

Pan-Slavic Parallels in the Music of Stravinsky and Szymanowski

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Igor Stravinsky and Karol Szymanowski were friends¹ and colleagues for whom the Slavic musical tradition was a frequent source of inspiration. Stravinsky's "Russian" works, and Szymanowski's championing of a modern Polish style are twin manifestations of the same nationalistic fervour that gripped Central Europe in the early decades of this century.² Yet their shared "Slavic" label implies numerous enigmas, for the boundary between their respective nations was not just a political division; it was the boundary between Orient and Occident,³ between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Through their music, Stravinsky and Szymanowski simultaneously defined and breached this permeable cultural division, and exemplify what it meant for each of them to be a Slavic composer in the early twentieth century.

In the Slavic "family", Russians and Poles have long been sibling rivals. Geographic and linguistic proximity account for the fluidity of cultural influences between Russia and Poland, while the stark contrasts arise from political and religious issues. From the late Middle Ages until its triple partition at the end of the eighteenth century, Poland was a vast and influential kingdom, much larger and more powerful than it is today. Its court in the Renaissance and early Baroque periods was an important centre of music-making, with particularly strong connections to Italy,⁴ and, before the partition, Poland was in the vanguard of the Enlightenment. The Polish kingdom in the eighteenth century included what is now Belorussia, Ukraine, Lithuania and parts of Russia. In these other territories there was substantial Polish influence, not the least of which was the spread of Catholicism into these formerly Orthodox areas. Russia (and many of the eastern and southern Slavic regions) had been converted to Christianity via Eastern

¹ According to Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) 616–17, n206. See also Michal Bristiger, Roger Scruton and Petra Weber-Bockholdt, eds, *Karol Szymanowski in seiner Zeit* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984) 13: '[Szymanowski's] letters emphasize that the two composers were on excellent terms.'

² Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Igor Stravinsky and Karol Szymanowski were all born in 1881 or 1882, suggesting that this particular brand of musical nationalism was not only a cultural phenomenon, but a generational one as well.

³ A point that Szymanowski himself was at pains to make. He wrote: 'Most people think that Polish music is identical, or nearly so, with Russian music, but it is utterly different. One does not realize here in America, or in the western part of Europe either for that matter, that the frontier of Russia is the boundary between the Orient and the Western world.' Karol Szymanowski, *Stwierzenia*, ed. Teresa Chylińska (Warsaw: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1987) 10.

⁴ Marenzio, Pacelli, Wincenty Lilius, Annibale Stabile, and Merula were among the foreign composers active in Poland in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. See Bogusław Schaeffer and Jan Steszewski, 'Poland,' *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 15 (London: Macmillan, 1980) 31.

Orthodoxy, while Poland had first been proselytised by the Roman Church, and the resulting religious tensions have continued ever since. The gradual partition of Polish territories in the years just prior to 1795 divided the country between Russia, the Austro-Hungarian empire and Prussia; the nation of Poland essentially disappeared from the map for the entire nineteenth century. In the aftermath of World War I, an independent Polish state was recreated, though much smaller than the former kingdom, and a massive resettlement of citizens attempted to ensure that the widely spread Polish population was contained within the reduced boundaries. After World War II Poland's area was reduced even further; it fell under the shadow of a now much more powerful and domineering Russian/Soviet system. This fundamental shift in power from Renaissance Poland to twentieth-century Russia has been a major contributor to the uneasy relations between these countries. Poland longs for its former magnificence; Russia's best interests lie in making sure that it is not achieved.

Igor Stravinsky stands as one symbol of how the Slavic nature straddles this ideological and political gulf. Stravinsky's familial and musical connections to Poland, as well as the broader Slavic influences on his music, temper his early reputation as a composer of distinctly Russian works.

The Stravinsky name is an adjectival form, originally meaning 'related to, or from, the area surrounding the Strawa River,' a tributary of the Nieman River in Eastern Poland.⁵ The branch of the family into which Igor was born moved from Poland to Russia during the reign of Catherine the Great, less than 100 years before Igor's birth.⁶ Igor knew of one grandfather, Ignace Stravinsky, whom he remembered as being 'a Pole and a Catholic.'⁷ Ignace married Alexandra Skhorodova, who was Russian Orthodox, and by Russian law the children of such religiously mixed marriages were required to be baptised Orthodox. Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov used to tease the young Igor, saying, 'So your grandfather's name was Ignace? I smell a Catholic there.'⁸ Igor's mother came from Kiev, where his father, a singer in the Kiev opera, met and courted her. Both sides of the family, then, come from Polish or Polish-influenced regions.

