

Stravinsky's "Rejoicing Discovery" Revisited The Case of *Pribaoutki*

by Marina Lupishko

The lack of correspondence between textual and musical accentuation in the vocal works of Stravinsky has been noticed by many scholars. It has become a commonplace to quote the composer's explanation in Robert Craft's retelling: "One important characteristic of Russian popular verse is that the accents of the spoken verse are ignored when the verse is sung. The recognition of the musical possibilities inherent in this fact was one of the most rejoicing discoveries of my life [...]." ¹ In the second volume of *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, Richard Taruskin bases his entire treatment of re-accentuation in Stravinsky's Russian vocal works on this quotation. ² The author believes that in Russian folk verse, literary accentuation is somehow "adjusted" by authentic performers of Russian folk songs in accordance with their musical needs. ³ As an illustration, Taruskin quotes the third stanza of the well-known round-dance song "Akh vi, seni moi, seni," which, according to Simon Karlinsky, "the late Roman Jakobson liked quoting to his students." Actually, Roman Jakobson need not have quoted this verse as a musical example – he could have simply recited it. In fact, the triple shift of accentuation of "po mostu" is caused primarily by the requirements of the regular poetic metre, the trochaic tetrameter with alternately feminine and masculine endings (S = strong syllable, w = weak syllable):

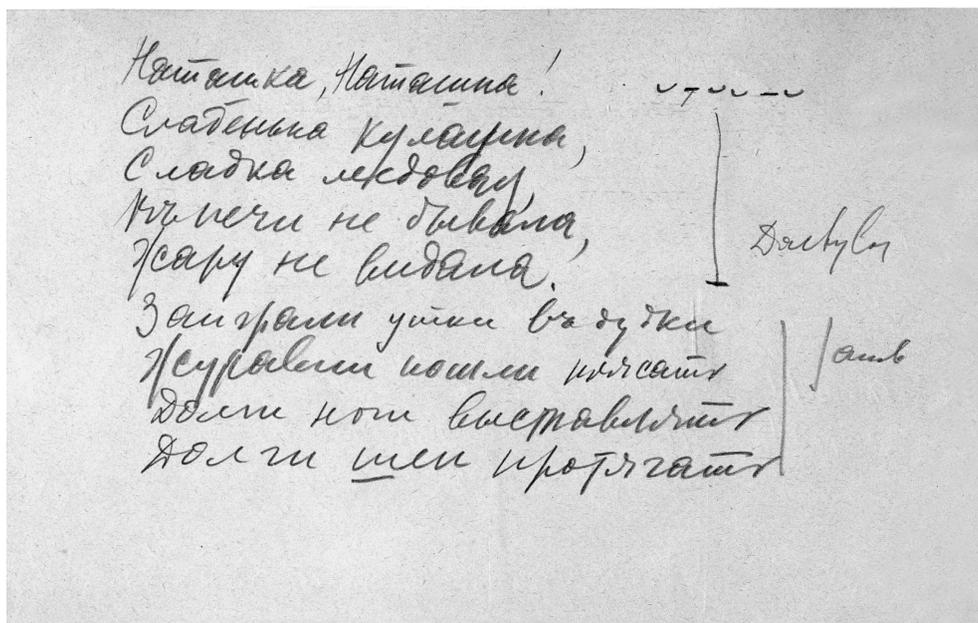
Uzh kak *pó* mostu, po *mó*stu, Sw Sw Sw Sw
Po shirókomu mostú Sw Sw Sw S

Taruskin has found a confirmation of his point of view in the works of Russian musical ethnographer Evgeniya Linyova. ⁴ It should be stressed, however, that such an explanation of the phenomenon of Russian folk re-accentuation reflects the tendency of early 20th-century linguists (Korsh, etc.) to attribute the metric irregularity of Russian folk verse to the melodic complexity of Russian folk song. ⁵ This concept appeared as a result of the failure of contemporary philological research to establish the underlying structural principles of Russian folk poetry. ⁶ Considered as new and original during Stravinsky's youth, today this "musical" theory of Russian folk versification has largely lost its significance and became outdated.

