uses the objects in the hospital to furnish a consciousness, Goryanchikov's overwhelming awareness of decay, banality and restriction. Cumulatively, detail in the various episodes that constitute *The House of the Dead* makes up the atmosphere of oppression that defines Goryanchikov's experience, and from which the few moments of joy and exaltation detach themselves. And narratively, too, Dostoyevsky evades, as John Jones has indicated in his account of the flexibility of the first-person tale telling.³² Jones analyses the sequence in which the convicts release the eagle they have captured and tried to tame, and shows how the narrator both distances himself from the group and includes himself within it.

Evasions are in evidence in Janáček's version also, serving a very similar aim of a 'deeper realism'. There are differences: the apparatus of the 'recently discovered document' falls away as it had in his setting of *The Diary of One who Vanished*, and the complexities of Dostoyevsky's first-person narration are absent. But again there is no central character. Gorjančikov has no particular status, even though it is he with whom the narration begins and ends, and it is he who is closest to Aljeja, the purest symbol of humanity within the prison. And, even though the number of characters is drastically reduced, the impression of a 'polyphony' of uncoordinated voices remains, particularly outside the context of the long sustained narratives such as the stories of Akulka and Lujza.

In some respects, the process of evasion goes further in Janáček than it had in Dostoyevsky: the appearance of strict logic is often absent even in individual interchanges. Dostoyevsky's episodes usually have recognizable beginnings and endings, but Janáček's often seem incoherent. This is, of course, the almost inevitable result of Janáček's work of condensation, particularly when he conflates different incidents and different characters; as Melnikova points out, all the characters with the exception of čerevin and one or two others are the products of confluations.³³ Most of what Janáček takes into the libretto is from the first part of Dostoyevsky's text; he preserves several of the incidents in Dostoyevsky's narrative, often in the same order, conflates others, but cuts out the bulk of it altogether. The combining of two of Dostoyevsky's prostitutes, Chekunda and Dvugroshovaya, in Part I, chap. 2, into a single anonymous prostitute at the end of Janáček's Act II, for instance, produces dialogue of particularly surreal inconsequentiality, since Janáček retains the precise wording of some of the original dialogue, but out of context; the comic tone of Dostoyevsky's anecdote (where, for example, the extreme ugliness of the girls forms part of the narration, rather than being relegated to stage directions) could only be projected through stage business in a production of the opera.

32. John Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 129–30.

33. Melnikova, 'Interpretace Dostojevského textu', p. 49.

The apparent absence of logical consequence is heightened by the process, often described in the Janáček literature as resembling the 'cinematic' or filmic,³⁴ by which Janáček's setting is apt to 'cut' abruptly and rapidly between different dialogues and different registers of discourse; a good example of this is the sudden switch from the miscellaneous, disconnected dialogues in Act II, after the amateur theatricals, to the 'folk-song' 'Oj, pláče, pláče, mladý kozáče' ('Ah, how he weeps, the young Cossack'),³⁵ and back again. One may wish to discount any dependence of Janáček on Eisenstein's (or any other) theories of cinematic montage, the placing of images in sharp juxtaposition for affective or rhetorical purposes; but the technique serves the same purpose as it does in film, of 'constructing realism' — creating the fiction that reality is unmediated, by evading the logical consequence of the discourse. The techniques that are used for the purpose might easily be described in terms of *ostranenie*, for they are thoroughly artificial in construction.

All these aspects of the opera might be described as examples of evasion, of the avoidance of clear exposition in the interests of constructing a fictional autonomy for the characters. Yet a clear understanding of them, and of the opera, requires that they be set against their converse, the constructions (in both libretto and music) that Janáček uses as affirmations, or as means of creating dramatic goals that act against the centrifugal tendency of much of this work — and that such central points of reference exist is already suggested by the tendency of some of the literature to speak of Janáček's music using Aristotelian terms such as catharsis (for example, in a remark by Melnikova concerning the 'Orel car' ('The eagle is tsar') episode in the final scene³⁶). First, Janáček sets up the action within the same two-part framework as was employed by Dostoyevsky (even though he distributes Dostoyevsky's material over three acts). The end of Janáček's Act II corresponds to the end of Dostoyevsky's Part I: the play within the play (no longer set in winter, though not necessarily 'in summer' as in the German stage directions in the score), somewhat abbreviated as compared with Dostoyevsky's version, occurs not long before the end of the act, which marks a clear turning-point in the action of the opera.

