

“Neo-romanticism”



1

The present age has an apparently insatiable appetite for the music of the past, but that observation conveys nothing about the degree of musico-historical insight enjoyed by the listeners. Meanwhile, to the music historian who is not deceived by the appearance of familiarity and does not equate aesthetic habituation with historical understanding, the second half of the nineteenth century, the period from 1850 to 1890 that provides the staple diet in our concert halls and opera houses, is less accessible than the Trecento or Quattrocento, whose musico-historical outlines are well established. And the primary obstacle in his way is by no means an all too slight and fragmentary knowledge of such peripheral figures as Raff and Goldmark, Bruch and Gernsheim, but the uncertainty of historical judgments (not, let it be said, of aesthetic judgments) concerning central works by Wagner and Liszt, Brahms and Bruckner.

As yet hardly any attempt has been made to present the history of music in this period in a form other than that of monographs about the leading composers, interspersed with occasional outlines of cultural history which find room for the “minor masters.” The history of music in the nine-

teenth century, unlike that of the fifteenth or sixteenth, is still seen primarily as the history of its heroes—the "great masters," the composers of the works which constitute the "canon"—but simply to condemn this one-sided emphasis as arbitrary does not take us much further.

For one thing, those who write history are not unaffected by the motives that stimulate the interest of a more general public in the subject under discussion. (A strictly autonomous historical method, one that was governed exclusively by considerations acknowledged only by other historians, would be as sterile as it was purist.) If music historians are apt to write the history of great men when faced with the nineteenth century, and to write cultural history when they tackle the Trecento, the reasons lie in the prehistory of academic historiography. Composers' biographies were being written before anyone embarked on the history of the nineteenth century, and the study of the art and culture of the Trecento as a source of "pictures from the past" preceded more systematic historical research. (Even today, the music of the Trecento is listened to primarily as a specimen of medieval culture, while books on the music history of the nineteenth century are read for the biographical keys they can supply to the "canonical" works.)

Secondly, the heart of the "aesthetic religion" of the nineteenth century was the cult of genius. And the spirit in which the musical facts were received and interpreted is itself a fact that shapes and motivates their history, and as such it must be taken into account by the historian. The principle that a past era must be surveyed in the light of its own preconceptions should not erect a barrier to understanding. It does not mean that one ought not to entertain ideas about the era that it did not, or could not, hold itself, but it does mean that the likelihood of arriving at pertinent insights is greater if one begins by mastering the categories of that era heuristically than if one ignores them from the first or merely dismisses them as ideologically untenable. Much would be lost by outright substitution of a struc-

turalist interpretation for the biographical emphasis in the history of nineteenth-century music; it is enough to recognize that the latter is only one side of the story and to complement it with accounts based on other premises.

Thirdly, one of the fundamental tenets of popular aesthetic theory in the nineteenth century was that compositions were fragments of autobiography: such was the view of "poetic" works at least, "poetry" being the distinguishing characteristic of "art." The expressive theory of aesthetics provided the soil in which biography, often bearing a marked resemblance to the novel, flourished alongside historiography with a strong biographical tendency. It would be excessively rigorous to set aside the popular aesthetic conceptions of the nineteenth century as pitiable errors which the period entertained about itself, and to treat phenomena such as the cult of genius and the expressive theory of aesthetics, with its emphasis on (almost always idealized) biography, merely as subjects for dissociated analysis and scrutiny; they should be given their historical due as factors influencing attitudes and developments. The history of nineteenth-century music would lose a substantial part of its "local color" if it was confined to the history of its structures.

This plea for some recognition of the merits of the nineteenth-century biographical method should not, however, be mistaken for a demand for its restoration. The aesthetic foundations and implications of the biographical premise in music historiography are indeed questionable, but the disrepute into which, as a result, it has fallen in present-day theory is so exaggerated that a sense of justice drives one to proffer some sort of apology on its behalf. On the other hand it persists so obstinately in practice (if the practice of writing music history is in the hands of the publicists rather than the scholars, if the music historians cannot bring themselves actually to write music history, it is because they find the older methods obsolete and the up-to-date postulates barely realizable) that some emphasis on

structuralist history must be made a priority if we are to avoid a situation where ever stricter formulations of methodological postulates will hinder or prevent their realization, and, conversely, delays in the introduction of changes in historiographical practice will provoke a hardening of theory into ever more abstract radicalism.

