

she said, 'is that it is neither one thing nor another. I mean that it isn't highbrow or commercial.'

It was not that she wanted to bring the discussion back again to the matter which so much interested her. No doubt she as much as anyone else had been caught in the moment of contemplation, but in uttering her feeling about it she used the only language she knew. And having used that language it was now natural for her to say, 'Tell me, Mr. Hammell, does this writer sell well?'

At the question there was a noisy little murmur of agreement to its relevance as the eyes turned to Vincent Hammell to demand his answer.

RENÉ LEIBOWITZ

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG'S SURVIVOR FROM WARSAW OR THE POSSIBILITY OF 'COMMITTED' ART

As soon as there are in this world connoisseurs of horses, the finest race-horses suddenly appear. The fact is that there always have been such race-horses, but the connoisseurs are very rare.

HAN YU, *Considerations on Race-Horses*

I

THE interference of political and social questions into the realm of artistic creation has recently been, and still is, one of the most acute and alarming problems where the artist's freedom of choice and commitment both on the social and the aesthetic plane are concerned. Although, as I have endeavoured to show elsewhere,¹ such a situation is not by any means new, and although some of its contradictions and inconsistencies are only too obvious, I do not think it superfluous to re-examine the matter from a different angle and to clarify some of its more hidden implications.

¹ 'Le Musicien Engagé', in *Temps Modernes*, No. 40.

Most of the interferences which we are referring to amount to a more or less open attack against what is called 'modern art' (a very vague concept which, of course, nobody takes the trouble to define) in the name of an 'art for the masses' or something similar (and these notions also lack completely in clarity and definition). In spite of some variation in tone and formulation, it is, I think, quite safe to say that wherever these attacks come from and whatever political or social group expresses them, they all take their roots in the same moral and artistic reactions.

I have also tried to show¹ that the fundamental characteristic of such an attitude is the total incapacity of facing, understanding and accepting clearly, and with lucidity, the most radical acquisitions of the best art of one's time. The fear of the difficulties and complexities of these acquisitions is necessarily combined with a nostalgia for 'simpler' means of expression and for the 'good old days' or whatever one chooses to call it. One forgets that these simpler means of expression only seem simple because they have become familiar (whereas they seemed just as hair-raising and abstruse when they came into being) and that the good old days were the 'bad new days' of another epoch during which there were also advanced artists and their conservative enemies. Whatever the arguments and attacks, their implicit goal is to control, to limit, or even to suppress artistic freedom (and freedom in general) of which the radical innovations of authentic creations are the purest and highest expression. For the deep sense of our great artistic tradition lies precisely in the boldness and in the subversion of those who have made it, so that one is justified in saying that this tradition finally amounts to an infinite chain of acts of freedom. Thus freedom in general, far from being a static concept, has to be reconquered with every undertaking and finally appears as the result of continuous victories within which man, transcending his own limitations, thrusts himself into the unknown, mysterious and frightening complexities of the new means of expression which face his consciousness at every given historical period.

Such were the main conclusions at which I had arrived in my previous endeavours at analysing the situation to which we have referred at the beginning of this article. Here, by discussing a

¹ loc. cit.

new and precise problem, I should like to illustrate the matter in a more concrete fashion.

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One of the common reactions of the artist who suddenly undertakes to produce a work for some specific social purpose consists of adapting some specific social *subject matter*. The painter will paint a miner and his family after a day of hard work, the poet will write a poem about the battle led by the righteous and deserving against their oppressors, and the musician will set this poem to music. Quite often the artist believes that such a choice is a sufficient guarantee for achieving both a revolutionary content and immediate response from the audience.

But, obviously enough, the situation is not quite so simple. For example, a poem may deal with revolutionary ideas and may, at the same time, be written in the most conventional and academic style. In such a case it may, of course, be easily grasped by even an uneducated audience, but one could hardly say that such a poem deserves being called revolutionary. On the other hand, if the poem is actually revolutionary in style and structure it may not, in spite of references to social realities, be understood by the masses.

When it comes to music, the situation is even more confused. The references to social realities cannot be made explicit in a symphony even if its title should suggest such realities. Many composers believe that they are socially or politically committed when they write a composition based on a text wherein their social or political preoccupations are expressed. Here we are faced once again with problems pertaining specifically to the text itself. This text—poem, libretto, etc.—may be, let us say, revolutionary in ideological content and conservative in structure. Even if it is revolutionary in all its aspects, the music composed on it may be conservative, or it may also use the most advanced idiom. In the latter case, at any rate, it will hardly convince an uneducated audience and it will most probably be considered ‘decadent’ or ‘formalistic’ by the majority of those who, nowadays, have become the champions of ‘progressive’ art.

