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## ‘Der Weg der Verheissung’ and the Prophecies of Jeremiah (I)

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for Christoph Becher

A vast epic of the Jewish people in four Acts (or Parts), *Der Weg der Verheissung* is Kurt Weill's only collaboration with the poet, playwright, and novelist Franz Werfel (1890–1945). The text was written in Austria in the spring and summer of 1934, and the score was drafted during the second half of the same year – mostly in the village of Louveciennes outside Paris. The musical perspectives are exceptionally wide: on the one hand they afford a view of all Weill's major compositions from the *Mahagonny* opera (1927–29) to *The Seven Deadly Sins* and the *Second Symphony* (1933); on the other, they look forward to his very last stage work for Broadway, the ‘Musical Tragedy’ *Lost in the Stars* (1949) which he and Maxwell Anderson based on Alan Paton's anti-apartheid novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

The final Act, which stands apart from the others in various respects, has the title *Propheten* in only one of Werfel's manuscripts; elsewhere the definite article is added. That small but significant change is characteristic of the entire Act and the problems it raises.

*Propheten* was heard for the first time at the Konzerthaus, Vienna, on 28 May 1998; a second performance followed at a Prom Concert in the Royal Albert Hall, London, on 26 July. The version performed on both occasions (and due to have its third performance in Bochum, Germany, in November) was prepared by the present writer, and the passages left unorchestrated by Weill – approximately one third of the score as performed – were orchestrated by the Israeli composer and conductor Noam Sheriff.

In *Der Weg der Verheissung*, the Biblical scenes are introduced by the recitatives of a Rabbi who is addressing his endangered community at an unspecified time of religious or racial persecution, and reminding them, by readings from the Torah-scroll, of the history of the Jewish people from Abraham and the Covenant to the destruction of the Second Temple.

Early in 1936, Ludwig Lewisohn's scrupulous translation of *Der Weg der Verheissung* was pub-

lished by the Viking Press in New York under the official and more marketable title *The Eternal Road*. On the title page, *The Eternal Road* is described as ‘A Drama in Four Parts’, without mention of composer or music. A subsequent page carries a note announcing that the English version ‘is the first to be performed... [with] Max Reinhardt as director, Kurt Weill as composer of the music, Norman Bel Geddes as stage designer, and Meyer W Weisgal [as producer]’. According to the same note ‘Werfel's drama was first given at the Manhattan Opera House in January 1936’ – an indication that the book went to press before the last-minute cancellation and indefinite postponement of the première.

Well before that crisis (but in the midst of earlier ones) *The Eternal Road* had been subject to various lane-closures – all of them at the expense of the music. Weill's position was difficult: for the first time (and the last) in his experience of musical theatre, circumstances had compelled him to base a full-length dramatic composition on a text to which he had contributed nothing apart from a few preliminary observations and interim comments. Pressures of time were so great that he had already completed his draft of ‘The Patriarchs’ and ‘Moses’ (Acts I and II) before he received the final scenes of ‘The Kings’ (Act III), and the entire ‘Prophets’.

For Weill, Werfel's ‘Prophets’ came as a revelation. Overjoyed, he wrote to Reinhardt on 6 October 1934 declaring that apart from the purely naturalistic scenes, Act IV would have to be almost through-composed. Certainly for Werfel and probably for Reinhardt too, that was dire news. The allowances Werfel had made for music when he first estimated a total running-time of four hours may well have been generous, but must have become progressively less so as he added page upon page to his magisterially elegant manuscript. Weill for his part was already exceeding his brief in the first two acts; and now that he had read the fourth, he was unstoppable – at least for the next year or so.

The reckoning came in New York during the fraught weeks of preparations, auditions and rehearsals for the scheduled première in January

1936. Now under considerable pressure to complete the orchestral score, Weill accepted the necessity of some cuts in the first three acts, but stoutly defended his 'large-scale' forms. Quite suddenly, and in circumstances that are poorly documented, 'The Prophets' was abandoned – *in toto*, except for the epilogue and those few previous episodes in which neither the protagonist Jeremiah, nor his opponent the False Prophet Hananiah, had made an appearance.

On the face of it, 'The Prophets' had been sacrificed in order to avoid the midnight curfew. According to a contemporary report in the Broadway trade-paper *Variety*, the curtain at long last rose on Reinhardt's production of *The Eternal Road* at 8.43 in the evening – the evening of 4 January 1937 – and fell three hours and seven minutes later, at 11.50. Had 'The Prophets' survived, *Variety's* punctilious reporter would not have been free to leave the Manhattan Opera House until at least half-an-hour after midnight, or later if there had been a third interval. The producers promptly informed *Variety* that the playing-time would now be reduced to the regulation two-and-a-quarter hours.

