

# Modernism as Degeneracy: Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*

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## I

Between 1927 and 1932, Arnold Schoenberg composed what is arguably modernism's most revolutionary opera, *Moses und Aron*.<sup>1</sup> The music – Schoenberg's longest twelve-tone composition – is startlingly original, filled with auditory effects that have no precedent and little afterlife. The voice of God, as ventriloquized through the Burning Bush, floats and flutters, a kind of acoustic impalpability, the wind of the Sinai refined into metaphysical abstraction. The scene with the Golden Calf is a savage rewriting of Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du Printemps* purged of its primitivist stylizations and restored to the dark and bloody breast of Dionysus. Finally, there are those passages of minimalist serialism – discrete plops, plinks and plunks that sound arbitrary and aleatory but have all the inexorable logic of a Beethoven symphony or a Jackson Pollock painting. And yet, if the opera's music astonishes in its radicalism, its text astonishes in its conservatism, focusing as it does on the central events of Exodus: God's summons to Moses; Moses and Aaron leading the Jewish people out of Egypt; the travail in the wilderness, the worship of the Golden Calf and its destruction. Of course, it is not unusual for a modernist work to draw its narrative from the literature and myth of antiquity, but *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos* speak in a multiplicity of voices, voices whose heterogeneity and heteroglossia serve to challenge Europe's Judeo-Christian heritage. Schoenberg's opera, to the contrary, draws not on a variety of texts, but on a single book, one that purports to be The Book; and it relates not just any story but the founding story of the Jewish people. How does Schoenberg reconcile his radical music with his conservative text? How, in other words, does he reconcile his modernism with his Judaism?

The short answer to this question – one that I will spend much of this paper elaborating – is to be found in the Second Commandment, with its famous prohibition against the making of images. Now in the Middle East of 1500 BCE, the Jewish God is unique among the reigning deities: an iconoclast with a hammer, he is committed to shattering all divine likenesses, especially his own.<sup>2</sup> Modernism, as we know, is also celebrated for its iconoclastic fervor, its hostility to representation. In the German-speaking world of Schoenberg's youth, the avant-garde dedicated itself with almost obsessive singularity to assaulting traditional mimesis, most notably through its experiments in expressionist and abstract art. Schoenberg himself composed two expressionist operas, showed his oil paintings in *Der Blaue Reiter* exhibition of 1911, and contributed an article and a musical composition to their 1912 almanac.<sup>3</sup> He also knew and admired such anti-realist painters as Oskar Kokoschka, Egon Schiele, Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky.<sup>4</sup> It was precisely the kind of art produced by these men, art that distorted or eliminated "natural" forms, that would later be condemned by National Socialism.

Nazi hostility to modernism was a matter of public knowledge as early as the mid-1920s,<sup>5</sup> but it was most fully and emphatically exemplified in the *Entartete Kunst* ["Degenerate Art"] and *Entartete Musik* ["Degenerate Music"] exhibitions in Munich in 1937 and Düsseldorf in 1938.<sup>6</sup> For the Nazis, "degenerate" referred to art that was not simply morally suspect but mimetically deficient, indeed to any representation that "degenerated" or – to use a more contemporary term – deconstructed the "natural" and "objective" forms of reality. The degeneration of these forms was, according to Nazi ideology, a quintessentially Jewish phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Hitler himself was quoted to this effect in the *Entartete Kunst* catalogue, where he described modern art as a collection of

Misformed cripples and cretins, women who can inspire only aversion, men who are more like beasts than men, children, who, if such were to live, must instantly be considered the accursed of God! And this these completely inhuman dilettantes dare to present to our present world as the art of our time, that is to say, as an expression of that which the contemporary epoch forms and upon which [it] impresses the seal.<sup>8</sup>

The phrase "cripples and cretins" is modified in the original German by *missgestaltete*, a word that derives from *Gestalt* (shape, form, figure) and carries obvious aesthetic connotations.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, by calling such "misformed" creatures "the accursed of God!" Hitler reverses the notion that the Jews are the "chosen people," even as his derisive characterization of modern art as an "expression" of the "contemporary epoch" connects them

with Expressionism. Elsewhere in the catalogue, Hitler makes even more explicit the affiliation between the Jews and modernism: “The Jews understood, especially through exploitation of their place in the press, with help from the so-called critics, not only how to confuse step by step the natural conceptions [*natürlichen Auffassungen*] about the essence and the lessons of art as well as the purpose, but moreover to destroy the common healthy perceptions in these matters.”<sup>10</sup> In what was to become a common formulation, the Jew is presented as the enemy of what is normative and organic, a shifty rhetorician who bends and shades the truth, thereby undermining “natural conceptions” about the “essence” of art.

Needless to say, the connection between Judaism and modernism that the Nazis drew was entirely factitious. Jews were arguably more interested in the arts than some groups, but the notion that they constituted an aesthetic Fifth Column that used modernism to undermine the *völkisch* values of Germany was a pure fabrication. In point of fact, out of the 112 artists shown in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition, only 6 or approximately 5% were Jews.<sup>11</sup> The story was much the same in music. According to the 1933 census, of the 93,857 Germans who listed themselves as career musicians, only 1,915 or about 2% were Jews.<sup>12</sup> Despite these small numbers, after Hitler came to power in 1933, there was a wholesale purging of Jews from musical positions in Germany. Eminent conductors such as Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter were chased from the podium by Alfred Rosenberg’s Combat League for German Culture.<sup>13</sup> Schoenberg, who held an appointment at the prestigious Prussian Academy of the Arts in Berlin, resigned his post in March, 1933 after the Academy’s President, Max von Schillings, publicly deplored the “Jewish influence” at the institution.<sup>14</sup> In April of that year the passage of the Civil Service Restoration Act, which officially denied jobs to “non-Aryans,” led to the dismissal of even more Jews.<sup>15</sup> By May of 1933, Schoenberg had fled Germany, traveling first to France and then to the United States, where he would spend the remainder of his life. But if Schoenberg was finished with Germany, Germany was not finished with him. He was later prominently featured in the *Entartete Musik* exhibition in a display disparagingly entitled “The Jew, Arnold Schoenberg.”<sup>16</sup>

Given the fact that *Moses und Aron* was the last major work Schoenberg composed before emigrating from Europe,<sup>17</sup> it may be worthwhile to consider the opera in light of the National Socialist discourse on *entartete Musik*.<sup>18</sup> I will argue that, as a matter of polemical provocation, Schoenberg not only accepts the equation of modernism with Judaism, but goes on to do what the Nazis have not: he advances a substantive argument for this claim. Hence, modernism begins not with the narrative experiments of Joyce and Woolf, the painterly innovations of Picasso and Braque, or the revolutionary philosophizing of Nietzsche and Bergson, but some 3400 years earlier with the Patriarch Moses and the Second Commandment’s prohibition against representationalism. But Schoenberg does not stop here. In a brilliant dialectical reversal, he develops two further lines of argumentation that would have outraged the Nazis even more. First, the critique of representation develops not simply from outside German culture, through the “alien influence” of the Jew, but from within that culture, indeed in its very heart and soul: its great philosophical tradition. Second, degeneracy in art – especially insofar as it promotes the “primitivism” and “atavism” that the Nazis deplored – results not from the rejection of mimesis but from its idolatrous and fetishistic worship, as the episode of the Golden Calf so vividly demonstrates. In other words, Schoenberg takes over the Nazi rhetoric on aesthetics and moral degeneracy, but he turns it on its head. Degeneracy is the product of the cult of the image, particularly the image conceived of in ritualistic and revelatory terms, the image as the incarnation of a higher or deeper reality. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that the early 1930s was a time when a number of artists and thinkers in the German-speaking world became deeply suspicious of the power of representation and spectacle, especially as it was invested in the image, from Walter Benjamin’s critique of the “auratic,” to Bertolt Brecht’s development of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s rejection of the “picture theory.”<sup>19</sup> *Moses und Aron* participates, then, in the broader challenge modernism mounted against a mimesis that in the German-speaking world had begun to assume negative, even nightmarish, political implications.

## II

Virtually all commentators agree that *Moses und Aron* is preoccupied with the issue of representation.<sup>20</sup> The opera begins with Moses’s invocation of God as “Singular, eternal, omnipresent, imperceptible and unimaginable”

[“*Einzig*, *ewiger*, *allgegenwärtiger*, */unsichtbarer und unvorstellbarer*”] (112).<sup>21</sup> But the answer Moses receives dramatically illustrates just how problematic representation is. For, despite the fact that God is *einzig* – singular, unitary, one – He responds in six different voices, three sung and three spoken, thereby immediately calling into question His true nature and man’s ability to represent Him. Indeed, the opera’s central conflict – between Moses and Aaron – develops into a philosophical dialogue on the relation of the noumenal to the phenomenal, of abstraction to representation. Moses the idealist is dedicated to a truth that is metaphysical and absolute, a truth that will remain doctrinally pure only as long as it remains rigorously abstract. It is therefore appropriate that his role is performed in *Sprechstimme*, a declamatory but spoken voice that is austere and detached. Aaron the pragmatist is, on the other hand, committed to God’s mandate to liberate the Jewish people, a task that requires the ability to communicate in vivid language, in words that function as pictures. It is therefore equally appropriate that his role is performed as a *bel canto* tenor whose singing is dramatic and highly colored.

