

**PERSÉPHONE: AN INTERPRETATION BY
IGOR STRAVINSKY AND ANDRÉ GIDE**

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Introduction: The collaboration between Igor Stravinsky and André Gide for *Ida Rubinstein*

Perséphone, though commissioned by Ida Rubinstein for the 1932 season, was not performed until 1934. Rubinstein's company was in some way a continuation of Diaghilev's, in that she attracted many of the greatest names of her day, Picasso excepting. She ran a ballet company in the 1920s and 1930s, financed by her own private means and in rivalry to the Ballets Russes; her most famous commission was Ravel's *Bolero* (1928).¹

The correspondence between Igor Stravinsky and André Gide, the librettist for the project and a formidable literary figure in his own right, shows the descent of an initially tolerable relationship into acrimony due to the artistic differences this study will explore.² Gide first wrote to Stravinsky in the final months of the First World War, to say that he had translated *Cleopatra*, and wondered if Stravinsky would write a score to 'illustrate' his text.³ That Gide asked Stravinsky to 'illustrate' his text, rather than adopting a more subservient attitude, indicates why Stravinsky and Gide were unlikely to enjoy working together. Stravinsky liked to have more control over his musical drama than Gide wanted to allow him, and Gide's request indicates an assumption that his part of the artistic endeavour would be the most important, and decisive, element.

When he became acquainted with Stravinsky's music for *Perséphone*, Gide left Paris in preference to attending the rehearsals and performances.⁴ This was primarily because Stravinsky ignored Gide's poetic rhythm in his vocal setting, and is an unfortunate outcome for any artistic collaboration. This does not necessarily imply that the finished product is not an artistic achievement, but the distance between the composer and the librettist was of sufficient magnitude that Stravinsky could allow himself to be quoted as saying, '...I hardly think it can be called a collaboration'.⁵

Part I of this study examines the literary, political and artistic origins and specific content of Gide's libretto, and uses the main primary and secondary sources on Stravinsky to assess what Stravinsky would have thought of it. Part II considers the extent to which Stravinsky's score realises the plot, drama, poetry, intentions, and aesthetics of Gide's text.

¹ Drummond, J., *Speaking of Diaghilev*, (London, 1997), 310.

De Cossart, M., *Ida Rubinstein* (1987), 162.

² Cf. Craft, R., ed., *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence* (1985), iii, 184-193.

³ Gide, A., 'Letter to Igor Stravinsky', 8.3.1918, in Craft, R., *op. cit.*, iii, 185.

⁴ Walsh, S., *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring* (1999), 533.

⁵ Stravinsky, I.F., and Craft, R., 'Three Operas', in *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (1959), 269.

Part I

Chapter One: The changing relationship of politics to artistic endeavour: the background to Gide's libretto

During the inter-war years the relationship between art and politics changed, in both Germany and France. This is especially true of the theatre, where the frivolities of Les Six were gradually replaced by more politically infused work. The reverse was the case in Germany, where any political comment in art was impossible after 1933.

André Breton's *Seconde Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1929) advocated taking the surrealist movement into the service of communism, and Christian Zervos, a Greek critic writing in his own lavish journal *Cahiers d'Art*, sought to challenge artists to define the relationship of their work to society.⁶ This was not the case before World War One or in the decade immediately following it. The plots adopted by French theatre were often classical in origin, and could be staged therefore, without reference to contemporary politics. Much of the content was ephemeral: the scenario of Erik Satie's *Mercury* (1924) is contrived and artificial. The final tableau is based around the mythical figure Mercury, in this case a caricature of Jean Cocteau. Mercury invents letters with which to announce his 'ball' and the first number thus becomes a 'polka' for them. Cocteau's own *Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel* is 'a series of apparently illogical, unrelated images and events... nothing more than meaningless, inconsequential amusement.'⁷

This was in stark contrast to the political content and topicality of the work of Germans Ernst Krenek and Kurt Weill and does not reflect the fact that not only German, but also French democracy was under threat from the extreme elements of both sides of the political spectrum.⁸ The artistic situation in France changed as the twenties drew to a close and the influence of communist ideals on the production of art became more apparent.

It is easy to see humanism, Christianity, and Gide's own personal symbolism in *Perséphone*, but there is a barrier to an interpretation of it as a truly communist text. Brachfield and Watson-Williams emphasise the similarity between Gide's *Proserpine*, written before the First World War, and *Perséphone*, with the implication that reading communist allegory into the later work could be anachronistic.⁹ However, Justin O'Brien convincingly argues that this is not the case, as there is new content in *Perséphone* which echoes Gide's communist campaigning style.

⁶ Ceysson, B., 'France' in Jane Turner, ed., *The Dictionary of Art* (London, 1996), xi, 548-9.

⁷ Grutt, P., and Selwood, S., *Artists in the Theatre* (1986), 8.

⁸ Cf. Agulhon, M., *The French Republic, 1879-1992* (Oxford, 1993), 216-219. Agulhon mentions the support of war veterans' associations for extreme right-wing parties and the commonality of purpose these groups had with communists, who also wanted to overthrow the elected government.

⁹ Brachfield, G.I., *André Gide and the Communist Temptation* (Paris, 1959), 112-3; Watson-Williams, H., *André Gide and the Greek Myth* (1987), 103-6.

Chapter Two: Gide's source and the divergences in the plot between this and his text

The mythological roots of Gide's libretto

Before considering the meaning of Gide's *Perséphone*, it will first be necessary to consider the source and story of his libretto. According to Graves, Persephone was abducted and raped by Hades, with the connivance of Zeus, Hades' brother and Persephone's father. She descended to the underworld with Hades but was sought by her mother, Demeter. On the tenth day of her search Demeter stayed at the palace of King Celeus, but sources disagree as to where this palace was located. Whilst there she was told that Hades had appeared with Persephone, and that the latter was still detained against her will.¹⁰

Demeter responded to this in two ways: she wandered around the earth, looking for her daughter, and caused a great famine. Zeus eventually appealed to Hades to release Persephone, on condition that she had not eaten anything in the underworld. In this matter Persephone was denounced by Ascalapus, who testified that she had eaten a pomegranate. A compromise was worked out at Eleusis, a town about ten miles northwest of Athens, between Zeus and Demeter. Persephone was obliged to spend three months of the year in the underworld. Demeter also taught mankind agriculture, by instructing Triptolemus, Eumolpus's brother. This agricultural content reflects a change in farming practice in ancient times: men became farmers, whereas this had previously been a female preserve.

The Religious Significance of the Hymn to Demeter

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* has a different focus to the agricultural rite Graves describes in that it seeks to establish the deity as particular to the Mycenaean town of Eleusis, justifying the priests of the 'Eleusian mysteries' in their 'most secret rites'.¹¹ These took place in the Eleusianian hall-of-initiation. Accordingly, Demeter's wandering is curtailed and her stay in Eleusis emphasised, with the main action occurring there, including Demeter's order that a temple be built in her honour. Eleusis is also the scene of her reunion with Persephone.

The rape of Persephone and the misappropriation of Homer

At the start of the story, Persephone is abducted and raped by Hades with the tacit permission of her Father, as Graves summarises:

Demeter lost her gaiety for ever when young Core, afterwards called Persephone, was taken from her. Hades fell in

¹⁰ Graves, R., *The Greek Myths* (1955-1992), i, 90-92.