2

To German music historians of the traditional school—popular as well as academic—the second half of the nineteenth century is the age of Wagner or of "neo-romanticism." Yet Wagner's very pre-eminence makes it all the harder to relate the specifically musical mode of thought of which the *Ring*, *Tristan* and *Parsifal* are the expressions to the non-musical trends of the age; that is, to comprehend them historically—in their context—and not merely aesthetically, as isolated, self-sufficient structures. The difficulty is not simply a matter of the incommensurability of Wagner's work, but the size of the gulf separating music in general, not just Wagner's, from the important art and literature of the age. It is hard to reconcile this fact with the belief in the unity of the *zeitgeist* in every manifestation of an age, which is the fundamental thesis of the "*Geistesgeschichte*" school of the history of ideas.

It was this difficulty that prompted the historians of ideas to attach the label "neo-romantic" to music from 1850 onwards. The term originated, in the early nineteenth century, in literary theory, where it was used consistently to distinguish each successive kind of romanticism from the preceding one: at first the romanticism of circa 1800 from the literature of the Middle Ages and the early modern era; then French romanticism of 1830 onwards from the German romanticism of circa 1800; finally the revived romanticism of circa 1900 from the original, paradigmatic romanticism of a century earlier.¹

1. R. Grimm, "Zur Wortgeschichte des Begriffs 'Neuromantik,'" in *Das Nachleben der Romantik in der modernen deutschen Literatur*, ed. W. Paulsen (Heidelberg, 1969), pp. 32–50.

There is a certain wry irony in the classification of Wagner as a "neo-romantic" alongside Liszt and Berlioz, since he himself used the term polemically in *Opera and Drama* in 1851 for the French romanticism of 1830 onwards, naming Berlioz and Meyerbeer—a curious pairing—as its musical representatives. Such romanticism he regarded as a distortion of, and falling-off from, the real thing, and he made a sharp distinction between it and his own music drama.²

It was their own thesis that all the arts in any one period are permeated by the same zeitgeist that prevented the historians of ideas from recognizing the real element of truth in the label they applied to music after 1850 as a matter of expediency.³ In spite of all the questions it begs, "neo-romantic" is appropriate if it is interpreted as acknowledging the fact that the music of the second half of the nineteenth century was still romantic, while the current of the age as expressed in literature and painting had moved on to realism and impressionism. E. T. A. Hoffmann's claim that music was the only truly romantic art can be disputed as a timeless, universal maxim (which is how he meant it), but as a forecast of developments in the nineteenth century it was remarkably accurate.

Early nineteenth-century music could be said to be romantic in an age of romanticism, which produced romantic poetry and painting and even romantic physics and chemistry, whereas the neo-romanticism of the later part of the century was romantic in an unromantic age, dominated by positivism and realism. Music, *the* romantic art, had become "untimely" in general terms, though by no means unimportant; on the contrary, its very dissociation from the prevailing spirit of the age enabled it to fulfill a spiritual, cultural, and ideological function of a magnitude which can hardly be exaggerated: it stood for an alternative world. The

2. R. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, ed. W. Golther (Berlin and Leipzig, n.d.), 3:273ff., 282ff.

3. W. Niemann, *Die Musik seit Richard Wagner* (Berlin, 1913); E. Bücken, *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Moderne* (Wildpark-Potsdam, 1929).

saying "music is different" formed the nucleus of the musical aesthetic of an age of positivism.