Schoenberg was deeply interested in philosophy, particularly the writings of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, which were crucial in shaping his thinking, and a few words here about how these philosophers criticized traditional notions of reality will be useful.<sup>22</sup> For Kant it is impossible to know the underlying nature of reality, what he calls the *Ding an sich* or *thing-in-itself*, and all knowledge is necessarily limited to the representations humans make of reality: “Although I have no notion of such a connection of things in themselves [*Dinge an sich selbst*], how they can either exist as substances, or act as causes, or stand in community with others . . . we have yet a concept of such a connection of representations [*Vorstellungen*] in our understanding and in judgments generally.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, a *Vorstellung*, or representation in the philosophical sense, is a mental construct of reality, a sensory datum that is defined by the categories of mind available to the perceiving subject. As Kant observes in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787): “We have within us presentations [*Vorstellungen*] of which we can also become conscious. But no matter how far this consciousness may extend and how accurate and punctilious it may be, they still remain forever only presentations [*Vorstellungen*], i.e. inner determinations of our mind in this or that time relation.”<sup>24</sup>

Schopenhauer, who owed a great debt to Kant, renders the Kantian notion of *Vorstellung* even more tenuous and uncertain in his magnum opus, *The World as Will and Representation* [*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*] (1818/1844). Kant distinguishes between *phenomenal* reality – those sensory representations that are accessible to humans – and *noumenal* reality or the thing-in-itself.<sup>25</sup> For Schopenhauer, the ultimate reality, the Kantian *noumenon*, is the unbounded and unformed energy that courses through the universe and that he calls Will: “Eternal becoming, endless flux, belong to the revelation of the essential nature of the will.”<sup>26</sup> Humans give shape and substance to reality by arresting the “endless flux,” by transforming the “eternal becoming” into a stable and predictable world of Representation. But the categories of mind that we apply to reality, the representations that lend our experiences their solidity and objectivity, are illusory: “in truth everything objective is already conditioned as such in manifold ways by the knowing subject with the forms of its knowing, and presupposes these forms; consequently it wholly disappears when the subject is thought away.”<sup>27</sup> No doubt Schoenberg was also greatly interested in Schopenhauer’s view that music comes closer than any of the other arts to expressing the “endless flux” and “eternal becoming” precisely because it is less invested in representation than painting or literature.<sup>28</sup>

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche pushes Schopenhauer’s argument further by associating Will with Dionysus and Representation with Apollo. Citing a passage from Schopenhauer that compares the Will to “a stormy sea” that is “unbounded in all directions” and Representation to the “*principium individuationis*,” Nietzsche identifies Apollo as the “divine image” of this principle and Dionysus with its “collapse.”<sup>29</sup> Later, in characterizing the tragic stage, Nietzsche speaks in terms that are unmistakably Kantian and Schopenhauerian in describing the relation between perception and reality: “we must understand Greek tragedy as the Dionysian chorus which ever anew discharges itself in an Apollinian world of images [*Bilderwelt*] . . . the scene [on stage], complete with the action, was basically and originally thought of merely as a *vision*; the chorus is the only ‘reality’ [*Realität*] and generates the vision.”<sup>30</sup> Again, the dynamic and amorphous energy of nature is identified with a Dionysian “reality,” the “*Bilderwelt*” of bounded and individuated images with the Apollinian realm of *Vorstellung*.<sup>31</sup> It also would not have escaped Schoenberg’s attention that the original edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* bore the subtitle *Out of the Spirit of Music*, that the volume was dedicated to Richard Wagner and that it implicitly compared Greek tragedy – which integrated the visual, musical and verbal arts – with Wagner’s

*Gesamtkunstwerk*. Since Schoenberg's library included Nietzsche's *The Case of Wagner* and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, he also knew that four years after the publication of *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche radically revised his conception of Wagner, coming to see the composer not as the savior of modern music but as one of its most destructive influences.<sup>32</sup>

While Nietzsche's evaluation of Wagner and the influence it exercised over Schoenberg are interesting in themselves, what needs to be emphasized here is that Schoenberg was intimately acquainted with a German philosophical tradition that rejected representationalism, a tradition that regarded reality as unknowable in itself and that treated *Vorstellungen* as constructions that enable humans to constitute the world. Modernism's anti-representationalism was, then, not an alien phenomenon imported by Jews, but a highly developed critique that emerged from within the very citadel of German culture – the philosophy of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. It is also worth remarking that not only was Nietzsche – whom National Socialism distorted to the point of parody – one of the favorite philosophers of the Third Reich, but so too was Schopenhauer.<sup>33</sup>

The philosophical category of *Vorstellung*, most often presented in its adjectival form (*vorstellbar* and *unvorstellbar*), as well as related metaphors of seeing, picturing and making visible, dominates *Moses und Aron*.<sup>34</sup>

Act One of the opera begins with Moses invoking an “*unsichtbarer und unvorstellbarer Gott*” [“imperceptible and unimaginable God”] (112) and Act Two ends with the same invocation: “*Unvorstellbarer Gott*” (194). Throughout the libretto we encounter words like *Bild* and *bilden* [picture, to picture] (118, 166, 168, 182, 184, 186, 190, 194, 196, 198, 202), *Gebild* [vision] (118), *Abbild* [copy] (130, 174), *Vorbild* [model] (174, 178) and *Form* [form] (158), along with variations on *Vorstellung* and *vorstellbar* (112, 118, 120, 134, 146, 148, 156, 160, 194), indicating how crucial the problem of philosophical representation is, especially *Vorstellung* conceived on the analogy of picture-making. Indeed, these words occur with such frequency that they begin to constitute something like the equivalent of a verbal tone row, which Schoenberg permutes and transmutes throughout the opera.

The fullest exposition of the Kantian and Schopenhauerian background to *Moses und Aron* is to be found in Pamela White's *Schoenberg and the God-Idea*, which focuses on such key words as Idea (*Gedanke*), Representation (*Vorstellung*) and Language or Word (*Wort*).<sup>35</sup> In her view, the opera is Platonic in its philosophy, dividing the world between a transcendent reality epitomized by *eidoi* or Forms, and the phenomenal realm of everyday life where we encounter the shadows of these Forms: “The concept of Idea is used in this context as similar to the Platonic archetype – the artist draws from another ‘plane’ where archetypal images are eternally pre-existent.”<sup>36</sup> On this reading, the God whom Moses attempts to know is equivalent to the Truth that Plato seeks to discover. White's commentary is valuable for documenting Schoenberg's philosophical borrowings from Kant and Schopenhauer, but there are serious problems with her Platonic interpretation. I shall argue, contra White, that Schoenberg advances precisely the critique of representation that I have traced in Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

As we have observed, the opera opens with Moses addressing God as single and unitary – qualities attributed not only to the Hebrew deity but also to Plato's World Creator in the *Timaeus*.<sup>37</sup> Hence, God's polyvocality undermines both the Mosaic and Platonic understanding of the divine. Plato regards the eidetic as accessible through reason, and while this realm can only be communicated by analogy it nevertheless is knowable.<sup>38</sup> By calling into question Moses's account of a single and unitary God, indeed by directly contradicting Moses (and at the all important level of music), Schoenberg aligns himself with Kant rather than Plato. For the former, the thing-in-itself cannot be known and therefore all sensory constructs or projections are just that, the *Vorstellung* or *placing-before* the subject of a constructed world. In other words, implicit in Kant, developed in Schopenhauer and fully articulated in Nietzsche is a conception of reality that is not idealist but constructionist.<sup>39</sup> As Nietzsche writes in “Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense”:

The various languages placed side by side show that with words it is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression; otherwise, there would not be so many languages. The “thing in itself” (which is precisely what the pure truth, apart from any of its consequences, would be) is likewise something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for.<sup>40</sup>

This constructionism is also implicit in *The Birth of Tragedy* and explicit in other works by Nietzsche, some of which Schoenberg owned.<sup>41</sup> Speaking more generally, we may say that Schoenberg's opera takes up the post-Kantian critique of representationalism and examines it in depth. While both Moses and Aaron reject a realist or objectivist conception of truth – the view that our sensory perceptions directly correspond to reality – each emphatically differs from the other in the approach he takes to the problem of *Vorstellung*. It is to these differences, and the debates that follow from them, that I now want to turn.

### III

As we have observed, the central conflict in the opera turns on Moses's commitment to the noumenal and Aaron's commitment to the phenomenal. Schoenberg takes a decidedly Kantian perspective in the first scene between the brothers, a scene that dramatically illustrates the incommunicability of these two realms as Moses and Aaron deliberately speak past one another:

- Moses: Other [gods] are to be found only in men, only in their representation [*Vorstellung*].  
But it [the imagination] is not spacious enough to contain the Almighty.
- Aaron: Form [*Gebilde*] of the loftiest imagining [*Phantasie*], how grateful it should be that you entice it to take shape [*zu bilden*].
- Moses: No picture [*Bild*] can give you a picture [*Bild*] of the unrepresentable [*Unvorstellbaren*].
- Aaron: Love will never weary of making a model of itself [*sich's vorzubilden*].  
Happy is the people that thus loves its God.
- Moses: A people chosen to know the Unseen [*Unsichtbaren*], to think the Unimaginable/Unrepresentable [*Unvorstellbaren*]. (118)

Here Schoenberg applies techniques of serial composition to his text by focusing on two words (*Vorstellung* and *Bild*), which he then permutes and transmutes (*Unvorstellbaren*, *Gebilde*, *bilden*, *vorbilden*) in ways that shift and alter their semantic values – just as each iteration of a tone row recalibrates the aural value of the notes within the row. Hence, Moses begins by observing that pagan deities can be reduced to *Vorstellung* (in the sense of representation), but that for this reason they have existence only in *Vorstellung* (in the sense of imagination). Aaron, seeming not to have heard his brother, commends the latter's desire to give material shape [*bilden*] to a Form [*Gebilde*] of such lofty immateriality, while Moses replies by reducing his language to its simplest terms, emphasizing the contradiction involved in attempting to make a picture [*Bild*] of what cannot be pictured [*Unvorstellbaren*]. Once more Aaron ignores Moses, celebrating the power of love to produce a model [*vorbilden*] of itself, as Moses celebrates the charge of the Jews to know what is Unseen [*Unsichtbaren*] and think what is Unimaginable [*Unvorstellbaren*].

