

Some Remarks on the Publication and Reception of Stravinsky's *Erinnerungen*

by Joan Evans

The German translation of Igor Stravinsky's *Chroniques de ma vie* was published by Atlantis-Verlag in the autumn of 1937.¹ Two years had passed since the original publication of the autobiography, during which time English, American, and Spanish editions had already appeared. The delay reflected the cultural-political situation in Germany, for during the early years of the Nazi period, Stravinsky was a target of strong opposition. This changed after 1936, when increased political and economic stability resulted in a lessening of the xenophobia that had characterized the earlier period. Slowly Stravinsky's music regained a position of importance in Germany's musical life, one it maintained until the outbreak of the Second World War.²

Symptomatic of Germany's desire to resume its former role as a cultural leader of Europe was the inauguration in April 1936 of the Internationales Musikfest für zeitgenössische Musik in Baden-Baden. Renewed interest in Stravinsky's music was stimulated by the composer's appearance at this festival, where he and his son Soulima presented the German première of the *Concerto* for two solo pianos. A further contribution was provided by the publication the following year of Stravinsky's *Erinnerungen*.

In July 1937 Martin Hürlimann of Atlantis-Verlag informed Stravinsky that his firm had acquired the German-language rights for the autobiography; the following month he sent Richard Tüngel's translation, requesting Stravinsky's comments.³ That Atlantis was aiming the book primarily at the large German market is obvious. In fact, its release was planned to coincide with the Berlin première of *Le Baiser de la fée*, scheduled for that autumn.⁴ More significantly, two passages that the publishers felt could endanger German sales, or even result in a ban, were shortened, altered, or omitted altogether.

The first of these two passages involved Stravinsky's recollections of his trip to Bayreuth in the summer of 1912 to attend with Sergei Diaghilev a performance of *Parsifal*.⁵ Even though Stravinsky's dislike of Wagner's music could hardly have been news to his German readers, his biting comments on what he described as the "comedy of Bayreuth" would certainly have hit a sensitive nerve in Hitler's Germany.⁶ Hürlimann reminded Stravinsky of the Reichskanzler's enthusiastic support of Bayreuth, adding that prohibitive measures were being taken against whatever did not conform with Hitler's views on the arts.⁷ With this consideration in mind, two extensive sections of

Stravinsky's Bayreuth recollections were omitted, while other phrases were toned down. The first cut, some twenty-three lines in the English edition, involves the composer's caustic remarks on the festival's atmosphere of stifling devotion, broken only for sausages and beer.⁸ The second involves the final twelve lines of his Bayreuth comments, in which he interprets the Bayreuth phenomenon as a substitute for religion – a refurbishing of “old cults” for an age lacking in “spiritual values”.⁹

The second sensitive passage occurs towards the end of the autobiography. It concerns Stravinsky's remarks on Jewish violinists. The context is the composer's account of his meeting with Samuel Dushkin, the Russian-American musician for whom the Violin Concerto had been written in 1931. This passage contains two related comments: one laudatory, the other critical. After praising Dushkin's “remarkable gifts” (including “an abnegation that is very rare”), Stravinsky writes:

A Jew, like the great majority of leading violinists, Dushkin possesses all those innate gifts which make representatives of that race the unquestionable masters of the violin.¹⁰

He notes that the names of the greatest violinists “have in fact a Jewish sound”, and continues:

Their owners should be proud of them and it is difficult to understand why most of them persist in prefixing Russian diminutives such as are generally used only among intimates. Instead of Alexander they call themselves Sacha; instead of Jacob or James, Yasha; instead of Michael, Misha. Being ignorant of the language and usages of Russia, foreigners can have no idea of how such lack of taste jars. It is as though one spoke of Julot Massenet or Popol Dukas!¹¹

This entire passage was omitted in the German translation.

Stravinsky's initial response to the cuts was, not surprisingly, one of annoyance. He pointed out to Hürlimann that neither the English, American, nor Spanish publishers had found it necessary to make alterations. “Please do not keep bringing up that passage about Bayreuth ...” he wrote.

I can refer you to another passage that you cut which I know would in no way offend the censor or the Nazi reader; it is the passage at the end in which I discuss diminutive Russian names, which Jewish virtuosos have the bad taste to use formally.¹²

Stravinsky seems to have forgotten, however, that this ‘inoffensive’ comment was linked to his praise of Jewish violinists.¹³ In Germany, Hürlimann reminded him, such praise could easily provoke a campaign against him.¹⁴

Although he complained of the alterations, Stravinsky understood the need for them. Indeed, a request contained in his reply to Hürlimann's very first letter reveals his tacit acceptance of the situation. He asks that in each instance of an alteration, the reader be informed by a note giving the relevant page number in the original edition;¹⁵ Hürlimann felt that this would prove annoying to German readers.¹⁶ He made a counter-suggestion: a prefatory

note could indicate that the French edition was the authoritative text.¹⁷ Stravinsky initially rejected this idea;¹⁸ it was disagreement on this point that generated most of the subsequent correspondence.