¹¹ Richardson, N.J., *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (1974, 1992). 6. "It seems clear that the poet of our Hymn, if not of necessity himself from Attica... was at least intimately acquainted with Eleusis, its topography and ritual, and was probably composing for relation to an Attic audience."

love with Core, and went to ask Zeus leave to marry her. Zeus feared to offend his eldest brother by a downright refusal but knew also the Demeter would not forgive him if Core were committed to Tartarus; he therefore answered politically that he could neither give nor withhold his consent. This emboldened Hades to abduct the girl, as she was picking flowers in a meadow... Hecate (see above) saw this and heard Persephone's cries of 'a rape'.¹²

The *Homeric Hymn* concurs with this chain of events, and the active role of Zeus is emphasised throughout: although he does not hear his daughter's cry during the rape, his will is fulfilled.¹³ This detail is important because Gide chose not to include it, possibly because of his long-standing humanist beliefs.

Gide begins each tableau with one of three short arias for the narrator, all of which contain references to Homer. The first of these includes the phrase 'Comment elle te fut ravie / C'est ce que nous raconte Homère' (How Persephone was ravished / This is what Homer relates to us).¹⁴ 'Ravie' is not a French expression that carries as much force as 'violer', which translates as 'violated'. However, it does not need to be, for in the *Hymn to Demeter* the evidence for the rape depends on the interpretation of Persephone's cries for help: her violation is not narrated or made explicit.

When Gide's narrator sings 'Homer tells us how Persephone was raped' he is referring to a different plot to that which unfolds in the rest of the libretto: Gide allows his narrator to acknowledge the original form of the story, perhaps as a nod of acknowledgement to those in the audience who know the original story. This is not, however, the case in Eumolpus's opening of Act III:

C'est ainsi, nous raconte Homère
Que l'effort de Démophon
Rendit Perséphon à sa mère
Et à la terre son printemps.¹⁵

*Now Homer tells us
That through Demophon's work
Persephone return to her Mother
And to the earth came springtime.*

Here, Gide lends Homer's authority to his own version of the story. In Homer's version the restoration of Persephone to earth does not occur through the conferring of immortality on Demophon, as can be seen in the table below. It is not clear whether any irony is intended; what is more likely is that the mention of Homer in Act III is purely a device for unifying the three tableaux, regardless of the authenticity of the reference.

¹² Graves, R., *op. cit.*, 89. Cf. Graves for an explanation of the reason for Persephone's real name (Core).

¹³ Richardson, N.J., *op. cit.*, 138.

¹⁴ Gide, A., *op. cit.*, 13.

¹⁵ Gide, A., *op. cit.*, 45.

The changes made by Gide to the *Hymn*

Event	Homer	Gide
Opening	The poet states that his subject is Demeter and Persephone, and describes Hades' abduction of Persephone.	The Priest, Eumolpus of the Elysian Mysteries, addresses Demeter, summarises the start of the story, and mentions Homer.
Setting for abduction	Persephone plays with the nymphs of Oceanus on the plain of Nysa. (Oceanus is a mythical place, but Mount Nysa is in India.) She is trapped by a narcissus flower. ¹⁶	Chorus of nymphs and Persephone: naï ve joy tableau. She is drawn to the narcissus and sees the underworld through it.
Abduction and rape?	A chasm is reported to have appeared in the earth, from which Hades appeared and carried Persephone away in a chariot. Hecate and Helios hear her cry, and this is the evidence that she has been raped.	Feeling sympathy for the plight of the shades she descends out of pity. There is no abduction or rape.
Intervening time before resolution	Demeter stays at the palace of King Celeus, at Eleusis, as nurse to the baby Demophoon, whom she tries unsuccessfully to make immortal. She has a temple built to herself. She causes famine.	Spent with Persephone rather than Demeter. She explores the plight of the shades but then feels lonely. She refuses to eat, until she accepts a pomegranate , which reignites her desire for the earth she left behind.
How Persephone's release is effected:	Zeus sends Hermes to ask Hades for the release of Persephone.	Demeter is able to effect the release of Persephone by conferring immortality upon Démophoon, whilst Persephone watches from the underworld. Persephone walks out of hell, rather as Orpheus did, into Demeter's outstretched arms.
Why does Persephone return to the underworld?	Persephone has been secretly fed a pomegranate seed by Hades. She cannot be completely free of the underworld as she has eaten its food.	The requirement for Persephone to return to the underworld is only implied.
Settlement	Persephone must visit the underworld for four months a year. This causes the season of winter on earth.	Persephone visits Pluto in the underworld 'voluntarily'.

¹⁶ Cf. Richardson, N.J., *op. cit.*, 144. 'The narcissus is made to grow by Earth, to catch the girl. It is a miraculous flower and when she reaches out her hands to the flower, the earth gapes and Hades leaps forth. This suggests that the flower is a kind of 'Open Sesame,' a common motif in folk-stories, in which the magic flower is the key that opens the earth, revealing the underworld, and its hidden treasures.'

Conclusion of story	Famine ends. Secret mysteries inaugurated. Princes (sons of Celeus) become both priests and the receivers of crops and the art of agriculture. ¹⁷	Persephone's subsequent descent to the underworld narrated by both Persephone and Eumolpe.
Conclusion of ceremony	Invocation to Demeter and Persephone for prosperity, Dionysus for happiness, Poseidon asked for the help of sailors, etc	Possible summary of Gide's social program (see below), and allusion to John XII, 24-25. ¹⁸

The Eleusinian mysteries, the name for the ceremonies re-enacted in honour of Demeter, are alluded to in *Perséphone* by the narrator's name: Eumolpus. He is one of the characters in the *Hymn* and officiates at the temple Demeter orders to be built to herself, and Stravinsky emphasised this in his *dramatis personae* at the front of the 1949 score: 'Eumolpe, Le Prêtre'. However, more emphasis is given to Persephone than would be appropriate in a presentation dedicated to the cult of Demeter.

¹⁷ Richardson, N.J., *op. cit.*, 302.

¹⁸ Cf. Watson-Williams, H., *André Gide and the Greek Myth* (1967), 106.

Chapter Three: Literary and extra-literary meaning in Gide's text

Symbolism, Christianity and Humanism in the libretto

The use of the narcissus in this story dates from the Homeric myth, as can be seen in the above table. The use of the pomegranate is part of Gide's own symbolism, and stands for 'the realm of sensual pleasure and sunlight'; as a symbolist writer associated with Mallarmé and Maeterlinck, Gide had naturally developed his own personal symbolism.¹⁹ The function of the pomegranate in Gide's text is different to that in the myth and in the Homeric *Hymn*, in which it is Persephone's consumption of the food of the underworld that entraps her, rather than arousing her desire:

La grenade mordue M'a redonné le goût de la terre perdue. ²⁰	Tasting this pomegranate Has aroused my feelings for the earth I left behind me.
--	--

When Persephone is given a pomegranate by Hades in the *Hymn*, it entraps her, because it was one of the conditions of her full release from the underworld that she should not have consumed the food of that realm. However, Gide inverts the pomegranate's meaning, as the above quote shows. Stravinsky commented that 'narcissuses and pomegranates are better kept in the cupboard of comic props now associated with the Gide-Wilde age.'²¹ He said this in the context of a philippic against Gide and the other collaborators.