The following scene (Act I, scene iii) also foregrounds the problem of *Vorstellung* as the Chorus describes the approach of Moses and Aaron:

- Chorus: Does Aaron now stand by Moses?  
No, he hurries before him!  
Does Aaron walk by Moses's side?  
In front of him or behind him?  
They do not move in space.  
Are closer,  
Are further,  
Are deeper,  
Are higher,

Have completely vanished!  
See Moses! See Aaron!  
They are now here! (133-4)

In this passage, the brothers function not as divine messengers so much as vaudeville philosophers, whose metaphysical pratfalls take apart those categories of time and space that Kant constructs at the beginning of *Critique of Pure Reason* and that he explicitly identifies with *Vorstellung*.<sup>42</sup> The larger effect of the scene – which plays a *fort-da* game with the *a priori* conditions of reality – is to show how fully the Jewish God is equated with, indeed seems to be the product of, Moses and Aaron. Hence, the two brothers enact not only the categories that make perception possible – stasis and kinesis, time and space, presence and absence – but also the limits of those categories, which they transcend by simultaneously standing and moving, being close and far, high and low – in short, all-in-all. But if this scene suggests that God – or the nature of reality – is constituted by the human mind, that it is nothing more than the construct of these brothers, then clearly Moses was wrong when he earlier asserted that the Jewish deity cannot be contained by the imagination [*Vorstellung*] (118). To the contrary, the Divine or Transcendent is a projection of consciousness, the placing-before or *Vorstellung* of Moses and Aaron. It is therefore appropriate that God is presented as the operative analogue of the two brothers: just as He combines *Sprechstimme* and *Singstimme* in communicating with Moses, Moses and Aaron combine these two forms in communicating with each other.

Yet no matter how the Chorus views Moses and Aaron, the brothers themselves continue their debate on *Vorstellung* in the next scene (Act I, scene iv). Moses insists on the impersonality and abstractness of God (“*Der . . . Unsichtbare, Unvorstellbare*”: “The invisible, unimaginable,” 134), while the people reject a deity they can neither see nor hear, and Moses complains that his “thought [*Gedanke*]” has become “powerless in Aaron’s word” (140). Aaron responds by asserting the equivalence of saying and doing (“I am the word and the deed,” 140), an assertion he proves by using words to perform the deeds attributed to Moses in Exodus – in this case the transformation of the rod into the serpent, the healthy hand into the leprous hand and the water into the blood.<sup>43</sup> The performative notion that language can compel reality, that Aaron can translate *das Wort* into *die Tat*, is crucial to this scene, with the result that a transcendental abstraction becomes a concrete representation. As the chorus of men proclaims:

So this God becomes imaginable [*vorstellbar*] to us,  
The symbol [*Sinnbild*] grows into the copy [*Abbild*] . . .  
Through Aaron Moses lets us see  
How he himself beholds God,  
So this God becomes imaginable [*vorstellbar*] to us,  
Attested by visible [*sichtbare*] wonders. (148)

But there is a problem. Although Aaron may understand his conjuring in purely allegorical terms, the people believe his miracles are real; for them the “symbol” [*Sinnbild*] becomes the literal representation, the copy [*Abbild*] of the thing-itself.<sup>44</sup> While I cannot elaborate this point here, it should be stressed that Schoenberg regards such representational literalism as dangerous, since it enables a political leader to deceive the people through the manipulation of powerful or sensational images. It is also worth pointing out that Moses is consistently referred to as *der Führer* and the Jews as *das Volk*.

As Act Two opens in the Wilderness, the Jewish people have grown restive waiting for Moses to return from the Mountain of Revelation. Again, the complaint turns to the problem of *Vorstellung*: “Forty days we have now waited for Moses, / And still no one knows justice or law! / The unimaginable [*Unvorstellbares*] law of an unimaginable [*unvorstellbaren*] God!” (156). To placate the people, Aaron constructs the Golden Calf, but significantly he does not treat it as the representation of a transcendent reality: “This image [*Bild*] testifies / That in everything that is a God lives . . . It little matters what shape [*Gestalt*] I have given it. / Worship yourselves in this symbol [*Sinnbild*]” (166). Any shape would have sufficed, not because transcendent reality can be comprehended by an image, but because it cannot. Indeed, the notion that a number of other images could have been substituted for the Golden Calf suggests the logic of the tone row, where the lack of priority of one note over

another attests the contingency of all musical representation. But again, it is important that the people neither regard the form of the Calf as extrinsic to its meaning, nor treat it as merely one in a series of interchangeable instantiations. Representational literalists, they view the Calf as the material manifestation of the god, an *Abbild* rather than a *Sinnbild*, and they worship it with the expectation that it will perform miracles and demand sacrifices.

The return of Moses and the destruction of the Golden Calf set in motion the climactic confrontation between the brothers. Moses triumphantly proclaims "Your image faded before my word" (184), to which Aaron responds:

Your word [*Wort*] was formerly [*sonst*] denied images [*Bilder*]  
And miracle [*Wunder*], which you disdain.  
And yet the miracle [*Wunder*] was nothing more  
Than image [*Bild*]  
When your word [*Wort*] destroyed my image [*Bild*]. (186)

The passage owes its complexity to its simplicity: the fact that key words are repeated but again – according to a serialist logic – with different emphases and meanings. Aaron observes that Moses has finally experienced the illocutionary power of language, the ability of words (his utterance that the Golden Calf "begone") to compel things. But notice the semantic slippage that *Wunder* undergoes. In the first sentence, the word refers to the "miracle" of language's transformative power, its ability to effect change in the world; whereas in the second sentence it has become the equivalent of Aaron's *Bild*, the Golden Calf that its worshipers regard as a "wonder" or "miracle." By the conclusion of the speech, *Wunder*, *Bild* and *Wort* have all become interchangeable, the performative consequences of manipulating tools within a language game.

As the debate continues, it becomes evident that Moses, the philosophical idealist, is dedicated exclusively to his abstract God, while Aaron, the philosophical pragmatist, feels a genuine commitment to the Jewish people:

Moses: Do you begin to grasp the omnipotence of  
Thought over words and images?  
Aaron: Here is what I understand:  
This people shall survive.  
But a people can only know through their senses.<sup>45</sup>  
I love this people,  
I live for them,  
And will save them. (186)

Moses counters that he "loves" and "lives for" his "idea" [*Gedanken*] (186), which he identifies with the tablets of the decalogue (190). But Aaron points out that the tablets undermine the transcendental nature of the idea, since as material and verbal entities they are "also an image" (190), and therefore a metonym for God – a mere "part of the idea" (190). While Moses responds by destroying the decalogue, his brother observes that the tablets are the "images of your thought" (190), indeed that they *are* the thought ("they are it," 190). Once more, Aaron has demonstrated that there is no outside to the language game – that even ideas depend on words and images.

With the appearance of the pillars of fire and cloud that will guide the Jewish people out of the Wilderness, Moses's idealism is finally undone. For him these manifestations are "*Götzenbilder*" (194), not images of God but the idols of pagan worship. Of course, the audience knows that the pillars of fire and cloud are not false appearances, but true signs sent to lead the Jewish people to the promised land – which means that Moses is himself refuted by the text of Exodus. As the people abandon Moses, he turns to God and utters the concluding words of Act II:

Unimaginable [*Unvorstellbarer*] God!  
Inexpressible and ambiguous thought!  
Do you permit this interpretation [*Auslegung*]?  
May Aaron, my mouth, fashion this image [*Bild*]?  
I too have made an image [*Bild*],

False,  
As an image [*Bild*] can only be!  
Thus am I defeated!  
Thus, everything that I thought  
Was madness  
And cannot and must not be spoken!  
O word, thou word, that I lack!  
(*He sinks despairing to ground.*) (194)

Moses's usual address to God consists of the formula, "Singular, eternal, omnipresent, imperceptible and unimaginable" (112). But here the stately procession of adjectives is reduced to a single, overdetermined word – *Unvorstellbarer* – as Moses internalizes this "omnipresent" being, treating Him as a thought so vague ("Inexpressible and ambiguous") as to resist verbalization and therefore conceptualization. In effect, Moses half admits what Aaron has long asserted: that pure intellection does not exist; that *any* effort to conceive or describe God relies on sensory categories, which is to say on the contingency of representation. Unable to reconcile his idealism with Aaron's nominalism, Moses cries out for what he lacks – revealingly not a thought but a word. In acknowledging his defeat, he acknowledges that language is the prior category.

How to approach Act III of the opera poses serious problems, both in terms of interpretation and staging. Schoenberg never scored the act, but shortly before his death indicated his willingness to have it "performed without music, simply spoken."<sup>46</sup> The scene is set in the Wilderness, before the Jews have entered the Promised Land, and Aaron, a prisoner in chains, has been accused of corrupting the youth of Zion. We hear nothing of the serious debate that the brothers carried on earlier. Aaron utters a few words in his defense, but Moses peremptorily cuts him off, using his power to silence dissent. Still, it appears that Moses has modified his earlier position, since the charge against Aaron is not that he uses word and image, but that he uses them inappropriately; that in his case "images . . . govern / The idea instead of expressing it" (202), suggesting that the latter is permissible. As Moses elaborates:

Images lead [*führen*] and rule  
This people, whom you have freed,  
And foreign [*fremde*] wishes are their gods,  
And lead [*führen*] them back to the slavery  
Of godlessness and pleasure. (202)

Again, the objection that Moses raises is not against images per se, but against those that lead astray, especially alien or foreign images that have a corrupting influence. Such language obviously invokes the discourse against degenerate art, linking Moses's doctrinal and aesthetic purity with that of the Nazis. It should also be pointed out that Moses is no longer the abstracted idealist, but a leader who understands the efficacy of political rhetoric, even of judicial clemency. Thus, when the soldiers ask if they should execute Aaron, Moses replies, "Set him free, and if he is able, he will live" (204). For no apparent reason, Aaron is not able to live and collapses at his brother's feet. Moses concludes by commending his people: "But in the wilderness you are invincible / And will reach your goal: atonement with God" (204).

