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# Schoenberg's early Wagnerisms: Atonality and the redemption of Ahasuerus

JULIE BROWN

When we young Austrian-Jewish artists grew up, our self-esteem suffered very much from the pressure of certain circumstances. It was the time when Richard Wagner's work started its victorious career, and the success of his music and poems was followed by an infiltration of his *Weltanschauung*, of his philosophy. You were no true Wagnerian if you did not believe in his philosophy, in the ideas of *Erlösung durch Liebe*, salvation by love; you were not a true Wagnerian if you did not believe in *Deutschtum*, in Teutonism; and you could not be a true Wagnerian without being a follower of his anti-Semitic essay, *Das Judentum in der Musik*, 'Judaism in Music'. . . . You have to understand the effect of such statements on young artists.<sup>1</sup>

It is a commonplace that Wagner's music profoundly influenced Schoenberg's brand of modernism. By Schoenberg's own confession, his motivic technique was inspired as much by Wagner as by Brahms, while his 'emancipation of the dissonance' was a theoretical solution to the consequences of Wagnerian harmony: both 'extended' and 'floating' tonality, Schoenbergian categories for pre-emancipation syntax, are defined with reference to *Tristan*.<sup>2</sup> The Schoenberg-led avant garde was, in short, a spiritual legacy of Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik*, and the proliferation of individual poetics that accompanied it, obsessively legitimising the compositional process, betrays the same Wagnerian inheritance.

The Wagnerian debt that is more aesthetic and spiritual than technical falls into the nebulous category of 'Wagnerism', a strain of reception often thought to have been more important in literature, aesthetic theory, philosophy, politics and the plastic arts than in music.<sup>3</sup> To draw a distinction between technical and spiritual influence may seem as redundant as asking whether a twentieth-century composer was influenced by Wagner in the first place. It is clear that when the subject is music, a technical dimension underpins even the ideological and the aesthetic: to consider musical legacy, whether in compositional or 'spiritual' terms, is to engage with music. And when a predecessor looms as large as Wagner, merely to consider the possibility of influence is unavoidably

<sup>1</sup> Lecture given on 29 March 1935 to the Jewish Mailamm group who were helping the Hebrew University to build and maintain a music department. In Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley, 1975), 502–3.

<sup>2</sup> Details on the motivic debt can be found in Schoenberg's 'National Music' (1931), *Style and Idea*, 174; see also 'Brahms the Progressive' (1933, rev. 1947), *ibid.*, 398–441; Werner Breig, 'Schönberg und Wagner: Die Krise um 1910' in *Bericht über den 2. Kongreß der Internationalen Schönberg-Gesellschaft: 'Die Wiener Schule in der Musikgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts'*, ed. Rudolf Stephan and Sigrid Wiesmann (Vienna, 1986), 42–8; and Helmuth Weinland, 'Wagner zwischen Beethoven und Schönberg', *Musik-Konzept*, 59 (Munich, 1988), 73ff.

<sup>3</sup> Erwin Koppen, 'Wagnerism as Concept and Phenomenon', in *Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 343. See also David C. Large and William Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca, 1984).

to find it. Wagner's musical impact on Schoenberg could be framed in terms of wilful appropriation, wilful misreading or anxiety-induced misprision; essentialism is built into the epistemological question.<sup>4</sup> Yet, in spite of the virtually guaranteed 'result', it seems perverse to ignore Wagner during the decades after his death, and even well beyond: the shadow *was* enormous, it embraced spiritual as well as technical features, and its shape changed with authorial perspective. In Robin Holloway's words: 'Modern music as a whole consists of the entire spread of the post-Wagnerian century, a release of energies from the impact, whether direct, oblique, or in vehement rejection, of the most influential composer there has ever been'. Richard Taruskin puts it more pungently: Wagner was everybody's 'appalling father'.<sup>5</sup>

One aspect of Wagnerism whose mainstream music-historical consequences have largely been ignored is the 'poetics' of anti-Semitism. This is in part a legacy of the persecution of Jewish composers in pre-war and wartime Nazi Germany, Schoenberg being notable – indeed, almost symbolic – among them. On one side is a Nazi campaign officially denouncing the supposed Jewish contamination of music and art, reaching its apotheosis in the *Entartete Musik* (and *Kunst*) exhibitions; on the other is Wagner as 'negative image', as virtual state institution.<sup>6</sup> Yet a speech made by Schoenberg to the Jewish Mailamm group shortly after his arrival in the United States (quoted in part above), reminds us that earlier in the century Central European composers and artists did not necessarily distinguish between the light of Wagner's technical achievement and the dark side of his inspirational genius. Schoenberg's speech amounts to a confession that his passion for Wagner had once been multi-faceted. As well as embracing the sonic world of his music dramas, Schoenberg had adopted Wagner's *Weltanschauung*, had consciously embraced the ideals of *Erlösung durch Liebe*, the anti-Semitic essay 'Judaism in Music', and German supremacism (*Deutschtum*).<sup>7</sup>

A brand of Wagnerism that involved following 'Judaism in Music', when espoused by someone as influential as Schoenberg, opens new perspectives not only on the reach of Wagner's anti-Semitism, but on the nature and extent of his influence on music of this century. At a time when Wagner's ideology has come in for fresh scrutiny (notably in Paul Lawrence Rose's *Wagner: Race and Revolution*), and when there is renewed interest

<sup>4</sup> Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford, 1975). On applications of this theory to twentieth-century composition, see Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Holloway, 'Modernism and After in Music', *The Cambridge Review*, 110/2305 (1989), 60; Taruskin, 'Revising Revision', review of Kevin Korsyn, 'Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence', and Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition*, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 46/1 (1993), 138. On Wagner's impact this century, see also Leon Botstein, 'Wagner and our Century', in *Music at the Turn of the Century: A 19th-Century Music Reader*, ed. Joseph Kerman (Berkeley, 1990), 167–80; Arnold Whittall, 'The Birth of Modernism: Wagner's Impact on the History of Music', in *The Wagner Compendium: A Guide to Wagner's Life and Music*, ed. Barry Millington (London, 1992), 393–6; Carl Dahlhaus, 'Wagner's Place in the History of Music', in *Wagner Handbook*, 99–117; and Joseph Kerman's still thought-provoking, 'Wagner: Thoughts in Season', *The Hudson Review*, 13/3 (1960), 329–49.

<sup>6</sup> See Albrecht Dümmling and Peter Girth, eds., *Entartete Musik: Eine kommentierte Rekonstruktion – zur Düsseldorfer Ausstellung von 1938* (Berlin, 1988); Fred K. Prieberg, *Musik im NS-Staat* (Frankfurt, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> The last of these has recently been brought polemically into focus by Taruskin; see his 'Revising Revision', 124–38.

in the ideologies of twentieth-century music, Schoenberg's Mailamm lecture presents us with fertile ground.<sup>8</sup> It implies a complex compositional influence, one that can serve as a counterweight to purely technical considerations, and includes race and religion as well as historical events tied to an intellectual legacy. I should like to concentrate on the juncture around 1910, a critical turning point within a period that is still, as Carl Dahlhaus observed, 'an unsolved problem'.<sup>9</sup> To consider Schoenberg's reception of Wagner at the time may address some long-standing questions about the birth of the Second Viennese School, and identify a moment when Wagner's spiritual influence found its most far-reaching compositional expression.<sup>10</sup>

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On 14 January 1910, Schoenberg's first major atonal works, the song cycle *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* and the Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11, received their first performances at the Wiener Verein für Kunst und Kultur. The concert also included Part I of *Gurrelieder* (1900–3, completed 1910–11), his overtly Wagnerian cantata, sung to a piano arrangement. In the programme note, Schoenberg recognises the stylistic incongruity of including the selection from *Gurrelieder*, but defends his choice by claiming that 'such heterogeneous works within the confines of a single concert' indicated the 'striking expression of one particular person's will'. He includes *Gurrelieder* as a means of signalling that he was

forced in this direction . . . not because my invention or technique is inadequate, nor because I am uninformed about all the other things the prevailing aesthetics demand, but [because] I am obeying an inner compulsion, *which is stronger than any up-bringing*: I am obeying the formative process which, being the one natural to me, is stronger than my artistic education (my emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

But why a specially prepared and incomplete *Gurrelieder* when other works could easily have demonstrated his technical competence, and better illustrated that the development of harmonic language was 'forcing him' in a new direction – why not the Chamber Symphony, for instance? And how might we understand *Das Buch's* relation to the Wagnerian *Gurrelieder* in light of what Schoenberg says in the same programme:

With the George songs I have for the first time succeeded in approaching an ideal of expression and form which has been in my mind for years. Until now, I lacked the strength and confidence to make it a reality. But now that I have set out along this path once and for all, I am conscious of having broken through every restriction of a bygone aesthetic; and though the goal towards

<sup>8</sup> *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (New Haven, 1992). For other recent perspectives, see Jacob Katz, *The Darker Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism* (Hanover, 1986); Dieter Borchmeyer, 'The Question of Anti-Semitism', in *Wagner Handbook*, 166–85; Barry Millington, 'Nuremberg Trial: Is There Anti-Semitism in *Die Meistersinger*?', this journal, 3 (1991), 247–60; and Millington, 'Wagner and the Jews', in *The Wagner Compendium*, 161–4. On ideology in this century, see Richard Taruskin, 'Revising Revision', and 'Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology', *19th-Century Music*, 16 (1993), 286–302.

<sup>9</sup> The period to which Dahlhaus refers is from 1889 to the advent of serialism: 'Wagner's Musical Influence', in *Wagner Handbook*, 554.

<sup>10</sup> This article is part of an ongoing project on the intellectual and cultural contexts of the Second Viennese School.

<sup>11</sup> The programme note is published in Willi Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*, trans. Leo Black (London, 1971), 48–9.

which I am striving appears to me a certain one, I . . . suspect that even those who have so far believed in me will not want to acknowledge the necessary nature of this development.

In the context of Schoenberg's confessed sympathy with a Wagnerian *Weltanschauung*, it may be fruitful to explore what he considered 'necessary' about the path he chose. Although considerable attention has been devoted to the composer's Jewish identity from the year 1921 (when he experienced the openly anti-Semitic treatment in Mattsee, Austria, that eventually led to his formal re-entry into the Jewish community), the same cannot be said of the previous forty-six years.<sup>12</sup> Many of the decisions he made in the historic year of 1908 may have been informed by a dilemma that he faced as both Wagnerite and Jewish modernist; a need to reconcile his professional status as composer with his supposed natural predisposition for musical 'damage'.

In 1940 Schoenberg claimed that by the time he was twenty-five he had heard each of Wagner's operas between twenty and thirty times.<sup>13</sup> It is less clear, however, how his absorption of Wagner's philosophy manifests itself compositionally, especially since Schoenberg was uncharacteristically low key about it: he wrote, for instance, no tribute to Wagner, as he did to Liszt, Mahler, Bach, Zemlinsky and – notably – Brahms. However, an essay published in the Berlin *Konzert-Taschenbuch* in 1912 includes the admission that 'I personally love Wagner so much that I include even his descendants, his most distant heirs, in this love'. This article was Schoenberg's contribution to a debate about the copyright on *Parsifal*, namely whether a special law ought be enacted to protect the composer's wish that the opera not be performed outside Bayreuth.<sup>14</sup> Arguing for the continuation of the copyright, but for limited performance elsewhere, Schoenberg proposed that three main issues were at stake: 'piety towards Wagner's wishes, the artistic and moral matter of the sacred festival drama, and . . . the legal and financial side which has to do with an author's copyright'. The financial issue was raised because to Schoenberg the well-being of Wagner's most distant heirs was more important than the libraries of so-called art-lovers. Such a statement in a brochure for the concert-going public about the ideologically controversial *Parsifal* can only be taken as an attempt to send out a clear message of allegiance. The composer's output as a whole – compositions, paintings and writings on various topics – gives us reason to believe that adoption of Wagner's *Weltanschauung* meant more to Schoenberg than either technical progress or sympathy with his Schopenhauerian philosophy, more even than the idea of *Erlösung durch Liebe* referred to in the Mailamm lecture. His paintings, the texts and subtexts of his aesthetic and theoretical writings, and certain features of a

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Mäckelmann, *Arnold Schönberg und das Judentum: Der Komponist und sein religiöses, nationales und politisches Selbstverständnis nach 1921* (Hamburg, 1984) and Alexander Ringer, *Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew* (Oxford, 1990). Ringer ignores the Mailamm speech; Mäckelmann, 269–72, considers it but underplays the Wagner reference, taking the lecture as a demonstration that Schoenberg not only understood complete assimilation as unattainable and therefore futile, but also that assimilation brought with it the danger of Jewish self-hatred. Hartmut Zelinsky, whose anti-Wagnerian polemics are well known, is the notable exception, although his reading differs from mine; see his 'Arnold Schönberg – der Wagner Gottes: Anmerkung zum Lebensweg eines deutschen Juden aus Wien', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 4 (1986), 7–19.

