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Abstract

Arnold Schoenberg's *Die glückliche Hand*: Artistic Self-Envisioning in the Early Modernist Era: This thesis focuses on Arnold Schoenberg's stage work *Die glückliche Hand* (1913), a major composition of Schoenberg's early atonal period, but one that has been less extensively studied by scholars. It argues that this work sheds considerable light on Schoenberg's self-envisioning as creative artist during a crucial phase of his development, and is best understood as a *Künstleroper* with strong autobiographical resonances. The first chapter seeks to situate the piece in relation to other notable Expressionist stage works of the period, demonstrating how it can be seen to constitute an *Ich-Drama* with strong resemblances in both conception and dramaturgical design to stage works by Wassily Kandinsky and August Strindberg. The second chapter attempts to explore the symbolism of its libretto, elucidating connections with the work of three noted contemporary writers—August Strindberg, Otto Weininger, and Stefan George—who exerted an appreciable influence on Schoenberg's worldview and artistic self-concept. Intrinsic to this self-concept were *fin-de-siècle* constructs of the artist as tortured, embattled genius, in possession of higher spiritual truths but destined to remain the target of uncomprehending hostility and persecution. Particular attention will be given to Strindberg's autobiographical prose work *Inferno* as a likely source of inspiration for Schoenberg, as well as George's major collection of poems *Der siebente Ring*. The conclusion sketches how the paradigm of artistic self-envisioning in *Die glückliche Hand* arguably remained central to Schoenberg's self-understanding in later life.

**Arnold Schoenberg's *Die glückliche Hand*:
Artistic Self-Envisioning in the
Early Modernist Era**

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Thesis prepared for accession to the degree of

Master of Arts by Research

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Statement of Copyright

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Introduction

The present study focuses on Arnold Schoenberg's early stage work *Die glückliche Hand*, op.18, which was written in 1910-13 and first performed in Vienna in 1924. It met with a rather lukewarm reception at its premiere and has since only seldom been performed. In contrast to other works of his early atonal period, such as the Second String Quartet, the *Five Orchestral Pieces*, *Erwartung*, and *Pierrot Lunaire*, which appear relatively frequently on concert programmes and have been the subject of much attention from scholars, *Die glückliche Hand* remains today one of his least well-known scores.

The present study seeks to explore the symbolism of this highly enigmatic score in relation to the wider cultural context and artistic trends of the period, as well as to autobiographical events in Schoenberg's life. This task has not been undertaken previously, and my findings suggest that a full appreciation of the work can only be properly gained through an understanding of the lives and works of contemporary figures in Austro-German intellectual and artistic life, particularly those of August Strindberg, Otto Weininger and Stefan George, who exerted a marked influence on Schoenberg's own artistic and existential outlook. The central argument of the thesis is that *Die glückliche Hand* can best be understood as a *Künstleroper*, in which Schoenberg projected a dramatised, symbolic account of his personal circumstances and evolving self-concept as artist. In doing so, he advanced what might be described as a 'personal myth'—a justification of his artistic self-worth during a crucial and particularly turbulent phase of his artistic development, moulded in an image informed by his reading of the work of several noted contemporary writers.

The thesis comprises two chapters. Chapter 1, '*Die glückliche Hand*: Genesis of a Dramatic Concept', examines the work's dramaturgical traits, concentrating on establishing its relationship to other notable Expressionist stage works of the period—focusing in particular on Wassily Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang*, and the 'dream plays' of August Strindberg, especially *To Damascus*. I also analyse the work's relationship to the highly influential typologies of Expressionist drama evolved by Bernhard Diebold's *Anarchie im Drama* (1921), arguing that it can most meaningfully be construed as an *Ich-Drama*, with an artist as central character.

Having established this context, Chapter 2 examines aspects of the libretto's symbolism, analysing the central character of the Man and his relationship to his environment. It argues that, in essence, this character can be understood as a symbolic self-representation comparable to the many self-portraits that Schoenberg painted in these years, dramatising a grandiose self-image as a genius and creative artist of world-historical importance, whose fate it is to be misunderstood and reviled by the spiritually debased society in which he lived. Of particular importance to evaluating this image as autobiographical is the work's portrayal of a triangular relationship (between the Man, Woman, and Gentleman), which has been read as paralleling that between Schoenberg, his wife Mathilde, and the painter Richard Gerstl, a reading which I dispute in light of recent scholarship

on this episode by Raymond Coffey. Rather, I contend that the erotic aspects of the plot are subordinate to its main theme of exploring the inner world of genius, and should be read in the light of the philosophy of Otto Weininger, especially his theorisation of the nature of genius, which he saw as an exclusively male attribute, and his claims about the inherent impossibility of genius finding fulfilment in the love of a woman.

Schoenberg's strong admiration for Strindberg is then brought to bear on the image of persecuted genius which Schoenberg projects in *Die glückliche Hand*, through the many parallels Schoenberg discerned in their life, outlook and work. These similarities are explored in some depth, and particular attention is paid to one of Strindberg's major autobiographical prose works *Inferno*, (1897), one episode of which manifests such remarkable resemblances to Schoenberg's opera as to suggest the strong likelihood that it served as a direct source of inspiration—a fact that seems to have escaped the attention of previous commentators. The closing section of the chapter explores the indebtedness of the opera's symbolism to the writings of Stefan George, which are intensively preoccupied with the figure of the artist-genius who finds himself wholly at odds with the society in which he lives.

As previously mentioned, *Die glückliche Hand* has received comparatively little attention from scholars, and there is relatively little literature examining the work in depth. Biographical studies of Schoenberg's life naturally situate the work in the period in which it was written, and the perfunctory mention of the work in early biographies by Wellesz, Reich and Stuckenschmidt seem to do little more than confirm that the work remained largely unknown and unappreciated.

Where they appear, discussions of the work for the most part have almost always followed in a single vein—as Hans Keller pointed out in a 1957 article ('The 'Lucky' Hand and Other Errors), even such authorities on Schoenberg as Egon Wellesz and René Leibowitz confined themselves to basic descriptions of the score, and subsequent commentators similarly tended to evade the issue of how the work might be interpreted. Stuckenschmidt for instance described the libretto as being 'without a subject, without reality', seeming to imply that an in-depth study of the work's symbolism would yield very little.

The biggest and most important study to date of *Die glückliche Hand* is Joseph Auner's 1991 doctoral thesis, *Schoenberg's compositional and aesthetic transformations, 1910-1913: The genesis of 'Die glückliche Hand'*. This comprehensively charts Schoenberg's compositional process as he worked on the score in 1910-13, demonstrating that he had originally intended to write an athenatic work similar in style to *Erwartung*, but as his aesthetic outlook developed over the course of composition he began to incorporate more 'worked-out' devices such as a fugal exposition to accompany the Workers' toil, and an imitation of the opening material when the veiled chorus reappears at the end. Musically the score thus fuses two styles of his early atonal

period—that of ‘intuitive’ composition in the manner of a stream of consciousness in sound, as typified by *Erwartung*, and that of traditional devices incorporated into an atonal idiom, such as in *Pierrot Lunaire*.

The present project, however, takes a different approach. Auner’s thesis offers fascinating insights into the work’s technical and stylistic aspects, and is sufficiently exhaustive that there would be very little to add to a discussion of the score. The work’s extramusical content and meaning, however, can be shown to enlighten Schoenberg’s self-concept as an artist in this period of his life, and the omission of this investigation in scholarship to date is an oversight which the present study hopes to rectify.

Those scholars that have so far made an attempt to interpret the work, such as John Crawford (in *Die glückliche Hand: Schoenberg’s Gesamtkunstwerk*, and *Die glückliche Hand: Further Notes*) and Brian Simms (in *My Dear Hagerl: Self-Representation in Schoenberg’s String Quartet No.2*) almost always discuss the work’s erotic triangle as the most prominent and meaningful aspect of the libretto, due to the aforementioned affair between Mathilde Schoenberg and Richard Gerstl in 1908. In reconsidering this aspect of the work, Raymond Coffey’s 2011 doctoral thesis, *Richard Gerstl and Arnold Schönberg: A Reassessment of Their Relationship (1906-1908)* allows for a more detailed understanding of these events and their ramifications for Schoenberg’s creative life. Additionally, recent scholarship by Julie Brown, particularly her 2014 book *Schoenberg and Redemption*, highlights the impact of Weininger’s philosophy on Schoenberg, and applying the same to the narrative of *Die glückliche Hand* allows for a more nuanced understanding of the sexual politics projected onto the stage in the interactions of the Man, Woman and Gentleman, in place of reductive interpretations about Schoenberg’s family life.

In addition to Auner’s thesis I have drawn on the only other substantial publication devoted solely to *Die glückliche Hand*, the volume of essays edited by Joëlle Caullier *‘C’est ainsi que l’on crée...’: A propos de La Main heureuse d’Arnold Schoenberg* (2003), and especially the contributions by Friedrich Buchmayr and Wolfgang Sabler. In the course of exploring the importance of the work of Strindberg and George as influences on Schoenberg’s self concept, I have also benefited particularly from the fine English-language studies of these figures by Michael Meyer and Robert Norton respectively.

My study of the intellectual and artistic influences shaping Schoenberg’s artistic self-concept as represented in *Die glückliche Hand* has been constrained somewhat by the word length available to me—it would in principle be possible to extend the list of influences to perhaps Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner, and Hegelian-influenced approaches to the writing of music history. However, these would likely require a separate study to do them justice.

Die glückliche Hand is often described as an opera by commentators, although apart from the Chorus there is only a single sung role, the Man, who delivers only a few brief phrases. Nonetheless, Schoenberg himself customarily referred to the score as an opera, and so I will consequently use the term for convenience, rather than the more cumbersome 'Drama mit Musik' as it is described at the head the score.

All translations from French and German are my own, unless otherwise acknowledged.

Chapter 1:
Genesis of a Dramatic Concept

Introduction

In spite of its comparative brevity, *Die glückliche Hand* had a protracted and difficult gestation. Unlike *Erwartung* however, in which he set a text by Marie Pappenheim, Schoenberg wrote the libretto of *Die glückliche Hand* himself. No starting date is indicated on the text of the libretto, so it is uncertain when Schoenberg commenced work on it. Having finished it at the end of June 1910, Schoenberg published it in the Austrian music journal *Der Merker* in June 1911 before he had completed work on the score. Work on the opera's music proved to be especially arduous; after *Erwartung*, which was finished within seventeen frenetic days in 1910, Schoenberg had hoped to perform a similar feat. Unfortunately, *Die glückliche Hand* proved a much more difficult endeavour, and work on it proceeded in fits and starts over the next three years. The final score is dated 18 November 1913.¹

The opera lasts approximately twenty minutes, and comprises four scenes that are performed without a break. The only singing parts are those of the main protagonist (the Man) and the chorus of twelve solo voices (six female, six male), who provide disembodied commentary in the first and last scenes. This has drawn comparison with the 'choruses' of ancient Greek drama, commenting en masse from a detached standpoint; as such, and in keeping with other scholarship on *Die glückliche Hand*, this will be referred to subsequently as the 'Greek chorus'. Additionally there are non-singing roles: the Woman who is the object of the Man's love, the Gentleman who is his romantic and artistic rival, and a group of Workers.

Musically speaking, the work is typical of Schoenberg's 'free atonal' period, in the years after he had first broached this new musical idiom in his Second String Quartet of 1908, and before he systematised the dodecaphonic method of atonal composition in the 1920s. As will be discussed subsequently, Schoenberg's attitude towards atonal composition and the ideal role of the modern artist underwent a significant shift in the years he spent composing *Die glückliche Hand*, and this change in attitude is manifest in certain aspects of the opera's score.² The work is scored for a large orchestra with triple woodwinds supplemented with a piccolo, an English horn, a clarinet in D and a bass clarinet. The extended percussion section stretches to cymbals, bass drum, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, tamtam, bells, xylophone, glockenspiel, and metal tubes, with a hammer also employed for the moment where the central protagonist strikes a hammer blow on stage.

¹ For an account of the genesis of *Die glückliche Hand* and a detailed discussion of the process of its composition, see Auner, "Schoenberg's Compositional and Aesthetic Transformations, 1910-1913: The Genesis of '*Die glückliche Hand*.'"

² For an overview of Schoenberg's change in method and outlook during the composition of *Die glückliche Hand*, see Auner, "Heart and Brain in Music."

In spite of its short length, *Die glückliche Hand* evinces a concentrated dramatic intensity that seems to lend it the substance of a much larger work. It is conceived as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in miniature, but combines much more than the music and poetry of the Wagnerian model. There are, for example, meticulous directions for lighting effects, which are manipulated to highlight certain key aspects of the action and to evoke a variety of changing moods.³ The score is also notable for the detailed attention given to various aspects of the staging, from the physical appearance of the characters to prescriptive directions for the appearance of scenery—Schoenberg also sketched and painted a number of examples of the characters and scenery he envisaged.



Fig. 1: Schoenberg's envisaged sunrise backdrop for Scene II; Oil on cardboard, dated no later than October 1910

Additionally the staging makes extensive use of mime, so physical gesture plays a prominent part both in advancing dramatic action and portraying emotion. So important to Schoenberg was control over these extra-musical aspects of his complex conception that in November 1913 he wrote to Fritz Soot, the tenor he was hoping to secure for the opera's main role, assuring him that

³ Various scholars have argued that these changing colours imply a symbolic meaning of their own, especially in light of Kandinsky's own ideas about the spiritual import of certain colours. A discussion of this is outside the scope of the current thesis, but for one such overview see Beck, "The Literary Sources of 'Die glückliche Hand.'"

it is primarily acting ability that matters here, so that it should be sung by the singer best suited from this point of view, regardless of whether he is a tenor, baritone or bass. It can certainly be done.⁴

After completing the opera's score, Schoenberg struggled to find an opera company that would stage the work, and the outbreak of World War I further hindered plans for its realisation on the operatic stage. Eventually it received its premiere at the Volksoper in Vienna on 14 October 1924, as part of a month-long musical and theatrical festival in Vienna. Accounts of the premiere are mixed, with some claiming that the hall received the work with virtually unanimous enthusiasm.⁵ Critical reception was almost entirely negative, however, and one particularly harsh review from the mouthpiece of the Austrian Federation of Music Teachers, the *Musikpädagogische Zeitschrift*, led to Schoenberg's disgusted resignation from the Federation.⁶ Additionally, rivalry between Vienna's Staatsoper and the Volksoper effectively cut the initial run of *Die glückliche Hand* short. It has only sporadically been staged since, perhaps on account of the technical challenges it presents for such a short work.

The following synopsis of the action is recreated from the libretto and broadly maintains the level of detail which Schoenberg specifies for each aspect of the action and staging. These nuances are important, as the subsequent discussion of the work's symbolism later in the thesis will make clear.

Synopsis

At the outset of the opera the Man appears on a darkened stage, pinned to the floor by a 'fantastic animal.' A dark violet, velvet curtain hides the back of the stage, through which the twelve faces of the Greek chorus are illuminated in green, with only their eyes clearly visible.⁷ They chide him for his spiritual failures:

Be still, won't you? You know how it always is, and yet you remain blind. Will you never be at rest?
So many times already! And once again? You know that the pattern once again repeats itself. Once again the same ending. Must you once again rush in? Will you not finally believe? Believe in reality: it is thus, thus it is, and not otherwise. Once again you trust in the dream. Once again you fix your longing on the unattainable. Once again you give yourself up to the sirens of your thoughts, thoughts that roam the cosmos, that are unworldly, but thirst for worldly fulfilment! Worldly

⁴ Letter from Schoenberg to Fritz Soot, 18 November 1913 (Schoenberg, *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters, Selected and Edited by Erwin Stein*, 41.)

⁵ An account of the premiere and of critical responses to the work can be found in Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*, 147–148.

⁶ Bujić, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 132.

⁷ Schoenberg similarly painted many bizarre and unsettling portraits with prominence given to the eyes—these came to be known as his *Augenbilder*.

fulfilment—you poor fool—worldly fulfilment! You, who have the divine in you, and covet the worldly! And you cannot win out! You poor fool!⁸

They disappear as the gaps in the curtain grow dark, and the fantastic animal also disappears. Everything is motionless for a second, before long black veils fall slowly over the man, as if shadows. Suddenly from behind the scene, brash, joyous music can be heard and shrill, mocking laughter of a crowd of people. At the same moment, the Man jumps onto his feet and the curtains at the back are split. He has short hair and is dressed in a dirty yellow-brown jacket of coarse, thick material, with black trousers, which on his left leg are in tatters from the knee down. His shirt is half-open, showing his chest, and his shoes are badly torn. He has a large open wound on one foot, cut by a nail. Similarly his face and chest are partly bloody, and covered in scars. He stands for a moment with his head bowed, and sings ‘Yes, oh yes.’

In the second scene, the stage becomes bright, and shows a larger stage area, with a soft blue, sky-like backdrop against a bright brown earth, with glaring yellow sunlight spreading from a circular cut-out five feet in diameter, framed by soft yellow-green pleated curtains at the sides. The man sings ‘The blossoming: oh, longing!’ and from behind him, a beautiful young Woman emerges from the side. She is wearing a pleated deep violet, flowing dress, with yellow and red roses in her hair. Without looking around, the Man trembles, and the woman looks pitifully towards the Man, who sings:

O you blessed one! How beautiful you are! How sweet it is to see you, to speak with you, to listen to you. How you smile, how your eyes laugh! Ah, your lovely soul!

The woman holds out a goblet to the Man, on which violet light shines while there is a ‘rapturous pause’. In a dreamlike instant, the Man finds the goblet in his hand despite not having yet looked at the woman, nor her making contact to pass it to him. He contemplates it rapturously, then becomes deeply serious, almost dejected, reflects a further moment, and then with a joyous resolution slowly drinks from the goblet. The woman watches with waning interest, before a cold expression comes over her face, and after rearranging her dress, she moves towards the side of the stage.

The Man finishes draining the goblet, and takes several steps forward. As he lowers his arm and stands deep in thought, the woman looks on with indifference, and slight hostility. Without looking at the woman he sings, ‘How beautiful you are! I am so glad when you are near me; I live again...’ before stretching out both arms, as if she stood before him. ‘Oh, you are beautiful!’

⁸ This, and other English quotations from the libretto are taken from David Johnson’s translation published in Schoenberg and Kandinsky, *Arnold Schoenberg Wassily Kandinsky—Letters, Pictures and Documents*, 91–98.

She begins to withdraw and slowly turns to face into the curtain on the side of the stage. Her face suddenly lights up, and a Gentleman appears before her, elegantly dressed in a dark grey overcoat and carrying a walking stick. The Man becomes uneasy, and as the Gentleman stretches out his hand to the woman, the Man's arm stiffens convulsively. The woman smiles and goes to the Gentleman as if to an old acquaintance. He takes her impetuously in his arms, and they leave the stage together. The Man sighs and takes several steps before standing still, utterly dejected.

Suddenly the woman rushes on from the side of the stage and kneels before him to beg forgiveness. He continues to look upward, and his face glows with happiness: 'Oh, you are sweet, you are beautiful!' She gets slowly to her feet, and seeks his left hand in order to kiss it. He sinks down on his knees and reaches towards her. She stands as he kneels, and her face takes on a slightly sarcastic expression. He looks up at her, raising his hand and touching hers lightly. She flees through the left curtain but he does not notice, gazing uninterruptedly at his right hand. After a while he stands, stretching out his arms and stands giant-like on tip-toe, singing 'Now I possess you forever.'

The stage darkens and then immediately grows bright, as a different backdrop comes into view of a wild rocky landscape in grey and black, with cliffs and pine trees. In the centre is a construction involving a ravine, and two plateaus, on which are featured two grottos, hidden by dark violet material. Above the ravine, and among other rock formations stands a single, man-sized boulder. These rocks cast shadows on the stage from lighting behind them, and the entire effect is intended to be a 'free combination of colours and forms' rather than a realistic depiction of nature.

As the scene brightens, the Man is seen climbing out of the ravine. He climbs without difficulty, though it must be an obviously treacherous place. He has apparently been engaged in bloody conflict, and now has two Saracens' heads hanging from his belt, and carries a blood-spattered sword.⁹ The first grotto on the left becomes lit, and is shown to be a cross between a machine shop and a goldsmith's workshop. Several workers (dressed in realistic workingman's dress) are seen at work, whether hammering, filing, or at a machine. In the middle is an anvil and a heavy hammer.

After contemplating this scene for a moment, the Man grows more cheerful and says quietly, 'That can be done more simply.' He drops his sword, bends to pick up a piece of gold from the floor and place it on the anvil, and picks up the hammer. The workers spring up and look as if they are about to pounce on him. Without noticing this, the Man contemplates his raised left hand, as his fingertips are lit from above. Swelled with a deep emotion and sense of power, he grasps the hammer with both hands and brings it sharply down on the anvil. To the Workers' astonishment

⁹ Schoenberg describes these as 'Turkenköpfe', literally turks' heads, though Saracens could be considered a viable translation. The significance of this will be considered at a later stage.

the anvil splits and the gold sinks into the cleft. The Man bends down and pulls it out, raising it up to show them: it is a complex diadem, set with precious stones. Without emotion, he says, 'This is the way to make jewels.'

The Workers gestures grow threatening again, and they appear to be planning to attack the Man. He throws the diadem to them, laughing, and turns away without seeing their hostility. As they prepare to rush at him, he stoops to pick up his sword, and as he touches it, the stage instantly grows completely dark. At the same time, it becomes windy, growing stronger as the music becomes louder. This crescendo is matched on stage by a colour-crescendo, as the man is lit sequentially by a series of coloured lights, which appear to emanate from him, and with each colour determining his reaction. Firstly there is red light (he looks at his hand, which sinks down), it then turns to brown, then a dirty green (his eyes grow), before dark red (his excitement increases and his limbs stiffen), blood red (he trembles and stretches out both arms, his eyes start from his head and he opens his mouth in horror), orange, and finally a glaring yellow (his head seems as though about to burst). This yellow light inundates the stage and lights the second grotto on the right. When it is completely bright, the storm abates and the light changes swiftly to a mild blue.

The Woman from the second scene re-enters quickly from the left, dressed as in the previous scene but stripped to the waist. She reaches the middle of the grotto and looks around inquiringly for a moment. The Gentleman re-enters from the right side of the grotto, beckoning her with the missing part of her dress. She reaches out her hand to him. The Man appears consumed with despair, clawing at his sides, bending his knees and leaning backwards. As the Gentleman beckons, he turns around with a jolt and falls on his knees, trying to crawl towards the grotto on all fours, but unable to climb up. He sings, 'You, you! You are mine... you were mine... she was mine...' as he tries in vain to clamber up to the grotto.

The Gentleman notices the Man, but casts only a cool glance in his direction. He throws the scrap of clothing to him calmly and exits with complete indifference. The stage grows dark again and is immediately lit in a pale greenish-grey which does not extend to the grotto. In the darkness the Man has leaned his head against the wall, and turned his back to the Woman. She springs forward, looking for the scrap of clothing; seeing it near the man, she picks it up and covers herself with it. As she does so, he turns around and throws himself on his knees, beseeching her, 'Beautiful vision, stay with me!'

She slips away from him, hastening up the rock; he leaps after her but she reaches the man-sized rock at the top long before him. This has begun to glow with a dazzling green light, and it now appears as a sneering mask, its shape somewhat resembling the fantastic animal of the first scene, standing upright. Just as the Man stands below and directly opposite the woman, she gives the stone a slight push with her foot, and it topples down to crush him.

At the moment when the stone buries the Man, it grows dark, and the loud music and laughter from the beginning are heard again. In the final scene, the stage is lit as at the opening, with the faces of six men and six women visible in grey-blue light. The fantastic animal is gnawing at the neck of the Man. The Greek chorus accuse him severely of not heeding their warning:

Did you have to live again what you have so often lived? Can you never renounce? Never at last resign yourself? Is there no peace within you? Still none? You seek to lay hold of what will only slip from you when you grasp it. But what is in you, around you, wherever you may be, do you not feel it? Do you not hear it? Do you understand only what you hold? Do you feel only what you touch, the wounds only in your flesh, the pain only in your body? And still you seek. And torment yourself, and are without rest. You poor fool!

During the final words, the grey-blue light that falls on their faces is tinted with red. The stage slowly grows dark, and the curtain falls.

***Die glückliche Hand* and contemporary Austro-German Expressionism**

Schoenberg's decision to write the libretto for *Die glückliche Hand* himself was not merely an emulation of Wagner's practice. At this period, many artists made forays into unrelated artistic spheres as a matter of course; Kandinsky and Kokoschka, though well-established painters, each wrote dramatic works of significant influence, *Der gelbe Klang* and *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* respectively.¹⁰ Similarly, it was in the years 1907-1912 that Schoenberg was most active as a painter.¹¹ In each case, an overriding aim of these artists was to escape the constraints of inherited technique and realise an unmitigated, genuine artistic expression.¹² Nonetheless, there are a number of striking features of the opera's dramatism which mark it out as heavily indebted to many of Schoenberg's contemporaries, and to Expressionist theatre generally. Indeed, it is only when many of its Expressionist devices are explained that the concept of the opera (and especially the wealth of its symbolism) begins to clarify.

Expressionism as a label has been one typically applied retrospectively to art by scholars and critics rather than, as with the Futurists and Surrealists, held up by artists as a collective banner for their style and self-conception.¹³ Its use can be traced back as far as 1850¹⁴ but is usually understood to

¹⁰ Kandinsky conceived *Der gelbe Klang* as an operatic libretto, and engaged the Russian composer Thomas Hartmann to write the score (which is now lost). Hindemith set the text of *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* in his 1921 opera.

¹¹ Baldassarre, "Among the Best Striving Today, There Are Secret Relationships': The Kandinskij-Schoenberg Connection Reconsidered," 244.

¹² Auner, "Heart and Brain in Music," 119.

¹³ John Willett points out that those artists who overtly courted a reputation as 'Expressionist' tended to be the weaker figures; strong dependence on a movement would arguably have compromised the individualism

refer to a particular style of Austro-German art (though there were important Expressionists hailing from other countries too) that preoccupied artists in all fields between approximately 1910-24.¹⁵ It was first of all applied to visual art, and its first modern use can apparently be traced to an exhibition of the Berlin Secession in 1911,¹⁶ where a foreword in the exhibition catalogue had employed the term *Expressionisten* to describe the ultra-modern French artists surrounding Henri Matisse, who had broken with the Impressionist paradigms of their contemporaries. The term immediately became popular with the public, and influential critics such as Max Osborn and Walter Heymann advocated its application to German artists of the period, many of whom had been experimenting with ‘intense antinaturalistic colours, forms and spaces’ for some years.¹⁷ Subsequently the Sonderbund International Exhibition in Cologne in 1912 offered a survey of what it considered ‘Expressionist’ art, giving prominence to Van Gogh as precursor of the style¹⁸ and also to the Norwegian artist Edward Munch, whose *Scream of Nature* has become its most iconic realisation. Also included were the artistic groups *Der Blaue Reiter* and *Die Brücke*, whose work is still regarded today as exemplifying the German Expressionist style in the visual arts, as were Oskar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele, two of the style’s most important Viennese exponents.¹⁹

Stylistically, certain trends were in evidence. Portraiture lost its traditional function of realistic pictorial representation, rather its aim became to realise and express the inner world of the sitter through their image—this also accounts for the numerous self-portraits of Expressionist artists who sought self-expression through art. Startling use of colours and broad brush strokes were employed vividly to illustrate the stark emotional world of subjects, and a tendency towards

that was so important to Expressionist artists, and this may explain their general reluctance to assert the shared characteristics of their style. (Willett, *Expressionism*, 7.)

¹⁴ An uncannily prescient reference was made in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1850 to ‘the Expressionist school of modern painters’ (Furness, *Expressionism*, 3–4.)

¹⁵ Samuel and Hinton Thomas, *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre (1910-1924)*, 1.

¹⁶ While the Berlin Secession controversially grappled with the new Expressionist style, the Vienna Secession exhibited much French Impressionist art, and its principle exponents were concerned with developing a style that draws on realist and impressionist tendencies. Nonetheless, Viennese Expressionist artists drew much from their technique, with Schiele being said to have ‘transformed Klimt’, his technique growing from ‘Expressionist intensification of a Secessionist source’. (Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea*, 88–9.)

¹⁷ Washton Long, *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism*, 3.

¹⁸ In the exhibition’s foreword, Richard Reiche talks of Van Gogh as ‘that great Dutchman, who we proudly hail as one of our own.’ (Reiche, “Foreword to the International Exhibition of the Sonderbund, Cologne, 1912,” 17.)

¹⁹ Dagen, “Sonderbund Show Recreated 100 Years after Galvanising Europe’s Art World.”

abstraction allowed for the realisation of an increasingly violent emotional world on the canvas.²⁰ Even when painting non-human subjects, the scene would necessarily convey a particular emotion or mood—as the painter Karl Jakob Hirsch explains, ‘It was not necessary to paint a flagpole well, but rather to show the convictions represented by the flag fluttering in the wind.’²¹ Such landscapes as exist are often apocalyptic visions, with expressive hints of familiar objects such as trees and houses amid swirling colours that rip them from their familiar context.

The emotional milieu of such Expressionist art is very much of its time, as artists rallied against the inhumanity of conditions surrounding them. The rapid expansion of urban populations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had forced inescapable daily reminders of grinding poverty upon even well-heeled city dwellers, and the theme of urban alienation informed much of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s paintings of nocturnal dance halls, cafes and prostitutes.²² Viennese Expressionist painters, such as Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka and Richard Gerstl represented the atmosphere of anxiety leading up to the First World War in monstrous visions of the grotesque and fantastic; Kokoschka retrospectively wrote of this period, ‘Before the War people lived in security yet they were all afraid. ... I painted them in their anxiety and pain.’²³ Much Expressionist art is therefore rooted in a sense of shared solidarity, the artist reaching out to others who share the pain of their social and spiritual fragmentation.²⁴

Technical and conceptual aspects of Expressionist drama

There is a reasonably extensive canon of Expressionist literature from around this period, but I would like to turn to drama primarily so as to elucidate the traits that *Die glückliche Hand* shares with other important plays of this period. Drama was a particularly important medium for Expressionist thought, attaining its peak in the period 1917-1923,²⁵ towards the end of which time *Die glückliche Hand* received its premiere. Some of the most notable Expressionist playwrights were: Frank Wedekind, whose plays *Erdegeist* (1895) and *Büchse der Pandora* (1904) formed the basis for the libretto of Berg’s *Lulu*; Gerhart Hauptmann, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1912; and the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, whose plays were highly influential in their German translations by Emil Schering.

²⁰ For a detailed examination of the technique, intellectual trends and subject matter of Expressionist art, see Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea*.

²¹ Quoted in Dube and Barron, *German Expressionism: Art and Society*, 16.

²² Barron, “Themes of the Exhibition,” 24.

²³ Quoted in Crawford, *Expressionism in Twentieth-Century Music*, 8.

²⁴ Kuhns, *German Expressionist Theatre: The Actor and the Stage*, 11.

²⁵ Benson, *German Expressionist Drama: Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser*, 6.