Whether such a miracle was achieved or even approached is a question of little importance compared to the bare facts: even with the cuts that were in principle acceptable to Weill, the score alone would have run for some three hours; interspersed with it were extensive spoken scenes in the synagogue, and other important spoken passages on the biblical levels. During both phases of the production-process – the second phase, in the autumn of 1936, being more commercially oriented than the first – the vehemence of Weill's protests gave a foretaste of the bitterness with which he subsequently reviewed the whole sorry story.

How far Weill held himself responsible for creating a structure too unwieldy and indeed too grandiose for the purposes of commercial production in the USA is hard to judge, since those purposes had not been the original ones. Between *Der Weg der Verheissung* and *The Eternal Road* there was far too narrow a defile, and at the end of it, a world of difference. True, many striking pages had survived the journey – among them, the scene for Sarah and the Angels in Act I, the Death of Moses (somewhat attenuated) in Act II, and the resoundingly un-Schoenbergian Dance Round the Golden Calf in Act III. Yet the processes of attrition became in a sense inexorable once Reinhardt and Weill had accepted the case against 'The Prophets'.

Though most easily expressed in terms of overtime calculations, the case was essentially separate

from considerations and forecasts of that sort. Jeremiah was not only a prophet of doom, but also a prophet of peace and a self-denying critic of materialism in all its forms. His opponent Hananiah is expressly (and without Old Testament sanction) identified as The False Prophet, and as such represents the advocates of aggressive war and material prosperity. Neither in the New Deal America of the 1930s nor in Isolationist America was there an audience crying out for the *Gotterdämmerung* that ended Weill's and Werfel's not-so-little tetralogy.

*The Eternal Road* opened to excellent notices and ran for 153 consecutive performances. With proper management from the start, it might well have lasted considerably longer. But the chapter of disasters that had ended 18 months previously with the bankruptcy of the original production-company and the last-minute cancellation of the scheduled première had not by any means marked the end of the story. Once Meyer Weisgal had achieved another of his fund-raising miracles and formed a new production-company, the tale of mismanagement had assumed epic proportions. The denouement in May 1937 was inevitable and grimly appropriate: the total collapse of the 'Eternal Road Distributing Company', the closure of its only production, and the demise of the Manhattan Opera House (which had been so extensively and expensively rebuilt in order to house Bel Geddes's mammoth sets that it was no longer considered viable for other theatrical or musical purposes).

*The Eternal Road* itself promptly disappeared beneath the mountain of bad debts. In later years Weill was to excavate small sections for recycling in the Ben Hecht pageants *Fun to be Free* (1941), *We Will Never Die* (1942), and *A Flag is Born* (1946). But these borrowings generally went unnoticed, and no wonder: of the three-and-a-half hours of music he had composed for Werfel's 'Drama' nothing had been formally published in 1937 apart from a 14-page show-album presented and titled as if it were the complete piano-vocal score.\*

Given the right incentives – an effective publisher, a congenial literary collaborator, and a conductor with appropriate interests and

\* Though never reprinted, the little album still retained its unique status sixty years later. By then, however, great changes were already afoot: the complete orchestral score was about to be computer-set under the supervision of Dr Edward Harsh, Managing Editor of the Kurt Weill Edition; and European American Music (President: Ronald Freed) were about to acquire from the original publishers the publishing interests in *The Eternal Road*. Without these developments, and without the active participation of Dr Harsh, the 1998 performances of *Propheten* would not have been feasible.

resources – the Weill of 1937 might well have been persuaded to salvage the most coherent passages in Acts I–III and re-work them in the (then fashionable) form of the 'scenic oratorio'. But that would have been a substantial undertaking, for which neither his own circumstances and mood in the USA, nor the musical and cultural climate on either side of the Atlantic during the late 1930s, were at all favourable.

Technically much simpler would have been a concert-version of Act IV, with or without elements of staging. In the cogency of its musico-dramatic structure and the consistent intensity of its expression, *Propheten* is quite distinct from its predecessors; and the dramaturgy (at least until the close) is relatively unproblematic. With ample time to spare for extra-musical considerations, Weill should not have needed more than two or three weeks for the enjoyable task of completing his orchestration of Act IV.

