

the Russian prefix *za* alters "sobbed" to "began to sob" in an economical and current way which does not exist in English. If this verb-form were translated as "began to" each time it occurred in the Russian text, the translation would, I think, be very clumsy.

(2) *Pogoda peremogalas*. ENGLISH and U.S. VERSION: "The weather was unseasonable." WILSON'S VERSION: "The weather was struggling to recover."

Neither is correct. The Russian means something like "the weather was struggling against disease" but this has none of the strangeness of the English. We deliberately dodged this difficulty because it seemed insuperable. Our only excuse for "unseasonable" is that the weather *was* unseasonable: it was thawing in autumn when it should have been freezing. (Mr. Wilson assumes that the winter was ending, but in fact it was beginning.)

(3) *Shary na pozharnykh kalanchakh*. ENGLISH and U.S. VERSIONS: "The golden domes on belfries." WILSON'S VERSION: "The golden balls on fire towers."

The Russian is in fact: "The balls on fire belfries," which even Mr. Wilson has dodged. I have only recently discovered that the objects referred to were metal balls which were hung from fire-station belfries and served as signals. But had I known this at the time, I would still have hesitated to use the transliteration because the words occur in a lyrical passage of reminiscences, listing several things which are familiar

to the Russians though unfamiliar to the English, and the transliteration would hold up the reader in a manner which was not intended by the author. Perhaps the proper solution would have been an explanatory footnote.

THE last example is an error of Mr. Wilson's. *Do svidanya na tom svetye* is correctly given by us as "Farewell until we meet in the next world." Mr. Wilson says in his article that "this is not in the text and would be contrary to Pasternak's cosmology." He has since courteously admitted his mistake to me by letter, though not, so far as I know, in print. I would not raise the matter if it were not to make the obvious point that, in dealing with a text of some 200,000 words, both translators and critics are bound to make some slips, and to suggest that the real argument is not, in fact, about such slips.

There is obviously no excuse for mistranslations, but fortunately these are usually picked up and corrected sooner or later. The real argument, I think, concerns the general approach to the translator's task. Briefly, the problem is whether to transliterate into as good English as one is capable of writing, or to try, at the same time, to keep the tone of the original. In our translation we were influenced by Pasternak's insistence (in his essay *On Shakespeare* and in his *Autobiography*) on the need to keep the tone and to write "in a natural and lively way." Mr. Wilson's suggested versions imply a basically different approach.

## Ending the Musical Tradition?

### Two Comments on Virgil Thomson's "Modest Proposal"

THE fundamental assumption underlying Mr. Virgil Thomson's stimulating, acute, bold analysis of the musical composer's present predicament [ENCOUNTER, *January*\*] is evolution: music is an art that has evolved, and as

Mr. Thomson vividly shows, has evolved at so terrific a rate in the last 200 years (*i.e.*, since the establishment of sonata form) that the pace has been killing. Progress is now at a standstill. All the "progressive" and even the revolutionary techniques have been absorbed into tradition. And now tradition has stuck. Musicians are occupied in the distributory instead of the manufacturing branch of their trade. So the composer must cease to think of pushing music

\* See also the discussion of Virgil Thomson's article by Martin Cooper in the *Daily Telegraph* (February 14th), and by Desmond Shawe-Taylor in the *Sunday Times* (February 15th).—Ed.

forward, cease to aim at "establishing" himself in the grand tradition, cultivate instead his own small patch of garden, and if he brings the world a posy from it, that posy will at least be fragrant with sincerity.

It is true that all the restless search of the 20th century for a substitute for tonality-by-key, which had served the art for three centuries but which had seemed to be exhausted by 1900, has been unsuccessful. Serialism has its loud-voiced advocates but makes no impression at all on the general musical public, and it alone of all the modern devices, schools, and tendencies has any pretensions to a place in the evolutionary process, which began at 1000 A.D. with the first tentative efforts at converting monody into polyphony. That process took 500 years to perfect the technique of polyphony, and another 300 were needed to exploit the possibilities of harmony and key. But this technical evolution, like the evolution of technology, has gathered speed since the 17th century, and whereas the physicists have exhausted the earth and are now crying for the moon the musicians are flummoxed and do not know which way to turn. Hence Mr. Thomson's predicament.