Stravinsky's second wife, Vera, would occasionally remark upon his Polish background, referring to Igor's hypocrisy as 'Polish falseness.'⁹ When both of them were in Warsaw in 1965, Vera noticed in her husband what she perceived as the Polish historical habit of palliation. As noted by Robert Craft, '[s]he claims that Igor shares this character, that is a mark of—as she says with no great fondness for it—his Polish side.'¹⁰ It was Stravinsky's Polish ancestry that accounted for the swarms of Strawinski "cousins" who wished to meet their internationally famous namesake in Warsaw.¹¹

⁵ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber, 1960) 17. In present-day political geography the Nieman River rises in Belorussia, forms the north-east border with Poland and flows through Lithuania into the Baltic Sea.

⁶ Catherine the Great reigned until 1793.

⁷ *Memories* 18.

⁸ *Memories* 18.

⁹ Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schoenberg, *The Apollonian Clockwork*, trans. Jeff Hamburg (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989) 131.

¹⁰ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Knopf, 1966) 333–34. Craft explained at length the national prejudices Russians have against Poles. Vera continued: 'When I ask whether he would prefer to do this or that and he replies "I don't know—what would you like?", I hear the voice of his Polish ancestors.' Conversely, when Igor wished to put Vera's ancestral heritage into its rightful context, as for example when he countered Thomas Mann's description of her as a 'belle Russe,' he would tell people, '[m]y wife...has not a single pin-prick of Russian blood.' See Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (London: Faber, 1962) 79.

¹¹ *Expositions* 68.

Another pan-Slavic influence on Stravinsky was the little town of Ustilug, on the banks of the Bug River, where Igor spent his childhood summers and where, after marrying his first cousin Catherine Nossyenko, he established his own residence. From 1907 to 1914 he spent at least part of every summer there, and later said: 'Ustilug is a haven for composing, and I had my Bechstein grand piano moved there from St. Petersburg.'¹² Ustilug is presently in the Ukraine, and the Bug River forms the border between Ukraine and Poland; before the partition the town was deep in Polish territory, and between 1919 and 1939 was again a part of Poland.¹³ Certainly at the time that Stravinsky stayed in Ustilug the Polish influence must have been substantial.

Stravinsky admitted to using three borrowed folk tunes in *The Firebird*, composed during his Ustilug years. However, according to Richard Taruskin, Russian musicologists have identified only two of them, both from Rimsky-Korsakov's *One Hundred Russian Folk Songs*, of 1877.¹⁴ The Polish musicologist G. Stempowski surmises that the "Lullaby" melody from *The Firebird* might be another borrowed folk tune. He writes that the "Lullaby" is typical of the folk music of the Volhynian area around Kovel, not far from Ustilug.¹⁵ It is likely, then, that *The Firebird* contains at least one Polish folk tune, and Stravinsky's work may in fact contain many others from the Ustilug region.¹⁶

In Taruskin's article, 'Russian Folk Melodies in *The Rite of Spring*,' a photograph of Stravinsky busily notating the song of a blind *moujik*¹⁷ confirms that apart from the numerous borrowings from published folk sources, Stravinsky took down melodies himself. Taruskin concludes that:

In at least one instance, too, it will be found that Stravinsky's source belongs to a melodic type indigenous to the area surrounding Ustilug, which suggests strongly that the composer...actually 'drew from life'...and that there are very likely many more actual folk melodies in his works than will ever be documented from published sources.¹⁸

If this is true, and the folk melodies of the Ustilug region influenced *The Rite of Spring*, *The Firebird*, and other early-period works as much as Taruskin claims, then the amount of material in these works that is Slavic, though not necessarily Russian, may well be substantial.

Stravinsky claimed that '[i]f any of these pieces sounds like aboriginal folk music, it may be because my powers of fabrication were able to tap some unconscious "folk" memory.'¹⁹ If

¹² *Expositions* 52.

¹³ Eric Walter White places Ustilug 'in a part of Russian that was later ceded to Poland.' White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) 22. His history is flawed; Ustilug was actually that part of Poland (or Ukraine) that was under Russian occupation during the nineteenth century. The town itself had about 4000 inhabitants, and was almost entirely Jewish. Stravinsky was given a violin by one of the villagers, possibly a Mr. Bernstein (an American emigré of whom Stravinsky was particularly fond), and he took a few violin lessons there. *Expositions* 59. It is tempting to see in some of Stravinsky's later works a reminiscence of the folk fiddle from this Ustilug experience with the violin.