<sup>13</sup> 'Art and the Moving Picture' (1940), *Style and Idea*, 155.

<sup>14</sup> 'Parsifal und Urheberrecht', *Konzert-Taschenbuch für die Saison 1911/12* (Berlin, 1912), 84–90. Translated as 'Parsifal and Copyright', *Style and Idea*, 491–6.

crucial composition suggest that the allegiance extended from the essay 'Judaism in Music' to the idea of *Erlösung dem Erlöser*, with Schoenberg as the *Erlöser*.

When Schoenberg first stepped into the 'wilderness' of atonality, he did so with *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*. He chose, that is, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon as his symbolic territory, one steeped in apocalyptic symbolism as well as topical Jewish associations. Schoenberg's move to Berlin in December 1901 had coincided with the so-called 'Streit über *Babel und Bibel*', a factional theological debate stemming from lectures given by the assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch in which 'Babel', Babylon and Babylonia became symbolic ground for religious and racial anti-Jewish attack.<sup>15</sup> The 'Streit' quickly became a subject for plays and pantomimes, and by 1905 a book had appeared entitled *Babel-Bibel in der modernen Kunst*. Especially in view of its emphasis on 'Book', Schoenberg's *Buch der hängenden Gärten*, begun in 1908, is strongly redolent of this incident.

The reference seems doubly appropriate for a work from which the confusing tongues of Viennese modernism first issued. The cycle's musical language is certainly Babel-like: while many of the fifteen songs are extremely radical, many refer to traditional structures and remain tantalisingly close to tonal closure; some contain a mix of new and old. Given this linguistic confusion and stylistic promiscuity, it is above all significant that *Das Buch's* Jewish reference should coexist with allusion to the Fall of Babylon, originally God's punishment for the decadent ancient city, but eventually a metaphor for the final judgement of mankind. The collapse of tonality in *Das Buch* was the necessary Musical Fall from which the Piano Pieces, Op. 11 and following works could emerge. In other words, the pointed symbolism of Schoenberg's radical musical step constructed technical development as a redemptive act, both musically and personally. Well before the incidents at Mattsee led him to realise that assimilation was not possible, Schoenberg's problematic identity as baptised Jew and Wagnerian seems to have contributed to his decision to choose the revolutionary path.

### Schoenberg as baptised Jew

It is well known that Schoenberg was born into a Jewish family, converted to Christianity as a young man, and then reconverted to Judaism in 1933, writing some overtly 'Jewish' works in this later period – notably the opera *Moses und Aron* (1932) and the *Kol Nidre* (1938). He is reported to have had very little, if any, formal training in Jewish religious traditions; in spite of roots on his mother's side in a family of cantors, his father and uncle had apparently encouraged freedom of thought.<sup>16</sup> The family seems, in short, to have tried to assimilate into Western European culture. Schoenberg himself was born in Vienna, but his parents were *émigrés* who had moved to the 'centre' from elsewhere in the Austro-Hungarian Empire as children: his father was Slovakian,

<sup>15</sup> The lectures are published in English as *Babel and Bible*, ed. C. H. W. Johns (London and New York, 1903); no record of German publication. For a full account of the incident, see Klaus Johanning, *Der Bibel-Babel-Streit: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Studie* (Frankfurt, 1988). I am grateful to Sander Gilman for directing me to this incident.

<sup>16</sup> See Hans H. Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, trans. Humphrey Searle (London, 1976), 18, 20–1.

from Pressburg (now Bratislava), and his mother was from an old Prague Jewish family. The move to the cultural capital was not, however, a guarantee of assimilation. *Fin-de-siècle* Vienna may have been something of an ethnic melting-pot, a place where citizens from the Bohemian Lands enjoyed theoretical equality with citizens of the Austrian capital; in reality a city law decreed that all citizens recognise the ‘German character of the city’. Czechs, for instance, were marginalised, not merely by virtue of their low socio-economic status, but also by constant reminders that they were unwelcome.<sup>17</sup>

Schoenberg’s family origins would have marked him with ethnic as well as Jewish difference. They lived in Vienna’s second district, an island between the River Danube and the Danube canal, identified with Eastern Jews even by ‘Viennese Jews’; it was seen figuratively as the ‘Island of the Matzohs’, a cultural ghetto where Yiddish was widely spoken.<sup>18</sup> Felix Greissle, who came into the Schoenberg circle around 1920 and subsequently married the composer’s daughter Gertrud (Trudi), reported that Schoenberg remained self-conscious about his birth:

Schoenberg . . . until his very last day was conscious that he had come from lower circumstances and been equipped with no manners; he had no breeding. His father walked around the streets and bought rags: finally he was called a ‘Handelsmann’ or businessman. Schoenberg was unfortunately always very anxious to hide his lowly past, to a point where he began to hate people who came from the same circumstances. He rejected his own background.<sup>19</sup>

Linguistic deficiencies were something the composer undertook to mitigate formally, as is suggested by an extensively annotated volume in his personal library entitled *Prof. Ed. Engels Stimmbildungslehre: Übungsstoff für den Unterricht im Sprechen* (Dresden, 1922). This book, whose final poem is teasingly entitled ‘Muttersprach’, includes passages for practice, with a list of hand-written words on the inside back cover suggesting that *tr* and *dr* were particular Schoenbergian problems (he includes for the latter the nonsense word ‘ladralaladra’): the publication date indicates that the composer worked at spoken language in this way even in his 50s.

Consciousness of humble Jewish origins and language may have found its ultimate biographical expression in Schoenberg’s conversion to Protestantism on 25 March 1898. Greissle speaks of his father-in-law’s Protestant phase as ‘the time when he had anti-Semitic traits in reverse. . . . At the time . . . I married his daughter [1921], he was very proud that his son-in-law was not Jewish. It was an absolute achievement that he had a non-Jewish son-in-law. It was my biggest asset that I was not Jewish.’<sup>20</sup> We have few other testimonies that Schoenberg had ‘anti-Semitic traits in reverse’, but the composer’s concern for pronunciation and, as I shall explore later, expression in music,

<sup>17</sup> See Monika Gletler, ‘Minority Culture in a Capital City: The Czechs in Vienna at the Turn of the Century’, in *Decadence and Innovation: Austro-Hungarian Life and Art at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Robert B. Pynsent (London, 1989), especially 49 and 55.

<sup>18</sup> See Sander L. Gilman, *Friend, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, 1993), 15. On Schoenberg’s family, see Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg*, especially 15–45.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with George Perle, 1970–1: transcript in the Arnold Schoenberg Institute, Los Angeles, p. 25 (minimally edited). Given the dearth of authentic material on Schoenberg’s circumstances before 1910, we might admit his testimony here.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Perle, 25–6.

were consistent with the idea that anti-Semitism among Jews was largely a response to the charge of being unable to command the discourse of the world they inhabited.<sup>21</sup> Yet Schoenberg's sense of religious and cultural identity, by the 1920s and probably earlier, was by no means stable. Greissle mentions his ambivalence about stereotyping: 'At the same time [as he saw my non-Jewishness as an asset], he made remarks that were turned against gentiles: he attacked me. I was the dopey gentile for having done this or that.'

Little survives on the circumstances of Schoenberg's decision to convert, which Greissle said was always 'shrouded in secrecy', although speculation has focused on Schoenberg's friend Walter Pieau, a Lutheran listed as Schoenberg's godfather in the register of baptism.<sup>22</sup> Alexander Ringer, who has written at length about the composer's Jewish identity, emphasises this personal link, stressing that the conversion was 'nominal', even 'paradoxical' – that Schoenberg was an 'unreformed Jew at heart'.<sup>23</sup> Yet the composer's confession in the Mailamm lecture of the open dislike of Jews he and his contemporaries expressed at the turn of the century suggests another view: that rejection of Judaism was both an act of Wagnerian renunciation and an expression of Wagner-inspired Teutonism. Conversion to Lutheranism meant alignment with Germany rather than Austria, whose state religion was Roman Catholicism. To become a Lutheran was also to become part of the most anti-Semitic branch of the Christian Church within Germany. Luther's disciples were taught to regard Jews, unless they had converted to Christianity, as the eternal enemies of Christ and his Church, owing to an inherited responsibility for the crucifixion.<sup>24</sup> Conversion to Lutheranism may therefore have lent Schoenberg's action an element of martyrdom. In this context, it is not surprising that his baptism, the clearest statement regarding national and religious identity, coincided with his compositional maturity and the turn towards Wagner.

September 1897 had seen completion and performance of the Brahms-influenced String Quartet in D major, but in 1898 Schoenberg departed from the Brahmsian path of absolute music and turned to 'New German' ideals – descriptive, symphonic music after literary models. In the first work he acknowledged with an opus number, two songs to texts by Karl von Levetzow, he began to explore a new chromatic language, although still retaining a predominantly Brahmsian style. With the valedictory titles of 'Abschied' and 'Dank', these seem to be Schoenberg's formal farewell to this style. He next turned to the poetry of Richard Dehmel. In two specifically Christian texts, 'Gethsemane' and 'Jesus bettelt', a Wagnerian debt becomes more explicit: Walter Frisch points out that the lengthy prelude to the incomplete 'Gethsemane' seems to be modelled directly on the Prelude to *Tristan*, and also that the song's climax occurs on

<sup>21</sup> See in particular Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> See Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Ringer, *Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew*, 26, 36, 7 and 178.

<sup>24</sup> Luther emerges as a 'political hero' because of his achievement of separation from Rome; see Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Lees (London, 1912), II, 366–77. Ringer (*The Composer as Jew*, 16) reports that ten thousand individuals – Jews and Catholics – became Protestants within two years. For a consideration of the impact of the Lutheran Church on German Jews, see Richard Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb! The German Evangelical Church and the Jews 1879–1950* (Oxford, 1976).



the *Tristan* chord itself.<sup>25</sup> However, the first conspicuously Wagnerian work, and the piece with which Schoenberg achieved his first notable recognition, was *Verklärte Nacht*, Op. 4 (1899), a chamber piece with a programme and the first of Schoenberg's attempts to reconcile his Brahmsian past with Wagnerian 'New German' ideals. The Dehmel poem that provides the programme may seem slightly tawdry, even misogynist on one level, but on another it embodies the Wagnerian ideal of *Erlösung durch Liebe*: a woman, pregnant by another man, is redeemed and her baby transfigured through the love of her new partner. In March 1900 Schoenberg began his next major work, *Gurrelieder*, based on the Nordic mythological poetry of Jens Peter Jacobson and containing themes consonant with those of Wagner's music dramas. While Schoenberg's mistrust of Jews did not necessarily arise directly from his Wagnerism (the cultural base of anti-Semitism in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna is dismally broad), and while his religious and cultural identity around 1898 remains somewhat elusive, a close relationship between his baptism and his Wagnerism seems likely.