Another feature of *Perséphone* that derives from *Proserpine* is the use of Persephone's descent as Christian allegory. John XII, verses 24-25, are alluded to in the last four lines of Gide's libretto:

Il faut, pour qu'un printemps renaisse Que le grain consente à mourir Sous terre, afin qu'il reparaisse En moisson d'or pour l'avenir. ²²	<i>In order for the rebirth of spring The seed has to consent to die Under the ground, before reappearing In a golden harvest years to come.</i>
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This is one of John's allegories for the death and resurrection of Christ: the golden harvest refers to man's eternal life through Jesus Christ and the passage has another significance in that one has to 'die' in order to be 'born again'. There is little to which Stravinsky would have objected in this passage, although it does have rather Protestant overtones, and Stravinsky was a member of the Orthodox Church. O'Brien refers to the myth as an 'ancient myth of regeneration',²³ which brings it close to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, as Jim Samson suggests.²⁴

However, in *Perséphone*, the principal character descends out of pity for humanity, rather than

¹⁹ O'Brien, J., *Portrait of André Gide: A Critical Biography* (1953), 316. O'Brien ignores the collaborative nature of this work and does not mention anyone other than Gide in connection with it.

²⁰ Gide, A., *Perséphone* (1934), 34.

²¹ Stravinsky, I.F., *Dialogues and a Diary* (1959-1960), 37.

²² Gide, A., *Perséphone* (1934), 53.

²³ O'Brien, J., *op. cit.*, 315.

²⁴ Samson, J., liner notes for Stravinsky, I., *The Rite of Spring and Perséphone* [compact disc], Virgin VCK 7 91511-2, London: Virgin Classics, 1992, 6.

merely acting as the passive agent of regeneration.²⁵ Pity, at a personal and humanitarian level, is an emotion in the consciousness of André Gide that O'Brien explores at some length; Gide clearly felt the pain of other people as his own, and was adept at intervening on behalf of political prisoners and championing what we would now call 'human rights'.²⁶ In accordance with the prevailing artistic current, his early work did not reflect his well-developed personal views on the nature of inequality, as this was not part of the symbolist aesthetic cultivated by Mallarmé and those around him. It was also his belief that one should concentrate on individual morals, rather than trying to alter the structure of society.²⁷

Even before the communist aspect is considered, a large gap becomes evident between the humanist pity of Gide's outlook and the lack of it in Stravinsky's aesthetic stance.²⁸ The latter only believed in humanism if it derived from 'divine revelation', and his right-wing nature is shown by Craft's assertion that his world was one of 'the [religiously-justified] acceptance of imposition from above'.²⁹ Here is an example, from the end of the piece, which illustrates the humanism in Gide's work and shows what Stravinsky would have objected to:

Ton lot est d'apporter aux ombres	<i>Your role is to give the shades</i>
Un peu de la clarté du jour,	<i>A little of the light of day,</i>
Un répit à leurs maux sans nombre,	<i>Respite from their countless ills,</i>
A leur détresse un peu d'amour. ³⁰	<i>In their distress a little love.</i>

Brachfield believes these lines summarise Gide's 'social program':

This benefactor of humanity [Persephone] is to bring education and hope ("la clarté"), material well-being ("un répit à leurs maux sans nombre") and universal brotherhood ("un peu d'amour") to the oppressed people of the earth ("aux ombres").

Brachfield may take his last two translations too far: 'un peu d'amour' translates literally as the more sentimental 'a little love', rather than universal brotherhood, but the dramatic context is Persephone's descent to the underworld (l'ombre souterraine), correctly interpreted by Brachfield, relates to more earthly concerns.

Communism and its effect on Gide's work

Justin O'Brien shows that what Persephone says to and about her underworld charges is similar to Gide's own expressed intention toward the less fortunate elements of society when he was at the

²⁵ Cf. Gide, A., *Perséphone* (1934), 21, or Stravinsky, I.F., *Perséphone* (1934, 1950), 43: fig.58.

²⁶ O'Brien, *op. cit.*, 319-321, 327. Also Cf. Craft, R., *op. cit.*, 193.

²⁷ O'Brien, *op. cit.*, 318. Gide's book *L'immoraliste* includes a matter-of-fact and unsympathetic description of the rape of a servant girl, with the assistance of the attacker's father.' Cf. Gide, A., *The Immoralist* (1902), translated by Bussy, D., (London 1960) 121.

²⁸ Cf. Adorno, T.W., *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1948, tr. London 1973), 157-160.

²⁹ Craft, R., *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence* (1985), iii, 476.

³⁰ Gide, A., *Perséphone* (1934), 53.

peak of his communist fervour. His chapter 'Compassionate Persephone' builds a case against the quality of the work by explaining Gide's circumstances.³¹ Gide was heavily involved in public life as a prominent communist sympathiser at this time, attending meetings, meeting other communists and reading about Marxism. This is borne out by contemporary journal entries.³² Gide even described his output during the thirties as 'extra-literary'; it was really just campaign material.³³ Such writing also occurs in *Perséphone*, which also contains the language of commitment, engagement and pity. O'Brien describes it as a 'slight' work, in a period of Gide's creative life which was hampered by his engagement with communism, both in the time it took out of his writing schedule and in the influence it had on his work.

O'Brien demonstrates a closer resemblance between *Perséphone* and campaign material than Brachfield; the former biographer compares an extract from *Retouches de l'U.R.S.S.*, written on Gide's disillusioned return from his last trip to the Soviet Union, with Persephone's explanation to the nymphs of why she has to explore the underworld, rather than stay on earth with them. 'I see and hear those victims; I feel them around me. Their muffled silence prompts these lines....' was written about Siberian deportees.³⁴ It has a striking resemblance to the first five lines of Persephone's conclusion to Act I.³⁵

This is in direct conflict with Stravinsky's views; he 'simply did not see art as a vehicle for changing society, whether morally or politically' and sent birthday-greetings to Mussolini.³⁶ Gide's communist sympathies lasted less than a decade, but O'Brien makes them out to have been as destructive of potential literature as Nietzsche's obsession with Wagner. They provided a vehicle for the relation of his long-standing humanist and Christian beliefs in his art, and the libretto of *Perséphone* is not without its good points, particularly in the sphere of quirky poetic rhythms, consistent rhymes, large-scale organisation and the re-organisation of the *Hymn to Demeter* around the consciousness of Persephone rather than that of her Mother. Although it is difficult to disagree with O'Brien's description of Gide's *Perséphone* as a slight work, it is conscientiously assembled.

It will have become clear that Gide's libretto shows his commitment to communism and the USSR just as much as Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* shows his fervent orthodoxy.³⁷ It is a highly individual and unique work, showing almost as much disregard for the authenticity of the ancient text as Stravinsky was soon show for his work, as shall be seen in the second part.

³¹ O'Brien, J., *op. cit.*, 315-334.

³² Gide's journals in the few months after his successful meeting with Stravinsky at Wiesbaden (early 1933) show him reading and commenting on Henri de Man's *Beyond Marxism*, including the anti-Protestant revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), issued by Louis XIV when he was under the influence of a bigoted Catholic wife, and ending religious freedom in France. In June of that year he was one of France's representatives on the European anti-Fascist congress. Cf. Gide, A., *The Journals of André Gide*, tr. O'Brien, J., iii, 261, 266, 270-272, 274.