The last act appears to represent the triumph of Moses's idealism over Aaron's pragmatism, but this triumph is heavily qualified, if not decisively undercut. First, there is the lack of music. It is difficult to believe that at some level this was not intentional on Schoenberg's part. From 1932 when he "interrupted" his work on the opera until his death, Schoenberg had nineteen years in which to score approximately four and half pages of text. Nor were these years of diminished productivity, including as they did the *Violin Concerto* (1934-6), *String Quartet No. 4* (1936), *Kol Nidre* (1938), the *Chamber Symphony* (1939), *Ode to Napoleon* (1942), the *Piano Concerto* (1942), the *Prelude for Orchestra* (1945), *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947), *Driemal Tausend Jahre* (1949) and *De profundis* (1950), to mention only these. Surely if he had wanted to score the brief coda that is Act III, he could have managed this task. Obviously we can only speculate on why Schoenberg did not "finish" his greatest masterpiece, but one explanation is that it was already finished – that the musical silence of this final scene is both

deliberate and eloquent.<sup>47</sup> For in leaving Act III unscored, Schoenberg reveals that Moses's triumph means the suppression of the sensuous and therefore the suppression of music itself. As long as Moses's asceticism was counterbalanced by Aaron's aestheticism – as long as *Sprechstimme* was answered by *Singstimme* – the music continued. But once song is vanquished, we are left only with text, an outcome that suggests Schoenberg was not of Moses's party. Another feature of Act III that appears to undercut Moses's triumph is its bizarre conclusion. In an opera that has not participated in the conventions of melodrama, indeed that has resolutely resisted baroque or flamboyant plot elements, Aaron's abrupt and unmotivated death strikes a decidedly false note. One way to make sense of this otherwise puzzling ending is to read it as an ironic rewriting of the final scene of *Parsifal*, an opera that Schoenberg himself linked with *Moses und Aron*.<sup>48</sup> It will be remembered that *Parsifal* concludes as the title hero heals Amfortas and restores to him his lance, whereupon Kundry collapses and dies. In Wagner's most Christian opera, spiritualism represented by Parsifal triumphs over sensuality represented by Kundry. Indeed, Kundry's sudden death only makes dramatic sense if we assume she has in some sense chosen it, that in being converted to Parsifal's spiritualism she has abandoned her bodily existence. A similar kind of logic seems to be at work in the case of Aaron, who appears to die on cue when Moses "magnanimously" grants his freedom, while ominously warning that he will live only "if he is able" (204). In other words, Schoenberg appears to reproduce the staginess of Kundry's death, but where Wagner strives to incorporate this death into the dramatic texture of his story, Schoenberg underscores its forced and improbable theatricality. The result is ironically to distance the audience from Schoenberg's own conclusion and to undercut further Moses's victory.

Finally, Act III ends with this proclamation, addressed by Moses to the Jewish people: "But in the wasteland [*Wüste*] you are invincible / And will reach your goal: / Atonement with God" (204). Confronted with these words, the audience cannot fail to realize how thoroughly Moses has misunderstood the historical destiny of the Jewish people, which is to become a nation by establishing a homeland. Since the end of Act I, Moses has preferred the wasteland to the homeland ("In the wasteland purity / Of thought will nourish, sustain and advance you" 150), and the fate he now conceives for his people ("Atonement with God") is exclusively spiritual. Yet the audience knows both from Exodus and from the beginning of the opera that Moses has misinterpreted his divine mandate [*Auftrag*] (114), which is presented in practical and political terms: "You must free your people from [their enslavement]" (112). In other words, Moses's insistence on ideological purity above all else constitutes a betrayal not only of the Jewish people, but also of God Himself.

The reading I have developed in this section is more critical of Moses and more sympathetic toward Aaron than many commentaries on the opera.<sup>49</sup> Here I would like to emphasize two points, one historical and one philosophical. In Schoenberg's drama, *Der biblische Weg* [*The Biblical Way*] (1926), written the year before he started work on *Moses und Aron*, he makes clear how fully committed he was to the establishment of a Jewish homeland. The hero of the play is Max Aruns, a name that serves as a composite of Moses and Aaron. While Schoenberg's play acknowledges the difficulty of reconciling the beliefs of these two strikingly different characters, it also recognizes that some combination of idealism and pragmatism is necessary if the Jews of Europe are to deliver themselves from an impending catastrophe.<sup>50</sup> For Schoenberg, Moses's allegiance to Jewish law and thought is admirable, but his obsession with doctrinal purity is ultimately destructive, a point Schoenberg emphasizes not only in his drama but also in his political writings.<sup>51</sup>

From a philosophical perspective, the debate between Moses and Aaron turns on the problem of *Vorstellung*, in which Moses plays the Platonic idealist and Aaron the Nietzschean pragmatist.<sup>52</sup> But Moses's position, even from a Platonic perspective, is extreme. He believes, at least through the first two acts, that any representation of a transcendent reality is a misrepresentation and therefore to be condemned, a position far more absolutist than Plato's.<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, Aaron favors a contingent system of representation, images (*Bilder*) that function not as literal copies (*Abbilder*) but as constructed symbols (*Sinnbilder*), a view consistent with the philosophical critique initiated by Kant and carried forward by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

The aesthetic consequences of the critique of representation are complicated. Both brothers reject a simple mimesis, the idea that there is a direct correspondence between *Vorstellung* and the *Ding an sich*. Schoenberg does not, however, align himself with either of his title characters. Moses's commitment to abstraction is so uncompromising that it ultimately leads to the end of music, exemplified both by Moses's use of *Sprechstimme*, and an unscored Third Act. By way of contrast, Aaron understands better than his brother the contingency of representation, but Schoenberg is equally critical of his penchant for conjuring up striking images, for pursuing a

mimesis that is dangerously incarnational. What Schoenberg seeks and his opera delivers is a compromise between Moses's rigorous abstractionism and Aaron's seductive pictorialism. Twelve-tone composition made available precisely that compromise. On the one hand, such composition decisively undermines the tonality that enabled late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century composers to paint sound-pictures. On the other hand, Schoenberg's music retains enough expressive force that it can register emotions, even suggest objects and events, without falling into the vulgar mimesis of musical realism or naturalism. In other words, Schoenberg's musical evocations stand, as it were, in quotation marks, carrying within themselves their own *Verfremdungseffekt*. Precisely how Schoenberg achieves the delicate balance between abstraction and expression, between Moses and Aaron, is deeply implicated in his opera's engagement with a composer much admired by both Schoenberg and the Nazis – Richard Wagner. And this engagement with Wagner returns us to the question with which we began: how is Schoenberg's modernism related to his Judaism?

#### IV

Schoenberg's interest in Judaism has been extensively documented, and while the story is by now familiar it will be useful to touch upon some of the high points here.<sup>54</sup> Although Schoenberg was born to Jewish parents, and his birth was recorded in the register of the Viennese Jewish community, he converted to Protestantism in 1898, probably under the influence of his friend Walter Pieau, who acted as his godfather at the baptism ceremony. Schoenberg's relation with the Lutheran Dorotheerkirche lasted approximately three-and-a-half years, until he moved to Berlin in 1902. As White notes,

Schoenberg's Christianity appears to have been more formal than deeply convicted: his involvement with Dehmel and the expressionistic group shortly after this time and through the 1920s led him easily through various stages of existentialism, German rational philosophy, theosophy, mysticism, and other diverse modes of religious and philosophical thought.<sup>55</sup>

A decisive shift in Schoenberg's sense of his religious and ethnic identity occurred, however, in 1921 in Mattsee, Austria, when he was denied a room at a resort hotel because of his Jewish background. Goldstein observes, "That experience proved so traumatic that two years later he turned down a very desirable invitation from his friend Wassily Kandinsky to join the Bauhaus cultural center in Weimar because of reports of antisemitism."<sup>56</sup> In a letter to Kandinsky, he wrote: "For I have at last learnt the lesson that has been forced upon me during this year, and I shall not ever forget it. It is that I am not a German, not a European, indeed perhaps scarcely even a human being (at least, the Europeans prefer the worst of their race to me), but I am a Jew. I am content that it should be so!"<sup>57</sup> So consequential did the issue of European Jewry become for Schoenberg, that around this time he began to conceive *The Biblical Way*, which explicitly deals with the founding of a new Jewish homeland. The hero of the work is modeled after Theodor Herzl, and the play dramatizes Schoenberg's view that assimilation represented a failed strategy for European Jews and that their only hope for salvation lay the establishment of a Jewish state.

