

2 Stravinsky as modernist

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One way of characterising the modernist period might be to say that it was the age of Picasso, Stravinsky and Joyce: geniuses who brought about revolutionary changes in the procedures for their arts and publicised them from Paris, so contributing to the myth that it was the avant-garde capital of Europe at that time. Other capitals were home to great geniuses as well – Kandinsky, Schoenberg, Mann – people who, while quite different from Stravinsky, were also very influential modernists and were well out of his cultural range. Indeed, to understand them, we would be moved towards modernist considerations to which Stravinsky was deeply antipathetic. His ‘rivalry’ with Schoenberg (whether it was actual or invented by defenders of the atonal, such as Adorno) is not nearly so important as his intellectual differences from him, including his refusal to write the kind of music that ‘develops’, as it does within the German tradition. But it is the modernist tradition in France – that of Debussy, Proust and Matisse – which influenced at least the early Stravinsky. This was a world that grew out of the Symbolist tendencies so strongly supported by Diaghilev and his circle in Russia¹ and one that produced works such as *Fireworks*, *Zvezdolikiy*, *The Firebird* and, most obviously, *The Faun and the Shepherdess*, influenced as it was by Debussy, Ravel and Dukas.

It is this belonging to a particular tradition which is most important for understanding Stravinsky as a modernist: as we shall see, there were plenty of inspiring modernist ideas, and Stravinsky was highly resistant to many of them (to the potential of the unconscious and the irrational, for example). Stravinsky, very like T. S. Eliot, was immensely conscious of the past, and exceptionally well placed to be aware of contemporary avant-garde activity in all the arts, but he nevertheless selected a very conservative tradition in which to work. He is a conservative innovator. This seems paradoxical only if you think, wrongly, that a socially critical, leftist avant garde is central to modernism, and forget the contribution of conservative modernists such as Pound, Eliot and Lewis in England, and Valéry, Cocteau and Claudel in France.

These differences do not seem to have mattered much to Stravinsky, whose commitments (to a sense of Russia, to orthodox religion) lay well outside the worldly politics that sometimes gripped friends of his, such as Picasso. In any case, his composing life, as it most dramatically came into

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contact with the public, was formed in the context of a hardly radical or critical institution, the Diaghilev ballet. Those critics of modernism who use 'bourgeois' as a term of criticism or disapprobation should see the dandified and obsessively money-conscious Stravinsky as a prime target.

There is a well-known drawing of Stravinsky by Picasso, made in May 1920, which depicts him in the style of Ingres.² The composer of *The Rite of Spring* is shown here in anything but a primitivist or avant-gardist mode. He looks like the conformist that he is. But Picasso has chosen the right mode in which to portray him. For both artists changed their styles in the 1920s, after revolutionising the languages for their arts before the War with their most radically avant-garde works. They moved on, from the invention of Cubism (on the part of Picasso and Braque) and the startling rhythmic complexities and violence of *The Rite of Spring*, to a new, neoclassical style. Quite apart from their everyday friendship and co-operation (on *Pulcinella*, for example), it is this willingness to change styles which unites them. This stylistic metamorphosis after radical beginnings is the sign of the extraordinary fashionability of modernism after the war, and signifies for many observers the compromise of artistic by social values.

Stravinsky was perpetually sensitive, in many ways, and not just as a man of the theatre, to the demands of patrons and of audiences. He was always inclined to communicate his position, his intentions, and his nationalist and religious commitments to an audience, and with some clarity, whether in the concert hall, the lecture theatre (through Roland-Manuel) or in conversation (through the person of Robert Craft). His very lucidity, even if occasionally borrowed from others, is a great disguiser of any internal conflict. He is at the opposite pole from the Expressionist artists of his time, such as Kandinsky and Schoenberg.

Like Picasso and Joyce, he is a great shape changer and, like them, he uses Greek mythology as one of his central justificatory escapes from orthodox religion to public drama. After *The Rite*, the solitary, isolated, self-imposed attempt to revolutionise the very language of music from within was not for him. Indeed, it took him a long time to show any sympathy for such aims as they manifested themselves in Schoenberg and, more discreetly, in Webern, who no doubt seemed to be far less Expressionist in his aims, and in his 'language less heavily founded in the most turgid and graceless Brahms'.³ Schoenberg's (self) portrait, with its great red glare of the visionary in the eyes, is the kind of act of self-exposure that Stravinsky would have found inexcusable. And, so far as I know, he never shows much sympathy for Expressionist art, despite the violence of *The Rite*, and perhaps comes near to it only in thinking of Chagall as a possible designer for a revival of *Les Noces* and in his early reactions to *Pierrot lunaire*. He is not, to that extent, a dedicated avant-garde artist.