¹⁴ Richard Taruskin, 'Russian Folk Melodies in *The Rite of Spring*,' *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 33 (1980): 522, n32.

¹⁵ Stempowski, *DU* Dec. 1950, cited in Vera Stravinsky, *Pictures and Documents* 39. Stempowski found an old choir singer born in that region who 'knew all the songs' and identified the tune as being typical.

¹⁶ Pawel Hostowiec, 'Dom Strawinskiego w Uscilugu,' *Kultura* Nov. 1949: 19-34.

¹⁷ Theodore Stravinsky, *Catherine and Igor Stravinsky: A Family Album*, reproduced in Taruskin, 'Russian Folk Melodies' 507.

¹⁸ Taruskin, 'Russian Folk Melodies' 509.

¹⁹ *Memories* 92.

taken at his word, that much of *The Rite* is a folk memory, or at least a remembrance of folk musics he had heard in Ustilug and elsewhere, then that would explain some of the connections between *The Rite* and the *vesnyanki*, the sung invocations to spring whose history reaches back into antiquity, and which are found only in specific areas of west and central Slavic cultures. Taruskin goes on to say that the *vesnyanki* from Smolensk and Bryansk, near the Beloruss-Ukraine border,

had and still have direct connections with the musical rituals of more westerly Slavic groups, extending westward as far as the Eastern Polish region known as Volhynia... And this, of course, is where Ustilug is located.²⁰

Whether Volhynian folk tunes should be classified as Polish or Ukrainian—and such classification may only be arbitrary at best—is less important than the realisation that borrowing such melodies makes *The Rite* as much a “Slavic” ballet as it is a product of Russian folk music influences.

There is yet more evidence to support this claim for the pan-Slavic nature of *The Rite*. The only tune Stravinsky admitted to borrowing for the work, the opening bassoon line, is a Lithuanian folk melody, yet Stravinsky specifically stated that he “discovered” it in Ustilug, just before he left for Clarens to complete the score for *The Rite*.²¹ Although hundreds of miles from Lithuania, Stravinsky had in his possession in Ustilug an anthology of Lithuanian folk songs, *Melodje ludowe litewskie*, compiled by the Polish priest Anton Juzzkiewicz and published in Cracow in 1900.²² Lawrence Morton’s study of Stravinsky’s sources show that he appropriated the opening bassoon line, but also parts of the ‘Augurs of Spring’, ‘Ritual Abduction’, and ‘Spring Rounds.’²³ The borrowed Lithuanian melodies thus make another substantial contribution to the non-Russianness of the so-called “Russian ballets.”²⁴ Certainly in the Polish mind, and quite probably in Stravinsky’s too, Lithuania and the western Ukraine were still very much a part of the hypothetical Polish state during the years that Stravinsky visited Ustilug.²⁵ He must have been aware that these were pan-Slavic borrowings.

With respect to musical quotations from Ukrainian or Lithuanian sources, one cannot ignore the 450 years of Polish influence in these regions. Assuming these folk melodies were not nineteenth-century concoctions—and that is hardly likely—then they developed within the boundaries of Poland’s cultural sphere of influence during the preceding centuries. Stravinsky spent the summers of 1891 and 1892 on his Aunt Catherine’s large estate in Pechisky. Lying about 400 miles south of Ustilug, it was also part of the former Polish kingdom and about thirty

²⁰ Taruskin, ‘Russian Folk Melodies’ 530.

²¹ *Expositions* 53.

²² An anthology of Lithuanian folk songs, edited and published in Poland, and turning up in a small town in present-day Ukraine, is a reminder that at least in the Polish mind these regions were all once a part of the greater Polish kingdom. Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, would still be in Polish territory had the national boundaries not been redrawn after World War II.

²³ Lawrence Morton, ‘Footnotes to Stravinsky Studies,’ *Tempo* 128 (1979): 9–16.

²⁴ The term “Russian ballets” as applied to Stravinsky’s works also derives, of course, from the composer’s associations with Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in Paris. But for many scholars it has also indicated to some extent the derivation and source of the folk content in works such as *Petroushka*, *The Rite of Spring*, and *Les Noces*.