From about 1908 it becomes possible to learn more about Schoenberg's Jewish identity. At that time he not only took the radical step into atonality, but also began to write articles, as well as the *Harmonielehre* (1911), to paint and, with *Die glückliche Hand*, to fashion libretti and plan set designs and lighting; he became, in short, something of a *Gesamtkünstler*. Common to much of this production is an attempt to construct a version of himself that was the negative image of his artistic and music critical surroundings. In his Mailamm speech, Schoenberg would draw a distinction between a view of Jewishness as a set of characteristics from which an individual Jew might 'redeem' himself (his reading of Wagner's 'Judaism in Music'), and a racial definition for which there was, as Schoenberg understood it, no redemption:

Wagner, perhaps not sure of his own pure Aryan blood, gave Jewry a chance: 'Out of the ghetto!' he proclaimed, and asked Jews to become true Germans,<sup>26</sup> which included the promise of having the same rights on German mental culture, the promise of being considered like true citizens.

But it was not the destiny of Jews to develop like Wagner desired. It was not our destiny to disappear, to meld and assimilate with Germans or any other people. And fortunately it depended not on desire, propositions and suggestions from any well-meaning stranger, but only on Divine Providence. We had to remain Jews and, as always when Jewry was endangered by assimilation, Providence for once constrained us by her powerful hand to fulfil our duties as God's elected people, and made the new-starting racial anti-Semitism her instrument.

What always happens with ideas when camp-followers develop them also happened in the case of Wagner: if Wagner were [*sic*] relatively mild, so his followers were harsh; if Wagner gave the Jews the possibility of living like citizens, his followers insisted on nationalism; if Wagner considered only the mental and moral accomplishments of Jews, his followers stated the racial differences. Followers always carry on to excess, and so we had soon to learn from men like Houston Chamberlain that there is a racial difference between Jews and Germans – that not only is the Aryan race a very superior race destined to rule the world, that not only is the Jewish race

<sup>25</sup> See 'Schoenberg and the Poetry of Richard Dehmel', *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*, 9 (1986), 151–2.

<sup>26</sup> I have reinstated the word 'German' that appears in Schoenberg's original typescript; it is substituted by 'human' in the published version. The text in *Style and Idea* is heavily edited to disguise the limitations of Schoenberg's English at the time of his emigration.

an inferior race and one to be detested, but, we had also to realize, the Jewish race possessed no creative capacity.<sup>27</sup>

As is well known, Wagner's 'Judaism in Music' reflects various stereotypes of Jews current at the time (1850) and directs them towards musical issues. It begins with a sketch of Jewish appearance, speech and greed, and goes on to a critique of the state of German music – its alleged corruption being largely the fault of the Jews. In particular, Wagner perpetuates the idea that although the Jew may speak 'the language of the country in which he has lived from generation to generation, . . . he always speaks it as a foreigner'.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the essay, Wagner states that for the Jew to become 'human in common with us is tantamount to his ceasing to be a Jew', a transformation he acknowledges will involve 'sweat and deprivation, and . . . the fullest measure of suffering and anguish' (33). In the 'Explanations' accompanying the 1869 republication of this essay, Wagner even calls on 'intelligent and high-minded Jews' to be the redeemers of German music; 'all which burdens native German life from that direction, weighs far more terribly on intelligent and high-souled Jews themselves'. He continues, 'Much may be permitted and overlooked in the intelligent Jew by his more enlightened tribesmen, since they have made up their minds to live not only *with* us, but *in* us'. This appeal to the 'better selves' of Jewish Wagnerians indicates that Wagner was open to the possibility that Jews might 'battle for their own true emancipation':

Whether the downfall of our Culture can be arrested by a violent ejection of the destructive foreign element, I am unable to decide, since that would require forces with whose existence I am unacquainted. If, on the contrary, this element is to be assimilated with us in such a way that it matures with us toward the higher development of our nobler human qualities, then it is obvious that concealing the difficulties of such assimilation can be of no help here; only their most open exposure.<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the essay Wagner associates redemption from the 'Jew's curse' with Ahasuerus, whom legend says was condemned to eternal wandering for having denied Christ. This pervasive Wagnerian motif seems to have taken hold of Schoenberg's imagination and occupied a central position in the radical musical 'path' he took in 1908. Schoenberg's own understanding of the legend is partly explained in a lengthy footnote (dated 5 December 1914) appended to his personal copy of Schopenhauer's *Parerga und Paralipomena*: Ahasver (his spelling) is the 'justifiably persecuted Jew'.<sup>30</sup> The footnote arises as part of an objection to Schopenhauer's interpretation of Ahasver as an archetype of all Jews; Schoenberg argues that this is a specifically Christian concept. Unless understood as such, Schopenhauer's alternative, 'incomprehensible' idea would

<sup>27</sup> *Style and Idea*, 503. Schoenberg presumably refers to Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*. Chamberlain had, of course, published several books on Wagner's works, and was later to become the composer's son-in-law.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Judaism in Music', translated in *Wagner*, 9 (1988), 23. Additional references to this work will appear in the text.

<sup>29</sup> Translation based on 'Appendix to "Judaism in Music"', *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London, 1894), III, 120–2.

<sup>30</sup> Manuscript, Arnold Schoenberg Institute, Los Angeles: this and subsequent quotations are taken from a transcript available at the Institute. I should like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Irene Auerbach with translations of this and many other German documents.

imply that Jews really are the Chosen People, a view that Schoenberg in 1914 does not wish to sanction:

So if [Jews] are not the Ahasver of a personal God and we wish to retain the image [of them as Eternal Wanderers], then they are something more; they are the Chosen People and await their Messiah with justification. [But] it is decidedly not permissible to employ a comparison against whose assumptions one is fighting. Ahasver, the justifiably persecuted Jew, exists only for Christians, not for Jews.

[Wenn sie also nicht der Ahasver eines persönlichen Gottes sind und man will im Bild bleiben, dann sind sie eben noch etwas mehr, das auserwählte Volk und warten mit Recht auf ihren Messias. Es ist entschieden unzulässig, einen Vergleich zu verwenden, dessen Voraussetzungen man bekämpft. Ahasver, den mit Recht verfolgen Juden, giebt es nur für den Christen aber nicht für den Juden.]

A similar distinction to the one Schoenberg draws in the Mailamm lecture also emerges from this obscure footnote, a distinction between attacks on Jewishness as a fixed, racial category from which there was no turning, and Wagner-style attacks on Jewishness as a set of negative characteristics from which a penitent might turn (or, as Wagner saw it, for which he might atone). Schoenberg discriminates here between Judaism as an institution – defined by ‘professional Jewish theologians’ – and Jews as individuals. Differentiating between the Jewish Bible, ‘the history of the Jewish faith’, and the unwritten history of the Jewish *people*, the story of individuals not mentioned in the Bible, he interprets the Christian fight as one of many struggles against Jewish theology. We know about Christianity’s attempt only because of its success, because it became a new faith with its own history. ‘Geniuses’, ‘heads’, and ‘prophets’ grasp the same thought as Christ did.<sup>31</sup>

The image of Christ as the first genius to overcome his Jewishness is a major theme of the chapter on Judaism in Otto Weininger’s *Geschlecht und Charakter (Sex and Character)*, a book we know Schoenberg admired.<sup>32</sup> It is tempting to read self-reference into Schoenberg’s extended footnote, especially in view of the fact that his step into atonality was marked by a burst of self-portraiture, most simply images of heads with penetrating visionary gazes (see Fig. 1). Yet self-reference may go further. There are also indications that Schoenberg chose the redemption of Ahasuerus ‘offered’ him – a Jewish composer – by Wagner, as if by accepting this course he would become the ‘good Jew’. This interpretation sheds light on the composer’s stoicism in the face of criticism and eventual thematisation of such public disregard: by 1914, when he wrote

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘Wie jedes andere, kann es mit einer abstrakten Theologie nichts anfangen, sondern braucht fühlbares. Nur die Genies, die Köpfe, die Propheten können diesen Gedanken erfassen der ihnen (wahrscheinlich trotz seines Mangels) noch immer höher scheint, als der polytheistische. Zudem aber ist die Bibel die Geschichte des jüdischen Glaubens und in folgedessen ist in ihr nicht enthalten, wer gegen diesen gekämpft hat und unterlegen ist. Das erste solche Ereignis in diesem Glauben, das gesiegt hat, das christliche, hat seine eigene Geschichte. Die besiegten sind untergegangen. Nochmals also: im Volk fehlte das Bedürfnis nach einem Weiterleben nach dem Tode keinesfalls; nur in seiner Theologie.’

<sup>32</sup> Weininger, *Sex and Character*, authorised translation from the German (London, 1906); see in particular p. 327. In the Introduction to his *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg wrote that Weininger, along with Maeterlinck and Strindberg, had ‘thought earnestly’ about life’s problems: *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Leo Black (London, 1978), 2.

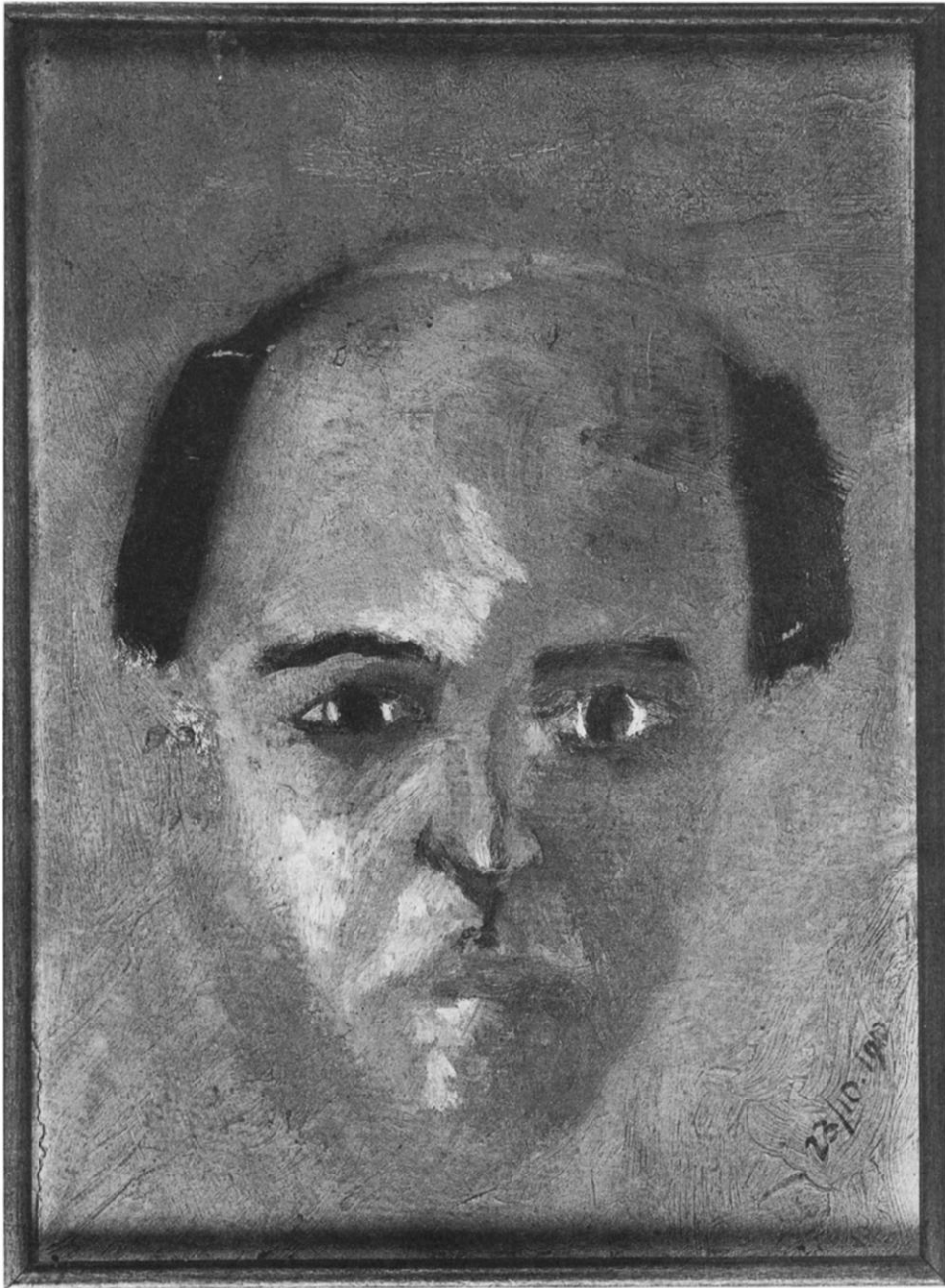


Fig. 1. *Green Self-portrait*, 1910. From *Arnold Schoenberg: Paintings and Drawings*, ed. Thomas Zaunschirm (Klagenfurt, 1991), number 3, p. 169 (reproductions and musical examples appear by kind permission of Lawrence Schoenberg).

the footnote in Schopenhauer, he may have resigned himself to persecution and rationalised it as fully justifiable. However, in order to perceive his own change of status he would have to begin seeing himself as distinct from ‘bad Jews’, Jews who remained ‘unrepentant’. This distinction became a motif of his writings and paintings.

