dissertations

Michael John Shott—*Hugo Wolf's Music Criticisms: Translation and Analysis According to Pepper's Four World Hypotheses*

Ann Arbor: University Microfilms (UM order no. 64-12,087, 1964. 655 pp., Indiana University diss.)

John Morgan

Between 1884 and 1887 the attention of Viennese musical circles was drawn to the previously unknown name of Hugo Wolf. This was not because, as Wolf had hoped, he had caught their interest and enthusiasm with the brilliance of his own creative achievements in music. (As a matter of fact, Wolf had at this point in his career composed scarcely anything even suggesting the mastery that he was to attain within a very few years.) Rather, it was as music critic for one of the city's most widely-read magazines of fashion that the young composer made his debut. His position as a contributor to the *Wiener Salonblatt* was secured through his friends, the Köcherts, who, as court jewelers, were important advertisers in the periodical. They were consequently able to wield their influence in Wolf's behalf upon the journal's publisher, Moritz Engel.[1] The position as music critic may not have fulfilled Wolf's ambitions with regard to his introduction to Viennese musical society, but it at least provided him with regular employment for three years and released him from financial dependence upon his family. More importantly, it insured that nearly every Sunday his name would lie before the eyes of the city's elite and fashionable.

The products of Wolf's journalistic activities were gathered into book form over half a century ago by two of the composer's friends, Richard Batka and Heinrich Werner.[2] For his 1964 Indiana University dissertation, Michael John Shott prepared an English translation of the 378-page Batka-Werner edition, complete with Werner's preface. While the translation accounts for the bulk of Shott's project, a brief section of commentary concludes his study.

Because copies of the Batka-Werner original are difficult to locate,[3] and since few institutions are likely to own appropriate numbers of the *Salonblatt*—which was, after all, little more than a fashion sheet—Shott's dissertation takes on major importance as a readily available source for Wolf's significant essays. It is therefore most unfortunate that the translation as Shott leaves it is adequate neither for publication nor for continued scholarly use. Objections to Shott's completed translation are of two kinds: errors of judgment and policy in the mechanical process of converting Wolf's ideas from German into English, and failure to provide the translation with the critical apparatus necessary for utilizing it as a research tool.

The translation itself follows Wolf's text closely and accurately enough, but

herein lies the first stumbling block. Shott's English is so bound to the German original that it is often clumsy and unidiomatic. This is particularly regrettable since Wolf's German is literary, polished, and elegant; certainly any English translation must approach a similar level in order to achieve permanent acceptability, even at the expense of a literal word-for-word rendering. Take, for example, this extract from a remarkable passage in a review (23 March 1884) inspired by Brahms's String Quintet in F Major, Op. 88. Shott's translation[4] is here juxtaposed against the German original.[5]

Die Phantasie des Komponisten schwelgt nur in pittoresken Bildern; die frostigen Novembernebel, die sonst über seine Kompositionen sich lagern und jedem warmen Herzenslaut, noch ehe er erklingen kann, den Atem benehmen,—hier entdecken wir keine Spur davon: alles ist sonnig, bald heller, bald dämmriger; ein zauberhaftes Smaragdgrün gießt sich über dieses märchenhafte Frühlingsbild aus. Alles grünt und knospet. Ja man hört formlich das Gras wachsen—die Natur so geheimnisvoll, so feierlich still, so selig verklärt, —der Komponist konnte sich nur mit Gewalt durch raschen Entschluß diesem Zauber entziehen, so sehr hielt ihn die Muse im Banne. Im zweiten Satze senken sich die Schatten tiefer herunter. Der Abend und allmählich die Nacht hüllen die phantastischen Gebilde des wunderlichen Lebens aus dem ersten Satze ein. Tiefes Sinnen und Schweigen. Ein lebhaft bewegtes anmutiges Bild durchschwirrt die tiefe Einsamkeit. Es ist, als ob Glühwürmer ihren Reigen tanzten, so blitzt und funkelt es in den hastigen Figuren der Instrumente. Aber das Bild verschwindet. Die vorige Stille tritt ein, um jedoch wiederum durch ein ähnliches Motiv unterbrochen zu werden. In seltsamen Harmonien, die wie zwischen Traum und Wachen modulieren, verhallt dieses mysteriöses Tongemälde.

The imagination of the composer abounds in picturesque images; the frosty fogs of November, which usually lie over his compositions and take the breath away from every warm sound coming from the heart even before it can be heard,—here we detect no trace of all this; everything is sunny, now brighter, now duskier, a magical emerald green is poured over this fairy tale picture of spring. All is green and budding. Yes, one can practically hear the grass grow—nature so mysterious, so solemnly peaceful, so blissfully radiant,—the composer had to drag himself away from this magic only through forcing a quick resolution, so securely did the muse hold him in bondage. In the second movement the shadows sink lower. The evening and gradually the night envelop the fantastic configurations of the strange life of the first movement. Deep meditation and silence. A sprightly, animated, graceful image whirls through the deep loneliness. It is like fireflies doing a round dance, flashing and sparkling in the hurried passages of the instruments. But the image disappears. The earlier silence comes back, to be interrupted again by a similar motif. In strange harmonies which modulate between dreams and waking, this mysterious tone picture dies away.