²⁵ It should be remembered that Lithuania is not strictly speaking a Slavic region. Linguistically it belongs to the Baltic language group, which is, however, closer to Slavic than to any other language group. Lithuania’s proximity to both Slavic and Scandinavian regions has resulted in a distinct culture influenced by both these neighbours.

miles away from the city of Yarmolintsy, which was especially renowned for its fairs. Stravinsky recalled:

The dancing contests were my chief delights at the fairs, and I first saw the *presiatka* (heel dance) there, that I later used in the coachmen scene of *Petroushka*; the *kazachok* (kicking dance), also incorporated in *Petroushka*; and the *trepak*. I heard much peasant music in Pechisky, too.²⁶

Similarly, much of the folk wedding ritual mirrored in *Les Noces* draws on Ukrainian custom.

These borrowings from other Slavic cultures only emphasise further the ease with which Stravinsky assimilated neighbouring influences into a flexible and heterogeneous style, but a style which is usually termed "Russian." Bogusław Maciejewski surmises that stylistic flexibility is itself a peculiarly Slavic trait: '[The Slavs are] a race essentially incapable of limiting themselves to a narrow programme or technique and fanatically sticking to it...How flexible was Tchaikovsky's technique, or Stravinsky's style!'²⁷

Perhaps twentieth-century politics have caused us to erroneously label Stravinsky's early period "Russian." It is all too easy for Western minds raised in the Cold War era to equate Russian with the Soviet Union or, worse still, with the entire Eastern Bloc. But many of the folk sources from Poland, Belorussia, the Ukraine and Lithuania which saturate Stravinsky's early works are not Russian. They are, more accurately, Slavic.

Igor Stravinsky maintained both professional and personal associations with numerous Polish musicians throughout his life. He worked with such well known figures as Józef Hoffman, Alexandre Tansman, Artur Rubinstein, Misia Sert and her brother, Cyprian Godobski, and Paweł Kochanski, but perhaps most interesting was the relationship between Stravinsky and Karol Szymanowski. Szymanowski was born in Tymoszwówka in central Ukraine, where his family belonged to the Polish landed gentry; the estate was a remnant of the former Polish empire that continued after the partition. The Szymanowskis were a staunchly patriotic family, convinced that one day Poland would once again be an independent nation, and regain its former glory.²⁸ They were comfortable, extremely well cultured, and all the Szymanowski children were musical.²⁹

By 1914 Karol Szymanowski had seen the Vienna production of *Petroushka* and had played through the two-piano version with Rubinstein. Stravinsky's music seemed so fresh to Szymanowski, and he wrote, 'Stravinsky...is quite a genius, I am very impressed by him.'³⁰ Stravinsky and Szymanowski met on a number of occasions, first in London in 1914,³¹ and at

²⁶ *Expositions* 37.

²⁷ Bogusław Maciejewski, *Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Music* (London: Poets' and Painters' Press, 1967) 31.

²⁸ The Szymanowskis' nearest neighbours in Tymoszwówka were the Davidovs. Leo Davidov was Tchaikovsky's brother-in-law, and both Tchaikovsky and Pushkin made frequent visits to Leo's and his son Dmitri's estates. Szymanowski's father, however, forbade any contact with the Russian neighbours, presumably on account of the Russian occupation of most of the former Polish state, but after the elder Szymanowski died in 1906, the relationship with the Davidov family became quite cordial. To maintain diplomacy, the two families only spoke French to each other. Karol Szymanowski set some of Dmitri Davidov's poems for voice and piano in his *Three Songs*, Op. 32.

²⁹ Karol's brother and sister had successful careers as a pianist and singer, respectively.

³⁰ Szymanowski, letter to Stefan Spiess (n.d.), quoted in Teresa Chylińska, *Szymanowski*, trans. A.T. Jordan (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973) 60.

³¹ In London Stravinsky first met Kochanski and Szymanowski because Rubinstein thought he might like to meet some people who were musical and spoke French and Russian. Apparently when in western Europe, the cultural rivalries dissipated and the shared Slavic culture was more important. Artur Rubinstein, *My Young Years* (New York: Knopf, 1973) 428.

least once at Cyprian Godowski's famous parties in Paris, though it was largely through correspondence that in later years they become quite close.³² Vera Stravinsky (despite her obvious distaste for the Polish temperament) was particularly fond of Szymanowski, and went to visit him in 1930 when he was a tuberculosis patient in Davos, Switzerland.³³ For Stravinsky, Szymanowski was probably just another of his close Polish associates,³⁴ but the direction of Szymanowski's whole career was altered by his exposure to Stravinsky's music. He sensed in Stravinsky a Slavic kinship.