³³ O'Brien, J., *Portrait of André Gide: A Critical Biography* (1953), 328-329.

³⁴ Gide, A., *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, (1937), quoted (in translation) in O'Brien, J., *op. cit.*, 332-333. O'Brien is careful to note that Gide never joined the communist party, and became a vocal anti-Stalinist in the late thirties.

³⁵ Gide, A., *Perséphone*, (1934), 21.

³⁶ Walsh, S., *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring* (1999), 521.

³⁷ Although the extract O'Brien gives above, n.34, is anti-Stalinist, this was a development in Gide's outlook that followed the completion of *Perséphone*.

Part II

Chapter Four: Greater Simplicity in Art after WW1: An analogy between Stravinsky and Painting

Both Cubism and Fauvism were influential movements in Paris before the First World War. However, Fauvism is of particular interest because two commentators describe the *Rite of Spring* (1912) as a 'fauvist' work. Adorno, quoting Cocteau, made the following comment linking Fauvism with Stravinsky's work:

Stravinsky was a student of Rimsky-Korsakov, who had corrected Mussorgsky's harmony according to conservatory rules; now he rebelled against his teacher's studio as only a fauvist could do against the rules of painting.³⁸

Fauvists ("beasts") got their name from the strong colours they used and their avoidance of the realistic and accurate presentation of natural forms. Henri Matisse's *La Desserte* (1908) is superficially comparable to *The Rite of Spring*: the large amount of the colour red could be indicative of violence; Matisse presents a woman standing in a room, but our perception of this room is complicated by the continuation of the wallpaper pattern on the table.³⁹ This quirk could be interpreted as a rebellion against the rules of painting, and the complication of two surfaces having the same pattern is comparable, if superficially, to the juxtaposition of chords in *The Rite of Spring*.

In contrast to the harmonic complexity and rhythmic inventiveness of his early ballets, Stravinsky employed much simpler textures and rhythms in the period after 1919. One has only to compare *Pulcinella*, *The Soldier's Tale*, *The Fairy's Kiss* and *Perséphone* with the *Rite of Spring* for this to become apparent. In the same way that Matisse's pre-war blurring of the boundaries of perspective through the use of colour and pattern gave way to simpler works, such as his own *Snail* (1952) or Paul Klee's *A Tiny Tale of a Tiny Dwarf* (1925). *Perséphone* uses much the same ostinato technique as *The Rite of Spring*, though the style is less aggressive, slower, written for a smaller orchestra and formed into a more translucent, simple texture.

³⁸ Adorno, T.W., *Philosophy of Western Music* (1948), 138.

³⁹ Cf. Gombrich, E.H., *op. cit.*, 572-3.

Chapter Five: The aesthetics of the relationship between music and words in *Perséphone*

The differing views of Stravinsky and Gide, compared to the score

What the primary sources from Stravinsky and Gide convey is that neither party was prepared to accept the aesthetic qualities of the work that would be produced by their partnership. Both collaborators wanted control over the other's work and although Stravinsky was able to make alterations to Gide's libretto, Gide could neither influence Stravinsky nor edit his work.

In examining André Gide's position on the relationship of music and words it is easy to discern that words are more important. Gide can also tell us something about what he considered the function of music to be: in *Notes sur Chopin* (1949), he emphasised that his preferred music to be absolute, without words and that he concerned himself very little with the 'meaning of a piece'.⁴⁰ This view is just as contrary to the nature of theatre-music as professed by Stravinsky and sits uncomfortably with Gide's detailed instructions for what he wanted the orchestra to express.⁴¹ Gide appears to have believed that the orchestra would comment on his poem, which would be sung in a neutral manner, sensitive to its rhythmic scansion. In *Memories and Commentaries*, Stravinsky shows the strictures he perceived Gide wanted to place on him: Gide thought the purpose of his composer-colleague was limited to 'imitating or underlining the verbal pattern'.⁴² Walsh correctly suggests that Stravinsky believed Gide had an attitude 'that Stravinsky felt needed refuting', namely that he thought he would have some control over the treatment of his libretto when the other collaborators started working on it, and particularly over the way Stravinsky dealt with his text.⁴³ Walsh adds, without justifying his comment, that the role of added music would be purely anecdotal. There is ample justification for this view if one examines the performance directions Gide included in *Perséphone*, which Walsh dismissed as the 'naïve ideas' of an 'amateur pianist'.⁴⁴

However, Stravinsky implicitly rejected Gide's orchestral commentary in his *Excelsior* letter, issued on the day before the first performance:

I think I should tell the public that I hate any orchestral effects as a means of embellishment. . . .⁴⁵

His embellishment of the text takes place alongside the texts themselves, in the choruses, arias, and accompaniments to *Perséphone*.

A positive statement of Stravinsky's thoughts concerning setting texts occurs in *Memories and Commentaries*. Stravinsky's comment is not particularly clear, but at least conveys the idea that there may be something more to his text-setting than just a syllabified negation of the words: he claimed that his views on the relationship of words to music were no different to those of

⁴⁰ Gide, A., 'Notes sur Chopin', 53, quoted in Walsh, S., *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring* (1999), 527.

⁴¹ Cf. Gide, A., *Perséphone* (1934). There are twenty-two stage and musical directions.

⁴² Stravinsky, I.F., and Craft, R., *Memories and Commentaries* (London, 1959-60), 75.

⁴³ Walsh, S., *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring* (1999), 526-7.

⁴⁴ Walsh, S., *op. cit.*, 527.

⁴⁵ Stravinsky, I.F., 'Letter to Excelsior', 29.4.34, quoted in Craft, R., ed., *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence* (1985), 479.

Beethoven. He also commented that ‘setting words to music’ is a ‘limited, pejorative description’ of the ‘relationship between music and words’.⁴⁶

An example of how the reality of *Perséphone* is different to what both collaborators’ aesthetic stances would lead us to expect can be found in Act I. Gide wrote ‘une grande plainte envahit l’orchestre’ (a big groan envelops the orchestra).⁴⁷ Stravinsky applied the disquiet, which this statement implies even before Gide’s ‘groan’ would have been effected at c. figures 35-38 and 43-45, but the orchestral section which Gide envisaged does not exist.⁴⁸

The vocal writing that responds to Gide’s drama is shown in bold in the table below, which summarises the whole of Act I:

Text	Figure	Setting
‘Déesse aux mille noms’ Invocation to Demeter and resume of abduction.	0	Liturgical declamation
‘Reste, reste avec nous’ Chorus and Persephone in pastoral idyll. ⁴⁹	7	Joy tableau
‘Celui qui se penche’ Eumolpus explains the power of the narcissus.	35+1 to 36+2, and 38+2 to 40.	Exoticism Stravinsky shows the luxurious and tempting quality of the narcissus flower enticing Persephone to it in his exotic music. ⁵⁰ Stravinsky is responds to Gide’s stage direction that Persephone is drawn to the narcissus.
‘Celui qui se penche’ Chorus tells Persephone that she should not approach the flower.	36+2	Alarm in the chorus : chords based on the diminished seventh rather than undulating between the tonic and mediant, and quick (semiquaver) declamation.
‘Je vois sur des prés’ Persephone sees the underworld through the narcissus flower.	41	Unfamiliar new world music ; sighing figures and austere dual pedal point in fourths.
45+2 (Gide only)		(Theoretical ‘groan’ envelops the orchestra)
‘Perséphone, un peuple t’attend’ Eumolpus announces Persephone’s descent; he represents Hades and conveys the immutability of her fate.	45+2	Austere, loud, and threatening aria , in contrast to the pastoral joy tableau.