Neither realism nor the spirit of the early years (the "*Gründerjahre*") of the new German empire proclaimed in 1871, neither naturalism nor symbolism had any effect on the major musical works of the second half of the nineteenth century, with a few exceptions that did not influence style in general. This is not to deny the underlying realism of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, analogous to that of the great Russian novels, or the homage paid by the French Symbolists to Wagner. (It is hard, in any case, to agree on just what their homage has to tell us about Wagner, or on whether it related to music and musical drama at all, or primarily to the "artistic phenomenon": to the energy Wagner brought to asserting and establishing the highest cultural claims for music.) But in spite of certain affinities it is hardly possible to describe realism or symbolism as musical movements, let alone as periods in music history. Naturalism was alien and even hostile to music (the champions of art for the scientific age distrusted music, which was an invitation to romantic musing of the kind dismissed by Brecht as "gawking" [*glotzen*]). If some of the sets designed for the festival theater in Bayreuth are reminiscent of the style of Makart, it by no means signifies that Wagner's music breathes the spirit (if that is the right word for it) of the new German empire—in spite of the theory of the "total artwork," the "*Gesamtkunstwerk*," which did not eliminate the lack of synchronism between the separate arts which were necessary to the stage realization of the drama.

Definitions of a period in the history of music or any of the other arts are never completely independent of value judgments: aesthetic decisions are made about which works belong to history (instead of merely to the debris of the past) and which not. The existence of analogies to Wagnerian music drama in some works of dubious literary merit—the products of a Wilhelm Jordan or a Felix Dahn—makes little or no difference to the gulf between the music of the late

nineteenth century and its literature and painting. The quality of works representing a particular stylistic trend is of no less importance in forming a historical judgment than the number of works representing the style, or the fact that a style manifests itself in one art and not at all in another. Charpentier's *Louise* is too weak a work to stand for naturalism in music: to all intents and purposes, apart from certain elements in program music, there is no such thing. Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* is a major work, yet the musical realism of which it is the outstanding document is so isolated a phenomenon that it can hardly be called a style—for one of the characteristics of a style is recurrence in more than one work. The central trends of the age were represented in music by peripheral works, while the central musical works were representative of the periphery of the age.

3

The positivist age in which musical neo-romanticism had to assert itself—as the prototype of an "alternative world"—was not the same thing as the "prosaic" everyday world that oppressed the poets and composers of the early nineteenth century. The principal difference was that positivism was by no means merely the day-to-day, trivial reality to which philosophy and art could be contrasted, as constituting a "true reality"; in the early years of the century philosophy regarded itself as the quintessence of "science" precisely when it was speculative, and art was imbued with metaphysical dignity. Positivism, however, was not merely a contrast, a foil, to the spiritual, intellectual, and cultural trends of the age: it was itself the spirit of a scientific age.

Around 1800 the ideas with which music was imbued were related to the principles which were uppermost in the literature, the painting, the philosophy, and the history writing of the age. The world that existed outside this realm of culture was "prosaic." But after the middle of the century music, in which something of romanticism lived on, was the odd art out in a cultural climate that was predominantly

anti-romantic. Romantic—"neo-romantic"—music found itself isolated in an age when literature and painting abhorred "ideas" (impressionism was still realism, even if it employed different techniques); when historians, after the eclipse of Hegelianism, shrank from writing speculative history; when the prevalent mode of thought among educated people increasingly reflected the methodology of the natural sciences; and when philosophy alternated between moods of positivism and metaphysics: between anxious dependency on the exact sciences on the one hand and experimental forays into "mythology" on the other. Of course some writers, painters, and historians continued to produce works tinged with romanticism, but these could not compare in significance with contemporary romantic music, which was the "great music" of the age.

Thus music increased its influence because it was almost alone in bearing the burden of providing an alternative to the realities of the world following the Industrial Revolution. (Lyric poetry of any significance had taken off into esotericism; the poetry that the general public actually read partook of neo-romanticism, but could not aspire to the heights reached by the style in music.) On the other hand, because of its alienation from the positivist zeitgeist, music could not lay claim to being a "representative" art, the document and reflection of its age. The reason why people followed Schopenhauer (who had to wait for true recognition until the second half of the century) in attributing metaphysical meaning to music was that they no longer believed that metaphysics had any true significance for reality—"true reality" now being synonymous with material reality. Music was raised to a status of incommensurability—and could then safely be ignored as irrelevant.