By upbringing, training and perhaps inclination a man of the theatre, Stravinsky was what we would call a dedicated networker, whose talents once he came to Paris were immediately recognised in the triumph of *The Firebird*. He then plays through *The Rite* on the piano with Debussy; his close friends include the musicians Ravel, Satie, Schmitt and de Falla, the writers Cocteau, Gide, Claudel and Valéry,⁴ the painters Picasso, Léger and Derain. And they work with or for him: hence, for example, Picasso's design for the cover of *Ragtime* comes about through the mediation of Cendrars for the Éditions de la Sirène. His many conversations with Craft, which until the recent publications of Taruskin and Walsh have very much controlled the image that Stravinsky wanted to project of himself, are often anecdotal memories of closely knit groups of his friends.⁵ And with fame, the metropolitan, modernist, cultural village of Paris was opened to him (offering opportunities undreamt of in the feuding and provincial St Petersburg). Some of these opportunities were rather unlikely ones, such as when Blaise Cendrars asked him to write music for a proposed film about Quixote directed by Abel Gance, and when in 1922 Picabia wanted him to set his play *Les Yeux chauds*.⁶ But Stravinsky generally avoided any connection with movements like Futurism (while being amused by it) and Surrealism. This modernist metropolitanism meant that Stravinsky, as an already well-read and sophisticated artist, continued to be closely and discriminatingly aware (at least by his later account) of French developments in all the major arts.⁷

A close attention to the visual arts was one of the advantages of working for Diaghilev, and Stravinsky co-operated with some of the greatest artists of his time in staging his works, from the designs of Golovine and the Bakst costumes for *Firebird* and the Benois décor and costumes for *Petrushka*, to the Matisse designs for *The Nightingale* (which he did not like).⁸ Benois describes Stravinsky as being deeply interested in painting, architecture and sculpture. But the stage designs with which he was most familiar were rarely avant-garde, and his co-operation with writers such as Cocteau and Gide also kept clear of real avant-garde aesthetic considerations (despite Cocteau's impresario-like activities) and has an air of compromise. He never set avant-garde poetry, for example, in contrast to a composer such as Poulenc. His most advanced text is probably that for *Les Noces*, which he compares to the work of Joyce: he tells us that it is 'a suite of typical wedding episodes told through quotations of typical talk... As a collection of clichés and quotations of typical wedding sayings it might be compared to one of those scenes in *Ulysses* in which the reader seems to be overhearing scraps of conversation without the connecting thread of discourse.'⁹ He was well aware of the politics of some of the advanced writing of his time. But then it is typical of modernist artists that they often worked within quite closely knit groups, as did the circles round Picasso and Braque, Gertrude Stein in

her Paris apartment, Virginia Woolf in Bloomsbury, and Pound and Lewis in London at the time of the Vorticist movement. On the other hand, Stravinsky never belonged to a modernist movement such as Imagism or Dada or Surrealism, or Schoenberg's Society for Private Musical Performances; and in his neoclassical period he did not need to ally himself to Les Six. On the other hand, the Ballets Russes as a whole should be seen as a modernist group, even if it is less obviously experimental than, say, Futurist theatre groups.¹⁰

And, of course, Stravinsky was making a living. Students of modernism have recently become (rather too disapprovingly) interested in its economic underpinnings;¹¹ and it is important for our understanding of Stravinsky that he had to make a transition from a considerable dependence upon a famous, aristocratic, extravagant and very well-advertised, if not always solvent, institution, which attracted extraordinary patronage (Diaghilev, for example, playing off Misia Sert and Coco Chanel), towards another source of patronage. He finally found this, like so many others, in the United States, a country described by Auden as 'so large, / So friendly, and so rich'.¹²

Thanks to Diaghilev and his extraordinary talent for bringing together a unified 'team' right across the arts, Stravinsky became, with *The Firebird*, 'a major figure in the world of music overnight'.¹³ To achieve this, it is necessary to work in an artistic mode that thrives on publicity. That is exactly what Stravinsky had. As a man of the theatre and later of the concert hall, he developed a career that could always be based upon the pragmatic needs of a particular audience in a particular place, and on giving pleasure. (The situation was very different for Schoenberg and his followers.)

His early music had characteristics, well adapted to the theatre, that – much modified – were to be sustained after his recognition as a major composer; that is to say, he had an extraordinary stylistic adaptability. Of course, *The Firebird* and *Petrushka* are unique; but they show an extraordinary eclecticism in their influences. This is, perhaps, what you would expect in a ballet and opera tradition that embraced the work of Borodin, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and (even) Glazunov. Stravinsky developed his language by working through such influences and metamorphosing them (Picasso-like) within masterpieces, but he only really begins to come within the modernist rather than the symbolist paradigm in the (to me, doubtful) early montage techniques of *Petrushka*. Here, folk influences combine with the popular mixture of high and low art (in his inclusion of Viennese and popular urban tunes) which is so typical of later modernism. We are close to the world of Toulouse-Lautrec, Seurat, Satie, Debussy, early Picasso and others. As Glenn Watkins puts it, 'Stravinsky's techniques in *Petrushka* differ from Satie's only in detail; both imply vernacular and pseudo-vernacular sources projected by overlap and intercut, and both embrace a nostalgia without tears'.¹⁴

Stravinsky's career as a composer of expensive-to-produce ballets as well as of concert music has to be understood, then, as driven by the need for a popular adaptability, for serious patronage and for large fees, as well as by independent aesthetic considerations (hence, for example, the piano concerto that he wrote for himself to play in exclusivity for five years). But it is nevertheless difficult to show in other than banal cultural materialist terms exactly when or how such monetary considerations affected his aesthetic decisions, for he was a composer whose inner artistic convictions were to prove to be very far from worldly, even as he maintained a way of life and an outer appearance that were entirely fashionable and, indeed, dandified. Stravinsky's relationship with money requires quite a deep psychological explanation, which is offered without Freudian oversimplification by Walsh.¹⁵

Stravinsky as revolutionary?

