

Review: Stravinsky and His Craft: Trends in Stravinsky Criticism and Research

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We may scour Rakhmaninov's juvenilia in vain for a glimpse of his future mastery, but this should not obscure the fact that, even at this early stage, he was laying the foundations for one important aspect of his later music – his choice of keys. D minor figures prominently (in the Scherzo, the *Song without Words*, the symphonic movement, the quasi-contrapuntal piano Piece, *Prince Rostislav* and *Aleko*), and it was to recur again and again in works written throughout his life, from the First Symphony (1895), through the First Piano Sonata (1907) and the Third Piano Concerto (1909) and right up to the Corelli Variations (1931) and the last movement of the Symphonic Dances (1940). The ominous C minor colouring in the third of the noc-

turnes was to be developed in the Second Concerto (1900–01), the Chopin Variations (1902–3) and in three of the *Etudes-tableaux* (1911, 1917), and indeed this youthful preoccupation with minor shadings was to persist during the whole of his career as a composer. In tonality at least, while stylistically exploring Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Tchaikovsky and other Russian composers, he was giving a taste of things to come after his graduation from the conservatory, in every sense a 'free artist'.

*Howard Shelley will be playing all Rakhmaninov's piano works at the Wigmore Hall this autumn, including the juvenilia (on 4 and 11 October).*

# Stravinsky and his Craft

## *Trends in Stravinsky Criticism and Research*

Jann Pasler

**Igor and Vera Stravinsky**, photographs selected by Vera Stravinsky and Rita McCaffrey, captions and introduction by Robert Craft

Thames & Hudson (London, 1982); 144pp.; £10

**Stravinsky in Modern Music**, compiled and introduced by Carol J. Oja  
Da Capo (New York, 1982); 205pp.; n.p.

**Dialogues** by Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft

Faber (London, 2/1982); 152pp.; £3.95 (paperback)

**A Book about Stravinsky** by Boris Asaf'yev, trans. Richard French, foreword by Robert Craft

UMI (Ann Arbor, 1982); 316pp.; \$44.95

**Igor Stravinsky: The Rake's Progress** by Paul Griffiths with Igor Stravinsky, Robert Craft and Gabriel Josipovici

Cambridge UP (Cambridge, 1982); 123pp.; £3.95 (paperback)

**Igor Stravinsky: his Life, Works and Views** by Mikhail Druskin, trans. Martin Cooper

Cambridge UP (Cambridge, 1983); 208pp.; £13.50

**The Music of Igor Stravinsky** by Pieter C. van den Toorn

Yale UP (New Haven and London, 1983); 536pp.; £25

The Stravinsky centenary year produced a startling array of Stravinsky publications, including new documents and previously unavailable material, analyses of individual works, and perspectives on Stravinsky's work as a whole. The Stravinsky household has put together a photograph album from Vera Stravinsky's collection of newspaper clippings and photographs, 1921–71. This complements the album *Catherine and Igor Stravinsky* assembled by Theodore Stravinsky in 1973 and documents Vera and Igor's 'fifty-year love affair'. The volume also contains over 30 interviews with Stravinsky made between 1912 and 1963. Da Capo Press has issued an anthology reprinting essays about Stravinsky that appeared in the American journal *Modern Music* between 1924 and 1946; it includes contributions by Roger Sessions, Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson and Elliott Carter. And the recent reissue in paperback of *Dialogues*, the fourth of the Stravinsky–Craft conversation books, makes readily available this informative and amusing portrait of Stravinsky in the early 1960s.

In addition, thanks to recent translations, the English-speaking world now has access to two important Russian monographs about Stravinsky, one by Stravinsky's Russian disciple in the 1920s, Boris Asaf'yev, and the other by one of his most enthusiastic supporters in recent years, Mikhail Druskin. While Robert Craft calls Asaf'yev's 'the one crucial book so far published about Igor Stravinsky', its pur-

view stops with *The Fairy's Kiss* (1928). Both the Druskin and van den Toorn studies examine Stravinsky's entire oeuvre and seek to explain how 'Stravinsky remains Stravinsky' despite his three clearly differentiated stylistic periods. These are the first monographs to give serious attention to the late serial works, apart from the Craft books and the second edition (1979) of Eric Walter White's life and works. With its inclusion in the Cambridge opera study series, Paul Griffiths's collection of essays on *The Rake's Progress* confirms the work's status as one of the great opera classics.

