



PROJECT MUSE®

Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in
Mahler's Re-Cycled Songs (review)

Mary Callaghan

Music and Letters, Volume 85, Number 3, August 2004, pp. 475-477 (Review)

Published by Oxford University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/178674>

tures. On a deeper level, however, Parry's creative process, with its inherent sense of intellectual and democratic duty, chimes with a sense of moral responsibility in which 'refinement', 'reassessment', and 'self-criticism' were seminal watchwords. These, Parry implicitly believed, were germane human values, and ones which, if carried through with sincerity and dedication, could be conveyed to audiences through the medium of music.

At £47.50 for 262 pages this book is perhaps a bit expensive, and it is a pity that it includes no glossy photographs or facsimiles, the latter of which would have been a helpful contextual addition to the generous number of music examples as well as an important visual aid to the understanding of Parry's hand and the 'physical' properties of the paper and ink. The music examples are well placed in the text, easy to follow, and neatly laid out. The text is supported by extensive but entirely relevant footnotes, a wide-ranging bibliography, and, in addition to a standard index, there is one for works which undoubtedly enhances the book's usefulness for reference purposes. As an addition to the literature on Parry, the book serves not only to complement more recent biographical and musical studies but also to accentuate the fact that Parry's music is fertile ground for research from both musicological and editorial points of view.

JEREMY DIBBLE

Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler's Re-Cycled Songs. By Raymond Knapp. pp. xx + 320. (Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 2003, \$24.95. ISBN 0-8195-6636-5.)

In the preface to this book, Raymond Knapp draws attention to the 'Mahlerian' structure of his book, indicating how it began life as an article on the Fourth Symphony which was later prefaced by five chapters on the first three symphonies. He then draws a further parallel between the composer's structuring practice and his own, summarizing the content of this analytical and interpretative study in the following programme: 'Mahler marches in—What the Child told him—What the fishes told him—What the spirit of the forest told him—What the *fahrenden Gesellen* [*sic*] told him—What Music told him—What the World told him' (p. xi). The structuring of his material forms part of a wider musicological agenda: the attempt to find a middle ground between the two prevalent and very separate strands of

Mahler scholarship, namely, structural analysis whose aim is to highlight the music's sophistication, and interpretative analysis whose aim is to derive a biographical, psychological, or philosophical reading of the music.

Knapp considers that his less polarized approach to the music—in which discussions of musical and extra-musical detail are placed side by side and are discussed in accessible language—is a positive means of reconciling the two attitudes to Mahler scholarship and, he implies, a more authentic one. Thus he admits that while 'some will find this disturbing and inadequate . . . others will find that it offers far more than if I had hewed more closely to either side of the divide' (p. xiii). He then goes on to reveal a key objective: 'If—like Mahler—I am able to provoke both types of response, I believe I will have succeeded in my larger project to produce a more suitably Mahlerian treatment of Mahler than what is currently available' (*loc. cit.*).

Knapp's analysis and interpretation of the first four symphonies is a significant contribution to Mahler studies. He deals specifically with the practice of self-borrowing and has much more to offer the reader than a presentation of thematic and formal resemblances and divergences between the lieder and the symphonies. He places a strong emphasis on subjectivity and alienation in the music, these being concepts that he considers central to the study of Mahler's 're-cycling' of song material in the symphonies.

The keyword 'metamorphoses' in the book's title draws attention to the manner in which Mahler's songs changed both in content and in meaning when transplanted from the more intimate world of chamber music to the public sphere of symphonic music. Thus while the book presents a discussion and analysis of the changes that existing Mahler songs underwent in terms of their structure, orchestration, and other features, the scope of Knapp's enquiry extends beyond the musical content to explore the impact that such changes had on the extra-musical and the symbolic content of the songs. The consequence of Mahler's numerous acts of constructing symphonic material through the 're-cycling' of his songs was to render the meaning of his song material subjective. This situation arose in more than one way: Mahler's treatment of the song material ranges from the virtually straightforward reuse of *Das himmlische Leben* as the finale to the Fourth Symphony (leading the listener to interpret the preceding three movements in the light of the finale's imagery) to the more complex process of symphonically working

melodies from the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* into the opening movement of the First Symphony (giving rise to a more tenuous connection between the notion of lost love and the death of a hero).