Similarly to visual and literary mediums, Expressionist theatre relied heavily on the portrayal of abstract states to communicate an essential expression of feeling, eschewing faithful depiction of outer reality. As such, actors were made to enact a range of stylised behaviours on stage, both in order to break from the naturalistic realism that had been the focus of so much romantic drama and also to fully realise the specific dramatic traits that marked out their work as Expressionist. Plots in the traditional sense were generally pared down to the bare minimum so as to present only enough dramatic context to convey each point as essentially as possible—often the world of these dramas is highly symbolic and referential, with fables, dreams or allegories employed to invoke a particular emotional response. Characters themselves were stripped of all but their vital characteristics, and instead were often embodiments of principles important to the dramatist, or else enacted highly dramatised states of mind or social functions. As such, the characters are typically unnamed in scripts, bearing such identifiers as Man, Child, Officer, Knight, and so on.²⁶ All of these devices are employed towards the central aim of moving away from a naturalistic depiction of a socially conditioned world and towards a more abstract mode of expression that is more personal and essential, existing in a referential world of symbol.²⁷

Very often, this effect is heightened through the egocentricity or solipsism of a single, central figure in the drama. Kaiser's 1912 play *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (From Morn til Midnight) is one such play that employs Expressionist devices to this end—a bleak tale of a bank cashier who impulsively embezzles 60,000 marks in order to elope with an exotic Italian lady who declines him, provoking a quest for fulfilment as he awakens from his soulless repetitive existence. It also constitutes an early example of the *Stationendrama*, after the religious model of the Stations of the Cross, with the narrative essentially comprising a series of scenes in rapid succession with no obvious link between them other than the personal transformation they enact.²⁸ Each part is given a single designation that defines their roles (for example Cashier, Penitent Cyclist, Prostitute) and rather than existing as autonomous characters their function is to reflect the inner turmoil of the central protagonist.

The central importance given to expression of the inner world of experience is obviously of crucial relevance to the narrative of *Die glückliche Hand*, insofar as it depicts the struggle of a single protagonist against an unremittingly hostile environment. The chorus emphasises the dichotomy

²⁶ As will be discussed in detail, Strindberg's *To Damascus* is an influential early example of this trend, and thus a likely original archetype of the practice (Ritchie, *German Expressionist Drama*, 15.)

²⁷ For more information on the general themes and characteristics of Expressionist drama, see: Ritchie, *German Expressionist Drama*; Kuhns, *German Expressionist Theatre: The Actor and the Stage*; Willett, *Expressionism*.

²⁸ Ritchie, *German Expressionist Drama*, 18.

between the Man's lofty celestial ideals, and the worthlessness of his earthly pursuits: 'Once again you give yourself up to the sirens of your thoughts, thoughts that roam the cosmos, that are unworldly, but thirst for worldly fulfilment!' Their essential message is that the only good or positive elements in the Man's tormented existence are contained within himself and his worth as an artist; everything external is degrading, vicious and treacherous, from the cheating Woman to the workers' attempted assault.

On a more fundamental level, of course, this is mere allegory. The imagery may be highly dramatised but there is no doubt that Schoenberg thought of himself as being in the same position: an endlessly persecuted individual with much of demonstrable worth that goes unnoticed by a spiteful world. The reading of *Die glückliche Hand* that I would like to advance in this thesis is therefore one whereby its allegory of the persecuted creative individual directly reflects Schoenberg's own self-image and the struggle he himself experienced as an early Modernist artist. Schoenberg's deeply-held persecution complex coincided with a trend in Expressionist art which allowed him the perfect means of dramatic projection for his inner life—the extent to which Schoenberg could be said to have channelled autobiographical experience into his portrayal of the Man will be the subject of chapter 2, but insofar as the protagonist represents Schoenberg himself on stage, in this highly dramatised account he is giving expression to the misery of his own personal and artistic circumstances.

Given this opera's intense preoccupation with Schoenberg's own inner world of subjective experience, it is no coincidence that its composition coincided with his most intense period of activity as a painter, which saw the production of numerous portraits, self-portraits, and *Augenbilder* (*eye-pictures*, sometimes referred to as *gazes*) of which he painted approximately 200 in the period 1907-12.²⁹ In keeping with Expressionist trends these invariably focus on the single, solitary self, with little or nothing in the way of worldly context that would distract from the direct expression of the subject. The fact that over a quarter of Schoenberg's paintings are self-portraits³⁰ indicates the importance that he placed on portraying his own inner life, and indeed it is no surprise that he sought to express his inner torment through projection on the stage just as he was experimenting with the same in the visual arts.

To strengthen this understanding of the work, it will be necessary to examine the symbolism of the play in the both in the context of the allegory Schoenberg was projecting, and also in terms of the dramatic construct in which it is framed. There are elements of the opera's narrative that are deeply strange, and which present difficulties to a modern audience far removed from the

²⁹ Baldassarre, "Among the Best Striving Today, There Are Secret Relationships': The Kandinskij-Schoenberg Connection Reconsidered," 244.

³⁰ Adams, "Artistic Parallels between Arnold Schoenberg's Music and Painting (1908-1912)," 8.

dramatic and artistic milieu in which *Die glückliche Hand* was originally conceived. Many aspects of the symbolic content, and thus its allegorical meaning, will be easier to bring into focus once its Expressionist dramatic construction has been examined.

Three categorisations of Expressionist Drama

Scholars of Austro-German Expressionism habitually employ categorisations for Expressionist plays which, while not strictly delineating separate styles of drama or schools of thought, are useful for expressing certain trends within the drama of the period. For the purposes of this study I will adopt those given by Mel Gordon in his 1975 article *German Expressionist Acting*³¹ which to date have not apparently been used to contextualise *Die glückliche Hand* alongside other comparable dramatic works of the period. To quote Gordon's descriptions of the three categories:

- 1) the *Geist* (purely spiritual or abstract) *performance*, which could be viewed as an ultimate vision of pure expression without the conventional intervention of dramatic characters or intricate plot—a sort of absolute communication between the playwright/director's *Seele*-mind and his audience;
- 2) the *Schrei* (scream or ecstatic) *performance*, which could be likened to an actual, if hazy, intense dream-state where movement, exteriors, language, motivation, and inner logic were uniformly and bizarrely warped; and
- 3) the *Ich* (I or ego) *performance*, which resembled the second type in certain ways, but focused upon a central performer who acted less—or more—grotesquely than the other, often stereotypical, characters and who was the subject of the playwright's and audience's identification—a kind of dream told to another person or a dream remembered.³²

³¹ These categories apparently originate from an influential 1921 book by the Swiss playwright and literary critic Bernhard Diebold, *Anarchie im Drama*. The concepts of *Schrei*- and *Ich*-drama are developed at some length, but the *Geist* appears to have remained, even in Diebold's comprehensive survey of Expressionist drama, a niche area of Expressionist drama, perhaps as a result of its strange, inaccessible subject matter but likely also due to its chief proponent, the director Lothar Schreyer, having often mounted deliberately esoteric productions in a similar manner to Schoenberg's *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*, to an invited audience only with critics strictly barred (Kuhns, *German Expressionist Theatre: The Actor and the Stage*, 150.) Subsequent theorists and critics have adopted and occasionally refined Diebold's terms, offering minor variations; David Kuhns for example argues that the 'Ich' drama could be more meaningfully understood under an expanded definition of 'emblematic performance', examination of which is outside the scope of the present discussion. Mel Gordon's categorisations serve to satisfactorily elucidate the terms for the purposes of the current project, although his study is primarily concerned with examining performance practice in Expressionist theatre rather than the works' dramatic construction and subject matter.

³² Gordon, "German Expressionist Acting," 42.

Gordon indicates some particularly striking features of Expressionist drama which can be discerned in *Die glückliche Hand*. Most notably, his description of the *Ich* drama aligns very closely with the libretto's focus on the central Man with whom the dramatist and audience are made to identify, an effect heightened by his being the only solo sung role. As befitting Gordon's description, the other characters exhibit grotesque, basic stereotypes (especially on the part of the woman who, as has been discussed, is given a role very typical for women in Expressionist drama). While the Man does indeed reach a quasi-rapturous state in his worshipping the woman, and conversely sinks to considerable despair at other moments of the drama, *Schrei* was predominantly a feature of Expressionist drama after World War I, and depended heavily on a highly idiomatic style of acting which only developed in this time in conjunction with specialised repertoire of plays.³³

For the remainder of this chapter, I would like to discuss two dramatists of particular significance to Schoenberg, and in terms of the trends just posited, contextualise *Die glückliche Hand* alongside their particular contributions to the Expressionist drama. Firstly, I would like to turn to the painter Wassily Kandinsky, and consider his play *Der gelbe Klang*, an archetypal example of the *Geist* drama, which was published around the same time as *Die glückliche Hand*. As a point of comparison, this deeply strange and intense work will serve to bring into focus the allegorical nature of *Die glückliche Hand*, and examining Schoenberg's correspondence with Kandinsky as he composed the opera's score will shed light on his creative intentions.

Secondly, I would like to turn to the influential Swedish dramatist August Strindberg as a particularly notable proponent of the *Ich* drama. Schoenberg is widely acknowledged to have been a great admirer of Strindberg's plays, and of all the influences that Schoenberg may have absorbed in the conception of *Die glückliche Hand*, Strindberg appears to have been the most important. Strindberg's late plays paved the way for the emerging *Ich* drama, giving vivid dramatic expression to a central protagonist's inner psychological life. As I will argue, there are a great number of dramatic concepts developed in his late plays which Schoenberg could be said to have drawn on in *Die glückliche Hand*. In particular, *To Damascus* bears such a close resemblance in its form that it very likely served as a template for certain of Schoenberg's ideas for his opera, and comes very close in its treatment of characters to Schoenberg's own dramatic construct.

³³ Willett, *Expressionism*, 89.

Kandinsky and the *Geist* Drama

Schoenberg and Kandinsky

The Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) was a figure of immense significance in Austro-German cultural life of the period. Having been a founding member of the *Blaue Reiter* school of artists at Munich in 1911, his ideas about the symbolic application of colour and conception of visual art as a means of spiritual expression had far-reaching consequences. His unique gift for moulding a cohesive whole from otherwise unconnected shapes, colours and gestures allowed him to make a groundbreaking contribution to Abstract Expressionism as the field emerged in the visual arts. His abstract pictures, like the much later drip-paintings of Jackson Pollock, strike the modern eye as exceptionally precise and purposeful images wrought out of chaotic raw material.

In January 1911, around the same time that he was first beginning to experiment with abstract forms, Kandinsky attended a concert of Schoenberg's early atonal works, and divined in the music a kindred creative spirit.³⁴ He immediately wrote to the composer conveying his impressions of the concert:

What we are striving for and our whole manner of thought and feeling have so much in common that I feel completely justified in expressing my empathy. In your works, you have realised what I, albeit in uncertain form, have so greatly longed for in music. The independent progress through their own destinies, the independent life of the individual voices in your compositions, is exactly what I am trying to find in my paintings.³⁵

Schoenberg, who had not yet apparently heard of Kandinsky, responded enthusiastically, and a friendship and professional relationship developed between them as they became great admirers of each other's work.³⁶ Coincidentally, Kandinsky's letter arrived at a time when Schoenberg was trying to establish himself as a painter, and once he had been sent examples of his work, Kandinsky responded with similar enthusiasm to Schoenberg's paintings as to his music. So high was his

³⁴ It is generally agreed that Kandinsky's 1911 painting *Impression III (Concert)* conveys his impression of an all-Schoenberg concert, possibly this same one which prompted him to first contact Schoenberg. (Baldassarre, "Among the Best Striving Today, There Are Secret Relationships': The Kandinskij-Schoenberg Connection Reconsidered," 243.)

³⁵ Letter from Kandinsky to Schoenberg, 18 January 1911 (Kandinsky and Schoenberg, "The Schoenberg-Kandinsky Correspondence," 21.)

³⁶ This admiration was life-long; writing in 1946, Schoenberg included Kandinsky in a list of (principally modernist) painters who are 'admitted into the Academy of the Immortals: the el Grecos, the Van Goghs, the Gauguins, the Kandinskys, the Kokoschkas, the Matissees, the Picassos.' (Schoenberg, "Criteria for the Evaluation of Music," 127.)

opinion of this work that Kandinsky even arranged for Schoenberg's paintings to be exhibited alongside his own at the first *Blaue Reiter* exhibition in 1912. Schoenberg subsequently also made a contribution to the 1912 *Blaue Reiter* almanac with his essay *Das Verhältnis Zum Text* (The Relationship to the Text), and a facsimile of his setting of Maeterlinck's *Herzgewächse*. Kandinsky reciprocated by contributing an essay, *The Paintings*, to the 1912 Festschrift organised in Schoenberg's honour by his pupils. Kandinsky and Schoenberg maintained a regular correspondence up to 1913, discussing in depth many aspects of their artistic ideals. After this period, as other commitments as a musician began to take up more of his time, Schoenberg's interest in painting waned, and their correspondence became more sporadic.

Given that Kandinsky only initiated correspondence with Schoenberg in January 1911, by which time Schoenberg had already written and published the libretto to *Die glückliche Hand*, and before which he had been apparently unaware of the Russian artist, it could not be argued that Kandinsky's artistic ideals in any way influenced the dramatic elements of Schoenberg's opera at the time of its conception.³⁷ Nonetheless, their lively correspondence, which is preserved for scholars today,³⁸ attests to the significant degree of overlap between the two artists in their ideas, methods and artistic outlook. Just as the aforementioned categorisations of drama have been meaningfully, but retrospectively, applied to works of this period to explain and contextualise their content, so it is worth examining the artists' correspondence and the similarities in their work and outlook, so as to gain a deeper understanding of the artistic and psychological world of its inception, particularly in relation to the *Geist* drama.

Der gelbe Klang

Early in his career, Kandinsky made a brief foray into dramatic writing. The most notable of his dramatic works is *Der gelbe Klang* (The Yellow Sound), an archetypical *Geist* drama conceived as an opera libretto, and published in the *Blaue Reiter* almanac in 1912. Its subtitle 'A Stage

³⁷ Some academics have been less strict on this point, noting the fortuitous overlap in their artistic ideals and concluding that Kandinsky must have been a major influence on the composer when he conceived of the work. Tom Beck is one such example, erroneously asserting in his article *The Literary Sources of 'Die glückliche Hand'* that the two artists met in 1908 at the Starnberger See in South Germany, when in fact it is clear from the correspondence that when Kandinsky initiated contact with Schoenberg in 1911 he did so for the first time. However, Kandinsky was to become an important influence on Schoenberg's career as a painter, and subsequently on the ideals Schoenberg developed concerning the visual arts and their relation to performing arts (Chai, "War and Peace: The Transformation from Expressionism to Atonality in Two Choral Works of Arnold Schoenberg," 4–5.)

³⁸ This is reproduced in its entirety in an English translation by John Crawford in *Arnold Schoenberg Wassily Kandinsky—Letters, Pictures and Documents*.

Composition' belies the fact that it is conceived as a means of bringing many different artistic realms together as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* realised at a level of extreme abstraction. Just as many of Kandinsky's paintings carried musical titles (there are works entitled Composition, Improvisation etc.) this was an ambitious attempt to realise, consciously or not, Pater's famous dictum that all arts should aspire to the condition of music. Stripping the play of any discernible plot, instead the elements of musical sound and movement, 'bodily spiritual sound and its movement, expressed by people and objects', and colour tones and their movement are manipulated on stage in order to create particular 'moods' receptive to the soul. Its bizarre symbolism can be subjected to a number of different interpretations, but its almost total abstraction represented a radical reconception of the role of the dramatist with far-reaching effects.

The most complete and unadulterated insight into the artistic aims and ideals underpinning this work can be gleaned from Kandinsky's 1912 treatise *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (On the Spiritual in Art).³⁹ The title itself gives a clear indication of the very depth of feeling Kandinsky attached to his creative work, as if it were a reflection of his most fundamental emotional life. As a representative example, Kandinsky at one point considers music, and notes that Debussy and Scriabin, but especially Schoenberg, are able to create art of genuine spiritual value:

This inner beauty [of the music of Debussy and Scriabin] is created by an imperative inner necessity which renounces conventional beauty. To the uninitiated, this inner spiritual beauty *naturally* appears ugly, because humanity inclines to outside charm, dislikes recognition of inner necessity, (increasingly so today!). Almost alone, enthusiastically recognized today by only a few, the Viennese composer, Arnold Schoenberg, advocates full renunciation of conventional beauty sacreligiously [sic], while accepting all those means leading to unconventional self expression. [...]His music leads us into a new realm where the musical experiences are not acoustic but *purely soul inspiring*. Here begins the "music of the future."⁴⁰

As can be plainly seen, Kandinsky's manifesto for art, whether on the canvas or in musical or dramatic form, is justified on Expressionist terms. Uncompromising self-expression is of primal importance, and the temptation towards baser reproduction of 'conventional beauty' must be resisted lest it compromise expression of the innermost spiritual life. The implication is that a

³⁹ After its publication Kandinsky sent Schoenberg a copy for interest, who read it eagerly and returned the favour by sending a copy of his recently-published *Harmonielehre*. (Letter from Schoenberg to Kandinsky, 14 December 1911; "The Schoenberg-Kandinsky Correspondence," 38–40.)

⁴⁰ Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 30–31. These remarks presumably were added as part of the revision to Kandinsky made to the text in 1912. The original manuscript had been written in 1909, before Kandinsky had come into contact with Schoenberg or his music (Baldassarre, "Among the Best Striving Today, There Are Secret Relationships': The Kandinskij-Schoenberg Connection Reconsidered," 254, n.18.)

truly spiritual or authentic work of art necessarily breaks from straightforward representation and is outwardly chaotic, or anarchic.

In contrast to the initial vanguard of Expressionist painters such as Egon Schiele, whose paintings continued to primarily represent human subjects in intense psychological portraits, in the years that he was most actively in correspondence with Schoenberg, Kandinsky's own inner life demanded expression through paintings which pushed towards greater abstraction. It is this abstraction which, as he began to experiment too in dramatic writing, prompted the most dreamlike and bizarre aspects of *Der gelbe Klang*. Had Schiele been tempted to write an Expressionist drama, one imagines that it might well have been an *Ich* drama, structured around a terrifyingly graphic central psychological portrait. Kandinsky's own Abstract Expressionism, however, found dramatic form in the chaotic dreamlike world of the *Geist* drama.

Kandinsky published his libretto for *Der gelbe Klang* in the 1912 *Blaue Reiter* almanac. Alongside it he published *On Stage Composition*, an introductory essay to the work.⁴¹ Employing similar language to *On the Spiritual in Art*, here Kandinsky explains the most important feature of his stage work as being a kind of harmonisation of the 'inner vibrations' caused by the various artistic media brought together on the stage. Speaking of the particular 'sounds' induced by different stage elements, Kandinsky describes his aim to manipulate them according to the coherency of the 'inner unity' he can perceive as they are combined on stage.

Thus liberated from the need to conform to any conventional narrative, or even draw together symbols for their external meaning, Kandinsky saw fit to draw together bizarre sequences involving protagonists such as 'five giants', 'people in flowering garb' and 'indistinct beings', as well as parts for a swaying flower and a child ringing a bell.⁴² The colours of all people, costumes and scenery are meticulously detailed, and one can imagine from the libretto that the effect might be an animated version of one of Kandinsky's paintings. Nonetheless, it is difficult to give a précis of events of *Der gelbe Klang*. Its unremitting strangeness, its ambitious technical demands and the loss of the work's musical score (written under Kandinsky's supervision by the Russian composer Thomas de Hartmann⁴³) has come to mean that *Der gelbe Klang* has been staged only a handful of

⁴¹ This is reproduced in full in English translation in *Arnold Schoenberg Wassily Kandinsky—Letters, Pictures and Documents*.

⁴² Jelena Hahl-Koch has pointed out the parallel between this depersonalisation of characters on the stage and Kandinsky's abstraction of human subjects in painting, a point which can further be underlined when contrasted with the typically anthropocentric paintings of the *Brücke* Expressionists. (Hahl-Koch, "The Stage Works," 162.

⁴³ It would be particularly insightful, I feel, to know to what extent the score might have been atonal, or followed in Schoenberg's musical idiom. Certainly Kandinsky's comments in the libretto strike the musical

times in the last century. It is consequently very difficult to imagine what effect it might have if staged, and impossible to know whether, with an alternative musical score, it would achieve the effect Kandinsky intended. On a fundamental level too, reading Kandinsky's libretto and its explanatory introduction, one wonders whether he may have misjudged, as a synaesthete, the extent to which a general audience would be able to be fully receptive to the 'inner sound' he perceived in the phenomena he wanted to project onto the stage.⁴⁴ Like Scriabin before him, the higher level of spiritual consciousness to which he felt he was guiding his audience might in practice prove more elusive than he perhaps hoped, but nevertheless there were a few others, Schoenberg included, who read the libretto enthusiastically and yearned to see it staged.

Schoenberg and aspects of the *Geist* drama

After its publication, Schoenberg wrote to Kandinsky extremely enthusiastically about the work:

Der gelbe Klang pleases me extraordinarily. It is exactly the same as what I have striven for in my *glückliche Hand*, only you go still further than I in the renunciation of any conscious thought, any conventional plot. That is naturally a great advantage. [...] Therefore I rejoice in *Der gelbe Klang*, and imagine it would make a tremendous impression on me when performed.⁴⁵

Schoenberg's description of Kandinsky's *Geist* play as 'exactly the same as what I have striven for' is remarkable given the lack of a central protagonist in *Der gelbe Klang* and the central importance of this to the dramatic construction of *Die glückliche Hand*. Nonetheless, such abstraction as each work shows was daringly novel in this early period of Expressionist drama, and given that in the same period Schoenberg was forging a means of atonal expression in music and Kandinsky was moving towards abstraction in the visual arts, one could imagine that Schoenberg admired

reader as somewhat naive, but suggest that it would probably not have been a strictly tonal composition, for example, in his indication that scene two should open with music that is 'shrill and tempestuous, with oft-repeated *a* and *b*, and *b* and *a-flat* (Kandinsky, "Der gelbe Klang," 119.)

⁴⁴ Kandinsky famously recalled as a young child hearing his paintbox make a hissing noise as he mixed colours. Conversely, on hearing a performance of *Lohengrin* in Moscow he reported 'I saw all my colours in spirit, before my eyes. Wild, almost crazy lines were sketched in front of me. I did not dare use the expression that Wagner had painted "my hour" musically. It became, however, quite clear to me that art in general was far more powerful than I had thought, and on the other hand, that painting could develop just such powers as music possesses.' (Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," 364.)

⁴⁵ Letter from Schoenberg to Kandinsky, 19 August 1912 ("The Schoenberg-Kandinsky Correspondence," 53–55.) This passage also conclusively demonstrates that Schoenberg could not have been influenced by the work when he first conceived *Die glückliche Hand*.

Kandinsky's play for its bold dramatic experimentation and the unprecedented extent to which it broke with conventional technique.⁴⁶

In considering to what extent Schoenberg had attempted to pre-empt aspects of *Geist* drama in *Die glückliche Hand*, his correspondence about the work is instructive. After completing the libretto in 1910, Schoenberg sent copies to several friends, among them Alma Mahler, Webern and Zemlinsky, as well as important contemporaries in the theatre, such as Hermann Bahr and Rainer Simons of the Volksoper.⁴⁷ Alma Mahler apparently responded enthusiastically to the work, and Schoenberg replied in an explanatory letter:

If I am honest and say something about my works (which I don't do willingly, since I actually write them in order to conceal myself thoroughly behind them, so that I shall not be seen), it could only be this: it is not meant symbolically, only envisioned and felt. Not thought at all. Colours, noises, lights, sounds, movements, looks, gestures—in short, the media that make up the material of the stage—are to be linked to one another in a varied way. Nothing more than that. It meant something to my emotions as I wrote it down.⁴⁸

Similar sentiments are in evidence in a letter Schoenberg wrote three years later to his publisher Emil Hertzka, setting out the conditions of a proposed film of *Die glückliche Hand*:

My foremost wish is therefore for something the opposite of what the cinema generally aspires to. I want:

The utmost unreality!

The whole thing should have the effect (not of a dream) but of chords. Of music. It must never suggest symbols, or meaning, or thoughts, but simply the play of colours and forms. Just as music never drags a meaning around with it, at least not in the form in which it [music] manifests itself, even though meaning is inherent in its nature, so too this should simply be like sounds for the eye, and so far as I am concerned everyone is free to think or feel something similar to what he thinks or feels while listening to music.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Schoenberg in his first letter to Kandinsky on 24 January 1911 also demonstrated his great admiration the trend towards abstraction in the visual arts: 'You seem to be objective only to a very small degree. I myself don't believe that painting must necessarily be objective. Indeed, I firmly believe the contrary.' (Ibid., 22–25.)

⁴⁷ Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life*, 87.

⁴⁸ Letter from Schoenberg to Alma Mahler, October 7, 1910, quoted in Ibid., 87–88. This letter could be said to draw attention to another of Schoenberg's creative ideals from around this time, that of the central importance of uninhibited, spontaneous creation. This ideal will be examined and discussed with relation to *Die glückliche Hand* subsequently.

⁴⁹ This letter is undated and without return address, but is presumed to have been written from Berlin in the autumn of 1913 (Schoenberg, *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters, Selected and Edited by Erwin Stein*, 43.)

Schoenberg could have many motives for wishing to accentuate the abstract qualities of the opera, perhaps to draw attention to the more radical aspects of its conception, or to heighten the parallel between this ‘abstract’ drama and the ‘atonal’ music accompanying it. However, a telling passage further in his letter to Alma Mahler gives another possible clue as to his motives:

I don’t want to be understood. I want to express myself—but I hope that I shall be misunderstood. It would be terrible if one could see through me. Therefore I prefer to say technical, aesthetic, or philosophical things about my works. Or this: certainly no symbolism is intended. It is all direct intuition.⁵⁰

For a composer who prizes being able to ‘conceal himself thoroughly’ behind his works to have written a libretto that features so patently a narrative of a persecuted artist, one wonders whether Schoenberg had realised the very transparency of his symbolic creation and hoped that he could divert attention from the exposed self-portrait exhibited in the work. Perhaps the need for this was particularly acute before having finished a crucial element of this *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the work’s score; as Adorno subsequently came to write, Schoenberg’s libretto, ‘stripped of the theatrical and musical setting which conditions it, the literary text of *Die glückliche Hand* may today seem trite and even artless in its symbolism.’⁵¹

Regardless of Schoenberg’s motives in wishing to draw attention to the abstract nature of his new opera, from the point of view of the work’s subject matter, Schoenberg’s dramatic conception most certainly does not approach the level of abstraction that Kandinsky had striven for in *Der gelbe Klang*. To the extent that it features jarring dreamlike discontinuities, such as the goblet passing mysteriously from the Woman to the Man, or the rock turning into the beast as it crushes the man in the final scene, these moments do not disrupt the continuity of the narrative. While never aspiring to be realistic in its depiction, the opera’s plot maintains an allegorical cohesion—anathema to Kandinsky’s renunciation of structuring media by their external life and worldly associations.

The work’s focus on the continued conscious existence of a central protagonist therefore more closely anticipates the essential theme of *Ich* and *Schrei* dramas, and thus the most important Expressionist drama of the period, but prevents it from exploring fully the series of thematically unconnected sounds, colours, gestures and images in the quasi-symbolist way proposed by Kandinsky. Rather, as shall be demonstrated, the array of symbols contained within *Die glückliche Hand* strike one as being carefully designed to paint a wholly cohesive portrait of this central Man.

⁵⁰ Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life*, 88.

⁵¹ Quoted in Kim, *Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky: The Study of the Relationship between Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky during Schoenberg’s Expressionist Period*, 127.

This point is worth exploring in detail: a comparison of the differences between these two works underlines the importance of the coherency of those symbols in *Die glückliche Hand* and justifies an attempt to interpret them.

In the first instance, Kandinsky set up his own theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in deliberate contrast to Wagner's music-dramas, which he thought had combined artforms in 'parallel repetition', that is, according to their external characteristics, and with music always taking an unjustified leading role.⁵² That there is a circular musical motif to signify the Ring of the Niebelungen and to accompany its mention or appearance on stage is, by Kandinsky's measure, naive:

[Wagner] on the one hand enriched with the effect of one means, and on the other hand diminished the inner sense—the purely artistic inner meaning of the auxiliary means. These forms are merely the mechanical reproduction (not inner collaboration) of the purposive progress of the action. Also of a similar nature is the other kind of combination of music with movement (in the broad sense of the word), i.e., the musical 'characterisation' of the individual roles. This obstinate recurrence of a [particular] musical phrase at the appearance of a hero finally loses its power and gives rise to an effect upon the ear like that which an old, well-known label on a bottle produces upon the eye. One's feelings finally revolt against this kind of consistent, programmatic use of one and the same form.⁵³

The 'substantive forms' of words, sound and movement had become combined in a tired series of 'affective means' (e.g. an aggrieved exclamation paired with a grief motif and a grieving gesture⁵⁴) which, according to Kandinsky, in spite of their supposed congruency produce 'inner vibrations' of wildly differing and incoherent effect. Instead, he proposes a radical concept of theatre whereby stage elements are wielded and combined purely for the consonance of their inner sounds. *Der gelbe Klang* thus strives for the opposite effect of Wagner's *leitmotifs*; all external coherence is lost as 'the worth of external unity appears in its correct light, i.e., as unnecessarily limiting' and 'the possibility is revealed for each of the elements to retain its own external life, which externally contradicts the external life of another element.'⁵⁵

Schoenberg's conception of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, by contrast, is still derived from Wagner. Notwithstanding the plethora of overtly Wagnerian symbols in the opera (the splitting of an anvil,

⁵² Hahl-Koch, "Kandinsky, Schoenberg and Their Parallel Experiments," 74–5.

⁵³ Kandinsky, "On Stage Composition," 114.

⁵⁴ In this example, Kandinsky posited that a more appropriate means of representation would be for a grieving woman's dress to turn bright red, emphasising the depth and suddenness of the gesture (Galeyev, "Kandinsky and Schoenberg: The Problem of Internal Counterpoint," 91.)

⁵⁵ Kandinsky, "On Stage Composition," 116.

a goblet of love potion, a goldsmith's workshop) Schoenberg aligns music, speech and gesture in what Kandinsky would call a 'repetitive' way, such as the 'worked out' fugue that accompanies the workers' toil. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, over the protracted course of composing *Die glückliche Hand* Schoenberg resorted to more traditional worked-out compositional devices and recurring motifs than had been his intention when he started in 1910. As such it could be argued that musically he perhaps originally intended a much freer association of musical material to the stage action; this fact notwithstanding however, it would still appear that he always intended for the operatic score to represent and amplify the work's dramatism in a broadly Wagnerian sense. And indeed, other examples can be found in his preceding work *Erwartung*, such as when the protagonist briefly mentions the 'crickets and their love-song', and we hear a brief ostinato emulating this noise in the strings and celesta.

Moreover, he makes use of Wagnerian leitmotifs to represent the characters of the Man and Woman. The Man's own leitmotif is first introduced on the cellos as the man rises at the end of the first scene; John Crawford has pointed out that this timbre remains associated with the Man for the duration of the opera, and, significantly, that Schoenberg himself played the cello:⁵⁶



Fig. 2: The Man's leitmotif, b.28-9

The woman's motif is usually played on the solo violin, and accompanied by soft and shimmering textures in the piccolo, flutes, celesta and harp—timbres traditionally associated with the feminine, that is, according to Kandinsky, in 'parallel repetition':



Figure 3: The Woman's leitmotif, b.36-7

In other ways too, Schoenberg 'makes music with the media of the stage' through deliberate linking of musical and dramatic gesture. For example, in his 1928 Breslau lecture on *Die glückliche Hand* Schoenberg describes the way he musically represents the gazes of the chorus that open the work, not only tying the musical idea to the visual, but explaining that by extension the gazes themselves embody musical behaviour:

⁵⁶ Crawford, "Die glückliche Hand: Schoenberg's 'Gesamtkunstwerk,'" 593.

