



Dvořák in Love

Josef Škvorecký, Paul Wilson (Translator)

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In 1892, at the height of his prodigious powers, Anton Dvorak was persuaded to leave his native Bohemia to come to New York to be director of the National Conservatory for Music. This splendid novel tells the story of Dvorak's utterly requited love affair with America.

Dvořák in Love Details

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From Reader Review Dvořák in Love for online ebook

Czarny Pies says

I am a great fan of Skvorecky and give this book three stars only because it is not as good as six other of his novels that rate four or five stars (being, The Engineer of Human Souls, the Cowards, the Miracle Game, Ten Rules for Father Knox, The Swell Season and Miss Silver's Past). Choose one of these six as your first Skvorecky novel. Once you have developed a taste for him Dvorak in Love is a very pleasureable read.

Dvorak in Love is an historical love that describes the four years Dvorak spent in New York City in the 1890s at the invitation of a wealthy patroness of the Arts. The second half of the nineteenth century was the era of heroic patronage of the Arts, major opera companies (e.g. the Met), symphonies (New York, Boston) and museums (Metropolitan, Massachusetts Fine Arts) were founded during the period. Dvorak in Love is thus is a glorious tribute to a great time in the development of American cultural institutions.

Skvorecky loves the USA and in fact he goes out of his way to argue that already cultural influences were starting to flow from the New to the Old World. He notes that Jazz will soon start to have an impact on European classical music. Finally taking great poetic license he suggests that the inspiration for Dvorak's great opera Rusalka came from a trip that Dvorak made to the forests of upstate New York.

Tyler says

Occasionally poignant, occasionally cheesy, nearly always delightful. Made me want to visit Spillville, Iowa; listen to more Dvořák; and read more Škvorecký.

Reesies says

This is one of my top 3 or so favourite books ever. It's just beautifully written, about music and nostalgia and all the best things that America could be at the end of the 19th century. The chapter titled "Jessie in the Oyster Bar" is a perfectly effected vignette.

El says

The story follows Czech composer Antonin Dvorak from Czechoslovakia to the United States (specifically New York and Iowa, allowing for interesting details dedicated to the differing landscapes and behaviors of the folks living in each) in the late 19th-century. The biographical novel is told from many perspectives of varying age, gender, race and opinion of the man and his music. Skvorecky is an obvious fan of Dvorak's music and clearly did research on his personal life, managing to not completely vilify nor champion Dvorak in the story. The various characters and their perspectives helped to flesh out this authentic person.

I like to imagine Skvorecky listened to nothing but Dvorak's music as he wrote this book; his writing is lyrical and foreful just as Dvorak's music is, and both are equally addictive, multi-layered. The composer had flaws, he was not always happy, he was hard to work with, but he always created something beautiful when he sat down to compose, and his difficulty with others only helped the creative process as opposed to destroying it entirely. This is one of those rare books I loved every moment of, but if I were to consider re-reading it at a later date I think it would be lost on me the second time around. Sometimes the first reading is the most magical; anything after that loses something, sort of like celebrating Christmas as one gets older: the presents are still nice, but the surprise is gone.

Robert Wechsler says

I adored this novel on the second try (the first time, many years ago, I found it too rich). One of the things I appreciated this time around, but not back then, was how ?apekian it is, both in its storytelling (it is story after story after story, much like Tales from Two Pockets) and its cubism (it might be the only cubist biographical novel).

A review I had left in the book faulted it for not presenting Dvo?ák clearly. How could it? You see him from myriad points of view, but it is not about him, it is only about how he is seen, and he is often offstage or in the background. He is there (or it is important that he is not there), but he is rarely center stage. Škvorecký took an enormous risk, and the novel works, but only if you recognize what he is doing.

Nell says

M?j první Škvorecký. Nebo aspo? první, kterého jsem do?etla.

Vzhledem k tématu (všemi ?echy bezpochyby milovanému Dvo?ákovi, mnou p?edevším), m? Scherzo moc bavilo, p?estože jsem ob?ast dost tápala, kdo je co za postavu, která sle?na je tamta a která tahle, který hrab? je tenhle, jakou p?ezdívku zrovna Dvo?ák má atd.

Bylo moc fajn p?e?íst si o život? tohoto velikého skladatele.

(Ale te? n?jakou dobu radši pauza od Škvoreckého.)

Virginia says

Mainly about Dvorak coming to America. Interesting because of the Negro Spirituals and how they influenced his New World Symphony.

Marlene says

Didn't finish. Not worth the effort.

