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The Work into the Open. Reading Mahler's Novelistic Symphony

ABSTRACT. Musicologists would consider Gustav Mahler's symphonies heterophonic, while literary scholars might read them as modern narratives that invite a myriad of interpretations. This road into the open is reflected in Arthur Schnitzler's 1908 novel *Der Weg ins Freie*. The protagonist Georg von Wergenthin is a Mahlerian figure, enamored of Vienna but also in search of a way out. This paper is a comparative study of Mahler's music in its dialogue with literature – from Dante and Goethe to D'Annunzio and Hofmannsthal – as well as their shared characteristics that come to shape fin-de-siècle Viennese modernity.

«Alles Vergängliche / Ist nur ein Gleichnis». As the concluding «Chorus Mysticus» of *Faust II* proclaims, the new is nothing but an eternal repetition of the similar from the past. Almost a century after Goethe's *Faust*, his vision inspired an Austrian composer and gave voice to his musical narrative about creation and love. In his Eighth Symphony Gustav Mahler uncovers the past and eternalizes the transient via a circular narrative that not only pays tribute to Goethe's vision but also resembles the circularity of Vienna's very own Ringstraße. Similarly, in Arthur Schnitzler's *Der Weg ins Freie*, a 1908 novel centered around issues of anti-Semitism and the cult of culture in fin-de-siècle Vienna, the circular boulevard becomes a reference point around which characters revolve and events unfold. Schnitzler models the life of the protagonist a young musician named Georg von Wergenthin after Mahler. While his conducting career left an enduring imprint in fin-de-siècle Viennese literary imagination, Mahler the composer has also opened his music to the modern era with his novelistic symphonies. Theodor Adorno argues that the form of Mahler's music tends toward that of a novel. Following Adorno's proposal, I will show the novelistic quality of Mahler's symphony, particularly the Eighth. In comparison, Schnitzler's *Der Weg ins*

Freie is a love story interwoven into an ever unfolding musical exposition. Mirroring Mahler's novelistic symphony, Schnitzler's narrative in *Der Weg ins Freie* emulates Mahler's symphonic open-endedness that strives for both the past and the future without ever reaching a final destination. The novel, in Lukács's words, «seeks to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life» that is «no longer directly given» (60, 56). In this Lukácsian vein Mahler's symphony with its novelistic tendency also strives to recover the lost sense of totality by reaching beyond the confines of fin-de-siècle Viennese society; but in the end, this unresolved yearning for the open inevitably brings everything back to the inner circle of the Ringstraße, to the heart of tradition that is the origin of Viennese modernity.

In Mahler's world, music can stand in for language and at the same time reaches beyond the expressibility of words. Following the Adagietto of the Fifth, Mahler once again transformed his love for Alma into the famous Alma motif of the Sixth Symphony, and a few years later, he would weave the love of his life into the monumental Eighth Symphony, as Dante has achieved for his Beatrice in his own magnum opus. Mahler's novelistic symphony, therefore, is inseparable from the theme of love. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the genre as a multi-layered, dynamic, complicated prose that is also a love story (8-9). Although these are by no means absolute characteristics, Bakhtin offers a more commonly recognized definition of the novel. In the Bakhtinian framework, Mahler's Eighth Symphony, perhaps more than any work that preceded it, qualifies as being novelistic. First of all, the symphony is constructed with a complex and multilingual system. As the name *Sinfonie der Tausend* suggests, Mahler's Eighth Symphony is a massive work of art. In its bipartite structure, Mahler joins the Latin hymn «Veni creator spiritus» together with the last scene from Goethe's *Faust II*. Despite the linguistic and historical gap in between, the two texts in Mahler's Eighth Symphony all share a common creator that is Goethe, because Mahler's first contact with the Latin hymn «Veni creator spiritus» was through Goethe's translation (Mitchell 433). Like his effort to revive Bach's art of counterpoint, advocating Goethe is also considered an advancement in Mahler's time¹. In comparison to Schiller, whose text was adapted to the choral finale

¹ Donald Mitchell reveals the direct influence of Bach's motet *Singet dem Herrn ein neues*

of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and often associated with German nationalism, Goethe's internationalism and cosmopolitanism are widely recognized. Therefore, by choosing «Veni creator spiritus» and the final scene of *Faust II* as the literary backbones for his symphony, Mahler is declaring his allegiance to an all-embracing and modern identity that he recognizes in the creative spirit of Goethe.

