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New Writing on Stravinsky

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Stravinsky Studies at the Crossroads

Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky: his Life, Works and Views*, translated by Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), £13.50

Paul Griffiths, *Igor Stravinsky: The Rake's Progress*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), £9.95 (hardback), £3.95 (paperback)

One year after the centenary of Igor Stravinsky's birth the Stravinsky scholarship factory is at last showing signs of coming into full production after an ominously long period of tooling-up. Pieter Van den Toorn's *The Music of Igor Stravinsky*, reviewed elsewhere in this issue,¹ is the first major product of what is sure to be a long line of analytical studies of the composer's music.

There has never been a dearth of general books on Stravinsky's life and works, but the situation here has never been really satisfactory either. His own writings about his music have been a source of mischief, misunderstanding, and misuse since at least 1913, and one wonders how far he was, like Wagner, consciously or subconsciously hoping to influence later conclusions about his personality and philosophy. Besides his many fascinating utterances to the newspaper and periodical press (long forgotten by or unknown to the general public until they began to emerge in such compilations as *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*),² *Stravinsky's Chronicle of my Life* (1936) and *Poetics of Music* (1942), and the series of conversation books, all written with the help of more or less silent collaborators, have trapped most writers on the composer into a reliance on unverified recountings of the composer's own views of his life, music, and critical reception. If this wasn't enough, Roman Vlad's *Stravinsky* (1960, rev. 2/1979) and Eric Walter White's *Stravinsky: the Composer and his Works* (1966, rev. 2/1979) have lasted far too long as the main source books for a study of the composer; they may be thorough but they are not the final word.

Stravinsky's death in 1971 has led to only a slow emergence of much-needed information on corners of the composer's life that he kept dark. In the case of many a 20th-century composer the widow has become the jealous guardian of such secrets and has held up the appraisal of her husband's music. Mrs Stravinsky's collaboration with Robert Craft, which produced *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* with its candid discussion of her relationship with the composer in the 1920s and 1930s, and her release of interesting pictorial documents that were the product of the Stravinskys' constant camera-clicking exercises,³ have shone a light into at least some areas of Stravinsky's private life, however selectively. Her death in 1982 may be expected to lead eventually to the availability of far more material of a like kind.

There remain, however, several major obstacles to the establishment of a comprehensive body of

writings on Stravinsky's life and works. The first of these is a nuisance, common to the study of many composers, rather than an insoluble problem: the wide dispersal of Stravinsky's musical scores and sketches among many libraries in Europe and the USA, the composer's publishers, and private collections. The second is the lack of material on Stravinsky's early life in Russia up to World War I. How much of this has been lost or destroyed and what actually remains in archives and private hands is something yet to be discovered. A heartening sign that Russian scholars may be able to begin to collate their holdings comes with the recent publication of critical works on the composer, the most important of which to date is the book by Mikhail Druskin under review; first published in Russian in 1974, it was revised in 1979, translated into German in 1976, and is now available in an English translation based on the revised edition.

A third difficulty is the sheer amount of material, other than scores and sketches, collected by the composer, who lived for so long and within such interesting circles. He was, after all, part of the heart of Western culture of the 20th century. While the Stravinsky estate will presumably be organised eventually to allow access to all the material it must hold, it is time now to discover what Stravinsky's friends and acquaintances and their descendants know and possess, and particularly what Stravinsky's own family (in both the West and the East) can contribute.

A final stumbling-block, and potentially the trickiest one, could be the relationship of Robert Craft, Stravinsky's long-time collaborator and assistant after the composer's arrival in the United States, to the Stravinsky estate and archives. There is no doubt that up to now he has played a major part in controlling what has been published from the material held by the Stravinskys themselves. The curious gathering of letters in the recently published first volume of a proposed three-volume *Selected Correspondence* edited by Craft,⁴ and the rag-bag nature of *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* suggest both that selecting and editing the material for publication is a task far beyond one man, and that Craft in any case is not the man for the job.