But music's position vis-à-vis the industrial age was not only that of a consolatory and elevating alternative to materialism: in another way they were also dialectically reconciled. Wagner himself provided the most drastic formulation of the matter in 1851, in *Opera and Drama*, when, in

addition to apostrophizing Berlioz as a "neo-romantic," he called him the musical "savior" of an age of "industrial machinery." If one ignores the scornful and denunciatory tone and concentrates on what his words describe, they could easily be applied to the composer of the Magic Fire music.

We understand now the supernatural wonders with which the priesthood used to deceive childlike people into believing that some god manifested himself to them; there was always some mechanical contrivance behind these marvels.

Wagner the mythologist, Nietzsche's "sorcerer," appropriates here the thesis of "priestly deception."

In exactly the same way nowadays the *supernatural*, being as it is the *unnatural*, is paraded before the bemused public solely through the marvels of machinery, and truly Berlioz's orchestra is a miracle of that order. Berlioz has explored the highest and the lowest extremities of this machinery and has thus developed a truly remarkable knowledge of its capabilities, and if we acknowledge the inventors of today's industrial machinery as benefactors of the citizens of the modern state, then we must acclaim Berlioz as the true savior of our world of absolute music

—by "absolute" Wagner meant "unmotivated": if music had no foundation in dance or words it lacked inner justification; he did not accept a program as a valid aesthetic *raison d'être* for a piece—

for by the use of an unprecedented variety of purely mechanical means he has enabled musicians to create the most marvellous effects, even if the content of what they are playing is inartistic rubbish.⁴

The feeling that metaphysical effects in music result from mechanical causes had already troubled Wackenroder more than half a century earlier, when he formulated an aesthetics of music in the early days of romanticism.⁵ But the

4. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:283.

5. W. H. Wackenroder, *Werke und Briefe* (Heidelberg, 1967), pp. 205 ("Die Wunder der Tonkunst"), 220 ("Das eigentümliche innere Wesen der Tonkunst").

composer's craft of which Wackenroder was thinking had become a technique (even a technology) in the music of Berlioz—and in the music of Wagner. (The distinction Wagner chose to make between his own "motivated" dramatic music and Berlioz's "unmotivated" programmatic music is not a good enough reason to withhold from him the judgment he passed on Berlioz.) The advances in musical techniques—"advances" is an expression normally frowned upon in the writing of music history, but it is the *mot juste* here—were the precise correlative in the nineteenth century to the increase in romantic illusionism that T. W. Adorno described as "phantasmagoria."⁶

Throughout the age of scientific positivism between 1850 and 1890, coinciding with the rise and establishment of the new German empire, music was at once "untimely," inasmuch as it was still a romantic art, and a spiritual force of incalculable influence, inasmuch as it was the expression of an alternative culture. The special position of music was what enabled Wagner—whose authority as a writer on the philosophy of culture derived from his authority as a musician—to mediate between the romanticism of the early part of the century, of which he was the heir, and the "*Kulturkritik*" of the end of the century,⁷ which he inspired. It was from that "critical re-evaluation of an entire culture" that a literary and philosophical neo-romanticism was born around 1900, reflecting musical neo-romanticism.

There is no mistaking the mark Wagner left on his time, yet its nature is hard to define since it manifested itself—unlike Hegelianism—less in a system of categories than in vague but powerful currents of feeling and in slogans which gave the currents an eruptive rather than a rationally comprehensible expression. (Terms like "*das Allgemeine-menschliche*"—meaning "that which is common to all mankind," "the general human lot"—or formulas like

6. T. W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (Frankfurt am Main, 1952), pp. 107ff.

7. E. Troeltsch, "Das Neunzehnte Jahrhundert," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4 (Tübingen, 1925), pp. 614–49.

the postulate that music should be the means of "realizing the poetic intention for the feelings" are as fundamental to Wagner's thinking as their meaning is hazy to someone who tries to analyze them dispassionately without being swept along in the Wagnerian current.)