The musical way in which this idea is composed testifies to the unity of conception: in spite of the diverse shaping of some *Hauptstimmen* this whole introduction is, as it were, held fast in place by an ostinato-like chord. Just as the gazes are rigidly and un-changeably directed at the Man, so the musical ostinato makes clear that these gazes form an ostinato on their part.⁵⁷

Towards the end of his lecture, however, he gives what amounts almost to a disclaimer about his ‘music of the stage’, and one wonders whether he had *Der gelbe Klang* in mind when he warned of the difficulty of finding a convincing form for any dramatic concept that purely represented ‘inner processes’ in an unmediated manner:

In reality the media of the stage are indeed not tones, and it would be completely arbitrary if one were, for example, to construct a scale of mime, or a rhythm of light. Naturally, such an endeavour could only be risked by someone who could trust his feeling for form and could say to himself that however the thoughts to be represented might be constituted, he was sure of being able to think them; however the feelings to be expressed might revolt others, he was sure he could *order* them. ... This kind of art, I don’t know why, has been called Expressionist: it has never expressed more than was *in it!* I also gave it a name, which did not become popular, however, I said that it is the *art of the representation of inner processes*. But I must not say that loudly, for all that is despised today as romantic.⁵⁸

In the above quotation Schoenberg perhaps unwittingly revealed the crux of the matter; when Kandinsky, and indeed Schoenberg, invoke music as a metaphor for their efforts on the stage, the precise quality they wish to borrow from music is its non-representational, non-conceptual means of communication. In discussing their attempts to convey this on the stage, they thus conflate the ‘musical’ elements of their dramas and those which embody abstraction from any narrative. Just as ‘pure’ or abstract music relies on its large- and small-scale form for cogency of communication and cohesion over time, so does a dramatic work need an overarching form of some kind if it is to be held together by something other than the continuity of a narrative. It is fair to say that it is the very formlessness of Kandinsky’s drama that prevents it from succeeding; while some stage events, such as the Giants, do reappear at different points in the play, it is not particularly obvious why from a dramatic point of view, and so their reappearance in effect strikes one as rather arbitrary.

Schoenberg, perhaps as a result of the musical training that Kandinsky lacked, intuitively realised the importance of form in a work of any duration, especially where technical or aesthetic innovation may otherwise impair communication of its content to an unprepared audience. Hans Keller has described the recognisable aspects of the form of the Second String Quartet which ease an audience into its new, unfamiliar sound world, calling it ‘the twentieth century’s monument to

⁵⁷ Schoenberg, “The Breslau Lecture on Die glückliche Hand,” 106.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 105.

creative responsibility, to art as communication.⁵⁹ The last two movements of this work, as with most of Schoenberg's extended free atonal works (notably *Erwartung* and *Die glückliche Hand*), convey a narrative upon which to hang his daring new musical idiom and ease understanding. The few purely abstract atonal pieces from this period are without exception short and aphoristic. The Five Orchestral Pieces of 1909 are a case in point;⁶⁰ Schoenberg wrote to Richard Strauss during their composition:

I expect a great deal from [them], especially as regards sound and mood. For it is these that the pieces are about- certainly not symphonic, they are the absolute opposite of this, there is no architecture and no build-up. Just a colourful, uninterrupted variation of colours, rhythms and moods.⁶¹

The parallel between the contemporaneous development of abstraction in the visual arts and atonality in music has often been remarked upon;⁶² and it is notable that the two figureheads who pioneered these developments, Kandinsky and Schoenberg respectively, also attempted, at the same time and separately, a move towards abstraction in drama. I would argue however that abstraction in the visual arts has its counterpart in music not only in the movement towards atonality but also in the actual formlessness of Schoenberg's early atonal pieces. In these, Schoenberg effectively did for the entire external reality of music what Kandinsky did to the external reality of *Der gelbe Klang*; unlike Kandinsky however, Schoenberg was mindful not to overtax his audience at any one time, either through presenting an overly long and incomprehensible form, or by stripping away all points by which one could grasp his meaning.

In the case of *Die glückliche Hand*, Schoenberg was unwilling to jettison the dramatic narrative he needed to hold together his atonal musical conception. The psychological continuity of the central Man enabled Schoenberg to bring together wildly disparate symbols from a plethora of dramatic, historical and biblical sources, matched with atonal, sometimes athematic music, without the

⁵⁹ Keller, *Music, Closed Societies and Football*, 159. Keller argues that the recognisable 4-movement form, as well as the sonata structure (and false exposition repeat) of the first movement and final tierce de Picardie contain Schoenberg's new experiments within a form that makes them maximally comprehensible to an unfamiliar audience, and contextualises Schoenberg's innovations in the history of the string quartet.

⁶⁰ Although each piece lasts only a few minutes and are intended as a series of abstract, atonal miniatures, Schoenberg's publisher nonetheless insisted on him appending descriptive titles to each in an attempt to make them more palatable to audiences. Schoenberg reluctantly agreed, but later withdrew them (Ibid., 158.)

⁶¹ Letter from Schoenberg to Strauss, 14 July 1909, quoted in Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, 70.

⁶² For a discussion of this point, written from the point of view of a Kandinsky scholar, see Dabrowski, "Kandinsky and Schoenberg: Abstraction as a Visual Metaphor of Emancipated Dissonance."

whole losing its coherency. While Kandinsky struggled to give dramatic form to his creative 'inner voice', Schoenberg represents the same notion dramatically by *depicting* an act of spontaneous creation on stage. If one is to believe Schoenberg that he thought Kandinsky's absolute abstraction to be a 'great advantage', then the dramatic concept of *Die glückliche Hand* could arguably be seen as a compromise between this ideal of inner expression and the traditional forms of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Yet, for such a compromise, there are genuine innovations in the disjointed narrative and dreamlike nature of his stage work, and at the time of its conception in 1910 the opera was easily among the most novel Expressionist dramas of its time.

It seems clear, however, that while Schoenberg did admire *Der gelbe Klang*, and hoped to accentuate the dreamlike aspects of *Die glückliche Hand*, with its overall focus on the spiritual portrait of a central protagonist, Schoenberg's conception of the work was much closer to the *Ich* drama than Kandinsky's groundbreaking model of *Geist* drama. There are a number of important precedents that Schoenberg will have drawn on in this regard, and to understand more fully its similarity to other examples of the *Ich* drama, we must examine the influence of another of Schoenberg's contemporaries, the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg.

Strindberg and the *Ich* Drama

The Swedish writer and dramatist August Strindberg (1849-1912) is generally credited as a progenitor of certain trends which would later come to exemplify Expressionist theatre. Alongside Ibsen and Chekov, Strindberg stood as a figure of seminal importance in European literature and drama at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶³ His output ran to a very considerable size, spanning over sixty plays and eighteen novels, and while much of it was originally written in Swedish, it was translated into all major European languages, assuring his position as a writer of central importance in forward-thinking artistic circles across Europe. An eccentric and deeply strange man, his biography makes for rather startling reading, as he ricochets geographically, intellectually and romantically from one all-consuming obsession to the next. Among these was music, and he was a keen amateur musician, playing the piano and especially admiring Beethoven's sonatas, as well as occasionally playing chamber works with friends. He often employed musical metaphors as explanations for the inspiration behind his dramatic works, and late in life he even devised a new system of musical notation.⁶⁴

Strindberg's influence on Schoenberg, while widely acknowledged and undoubtedly of significance, has not been the subject of extensive examination in scholarship. Adorno claimed that Schoenberg had been 'obsessed' with Strindberg,⁶⁵ an assertion which does not seem to be borne out by extensive references to the writer in Schoenberg's correspondence, but there is no denying that he was a figure of unquestionable importance to the composer and his entourage. A notable anecdote, which recurs with minor variations in different sources, tells of a question Gustav Mahler asked a group of younger musicians, including Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, the day before leaving for New York in 1906. He reportedly asked the assembled musicians what current opinion was of Dostoyevsky, to which they replied "We don't bother with him any more. It's Strindberg now."⁶⁶

Schoenberg acquired Strindberg's works as they were published in their German translations by Emil Schering,⁶⁷ of which twenty such volumes had been issued by 1910.⁶⁸ Schering also

⁶³ In their preface to *Strindberg on Drama and Theatre*, Egil Törnqvist and Birgitta Steene even assert that of the three dramatists, Strindberg's contribution was the most important towards the development of modern theatre (Törnqvist and Steene, *Strindberg on Drama and Theatre*, 7.)

⁶⁴ Parker, "Strindberg's Interest in Music," 581.

⁶⁵ Robinson, "Strindberg and Musical Expressionism in Vienna," 135.

⁶⁶ In this case I have taken the details of this anecdote as related by Alma Mahler in Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, 126.)

⁶⁷ When Schering discovered Strindberg, he immediately set about learning Swedish so as to serve as to devote his life to translating Strindberg's works into German. His efforts were unflagging, and much

contributed translations of seventeen of Strindberg's articles to the Viennese satirical magazine *Die Fackel*, which was read assiduously by Schoenberg's circle, and may account for their first exposure to Strindberg. Nonetheless, Schoenberg was somewhat ahead of his time in his appreciation of the Scandinavian dramatist—it was primarily Reinhardt's 1911 staging of many of Strindberg's later works which exposed his dramatic ideals to what would become the core generation of German Expressionist writers,⁶⁹ by which time Schoenberg had already written his libretto for *Die glückliche Hand*.

On close examination of Strindberg and his body of work, two principal areas of influence emerge. On the one hand, there is no doubt that Schoenberg held a certain affinity for Strindberg on a personal level. There is a compelling argument that as a contemporary figure, Strindberg's stature on some level informed or justified aspects of Schoenberg's own identity as an emerging modern artist. This personal aspect of Strindberg's influence on Schoenberg will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

For now I would like examine the other aspect of Strindberg's influence over Schoenberg: that which he had on Schoenberg's construction of his own dramatic works. As I will argue, Strindberg was perhaps the single most important external influence on Schoenberg's conception of *Die glückliche Hand*, and a number of its most important or original developments have parallels in Strindberg's own plays. There is a strong case to be made that Schoenberg adopted both the symbolic content of some of Strindberg's output for his opera, and also espoused some of Strindberg's more innovative dramatic devices. Properly to contextualise these developments, it will be necessary to consider Strindberg's artistic outlook and the ground he broke in the dramatic arts, as well as the reasons why he came to be hailed as a key progenitor of Expressionist drama.

appreciated by Strindberg, and were in no small part responsible for the surge in interest in Strindberg's works across the continent before the First World War. He was, however, an occasionally haphazard and inconsistent translator, and errors were further compounded as further translations were made into other European languages from Schering's editions in German (Classe, *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English*, Vol.1, 1344.) Schoenberg himself could even recognise the deficiencies in Schering's translations (Letter from Schoenberg to Max von Schillings, 27 October 1932, Schoenberg, *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters, Selected and Edited by Erwin Stein*, 168.)

⁶⁸ When Schoenberg catalogued his library in January 1913, Strindberg was represented by twenty-eight volumes, compared to eighteen of Maeterlinck, twelve of Balzac, and eleven of Stefan George (Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, 183.)

⁶⁹ Kuhns, *German Expressionist Theatre: The Actor and the Stage*, 96. These stagings in Germany further led to greater exposure and appreciation of Strindberg in his native Sweden.

Strindberg as an early exponent of Expressionist ideals

Early in his career, Strindberg became a committed naturalist in drama, influenced both by the evolutionary ideas of Darwin and the naturalist objectives of the French novelist Émile Zola. Zola's literary objective was to realise a level of objectively realistic depiction by assimilating recent advances in psychology and physiology into his prose. Strindberg admired Zola and adopted elements of this style,⁷⁰ concentrating principally on faithful depiction of psychological reality and continuity, with his characters exhibiting realistic colloquial speech and behaviour, and vividly projecting their psychic life. The psychological torment and eventual breakdown of Borg, the central protagonist of Strindberg's 1890 novel *By the Open Sea* is a particularly vivid and striking example.⁷¹

In his stage works, the highest point of this trend in his output was arguably his 1888 play *Miss Julie*, the action of which centres on a sexual encounter between a landowner's daughter and a servant, and the dire consequences that ensue. Of central importance are the psychological portraits painted of Miss Julie and her valet Jean, particularly in their neuroses and inconsistencies as the tension between them heightens in the second half. The preface to *Miss Julie* is widely considered to be one of Strindberg's clearest and most concise declarations of his artistic aims, and it is noteworthy for the ways in which it at times strikingly overlaps with Schoenberg's own declared principles. This passage, for example, proposing a new model for serious theatre, has strong echoes of Schoenberg's intentions for his Society for Private Musical Performances:

If we could then dispense with the visible orchestra with its distracting lights and faces turned towards the audience; if we could have the stalls raised so that the spectator's eyes were on a line higher than the actor's knees; if we could get rid of the private proscenium boxes with their

⁷⁰ Occasionally Strindberg's efforts to shoehorn scientific data into his works strike the modern reader as somewhat incongruous and detracting from the image he is trying to portray. For example, in *By the Open Sea*, one finds the following passage: 'He had, as it were, his own atmosphere about him, floating along alone as if on another heavenly body in a medium that was not air but steam, more pleasant and more refreshing to inhale than the drying air with its unnecessary 79 percent nitrogen, which has remained without any apparent purpose when the earth's matter arranged itself from the chaos of gases.' (Strindberg, *By the Open Sea*, 121.)

⁷¹ While there is no evidence that Schoenberg was necessarily aware of this novel, some its main themes overlap strongly with those of *Die glückliche Hand*. Borg lives on an isolated island, and attempts to modernise their fishing industry according to his own demonstrated, more efficient methods, but faces only hostility from the islanders. Additionally the romantic interest features another parallel, as his fiancé leaves him for his assistant, the tipping point for his eventual breakdown. Eric O. Johannesson's analysis of the novel to expose a number of Jungian archetypes amply demonstrates the striking acuity Strindberg brings to his the tortured psychological portrait of Borg (Johannesson, *The Novels of August Strindberg*, 159–171.)

giggling drinkers and diners; if we could have complete darkness in the auditorium; and finally, and most importantly, if we had a *small* stage and a *small* auditorium, then perhaps a new drama might arise, and the theatre would at least be a place where educated people might once again enjoy themselves. While waiting for such a theatre, we shall just have to go on writing for our desk drawers, preparing the repertoire whose time will come.⁷²

Miss Julie, though written early in his career, also exemplifies another proto-Expressionist ideal of Strindberg's writing: his concern that stage characters exhibit multifaceted, labile psyches. 'I have depicted the figures in my play as more split and vacillating, a mixture of the old and new', he writes of Miss Julie and Jean, in protest against characters with a narrow range of responses, repetitive habits or single, overbearing personality traits—those, in other words, he defines as having 'immobile souls'.⁷³

So as to concentrate this aspect of the drama, Strindberg also came to advocate the one-act play as the best medium for modern dramatic expression. In 1889 Strindberg writes in his essay *On Modern Drama and Modern Theatre* that the reality of time and place must be respected in drama, with Aristotle's dramas exemplifying an ideal model where dramatic action is confined to twenty-four hours and a single setting.⁷⁴ He takes up the same theme in his 1894 essay 'What is the Modern', declaring the one-act play to be the ideal modern artistic form.⁷⁵ This was in keeping with the trend across European drama at the time; in opera from around this period one also notes works as diverse as Puccini's three operas comprising *Il Trittico*, Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, and Ravel's *L'heure espagnole*. Schoenberg's own one-act operas *Erwartung* and *Die glückliche Hand* could be in part due to the influence of Strauss' successes with *Salomé* and *Elektra*, the latter of which is a particularly Expressionist character portrait of a central protagonist.⁷⁶

In the mid-1890s, Strindberg suffered a significant period of writer's block and in 1896 was troubled by a number of episodes which friends had difficulty convincing him were fully psychotic. He became paranoid, discerning ubiquitous bad omens and often going to great lengths to avoid encountering them, as well as relentlessly uncovering perceived entrapments or fantasised elaborate attempts on his life. His days became consumed by compulsive rituals and waking nightmares; on one such occasion when staying in a Parisian hotel he became convinced that

⁷² Strindberg, "Miss Julie," 67–8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁴ Strindberg, "On Modern Drama and Modern Theatre."

⁷⁵ The French original of this obscure text ('Qu'est-ce que le Moderne?') is held in the Royal Library of Sweden in Stockholm, and is discussed in Buchmayr, "'Cela Pourrait Venir de Moi' - L'admiration d'Arnold Schoenberg pour August Strindberg," 137.

⁷⁶ According to some sources, Schoenberg had *Elektra* in mind when he commissioned a libretto from Marie Pappenheim for *Erwartung*. (*Ibid.*)

conspirators in the rooms either side had induced in him the feeling of being ‘tugged between the poles of a powerful electrical machine or as though I were being suffocated between pillows’, insisting in a feverish letter to his director friend Torsten Hedlund that he had escaped with his life.⁷⁷

Partly as a means of explaining his more difficult experiences, he began to develop an interest in mysticism and the occult, at the same time as his superstitions developed into compulsive rituals. The avowedly rational and naturalistic Strindberg became deeply involved with Parisian occultists, and a regular reader and contributor to their magazine, *L’initiation*. They lauded the new symbolist poets such as Mallarmé and particularly Maeterlinck, whose early successes marked a sea-change away from the naturalism of Zola, towards an interest in mysticism, metaphysics and myth. Strindberg’s newfound interest in such topics was timed fortuitously with this emerging trend.

Another keen interest in the circles Strindberg began to move in at this time was alchemy; having previously dabbled unsuccessfully in the sciences,⁷⁸ particularly chemistry, after rigorous experimentation in this field he claimed on several occasions to have successfully created gold from baser elements.⁷⁹ This period he later referred to as his ‘Inferno crisis’ in reference to the semi-autobiographical novel he wrote once able to return to work, into which he channelled many of the more disturbing experiences of his breakdown. (As will be discussed in Chapter 2, this work almost certainly inspired the central concept of *Die glückliche Hand*.) Given the archetypes for Expressionist theatre that Strindberg was about to devise in his late plays, one wonders to what extent early modern dramatists are indebted to Strindberg’s having undergone these psychotic incidents, and the interests and habits he developed as means of explaining and coping with them.

In his writing he began to play down his earlier commitment to naturalism, and out of his new interests sprang a number of deeply introspective and psychologically turbulent works. His already

⁷⁷ Letter from Strindberg to Torsten Hedlund, 19th July 1896, quoted in Meyer, *Strindberg: A Biography*, 342–3.

⁷⁸ Strindberg on many occasions renounced writing altogether to devote himself to the sciences. To the modern world his scientific endeavours seem sadly ludicrous and misguided, such as his conclusively demonstrating to a ship’s captain, using nothing more than the on-board telescope, that the earth was flat. He also asserted that the moon was a disc of quartz in which one could see the reflection of America, and his central claim to scientific fame was to have repeatedly proved that Sulphur is a compound of carbon and hydrogen rather than the element we still hold it to be today.

⁷⁹ On one particular occasion, at his favoured *crémérie* in Paris, an explosion in the kitchen caused all the food to be ruined just as lunch was about to be served. Strindberg had apparently let himself into the kitchen and had caused the explosion by trying to make gold in a saucepan. (Ibid., 336.)

objective depiction of authentic psychological life gained a dimension of depth from his new spirituality; whereas previously, characters with religious inclinations were examined almost anthropologically as a curiosity,⁸⁰ in his later style such spiritual concerns were of more primal importance and worthy of sympathetic exploration. As psychological exploration and explanation of his own experiences became a prominent feature of his dramatic works, Strindberg's late plays increasingly came to exhibit the most important aspects of what would later be termed *Ich* drama.

His late style is characterised by shorter, more pithy dialogue than his earlier works, often existing within a dream-like symbolic narrative populated by abstract characters, sometimes with faithful recreation of the laws of the subconscious entirely usurping naturalistic depiction altogether. His Dream Play of 1901 exemplifies this trend, as Strindberg sought to depict faithfully on stage the internally logical yet outwardly disjointed narrative of dreaming, centred around the descent to Earth of Agnes, daughter of Indra, as she tries to understand the suffering of human nature.

Despite the groundbreaking nature of these developments, a certain continuity can be traced back in Strindberg's output to the devices he uses to paint psychological portraits in his earlier works. In his influential book *On the Theory of Modern Drama*, Peter Szondi argues that many of the works from Strindberg's ostensibly naturalistic period are proto-Expressionist in their own right.⁸¹ Perhaps no one early work demonstrates this more clearly than his 20-minute one-act play from 1889, *The Stronger*. This extraordinary piece was written so as to give Strindberg's first wife Siri von Essen, a Finnish actress who spoke Swedish, a mimed stage role that she could act in their adopted France. There are only two characters on stage: both women, one of whom delivers a monologue, and the other who is confined to occasional reactions and glances. Both are professional and romantic rivals, and the spoken monologue takes the form of a stream of consciousness as she infers, implies and deduces intention and past misdemeanours in the other's silence. While the work's setting and speech is perfectly realistic, through a monologue based on simple projection Strindberg succeeded in subjugating external reality entirely to the flux of inner consciousness, a central dramatic aim of Schoenberg's *Erwartung*. Schoenberg will have been aware of *The Stronger* as it was included in the volume of *Elf-Einakter* (Eleven one-act plays) published in German translation in 1902 and which he acquired on its reissue in 1908.⁸² A comparison can also be drawn between the mimed role of *The Stronger* and that of the Woman in

⁸⁰ A strong example is Kristin, the cook in *Miss Julie*, who maintains a clear conviction in moral and societal propriety as Jean and Miss Julie struggle to contain the fallout of their sexual indiscretion.

⁸¹ Szondi singles out *The Father* (1887) and *The Stronger* (1888-9) as particularly important early examples (Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama*, 22–5.)

⁸² Buchmayr, "‘Cela Pourrait Venir de Moi’ - L’admiration d’Arnold Schoenberg pour August Strindberg," 135–6.

Die glückliche Hand, since both are confined to non-verbal gestures which nonetheless undermine the central, spoken or sung, character. In each of these works, in keeping with Expressionist trends, focus remains squarely on the isolated perspective of a central individual.

Towards the very end of Strindberg's life, as this trend towards projection of a central character's inner psychological life continued to intensify in his output, he began to think more holistically about the media and manipulation of movement on stage. In keeping with early-modernist trends in other arts, all superficial ornament was stripped back and all available material harnessed for uncompromisingly expressive ends. He became sceptical about the role of spoken dialogue in communicating innermost thoughts and fears, and his last works are characterised by an increased focus on gesture, image and music. Strindberg in fact had in mind musical values as he took greater control of the other stage elements,⁸³ a mindset echoed in Schoenberg's desire to 'make music with the media of the stage' in *Die glückliche Hand*. These dramatic devices were employed to expound themes of psycho-spiritual anguish and social alienation, assuring him an audience among early Expressionists, who keenly adopted many of Strindberg's dramatic devices in their own works. The most recognisable gesture recurring throughout the Expressionist canon is that of a man with arms outstretched in anguish towards the sky, a gesture which can be traced back to the quarantine scene in Strindberg's Dream Play; indeed in *Die glückliche Hand*, the colour crescendo at the centre of the work emanates from the man as he adopts this very pose.

⁸³ Ibid., 145.



Fig. 4: Schoenberg's sketch of the Man's pose for the colour crescendo

The Strindberg scholar, Margery Morgan, singles out Schoenberg as a composer who more than any other assimilated into musical works many of Strindberg's dramatic ideals and devices,⁸⁴ and strong comparisons can be drawn between the dramatic experiments that Schoenberg attempted in some of his early works, and those of Strindberg's works that he may have become familiar with. In the case of *Die glückliche Hand* especially, such comparisons are particularly strong and have consequently drawn comment from scholars, though usually without systematic examination.

To date, the relationship between Strindberg and Schoenberg has only been closely examined in two recent works, firstly in an article by Friedrich Buchmayr which I have referred to in a French translation ("*Cela Pourrait Venir de Moi' - L'admiration d'Arnold Schoenberg pour August Strindberg.*") and secondly in Florian Heesch's thesis examining Strindberg's influence in the world of opera until 1930 (*Strindberg in der Oper: August Strindbergs Opernpoetik und die Rezeption seiner Texte in der Opernproduktion bis 1930.*) The first of these concentrates principally on the personal affinities that Schoenberg felt to exist between himself and Strindberg (a subject for discussion in chapter 2), whereas the second attempts to draw on Strindberg's works and elucidate the formal and thematic characteristics that they shared with Schoenberg's operas. Several such comparisons can be made, and in order to focus the discussion it will be necessary to

⁸⁴ Morgan, *August Strindberg*, 53.

concentrate primarily on one work in particular. Of all Strindberg's dramatic works, the one which bears the closest resemblance to *Die glückliche Hand* is surely his heavily symbolic trilogy of plays, *To Damascus*, and its first volume in particular. An examination of some of the themes and dramatic devices of this influential work will reveal a number of interesting parallels with Schoenberg's opera, and thus situate it comfortably among the earliest Expressionist dramatic works.

***To Damascus* as dramatic prototype**

To Damascus was the first dramatic work that Strindberg wrote after the psychological torment of the mid-1890s. Written in early 1898, the first volume of the *To Damascus* trilogy is an entirely self-supporting, integrated morality play, and at the time of writing it Strindberg had had no intention of following it with two further volumes.⁸⁵ However, later in the summer he wrote a second play, and in 1901 completed the trilogy. It is widely acknowledged to be one of his most successful plays, and as the first significant embodiment of his late dramatic style, has often been hailed as the first fully Expressionist play.⁸⁶

Contrary to Friedrich Buchmayr's assertion that *To Damascus* was not published in German translation until 1912, in fact it first appeared in German in 1899, when it was published by Pierson in Dresden and Leipzig in a translation by Emil Schering.⁸⁷ Schoenberg did not acquire a copy of this edition before 1910, but it is entirely possible that given Strindberg's pre-eminence in Schoenberg's artistic circles, and Schoenberg's own keen interest in the playwright, that either a copy of the play passed into his hands, he was able to see a staging, or word of its key features reached him by some other means sometime in the 1900s. This cannot be proven by the available evidence, but were it not the case it would leave open the extraordinary suggestion that Strindberg and Schoenberg's dramatic vision for the theatre was so closely aligned that they independently, albeit a decade apart, invented and employed Expressionist devices of startling similarity in their respective works. The overlap in dramatic function and content between these two works is so notable that it seems almost more extraordinary to believe that Schoenberg was *not* influenced by *To Damascus*, and particularly its first volume.

It is certainly true that in October 1912 Schoenberg was strongly considering using *To Damascus* as the basis of a musical dramatic work, as evidenced by a letter to Berg:

⁸⁵ Meyer, *Strindberg: A Biography*, 374.

⁸⁶ Dahlström, writing in 1930, points out that this acclamation had first of all been bestowed by German critics of the time (Dahlström, *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism*, 119.)

⁸⁷ Buchmayr, "Cela Pourrait Venir de Moi' - L'admiration d'Arnold Schoenberg pour August Strindberg," 136.

Have you ever thought of writing something for the theatre? I sometimes think you would be good at that! In any case it could be very stimulating for you. Just see that you don't take the *Dream Plays* away from me, for I'm considering them myself. But some other Strindberg work! I consider that very feasible!⁸⁸

By the *Dream Plays*, Schoenberg is referring to Strindberg's *Dream Play* of 1901, and his trilogy of plays *To Damascus*, with which it shares a number of themes and dramatic devices—indeed, in his preface to *A Dream Play*, Strindberg refers to *To Damascus* as his 'former dream play'.⁸⁹ If Schoenberg did first become familiar with *To Damascus* in 1912, it is perhaps no surprise that he warmed to it so quickly given its autobiographical elements, and the fact that, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, Schoenberg went to considerable efforts to liken his own travails to Strindberg's. *To Damascus* portrays, according to Gunnar Ollén, 'a trenchant settling of accounts between a complex and fascinating individual—the author—and his past'.⁹⁰ The spiritual and psychological crisis from which Strindberg had not long emerged in 1898 demanded a working out on paper, and the spiritual pilgrimage on which the central unnamed character embarks could allegorically be described, to an extent, as a therapeutic catharsis of that trauma which had troubled the author. Additionally, the central protagonist, an author, is described at one point as remarkably like the younger Strindberg:

Let me look at the police list, and see if the description tallies: thirty-eight, brown hair, moustache, blue eyes; no settled employment, means unknown; married, but has deserted his wife and children; well known for revolutionary views on social questions: gives impression he is not in full possession of his faculties...⁹¹

However, the work should not be considered strictly autobiographical or a record of fully-fledged self-analysis; Strindberg excelled at painting intricate psychological portraits in all his greatest works, and the autobiographical elements of *To Damascus* serve primarily to deepen its impact rather than to project a comprehensive self-image, however unmistakable the parallels

⁸⁸ Letter from Schoenberg to Berg, 3rd October 1912 (Schoenberg and Berg, *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters*, 117.) Berg replied to say that he had already been considering a setting of Strindberg's Chamber Plays. In the end, however, since neither Berg's nor Schoenberg's projects were realised, the only Second Viennese School composer to set Strindberg's words directly was Webern, who borrowed Strindberg's paraphrase of the Icelandic 'Song of the Sun' in *The Ghost Sonata* for one of his Four Songs for Voice and Piano, Op.12, 'Schein mir's, als ich sah die Sonne'.

⁸⁹ Strindberg, "A Dream Play," 176.

⁹⁰ Gunnar Ollén's introduction is printed in the 1939 English translation of *To Damascus* published by Jonathan Cape Ltd, and is also reproduced in the Project Gutenberg edition of the same translation, available online (Strindberg, "To Damascus.")

⁹¹ Strindberg, *The Road To Damascus: A Trilogy*, 38–9.

undeniably are.⁹² Strindberg himself described the play as ‘a fiction with a terrifying half-reality behind it’,⁹³ a description we could also apply to the clear, if over-dramatised, self-image Schoenberg projects in *Die glückliche Hand*.

As with Schoenberg’s *Man*, the central character of *To Damascus* is unnamed, though translators into English are charged with finding a corresponding signifier to the Swedish ‘Den Okände’, with most settling on ‘The Stranger’, whereas ‘The Unknown’ might be considered more faithful.⁹⁴ The central focus of the play is the Unknown’s spiritual journey, one on which the audience embarks with him, in order to discover who he is; as Dahlström puts it, he is the x in a mathematical problem.⁹⁵ A brief overview of the plot of the first volume of *To Damascus* can be given as follows, in a summary by Gunnar Brandell:

[The Unknown] meets the Lady and abducts her from her first husband. They marry, and economic need drives them to seek refuge with her family in the country, where they find a mixed reception. The Mother coaxes the Lady to read [the Unknown’s] latest book. [The Unknown] leaves her and later finds himself in an asylum. After the moral crisis that he undergoes there, he retraces his steps—part of the time accompanied by the Lady—and discovers that he has treated people unjustly. When he returns to his point of departure, he finds a money order that had been awaiting him all the time at the post office. The play ends with a bit of moralistic wisdom: ‘It was my own stupidity, or my wickedness... I did not want to be life’s dupe, and therefore that is exactly what I did become!’⁹⁶

Themes of mission, obstruction and martyrdom pervade both dramas, and both the *Man* in *Die glückliche Hand* and the Unknown in *To Damascus* are torn between the poles of sensual gratification and spirituality. Just as Schoenberg’s disembodied Greek chorus chastens and chides the *Man* from an intangible position of physical and emotional detachment, cautioning humility and resignation, so does Strindberg depict an antagonist in the form of the ‘Unseen One’, the hand of fate whose inevitable direction and judgement the Unknown eventually comes to accept. This ‘Unseen One’ is also referred to by Strindberg in his personal correspondence and also

⁹² Some of these parallels include a seaside scene depicting his honeymoon on Heligoland, a visit to the Lady’s parents which are virtually a recount of a visit he and his wife Frida paid to her grandparents, and the central scene in the Abbey of Good Hope, with strong overtones of his time spent in the asylum at the Hôpital St. Louis. The play also depicts other traits of Strindberg’s character and experience, notably his sense of guilt at being unable to support his children, his lack of recognition as a scientist and his fear of madness (Meyer, *Strindberg: A Biography*, 375.)