I accept Mr. Thomson's analysis in broad outline, while questioning some of his sweeping generalisations caught up in the swirl of his swift argument—his statistical disposal of Brahms and Wagner for instance. But there are two observations to be made. The concept of evolution as the most satisfactory philosophy of musical history (better, that is, than Herodotean or Marxian interpretation) is less than a hundred years old. It came in along with an evolutionary view of ethics on the heels of Darwinism. And it is now being challenged. My own view is that the technique of music has evolved in the way first described by Parry and assumed by Mr. Thomson, but it is the technique not the art itself. I would allow that it was not till the technique had advanced to a certain point that it became possible for a certain type of subject-matter, to wit, socio-political and metaphysical ideas, to be discussed in music by Beethoven. At any rate, until Beethoven such ideas never had been expounded in music. But basically the subject-matter of music, as of all the arts, is the eternal verities. No one propounds an evolutionary philosophy of history for literature or painting, and while I believe evolution to be a correct description of the last thousand years of musical history, I am bound to admit that the corollary of constant progress through evolution is unsound. Mozart is not merely a predecessor of Beethoven nor is Beethoven only the successor to Haydn; they are composers in their own right with their own visions of eternal truth. Still less would I embrace the doctrine deflated by Mr.

Thomson that every composer must contribute novelty to the tradition to be worthy of the designation of composer. We have had criticisms of major works by our contemporary composers deploring that they have shown no advance, no new developments in idiom, no fresh ground broken, since their former works. Are we to suppose that on the morrow of the production of *Don Giovanni* in Prague, heads were shaken that alas! poor little Mr. Mozart had not shown any advance in his new opera on *Figaro*?

The other point, and my substantive rejection of Mr. Thomson's somewhat depressed conclusion, is that the world is wide, that though it is unfashionable almost to the point of indecency to mention the eternal verities in art criticism or æsthetic discussion, they are still there for every generation, indeed for every individual to have his say upon them. Bach was not inhibited from writing music because his sons called him "Old Wig" and he came at the end of a period. Let the evolution of technique slow down or be left to the *concrète* mixers. The composer with something to say even on so well-worn a topic as the Kantian trio of God, Freedom, and Immortality, which sufficed for Beethoven, will still catch the world by surprise. And on a narrower front, as Mr. Thomson suggests, "a conquest of the English language by opera" is always a possibility.

Frank Howes

VIRGIL THOMSON'S "modest proposal" is so embellished with verbal pyrotechnics, stylish side-kicks that are hardly very relevant to the matter at issue (but was Saint Saens really all that progressive in "introducing" sonata form into French music almost a generation after Gounod's admirable Mendelssohnian *Symphony in E flat major* of 1855?), and deft trailing of coats before progressive bulls (but does Mr. Thomson really suppose that Wagner's claim to be writing the "music of the future" is invalidated by the box-office receipts of Brahms a century later; the fact remains that *Tristan* determined fifty years of musical evolution), that it may be useful if I summarise his argument.

It seems to go like this:

(a) "The 19th century was a brilliant period full of change and excitement and everywhere solidly nourished on the classics."

(b) "The speed of evolution accelerated until about 1914."

(c) "Since World War I (or at least since 1925) technical advance and expressivity has shown a decline in vigour."

(d) "Music as a language... *will not* [my italics], I fear, be evolving much more."

(e) Modernism is a concept, perhaps appropriate to the 19th century, that urges an attitude of receptivity towards anything that may seem "progressive." "It is an 'open door' policy regarding change."

(f) In the circumstances of (c) and (d) this attitude is irrelevant. Composers will "have to forget for a time about novelty and change and tradition. The tradition of constant change *must* [my italics] be thrown overboard... I propose to you that every composer has plenty of small ideas... and that these ideas are all valid if sincerely and competently acted upon... It is better to work with the ideas one really has... than to follow an outworn modernism at any price."

