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Reinhardt's Choice: Some Alternatives to Weill?

The pretexts for the present paper are the author's essays ›*Der Weg der Verheissung* and the Prophecies of Jeremiah‹, *Tempo*, 206 (October 1998), 11–20, and ›*Der Weg der Verheissung: Weill at the Crossroads*‹, *Tempo*, 208 (April 1999), 335–50. As suggested in the preface to the second essay, the paper is intended to function both as a free-standing entity and as an extended bridge between the last section of the earlier essay and the first section of its successor.

According to Meyer Weisgal's detailed account of the origins of *The Eternal Road*, Reinhardt had no inkling of his plans until their November 1933 meeting in Paris.¹ Weisgal began by outlining the idea of a biblical drama that would for the first time evoke the Old Testament in all its breadth rather than in isolated episodes. At the end of his account, according to Weisgal, Reinhardt sat motionless and in silence before saying »very simply«

»But who will be the author of this biblical play and who will write the music?«. »You are the master«, I said, »It is up to you to select them«. Again there was a long uncomfortable pause and Reinhardt said that he would ask Franz Werfel and Kurt Weill to collaborate with him.

With or without prior notice², the problems inherent in Weisgal's commission were so complex that Reinhardt would have had good reason for

¹ Meyer W. Weisgal, ›Beginnings of *The Eternal Road*‹, in: *The Eternal Road* (New York 1937 – programme-book for the production by MWW and Crosby Gaige at the Manhattan Opera House), pp. 7/30. Internal evidence suggests that most of the contributions to the programme book, including Weisgal's, pre-date the actual premiere by 12–15 months. From the standpoint of, say, November 1934, rather than a year later, Weisgal's recollections have a slight but significant advantage in terms of their reliability.

² From a scholarly point of view, the accuracy of Weisgal's account is questionable: his are the arts of the story-teller and the enthusiast, not the disciplines of a historian. Whether from natural modesty, or from a fear of losing the attention of his readers, or both, Weisgal omits to mention the important precedent he himself had set with his pageant *The Romance of a People*. Thus the immediate context and initial purpose of his approach to Reinhardt is almost inadvertently obscured. His description of the actual encounter (quite apart from the relatively unimportant question of venue) should therefore be treated with appropriate reserve. Without the reliable testimony of eyewitnesses, or better still, a stenographer's word-for-word transcript, who's to say how

balking at them and every excuse for prevaricating. But it was not a time for prevarication; and Reinhardt was not the man for it.

Even so, the speed and decisiveness of his response seem extraordinary. The choice of Werfel offered a more than merely intelligent solution to an array of problems, each one of which might have defeated a lesser man. But every answer implicit in that choice gave rise to a new set of questions on the musical side.

Music was not a recreational diversion for Werfel, but a lifelong passion.³ It was also central to his life with Alma Mahler. Had he discovered some new Verdi in the early 1920s rather than merely dreamed of one, the Verdi novel he completed in 1924 would have had a different thrust, and his *Juarez und Maximilien* could have been framed as a conventional libretto rather than as the equally conventional historical play which Reinhardt immediately produced in Vienna and Berlin. In 1924 Werfel had in effect constructed several effigies of a composer yet to come. But only one of them, Verdi himself, corresponded to his own hopes.

By November 1933, Werfel was still without his new Verdi, and Reinhardt had lost all means of access to the not-so-old Old Master who, jointly with Hofmannsthal, had dedicated *Ariadne auf Naxos* to him »in Verehrung und Dankbarkeit«. Either in the wake of Richard Strauss or aggressively positioned in front of him, almost every composer of any note whose name might have occurred to Reinhardt during that »long uncomfortable silence« was disqualified on one ground or another. Yet the one closest to Strauss and his world also happened to be the one most readily available: Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

closely Weisgal's account of that momentous meeting corresponded to what actually happened? His approximate dating is, however, corroborated: Weill had been informed of the project and was involved in it during the week before he wrote to Lenya on 16 December 1933 (see letters 59 and 60 in *Speak Low (When You Speak Love). The letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*. Edited and translated by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, Los Angeles, 1996, pp. 105–107). Ultimately it matters little whether the »long, uncomfortable silence« to which Weisgal refers was measurable in minutes, hours, days or weeks: in its narrative essence, his account has the ring of truth.

- ³ The literature is considerable. A pioneering study is Adolf D. Klarmann, *Musikalität bei Werfel*. A thesis in Germanics presented to the faculty of the Graduate School in practical fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 1931.

At the time of his first meeting with Weisgal, Reinhardt was working at the Théâtre de Pigalle on his production of *La belle Hélène* in the ›Szenische Bearbeitungs‹ he had prepared, with Korngold, for his original production at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm in June 1931 (six months before the Berlin premiere of Weill's *Mahagonny* opera). Reinhardt's collaboration with Korngold as his musical arranger, and also as conductor, had begun in 1929, with the highly successful production of *Die Fledermaus* which he had staged at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin.