But where was the public for Weill and his Prophets during (say) the 1937–38 season? Perhaps in the France of Léon Blum's Popular Front government – though Weill had already decided against returning to his old refuge in the village of Louveciennes outside Paris – or even in related circles in England; but certainly not in the USA.

### Origins of the 1998 *Propheten*

In the early 1970s the present writer re-examined the score and sources of *Der Weg der Verheissung/The Eternal Road*, and revised his earlier and largely unfavourable view of the music. An unpublished essay on the subject was soon replaced by a new and much longer one emphasizing the importance of the score and noting the error of looking down on it from the mountain-tops of 'high' culture and applying to it aesthetic criteria which Weill himself had consciously and demonstrably rejected.

Although the distinctive qualities and latent potential of Act IV had now become clear, it was not until 1993 that the idea of a self-standing performing version was proposed by the present writer in connexion with plans for a concert in Berlin marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. But the idea did not begin to take shape until arrangements for that particular concert had fallen through and eventually been supplanted by the new interest in such a version that had been expressed by the Director of the BBC Proms, Nicholas Kenyon.

One of the themes of the 1998 Prom season was to be Power and Politics; and May 1998 would see the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of the State of Israel.

### Power and Politics in 'The Prophets' of 1936

As protagonist, the Jeremiah-figure is neither more nor less political than the secular Christ-figures which the theatre of the inter-war years inherited from German Expressionism, and which Brecht – as distinct from Weill – was parodying in the *Mahagonny* opera. Jeremiah denounces the powerful, the wealthy, and the worldly but does so in Werfel's strictly Biblical terms. It is Weill who enlarges his dimensions by enhancing the role of his antagonist, the False Prophet Hananiah.

In Weill's setting, Hananiah becomes the direct successor to the Commissar of the Great Power in his anti-imperialist opera *Die Bürgschaft* (1930–31), but is reduced to the dimensions of the mephistophelian Lottery Agent in *Der Silbersee* (1932). War-mongering nationalist, smooth-tongued demagogue, and artful flatterer, Hananiah does not have to represent any specific figure of Weill's day because he plainly represents every sly, ambitious, and conniving politician since time immemorial.

His King, the weak but not unprincipled Zedekiah, is likewise a timeless figure, as is the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. Zedekiah's defiance of Nebuchadnezzar (and hence of the Lord's commandment) had no contemporary relevance in the mid-1930s except as a negative example which turned on its head the Tolstoyan principle of passive resistance advocated by Ghandi in British India and echoed by the Judge in *Die Bürgschaft*.

For Hitler's conscientious opponents in the Third Reich, passive resistance and inner immigration were doubtless the most accessible alternatives to flight or potentially suicidal action. But these were not immediate concerns of 'The Prophets' – neither of the aggressively outspoken Jeremiah, nor of the disembodied voice of Isaiah which answers his first lamentation with the message 'Comfort Ye, my people' and then with a reminder of the promised day when Israel's example shall be envied and emulated by all peace-loving nations, and swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.

In an introductory note on Franz Werfel for the *Eternal Road* programme-book, the author of the American adaptation remarks that Werfel addresses the Jewish people 'in their time of deepest disillusionment, suffering, and extremity' but does not 'deign to make answer to their oppressors'. The 'artistic triumph of Werfel's poetic drama', he continues,

is explicit in the complete universality of its appeal. Its pageantry and ideology are identically shared by Jews and Christians alike.

Even perhaps in the resurgent Germany of 1937? Who knows what wild fantasies *The Eternal Road* had conjured up, despite the warnings of many authorities – among them its distinguished translator, Ludwig Lewisohn.

Born in Berlin in 1882 and brought to the United States while still a child, Lewisohn was widely admired as a novelist and commentator. In 1934, only a few months before beginning his translation of *De Weg der Verheissung*, he contributed the key essay to a symposium entitled *Nazism: An Assault on Civilisation*. For those who knew little or nothing of *Mein Kampf* and were unlikely to take it seriously, Lewisohn's perception of what he himself had termed 'The Assault on Civilisation' was soon to be proved prophetic.

In September 1935 – the very month in which Weill sailed for New York to begin his work on the production of *The Eternal Road* – a special session of the Reichstag (co-ordinated with the Nazi Party's triumphant rally in Nuremburg) formally approved the racist legislation known as the Nuremburg Laws. At that time Weill's parents were still living in Leipzig, where his father Albert was warden of a B'nai B'rith orphanage.