### The ‘good Jew’ versus the ‘bad Jew’

Being Jewish meant being seen as different in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. In order for an assimilated Jew such as Schoenberg to regard himself as distinct from the ‘bad’ Jewish Other, he might identify those differences with a smaller subset of the larger group. In this case, the composer set up an antithesis between his music and current music by others, and also between himself and the musical establishment (especially newspaper critics): an opposition, that is, between creativity and non-creativity. Notwithstanding the distinction he drew in 1935 between the ‘good Jew’s’ chance of redemption and pessimistic racist determinism, Schoenberg’s writings indicate that he had himself absorbed the discourse of racial biology that pervaded medical science of the day.

Consider, for example, the qualities of difference in Schoenberg’s caricatures of two music critics dating from before 1912. The first (see Fig. 2) has a long curly beard and seems to be blind.<sup>33</sup> Blindness was a central myth of Jewish lack, a Christian accusation of the Jew’s inability to ‘see’ the truth of Christ prefigured in the Old Testament. Converted Jews, however, can ‘see’, as Schoenberg does in his self-portraits (Fig. 1).<sup>34</sup> Indeed, conversion often brought with it belief that the ‘seeing’ Jew might be even better than his co-Christians: he ‘sees’ in the enlightened way of the Christian, but at the same time maintains his access to ‘hidden’ language. Schoenberg constructed this antithesis between ‘blindness’ and ‘seeing’, inability and ability to understand, on a number of occasions. One was in an interview made as late as 1937:

[My] future course always lies so clearly ahead of me that nowadays, at least, I can be certain that it will [not] be different from that of my conception . . . only my blindness may be blamed for not perceiving where I stand, where I stood. . . . One wins a feeling of the most faithful carrying out of one’s duty when, although wishing otherwise, one does not do what appeared holy in the past and begins quietly to rejoice over one’s blindness with seeing eyes.<sup>35</sup>

Another was in a tribute to Mahler dating from 1912:

We are still to remain in a darkness which will be illuminated only fitfully by the light of genius . . . We are to remain blind until we have acquired eyes. Eyes that see the future. Eyes that

<sup>33</sup> A majority of Schoenberg’s visual works are undated, including this and the next caricature; however, since the bearded one and a ‘Vision’ (satire) – extremely similar to, and apparently contemporary with, the profile – are reproduced in a 1912 *Festschrift* to Schoenberg, edited by Berg, they clearly date from 1911 at the latest.

<sup>34</sup> Gilman (*Jewish Self-Hatred*, 29–31) traces this distinction between ‘blindness’ and ‘seeing’ from as early as the twelfth century. Concerning Luther and Lutheranism’s appropriation of this myth, see 63–7. For the pathological perspective, see Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (London, 1991), 68–72. My observations on Jewish identity and stereotyping owe much to Gilman’s work.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Affirmations’, statements by Schoenberg selected from various unspecified interviews, in *Schoenberg*, ed. Merle Armitage (Freeport, N.Y., 1937; rpt. 1971), 248. There is no doubt an additional mystical element to this Christian concept of ‘seeing’.



Fig. 2. *Critic I* (undated). Zaunschirm number 169, p. 275.

penetrate more than the sensual, which is only a likeness; that penetrate the super-sensual. Our soul shall be the eye.<sup>36</sup>

In his caricature of the critic, Schoenberg goes further and contrasts seeing with hearing: the message is that although this bearded critic may *hear* – with huge, slightly demonic pointed ears – he *sees* (understands) nothing. The painting may be the Mr Liebestöckl towards whom he directed his ire in the 1909 article ‘A Legal Question’, and who ‘looks like the incarnation of ill-will – a nightmare become flesh and beard’.<sup>37</sup> The beard takes on special significance elsewhere in the essay as the marker of masculine weakness. Responding to Liebestöckl’s suggestion that he, Schoenberg, carried a thick stick at the concert in question for protection, he says: ‘Against him, at least, I need no weapon – his beard is enough for me’. Karl Kraus, editor of the satirical journal *Die Fackel*, which Schoenberg read and admired, frequently reversed the symbolism of the beard in this way, turning a sign of potency into camouflage for intellectual and sexual insufficiency.<sup>38</sup> It would seem that for the clean-shaven, assimilated Schoenberg, this beard was a sign of the critic’s want of intellect and manliness – a sign of his Jewishness. It is ironic that the same stereotype should have been turned back on Schoenberg in Hans Pfitzner’s notorious pamphlet of 1920, *Neue Ästhetik der musikalischen Impotenz. Ein Verwesungssymptom?* (New Aesthetic of Musical Impotence: A Symptom of Decay?).

The second caricature is of a male face, complete with what looks like war paint (see Fig. 3): the subject is not simply ‘black’, but primitive, a ‘savage’. The profile highlights a bulging nose, ‘weak’ chin and frizzy hair. In a very similar painting, Schoenberg shows red – apparently blood – around the mouth and dripping from its corners.<sup>39</sup> The ‘black’ Jew is another of the myths that permeated both cultural stereotyping and the discourse of racial biology. According to Weininger, Jews ‘appear to possess a certain anthropological relationship with both Negroes and Mongolians’.<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to Kandinsky of 1923, Schoenberg expressed his own understanding of physical difference as a mark of the Jew. ‘Guilt’ was written on the body, was collective, racial:

What every Jew reveals by his hooked nose is not only his own guilt but also that of all those with hooked noses who don’t happen to be there too. But if a hundred Aryan criminals are all together, all that anyone will be able to reveal from their noses is their taste for alcohol, while for the rest they will be considered respectable people.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> ‘Gustav Mahler’, *Style and Idea*, 471. Schoenberg reworked this essay in 1948, but this statement dates from 1912.

<sup>37</sup> *Style and Idea*, 185–9.

<sup>38</sup> See Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna* (New Haven, 1986), 130–5; Timms, 133, also reports that Theodor Herzl reacted to the anti-Semitic sentiment of the 1880s by defiantly growing his beard to accentuate his Jewish solidarity.

<sup>39</sup> *Vision (Satire)*, *Zaunschirm* number 172, p. 276.

<sup>40</sup> *Sex and Character*, 303.

<sup>41</sup> *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein (London, 1964), 90. In a brief, unpublished essay, ‘The Art of the Caricaturist’, Schoenberg focuses on the nose, taking a caricature of himself as the starting point. Eventually he makes comparisons between the art of caricature and the technique of variation. Manuscript, Arnold Schoenberg Institute, Los Angeles.

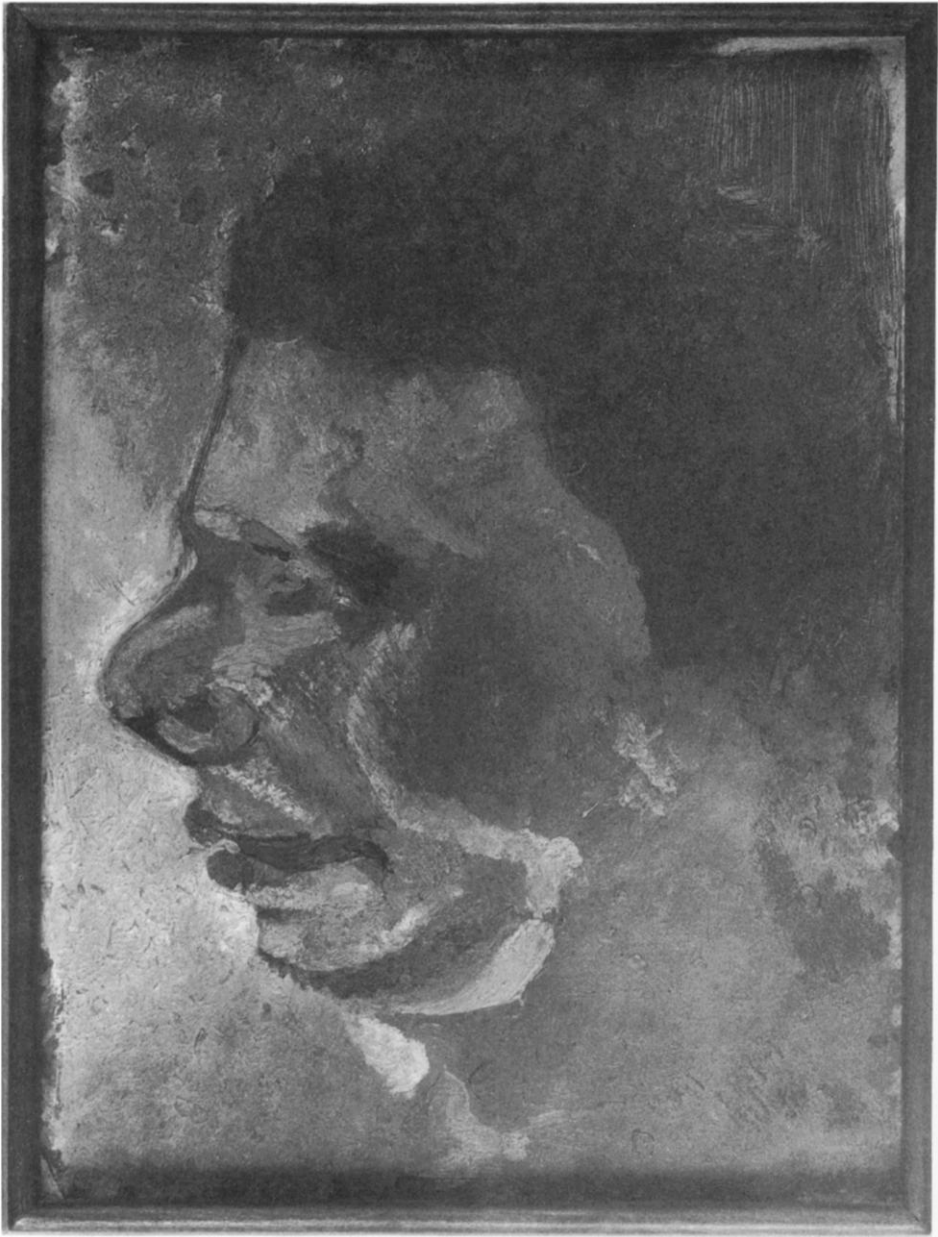


Fig. 3. *Critic II* (undated). Zaunschirm number 170, p. 277.