### I

It is impossible to survey these publications without noticing the substantial involvement of the composer's friend and chronicler Robert Craft. In four of the seven books listed above, Craft played a direct role, either as interviewer (in the *Dialogues*), documentary historian (having assembled the interviews and written the captions for *Igor and Vera Stravinsky*), facilitator or critic. He was responsible for acquainting Malcolm Brown of the UMI Russian Music Series with Richard French's English translation of the Asaf'yev, which had existed unpublished for ten years, and, in his foreword to Asaf'yev's *Book about Stravinsky*, he analyses Stravinsky's marginal comments in the book. Craft also contributes an essay on the sketches and the libretto of *The Rake's Progress* to Griffiths's anthology. In

the van den Toorn book, the Stravinsky–Craft conversations serve as the author’s most important source material and provide the basis for his critical commentary. Only two of the books do not involve Craft in a significant way. The essays from *Modern Music* were published before he and Stravinsky met in 1948. And in the few pages that his monograph devotes to their over 20-year relationship, Druskin relegates Craft to a position of ‘assistance’ rather than ‘influence’, an interpretation to which Craft has taken exception in an extensive recent article.<sup>1</sup>

Craft’s relationship with this research is closely connected with his evolving explanation of his place in Stravinsky’s life. The choice of the photograph on the 1982 reprint of *Dialogues* (this month’s MT front cover) corroborates the evidence that Craft has offered in his recent essays in the *New York Review of Books* and the *Atlantic Monthly*<sup>2</sup> – that is, of his having played a more important role in Stravinsky’s later years than he has previously admitted. The jacket of the book’s original hardback editions did not feature this picture, nor is it to be found within them. Instead of Stravinsky by himself, the portrait shows the two together, possibly at work before a score. With Stravinsky gazing at Craft and Craft, seeming puzzled, staring down and away, the relationship depicted is ambiguous – did Stravinsky just ask Craft a question which he is pondering? (One wonders how Roland Barthes would ‘read’ this photograph.)

For years Craft made light of comments that he was ‘more than a mere guide’ in Stravinsky’s life (‘as if anyone could even lead that horse to water, if it didn’t want to go, let alone make it drink’).<sup>3</sup> Yet questions have remained, particularly regarding the conversation books (after all, Craft lived with the Stravinskys for many years and has even said he was ‘too close’ to consider writing the definitive biography).<sup>4</sup> First, what editorial role did Craft play in these books? Stravinsky’s humour inevitably shines through, as when he praises Casella for recognizing the new neo-classical direction implied by ‘such a piece of popcorn’ as the Polka from the Eight Easy Pieces.<sup>5</sup>

But who is responsible for the innumerable citations from the works of famous writers? Second, what organizational principle structures these books? – for example, why do the pair discuss certain issues in one book, others in the next? what determines the order of presentation? why do they publish some correspondence but not other, and sometimes omit parts of letters? Third, how can scholars form their own conclusions about these invaluable documents? The Stravinsky archives have long



been the subject of a costly litigation that has made them inaccessible. With Craft now an important heir, some have mistrusted him for the power he could exert in writing Stravinsky’s history. But Stravinsky once said: ‘It is not up to me to explain and judge my music. That is not my role. I have to write it – that is all’.<sup>6</sup> And history is never written by just one person. Without Craft’s interviews and documentation, where would we get so much raw material with which to begin to understand how the great composer worked?

After many speaking and conducting engagements during the centenary year, Craft has begun, in his words, to ‘pull back the curtain’ on his relationship with Stravinsky.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the time has come for me to say, as I have not done before, that I provided the path and that I do not believe Stravinsky would ever have taken the direction that he did without me. The music that he would otherwise have written is difficult to imagine.