Korngold had first demonstrated his abilities as an operetta arranger with his version of *Eine Nacht in Venedig* for the Theater an der Wien in October 1923. By that time it must already been clear to Korngold that although he was still in his mid-twenties and enjoying the benefits of his international success in 1920 with the opera *Die tote Stadt* – written three years earlier – fashions had changed, and the times were no longer propitious for outspokenly late-Romantic music such as his, or even for the technically more ›advanced‹ music of his distinguished predecessor Franz Schreker. Between 1923 and 1931, no less than seven Strauss and post-Strauss operettas had occupied his attention.⁴ His own *Baby-Serenade*, written for the Wiener Sinfoniker in 1928–29, was a genuine and charming attempt to catch up with the times and the new world of saxophone and banjo. But like the operetta arrangements, it suggested that a composer whose prodigious gifts had been recognised by Mahler as early as 1906, and then by Richard Strauss after Bruno Walter had conducted his two one-act operas in München in 1916, was no longer sure of his public.

However close his friendship with Korngold, Reinhardt would surely have thought twice before choosing an apparently *passé* composer for so substantial and problematic a project as Weisgal's. Moreover, there was no evidence in Korngold's work of any predisposition towards either the sacred or the contemporary subject-matter Weisgal was proposing.

Although Korngold's musical language was one that approximated almost exactly to Reinhardt's own musical tastes, the same could be said of many other composers of the day who had failed to attract, or no longer enjoyed, international attention. Equally congenial in principle, and already establishing a name for himself in the United States, thanks to the

⁴ *Eine Nacht in Venedig* (1923, Johann Strauß); *Cagliostro in Wien* (1926–27, JS); *Rosen aus Florida* (1928, Leo Fall); *Die Fledermaus* (1929, JS); *Wäizer aus Wien* (1930, JS, father and son, arr. EWK and Julius Bittner); *Die schöne Helena* (1931, JS); *Das Lied der Liebe* (1931, JS).

support of Toscanini and Jascha Heifetz, was the Italian composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, whose Second Violin Concerto of 1933 – commissioned by Heifetz for performance by the New York Philharmonic under Toscanini – happens to bear the same title as Act IV of *Der Weg der Verheissung*: 'The Prophets'.

Yet there is no reason to suppose that Reinhardt's many paths to Italy had ever crossed with those of Castelnuovo-Tedesco, whose home was in Florence whereas Reinhardt's principal base in Italy, and Werfel's too, was Venice. Personal acquaintance with his collaborators at every level was manifestly a primary requirement for Reinhardt and his entire concept of »Regietheater«. In that sense, the evidence that Korngold's name was perhaps the first that sprang to his mind and certainly one that he continued to hold in reserve seems consistent with his general practice. Conversely, there is no reason to suppose that Reinhardt would have had any cause to consider the eminent Swiss-born American composer Ernest Bloch, who was widely credited with the formulation of a new 'Jewish National Style' in music⁵, but not held to be a composer for the musical stage, at least on the evidence of *Macbeth*, his only opera.

Since the start of his directorial career, Reinhardt had aligned himself with the German tradition of theatre-music that transcended the purely incidental and traced its origins back through Schumann and Beethoven to the Mozart of (notably) *King Thamos of Egypt*. The musical tastes he had formed in the 1900s were exemplified by his recurrent and extensive collaborations with Humperdinck and his single but exceptional one with Pfitzner. In that context, it was natural for him to associate Shakespeare with Mendelssohn in his epoch-making 1905 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the new and immediate context of Weisgal's proposal, his own plans for the Hollywood film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were predicated on the inclusion of Mendelssohn's much-loved score, by way of an answer, among many others, to the new rulers of Germany.

While Weisgal's proposal may have seemed to presuppose the engagement of a composer and a writer who were both Jewish, Reinhardt's final decision indicates that his criterion was Jewish descent rather than Jewish faith. If there was any non-Jewish composer who might have been worth considering as a partner of Werfel, it was surely the solitary non-Jewish

⁵ For an early exposition of this theme, see Leonid Sabaneyev, 'The Jewish National School in Music', in: *Musical Quarterly* XV (1929), p. 448.

composer Hans Nathan included in his neo-Zionist collection *Folksongs of the New Palestine*⁶: Arthur Honegger.

The Honegger most obviously relevant to Reinhardt's discussions with Weisgal was the composer of the music for René Morax's 'dramatic psalm' *Le roi David* (1921), written for the open-air theatre in Mézières, Switzerland. But Morax was virtually unknown outside his native country, and his play was expressly designed for local conditions, as were the 27 vocal, choral and instrumental numbers Honegger composed for it (using a wind and brass ensemble plus piano, harp and celesta). The same music, re-scored for full symphony orchestra, and furnished with Morax's linking narrations, was an almost instantaneous success in Europe and America. In that form *Le roi David* won a place in the standard choral repertory on the strength of its simple melodiousness and boldly graphic pictorialism. By the same token, it lost any theoretical or practical relevance to Reinhardt's theatrical preoccupations. As a model for one aspect of the Stravinsky-Cocteau *Oedipus Rex*, the oratorio version of *Le roi David* was no more likely to interest Reinhardt than the other and overtly modernist precursor of *Oedipus* – the *Antigone* Honegger and Cocteau wrote in 1926.⁷ It was not the theatre of Reinhardt to which *Oedipus Rex* inclined, but rather that of Leopold Jessner.