Of course, by 1923 his perspective had changed, this letter being important in that it details many factors that eventually led to his re-entry into the Jewish community in 1933. However, his earlier caricatures suggest that he had once been guilty of such physical stereotyping. Certainly his own self-portraits stand as a clear antithesis. Unlike those blind critics, he awards himself a direct and intense gaze; converted and assimilated, Schoenberg was a 'seeing' Jew. Furthermore, being clean-shaven, his nose



with a narrow bridge (as he consistently represented it around this time), Schoenberg's face was not only visionary, but also 'responsible'.<sup>42</sup>

A comparable focus on Jewish characteristics marks Schoenberg's verbal descriptions of critics, many of which also refer to Wagner. After Karl Kraus broke away from the mainstream and predominantly Jewish press to produce *Die Fackel*, he frequently satirised it in terms of Jewish categories, mentioning, for instance, the noses of prominent journalists; similarly, after Schoenberg broke away from the musical establishment with his step into atonality, he frequently represented the opposition – often critics – with Jewish motifs. I shall concentrate here on the period around 1910, but it is worth noting that revisions Schoenberg made for the 1922 edition of the *Harmonielehre* still stereotype critics as unproductive attackers who

annihilate themselves whenever they marshal their criticism against the work of art, their impotence against power, their sterility against productivity.

And even Heinrich Schenker, though praised highly as one who 'loves and understands the works of the older art', seems to be included:

inactivity in the creative sphere . . . turns into outrage when they assume a creative posture and lay claim, though with cracking voice, to the utmost recognition for their systems, setting these higher than the musical works themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Schoenberg admired system builders, but criticised Schenker both for his nostalgia for 'the good old days' and, as one of those posturing critics, for the cracking voice of impotent, emasculated, Jewish unproductivity.<sup>44</sup>

In the introduction to the *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg invokes the world of financial dealing and misdealing, a world perceived to be dominated by Jews in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. He imagines a critic accusing composers of treachery if they cross certain lines or create something the critic does not understand. He goes on to condemn assumptions that theory elaborates laws for art of the future, arguing that it describes rather than prescribes, and uses terms associated with sharp business practices: any composer who dares express something that 'did not agree with their rules', will be called a 'swindler' or 'con-man', and 'be slandered' by being accused of wanting 'to dupe' or 'to bluff'.<sup>45</sup> In the same context, he cites Beckmesser's epithet for Walther in *Die Meistersinger*: a composer will be called 'Neu-Junker-Unkraut' (new-Junker-weed). The message seems to be that people associated with music who are in the 'business world', such as critics, think in its terms.

In a public exchange with critic Carl Schmidt early in 1912, Schoenberg had first intended to align himself explicitly with Wagner by submitting an article entitled 'Schlafwandler' (Sleepwalker) to the journal *Pan* under the pseudonym 'Carl

<sup>42</sup> See Timms, *Karl Kraus*, 140–6.

<sup>43</sup> *Theory of Harmony*, 408.

<sup>44</sup> Gilman discusses a musical representation of this stereotype in Strauss's *Salome*: see 'Strauss and the Pervert', in *Reading Opera*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton, 1988), 306–27. In 'Nuremberg Trial' (see n. 8), Barry Millington argues that similar stereotypes inform Wagner's representation of Beckmesser.

<sup>45</sup> Schoenberg, *Harmonielehre* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1912), 4 (my translations). Further references are given in the text, citing Black's translation and then the 1911 page number.

Freigedank', the name Wagner used when he published 'Judaism in Music'.<sup>46</sup> In 'Der Musikkritiker' (The Music Critic), the second of the two articles in this exchange, Schoenberg openly admits to sharing Wagner's reaction to critics.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in 'Parsifal and Copyright', he moves smoothly from alignment with the 'artistic and moral matter' of the 'sacred festival drama' to an attack on present-day 'traders in art', an attack consonant with Wagner's on Jewish financial interests in opera. At the end of 'An Artistic Impression' (written in 1909 but unpublished at the time), in which he again speaks of critics 'conferring market value' on music, Schoenberg ends with an explicitly Wagnerian revolutionary utterance:

I shall not let the hubbub intimidate me. My only request would be – off with the masks! Then I could address my opponents in the words which the current view of *Walküre* finds superfluous: 'Where powers are boldly stirring, I counsel open war'.<sup>48</sup>

Schoenberg's hostility to critics was perhaps understandable given their incomprehension of his music, and his essays were not all negative. In 'An Artistic Impression', he suggests that part of the critic's responsibility is to nurture an ability to compare – 'to be outstandingly able to receive artistic impressions, to pin them down, compare, and describe them' – but also to understand current thinking on culture and ethics and to have an inkling of the relationship between it and modern composers. Critics must be in contact, intellectually and morally, with the main line of cultural and ethical development, or at least with one of its necessary offshoots.

An assumption that people would make comparisons between Wagner (the main line of cultural and ethical development?) and himself (its necessary offshoot?) may have informed Schoenberg's juxtaposition of *Gurrelieder* and *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* at the atonal concert of 1910. It may also have informed his curious completion of the cantata in 1910–11, and its full staging in 1913. In 1912 he wrote that *Gurrelieder* was 'the key to my whole development'.<sup>49</sup>

### Redemption and technical innovation

Schoenberg's perspective on the state of harmony, as found in the *Harmonielehre*, touches on these same themes: a recurring motif is music's emasculation, its infiltration by something unnatural that undermines tonality as a system. Schoenberg claims to have 'sensed immediately that the exclusive use of [the "exotic" whole tone] scale would bring about an emasculation [*Verweichlichung*] of expression, erasing all individuality' (394/439); the diminished chord has an 'indefinite, hermaphroditic, immature

<sup>46</sup> On this exchange, see Walter B. Bailey, 'Composer versus Critic: The Schoenberg-Schmidt Polemic', *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*, 4 (1980), 118–37, especially 126. In the end the journal, alerted to the author's identity, convinced Schoenberg to publish under his own name. Schoenberg's two essays appear in Bailey's article (in both German and English) along with Schmidt's original article and response. Schoenberg's essays also appear in *Style and Idea*.

<sup>47</sup> *Style and Idea*, 199.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to Emil Hertzka (managing director of Universal Edition, Vienna), 19 August 1912; quoted in Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 135.

character' (196/218).<sup>50</sup> The latter appears in a passage evoking stereotypes of both the Eastern Jew and the Eternal, Wandering Jew. A 'vagrant' chord, he argues, is 'at home in no particular key, is not the exclusive property of any . . . is a cosmopolitan or a tramp!' (195/217). Later, in *Structural Functions of Harmony* (1948), he would describe vagrant harmonies as 'wandering nomadically between regions, if not tonalities, without ever settling down'.<sup>51</sup> In the *Harmonielehre*, however, 'vagrant' chords are not yet associated with 'wandering'; instead, they produce almost parodic images of an assimilated Western Jew viewing the 'bad', conformist Orthodox Jew:

homeless phenomena, unbelievably adaptable and unbelievably lacking in independence; spies, who ferret out weaknesses and use them to cause confusion; turncoats, to whom abandonment of their individuality is an end in itself; agitators in every respect, but above all: most amusing fellows. (258/284)

In elaborating this image, Schoenberg touches on contemporary medical theories with which he would have been familiar from *Die Fackel* if not from newspapers. He distinguishes between vagrant chords that are 'truly' or naturally vagrant, and those we make so by artificial means, claiming that the 'truly' vagrant possess an inner structure that makes them different. Diminished sevenths and augmented triads fall into this category: they lack the perfect fifth that is the defining feature of 'natural' generation from the overtone series. They are 'the issue of inbreeding' (196/218), of 'incest' as he later adds (314/350) – both common in scientific discourse for defining a Jew's physiological difference – and have an insidious effect on tonality: they accomplish nature's will, but 'they arise out of the logical development of our tonal system, of its implications', rather than 'directly out of nature'. If from one perspective Schoenberg argues that the tonal system brings about its own end, from another he suggests a model of 'racial' degeneration: the 'logical development' by which tonality loses what is truly 'natural' (namely, a chord's perfect fifth), and the metaphors of 'inbreeding' and 'incest' relate the discussion to racial supremacy and potential degeneration through contamination with (to borrow Houston Stewart Chamberlain's word) the 'mongrel' races of Jews and gypsies.

This association is made more explicit in the chapter 'Non-Harmonic Tones', in which Schoenberg elaborates the innovative idea that tonality is no longer necessary if one considers all notes to be harmonic. He begins with a parallel between his harmony book and a medical book: something *non-harmonic* (*harmoniefremd*) in a harmony book is as nonsensical as that something non-medical (*medizinfremd*) might appear in a medical

<sup>50</sup> It is significant that a certain inconsistency emerges in his discussion of the whole-tone scale and the augmented triad: on the one hand, he is keen to distance himself from the idea that German usage of the augmented triad derives from 'exotic scales', suggesting rather that it originated in the New German School (Liszt); on the other, he seems to accept the 'exotic' source's evil influence, as witnessed by the comments above. It may simply be that the ideological threads woven through the subtext occasionally become entangled. For a brief reading of Schoenberg's discourse according to gender tropes, see Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, 1991), 11–12, 105–9.

<sup>51</sup> Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, ed. Leonard Stein (London, 1954), 35. In the *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg speaks instead of 'schwebende' and 'aufgehobene Tonalität': *Theory of Harmony*, 383–4.

book, a logic at which a reader who has followed the many digressions in Schoenberg's own text might raise an eyebrow (309/344). And while he does not elaborate the medical theme, Schoenberg invokes evolutionary metaphors and therefore – again – the potential for degeneration. Complex sounds are not accidental, but endemic and therefore to be freed from the notion of functional subordination; the process of 'historical evolution' – reality – 'is different from the natural evolution it might have been' (315/352). Complex chords are nevertheless chords, although 'not of the *system*, but of music' (322/361, emphasis added). The system to which he refers is the 'natural' harmonic one. There are, he concludes, 'no non-harmonic tones, no tones foreign to harmony, but merely tones foreign to the *harmonic system*' (321/360, emphasis added). It is significant that the *fremd* of *harmoniefremd* can imply more than simply foreign, but alien, even contaminating; it is also the word Wagner uses to describe the 'destructive foreign element' that needs ejecting from German *Kultur*.

The picture of tonality that emerges from the *Harmonielehre* is of a system perfectly legitimate in itself, but contaminated by 'vagrant' chords, the result of 'inbreeding' and 'incest', chords that can only make a pretence of freedom because they retain other ties: the solution it outlines is the vagrant's emancipation, the freedom to rove or wander endlessly. Schoenberg's theoretical solution seems, in other words, to be a harmonic equivalent to the redemption of the Eternal Jew. The situation whereby a tonal piece saturated with vagrant chords has a tonic 'turn up suddenly at the end' is unsatisfactory, a state of affairs he again describes by bringing forward stereotypes of the *unassimilated* European Jew; these chords 'flirt with freedom while retaining [their] bonds', are 'homeless' yet inextricably tied (394/438–40). A harmony relieved of this bond, left to wander, is described in the *Harmonielehre* as 'eternal' (*unendliche*) harmony, a term that includes metaphysical associations – infinity, fluctuation and the vacuum – but finds its explicit description with images of the Eternal Jew: 'eternal harmony . . . does not always carry with it a certificate of domicile and passport carefully indicating country of origin and destination'.<sup>52</sup> Wagner's own use of the word for 'unendliche Melodie' is important in this connection; it may be that Schoenberg appropriated that earlier musical application and, by glossing it with parallel descriptions of the Wanderer, gave it a personal double meaning.