In a word, it has all come to an end, and all composers can do is to make-do and mend.

Clearly Mr. Thomson is right when he asserts that around 1914 a great period of music reached "full term." Clearly any consideration of 20th-century music must start, as does Mr. Thomson's, from the fact that since 1914 music has been in a state of crisis. The demand, whether it come from Printing House Square or the social realists in Moscow, that things should go on unchanged, as though the confident days of the 19th century were still with us, is unreal. Equally unreal, it seems to me, is the assumption of the progress brigade that the radical experimenters of our day (Boulez and so on) are only contemporary counterparts of the radical experimenters of sixty (Debussy) or a hundred (Wagner) years ago. Of course, each generation as it ages is tempted to repeat the old cry of *après moi le déluge*. But that does not alter the fact that deluges, like wolves, do exist. Around 1914 a deluge came in the form of the virtual exhaustion of diatonic harmony (yes, I know good music is still written in C major; the point is that it has become rare enough to excite comment), whose exploitation was the basis of the great achievements of the 19th century. Wagner was working before the deluge; Boulez is working after it. To suggest, merely because both men are innovators, that Boulez is in a similar position to Wagner a century ago is a crude misuse of historical analogy.

Since about 1914 it has clearly become much harder to write a piece of fine music, so much harder that only a handful of composers of outstanding abilities have managed to do so. Thus, in a sense, I am with Mr. Thomson when he says that since the first World War there has been a decline in vigour, although this seems to me a decline not so much in quality as in quantity.

When, however, he goes on to list five post-1914 works that he finds so outstandingly powerful as to merit postponing the date of the decline until 1925, puts Milhaud's *La Création du Monde* and Honegger's *Pacific 231* among them, points out that they were all written before 1926 and then solemnly asserts that nothing of comparable originality has been written since, a suspicion arises that he is really telling us less about the century than about himself, and how infinitely charming he found his early days in Paris. I suggest that suspicion attaches to any guide who overlooks the fact that in 1926 Stravinsky wrote *Oedipus Rex*, in 1936 Bartok wrote the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, in 1946 Schoenberg wrote the *String Trio*, and in 1956 Stravinsky was at work on *Agon*. To place *La Création du Monde* or *Pacific 231* in the company of four masterpieces such as I have mentioned might be considered an engaging, if somewhat exaggerated, loyalty to early playmates. To imply that these examples of Cocteauesque *chic* of the early 'twenties (a *chic* that did not hesitate to set itself up against the genius of Debussy) are unequalled in originality by anything written since 1926, suggests a profound æsthetic fixation.

CURIOUSLY enough, Mr. Thomson has overlooked the most telling evidence for his thesis that the years since 1914 have marked a decline in creative vigour. If one examines the year of birth of the five composers of the 20th century to whom the word "great" might be applied—Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartok, Berg, and Webern—one makes the alarming discovery that, with the possible exception of Bartok, all of them were by 1914 grown men with a mature and personal style. Where are the composers *born* in this century, where are the composers of Mr. Thomson's generation who grew to maturity in the years after the first World War, who are comparable in stature to these five great names. Hindemith, Dallapiccola, Tippett, Shostakovitch, and maybe Messiaen, have all written one or two fine works, a few which border on lasting greatness. But one has only to mention their names against those of the previous generation to appreciate what a gulf in stature and achievement lies between them.

It may be that Boulez or Stockhausen or Nono will in due course write, or conceivably prove already to have written, music of the import of that produced by the Berg-Stravinsky generation. But it is early days to tell, and living in one of Europe's remotest musical provinces, my acquaintance with the style of their music is too slight for me to have much confidence in my assessment of its quality. No country cousin, Mr. Thomson is, it seems, in no doubt that he is

more fortunately placed. He finds the products of this school of *sérialisme intégrale* "utterly charming in sound and refreshingly innocent in expression." Well, well. . . .