Frank Walker, in the chapter of his biography dealing with Wolf's criticism, translates the same passage as follows:[6]

> The imagination of the composer revels in picturesque images; we find no trace of the frosty November mists that elsewhere brood over his compositions and stifle each warm tone from the heart before it can sound out—all is sunny, now brighter, now more dim; a magical emerald green is diffused over this fairy-like picture of spring; everything grows green and buds, one really hears the grass growing—nature is so mysterious, so solemnly still, so blissfully transfigured—the composer could only by a sudden effort of will withdraw himself from this magic, so closely did the muse hold him under her spell. In the second movement the shadows sink lower. Evening, and then night, shroud the fantastic creations that moved so wonderfully in the first movement. Deep meditation and silence. An animated form moves through the deep solitude. It is as if glow-worms danced their rounds, it flashes and sparkles so in the rushing figures of the instruments. But the form disappears. The former silence returns, to be once again broken by a similar motive. In strange harmonies, that modulate between dream and waking, this mysterious tone-picture dies away.

Certainly Walker's translation conveys the sense of Wolf's remarks as well as Shott's, but it reads in English with a polish that reflects the quality of style found in Wolf's German—a quality that inspired Walker to apply the term "prose poem" to some of the composer's best writing. A strong sense of poetry also graces Ernest Newman's somewhat freer rendering of selections from the same review.[7]

Beyond this general criticism of Shott's manner of converting German into English, there are particular problems in the translation that betray Shott's provincialism in approaching 19th-century music. For example, Wolf sometimes refers to the titles of individual works in the original language, sometimes in the German equivalent. This is a common and perfectly natural outgrowth of the fact that music, particularly in the operatic sphere, has always been somewhat multilingual in Germany. Since, however, in modern English most operas are referred to either by their original titles or by some commonly-recognized English translation, one title should be employed consistently. *Il Trovatore*, for example, should not appear as *Troubadour* (pp. 6, 56)[8]; *L'Enfance du Christ* is known better by that title than by *The Childhood of the Lord* (p. 473). *Guillaume Tell* is probably more familiar as *William Tell*, but in any event should not be called *Guglielmo Tell* (p. 52). Auber's *La Muette de Portici* is best known by that title or by its subtitle, *Masaniello*; few readers would know the work as *Mute Woman of Portici* (p. 9). Sometimes Shott's use of titles suggests that he is unsure about the country of origin. There can be no excuse, however, for the appearance of titles like *Robert der Teufel* (p. 81), *Die Afrikanerin* (p. 81), *Die Jüdin* (p. 91), or for the consistent misspellings *Symphonie phantastique* and *The Hugenots*.

Shott's failure to provide his text with a critical apparatus points the way

to another project that must be undertaken before Wolf's criticisms can appear in a satisfactory edition. In the first place, the Batka-Werner edition, while complete in most respects, does contain certain clearly indicated deletions. These could be restored by reference to the *Salonblatt* itself. Complete information about the programs reviewed by Wolf should also be provided in critical notes, including the date and place of each performance, a list of performers, and the title of each work presented. For example, Wolf may refer to a "Brahms symphony," without any further indication; more thorough documentation would eliminate such obscurities and allow more immediate access to Wolf's observations.

Shott's "analysis" section explores questions that appear, to this reviewer at least, of dubious value. The author sets himself (p. 541) the task of testing the "validity" of Wolf's criticisms. After a labored discussion of what validity is, why it is important, and then a capsule biography of Wolf, we read the following, which is the cornerstone of justification for the edifice that Shott is about to construct (pp. 554–55):

> Although Wolf was certain that the styles of Berlioz, Wagner, and Liszt were going to constitute the foundation for the future, subsequent history has proved him mistaken. Had he lived for another twenty years, he would have become a witness to a marked reaction against the romanticism in which he believed so strongly. Today Brahms is considered a great composer, and the opinions of Wolf's adversaries seem to have been vindicated, while the works of Wagner and Liszt no longer enjoy the esteem accorded to them by Wolf and his supporters.

Having assumed that history has settled the supposed Brahms-Wagner controversy once and for all and has thereby rendered Wolf's criticisms "invalid" in one sense, Shott sets out to test "whether Wolf's judgments of compositions and performances are based upon standards that may be considered valid in the light of acceptable aesthetic criteria of the present day" (p. 559). Before this test can be made, however, Shott screens Wolf's reviews to arrive at a core of material that meets the requirements of being at least 125 words in length, exclusively devoted to clear opinions about a composition or performance (rather than description), and characterized by objectivity rather than subjective bias. Shott is thus left with about eighty pages of Wolf's writing—less than twenty per cent of all the criticisms published in the *Salonblatt.* At this point there follows a chapter surveying Shott's search for "acceptable aesthetic criteria" against which to weigh the reduced body of criticism (pp. 576–87). The choice falls upon the system first expounded by Stephen C. Pepper in *World Hypotheses*[9] and amplified in his *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts.*[10] In a chapter summarizing Pepper's ideas Shott describes each of the four hypotheses and then concludes (p. 599):

> The critic, then, must ask the following separate questions about a work of art: (1) How pleasant are the feelings it arouses? (2) How vivid an experience does it provide? (3) How well integrated is it? (4) How satisfying is it to a normal person?