If Atlantis cannot come to an agreement with the composer regarding the cuts, Hürlimann wrote, the sole solution would be to publish a Swiss-only edition, with German booksellers having to order the book from Zürich.¹⁹ However, he added, given Switzerland's population of three million, as compared to Germany's nearly seventy million, such an edition would not be as financially advantageous. Perhaps Hürlimann thought to appeal to Stravinsky's well-known business sense with this suggestion. If so, he must have been disappointed by the composer's reply. Through an intermediary, the Neuchâtel publisher Richard Heyd, Stravinsky simply replied that he had nothing to add to his previous letter.²⁰

In response, Hürlimann directed a letter to Heyd, in which he outlined three proposals.²¹ The first (his original plan) was to publish the translation with the present cuts. A prefatory statement would indicate that several changes had been made (without giving specific details), and would note that the French text was the authoritative version. This, Hürlimann added, was the only form in which the Berlin and Leipzig distributors would accept the book for sale in Germany. The second proposal was to restore the cuts. This would mean that the book could be only obtained from Zürich, resulting in a loss of about eighty per cent of sales as compared to this first proposal. The third proposal was to prepare an abridged edition of the work, which could be sold in Germany.

Whether Hürlimann seriously considered the second and third of these proposals as viable options for either Stravinsky or Atlantis is doubtful. He must have known that neither the second proposal, with its severely limited distribution, nor the third, involving even more extensive cuts than originally planned, would appeal to the composer any more than it did to Atlantis.²² It is likely that the publisher conceived the alternative options simply as a means of stressing the appropriateness of his original plan. If so, he achieved his aim. On 4 September Stravinsky capitulated, indicating his acceptance of the first proposal.²³ The German edition appeared shortly thereafter, published both in Zürich and Berlin.

For several years after January 1933, Stravinsky had been widely reviled in Germany as a modernist, an 'internationalist', a 'cultural Bolshevik', and (as persistent rumor had it) a Jew. Performances of his music were rare, and the composer himself was offered no engagements whatever. Though many hardliners continued to reject his music as 'degenerate' (as illustrated most strikingly by the composer's inclusion in the now infamous "Entartete Musik" exhibition of 1938), after 1936 the long-term efforts of Stravinsky's German supporters finally began to bear fruit. This was clear by the beginning of the 1937–38 season, which saw more performances of his music than did any other during the Nazi period.²⁴

As part of their campaign to show that Stravinsky's music deserved a place in the cultural life of the new Germany, his supporters were quick to draw attention to the appropriateness of the composer's views as expressed in the *Erinnerungen*.²⁵ These included his dislike of the 'modern' label, his admiration for German music, the importance of his Russian background, and his anti-Communist stance.

"In his recent autobiography, Stravinsky protests against being labelled a 'Zukunftsmusiker'". Thus Karl Laux began his review of *Jeu de cartes*, a work whose European première, conducted by Karl Böhm on 13 October at the Dresdner Staatsoper, was a highlight of the 1937–38 season.²⁶ For his part, Hans Schnoor, in his review of the occasion, was careful to stress the composer's opposition to communism.²⁷ Noting Stravinsky's "witty challenge" to "cultural Bolshevism", an apparent reference to the composer's criticism of a Beethoven article published in *Izvestia*,²⁸ Schnoor claimed that Germans could join with Stravinsky "in a feeling of European solidarity that opposes any form of asiatic barbarism".

Fritz Bouquet made pointed reference to Stravinsky's admiration of Beethoven in his review of the German première of the *Dumbarton Oaks* Concerto, which took place the following October in Mainz.²⁹ After quoting at length from Stravinsky's praise of Beethoven's instrumentation, including the German master's "profound wisdom" in the distribution of parts and "carefulness" in instrumental writing,³⁰ Bouquet applies Stravinsky's praise to his own music. "Logical consistency, indeed the necessity of each note", he writes, is also characteristic of Stravinsky's new Concerto. Nor does Bouquet neglect to mention the obvious influence of Bach in this work.

Stravinsky's admiration for the German tradition is also emphasized, for example, by Jürgen Petersen in his review of the *Erinnerungen*.³¹ He remarks that although Stravinsky's music is generally judged to be "intellectual and cold" (favorite epithets of the anti-Stravinsky camp), the composer has words of "highest admiration" for Schubert and Weber.³² Significantly, Petersen also points out that Stravinsky's music is firmly "rooted" in the Russian musical tradition.