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁹⁴ Morgan, *August Strindberg*, 46.

⁹⁵ Dahlström, *Strindberg’s Dramatic Expressionism*, 121.

⁹⁶ Brandell, *Strindberg in Inferno*, 251.

autobiographical works such as *Inferno*, as he grapples with invisible assailants and paranoid delusions. Strindberg thus wholly empathises with his Unknown against this obstructive, yet indefinable force.

Schoenberg's partially concealed chorus also has a parallel embodiment in the asylum scene, where Strindberg indicates that the assembled inmates are to be veiled in gauze, as if the ghosts haunting the Unknown's mind. The assembled inmates, who all resemble characters the Unknown has already met, thus function, as with many other aspects of the play, on both the objective and subjective level; as the Nurse remarks to the Unknown, 'it may be they look strange to you because you're still feverish. Or there may be another reason.'⁹⁷ Additionally, in *To Damascus* are scenes at a blacksmith's, and at a ravine—an uncanny correspondence to the only two realistic settings denoted in *Die glückliche Hand*.

The Unknown is similarly accompanied by an unfaithful woman; whereas Schoenberg's Woman leaves the central Man for the Gentleman, Strindberg's Lady is unhappily married and the Unknown takes her away from her husband. Nonetheless, she betrays him in the end by reneging on a promise not to read the manuscript of his latest book, an act sufficiently treacherous that he deserts her. Specifically, as one of many biblical allusions in this work, Strindberg is in this instance channelling Eve's succumbing to temptation in eating the apple, and her fall through acquisition of knowledge; Strindberg's notorious tendency towards misogyny will be discussed in chapter 2, but for now suffice it to say that *To Damascus* is an example of a trend in Expressionist drama towards depictions of women as shallow and deceitful, of which *Die glückliche Hand* is also a notable example.

This plays into another strong theme for both dramas; that of unrelenting disappointment in the protagonists' lives. Both yearn for more than their lot, and this unsatisfied desire leads both to project qualities onto the women they encounter. Strindberg's Unknown does this explicitly, creating Eve as if God himself:

The Unknown: I gave her a name of my own choosing in order to make her mine. I intend to re-create her according to my tastes and desires—.

The Mother: In your image! (She smiles)⁹⁸

Schoenberg's Man, to a greater extent still, sees only the image of the Woman that pleases him, so much so that when she has let go of his hand to run off with the Gentleman he still believes he 'possesses her forever'. And just as the woman in *Die glückliche Hand* eventually falls far short of

⁹⁷ Strindberg, *The Road To Damascus: A Trilogy*, 80.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68–69.

the embodiment of divine perfection projected by the Man, so does Strindberg's Unknown live a life plagued by duplicity:

I've often thought that two beings were guiding my destiny. One offers me all I desire; but the other's ever at hand to bespatter the gifts with filth, so that they're useless to me and I can't touch them. It's true that life has given me all I asked of it—but everything's turned out worthless to me.⁹⁹

Apart from the content of the play, a number of other important points of comparison can be drawn from the overarching structure of *To Damascus* and its dramatic construction. As can be seen from the above synopsis, the first volume of *To Damascus* and *Die glückliche Hand* are both structured in an overarching palindrome, with Strindberg's Unknown and Schoenberg's Man retracing their steps in the second half and revisiting scenes of their past striving in reverse order, a construction that Strindberg himself claimed he derived from the notion of a contrapuntal musical composition.¹⁰⁰ Both feature significant climaxes at the central height of the drama, with the Unknown being incarcerated in an asylum, and Schoenberg's Man accomplishing an act of miraculous creation, followed by the 'colour crescendo'. To emphasise this aspect of the work's structure, in the original German translation the scenes are indicated in the following manner at the beginning of the book:¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰⁰ In an explanatory note to the director of the first performance of *A Dream Play*, Strindberg also claimed that the seemingly incoherent structure of this work was in fact conceived in musical terms, as 'a symphony, polyphonic, now and then in the manner of a fugue with a constantly recurring main theme, which is repeated and varied by the thirty odd parts in every key.' (Strindberg, *Miss Julie and Other Plays*, 300.)

¹⁰¹ At the time of writing, the 1920 edition of *To Damascus* is also freely available online at Archive.org: <https://archive.org/stream/nachdamaskuserst00stri#page/4/>, accessed 17th January 2015 (Strindberg, *Nach Damaskus*, 4.)

SZENERIE.

1. An der Straßenecke	17. An der Straßenecke
2. Beim Arzt	16. Beim Arzt
3. Das Hotelzimmer	15. Das Hotelzimmer
4. Am Meere	14. Am Meere
5. Auf der Landstraße	13. Auf der Landstraße
6. Im Hohlwege	12. Im Hohlwege
7. In der Küche	11. In der Küche
8. Die Rosenkammer	10. Die Rosenkammer

9. Das Asyl

Significantly, this work is often cited as the progenitor for a precedent of Expressionist *Stationendrama*, or ‘Station dramas’: rather than demarcate separate scenes in the traditional manner, there are seven loosely related ‘stations’ through which the Unknown passes towards the central point of the drama. This is overtly underlined by the Mother’s exhortation to the Unknown:

My son! You have left Jerusalem and are on the road to Damascus. Go back the same way you came. Erect a cross at every station, and stay at the seventh. For you, there are not fourteen, as for Him.¹⁰²

These scenic changes are somewhat more passive than the traditional construction, and could perhaps be said to pass the Unknown by as if an ephemeral backdrop to the unimpeded continuity of his psychological experience. This means of seamlessly dividing the dramatic action could be said to apply to the organisation of *Die glückliche Hand*, with changes in scene navigated through lighting to highlight certain aspects of the stage.

Another effect of these dreamlike transitions is that within the play, time itself moves at the subjective pace of the protagonist’s experience, rather than being driven onwards at the speed of

¹⁰² Strindberg, *The Road To Damascus: A Trilogy*, 93. Notwithstanding the comparison of the Unknown to Jesus, and especially his period of most intense suffering, Strindberg also refers at times to the worsening trials of the Unknown as if mirroring a descent into Hell in the centre of the drama. This allusion is given a personal dimension by the fact that in the period of his life from which he mined experiences for this drama, he decided to give his quasi-autobiographical book the title *Inferno*.

traditional cause-and-effect character interactions. This, as well as the absence of extended backstory or complex plot twists, and the fact that the climax of the work has moved towards the centre rather than the end, constitutes a decisive break from the most important aspects of the 'well-made play', a model which Strindberg had extensively employed in his earlier period. Egil Törnqvist thus, in his analysis of *To Damascus*, contrasts the dream-like continuity of the play with Strindberg's earlier naturalistic style, adopting terminology from Expressionist drama scholar Walter Sokel to describe it as 'theme-centred' rather than 'plot-centred'.¹⁰³ This could reasonably be said to apply just as aptly to *Die glückliche Hand*: there is no backstory at all to speak of, and characters interact in the most basic way in service to the broad themes which Schoenberg is portraying, rather than as means to the end of plot advancement. Certain aspects of the 'plot' insofar as it exists are merely implied rather than acted out, such as the workers' gestures as they threaten to pounce on the Man, or the Woman's seduction of the Man via the goblet of love potion—in this sense these are mere 'themes' for Schoenberg to manipulate on stage at the simple pace at which his Man encounters them, and the palindromic construction in which these stations are contained functions, as in *To Damascus*, only as a convenient and comprehensible structure for their exposition.

In *To Damascus*, these dramatic innovations are geared towards explicating the mindset of the Unknown for the audience, and his interactions with other characters are means to this end as well. The characters the Unknown encounters are more one-sided than in Strindberg's earlier plays; each embodies a simple type, or, in an almost Socratic way, a symbolic position or facet of the psyche with which the Unknown can interact. Their language vacillates between the colloquial and formal, sometimes affecting a kind of forced religiosity.¹⁰⁴ Various they appear either as mirrors, or as guides or portents in a narrative that often verges on the illogical, and their relation to the 'Unseen' remains ambiguous. Strindberg does not designate names to these other characters, choosing instead to signify them as Doctor, Beggar, An Old Man, etc.¹⁰⁵ The use of such archetypal figures to some extent enables Strindberg to portray his tale as a study of the universal human condition, rather than a portrait of a Man rigidly confined to a specific era and locale.¹⁰⁶ The work's title implicitly places the Unknown himself in the position of a biblical

¹⁰³ Törnqvist, "Strindberg and the Drama of Half-Reality: An Analysis of *To Damascus* Act I," 120. For the original work from which this terminology was originally derived, see Sokel, *An Anthology of German Expressionist Drama: A Prelude to the Absurd*.

¹⁰⁴ Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama*, 105.

¹⁰⁵ An exception among these unnamed characters is Caesar, who nonetheless exemplifies a particular psychological trait, being essentially representative of spiritual self-aggrandisement.

¹⁰⁶ This universal aspect of the drama is only undermined by one implicit mention of the year of the play's publication: in the first scene, the Stranger tells the Lady that since she is thirty-four, she will have been born

archetype, that of Saul on the road to Damascus, with the road allegorising the stranger's journey of discovery. This is a dramatic device that has elicited comparison with medieval morality plays,¹⁰⁷ and perhaps significantly, from reading his Occult Diary, it is apparent that the first volume of *To Damascus* was originally to be called *Robert de Diable* after the hero of a French medieval folktale.¹⁰⁸ However, *To Damascus* is usually credited as the archetype for this means of character interaction in Expressionist drama,¹⁰⁹ and it came to be used very extensively, not least in *Die glückliche Hand*.

The function of this device is not entirely, as is sometimes described in scholarship, to designate these minor characters as mere projections or mirrors of the Unknown's experience, existing only so far as the Unknown experiences them and without any psychological autonomy or agenda of their own.¹¹⁰ Rather, the characters, scenery, dialogue and plot of *To Damascus* function both on a realistic and figurative level. This double meaning is made explicit through the Unknown's uncertainty about the reality of the world he experiences and, by extension, the audience is made to feel uncertain alongside him as they too attempt to determine what level of reality is depicted before them. Before he meets the Beggar for the first time, the Unknown expresses the chimeral impression his presence makes:

in 1864, implicitly setting the play in 1898. Egil Törnqvist is in no doubt that Strindberg inserted this so as to draw attention to the play's autobiographical elements. (Törnqvist, "Strindberg and the Drama of Half-Reality: An Analysis of *To Damascus* Act I," 144.)

¹⁰⁷ Szalczer, "A Modernist Dramaturgy," 99.

¹⁰⁸ As the child of a duchess's liason with the Devil, Robert commits terrible crimes before repenting, making a pilgrimage to Rome and finally living as a hermit. Strindberg scholars have demonstrated that this tale undoubtedly provided the basic outline for Strindberg's play (Törnqvist, "Strindberg and the Drama of Half-Reality: An Analysis of *To Damascus* Act I," 137.)

¹⁰⁹ In spite of the fact that *To Damascus* is usually cited as the first Expressionist play with unnamed characters, in Strindberg's output it hails back at least to *The Stronger* of 1889, where the two women are named Mrs X and Miss Y.

¹¹⁰ Perhaps worryingly, this assertion has apparently been more often made by critics reading Strindberg in translation, whereas Swedish critics have tended towards the interpretation that the characters represent both an objective and subjective reality (Ibid., 125.) Some interpretations of *Die glückliche Hand*, such as that of Alan Philip Lessem, explicitly interpret its dramatism in the same manner; 'the action... takes place entirely within the mind of the anonymous Man, though simultaneously projected into stage figures: a quasi-Greek chorus, a Woman and a Gentleman.' (Lessem, *Music and Text in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg: The Critical Years, 1908-1922*, 97.)

In my loneliness I meet someone. I don't know whether it's myself or someone else. All I know is that in the midst of my loneliness I'm not alone. The air thickens, congeals, certain presences begin to take shape, invisible but tangible, and possessing a life of their own.¹¹¹

Reality has thus been so effectively destabilised in *To Damascus* that the audience is never entirely sure whether one perceives an event objectively, or through the lens of the Unknown's perception. The resultant heightening on stage of the central Unknown's psychological experience is the essential Expressionist aim; from this particular dramatic construction, realised here more fully than in any other of Strindberg's previous plays, the emotional axis of later Expressionist theatre was established.¹¹²

The characters in *Die glückliche Hand* serve a similar function; they again are types or projections, executing one-sided dramatic functions rather than living rounded psychological lives. Their relation to the central protagonist however demonstrates one crucial dramatic difference between *To Damascus* and *Die glückliche Hand*. Strindberg's Unknown in *To Damascus*, and to a greater extent the actors in his *Dream Play*, are, in Eszter Szalczzer's words, 'actors and perplexed spectators in a grand cosmic theatre.'¹¹³ They have an emotional detachment to their surroundings which enables them to comment, and crucially, to reflect on their own reactions and opinions. This opportunity for self-examination is denied to Schoenberg's rather more impulsive Man, who is utterly immersed in his dreamlike world and consumed altogether by the brutish trials he faces. Strindberg's dramatic construction is arguably the more nuanced, allowing the Unknown to piece together an image of himself through recognising uncanny aspects of his character in the people he meets. Strindberg's demonstrated commitment to psychologically complex characters notwithstanding, this dramatic device undoubtedly draws on contemporary ideas of dynamic psychiatry, where the disparate portions of the psyche were being examined and mapped for the first time, especially through close scrutiny of dreams. By contrast, the inner life of Schoenberg's central Man is relatively simple, and dramatically polarised so as to emphasise his confrontational relationship with his environment. His dream world never sympathetically mirrors the Man in the slightest, and instead is set up to project an image to the audience rather than the actor. Schoenberg, like his central protagonist, is concerned with communicating in visceral, emotional terms.

While the bleak emotional landscape of *Die glückliche Hand* is in keeping with much Expressionist art of the period, the dramatic construction which Schoenberg sets up, and the Expressionist devices he employs, were daringly modern for 1910. While many of these can be

¹¹¹ Strindberg, *The Road To Damascus: A Trilogy*, 26–7.

¹¹² Morgan, *August Strindberg*, 44.

¹¹³ Szalczzer, "A Modernist Dramaturgy," 97.

shown to originate in Strindberg's works, Schoenberg's appreciation and application of them pre-empt the most active period of German Expressionist drama, of which *Die glückliche Hand* can legitimately be considered a precursor. In contrast with Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang*, and despite its dreamlike and otherworldly nature, the narrative of *Die glückliche Hand* purposefully projects a coherent image to the audience. The next chapter discusses the content of this imagery, unpicking its occasionally oblique symbolism and discussing some of the influences which Schoenberg will likely have drawn from. A full century after its conception, *Die glückliche Hand* is a considerably more difficult work to approach, so far are we from the cultural milieu in which it was originally intended to be received. It is only once this symbolism is considered in light of its original cultural context that the full emotional import of the work begins to be clarified.

Chapter 2:
Symbolic Projections of the Modern Artist

Introduction

As Chapter 1 has demonstrated, a number of the most curious aspects of *Die glückliche Hand's* dramaturgy become clear once the work is situated among other Expressionist dramas. The strong similarities that the opera particularly displays to the genre of the Expressionist *Ich* drama furnishes a starting point for our interpretation of the work's content: just as Strindberg's most noted *Ich* dramas were introspective works designed to project the inner psychic world of a central protagonist (which often drew on autobiographical material), so should we consider the image of Schoenberg's Man as of central importance to the meaning of *Die glückliche Hand*.

The temperament of this Man, the trials he undergoes, and the interactions he has with the other characters paint a coherent, multifaceted portrait of an individual whose similarities to Schoenberg's own position in fin-de-siècle Vienna are too striking to be overlooked. The task of this chapter will be to explore ways of interpreting the content of the drama and decoding its symbolism. I will be primarily concerned to show how the possible meaning of this symbolism is illuminated if it is read in the light of three contemporary authors who exerted a very strong influence on Schoenberg's worldview, and to evaluate the extent to which it could reasonably be considered an autobiographical projection of Schoenberg's own self and his envisioning of his circumstances.

In an article of 1957, Hans Keller observed that commentators were generally reluctant to discuss the symbolism or import of *Die glückliche Hand*, or even preferred 'not to have a go at the "story" at all':

[The] authorities are ... at best evasive. Wellesz confines himself to the descriptive level, René Leibowitz to the music. The Schoenberg biographer H. H. Stuckenschmidt says that 'in the logical sense, the text is without a subject, without reality'; Dika Newlin contents herself with calling the drama a characteristic specimen of modern expressionism; and Humphrey Searle, in the new *Grove*, says "the subject is the symbolic pursuit of happiness".¹¹⁴

More recent commentators have tended to put forward interpretations of *Die glückliche Hand* that suggest it is in some way autobiographical. That the image of the Man is on some level a projection of Schoenberg's image of himself is not now a controversial one; however, those scholars and commentators who have made an attempt to understand or decode the work have often focussed on a single aspect of the work's libretto to the exclusion of all others, namely the love interest of the Man, the Woman and the Gentleman.

¹¹⁴ Keller, "The 'Lucky' Hand and Other Errors," 74–5.

Since Schoenberg's death it has come to light that the opera was written in the years following a particularly tumultuous crisis in his marriage, which affected the composer so deeply that at one point he was even brought to consider suicide. His wife Mathilde had a brief affair with a Viennese artist named Richard Gerstl, with whom they were holidaying in the summer of 1908, and the opera's love triangle between the Man, the Woman and the Gentleman could be interpreted as bearing a similarity to the triangular relationship between Schoenberg, Mathilde, and Gerstl. Commentators have thus frequently cited Mathilde's infidelity as the main inspiration for the deceitful figure of the Woman in *Die glückliche Hand*.

This contention appears to originate with the first publication to reveal the affair, Jan Meyerowitz's 1967 book *Arnold Schönberg*, and the description of events ascertained from the testimony of the composer's son-in-law, Felix Greißle, who married Schoenberg's daughter Trudi.¹¹⁵ Greißle explicitly claims that the affair was Schoenberg's inspiration for the figure of the Woman in *Die glückliche Hand*—a conjecture which appears to have been made without first-hand indication of the fact from Schoenberg himself. This assertion has tended to be repeated uncritically by commentators, despite a complete lack of evidence that Schoenberg consciously channelled the experience of his own marital difficulties into the work's libretto.

This interpretation of the drama was initially justified by an assumption which predated public knowledge of the affair: in his 1959 work *Das Werk Arnold Schönbergs*, Joseph Rufer examined a number of Schoenberg's musical sketches, and discerned a likeness between two of them and the score of *Die glückliche Hand*. One of these sketches was dated 11 October 1908, and the other, with which it shares motivic material, bears three titles— 'Deeds', 'Placation' and 'False happiness', which have been assumed to be embryonic ideas for the themes of the opera as it later materialised. The subsequent revelation of the affair, and its undoubted rawness in Schoenberg's mind in October 1908 has thus been assumed to settle the matter of the main source of the opera's inspiration as he jotted down these initial sketches. On the basis of Rufer's discovery, October 1908 has thus been widely reproduced as the date at which Schoenberg began to conceive the material for *Die glückliche Hand*—Reich and Stuckenschmidt, for example, both refer to this date in their biographies of Schoenberg; Stuckenschmidt further describing its essential theme as 'a drama of destroyed love'.¹¹⁶

Unfortunately, however, subsequent examination of the 1908 sketches has revealed that in fact they bear no convincing resemblance to the score of *Die glückliche Hand*. Schoenberg scholars Jan

¹¹⁵ Meyerowitz, *Arnold Schönberg*, 16.

¹¹⁶ Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*, 183; Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, 122.

Maegaard, and latterly John Crawford, have independently corroborated this fact,¹¹⁷ in light of which we must assume that Schoenberg did not take up composition on the opera until after he had written the libretto in the summer of 1910, a full two years after the affair itself. Nonetheless, the affair has since been drawn into virtually every discussion of the work to appear in scholarship as a means of explaining the figures of the Woman and the Gentleman.

In recent years, scholars have been more circumspect about the extent to which the libretto of *Die glückliche Hand* draws on Schoenberg's marital difficulties. Brian Simms in *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908-1923*, has suggested that the projection of the Man as an artist is of comparable significance to understanding the work, alongside the projection of Schoenberg's own marital strife.¹¹⁸ And Joseph Auner, in *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life* cautions that the love triangle is 'better seen not as any sort of literal representation but rather as a reworking of autobiographical material filtered through contemporary attitudes toward the relationship of the sexes expressed in the writings of August Strindberg, Otto Weininger, Kokoschka, and others.'¹¹⁹

Ultimately, I will argue, there are aspects of the drama, and particularly in Schoenberg's characterisation of the Man as artist, which are of more fundamental importance to the drama and which constitute its principal subject matter. First, however, given the prominence afforded in scholarship to Schoenberg's marital difficulties, it will be necessary to examine the events which caused a rift in Schoenberg's marriage, in order to evaluate the extent to which they could reasonably be said to have informed the portrayal of the love interest in *Die glückliche Hand*.

¹¹⁷ For a discussion, see Crawford, "Die glückliche Hand: Further Notes." In 1988, Harald Krebs examined the sketches again and discerned a likeness between the 'placation' sketch and the opera's score, but from his description it seems a somewhat superficial likeness (Krebs, "New Light on the Source Materials of Schoenberg's 'Die glückliche Hand,'" 131.)

¹¹⁸ Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908-1923*, 103–5.

¹¹⁹ Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life*, 81–2.

The Gerstl Affair

In absence of explicit statements by a creative artist, attempting to discern evidence of autobiographical events in works of art is a dangerous pursuit for commentators, particularly when those events are both traumatic and deeply private, such as the difficulties in Schoenberg's marriage in the summer of 1908. To complicate matters, while on holiday that summer, Schoenberg composed the work that has perhaps generated the most controversy and discussion of anything he ever wrote: his String Quartet No.2, in which he first broke through to a fully atonal musical idiom. The confluence of this turbulent period in his marriage with a burst of musical inspiration has led commentators irresistibly to perceive a causal relationship between the traumatic events of his marital breakup and the creation of an unprecedentedly complex and uncompromising musical language as he sought to contain his unbearable anguish. Among others, Bryan Simms makes this argument at length in his 2003 article chronicling the work's composition: 'My Dear Hagerl: Self-Representation in Schoenberg's String Quartet No.2'.

For many years, the exact details of the affair were only known in somewhat patchy detail. In part, this was because Schoenberg refrained ever from discussing the matter, but also because so few of Gerstl's personal papers appeared to have survived. The first carefully considered appraisal of events was Otto Breicha's 1993 study *Gerstl und Schönberg: Eine Beziehung*, but, in spite of Breicha's considerable investigative efforts, he was unable to reconstruct a coherent timeline of events.¹²⁰ However, a more successful second attempt was made in Raymond Coffey's 2011 thesis 'Richard Gerstl and Arnold Schönberg, a Reassessment of Their Relationship (1906-1908)'. Building on Breicha's research, Coffey undertook an exhaustive investigation of Gerstl's career and his interactions with Schoenberg, particularly over the summer of 1908, as well as piecing together a timeline of Schoenberg's itinerary and compositional activity for that summer in light of newly available archival materials. In contrast to commentary asserting that the turbulent emotional world of the String Quartet No.2 owes its inspiration to his despair over his wife's infidelity, what emerges is the perhaps less sensational, but ultimately rather more plausible story that Schoenberg's most intense periods of despair did not coincide with his composition of the quartet, and that the affair may even have only properly come to light after the quartet had been finished.

In light of Coffey's recent scholarship, reproducing a brief overview of the timeline of Schoenberg's marital difficulties here will stand as a corrective to the generally received understanding of the affair, as well as allowing for a discussion of the extent to which Schoenberg could be said to have channelled these events into *Die glückliche Hand*. (As will be discussed towards the end of this chapter, a number of other important points already discussed in this thesis, such as Schoenberg's

¹²⁰ Breicha, *Gerstl und Schönberg: Eine Beziehung*.

demonstrated commitment to representing artistically his innermost emotional life, also converge on the narrative of the composition of the Quartet.) Once this has been related, it will also be possible to situate the romantic interest between the Man and the Woman in *Die glückliche Hand* among other artistic influences which will likely have informed Schoenberg's conception of this aspect of the libretto.

Overview of events

The man with whom Mathilde Schoenberg was adulterously involved was a Viennese painter named Richard Gerstl (1883-1908). Personal accounts of Gerstl indicate that he was a solitary, morbidly sensitive, and occasionally somewhat unstable figure. Similarly to Schoenberg, he could be extremely sensitive to criticism, but sharply derided the opinions of those he considered beneath him. Aspects of Gerstl's limited surviving output show him to have been stylistically adventurous, and mark him out as being among the most innovative of Expressionist painters of the time.¹²¹

Just as Schoenberg was an amateur painter, so was Gerstl a music-lover who considered at one stage becoming a music critic; he became particularly admiring of the circle surrounding Mahler, and his artistic inclination towards radicalism aligned him with Schoenberg, to whom he introduced himself at a concert, and who became appreciative of him as an audience for his ideas.¹²² Gerstl was quickly adopted as part of the Schoenberg circle, wherein he found himself among friends who were similarly dismissive of the artistic establishment. From 1906 he began to give both Schoenberg and his wife painting lessons, and they both sat as models for Gerstl on numerous occasions, sometimes with other members of their family.¹²³ Perhaps on account of the affinity he shared with the Schoenbergs, he also moved to a house on Liechtensteinstraße, the same street as theirs.

It would appear that, sometime in early 1908, Schoenberg's daughter Trudi reported to him that she had seen her mother kissing Gerstl; he immediately forbade her from going to the painter's studio but, curiously, wrote to Gerstl to insist that they should not allow a woman to come between them.¹²⁴ If this did indeed take place, then Schoenberg appears to have blamed Mathilde

¹²¹ Kallir, *Arnold Schoenberg's Vienna*, 38.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²³ Some scholars maintain, given Schoenberg's later assertions, that he in fact taught Gerstl more about painting than he learnt; this point is discussed in Jackson, "Schoenberg's Op.14 Songs: 'Textual Sources and Analytical Perception,'" 40–41, N.16.

¹²⁴ Simms, "My Dear Hagerl': Self-Representation in Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2," 257.

over Gerstl for the indiscretion,¹²⁵ and, preceding events notwithstanding, Gerstl was still invited to join them for their summer holiday at the lake resort of Gmunden, as he had done the year before. Correspondence between Webern and Schoenberg also attests to the fact that Gerstl maintained his place in Schoenberg's circle as if nothing had happened.

Possibly to effect a separation between Mathilde and Gerstl, but perfectly likely for other, more innocuous reasons, Mathilde went to Gmunden with the children three weeks earlier than planned. In this period, the daily correspondence that passed between Schoenberg and his wife, while occasionally tense and containing reassurances from Mathilde that she cared for nobody but Schoenberg, primarily concerned matters such as the need to exercise financial prudence, which far eclipsed Gerstl as a point of conversation and cause of tension.

Schoenberg always carved out a significant amount of time at his summers in Gmunden to compose; the previous summer he had begun the first movement and sketched elements of the second movement of his String Quartet No.2, and, having had scant time to return to it over the course of the year, he now picked it up again. He sent for a transcription of the Stefan George poems *Litanei* and *Entrückung* from his student Karl Horwitz, possibly having first discovered them through Webern visiting Gmunden one weekend with a the volume of poetry from which they are taken, *Der Siebente Ring*. Upon receiving copies he rapidly composed settings as the final two movements of the string quartet, as well as incorporating into the second movement a familiar Austrian tune, *Ach du lieber Augustin, alles ist hin*.

Gerstl for his part also experienced a burst of creative energy around this time, completing among other things a number of group portraits, which included the Schoenbergs. Just as the composer had broken new ground with his new compositional idiom, so do Gerstl's portraits veer daringly towards abstraction, the figures themselves depicted through broad, brash strokes and very rough detailing.

Towards the end of the holiday, Schoenberg discovered that Gerstl and Mathilde were on *per du* terms, rather than using the formal *Sie* in conversation. Mathilde revealed that this had been the case for the two years of their knowing Gerstl; he immediately banned Mathilde from visiting Gerstl's rented farmhouse. Nonetheless, their full affair came to light on 26th August, when Schoenberg apparently discovered the lovers in a compromising situation. Gerstl and Mathilde subsequently fled that evening, first to a hotel in Gmunden, where despite a desperate search Schoenberg was unable to find them, and the next day they returned by train to Vienna. Schoenberg followed a day later with his children, somewhat earlier than had previously been

¹²⁵ Perhaps astonishingly, when Mathilde suggested Schoenberg ask someone to stay with him to ensure he was taking care of himself in his despair, he asked his neighbour, Gerstl, who declined. (Ibid., 269.)

planned. Mathilde and Gerstl stayed in a guesthouse for three days, at the end of which time Mathilde returned to the family in Liechensteinstraße. Contrary to many reports, Webern could not have played a part in convincing Mathilde to reconcile with Schoenberg as at this time he was eight hours away in Ischl for a conducting engagement.¹²⁶

Over the next two months, there is reason to believe that Mathilde and Gerstl continued their affair, and that Schoenberg may on some level have been aware of it. Gerstl however was ostracised from the Schoenberg circle, and on November 5th committed suicide, having slipped a noose around his neck and stabbed himself in the chest. His reclusive, irascible nature while alive, combined with the ignoble circumstances surrounding his death and the wayward, experimental nature of his art meant that he faded quickly into obscurity, despite a promising talent and an innovative Expressionist style. His death brought their affair to an end, and its details were subsequently virtually erased from the history of the two artists.

Ramifications for our understanding of *Die glückliche Hand*

When considered together, the surviving evidence about the two artists' holiday in Gmunden in 1908 seems to indicate that for the most part the holiday was a relaxed, productive break and that at the denouement of the affair at the end of August, Schoenberg was genuinely shocked and surprised.¹²⁷ The Second String Quartet had, by this time, long been completed in leisurely instalments earlier in the summer, and so commentators keen to discern elements of the trauma inscribed in the musical fabric or subject matter of the work are unfortunately mistaken. The far more reasonable interpretation is thus the one offered by commentators such as Hans Keller and Walter Frisch,¹²⁸ whereby the quartet's four movements convey a narrative of movement from classical forms and tonality to a new mode of expression.

As discussed previously, Schoenberg's decision to use texts to ease this transition was a typical means of containing his new means of expression so that it could be approached by an audience without such novelty overwhelming them.¹²⁹ In this context, as Frisch argues, the second movement's quotation of *Ach, du Lieber Augustin, alles ist hin* ('Oh, you dear Augustin, all is lost') can most meaningfully be understood not as a despairing comment on the state of his marriage,

¹²⁶ Coffey, "Richard Gerstl and Arnold Schönberg: A Reassessment of Their Relationship (1906-1908)," 289.