The emancipated dissonance, then, may be read as a type of harmonic Ahasuerus, inscribed – whether before or after the fact – as part of Schoenberg's attempt to redeem music from the contaminating Jewish element: separating the 'vagrant' chord from the tonal system and allowing it freedom to wander alone redeems that system and ensures its 'natural' purity. Schoenberg likens this process to the removal of *Unkultur* (barbarians) from *Kultur* (high civilisation) when he draws a distinction between natural and historical evolution in an aside about the Roman Empire. Lamenting the conquest of *Kultur* by an *Unkultur* through migration, he argues that there is no inescapable decadence in 'the life of nations', and that 'the Romans could yet have surpassed even the highest stage of their development had an event not intervened entirely extraneous to those factors relevant to the evolution of a civilisation: the great migrations' (96/112). The lesson he draws from what is ostensibly an argument for the constant

<sup>52</sup> 129/146: Leo Black translates 'unendliche Harmonie' as 'unending harmony'.

advance of art, a linking of evolution with the notion of revolution, has ideological overtones that are distinctly Wagnerian:

let it not be forgotten: a *Kultur* . . . was conquered by an *Unkultur* . . . it was not that a *Kultur* failed, became unproductive, was worn out and had to be disposed of. This disposal could have been accomplished within the organism by revolution, which would have culled out the dead organ while retaining the organism. . . . Pessimists . . . scent decay and downfall on all sides, where the courageous find traces of new vigor. . . . Even if our tonality is dissolving, it already contains within it the germ of the next artistic phenomenon. . . . Evolution is not finished, the peak has not been crossed.

The *Kultur* of music – ‘worn out’ but still productive – could similarly be saved by the courageous disposal of its *Unkultur*, just as Wagner’s ‘Judaism in Music’ stressed the need to arrest ‘the downfall of our Culture (*Kultur*)’ – and therefore to uphold the German tradition – by drastic means: ‘a violent ejection of the destructive foreign element’. Schoenberg’s nationalism is well known, especially through the famous report that when he devised the twelve-note system he celebrated having ensured the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years.<sup>53</sup> From the beginning, revolutionary necessity and continuity with the past coexisted for him in a symbiosis similar to Wagner’s.<sup>54</sup>

Reading Schoenbergian aesthetics in relation to ‘Judaism in Music’ reveals a resonance between the two composers’ statements on the musical representation of speech. For Wagner, the Jew ‘fails completely in his attempts to understand us, he responds only superficially to our artistic world and its life-giving inner organism . . . he discerns only outward similarities between our own art and what is intelligible to his way of seeing things’ (28); he expresses himself in the way ‘parrots imitate human words and phrases’ (26). For Schoenberg in 1912: ‘I . . . grasped the content, the real content [of some Schubert songs], perhaps even more profoundly than if I had clung to the surface of the mere thoughts expressed in the words. . . . Thence it became clear to me that the work of art is like every other complete organism.’<sup>55</sup> However, the most telling of Schoenberg’s categories is the aesthetic and technical concept ‘musical prose’, which creates an explicit link between musical and linguistic expression. Although Schoenberg did not associate the term with compositional techniques until his ‘Brahms the Progressive’ essay of 1933 (rev. 1947), those techniques had long been a part of his vocabulary. Moreover, Berg, Erwin Stein and Webern had all associated their teacher’s

<sup>53</sup> Josef Rufer claims that Schoenberg made this statement in July 1921: *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, trans. Dika Newlin (London, 1962), 45. Jan Maegaard suggests that the correct date is July 1922. See Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg’s Serial Odyssey: The Evolution of his Twelve-Tone Method, 1914–1928* (Oxford, 1990), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Schoenberg’s rhetoric shifted on revolution vs. evolution. Robert Falck outlines this in a brief history of the expression ‘emancipation of the dissonance’, from Rudolph Louis’s *Die deutsche Musik der Gegenwart* (1909) to Schoenberg’s first use of it in ‘Opinion or Insight?’ (1926: *Style and Idea*, 258–64): from seeing this step as a result – what Falck calls a ‘neutral factor’ – to a ‘leap’ (1930); also a ‘basic assumption’ (1930), a ‘theory’ (1946), and even a ‘law’ (1949); see Falck’s ‘Emancipation of the Dissonance’, *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*, 6/1 (1982), 106–11.

<sup>55</sup> ‘The Relationship to the Text’, *Style and Idea*, 141–5; this essay was first published in 1912 in the single issue *Blauer Reiter Almanac*, edited by Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky.

music with the term.<sup>56</sup> 'Musical prose' became Schoenberg's idea of an art music; a means of organising a composition when asymmetrical syntax is preferred and 'empty' repetitions avoided: of realising polyphonic sentences in all voices, producing an expressively filled musical language, free from hackneyed formal working.

In the Brahms essay, Schoenberg wrote that musical prose was 'a direct and straightforward presentation of ideas, without patchwork, without mere padding and empty repetitions'.<sup>57</sup> One immediately wonders whether the pithy character he sought was a response to Wagner's charge of Jewish verbosity, in the same way that Kraus's aphoristic style sought to rid language of those excesses associated with the Jewish press. Wagner asserts that the Jewish composer's preoccupation was with speech 'for the sake of speaking, rather than with the object that first makes speaking worth while' (28). Meyerbeer, that 'universally famous Jewish musician of our own day', merely bored his listeners (31). Seen in this context, it is significant that aphorism, the aesthetic that counters this charge, had for Schoenberg an explicitly 'ethical', spiritual impulse. In his preface to Webern's *Six Bagatelles*, Op. 9 (1913), written in June 1924, he insisted that:

While the brevity of these pieces is their eloquent advocate, such brevity stands equally in need of advocacy. Think what self-denial it takes to cut a long story so short. . . . These pieces will be understood only by someone who has faith in music as the expression of something that can only be said musically. . . . If faith can move mountains, disbelief can refuse to admit they are there. Against such impotence, faith is impotent. . . . But how to deal with the heathen? With a fiery sword, they can be kept in check, bound over: but to be kept spell-bound – that is only for the faithful. May they hear what this stillness offers!<sup>58</sup>

The religious focus, the exaltation of self-denial, the resonance of those 'impotent heathens', the images of fiery swords of righteousness: all are grimly reminiscent of Wagner's call to a 'self-destructive and bloody battle' at the end of 'Judaism in Music'. Fiery swords are part of the explicitly Christian symbolism in *Friede auf Erden*, Op. 13, Schoenberg's choral work of 1907:

Mählich wird es sich gestalten,  
Seines heiligen Amtes walten,  
Waffen schmieden ohne Fährde,  
Flammenschwerter für das Recht.

[Gradually it [a kingdom] will take its shape, carrying out its holy duties, forging weapons without danger, flaming swords for justice.]

<sup>56</sup> For more on the history of the prose concept, see Carl Dahlhaus, 'Musical Prose' (1964), in *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge, 1987), 105–19; Hermann Danuser, *Musikalische Prosa*, Studien zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, 46 (Regensburg, 1975); and Danuser, 'Musikalische Prosa', *Handwörterbuch der musikalischen Terminologie*, vol. 2, ed. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht (Wiesbaden, 1978).

<sup>57</sup> 'Brahms the Progressive', *Style and Idea*, 415. For more on this essay, see Albrecht Dümling, ed., *Verteidigung des musikalischen Fortschritts: Brahms und Schönberg* (Hamburg, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> Reich, *Schoenberg*, 56. This translation is different from that in the published score, an attempt to be more faithful to what Leo Black (Reich's translator) describes as one of Schoenberg's 'tersest and most poetic pieces'.

In the Webern preface there is an atonal musical ‘kingdom’ of aphorism: only the manly and those with faith can hear this style’s import; the heathen, those lacking in faith, the impotent – all inevitably fail.

If a response to Wagner’s call on the self-sacrificing Jew has begun to emerge from Schoenberg’s writings, it becomes clear near the end of the *Harmonielehre*, where Schoenberg encourages young artists to find courage; to submit, after noting what they find ‘hateful’, to the compositional necessity of listening to their ‘own inclination’. This idea of creative courage arises during a discussion of music of the future. When Schoenberg emphasises that a composer must follow his expressive urge in any radical step, not simply conduct technical experiments, Wagner is his main example. To come up with a new and unusual expressive harmony, as Wagner did, requires great courage:

successors, who continue working with it, think of it as merely a new sound, a technical device; but it is far more than that: a new sound is a symbol, discovered involuntarily, a symbol proclaiming the new man who so asserts his individuality (400/448).

This ‘new man’ becomes central to the discussion. Wagner’s characteristic voice emerged early: ‘note how in *Lobengrin* and *Tannhäuser* those chords that later became highly significant for his harmonic style had already occurred . . . they accomplish *everything*, the *utmost* . . . they represent a world, giving expression to a new world of feeling . . . *they tell in a new way what it is that is new: a new man!*’ (400/447). The ‘new man’ is not only a genius (who, like Wagner, asserted his individuality when he created new ideas), but also the object of Wagnerian expression: the ‘new men’ in *Tannhäuser* and *Lobengrin*. Even though the argument is characteristically circuitous, we seem to find the modern version of this saviour in Schoenberg himself: a ‘young artist’ who similarly found his ‘characteristic’ (atonal) style relatively early; indeed, this artist might even be the Jewish musician who, following Wagner, ‘battles for his own true emancipation’ and redeems music of the ‘destructive foreign element’. As Schoenberg describes him, he ‘begins to notice that what he likes is different from the [norm]; he begins to notice what his hateful to him’ and he is required to make a courageous sacrifice:

*The artist who has courage submits wholly to his own inclination. And he alone who submits to his own inclinations has courage, and he alone who has courage is an artist.* (400/448)

Like Wagner’s self-sacrificing Jew, the true artist must not only acknowledge his difference, but must submit to its implications. Invoking language similar to that found in his programme note at the première of *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, Schoenberg continues:

The literature is thrown out, the results of education are shaken off, the inclinations come forward, the obstacle turns the stream into a new course . . . a personage is born. A new man! This is a model for the development of the artist, for the development of art. (400–1/448)

By the end of the *Harmonielehre*, one is tempted to conclude that the ‘upbringing’ against which Schoenberg rebelled included his Jewishness: he cast the shadow of Ahasuerus and destructive self-redemption not only over his first atonal work (*Das Buch*), whose final poetic image is of the protagonist walking out of a destroyed garden into the wilderness, but also over atonality as a solution to the crisis facing tonality, and himself as composer. In other words, at the time of his radical step, Schoenberg fictionalised

himself as both 'new man' – visionary, prophetic hope for the future – and self-sacrificing Jew, wandering out into the wilderness of atonality.

### The shadow of Ahasuerus

In the last song of *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, the quester tells us that the object of his passions – 'she' – leaves the garden forever, smiling; he remains in their former Eden, stumbling about in its rotten leaves and grass. The song before that, Song XIV, is stylistically unique. Adorno recognised its progressive, aphoristic ('prose') style when he called it 'the boldest and most advanced, completely without conventional architecture, totally shortened and deprived of sentences/phrases', but he did not comment on the residual 'architecture' of the accompaniment.<sup>59</sup> Two striking features of the song are its use of sequence and its rhythmic vitality, the projection of metrical stresses through reiterations of the opening rhythmic figure: both features seem to follow from the hints of a residual contrapuntal structure made in the opening bar (see Ex. 1). These hints in turn suggest an allegory of release from bonds and flight into an unknown future.