That ‘path’, of course, was serialism. In his response to Druskin’s new book, Craft writes:<sup>8</sup>

to some extent I ‘directed’ and ‘controlled’ Stravinsky, . . . for, in truth, every Stravinsky opus after and including the Septet and *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas* (1954) was undertaken as a result of discussions between us. The texts of *A Sermon, A Narrative, and A Prayer* were entirely my choice . . . I sometimes went so far as to suggest forms that new pieces might take.

Craft’s claim that ‘Stravinsky wanted to be influenced’, however, should come as no surprise, for Stravinsky was influenced by friends throughout his life. Further, this perception of Stravinsky as ‘radically susceptible to personal influence, which I say because I can see the reactive effects that I myself have had on him’, dates from as early as Craft’s 1949 diary.<sup>9</sup> Yet these assertions do not explain their relationship entirely nor the music that resulted from their association. In his foreword to the Asaf’yev book, Craft discusses aspects of Stravinsky’s personality that may have had a bearing on their interactions. When he writes ‘Who, least of all Igor Stravinsky, wants an alter-ego?’, while pointing to Stravinsky’s refusal to endorse Asaf’yev’s insights,<sup>10</sup> Craft seems at the same time to be refuting Druskin’s depiction of him as Stravinsky’s ‘alter-ego’. This perhaps inadvertent self-portrait continues as he expounds the character of Stravinsky, a man who ‘would tolerate no interpreter he could not control – hence his autobiography – and, in conducting, his preference for a mere craftsman over a Bernstein’. If there was ‘control’, then quite possibly it flowed in both directions.

Anxious to share his insights about information and materials to which he has had unique access, Craft has recently been

<sup>1</sup> ‘On a Misunderstood Collaboration: Assisting Stravinsky’, *Atlantic Monthly* (Dec 1982), 68–74

<sup>2</sup> ‘My Life with Stravinsky’, *New York Review of Books* (10 June 1982), 6–10; op cit

<sup>3</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft: *Retrospectives and Conclusions* (1969), 196 (cited by van den Toorn, 382)

<sup>4</sup> ‘My Life with Stravinsky’, 10

<sup>5</sup> *Dialogues* (1982), 41

<sup>6</sup> Ingolf Dahl: ‘Stravinsky in 1946’, *Stravinsky in Modern Music*, 86

<sup>7</sup> ‘My Life with Stravinsky’, 10

<sup>8</sup> ‘Assisting Stravinsky’, 73

<sup>9</sup> Entry for 10 Aug 1949 in Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft: *Dialogues and a Diary* (1968), 159, and in Robert Craft: *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship 1948–1971* (1972), 13. These versions differ in word order but not in content.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Foreword: Asaf’yev and Stravinsky’, in Asaf’yev, p.viii. Craft explains that ‘at the time he marked his copy of the book’, Stravinsky was ‘well aware’ that the Russian scholar disavowed this monograph when he became a Stalinist in the 1930s. Perhaps Stravinsky was also hypercritical because Asaf’yev wrote in his own native tongue.

publishing numerous analyses. Of particular interest is what he is unveiling about the conversation books. In his 1978 publication, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, he admits that Stravinsky 'controlled the questions by naming his interviewers', but he also quotes Stravinsky's letter to his agent dated 15 March 1958:<sup>11</sup>

The title of the book is 'Conversations with Igor Stravinsky by Robert Craft'. It must appear that way in all editions . . . This isn't Bob – who is in fact at fault the other way in not wanting his name on anything – but he did write the book, it is his language, his presentation, his imagination, and his memory, and I am only protecting myself in not wanting it to appear as though I write or talk that way. It's not a question simply of ghost writing but of somebody who is to a large extent creating me. Also, my Autobiography will be reissued in a few weeks. The difference between the two books is so great as to make what I have said even more urgent.

Although Craft reproduces the text in Stravinsky's hand and asserts in this book that 'most of the language . . . was his [Stravinsky's]', he now criticizes Druskin for quoting from these books 'as if my part in them was exclusively that of the interrogator, but though I no longer remember my exact contributions, certainly there were some, and without both of us the books would not exist'.<sup>12</sup> In his forthcoming *Recent Perspectives* (Knopf, 1983), Craft gives a detailed review of the circumstances under which these books were written.