A potential rapprochement between Honegger and Reinhardt was however latent in the operetta *Les aventures du roi Pausole* which Honegger began in 1929. Such was the success of its production in 1930 at the Bouffes

6 Twelve composers – Leon Algazi, Copland, Paul Dessau, Frederick Jacobi, Honegger, Menashe Rabbinoitz, Milhaud, Lazare Saminsky, Toch, E. W. Sternberg, Weill, and Wolpe – contributed 29 arrangements, which were to have been published in two series, but only the first appeared in the intended form at the intended time (*Folksongs of the New Palestine*, ed. by Hans Nathan, New York 1938). The project is documented in a recent volume including 17 of the arrangements: *Israeli Folk Music. Songs of the Early Pioneers*, ed. by Hans Nathan. With a Foreword and Afterword by Philip V. Bohlman, Madison 1994.

7 *Antigone* represents a potential link between Reinhardt and Honegger, but a tenuous one that depends too much upon the mediating figure of Richard Strauss, whose music Honegger valued highly. Musically and dramatically, Strauss's *Elektra* has a much closer bearing on *Antigone* than *Antigone* has on Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, where the same combination of Sophocles and Cocteau is so re-fashioned and re-functioned that the immediate precedent of *Antigone* was either overlooked at the time or dismissed as irrelevant (which the concert version of *Le roi David* could hardly have been). As far as Reinhardt's musical predilections went, the proto-Expressionist Strauss of *Elektra* was already wide of the mark, and the musical language of Honegger's *Antigone* wholly foreign.

Parisiens – where it had a run of over five hundred performances⁸ – that a Berlin production would surely have followed had the economic and other conditions been more favourable.

In creative terms the line from *Le roi David* to *Le roi Pausole* is tortuous, and it therefore twists in the opposite direction for the ›stage oratorio‹ *Cris du monde* of 1931, and back again for Morax's vaudeville *La belle de Moudon*, written once again for the Mézières theatre in 1933. It is not hard to imagine another twist in that line which would precisely have met Weisgal's, Reinhardt's and Werfel's requirements for *Der Weg der Verheissung*.

But that, of course, is pure speculation. Even assuming, for the sake of argument, some prior encounter between Reinhardt and Honegger, a collaboration during 1934–35 would in practice have been ruled out by Honegger's commitments to the Russian-born dancer, choreographer and actress Ida Rubinstein, for whom he had already composed a *Semiramis* to a text by Paul Valéry, and was about to begin *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* with Paul Claudel.⁹

It is not Honegger so much as Claudel who looks forward to the Reinhardt of *Der Weg der Verheissung*. Claudel in his turn introduces another key figure: his lifelong friend and collaborator Darius Milhaud.

Claudel was a devout Catholic whose conversion from the Protestantism still professed by his friend and colleague André Gide had, in the view of his opponents, made a fanatic of him. Milhaud for his part was quietly committed to the Jewish faith of his ancestors. Throughout his long life, however, he also dedicated himself and his art to the notion of an understanding between Judaism and Christianity. Together with Armand Lunel – likewise from an old Provençal Jewish family, but not himself a believer – and their slightly older mutual friend Leo Latil, a Catholic poet and intellectual, Milhaud had been exploring the possibilities of such an understanding while he was still completing his musical education.¹⁰ It was Latil who in 1913 introduced Milhaud to Claudel (some of whose poems he had already set to music) and to the still Protestant Gide. In that year –

⁸ Arthur Honegger, *I am a Composer*, trans. from the French by Wilson O. Clough and A. A. Willman, London 1966, p. 108.

⁹ The exclusivity-clause in Honegger's contract with Rubinstein was rigorous: Honegger's collaboration with the dancer and choreographer Serge Lifar in 1935 had therefore to be pseudonymous.

¹⁰ Armand Lunel, *Mon ami Darius Milhaud*, Aix-en-Provence 1992, pp. 37–40. Lunel and Milhaud were lifelong friends from their schooldays; Latil was their mutual friend and mentor until his death in battle in 1915.

his own 21st – Milhaud composed *Agamemnon*, the first part of his Oresteia trilogy based on Claudel's translations from Aeschylus.

The origin of Claudel's and Milhaud's links with Reinhardt go back a long way. In February 1917 Claudel became French Ambassador in Brazil, and established Milhaud as one of his secretaries at the embassy in Rio de Janeiro. Four months later the Diaghileff company arrived in Rio for a short season at the Municipal Theatre.¹¹ Claudel's and Milhaud's discussions with Nijinsky and others led to a ballet project and eventually – soon after Milhaud's return to Paris in 1919 – to the composition of *L'homme et son désir* to a scenario by Claudel.

In June 1919, Milhaud played *L'homme et son désir* to Diaghileff and Massine. They were not impressed (understandably, considering that the score cannot be adequately rendered in keyboard terms).¹² It so happened that the audition took place in the house of Diaghileff's patron and occasional designer, José-Maria Sert.¹³ Typically, Sert availed himself of the opportunity of furthering his own artistic and professional interests, and invited Claudel to write another scenario, expressly for the Diaghileff company and Manuel de Falla, the composer of *Le Tricorne* (1919), its most recent international success. The subject suggested by Sert was historically relevant to Claudel's vision of the primaeval Brazil of *L'homme et son désir*: Columbus and his discovery of the Americas.