The rich Parisian network sketched above (which could be paralleled elsewhere, though with less *éclat*) ensured that you could be a modernist by association (in the way that figures such as Cocteau, Anna de Noailles, Gleizes and Metzinger, Auric and Tailleferre were). These 'fashionable' modernists could promote and adapt styles invented by others.

Stravinsky is a genuine revolutionary (much as he disliked the idea), but only up to a point. That is what makes him like Picasso, Schoenberg, Apollinaire and Joyce, who also moved through the extraordinarily successful adaptation of available late-nineteenth-century or symbolist modes (such as Picasso's post-Impressionist and Blue Period paintings, Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*, Apollinaire's more symbolist poems, and Joyce's Chekhovian *Dubliners*), to the production of a startlingly innovative work, which revealed completely new possibilities for the basic techniques of their art. Picasso did this with the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), Joyce with the opening pages of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914), Schoenberg with the last movement of his Second String Quartet (1908), and Stravinsky with *The Rite of Spring* (1913).

He thus came through to the prototypically modernist avant-garde 'scandal' of *The Rite*, which was in its way as unpredictable as the other examples cited above (though Stravinsky's implausible 'I was the vessel through which *Le Sacre* passed' has all the marks of a fashionable, anachronistic, post-Surrealist explanation which transfers the impulse for innovation into the unconscious or the dreaming faculty). Nor was *The Rite* really scandalous, despite the noisy manifestations at its first performance, which were vital side-taking publicity of a kind that has done yeoman service for many more or less 'avant-garde' works. This kind of row was what Futurists

counted on; but shocking your rivals, the bourgeoisie, or the merely ignorant, does not get you very far. For success and later influence, you need to impress an artistically informed intelligentsia, and that is exactly what the Ballets Russes, and *The Rite of Spring* – which was very soon widely performed as a concert work – could do.

It was soon applauded and accepted everywhere, and it had to be, precisely because it presented something new, which, however much it might have been detested by conservatives, would have seemed to any well-informed consumer of contemporary art to demand precisely the same kind of attention as the other works that were even then seen as part of the artistic avant garde. This is for precisely the same reasons as apply to Picasso, Joyce and Schoenberg; for the *Rite* was like nothing else in 1913. It would be clear that something had changed irrevocably, and a newly available technique would become apparent (as it was to Eliot, in proclaiming a new post-Einsteinian ‘mythical method’ for literature after reading Joyce, which he adapted for ‘Gerontion’ and *The Waste Land*). Stravinsky had taken apart the very basics of the language of the art involved, as is most obvious in the still extraordinary treatment of rhythm in the *Rite*. In it, dissonance for once does not rob music of movement. The need for harmonic movement is overridden.

Where a chord is so dissonant that the ear cannot sense a possible resolution, the music stands still. Stravinsky’s achievement, and it was unprecedented, was to give a crucial structural importance to rhythm instead of harmony, and to use the tension of dissonance to fuel this powerful engine still further.¹⁶

This development in the *Rite* was as radical as the taking apart of perspectival relationships in Cubist painting, and the disruption of logical ordering and ‘normal’ syntax in the newly disjunctive writing of such as Apollinaire, Marinetti and other Futurists, Joyce and Eliot, whose ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ (written 1909, published 1915/17), was the work by which Pound in 1914 recognised that Eliot had ‘modernised himself all on his own’ – just as Stravinsky had. But it is important to note that Stravinsky later emphasised that his work was not so much revolutionary, as an extension of the past.

in music advance is only in the sense of developing the instruments of the language – we are able to do new things in rhythm, in sound, in structure, we claim greater concentration in certain ways and therefore contend that we have evolved, in this one sense, progressively. But a step in this evolution does not cancel the one before.¹⁷

There is, of course, more to be said about *The Rite*; but the internal, technical nature of Stravinsky’s ‘revolution’ needs to be emphasised – finely adapted though it may have been to an orgiastic ritual in the theatre – with

yet another erotically engaging sacrifice of the female, to succeed those in *Salome*, *Elektra* and Schmitt's *Tragédie de Salomé*. For Stravinsky was not one of those artists and intellectuals who, in being affected by the widespread late-nineteenth-century propaganda against past lies in favour of the 'Modern', were encouraged (by Nietzsche among others) to see themselves as *critics*, and so divorced from and marginal to the society in which they lived. It is not clear that Stravinsky as a good, landowning bourgeois with an extraordinary loyalty to a large dependent family, however cranky or useless or reactionary (not surprising given their position after 1917), would have had much time for that modernist strain that runs from Flaubert through Ibsen and Freud, which lays bare bourgeois self-deceptions. (There are no significant references to Freud that I can find in any of Stravinsky's extant writings or conversations. An amazing omission.)