With correspondence and other documents now available, the time has come for a thorough study and cross-comparison of these books. The American and subsequent English editions of each differ significantly. Recent scholarship (most notably on Stravinsky's use of folk tunes) indicates that the composer experienced lapses of memory in his later years, or coloured his recollections to align with current concerns. Pieter van den Toorn's new study provides the first serious compilation of material from the conversation books. Before the analysis of each work, he presents what Stravinsky has written on the subject. Van den Toorn uses these statements in forming his perspective; but, more important,

he also analyses them critically. For example, after finding in *Agon* frequent 'double leading-tone' and 'Landini' cadences characteristic of late medieval music, van den Toorn suggests that Stravinsky and Craft apparently attempted 'to shortchange' remnants of a neo-classical orientation in the work by referring 'rather persistently to the *Doppio lento* section at mm. 504–11 as the *crème de la crème*'. Van den Toorn argues that this focus on the serial at the expense of the late medieval aspects of the piece appears to reflect 'a temporary preoccupation with Webern's methods' and 'a curiously apologetic attitude toward the neoclassical past, as if serialism, construed as some grievously overlooked Final Solution, could in some ultimate sense threaten the legitimacy of all other processes of musical invention'. Since Craft now claims responsibility for encouraging Stravinsky to use serial methods in the early 1950s, one wonders to what extent his influence contributed to this lack of attention to the larger picture of the work as a unique synthesis with a 'vast, pluralistic reach in historical reference'.

Clearly now, more than ever, the first aspect of Stravinsky research to be sorted out is the relationship between Stravinsky and Robert Craft. In response to events of the centenary year and to interpretations by critics, Craft has begun to clarify his involvement in Stravinsky's life and his feelings about it. Moreover, Craft's recent analyses of archival material and editions of letters and other documents are swamping the field, providing scholars with a wealth of new information that demands examination. If Craft's influence on Stravinsky proves as substantial as he now asserts, scholars should begin examining what determined Craft's tastes and what may have led him to introduce Stravinsky to certain texts or to suggest certain forms.

## II

Apart from Craft's works, recent scholarship has focussed on the critical reception that Stravinsky received in the 1920s as well as on elements of continuity in his style. The essays in *Modern Music* reveal that the unpredictability of Stravinsky's music puzzled American critics and French correspondents at the time. Some regretted the 'halt in his progress' and felt his new style failed 'to meet the needs of our emotions'. Others, more receptive, found Stravinsky's

'impersonal, objective' art 'certainly not to be judged by the standards generally current'. Stravinsky himself responded to Ingolf Dahl's question of whether these works constituted a new departure: 'I wish people would let me have the privilege of being at least a little bit unconscious. It is so nice sometimes to go blind, just with the feeling for the right thing'. Apart from occasional insights, these short articles, typically two pages in length, tell more about individual performances, costume and set-designs for his American premières, and the impoverishment of American musical criticism at the time than about Stravinsky's music.

By contrast, in the Russian critic and composer Boris Asaf'yev Stravinsky unwittingly found not only an impassioned sympathizer but also a sophisticated interpreter whom Craft says 'understood [Stravinsky] as no one else'. Firmly committed to the idea of music as a 'constructivist' art, 'first and foremost material . . . for the organizing and refining powers of human cognition', Asaf'yev anticipates what Stravinsky himself later wrote in the *Poetics of Music*. Such an aesthetic orientation and a focus on 'problems of form and craftsmanship' rather than on biography make it no surprise that Asaf'yev understands Stravinsky's turn to materials from the past 'not as an intermediate step in his creative career' but as 'completely natural' and 'absolutely and faultlessly contemporary'. Asaf'yev even calls this interest in the 'universality of formal and technical interrelationships' typically Russian (he compares Stravinsky to Pushkin throughout the book). After a cursory look at works up to and including *Petrushka*, Asaf'yev traces the origins of this formalism from the last dance in *The Rite of Spring* and the Three Pieces for String Quartet through *Apollo* and *The Fairy's Kiss*. Although he cannot spell out the implications of Stravinsky's neo-classical style, Asaf'yev hails it as one of the most vibrant directions in 20th-century musical thought.