Claudel declined the invitation, but resolved that he would write a play on the same subject. From time to time during the next years he would tell Milhaud about his progress, and promise that whenever anything was ready for scrutiny, he would be the first to see it.

In 1927 Claudel was appointed French Ambassador in Washington. The long-silent but ever-watchful J-M Sert at once returned to his dormant Columbus project, and proposed it to Max Reinhardt as a dramatic and musical epic for stage or screen.

Reinhardt's standing in the USA had been very high ever since the success of his 1924 Broadway production of *The Miracle*. Nominally the work of the writer and businessman Karl Vollmoeller, *The Miracle* was essentially the creation of Reinhardt. First staged in London and Berlin in the

¹¹ Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, London 1979, p. 337.

¹² The structure as well as the texture of *L'homme et son désir* depend on the segregation-integration of three distinct ensembles – vocal, pitched instrumental, and (mostly) unpitched percussion.

¹³ Buckle, *Diaghilev* (see note 11), p. 385.

season of 1911–12 – with a commissioned score by Humperdinck (Weill's first composition teacher) – *The Miracle* was filmed in Vienna in 1912.

By 1926 Reinhardt was discussing major film projects in Hollywood, and thanks to his American backer (the banker Otto H. Kahn), he was also able to explore the possibility of building a so-called Reinhardt Theatre on Broadway which could among other things function as the American forum for his Berlin companies and their productions.¹⁴

It is hardly surprising that in these circumstances Reinhardt welcomed Sert's proposal. The possibility that he already saw Claudel as a potential successor to Hofmannsthal – who in fact had only two years to live – is underlined if not confirmed by his otherwise barely comprehensible suggestion of composer for the Columbus show – none other than Richard Strauss.¹⁵

Diplomat as he was, Claudel successfully pleaded in favour of Milhaud. In the summer of 1927, shortly before his departure for Washington, he summoned Milhaud to his country home in the Isère and showed him the long-promised first act of *Le livre de Christophe Colomb*. A single read was enough to convince Milhaud that irrespective of the Reinhardt plan, the play must become an opera; moreover, that it must take precedence over the opera *Maximilien* whose composition he was about to embark upon.¹⁶ The libretto for *Maximilien* had been adapted by Armand Lunel from *Maximilien und Juarez*, a historical play which Reinhardt had produced in Vienna and Berlin. The author of the play was Franz Werfel.¹⁷

From Washington, Claudel sent Milhaud encouraging reports on the progress of his discussions and correspondence with Reinhardt. Then came the perhaps predictable news that Claudel had broken off the collaboration with Reinhardt on the grounds of irreconcilable artistic differences.

14 Leonhard M. Fiedler, *Max Reinhardt*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1975, p. 119.

15 Darius Milhaud, *Ma vie heureuse*, Paris 1973, p. 172.

16 Darius Milhaud, *Maximilien*. Opéra historique en trois Actes et neuf Tableaux, Livret de R. S. Hoffmann d'après »Juarez et Maximilien« [-] Drame de Franz Werfel [-] Adaptation Française d'Armand Lunel, Wien 1931.

17 In January 1922 Milhaud had conducted a performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* in Alma-Maria Mahler's salon in Vienna (Milhaud, *Ma vie heureuse* [see note 15], p. 117). It was on that occasion that he met Werfel for the first time, though their conversation was inhibited by the lack of a common language. At their second meeting, five years later and again in Vienna (*Ma vie heureuse*, p. 171), Milhaud's publisher Emil Hertzka brought an interpreter. The libretto credited to R. S. Hoffmann – a prominent member of Hertzka's publishing team – is the German one, based on Milhaud's discussions with Werfel and his subsequent editing of a newly-arrived French translation of the play.

As far as Milhaud and his opera were concerned, the break with Reinhardt had no serious disadvantages, for the opera itself had never been part of the plan, and the composition of whatever forms of incidental music Claudel and Reinhardt had had in mind would have been an unwelcome interruption. Having already finished the first act of the opera, he was now free – as far as his international conducting and performing commitments allowed – to continue with the second.

The world premiere of *Christophe Colomb* was given at the Staatsoper unter den Linden, Berlin, in May 1930, some three months after the stormy premiere in Leipzig of Weill's and Brecht's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. The conductor was Erich Kleiber, whose triumph with the premiere five years earlier of Berg's *Wozzeck* was seen by the liberal press as a precedent for the equally controversial but ultimately successful production of *Christophe Colomb*.¹⁸

It is hard to imagine that Reinhardt denied himself the opportunity of witnessing the first production of a work with which he himself had been sufficiently involved to have exerted some influence on its creation and perhaps on its technologically sophisticated staging. Whatever the musical press had to say about it – ranging as it did from the highly favourable to the venomous – *Christophe Colomb* was well received by the public and successfully revived the following season.