¹²⁷ As an example, Schoenberg's light-hearted and good-natured letter of 18th July 1908 to his pupil Heinrich Jalowetz seems to demonstrate unequivocally that he took a break between writing the third and fourth movements of the quartet to relax and enjoy the holiday with his family. (Ibid., 231–2.)

¹²⁸ Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg 1893-1908*, 255–6; Keller, *Music, Closed Societies and Football*, 159.

¹²⁹ Bauer, "A Contextual Approach to Schoenberg's Atonal Works: Self-Expression, Religion and Music Theory (Harmonielehre)," 26.

but as a quotation referring to this dissolution of tonality and form, given a grotesque Mahlerian twist.¹³⁰

Schoenberg's other settings of Stefan George, which were composed 1908-9 and form the song cycle *Das Buch der Hängenden Gärten* also reflect this narrative through the metaphor of the destruction of the garden and the departure of the woman. It also, somewhat less problematically than the quartet, could be said to reflect the narrative of Mathilde's affair, since those poems which deal prominently with abandonment and despair were composed after the summer of 1908. Bryan Simms goes as far as to suggest that after the summer, in despair at the damage wrought on his marriage, Schoenberg felt inclined to reconceive the cycle so as to provide a vehicle for expression of his despair, and so this new narrative was a direct consequence of Mathilde's infidelity.¹³¹ I would argue, however, that just as the programmatic elements of the Second String Quartet reflected allegorically its move into an atonal musical language, so would Schoenberg have wanted to find a similar metaphor for the narrative of his song cycle, since he wanted to continue writing the last of its settings in an atonal idiom.

These two key works of the period can thus be shown not to bear such a direct effect of Mathilde's affair with Gerstl than has previously been claimed. It is with caution, then, that we might begin to assess the extent to which the cheating woman in *Die glückliche Hand* bears a direct resemblance to Mathilde, and to what extent Schoenberg could be said to have metabolised the difficulties of this period in the work's libretto and score. The outlines of the opera's plot, in which a Woman cheats on the central Man without his knowledge, bear at first an obvious resemblance to the events of the summer of 1908. However, there are a number of problems with reading the work's libretto as a direct representation of the affair itself.

The first is that Schoenberg could not reasonably be said to have hoped to evoke the sympathy of an audience for his marital difficulties, the details of which he went to some lengths to keep from public knowledge.¹³² Schoenberg certainly would not have wished to unnecessarily give Vienna's press (which was for the most part both morally and artistically staunchly conservative) another

¹³⁰ Audiences will likely have been familiar with the funeral march of Mahler's First Symphony, in which he interweaves with characteristic black humour the tune *Bruder Martin* (which in English-speaking lands is more familiar to us as *Frère Jacques*).

¹³¹ Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908-1923*, 48-49.

¹³² In the wake of Gerstl's suicide, Schoenberg wrote to his brother Alois expressing his fear about a vindictive reaction from the press if the artist's death had precipitated word getting out about the affair, and asking him to omit to mention anything of Mathilde as he sorted out his brother's affairs. Mathilde also wrote to him asking him to destroy anything of hers he found among Gerstl's possessions. (Coffer, "Richard Gerstl and Arnold Schönberg: A Reassessment of Their Relationship (1906-1908)," 296-7.)

stick with which to beat him. Any expectation that the opera would be publicly understood as representing his marital difficulties should be discounted.

For his own part Schoenberg could, at least in principle, have projected a redacted version of this affair on stage as perhaps some means of working through the experience or finding a means of expressing artistically the anguish it caused. If this were true, then for such a personal and deeply intimate betrayal, then the narrative of *Die glückliche Hand* would represent an undeniably simplistic and melodramatic portrayal of events as they happened. For one so complex as Schoenberg, who even in routine correspondence with his pupils would spend hundreds of words explaining the detailed philosophical nuances of his intended meaning, this would be a positively vacuous and banal portrayal of the events of that summer in Gmunden, and one which it is difficult to see Schoenberg deriving any meaningful succour from.

Furthermore, our recently revised understanding of the affair illustrates the gulf between the real-life Gerstl and Mathilde and the figures of the Man and the Woman portrayed on stage in *Die glückliche Hand*. In contrast to the suave, worldly Gentleman, Gerstl was a perpetually struggling artist whose expulsion from art school in 1908 was only the latest dramatic setback in a long and difficult education, and whose difficult temperament and struggle with mental health problems had held him back personally and professionally his entire, short life. Perhaps the one worldly attribute which he could have been said to possess over Schoenberg was his youth, but materially, personally and professionally it is difficult to see how Schoenberg could have transmogrified him into the Gentleman, if this really was a projection of his real-life romantic rival.

Moreover, the figure of the Woman bears little discernible resemblance to Mathilde, particularly in her relationship to the Man. The Woman is an adored muse to the artist Man, and, as shall be discussed subsequently, the source of his inspiration. There is little evidence that this mirrors Schoenberg's marriage to Mathilde, which could possibly have been entered into primarily due to Mathilde conceiving their first daughter Gertrud out of wedlock. Rather than lavish attention on his wife, whose love and attention he needed to fuel of his capacity for creation, Schoenberg could be a patriarchal, domineering husband, under whose thumb the previously vivacious Mathilde often suffered. It is possible, of course, that his self-image was somewhat short-sighted and differed from the reality he perpetuated—that is to say, that he considered his wife a muse and the source of his creative ability in spite of his uncompromising attitude. However, the letter he wrote to his brother-in-law Zemlinsky on Mathilde's death in 1923 suggests otherwise:

We are gradually beginning to settle down. This, of course, does not come to pass smoothly. Mathilde's arrangements were so clear and simple, she knew how to solve complicated difficulties with a few words, and always virtually without a sound. [...] Now one has to think about many things the existence of which one was not previously aware of. So one gradually loses this human

being, whom one hitherto merely ('merely!') regarded as the person to whom one was attached for inexplicable reasons...¹³³

In any case, rather than the affair engendering helplessness and a desertion of Schoenberg's creative ability, as in the *Man*, it seems instead to have stiffened his resolve and strengthen his self-image as a reviled *artiste maudit*. Moreover, although Viennese audiences reacted with increasing incomprehension to his new atonal idiom after 1908, the next few years would prove remarkably productive of major and highly original new works.

Further, one wonders what effect Schoenberg's projection of the *Woman* will have had personally for Mathilde—she will undoubtedly have come to know the plot of *Die glückliche Hand* shortly after it was written, and were it even a private representation of their marital difficulties on the operatic stage, Schoenberg would have only caused further distress to an already strained marriage. It is easier to believe that, despite the obvious parallels, Mathilde would have been expected to understand that the work was concerned with a very different kind of subject. Similarly, the close friends to whom he sent copies of the drama shortly after it was published will surely have noted the similarities to real-life events but still understood that the work's symbolism was broader in its reach. In a drama of such concentrated, compact meaning, Schoenberg would not have indulged in a simple, private representation of Gerstl and Mathilde, or have rendered two such figures if their presence did not convey something that could be more widely understood, so we are justified in examining other possible interpretations of this aspect of the drama.

In order to fully understand and appreciate the meaning of the symbolism of the *Woman* and the *Gentleman*, we will have to briefly consider the gender and sexual roles through which a contemporary Viennese audience would have understood *Die glückliche Hand*. As will become clear, this audience will have brought to the opera a number of preconceptions which do not hold any cultural currency today, and without which it is impossible to fully understand the love triangle enacted on the stage. To reconstruct this understanding, we will briefly need to examine the ideas of the writer and philosopher Otto Weininger, the most celebrated and notorious theorist on this topic of Schoenberg's day, and a figure who exerted an appreciable influence on his thinking.

¹³³ Letter from Schoenberg to Zemlinsky, 16 November 1923, quoted in Macdonald, *Schoenberg*, 36–7.

Weininger, Gender and Genius in *Die glückliche Hand*

Otto Weininger (1880-1903) was a Viennese philosopher whose short life was notable for the remarkable controversy he created. In 1903 he published his single substantial work, entitled *Sex and Character: A Fundamental Investigation*, in which he set out his own highly particular ideas of the nature of male and female psychology, also taking in explanations of the nature of genius, creativity, logic and race.¹³⁴ Today its unashamed sexism and anti-Semitism make for uncomfortable and disconcerting reading, but it provided much food for thought to Viennese intellectuals of the period, for whom gender and sexuality were major preoccupations—this after all was the epoch of Freud's revelations about the sexual undercurrents of the psyche. A few months after its publication, Weininger committed suicide, shooting himself through the heart in an apartment in the house where Beethoven, Weininger's 'genius of geniuses', had died. Having been born into a middle-class Jewish family, Weininger had converted, like Schoenberg, to Protestantism in 1902; his suicide was thus a kind of performative confirmation of the ideals of his philosophy, echoing Christ's death in his own ethical overcoming of his Jewish identity.

After Weininger's suicide, his stock among contemporary intellectuals rose exponentially. Among the champions of his work was August Strindberg, to whom Weininger had sent a copy of *Sex and Character*, explaining that his play *The Creditors* had demonstrated woman's soullessness and their sexual alterity. Strindberg had replied enthusiastically, exclaiming 'Finally—to see the woman problem solved is a deliverance for me, and so—accept my deepest admiration and my thanks!'¹³⁵

Another deep admirer of Weininger's philosophy was Karl Kraus, the influential Austrian writer and founding editor of *Die Fackel*, who was particularly sympathetic to his ideas about the nature of the feminine as a muse for the creative genius. After Weininger's suicide, in a singularly unusual mark of respect he commissioned an obituary for *Die Fackel* from Strindberg, whose 'Idolatrie, Gynolatrie' was published in October 1910, an indication of the high esteem Kraus held for both men. In return Strindberg asked only that Kraus lay a wreath on Weininger's grave.¹³⁶ This was the start of a fruitful working relationship between Kraus and Strindberg, and in the coming months and years Strindberg's German translator Emil Schering submitted so many of his essays to *Die Fackel* that he quickly came to take a hitherto unprecedented prominence among contributors to the magazine. Schoenberg was an avid reader of the magazine, and a part of Kraus' circle, and so

¹³⁴ All cited page numbers from *Sex and Character* refer to a transcription of the 1906 authorised translation from the sixth German edition, available online as a PDF from 'The Thinking Man's Minefield', (<http://www.theabsolute.net/ottow/schareng.pdf>, accessed 1st December 2014)

¹³⁵ Letter from Strindberg to Weininger, May or June 1903, quoted in Robinson, "Strindberg and Musical Expressionism in Vienna," 136–7.

¹³⁶ Letter from Strindberg to Kraus, 12 October 1903, Strindberg, *Strindberg's Letters, Vol.1*, 703.

we can safely assume that he will have been very familiar with the works of both Weininger and Strindberg long before he began work on *Die glückliche Hand*—Kraus and his circle may in fact be responsible for introducing Schoenberg to the ideas of both writers.¹³⁷

Educated Viennese of Schoenberg's day would have been generally familiar with the outlines of Weininger's views, and if not with his work in particular, then with the plethora of other writers and dramatists such as Strindberg, whose portrayals of gender roles have a great deal in common with Weininger.¹³⁸ Although distasteful today, at the time, Weininger's misogynistic views were part of a wider trend which stood as a cultural counterpart to the emerging women's rights movement. Weininger's book articulated these views in a particularly forceful way and in a single thesis, and so are a useful focal point for comparison with *Die glückliche Hand*.

To date, two commentators in particular have considered Weininger's influence on Schoenberg. Julie Brown in the collection of essays in her book, *Schoenberg and Redemption*, has drawn attention to Weininger as an important theorist on Judaism, since in this respect his ideas, in conjunction with those of Wagner, were of crucial significance to Schoenberg.¹³⁹ Brown does a particular service to Schoenberg in contextualising Weininger dispassionately as a thinker representative of his age, and helps to illuminate his importance as an influence on Schoenberg's outlook in particular.

In a thought-provoking contribution to a recent French-language volume of essays on *Die glückliche Hand*, Wolfgang Sabler argues for the importance of Weininger's philosophy for understanding its dramaturgy.¹⁴⁰ However, Sabler does so in such a way as to suggest that Schoenberg's autobiographical projections of the Gerstl affair are of central importance to the opera. In light of Coffey's research, we may choose to play down this interpretation, but Sabler's key argument that the interaction of the Man, the Woman and the Gentleman can best be understood in light of reading Weininger's philosophy is a persuasive one. This argument is worth exploring in some detail, for which we will need to briefly examine the key tenets of *Sex and Character*; before discussing the influence they may have had on the love triangle in *Die glückliche Hand*.

¹³⁷ For a discussion of Kraus' influence on Schoenberg, see Johnson, "Karl Kraus and the Schönberg School."

¹³⁸ Among musicians, for instance, the immediate Schoenberg circle all read Weininger, as well as Zemlinsky, Schreker and Pfitzner (Brown, "Understanding Schoenberg as Christ," 133.)

¹³⁹ *Die glückliche Hand* is also notable for its melding together of Weiningerian philosophy and Wagnerian symbols. For a discussion of Weininger, Wagner and Schoenberg, see Brown, *Schoenberg and Redemption*.

¹⁴⁰ Sabler, "La Main du Dramaturge: Le Livret d'Arnold Schoenberg."

Gender roles in *Sex and Character*

Weininger's psycho-philosophical system posited the existence of two polarised elemental psychological dispositions at play in human nature, type M (*Mann/Man*) and W (*Weib/Woman*), which are largely linked, but not wholly so, to biological gender. Type M embodies all admirable attributes of human nature, ethical and moral conscience, logical intelligence, and above all, the creative ability of genius. By contrast, type W amalgamates together a raft of misogynistic tropes, Weininger's woman being essentially soulless and unconscious, a slave to her irrational sexual urges, ruled entirely by base instinct, and incapable of the higher intellectual and creative ambitions of Type M. In short, Weininger argued,

men are capable of a clarity of consciousness and capacity for abstract/logical thinking of a kind that women are not capable of, and their consciousness is one of far less state of clarity.¹⁴¹

There is also a mediating Type J, the Jewish type, which draws heavily on Type W, but with the crucial difference that Type J is capable of moral consciousness, but eschews it deliberately, and is thus consciously unethical. In practice, real human beings are a mixture of these types, with the most talented and able men embodying Type M in as pure a way as possible. Nonetheless, there is a biological root to Weininger's types, which are prescriptive inasmuch as some people are demonstrably incapable of rising above the types which come to define them. The archetypal Woman of Type W is thus appreciable in most women's behaviour, according to Weininger. As with Freud, Weininger's theory of sexual psychology is somewhat deterministic.

Of key significance to Weininger's portrait of the Woman, as well as for our consideration of the Woman in *Die glückliche Hand*, is her sexual appetite and habits. Woman, in Weininger's words,

is completely occupied and content with sexual matters, whilst men are interested in much else, in war and sport, in social affairs and feasting, in philosophy and science, in business and politics, in religion and art. [...] To put it bluntly, man possesses sexual organs, but sexual organs possess women.¹⁴²

In this respect, Weininger's Woman prefigures many dramatic works around the turn of the century where men struggle with women's uncontrollable sexual urges, in genres ranging from social comedy to naturalist and symbolist dramas. Maeterlinck's *Pelleas et Melisande* is one such example, and Wedekind's two *Lulu* plays, *Erdgeist* and *Die Büchse der Pandora* exemplify the same ideas which also found form in Weininger's soulless, sexually predatory woman.

¹⁴¹ Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, 56.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 53, 55.

The Woman in *Die glückliche Hand* is another projection which can be best understood as embodying these ideas. Sabler makes the point that in the libretto, Schoenberg uses the terms *Mann* and *Weib* to indicate the Man and Woman. He could equally have used the word *Herr* to describe the Man, which would have been a valid descriptor but underlined the character's social standing as a man, whereas *Mann* more overtly positions him as of the male sex. The term *Weib*, compared to *Frau*, is fraught with misogynistic connotations, and was uncommon in dramatic literature of the period. Sabler argues that it consequently refers directly to *Sex and Character*, where *Weiblich* is the denotation of type W.¹⁴³

The Woman in *Die glückliche Hand* is not a particularly fleshed-out character, especially since she must convey everything through mime, rather than being able to communicate vocally with the Man and audience. Nonetheless, all the significant behaviour she exhibits aligns very closely with Weininger's prescriptions of Type W. Most notably, she is portrayed as a fickle being governed by base sexual instinct, making a simple choice between the men who expend energy wooing her. She is unable to appreciate the Man's inner worth as a creative being, such ideas being well out of the domain of Type W, and well above her level of comprehension.

By contrast, the Man embodies all the most important characteristics of Type M. He is defined by his ability to act, even with an aggressive, combative attitude, as evidenced by the sword and Turks' heads that he carries at the beginning of the third scene. In particular, he is endowed with a lofty notion of beauty and refined aesthetic sense, and, in contrast to the shallow and sexually impulsive woman, is capable of the elevated emotional state of love. As will be argued subsequently, this, coupled with his unique creative ability, mark him out as able to accede to the highest state of Type M, the genius.

The polarised opposition of character traits between the Man and Woman on stage is further illustrated by their physical separation in Scene 3, where two separate grottos are the setting for spiritually opposed activities, as if each were the exclusive domain of one of Weininger's Types. In the first, the Man has a burst of creative energy, an action of which no Weiningerian woman would ever be capable. In the other, it transpires that the Woman has mindlessly become sexually involved with the Gentleman. So stark is the difference between the realms of these grottos, that in the second half of the scene, the Man cannot even make it on all fours over to the Woman's grotto on the other side of the stage, despite having previously bounded effortlessly over difficult terrain before his act of creation that forms the climax of the opera.

¹⁴³ Sabler, "La Main du Dramaturge: Le Livret d'Arnold Schoenberg," 115.

Genius in *Sex and Character*

Weininger's *Sex and Character* is rightly regarded today as a morally indefensible treatise, positing not only a raft of misogynistic explanations for human behaviour but also prefiguring a number of the racial supremacist ideals which were taken to their logical conclusion in the Nazis' Final Solution. These elements of the book, ubiquitous though they are, are among other things the means of setting up the conditions for an expanded explanation of the nature of genius, which is often overlooked as one of the central concerns of *Sex and Character*, and which, as I now hope to demonstrate, is a central preoccupation of Schoenberg's stage work.

Having set up Type W and Type M in opposition, and ascertained the intellectual and emotional superiority of Type M, Weininger introduces genius as the condition to which men have a duty to aspire, the very highest psychological form of Man. This is a state to which all men have, in principle, the capacity to accede, but it requires a 'supreme active will' of which women are completely incapable:

The life of the male is a more highly conscious life than that of the female, and genius is identical with the highest and widest consciousness. [...] Whilst woman has no consciousness of genius, except as manifested in one particular person, who imposes his personality on her, man has a deep capacity for realising it, a capacity which Carlyle, in his still little understood book on 'Hero-Worship,' has described so fully and permanently. In 'Hero-Worship,' moreover, the idea is definitely insisted on that genius is linked with manhood, that it represents an ideal masculinity in the highest form. Woman has no direct consciousness of it; she borrows a kind of imperfect consciousness from man. Woman, in short, has an unconscious life, man a conscious life, and the genius the most conscious life.¹⁴⁴

According to Weininger, Men alone are capable of realising the high intellectual ideal of love, and concomitantly the ideal of beauty. Beauty is such an otherworldly and profound ideal that it can hardly be contained within man in a raw state. Only a creative genius of the most ideal and pure kind can envision beauty as an ideal and make it manifest within his work without the mediation of a woman as his muse. Beauty is much more commonly manifest as a projection within man's mind of an idealised woman, that is, once man falls in love. Thus, the beauty which the man of genius projects onto his idealised image of woman does not emanate from her, rather it is a projection of man's innate ability and desire to accede to the highest state of Type M, the creative genius.

The illusory, beautiful image of woman which man constructs in his mind bears no relation to woman's reality, as any worldly embodiment of Type W stands in contradiction to the masculine

¹⁴⁴ Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, 67–8.

ideal of beauty. As such, Weininger asserts, the beautiful image which one has constructed and loves can only be maintained at a distance. Once one becomes close to the real object of affection, much more if one yields to woman's uncontrollable sexual appetite, the reality of woman's failings becomes apparent and the illusion of beauty is destroyed. To love a woman, according to Weininger, is a contradiction in terms, as the ideals embodied by woman in reality are so very alien to the profound and otherworldly ideal of love.

In *Die glückliche Hand*, the projection of the Man is Weiningerian not only in his masculine identity, but through aspiring to the level of Weininger's genius. This is revealed through his relationship with the Woman, his adoration of her, and the creative ability which their interaction awakens within him. The Man's gestures of adoration and praise when meeting the woman demonstrate that he is possessed of the profound ideal of love—demonstrations which elicit no reaction whatsoever from the Woman, being psychologically incapable of grasping such an elevated concept. This love exists only as a projection or emanation of desire from the Man, who must project onto her an image of the most profound kind of beauty—in other words, the 'beautiful soul' with which he endows his image of the Woman, and which the audience can plainly see bears little relation to reality. Moreover, in keeping with Weininger's assertion that such love can only exist as an ideal and could be shattered by close proximity or sexual contact, Schoenberg's Man throughout the whole of the second scene and his seduction gazes uninterruptedly ahead, never looking at the woman to his side or behind him. Only once her betrayal comes to light in the third scene does he look at her directly, whereupon the illusion he had maintained of her profound beauty evaporates. The Man's theatrical groan 'Oh,' at this stage of the opera recalls similar cries of suffering of deceived men on stage in drama of this era, constituting a climactic *Schrei*.¹⁴⁵

In this connection, it is interesting to note Schoenberg's comments about the work's title in a lecture he gave in Breslau in 1928 at a staging of *Die glückliche Hand*:

This title, *Die glückliche Hand*, is connected to the text at the end of the second scene, where it says: 'The man does not realise that *she* is gone. To him, she is there at his hand, which he gazes at uninterruptedly.' Perhaps this is also a good opportunity to show what I mean by 'making music with the media of the stage.' Because here, *music is made with ideas*, so to speak. Our extremities, including our hands, serve to carry out our wishes, to express, to make manifest, that which does not have to remain inside. A fortunate [glückliche] hand operates externally, far outside our well-protected self—the farther it reaches, the farther it is from us. Further, a fortunate hand is only 'fortunate fingertips;' and further, a fortunate body is a fortunate hand, is: fortunate fingertips. A

¹⁴⁵ Sabler, "La Main du Dramaturge: Le Livret d'Arnold Schoenberg," 119.

fortune at your fingertips: 'You, who have the other-worldly within you, long for that which is earthly...?'¹⁴⁶

Schoenberg's somewhat enigmatic explanation¹⁴⁷ is clarified in the light of Weininger's ideas on genius and creation. Through his interaction with the Woman, the Man is instilled with not only love but concomitantly a concept of profound beauty which allows him to create; Schoenberg melds together these ideas through the actions of the man's Hand—it is both the hand with which he once touches the Woman, and the hand he uses to raise the sledgehammer to create the diadem. Having been instilled with a concept of love, he metamorphoses into the highest form of Type M, the genius, and is endowed with not only the masculine energy of a combatant but also the ability to create a work of inspiration.

Schoenberg himself notes the polarisation between the other-worldly and the earthly in relation to this act of creation—he who has an artistic fortune at his fingertips still longs for that which is worldly. The chorus' warning at the outset of the opera can also be explained by Weininger's philosophy, since the Man is unable to contain within him the concept of beauty without a worldly object of infatuation as a container for it. The inevitable disappointment that they predict and caution him against is inescapable, as Weininger too warns that upon close inspection, the worldly reality of the woman will inevitably fail to measure up to the 'beautiful soul' he has projected.

A number of important things begin to become clarified in the light of Weininger's philosophy. Firstly, it becomes clear that this is a much more nuanced and rounded portrait of sexual politics than is immediately apparent to a modern interpreter. Schoenberg's intended contemporary audience was undoubtedly educated, and will have spotted, among the other portents in this highly symbolic drama, a representation of the Weiningerian soulless *femme fatale*.

It is perhaps because this connection with Weininger was no longer immediately apparent to later commentators that the Gerstl affair seemed a more obvious explanation for the origin of its symbolism. In the wake of the affair, Schoenberg will have perhaps have drawn some succour from the pages of *Sex and Character*, and decided that it was perhaps inevitable that a creative man would not be able to enjoy a woman's company in an uncomplicated way. Perhaps this engendered

¹⁴⁶ Schoenberg, "The Breslau Lecture on Die glückliche Hand," 107.

¹⁴⁷ One critic at the time, who gave an earnest but mixed review to the 1928 Breslau performance, and who was present at Schoenberg's lecture, described it thus: 'It was wonderful to see this genius groping around at first in his lecture till he found firm ground (and contact). He then continued, going higher and higher, until he lost himself finally in the distance in a spoken, but nevertheless almost musical fantasy on the obscure title of his work. These introductory words also were chamber music by one filled with and possessed by music.' (O.G., "Review of Die glückliche Hand at German Premiere in Breslau; Königsberger Hartungsche Zeitung, April 24 1928," 274.

a sympathy for Weininger's philosophy which conditioned the portrayal of the Man and Woman on stage in *Die glückliche Hand*. It would be problematic to assert, however, that these two characters are straightforward embodiments of Schoenberg and Mathilde enacting the private events of two summers past, and much less that the Gentleman is a representation of Gerstl, even if Schoenberg may well have interpreted his marital difficulties in the light of Weininger's philosophy.

Schoenberg's explanation that the title of the opera itself relates to the hand which serves 'to express, to make manifest, that which does not have to remain inside' is instructive, as it confirms that the protagonist's identity as an artist is of central concern to Schoenberg's program. As an *Ich* drama about a creative artist, *Die glückliche Hand* could perhaps then best be contextualised among other *Künstler-opern*, or 'creative artist operas', of which there are many other examples from the early twentieth century, such as Schreker's *Christophorus*, Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*, and Pfitzner's *Palestrina*.

As well as deriving from Weininger the notion of a genius able to create once inspired by illusory love for a woman, there were other highly idealised conceptualisations of the artist and the nature of artistic creation which Schoenberg held in particularly high regard at the time of the conception and composition of *Die glückliche Hand*, and which were given form in the portrayal of the central Man and his act of creation. We should turn to examine these in order to understand the ways in which they informed the portrayal of this central artistic protagonist.

Schoenberg's Self-Concept as Artist

Schoenberg's self-concept as artist underwent a significant change in the period during which he was composing *Die glückliche Hand*, and an examination of his changing attitude will further our understanding of the representation of the Man as artist.¹⁴⁸ Of particular relevance to this consideration is Schoenberg's correspondence with Kandinsky while at work on the score, in which Schoenberg repeatedly stressed the importance of direct expression of the unconscious as a guarantor of the authenticity of genuine art.

In their first exchange of letters, Schoenberg and Kandinsky were delighted to discover in the other a likeminded artistic outlook. Both were, in the earliest days of what would later be termed Expressionist art, intent on faithfully giving voice to the innermost and most private aspects of their experience through a process of expression unmediated by societal conditioning. Schoenberg replies enthusiastically to Kandinsky's first letter, affirming that

what you call the 'unlogical', ... I call the 'elimination of the conscious will in art. ... Art belongs to the *unconscious!* One must express *oneself!* Express oneself *directly!*¹⁴⁹

In his early atonal works, as he grappled with the problem of structuring music without any tonal centre, this ideal offered a way of justifying his new, apparently chaotic musical idiom. Posed as unmitigated, spontaneous expression, his music could not be criticised as artistically inauthentic, however ugly it may appear to its detractors. Schoenberg went still further, however, tearing down not only tonality in pursuit of his new music but also, for a short while, conventional form. As he writes to Kandinsky,

all form-making, all conscious form-making, is connected with some kind of mathematics, or geometry, or with the golden section or suchlike. But only unconscious form-making, which sets up the equation 'form=outward shape,' really creates forms; that alone brings forth prototypes which are imitated by unoriginal people and become 'formulas.' But whoever is capable of listening to himself, recognising his own instincts, and also engrossing himself reflectively in every problem, will not need such crutches.¹⁵⁰

Schoenberg's aphoristic pieces from this period are thus short because Schoenberg had begun to deliberately eschew conventional forms with which to structure a larger music argument. *Erwartung* is famously athematic, and the 'colourful, uninterrupted variation of colours, rhythms

¹⁴⁸ The fullest account of Schoenberg's change in attitude over the course of composing *Die glückliche Hand* is given by Joseph Auner in "Heart and Brain in Music."

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Schoenberg to Kandinsky, 24th January 1911 (Kandinsky and Schoenberg, "The Schoenberg-Kandinsky Correspondence," 23.)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

and moods' in the Five Orchestral Pieces are clearly the only structural justification he felt his atonal idiom needed.

Furthermore, as Auner has argued, both his and Kandinsky's motivation for attempting to write dramatic works at this time were motivated by a desire to free themselves from the technical constraints of the inherited techniques of their respective artforms,¹⁵¹ and likewise did Schoenberg justify his decision to begin painting in earnest in the years 1910-12.¹⁵² It apparently seemed to the composer that, as he felt himself to be overflowing with expressive potential and was determined to break with inherited techniques and forms, he should be able to make an original contribution to the visual arts as well as music. As he wrote defensively to Karl Moll, who as co-founder of the Vienna Secession had discouraged him from exhibiting his painting publically, 'I have always been able to do only that which is suited to me—absolutely, immediately and almost without any transition or preparation.'¹⁵³ Kandinsky himself evidently judged his efforts a success, writing in 1912 that 'Schoenberg's pictorial works enable us to recognise, beneath the stamp of his own form, his spiritual complex.'¹⁵⁴

Eventually however, Schoenberg outgrew his ambitions in painting—it is perhaps inevitable that he came to realise that his technical shortcomings would ultimately limit him. In the *Blaue Reiter* exhibition his muted colours and small, introspective images made little impression next to Kandinsky's sprawling canvases and vivid juxtapositions of colours and shapes. It ultimately proved too difficult for Schoenberg to reconcile his deeply-felt need for primacy of creation and the obvious artistic advantage of a honed technique. His writings from this period attest to this struggle—in the 1909 essay 'On Music Criticism' for example, he maintains that to communicate through an artform truly intuitively, one must master its technique only to throw off these shackles entirely, a remark that can be read as overt self-justification for his dispensing altogether with tonality, as well as his turn towards athenaticism and eschewing of large-scale forms.¹⁵⁵

Die glückliche Hand occupies a unique position in this narrative of Schoenberg's wrestling with ideals of artistic form. The central climax of the work depicts an act of authentic, spontaneous creation, accomplished in a flash of inspiration in contrast to the laborious, mechanical production

¹⁵¹ Auner, "Heart and Brain in Music," 119.

¹⁵² Schoenberg's paintings date from 1908 and largely tail off after 1912, although he continued to paint sporadically throughout his life (da Costa Meyer, "Schoenberg's Echo: The Composer as Painter," 37, 43.)

¹⁵³ Letter from Schoenberg to Carl Moll, 16th June 1910, quoted in Kallir, *Arnold Schoenberg's Vienna*, 44.

¹⁵⁴ Kandinsky contributed an article entitled 'The Pictures' to a 1912 Festschrift organised by Schoenberg's pupils, in which he praised the original pictorial form Schoenberg had found for his inner experience (Kandinsky, "The Pictures," 126.)