In the years before 1917 Szymanowski's career was blossoming. Stravinsky's music had left deep impressions on him, but World War I and the October 1917 Revolution profoundly altered the situation. Stravinsky "lost" his homeland precisely at the time that Szymanowski gained his back, but in Szymanowski's gaining a homeland, he lost his home. Tymoszkówka was embroiled in the upheavals of the Revolution; Szymanowski's house was ransacked, and the two grand pianos thrown into the lake. From that time on Szymanowski never owned a home, or even a piano.³⁵ He, like so many others, was obliged to resettle in the new Poland, meaning that Szymanowski was, after 1919, an emigré in his own country, yet from 1920 onwards Szymanowski's ruling principle was, as he said, 'a fanatic love of the idea of Poland.'³⁶ He became obsessed with creating a national music style based on the rich folk heritage that had been maintained through foreign occupation, and in spite of the various occupying nations' efforts to eradicate Polish culture. What better model for a modern music based on folk tunes than the "Russian" works of Stravinsky he had heard a few years earlier?³⁷ Szymanowski realised that Stravinsky had tapped a pan-Slavic source; one that could provide a similar inspiration for a modern Polish style:

Stravinsky's "folklore" elements, inspired by his own inexhaustible resources—like those of Chopin—will be far deeper and more genuinely "national" than the assortment of motives worn smooth, like pebbles endlessly tossed on the beach by rolling waves, which the devoted folklorists assiduously collect with a devotion worthy of a better cause... We should be especially concerned with his work because of the treatment he accorded in his music to national elements. As Chopin once did for us, he probed in search of inspiration the depths of his soul, inevitably finding there the genetic heritage of the race, accumulated over generations—and, discarding the superficial disguise of the folksy garb, found in that treasure the priceless ore from which he forged his greatest visions.³⁸

If we are to believe Taruskin and Morton, Stravinsky was not probing the depths of his soul for inspiration, he was probing his notebooks and the published folk song collections. But

³² After 1922, they met in person rarely, if at all. Even when Stravinsky visited Warsaw in 1924, Szymanowski was not able to be there. He telegraphed best wishes for Stravinsky's success from L'vov (in French, presumably so as to avoid the social awkwardness of having to choose between Polish and Russian). See Vera Stravinsky, *Pictures and Documents* 616–17.

³³ Robert Craft, ed., *Dearest Bubushkin: Selected Letters and Diaries of Vera and Igor Stravinsky* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985) 44.

³⁴ When the Stravinskys visited Warsaw in 1965, Igor was 'questioned again and again about his friendship with Szymanowski.' *Themes* 336.

³⁵ Christopher Palmer, *Szymanowski* (London: BBC, 1983) 15.

³⁶ Bristiger, *Szymanowski* 13.

³⁷ Szymanowski's ideal 'was the thorough deployment of ethnic characteristics that Stravinsky had managed in *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring*, and *The Wedding*, preserving national features in music of far wider range.' Bristiger, *Szymanowski* 14.

³⁸ Karol Szymanowski, unpublished essay (1921), cited in Jim Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1980) 156.

Szymanowski's admiration was unwavering, and his single-minded zeal to create a folk-based idiom continued to draw on the Stravinskian model. Szymanowski had heard Stravinsky play through sections of *Les Noces* in 1921,³⁹ and its impression was apparently a lasting one. Szymanowski's own "Slavic" ballet, *Harnasie* (1923–31) includes many characteristics gleaned from *Les Noces*. It, too, depicts a peasant wedding ritual, with the instruments and singers on stage alongside the dancers, and a chorus articulating the feelings of the bride and groom in stylised folk idioms. Szymanowski incorporated Stravinsky's techniques of timbral and melodic layering, cross-rhythms, and shifting metres into *Harnasie*. Possibly the similarity between these two works arises from Szymanowski imitating a model, but perhaps both composers simply extracted these elements from similar folk cultures. Certainly Szymanowski, like Stravinsky, was involved in ethnographic collecting of folk tunes, and the traits exploited in both composers' ballets occur in a number of other eastern European folk styles. The highland music of the Tatra mountains, which Szymanowski incorporated into *Harnasie*, is unlike any other Polish folk idiom, 'having more in common with the music of other non-Polish inhabitants of the Carpathians.'⁴⁰ Szymanowski's borrowings, like Stravinsky's, were pan-Slavic.