If Reinhardt did indeed attend a performance of *Christophe Colomb*, some of his reactions to it may be inferred from his handling of *Der Weg der Verheissung*. Apart from the authors themselves, there was no-one in a better position than he to appreciate the clash between Claudel's original intentions as poet and playwright, and Milhaud's as composer. Admittedly with Claudel's whole-hearted agreement, Milhaud had in effect commandeered the entire play for his own musical purposes. Four years later, Reinhardt was well aware about, and Werfel deeply alarmed about, the evidence that Weill had comparable designs upon large areas of *Der Weg der Verheissung* that had not been intended for musical setting.¹⁹

¹⁸ The Staatsoper unter den Linden, Berlin, staged a new production of *Christophe Colomb* (directed by Saskia Boddeke and Peter Greenaway) in the autumn of 1998. The opera and its two Berlin productions are the subject of an essay by the present writer: David Drew, 'Athwart the Paradise of the Idea', in: *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 December 1998, pp. 18–20.

¹⁹ The letter of 15 September 1930 from Werfel to Weill (enclosing the just-completed text of the final part of *Der Weg*), and Weill's letter to Reinhardt of 6 October 1934, are crucial documents in the early stages of a struggle for authorial sovereignty that continued until January 1936 – and beyond.

Assuming, for the sake of argument, that Reinhardt either saw or at the very least read about the Staatsoper production of *Christophe Colomb*, he would surely have recognized any vestiges of his early and friendly discussions with Claudel. Werfel's conception of *Der Weg der Verheissung* is clearly indebted to – though a conventionalisation of – the typically Claudelian dramaturgy of *Christophe Colomb*. Moreover, the ›Livre‹ of Columbus that is physically represented in the foreground of the action by the volume of his (apocryphal) Journals, and metaphysically, as it were, by the Old and the New Testaments, becomes in *Der Weg der Verheissung* the physical presence of the Torah scrolls, with Werfel's quasi-Catholic reading of both Testaments looming in the background.

The essential difference between Milhaud's collaboration with Claudel and Weill's with Werfel can perhaps best be summarized in terms of authorial rights and the willing renunciation of them. In conversation with Milhaud, Claudel would speak of ›your opera‹ and ›our play‹; and it was on that understanding that he successfully persuaded Milhaud to undertake the difficult task of writing the ›incidental‹ music for *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb* in the famous production by Jean-Louis Barrault which was first staged in 1953 (two years before Claudel's death).²⁰ On the same understanding, and in the same postwar period, Claudel gladly allowed Milhaud to make a fundamental change in the structure of ›his‹ opera. Between Weill and Werfel there was never any such understanding.

Of the 150 minutes of music in the Staatsoper's production of *Christophe Colomb* only a very small percentage would have been likely to make any impression on Reinhardt in 1930. As for *Maximilien*, which was staged by the Paris Opéra two years later, its form, thanks to Werfel's play, is strictly traditional, but the polytonal writing tends to be more extreme, and much more contrapuntal, than in *Christophe Colomb*. Apart from the ethnic borrowings associated with the revolutionary Juarez and his republican cause, there is hardly anything in *Maximilien* that Reinhardt would have found attractive or relevant to his purposes.

The *Maximilien* premiere was calamitous: for Milhaud, the first major reverse in twenty years²¹; for friends like Poulenc, a fiasco in every re-

²⁰ In the original production by the Renaud-Barrault company, the conductor of the music was the young Pierre Boulez. During the next years the company toured the production to many countries.

²¹ Milhaud, *Ma vie heureuse* (see note 15), p. 175.

spect²²; for Werfel, a clear warning of the kind of damage a composer might unwittingly inflict on a hitherto successful play, and as such distinctly inopportune at a time when his reputation was slender in France and shrinking elsewhere. Totally absorbed, as he then was, by the task of finishing his novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*²³ he may well have been able to shrug off the failure of *Maximilien*. Within a year the novel was published and his international reputation secured.

It is clear that associations alone would have been sufficient to call the names of Milhaud and Claudel to mind during that »long uncomfortable silence«, and equally clear that Reinhardt would at that time have been as much in the dark about Milhaud's true relevance as he surely was about Honegger's. For the Milhaud who had a direct bearing on the aims and objectives of *Der Weg der Verheissung* was represented by the still unperformed opera *Esther de Carpentras* (1925) and otherwise by two song cycles²⁴ familiar only to admirers of such sopranos as Jane Bathori and Madeleine Grey (whose performance of three songs from Weill's *Der Silbersee* in Paris in November 1933 was the occasion for an anti-Jewish demonstration led by the composer Florent Schmit).

Esther de Carpentras is a direct successor to the much better-known chamber-opera *Les malheurs d'Orphée* (1924) and likewise written in collaboration with Armand Lunel. Whereas ethnic and social tensions, as distinct from religious ones, are central to Lunel's re-telling of the Orpheus myth in the context of rural communities in the Camargue, his *Esther* exploits all three sources of tension in the interests of a Molière-like comedy with tragic undertones. The time is the early 18th century, and the setting is the capital of the Comtat Venaissin, the smaller of the two Papal enclaves in the French Midi. As in the nearby Comtat d'Avignon, there is a prosperous Jewish community. Although confined to a ghetto, it enjoys – by Papal edict – protection and privileges unknown elsewhere in Europe.