In *The Rite*, Stravinsky is not trying to say something radically new and challenging about sex or women or the social order; it was always intended to be a viscerally exciting work, with all the attendant sensationalism involved in its post-Polovtsian (if more clumsily choreographed) group uproar round the human sacrifice of an attractive young girl. But he might well have been aware of the strong relationship between Roerich's treatment of the scenario and fashionable modernist ideas of myth, primitivism and tribal art, and so *The Rite* is one of the key works for the modernist interest in the 'primitive'.¹⁸ It comes after the *Demoiselles*, and it is the contemporary of Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, with its lyrical appraisal of the sexual appeal of an African statue; its thirteen pictures or stations, plus two preludes, enact, not for the last time in Stravinsky's work, a public ritual of a kind which, many were coming to think in this period, must be the primitive basis and origin of drama as a genre.

This radically new language is not really exploited by Stravinsky to the same extent in later works: the nearest he comes to it is in the *Three Pieces for String Quartet* of 1914, although again the second movement looks back to the turn of the century, in that it is inspired by the movements of the clown Little Tich. Even here there is a connection to the world of Toulouse-Lautrec and Debussy. Not a few attempts have been made to see these *Three Pieces* (and other works of Stravinsky) as somehow related to other movements in the arts of the time – the obvious radical innovation being that of Cubism. So Watkins sees the first of the *Three Pieces for String Quartet* as 'a virtual demonstration piece, a *reductio* of Cubist premises'.¹⁹ But this is a typical example of the attempt to make what are no more than analogies, between ambiguous referentiality in painting and its apparent counterpart in music, and music without text does not even attempt to refer to particulars in the real world. Similarly analogical is the claim that this music superimposes three essential layers, which are allowed to

be independent (like the conflicting points of view in a Cubist painting) through ‘different phraseological lengths, variable periodicity, and independent tonal orientation . . . until they locate a logical terminating point’.²⁰ Stravinsky certainly knew about some versions of Cubism, in the work of Goncharova, Laryonov, Malevich, Picasso and others. But the Russian artists associated with Diaghilev did not have any ‘shared commitment to the premises of Cubo-Futurism’ in anything but a very selective sense.²¹

The argument for the Cubist character of any of Stravinsky’s work thus depends upon some pretty loose analogies – we can see, for example, that Cubism and *The Rite* and ‘Prufrock’ are all disruptive of previously acceptable single types of ordering, as in narrative; that they juxtapose rather than put in logical order; and that they (perhaps) also contest the idea of a single ordered viewpoint on the world, though how a piece of music can express that without text is difficult to explain (the analogy between a conflict of keys and a conflict of ‘viewpoints’ is popular). Watkins is nevertheless surely right to say that the ‘conscious movement towards simultaneous non-alliance in matters of harmony, rhythm, phraseology and cadence appears as an increasingly observable fact of musical life’ in Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Ives, Debussy and Ravel.²² For him and for many others, this is like the ‘relativity’ of time and space in Cubism, where we have conflicting points of view of the same object, which are ‘simultaneous’, at least in the sense that they are to be seen together on the same two-dimensional surface). This lack of a background narrative order (for which the most obvious musical analogy is harmonic progression) is most obvious in the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, which certainly comes closest to a collage-like juxtaposition of its musical sections.

Stravinsky as traditionalist

After *The Rite*, Stravinsky quickly developed into another kind of modernist, typical of the post-war period, in which there was a change from the pre-war avant-garde formal experiments (which established the techniques of atonality, Cubism and the juxtapository stream of consciousness) to an adaptation of modernist technique to the production of a whole variety of socially acceptable, indeed fashionable, styles. Picasso, for example, was much berated by John Berger for giving in to this socialisation,²³ and we can see in the work of such figures as Dufy, Derain and the Delaunays a kind of ‘jazz modern’ style whereby modernism became acceptable to the luxury consumer. The trajectory of the Diaghilev ballet after *Les Noces* – in producing work like *Les Biches*, *Le Train bleu* and *Les Matelots* – can be seen in the same light. Modernist techniques were superimposed, in an allusively sophisticated kind of way, to quite obvious and often popular

subject-matter: as, for example, in much of the work of Stravinsky's friend Cocteau, who was a talented modernist imitator and trivialiser (his addition of a little trail of 'cubes' to his sketch of Stravinsky playing *The Rite* on the piano shows the extreme adaptability of 'modernist' styles of representation to the popular caricature or cartoon). Goncharova's backcloth for the 1926 revival of *The Firebird* is similarly well adapted, to look like an easily legible Klee cityscape, with some Slavonic onion domes thrown in. The Diaghilevian theatre as spectacle thus democratised, popularised and synthesised a number of available modernist styles.