### The Weill family in Germany

In Wilhelmine times Albert Weill had the privileged position of Kantor at the large synagogue in Dessau, a city renowned as the birthplace of Moses Mendelssohn. The Jewish community was prosperous and enjoyed the protection and favour of the local Duchy of Anhalt-Cöthen. Albert Weill's four children had benefited accordingly, and their childhood years were happy.

Weill left Germany in March 1933, shortly after the Nazi seizure of power. In the expectation that the madness would soon be over and that he would then be able to resume his life there, he travelled with light luggage, limited funds, and no work-materials apart from those relating to a commission from the Princesse de Polignac (for an orchestral work that was to become his Second Symphony). His destination was Paris – now the most attractive alternative to Berlin, thanks to his recent success there.

Two years were to pass before any of Weill's immediate relatives left Germany. The wife of his eldest brother, Nathan (a doctor), had been an active member of the now suppressed Social Democrat party (which did not have today's

bland connotations). She and her husband were the first of the family to leave in 1935. Like Weill, they went first to France.

Albert Weill and his wife had long been interested in Zionism, and that interest was now put to practical account. On the strength of a favourable report from their daughter Ruth (who had been sent ahead on an exploratory mission), they left for Palestine in September 1935. Before long they were joined by Nathan Weill and his wife.

The last of Weill's immediate family to leave Germany – as late as the spring of 1938, and in circumstances of personal danger – was Hans, his favourite brother and a keenly musical one. Hans had been the dedicatee of Weill's *Recordare* (1923), a large-scale unaccompanied motet for mixed voices including children's choir, setting the traditional passages from the Latin Vulgate version of 'The Lamentations of Jeremiah' – historically and in the Old Testament the sequel to Werfel's main source for 'The Prophets', namely The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.

### The 'Promise' and 'The Road'

The roots of the modern Zionist movement were complex and far-reaching. By the mid-19th century they were thoroughly intertwined with European power politics, with national and commercial interests in the Middle and Far East, and with all manner of philosophical and ideological threads ranging from Mendelssohnian culture to socialism and Christian Millenarianism. But the movement itself sprang from the publication in 1896 of Theodor Herzl's pamphlet *Der Judenstaat*. A lawyer by training and by then one of Vienna's leading political journalists, Herzl (1860–1904) combined vision with practicality: within a year of his affirmation of the cause of an autonomous Jewish state in Palestine (under Turkish suzerainty), the World Zionist Organisation was founded in Basel – with Herzl as its first president.

Even before his early death, Herzl was confronted by alternative suggestions of a home for oppressed Jewry – including, provisionally, the Sinai peninsular, and later (via an offer from Joseph Chamberlain) Britain's East Africa Protectorate. Herzl's successor David Wolffsohn was a banker from Cologne, and it was under his presidency that the rejection of the East African offer led to a split in the Zionist movement.

The outbreak and course of World War I were to change almost everything that had been familiar to Herzl and his successors; yet it was expressly to the 'establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people' that the



British Government pledged itself in the Foreign Secretary's momentous letter to Lord Rothschild of 2 November 1917 – the so-called Balfour Declaration. A key figure in framing the Balfour Declaration was Dr Chaim Weizmann, an eminent Polish-born chemist who was now a British citizen and head of the Admiralty's research department. Weizmann became President of the World Zionist Organisation in 1921, but had to wait two years before the League of Nations formally approved the British Mandate for Palestine.

### Weizmann and Weisgal

I can vouch for the fact that Dr Weizmann [...] used to rise like a lion to [Weisgal's] defence when even the mildest reservation about him was expressed. He understood and valued the central characteristics of his friend and disciple – his fearlessness, his dedication and his enthusiasm: Meyer was prepared to risk everything in a cause in which he believed, never retreated, never temporised, and openly scorned those who did. [...] Courage, passion, amordant wit, an acute sense of the ridiculous, the constant pursuit of a vision of some unimaginable splendour, [...] the erratic, capricious, but unconfined temperament of an artist – all these are rare qualities and an astonishing combination in a man who insisted in describing himself as a simple, working journalist.

Sir Isaiah Berlin, 'A Generous Imaginative Idealist' in: *Meyer Weisgal at Seventy*, London 1966.

As editor of a leading American Zionist periodical, Weisgal attended the 17th World Zionist Conference in Basel. It was there that his lifelong friendship with Weizmann began.