Multiple feelings are vividly represented in the music, though during Act II the dramatic sequence is more monochrome in this dynamic, dramatic tableau.

Looking at the dramatic crux of Act I in this way shows that Stravinsky’s rhetoric about the independence of music from words and the lack of an emotional response to the words is spurious

⁴⁶ Stravinsky, I., and Craft, R., *Memories and Commentaries* (London, 1959-60), 74-75.

⁴⁷ Gide, A., *Perséphone* (1934), 19.

⁴⁸ Cf. Stravinsky, I.F., *Perséphone* (1934), 35: bar two of fig.45 has a single crotchet rest where Gide would have placed his ‘big groan’.

⁴⁹ ‘Pastoral idyll’ coined by Jim Samson. Samson, J., liner notes for Stravinsky, I., *The Rite of Spring and Perséphone* [compact disc], Virgin VCK 7 91511-2, London: Virgin Classics, 1992, 8.

⁵⁰ There are two exotic elements here. The first is the scoring of muted trumpets, playing a theme which pre-figures the music for ‘Je vois sur des prés’ (fig.41); the second is Eumolpus departure from C major/A minor to an A major 6 chord for the phrase ‘Voit le monde inconnu des Enfers’ (see the unknown realm of the underworld, fig.39).

in *Perséphone*, and that the thrust of Gide's drama, including some of the minutiae of his complicated sequence for the quasi-voluntary abduction of Persephone, is reflected in the finished product. The manner in which it is realised is different from what Gide envisaged and necessarily so: Stravinsky was not writing background or illustrative music, like Satie's 'musique d'ameublement' in *Parade*, but a musical work in its own right.

The aesthetic problem of characterisation: the limits of music's role in drama

Ruth Zinar included a section in her doctoral dissertation proving that Stravinsky's music for the principal character in *Oedipus Rex* included characterisation. She came to the conclusion that 'Stravinsky... used dynamics, melodic contour, orchestration, the repetition of words, and vocal style (melodic or syllabic) to characterize Oedipus.'⁵¹

This is not a radical position and can even be reconciled with Stravinsky's *Excelsior* statement: the emotive, appropriate responses to theatrical necessity in *Perséphone* may exist, but Stravinsky tells us that he is not bearing his soul for the public, as his gestures are purely 'formal'.⁵² However, from the viewpoint of modern philosophy and current aesthetics, as exemplified by Peter Kivy and Roger Scruton, Zinar may be incorrect: 'Music', Kivy wrote, 'is powerless to characterize'.⁵³

The devices Zinar usefully found in *Oedipus Rex* only distinguish Oedipus from the other characters, just as rhyming couplets distinguish major Shakespearean characters from minor characters with prose; they do not characterise him.⁵⁴ The same is true of *Perséphone*, which would not leave the audience with a developed impression of its protagonists' personal qualities, unless they studied and interpreted the libretto in depth.

Stravinsky appears to have distanced himself from the practical, expressive, and dramatic qualities of theatre-music. He does not go as far as denying the functional role of music in the theatre, but to say that trying to convey any emotional response was 'purely formal' shows a disregard, at least in his theoretical writings, for the intense, heightened power of music to move the listener when heard in a theatrical context.⁵⁵ However, a good performance of *Perséphone* can be highly dramatic, principally because of the dynamic contrasts, innovative chords and constantly inventive orchestration.

The role of Music in an Aesthetic Theory of Music and Drama

Kivy is positive about the function of music in a way that gives a key to the interpretation of the whole of *Perséphone*:

⁵¹ Zinar, R.E., *Tragedy in Theatre pieces of Stravinsky and Milhaud* (Ph.D Diss., 1972), 164.

⁵² Cf. Craft, R., *op. cit.*, 486.

⁵³ Kivy, P., *Osmín's Rage: Philosophical Reflections on Opera, Drama, and Text* (Princeton, 1988), 269. Cf. Roger Scruton's chapter 'Expression' in *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, 1997), 140-170; Scruton defines the concept of expression negatively, by providing a critique of those who claim music is a representational art.

⁵⁴ That the composer does not characterise Oedipus does not mean that the librettist avoids characterisation. Zinar shows the devices used by the librettist to do this. Zinar, R., *op. cit.*, 157.

⁵⁵ Stravinsky, I.F., 'Letter to Excelsior', 29.4.1934 and 15.1934, reprinted in Craft, R., *op. cit.*, 479.

The reason drama is such an available material for transmutation into music is that both drama and music have as their deepest and most pervasive feature the generation and resolution of conflict, the building and resolution of tension.⁵⁶

Kivy's remarks on the capabilities of music may apply very neatly to Act II. However, Kivy does not include the capacity of music to go round in circles, achieving stasis: his main use in this context is his reduction of musical expression to two polarities. Rather than building tension, as takes place in act I at fig.37-8, the music of Act II is polarised between passive despair and energetic hope. Where Persephone experiences hope or the audience can see that she grows closer to freedom, the music has more purpose, but whilst she is in relative despair or engages in discourse with the shades, the music is more monotonous. Stravinsky makes no attempt to characterise her, partly because Gide took this possibility away from him by writing a spoken part for the principal character. This conclusion is contrary to what Stravinsky wrote at the time:

Music is not thought. One says "crescendo" or "diminuendo", but true music neither inflates nor diminishes itself according to the temperature of the action.

There really is a tangible sense of enthusiasm, or 'inflation' in the hope-tableau of Act II, as can be seen in this table:

Part	Text	Figure	Musical setting
Eum.	'Pauvres ombres désespérées'	164	Sprightly walking bass , rhythmic parts for upper strings.
Chorus	'Et grâce à ton travail...' Chorus announce that thanks to the intervention of Déméter, Persephone can return to earth.	175-1	Joyous, if contained, expression (mf only). Accented descent in lower strings to plagal cadence.
Pers.	'Eh quoi, j' échapperais à l' affre souterraine?' Persephone realises she is about to escape	176-2	Più mosso ; syncopation in horns and lower strings, but only briefly.
Chorus	'Reine, Reine du terrestre printemps' "Queen of terrestrial spring"	177	Chorus, f. Maestoso : Builds block chords to subito piano in the bar before fig. 179
Pers.	'Déméter tu m' attends' Persephone narrates her mother waiting for her (in the present tense)	179	Gentle, continuous lullaby for solo instruments, becoming discontinuous and starting to die away. Retains good-natured feeling of preceding sections.

Musical polarities are indivisible from dramatic structure, as Eric Chafe shows in his analysis of the Bach Passions.⁵⁷ The concept of polarities can be refined to provide a model for the dramatic structure of *Perséphone* when linked with the comments Stravinsky made on his libretto drafts, as shall be seen in Chapter VI.

⁵⁶ Kivy, P., *op. cit.*, 281.

⁵⁷ Chafe, E., 'Key Structure and Tonal Allegory in the Passions of J.S.Bach: An Introduction' in *Current Musicology* 31 (1981), 39-54.