Both «Veni creator spiritus» and *Faust II* are also united by a strong inner logic – the union of Eros and Creativity, as Donald Mitchell points out. Since «Mahler's relationship to her was a fundamental part of the symphony's narrative», the crucial link here is again Alma (Mitchell 427; 451). Following Mahler's dedication of the Eighth Symphony, he proudly told Alma: «It was strange and exciting to see the tender, beloved name on the title page for all the world to see, like a joyful confession» (Floros 339). Within the universe of the Eighth Symphony, from the Pentecostal Latin hymn to the last scene of Goethe's *Faust*, Mahler is guided by Love, both earthly and heavenly with the image of Alma in his head. She is the reincarnation of Mater gloriosa, and with her middle name «Maria» her image also alludes to Virgin Mary. This connection is made explicit by Mahler's dedication page: «to my dear wife Alma Maria» (Fischer 646). Nevertheless, the Eighth Symphony emerged out of Mahler's marital crisis, as he discovered Alma's affair with the German architect Walter Gropius. It is clear that Mahler's dedication is an attempted appeasement: Alma is the Muse, the capricious Aphrodite, to whom he must offer sacrifice (Fischer 646). In the Eighth Mahler puts almost equal weight on the eternal and on the earthly love, if not more drawn towards the latter. The musical adaptation of the *Faust II* text, with its final note on «das Ewig-Weibliche», secularizes Mahler's message, especially taking into consideration the fin-de-siècle Viennese context (Mitchell 451). The image of Mater gloriosa in Mahler's Eighth Symphony is a complex mixture of motherly and romantic love that haunted Mahler throughout his life. Therefore, just like Goethe, Mahler is

Lied on the creation of the Eighth, a paradoxical gesture typical to Mahler: «He often consciously made reference to the past in his own music while at the very same time he was busy creating music's future». Mitchell, 434; 437.

inspired by the eternal feminine, and by offering his own work as a sacrifice, he hopes that the power of Eros could lift him up into the transcendental.

In simplified Bakhtinian terms Mahler's Eighth Symphony could be read as a novel, because it is a love story in essence, a multi-layered message about his longing for the eternal feminine. Other than Goethe, Mahler must have been inspired by Dante's *La Commedia* as a literary model, as already seen in the early programs of the First Symphony. The ending of Goethe's *Faust II* also echoes the last canto of Dante's *Paradiso*, where all eyes turn upward to the Eternal Light, and Love triumphs in Paradise. Like Dante's Beatrice, from the Fifth to the Eighth, Alma has been the light in Mahler's novelistic symphony since their first encounter. When Mahler played and sung «Chorus mysticus» for Alma, she was «completely under the spell of this work» (Floros 216). It was Eros that propelled Mahler's music and his novelistic narratives. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács praises Dante for revealing the immanent meaning of life in the beyond, and that is why Dante «represents a historical-philosophical transition from the pure epic to the novel» (59; 68). Like Dante's *La Commedia*, Mahler's symphony too, as Lukács might argue, reveals the totality of life in the transcendental. At first glance, the Eighth Symphony appears to be a work of discontinuity, and even Mahler himself noticed the work's apparent lack of coherence in a conversation with Richard Specht: «This Eighth Symphony is noteworthy, for one thing, because it combines poetry in two different languages» (Floros 214). In the Bakhtinian vein, however, it is precisely this «multi-languaged consciousness» of Mahler's Eighth that contributes to the work's three-dimensionality and hence distinguishes itself as novelistic (Bakhtin 11).

In addition to the multi-layered text itself, the second part of the Eighth Symphony expresses Mahler's understanding of love musically. Mahler adopted very light orchestration to accompany the entrance of Mater gloriosa. As Mitchell points out in his analysis, only strings and a harp were scored. This light texture goes further back to Vincenzo Bellini and the Italian *bel canto* tradition that is dear to Mahler's heart (Mitchell 453). In *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Carl Dahlhaus points out the connection between Bellini and Mahler's other major operatic influence – Wagner. In particular,

Dahlhaus notices that this «“endless melody” generates a sensuous and spiritual intoxication» and is “fundamentally akin to the effect of Bellini’s melodies”» (Dahlhaus 117). Wagner’s *Tristan* has long been a source of inspiration for Mahler not simply limited to the «glance motif». In this Wagnerian *Musikdrama*, desire is generated and sustained by the irresolvability of the famous Tristan chord. By tracing Wagner’s unending melody to Bellini, Dahlhaus shows the strong presence of Italy in the tradition of vocal music. Even though Mahler is a celebrated opera conductor, he has never composed an opera himself. Yet his symphonic music – given their novelistic qualities – comes very close to opera. As Adorno sees it, Mahler’s symphony is *opera assoluta*: «[l]ike the opera, Mahler’s novelistic symphonies rise up from passion and flow back into it; passages of fulfillment such as are found in his works are better known to opera and the novel than to otherwise absolute music» (Adorno 71). The Eighth Symphony has perhaps the strongest operatic resonance among all of Mahler’s symphonies. It is also no coincidence that Goethe, in his conversations with Eckermann, fancied the idea of setting his *Faust* to music, and the composers he had in mind for this opera were Meyerbeer and Mozart, who were both strongly connected to the Italian operatic tradition (Niekerk 247). Although Goethe later considered his idea impossible to realize, Mahler, a keen reader of Goethe, decided to take up this challenge and achieves what would be an indescribable deed: «Das Unbeschreibliche, Hier ist’s getan». Mahler seems to have set the last scene of *Faust* to music the way Goethe imagined it, lighthearted and positive (Niekerk 238). Instead of adopting the stern and heavy Germanic model, Mahler opted for the Italian vocal tradition. Together with the Latin hymn and its musical influence from Bach in Part I, Mahler’s approach is polyphonic, multicultural and modern, which would agree with Goethe’s intention for his imagined *Faust* opera and the internationalism of his literary persona.