After fleeing to Paris in 1933, Schoenberg reconverted to Judaism in a well publicized act. But, as he wrote in a letter to Alban Berg, the conversion had effectively taken place years earlier:

As you have doubtless realised, my return to the Jewish religion took place long ago and is indeed demonstrated by my published work ('Thou shalt not . . . Thou shalt') and in 'Moses and Aaron', of which you have known since 1928, but which dates from at least five years earlier; but especially in my drama 'Der biblische Weg' ['The Biblical Way'] which was conceived in 1922 or '23 at the latest, though finished only in '26-'27.<sup>58</sup>

"Thou shalt not, thou must" is the second of "Four Pieces for Mixed Chorus," composed in 1925, and its reference to the Second Commandment's prohibition against making images reveals how fully he identified Judaism with anti-representationalism. Indeed, the text of the song, written by Schoenberg himself, sounds like a preview to *Moses und Aron*: "Thou shalt make no image! / For an image confines / limits, grasps / what should remain

unlimited and unrepresentable [*unvorstellbar*].”<sup>59</sup> In other words, by the time Schoenberg began to write *Moses und Aron* he was committed not only to Judaism but also to the cause of Jewish freedom, which is of course the central theme of Exodus.

In *Reinscribing Moses*, Goldstein speculates that Schoenberg composed *Moses und Aron* in response to “experiences of growing antisemitism and the rise of National Socialism.”<sup>60</sup> She goes on to observe that the “prohibition against making images is especially important not merely for a person returning to Judaism . . . but for those who had everything to fear from the Nazis and their preoccupation with symbols, ritual, and worship of heroes and idols” (165). I have argued that of central importance to Schoenberg’s experiences of this time was the Nazi assault on anti-representationalism in modernism. That assault was already under way well before the *Entartete Kunst* and *Entartete Musik* exhibitions of 1937-8. In the area of musicology, two works were of crucial importance in defining what the Nazis regarded as the Jewish influence on music. In 1926, Hans Pfitzner published *Die neue Aesthetik der musikalischen Impotenz* [*The New Aesthetic of Musical Impotence*], a work which, according to Michael Meyer, took “an alarmist reaction in the 1920s to the disintegration of tonality – dissonance, twelve-tone theory, and alien jazz.”<sup>61</sup> Meyer continues:

Pfitzner spoke for many, and anticipated an important argument of the National Socialists, when he attributed this “musical chaos,” a symbol of threats to civilization itself, to an active anti-German international conspiracy. His radical conservative defense of traditional harmony, melody, and inspiration (all claimed as characteristically German) and his attack on subversive atonality and jazz (identified with Bolsheviks, Americanism, and Jews) were reformulated in racist terms by the Nazis with little violence to the original. (171)

The other work that helped provide a background for the exhibitions of 1937-8, was Richard Eichenauer’s *Musik und Rasse* [*Music and Race*], published in 1932. As Meyer observes, Eichenauer “associated ‘degenerate’ modern music with the Jews, who were ‘following a law of their race.’ Music was assumed to reveal fixed, racially defined German characteristics and their Jewish opposites” (171).

Of course, standing behind Pfitzner and Eichenauer was the paterfamilias of musical anti-Semitism, Richard Wagner, who in 1850 published “Judaism in Music,” which he revised and reissued in 1869. So vicious and vituperative is Wagner’s essay that it is easy to dismiss it as nothing more than a toxic piece of anti-Semitism. Yet the essay repays analysis, since it brings together all the elements of what became the National Socialist polemic against Jews and music. Wagner begins with the question, “Why does the European feel “*involuntary repulsion*” toward and “instinctive repugnance” against “the Jew’s prime essence”?<sup>62</sup> The answer, he suggests, is to be found in the unnaturalness of the Jew, an “unpleasant freak of Nature” (83) who is incapable either of “purely human expression” (85) or “mutual interchange of feelings” (85). Wagner develops this claim within a musical context, observing that while “Song is just Talk aroused to the highest passion” and “Music is the speech of Passion” (86), the “Jew is almost [altogether] incapable of giving artistic enunciation to his feelings” (86).<sup>63</sup> Yet, despite an incapacity for artistic expression, the Jew has been able “to reach the rulership of public taste” (87), even to extend his influence to performance and composition through a talent for imitation. Hence, he mimes musical forms and intonations, “as parrots reel off human words and phrases” but with as little “feeling and expression as those foolish birds” (89), listening to “the barest surface of our art, but not to its life-bestowing inner organism” (92). What ultimately emerges from Wagner’s essay is a familiar portrait of the Jew as cosmopolitan. A wanderer on the earth, cut off from the rhythms of the land and isolated from the restorative life of the People, he creates an etiolated kind of art, an artificial, hothouse growth that is kept alive by a coterie of connoisseurs, who prefer subtlety over authenticity, abstraction over emotion, form over substance. What Wagner described as the degenerate art of the Jew, all effect and no affect, the Nazis gave another name. They called it modernism.<sup>64</sup>

## V

In 1935 Schoenberg opened a lecture on the “Jewish Situation” with these remarks:

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."<sup>65</sup>

Schoenberg greatly admired the musical genius of Wagner, whom he counted among his chief influences, but his relation to the composer was complicated. Certainly Wagner's chromaticism did more than any other development in the nineteenth century to break the back of musical tonality, thereby opening the way for the "New Music" of Bruckner, Mahler, Debussy, Strauss and Schoenberg.<sup>66</sup> Yet Wagner's operas, with their nationalist emphasis on Teutonic mythology and their celebration of epic heroism and later Christian virtue, stood at a great distance from Schoenberg's own sensibility. A particular source of ambivalence was the *Leitmotiv*. For Schoenberg this repeating element – which he compared to the tone row – was a brilliant formal innovation that enabled Wagner to write longer operas that nevertheless retained their musical coherence.<sup>67</sup> But the *Leitmotiv* was musically regressive insofar as it functioned as an aural signature, music at its most reductively descriptive and mimetic. The galumphing march of the giants, the flowing strains of the Rheinmaidens, the fiery and mercurial dance of Loge all seem to mime reality, particularly the primal forces of nature. With the *Leitmotiv*, especially as it is used in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, representation and reality appear to coalesce, as though music is finally performing the task Schopenhauer assigned it: rendering transparent the inner structure of the universe, the Will that underlies and animates all things.

Of course, Schoenberg's own music, even those compositions written in the dodecaphonic style, possesses descriptive and emotive force.<sup>68</sup> The problem with Wagnerian pictorialism was not its expressive or mimetic character, but its claim to representational transcendence, as though it had ascended, like Erda, from the chthonian depths and was singing the music of nature itself. With the *Leitmotiv*, representation, so far from acknowledging its own contingency, treats itself as a substitute for, indeed as a manifestation of, the thing-itself. Such representational literalism is from Schoenberg's perspective philosophically naive, musically vulgar, and politically dangerous.<sup>69</sup> Needless to say, National Socialism offers no methodical account of the epistemology of representation, but the Nazis' *Blut und Boden* ideology assumes that art can directly connect the viewer or auditor with the deep structure of reality, whether this consists of the primal patterns of Nature or the enduring wisdom of *das Volk*. It is also worth remembering that Wagner's music played a central role in the Nazi propaganda effort to fuse ritual and myth with politics. In this regard, the *Leitmotiv* was a remarkably effective tool. The ease with which it was recognized made it well-suited for a mass audience, and its musical literalism ("heavy" music for the giants, "light" music for Loge) gave the impression that Wagner had, in a few deft phrases, disclosed the types and symbols of eternity.

It will be remembered that in responding to the Nazis' polemic on *entartete Kunst*, Schoenberg argues that it is not modernism's rejection of the image that leads to moral degeneracy but precisely the opposite: the summoning up of images that are treated as revelations of the thing-itself. In *Moses und Aron*, the two most obvious examples of this kind of representational literalism are the conjuring that Aaron performs in the first act and the construction of the Golden Calf in the second act. It is no accident that these scenes, which equate degeneracy with image-making, all involve allusions to the man who invented the *Leitmotiv* – that ultimate act of musical conjuring. Of course, Schoenberg had a long history of drawing upon Wagner's music, and such early compositions as *Verklärte Nacht* (1899), *Gurre Lieder* (1901) and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1903) are unmistakably Wagnerian in their inspiration and construction.<sup>70</sup> But by the time Schoenberg composed *Von Heute Auf Morgen* (1929), the twelve-tone opera that immediately precedes *Moses und Aron*, he was no longer imitating Wagner, but quoting him directly and to devastatingly ironic effect.<sup>71</sup> Schoenberg adopts a similar approach in *Moses und Aron*, but here the allusions are not identified in the text, and they involve travesties of Wagner's music rather than direct citations. It is also significant that the allusions focus on passages drawn from *Der Ring des Nibelungen* – Wagner's most nationalist and anti-Semitic opera.

The first of these allusions occurs in Act I, scene 4,<sup>72</sup> where Schoenberg quotes (mm. 706-7) a parodied version

of the "Dragon" motif from *Siegfried*, as Aaron transforms Moses's rod into a snake.<sup>73</sup>



**Dragon motif (*Siegfried*)**

**Rod & Snake motif (*Moses und Aron*)**

In Wagner the semi-tone movement in the first half of the phrase, combined with the slow tempo (dotted half notes), gives the impression of something gradually unfolding, while the resolution of the phrase in a minor third emphasizes the dragon's menacing and demonic quality. Schoenberg briefly quotes this passage in truncated form in the violins, preserving the dotted half note, only in his version (he has shifted registers) he begins on the second note of the "Dragon" motif. To preserve the Wagnerian progression, the phrase should be G – A-flat – G – B-flat but Schoenberg displaces the final note to a C-sharp, producing a diminished fifth rather than a minor third. He then gives us the full Wagnerian phrase in inverted form in the cellos (E – D-sharp – E – A), again displacing the minor third with a fifth.