Professor Druskin had the use neither of *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* nor the *Selected Correspondence* for his book on the composer. He knows, at least from scores, the whole of Stravinsky's musical output, but relies for discussion of the composer's life largely on *Chronicle of my Life* (in apparently either the 1935 French or 1936 English editions), the conversation books, Eric Walter White, Roman Vlad, and disappointingly (for the Western reader) few Russian sources. He has not set out to write a biography, but appears to have seized the opportunity to publish, mainly for the Russian public, his lifelong musings on the nature of Stravinsky's personality and music, not shrinking from discussion of Stravinsky's late period, his religious music, or the physical break from his homeland. Druskin, a distinguished Soviet musicologist (a professor at the Leningrad Conservatory), wrote his first published criticism of Stravinsky in 1928 and has long been an authority on Western music in general, but *Igor Stravinsky: his Life, Works and Views* (or as the dust jacket has it *his Personality, Works and Views*) is

more interesting in the end for what one sees of the Russian mind at work than for what it offers on Stravinsky. The book is certainly tinged with the turgidity of the Russian academic thesis. In carefully proposing, discussing, and summing up his points, Druskin is led into much cross-reference and repetition, and the book is completely devoid of musical examples to illuminate the text. The first, general chapters, in which he sets out his arguments, are in fact the most interesting and, as with all penetrating descriptive writing, some of his points and comments suddenly enlighten our understanding of the composer.

Druskin sees Stravinsky as a person who remained a Russian artist all his life, but also both as a universal artist and an individual one. His division of Stravinsky's life into the now customary three periods is underlined by a conviction that there is a continuity in all the composer's apparent changes:

Beneath all these differences of manner we are aware of a single personality, a unity in complexity and a specifically Stravinskian vital sensibility, the manifestation of which changes with each new work. [p.6]

In each of the three periods Druskin follows three strands; the first period he thinks of as one of intensity, an interest in the barbaric, and an emphasis on Russianness; the second as the period of extension, aestheticism, and of the universal composer; and the third as the period of concentration, asceticism, and individuality. While these are perhaps truisms, Druskin puts his arguments well and underlines them with aptly chosen quotations from Stravinsky's own words and useful discussion.

The three long chapters in which he delineates the music of those three periods, the Russian, neo-classical, and the final, become, however, very laborious as the author trundles through the works, trying to make sure that the characteristics of each period are noted but at the same time that the composer's continuity is stressed. Potentially more interesting are shorter chapters that attempt to throw some sidelights on Stravinsky's character—chapters headed 'Petersburg', 'Pushkin', 'The Theatre', 'Neo-classicism', 'Movement', and 'Space'. Here Druskin's knowledge of the artistic milieu of the early 20th century allows him to indicate interesting possible influences on Stravinsky in these earlier years, particularly from the art world and the theatre. But the expectations aroused in the Western reader by the prospect of information on Stravinsky's Russian origins are never completely fulfilled. The short chapter on St Petersburg suggests only that Stravinsky's music may have been influenced by the city's architecture and street patterns, and the chapter on the Russian element in the composer's work adds little to what we know already.

There are, nevertheless, helpful insights to be gained from this book. Druskin discusses well what he terms the 'play-element' in Stravinsky's art and the 'festival' nature of his works for the theatre, and he does not neglect the Apollo-Dionysus conflict in Stravinsky's thinking. The chapter on Pushkin, though sadly lacking in detail for the uninitiated Western reader, delineates the place in Russian culture of 'Russian-European' artists such as Pushkin himself, Glinka, and Tchaikovsky, and their influence on Stravinsky; Druskin makes an interesting case for the 'Protean' nature of both Stravinsky's and Pushkin's art in examining 'the multi-faceted nature of Pushkin and the multiplicity of Stravinsky's stylistic "manners"' (p.20). But conclusions are not pressed, and the steady plod through the works in the main chapters confuses rather than clarifies the argument of the

others. The arousal of expectation by the promise of further details is often never satisfied.