The first of the two Acts is set in the Cardinal-Bishop's palace, whose splendours throw into relief the oddities and strangeness of the three figures in traditional yellow caps who arrive from the ghetto and seek audience with the Cardinal-Bishop. According to the appropriate regulations and long practice, they are applying for permission to mount the 2-day

22 Paul Collaer, *Correspondance avec des amis musiciens*, présentée et annotée par Robert Wangermée, Hayen 1996, p. 302.

23 Alma Mahler Werfel, *And the Bridge is Love*, New York 1958, pp. 216–17.

24 *Poèmes juifs*, op. 34, Paris: Eschig 1916; *Six chants populaires Hébraïques*, op. 86, Paris 1926.

carnival which is held every year in the ghetto's main square to celebrate the festival of Purim; and as usual, they are hoping that the Papal gendarmes will help them prevent unseemly or riotous behaviour. This year's deputation, however, has come with a new request: permission to erect a street-theatre on one side of the square, opposite the synagogue, and there to present a play improvised and acted by members of the community. The aspiring director – visibly the most nervous of the community's three emissaries – is an *amateur* of theatre, and otherwise, it seems, a ne'er-do-well.

The subject of the improvised play is determined by the origins of the Purim festival, and its source is the biblical story of Queen Esther, the Jewish consort of King Ahasuerus of Persia. According to the Book of Esther it was thanks to her courage and self-sacrifice that the entire Jewish race was saved from the terrible fate prepared for it by Haman, the King's genocidal Grand Vizier.

Not without resistance from Vaocluse, his aged and prejudiced attendant, the exceptionally young and seemingly ›liberal‹ Cardinal-Bishop grants all the necessary permissions. But in his brief soliloquy before the Act 1 curtain falls, he recalls, with amusement, his three strange visitors, and promises a surprise for them.

Act 2 is subtitled ›The Play of Queen Esther presented by the Jews of Carpentras‹. The human comedy of casting the roles, one by one, from the assembled onlookers, is enhanced by the competition for the title role and the director's sense that none of the girls, however charming, is equal to the part. It is therefore agreed that Hadassa, a professional actress from Avignon, must be engaged forthwith.

Gradually, the processes of rehearsal and improvisation become the play itself. Something resembling real panic grips the actors and the spectators alike when the player of Haman (a despised astrologer) delivers the genocide-order. There is nothing histrionic about the communal cry for Queen Esther, though it remains unanswered since Hadassa (Hebrew for Esther) has yet to arrive. Instead, the young Cardinal-Bishop strides into the square, with Vaocluse at his side. Mounting the little stage, he usurps the role of King Ahasuerus from the community's leading businessman, and delivers an up-to-date version of Haman's edict: on pain of instant expulsion from Carpentras, the entire community must before the setting of the sun renounce its ancestral faith and embrace the Church of Rome. The assembled crowd roars its defiance, and disperses into the narrow streets of the ghetto.

The peripeteia is of course one that foreshadows the arrival of the King's Messenger at the end of *Der Weg der Verheissung*. But in *Esther*, it leads in quite another direction – not to the celestial heights, but to quotidian reality.

The ghetto square is now empty, and the young Cardinal-Bishop alone on the stage. At long last, Haddassa arrives and makes her belated entry. Astounded by the absence of spectators no less than by the appearance of the supposed Ahasuerus, she quickly recovers her wits, and before long has persuaded the Cardinal to withdraw a foolish and improvident edict. Moments later, the Cardinal-Bishop is discovered by his processing clerics, who are appalled to find him in the ghetto talking to a young Jewish diva, and summon him at once to officiate at High Mass.

The play-director's closing words seem to echo the sentiments of the sceptical Lunel – the 'masquerade' will end with sermonizing, by Rabbi and by Cardinal-Bishop alike. But neither for Lunel nor for Milhaud is there time or space for anything but a moment's reflection before the curtain falls. After the C major radiance of the choral apostrophes, the quiet cadence in E minor suggests that it is not in the name of some Utopian brotherhood, but rather a matter of common sense, reasonable tolerance, and enlightened self-interest, that the two communities must continue to coexist.

While researching Jewish folklore and collecting traditional religious and secular songs of the Comtat Venaissin, Lunel discovered several Christmas carols which incorporated, without friction, verses defining the different beliefs of Judaism.²⁵ The scene in *Esther* where the Jews criticise, with good humour, the poor theology and worse prosody of a carol improvised by Vacluse is a dramatic expression of just such a juxtaposition. In spirit, it is – like the opera as a whole – a clear anticipation of the broadly ecumenical aspirations of *Der Weg der Verheissung*.

Musically, however, the language of *Esther de Carpentras* was as far removed from Weill as anything in *Christophe Colomb* or *Maximilien*. Although described as an 'opéra comique' – a term that is by no means synonymous with 'comic opera' – *Esther* is at heart a deeply serious comment on a universal rather than a (merely) modern problem. From Chabrier and

²⁵ Lunel's text for Milhaud's cantata *Couronne de la Gloire* – written for the centenary of the inauguration of the synagogue in Aix – opens with *La Prière pour le pape*. See Lunel, *Mon ami Darius Milhaud* (see note 10), pp. 84–87, for an account of the traditional, historical and ethnic background of *Esther de Carpentras*.