The most obvious example of Stravinsky's own mixture of styles and rapprochement between high and low in art is perhaps his *Ragtime*. It is a descendant of Debussy's 'Golliwogg's Cake-Walk'; and jazz themes recur in Stravinsky through to the *Ebony Concerto* of 1945. This adaptation of a popular music which was easily to be heard in Paris in this period,²⁴ is also to be found in works by Poulenc, Milhaud and others. Given the extraordinary celebrity of Josephine Baker and her colleagues in the famous *Revue nègre*, Stravinsky might well have thought that he was producing an amusing essay on a different kind of 'primitivism', that of the 'negro'. Stravinsky thought he had 'the idea of creating a composite portrait of this new dance music' in a concert piece, as other composers had done for the waltz,²⁵ and his phrase reveals the way in which his music can be thought of as a parallel to the juxtapository construction of collage in much contemporary painting. This putting bits of things together into 'constructions' (rather than developing them, by harmonic progression or by extended narrative) is typical of the arts of the twenties. For Adorno this is an 'infantile phase' of Stravinsky's composition. In the *Piano-Rag-Music*, 'anxiety before dehumanisation is recast into the joys of revealing such dehumanisation, and, in the final analysis, into the pleasures of that same death wish whose symbolism was prepared by the much hated *Tristan*'. It is a '*danse macabre*' round the 'fetish character' of consumer goods.²⁶ This ludicrous judgement is a fine example of the incongruities that arise if you try to ensnare Stravinsky – and his putative intentions and subconscious motivations – in a mixture of Freud and Marx.

Ragtime, *The Soldier's Tale*, *Pulcinella* and *Mavra* reflect the stylistic pluralism, and the interest in the popular arts, that existed in the 1920s. Stravinsky is very like Picasso in the same period, who moved from the pre-war primitivism of the *Demoiselles* and the 'analytic' or 'hermetic' cubist style, through collage towards (by 1915) a far more accessible 'synthetic' mode, full of Harlequins and clowns, and then beyond that, to an Ingres-like reproductive classicism (just as in *Pulcinella*), which can be seen in his portrait of Stravinsky – and in his portraits of Diaghilev ballerinas, one of whom (Olga Kokhlova) he married.

Stravinsky's surprising contribution to this regressive Harlequinade (once more to meet the theatrical demands of Diaghilev) was the (re)composition of *Pulcinella* from work originally attributed to Pergolesi, with costume designs by Picasso. It was classical, clear, not at all Russian, and French rather than Germanic, and so came perilously close to the mere pastiche of other ballets of the period, which were also spiced-up arrangements of previous music, such as Respighi–Rossini's *La boutique fantasque* and Tommasini–Scarlatti's *The Good-Humoured Ladies*. Constant Lambert (himself not above the popular style) hated this development:

a composer with no creative urge and no sense of style can take medieval words, set them in the style of Bellini, add 20th century harmony, develop both in the sequential and formal manner of the 18th century, and finally score the whole thing for jazz band . . . These scrapbook ballets were of course only a more grandiose and theatrical presentation of the scrapbook taste which is considered so modern and 'amusing' when applied to interior decoration.

Lambert saw the Stravinsky of *Pulcinella* as 'like a child delighted with a book of eighteenth-century engravings, yet not so impressed that it has any twinges of conscience about reddening the noses, or adding moustaches and beards in thick black pencil'. The result, for Lambert, is 'a complete confusion between the expressive and the formal content of the eighteenth-century style . . . like a savage standing in delighted awe before those two symbols of an alien civilisation, the top hat and the *pot de chambre*, [Stravinsky] is apt to confuse their functions'.²⁷

These later critical reactions did not of course prevent *Pulcinella* from being of immense importance for a change in Stravinsky's aesthetic – the point at which he thought he had taken on a quite new kind of motivating idea – for he called it his 'discovery of the past, the epiphany through which the whole of [his] late work became possible'.²⁸ What saves *Pulcinella* from being mere pastiche and puts it into the mainstream of Stravinsky's modernist works is an astringency, an irony and detachment which are already characteristic of his works from *Petrushka* on, and which extends itself into all the stylistic parodies of this period. As Walsh puts it:

In 1917 it would still have been possible to look at Stravinsky's work and grade it as, on the one hand, the 'real' Stravinsky of the *Pribaoutki* and the Russian ballets, and on the other the casual derivative Stravinsky of the easy pieces. In 1918 it no longer makes sense to separate these styles; they have all become part of the essential artist, the mixing up of tonal and modal allusions every bit as much as the jostling of modern popular dances, archetypal marches and folk ditties . . . The ironic effect of these colliding planes, so different from the calm objectivity of *The Wedding*, is

directly associated with the work's moralising tendency. As we listen to the 'Chorale' in the *Soldier's Tale*, it is hard to resist that sense of superior knowledge carefully avoided in *The Wedding*, which comes from the parodying of a solemn observance.²⁹

This detachment and humour is a formal and emotional characteristic which is shared by modernists in other arts, notably in the tradition through Laforgue and Apollinaire to Eliot, who in 1920 temporarily abandoned free verse for neoclassically strict quatrains in adapting Gautier.