Chapter Six: The Realisation of Gide's text in Stravinsky's organic dramatic structure

Dramatic structure and the 'dialogue form'; Stravinsky's attitude to Gide's libretto drafts

The dirge-tableaux and the hope-tableau defined for the above table have as their theoretical origin a comment made by Stravinsky on his draft copy of the second act of the libretto:

The beginning must be established by the musical form so that the music is not enslaved by the dialogue. It is impossible for me to create a succession of musical pieces (forming a musical ensemble that will be logical and useful) while accepting the dialogue form.⁵⁸

Some idea of the nature of these dialogues can be gained from glancing at Gide's libretto, pages 26-27. The choruses only occupy a small proportion of the page, with a short question and answer session between Eumolpus, Persephone and the Chorus filling the remaining space.

The necessity to bring all of this into a single continuous musical piece does provide some justification for Stravinsky's attitude to Gide's text: because of the way he ignores the poetic scansion, he is able to set the chorus 'Attentives', which occurs at the bottom of page 27, to the same music as 'Sur ce lit elle repose'. The accompaniment, offbeat string harmonics against a barely moving undulating stepwise bass-line, continues throughout the intervening section (compare fig.78-79 with 81-82). This section takes in the two pages of Gide's dialogue, which is consistently set in triplet quavers, outlining a B minor triad. The different statements made by the Chorus and Eumolpus are subsumed into the feeling of gentle monotony engendered by the dirge-tableau. 'Ici rien ne s'achève' (nothing is achieved here), a line for the chorus on page 27, is set in a very similar way to 'Tu règues sur les Ombres' (You reign over the shadows), a far more dramatic pronouncement from the narrator.⁵⁹ Here we can see Stravinsky turning Gide's dialogue into the 'syllables' referred to in his *Excelsior* letter; and creating a 'musical piece...while accepting the dialogue form'.⁶⁰ Considering that the composer's aim in this was to create a piece of music-theatre in the central Stravinskian tradition, this is a reasonable way to achieve that aim, but one which would obviously clash with Gide's ideals. The best example of really successful 'syllabified' music, making a virtue of the lack of a link between words and music, occurs in the way the chorus and narrator juxtapose different verbal sounds from fig.257 to fig.260.

⁵⁸ Craft, R., *op. cit.*, 486.

⁵⁹ Stravinsky also deleted occasional lines of Gide's libretto and transferred others between Eumolpus and the chorus.

⁶⁰ Craft, R., *op. cit.*, 486.

Acts I and II: dramatic structure hewn from the dialogue form

A brief summary of Act I is given below. The passage from fig. 7 to 35 is a joy tableau, the dramatic function of which is to prepare for the loss of Persephone to the underworld. It gives life to Persephone's experience of the earth, so that she has something to lose. In this it fulfils much the same function as Acts I and II of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*: these show Orfeo's joy in love, so the audience can appreciate his devastation when Euridice is killed. Just as Kivy discussed the building and resolution of conflict, Stravinsky and Gide build a peaceful scene here in order that we can appreciate the conflict, which is tentatively broken into at fig.35.

The dramatic structure of Act II can be summarised as follows:

Text	Figure	Function
'O peuple douloureux des ombres'	60	Indicates descent of Persephone
'C'est ainsi nous raconte Homère'	70	Distant narration
'Sur ce lit elle repose', 'Attentives', and 'Les ombres ne sont pas malheureuses'.	74	Dirge-tableau 1. Persephone experiences the dull repetitiveness of the underworld; section concludes with the austere aria 'Tu viens pour dominer' in which her role in the underworld is redefined in favour of autocracy.
Orchestral section, and 'Perséphone confuse'.	124	Mercury scene; dramatic centrepiece heralding Persephone's renewed desire to see earth again.
'Si tu contempnais le calice', etc.	152	Dirge-tableau 2. Persephone sees the depressing state of earth through the narcissus.
'Pauvres ombres désespérées'	164	Hope-tableau: The resurrection of Persephone is engineered and enthused about in the underworld.
'O mon terrestre epoux'	179	Harsher section (sting) as she praises Triptolemus (fig. 183, see below).

There is a feeling of stasis engendered by the first 'dirge-tableau', fig.74-124. One of the reasons Walsh points out for this is the lack of cadences: '*Perséphone*', Walsh wrote, 'teases the ear with a static diatony that could cadence but rarely does.'⁶¹ There are two kinds of stasis in the opening tableau of Act II: the opening orchestral section is in ABA form, with the A sections (figs. 59-62 and 67-70) proceeding by discontinuity, and avoiding progress by consistently juxtaposing the same elements. The middle section, like the choruses in the 'dirge-tableaux', also avoids excessive variety but does this through the repetitive choruses 'Sur ce lit elle repose' and 'Les ombres ne sont pas malheureuses'.

The music accompanying fig. 183 includes the continuation of the gentle rocking motion between the Vc. and Cb. and horns, with a soft, lyrical texture (marked *cant. express* at fig. 180 and *dolcissimo* after fig.182), and a similar style and mood to the 'Epitaph' from Stravinsky's *Ode* (1943).⁶² Immediately following with this are harsh, loud unison notes for almost full orchestra. They function in a similar way to the chiming of the bell at the end of *Les Noces* and deliver an acerbic and pointed surprise. Although a single note played on more than one instrument is a fairly regular texture in *Perséphone*, particularly around the start of Eumolpus' aria, this is the only place where it is scored for so many instruments.

⁶¹ Walsh, S., *Music of Stravinsky* (1988), 156.

⁶² Stravinsky, I.F., *Ode: Elegiacal Chant in Three Parts* (1943), London: Schott, 1947, 20.

Chapter Seven: The negation of Gide's poetry

Types of text-setting and their varying rhythmic effects on clarity and immediacy

In 1985 Craft noted that, in *Perséphone*, 'the rigidly fixed quantities of words are followed but the spoken verbal requirements of accentuation are not.'⁶³ Craft put this down to 'Stravinsky's argument that to duplicate verbal rhythms in music would be dull', which is not a particularly valid point, as the lack of a dynamic synthesis between the verbal requirements of the words and the music does not always augur for the greatest interest in the vocal line.

Taruskin quotes César Cui (1835-1918), as an advocate of the Russian realist aesthetic in word setting:

The phrasing of text and observance of its punctuation should be correct. Besides that, the rhythm of the music and its meter must be in direct correspondence with the meter of the phrase, and [ensure], that the music in every way blend with the word so as to form one indissoluble, organic whole.
.... A powerful force of expression and impression [is lost, when composers take no account of the above].⁶⁴

Cui espouses a fairly austere aesthetic not unlike that pursued at the times in operatic history when the words took precedence over the music. However such an austere method of setting words is not necessary in order to make them clear. One need only look at a small extract from a Gilbert and Sullivan opera to see the interest that can derive from a composer's conscious, yet organic, rhythmic intervention.⁶⁵ On page 104 of *The Sorcerer*, reproduced below, the last bar of the first system is the first and only time Mrs. Partlett sings. The foursquare rhythm of the music is matched by poetry with predictable vocal accentuation, and the strong 'feet' of the poem consistently fall on strong beats of the bar. Within this regimented framework Sullivan is able to engage with and add to his text, by using a quaver-dotted crotchet rhythm on 'giddy' and 'widdy', on the second system.

⁶³ c.f. Craft, R., *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence* (1985), iii, 478.