The Stravinskian folk influence on Szymanowski continued, despite (as Taruskin notes) Stravinsky's radically altered attitudes to folk song after the October 1917 Revolution. Folklorism for Stravinsky, after he became an emigré, began to have 'very evil associations,'⁴¹ yet Szymanowski continued to cling to Stravinsky's old model. Szymanowski's music after 1920 exploited the folk style; Stravinsky's music assiduously avoided it. Szymanowski gloried in the emotional richness of a nationalist musical culture, while Stravinsky pursued an anti-folkloric neoclassicism. Why did Szymanowski not change allegiances at this point, and claim an affinity with Bartók, the composer whose ideology and career Szymanowski's most closely resembled? He conceded that Bartók was an important folklorist whose goal of a national "school" was a worthy one, but Bartók's Hungary was not Slavic, and that was a prime consideration for Szymanowski.⁴² Stravinsky had already achieved a synthesis of modernism and folk melody for which Bartók and Szymanowski strove.

Two other characteristics in the music of these composers deserve special attention, both of them central to Slavic culture: language and religion. In some works Stravinsky and Szymanowski treated language in a similar manner. Stravinsky once said that *Renard* was 'phoneme music,'⁴³ and his *Pribaoutki* employs texts that exemplify language as object. The words define the rhythmic accentuation and tempo characteristics of the music. A similar approach is found in Szymanowski's *Słowieńie* (1921), a song cycle with orchestral accompaniment in which the text is based on old Slavic roots but with altered suffixes that render the words almost meaningless. Like Stravinsky's *Pribaoutki*, they are word-sounds, in which the sense is of secondary importance, while the natural inflections of the text are inseparable from the musical traits.⁴⁴ Such derivations of rhythm and inflection from the text were not new in Slavic music. Janáček's theory of "speech-melody" relied on this principle, and Mussorgsky's vocal music was also concerned with this connection. Slavic languages, in general, lend themselves to word play. The countless combinations of prefix, suffix and root,

³⁹ Chylińska, *Szymanowski* 112.

⁴⁰ Samson, *The Music of Szymanowski* 167. The Carpathian range forms the border between Poland and the Czech and Slovak Republics.

⁴¹ Taruskin, 'Russian Folk Melodies' 504.

⁴² He couldn't turn to Czech or Slovak composers for a model for the Slavic-based modern idiom. Leoš Janáček (d. 1928) was from a different generation, still writing in a nineteenth-century nationalist style, and later Czech composers did not pursue folk influences with any real vigour.

⁴³ *Expositions* 121.

⁴⁴ Maciejewski, *Szymanowski* 73.

and the relative freedom of word order, almost invite explorations of their purely sonic possibilities. Both Stravinsky and Szymanowski exploited the quality, inherent in Slavic languages, of being able to project some notion of sense without clear definition.

The attitudes of these composers towards Latin as a religious language raises another Slavic contradiction. In 1926, Stravinsky decided to return formally to Orthodox communion. At that time he was involved with the composition of *Oedipus Rex*, and the issue of religious language—Latin, in particular—became more important to him, even though Old Church Slavonic was now his language of worship.⁴⁵ Stravinsky chose Latin for *Oedipus* so that 'a text for music might be endowed with a certain monumental character by translation backwards, so to speak, from a secular to a sacred language.'⁴⁶ He also said, 'I prefer Latin to Greek and Slavic because Latin is definitely fixed—as well as universal, thanks to its diffusion by the Church.'⁴⁷ He believed Latin was 'a medium not dead, but turned to stone, and so monumentalised as to have become immune from all risk of vulgarization.'⁴⁸

While Stravinsky viewed Latin as a sacred monument, Szymanowski saw it as a stultifying symbol of the institutionalised church. Szymanowski set his *Stabat Mater* (1925–26) not in the traditional Latin (the language of his Polish-Catholic heritage) but in a vernacular translation. He wrote:

I think that even for persons thoroughly familiar with Latin, that language...has lost its emotional value... [I]n its Polish version that ancient, naive hymn acquired a peculiar sense of immediacy, it became like a picture painted with familiar colors—in contrast to the 'drawing' of the archaic original.⁴⁹

This may be compared with an article on Stravinsky from March 1928:

An active language, Stravinsky tells us, will always contain elements of emotional and sentimental evocation, no matter how hard the composer tries to eliminate them, and these detract from the musical value of the word.⁵⁰

Both composers agreed that Latin was an emotionally barren language, but that was exactly why Stravinsky embraced it in *Oedipus Rex*, and why Szymanowski rejected it in his *Stabat Mater*.⁵¹ Yet the results are not all that different.