Underlying Schoenberg's musical allusion to Wagner is a textual analogy. Just as Fafner has transformed himself into a dragon (or *Wurm* in German), Aaron has transformed the rod into a snake. When we forget the metaphoric status of words, when we insist on turning an abstraction (the power of Moses's rod) into a concrete object (a snake), we begin to act as mere conjurers. Eduard Hanslick, the music critic whose writings Schoenberg knew and admired, had condemned Wagner for being more magician than musician – for employing cheap stage tricks to achieve theatrical effects – and here the *Leitmotiv* functions as a wonderful device for bodying forth the ominously uncoiling dragon.<sup>74</sup> In other words, Wagner's use of the *Leitmotiv* is the equivalent of Aaron's conjuring, which means that the devotees of Bayreuth are no less credulous than the Jews of the Sinai. Especially noteworthy are the reactions of three characters to Aaron's sorcery. The Girl rapturously affirms that "[Moses] will free us," (144) while the Young Man swears fealty to his "*Führer*" (142) with the words "We want to serve him" (144), as the Man promises to "make a sacrifice to him" (144). Schoenberg's point is especially revealing in the context of 1930's Germany: a naive mimeticism that collapses the distinction between the figurative and the literal, exposes a people to political manipulation that is dangerous and potentially despotic.

The second allusion I want to discuss centers around the scene with the Golden Calf, when a character called the Naked Youth carries off a woman whom he is about to rape, as he proclaims “In your image, gods, / We live up to love!” (178). There follows in m. 918 in the woodwinds and strings, and in m. 921 in the woodwinds and brass, a figure that parodies the “Siegfried” *Leitmotiv* from the opera of that title. Here are the passages from Wagner and Schoenberg:<sup>75</sup>



**Siegfried motif (*Siegfried*)**



**Naked Youth motif (*Moses und Aron*)**

The “Siegfried” motif is built around a G major triad, beginning with an arpeggiated chord in which the notes are played in the 1-5-3 positions, followed by a series of triplets that ascend the scale, ultimately returning to the tonic G. Schoenberg begins with Wagner’s 1-5-3 triad, but contracts the fifth by a whole step and the third by a half step, producing a distorted and diminished version of Siegfried’s rousing motif. He then parodies Wagner’s climbing triplets, substituting a series of rising notes that alternately point toward and displace harmonic resolution. Schoenberg begins his ascent on a B-flat, establishing – however fleetingly – a tonal center around the E-flat triad. He then undermines that tonal center with a minor second (B-flat to B), seems to reclaim it with a major second that repeats itself (B to D-flat, D-flat), and then instead of converging on the tonic an octave up (as Wagner does) plunges his motif into the crashing dissonance of a seventh (D-flat to E). Musically speaking, the effect of Schoenberg’s rewriting of Wagner is to take a noble and gracefully articulated hunting call and reconfigure it as a hectic and lecherous hoot. At the level of text, Schoenberg has worked a similar transformation. By equating Siegfried with the Naked Youth, Schoenberg re-imagines Wagner’s ideal warrior hero – and by extension the Nazi ideal of German manhood – as a brutal, gang rapist. Again, it is significant that the Naked Youth’s degenerate behavior results from his exposure not to the intellectual bohemianism of abstract art, but to its opposite – a vulgar and kitschy representationalism, embodied by the Golden Calf.

The last musical travesty of Wagner also occurs in the Golden Calf scene and involves another one of the Nazis’ most cherished symbols. If Siegfried represents an ideal of German masculinity, the Rheinmaidens

Begam, 'Modernism and Degeneracy'

represent an ideal of German femininity, identified through their flowing music with nature and the Life Force. Wagner uses two related motifs to describe his water nymphs – the “Rheinmaidens” and the “Rheinmaidens’ Song” – but it is the latter, sung at the end of *Rheingold*, that becomes the focus of Schoenberg’s parody.<sup>76</sup>

**Woglinde** (Die drei Rheintöchter in der Tiefe des Tales, unsichtbar.)

Wellgunde Rhein - gold! Rhein - - gold!

Floßhilde Rhein - gold! Rhein - - gold!

Rhein - gold! Rhein - - gold!

rei - - nes Gold! wie

rei - - nes Gold! wie

rei - - nes Gold! wie

lauter und hell leuchtetest hold du uns!

lauter und hell leuchtetest hold du uns!

lau - - ter und hell leuch - - tetest du!

**Rheinmaidens (Das Rheingold)**

The “Rheinmaidens’ Song” is constructed around an A-flat triad, beginning with a stately and declamatory rhythm (dotted half and quarter notes give emphatic shape to the refrain “Rhein - Gold!”), as the melody coyly hovers above the triad moving between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup>, before relaxing into quarter and eventually eighth notes that flow into the tonal center of the motif (in measures 3 and 4 we move from A-flat through G and F to E-flat and then down to C). Schoenberg parodies the “Rheinmaidens’ Song” in his own Song of the Four Naked Virgins:

Immer sehr leise!  
very soft

S I Oh O

S II

4 Jungfr

A I Oh O

A II

m. 780

Göt-ter,  
gold-ener.

Göt-ter,  
gold-ener.

m. 785

Sop I das Blut jung - frau - li - cher Un - be - ruht -  
our blood, eir - gin - al and still un - blem -

Sop II

4 Jungfr

3

4

Alt I das Blut jung - frau - li - cher Un - be - ruht -  
our blood, eir - gin - al and still un - blem -

Alt II

mm. 786-8

Göt - ter, ent -  
great ones, en -

Göt - ter, ent -  
great ones, en -

m. 796

**Four Naked Virgins (*Moses und Aron*)**

Textually the passages are closely related. The Rheinmaidens open with “Rhein - gold! Rhein - gold!” (250), the Four Naked Virgins with “O gold - ener Gott, O priester gold - ener Götter” (102), and both proceed to sing the praises of the Gold they worship. Because Schoenberg coordinates four singers rather than three, and gives each a separate melodic line, it is difficult to hear the quotation of Wagner, but even the casual listener is struck not only by the similarity in text, but also by the choral effect of multiple feminine voices. The more attentive listener will also detect in Schoenberg’s Virgins a recurrent use of precisely the same A-flat triad that dominates the Rheinmaidens’ Song. Schoenberg has, however, introduced a crucial modification. By expanding the three voices to four, he is able to bend and distort Wagner’s triadic structure. Hence in m. 780, which opens the scene with the Naked Virgins, three of the voices sing a chordal version of the A-flat triad, which is then knocked off tonal center as the Second Alto adds a dissonant D. In m. 785, Schoenberg produces almost the same chordal progression, only he displaces it further from the A-flat triad, converting the C-natural to a C-sharp and the D to an F. In m. 786, he works another variation on m. 780, but here he combines the decentering D with an A as opposed to an A-flat chord. He further elaborates the A-flat triad – now in arpeggiated form at mm. 787 and 788 – where the Second Soprano sings A-flat – D – E-flat (taking the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the triad up a whole), and then E-flat and an emphatically repeated A-natural, producing a slightly displaced version of the triad’s dominant and tonic. Finally, m. 796 offers a chordal version of the A-natural triad with an A-flat sounded by the Second Soprano. Equating the Rheinmaidens and the Four Virgins has much the same effect as equating Siegfried and the Naked Youth. Schoenberg plays the Rheinmaidens but off-key, treating them not as emanations of nature or acolytes of solar joyfulness, but as fetishists for whom the Gold has become a form of idolatrous celebration. And again, the degeneration into mass hysteria and ritualistic blood-letting that follow are inspired not by the destruction of the image but by its cultic worship, especially the worship of an image that represents the primal forces of nature.

The three moments of travesty I've examined are revealing because they illustrate Schoenberg's critique not only of Wagner but also of the emerging aesthetic of National Socialism. This aesthetic invested tremendous importance in a vulgar pictorialism, which for a critic like Hanslick was exemplified by the *Leitmotiv*. Again, while Schoenberg recognized the musical genius of Wagner, he was uneasy with the latter's representational literalism, which too often presented itself as naturalism. That naturalism took on special meaning, given Wagner's pronouncements on the denatured and deracinated Jew, whose cosmopolitanism, Wagner believed, would have made it impossible for a composer like Schoenberg to create significant or original music.

## VI

In the foregoing pages, I have argued that *Moses und Aron* mounts an extended critique of the Nazi polemic on *entartete Kunst*, a polemic that identified modernism with anti-representationalism and anti-representationalism with the Jew. By deliberately embracing these facile and false equations, Schoenberg connects the Second Commandment's prohibition against image-making with one of the most influential traditions in German philosophy, the post-Kantian critique of *Vorstellung* that would eventually open the way to Wittgenstein and the language game – the latter having intriguing affinities with the tone row. Schoenberg's opera aligns itself neither entirely with Moses's perspective nor with Aaron's. Moses's abstractionism leads to the end of sensuous art, a third act in which the music has fallen silent; while Aaron's pictorialism leads to the end of serious art, a debased and vulgar mimeticism, the kind of sensationalism that took its inspiration from Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and found its ultimate expression in Leni Riefenstahl's mythological cinema and Albert Speer's monumental architecture.

In *Language and Silence*, George Steiner suggests that Moses's concluding utterance in Act II – “O word, word that I lack!” – acknowledges the inability of language to articulate the historical horror that was looming on the European horizon.<sup>77</sup> What I have attempted to show, contra Steiner, is how amply and eloquently Schoenberg resists a discourse that sought to destroy not only modernism but also European Jewry. Confronted with crises that were political, cultural and philosophical, Schoenberg nevertheless found the words and the music to image forth an experience that would soon become, in the fullest sense, *unvorstellbar* – inconceivable, unimaginable, unrepresentable.

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1. White offers the fullest and most detailed account of the genesis of the opera, beginning with the earliest manuscript entry (labeled DICH 17) and extending through the 196 page fair score (Source B). In her view, the “composition of *Moses und Aron* spans the years 1927-1932”; Pamela C. White, *Schoenberg and the God-Idea: The Opera 'Moses und Aron'* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 29.

2. 1500 BCE is a rough approximation of the Mosaic era.