Nowadays, it is commonly accepted among linguists that (1) the *folk* accentuation, notable for its freedom and flexibility, differs significantly from the *literary* accentuation,⁷ that (2) the shifted stress is a normative feature of folk *verse*, not only of folk *song*, and that (3) in many cases, it is the specific Russian folk poetic metres that make the shifted accentuation necessary.⁸

At the same time, it would be no less wrong to dismiss entirely the role of purely musical factors in the emergence of stress shifts in Russian folk songs. Such “musical” re-accentuation can be caused, for example, by a prolongation or melismatic extension of a syllable (phonetic factor), a rise of musical intonation in accordance with the already established melodic pattern (intonational factor), a creative urge to destroy monotony at an immediate repetition of one and the same word with a slight change of emphasis (agogic factor), etc. However, such types of “musical” re-accentuation are often genre-specific: the first is more typical of slow drawn-out songs, the second is more characteristic of epic folklore, while the third type is found mainly in children’s, dance, and game songs, that is, in songs connected with physical movement.

In order to find the reasons for re-accentuation in Stravinsky’s settings of Russian folk poetry, one would have to divide the problem into two parts: (1) re-accentuation already present in the text, (2) re-accentuation present in the works of Stravinsky but absent from the text. The former is what



Example 1: Igor Stravinsky, *Pribaoutki* for voice and eight instruments (1914), text of no. 1, “Natashka,” in Sketchbook II, separate leaf (Igor Stravinsky Collection).

Bailey called “folk accentuation,” caused by the necessity to adjust the verse to a specific folk poetic metre. The latter is the more numerous category including stresses shifted for rhythmic purposes, for semantic purposes, for preservation of the same melodic material, for deliberate deviation from the established pattern, etc. In the beginning of his involvement with Russian folk verse, Stravinsky is attracted by “primary” re-accentuation, but soon thereafter he starts using the types of “musical” re-accentuation, discussed above, and inventing many others. Overall, one may argue that during the Swiss period of the composer’s life (1913–20), a peculiar evolution can be observed in his creative work: from setting regular trochaic verse (*Souvenirs de mon enfance*) to setting irregular tonic verse (*Svadebka, Podblyudnië, Quatre chants russes*).⁹

The turning point was *Pribaoutki*, the cycle for baritone and eight instruments, written in August–September 1914. As seen from the dates,¹⁰ “Natashka” was written first, “Kornilo” second, with only a few days between them. In the setting of “Natashka,” the first song to be composed, the principle of absolute correspondence between the poetic metre and the musical rhythm prevails. In the draft, Stravinsky wrote the text down like a poem instead of a paragraph of prose. The first half is labeled erroneously in his hand “dactili” (*recte* amphibrachs), the second “jamb” (*recte* trochee) (*Example 1*). The music is set accordingly: the first half to 3/8 with a quaver upbeat (Allegro), the second to 2/4 (Meno mosso). In order to keep the constant two-foot amphibrach throughout the first half, Stravinsky corrected Afanasiev’s “sláden’ka” (sweet) to “sladyónka.”¹¹ The third line of Afanasiev, “sladká medovAya,” remained intact.¹² The word “medovAya” (honey-like) has a folk stress on the third syllable (marked in capital letters),¹³ as compared to the literary stress “medóvaya.” This shifted accent, as well as the one on “zharU” in line 5 (heat in the accusative, cf. literary “zháru”) are already present in the text source. The musical settings of these words follow the folk stresses (mm. 1–10):

Natáshka, Natáshka!
Sladyónka kulázhka,
Sladká medovAya,
V pechí ne bivála,
ZharU ne vidála.

Below is the first part of the text of the opening song “Kornilo.”¹⁴ Note that the shifted accents in “gorYO-toskú” (grief-sadness in the accusative, cf. literary “góre”) and “StOit” (stands, cf. literary “stoít”) are immanent to this trochaic verse. Both are duly reflected in the music (mm. 10–14):

Nú-tko, dyádyushka Kornílo,
Zaprygáy-ko tì kobílu,
U Makár’ya na peskú
Prirazmích’ gorYO-toskú:
StOit brázhka v tuyaskú.

Король "Корнет"

Король - ую ко - но - баяры ко - нет

- ую ко - но - баяры

Король ую ко - но - баяры ко - нет
Король ую ко - но - баяры

Король ую ко - но - баяры ко - нет
 Король ую ко - но - баяры
 Король ую ко - но - баяры

Example 2: Igor Stravinsky, *Pribaoutki* for voice and eight instruments (1914), draft of no. 3, "The Colonel," in Sketchbook II, fols. 16 verso and 17 recto (Igor Stravinsky Collection).