For Stravinsky, Latin was the language of the rival Christian religion which had been pressing on Russia's Orthodox borders for nearly 1000 years. But Latin, while not widely understood, was easily recognised, and anyone for whom it was the language of religious worship was

⁴⁵ Stravinsky summarised the intertwined roles of language and religion when he said, 'Perhaps the strongest factor in my decision to re-enter the Russian church rather than convert to the Roman, was linguistic.' *Expositions* 76.

⁴⁶ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (London: Faber, 1962) 21.

⁴⁷ *La Veu de Catalunya* [Barcelona] Mar. 1925, cited in Vera Stravinsky, *Pictures and Documents* 205.

⁴⁸ Cited in Glenn Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1994) 354. Stravinsky's choice of terms here is interesting. When referring to language, "vulgar" means 'vernacular, common, or of the people.' St Jerome's translation of the Bible into Latin in the fourth century is called the Vulgate, a reminder that Latin was once, indeed, a vulgar language. This irony would not have been lost on Stravinsky, whose interests in both language and saints were equally intense. See Robert Craft, *Igor and Vera Stravinsky: A Photograph Album, 1921–1971* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982) 17.

⁴⁹ Chylińska, *Szymanowski* 132.

⁵⁰ Cited in Craft, *Album* 17.

⁵¹ Coincidentally, it was the Princess de Polignac who provided financial support for both Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* and Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater*, and who suggested to Szymanowski that the choral work he was to write might use a Polish text.

likely to associate it with religious feelings, even in the secular context of *Oedipus Rex*. In a corollary to Stravinsky's choice of Latin, Szymanowski had the *Stabat Mater* text translated into old, not modern, Polish, which more closely resembles the Old Slavonic of the Russian Orthodox rite. Perhaps for both composers there was an element of intra-Slavic curiosity on the issue of religious language.

Stravinsky composed *Oedipus Rex* during his 'strictest and most earnest period of Christian Orthodoxy.'⁵² The language, choral writing, and chant lines infuse it with a Byzantine church nature.⁵³ In the middle of composing the opera/oratorio he wrote a *Pater Noster* as a more overt expression of his newly found faith, originally with a text in Church Slavonic but later revised into Latin. The style is one of simple harmonisation, drawing on the Russian Orthodox choral tradition, for unaccompanied four-part chorus.⁵⁴ He once said he could endure unaccompanied singing only in 'the most harmonically primitive music,' and he admitted that this work was written 'with the conscious aim to adhere to a simple and severe harmonic style.'⁵⁵ Though not particularly religious before 1925, Stravinsky had heard the Russian *Pater Noster* in Paris in 1924, and he admitted that childhood recollections of church music in Poltava and Kiev influenced his sacred works.⁵⁶ The Orthodox church style reverberates in this *Pater Noster*, but while the nostalgic element is obvious, the linguistic character remains—typically for Stravinsky—somewhat abstract. Old Church Slavonic is as different from modern Russian as Latin is from Italian.⁵⁷ In both its Slavonic and Latin forms, this *Pater Noster* is as much a phonic ritual as *Les Noces*. In fact, Stravinsky may have viewed the entire Orthodox and Roman liturgies as abstract word rituals in much the same sense, in that the symbolic act of the liturgy was more important than understanding the language of worship.

Stravinsky exploited the ritual nature of Latin in his sacred works, but it was ritualism that turned Szymanowski away from institutionalised religion. His three settings of sacred texts, *Stabat Mater*, *Litany* and *Veni Creator*, use Polish translations of the original Latin to achieve, in his words, 'the direct emotional effect, the general intelligibility of the text and the fusion of the emotional substance of the word with its musical equivalent.'⁵⁸ He wanted the *Stabat Mater* to be as far removed as possible from official liturgical music, 'from its elevated, archaic academism.'⁵⁹

The use of the vernacular certainly prevented any chance of Szymanowski's sacred works from being performed liturgically.⁶⁰ Stravinsky, on the other hand, intentionally fashioned some of his own music for liturgical performance, occasionally for the Roman Church, as well as in his own Orthodox service.⁶¹ When Robert Craft asked Stravinsky 'must one be a believer to

⁵² *Dialogues* 26.

⁵³ Vera Stravinsky, *Pictures and Documents* 212.