Knapp demonstrates how the alteration of the content of a song leads not only to ambiguity and plurality of meaning but also to a sense of alienation from the original musical source. The scherzo of the Second Symphony is a case in point. The author highlights how the removal of the text and vocal line from the *Wunderhorn* song *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt* gives rise to a situation that is both absurd and grotesque: that of a tipsy clarinet preaching a sermon that cannot be heard (p. 90). Here, and in an earlier instance in which songs are stripped of their text, the opening movement of the First Symphony, programmatic music is transformed into absolute music. Knapp advances the fascinating and enlightening theory that it is in such instances that absolute music is consciously being employed as a musical topic and that the objective of such an act is to project a sense of alienation. He derives this from a widely accepted construction of Mahler's personal identity: that of the cultural outsider, concluding that 'in a real sense, absolute music was for Mahler a second language, the inevitable result of his provincial background . . . This in turn led to a fundamental ambivalence in Mahler that would make it possible for him to establish, almost by default, an outsider's perspective as well on absolute music, even though he remained committed to its central traditions' (p. 99).

In order to illustrate how the placing of song material in the wider context of a symphonic work necessarily leads the listener to perceive that material differently, Knapp offers the cinematic Kuleshov effect (the phenomenon whereby the viewer's perception of an actor's emotional state alters when a single image of the actor's face is set alongside a wide variety of other images in turn) as an easily grasped analogy for how the meaning of an element of a musical work is affected by the nature of the material against which it is juxtaposed. Indeed, throughout this book, comparisons are drawn between Mahler's practices and those found in other disciplines such as film, literature, popular music, painting, and psychology, making Knapp's discussions rich and diverse. The belief that music is able to express something beyond itself shines through clearly in this book. Such a belief is not confined to Mahler's work, since Knapp has previously written at length on the narra-

tive and referential natures of symphonic works by Beethoven and Brahms.

A refreshing aspect of Knapp's discussion of the symphonies and songs is his total avoidance of analysis of Mahler's music as psychoanalysis of the composer himself. Rather than treading this already well-trodden path, he prefers to focus upon the meanings or ambiguity of meaning that arise in the mind of the listener as a consequence of Mahler's repeated decision to rework existing material. Knapp also draws attention to the presence of a number of extra-musical symbols in these symphonies that would have been more apparent to Mahler's contemporaries than to today's audiences. One such symbol is that of death as a fiddler. Facsimiles of Böcklin's *Self-portrait with Fiddling Death* (1872) and images from Hans Holbein the younger's *Bilder des Todes*—works that Mahler is thought to have known—are provided in support of the description of the scherzo from the Fourth Symphony as a dance of death. A second form of symbolism that has not previously been highlighted is the similarity of portions of the scherzo of the Second Symphony to the third movement of Bruckner's Fourth. Knapp interprets Mahler's reference to Bruckner as a commentary upon how the older composer (represented by the Preacher) was misunderstood, and to a certain extent ignored, by his audience (pp. 75–6).

An obvious strength of Knapp's book is the inclusion of a number of clear and concise music examples; they are placed close to the observations or arguments that they are designed to support, making the analytical portions of the book user-friendly. On the other hand, I found annoying the decision to place in the endnotes most primary source material such as quotations from memoirs and letters, and to confine there too virtually all references to the compositional process and sketch materials. It almost appears that Knapp has intended his book to be read by two separate audiences: analysts with an interest in the music's wider meaning as constructed by later minds (the main body of the book being oriented towards such readers), and musicologists whose interests lie in determining Mahler's intentions, motivations, and compositional processes (the endnotes catering for such interests).

Knapp displays a sound knowledge of the writings of the Mahlerian 'heavyweights'—Cooke, La Grange, Mitchell, Franklin—and provides an extensive bibliography of English and German sources. He takes into consideration existing scholarship on the song-based symphonies (e.g. Carolyn Abbate's and Con-

stantin Floros's interpretations of the *Fischpredigt* and its relationship to the scherzo of the Second Symphony) and offers critiques of it when presenting his own readings. A short article that Knapp appears to have overlooked is 'Das irdische Leben: Zum Weltbild des jungen Mahler' by Mathias Hansen (*Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft*, 16 (1974)), which anticipates Knapp's discussion of the 're-cycled' symphonies by bringing the concept of alienation briefly into play. (A second text that is notable by its absence is Donald Mitchell's *Gustav Mahler: Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death. Interpretations and Annotations* (Berkeley, 1986), though this deals in the main with later songs and symphonies.)