Inspired by a performance of *Aida* at the Chicago Lyric opera in 1931, Weisgal conceived and produced a Chanukah Festival for the following year. He was still preparing the Festival – and simultaneously assisting the president of Chicago's Zionist association – when he received word that the organizers of the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago would welcome a major Jewish production. The result was *The Romance of a People* – an open-air pageant depicting four millennia of Jewish history. Conceived and produced by Weisgal, it would be presented on Soldier's Field by a cast of 15,000.

Weisgal borrowed his production-team from the Chanukah Festival – which had been a triumph – and made full use of the *Aida* sets donated by the Chicago Opera. At Weisgal's invitation, Dr Weizmann attended the première on 3 July 1933.

The pageant proved to be the outstanding success of the Fair, and was subsequently toured to other metropolitan centres. In New York its success was enormous. While a more prudent

producer would have reserved the net profits from the box-office takings for contingencies on the next leg of the tour, Weisgal had another and grander plan. It had been germinating ever since he began work on the pageant and happened to read of Max Reinhardt's dismissal from the Deutsches Theater; and no doubt he had already mentioned it to Dr Weizmann during his July visit to Chicago.

After the New York success of the pageant, Weisgal arranged to meet Weizmann in London in November, and bring him a substantial cheque for forwarding to the Central Fund for the Relief of German Jewry. According to Louis Lipsky,\* the cheque represented the entire net profits from the New York performances of the pageant. Whatever the case, it was an earnest of Weisgal's intention to carry on the good work, and to do so on an artistic level to which his more-or-less artless pageant had never aspired. With Reinhardt as his director, a universal as well as a Zionist significance might be won for an epic of the Jewish people based on the Old Testament but taking into account the present threats and dangers. If there was a new Verdi on the horizon, Reinhardt would surely find him – and bring him at least a new Boito rather than a mere Ghislanzoni.

If Wiesgal had any idea of the financial implications of collaborating with Reinhardt, Weizmann and his associates also did. Before or after Weisgal left for his meeting in Paris with Reinhardt, he had the promise of an introduction to the financier and industrialist Lord Melchett, son of Alfred Mond of ICI and grandson of the German-born chemist Ludwig Mond.

### Ha'tikvah – The Hope

In Weisgal's devout imagination and later in Werfel's *Der Weg der Verheissung*, 'Der Weg' was at once the Old Testament 'Way' of religious duty and the 'Road' taken by the Jewish people, while 'die Verheissung' was the explicit Promise of the Almighty to Abraham. Yet Weisgal's own path was also a political one, inseparable from his loyalties to Weizmann and his essentially peaceful cause. It was not as a Zionist but as a delegate of Mapai – the Eretz-Israel Labour Party – that Weisgal attended the 1946 Congress in Basel. Revolted by 'the backstage intrigues and manoeuvrings'† against Weizmann, Weisgal severed all links with the Zionist movement and with the Jewish Agency.

In 1947 Weisgal became Executive Vice Chairman of the American Committee for the

\* *Meyer Weisgal at Seventy*, p.59.

† *Ibid.*, p.34

'The wind is blowing from that book'

(Propheten, Prologue).

There is a paperweight on the book Weill is gazing at, and the book is an atlas. The stone stairway leads to the first floor of his converted farmhouse in Rockland County, NY; the atlas could be leading anywhere, but at this period (the winter of 1946-47) it is surely helping to mould Weill's plans for the momentous journey of May 1947 – which will take him to Palestine and unite him with his parents for the first time in nearly twelve years. A decade has passed since the première of *The Eternal Road*, yet the tone of Yousuf Karsh's extraordinary portrait seems to take account of it with such sensitivity that it seems also to prefigure the arrangement of the *Hatikvah* which Weill will compose in his upstairs studio soon after his return from Palestine.