¹⁵⁵ Schoenberg, "About Music Criticism," 191–2.

of the workers. Moreover, the Man splits apart the anvil, literally shattering the previous artistic paradigm and form, which could not contain the force of his spontaneous expression. In the process, by virtue of the superior capabilities of genius with which he is by implication endowed, he creates an artefact of dazzling complexity and beauty. This is a clear projection of an ideal which was both important to his self-conception as an artist, and also representative of his creative practice. He described the process of writing his first string quartet, for example, as follows:

Usually taking morning walks, I composed in my mind 40 to 80 measures complete in almost every detail. I needed only two or three hours to copy down these large sections from memory [...] (which even a fast writer could not copy in less time than it took me to compose them) [...].¹⁵⁶

One of Schoenberg's greatest successes in this regard had been the composition of *Erwartung*, the draft of which had been completed in only seventeen days. In his essay 'Heart and Brain in Music', Schoenberg gives numerous examples of this kind of feat, by implication pointing to the effortless with which he created as an irrefutable indication of his genius. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the very title of *Die glückliche Hand* draws attention to this quality of genius. As Hans Keller pointed out:

'Lucky' and *glücklich* overlap, but whereas in 'lucky', the element of chance obtrudes, there is a German idiom, *er hat eine glückliche Hand* (he has a lucky hand) which means, not that he tends to be lucky, but on the contrary, that he doesn't depend on luck because that he is so gifted that, to express it crudely, 'he has the knack of it'. What Schoenberg characteristically did was to change the object of the idiom into a subject and this into a symbol. 'The Blessed Hand' or 'The Favoured Hand' would be correct translations if they did not inflate Schoenberg's understanding title which, paradoxically enough, cannot be rendered in English. Properly understood, the title gives the point of the work ...¹⁵⁷

The composition of *Die glückliche Hand*, however, was a protracted process, and the score was written in fits and starts over a period of three years. The irony of suffering creative block over an opera which featured an act of spontaneous creation as its subject was not lost on Schoenberg, who wrote to Berg in the summer of 1911 quoting directly from the libretto, complaining that he was curious to know 'how one makes jewels'.¹⁵⁸

His means of overcoming the difficulties he encountered writing *Die glückliche Hand* represented something of a retreat from the ideals he had previously espoused. In the later stages of composition, he began to have recourse once more to traditional techniques, such as imitative

¹⁵⁶ Schoenberg, "Heart and Brain in Music," 61.

¹⁵⁷ Keller, "The 'Lucky' Hand and Other Errors", 74

¹⁵⁸ Postcard from Schoenberg to Berg, 25th August 1911, Schoenberg and Berg, *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters*, 11.

counterpoint, fugal constructions, and canon in inversion, working them into his atonal idiom alongside the material already written.¹⁵⁹ It is significant that this shift occurred around the same time he began to give up painting,¹⁶⁰ as well as his abandonment of non-repetitive, aphoristic compositions.¹⁶¹ As such it marks the renunciation of some of the ideals he had only recently been enthusiastically espousing in correspondence with Kandinsky. It could perhaps be said that to some extent Schoenberg bowed to inevitability in readmitting traditional forms to his ‘new music’, given the inherent problems with structuring music around simple variation in colour and texture, even with the aid of a literary narrative.

In the decades that followed, and especially once he had established dodecaphony as a totemic means of systematising structure in new music, Schoenberg began to actively divert attention from many of the ideals he had espoused in his early atonal period. As is well known, Schoenberg spent a great deal of energy contextualising his work as standing in the lineage of the great composers of the Austro-German tradition, and continuing their legacy into the uncharted territory of atonal music. Now intent on emphasising the logical continuity between his later works and the traditions from which they had evolved, Schoenberg had to forego the ‘illogical’ ideal of the ‘elimination of the conscious will in art’ and in doing so had also to give up that part of him that aspired to embody the image of the god-like Romantic creator in *Die glückliche Hand*.¹⁶² It is difficult to assess what Schoenberg of 1911 might truly have made of his subsequent systematisation of atonal music, and whether he would consider it among the ‘crutches’ he warned Kandinsky about.

In addition to displaying obvious signs of exceptional creative ability, Schoenberg’s self-concept as artist and genius was informed by one further conviction that is directly relevant to understanding *Die glückliche Hand*: that it is the fate of the great and original genius to suffer persecution and misunderstanding, and to be the object of envy. As Schoenberg increasingly came to see himself as one of the great composers of the Austro-German tradition, he effectively considered himself in Hegelian terms as a figure of world-historical significance.¹⁶³ The cult of genius which had always surrounded him came to justify the grandiosity of this self-image—Berg, for example, rewrote

¹⁵⁹ In writing *Pierrot Lunaire* in 1912, he had been able to experiment with these techniques in an atonal idiom, though in a more ironic and parodistic way.

¹⁶⁰ His move away from painting could also in part be attributed to an increase in the number of musical engagements, including the 1912 tour of *Pierrot Lunaire*.

¹⁶¹ Crawford, “Schoenberg’s Artistic Development to 1911,” 184–5.

¹⁶² Auner, “Heart and Brain in Music,” 124.

¹⁶³ For a discussion see Donin, “War Schönberg ein Hegelianischer Heros? Über die Unumgängliche Isomorphie zwischen Universal- und Musikgeschichte.”

Riemann's dictionary entry on Bach with minor changes to describe Schoenberg.¹⁶⁴ Given the exalted status he cultivated among his following of students, it seems clear that Schoenberg found it difficult to accept incomprehension or criticism, and remained extremely sensitive to it throughout his life.¹⁶⁵ The position he outlines in his 1937 article 'How One Becomes Lonely' not only attests to the extent to which he felt such criticism very deeply, but also stands as a justification for the image of the persecuted artist he had long adopted. Self-importance and self-pity can both be discerned in the article, which ends with the words 'There might come the promise of a new day of sunlight in music such as I would like to offer the world.'¹⁶⁶

The image of Schoenberg as a perpetually persecuted artist of unique talent is one which has been handed down to us by Schoenberg himself in such articles, as well as through the public affirmations of his disciple-like students and other people drawn into his circle. As one example of many, the writer Franz Werfel, four years into his marriage to Alma Mahler, gave a reminiscence of Schoenberg in 1934:

In Arnold Schoenberg's personality and art we honour above all his relentless striving towards the Absolute, a greatness and a strength of will and an ideal of perfection, which is scarcely comprehensible to a purposeless and mindless group of contemporaries. [...] Thus he achieves in the strong and courageous loneliness of the mystic, devoid of approval and sympathy, a work of the highest spiritual conception, for which a more powerfully minded and finer spiritually developed era will be able to find judgement.¹⁶⁷

This image of Schoenberg has only recently begun to receive critical attention—Esteban Buch has recently examined the reception which Schoenberg received in Vienna and argued that the rhetoric that the Schoenberg school resorted to about the difficult reception they faced was in fact somewhat exaggerated, and to some extent mythologised.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Sabine Feisst has demonstrated that Schoenberg's reception in America in his last two decades was by no means as hostile or uncomprehending as has often been believed, and was in fact often warmly admiratory and appreciative.¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the Man in *Die glückliche Hand* lives in a perpetual state of

¹⁶⁴ Berg's rewritten biography was published in Die Musik, Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*, 129.

¹⁶⁵ This created an atmosphere that some close to the Schoenberg circle found difficult to tolerate, such as the philosopher Karl Popper, who took exception to the circle's *esprit de partie* and internal squabbling, describing the Society for Private Musical Performance as being 'like a Communist cell, full of conspiracy.' (Hacohen, *Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945*, 100.) For a further discussion, see Brown, *Schoenberg and Redemption*, 38ff.

¹⁶⁶ Schoenberg, "How One Becomes Lonely," 53.

¹⁶⁷ Armitage, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 205.

¹⁶⁸ See Buch, *Le Cas Schönberg: Naissance de l'Avant-Garde Musicale*.

¹⁶⁹ See Feisst, *Schoenberg's New World: The American Years*.

antagonism with his society, between facing the treachery of the deceitful Woman and workers who aggressively resent the Man's creative talents. The chorus warn him from the beginning that such adversity is inevitable and perpetual.

The rest of this chapter will discuss two of the principal influences on Schoenberg which may have contributed to this aspect of his self-image as an endlessly persecuted artist. First, we will consider the personal affinity which Schoenberg felt towards Strindberg and the aspects of the Scandinavian playwright's life and work which Schoenberg saw paralleling his own. Both were artists who considered themselves victimised by their societies, and their shared personality traits and intellectual preoccupations mean that this is one of several important themes that their work has in common.

Secondly, we will consider the impact of the poetry of Stefan George on Schoenberg. George adopted a deliberately confrontational relationship to wider society, and, like Schoenberg, gathered a group of disciple-like students who revered him in quasi-messianic terms. Schoenberg's discovery of George's poetry came at a pivotal moment in his artistic development, coinciding more or less exactly with his breakthrough into atonality, two years before his composition of *Die glückliche Hand*. As I shall argue, a great deal of the symbolism of Schoenberg's opera overlaps with themes of George's poetry, particularly of those poems which Schoenberg chose to set to music.

Schoenberg and Strindberg's Shared Affinities

Schoenberg and Strindberg shared a number of remarkable similarities, both in their personalities and outward interests. Both were comparably modernist and innovative in their approach to their respective artforms, and each veered between overbearing self-assurance and crippling self-doubt. As such, they were keen to surround themselves with likeminded disciples, and went to extreme lengths in seeking to justify their artistic trajectories. They both exemplified, in their own way, the figure of the *artiste maudit*, scorned by society and forced to enter into a confrontational relationship with the artistic establishment, with the generated opprobrium implicitly standing as a vindication of true artistic worth.

The central character of *Die glückliche Hand* is a clear projection of this *artiste maudit*, singular in his creative ability, but entirely isolated, rejected by the Woman and nearly assaulted by the Workers. In this chapter I will argue that this figure represents a consciously projected self-image, and to depict him, Schoenberg drew on his own experience and other ideas which had cultural currency at the time. To fully understand and contextualise this projected image, it will be necessary first to discuss Schoenberg's relationship to Strindberg, as there are many aspects to Strindberg's life and work which Schoenberg considered to reflect his own image. In due course, I will consider the ways in which Schoenberg adopted aspects of Stefan George's heroic imagery to further flesh out this image of the Man in *Die glückliche Hand*. Finally, I will consider Schoenberg's own artistic methods and values at the time he conceived of *Die glückliche Hand* to illustrate the ways in which the opera projects the most fundamentally important ideals of his self-image as a creative artist.

For now, it will first be necessary to consider Schoenberg's affinity for Strindberg both in light of their shared personality traits, and also the metaphysical preoccupations which they both employed as justification for their outlook and creative ambitions. The figure of the Man in *Die glückliche Hand*, and the trials he undergoes, are intended to be understood within a context which is far from obvious to a modern audience, but which can be clarified by considering the two artists' interest in Swedenborgian ideas, particularly as described through Balzac's *Séraphita*. Finally, the possibility will be explored that Schoenberg may have been closely influenced in his choice of material and symbolism in *Die glückliche Hand* by a passage in Strindberg's *Inferno* which contains many of the most important symbols and aspects of the work's setting.

Schoenberg's 'persecution complex'

As well as his interest in Strindberg's dramatic achievements, which was discussed in some detail in Chapter 1, it is clear that Schoenberg took an interest in the dramatist's personality.

Schoenberg's earliest written allusion to Strindberg is in fact among what look like idle scribbles on the back of a letter that he received in April 1909:

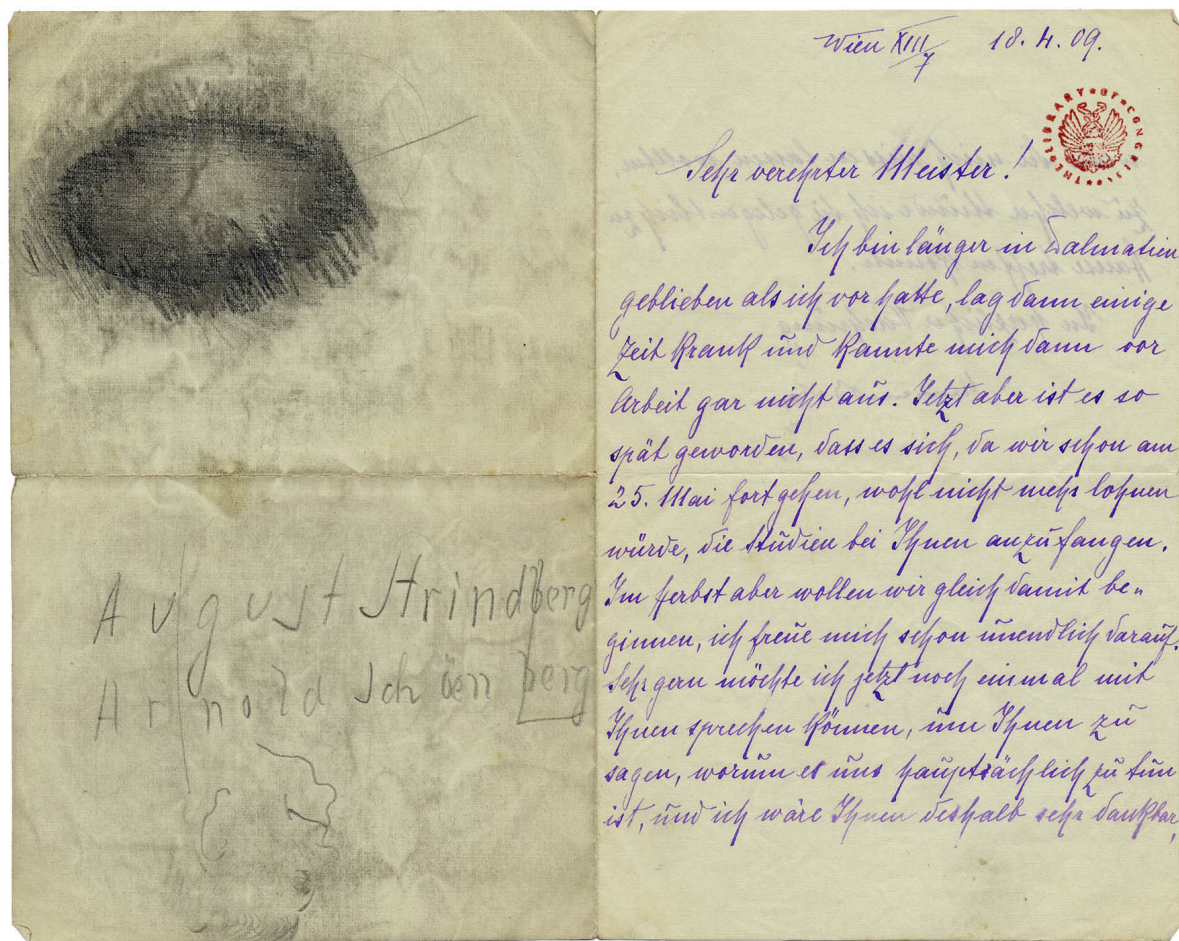


Fig. 5: Letter to Schoenberg from Hermann Bahr, 18th April 1909

As can be seen, Schoenberg noted the similarities between his own name and Strindberg's, stressing their same initials, the same number of letters, and the shared '-berg' in their surnames. Implicitly, in a private moment Schoenberg was comparing his own artistic personality, and perhaps destiny, to that of a contemporary artistic figure of towering notoriety and importance. This is not implausible, especially when one bears in mind both Schoenberg's fanciful superstition and his well-known inferiority complex around this time.

Schoenberg's pupils also looked earnestly for a reflection of Strindberg in their revered teacher. Among Second Viennese School composers, Berg is known to have held Strindberg in particularly high regard, and there are extensive references to Strindberg in his published letters where he praises the dramatist in the highest terms. To take just one example, on 20 November 1911 he

wrote to his wife likening a Strindberg book to a Mahler symphony as examples of God's finest creations.¹⁷⁰

In light of this, perhaps it is no surprise that he wrote to Schoenberg late in 1911, in response to a downhearted letter from his teacher, reassuring him that

something magnificent is growing within you, your gaze is so fixed on the future that you can no longer see the past, indeed, perhaps no longer the present. But you must believe *us*, who live in your works, me above all, as I'm now experiencing the unique joy of immersing myself in the *Gurrelieder*; indeed of being engulfed by it, staggering from one treasure to another like a drunken man—you must believe me, when I swear to you that your works belong to the very, very highest, that they can only be considered in company with those of Beethoven, Mozart, Wagner, and Mahler and that all others are beneath them. They really are, as Webern wrote to me yesterday: "emanations from God [Ausstrahlungen Gottes]:

Beethoven—Kant

Wagner—Schopenhauer

Schoenberg—Strindberg"¹⁷¹

There are a number of reasons why this link to Strindberg may have seemed an attractive one for the Schoenberg circle to posit. As much an object of notoriety as of admiration for his dramatic experiments and unusual personal and political inclinations, Strindberg was a figure of international renown by the 1900s, and Schoenberg must surely have felt an affinity, perhaps mixed with envy, for this iconoclast. Similarities between the two men abound; one of the most notable is that, like Schoenberg, Strindberg was keen to surround himself with a following of disciples in the various circles he moved between. Schoenberg's close-knit group of pupils famously revered him as a messiah-like figure, with the above letter from Berg standing only as one of many examples of their effusive praise, very often religious in their tone, and especially drawing on images of martyrdom.¹⁷²

Strindberg, although he was far more peripatetic than Schoenberg, and moved in a number of different circles as his interests changed over time, was no less keen to amass a following of disciples. At one point in 1897, as his interest in alchemical chemistry was at its height, he wrote to his mother-in-law Marie Uhl:

¹⁷⁰ Letter from Berg to his wife, Helene Berg, 20th November 1911 (Berg, *Alban Berg: Letters to His Wife*, 132).

¹⁷¹ Letter from Berg to Schoenberg, 23rd December 1911 (Schoenberg and Berg, *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters*, 61.) Berg is quoting Webern's letter to him of the 17th December.

¹⁷² Examples of the religious praise Schoenberg's pupils heaped upon him can be found, with a discussion, in Brown, "Understanding Schoenberg as Christ."

I shall rent a laboratory, where I shall have the right to work, and to train disciples if I find any. In this laboratory, surrounded by friends and disciples, I would like to aim at the Nobel Prize [for chemistry]. My Paris friends, the chemists, expect this of me!¹⁷³

A certain megalomania is also in evidence in passages such as this, of which this is just one of many examples—only a week later he wrote again to Marie Uhl, saying that he felt sure that, once finished, his quasi-autobiographical account of his breakdown, *Inferno*, would assuredly win him the Nobel Prize, this time for literature.¹⁷⁴ Schoenberg will no doubt have been aware of this trait in Strindberg's personality, as *Inferno* was published in German in 1910.

It could also reasonably be said that Schoenberg shared this self-assured streak, not least because he gave his 'heartiest thanks' for Berg's 'very, very dear letter' rather than contest the validity of the assertion that his works were 'emanations from God'.¹⁷⁵ Schoenberg's most notorious utterance, about claiming to have assured the supremacy of the German music for the next hundred years, may be apocryphal, but its persistence as an anecdote stems from the fact that its tone is consistent with the many other self-assured statements that Schoenberg made about his work.¹⁷⁶

This aspect of his personality is borne out, moreover, through the impressions of his colleagues from around this period. To the pianist-composer Ferruccio Busoni, who was a far less intimate acquaintance than Berg, he wrote in 1911, when appealing to Busoni to use his own influence to secure him employment in Berlin:

You need have no fear that I am a bad conductor. In fact I am most certainly an excellent one! How could I not be, for I am able to rehearse my own pieces!!! There is nothing more difficult than that, and rehearsing is the most important part of it all!¹⁷⁷

Schoenberg unfortunately came across as self-important often enough that Busoni related this impression of Schoenberg to Emil Hertzka, the director at Universal Edition, who published both composers' works:

¹⁷³ Letter from Strindberg to Marie Uhl, 16 February 1897, quoted in Meyer, *Strindberg: A Biography*, 363.

¹⁷⁴ Despite his lifelong obsession with the awards, and his international reputation, each year Strindberg was denied a Nobel prize, which in the minds of many of his supporters amounted to a conspiracy within the Swedish awarding body, and further evidence of embedded antipathy towards Strindberg in his homeland.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Schoenberg to Berg, 28th December 1911: Schoenberg and Berg, *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters*, 62.

¹⁷⁶ For a discussion of the history of this anecdote, see the article by the composer's grandson, E. Randol Schoenberg, "The Most Famous Thing He Never Said."

¹⁷⁷ Letter from Schoenberg to Busoni, 11 September 1911 (Busoni, *Ferruccio Busoni: Selected Letters*, 412.)

Schoenberg has done nothing for me. Thus it is characteristic of our correspondence that S. speaks only of himself, while I have spoken only of him and about him.¹⁷⁸

Like Schoenberg, Strindberg only received the wider recognition he craved in the later stages of his career. In January 1912, on the occasion of his 63rd birthday, which was to be his last, Strindberg received a shower of cards and telegrams from admirers wishing him well. When a Stockholm newspaper editor contacted him to ask about the congratulations he had received, he wrote a characteristically introspective reply, which was subsequently reprinted in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on Saturday 27 January. Schoenberg happened to read it and notes in his diary the likeminded personality that he intuited in Strindberg's note of thanks:

Could have been [written] by me. Exactly my sentiments and experiences: the devotion and humility versus a compliment one does not feel worthy of; on the other hand the arrogance and the indignation when deserved recognition has been withdrawn.¹⁷⁹

Schoenberg's diary was evidently conceived on some level as a document left for the sake of future generations—his first entry on January 20 1912 describes how he would have liked to note down what he can remember from his early life first of all, but that this had proved an insurmountable task that had delayed him starting his diary for a decade.¹⁸⁰ Apparently then, a comprehensive autobiography would have been the ideal final form of his diary, and we should perhaps understand that we are at least on some level his intended audience. As such, his noted recognition of Strindberg's arrogance as a character trait they had in common is interesting in its import. Without doubting Schoenberg's sincerity in the comparison he draws, it could reasonably be described as a consciously cultivated likeness here, as elsewhere.

The article from the *Berliner Tageblatt* to which Schoenberg refers does not seem to have been examined so far in light of his interest in it, so I have reproduced it in its entirety as Appendix I, with an English translation. The particular paragraph which he was likely referring to is as follows (italics are those of the original article):

To those who did not quite believe my modesty, because they have heard me overestimate myself in unguarded moments, I would like to say: *If one is treated with palpable injustice, one must defend oneself, and in this self-defence one will have to emphasize one's merits. As such, one is more frequently arrogant in unpleasant circumstances, while one feels himself unworthy and humble in the face of success. Some are robbed of their self-confidence by systematic underestimation, but in compensating for this weakness they quickly yield to the temptation to kick over the traces and fight fire with fire. It is the truly misunderstood person, "who sits in the*

¹⁷⁸ Letter from Busoni to Emil Hertzka, 16 December 1909 (Ibid., 402.)

¹⁷⁹ Schoenberg, "Attempt at a Diary," 16.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

*tavern blowing his own trumpet”, in order to have the illusion for a moment that that is who he is.*¹⁸¹

Strindberg’s remarks are intended as a pre-emptive defence against the charge that his gratitude for the flood of birthday wishes which he had received was insincere. By comparison, one month earlier, in Schoenberg’s own response to Berg’s letter quoted above, by way of explaining his low mood, he replies:

This is an inner matter I have to deal with—or not—by myself. I have experienced it very, very often before and it was always followed by periods of self-delusion (as I must call it now) that made life easier for me. That has nothing to do with success and failure. It’s a kind of persecution complex; an insight can persecute one too.¹⁸²

Where Strindberg describes having his ‘self-confidence robbed by systematic underestimation’, Schoenberg refers to being persecuted by insight, having previously only been happy in periods of ‘self-delusion’. And both artists identify and describe this trait in almost identical circumstances: Schoenberg, having been given the highest possible praise from Berg, could only give a muted reply, while Strindberg, having received a mound of ecstatic birthday wishes, felt the need in his note of thanks to defend against anticipated hostility and criticism—a ‘persecution complex’ to rival Schoenberg’s.

The similarity Schoenberg draws between himself and Strindberg, however, encompasses both their ‘sentiments and experiences’—Strindberg in his note explains his resort to arrogance in the face of ‘unpleasant circumstances’, having been ‘treated with palpable injustice.’ Whether understood as mere projections of their ‘persecution complex’ or objective and demonstrable difficulties from the outside world, Schoenberg believed, like Strindberg, he was treated unjustly as a matter of routine, and that his recourse to overcompensation was a valid response, and one demonstrated and justified by another major modernist artist in a parallel field to his own.

This very overcompensation can be said to find a form in *Die glückliche Hand*. The central scene where Schoenberg’s Man both faces a hostile group of workers and performs his miraculous act of creation is the climax of the piece, and the point at which the image of the Man as artist is revealed. This is an explicit image of vindication—the audience is plainly able to see that the diadem is an object of self-evident beauty, and that the workers’ blindness to its obvious worth is a failing on their part. As such, the audience observes this scene as if from Schoenberg’s own point of view, able to see the beauty of his controversial creation. The furious workers who make a move

¹⁸¹ Strindberg, “Strindbergs Dank,” 2.

¹⁸² Letter from Schoenberg to Berg, 28th December 1911: Schoenberg and Berg, *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters*, 62.

as if about to pounce on the Man enact that persecution that Schoenberg and Strindberg felt they faced on a daily basis. In particular, as a projection of his own artistic capabilities, Schoenberg himself is overemphasising his own merits through heightening the depiction of this act of creation to a miraculous, performative act—exactly the overcompensation that Strindberg describes.

Such a highly dramatised act of creation, combined with its unjustifiable, hostile reaction, illustrates that Schoenberg considered outside persecution as a vindicating attestation of the talents of a great artist. This is an absolutely central theme for Strindberg, and he went to huge lengths to justify and explain the persecution he encountered as proof of his worth as an artist, drawing particularly on the ideas of the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, a writer who also came to interest Schoenberg. His interests in superstition, occultism and Christian philosophy in the later years of his life were drawn together to explain and support a self-image remarkably similar to Schoenberg's own, as projected in *Die glückliche Hand*.

Shared superstition

In Schoenberg and Strindberg's day, a sincerely held interest in superstition and the occult was considered neither as faddish or absurd as it generally is today. Weininger summed up the preoccupation of his age in one passage from *Sex and Character*:

Man's new experiences acquire a deeper significance because of his past, which is always present to him, and hence the great man and only the great man, feels that he himself is in very truth a 'man of destiny.' And so it comes that great men are always more 'superstitious' than average men.¹⁸³

Strindberg's interest in superstitious and occult phenomena increased significantly during the 1890s, and from 1896 he kept an 'Occult Diary', in which he recorded coincidences, dreams and fantasies, as well as any signs or symbols of perceived importance, such as the movements of animals and numbers on train tickets.¹⁸⁴ This was not a fanciful pastime, but a serious occupation. Occultism was an established interest in *fin de siècle* culture, especially in Paris, where Strindberg spent many years of his life; additionally, the sincerity of his interest was strengthened by his search for the means of explaining his increasingly frequent psychotic incidents.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, 76.

¹⁸⁴ Passages from this diary, which he kept sporadically up to his death, have been subsequently published in English as *From an Occult Diary*. Since *Inferno* is a semi-fictionalised account of this period, many of the passages from the *Occult Diary* were used directly.

¹⁸⁵ Unfortunately the absolute sincerity with which he both looked for omens and signs, and believed in other, more spiritual realms, also made him an easy target for his friends' pranks. The composer Frederick Delius recalls inviting Strindberg to a séance one evening and waiting for the spirits to tap out a message to

In a somewhat interesting parallel, at the outbreak of World War I, Schoenberg also kept a diary to catalogue his superstitious interests, in this case the movements of clouds, which he tried to tie to events in the war so that he might be able to read future signs about the evolution of the conflict.¹⁸⁶ He explains his rationale for this enterprise in his first entry of 24 September, 1914:

Many people, like myself today, will have tried to interpret the events of war by the sky, since finally the belief in higher powers and also in God has returned [...] Repeatedly I noticed that 'golden glitter,' 'victory-wind,' a 'deep blue sky,' 'bloody clouds' (at sunset) always preceded victorious German events. Likewise, heavy deterioration of the weather with storm and rain, deep black clouds of eerie impression anticipated bad turns at the Austro-Russian front.¹⁸⁷

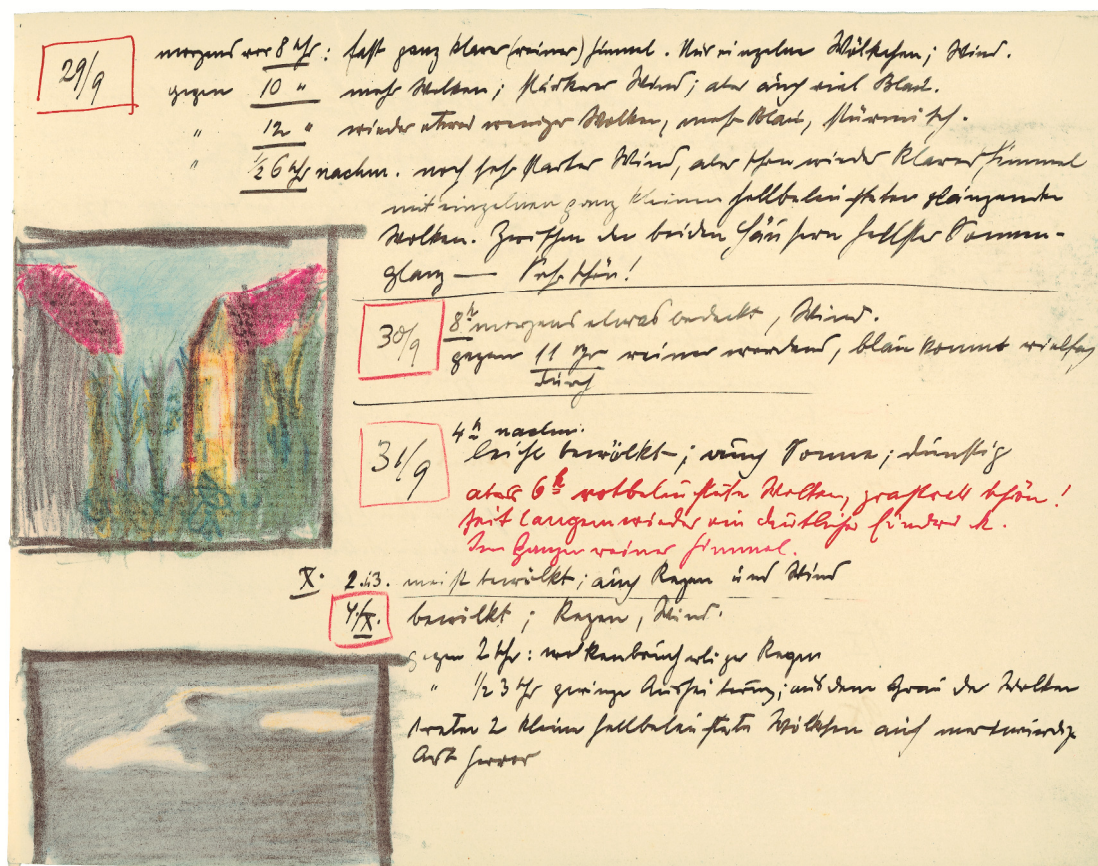


Fig. 6: Page from Schoenberg's War-Clouds diary

participants on the table: 'The first letter rapped out was M, and with each letter Strindberg's interest and excitement seemed to increase, and slowly came the momentous letters "MERDE". I do not think he ever quite forgave us for this.' (Warlock, *Frederick Delius*, 51.)

¹⁸⁶ Buchmayr, "Cela Pourrait Venir de Moi' - L'admiration d'Arnold Schoenberg pour August Strindberg," 148.