But Janáček's realization of the drama, if one is to judge it with the help of the autograph synopses (scenarios) that survive (described above), has rather different nuances from that of Dostoyevsky. One of the synopses, that for Act II printed by Procházka,³⁷ represents the play within the play as a set of 'conflicts' (with the knight, the priest and the cobbler) — and this may supply a key to a conception of the whole narrative, not merely the Don Juan/Kedril/Elvira and Fair Miller's Wife scenes in the amateur theatricals, as a succession of episodes, which, though apparently unrelated, unite in presenting a series of conflicts,

34. See, for example, Procházka, 'Z mrtvého domu: Janáček vytvořil i lidský epilog a manifest', p. 230.

35. Rehearsal number 39, p. 114 in the Universal Edition vocal score.

36. Melnikova, 'Interpretace Dostojevského textu', p. 47: 'The placing of Dostoyevsky's chapter before the end of the whole libretto of the opera functions as an expressive catharsis'.

37. Procházka, 'Z mrtvého domu: Janáček vytvořil i lidský epilog a manifest', p. 229.

some comical, some inconsequential, and some deeply serious. Like Dostoyevsky's episodes, they do not hang together in a coherent succession. Yet as an ensemble they too present a picture of the great, undeserved suffering of the human beings who happen, through a single, unexpected 'stab of Fate', to use Janáček's phrase,³⁸ to find themselves locked without any possibility of escape into this charnel house. Like Dostoyevsky, Janáček expects his audience to do some of the interpretative work themselves; if they do, they will follow Gorjančikov in recognizing this view of humanity.

In accordance with his conception of the drama as a series of conflicts, Janáček does not end the Act as Dostoyevsky ends the Part, with Goryanchikov musing half-optimistically as night falls. Instead, he introduces, after the play within the play, several unrelated vignettes of interaction between characters at odds with one another, culminating in an episode where the Short Prisoner becomes very hostile and aggressive, finally hurling a samovar at Gorjančikov on account of his possession of money and his apparent violation of the prison code of equality. Instead of Gorjančikov, Aljeja is struck, and seems to have been mortally wounded. This, the most serious of the conflicts, besides motivating another highly theatrical end to the act, sets the scene for the beginning of Act III, set in the prison hospital, which was characterized by Janáček in one of his synopses as the 'climax of the suffering'.³⁹ (Elsewhere it is clear that Janáček had an idea of staging with Aljeja dressed in a white hospital robe at this point in the opera, as a visible emblem of the purity of humanity in its hour of direst suffering, and indeed as a kind of incarnation of Kamila Stösslová.)

However, there is a division between incidental, unimportant confluences such as these, whose tone (comic or serious) is not always easy to discern, and those confluences chosen by Janáček to give sharper definition to the direction of the drama. One such is the conflation of Goryanchikov and the 'Polish nobleman]—ski', which has the important consequence that Gorjančikov in the opera has admitted to being a political prisoner, and therefore that the lashing administered to him at the end of Act I is far more strongly motivated than in the book. The combination of the offstage beating with Luka's narration of his own beating further sharpens one's sense of the oppression endured within the prison, and heightens the importance of Gorjančikov as a character within the action (here signifying one who represents suffering humanity). Yet Janáček retains the comic response, 'And did you die?', to the account of Luka's beating (made in Dostoyevsky's narration by a slow-witted prisoner), and times it to coincide with the horrifying return of Gorjančikov after his ordeal; this shockingly abrupt juxtaposition of moods produces a highly theatrical effect, heightened by the fact that the curtain falls almost immediately.

Moreover, these techniques are complemented by the musical techniques, which run partly in parallel with the construction of the libretto (Janáček is