Stravinsky completed the third song "The Colonel" shortly after "Kornilo," using all his imagination in setting this metrically peculiar poem. The first two lines of this poem are a free three-stress tonic verse, while the rest of the poem is a more regular two-stress tonic verse. The fact that Stravinsky

Pála-propála,
Pod lyod popála,
Popá poymála,
Popá popóvicha,
Petrá Petróvicha.

The vocal part begins in the iambic manner, as does the poem. However, by placing accents above the notes, Stravinsky aims to emphasize the initial Ps of the tongue twister and thus to create a tension between the poetic metre – practically, a four-foot iamb – and the rhythmic accents on the first syllable of every word. All three words thus receive unusual stresses: “*pOshyol*” (went), “*pOlkovnik*” (colonel), and “*pOgulyat*” (for a walk). Such re-accentuation is not caused by the requirements of the poetic or musical metre but is there thanks to purely artistic considerations of the composer (mm. 6–8):

Poshyól polkóvnik pogulyát'. wS wSw wws →
POshyol pOlkovnik pOgulyat'. → Sw Sww Sww

In the middle part (mm. 22ff.), the changing metres 4/8, 5/8, 3/8, 4/8 are employed to set each word individually and to emphasize the initial syllables that contain the sound P (mm. 25–27). As seen from the sketches, the “Pála-propála” part of the poem gave Stravinsky the most trouble, until he finally chose a simple syllabic setting on a single repeated pitch, where all the literary stresses fall on downbeats in continually changing metres 3/8, 2/8, 3/4 (mm. 27–32).

Contrary to the notorious statement of the late Stravinsky, we have seen that re-accentuation is already present in the texts of the first two songs of *Pribaoutki*. In both cases, we deal with a stress shift caused by a necessity to adjust the poetic line to the regular metric pattern. In the last two songs of *Pribaoutki*, Stravinsky turns his attention to irregular tonic verse and sets it as it stands, without any adjustment to the more known to him trochaic forms. Both songs also abound with re-accentuation, totally unjustified by any logical reason. Out of the two settings, “The Colonel” is the more interesting because in its final “Pála-propála” episode Stravinsky employs a simple syllabic setting with changing time signatures, where accented syllables fall on downbeats.¹⁵ Such prosodically perfect but metrically irregular way of text-setting of Russian folk tonic verse will soon become the “visiting card” of the composer’s mature style, his recognizable “stroke of pen” in the late *Chansons russes*, *Bayka*, *Svadebka*, and other works.

¹ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 121.

² Cf. Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 1206–36.

³ See, for instance, his words “distentions of verbal stress patterns, something fully revealed only in singing” (ibid., p. 1207), and many others.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 1212ff.

⁵ Evgeniya Linyova (1853–1919) was essentially an ethnomusicologist, not a linguist, and therefore her explanations of poetic phenomena should be taken with caution. The chapter on rhythm in her book *Velikorusskie pesni v narodnoy garmonizatsii* [The songs of Great Russia in the folk's harmonization] (text edited by the academician F. E. Korsh, 2 vols [St. Petersburg: Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences, 1904 and 1909]), from which Taruskin extracts his long quotation (cf. Taruskin, *Stravinsky* [note 2], pp. 1213–14), does not cover the issue of re-accentuation in detail.

⁶ Mikhail Shtokmar, *Issledovaniya v oblasti russkoro narodnogo stikhoslozheniya*, Studies in the area of Russian folk versification (Moscow: The USSR Academy of Sciences, 1952), p. 102.

⁷ Cf. James Bailey, *Three Russian Lyric Folk Song Meters* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1993), p. 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–19.

⁹ According to Bailey, tonic (accentual) verse has a constant number of metrical stresses per line but a varying number of syllables between them (cf. *ibid.*, p. 14).

¹⁰ Taruskin, *Stravinsky* (note 2), p. 1138.

¹¹ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Conclusions* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 37.

¹² Cf. Aleksandr Afanasiev, *Narodnie russkie skazki A. N. Afanas'yeva* (Russian folk fairytales by A. N. Afanasiev), ed. V. Ya. Propp, vol. 3 (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1957), No. 550.

¹³ Cf. "medovOy" in Bailey, *Three Russian Lyric Folk Song Meters* (note 7), p. 329.

¹⁴ Afanasiev, *Narodnie russkie skazki* (note 12), No. 543.

¹⁵ Taruskin, *Stravinsky* (note 2), p. 1226.