The actual texts of Wagner's writings on the philosophy of culture did not exert a very great influence, nor were the ideas he expressed in his writings automatically taken seriously out of deference to his musical authority. It was the music itself which had an effect on the philosophy of culture. We could, with only a tinge of exaggeration, speak of the "cultural re-evaluation" of the end of the century as being born from the spirit of music—Wagner's music. But his own writings constituted only one—and not the decisive one—among several attempts to interpret the significance of his music for the philosophy of culture.

4

If Wagner's was the dominant, so to speak "official," music of the second half of the nineteenth century—and the most partisan adherents of Brahms, those who regarded Wagner's later works as a dreadful omen for the future of music, did not deny that they were a phenomenon overshadowing everything else—at the same time, and not by chance, "unofficial," "trivial" music evolved to become a musico-psychological force such as it had not been before. We can see here a qualitative leap in the development of "low" (as opposed to "high") art. The paradoxical intermingling (typical of Germany in the 1870s) of two contrary and apparently mutually exclusive tendencies—of the positivism which regarded itself as the spirit of an industrial age, and of a neo-romanticism which was out of its proper time and yet powerful—is as clearly illustrated by the products of the musical basement as by the "great art" produced on the *piano nobile*.

The fact that musical neo-romanticism was a late flowering of romanticism in a positivist age—without being epigonal in any derogatory sense—was one of the aesthetic

circumstances that shaped and encouraged the spread of musical kitsch in the second half of the nineteenth century (The decisive social cause, which would have been as ineffectual without the aesthetic factor as the aesthetic factor would have been without the social cause, was of course the desire of the classes made prosperous by the political and social circumstances of the age to have their own form of the bourgeois musical culture that was shaped by romantic tradition.)

Musical kitsch, whether rousing and high-flown or soothingly sentimental, is a decadent form of romantic music. When the *noble simplicité* of a classical style descends to the market place, the result is banality—the mere husks of classical forms—but hardly ever kitsch. Kitsch in music has hybrid ambitions which far outreach the capabilities of its actual structures and sounds, and are manifested in effects without cause, empty attitudinizing, and titles and instructions for performance which are not justified by the musical results. Instead of being content with modest achievements within its reach, musical kitsch has pretensions to big emotions, to "significance," and these are rooted in what are still recognizably romantic preconceptions, however depraved.

Another thing which has always led to works being branded as kitsch is the sense that they are somehow mechanical, calculated, "manufactured." In other circumstances, an aesthetic theory that disparages the "making," the construction—the *poiein* that gives poetry its name—may itself be open to question and alien to art; but in the case of kitsch it hits the nail on the head. How a piece of musical kitsch is made, put together, is particularly obvious, even if only to listeners who are capable of hearing musical structures at all, because it is primitive; and since kitsch subscribes to the anti-mannerist principle, common to both romantic and classical art, that artifice must be concealed in art, its primitive construction contradicts and undermines its aesthetic intentions. Its pretensions to emotional immediacy collapse when the listener is able to see through its

calculation. The "industrial machinery" to which Wagner discovered a musical analogy in the orchestral technique of Berlioz—a machinery central to neo-romantic music as a whole, giving it its particular characteristics of a romantic art that employed the means of a positivist, industrial age—is thus also at work in musical kitsch, but—and the distinction is crucial—it is employed schematically. The Magic Fire declines into pyrotechnics. The decisive point aesthetically is not, as the adherents of a sentimental, popular, aesthetic theory believe, the sincerity or insincerity of the emotions expressed in the music. For one thing, sincerity is a questionable aesthetic category, and for another, no one has the moral right to impugn the sincerity of the emotions that give rise to kitsch. What is decisive is the sheer inadequacy of the machinery, its rudimentary schematics, its spurious invention.