⁶⁴ Taruskin, R., 'Stravinsky's Rejoicing Discovery,' in Haimo, E., and Johnston, N., *Stravinsky Retrospectives* (1987), 162.

⁶⁵ Sullivan, A., and Gilbert, W.S., *The Sorcerer* (London, 1877), 104-105.

Mrs. P.

Reduction

I'm no sau·cy minx, and giddy, Hus·sies such as them, a·bound. But a

clean and ti·dy widdy, Well be known for miles a·round

Extract from *The Sorcerer* by Gilbert and Sullivan

Gilbert's libretto is not overly literary in its implications, something for which Gide's text was criticised by Francis Jacobi in 1935.⁶⁶ Simpler, more direct words without rhythmic irregularities lend themselves to being enlivened by music in this way.

There are two kinds of text setting in *Perséphone*, neither of which adhere to the normal conventions of word setting. 'Les ombres ne sont pas malheureuses' (fig.93) consists of five musical phrases: A A¹ A A¹ A. The start of each of Gide's five different phrases is matched by the start of one of Stravinsky's musical phrases, which are all identical, excepting those with a higher starting note (marked A¹). The lines occur where Gide put them, but the words are incorrectly stressed. This is how Craft described all the text setting in this piece.⁶⁷ However this is only the procedure Stravinsky adopted when he was composing new music, rather than applying new words to old music, where the lines can sometimes start anywhere, such as Anne's aria 'Quietly, night' in *The Rake's Progress*,⁶⁸ and 'Sur ce lit elle repose' in *Perséphone*, which was originally written as a lullaby for Vera de Bosset.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Jacobi, F., 'On hearing Stravinsky's *Perséphone*' (1935), in *Stravinsky in Modern Music (1924-1946)*, (New York, 1982), 48.

⁶⁷ See above, p.40, n.59.

⁶⁸ Cf. Taruskin, R., 'Stravinsky's Rejoicing Discovery' in Haimo, E., and Johnston, P., *Stravinsky Retrospectives* (1987), 194-5.

⁶⁹ Stravinsky, I. F., and R. Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (1968), 37.

Sur ce lit elle repose
 Et je n'ose
 La troubler.
 Encore assoupie à moitié
 Elle presse sur son cœur
 Le narcisse don't l'odeur
 L'a conquise à la pitié.⁷⁰

*On this bed she lies
 And I dare not
 Trouble her.
 Still drowsing, barely awake
 She presses to her heart
 The narcissus bloom whose scent
 Her heart with pity filled.*⁷¹

The length of the musical lines does not match that of Gide's couplets, so there is a good deal of textual repetition, such as that on 'presse' in the crotchet before fig.77. The first three lines of Gide's poem are particularly interesting. In French versification, Es on the end of words, which are normally silent, are pronounced. Therefore the first line in the above table has eight syllables. It is easy to see why Gide was not so unreasonable in believing that he had already composed the rhythm for Stravinsky, as his rhythm is interesting and must have taken considerable thought. The irregularities in this passage are worthy of being brought out: the first line aims for its penultimate syllable and the second line echoes this by placing its verb on the third of four syllables. The third line is part of the same scheme but truncates itself further into three equal syllables. There is also a cddc rhyme-scheme in the last four bars.

Stravinsky observed the convention that Es form a separate syllable when sung, but by the arbitrary application of Gide's subtle poem to a piece of music he prepared earlier (fig.74-80) Stravinsky all but destroyed its rhythmic inflections.

L.G.Moss considered text setting in *Perséphone*, *Oedipus Rex* and *The Rake's Progress* and came to the following conclusion:

'Those who expect the accentuation and meaning of the words to be supported through rhythm and expressive devices find Stravinsky's music perplexing, but those who enjoy being challenged and invigorated by rhythm find it engaging.'⁷²

There are examples of Stravinsky's vocal setting working to produce an engaging result, particularly in *The Rake's Progress* where, on Act III, fig.226, the chorus sing:

Out of sight it out of mind
 In these caverns of the dead

The text is set such that 'sight' and 'cav-' fall on weak beats, and the penultimate four syllables are set to quavers rather than crotchets. This is successful text setting, however, as the liberty taken the English language here is small and the effect is to colour the listener's perception with an appreciation of this quirkiness. The music and words do, in effect, engage with one another and the offsetting of the strong beat within an otherwise tight and enervating rhythmic framework delivers a

⁷⁰ Gide, A., *Perséphone* (1934), 26.

⁷¹ Translation anonymous, with corrections, in CD 09026 68898-2: Stravinsky, I., *Firebird, Rite of Spring, Perséphone*, San Francisco Symphony [Orchestra], dir. Michael Tilson Thomas, 1999.

⁷² Moss, L.G., 'Rhythm and Text in the Music of Igor Stravinsky: A Study of Three Neoclassical Operas', in *The Opera Journal*, 29 (1996), 17.

small jolt to the consciousness.⁷³

By contrast *Perséphone* is a weaker use Stravinsky his ‘notorious’ text setting, because the writing has a distanced, random feel which fails to engage the listener in the way Moss describes. Where it is successful, as in fig. 257-260, it is successful in the way Stravinsky described, rather than engaging the listener as Moss suggests. His work with Auden (*The Rake’s Progress*) shows that a more suitable text from Gide might have been set with less disregard for its expressive features.

After the Second World War he dismissed Gide as an ‘anti-poet’ and author of ‘leaden-eared rhymes’,⁷⁴ but at the time he wrote something more conciliatory:

In *Perséphone* I wanted only syllables, beautiful, strong syllables and only after that an action. With respect to that desire, I congratulate myself on having chosen Gide, whose text, highly poetic and free of jolts, provided me with an excellent syllabic structure.⁷⁵

Why did Stravinsky want a syllabic structure? He had used something similar in *Oedipus Rex*, something Walsh describes as ‘quasi-traditional misaccentuation misapplied to languages for which it was inappropriate in strict idiom.’⁷⁶ Taruskin traces Stravinsky’s ‘notorious’ text-setting back to Russian verse, ‘in which the actions of the spoken verse are ignored when the verse is sung’.⁷⁷ This was the origin of the dogmatic debunking of Gide’s poetry, its random setting to pieces unsuitable for the poetic rhythm, and the consequent lack of any dynamic synthesis of words and music.

If a further example is needed, there may be reason to believe that ‘Ivresse matinale’ (fig.23) is more reflective and fatalistic than Stravinsky’s ‘aerated’ setting would lead the audience to perceive. In this verse Gide contrasts naïve joy with the slightest hint of worse to come:

Ivresse matinale,	<i>Drunken dawn</i>
Rayon naissant, pétales	<i>Infant rays, petals</i>
Ruisselants de liqueur.	<i>Dripping with liqueur.</i>
Cède sans plus attendre	<i>Yield without further delay</i>
Au conseil le plus tendre.	<i>To our tender counsel.</i>
Et laisse l’avenir	<i>And let the future</i>
Doucement t’envahir. ⁷⁸	<i>Gradually take you over.⁷⁹</i>

The poetic conceit expressed in this passage is not unlike that in the short poem *Ein Gleiches*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: ‘Look out for what is round the corner.’⁸⁰ Although Stravinsky

⁷³ Stravinsky, I.F., *The Rake’s Progress* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1951).

⁷⁴ Stravinsky, I. F., and R. Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (1968), 37.