¹⁸⁷ Schoenberg, "War-Clouds Diary," 61. The War-Clouds diary was published in 1986 in the Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute, in German with an English translation. It can be seen that Schoenberg wrote in occasionally Romantic prose, reading metaphors for battle in the sky. Eventually he became disillusioned with the idea and his entries became more sporadic, with only a handful of entries in 1915 up to June.

There are two important aspects to this shared superstition: the importance it grants to symbolic interpretation and reasoning, and its roots in troubled faith. Both aspects are brought together in Strindberg's active interest in alchemy—the analytical psychologist Carl Jung devoted the later years of his life to exploring the parallels between alchemical processes and the importance of the symbols contained therein for psychological workings-out in the alchemist's mind. Strindberg's modern biographer Michael Meyer is in no doubt that his considerable efforts in this field amounted to 'a symbol of defiant unwillingness to accept the existence of God, and of his search for an alternative explanation of the human condition.'¹⁸⁸

Given Strindberg's religious struggles in the last decade of his life, the occult offered him the means of an explanation for his intense personal suffering and the external hostility he experienced (both real and the product of his paranoid delusions). The idea that his was a uniquely spiritual path to follow, on which his own particular striving was the sign of a special pre-ordained destiny, allowed him to fashion a narrative about his life which lent meaning to his personal ordeals. There is evidence to suggest that, in works such as *Die glückliche Hand*, Schoenberg evolved a comparable myth of self and vision of his life, explaining his suffering as preordained by powers higher than himself.

It is particularly interesting that Schoenberg makes the distinction between 'belief in higher powers and also in God'. Superstition and faith were constantly recurring themes in his life, and once transformed into symbolic language, aspects of each could be coherently combined in works such as *Die glückliche Hand*. In this instance, the chorus is the most important embodiment of these themes, as a portent of the Man's exalted destiny, but also commenting from a position of otherworldly, spiritual wisdom. Aspects of superstition, fate and faith are intertwined to an even further degree in Schoenberg's original paintings for the opera's set, where their faces in fact number thirteen rather than twelve, intimating unluckiness and at the same time warning of the importance of spiritual striving. Schoenberg was famously triskaidekaphobic, and his eventual death on Friday 13 July 1951 was thus a piquant irony.¹⁸⁹ One can only imagine that he was sufficiently worried about the repercussions of staging thirteen chorus members that he decided to reduce their number by one.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Meyer, *Strindberg: A Biography*, 335.

¹⁸⁹ One is reminded of Mahler's own doggedly held superstition, refusing to number *Das Lied von der Erde* among his symphonies lest they come to number nine and precipitate his death. Of course, he did subsequently write his ninth symphony, but did not finish the tenth.

¹⁹⁰ Anna Maria Morazzoni has also indicated that to some extent this superstitious reasoning may have derived from aspects of Schoenberg's Jewish and Christian faiths, as well as his interest in theosophy (Morazzoni, "Schönberg's Plural Concepts of Faith and Reason," 85.)



Fig. 7: Schoenberg's painting of the opening scene, with 13 heads visible; painted before October 1910

Jacob Wrestles, Séraphita and Swedenborg

As well as having a penchant for occult explanations of events, both Strindberg and Schoenberg were intensely interested in Christian mysticism. This interest came to affect each of them deeply, and also provided a basis for crystallising their ideas about the nature of their work as artists. Schoenberg's large-scale oratorio *Die Jakobsleiter*, which remained unfinished at the time of his death, was to prove his biggest statement in this arena—the planning of this work went through several stages even as he worked on *Die glückliche Hand*,¹⁹¹ and so aspects of its conception are worth relating here, as they shed light on Schoenberg's relationship with Strindberg, and their shared interest in Balzac's *Séraphita*. An overall discussion of the religious philosophy of *Die Jakobsleiter* is beyond the scope of this project, but it will be necessary to pick out those aspects of Swedenborgian philosophy which, as in Strindberg's case, helped to form Schoenberg's self-image as *artiste maudit*, and which inform the portrayal of the Man in *Die glückliche Hand*.

In 1911, when he had not yet finished the music to *Die glückliche Hand*, but after finally finishing the orchestration of his large-scale oratorio *Gurrelieder*, Schoenberg first began formulating plans for another large choral work. He had apparently hoped first of all to write to Strindberg to

¹⁹¹ An account of the conception and composition of *Die Jakobsleiter* can be found on the website of the Arnold Schoenberg institute (Muxeneder, "Die Jakobsleiter (Nach Einer Dichtung des Komponisten) für Soli, Chor und Orchester.")

enquire about engaging him to write a libretto to set to music.¹⁹² This unfortunately amounted to nothing, as Strindberg died in May 1912, before, so far as we know, Schoenberg had been able to make contact with him.

However, late in 1912 the poet Richard Dehmel wrote to Schoenberg enthusiastically after hearing *Verklärte Nacht*, Schoenberg's programmatic string sextet based on his poem of the same name. The two men had met in Hamburg earlier that year and so were on some level personally familiar, and Schoenberg, perhaps regretting not having contacted Strindberg before his death, took the opportunity to ask Dehmel if he would be interested in writing a libretto for a work which he was now planning along the following lines:

For a long time I have been wanting to write an oratorio on the following subject: modern man, having passed through materialism, socialism, and anarchy and, despite having been an atheist, still having in him some residue of ancient faith (in the form of superstition), wrestles with God (see also Strindberg's 'Jacob Wrestling') and finally succeeds in finding God and becoming religious. Learning to pray!¹⁹³

He also, later in the same letter, outlines the way in which his ideas for the work had progressed to that point:

Originally I intended to write the words myself. But I no longer think myself equal to it. Then I thought of adapting Strindberg's 'Jacob Wrestling'. Finally, I came to the idea of beginning with positive religious belief and intended adapting the final chapter, 'The Ascent into Heaven', from Balzac's 'Seraphita'. But I could never shake off the thought of 'Modern Man's Prayer', and I often thought: If only Dehmel...!¹⁹⁴

Strindberg's fragment *Jacob Wrestles*, part of his collection of *Legends*, had been published in German in 1899, and reissued together with *Inferno* in 1910, which is the edition Schoenberg owned. In this short work, Strindberg updates the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with God to dramatise his own religious doubts and frustrations: a modern intellectual protagonist meets Christ in Paris and argues with him in person, torn between guilt and self-justification, and between faith and atheism—a theme that is mirrored in the polarised struggle between spiritual ascendancy and earthly pursuits in *Die glückliche Hand*. Just as Strindberg's protagonist meets

¹⁹² Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, 239.

¹⁹³ Letter from Schoenberg to Richard Dehmel, 13 December 1912 (Schoenberg, *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters, Selected and Edited by Erwin Stein*, 35.) While Dehmel did not feel able to provide a new libretto for Schoenberg, he did offer a text that he had previously written, *Oratorium Natale* [Celebration of Creation], which proved not to be to Schoenberg's specifications. *Die Jakobsleiter* remained no more than a mooted idea until Schoenberg was able to put aside time in 1914 to begin planning the work in earnest.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

Christ in person, Schoenberg's man struggles to heed the warning of the illuminated 'Greek chorus' at the opening of the work, a conscious, omniscient embodiment of his fate, and also of spiritual wisdom.

The other work which Schoenberg considered setting, Balzac's 1834 novel *Séraphita*, is a patently transparent vehicle for expounding the ideas of the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. Like Strindberg, Swedenborg combined passions for investigation in the natural sciences with occultist revelation in later life. He latterly came to believe that he could commune with spirits inhabiting another plane, and that angels could confide scientific truths to him. Among his later works, which cover a variety of Christian and spiritual themes, is an eight-volume translation and reinterpretation of Biblical texts from their original Hebrew, in which Swedenborg claimed to have illuminated their true spiritual import.

Schoenberg's plans for a musical work based on *Séraphita* underwent several developments. He was first introduced to the work in March 1911 by Webern,¹⁹⁵ and apparently became so taken with it that at one stage of the planning process, rather than set it alongside *Jacob Wrestles*, he envisioned a sung oratorio spun out entirely from this novel, spanning three evenings and complete with a setting of Swedenborg's comprehensive angelology. As he explained to Kandinsky, in the same letter in which he highly praised *Der gelbe Klang*:

[The composition of *Pierrot Lunaire* is] in any case, remarkable for me as a preparatory study for another work, which I now wish to begin: Balzac's *Seraphita*. Do you know it? Perhaps the most glorious work in existence. I want to do it scenically. Not so much as theatre, at least not in the old sense. In any case, not 'dramatic.' But rather: oratorio that becomes visible and audible. Philosophy, religion that are perceived with the artistic senses.¹⁹⁶

As Julian Johnson points out, *Pierrot Lunaire* is essentially an expression of spiritual longing through grotesque parody.¹⁹⁷ In its final form, *Die Jakobsleiter* fulfils Schoenberg's early idea for an oratorio in which dramatic plot takes back seat to the earnest exploration of philosophy and religion, and Balzac's *Séraphita* is similarly structured with its dramatic narrative more as a pretext for such philosophical exposition. The plot of *Séraphita* details the appearance on earth of the androgynous spirit, *Séraphita-Séraphitus*, who appears as a woman to one lover, Wilfred, and as a man to another, Minna. In the final chapter, *Séraphita-Seraphitus* ascends into heaven and Wilfred and Minna briefly glimpse a Swedenborgian other, spiritual realm. In this work, as in *Jacob Wrestles* and *Die glückliche Hand*, the protagonists struggle to leave behind their worldly

¹⁹⁵ Brown, "Understanding Schoenberg as Christ," 120.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Schoenberg to Kandinsky, 19th August 1912 (Kandinsky and Schoenberg, "The Schoenberg-Kandinsky Correspondence," 54.)

¹⁹⁷ Johnson, "Schoenberg, Modernism, and Metaphysics," 116.

pursuits and rise to the spiritual realm of striving of which they are made aware. This similarity has drawn Tom Beck to argue that Schoenberg's Man exists as a counterpart to Balzac's Wilfred, who, unable to free himself from the temporal realm and striving instead to capture *Séraphita* within it, offers her in desperation 'the riches of art, the wealth of the world, the splendours of a court'—the worldly riches, in other words, implicitly offered by Schoenberg's Gentleman to seduce the Woman.¹⁹⁸ In *Die Jakobsleiter*, the ladder of the title is that which one uses to ascend to the other realm, the very transcendence denied to the Man of *Die glückliche Hand*.¹⁹⁹

Swedenborg's philosophical ideas made an impression on Schoenberg which lasted a lifetime. Later in life, Schoenberg would even use the concept of a Swedenborgian heaven to illustrate the 'unity of musical space' in dodecaphonic music, noting that in both, 'there is no absolute down, no right or left, forward or backward.'²⁰⁰ To understand the significance for Schoenberg of Swedenborg's ideas, and *Séraphita* in particular, as mediated through Strindberg's writings, we should examine Strindberg's own preoccupation with the same philosophical concepts, and the ways in which they were of particular importance to his self-concept as an artist.

One of the most important of Strindberg's works to engage with Swedenborg's ideas was the extended prose work *Inferno* (1897), the first work that Strindberg produced after his crisis in the mid-1890s. In it, he gives an account of this turbulent period of his life, vividly recounting his paranoid episodes and almost schizophrenic personal crises. Strindberg intended that it stand as a de facto account of this period of his life, but as with his previous autobiographical works (*The Son of a Servant* and *A Madman's Defence*) there is a strong element of grandstanding and fictional embellishment.²⁰¹ In the very last paragraph of the epilogue, nonetheless, he belligerently throws down a challenge:

The reader who is inclined to consider that this book is a work of imagination is invited to consult the diary I wrote up day by day from 1895, of which the above is merely a version, composed of extracts expanded and arranged.²⁰²

The diary to which he refers has subsequently been published in an abridged version, as *From an Occult Diary*. Swedenborg's magnum opus, the *Arcana Coelestia*, is partially in the form of recounted diary entries, and Strindberg was undoubtedly influenced by this practice as he pieced

¹⁹⁸ Beck, "The Literary Sources of 'Die glückliche Hand,'" 19.

¹⁹⁹ For a discussion of the metaphysical import of *Die Jakobsleiter* and its concern with crossing such a threshold, see Johnson, "Schoenberg, Modernism, and Metaphysics."

²⁰⁰ Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones," 223.

²⁰¹ For an in-depth examination of Strindberg's autobiographical works, see Robinson, *Strindberg and Autobiography*.

²⁰² Strindberg, *Inferno*, 176.

together the narrative of *Inferno*. His added embellishments notwithstanding, both *Inferno* and *From an Occult Diary* stand as a testimony to the deep-seated spiritual unease Strindberg evidently felt during this period, and much of the book reads, if not as a cry for help, then as a wholehearted railing against viscerally felt unceasing torment. Michael Meyer describes *Inferno* as ‘an extraordinarily powerful and convincing portrait of the interior of a distraught mind, worthy to stand beside the self-portraits of Van Gogh, the Poems of Hölderlin or the novels of Dostoyevsky.’²⁰³

In a striking passage of *Inferno*, Strindberg explains how, upon discovering *Séraphita*, he quickly turned to its Swedenborgian philosophy to find an explanation for his own difficulties:

Séraphita became my gospel. It caused me to renew my ties with the beyond to such an extent that life filled me with repugnance and Heaven drew me to it, so that I yearned for it with the irresistible yearning one has for home. I doubted not that I was already prepared for a higher existence. I despised the earth, this unclean world, man and all his works. I saw in myself the righteous man upon whom the Eternal has visited temptations, but whom the purgatory of this earthly life would make worthy of imminent deliverance.²⁰⁴

As ever, his accounts of this period of his life in *Inferno* are related with a heightened dramatism that is not entirely faithful to the events themselves—it is only about a year or so after reading *Séraphita* that he had properly digested it and appropriated it for his own ends.²⁰⁵ Swedenborg’s philosophy was particularly useful for Strindberg to explain the persecution that he felt so acutely, as a comforting signifier that this marked him out as one of God’s elite. At the end of 1896, the year in which he both discovered *Séraphita* and suffered the worst of his paranoid and psychotic incidents, he wrote to Marie Uhl:

Either I am persecuted or I have persecution mania. But no matter. It even gladdens me to think that higher powers torment me so that I shall long for the hereafter. And the world tempts me no longer. I say to myself continually: ‘*Adieu, pauvre terre, adieu!*’²⁰⁶

Unlike Schoenberg’s ‘persecution complex’, Strindberg’s ‘persecution mania’ refers to the more disturbing and paranoid experiences he suffered that year, which his friends will have attempted at times to convince him were wholly and genuinely a product of his mental state. Nonetheless, he also undoubtedly means to encompass within the term the same sensitivity to outward persecution that Schoenberg describes, which he experienced just as wholeheartedly when in

²⁰³ Meyer, *Strindberg: A Biography*, 367.

²⁰⁴ Strindberg, *Inferno*, 60–61.

²⁰⁵ Meyer, *Strindberg: A Biography*, 338.

²⁰⁶ Letter from Strindberg to Marie Uhl, 4th December 1896, quoted in *Ibid.*, 359.

sound mind. The adage he has adopted for himself, 'Adieu, pauvre terre, adieu!' is a quotation from S raphita, as he draws succour from the promise of an otherworldly justification for his mortal anguish as an *artiste maudit*.

Just as Strindberg invoked Jacob to present himself as a figure submitting to God only after defiance, at other times, and in conjunction with this Swedenborgian justification for his worldly difficulties, he would try to position himself as the biblical Job. As an archetype, Job was a useful figure against which Strindberg could affect a comparison, given the unremitting suffering and spiritual doubts that he experienced, and of course the ultimate vindication of his convictions. Such was the affinity that Strindberg felt for Job, that at one point he considered undertaking a similar enterprise to Swedenborg's reinterpretation of the Bible specifically for the Book of Job. He detailed his plans to his friend the publisher and occultist Torsten Hedlund in July 1896:

If I live long enough, I shall translate the Book of Job and illustrate it from an occult standpoint. ... The illustrations would look like a piece of paper which one has crumpled and over which one has broken charcoal. The uninitiated would see nothing, but the seers would ... Read the book of Job! 'O blessed is the man whom God chastiseth!'²⁰⁷

Strindberg's posturing here is particularly revealing—the distinction he draws between the 'uninitiated' and the 'seers' marks out the latter as a spiritual elite of the deserving, understanding 'blessed', whose trials are unique to them. To the same ends, in *Inferno* he invokes the apostle Paul, the same whose spiritual journey was the inspiration for *To Damascus*.

By a single word, just one, [Swedenborg] brought light to my soul, dispelled my doubts, my vain speculations about my imaginary enemies the electrical experts and the practitioners of black magic, and this little word was *Devastation*. Everything that had befallen me I found again in Swedenborg. The sensations of acute anxiety (angina pectoris), pressure on the chest, palpitations, what I called the electric girdle, they were all there, and the sum total of these phenomena constituted the spiritual purification known even to the apostle Paul...²⁰⁸

Gunnar Brandell has argued that such philosophy provided Strindberg with an explanation for his suffering that did not require him to own up to any personal guilt. This will undoubtedly have been an attractive position for him, as his personal problems were certainly compounded by a number of destructive habits—he amassed considerable debts, not least to support estranged ex-wives and children, spent a great deal of time and money in taverns, and his reputation for misogyny and strange personal quirks preceded him as much as did knowledge of his dramatic works. Most of all, this reasoning offered him the conviction that, in leaner times, he was not to

²⁰⁷ Letter from Strindberg to Torsten Hedlund, 23 July 1896, quoted in *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁰⁸ Strindberg, *Inferno*, 160.

blame for eschewing stability and security to pursue his artistic (as well as scientific, alchemical and occultist) interests, rather than that these difficulties come from without, and are to be expected of any creator engaged in 'spiritual purification'. It is notable that whereas in his earlier works, guilt features as a reasonably constant motivation, it disappears almost entirely in his late output, so complete was the absolution and justification Strindberg discovered in Swedenborg.²⁰⁹ So exceptional did he come to believe himself to be that he was only too eager to interpret a passage in *Séraphita* that read 'Once more the light will come from the North' as foretelling his own birth. His friend, the Danish critic Georg Brandes asked by way of reply, 'How do you know he doesn't mean Ibsen?', to which Strindberg reportedly replied 'No, it's me, there can be no doubt.'²¹⁰

Inferno as possible inspiration for *Die glückliche Hand*

Schoenberg undoubtedly knew *Inferno*, as he acquired a copy of the second German-language edition published in 1910, the same year he wrote the libretto to *Die glückliche Hand*.²¹¹ However, it is very possible that Schoenberg knew of an earlier translation by Christian Morgenstern, issued by Hyperionverlag in Berlin in 1898—indeed, a particular passage about a journey Strindberg undertook through the Austrian countryside, heavy with Swedenborgian explanation, bears such a striking resemblance to some details in *Die glückliche Hand* as to make the possibility of direct influence seem very likely—something that appears to have escaped the attention of previous commentators. I have reproduced this passage in its entirety as Appendix II, and will provide a précis of its relevant features here.

The chapter as a whole portrays Strindberg's earthly trials in terms of a journey through a landscape that he embellishes to demonstrate its likeness as a Swedenborgian Hell, recalling the prototype of Dante's *Inferno*. He recalls a walk in the countryside, illustrating everything he sees as through the lens of a persecuted, tortured soul, with the world set up to disappoint, persecute and intimidate him. He describes walking through a gorge, with a ravine between two hills, surrounded by littered rocks. Above, where a ruined castle stands on the cliff, the top of the rock looks unmistakably like a Turk's head. He walks past a miller's shed where he sees a goat's horn and a besom—both insignia of witches. The image of Dante's Hell rises up in him as he passes a shed with six ovens, but this nightmarish reality remains grounded by 'a horrible stink, a stream of mire, and a chorus of grunts coming from the pig-sty'. He continues walking and encounters an enormous Danish mastiff, like a wolf, which he likens to Cerberus, 'the very image of [a] monster' he had previously seen. He steels himself with Jacques Coeur's motto, 'To a brave heart nothing is

²⁰⁹ Brandell, *Strindberg in Inferno*, 121.

²¹⁰ Meyer, *Strindberg: A Biography*, 355.

²¹¹ Buchmayr, "'Cela Pourrait Venir de Moi' - L'admiration d'Arnold Schoenberg pour August Strindberg," 136.

impossible', and presses on. He encounters a woman who seemed beautiful at a distance, with 'a mark like a blood-red half-moon' on her forehead, but who turned out to be 'toothless and hideous' up close. Subsequently he sights the paddle-wheel of a mill engaged in its 'Sisyphean task' of sending water running up and down ceaselessly, and eventually comes across a smithy. Here are 'begrimed, naked smiths armed with fire-tongs, pincers and sledge-hammers, standing in the midst of fire and sparks and glowing iron and melted lead.' He eventually returns home through the ravine, 'devastated by pelting rain and whirlwinds', contemplating the 'sequence of accidental circumstances which, taken together, formed one great whole, awe-inspiring but by no means supernatural.'

As can be seen, there is a remarkable resemblance between details in the descriptions of the terrain of Strindberg's imaginary metaphorical hell and the landscapes and characters of *Die glückliche Hand*. First of all, let us consider the more straightforward symbols which are reproduced in different guises.

Both narratives feature a blacksmith's workshop, and Strindberg alludes to a sledgehammer, the very tool which Schoenberg's Man borrows from the workers to create the diadem at the climax of the opera. Moreover, both feature a colossal storm, with that in *Die glückliche Hand* emanating from the Man himself in the form of the colour crescendo. The further inclusion of a Turk's head is particularly remarkable; it makes a slightly bizarre addition to Strindberg's story, and its use as a portent of danger is somewhat ambiguous. In Schoenberg's application of the same symbol, however, there is a stronger archetype to draw on, since the Turks had been a traditional enemy of the Austrians on the operatic stage at least as far back as Mozart (most notably in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*).

Strindberg's encounter with the woman similarly mirrors the dynamic of Schoenberg's Man and Woman in *Die glückliche Hand*, if in considerably compressed form. Strindberg's woman appears immediately as if possessed of unworldly beauty, but on much closer inspection this proves to be entirely illusory, even projected by Strindberg himself, down to details such as a half-moon mark on her forehead. This corresponds closely with the experience of Schoenberg's Man, who is so much in the grip of illusion as to believe that the Woman is still at his hand when she has fled with the Gentleman. Like Schoenberg's Woman, Strindberg's *femme fatale* has a captivating magical allure not entirely distinct from witchcraft and is of dubious virtue. As such, Strindberg's interest was piqued as he noticed the goat's horn and the besom, and Schoenberg's own Woman is endowed with ample magical hold over the Man, not least having given him a goblet of what appears to be a love potion, a pointed allusion to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*.

The overlap of all these symbols notwithstanding however, the most important correspondence between Strindberg's tale and Schoenberg's opera is the way that each exemplifies a particular self-

envisioning of its author, and the fact that these symbols are applied to the same ends. Strindberg in this chapter, approximately two-thirds of the way through *Inferno*, is concerned with projecting an image of his inhospitable environment; he does so by appropriating a number of archetypal symbols of hostility or persecution (Cerberus, witches, hellfire) and integrating them with elements of Swedenborgian philosophy to explore a new means of explaining and describing his earthly self-pity. Indeed, so unceasing has this torment been that Strindberg extends his explanation back to encompass his unhappy childhood:

When I subjected my past life to close scrutiny and thought of my childhood, I could see that even that had been like a prison sentence, an inquisitorial court. The tortures to which an innocent child had been subjected could be explained in no other way than by assuming that we have had a previous existence, from which we have been removed and sent here to suffer the consequences of misdemeanours of which we ourselves have no recollection.²¹²

Schoenberg's own allegory is that of a central Man in a world where all worldly elements bear him spiritual and physical harm, and against which it is impossible find fulfilment or success. In particular, the linking of the last scene to the first implies that this Man faces the same trials day after day without respite, just as the chorus chides him for 'again and again' succumbing to the same earthly temptations. He makes this element of the opera explicit in a fragment of a rebuttal to an incensed critic, to whom he felt it necessary to explain in simple terms this implication of the opera's structure:

It should be obvious to everybody that the *opening scene* is identical with the *closing scene* [...] doesn't one gather from this that (since [scene] 4 = 1) the closing scene could now be followed by the second scene? And that this is meant to say: etcetera, every time the same again?²¹³

The image of Sisyphus, condemned for eternity to roll a boulder up a hillside, only to have it daily fall back down again, looms large in *Die glückliche Hand*, not least in the final moments of the third scene, when the Woman pushes an enormous rock from a great height, crushing the Man. It is telling that in this passage from *Inferno* Strindberg comments on the Sisyphean task of the rolling water mill he encounters, as if in sympathy for its endlessly futile endeavour.

An important part of Schoenberg's affinity for Strindberg was identification with the image that preceded him as a suffering, persecuted *artiste maudit*. The clear projection of this theme may have marked this passage out to Schoenberg as he read Schering's translation of *Inferno* in 1910, if he was not already familiar with the work. Indeed after a close comparison of the symbolic content

²¹² Strindberg, *Inferno*, 121.

²¹³ Fragment of an article to a critic, July 1927, referred to as the 'Petschnig' fragment and quoted in Steiner, "The Happy Hand: Genesis and Interpretation of Schoenberg's Monumentalkunstwerk," 217.

shared between Schoenberg's stage work and Strindberg's prose work, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that Strindberg's evocation of his personal 'hell' influenced Schoenberg's portrayal of a similar 'hell' in theatrical terms, and with similar aims to the great dramatist.

Both works project a polarised image of a brave, perceptive, individual forging ahead through an unremittingly hostile environment; to this end, both evoke a rock-scattered ravine, treacherous to walk upon. Schoenberg's man demonstrably 'climbs without difficulty' as illustration of his prowess overcoming difficulty, while Strindberg draws strength from the sure knowledge that for a soul as brave as his, 'nothing is impossible' (and Schoenberg's Man further rises to the impossible in his singular act of spontaneous creation). Moreover, this point is driven home by Strindberg's evocation of Dante's Hell, and the 'horrible stink', 'stream of mire', and 'chorus of grunts' emanating from the pigsty—a clear allusion to his tormenting critics and the many others whom he felt abused and misunderstood him.

It is interesting to note that Strindberg routinely drew on hellish imagery to describe his surroundings: 8 September 1896 he excitedly noted that Swedenborg's description of Hell bore a distinct resemblance to his surroundings in Klam, in the Austrian Alps, with its enclosed valleys, hills and dark woods, and its manure heaps and puddles of filth. In particular he records a damning description of his fellow townspeople:

The unblest cannot endure daylight and clean air. Self-love, hatred, jealousy... Hell's fire: to wake passions which are never satisfied, flare up again... To each other they look human but in the light of heaven they wear a horrible corpse-like aspect. Some black, others like firebrands, others with warts and boils; some with tufts of hair on their face; others have bones without skin, others only one row of teeth... Seeking sensual pleasure, honour and wealth. They get it too, only to lose it again. They wander about lonely and sad, they hunger and have nothing to eat... get a whore for company. Despair, hatred of the good and of God...

Even in this description of the damned, one notes parallels with Schoenberg's Man: ragged in appearance; confined to striving on a worldly plane, where success is only sure to slip away from him; with a whore for company, and all the while despairing, lonely and sad. Strindberg's bleak view of his fellow men, and the dehumanising portrayals of those by whom he felt persecuted, point to another similarity in Schoenberg's relationships with the public—paintings such as *Critic I*, which portray his detractors as hideous, sub-human creatures.



Fig. 8: Critic I, 1909 or 1910

The antagonistic polarity between himself and his contemporaries, as portrayed between the Man and his environment in *Die glückliche Hand*, was also informed by another contemporary writer, Stefan George, who held similar views to Schoenberg and Strindberg about the trials of men of genius, fated to suffer at the hands of an ignoble society. We will now turn to consider George's influence on Schoenberg, and the ways in which his poetry may have directly influenced the subject matter of *Die glückliche Hand*.

Stefan George and the Artist as Hero

The German poet Stefan George (1886-1933) was a figure of seminal importance in German literature of the early twentieth century, and in his lifetime was widely considered to be the greatest German writer of the age. Like Schoenberg, indeed to a much higher degree, he found himself locked in a highly polarised state of constant antagonism with society, and he articulated this image of himself as artist through the provocative imagery of collections of poetry such as *Der siebente Ring*. George was also an accomplished translator of French, Italian and English poetry and prose into German—Schoenberg's copy of Balzac's *Séraphita* was in fact one of George's translations.

Despite the esotericism and hermeticism of his work, which owed much to the example of Mallarmé, George was widely lauded in his lifetime, and was the inaugural recipient of the Goethe Prize, as well as being nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature on two occasions—an honour denied to the Swedish Strindberg, much to his chagrin. Yet in spite of George's towering importance as a poet during his lifetime, today he is virtually forgotten—his self-centred aestheticism quickly became outmoded compared to more austere and stripped-back postwar styles, and the ferocious imagery of the fated apocalyptic destruction of what he considered to be the unworthy mass of humanity strikes the modern reader as decidedly disturbing in the post-Holocaust era.²¹⁴

Schoenberg will have become aware of George's poetry as early as February 1904, when he attended a concert of Conrad Ansoerge's settings of poems from George's cycle *Waller im Schnee*. The settings were musically very simple, which perhaps accounts for Schoenberg's lack of immediate interest in the poetry. However, he kept the programme note to the concert, which contained an explanation of *Waller im Schnee* as a cycle of poems about the lonely artist about to lose his friend—in December 1907, as Mahler departed Vienna, Schoenberg turned to the same cycle to make a setting of *'Ich darf nicht dankend an dir niedersinken'*, lamenting his loneliness at having lost his most important and influential supporter.

Schoenberg's rediscovery of George in 1907-8 began a period of intense preoccupation with the themes of his poetry, in which time Schoenberg's musical style and priorities as an artist also underwent significant change. George was a figure of immense importance to Schoenberg in his free atonal years: settings of his poems number among the very first atonal pieces ever written, including the settings of *Litanei* and *Entrückung* in the Second String Quartet, poems taken from *Der siebente Ring*. Schoenberg's collection of settings from *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* were

²¹⁴ As illustration of this fact, the only full biography of George available in English is Robert E. Norton's book *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle*.

undertaken in 1908-9, and completed after he had finished work on the quartet; Schoenberg described these as showing, to his own surprise, 'a style quite different from everything I had written before, [...] the first step on a new path, but one beset with thorns.'²¹⁵ His affinity for the content of George's poetry was apparently overwhelming and guided by instinct, and he describes in 'The Relationship to the Text' having written settings of George working straight from the inspiration afforded to him by the 'first direct contact with the sound of the beginning', needing no additional analysis or reflection to guide him.²¹⁶

A number of similarities between the two artists could account for Schoenberg's attraction to George's poetry. Like Schoenberg and Strindberg, even to a greater extent, he surrounded himself with a close-knit circle of disciple-like followers who revered him in quasi-prophetic terms.²¹⁷ Indeed, his inner circle of reverential followers, the 'George-Kreis', were not merely a hub for artistic activity but increasingly came to see themselves as a viable and ideal model of social order—George considered himself as a kind of artist-prophet with a special redeeming message for humanity, one that could thus far only be appreciated by a spiritually superior artistic elite, and he writes with fervent, apocalyptic rhetoric about the necessary destruction of the degenerate modern world that failed to recognise him as its modern-day saviour. As such, the literary magazine that he oversaw, *Die Blätter für die Kunst*, maintained a tiny print run and was distributed to an exclusive coterie of supporters.