In September 1910, Mahler premiered his Eighth Symphony in Munich. Some of the most influential artists of his day attended the performance, such as Thomas Mann, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Stefan Zweig (Fischer 658). The choice of the premiere location is not insignificant. Al-

ready at the end of 1907 Mahler departed from his directorship at Wiener Hofoper and became the new director of the Metropolitan Opera in New York. For his debut at the Met on January 1, 1908 he conducted Wagner's *Tristan*. At this turning point in Mahler's career, the choice of program is not simply a musical one but also a personal one. Mahler decided to premiere his Eighth Symphony – the closest thing to opera he has ever composed – in the same city that Wagner premiered his *Tristan* forty-five years ago. The cultural significance of Mahler's choice, therefore, cannot be overlooked. Among the attendees at the premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony was the Austrian writer Arthur Schnitzler, who has long been an admirer of Mahler's music². His 1908 novel *Der Weg ins Freie* captures the moment of crisis in fin-de-siècle Vienna by focusing on the life of an aspiring Viennese composer and conductor Georg von Wergenthin. Schnitzler's novel is musical in many ways, and like in many of his works, music reveals the problem between art and audience³. At the end of *Der Weg ins Freie*, Schnitzler creates a stage for his characters inside an opera house at the new production of Wagner's *Tristan*, so they can rebuild the lost connections among themselves⁴. Although the name is not given, the conductor of that performance

² «[...] Arthur Schnitzler, who had been deeply moved by the Finale of Mahler's Sixth Symphony, leading Mahler to exclaim, «This Schnitzler must be a splendid fellow». It had been Schnitzler who, after encountering Mahler sitting on a bench after Putzi's death, wondered in a letter «how he was able to go on living». On another occasion Schnitzler had watched Mahler walking for fully five minutes, fascinated by the strangeness of his gait. An admirer of Mahler, he would attend the coming premiere of the Eighth Symphony in Munich. But Mahler was not the avid reader of Schnitzler that Freud was». Stuart Feder, *Gustav Mahler: A Life in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 223.

³ «Schnitzler's works portray the relationship between the aesthetic-social problems that appear when his characters respond to music and those involved in the creation of new artworks». Marc A. Weiner, *Arthur Schnitzler and the Crisis of Musical Culture* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1986), 94.

⁴ In his review for the English translation of Schnitzler's novel, Larry Wolff points out that «Schnitzler brings all his characters together in the opera house for “Tristan und Isolde”, so they can all commune with Wagner even if they can't connect with one another». Larry Wolff, «The 20th Century: Dr. Schnitzler's Diagnosis», *The New York Times* 8

would have been no other than Mahler himself, and it is certain that Schnitzler saw this production in person, while he was working on the novel *Der Weg ins Freie*⁵. Therefore, Mahler's Eighth Symphony and Schnitzler's *Der Weg ins Freie* are already connected intricately via Munich and *Tristan*.

Wagner's *Tristan* – with its heavy philosophical and musical connotations – shaped Europe's cultural imagination since its 1865 premiere. The *Tristanvorstellung* Schnitzler depicted near the end of the novel is reminiscent of the last book from Gabriele D'Annunzio's 1894 novel *Il trionfo della morte*, which features Wagner's *Tristan* recounted in detail by the protagonist Giorgio. At the end of the *Tristanvorstellung* in Vienna, Schnitzler's Georg von Wergenthin, the Viennese twin of D'Annunzio's Giorgio Aurispa, is deeply moved by this new production. But unlike D'Annunzio's *Il trionfo della morte* that culminates in its protagonists' interpretation of Isolde's «Liebestod», Schnitzler's *Der Weg ins Freie* reverses it⁶. In fact, Isolde's final aria is already alluded to in chapter 1, when Anna Rosner sang one of the two songs from Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* set to music by Georg which were first sent to her as a gift. «Georg modulierte in die Anfangsakkorde seines Liedes. Anna fiel ein, und zu Georgs Melodie sang sie die Goetheschen Worte: "Deinem Blick mich zu bequemen, / Deinem Munde, deiner Brust, / Deine Stimme zu vernehmen, / War mir erst' und letzte Lust"» (31). Goethe's verses strongly echo Wagner's «Liebestod», as Isolde recalls the eyes, lips and the sweet voice of Tristan. Isolde's final aria ends with «höchste Lust», which is not so far away from the «letzte Lust» in Goethe's poem. Even more subtly, Schnitzler's Goethe quotation carries a Mahlerian trace as well. In his correspondence with Carl Friedrich Zelter, Goethe discussed the Latin hymn «Veni creator spiritus» as a continuation of *West-östlicher Divan*, and it is very likely that from this letter Mahler first learned about Goethe's translation