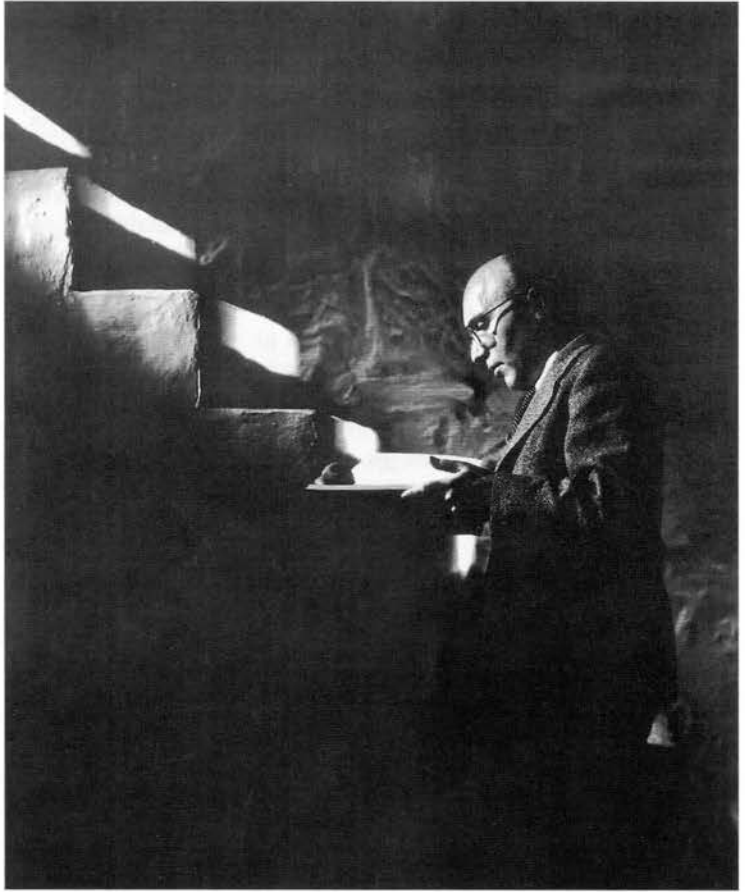


Photo courtesy of The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, New York.

Weizmann Institute of Science and Chairman of its Provisional Administrative Council at Rehovot. In May of the same year – almost exactly ten years after the collapse of *The Eternal Road* – Weill travelled to Palestine to visit his ageing parents, whom he had not seen since 1934. (On the way there and back he saw something of post-war Europe but nothing of Germany). Among his semi-official appearances during the visit were a meeting with the Palestine Orchestra and a tour of the Weizmann Institute at Rehovot. A private lunch with Dr Weizmann was also arranged.

It is clear from his published correspondence with Lenya, and confirmed by other letters of the time, that Weill was impressed and fascinated by much that he saw in Palestine, and that his one disagreeable experience was in Tel-Aviv – 'a very ugly city', he told Lenya (in a letter from Geneva dated 4 June 1947) 'with a Jewish-fascist population that makes you vomit'.

In the late summer, Weizmann travelled to America. Though in poor health and suffering from failing eyesight and the after-effects of the previous year's strife, he was to testify to the

General Assembly of the United Nations prior to its vote on the Partition plan – scheduled for 29 November. Four days before the crucial vote, a Testimonial Dinner in Weizmann's honour was held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. It was preceded by the Boston Symphony Orchestra's performance under Koussevitzky of the arrangement of *Hatikvah* which Weisgal had commissioned from Weill.

The original holograph manuscript of Weill's *Hatikvah* is in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. At the end of the holograph is the completion-date, 'November 19, 1947'. The title page, again in Weill's own hand, is written on the same manuscript paper. It bears the legend: '*Hatikvah*/Orchestrated/by/Kurt Weill'. Two staves below the signature, and precisely where Weill might have appended either a dedication or a historical note, some further lines of handwriting have been bleached out.

'Ha'tikvah' was the title of an anthem-text written by Naftali Herz Imber in the 1870s and first published in 1886. Two years later, the original musical setting of Imber's verses was

discarded in favour of an adaptation of a Moldavian folksong – the one recently popularized by Smetana's tone-poem *Má vlast*. This was the version adopted at the turn of the century as the anthem of the newly formed Zionist movement.

On 29 November 1947 the UN General Assembly, with powerful American support, adopted a resolution to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab sectors. In May of the following year the new State of Israel was proclaimed from Tel-Aviv, Dr Weizmann was elected its first President, and *Hatikvah* (not, emphatically not, in Weill's sombre arrangement) was adopted as the national anthem. The British Mandate expired on 15 May, whereupon the new State was simultaneously attacked from north, east, and south by five nations of the Arab League.

### Reinhardt and Werfel

On 9 October 1933 – a month or so before his meeting with Weisgal in Paris – Reinhardt wrote from Venice to his old friend and colleague Richard Beer-Hofmann, and revealed a part of his inner life that few if any members of his immediate circle were aware of: 'I am an unaffiliated but in actual fact a pious man. Since my childhood I have time and again found my inner balance, amid the vicissitudes of life, through prayer'. The 9th of October was the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur); and Reinhardt had spent the daylight hours praying in a Venetian synagogue.