Stravinsky is at his most witty and charming, and his most obviously neoclassical, in the Octet. He uses a visual analogy for this work: 'My Octet is a musical object. This object has a form and that form is influenced by the musical matter with which it is composed. The differences of matter determine the difference of form. One does not do the same with marble that one does with stone.'³⁰ In this and later works one can hear Bach given the inflections of jazz, Handelian slow introductions, toccata-like passages and so on. All this has the self-conscious, academic, reactionary (but not in this case as in so many others in France, nationalist) sense of the wish to go back to a better order for inspiration. Stravinsky in this period becomes more and more like T. S. Eliot, as a classicist and then as a Christian. Both men 'reconverted' in 1926, partly for reasons that are consistent with their (declared) conservative aesthetic.³¹ And Stravinsky, in writing music that is extremely allusive, was also preoccupied with the thought that even when a composer follows earlier forms and is anti-Expressionist and anti-Romantic, he can still have, as Eliot put it, 'a personality to express': 'In borrowing a form already established and consecrated, the creative artist is not in the least restricting the manifestations of his personality. On the contrary, it is more detached and stands out better, when it moves within the limits of a convention.'³²

It thus came about that the idea of a European canon was tied to a general modernist technique of allusion, and of an interrelationship between pictures, texts and music which was central to the thinking of many modernists. When Eliot tells us, in his famous essay on 'Tradition and the individual talent', that 'we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously',³³ he could be speaking for Stravinsky, Picasso, Joyce, Schoenberg and many others. In the post-war period, this aesthetic meant for Stravinsky a joining of a European tradition (and to some extent, the temporary exclusion or suppression of Russian influences). As his immensely cultivated and allusive later conversations show, he would rather have prided himself on this newly extended 'historical sense' as prescribed by Eliot, which involves

a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.³⁴

This does not mean succumbing to any ‘influence’, a word which can too often give a false impression of passivity. It is really a matter of paradigm adaptation, and that is exactly what neoclassicism involved, in music and in painting.

Eliot (much influenced by current conservative French thought) asserted in his rather later ‘The function of criticism’ (1923) that classicists ‘believe that men can not get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves’. This kind of doctrine was immensely influential in Europe after the war, though it was prepared for by writers like T. E. Hulme well before it:

Here is the root of all romanticism: that man the individual is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress.

One can define the classical quite clearly as the exact opposite to this. Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him.³⁵

This something outside (easily compatible, too, with the Christian view of ‘original sin’) could also secure a kind of impersonality in art, and was for many modernists in England and France a peculiar mixture of inherited myth and orthodox religion, both conceived as belonging to the society represented in the work of art. Stravinsky is no exception here. He creates rituals in his works which seem to take place quite independently of his own subjective position; indeed, he uses alienation effects (such as the pianos on stage in *Les Noces* and the narrator in *Oedipus Rex*) to secure this detachment. He took pride in the fact that the former work is ‘perfectly homogeneous, perfectly impersonal, and perfectly mechanical.’³⁶ The peasant band of earlier versions has given way to something far more traditional and abstracted. This aim at a basic archetype, rather than at nineteenth-century local detail and sentiment, is typically modernist. (It can also express nostalgia for a lost communitarian unity, and this, for Stravinsky, was only to be reconstructed, at some cost, in Orthodox religion.)

After *Les Noces* this sense of permanence was to be found in the revival of Greek myth in detached, Apollonian modernist modes. Like Joyce,

Stravinsky prefers the myth of timeless repetition, basic human beliefs, and some none too forcefully expressed, rather purified emotions in these later ballets. (Thus *The Fairy's Kiss* hardly rises to the full Tchaikovskian passion, though *Apollon musagète* brilliantly implies it.)

Oedipus Rex fits into a French modernist tradition of its own. (For example, Milhaud had provided music for Claudel to *Agamemnon* (1913–14), *Les Choéphores* (1915) and the *Eumenides* (1917–22).) *Oedipus* completes one trilogy, with *The Rite* and *Les Noces*, and leads towards another, from *Apollon musagète* through *Orpheus* to *Agon*. Its use of formulae from Handel oratorios, crowd scenes from the Bach Passions and so on is as suppressed as are its echoes of Verdi. It is a curiously creaky work, in which the narrator's explanations are peculiarly condescending, the use of Latin no doubt *très catholique* (old style, another 'universal authority') – but all the same a huge barrier to comprehension (though its meaning in English is often bathetic) – and the orchestration odd (one can sympathise at times with Schoenberg's thought in 1928 that it is 'a Stravinsky imitation by Krenek').³⁷ Stravinsky's literary discrimination failed him here, as it was later to do with Gide, but he had admired Cocteau's *Antigone* and so asked him to do the libretto for *Oedipus*, which was then put into Latin by Jean Daniélou. It is a work which, partly because of its allusions to other works, parades its own restraint. Stravinsky makes a rather teasing general remark about his ideals in this respect in his *Poetics of Music*:

What is important for the lucid ordering of the work – for its crystallisation – is that all the Dionysian elements which set the imagination of the artist in motion and make the life-sap rise must be properly subjugated before they intoxicate us, and must finally be made to submit to the law; Apollo demands it.³⁸

This third sacrifice is at the opposite extreme to that of the *Rite*, and it leads on to similar restraints in *Apollon musagète*, the *Symphony of Psalms* and *Perséphone*.