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⁵ «He (Mahler) led a celebrated new production of "Tristan" in 1903, which Schnitzler saw the following year as he worked on his novel. His diary contains the telegraphic entry: "Afternoon, novel. — Headache. Opera, Tristan"». Wolff.

⁶ Marc A. Weiner, «Schnitzler's Response to Wagnerism», *Modern Austrian Literature* 19.3/4 (1986): 135.

of the hymn that led to the creation of the Eighth Symphony (Niekerk 259-260). Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* conveys a mediated experience of the Orient inspired by the medieval Persian poet Hafiz, whose main influence on Goethe is the theme of «earthly love and the wisdom of the body» (Niekerk 260). It is not clear whether Mahler's Eighth Symphony is directly influenced by Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*, but the idea of earthly love that dominates Goethe's poetry is also essential to the creative process of Mahler's Eighth Symphony. Maybe it is not a coincidence that in 1903 when Schnitzler was writing *Der Weg ins Freie*, the poem quoted in the novel was set to music by the young composer Arnold Schoenberg, an ardent admirer and follower of Mahler. Schoenberg's song for piano and soprano (just like Georg's) is already on the brink of breaking away from tonality. With this allusion to Schoenberg, who challenges tonality in his early experimentation, Schnitzler is hinting at a musical quest for a road into the open. When *Der Weg ins Freie* was published in 1908, Vienna would hear atonal music in Schoenberg's Second String Quartet, as if to feel the air from another planet for the first time⁷.

In Schnitzler's novel, the protagonist Georg aspires to become a successful composer and conductor after the model of Mahler. «Mit sechsundvierzig kann ich Großvater sein... Vielleicht auch Direktor einer Opernbühne und ein berühmter Komponist» – this is how Georg envisions the future of his musical career⁸. Mahler, a successful director at the Wiener Hofoper and also a reputable composer in his mid-forties at that time, would naturally be the first example that came to any young musician's mind in turn-of-the-century Vienna. When Georg goes to the opera to see *Carmen* and *Lobengrin*, he also brings the score with him so he can practice conducting⁹. The maestro from whom Georg is learning would very likely

⁷ «Ich fühle luft von anderem planeten». It is the first verse of Stefan George's poem «Entrückung» used by Schoenberg in the Fourth Movement of the Second String Quartet, the only atonal movement of the piece.

⁸ «Schon im letzten Winter hatte er daran gedacht, sich um eine Stelle an einer deutschen Opernbühne als Kapellmeister oder Korrepetitor umzusehen». Schnitzler, 73.

⁹ «[...] Die Partitur nehm ich mir mit, wie neulich zu *Lobengrin* und üb" mich wieder im

have been Mahler himself, who more than once conducted *Carmen* and *Lohengrin* in Vienna. Moreover, Georg also plans to become a *Kapellmeister*, but as the story progresses, the *Kapellmeister* position slips a bit farther away every time it is mentioned. As a prospect it always exists in the future, in the «not yet», like a finale that is yearned for but constantly delayed¹⁰. Therefore, Georg is always in the process of becoming a *Kapellmeister*, as if structurally mimicking the quality of a Lukácsian novel. Even so, Georg has clear goals for his role as a *Kapellmeister-to-be*: he wants to modernize opera, like Mahler did at Wiener Hofoper with his staging collaborator Alfred Roller¹¹. One of Mahler's most successful new productions with Roller is Wagner's *Tristan*, the *Neuinszenierung* which Georg sees in chapter 9¹². More directly still, Mahler's conducting career is the direct model for Georg's own. Near the end of the novel, in a conversation with Georg, Herr Nürnberger speaks about the «direction crisis at the opera» and Georg's prospect of making a triumphant return to Vienna after a «six-week career as *Kapellmeister* at a German court theater»¹³. In reality, Mahler left the Wiener Hofoper at the

Dirigieren. Im Hintergrund natürlich. Du kannst dir nicht vorstellen, was man dabei lernt». Schnitzler, 144.