In any event it is clear that one cannot judge the work of art on its subject matter alone, and that no given subject matter, however progressive or advanced, can guarantee the achievement of a progressive or advanced work of art.

By unfortunately having to state such platitudes one should not, of course, commit the contrary mistake which consists of believing that, in order to become a true artistic achievement the work of art must, by all means, avoid every possible connexion with topical, political or social matters. Both attitudes are equally wrong and for exactly the same reason. Indeed, in both cases, the subject matter is endowed—positively or negatively—with an importance which it does not possess *per se* (that is, when separated from the rest of the work). In other words, the subject matter can only be considered (a) as a mere source of inspiration, (b) as the possibility for the artist to express something which is actually important to him on an extra-artistic plane.

These two points need further investigation and comment.

(a) The artist is of course free to find his inspiration in whatever source he chooses. In this respect there is no reason why he should not be inspired by topical, social or political events if they constitute realities by which he is intensely and genuinely moved. It is obvious that we cannot, and must not, doubt the depth and the sincerity of his emotion, but,

(b) as a possibility of expression of this emotion, the chosen subject matter remains, in spite of everything, a *neutral* element, something like a raw material, which will have to be submitted to a purely artistic treatment. It is finally only the latter which will (or will not) prove the adequacy of the extra-artistic emotion and interest to the purely artistic project. Better still, the value of the work of art based on an extra-artistic subject matter will depend on the degree of adequacy existing between the artistic project and the 'emotional' one.

If the one can become totally absorbed by the other, if no choice hinders the freedom of the other, if both finally spring out from and culminate in a completely radical gesture, then the result will be a great work of art in spite of some extra-artistic elements and—*vice versa*—it will also be a great tribute to social or political realities, in spite of purely artistic preoccupations.

That such an achievement is possible is what we now shall endeavour to show.

II

Schoenberg's last completed work, *A Survivor from Warsaw*,¹ op. 46, is based upon the story of the Nazi purge of the Warsaw ghetto. This story was told to Schoenberg by someone who had actually been exposed to one of the worst massacres and who had survived it. It is upon this that Schoenberg undertook to write his own 'libretto'.

The 'plot' is a very simple one: one morning, as usual, the trumpets sound. The Jews are then assembled and beaten by the Germans, whereupon the sergeant orders his subordinates to count those who, unable to resist the beating, have died, so that the corpses should be delivered to the gas chamber. The 'Survivor' then tells how the act of counting, becoming faster and faster, sounded like a 'stampede of wild horses' and then, 'in the middle of it' those who were still alive started singing the old Hebrew prayer, the 'Shema Yisroel'.

Told in the first person (as though by the 'Survivor' himself), the story is written in a very simple narrative style. It is meant to be recited by a male narrator according to the principles of the specific Schoenbergian technique of the 'Sprechgesang'.²

The Hebrew prayer used at the end is set for a male chorus singing in unison.

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Here, then, we are faced with a completely topical subject based on specific social (and even political) realities. That such a subject should have moved and inspired Schoenberg is, after all, not astonishing, and it would also be absurd to doubt the validity of the subject considered as a potential source of inspiration in general. The point which must be examined here is whether, and how, Schoenberg's inspiration has been able to express itself adequately in purely musical terms.

¹ Written on commission for the Koussevitsky Foundation, in September 1947.

² First used in the musical drama *Die Glückliche Hand*, op. 18, then in the *Pierrot Lunaire*, op. 21, and lately in the *Ode to Napoleon*, op. 41. It consists of a rhythmically very strict narration with relatively free pitch, the inflections of the voice either mounting or descending, being indicated in the score. Given the fact that the pitch is only approximate, no singing effect is ever aimed at, and yet the rigorous prescriptions as to rhythm and inflection give the narrator's part a firm musical (i.e. motivic and thematic) structure.

To begin with, we must observe that Schoenberg's extra-musical choice does not constitute the slightest obstacle or hindrance to the freedom of his compositional project. Not only does Schoenberg not make the slightest concession as far as the general tone and structure of his musical idiom are concerned, but, on the contrary, he uses this idiom in a most radical and novel way, so that it becomes possible to say that this new musical gesture of his culminates into one of his freest and most subversive acts.¹

All this should not be surprising. It is, indeed, quite obvious that an artist of Schoenberg's greatness cannot suddenly weaken his idiom when outer circumstances affect him. But the reason for the increased radicalism (if I may say so) of Schoenberg's idiom in this particular circumstance can be understood all the better if one keeps in mind that the *Survivor from Warsaw* is a *dramatic* work. The dramatic streak is one of the most evident and one of the strongest in Schoenberg's output. He has written three of the most powerful works of our time for the theatre, and he has used dramatic means and devices in many other works. Just as significant is his interest, which arose some twenty years ago, in the specific drama of the Jewish people. He has expressed these preoccupations in a so far unpublished play: *The Biblical Way*, and in a yet unfinished opera, *Moses and Aaron*. Of the latter he wrote the text and the first two acts in a surprisingly short time (between 1930 and 1932), but he has so far been prevented by circumstances from completing the work. No wonder then that, lately, Schoenberg has not only resorted to dramatic means quite often, but that a short and striking dramatic scene such as the subject of the *Survivor* provided an ideal opportunity for, should have become one of his boldest and most perfect undertakings in the field of musical drama.