Reinhardt was no Zionist, and even the socialism which was part of the Zionist tradition – as Weisgal acknowledged – seems remote from Reinhardt's world (or if not, was as successfully concealed as his piety). The party politics which necessarily influenced his tactics and strategies in Europe played no part in his work, where the only tendency is broadly humanistic. The fact that the one political manifesto he ever signed was a declaration of patriotic solidarity to which 93 prominent Austro-German intellectuals subscribed in 1914 is of little account compared to the courageously anti-nationalist and pacifist implications of some of his greatest wartime productions in Berlin: the Shakespeare cycle of 1916, the historic Molière productions (for which he was bitterly attacked in the nationalist press), the *Dantons Tod* (Büchner), and almost outrageously, the *Soldaten* of Reinhold Lenz.

Were Reinhardt to be glimpsed from the cultural skating-rinks of today's popular biographers and Sunday arts-and-leisure supplements, he would surely be seen as splendidly 'iconic' – begetter and magician of modern

*Regietheater*, a pioneer of Berlin cabaret at the turn of the century, distinguished actor, charmer, and monster on both sides of the foot-lights, supreme master of press and publicity, favourite of financiers and high society, inveterate bon viveur even in his darkest times (notably in Hollywood) – in short, a thoroughly packageable and marketable genius-figure, with 'secret' love-life to match.

The truth is more interesting, and Meyer Weisgal grasped it as soon as he read in the American press that Reinhardt had been ousted by Germany's new masters. Though his 28 years as director of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin had come to a sudden and cruel end, his achievements were unmatched in the history of modern theatre; and they remain so today.

Reinhardt had succeeded Otto Brahm as director of the Deutsches Theater in 1905 shortly before his 34th birthday, and opened the theatre in October with his production of Kleist's *Käthchen von Heilbronn* (with Pfitzner's specially commissioned score). Among his later productions that first season was the historic world première of Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen* (entailing a fierce struggle with the Prussian censorship, already alerted by the *Erdegeist* scandal).

The association with Wedekind had begun in 1902 during Reinhardt's second season as director of the 'Schall und Rauch' cabaret, and was characteristic of a period which also saw Reinhardt's widely noted production of Gorki's *Lower Depths* (itself a victim of the Tsarist censorship). His acute sense of what was in the air was seldom uncritical and did not desert him either at the pre-1914 dawn or in the post-1918 twilight of German (as distinct from Austrian) Expressionism. Significantly it was in 1919 that his long relationship with Werfel began.

17 years his junior but surviving him by only two years, Franz Werfel (1890-1945) had first made his name in 1911 with a volume of Expressionist verse, *De Weltfreund* – followed in 1915 by *Einander*. But it was the post-war success of his dramatic trilogy *Spiegelmensch* which brought him into the limelight as a critic of the very movement to which he and the trilogy still belonged.

In *Spiegelmensch* Werfel took issue with the self-deifying egotism and illusory utopianism underlying 'high' German Expressionism in its vitalist and activist phases. Expressionism's favourite motif of the *Doppelgänger* is turned against itself by the Faustian struggles of the protagonist, Tamal. Lured from his life of monastic contemplation by his reverse-image, Mirror-Man, Tamal is led down the 'path' of secular activism

which is to end with the redemption of the human race. But in the pursuit of power the great liberator forgets his ideals, abandons morality in favour of self-aggrandisement, and finally emerges as an absolute dictator, hailed as 'God in person' by his false prophet, Mirror-Man. The true redeemer, as Werfel here suggests (from some mid-point between Christianity and Buddhism) is not conceivable as a mortal human being.

Werfel read *Spiegelmensch* to Reinhardt and some of his aides at a social gathering in Berlin in March 1919. According to Alma Mahler, who was still married to Walter Gropius but had been living with Werfel for some while, everyone 'went wild with enthusiasm'. The Werfel whom she had heard in November 1918 delivering 'wild, socialistic speeches' in the streets of Vienna and shouting 'Storm the banks' from the benches beside the Ring-Strasse had been his own Mirror-Man, and was no more.

Werfel's critique of Expressionism in *Spiegelmensch* was confirmed in 1924 by the publication of *Verdi. Roman der Oper* – the novel on which he had been working since the time of *Die Weltfreund*. Though set in Venice at the time of Wagner's last visit and death, *Verdi* was essentially an epic account of his own Expressionist decade, and of the *hubris* that finally destroyed the movement as a whole. Discussible though hardly readable as a counterfactual history prefiguring postmodernism by half a century, *Verdi* has direct links with *Der Weg der Verheissung*. Unlike *Spiegelmensch* (whose form, style and diction are those of a period-piece) *Verdi* has acquired at the end of the millennium something of that same unexpected contemporaneity that has already been recognized in *Propheten* and may yet be revealed in *Der Weg*.