¹⁰ In the last chapter, Georg's conversation with Dr Stauber reveals that he has not yet become a *Kapellmeister*, even though this plan has clearly been much talked about. [Georg:] «Viel wesentlicher ist, daß ich Aussicht habe, noch in dieser Saison zum Kapellmeister ernannt zu werden». [Stauber:] «Ich dachte, Sie wären es schon». [Georg:] «Nein, Herr Doktor, offiziell *noch nicht*. Ich hab zwar schon ein paarmal dirigiert, in Vertretung, Freischütz und Undine; aber vorläufig bin ich nur Korrepetitor». (emphasis mine) Schnitzler, 392.

¹¹ «[...] er trug sich mit dem Plan, die Oper in modernem Sinn zu reformieren und wollte sich für seine weitgehenden Absichten in Georg, wie es diesem schien, einen Mitarbeiter und Freund heranziehen». Schnitzler, 395.

¹² «[...] er wollte sie [Anna] von Bittners abholen und dann mit ihr in die Oper zur Tristanvorstellung gehen, über deren Neuinszenierung zu berichten sein Intendant ihn gebeten hatte». Schnitzler, 394.

¹³ «Sollte Ihr Eintreffen in Wien mit der Direktionskrise in der Oper im Zusammenhang stehen?» fragte Nürnberger. [...] «wenn der Baron Wergenthin, nach der immerhin mühevollen, sechswöchentlichen Kapellmeisterkarriere an einem deutschen Hoftheater, im Triumph an die Wiener Oper geholt würde». Schnitzler, 417.

end of 1907 after what would have been a *Direktionskrise* that was very much in the public knowledge of his day. Moreover, Nürnberger's expectation of Georg's return to Vienna recalls Mahler's own a decade earlier in the year 1897, which took place after his six-year directorship at the Stadttheater in Hamburg. Schnitzler shortens the duration from «years» to «weeks» so as to create a shadow of Mahler over Nürnberger's remarks. For any aspiring conductor-to-be in fin-de-siècle Vienna, Mahler would be the obvious model and the center of discussion in the music circle.

In Schnitzler's novel, Georg is also following Mahler's steps as a young composer, and his unfinished opera is a symbol of this connection. The only musical clue of Georg's opera remains in the D-minor overture¹⁴. One of the most famous musical compositions scored in the same key is Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which, in the context of opera, is best known as a choral symphony for its last movement «An die Freude». As mentioned above, the Goethe-Schiller dichotomy runs deep in the German cultural imagination. Mahler's choice of Goethe's *Faust II* in his Eighth Symphony sets him apart from the tradition of Beethoven, who uses Schiller's text for the choral finale of the Ninth. As a composer, Mahler consciously wanted to escape Beethoven's shadow. When composing the Second Symphony, Mahler even hesitated about including a choir in the last movement for the fear of sounding too Beethoven-like¹⁵. Georg's conscious choice of the D-minor key for the overture to his opera alludes to the musical giant in the German tradition – Beethoven – and along with him Mahler's preference for Goethe. This connection to Beethoven is by no means far-fetched, and in fact, it might even be suggested by Schnitzler himself. In the chapter preceding the appearance of Georg's D-minor overture, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony appears together with Goethe's *Faust II* in a conversation between Lieutenant Demeter and Georg about artistic talents: «Demeter lachte: „Ja, aber es *halt'* länger, so ein künstlerisches Talent, und es bildet

¹⁴ «Vorher Overture in *D-moll'*, unterbrach ihn Georg. Er pffif eine getragene Melodie, nur ein paar Töne, und schloß mit einem „und so weiter“». Schnitzler, 309.

¹⁵ «Only the fear that this might be considered an overt imitation of Beethoven made me hesitate again and again!». Floros, 53.

sich mit den Jahren sogar weiter aus. Zum Beispiel der Beethoven. Die neunte Symphonie ist doch die allerschönste, nicht wahr? Na, und der zweite Teil Faust!...» (256). Here, Schnitzler ingeniously brings together Beethoven and Goethe, while hinting at the hidden incongruity between the two. Among Mahler's symphonies, both the *Trauermarsch* movement of the First and the colossal Third Symphony were composed in D minor. In addition, the main section of the third movement in the Seventh Symphony – *Schattenhaft* – was also scored in this key. This shadowy Scherzo comes in between the two *Nachtmusik* movements for which the symphony is known and twists a Viennese waltz into a ghostlike dance with the full irony of the D minor. As a result, like Demeter's remarks about artistic genius, the D-minor overture of Georg's unfinished opera – bearing its heavy allusions to both Beethoven and Mahler, Schiller and Goethe – is a mockery in essence, because what it suggests is an inherent disparity that cannot be reconciled. That could be why Georg does not carry on with his opera after humming those opening notes of the D-minor overture – it is an incompletable project that is doomed to collapse. As a likely commentary from Schnitzler on Mahler's composing career – the model for Georg's own – this musical reference to the past shows that Mahler's breakaway from his contemporary Vienna also draws him into a circle that does not have a real ending.