Having observed the complete adequacy of inspiration and expression, of extra-musical and purely musical preoccupations on a more or less general level, let us now verify the similarity of this state on more and more particular levels.

One of the most obvious consequences of Schoenberg's

¹ The work is a strict twelve-tone composition wherein the twelve-tone technique is used in a highly advanced manner.

dramatic preoccupations is the creation and frequent use of this entirely new musical and dramatic medium, the 'Sprechgesang', to which we have referred above.¹

He has resorted to it over and over again, and most recently in the *Ode to Napoleon* (composed in 1942). So far, however, Schoenberg has never actually experienced the combination of both the 'Sprechgesang' and the large orchestra,² and after the *Ode* it became quite obvious that such an experience had to be gone through. Thus the composition of a dramatic work with orchestra, within which the 'Sprechgesang' would play an important part must have been one of Schoenberg's main compositional preoccupations.

The idea of a narrator telling us the story of the tragic episode of the Warsaw ghetto now appears to us in a new light. Not only does it correspond to some of Schoenberg's most constant social concerns, not only does it thus become one of the best sources of dramatic impulse and inspiration, but, above all perhaps, it fulfills a pure and specific compositional purpose; thus the total adequacy of all the elements and preoccupations involved becomes a natural consequence.

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It would be easy to pursue the examination of this admirable balance of extra-musical and purely musical projects right into the subtlest details of the *Survivor*. Without wanting to go so far, let us nevertheless draw attention to a few more instances which, I hope, will prove our point.

Another very important problem of composition posed in Schoenberg's last works is the blending of highly contrasted elements. The musical discourse thus achieves complete formal freedom and tends towards what one might call an 'athematic'

¹ Its main merit resides in the fact that it can take the place of the old Recitative, without ever destroying or interrupting the general musical construction. The Recitative did not always avoid these dangers. At its best it still had to conform to completely conventional patterns. The 'Sprechgesang', however, thanks to its complete structural firmness (see footnote 2 on page 126), not only submits completely to the exigencies of the strictest musical form, but it is never tied to any particular structural handling, and can thus be used in any environment, in any setting, etc.

² The Klaus Narr sections in the *Gurrelieder* are an attempt in this respect, but the 'Sprechgesang' is not yet fully developed in this work.

style wherein no themes and no important sections are repeated. This problem is solved in a masterly fashion in the works in question. It is therefore possible to say that this solution is also due to the very subject matter and to the character of the narration, both of which present a highly 'distorted', 'ragged' and even savage dramatic aspect within which formal symmetry and repetitions would constitute real incongruities.

However this lack of formal symmetry does not in any sense exclude a musical construction of the most rigorous type. On the contrary, the wealth of musical features with which we are presented here is the result of the finest craftsmanship in the realm of developing variation, this most dignified tool of musical composition. In this respect it is interesting to observe that the art of variation is applied here to the most elementary and the most laconic motivic material, so that, by avoiding the statement of too precise figures, the freedom of the musical discourse should be achieved in a consequential and natural fashion. The trumpet motive and the martial rhythms which open the work (and which immediately create the atmosphere of military and terrifying 'discipline') are very characteristic examples of the brief and elementary basic material.

I should also like to mention the important part played by the percussion instruments (another reference to the military atmosphere) which are used here in rather unusual quantity,¹ and the grotesque, shrill shouting effects of the narrator when he imitates the voice of the 'Feldwebel'. These highly dramatic gestures determine certain important moments of suspense and create precise compositional caesurae which contribute to the formal asymmetry discussed above.

Finally, I should like to say a few words about the significance of the Hebrew prayer and the usage of the chorus. Early in the work, when the narrator first mentions the fact that the prayer was sung, a remote and vague musical phrase is heard in the orchestra. This phrase, presented by the first horn on a 'blurred' background of broken chord figures in the strings to which the harp adds a delicate bass, seems, at first, ambiguous in its function. It seems to be either the conclusive segment of what occurred

¹ At the performance which I gave of the work (over the Paris radio in December 1948) I used seven percussion players in order to achieve a maximum of clarity.

before or the transition to the following section, or even a completely 'free' phase without any specific function. Such an ambiguity (due both to the dream-like, almost unconscious, quality of the narrator and to the vague and diluted structure) is one of the most characteristic features of the contrasted, athematic style pursued by Schoenberg. And yet the full and clear significance of the passage which we have just described reveals itself in the conclusive choral section of the work.