Mäßig (♩ = 108) sehr gebunden

*pp*

Sprich nicht immer von dem Laub, Windes

*pp*

ohne Pedal

Ex. 1 *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*: Song XIV, bars 1–3

The contrapuntal structure signalled at the opening suggests a residual fugue; and if the song is analysed as such, pseudo-countersubjects, instances of (almost) exact sequential repetition, hints of stretto, a sense of recapitulation, even a fifth relationship between two consecutive thematic entries emerge. This is intriguing because, in 1950, Schoenberg noted that although Bach composed a great number of fugues involving complex contrapuntal combinations, he also composed many 'which seem to correspond to the most superficial concept of the several entrances of themes "fleeing from one another"'.<sup>60</sup> This free, metaphorical notion of fugue – as 'fleeing', or 'flight' – seems above all relevant to Song XIV: its tempo, rhythm

<sup>59</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Zu den Georgeliedern', afterword to Arnold Schoenberg, *Fünfzehn Gedichte von Stefan George für Singstimme und Klavier* (Wiesbaden, 1959), 82.

<sup>60</sup> 'Bach' (1950), *Style and Idea*, 396.



and aphoristic style lend it a special lightness, and its final gesture is positively will-o'-the-wisp.<sup>61</sup>

The 'fleeing' of which Schoenberg writes derives from the etymology of the word 'fugue'. Keen on linguistic games, he seized this potential for word-play in an unpublished prose fragment entitled 'Fuga=Flucht', which I quote in its entirety:

I find this beautiful theory everywhere. Also in Riemann I believe. In any case; it is in the work of others who have no inkling of the true spirit of fugue and the true essence of counterpoint. It is even possible that people have already long believed that the name comes from this. Perhaps, in fact, it is a play on words; or rather, that the German word, into whose connection I bring it, comes from Fu-ga=Flight and [even] first received its German meaning from the musical meaning in this roundabout way. However, I believe that the word takes its sense from the German word-complex: fugue [*Fuge*], to formulate/ordain [*fügen*], structure [*Gefüge*], the ordained/structured [*Gefügtes*]. A structure is something composed: from the Latin – composition. Therefore: fugue=composition! Anyone who knows what a fugue is in aesthetic terms, cannot in any way doubt that such a structure could only happen according to rules of composition. That fugal harmony (which, with complete justification [*Fug und Recht*], became artificially enriched) has given the musician the authority [befugt] and entitlement to use the Latinate meaning as a symbolic wordplay, lies in the synthesising ability of the musician's brain: whoever has the ability, is authorised [*befugt*] to do all manner of things.

[Diese wunderschöne Theorie findet man überall. Ich glaube auch bei Riemann. Jedenfalls; denn sie steht bei allen, die keine Ahnung vom Sinn der Fuge und vom Wesen des Kontrapunkts haben. Es ist ja möglich, dass man schon lange geglaubt habe, der Name komme daher. Vielleicht sogar ist es ein Wortspiel. Oder aber: das deutsche Wort, mit dem ich es in Zusammenhang bringe, stammt von Fu-ga=Flucht und hat seinen deutschen Sinn erst auf diesem Umweg über die musikalische Bedeutung erhalten. Aber ich glaube, das Wort stammt dem Sinn nach von dem deutschen Wortkomplex: Fuge, fügen, Gefüge, Gefügtes. Ein Gefüge ist etwas zusammengesetztes lat: Komposition. Daher dann: Fuge=Komposition! Wer weiss, was die Fuge in ästhetischer Hinsicht ist, kann gar nicht zweifeln, dass eine solche Zusammensetzung nur nach den Gesetzen der Komposition geschehen konnte. Dass der Gleichklang mit Fuge (der mit *Fug und Recht* künstlich verstärkte würde) die Musiker befugt und berechtigt hat, die lateinische Bedeutung als symbolisches Wortspiel zu benutzen, liegt in der Befähigung der kombinierenden Musikergehirne: wer so befähigt ist, ist zu vielem befugt.]<sup>62</sup>

The verb 'fügen' and its cognate noun 'Gefügtes' embrace two very different meanings, both of which are included here in order to do justice to Schoenberg's already complex word-play: the commentary implies notions of both 'ordained' and 'structured'. According to Schoenberg, the term 'fugue' is not merely about flight, but about structure itself and the process by which such a structure is formulated. A fugue justifies a certain enrichment of harmony, he says, partly because the structure ordains it, and partly as the natural result of the synthesising ability and authority of the composer (someone who understands the 'true spirit' of the fugue – presumably Schoenberg). This essay sheds considerable light on Song XIV. Fugue may not merely symbolise

<sup>61</sup> For a detailed analysis and critique of both songs, see Julie Brown, 'Schoenberg's *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*: Analytical, Cultural and Ideological Perspectives', Ph.D. diss. (University of London, 1993).

<sup>62</sup> Manuscript, dated 10 January 1924, Mödling: Arnold Schoenberg Institute, Los Angeles. For an example of similar word-play, see 'Wechseldominante' in *Theory of Harmony*, 429.

flight, but also confirm (at least in private code) that the flight is divinely ordained, that the composer himself is somehow special.

Ex. 2 *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*. Song XV, postlude

We might also read this structural allegory in light of the song's status as a stylistic Janus. Its flight, like wandering, is not merely from restraint: because of its references back to an idyllic (Bachian, therefore also Lutheran) musical past and forward to an aphoristic future, it is also flight from the 'bad' Jewish world symbolically constructed by the work as a whole, the decadent world of Babylon.<sup>63</sup> Yet the poignant setting of poetic images in Song XV, of stumbling aimlessly in a destroyed Eden, is telling; after the prolepsis of Song XIV we can read the very end of the cycle as Wagnerian self-sacrifice, as the loss that would necessarily accompany the Jew's redemptive act. Song XV is almost tonal (if highly chromatic). It provides a resounding finale, one that musically almost places a question mark over the Exodus, flight and redemption it represents. Almost symphonic in the postlude (see Ex. 2), the broad descending phrases of this finale even seem to mimic the sweep of a final curtain; the poignancy of the slow dotted rhythms and two-note downbeats, and the return to attenuated tonality suggest

<sup>63</sup> In a draft lecture on 'The Jewish Situation' dating from 1934 Schoenberg refers to: 'the tragicomedy of the democracy in our people: our aim to [maintain] freedom in spiritual things has caused a new Babylonian captivity'; quoted in Ringer, *The Composer as Jew*, 156n.

a certain reluctance. If there is a proleptic gesture in the penultimate song, it seems to be countered in the last, whose nostalgic final bars are one of the closest encounters with tonal closure in the entire work.

The approach towards its final chord may even be an expression of the resignation and difficulty with which Schoenberg took this final step into the 'wilderness' of 'atonality'. What in the end remains a cadential interruption is extremely close to resolution, but hope of a final 'cadence' in D minor is dashed as parts of the final sonority gradually disappear, eventually leaving only the 'suspended' B<sup>b</sup>. Indeed, such cadential reluctance – 'atonality' won as if by attrition – seems a dramatisation of Schoenberg's famous response to a question asked in the army: 'So you are this notorious Schoenberg?'; to which he responded, 'Nobody wanted to be, someone had to be, so I let it be me'.<sup>64</sup> Nostalgia, regret and self-sacrifice all seem inherent in the gradual relinquishment of what might have made this cadence 'tonal': musical renunciation seems to stand for spiritual renunciation. When Schoenberg projected himself as an 'alter deus' in 'Composition with Twelve Tones', he followed it with another image: 'human creators, if they be granted a vision, must travel the long path between vision and accomplishment; a hard road where, driven out of Paradise, even geniuses must reap their harvest in the sweat of their brows'.<sup>65</sup> Wagner's words in 'Judaism in Music' are not dissimilar: the redemption of Ahasuerus 'must be fought for . . . through sweat and deprivation, and through the fullest measure of suffering and anguish'.<sup>66</sup> As well as a judgement on Babylonian excess, the destruction of Schoenberg's Hanging Garden is a loss of Paradise.

Whether or not one accepts Paul Lawrence Rose's proposition that racial and political revolution were intertwined for Wagner, it seems inescapable that race was an element of Schoenberg's 'revolutionary' musical technique and aesthetics. It seems equally clear that revolution was for him deeply connected with a Christian 'ethical' objective as the means by which he, a Wagnerian, could accomplish his and music's symbolic purification, deal with the burdensome knowledge that there was Judaism in his own music. And it seems not to have mattered that some of the charges Wagner levelled at Jews, and some of the musical categories Schoenberg himself identified for ritual cleansing, find expression in Wagner himself: repetition and long-windedness are complaints frequently directed at Wagner's music dramas by detractors; and rampant harmonic 'vagrancy', the supposed cause of a tonal crisis in 1908, was a direct consequence of *Tristan*. Paradoxically, therefore, Wagner was both author of a poetics that called on the self-sacrificing Jew, and high priest of what Schoenberg now had to consider the old style. The relationship was Oedipal.

It is in this context that we might understand the inclusion of *Gurrelieder* at the 1910 première of new atonal pieces. Although *Gurrelieder* appeared there in chamber-like proportions, considerable effort had gone into ensuring that it was as large-scale or 'Wagnerian' as possible. Schoenberg had originally conceived the work as a song cycle with piano accompaniment – perhaps as a further reconciliation of Bramsian chamber

<sup>64</sup> 'New Music: My Music', *Style and Idea*, 104.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>66</sup> 'Judaism in Music', 33.

music with New German (Wagnerian) expressive ideals like *Verklärte Nacht*, the Second String Quartet (with its peculiar vocal intrusion), and even perhaps *Das Buch* itself – but as early as 1900 he had decided instead on a fully orchestrated, oratorio-like work. However, when Part I was heard with *Das Buch* in 1910, *Gurrelieder* remained incomplete, Schoenberg having left it in 1903 only a little way into Part III. A two-piano, eight-hand arrangement of the prelude and interludes was specially commissioned from Webern, perhaps to create an impression of the work's Wagnerian proportions, to point to Wagner as predecessor. It may then be no coincidence that Schoenberg took up the cantata again only six months later, with the express aim of mounting its full orchestral version, even though by this time, and certainly by the time of the 1913 première, his technique and public image had move on.<sup>67</sup> His enthusiasm to complete *Gurrelieder* in 1910 and 1911 (after the step into atonality), and the incongruous stylistic intrusion of its lavish première, following public incomprehension of his new works and only a month prior to the notorious *Skandalkonzert* at the Musikvereinsaal, seem designed to send strong messages of ideological allegiance, of lineage and spiritual loyalty. Appearing against *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* in 1910, the Wagnerian *Gurrelieder* suggested in musical code why this new direction was being 'forced' on Schoenberg: that musical revolution was his Wagnerian duty as a 'high-souled' Jew. With its new language, *Das Buch* did create something of a revolution, but it was also a symptom of the baptised Schoenberg's acceptance and internalisation of his own damaged discourse, and a sign of his endeavour to find its 'logical' resolution.<sup>68</sup>

One of Schoenberg's self-portraits dating from 1911 takes its perspective from behind the subject (see Fig. 4). It juxtaposes two images: the full figure walking away, and what seems to be a road kerb indicating that he is following a path. He is heading in an undefined direction, to some undefined place, strolling rather than hurrying, and the full figure perspective – the only such one of his self-portraits – shows us that he is carrying a stick. A presumed sketch for this portrait has him wandering away into an anonymous city, again to an unknown destination; but this time with his smallness emphasised in the face of the vastness of the urban desert of modern life (see Fig. 5). In the painting, by contrast, that sense of humility before the great unknown is removed; a sense of purpose attaches to the act of going. Read in relation to the legend of the stick-carrying Wandering Jew, these images are complementary aspects of the same story. In a passage dating from the 1912 version of his Mahler tribute, Schoenberg wrote: 'The truly great have always had to flee from the present into the future, . . . the present has never belonged so completely to the mediocre as it does today'.<sup>69</sup> These self-portraits allegorise Schoenberg's flight from, or wandering away from mediocrity –

<sup>67</sup> On the composition of *Gurrelieder*, see Jan Maegaard, *Studien zur Entwicklung des dodekaphonen Satzes bei Arnold Schönberg* (Copenhagen, 1972), 31–2; on the various piano arrangements, see Berthold Türcke, 'Gurrelieder and Orchestra Pieces, Op. 16, for Two Pianos: A Rediscovery of Reductions by Schoenberg/Webern and Erwin Stein', *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*, 7 (1983), 239–54.