Druskin's enthusiastic espousal of Stravinsky's late-period works suggests that all the composer's work has been assimilated into Soviet musical life. While critics in the USSR in 1958 referred to *Canticum sacrum* as 'holy cacophony'—'How ravaged, how emasculated must have been the soul of the composer capable of creating such dreadful music'⁵—Druskin can now describe it as a work of 'completeness, conclusiveness and integrity' (p.157), and he goes on to call the *Requiem Canticles* Stravinsky's greatest achievement.

The book has been issued with a laudatory preface by Stravinsky's son Theodore, but with no notes or explanations by the translator. A number of typographical and spelling mistakes suggest that it was rushed through the press. References to the ancient editions of source books used by Druskin (such as the 1936 edition of *Chronicle of my Life*) are retained and I found that page numbers did not always tally with any edition. Clumsy-sounding translations and odd paragraphing mar one's understanding of some of Druskin's arguments (I liked the idea of 'Russisms' in the *Symphony in C* (p.106) though). The publishers may have wished to present the book as Druskin wrote it, but it would have been helpful for the English reader to have notes on Meyerhold, Bergson, and some of the Russians mentioned or quoted, on details obscure to any but a Soviet audience, and on the method of translation. Information unknown to Druskin at the time of writing could have been supplied, too, such as that concerning the origins of and quarrel over Stravinsky's article on *The Rite of Spring* in *Muzyka* (1913), now available in both *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* and *Selected Correspondence*.

The disappointingly general discussion of Stravinsky's work in Druskin's book suggests that we are in no need of more books that set out to survey his entire output. Druskin remarks on two periods of crisis in Stravinsky's artistic career—one in 1920 and the other from 1935 until after the completion of *The Rake's Progress* (p.26)—and despite his belief in a continuity in Stravinsky's musical thinking he is as caught up as any critic in discussions of Stravinsky's 'impulsive and explosive' changes and 'sudden enthusiasms' (p.83). Well-researched studies of short periods in Stravinsky's life and of individual works would be the most helpful direction for Stravinsky scholarship to take from now on.

The Rake's Progress has long been considered a problematical work and is usually cursorily dealt with by writers of general books, such as Vlad or Francis Routh;⁶ Druskin's discussion of the work is fairly sparse too. *Igor Stravinsky: The Rake's Progress* by Paul Griffiths, the latest Cambridge Opera Handbook, might have closed this gap, but it is somewhat uneasy in tone and chapters vary in their attitudes to the expected readership. The intelligent essay on the libretto by Gabriel Josipovici (reprinted from *Tempo*) is as illuminating on the music as it is on the underlying theme of the work, and Paul Griffiths's concluding chapter makes a worthwhile apology for Stravinsky's manipulation of operatic convention. Chapters on the work's history range from a careful collation of all available sources on the genesis of the work (Griffiths) and a tantalising glimpse of some of the sketches with a muddily commentary (Craft), to an account of the performance history (Griffiths) which might have been better organised as a commentary with detailed cast lists.

The current problem of how to write about Stravinsky's music is well shown by Griffiths's central

analytical chapters, in which it is plain that he cannot decide how to approach the work. Although he remarks that

often the key of a passage is not inherent in the music but exists instead as a background perspective . . . Tonality is not a language which the music breathes, but rather a means of creating directional pulls which it may go along with, resist or change without warning [pp.99-100]

the 16-page synopsis of the opera analyses each scene almost entirely in terms of key, and without a single musical example. But does, for instance, Tom's first accompanied recitative, 'Here I stand', move from the key of C major to B major to E major and end in F major as Griffiths states (p.32)? It is surely not as simple and straightforward as that. In lieu of any penetrating analysis of the form and musical language of the whole opera, Griffiths gives a rather convoluted, detailed description ('The harpsichord for this recitative also seems suddenly more experienced' (p.84)) of the graveyard scene (Act 3 scene 2), which is neither concise enough nor, in its musical examples, entirely accurate.