Also like Strindberg in his later period, George was heavily influenced by the French symbolists and many of their theorisations of art. Of particular importance was the notion that, in order to make it a fit medium for artistic expression, language needed to be purified and protected from its abusive debased appropriation by, for example, tabloid journalism and political ideology.²¹⁸ As such, he went to great lengths to cultivate and project an image of himself as an isolated artist, whose esoteric art and principles were understood only by the sufficiently enlightened. George's poetry is precise and lyrical in style, and is imbued with a highly subjective, emotionally charged

²¹⁵ Schoenberg, "How One Becomes Lonely," 49.

²¹⁶ Schoenberg, "The Relationship to the Text," 140. He mentions this ease with 'many of my songs' but a reference to George in the next paragraph seems to indicate that it was George's poetry that had been so easy to set intuitively to music.

²¹⁷ George may have derived this practice to some extent from Mallarmé's intimate soirées, in which he partook when visiting Paris, and wherein his close associates addressed him as maître. Winkler, "Master and Disciples: The George Circle," 146.

²¹⁸ As Eric Voegelin points out, this was a particularly acute problem for writers in the German language from the 1870s, due to a period of 'fantastic destruction' in the language which has no comparable parallel in the history of French or English. For a discussion of this point, see the chapter 'Stefan George and Karl Kraus' in his book *Autobiographical Reflections*.

aestheticism.²¹⁹ Its subject matter typically veers between apocalyptic visions of battle for the sake of higher artistic ideals, heightened quasi-religious imagery, and unrestrained erotic longing.

Georgian imagery pervades the libretto of *Die glückliche Hand*, and a discussion will reveal that many of its most important symbols can be compared closely to the themes of George's poetry. Of particular significance for Schoenberg's opera are the theorisations of genius which George and his circle propagated, and the antagonistic relationship which they held with the outside world, as these undoubtedly fed into the self-image of the artist which he projected in the figure of the Man. Secondly, he appears to have drawn on the Georgian image of the heroic artist engaged in battle against a philistine, uncultured public, which was a constant theme throughout George's works. Finally, George, like Strindberg, frequently drew on the notion of spiritual transcendence as justification for his own worth as an artist, and this theme can frequently be found in those of George's poems which Schoenberg set to music. We will now consider the influence of each of these in turn on Schoenberg's portrayal of the Man as artist in *Die glückliche Hand*.

Antagonism towards the outside world and the elevation of genius

The perpetual distain which the *George-Kreis* held for the outside world was perhaps unrivalled in its intensity. Correspondence which passed between members of the circle attests to the sincere, yet undeniably melodramatic antagonism they routinely projected, such as in this passage of a letter from Ludwig Klages to Friedrich Gundolf in 1903:

Humanity is becoming more SORDID by the day. How could one still do anything in view of this vermin that stinks to high heaven! Rather one has to try intensively to forget that people even exist at all: this coating of fungus on the crust of this planet that is starting to decompose. But one can dust off the mold and make the idols totter: for everything is rotten to the core. And for that reason, whoever even goes out should at least do so with a sword: but research is also a sword. And so you are right that a time of 'churnings' is beginning, as dead as this time is.²²⁰

Such imagery is brutal; it can probably be best understood in conjunction with another maxim of the George-Kreis, the idea that the artist was the guardian of higher spiritual values and that this cognoscenti would eventually come to be recognised for their profound insights only after the world adopted the model of social order exemplified by George and his disciples. This became an increasingly focussed idea in the George-Kreis in the early years of the twentieth century, and increasingly prevalent in the tone of George's poetry, as well as being manifest in dictums such as that published in the 1903 catalogue of the *Blätter für die Kunst*, 'Hero Worship (Cult of

²¹⁹ For a discussion of George's aestheticism, see Todd, "Stefan George and Two Types of Aestheticism."

²²⁰ Letter from Ludwig Klages to Friedrich Gundolf in 1903 quoted in Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle*, 364.

Personality)'. This article set out to explicate the ways in which the pose and unity of the George-Kreis represented a superior alternative to the aggregations of people in random association with one another, as they perceived the unwashed, unthinking masses of modern society. As such, the *Blätter* came to represent, over time, more than a rallying war cry against philistinism, but even a mouthpiece and extended political justification for social change.²²¹

Schoenberg's own indignant anger at his maltreatment by critics and the public, while sincere and deeply felt, did not for the most part rise to presage their wholesale destruction. Nonetheless, the description of genius he gave in a 1912 memorial lecture on Gustav Mahler echoes George's desire for humanity to revere and embody genius as its future state of consciousness:

We are still to remain in a darkness which will be illuminated only fitfully by the light of genius. We are to continue to battle and struggle, to yearn and desire. And it is to be denied to us to see this light as long as it remains with us. We are to remain blind until we have acquired eyes. Eyes that see the future. Eyes that penetrate more than the sensual, which is only a likeness; that penetrate the super-sensual. Our soul shall be the eye. We have a duty: to win for ourselves an immortal soul. It is promised to us. We already possess it in the future; we must bring it about that this future becomes our present. That we live in this future alone, and not in a present which is only a likeness, and which, as every likeness, is inadequate.

And this is the essence of genius—and that is our future. That is why the genius is nothing to do with the present. Because present and genius have nothing to do with one another. The genius is our future. So shall we too be one day, when we have fought our way through. [...] The future is eternal, and therefore the higher reality, the reality of our immortal soul, exists only in the future.²²²

This quotation will furnish a number of comparisons with George's own preoccupations and the themes which appear in his poetry. Most importantly, this passage distils a recurring theme in Schoenberg's reasoning on the nature of genius, and one which he shares directly with George and Weininger, namely the clear distinction between the elevated consciousness of genius and the lower order of thought which characterises so much other human activity, in this case so stark as to mean the difference between light and dark.

It is interesting to note that the exalted tone of quasi-religious phraseology used in the George-Kreis to characterise the artist of genius, and the intemperate rhetoric used to denigrate those who could not appreciate their greatness, were also used among the members of the Schoenberg circle to describe their own relation to the outside world. Julie Brown has catalogued the examples of such religious imagery in 'Schoenberg as Christ', among which are examples such as Berg writing

²²¹ Ibid., 356–8.

²²² Schoenberg, "Gustav Mahler," 470–1.

to Schoenberg on 26-27 September 1911 about the 'great and holy cause' his teacher was fighting against the outside world. Webern also made clear that he despised the *Dreck* ('scum', or 'filth') in society who deserved only to be destroyed for their opposition to Schoenberg and his *Harmonielehre*, and on August 11 1911 even went so far as to write to his teacher, 'I believe that the disciples of Jesus Christ could not have felt more deeply for their Lord than we for you.'²²³

The Georgian gulf separating the artist from the common mass of humanity finds form in *Die glückliche Hand*, where there is sharp division between the genius of the Man and the mundane consciousness of those who share his universe. In this instance, the audience is elevated to the position of the cognoscenti, able to understand the value of the Man's artistic feat, and also, in contrast to the other players on the stage, understand his speech and that of the otherworldly chorus. This dramatic framing of the Man is effected specifically so as to allow the audience to feel indignant on his behalf at the trials he undergoes. In particular, the hostility he faces from the workers at the simplest demonstration of his abilities is seen plainly by the audience but apparently overlooked by the Man himself, who throws the diadem to the enraged workers, laughing. This is an interesting stage direction to the Man; rather than react with fear, or with counteracted aggression, or even incomprehension, he remains completely oblivious to their intentions to pounce on him. The main purpose of this direction is to make absolutely clear that the Man does not precipitate, nor deserve, the unprompted aggression he faces. Schoenberg's description of his own trials in 'How One Becomes Lonely' make it clear that he believed himself to stand in the same position against a society in which unjustifiably hostile criticisms of his art predominated. However, it also suggests that the Man's character is so infinitely nobler than that of his fellow men that he can hardly comprehend that genius would be denied the adulation that it deserves.

The battle of the heroic artist

One of the central images that pervades George's writings is that of the artist as a kind of warrior, waging war against the 'infidel' for the sake of higher artistic and aesthetic values. Indeed, a striking maxim from the 1903 issue of *Blätter für die Kunst* is entitled 'Artist as Warrior'. The exact import of its hyperbolic, often contradictory prose is somewhat difficult to elucidate, but Robert Norton paraphrases it thus:

Since the world, it seems to say, is no longer governed by strong, heroic leaders but by the faceless throng, overpowering in its number and its brute mindless agency, any 'deed' performed by an

²²³ Brown, "Understanding Schoenberg as Christ," 36–8. Curiously, Brown does not make the connection between these kinds of pronouncements and the language of the George-Kreis, although elsewhere in her article she does discuss George.

individual agent acting alone is as doomed as the gesture of someone who wants to stop the wind by extending his hand. This would seem to be a veiled argument for the necessity of a collective, a 'circle,' of confederates, who might be better able to accomplish what a single person could not. But then it is the individual, solitary 'Artist' who is extolled, the mighty 'Warrior' could carry aloft the 'sword of battle,' presumably to cut down the swarms of riffraff who get in the way of great things.²²⁴

George depicts his circle as being engaged in war, painting himself as king or prince, leading supporting armies or knights templar into battle. In images of startling brutality and violence, George portrays the destruction of the masses and the establishment of a new spiritual order. This ideological battle particularly informs the unprecedentedly violent cycle of poems *Der siebente Ring*, which was newly published in 1908 when Schoenberg discovered in it the two poems he decided to set in his Second String Quartet. The first of these, *Litanei*, opens with the following words, which are also given in English translation by Carl Engel:

Tief ist die trauer die mich umdüstert	Deep is the sadness that overclouds me
Ein tret ich wieder, Herr! in dein haus.	once more I enter, Lord! in thy house
Lang war die reise, matt sind die glieder,	Long was the journey, weak is my body,
Leer sind die schreine, voll nur die qual.	bare are the coffers, full but my pain.
Durstende zunge darbt nach dem weine.	Thirsting, the tongue craves wine to refresh it,
Hart war gestritten, starr ist mein arm.	hard was the fighting, stiff is my arm.

In the context of the quartet, as its tonal centre becomes more and more destabilised, Schoenberg implicitly draws on the content of the poem as an allegory for his own braveness in forging ahead into hitherto uncharted musical territory, a journey too perilous for any uncultured philistine. Schoenberg thus appropriates George's hero-artist in this instance as an image for himself.

The Man in *Die glückliche Hand*, as another projected image of himself as artist, takes up elements of the same heroic persona. As a physical presence on stage he is presented as hypermasculine and with literal battle scars on his face and visible chest, some old, and others still bleeding. His clothes too have the appearance of somebody who has been through the wars, with his shirt half open and the left side of his trousers hanging down in tatters below the knee. Moreover, he bears an injury in his foot as if made by a nail, a clear allusion to the wounds of the crucified Christ, as well as the injury that Oedipus sustained to his feet; nonetheless he is able to climb effortlessly from the ravine and bound around the stage in the third scene, despite the treacherous landscape. As he climbs from the ravine, he has overtly been engaging in conflict, as demonstrated by the sword he carries and the two Turks' heads hanging from his belt.

²²⁴ Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle*, 359.

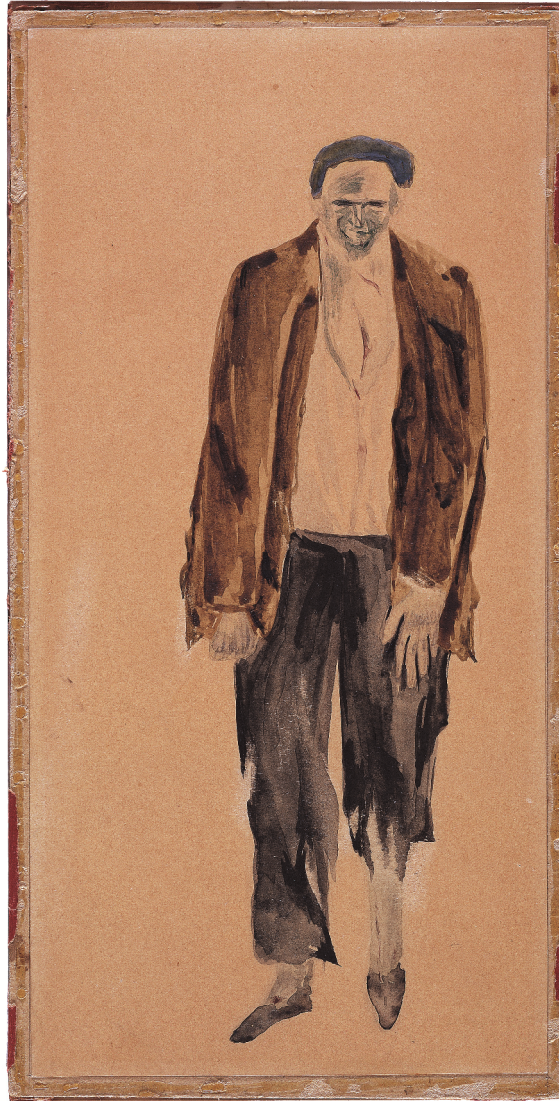


Fig. 9: Schoenberg's painting of the Man, before October 1910

The Turks' heads (a symbol, as I have argued previously, that Schoenberg could have found in Strindberg's *Inferno*) are further instructive as they are a key symbol of the nature of this war, which is not only fought on Georgian terms against philistinism, but with a holy purpose. The use of Turks' heads implicitly raises the purpose of this war to a crusade against what George perceived as 'barbarism', a mission fought with a quasi-divine purpose.

This sacred mission was in itself a key element of George's self-image—as if to embody this holy mission, George lived a largely ascetic, monkish life, but the cycles of poetry he published are adorned with lavish, intricate designs by Melchoir Lechter, much as were holy texts laboriously decorated in the age before the printing press.²²⁵ The implication that he somehow understood himself to be a quasi-divine being is discernable throughout his poetry; not only does *Litanei* begin

²²⁵ Winkler, "Master and Disciples: The George Circle," 147.

with the protagonist entering the house of the Lord, but *Entrückung*, the second poem Schoenberg set in the quartet, is an evocative description of the spiritual transcendence of holy rapture, ending with the phrase 'I am the spark of the holy fire / I am a roar of the holy voice' (Ich bin ein funke vom heiligen feuer / Ich bin ein dröhnen nur der heiligen stimme). The unmistakable implication of these lines is that the artist-genius should be regarded as the mouthpiece of the divine.

Schoenberg's choice of text for this movement is clearly bound up with the same explication of genius as he put forward in his memorial lecture on Mahler. When he speaks of the 'battle and struggle' to 'win for ourselves an immortal soul', his illustration is drawn along the same lines as George in *Der siebente Ring*, where the genius differentiates himself from the masses through the higher spiritual purpose bestowed on him through his unique creative abilities. Both Schoenberg and George envisaged their art as forging a greater future for mankind, where humanity ascends to the state of aesthetically attuned genius of which it is truly capable, and the unbelieving masses fall inevitably at the wayside.

The Man of *Die glückliche Hand*, warned at the outset to 'believe in reality, it is thus, and not otherwise,' embodies and enacts Schoenberg's aspirational attempt to forge for himself the greater future which he believes possible; that he inevitably fails having gained nothing by the end perhaps illustrates the futility that Schoenberg came to feel as the reality around him fell far short of the ideal he hoped to realise.

Conclusion

As the foregoing chapters have sought to demonstrate, *Die glückliche Hand* is very much a work of its time and place, and was heavily influenced by contemporary currents of artistic and intellectual life. It does not seem an exaggeration to suggest that it is virtually incomprehensible without some knowledge of this context—and especially of contemporary thinking in the German-speaking world on the nature of genius and on the function of art. As Julie Brown has shown, intrinsic to Schoenberg's entire creative enterprise was a self-concept of himself as an artist-genius cast both in a heroic and a quasi-religious mould, partaking of the archetypes of the martyr, prophet, and messiah. The present study has argued that *Die glückliche Hand* can best be understood as a first attempt at embodying this self-concept in musico-dramatic terms, and that the opera's symbolism clarifies considerably once its indebtedness to the work of Strindberg, Weininger, and George is understood.

Schoenberg's attempts to interpret himself to himself persisted throughout his career, and his self-concept assumed progressively more grandiose forms. The central character of the Chosen One in his planned monumental vocal, choral, and orchestral work *Die Jakobsleiter* would have represented another stage in its evolution, and from the 1920s onwards, as the research of Michael Mäckelmann and Alexander Ringer have shown, Schoenberg seems to have increasingly come to think of himself as not merely a great composer, but also as a latter-day Jewish religious prophet and leader.²²⁶ Max Aruns, the central character of his play *Der biblische Weg* (1926), is described in the stage directions as having an unmistakable physical resemblance to Schoenberg, and in 1933, when the Nazi persecution of Jews commenced in earnest, Schoenberg seriously considered assuming an active role in political life to achieve aims similar to Aruns. His self-identification with the central character of his opera *Moses und Aron* seems beyond doubt; and towards the very end of his life, Schoenberg embarked on an ambitious project to write an extended series of Modern Psalms, which he initially intended to start numbering at 151—where the biblical psalms of David had left off.²²⁷

These aspects of Schoenberg's personality raise questions that are both interesting and troubling. As scholars such as Esteban Buch and Sabine Feisst have demonstrated, there has been a strong tendency towards mythologisation in writing about Schoenberg from the very outset, which largely originated with the composer himself—and the reception accorded his work was by no

²²⁶ For a discussion see Ringer, *Arnold Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew*; Mäckelmann, *Arnold Schönberg und das Judentum: Der Komponist und sein Religiöses, Nationales und Politisches Selbstverständnis nach 1921*.

²²⁷ Cross and Berman, *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, 261.

means as unsympathetic as has been assumed. Yet in many respects, it could be argued that Schoenberg's self-concept of the persecuted, tortured genius to whom the idea of compromise is anathema in spite of the hostility that he universally arouses became widely accepted as a paradigm of the truly 'authentic' modernist artist, and has exerted a profound influence—both on the writing of historical narratives of musical modernism, and also on the ways in which some prominent modernist composers subsequently tended to define themselves, up to the era of Boulez and Stockhausen, and beyond. It is difficult, however, not to feel highly ambivalent about such envisionings of the composer as guardian of higher moral and artistic truths or even as prophet, especially when these claims are accompanied by strong tendencies towards authoritarianism and speaking of one's fellow men in an intolerant and dehumanising way, and underpinned by the conviction that the relationship between the 'authentic' artist and society must inevitably be hostile and antagonistic.

Schoenberg's role in the formation of these self-envisionings of the modernist artist, and of the modernist composer in particular, are self-evidently deserving of more detailed study, and could potentially shed a profound light on the intellectual and culturally-determined assumptions that shaped the musical modernist movement.

Appendix I: Strindberg's Thanks

The following article appeared in the morning edition of the Berliner Tageblatt on Saturday 27th January 1912—the reproduction of a letter Strindberg wrote in response to an editor asking about the wishes he had received for his 63rd birthday. Schoenberg notes in his diary on the 28th January that he immediately recognised himself in Strindberg's sentiments. The German article is printed in full here, with the present author's translation.

Strindbergs Dank

August Strindberg veröffentlicht in einer Stockholmer Zeitung einen Antwortbrief an einen Redakteur, der etwas über die Glückwünsche wissen wollte, die Strindberg zu seinem Geburtstag erhalten hat. Die Worte des Dichters sind so charakteristisch, daß wir sie hier wiedergeben wollen; das entspricht, wie wir wissen, auch dem Wunsche Strindbergs, der seiner Freunde in Deutschland an seinem Ehrentag herzlich gedacht hat.

Die Antwort lautet:

Herr Redakteur!

Sie baten mich, Ihnen zu sagen, von wem ich Telegramme erhalten habe. Ich antworte ungefähr so: Dieser Markt der Eitelkeit, wo man die Ehrenbeweise der großen Männer ausstellt, aber die der kleinen Leute wegläßt und die weniger ehrenden verschweigt, ist mir schon immer unwürdig erschienen. Noch unpassender ist es, in der Gegenwart des Gefeierten Glückwünsche vorzulesen, geschrieben in einem aufrichtigen, aber begeisterten Augenblick, mit übertreibenden Superlativen, die an grobe Schmeicheleien grenzen und dadurch wieder die Rechte anderer kränken. Lassen Sie mich deshalb die vielen schriftlichen Beweise freundlicher Gefühle für mich selber und zur eigenen Selbstprüfung zurückbehalten. Zwar bin ich nicht unempfindlich für Ermunterung, doch überschätzende Titel aus der hebräischen Gottesmythe und von irdischer Königlichkeit wirken als Lästerung auf mich, der ich nie einen Nebukadnezar bewundert habe oder danach strebte, den Herren dieser Welt gleich zu werden.

Nun sollte ich all diese Glückwünsche beantworten, und gestern morgen begann ich zu schreiben und zu telegraphieren; doch wuchs mir die Arbeit derart über den Kopf, daß ich alles liegen lassen und zu Bett gehen mußte. Da ich aber weiß, wie beklemmend ein unbeantworteter Gruß und Brief wirkt, so lasten alle diese Telegramme und Briefe schwer auf meinem Gewissen. Andererseits sehe ich auch keine Möglichkeit, diese Riesenkorrespondenz einzeln zu beantworten. „Das verlangt man gar nicht!“ so tröstete mich ein Freund. Darf ich das wirklich glauben, ja, dann bitte ich Sie,

ohne meine Abgespanntheit nach überstandener Krankheit vorzuschützen, wozu ich wohl Grund hätte, in Ihrer Zeitung den Empfang und meine Dankbarkeitsschuld allen Gratulanten zu erkennen zu geben. Denen, die nicht recht an meine Anspruchslosigkeit glauben, weil sie von mir selbst in unbewachten Augenblicken Worte der Ueberschätzung gehört haben, möchte ich sagen: *Wenn man mit handgreiflicher Ungerechtigkeit behandelt wird, so muß man sich selbst verteidigen, und in dieser Selbstverteidigung muß man ja seine Verdienste hervorheben. Deshalb ist man öfter hochmütig bei Widerwärtigkeiten, während man sich dem Erfolg gegenüber demütig und unwürdig fühlt. Manchem wird das Selbstvertrauen durch systematische Unterschätzung geraubt, aber im Reagieren gegen diese Schwäche kommt er gar leicht in die Versuchung, über die Stränge zu schlagen und setzt hart gegen hart. Es ist der wirklich Verkannte, „der im Wirtshaus sitzt und sich aufbläht“, um einen Augenblick lang die Illusion zu haben, er sei der, der er ist.*

So schließe ich denn in der Hoffnung, daß man mir Absolution bewilligt. All die freundlichen blauen Botschaften werde ich in einem Schrein bewahren, der sein Behälter für Weihrauch sein darf. Er soll nur eine Erinnerung sein und ein Erbe für meine Kinder, das Verbindlichkeiten auferlegt; dies Erbe soll ihnen ein Gewissen werden, das drohend erstehen wird, wenn sie ihnen geringen Ursprung vergessen sollten und die Quelle, aus der diese besseren Lebensbedingungen geflossen sind.

August Strindberg

Ueber Strindbergs Gesundheit hören wir Gutes. Alle Befürchtungen, daß er die Anstrengungen, denen er an seinem Geburtstage ausgesetzt war, nicht überstehen würde, haben sich als unbegründet erwiesen.

In einem Interview teilt seine Tochter, Frau Greta von Philp mit, daß der Dichter am folgenden Morgen bei bester Gesundheit war. Er machte mit ihr einen Spaziergang durch Stockholms Straßen.

„Mein Vater“, erzählt Frau von Philp, „war in bester Laune. Es war herrliches Wetter und er freute sich nach seiner schweren Krankheit, die Sonne wieder zu sehen. Ueber all die Herzlichkeit, die ihm bei seinem Geburtstag zuteil wurde, war er ganz entzückt. Er hatte einen förmlichen Strahlenkranz von Freude um sein Haupt, und alle dunklen Wolken waren verschwunden. Vielleicht werden wir ihn dazu vermögen, einmal sein Schneckenhaus zu verlassen und einige Zeit im Süden oder in der Schweiz zu verbringen, wo er vor dreißig Jahren längere Zeit weilte.“

Strindberg's Thanks

August Strindberg published a letter in a Stockholm newspaper in response to an editor who enquired about the congratulations which Strindberg had received for his birthday. The poet's words are so characteristic that we want to reprint them here, in accordance, as we know, with Strindberg's wishes, who sincerely thought of his friends in Germany on his special day.

The answer reads:

Sir,

They asked me to tell you from whom I received telegrams. I answer something like this: This Vanity Fair, where one parades the marks of honour received from great men but omitting those from the less significant and concealing those lesser honours, has always seemed ignoble to me. It is even more inappropriate to read out, in the presence of the person being honoured, congratulations which are written in a sincere yet impassioned moment with exaggerated superlatives verging on gross flattery, and thereby again treat others unjustly. Therefore allow me to keep these written demonstrations of gracious sentiment for my own personal scrutiny. Indeed, while I am not insensitive to encouragement, hyperbolic epithets from Hebrew mythology and pertaining to earthly royalty seem sacrilegious to me, as I have never admired a Nebuchadnezzar or aspired to be a similar Lord of the world.

Now I should answer all of these well-wishes, and yesterday morning I started writing and telegraphing, but the task overwhelmed me so much that I had to drop everything and go to bed. But since I know how offensive an unacknowledged greeting or letter can seem, all these telegrams and letters weigh on my conscience. On the other hand, I can see no way to answer this enormous correspondence personally. 'No-one would expect you to!', so a friend of mine consoled me. Were I to really believe that, then yes, without pleading exhaustion after recovering from illness, for which I would have good reason, I would ask you to convey my acknowledgement and debt of gratitude to all well-wishers in your newspaper. To those who did not quite believe my modesty, because they have heard me overestimate myself in unguarded moments, I would like to say: *If one is treated with palpable injustice, one must defend oneself, and in this self-defence one will have to emphasize one's merits. As such, one is more frequently arrogant in unpleasant circumstances, while one feels himself unworthy and humble in the face of success. Some are robbed of their self-confidence by systematic underestimation, but in compensating for this weakness they quickly yield to the temptation to kick over the traces and fight fire with fire. It is the truly misunderstood person, "who sits in the tavern blowing his own trumpet", in order to have the illusion for a moment that that is who he is.*

So I conclude, then, in the hope of being granted absolution. I will preserve all friendly blue messages in a shrine, which shall be its container for incense. This is meant to be only a memory and a legacy for my children, which imposes commitments; this inheritance shall become their conscience, which will rise up threateningly if they should forget their humble origins, from which better living conditions have followed.

August Strindberg

We hear good things about Strindberg's health. Any fears that he would not survive the stresses to which he was exposed on his birthday have proven unfounded.

In an interview with his daughter, Mrs Greta von Philp, she reported that on the following morning the poet was in excellent health. He took a walk with her through the streets of Stockholm.

"My Father," said Mrs von Philp, "was in excellent spirits. It was beautiful weather and he was pleased to see the sun again after his serious illness. He was delighted by all the warmth shown to him on his birthday. He was absolutely beaming with joy, and all the dark clouds were gone. Perhaps we may even induce him to leave his shell and spend some time in the South or in Switzerland, where he spent a long time thirty years ago."

Appendix II: From Strindberg's *Inferno*

The following extract is taken from pages 120-123 of Strindberg's Inferno, in an English translation by Mary Sandbach, published by Hutchinson & Co. of London in 1962. In it, one follows Strindberg on an ambling anecdote typical of this book, which is quasi-autobiographical and comprises many extracts from his Occult Diary. The wider chapter is about his discovery of the ideas of the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, and this may have drawn it to Schoenberg's attention. Certain aspects of its setting and symbols are remarkable for their overlap with those of Die glückliche Hand—these correspondences are underlined for emphasis by the present author, and are discussed at length in chapter 2.

When I compared Swedenborg's description of Hell with the torments mentioned in the Germanic Mythology, I saw that there was an unmistakable similarity between them, but to me personally the essential point was the fact that these two books had overwhelmed me at the same moment. I was in Hell and damnation lay heavy upon me. When I subjected my past life to close scrutiny and thought of my childhood, I could see that even that had been like a prison sentence, an inquisitorial court. The tortures to which an innocent child had been subjected could be explained in no other way than by assuming that we have had a previous existence, from which we have been removed and sent here to suffer the consequences of misdemeanours of which we ourselves have no recollection. Because of a faint-heartedness from which I often suffer, I pushed away into the furthest recesses of my soul the impression that my reading of Swedenborg had made upon me. But the Powers would no longer give me any peace.

When I took a walk in the outskirts of the village, the little stream led me towards the gorge between the two hills. The truly magnificent entrance to it, between masses of fallen rocks, lured me on with a strange and irresistible fascination. The perpendicular side of the rock, upon which the ruined castle stood, came down right to the bottom and formed a gateway to the ravine itself at the spot where the stream became the mill-race. By a freak of nature the top of the rock looked like the head of a Turk, so like, that everyone in the district had noticed it.

Under it, nestling against the wall of rock, was the miller's wagon shed. On the door handle hung a goat's horn, containing the grease for lubricating the wagons, and close by, leaning against the wall, was a besom.

In spite of the fact that all this was perfectly natural and just as it should be, I could not help asking myself what demon it was who had put those two insignia of witches, the goat's horn and the besom, just there and right in my way on this particular morning.

I walked on along the dark, damp path, feeling decidedly uneasy, and pulled up sharply before a wooden building of unusual appearance. It was a low, oblong shed with six oven doors. Ovens!

Good heavens, where had I got to?

The image of Dante's Hell rose up before me, the coffers, the sinners being baked red hot ... and the six oven doors. Was it a nightmare? No, it was a commonplace reality, that was made perfectly plain by a horrible stink, a stream of mire, and a chorus of grunts coming from the pig-sty.

Exactly under the Turk's head the path contracted to a narrow passage between the miller's house and the rock wall. I went on, but in the background I espied an enormous Danish mastiff, the colour of a wolf, the very image of the monster who had guarded the studio in the Rue de la Santé in Paris.

I shrank back a couple of paces, then I remembered Jacques Coeur's motto: 'To a brave heart nothing is impossible', and pushed on into the abyss. Cerberus pretended not to notice me, and I marched on between two rows of low, gloomy houses. A black hen with the comb of a cock. A woman who at distance seemed beautiful and bore on her forehead a mark like a blood-red half-moon, but who turned out, when I got closer, to be toothless and hideous.

The waterfall and the mill-wheel made a noise that was just like the humming in my ears that had been with me ever since those first nights of agitation in Paris. The mill-hands, white as false angels, handled the machinery like executioners, and the great paddle-wheel performed its Sisyphean task of sending the water running down ceaselessly, over and over again.

Further on was the smithy, with the begrimed, naked smiths armed with fire-tongs, pincers and sledge-hammers, standing in the midst of fire and sparks and glowing iron and melted lead and a din that made my head whirl and my heart thump against my ribs.

Next came the saw-mill and the huge saw, gnashing its teeth as it tortured the giant logs lying on the rack, while from them colourless blood trickled down on to the slimy ground.

The ravine, devastated by pelting rain and whirlwinds, followed the course of the stream. Floods had left a layer of greyish-green slime that covered the sharp pebbles on which I slipped and hurt my feet. I wanted to cross the water-course, but the plank had been carried away and I was brought to a halt under an overhanging precipice where the rock had been undermined. It was threatening to fall on an image of the Virgin, whose divine but slender shoulders alone seemed to be holding it up.

I returned the way I had come, lost in contemplation of a sequence of accidental circumstances which, taken together, formed one great whole, awe-inspiring but by no means supernatural.

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