Scholars still puzzle over Stravinsky's neo-classicism. Following Asaf'yev, Druskin traces the roots of Stravinsky's neo-classical style to the same cultural movement that affected Picasso and T. S. Eliot. He also links it with 'Stravinsky's desire to universalize the Pushkin tradition' of 'appearing in every form and penetrating the spirit of different epochs'. However, Druskin's analysis becomes more tenuous when he posits the 'classical beauty and grandeur' of St Petersburg's 18th- and 19th-century architecture as a source for

<sup>11</sup> Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft: *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (1978), 438–40. Stravinsky obviously trusted Craft to put together these books, perhaps because he admired Craft's command of English and anyway nothing but Russian, his preferred language, could fully carry the integrity of his thought.

<sup>12</sup> 'Assisting Stravinsky', 74

the 'powerful sense of proportion and the strict regulation of musical forms' in Stravinsky's neo-classical works. More interesting is the notion borrowed from Tansman and Huizinga, the 'play-principle', which he uses to explain Stravinsky's attraction for pre-established frameworks and for the theatre.

Van den Toorn's definition of Stravinsky's neo-classicism, more precise than that given by other scholars, results from his technical analysis. He argues that Stravinsky's style changed because the composer 'tired' of the tetrachordal fragments derived from one form of the octatonic scale found throughout his 'Russian' works and began working with 'triadic, tetrachordal, and major-minor partitionings' of another form of the octatonic scale as well as 'interaction' between 'octatonic and diatonic C-scale' material. Such language may seem hard to penetrate, but the many insights throughout the book make the effort well worthwhile.

In contrast, the lengthiest recent study of a neo-classical work, Griffiths's handbook on *The Rake's Progress*, is written for the layman. Interesting discussions explore how the work 'gives justification in terms of human psychology, and of the realities of the world, for that obsessional need to repeat and return'. However, for the most part, description substitutes for analysis. A synopsis takes up nearly 20% of the book – useful if the opera used a foreign language, but here of little value. Rather than explaining 'the opera as a structure of musical and dramatic effects' as intended, it merely incorporates the sequence of keys and instruments as part of the story and rarely mentions rhythmic or melodic intricacies.

Scholars have only gradually begun to perceive unifying elements in Stravinsky's music.<sup>13</sup> Writers in *Modern Music* such as Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, Boris de Schloezer and Virgil Thomson point only to the 'seriousness' of 'tone' or of 'purpose', 'the exact correlation between the goal and the means', or a dry 'ant-like neatness' in his work. Their contemporary Asaf'yev goes much further because he can point to underlying characteristics that derive from the composer's Russian background. The most important of these is the 'melos' of

the oral tradition. Asaf'yev calls Stravinsky the first to understand Russian folk music's 'strength and originality as a system of organized sound'. Its supra-personal lyricism, tied to the rhythms of speech and dance, and its technique of forming melodies by improvisation and gradual crystallization rather than by thematic development, characterize many of Stravinsky's works. Asaf'yev also finds the 'quality of festival' throughout Stravinsky's music. Using the metaphor of a circus, he discusses the absence of the personal, the importance of construction and discipline and the role of irony and buffoonery. For him, the prominence of wind and percussion instruments as well as the use of improvisatory violin writing further reflect this festive aspect. But most interesting is his discussion of the recurring presence of bell-like sounds. Asaf'yev proposes that the sonority of bells inspired a 'new conception of sound and new world of rhythms' that had a 'great influence on the design of [Stravinsky's] works'.<sup>14</sup> With his emphasis on 'rhythm as a basic principle of musical design and on the evolution of percussive intonations as the "collective" disciplining the total organization of musical energies', his analyses go far beyond those of his contemporaries. It is a pity that the book is marred by a frequently awkward translation.

The recent studies by Druskin and van den Toorn represent a new trend in Stravinsky research. Without having known the composer personally (except, in the case of Druskin, during Stravinsky's short visit to Russia in 1962), and without pretending to write definitive biographies, these scholars, unlike Asaf'yev, do not avoid musing about Stravinsky's personality. In fact, they give considerable attention to the two crises in Stravinsky's life (when he left Russia and then France), examining the impact that these traumas may have had on his stylistic changes. More important, however, both authors focus on certain consistencies in Stravinsky's music – recurring elements that, in their different guises, reinforce the notion of three periods in his career and, in their omnipresence,

suggest a kind of unity in his oeuvre.