As decadent romanticism (typical of the age in that respect), kitsch makes us aware of one element which threatens all the music of the later nineteenth century, the great neo-romantic art as well as the trivial pseudo-romantic art, and that is the "untimeliness" of romantic attitudes and ways of thought. Of course neo-romantic music of quality does not raise the aesthetic objections that apply to the kitsch of the same era: there is no disparity between its expressive character and its compositional techniques—the "poetic intention" and its "realization," as Wagner would say. But it is dogged by the awareness, or at the very least by an obscure presentiment, that the romanticism to which it holds fast—or of which it is the fulfillment, as Wagner's champions claim for the founder of Bayreuth—is no longer "substantial" (in the objective, historico-philosophical sense, not the subjective, psychological sense; it is not its sincerity that is in question, but its historical authenticity).

The loss of historico-philosophical substance emerges aesthetically in the fact that it is impossible to give romantic intentions a simple direct expression. In the first half of the century profound and significant thought could legiti-

mately be expressed in straightforward musical language, inasmuch as directness and simplicity were in accord with the romantic zeitgeist. But in the second half of the century such a mode of expression at once came under the suspicion of being kitsch (and since aesthetic cases are tried by public opinion, not by learned judges, suspicion is already tantamount to conviction). Therefore, if it was not to sink to basement level, musical neo-romanticism had to have recourse to complex compositional techniques (such as lie behind the apparently artless simplicity of *Die Meistersinger*), that is, to the "industrial machinery" of a Berlioz that aroused Wagner to simultaneous admiration and denunciation. The "machinery," in other words the deployment of musical technology (as opposed to musical craftsmanship, of which Wagner and Berlioz were considered not fully masters by some of their contemporaries, and not always those who were the worst judges), though it is in one respect a document of the spirit of the industrial, positivist age, is not so much a denial of the neo-romantic "poetic intention" as an essential factor in its musical realization. It is the artistic quality of the realization which distinguishes it from kitsch, which cannot bridge the gulf between its primitive techniques and its "poetic" pretensions.

5

The attempt to understand the musical neo-romanticism of the second half of the nineteenth century as romantic art in an unromantic, positivist age presupposes something which is by no means self-evident, namely that the decades between 1850 and 1890 (or 1910) form a coherent epoch, distinct from romanticism on one side and modernism (or the "new music") on the other. (The period around 1900 thought of and referred to itself as "modern.")

Some music historians are inclined to place less stress on the caesura of circa 1850 and more on the end of classicism and early romanticism around 1830, and to regard the "musical revolution" of circa 1910 as the end of the romantic

age, rather than the changes that took place around 1890.⁸ The differences are due not so much to varying opinions about facts and circumstances as to divergences in the underlying historiographic principles.

The year 1830 seems an obvious place for the caesura if Berlioz is contrasted with Beethoven and Meyerbeer with Rossini, and if events in France are placed in the forefront: the end of the Bourbon restoration, which in music was Rossini's heyday, and the establishment of the July monarchy, as whose musical representatives Wagner coupled Berlioz and Meyerbeer.⁹ In Germany, on the other hand, the relationship between Weber and the young Wagner (the composer of "romantic operas," which it is willful to reinterpret as "music dramas"), or that between Beethoven and Schubert on the one hand (as Thrasybulos Georgiades has shown, early romanticism and Viennese classicism intermingle¹⁰) and Schumann and Mendelssohn on the other, is too close to allow talk of two ages or the end of a musical era. (Schumann was no musical Heine; rather, the German romantics after 1830 regarded themselves, with some justice, as the heirs of Beethoven, the executors of the musical testament that Beethoven had left in his late works.) Thus the importance of 1830 for the music historian depends on whether he considers the relationship music bore to events and structural changes in the political and social arena more or less decisive than the aesthetic standing music reached on its own, as an autonomous art. In other words, it depends on whether he chooses to draw his musico-historical frontiers according to the major events in political and social history (in which France was the leader) in spite of the relatively weak impression those events made on music, or according to the major events in music history (in which

8. F. Blume, "Die Musik von 1830 bis 1914: Strukturprobleme einer Epoche," in *Kongressbericht Kassel 1962*, pp. 40-50.

9. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:300.

10. T. G. Georgiades, *Schubert, Musik und Lyrik* (Göttingen, 1967), pp. 127ff.

Germany was the leader) precisely because the impact of political and social events was relatively slight.