More specifically following the Mahlerian model, Georg's unwritten opera – despite his enthusiasm for opera itself – also implies and eventually anticipates the opera that Mahler has never composed. However, Georg's still-born musical creation is juxtaposed with a mature opera that is Wagner's *Tristan*¹⁶. In chapter 8, the score of *Tristan* makes an uncanny appearance while Georg awaits the birth of his child:

Er trat auf den Balkon. Auf dem Tisch lag die Partitur des «Tristan» aufgeschlagen. Georg blickte in die Noten. Es war das Vorspiel zum dritten Akt. Die Klänge tönnten ihm im Ohr. Meereswellen schlugen dumpf an ein Felsenufer, und aus trauriger Ferne klang die wehe Melodie des englischen Horns. Er sah über die Blätter weg in den silber-

¹⁶ Weiner suggests some similarities between Heinrich's libretto to «Ägidius» and Wagner's *Tristan*. See Weiner, *Arthur Schnitzler and the Crisis of Musical Culture*, 154-155.

weißen Glanz des Tages. Sonne lag überall, über Dächern, Wegen, Gärten, Hügeln und Wäldern. Dunkelblau breitete der Himmel sich hin, und Ernteduft stieg aus den Tiefen. Wie stand es heute vor einem Jahr mit mir? dachte Georg. Ich war in Wien, ganz allein. Ich ahnte noch nichts. Ich hatte ihr ein Lied geschickt... «Deinem Blick mich zu bequemen...» Aber ich dachte kaum an sie... Und jetzt liegt sie da unten und stirbt... (339)

In the Prelude to Act III of *Tristan*, Georg notices the melodies of the English horn, which in fact does not enter until the first scene. After the prelude, the last act of Wagner's *Tristan* opens with the English horn solo that Georg hears in his mind. In the opera, Tristan hears the shepherd's «Alte Weise», but his delirious mind distorts the familiar tune into an eerie melody that is played by an English horn offstage¹⁷. Wagner's ingenious use of the English horn solo in this scene to convey a sense of immense loss and sorrow also inspired Mahler. In the Andante Moderato movement of Mahler's Sixth Symphony, English horn becomes the «instrument of lament par excellence» in a melancholic solo (Floros 177). Years later, Mahler cited Wagner's «Alte Weise» from *Tristan* in his song cycle *Das Lied in der Erde* (mm. 25-28 of «Der Einsame im Herbst») to express «immeasurable sorrow and bleakness» (Floros 253). Returning to the scene from Schnitzler's novel, the appearance of the lamenting English horn in Act III of *Tristan* also foreshadows loss – the death of Georg's child, the doom of his unborn opera and the impossibility of his breaking into the open. The melancholic undertone of the shepherd's pipe also brings Georg's thoughts to a year ago,

¹⁷ «In Act III, it will be Tristan's turn to hear and recreate music, when the melody of the «Alte Weise», initially a phenomenal tune performed by the Shepherd onstage, pass into the pit orchestra. We experience once more the effect of eavesdropping inside the consciousness of another, an effect that inscribes the author (134) into the music. Tristan, dying and delirious, hears what we heard—the «Alte Weise» of the Shepherd's horn—but he hears (interprets, remakes) it to recreate it as his own in an act of creative recasting that we *overhear*». Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 131-134. For a detailed musical analysis of the «Alte Weise» see Eric Thomas Chafe, *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: The Musical Revolution of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 255-256.

when he sent Anna the song from Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*, and the line quoted «Deinem Blick mich zu bequemen...» again hints at the *Blick* motif in Wagner's *Tristan*. In this circularity of musical and literary quotations, the motif of lament is repeated and its emotional charge intensified. In chapter 9, Schnitzler reveals Georg's struggle with pinning down his thoughts in words using an example of the glance: «Wie sollte man auch die seltsame Stimmung in Worte fassen [...] wie sollte man einen Blick schildern?» (397). As a musician, perhaps Georg could only describe the *Blick* using music notes instead of words, like Wagner did in *Tristan*. If Mahler sent the Adagietto to Alma with repeated paraphrases of Wagner's *Blick* as an unspeakable message of love, then Georg's song, by specifically quoting Goethe's *Blick*, should also evoke a similar feeling of love that he himself could only express in music. Moreover, Georg's thought is echoing that of Hofmannsthal's Lord Chandos, whose *Sprachkrise* reveals the boundaries of traditional language and insinuates an unfulfillable yearning for a way out in the author's own Vienna at the turn of the century.