The specific consistencies that these writers find in Stravinsky's music are remarkably similar, although Druskin's perspective is larger, both culturally and conceptually, and van den Toorn's more narrowly analytical. First, both examine the quality of movement in the music. Druskin suggests that 'visual impressions of movement' from dance or film often inspired the 'tempo, rhythm, and dynamic amplitude' of his music. Van den Toorn points to the 'physicality of it all', perhaps rooted in the composer's working at the piano. He finds the key to Stravinsky's rhythmic invention in the 'play' between metre and rhythm, the often concealed 'contradiction or reversal in the upbeat/downbeat identity of reiterating fragments', and points out two types of rhythmic/metric relationship in Stravinsky's music: one with 'background (concealed) metric periodicity' but 'foreground metric irregularity', the other with 'foreground regular metric periodicity' but recurring stresses or phrases that do not occur at the same place in each bar.

Second, both scholars explain the formal layout of Stravinsky's music in terms of juxtapositions, superimpositions and repetition. Druskin traces the 'juxtaposition and confrontation of different planes and volumes of sonority' or the 'spatial character' of Stravinsky's music to Debussy. Comparisons, using Uspensky's concept of 'reverse perspective' and Wolfelin's idea of 'tectonic' structures yield for him provocative insights into the 'variation and permutation of [Stravinsky's] sound-masses'. Although van den Toorn 'remains largely unconvinced' of 'any substantive influence' from Debussy, he discusses the same techniques but adds: 'juxtaposition, like superimposition, is no mere formality . . . to be heard and understood solely in terms of "form" or sudden "discontinuities" . . . Abrupt juxtaposition is *content-motivated* . . . discernible . . . in terms of shifting in the collection reference (possibly from octatonic to diatonic or the reverse)'. Later, he explains, 'It is by way of block juxtaposition that symmetrically defined, self-enclosed deadlocks are broken, and that a sense of release, of movement or progress, is effected'.

Third, both studies stress the importance of intervals in Stravinsky's pitch organization. Druskin points to Stravinsky's 'interest in experimenting with different intervallic structures' in the late works, but goes no further. Van den Toorn builds his central thesis on Stravinsky's recurring use of octatonic pitch collections, beginning with

<sup>13</sup> This topic constitutes a central concern of many papers delivered at the International Stravinsky Symposium, 10–14 September 1982, to be published in *Stravinsky: Centennial Essays* (University of California Press).

<sup>14</sup> In his foreword to the book, Craft writes that Asaf'yev 'knew that Stravinsky would have heard the great bell of the Nikolsky Sobor in his cradle'. This discussion of bells reminds Craft of Stravinsky's 'experiments with notations for the different speeds of the city's bells, since their rhythm absorbed him as much as their ring and the percussive articulation of mallet and clapper'. Druskin also elaborates on the recurring bell sounds in Stravinsky's music.

*The Firebird*. His numerical notation that circumvents tonal implications and de-emphasizes pitch-class identity allows him to show relationships between works from one period to the next. But, convincing as his argument is, one should remember that Stravinsky never referred to such a collection in print nor, according to Lawrence Morton, had he mentioned it. That Stravinsky worked with symmetrical intervals such as the alternating-whole and half

steps of the octatonic scales is incontrovertible – Rimsky-Korsakov and even Skryabin used them, too; however, one should note that van den Toorn frequently has to speak of ‘partitionings’ of an octatonic collection because Stravinsky often uses less than eight pitches.

These two books are worth reading together. Whereas the Druskin lacks musical examples and rarely discusses a composition at length, the van den Toorn

has copious examples, extended analyses of individual works, and expects the reader to have a piano or record player on hand to hear what is being discussed. Martin Cooper’s idiomatic translation of the Druskin monograph is much easier to follow, but one wonders why the original footnotes are drastically cut and why the book does not reproduce the photographs of Stravinsky’s 1962 Russian tour that appeared in the 1976 German translation.