⁷⁵ Stravinsky, I.F., ‘Letter to Excelsior’, 29.4.1934 and 1.5.1934, reprinted in Craft, R., *op. cit.*, 479.

⁷⁶ Walsh, S., *Oedipus Rex* (1993), 92-95.

⁷⁷ Taruskin, R., ‘Stravinsky’s Rejoicing Discovery and What it Meant: In Defense of his Notorious Text Setting,’ in Haimo, E., and Johnston, P., eds., *Stravinsky Retrospectives* (1987), 174.

⁷⁸ Gide, *op. cit.*, 16.

⁷⁹ The first three lines of this translation are from Emma Roach’s translation in the booklet accompanying Kent Nagano’s recording, and the last four are my own. Stravinsky, I., *The Rite of Spring and Perséphone* [compact disc], Virgin VCK 7 91511-2, London: Virgin Classics, 1992.

⁸⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Ein Gleiches*

repeats the most important lines as the B section, the driving rhythm of the passage continues and there is no musical response to it: the nymphs' first warning is subsumed into a joyous song, and its meaning is lost.

The 'Rejoicing Discovery', Stravinsky's aesthetic statements, and the reaction of the press to *Perséphone*

It has been shown that the 'Rejoicing Discovery' had an effect on the clarity of the text, both in terms of good declamation, and because it precludes an intimate response to dramatic subtleties such as the nymphs' warning to Persephone (fig.23). Taruskin relates the 'Rejoicing Discovery' to Stravinsky's aesthetic aims:

It was precisely the dissociation of sound from meaning (present in all poetry to some degree, of course) that provided Stravinsky with a reassuring validation and a powerful weapon in his avowed aim... the dismantling of the Gesamtkunstwerk.⁸¹

Taruskin further remarks that Stravinsky sought, in the aesthetic stance of his native folk artists, 'the seeds and validation of an authentic modernism'.⁸² That Stravinsky may have been thinking of more than the success of his collaboration is something Taruskin implies, and makes sense of Supicic's assertion:

According to Aristotelian and Thomist philosophical tradition, the objective of a work of art is not a perfection of the acting subject, the artist, but rather a work to be produced, hence, an "inhuman" aim or objective – a concept that Stravinsky accepted in his *Poetics of Music*.⁸³

Poetics of Music was not written until the sixties and was published in English in the year before his death. However there are indications far closer to *Perséphone* of a similar attitude. In his letter to *Excelsior*, Stravinsky issued a stern message to the public about their role in his art:

The idea of wooing the public I find loathsome, even humiliating, though composers and conductors strive toward that end to the point of nausea.⁸⁴

The attitude of the Paris press to the first performance was generally one of 'respect rather than vast enthusiasm', as Walsh summarised, and the work has not achieved as much recognition during the years since its composition, as some of Stravinsky's other pieces.⁸⁵ A contributory factor to this

'Über allen Gipfeln / Ist Ruh, / In allen Wipfeln / Spürest du / Kaum einen Hauch; / Die Vöglein schweigen im Walde. / Warte nur, / Balde ruhest du auch'. (The first six lines build an eerie picture of silence, but the final two translate as 'Just you wait/You'll be quiet too').

Source: <http://www.zum.de/schule/Faecher/D/Saar/gym/goethmor.htm>

⁸¹ Taruskin, R., *op. cit.*, 196.

⁸² Taruskin, *op. cit.*, 196.

⁸³ Supicic, I., *Music in Society: A Guide to the Sociology of Music* (New York, 1987), 343-344.

⁸⁴ Stravinsky, I.F., 'Letter to Excelsior', 29.4.1934 and 1.5.1934, reprinted in Craft, R., *op. cit.*, 479.

⁸⁵ Walsh, S., *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring* (1999), 535.

could be the reluctance of Stravinsky to 'woo the public' with a more conventional setting of Gide's text. The audience members were, of course, predominantly Francophone and may not have enjoyed hearing their language treated in this casual manner.

Conclusion

Stravinsky was unhappy with Gide's contribution to the collaboration, and Gide felt the same way about Stravinsky's part. The principal differences of opinion concern the relationship of music and words and art to personal and political ideals. There was little in either man's character to preclude good relations, which did exist before they had to work together.⁸⁶

Stravinsky disliked having to work with Gide's libretto, as we can see from his comments on his personal copy of the draft.⁸⁷ His mandate from Gide was only to illustrate the text, and although he was able to do more than add 'orchestral embellishment', but the libretto wasn't written in a way that lends itself to such treatment. This is evident from our consideration of the subtleties that were lost when Stravinsky merged the dialogues at the start of Act II into continuous musical sections. Gide may or may not have been aware of the successful precedent set by Cocteau in *Oedipus Rex*, whose libretto, also based on a classical theme and led by a narrator, keeps dialogue to a minimum and has more substantial stanzas.⁸⁸

Stravinsky saw his art as a personal act intimately connected with his intense faith, rather than more collective, social preoccupations. The communist allegory was therefore contrary to his personal aesthetic, and any association with the USSR was offensive to him: he was an émigré from White Russia and found the new Russia both intolerable and inhospitable. There is no difficulty in ascribing communist symbolism to Gide's libretto. Although the fundamental plot is humanist in origin, it lends itself to communist interpretation and has this aspect brought out by the rhetoric of Gide's campaigning style.

Gide left Paris rather than attend the rehearsals, principally because of the way his poetry was undervalued by Stravinsky, whose word setting ignores the all-important rhythmic element in Gide's work. There is little really exciting vocal writing in *Perséphone* because of Stravinsky's avoidance of a convincing synthesis of individual textual phrases and their music: his treatment of elements of Gide's work and the French language is so radical it could even be called disrespectful.

Walsh, whose latest book deals with the background to *Perséphone* in some detail but does not analyse the score in much detail, acknowledges that the musical idiom itself was far less forbidding than earlier Stravinsky works known by Gide.⁸⁹ It is generally the case that the score presents a sympathetic dramatisation of the emotional sequence Gide programmed for *Persephone*. However, it does this on Stravinsky's own aesthetic terms, responding at a distant rather than immediate level to the mood of individual sections. That Gide thought his dramatic vision would be brought out by Stravinsky's music, rather than being re-dramatised, albeit sympathetically, reflects fundamental differences in the collaborators' views of the relationship between music and words.

Perséphone is now available in two different compact disc recordings, by Robert Craft and Michael Tilson Thomas, but was unavailable for a time. It is not nearly as popular or frequently performed as the early ballets, which were written for the better-organised Ballets Russes, or as

⁸⁶ Cf. Craft, *op. cit.*, 184-187. (Correspondence between Stravinsky and Gide 1917-1933).

⁸⁷ See above, page 35, or Craft, R., *op. cit.*, 486.

⁸⁸ Cf. Walsh, S., *Stravinsky: Oedipus Rex* (1993), 79-91.

⁸⁹ Walsh, S., *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring* (1999), 532.

successful as *The Rake's Progress*, a masterpiece written with W.H.Auden from 1948-1951. This reflects the reality that collaborations achieve more if the collaborators produce work that is tailored to each other's requirements, as this is more suitable to work with, and leads to more integrated, complete works. Whilst there is an argument for a more tangential relationship between the libretto and the score, because two layers of meaning can be more interesting than one, much of the interest inherent in music-theatre derives from the close relationship between music and words embodied in the singer.

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