In an otherwise well-produced book (though what fad has decided that *Renard* should be referred to as 'Bayka or Baize' (p.67)?) it is irritating to find the two excerpts from Stravinsky's writings in a form somewhat different from that of the acknowledged source, *Themes and Episodes* by Stravinsky and Craft. Did Griffiths translate the material afresh from the original French? Well and good, but I should like to have known.

This irritating detail brings me to a final point. Up to now scholars have been working with incomplete data or secondhand sources, and there has been some excuse for inaccuracy. But the time has surely come for sorting the fact from the fiction, for checking rigorously against the sources, and for nailing the discrepancies. I give below a few examples of variations I noticed in my reading for this review. None is devastating, but from now on such differences ought to be dealt with.

For example, most writers on *The Rake's Progress* refer to the influence of Mozart's operas on Stravinsky at the time he began planning his opera. But was *Così fan tutte* the most important influence, or *Don Giovanni*? Authors disagree. Druskin plumps for *Così* on page 20 and *Don Giovanni* on page 109. It would be nice to see this argued out from evidence in the music of the opera itself. It would also be helpful to know exactly which operas by Mozart Stravinsky studied. Griffiths tells us (p.10) that 'Stravinsky wrote to Hawkes asking for full scores of the Mozart-da Ponte operas and *Die Zauberflöte*, all to be the "source of inspiration for my future opera".' The reference given to support this quotation cites *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, but there the note reads (p.397) 'Writes to Hawkes asking for orchestra scores of four Mozart operas, the "source of inspiration for my future opera".' One would have expected to be able to sort out this discrepancy from the first volume of the *Selected Correspondence*, but I looked there only to find that it does not include letters to and from Ralph Hawkes. It does, though, give the Stravinsky/Auden exchanges about *The Rake's Progress*. Or does it? Even these turn out to be incomplete: at least one important letter—from Auden, written on 28 January 1948, suggesting that the auction scene be transferred to Act 3—is missing. This letter appears in *Memories and Commentaries*,⁷ but we have no means of knowing what others may have been rejected from the selection.

It is, however, good to have for the first time Stravinsky's interesting letter of 18 October 1949

detailing the problems of inserting Baba's prose into Tom's and Anne's verse duet (*Selected Correspondence*, vol.1, pp.309-10), which Craft does not enlarge upon in his article in the Griffiths handbook (p.28). But was the resulting number a 'trio' (Craft in Griffiths) or a 'terzetto' (Craft in *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* and *Selected Correspondence*) or a 'terzettino' (Craft elsewhere in Griffiths)? Stravinsky himself, of course, called it a trio. And was it composed at the end of October 1949 (Craft in Griffiths and *Selected Correspondence*) or on 3 October (Craft in *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*)?

By contrast with the act of silent editing perpetrated on Stravinsky's articles reprinted in Griffiths's handbook, Martin Cooper allows mistakes to remain in Druskin's book, such as the date of the first performance of *Jeu de cartes* (1937) and a complete muddle over the date of a production by Meyerhold of *The Nightingale*. This curious hybrid work would indeed be worthy of a study of the kind that I have indicated is now needed. Its crucial place in Stravinsky's development could now be completely elucidated from a purely analytical angle. Both Druskin and Griffiths make some interesting assumptions about it; both *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* and *Selected Correspondence* add previously unknown source material on it to what had already been published; there are people still alive who have memories of its early productions. Scholars should now be ready to follow up such leads with care and thoroughness; the writers of general books will then be able to make new assessments of the chameleon composer that was Igor Stravinsky.

- ¹ Pieter C. Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), reviewed below by Gloria Toplis.
- ² Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (London: Hutchinson, 1979).
- ³ Igor and Vera Stravinsky, *A Photograph Album 1921-1971* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).
- ⁴ *Stravinsky, Selected Correspondence*, vol.1, ed. and with commentaries by Robert Craft (London: Faber, 1982).
- ⁵ The critic I. Nestyev in *Sovetskaya muzyka* (1958), no.2, p.132, quoted in Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia 1917-1970* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972).
- ⁶ Francis Routh, *Stravinsky, The Master Musicians* (London: Dent, 1975).
- ⁷ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber, 1960), p.161.