Auber it inherits something of its lightness, but its darker undertones are part of a heritage as old as Aeschylus. To hear or read Milhaud's *La mort d'un tyran* of 1932 as a cataclysmic coda to *Esther de Carpentras* is to be reminded of *Les Choéphores*, but not of the mere coincidence that at precisely the same moment in history Weill was composing for *Der Silbersee* Fennimore's ›Ballade vom Cesars Tod‹ and Severin's revenge-aria.

Weill's sense of the *Zeitgeist* was akin to Reinhardt's and quite foreign to the global consciousness of Milhaud. *Esther de Carpentras* was neither a tract for France in the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair nor a premonition of the resurgence of French anti-semitism in the 1930s. It was concerned with timeless truths about human beings and the ways that more or less complex societies articulate or seek to suppress internal differences. Whereas the ›comedy of a tragedy‹ which Reinhardt urged Werfel to write in 1943 was one that aspired to the tradition of Nestroy and Raimund while at the same time remaining amenable to Broadway and Hollywood.²⁶ *Esther* suffered an even worse fate than *Maximilien*: alone among Milhaud's stage or concert works of any period – but notably so in a period when his international reputation was at its highest – it remained unperformed for many years, and did not reach the stage until shortly before the outbreak of World War II.

To borrow a mock-classical term from Milhaud, Weill's *Opus Americanum No.1* was *The Eternal Road* while Werfel's, in a stricter sense, was the novel *Das Lied von Bernadette* – written in fulfilment of the vow he had made at Saint Bernadette's shrine in the town of Lourdes, where he and his wife Alma Mahler had paused in the summer of 1940 during their anxious journey across France and Spain to the Portuguese ship that would carry them to safety in the USA. Meanwhile the work which actually bore the subtitle ›Opus Americanum No.1‹ was the String Quartet (his 10th) which Milhaud composed that same year in similarly fugitive circumstances while crossing the Atlantic from Lisbon to New York.

More relevantly to *Der Weg der Verheissung*, no.2 in the series (and the last before it was discontinued) was the *Moses* which Milhaud began soon after his landing in the USA, almost as it were to be a Judaic reply to the Catholicising vow of the never-baptised Werfel. At once a personal and a universal affirmation, *Moses* serves as a quasi-symphonic prelude to the 5-act opera *David* which Milhaud and Lunel wrote in 1952–53 to a com-

²⁶ Franz Werfel, Jacobowsky und der Oberst. Komödie einer Tragödie in drei Akten, Stockholm 1944.

mission in honour of the 2000th anniversary of the founding of Jerusalem. Similarly, the brief but exceptionally powerful cantata *Le château de feu* – dedicated to the memory of relatives of the composer who were deported by the Vichy authorities and murdered in Nazi death camps – is the testimony to which the immediately adjacent *Trois psaumes de David* provides a symbolic answer through its alternations of Gregorian monody and a polyphony whose Sephardic implications are essential to the dialogue.

Important as the geometry of these four works is in relation to the four acts or 'books' of *Der Weg der Verheissung*, it is *Moses* which provides the most accurate measure of the vast distance between Milhaud's world and Reinhardt's – a distance as almost unbridgeable as that between Reinhardt and Claudel, or Reinhardt and Schoenberg.²⁷ Commissioned as it was for an American dance company and its public, *Moses* impeccably fulfils the practical requirements while at the same time achieving a structural and imaginative coherence of its own. It speaks to a broad audience without condescension, and it speaks of that which Milhaud understands as holy.

If *Le roi David* was the one score by his friend and neighbour Arthur Honegger that Milhaud took exception to, it was surely not because of envy – international success was something he too had experienced and enjoyed – but rather because of a perceived discrepancy between the moral and religious claims of the subject-matter and the overtly popularist character of the music.²⁸ Milhaud's *Moses* is certainly not Schoenberg's; but neither is he Weill's. For Milhaud, the modernism whose cause he defended all his life was a force of nature, not a dogma. In that respect it was akin to his religious beliefs and equally capable of including much that was nominally foreign to it. Yet there is no evidence that an open and 'liberal' modernism such as his would have been significantly more attractive to Reinhardt in 1933 than the militancy of Schoenberg and his school. After the revelation of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Reinhardt had absorbed no musical information germane to his theatrical purposes other than that

²⁷ The Reinhardt-Schoenberg-Werfel nexus and its bearing on Schoenberg's drama *Der biblische Weg* as well as on *Der Weg der Verheissung* are examined in 'Der Weg der Verheissung: Weill at the Crossroads', in: *Tempo* 208 (April 1999), pp. 35–36. For the complex religious and political background, essential reading on this subject is Alexander Ringer, *Arnold Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew*, Oxford University Press 1990.