## Tchaikovsky: Crises and Contortions

Hugh Macdonald

David Brown’s admirable study of Tchaikovsky\* becomes more absorbing the more closely he examines the life and work of his subject. This second volume moves at a more concentrated pace than the first, with decided advantages – even if it means a further three volumes to bring the composer to that extraordinary death, discussion of which will surely take up a good deal of the final pages. The narrative does not drag since biographical information is as abundant as works to be discussed, and any more slender treatment would inevitably seem superficial. Tchaikovsky’s mind was as restless as his body: he pondered and discussed matters of the intellect and the soul as regularly as he took the train, and since correspondence was his chosen medium for many of his inmost thoughts, especially to his family and to Mme von Meck, material for discussion and patient sifting is superabundant even after the Soviet censors have done their work. Dr Brown’s book has profited from his access to the only pre-publication copy of Tchaikovsky’s letters to reach the West after the volume was withdrawn in 1940, which has some valuable additions to the established texts. This volume covers momentous events in the composer’s life from the First Piano Concerto and its withering reception by Nikolay Rubinstein through to the disaster of his marriage and his breach with the Moscow Conservatoire. These years produced the Third and

Fourth Symphonies, *Francesca da Rimini*, the Violin Concerto, *Swan Lake*, *Eugene Onegin*, much piano music and a number of songs. The encounter (it was not, of course, a meeting) with Mme von Meck is superbly told; their decision never to meet was aided by Tchaikovsky’s disappointing discovery that the real Tolstoy, when he met him, was more a man of clay than the writer Tolstoy, and by their shared need for a recipient of confidences.

There is penetrating comment on the songs, on *Francesca da Rimini*, and an extremely useful presentation of the *Rococo Variations* in their original sequence, the work being universally familiar in Fitzhagen’s improperly revised version. Of Tchaikovsky’s true feelings on this it is unfortunately hard to be certain, since he could have insisted on publication of his own text had he felt strongly enough about it. Perhaps at the time the work meant little to him, as sooner or later did many of his most individual works.

Dr Brown enjoys the advantage of all Western writers in being able to treat Tchaikovsky’s homosexuality objectively, even though he sometimes refers to it as ‘abnormal’ and ‘unnatural’. Since Tchaikovsky is the classic case of the neurotic homosexual, it would be well worth while to establish the outlines of his condition even if many details of his private life will always be obscure. The reader is naturally inquisitive about Tchaikovsky’s relations with other men since some obviously enjoyed an intimacy denied to others. In this quarter Dr Brown hesitates to speculate, perhaps wisely, although characters who played an important part in the Tchaikov-

sky drama appear often enough in these pages. What was the nature of Tchaikovsky’s friendship with Vladimir Stepanovich Shilovsky, for example, to whose side the composer often fled at moments of stress? It is not purely an appetite for gossip that prompts the question but a desire for biographical precision wherever it can be attained, and there is much here for discussion even if not for firm answers. And the violinist Kotek? ‘A strong bond’ developed between them, we are told, but without any suggestion until very near the end of the volume that the bond was sexual. What kind of a friend was Bochechkarov? The identity of Tchaikovsky’s intimate friends should be a primary task of a biography on this scale, however scant the available detail. When Saint-Saëns came to Moscow in 1875 he ‘straightway charmed Pyotr Ilich and became very close to him’, Modest Tchaikovsky later recorded, as quoted here. ‘Both had not only been very attracted to the ballet, but had also some natural skill for that sort of dancing’, comments Dr Brown, going on to describe (though without further comment) Saint-Saëns dancing Galatea to Tchaikovsky’s Pygmalion on the stage of the Conservatoire hall. This picture of the two prancing poufs is not only very comical, but surely helps to explain the sudden coldness which sprang up between them the following year when Tchaikovsky deliberately avoided Saint-Saëns when he was in Paris. We are given occasional hints about Tchaikovsky’s drinking but not enough to form a clear idea of how far, or even whether, this should be considered a major factor in his mental and physical life.

\***Tchaikovsky, ii: The Crisis Years 1874 – 1878** (London: Gollancz, 1982; 312pp.; £17.50)