<sup>68</sup> Gilman has argued that such acts of rejection, followed by the creation of new discourses uncontaminated by their exclusion from the predominant one, have often put Jews in the forefront of the avant garde; see *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 9–10.

<sup>69</sup> 'Mahler' (1912/1948), *Style and Idea*, 452.

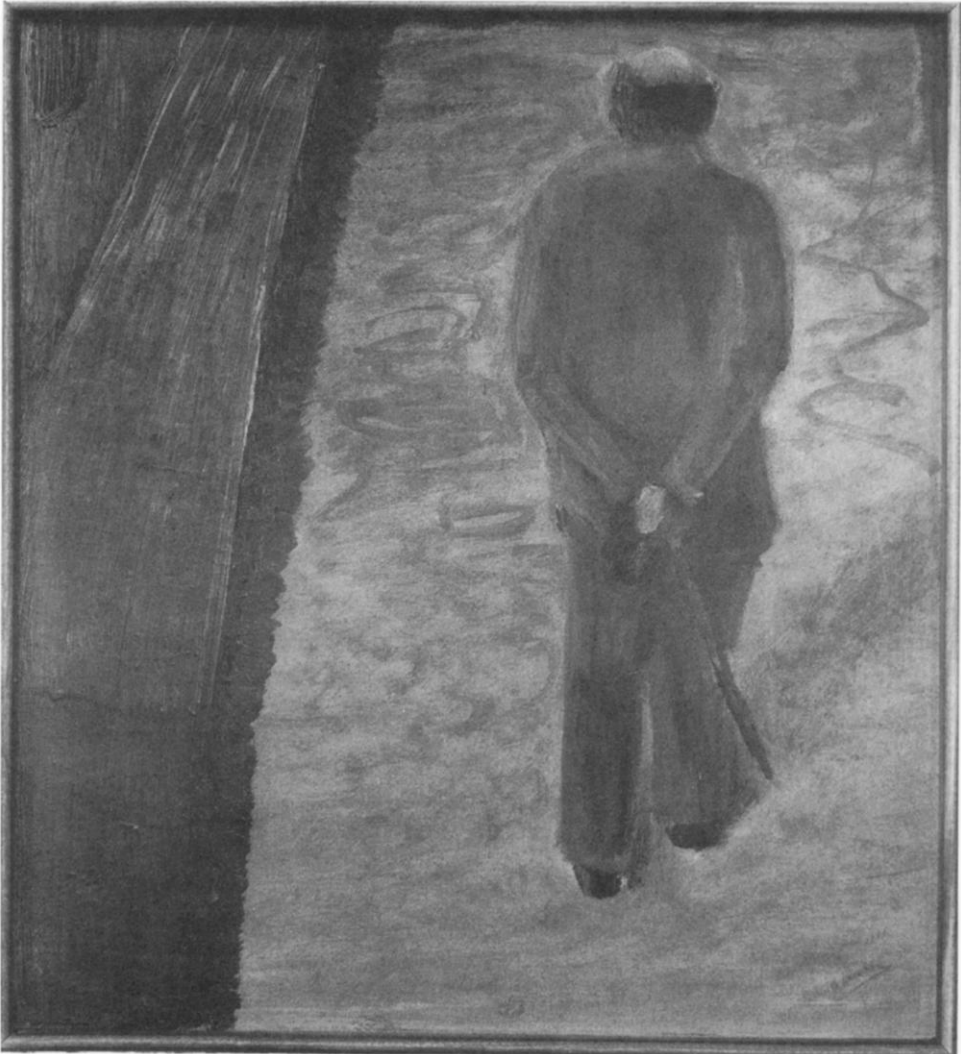


Fig. 4. *Self-portrait*, 1911. Zaunschirm number 4, p. 141.

the critics, the ‘guild musicians’ – not only into the future, but into the urban desert where an assimilated Jewish composer might redeem both himself and German *Kultur*.

At the end of ‘Judaism in Music’, Wagner holds up Heine as the model of the self-sacrificing Jewish artist, the ‘true poet’ who entered Germany when poetry had become ‘a lie’:

it became the task of this uncommonly gifted Jewish poet to reveal this lie with charming contempt, and to lay bare the Jesuitically jejune hypocrisy of modern versemongering with all its attempts to achieve poetic expression. He even ridiculed his illustrious musical fellow tribesmen, pillorying them mercilessly for their claims to be artists; it was impossible to deceive him for long. He was driven on by the implacable demon of denial, a demon who denies all that merits denial, feeling cold and scornful self-contempt as he exposed the illusions of modern self-deception. He was the conscience of Judaism . . . (33)

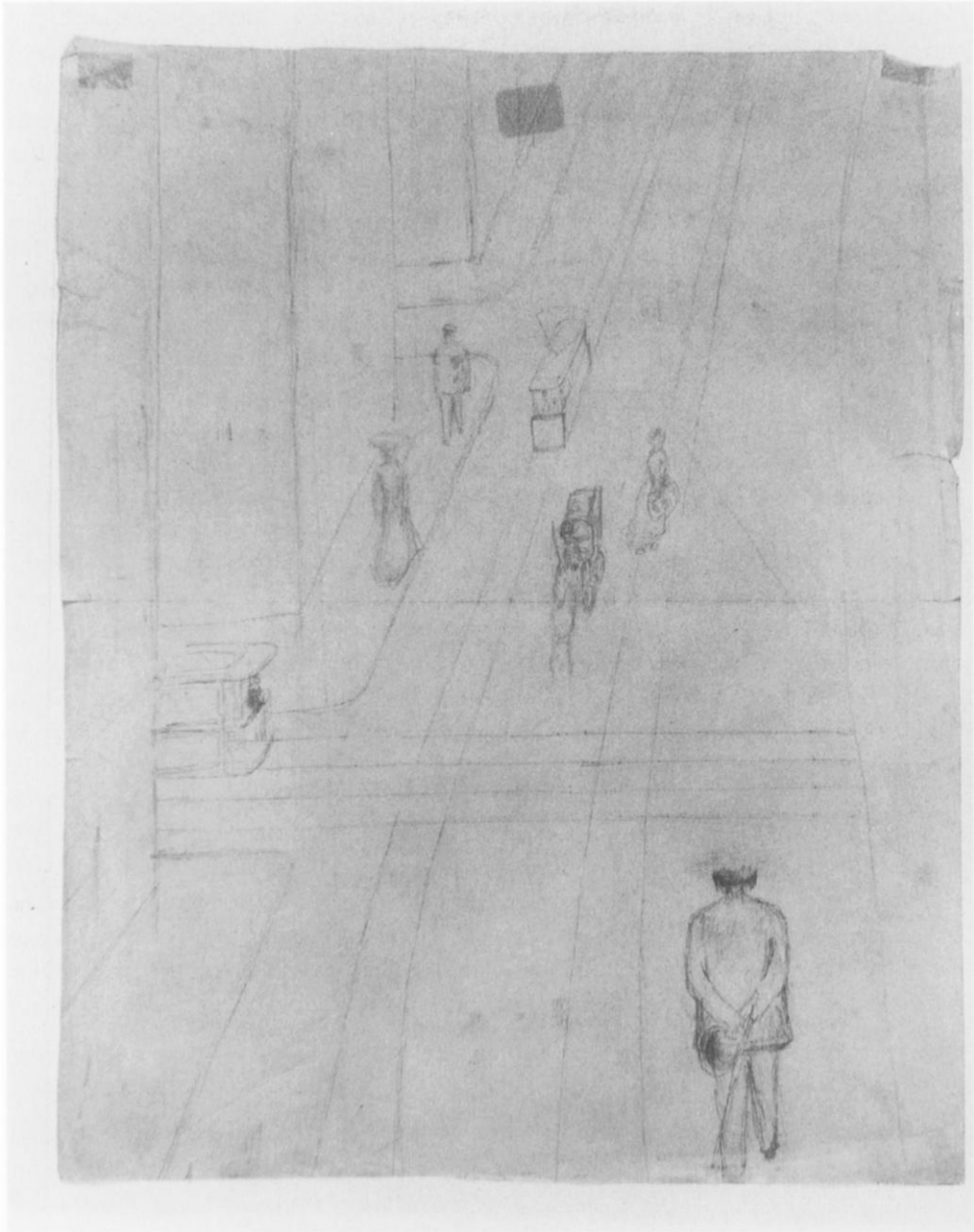


Fig. 5. *Self-portrait* (undated). Zaunschirm number 58, p. 140.

Schoenberg's expressions of contempt for the musical establishment and critics on the one hand, and his sense of Christian purpose on the other, are not dissimilar to Heine's as fictionalised here by Wagner.<sup>70</sup> Of course, by the time of his exile from Nazi

<sup>70</sup> For another perspective on the relationship between Heine and Schoenberg, see Bluma Goldstein, *Reinscribing Moses: Heine, Kafka, Freud, and Schoenberg in a European Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

Germany, reconverted to Judaism and a committed Zionist, his perspective had shifted enormously. To consider the relationship between these periods is beyond the scope of the present article, but the fact that certain choices quickly followed his reconversion and flight to the United States in 1933 may be telling. In a year that was also a Wagner anniversary (1933), Schoenberg ‘pinned his colours’ to Brahms (only two days after Thomas Mann gave his lecture ‘The Sorrows and Grandeur of Richard Wagner’); in 1934 he began nostalgically to write tonal pieces again; in 1935 he gave his Mailamm lecture; and he began generally – for posterity – to sketch out accounts of his stylistic development. It may also be significant that he reclaimed much of *Das Buch’s* symbolic ground and reinscribed with Jewish ethical significance the motifs of flight and wandering in *Moses und Aron*: within, that is, a Wagner-scale music drama that questions its own expressive, even generic, premises.

There can be no doubt that Schoenberg’s Great but ‘appalling’ Father was, above all others, Richard Wagner. However, the significance of this debt cannot be reduced to technique, to spotting the *Tristan* chord, nor even to his public alignment with the ‘sacred message’ of *Parsifal*. Nor, moreover, can the anxiety of influence model adequately account for it unless equal consideration is given to the complex of cultural impulses that drove Schoenberg: nationalism and ideology as well as religion and race. One of the most important factors is merely the force of history: that a Viennese Jewish composer, baptised but reconverted and whose creative life spanned two continents and the period between 1898 and 1951, experienced dramatic shifts in perspective on Wagner’s *Weltanschauung* and Wagner the Father. The prevailing view of Schoenberg as the twentieth-century composer who worked against Wagner in an ‘effort to restore the classical autonomy of musical language’, in opposition to the overtly displayed Wagnerian expressive aesthetics of Tchaikovsky, Mahler and the young Strauss, requires greater nuance, as does any simple antithesis between fascist reactionism and ideologically ‘clean’ modernism in wartime central Europe.<sup>71</sup> Problematic ideology is, of course, something to which lovers of Wagner’s music have had to reconcile themselves for over a hundred years; it may be that reappraisal of his modernist Son will require similar reconciliations. As Schoenberg, writing in 1931, remarked elliptically:

the war cry of pre-war [European] musicians was ‘liberation from the influence of Wagnerian music’.

The echo this war cry found in Germany is strange and interesting.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Botstein, ‘Wagner and Our Century’, 179.

<sup>72</sup> ‘National Music (I)’, *Style and Idea*, 172.