²⁸ Letters of Milhaud dated 24 October 1927, 4 April 1924, and 13 April 1924, in Paul Collaer, *Correspondance* (see note 22), pp. 90, 178, 181.

which Wedekind had transmitted to the young Brecht and thence to Weill. Brecht's engagement in 1924 as a Dramaturg in Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater was ultimately (though not directly) Reinhardt's responsibility. For Reinhardt, Brecht's production of his *Baal* at the Deutsches Theater in February 1926 was not only a step towards the Viennese production five weeks later – for which Hofmannsthal wrote his famous Prologue – but also the incentive for commissioning a satirical revue on the subject of Americanism: a commission that remained unfulfilled, except in the minds of Brecht scholars who, not without cause, regard it as the origin of the *Mahagonny-Gesänge* and the opera that Weill and Brecht derived from them.

With hindsight it is a little too easy to argue that Weill was the obvious and outstanding choice for Reinhardt in the circumstances of November 1933, and Werfel likewise. Only if Reinhardt understood more about Weill than most of his contemporaries did – and more, in this respect at least, than even Lotte Lenya, if her extant letters of the time are anything to go by – does the final choice of composer acquire the distinction its sheer audacity calls out for. If however the name of Korngold sprang to Reinhardt's mind as readily as had that of Richard Strauss in 1927 (à propos of the Columbus project), Weill was simply a more fashionable if rather less malleable alternative.

To Lenya on 16 December 1933 Weill writes that he »almost went to America for a huge Jewish theater work. But the date they wanted for it was too soon«.²⁹ Also, and more importantly, Weisgal had yet to assemble his financial package, and Reinhardt, like Weill, was keeping his options open. Chief among these were his current negotiations with Warner Brothers for a film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While awaiting further news from Weisgal he asked Weill to consider whether he would in principle be willing to arrange and supplement Mendelssohn's score for film purposes. Weill's response was nicely balanced between reluctance to interfere with the integrity of Mendelssohn's score, his interest in the challenge of adding new material of his own, and a natural inclination to take advantage of a golden opportunity.

Given that Weill was clearly Reinhardt's first choice for the Shakespeare film, it is arguable that he was also the first choice for the Weisgal project. If so, Korngold was surely the second. In the time that elapsed before ne-

²⁹ Speak Low (When You Speak Love). The letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. ed. and trans. by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke, Los Angeles 1996, p. 107.

gotiations for the *Midsummer Night's Dream* film were completed, Weisgal had engaged Weill as well as Werfel. Not because of Weill's reservations about tampering with Mendelssohn's score but simply because of the time factor, Reinhardt had therefore to find another congenial musical assistant for the Shakespeare film. He did not have far to look.

So it was Korngold that Reinhardt took to Hollywood in the spring of 1934, and Weill who remained in Europe for another 15 months. While Korngold soon became one of Hollywood's most successful film composers, and retained that reputation until his death in 1957, Reinhardt's foothold in Hollywood became precarious after 1937 and the box-office failure of his inordinately costly Shakespeare film. The equally resounding failure of *The Eternal Road* in the same year may perhaps have influenced his decision to remain in Hollywood (as part of a community of distinguished European exiles) rather than risk the challenges and rough-and-tumble of Broadway. But professionally speaking it was of little avail, and none at all in the film world. Until his death in 1943, he nevertheless contrived, with help from wealthy friends and especially from the ever-loyal Korngold, to maintain a characteristically regal way of life. Korngold was already a habitué of the Werfel salon in Beverly Hills, and in 1941 had for the first time been moved to set a Prayer by Werfel and, in a separate work for chorus and orchestra, a Hebrew text from the Hagada.

Just for once, Korngold had in spirit recognized *Der Weg der Verheissung*. Seven years earlier (3–6 March 1934) Weill had written as follows to Lenya: »Aber ich sage mir: (1) ziehen sich doch diese Reinhardtschen Pläne bestimmt noch hin u. (2) mit wem soll er denn diese Sachen machen ausser mit mir?«³⁰

Had each individual roulette wheel stopped at slightly different points, Weill might well have accompanied Reinhardt to Hollywood, leaving Korngold with the problem of how best to supply Werfel and Reinhardt with a score for *Der Weg der Verheissung* that would at least measure up to Humperdinck's music for *The Miracle*. But Weisgal moved faster than Warner Brothers, and Weill stayed in Europe, with results whose historical importance is only now beginning to be appreciated.

Weill was right to consider himself irreplaceable as far as Reinhardt was concerned, but wrong to suppose that there was no competition from acceptable alternatives. Reinhardt's choice of Weill was an inspiration born

³⁰ Lys Symonette/Kim H. Kowalke (ed.), *Sprich leise wenn Du Liebe sagst. Der Briefwechsel Kurt Weill/Lotte Lenya*, Köln 1998, p. 125.

of long experience, acute intelligence, and natural flair. But it was not without flaws. Had circumstances forced him to make do with Korngold, the net gain could have been considerable – for Weisgal and his cause (not forgetting its charitable objectives and commercial ramifications), for Reinhardt and his American career, and not least, for Werfel. Where that would have left Weill is another question, and one that now seems less pressing than the immediate future, in performance and production, of *Der Weg der Verheissung* and *The Eternal Road*.