3. See Willi Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*, trans. Leo Black (London: Longman, 1971), 42. Schoenberg's expressionist operas are *Erwartung* (1909) and *Die Glückliche Hand* (1913). Schoenberg's contributions to the almanac were his composition, *Herzgewächse* (Op. 20) and the essay, “Das Verhältnis zum Text,” later published as “The Relationship to the Text” in Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 141-5.

4. Reich, 40-42, 84, 105, 124-5. When Schoenberg contemplated turning his opera *Die Glückliche Hand* into a film, he considered both Kokoschka and Kandinsky as possible set designers (Reich, 84). For Schiele's wonderfully evocative portrait of Schoenberg, see Reich, 53.

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5. See especially Hans Pfitzner's *Die neue Aesthetik der musikalischen Impotenz* [*The New Aesthetic of Musical Impotence*], published in 1926, which equated atonality with Jewishness and "musical impotence"; Hans Pfitzner, *Gesammelte Schriften: Band II* (Augsburg: Filser Verlag, 1926), 101-281. Also important, although it did not appear until 1932, was Richard Eichenauer's *Musik und Rasse* [*Music and Race*], which specifically mentions Schoenberg as an example of the "Jewish" trend in music; see *Musik und Rasse* (Munich: J.S. Lehmanns Verlag, 1932), 273. Of course, the discourse on *Entartung* may be traced back to Max Nordau's book of that title (published 1892). There is a certain irony in the fact that Nordau, who was Jewish and regarded both Nietzsche and Wagner as instances of "degeneration," is largely responsible for inaugurating the discourse of *Entartung* in the German-speaking world. See Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, translator unknown (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

6. For an excellent account of these exhibitions see Stephanie Barron, ed. "*Degenerate Art*": *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991).

7. The *Entartete "Kunst"* catalogue connected modernism not only with Jewish influences, but also with Africanism and Bolshevism; see *Entartete "Kunst": Führer durch die Ausstellung*. (Original German with Accompanying English translation.), trans. William C. Bunce. (Redding, CN: Silver Fox Press, 1972).

8. *Ibid.*, 16.

9. In German to be *gestalterisch* is to be "creative" or "artistic."

10. *Entartete "Kunst,"* 20.

11. In Barron, ed. "*Degenerate Art*," see Stephanie Barron, "Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany," 9.

12. The census figures are quoted in Michael Meyer, "A Musical Facade for the Third Reich"; *ibid.*, 172.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Schoenberg's letter of resignation was dated 20 March 1933; Reich, 187.

15. Meyer, in "*Degenerate Art*," 172-3.

16. *Ibid.*, 173.

17. Schoenberg completed the second act of *Moses und Aron* in 1932. His only other musical compositions before leaving Germany were an arrangement of a concerto by Georg Matthias Monn and three songs (Op. 48); see Reich, 184-5.

18. Although his focus is not specifically on "degenerate art," Herbert Lindenberger's "*Moses und Aron, Mahagonny, and Germany in the 1930s: Seventeen Entries*" demonstrates with great specificity how fully Schoenberg's opera responded to the history and culture of the period. See Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

19. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968); Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957); Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 298-304; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Third Edition, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York:

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Macmillan Publishing, 1968).

20. While commentators agree that the opera deals with the crisis of representation, their emphases are different: Adorno focuses on the inability to achieve a totalizing representation or image in a secularized and fragmented world; Albright views the opera as a self-reflective examination of the tension between representation and imagination; Janik and Toulmin and Botstein stress the importance of language to epistemology in relation to Viennese language-critique; Goldstein is principally concerned with "communicating the idea of an ineffable deity through language" (152); HaCohen links the opera's "[p]henomenological and semiotic considerations" to its aesthetic of "irresolution" (112); Lacoue-Labarthe connects the crisis of representation to the Kantian category of the sublime (129-133); George Steiner identifies the silence of the opera's third act as the only legitimate response to the experience of the "unspeakable" (163); and Pamela White explores a number of these themes in their historical and biographical contexts. For other articles of interest see Cherlin and Latham; Wörner's study provides valuable historical, formal and thematic analysis and includes the opera's libretto. See "Sacred Fragment: Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*" in Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), 225-258; Daniel Albright, *Representation and the Imagination: Beckett, Kafka, Nabokov, and Schoenberg* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Leon Botstein, "Arnold Schoenberg: Language, Modernism and Jewish Identity" in Robert S. Wistrich, ed., *Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 162-183; Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1996), 102-112; "Word, Image, Idea: Schoenberg and Moses – A Tragic Coexistence" in Bluma Goldstein, *Reinscribing Moses: Heine, Kafka, Freud, and Schoenberg in a European Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 137-67; Bluma Goldstein, "Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*: A Vanishing Biblical Nation" in Charlotte M. Cross and Russell A. Berman, eds. *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 159-192; Ruth HaCohen, "Sounds of Revelation: Aesthetic-Political Theology in Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*," *Modernist Cultures* 1.2 (2005): 110-140, <http://www.js-modcult.bham.ac.uk>; Lacoue-Labarthe, "Adorno" in Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 117-45; "Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*" in George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 150-163; Michael Cherlin, "Schoenberg's Representation of the Divine in *Moses und Aron*," *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 9.2 (1986): 21-16; Edward D. Latham, "The Prophet and the Pitchman: Dramatic Structure and its Elucidation in *Moses und Aron*, Act 1, Scene 2," in Cross and Berman, eds. *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg*; Karl H. Wörner, *Schoenberg's 'Moses and Aaron'*, trans. Paul Hamburger (London: Faber and Faber, 1963).

21. All references are to the libretto included in Karl H. Wörner, *Schoenberg's 'Moses and Aaron'*. The English translations are my own.

22. White has documented the contents of Schoenberg's private library, which included Kant's First and Third Critiques and his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic*, Schopenhauer's *Sämtliche Werke* (Reclam edition of 1891), as well as an extensive collection of Nietzsche (White, 68-9). White writes: "It may be seen from these data that Schoenberg's interest in Schopenhauer, Kant, and Nietzsche was well developed by 1913" (69). Reich and Stuckenschmidt also discuss the influence of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on Schoenberg; see Reich, *Schoenberg* and H. H. Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life and Work*, trans. Humphrey Searle (London: John Calder, 1977).

23. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena for Any Future Metaphysics*, revision of the Carus translation by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill: 1950), 58; *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001), 81.

24. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Unified Edition (1781/1787), trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing: 1996), 266; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller: 1889), 218.

25. See sections 32 and 33 of *Prolegomena*.

26. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 164. Will expresses itself in inorganic matter as gravity, electro-magnetic energy, rigidity, impenetrability, fluidity (130); in animals it expresses itself principally through hunger and sex (108).

27. *Ibid.*, 28

28. *Ibid.*, section 52, 255-67. One suspects Schopenhauer's crude mimeticism would not have appealed to Schoenberg, as when the philosopher identifies the "ground-bass" with "inorganic matter" (258), or equates the departure from the tonic in music to "desire" and the return to it as "satisfaction" (260).

29. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1967), 36.

30. *Ibid.*, 64-5; *Geburt der Tragödie* in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in Zwei Bände*, Band I (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1973), 44-5.

31. That Nietzsche was himself thinking in the phenomenological terms proposed by Kant and Schopenhauer is evident from his unpublished essay, "Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense" (1873), which he wrote the year after he published *Birth of Tragedy*. In that essay, Nietzsche argues that in returning to the primitive Dionysian world of our linguistic origins, we discover that the categories or metaphors that enable us to define and shape reality, are merely human inventions. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breaseale: Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1979), 86.

32. As Nietzsche wrote in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, "By the summer of 1876, during the time of the first *Festspiele*, I said farewell to Wagner in my heart"; *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Penguin, 1983), 675.

33. For a discussion of the Nazi misappropriation of Nietzsche, see Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 285-306. Of course, one need only read Nietzsche himself to realize how preposterous was the Nazi distortion of his thought, something Schoenberg himself would have understood from Nietzsche's writings on Wagner; see for example the numerous anti-German remarks in *The Case of Wagner* ("Wagner's stage requires one thing only—*Teutons!*— Definition of the Teuton: obedience and long legs," 180) or Nietzsche's revulsion with anti-Semitism as expressed in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* ("since Wagner had moved to Germany, he had condescended step by step to everything I despise — even to anti-Semitism," 676). Nietzsche's hatred of both German nationalism and anti-Semitism has been amply documented in numerous studies and biographies; in addition to Kaufmann, see Curtis Cate, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002) and Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: Norton, 2002). Schopenhauer, on the other hand, had more typically German views of his time on the subject of the Jews, and he is approvingly cited in Hans Pfitzner's polemical *Die Neue Aesthetik der musikalischen Impotenz*.

34. Pamela White translates *Vorstellung* as Idea and *Darstellung* as Representation. In common German usage *Vorstellung* can refer to the presentation one makes in a courtroom, a performance one gives on stage, as well as the imagination, an idea, conception or mental image. The notion of the "mental image" comes closest to the philosophical application of the term, which carries with it the implication of an object-category (i.e. the epistemic category of a table, a chair, a leaf, etc.). In philosophical writing, one of the standard translations of *Vorstellung* is "representation" (as in E. F. J. Payne's translation of Schopenhauer's *Vorstellung* as Representation), and

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obviously the notion of *Vorstellung* as a mental image of the world is deeply implicated in the whole problem of mimesis or representationalism.

35. White, see especially 67-76.

36. *Ibid.*, 75.

37. *Plato's Timaeus*, trans. Francis M. Cornford (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), 20-1 (sections 31a & b).