As Walter H. Sokel remarks in his classic study *The Writer in Extremis* (1959), *Verdi* is for Werfel the 'heir to centuries of Mediterranean civilisation' while Wagner is the 'egocentric-romantic-modernist' whose primary need is to 'free himself of his own 'anguish' rather than to engage in the 'battle for humanity'. That Werfel's polemic is also directed at 'ultramodern' and Futurist developments in his own time is clear in his depiction of Fischboeck, a starving expatriate composer who has abandoned the last vestiges of traditional harmonic practice and appals *Verdi* by repudiating any responsibility towards the public, present or future. Described by Sokel as a forebear of Thomas Mann's Leverkühn, Fischboeck was in fact a shadow of Werfel's Wagner-figure and a caricature in silhouette of the young Ernst Krenek, who had

invaded the lives of Alma Mahler and Werfel in 1922 and (according to Alma) made 'hell' of their next summer.

The publication of *Verdi* coincided with Werfel's completion of his quasi-Verdian historical play *Maximilian and Juarez*, which Reinhardt was to produce at the Deutsches Theater in 1926. The play was followed by a translation of *La forza del destino* whose success in German-speaking countries contributed much to the Verdi renaissance of the late 1920s. In 1929 came his equally successful *Simone Boccanegra* translation; and *Don Carlos* followed in 1932. Plans to continue the series were cut short by the political events of March 1933, which overnight deprived Werfel of a German market for any of his work.

That fateful turning-point coincided with the completion of *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, a novel whose setting was the Turkish massacre of the Armenian people in June 1915 – an atrocity that had attracted little international attention at the time. Were Reinhardt in any doubt about Werfel's unique qualifications for the Weisgal project – and there is no reason to suppose that he was – the subject matter and implicit topicality of the novel, combined with its extraordinary success both in Europe and the USA, should have dispelled it. Such considerations had little bearing, however, on the very real misgivings of Meyer Weisgal. Having offered Reinhardt carte blanche he seems to have accepted his proposal of Werfel with good grace, and deferred his final judgement accordingly. But as a devout Jew as well as a Zionist he was deeply concerned about the kind of influences that Alma Mahler-Werfel might bring to bear. Now at long last a respectably married woman, she had returned to the Catholic church in 1932 and was reputed to be urging her husband in the same direction. Whether or not Weisgal had heard rumours of Alma's personal links with clerico-fascist circles in Austria, her undying loyalty to Gustav Mahler was well known. Although Mahler had converted to Catholicism in 1897 primarily for career reasons, Alma maintained that her influence – from 1901 onwards – was an important element in his awakening to true Christianity.

The Werfel who had included an adaptation of *Veni creator spiritus* in *Einander* in 1915 had first been drawn to Alma through his deep love of Mahler's music. If, in the Austria of Dolfuss, Werfel was now considering conversion, it was not for the first time. Already in *Spiegelmensch* one of the two roads from Tamal's monastery led to Rome. Suppose the *Der Weg der Verheissung* were to lead in the same direction?

As an expansion of Weisgal's chosen route



rather than an awkward and unseemly diversion, some such dual carriage-way was arguably in the best interests of Reinhardt's production and its appeal to a broad public. Weisgal reserved his judgement until August 1934, when Reinhardt convened a top-level meeting at his Salzburg residence, and invited Werfel to read his unfinished draft to all concerned. The impression made on the assembled company was great. Deeply moved, Weisgal had no further doubts about Werfel's fitness.

Yet Act IV, 'The Prophets' was still to be written. According to the date-stamp at the end, Werfel's draft was completed at Breitenstein on 9 September 1934. The house at Breitenstein, high above the Semmering pass, was Alma's; and so was its name – 'Haus Mahler'.

*(The conclusion – with bibliographical and other notes – will follow)*

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## ***TEMPO On The Web***

***Tempo's own website went live at the end of August. Visit [www.temporeview.com](http://www.temporeview.com) for general information on the magazine, its history, samples of editorial, details of current and future issues, how to obtain lists of back issues and to subscribe on line. It is hoped to expand the website facility, perhaps to include a listing of contents of all issues since 1939, during our 60th anniversary year. Please note also that the London editorial and subscriptions office can now be e-mailed direct ([www.tempo2@boosey.com](mailto:www.tempo2@boosey.com)).***

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