Stravinsky and Picasso and many others, in all the arts and in all the main capitals of modernism, thus became traditionalist, conservative modernists, and turned away from the experiments of Cubism and Futurism and early Expressionism to neoclassicism. Paul Dermé and Pierre Reverdy indicate some of the considerations that were involved, the former claiming that 'a period of exuberance and force must be followed by a period of organisation, stocktaking, and science, that's to say a classicist age',³⁹ and the latter that 'the moment came [in 1916] when one could talk about aesthetics . . . because the period was concerned with organisation, with the mustering of ideas, because *fantasy gave way* to a greater need for structure'.⁴⁰ This post-1918 reappraisal of the artist's relationship to the past opened up a new

aesthetic – of allusion, of relativistic contrast between cultures, and of the combination of their values – in an attempt to reconcile the apparent chaos of the modern world to a classical order; hence the kind of historical reconstruction we find in Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is at once a compendium of eighteen available experimental styles, and (for Eliot and others) an attempt to bring order through myth to 'the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'.⁴¹ This was, of course, only one tendency within modernism in general. It is clear from the fortunes of Dada after the war and Surrealism from at least 1922 on that the attempt to transform consciousness through various forms of Expressionism and the anarchism of fantasy was not going to go away. Picasso was soon drawn into these movements; Stravinsky kept well clear.

There are many conflicting causal explanations for this shift away from what could be seen as a dominant Cubist aesthetic. Kenneth E. Silver, for example, depends on the idea that the reaction against effects of the war included a turn towards a conservative defensive nationalism, which expressed itself in the adaptation of earlier styles.⁴² He says of Picasso, for example, that he turned to neoclassicism to escape criticism of his non-participation in the war, and so distanced himself from Cubism and aligned himself with values associated with the Mediterranean tradition. But this fails to notice his continued Cubism during the war, notably in the *Seated Man* of 1916; his exhibition of the *Demoiselles* in 1916; and most particularly his Cubist costumes for *Parade* in 1917, let alone the animated Cubism of his work for *Le tricorne* in 1919. Convincing though Silver's view may be for many French artists, it hardly applies to the fast-becoming-French but expatriate figure of Stravinsky, whose move towards classicism of all kinds must, I think, be explained in terms of a religious conservatism.

Other, more severe, leftist critics see these changes as a failure of nerve, as we move from revolutionary Cubism to pastiche to neoclassicism as the 'counterfeit Other' of the truly modern. Hence, also, Adorno's attack on Stravinsky for retaining tonality in a mutilated form, in contrast to Schoenberg's heroic pioneering of the twelve-note technique. For Marxist critics like Rosalind Krauss,⁴³ Stravinsky's music and Picasso's neoclassical work are equally 'fake', a 'borrowed music of the pastiche'. This makes it difficult to rationalise Schoenberg's reliance upon classical models as well in this period. And, although the contrast between linguistic radicalism and stylistic accommodation may well be a valid one, it takes some very odd assumptions about art, and distorted views of the historical development of modernism, to see the latter as a betrayal of the former, particularly when one considers the major works (including Schoenberg's own) that attempt a synthesis of the two. Stravinsky and Picasso both compromised, much

to the benefit of the enjoyability and intelligibility of their work. For some others who took the same route – Chirico, Severini, Derain – the same could not be said.

Nevertheless, for some interpreters of modernism the invention of new ('bourgeois-free') systems of meaning is of the essence, and any retreat from that is a betrayal of what they see as 'the modernist project': *the* modernist project, as if there could be one, except as prescribed by them. Liberal pluralists tend to retort that there can and should be no such thing as 'the' modernist movement or 'the' inner (progressive) tendency of an epoch. One can give the impression that there is such a tendency only if one also takes on a good deal of implausible Hegelian Marxist baggage.⁴⁴ Claims to have discovered, or attempts to defend, a 'central' or essential tradition in modernism are no more than politickings *with* modernism, and have very little to do with the making of an empirically well-founded historical analysis of its very various manifestations. In the cases of Stravinsky and Picasso, we have two modernist geniuses who expressed themselves by taking more than one approach to art. And their changes of style were just as provocative to those who thought that there should be a modernist orthodoxy in the 1920s as they are to those who hanker after the same kinds of doctrinal certainty today.

A third phase?

As Stephen Walsh points out, much of Stravinsky's work in America was consolidatory.⁴⁵ After the Second World War, Stravinsky addresses the legacy of the past in two ways: both involve consolidation. In *The Rake's Progress* he summarises the neoclassical method in a moralising masterpiece, and then (for whatever reason to do with the presence or absence of Schoenberg, and/or of Robert Craft) he goes back to look at another stylistic path not followed, into serialism, by yet again constructing his own – Webernian, medievalising, scrupulously clear – tradition in which to work. As he does so, he finds that he can use the once new twelve-note language of the 1920s in a way that manages to be extraordinarily conservative, and to offer no consolation whatsoever to the progressivist camp, who had always so much disapproved of him.

His position as a modernist, by the time he came to write *The Rake*, was an equivocal one, as was that of his collaborator. Both had left far more radical experimental works behind them, such as Auden's *Orators* (1932). Though they hardly knew one another to begin with, they had both returned to orthodox religious belief under the pressure of politics, and both had an

equivocally accepting and critical relationship to the American culture in which they were honoured and often well-remunerated guests. What could they say, in 1948, in the wiser, post-war phases of both their careers? It had been their fate as modernist classicists to become classics themselves. They both could play with tradition, make some comment on modernism, look for a final internal *rappel à l'ordre* and try to make some kind of moral statement – of a more or less disguisedly theological kind – by putting the Devil into Hogarth, and making his Rake a Don Giovanni, as we can see in the graveyard scene and in the moralising limericks of the final quintet. Stravinsky here follows Mozart, after using Bach for *Dumbarton Oaks* and other works, and even Beethoven in his Symphony in C.