38. "Of that region beyond no one of our earthly poets has ever sung, nor will any ever sing worthily. Its description follows, for I must dare to speak the truth, especially since the nature of the truth is my theme. It is there that Reality lives, without shape or color, intangible, visible only to reason, the soul's pilot; and all true know is knowledge of her." See Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. W. C. Helmhold and W. G. Rabinowitz (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 28 (section 247).

39. Nietzsche makes his explicitly anti-Platonic position clear in "Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense": "Every concept [*Begriff*] arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept [*Begriff*] 'leaf' is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. This awakens the idea [*Vorstellung*] that in addition to the leaves, there exists in nature the 'leaf': the original model [*Urform*] according to which all the leaves were perhaps woven, sketched, measured, colored, curled and painted – but by incompetent hands, so that no specimen has turned out to be a correct, trustworthy, and faithful likeness [*Abbild*] of the original model [*Urform*]; "Truth and Lies," 83; "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im Aussermoralischen Sinne" in *Die Geburt der Tragödie und Schriften der Frühzeit* (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1924), 492.

40. "Truth and Lies," 82.

41. See, for example, *Twilight of the Idols* (especially "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable" and the "Four Great Errors") in *The Portable Nietzsche*.

42. "Space is a necessary a priori presentation [*Vorstellung*] that underlies all outer intuitions" (*Critique* 78, *Kritik*, 73), and "Time is a necessary presentation [*Vorstellung*] that underlies all intuitions" (*Critique*, 86; *Kritik* 80).

43. In Exodus, Aaron acts as Moses's assistant and the miracles are performed before Pharaoh, while in Schoenberg's opera, Aaron initiates the miracles, which are performed before the Jewish people. See Exodus 7:9 and ff.

44. While Moses's rod is nothing more than the "symbol" of his authority, insofar as it inspires his followers its power is "real." But obviously this is not the same as saying the rod possesses supernatural properties that literally enable one to perform miracles.

45. In the original German, the line reads: "Aber ein Volk kann nur fühlen." "Fühlen" combines the ideas both of having "feelings" and "perceiving" through the senses.

46. Noted in the libretto of the enclosed booklet in Arnold Schoenberg, *Moses und Aron & Chamber Symphony No. 2, Op. 38*, conducted by Pierre Boulez (New York: Sony Classical, 1993), 122

47. Albright notes that the "mechanism of the drama can be compared to a wind-up toy, a black box out of which, when one turns a switch on, a small hand reaches to turn the switch off; Schoenberg has made a gesture that is accomplished only for the sake of its own termination, has designed a song that intensifies silence";

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Representation and Imagination, 44.

48. See Schoenberg, "Art and the Moving Pictures" in *Style and Idea*, 154. Although I know of no commentary that has drawn a parallel between the deaths of Kundry and Aaron, a number of critics have noted significant connections between *Moses und Aron* and *Parsifal*; see Adorno, "Sacred Fragment," 239; Botstein, "Arnold Schoenberg, Language, Modernism and Jewish Identity," 176-79; Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta*, 121-2; and George Steiner, "Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*" 153. Lacoue-Labarthe treats *Moses und Aron* as the "negative (in the photographic sense) of *Parsifal*" (121), a description that aptly describes the relation between Wagner's and Schoenberg's respective endings. Also of interest is Steiner's discussion of the Golden Calf scene: "Thus the Golden Calf is both the logical culmination of, and a covert satire on, that catalogue of orgiastic ballets and ritual dances which is one of the distinctive traits of grand opera from Massenet's *Hérodiade* to *Tannhäuser*, from *Aida* and *Samson et Dalila* to *Parsifal* and *Salome*," 160.

49. Most critics believe that Schoenberg himself identifies with Moses (Adorno 226, Botstein 169, Linbenberger 221) but Goldstein ("Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, 176-8) and HaCohen (131) view Schoenberg's sympathies as more divided between the two brothers, and Albright observes, "I do not think Schoenberg intends all virtue to be on Moses' side" (39).

50. A dying Aruns believes that God has "smitten" him for presumptuously attempting to be "both Moses and Aron in one person"; *The Biblical Way*, 319. The play was published as a bilingual text; see *Der biblische Weg/The Biblical Way*, trans. Moshe Lazar, *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 17: 1-2 (1994): 162-329.

51. In a "A Four-Point Program for Jewry," which dates from 1938, Schoenberg insists on the need for "practical politics" (55), and while he acknowledges that Mandate Palestine is the historic homeland of the Jews (56), he nevertheless feels that the Uganda Project offered a practical solution for European Jewry at a time of political crisis (56). See Arnold Schoenberg, "A Four-Point Program for Jewry," *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 7:1 (1979): 49-67.

52. Here I have in mind the account of Nietzsche that emerges in "Contingency of Language," in Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) and Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

53. See, for example, Plato's qualified defense of a representational system such as writing in *Phaedrus*, 73-4 (sections 276-8).

54. For accounts of Schoenberg's relation to Judaism see Goldstein, *Reinscribing Moses*, 137-149; Botstein, 162-67; White, 51-55.

55. White, 54.

56. Goldstein, *Reinscribing Moses*, 138.

57. Arnold Schoenberg, *Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 88.

58. *Ibid.*, 184.

59. Text quoted from liner notes for Arnold Schoenberg, *Das Chorwerk*, conducted by Pierre Boulez, (New York:

Sony Classical, 1990), 66.

60. *Reinscribing Moses*, 165.

61. Meyer, 171.

62. Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music and Other Essays*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 80 [italics in the original], 82. Subsequent citations appear in the text.

63. In the original 1850 version of the essay, Wagner wrote that the “Jew is altogether incapable [*durchaus*] of giving artistic enunciation to his feelings,” which he softened in the 1869 version to “almost.”

64. For an excellent discussion of the relation of cosmopolitanism to modernism, see Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

65. Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 502-3.

66. In “New Music: My Music,” Schoenberg writes, “not a single note written by any of the ‘new classicists’, ‘folklorists’, ‘new objectivists’, and ‘community-art’ musicians would be possible without Wagner the musician” (*Style and Idea*, 105); and in “Criteria for the Evaluation of Music” he writes, “Wagner’s entirely new way of building, expressing, harmonizing and orchestrating” has the effect of “revolutionizing music in all its aspects” (*Style and Idea*, 133).

67. As Schoenberg remarked in “Twelve-Tone Composition” (1923), “I believe that when Richard Wagner introduced his *Leitmotiv* – for the same purpose as that for which I introduced my Basic Set – he may have said: ‘Let there be unity.’” *Ibid.*, 244.

68. Helen White demonstrates not only that Schoenberg employs expressive and affective devices in his music, but also that he makes use of a fairly elaborate structure of *Leitmotive* (see *Schoenberg and the God-Idea*, Chapter 5 and Appendices 2 and 3). Schoenberg’s *Leitmotive* are, however, sufficiently stylized that no one would imagine that they are direct musical manifestations of the person, thing or event with which they are associated.

69. In writing against music designed to produce specific subjective impressions or “psychological” effects, Schoenberg observes that “certain dance music goes where it belongs – to the feet.” He continues, “Certainly *Forest Murmurs* and the *Moonlight Sonata* do not go to the feet – not, at least as their principal target. It is less hard to imagine someone on whom the waltzes from *Die Meistersinger* . . . have such a narrowly ‘psychological’ effect – but one may not feel obliged to view it as a virtue worth mentioning”; see “New Music” in *Style and Idea*, 139.

70. In “My Evolution,” Schoenberg writes “in my *Verklärte Nacht* the thematic construction is based on a Wagnerian ‘model of sequence’ above a roving harmony . . . the treatment of instruments, the manner of composition, and much of the sonority were strictly Wagnerian.” (80)

71. In mm. 693-4 of *Von Heute Auf Morgen*, the Singer praises the Wife’s “radiant eyes” (“*der Schein von . . . Ihren strahlenden Augen*”) in a lyrical run up the scale, which inspires the Husband’s harshly ironic dissonance (dropping from B-flat to A to C-flat) when he points out that the Singer is merely quoting *Rheingold* (“*Siehe Rheingold!*”). The humor is even richer if we realize that the text being quoted (the music is not) comes from Fasolt’s love-sick mooning over Freia toward the end of the opera (“*Weh! Noch blitzt ihr Blick zu mir her; des Auges Stern strahlt mich noch an*”). The other Wagner allusion in *Von Heute Auf Morgen* occurs at measure 997 (“*Schmecktest du mir ihn zu!*”) and involves a direct quotation of both music and text from Act I, scene 1 of

*Walküre*. Here the irony is, if anything, greater than in the earlier allusion. Instead of a heroic and wounded Siegmund who accepts a restorative drink from Sieglinde, we are confronted with a vain and puffed-up tenor who tells the Wife that a cup of coffee poured by her hand would taste as good as gin (“*schmeckt ein Milchkaffee sicher wie Gin!*”). See Arnold Schoenberg, score and text of *Von Heute Auf Morgen* (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1961).

72. I am grateful to Michael Bane for his advice and assistance in my musical analyses of Wagner and Schoenberg.

73. Arnold Schoenberg, score and text, *Moses und Aron: Oper in drei Akten* (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1958). The “Dragon” motif is quoted in Ernest Newman, *The Wagner Operas* (Princeton: Princeton University: 1991), 545.

74. For a discussion of Hanslick, see Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*, 103-7. Janik and Toulmin write, “Wagner was offensive to Hanslick because, in personal as well as musical matters, he was always the conjurer, always the entertainer” (104); they go on to cite the *Leitmotiv* as an example of this “conjuring” (104).

75. The “Siegfried” motif is quoted in Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, 546.

76. For the “Rheinmaidens’ Song,” see Richard Wagner, score and text, *Das Rheingold* (Frankfurt: C. F. Peters, 1942), 250.

77. *Language and Silence*, 162-3.