It is when Mr. Thomson moves on from his account of what has happened in the past to his recommendations for the future that I part company from him, root and branch. Here he reminds me of one of those political philosophers who start off to examine the nature of the political societies with a brave front of objectivity, but who, before the reader can draw breath, have used the examination as a springboard to a pulpit, from which they thunder forth about the particular society they live in, with particular reference to their own position in it. Mr. Thomson skips with such agility from analysis to injunction that he is scarcely observable in mid-air. And he does it on the assumption that examination of the creative past can provide binding creative "oughts" for the future, and as though these "oughts" are as binding for all composers as they appear to be for one Virgil Thomson.

At the back of Mr. Thomson's "modest proposal," that the only way composers should operate to-day is by a sort of make-do and mend operation, lies a presumptuous dogmatism, that is no less dogmatic than the straw castles of "modernism" he attacks so savagely. I do not doubt that for many composers all that is left is to make-do and mend, that among them will be found a number of neo-classicists of the Parisian *avant garde* of thirty-five years ago who have in fact never done anything else; and I do not doubt that this form of academicism will, like most academicisms, produce some acceptable music.

But by what right does Mr. Thomson enjoin this procedure (which is as old as the hills) on his fellow composers? By what right does he demand that they eschew "novelty and change"? And what basis has he for a prediction that "Music as a language, though long may it live, will not, I fear, be evolving much more"? Mr. Thomson may choose to mock the integral serialists, but it is surely a little early to dismiss with such bland assurance an attempt to meet a radical crisis with radical innovations.

Mr. Thomson complains a good deal about "modernism," and, in so far as this word implies a dogma that no work that does not contain some technical innovation can be of value, his complaints are justified. But in so far as "modernism" implies "an open-door policy regarding change," I should have thought that never was it so essential to defend and maintain it. Attempts to shut the door on Wagner were

futile because in the final resort he had behind him all the weight of the great tradition he sprang from. It is precisely because it is to-day so temptingly easy to slam the door, and slam it successfully, on new shoots that are tender and tentative and lack the support of tradition, that it is so important to keep a foot in it.

Mr. Thomson really cannot have it both ways. At least the Printing House Square brand of aesthetic conservatism, which urges us to avert our eyes from the "decadence" of Schoenberg and from that flirtatious old carpenter, Igor Stravinsky, and to turn instead to the sound, sane, English structures of Dr. Rubbra, as though there were no crisis at all outside the minds of a few "mad Central Europeans," at least such an attitude has the merit of a certain magnificent, blinkered consistency. Mr. Thomson's brand of conservatism aims to appear ever so much more sophisticated and knowing, but it ends by being ever so much more silly.

For if things have really come to an end, if for his generation there is nothing left but to make-do and mend, then it is surely all-important to uphold the policy of the open door, and to preserve the attitude of benevolent if sceptical interest in what is new that goes with it. Mr. Thomson may offer, and not without reason, a counsel of despair to his own generation. But he should not try to stamp on the fingers of the generations behind him. No one can tell where salvation may come from. It may well be that the generation of Boulez (like, perhaps, the Florentine experimenters of the late 16th century) will produce even less than Mr. Thomson's generation. It may be that the political *Untergang* of Europe will be followed by a lengthy cultural *Untergang*. But even at the worst the human desire to express something in music cannot be extinguished, and sooner or later things will start up again.

In the long run, you cannot impose a static solution on a dynamic situation. That goes for art as it goes for politics. And just as the prime essential of any political system that is to last is an ability to adjust itself to changing circumstances, so a healthy musical society will show interest in the new as well as honour for the old. New times and new men will, as ever, have new things to say and new ways of saying them. The deeper the crisis, the less likely is salvation to come from the sort of patching that Mr. Thomson advocates. The longer it is before musical creation flourishes again, the less likely is it to flourish in present-day terms. It is for this reason that, for all its excesses, sillinesses, and arrogance, I am all for the open-door of "modernism."