The importance of Stravinsky's Russian "roots" to his reception in Nazi Germany was spelled out by Richard Ohlekopf later the same year.³³ Prompted by Stravinsky's inclusion in the "Entartete Musik" exhibition, the editor of the *Signale für die musikalische Welt* disagreed with the charge of "internationalism" levelled against Stravinsky by his *völkischen* opponents. On the contrary, he claims, the strong Russian character of Stravinsky's music is proof of its "national" orientation – and thus its suitability for German audiences.

Ohlekopf's comments were echoed by Herbert Gerigk.³⁴ As musical spokesman for the Amt Rosenberg and editor of *Die Musik*, Gerigk was an influential member of the Nazi musical establishment. Indeed, the fact that his comments appeared in an official Party publication supports the observation that all but the fiercest of Stravinsky's *völkischen* enemies gradually abandoned their opposition to his music.

Although Gerigk (like Ohlekoopf) does refer directly to Stravinsky's *Erinnerungen*, his defense of the composer draws directly on views expressed therein. Stravinsky's "Aryan" background can no longer be doubted, Gerigk writes – even though some of his earlier works, such as *L'Histoire du soldat* and *Le Sacre du printemps*, come "perilously close" to "Jewish-inspired degeneracy". Stravinsky is an admirer of German music, he continues, an outspoken enemy of Communism, and his music, regularly performed in Germany, exhibits an unmistakably "national" character. In Gerigk's view, however, Stravinsky, as a representative of a foreign *Volkstum*, can never belong to "our cultural circle". But so long as "false prophets" do not hold up his music as an "ideal" for German composers, he sees no reason to exclude Stravinsky from the country's musical life.

The appearance in 1937 of the German translation of Stravinsky's *Chroniques de ma vie*, pruned to avoid offending the "Nazi reader" and timed to take advantage of the renewed interest in his music, was thus a boon to his German supporters, who made good use of a number of the composer's views in their on-going campaign to secure for him a place in Germany's musical life. Combined with such high-profile events as the Berlin première of *Le Baiser de la fée* and, especially, the European première of *Jeu de cartes*, the publication of Stravinsky's *Erinnerungen* contributed to what was described in Germany as the composer's rehabilitation.

Every subsequent German publication of Stravinsky's autobiography, including the most recent edition of 1983, retains evidence of the circumstances under which the translation was first published. At the end of 1951, some fourteen years after the work appeared, Hürlimann contacted Stravinsky about the possibility of issuing a new edition. The Bayreuth cuts, he noted, would now be restored.³⁵ Hürlimann seems to have forgotten, however, that a second passage had also been cut, namely, Stravinsky's comments on Russian-Jewish violinists. Nothing came of plans for a new edition until 1957, the year of Stravinsky's seventy-fifth birthday, when the autobiography was published in a compilation volume issued jointly by Atlantis and B. Schott's Söhne.³⁶ This edition includes a full translation of Stravinsky's comments on Bayreuth. His remarks concerning Jewish violinists, however, are absent.³⁷ The following year a paperback version of the autobiography appeared. Although a preface informs the reader that this edition restores "die seinerzeit notwendigen Kürzungen", the passage in question is still lacking.³⁸ Nor is it to be found in the most recent edition of the work, published by Schott's in 1983.³⁹ Thus Stravinsky's comments, excised for political reasons in 1937, have never appeared in a German edition of his autobiography.

1 Igor Strawinsky, *Erinnerungen*, transl. Richard Tüngel, Zürich/Berlin 1937.

2 See Joan Evans, "Die Rezeption der Musik Igor Strawinskys in Hitler-Deutschland", in: *Zur Situation der Musik in Deutschland in den dreißiger und vierziger Jahren*, ed. Hans Jörg Jans, Laaber, forthcoming.