Agon makes a Greek trilogy with *Apollon musagète* and *Orpheus*, as Balanchine wished. It makes an appraisal of the history of music, tonal and atonal, and dancing, side by side. Like *Ulysses* (and like *Wozzeck*), it is a kind of encyclopaedia: twelve-note series and diatonic scalar patterns, ostinato, Baroque dance types, canon, ritornello are all here. The ‘plot’ is no more than a game or contest – there is no story, and the dancers’ rehearsal costume emphasises the different disciplines of its parts, which are required for a competition before the gods. It moves from one style to another as its technique changes towards serialism. (It is rather like the comparative narrative ease and realism of *Ulysses*’ opening episodes, whose elements are then combinatorially disrupted in the later ones.) In Lincoln Kirstein’s original proposal, suggesting that Stravinsky look at the *Apologie de la danse* by de Lauze (1623), he asks for a competition of ‘historic dances’ before the gods, in which ‘the dances which began quite simply in the sixteenth century took fire in the twentieth and exploded’.⁴⁶ Watkins cites Luciano Berio as seeing *Agon* as ‘a “short history of music” that performs a lucid, but tragic autopsy on itself under the pretext of a game’.⁴⁷ All this – the lack of a controlling narrative, the game-like construction and the self-conscious self-referentiality, the assembly of a ‘funhouse’ of available techniques – could be thought to be quite postmodern.

Agon makes a wonderful contribution to the canon of abstract ballet by adapting neoclassical disciplines within a serialist environment.⁴⁸ Stravinsky likes the economy of Schoenberg’s method, although he allows repetition and uses rows shorter than the prescribed twelve notes, but he likes even more the economy of Webern’s sound world, which fits with his earlier compositional methods. Eliot similarly uses the abstract, musically derived structures of *Four Quartets* to make his own combinatorial *art poétique*. Even as Stravinsky is, so to speak, working from inside, in one modernist tradition of utopian formalism (following a language alone into its combinatorial possibilities), he is also, like Schoenberg and Berg, looking to classical forms

to hold the whole thing together – not Brahms but French ballet music, which also emancipates him into the rhythmic drive and interest that so often eluded the second Viennese school.

Stravinsky, then, is three types of modernist. Firstly, he is an avant-garde scandal-maker who produces an initially unintelligible discordant masterpiece which provokes all sorts of outraged reactions, is immediately recognised for its originality and its contemporaneity, exerts a huge influence, and now sounds positively tuneful. Secondly, he is a fashionable style-changer who can also be austere traditionalist, in the sense defined by a key figure such as T. S. Eliot. He is a composer who can transform any style in all sorts of ways, from minor melodic and harmonic modification (as he did for Pergolesi) to imitation (in *Apollon musagète* and *The Fairy's Kiss*) to total transfiguration by moving from one musical language to another (to serialism in *Agon*). This makes for a level of allusion and deviation that allies him to many other literary modernists, and to many painters, notably Picasso, who paraphrased works from the past. Thirdly, he is possibly a belated progressive, influenced perhaps by the new sound world of composers such as Boulez, who takes on serialism after the death of Schoenberg.

Adorno was right – at least about Stravinsky's social conformity, if that can be thought of as something which is not just disablingly 'bourgeois', but a pragmatic response to the disciplines of the ballet or the ritual demands of religion. It is these external demands which made it impossible for Stravinsky to follow the excessively self-centred methodical obsessions of so many of his rivals. He could not see himself as an avant gardist devoted to the 'new language' approach and to 'progress'. If we put aside the political premises upon which Adorno and his allies base their arguments, we can see that there are *two* traditions within modernism here, of a kind that liberals (rather than Marxists) would be inclined to tolerate, indeed encourage, for producing their own dialectic. One centres on a 'progressive' avant garde, where 'progressive' is understood to have some of the Hegelian Marxist overtones of an historical progress towards social emancipation, whose true nature can be revealed to the initiated in philosophy or theory or the relevant technical language. Artists in this tradition are like those utopian philosophers who want to clean up ordinary language, making it more logical, more 'scientific'. Other artists see the different languages of art as inherently social, as Wittgensteinian language games, and even as competing discourses of power related to particular institutions. For this group, innovation will have a great deal to do with the untidy historical development of all those institutions and their rivalries and co-operations. Who would have thought, looking at the secularist emancipatory aims of so many in the modernist avant garde of the 1890s, that so many undoubtedly innovative modernists

would have turned out to be Christians or fascists? Like Stravinsky, they looked to something bigger outside themselves, whereas artists in the other tradition are far more inclined (and most particularly since the advent of postmodernism) to obey the theoretical imperatives of the critical guardians of avant-garde orthodoxy. Their results are often brilliantly innovatory. But Stravinsky was never one of these. And so he has very little to teach post-modernists that they want to hear.