⁵⁴ The Russian church polyphony, so characteristic of Orthodox music, developed from contact with western polyphonic traditions during the Renaissance. These influences reached Russia after they had passed through the powerful, and Catholic, Polish court. Consequently, the Russian Orthodox musical tradition has a Polish Catholic element in it, producing another Slavic enigma.

⁵⁵ Cited in White, *Stravinsky* 288 and 407–8.

⁵⁶ *Dialogues* 46. See also White, *Stravinsky* 288.

⁵⁷ Stravinsky could not even recite the Lord's Prayer in Russian because he did not know the words, even though he knew it by heart in Slavonic. *Expositions* 65.

⁵⁸ Unsourced citation in Maciejewski, *Szymanowski* 81. One of the factors that precipitated the composition of the *Stabat Mater* was the death of Szymanowski's niece, Alusia, and at the work's premiere, Szymanowski's sister, Stanisława Szymanowska (Alusia's mother) sang the soprano solo. Such direct emotional resonance was exactly what Szymanowski intended.

⁵⁹ Unsourced citation in Maciejewski, *Szymanowski* 81.

⁶⁰ At least until Vatican II.

⁶¹ Cited in White, *Stravinsky* 408. Stravinsky wrote the *Mass*, based on the Catholic liturgy, specifically for liturgical rather than concert performance.

compose in these [sacred] forms?', he replied: 'Certainly, and not merely a believer in "symbolic figures," but in the Person of the Lord, the Person of the Devil, and the Miracles of the Church.'⁶² He also said, '[r]eligious music without religion is almost always vulgar.'⁶³ It makes one wonder what Stravinsky thought of his heathen friend's *Stabat Mater*. Perhaps Szymanowski would not have argued with Stravinsky's statement, since he was not a religious man in the literal sense. For Szymanowski, "spiritual values" were a product of musical coherence, not of religion. He wrote that Debussy's *Péleas et Mélisande* or the *Nocturnes* 'are much more greatly spiritual art than Bruckner's 9th Symphony.'⁶⁴

Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater* fuses modernist techniques with quasi-archaic religious elements,⁶⁵ exactly what Stravinsky had done in *Oedipus Rex*, the *Pater Noster*, the *Mass* and *Symphony of Psalms*. In the second movement of the *Stabat Mater*, Szymanowski used modality, metric shifts, chanting and intonation on a monotone, harmonic layering and the parallel harmonisations that are stereotypically Slavonic, as well as a smattering of Stravinskian "wrong-note" dissonance. The fourth movement of the *Stabat Mater* most closely resembles the music of the Slavonic Church, reminding us that in preparation for its composition, Szymanowski studied not only Palestrina, but also the sixteenth-century and pre-sixteenth-century Polish composers, with whom he was particularly impressed.⁶⁶ These were the same composers who had helped to transmit Western polyphonic techniques into Russia during the sixteenth century, thus initiating what is now recognised as the Russian Orthodox style of choral polyphony. In the fourth movement of the *Stabat Mater* the unaccompanied four-part writing in parallel harmonisation, and the predominantly homorhythmic motion also recall Rachmaninov's 'conscious counterfeit of the original' in his own archaic/Orthodox *Vespers*. The differences between Slavonic Orthodoxy and Slavic Catholicism are remarkably small in Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater*, as they are in Stravinsky's sacred works. Both composers amalgamated these influences into their own brand of an ecumenically Slavic expression.

The common view of Stravinsky's early work in particular as "Russian", and of Szymanowski as a Polish nationalist composer, creates a false stylistic divide between two composers who drew on a similar cultural background. The recurring themes in their lives and music—language, religion, history, and folk—encapsulate the characteristic elements of Slavic culture, a culture which is far from homogeneous, embracing contrasts and contradictions. Yet it may be more instructive to view Stravinsky and Szymanowski not in terms of nationalism, which tends to highlight these idiomatic differences, but rather according to their pan-Slavic connections and the parallels they demonstrate.

⁶² *Conversations* 125.

⁶³ *Conversations* 124.

⁶⁴ Cited in Joanna Jaszunska, ed., *Rok Karola Szymanowskiego, 1982* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Radia i Telewizja, 1982) 104. In his *Stabat Mater*, Szymanowski was apparently as attracted to the graphic violence inherent in the text as to any spiritual message it might contain.

⁶⁵ As do his other sacred works, and also the opera *King Roger*.

⁶⁶ Palmer, *Szymanowski* 88.