Near the end of *Der Weg ins Freie*, when Georg goes to see the new production of *Tristan*, the prelude to the third act again brings him back to that balcony when he saw the score before the death of his child¹⁸. Yet for a moment he could not remember where he heard the uncanny melody of the shepherd's pipe last time: it could not have been in Munich, could it? It is possible that Schnitzler is alluding to the premiere of *Tristan*, but more

¹⁸ «Die Lichter verlöschten, das Vorspiel zum dritten Akt begann. Georg hörte müde Meereswellen an ein ödes Ufer branden und die wehen Seufzer eines totwunden Helden in bläulich dünne Luft verwehen. *Wo hatte er dies nur zum letztenmal gehört? War es nicht in München gewesen?*... Nein, es konnte noch nicht so lange her sein. Und plötzlich fiel ihm die Stunde ein, da auf einem Balkon, unter hölzernem Giebel die Blätter der Tristanpartitur vor ihm offen gelegen waren. Drüben zwischen Wald und Wiese war ein besonnter Weg zum Friedhof hingezogen, ein Kreuz hatte golden geblinkt; unten im Hause hatte eine geliebte Frau in Schmerzen aufgestöhnt, und ihm war weh ums Herz gewesen. Und doch, auch diese Erinnerung hatte ihre schwermutvolle Süßigkeit, wie alles, was völlig vergangen war. Der Balkon, der kleine, blaue Engel zwischen den Blumen, die weiße Bank unter dem Birnbaum... wo war das nun alles! Noch einmal mußte er jenes Haus wiedersehen, einmal noch, ehe er Wien verließ». (emphasis mine) Schnitzler, 407.

likely he is bringing Georg back to his trip in Munich with Anna a year ago, when they saw *Tristan* together still as a couple in love¹⁹. After their first stop in Munich, Georg and Anna travelled southwards to Italy. Their route within Italy – via Brenner Pass to Bolzano, Verona, Venice, Ferrara Rome, Naples – clearly follows Goethe’s Italian journey from 1786-1788, as he recorded in the first part of *Italienische Reise*: «Karlsbad bis auf den Brenner; Vom Brenner bis Verona; Verona bis Venedig; Venedig; Ferrara bis Rom; Rom; Neapel»²⁰. More importantly than the itinerary of Georg’s Italian journey with Anna, he identifies with Goethe’s affinity for Italy as a new *Heimat*: «erst als Georg die Hügel von Fiesole erblickte, fühlte er sich wie von einer andern Heimat begrüßt» (228). The episode of Georg’s dream in which he murmurs *Mutter*, other than invoking Anna who is bearing his child at that time, also implies the connection between Italy and the ideal motherland in Georg’s imagination. With a clear echo of Goethe’s Italy, Schnitzler is adding another layer of interpretation to «das Ewig-Weibliche» that is also crucial to Mahler’s musical inspiration: Italy. If Schnitzler’s Georg is already a Germanic Doppelgänger of D’Annunzio’s Giorgio, then in this culturally charged journey, Italy is celebrated as an embodiment of the eternal feminine for which Goethe, Mahler, and Georg all long. Goethe documented his love for Italy in the voluminous *Italienische Reise*; Mahler returned to the Italian vocal tradition in his Eighth Symphony and melded it with Goethe’s text to celebrate love and femininity. Georg’s own quest for an imaginary *Heimat* follows the steps of his predecessors, yet Schnitzler’s novel is not without irony – the Italian journey in *Der Weg ins Freie* is neither a real break-away nor a final solution to his crises, because Georg’s connection with Anna and the maternal world will soon be lost. After returning to Vienna, Georg no longer feels at home even walking down the streets with which

¹⁹ «Es wurde schön. Zuerst hielten sie sich in München auf. [...] Und sie hatten ihre Plätze nebeneinander in der Oper, bei Figaro, bei den Meistersingern, bei Tristan; und es war ihnen, als webte sich aus den geliebten Klängen ein tönend durchsichtiger Schleier um sie allein, der sie von allen andern Zuhörern abschied». Schnitzler, 226.

²⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (Berlin: Edm. Gaillard, 1885), VII.

he was once familiar, and this city ceases to be like home²¹. This sentiment coincides Lukács's characterization of the novel as an expression of «transcendental homelessness» (41). In this sense, Mahler's music – a reflection of his own life in wandering – is an exemplification of a Lukácsian novel, and therefore Georg's inability to escape from Vienna is the ultimate parody of Mahler's departure from the city and his never-ending diaspora.

In chapter 9, when Georg plays the piano for Anna – a piece he composed in the summer by the lake – the shadow of Mahler looms large²². The love bond between Georg and Anna, already weakened at this point, is reminiscent of the marital crisis between Mahler and his wife. Georg's inner monologue might as well be coming from Mahler, who was paranoid about his lost connection with Alma at that time. Mahler would ask Alma if she still understood those music notes he himself wrote down by the lake, in other words, the message of love in the Eighth Symphony. Composed in the summer of 1906 in Maiernigg, Mahler's Eighth Symphony was developed in an artistic frenzy, as he told Alma in a letter²³. Similarly, Georg was possessed by an outpour of musical inspiration while staying in Lugano: «Melodien klangen in ihm, Harmonien kündigten sich an» (236). At the end of the novel, Georg plays the same melodies he composed during perhaps the most carefree days of his life (like Mahler's summer in 1906) not to

²¹ «Nun spazierte er langsam weiter, durch die Straßen, die ihm so wohlbekannt waren, und doch schon den Hauch der Fremde für ihn hatten [...] In Georg war ein Vorgefühl der Sehnsucht, mit der er in Jahren, vielleicht schon morgen sich dieser Landschaft erinnern würde, die nun aufgehört hatte ihm Heimat zu sein». Schnitzler, 395; 453.