Peter Heyworth

## Poker on the Rhine

EVERY spring a plane-load of British politicians, journalists, businessmen, and academics takes flight for Germany, to spend a long week-end with a similar group of Germans at the river resort of Koenigswinter on the Rhine.

Ten times now this conference has assembled at the invitation of the Anglo-German Society, its impeccable respectability attested by the hospitable welcome it receives from both the Federal Government and from Her Majesty's Ambassador. After a decade of this activity it is legitimate to ask, "What does it all add up to?"

That it adds up to something is, I think, shown by the consistency with which the conference is revisited by such busy and hard-boiled characters as the editors and foreign editors of leading newspapers, ex-ministers and service chiefs, and a variety of others who, although they have sources of information elsewhere, nevertheless find this week-end worth their while.

The explanation seems to be that, in three days at Koenigswinter, they are exposed to a wider variety of Anglo-German opinion than could be encountered anywhere else in so short a time. More than the public speeches, the private talk enables them to take the political temperature on topics of the moment. For those participants who come again and again, a main source of interest is the fluctuation of opinion which occurs from year to year. Changes are fairly easy to detect since many of the people are the same, and the problems examined, no matter what the formal title of the year's discussion may be, are always predominantly the same in the end—the Cold War, the *Wiedervereinigung* of divided Germany, and Berlin.

In earlier years it was noticeable that the British were telling the Germans all about "the German problem," while the Germans who, during the years of Nazism, war and occupation somewhat lost the habit of formulating policy for themselves, seemed ready enough to listen. This has changed over the years; but there are other inhibitions on the German side. For them the settlement of Europe involves not only foreign but internal issues, not all of which can be aired without embarrassment in an international gathering. Moreover, Koenigswinter is but a stone's throw from Bonn, and German government supporters are always conscious that the magisterial eye of Dr. Adenauer is upon them. On more than one occasion C.D.U. speakers have seemed unwilling to speculate, even off the record, until "*der Alte*" has given a public lead.

Things are easier for the British, but even with them there is greater caution shown on the government side, which, unlike the opposition, is inevitably represented mainly by back benchers. Controversy is, of course, by no means, confined to the party politicians. Not only the journalists but also the Service chiefs are often in the thick of the battle. (Last year, for instance, the German press headlined, with some bewilderment, a dispute about European security between Air Marshal Sir John Slessor and Field Marshal Lord Harding.)

For some years past, debate has centred around the prospects of achieving German reunification and, in particular, the relevance to this issue first of the rearmament of Western Germany and, more recently, of "disengagement." On these topics the main division has been not so much between Germans and British as between right and left in both countries. On rearmament there was considerable confusion on the left, since the Labour Party was openly split, and the S.P.D. contained numerous diverging currents. When the theme switched to disengagement, however, the socialists of the two countries came very close to a common policy in support of it, while the government parties resisted it with a conviction of righteousness amounting almost to fanaticism.

At the conference held last month, however, it was the turn of the right wing to experience doubts. Suspicion of "disengagement" was still very strong, but neither Conservatives or C.D.U. dared to insist that proposals for zones of limited disarmament or disengagement in Europe would necessarily spell "the end of western defence," for Dr. Adenauer was at that very moment in process of agreeing with Mr. Macmillan that something of this kind might legitimately figure on the agenda for a summit conference. The unhappiness of some Conservative and C.D.U. members at this perplexing turn of events was almost comic, but the socialists were not in the best shape to enjoy the situation, because the S.P.D.'s own favourite disengagement plan had just received a rough handling from Mr. Krushchev in his talk with Erich Ollenhauer in Berlin (and a week later, even more severely, with Carlo Schmid and Fritz Erler, in Moscow).

The truth is that the Berlin crisis, by putting a number of long-held theories to the test, had injected a gleam of realism into the fog of wishful thinking, which has long enveloped the whole question of German reunification. Faced with the threat of a unilateral assault upon the status quo by the Soviet Union, the rival policies both of "situations of strength" and of "disengagement" were revealed as oversimplifications of a highly complex problem.

The interesting and indeed encouraging