- 3 Letters of 23 July and 16 August 1937. The correspondence is preserved in the Igor Stravinsky Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. The letters are written in German (Hürlimann) and French (Stravinsky).
- 4 Hürlimann, letter of 16 August. The première of *Le Baiser de la fée*, originally planned for the 1936–37 season and then rescheduled for 22 September 1937, finally took place on 2 October.
- 5 Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, New York 1962, pp. 38–40.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 7 Letter of 26 August.
- 8 Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, middle of page 38 (“The performance that I saw there ...”) to top of page 39 (“... another act – finis!”).
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 40 (“To confound these two distinct lines of thought ...” to “...competition with the Church.”) In addition, Stravinsky’s demand, at the beginning of this paragraph, for an end to the “unseemly and sacrilegious conception of art as religion and the theatre as a temple” (*Ibid.*, p. 39) was both shortened and softened: “Wie widerspruchsvoll die Ästhetik ist, die Kunst und Religion, Theater und Tempel gleichsetzt ...” (Stravinsky, *Erinnerungen*, p. 52).
- 10 Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, p. 166.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 166–167.
- 12 Letter of 22 August. Translation from *Stravinsky. Selected Correspondence. Volume II*, ed. Robert Craft, New York 1984, p. 502 (where the date is incorrectly given as 22 November).
- 13 Stravinsky writes that he does not have his French edition at hand.
- 14 Letter of 26 August. The publisher noted that the Russische Musik-Verlag agreed that the cuts were essential. Still, he wrote, the passage concerning Jewish artists might be retained, if Stravinsky felt it to be absolutely necessary, leaving only the Bayreuth cuts. Stravinsky did not pursue this possibility.
- 15 Letter of 17 August.
- 16 Letter of 28 August.
- 17 Letter of 21 August.
- 18 Letter of 22 August.
- 19 Letter of 26 August.
- 20 Letter of 30 August.
- 21 Letter of 1 September.
- 22 If Atlantis had been content to restrict the publication of the work to Zürich, surely it would have pursued this option earlier, instead of waiting until 1937, when conditions in Germany had become more favorable.
- 23 On 2 September Heyd had forwarded Hürlimann’s letter to Stravinsky, summarizing the contents and suggesting that the composer accept the first proposal.
- 24 Most notably, October 1937 saw both the Berlin première of *Le Baiser de la fée* at the Staatsoper and the European première of *Jeu de cartes* at the Dresdner Staatsoper. Concert performances of *Jeu* were given in Hamburg, Berlin, Wiesbaden and Münster between January and May 1938, while in February of that year Stravinsky travelled to Berlin to record the work for Telefunken. *Petrushka* was staged in Mannheim that season, the first time in more than a decade, and several new productions of *Firebird* took place. In May the Braunschweig Landestheater performed *Perséphone*, whose German première it had presented at the end of the previous season; the work was also staged in April 1938 at the third Baden-Baden festival.
- 25 The autobiography “has met with much interest”, Strecker informed the composer on 21 October 1937, adding that it “should help to dispel rumors”. Translation from *Stravinsky. Selected Correspondence. Volume II*, p. 502.
- 26 Karl Laux, “Strawinskys ‘Kartenspiele’”, in: *Deutsche Zukunft*, 24 October 1937 (Laux’s reference is to the closing paragraph of Stravinsky’s autobiography). This review also appeared the following month in *Neues Musikblatt*, where the change of attitude towards Stravinsky’s music is clearly reflected in the subtitle: “‘Das Kartenspiel’ in Dresden. Der neue Strawinsky” (pages 5 and 7).
- 27 Hans Schnoor, “Das tanzende Kartenspiel. Strawinskys neues Ballett im Opernhaus umjubelt”, in: *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 14 October 1937.

- 28 Stravinsky's extensive comments on Beethoven comprise pages 115–119 of his *Autobiography* (here pp. 116–117).
- 29 Fritz Bouquet, "Beifallsumrauschter Gieseking – Strawinskys neues Kammerkonzert. Erstes Städtisches Symphoniekonzert als bedeutsamer Auftakt des Mainzer Musikwinters", in: *Mainzer Anzeiger*. The undated clipping is preserved among Stravinsky's papers; the première took place on 19 October 1938.
- 30 Stravinsky. *An Autobiography*, p. 118.
- 31 Jürgen Petersen, "Strawinskys Erinnerungen", in: *Neues Musikblatt*, February 1938, pp. 3–4.
- 32 See Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, pp. 159–160.
- 33 Richard Ohlekopf, "Gedanken über ein Fragezeichen hinter Strawinskij", in: *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 96/48 (23 November 1938), pp. 641–642. Ohlekopf's article comprises the strongest defense of Stravinsky to appear in the Nazi period.
- 34 Herbert Gerigk, "Musikpolitische Umschau", in: *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* 106 (January 1939), pp. 86–88.
- 35 Letter of 7 December 1951.
- 36 *Igor Strawinsky. Leben und Werk – von ihm selbst. Erinnerungen. Musikalische Poetik. Antworten auf 35 Fragen*, Foreword by Willi Schuh, Zürich/Mainz 1957.
- 37 See *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- 38 Igor Strawinsky, *Mein Leben*, München, 1958 ("Mit Genehmigung des Atlantis Verlages Zürich und des Verlages B. Schott's Söhne, Mainz"). See page 153. Craft apparently refers to this volume when he states, "The complete text [sic!] was not published in German until 1958." *Stravinsky. Selected Correspondence. Volume II*, p. 502, n8.
- 39 *Igor Strawinsky, Schriften und Gespräche I*, Introduction by Wolfgang Burde, Mainz 1983. See page 163.