²² «Und er spielte. Er spielte das kleine, leidenschaftlich-schwermütige Stück, das er an seinem See komponiert hatte, als Anna und das Kind für ihn völlig vergessen waren. Es erleichterte ihn sehr, daß er es ihr vorspielen durfte. Sie mußte ja verstehen, was diese Töne zu ihr sprachen. Es war gar nicht möglich, daß sie es nicht verstand. Er hörte sich selbst gleichsam sprechen aus diesen Tönen; ja ihm war, als verstände er jetzt erst völlig sich selbst». Schnitzler, 450.

²³ «Four years ago, on the first morning of our summer in Maiernigg, I went up to my shack, resolved to take it easy [...] As I entered that all-to-familiar room, the creator spiritus took possession of me, held me in its clutches and chastised me for eight weeks, until the work was all but finished». Fischer, 520-521.

evoke happiness but instead melancholy as his farewell to Anna²⁴. In *Der Weg ins Freie*, at the end of each chapter the image of home appears to convey a sense of closure, yet Georg's feeling of home is only transitory if not illusory. «War es denn möglich, daß es auf immer zu Ende war, daß all dies niemals, niemals wiederkommen sollte...?» (328). Is it possible to end the story at all? When interpreted musically, the ending of each chapter is like a deceptive cadence, which builds on the longing for the final resolution, achieving a similar effect as Wagner's irresolvable Tristan chord. In the end, Schnitzler leaves Georg in an open field without either the view of home or a clear direction. *Der Weg ins Freie* is left without an authentic cadence, without a real ending but instead remains structurally a work out in the open. Eventually, with the unfinished Tenth Symphony striving toward dissonance, Mahler also leaves his novelistic symphony with a non-ending that would open a path for the Second Viennese School.

The key to approaching the open structure of *Der Weg ins Freie* in relation to Mahler and Goethe lies not in the ending but in middle of the novel. «Es gibt überhaupt keine neuen Ideen» (203). There is no new idea at all, says Doktor Stauber, not Nietzsche, not Ibsen. If this is Schnitzler's diagnosis of his and Mahler's Vienna, perhaps that is why his protagonist does not manage to complete a single piece of music within a span of the novel. All of the musical allusions to the past in *Der Weg ins Freie* would testify to the ending of Goethe's «Chorus Mysticus» in *Faust II*: »Alles Vergängliche / Ist nur ein Gleichnis». With *Der Weg ins Freie* Schnitzler would add this lack of new ideas to Broch's observation of Vienna's value vacuum. From art and architecture to music and literature, fin-de-siècle Viennese society revolves around the circular Ringstraße – the semblance of history, creating an illusion of *perpetuum mobile* in a futile search of its own road into the open. Following the gigantic Eighth Symphony, Mahler composed the song cycle *Das Lied von der Erde* upon his departure from Vienna. This «unnamed Ninth» and Mahler's most personal work ends with the haunting repetition of *ewig*

²⁴ «Die Tage in Lugano erschienen Georg als die besten, die er seit seiner Abfahrt aus Wien erlebt hatte. [...] Nie hatte er sich so wunschlos, in Voraussicht und Erinnerung so beruhigt gefühlt als hier». Schnitzler, 235.

in the last song «Der Abschied», bringing to mind Zarathustra's calling of *Enwigkeit* in the «Midnight Song» of the Third Symphony and above all, Mahler's own pre-written farewell to the earthly world. In Adorno's words, «*Das Lied von der Erde* rebels against pure forms» (151). Mahler's own *Abschied* – with its deceptive cadences and the sevenfold *enwig* – cast a semblance of the unending. This farewell refuses the music's desire for closure and instead turns it into an open work. Like Lukács's characterization of the novel as a genre that is always in the process of becoming, Mahler's symphony with its immanent incompleteness turns out to be essentially novelistic. Its circularity captures the transitoriness of the present, generating «an eternal continuation without beginning or end (Bakhtin 20). Mahler's Eighth Symphony, in light of Lukács's view on Dante, seeks to retrieve the totality of *this* life by reflecting on the transcendent. Within his symphonic universe Mahler has completed a circle that resembles ironically the constraining and alienating Ringstraße and brings him to the origin where everything began.

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