All in all, Raymond Knapp succeeds in presenting his analyses and discussions in a lively, informative—and certainly never dry—manner. His book is clearly structured and well referenced, making it easy for the reader to navigate. It has something to offer the analyst, the musicologist, and the lay reader. Most important of all, Knapp presents his audience with many new insights into Mahler's music and much food for thought, while never imposing his interpretation upon us. This is consistent with his intention to 'try to leave open, as much as possible, the ambiguities that Mahler himself left open' (p. xiii).

MARY CALLAGHAN

Francesco Cilea e il suo tempo: atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Palmi—Reggio Calabria, 20-22 ottobre 2000). Ed. by Gaetano Pitarresi. pp. 440. (Edizioni del Conservatorio di Musica F. Cilea, Reggio Calabria, 2002. ISBN 88-87970-01-7.)

Francesco Cilea is best remembered today—if he is remembered at all—for his 1902 opera *Adriana Lecouvreur*. But he also wrote a number of other stage works: *Gina* (1889), *La Tilda* (1892), *L'arlesiana* (1897), and *Gloria* (1907); and a final work, *Il matrimonio selvaggio*, was left incomplete in 1909. Although Cilea lived until 1950 he never again attempted to write an opera, a fact largely attributable to the failure of his works to attain major success in their own time. During the *fin de siècle* period, only one of his operas was staged at La Scala (the premiere of *Gloria* in 1907), although *Adriana Lecouvreur* would be produced there regularly from the 1930s, with sporadic performances of *L'arlesiana*.

This collection of essays, the proceedings of a conference held in Cilea's home town in 2000, has been published by the Conservatorio di

Musica in Reggio Calabria which now bears his name. The volume is in many ways a companion piece to two other recent publications produced by the Conservatorio: the composer's correspondence (*Lettere a Francesco Cilea, 1878–1910*, ed. Gaetano Pitarresi (Reggio Calabria, 2001)), and a collection of miscellaneous documents relating to his life and works, including photographs, set designs, programmes, and posters (*Francesco Cilea: documenti e immagini*, ed. Maria Grande (Reggio Calabria, 2001)). Calabria is evidently keen to show the musicological world that its neglected local composer deserves a second glance.

The present volume, along with *Ultimi splendori: Cilea, Giordano, Alfano*, ed. Johannes Streicher (Rome, 1999), is evidence of the fact that Italian and German scholars are beginning to examine the lesser-known Italian operas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is not to say that their efforts to rehabilitate Cilea's music are entirely persuasive. In 'Cilea orchestratore: *Adriana Lecouvreur*', for example, Francesco Cesari paints the composer as such a derivative orchestrator that one wonders whether his scores merit the attention paid to them here, and the songs scrutinized in 'Francesco Cilea fra romanzo e lirica da camera' seem by Cesare Orselli's own admission to be wholly unexceptional.

However, this book offers many valuable new perspectives on Cilea's life and works, and his operas are considered from a variety of historical, analytical, and socio-cultural angles. Production issues are discussed in Marcello Conati's 'La disposizione scenica dell'*Adriana Lecouvreur* di Cilea', which provides information about the original scenery, costumes, and movements for the composer's most famous opera. Meanwhile, his non-vocal works are considered in Antonio Rostagno's 'Formazione ed evoluzione del linguaggio nei lavori strumentali di Cilea', which challenges the widespread view of turn-of-the-century Italy as a wasteland in terms of instrumental music, and explores Cilea's stylistic debts to foreign composers.

Nor is Cilea himself the only focus of attention: the volume concludes with essays on some of his even more obscure contemporaries. Maria Grazia Sità considers Mugnone's *Birichino*, Nicolò Maccavino examines Crescimmano's *Filippo*, and Matteo Sansone offers an intriguing introduction to a number of long-forgotten 'mafia operas', focusing in particular on Spinelli's *A basso porto* and Wolf-Ferrari's (rather less forgotten) *I gioielli della madonna*. The connections between these composers and Cilea are not fully explored, with the result that