

A Touchstone

Review of 'S.O.Prokofieff: Myth and Reality' by I. Gordienko. From NOVALIS 3/4 2002

Irina Gordienko's book 'S.O.Prokofieff: Myth and Reality' has been available for quite some time (in German). It has been almost unnoticed and has never been reviewed, although (or maybe because) it can scarcely be matched in its many-layered and highly-charged content. Here the working-method of a well-known associate of the Dornach Vorstand is attacked so fundamentally that one can regard it as a duty to study it very closely. It is not possible here to go into the wealth of problems which Gordienko believes she can see in Prokofieff's work. Gordienko has studied Prokofieff's work in great detail. The unprejudiced reader, one who feels under no obligation of any kind towards either Gordienko or Prokofieff, and who is not an adherent of any special group, can recognize that there is a certain necessity in the way Gordienko asks her questions of Prokofieff's work. One of the questions concerned here is that regarding the actual nature of an Anthroposophical method of cognition. Prokofieff's method, as described by Gordienko, has features that are more than questionable. After reading the Gordienko book one can have the impression that Anthroposophy is standing at a crossroads with regard to the foundation on which it rests as a system of knowledge, and the ways in which the results of occult research are communicated.

In Prokofieff's first book "Rudolf Steiner and the Founding of the New Mysteries" (Stuttgart 1982), which was reviewed critically by Hellmut Finsterlin in the journal "Erde und Kosmos" as early as 1983, the not exceptionally attentive reader could already find an unmistakable hint of the problems. In connection with the description of the seven-year periods in the development of the individual human being, and the impulses they bring, Prokofieff quotes Rudolf Steiner. In the quotation given by Prokofieff on p. 21 (German edition), Rudolf Steiner says the following about himself: "I had now attained my fortieth year, before which time no-one - according to the Masters - is allowed to come forward publicly as a teacher of occultism. (Whenever someone teaches before this, there is an error involved)" (GA 262, p.13).

The reader of Prokofieff's book finds that it contains a wealth of occult descriptions by the 27 or 28-year-old author, the sources of which he often does not indicate, so that even at that time one had to come to the conclusion that Prokofieff had either drawn his knowledge - some of which was in contradiction to statements of Rudolf Steiner - from unknown sources, or that he was acting in contravention of the law which he quotes in the book. Or is it not research of this kind with which we are dealing when, for example, Prokofieff describes the working upon the personality of Rudolf Steiner by spiritual beings whom Steiner had not remotely spoken of in this form?

So far as I am aware S. Prokofieff has not referred in writing either to the Finsterlin review or to the book of Gordienko. Consequently, whether one likes it or not, the questions still remain unanswered: a highly perilous situation, particularly in view of the appointment of Prokofieff to the Vorstand (ratified at Easter 2001 by the A.G.M. of the Anthroposophical Society).

A study of this book by Irina Gordienko, who died in an accident some time after its publication, raises still deeper questions, which the reader can draw from the book himself. The fact that the book has appeared in the Moskau-Basel Verlag, with whose publications one cannot always agree, will perhaps impede its wider circulation. But a coming-to-terms - or a failure to come to terms - with the *content* of this book will have a significance, as yet perhaps undreamt-of, for the future of Anthroposophy. My pessimistic forecast: this challenge will not be faced.

Arfst Wagner

Irina Gordienko, Sergei O. Prokofieff: Myth and Reality
Moskau-Basel-Verlag
Translated by Graham B. Rickett

Available from: Wellspring Bookshop
5, New Oxford Street,
London WC1A 1BA Tel. (0207) 4056101

Also from the translator.