The narrator's final words, 'They began again (counting the corpses), first slowly: one, two, three, four, became faster and faster, so fast that it finally sounded like a stampede of wild horses and, quite of a sudden, in the middle of it, they began singing the "Shema Yisroel"', which create the highest point of dramatic tension, are accompanied by a fantastically powerful orchestral *accelerando* and *crescendo* which establish the purely compositional climax. The last words of the narrator, when both drama and music achieve their highest point, are followed by a sudden outburst of the chorus which begins singing the prayer. Thus begins the last section of the work, a broad coda in the form of a figured *cantus firmus* which reminds one of the typical final *chorale*. Here we recognize the ambiguous horn phrase mentioned above, developed in all its implications and carried to its furthest limits. Such a development has been made possible through the consequent use of the *cantus firmus* technique for which the mere idea of the prayer has proved to be the most adequate opportunity.

CONCLUSION

It seems hardly worth while recapitulating the various aspects of the miraculous equilibrium between extra-musical and purely musical preoccupations which, in the *Survivor*, are responsible for the completely successful realization of one of the most difficult tasks any artist can undertake. The attentive reader, will, I think, have grasped the point which we have tried to prove and it should also be superfluous to have to repeat that only a really great work of art (that is, a work achieved through the masterful usage of purely artistic means) can, if inspired by social realities, become a valid expression of, and a real tribute to these realities.

One point, however, can never be repeated nor emphasized enough: by trying to force upon themselves or upon others an

artistic behaviour which is commanded by extra-artistic speculation, our present champions of so-called ‘progressive art’ are sponsoring a second-hand product which not only implies real contempt for those whom they pretend to serve, but which, above all, will become a harmful element within the society which they are trying to build. Their so-called commitment to social realities can only appear to us in a most dubious light, since they have failed to commit themselves totally to the exigencies of that which should be their primary *raison d’être*, a complete devotion to their work and to their deepest responsibilities in their own field. It should be obvious that every man is most useful to society and mankind in general by doing his utmost in his own field and, unless one assumes that art is a completely useless activity (which the ‘progressive’ minds pretend they do not), an artist can only be fully useful by becoming a genuine artist. For this he must have the courage to face the most radical problems of his work; in other words, he must commit himself entirely to the most advanced acquisitions (complex and terrifying as they may be) of the evolution of his art. If he is able to do this he will, through his own commitment, produce an art which will be essentially committed. If, on top of this, he will try to express some social reality which affects him, he will not produce a caricature of this reality, which will perhaps satisfy the laziness and cowardice of those who are as lazy and as cowardly as the caricature itself, but he may possibly create a great work of art within which the reality expressed will reveal its highest significance.

Thus, but only thus, can the artist contribute to the values of mankind, civilization, society, or whatever one chooses to call it, and this is, I think, what Schoenberg’s *Survivor from Warsaw* has not failed to achieve.

MARK SCHORER

THE GOOD NOVELIST IN 'THE GOOD SOLDIER'

TODAY one hears very little about Ford Maddox Ford, not long ago so prolifically present, the always present friend of all the great, the abettor of all the promising young. Yet Ford was great in his own right, and it is painful to feel that rather than isolate the solid work from the mass of books he wrote and make that stand, we should, through our inertia, let what was great sink dimly into the mass while the name continues to lose its lustre. As a beginning in an attempt to estimate the name again and to determine the particular things that Ford could do well in fiction, one might profitably re-read *The Good Soldier*.

Like most great works of comic irony, the mechanical structure of *The Good Soldier* is controlled to a degree nothing less than taut, while the structure of meaning is almost blandly open, capable of limitless refractions. One may go further, perhaps, and say that the novel renews a major lesson of all classic art: from the very delimitation of form arises the exfoliation of theme. This, at any rate, is the fact about *The Good Soldier* which gives point to John Rodker's quip that 'it is the finest French novel in the English language', which is to say that it has perfect clarity of surface and nearly mathematical poise, and—as an admirer would wish to extend the remark—a substance at once exact and richly enigmatic. As a novel, *The Good Soldier* is like a hall of mirrors, so constructed that, while one is always looking straight ahead at a perfectly solid surface, one is made to contemplate not the bright surface itself, but the bewildering maze of past circumstances and future consequence which—somewhat falsely—it contains. Or it is like some structure all of glass and brilliantly illuminated, from which one looks out upon a sable jungle and ragged darkness.

The Good Soldier carries the sub-title 'A Tale of Passion', and the book's controlling irony lies in the fact that passionate situations are related by a narrator who is himself incapable of passion, sexual and moral alike. His is the true *accidia*, and so, from his