38. See Procházka, 'Z mrtvého domu: Janáček vytvořil i lidský epilog a manifest', p. 477.

39. The synopsis of Act III printed in Procházka, 'Z mrtvého domu: Janáček vytvořil i lidský epilog a manifest', p. 232.

never averse to writing 'realistic' descriptive music) but which also expand well beyond them, and sometimes appear to be at odds with them. Two brief examples from the closing scenes of Acts I and II may serve to illustrate this, for these are moments in which Janáček chooses to maximize his dramatic effects. In the closing scene of Act I, Luka's narrative comes to a close; both text and music have been extraordinarily fragmented, with brief, curt interjections, often of no more than two or three notes or words, between pauses that were so long that Bakala and Chlubna added extra text to Janáček's original. While the narrative remains fragmentary (after rehearsal no. 27), the music begins to change character, the fragmentary falling motif with slurred quaver pairs giving way to a more coherent, continuous rising motif in quadruplet crotchets, and this signals a process of increasing importance for the music as against the text; a climax (in textural and dynamic terms) ensues, fortissimo, in D flat minor ('Vbodl jsem mu nůž do života', 'I stuck the knife into his stomach'), although the dialogue is still fragmentary and abrupt. And then (tempo primo, piano, just before 'Aljeja, niti!', 'Aljeja, more thread!'), with a tonal drop to B (C flat) minor, although the mood changes, there is clearly tonal continuity — with a reminiscence of the music of the overture, even to the use of two solo violins, through to the next section of the narration. This covers, and to an extent contradicts, Luka's breaking off the story (perhaps in an excess of emotion) in order to deliver his asides about the thread to Aljeja. At rehearsal number 30, the 'height of suffering' in this story and therefore perhaps in Janáček's mind its climax, the tonal centre returns to D flat minor with another fortissimo; the dialogue ceases, after the comic interjection, and then the music continues through to the unforgettable final 22 bars of the act, where the D flat minor turns out to have been a preparation for a shattering final affirmation of A flat minor, with prominent percussion, as the ultimate tonal goal of the scene and indeed the act. This well illustrates the manner in which Janáček uses the fragmentary evasions of his original in this work to suggest a shattered universe — from which dramatic moments of great human significance are nevertheless built.

A comparable construction occurs at the end of the second act, after the amateur theatricals. The dialogue between the Young Prisoner and the Prostitute (after rehearsal number 37) is accompanied once again with fragmented lines (though of a very different character from those used for Luka in Act I). The progression towards coherence begins with the offstage interjections from the chorus of prisoners (before rehearsal number 39), and Luka's folk-song, with which the music settles firmly, at rehearsal number 39, on a modal A flat minor tonal centre. The tonal voice-leading continues in a far from fragmented way through the next exchange between Gorjančikov and the Short Prisoner, settling once again at the offstage folk-song (rehearsal number 40, this time in E (F flat) minor). The movement from this point onwards towards another 'height of suffering', the point of maximum violence in the narration and thus the point at which the conflict is most starkly articulated, is once more a continuous preparation for another overwhelming tonal affirmation, this time of D flat major, accompanied by the snare drum (and alternating, before the curtain falls, with a

choral outburst, 'Ubíjstvo!', 'Murder', in E (F flat)); although the musical foreground is highly diversified, the sense of the progression, once it gets under way, is perfectly straightforward and clear.

Although these two passages are highly idiosyncratic (even in Janáček's work generally), they may serve to suggest general points about the ways in which literary models are transformed into musical settings within the twentieth-century *Literaturoper* repertory. If a literary model has any worth, it will have complexities that will never translate into opera, where, as Auden remarked,

The quality common to all the great operatic roles, e.g., Don Giovanni, Norma, Lucia, Tristan, Isolde, Brünnhilde, is that each of them is a passionate and willful state of being. In real life they would all be bores, even Don Giovanni.

In recompense for this lack of psychological complexity, however, music can do what words cannot, present the immediate and simultaneous relation of these states to each other.⁴⁰

In *From the House of the Dead*, there are no great operatic roles of this sort, and clearly Janáček is attempting to follow Dostoyevsky in his epiphanic style of writing. Yet the great moments in the opera bear out Auden's point precisely, for at these points the music contradicts the evasive, ambiguous style of the model, even though it persists in the libretto. The characters, even Skuratov, Luka, Šiškov, cease being 'human' in the real literary sense that was of such importance to Janáček, and instead become 'human' in the antithetical operatic sense — which was his more essential concern. In order for the opera to be successful, at these moments a misreading, comparable to that of Tolstoy quoted at the beginning of this article, has to occur: the characters must cease being psychologically complex and interesting; they must become bores, and must for their great moments become Toscas and Carmens, adopting the 'passionate and willful' mode proper to opera of every period and style.

40. W. H. Auden, 'Notes on Music and Opera', *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 470.