Hugh says

I read most of Skvorecky's fiction about 20 years ago but for some reason never got round to this one. It is very different to his other work in that it has a biographical element, and is largely about the composer Dvorak and his trips to America that inspired the New World Symphony, but it is far more fun than a straight biography would be, as the narrative baton is passed through various friends, family members and musicians of varying degrees of reliability. Possibly not quite Skvorecky's best work but well worth reading, entertaining and educational.

KayG says

This fictional account of Dvorak's life during his years in the U.S. was thought-provoking. Stories were told by various characters who had encounters with Dvorak. He was fascinated with the music of the U.S. and spent time with the black musicians of the day, including Harry T. Burleigh. Although blacks were free then, their struggles were enormous, and this book showed this intimately.

A few passages from the book:

“But the important thing is that Beethoven got performed here at all back then in the thirties, when pigs were still at large in the streets and most of the music-going public in New York still believed that cellists were impoverished double-bass players who couldn't afford a larger instrument. “

“Not that I mind Dizzy or be-bop, but there's more to the palace of music than the basement. “

Told by conductor, after listening to street music:

So the old fellow turned to me and said, “Sure can play, eh what?”

“They're doing a fine job,” I replied.

“A fine job,” said the old man, “but I tell you sir, this is nothing. I once heard a band - a big one - maybe a hundred people in it. Now there was music. Not waltzes - symponys, sir. Ever heard a symphony? My, it was lovely.”

“Where was that,” I asked.

“Oh, it must be a good twenty years back, in New York,” he said. “Friend of mine took me to the Terrace Garden, that's where I heard it. A sympony. Ever hear a symphony? If you haven't, then you don't know what music is!”

I swear to you, nothing, not even the finest review has ever given me so much pleasure. Here I am, standing in a one-horse town in Nebraska, and a tattered old man tells me he heard my orchestra twenty years ago, and the experience stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Dewey says

Being a big Dvorak fan, I had been looking forward to reading this book by one of the many great Czech writers the 20th century gave to both them and the rest of the world in translation for some time. Having already read his debut novel *The Cowards* and his two novellas *the Bass Saxophone* and *the Legend of Emöke*, Škvoreckys historical fiction was the one speciality of his that I hadn't yet explored.

It is with much regret that I found myself unable to finish the novel. Škvoreckys prose is immaculate. He had most definitely come a long way from the meandering, stream-of-consciousness that defined his debut and wields a mighty weapon here. But for some reason, Škvorecky chose to tell Dvoraks story from the perspectives of those people involved in that important chapter of his life. Which isn't a bad thing in and of itself, but he doesn't make it work. Not only is it not fully clear which character is telling which story (it worked with *Dos Passos* but not here), he eschews chronology as well, bouncing between time periods and leaving the reader unsure of where he or she is. As a result, I felt like I wasn't gaining anything from this book.

Great book for those who like prose for proeses sake. But *Dvorak in Love* is a failed experiment. If you do choose to read it (and I don't intend to dissuade anybody from doing so), I suggest not making it the first thing you read by Škvorecky. Start with his novellas *the Bass Saxophone* and *the Legend of Emöke*.

Mike Bruce says

Dvorak is one of my favorite composers for pieces like "Slavonic Dances", "From the New World" Symphony, and the "American" quartet (all his quartets are amazing). I read this book to learn more about his life and his adventures during his trip to America where he wrote some of his most famous pieces like the "New World" and the "American", which are largely based on native american and african-american tunes he heard. Read the book if you want to learn more....

Ania says

Trudna księżka, w której Škvorecký nie ma dla czytelnika litości – rzuca go w sam środek jakiejś sceny, gwałtownie skacze w czasie i przestrzeni, a kiedy już ten jako-tako zdąży się przyzwyczaić do scenerii i uczestników zdarzeń, przerzuca go gdzie indziej. Warto się z nią jednak zmierzyć i wypróbować z niej to, co najprzyjemniejsze. Obraz Dvořáka jako wielkiego kompozytora, ale również zwykłego człowieka, ze swoimi słabościami, tajemnicami, skrywanymi uczuciami. To, co inspirowało go w Ameryce – i co również nas fascynuje w tym ogromnym, barwnym kulturowym tyglu. Zabawne i smutne historie imigrantów, murzyńskie pieśni, dźwięki, smaki, zapachy...

Martha Toll says

Here's an article I wrote that discusses Dvorak in Love. <http://www.tinhouse.com/blog/38118/co...>

Nathan says

Absolutely beautiful. Its method of indirect storytelling is poignant and highly effective.