Estimation of the alternative claim of 1850 to be the proper place for a musico-historical caesura is tied up with the methodological decision as to whether emphasis should fall on musical style—understood as the essence of musical means—or on the meaning music had in the contemporary consciousness. The stylistic continuity between Schumann and Brahms, Berlioz and Liszt, the Wagner of the romantic operas and the Wagner of the music dramas, may be seen as grounds for designating the entire century "romantic" so far as its music is concerned, so that the caesuras of circa 1850 and circa 1890 diminish in importance to the level of divisions between phases of romanticism. Alternatively, the decisive factor may seem to be the historico-philosophical distinction between romanticism and neo-romanticism—the gulf between musical romanticism in a romantic age and musical neo-romanticism in a positivist age. The difference of opinions is less important, however, than the insight into the premises that support each of the differing opinions, and into the relative extent to which each can be said to be right.

The central political event of the mid-century was the revolution of 1848–9. That a virtually simultaneous caesura or turning-point can also be seen in music history cannot however be explained by a simple attribution of musical events to socio-historical causes. Wagner's romantic operas (*Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*) and some of Liszt's major works were written before 1850, and it would be wrong to deny the continuity between the pre-1850 and post-1850 works of both composers for the sake of a thesis. Yet stylistic changes patently did take place,¹¹ and there is no mistaking the altered "tone" of music after 1850: it became either forced or resigned, as though, for all the continued adherence to the romantic idea, the idea had lost its substance. The composers who died within a few years of 1850—Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin—represent a dif-

11. H. Rietsch, *Die Tonkunst in der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1900).

ferent era from that of Wagner and Liszt, although they belong to the same generation. (The operas Wagner wrote before 1850 can be seen as forerunners of his later music dramas in certain respects, but if Schumann had lived to Wagner's age it is unlikely that he would have done anything more than repeat himself; the decisive factor is not that he died but that, by 1850, unlike Wagner's, his work was done.)

It is not easy, however, to express unambiguously in a few words the connection between the 1848–9 revolution and its consequences and the musical innovations of the early 1850s: aesthetically, the change in the significance of music indicated by the word neo-romanticism; in the history of genres, the establishment of music drama by Wagner and of the symphonic poem by Liszt. The relationship between the musical changes and the political and social events and trends is ambivalent. It is obvious on the one hand that the revolution and its failure had an immense influence on Wagner's conception and shaping of the *Ring*, the paradigm of music drama; not only the subject of the drama was affected but the character of the music as well. On the other hand, while the compositional techniques of the symphonic poems Liszt wrote in the 1850s are undoubtedly representative of the "new music" of their time—the "music of the future"—their spiritual and intellectual structures were essentially informed by the French romanticism of the 1830s, to whose ideas and attitudes Liszt remained unshakably loyal, passé though they were by 1850. (Even his attitude towards the German classicism that he systematically upheld in Weimar was conditioned by French romanticism's view of classicism.)

The caesura that can be drawn around 1890, the start of the era of "modernism," is marked in the political field by the "new imperialism" of the late nineteenth century,¹² and in intellectual and cultural history by the "cultural re-

12. G. Barraclough, *Tendenzen der Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1967) [*An Introduction to Contemporary History*, London 1964], I. §3.

evaluation" of the turn of the century.¹³ It would be absurd to draw a direct analogy between the musical modernism of the 1890s, whose standard-bearers were Strauss and Mahler (primarily Strauss and secondly Mahler in the eyes of their contemporaries, the other way round in the view of posterity), and the political and philosophical trends of the time—that is, to regard musical innovations merely as a reflection of events outside music. All the same, the spirit of cultural re-evaluation undoubtedly affected thinking about music. Profound changes were taking place virtually simultaneously in different arenas, political and social as well as musical, and that is a fact that positively incites to historico-philosophical speculation, even if materialist reductionism may be regarded with as much distrust as idealist reductionism, because the former seems to be only the latter stood on its head, a negative yet dependent variant of it.

13. Troeltsch, "Neunzehnte Jahrhundert," pp. 641ff.