All this is by way of preparation for a very brief (twelve-page) section of analysis, in which Shott demonstrates that Wolf never seems to have applied Pepper's "mechanist" standard (number 1 above) to a musical work, and that his criteria are valid primarily by "formist" standards (number 4 above).

Even if one is willing to accept the premise of Shott's approach, one cannot help but feel that he has drawn back from reaching the inevitable conclusion of his own researches: that Wolf's criticisms are, by Pepper's standards, invalid. On page 598 we learn that Pepper's method demands the simultaneous involvement of all four viewpoints represented by the world hypotheses:

> The only requirement that must be fulfilled to arrive at a valid judgment is that all of these four world hypotheses are to be consulted. The perceiver of a work of art can and often does reflect only one. However, if the critic disregards the ideas of even one of the four, it would prevent him from arriving at a fair judgment, because the data would not be comprehensive, as we are using the term.

Since, according to Shott's findings, Wolf never expressed in his written reviews a single attitude that reflected the composite of all four world hypotheses, one must conclude that his essays are, in these terms, invalid. Shott's failure to draw this conclusion would seem to indicate that he is as unconfident in the approach he has taken as we are.[11]

Certainly, an examination of the circumstances surrounding Wolf's assumption of his post with the *Salonblatt*, as well as a consideration of the audience for which the reviews were intended, suggests that the application of such abstract, ideal criteria as those advanced by Shott is extremely unfair. Wolf aimed to set down what he considered the faults of musical society in the Vienna of his day; but he was not prepared to do so in the systematic, analytical way demanded by Pepper's methods, nor would such an approach have interested or satisfied his readers. The story[12] that Wolf rejected the idea of publishing his criticisms in book form because they were poorly written has baffled biographers, since, as reviews, they are extremely well written. In fact, Wolf's attitude may have arisen from an unwillingness to present his ideas in the impassioned *Salonblatt* style before a more discerning public. The delectable treat Wolf whipped up to please Vienna's dilettantes would not, he knew, satisfy the more substantial and circumspect tastes of the *Musikus*.

Beyond this, the question of "validity" in Wolf's criticisms is, for the historian, quite beside the point. Because Wolf ranks as an important figure in the development of new music in the later 19th century and because his criticisms reflect his tastes and preferences in colorful and meaningful prose, they have already earned a validity of their own and are more interesting when studied as historical documents than as mere records of opinion. From this standpoint the *Musikalische Kritiken* are a musicologist's treasure-trove. Surely, for example, Wolf's thoughts with regard to the symphonic poem

recorded here are of major significance in casting some light on his own important essay in the genre, *Penthesilea*, with which he was occupied while writing for the *Salonblatt*. Wolf's observations on songs and song-writing are few and far between in the criticism; yet he discusses the qualities he found admirable and damnable in most of the famous singers of his time. Not only do these comments illustrate the composer's ideas about what constitutes good musicianship and good drama, but they are also a guideline to what he expected—no, counted upon—for effective delivery of his own songs. Furthermore, many of the artists reviewed by Wolf lived long enough to make recordings. Gustav Walter, for example, who seems to have been among the first well-known singers in Vienna to abandon opera for the recital hall, always received Wolf's warm approval. Walter's voice was, from Wolf's comments, already in decline in the 1880's, and by the time he cut records early in 1904 there was little left of its former glory. But the sensitivity to poetry, the vividness of interpretation combined with smooth vocal technique that fired Wolf's imagination twenty years before, may still be heard by students of the *Lieder*-singer's art. Nor is it difficult to discern from Lilli Lehmann's recordings the virago side of her delivery that sometimes offended Wolf and inspired his poetic vision of the soul of Isolde.[13] Similarly, Wolf's comments on operatic composition and production, performance at the piano, and the art of ensemble playing take on particular significance and interest when considered in conjunction with the products of Wolf's own career as a composer.

In other words, Wolf's criticisms, like those of other composer-critics, are most valuable when they reflect upon his own musical ideas and feelings; no analysis can be considered satisfactory if it fails to deal with this aspect of their importance as historical documents. Shott's avoidance of these matters for what seems, by comparison, an intellectual goose-chase seriously undermines the musicological significance of his project and leaves much to be considered in some future study of Wolf's essays.

NOTES

[1] Frank Walker, *Hugo Wolf: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 147.

[2] *Hugo Wolfs musikalische Kritiken* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911).

[3] On p. viii of his dissertation Shott lists the six libraries he knew to hold copies in 1964.

[4] Shott, p. 45.

[5] Batka-Werner, p. 31.

[6] Walker, pp. 157–58.

[7] *Hugo Wolf* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), pp. 37–38.

[8] All page numbers in the text refer to Shott's dissertation.

[9] Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961.

[10] Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.

[11] Shott, in fact, appears to lay the groundwork for this conclusion on p. 607. But he ultimately backs down from the harsher verdict, allowing in his final summary that Wolf's criticisms are "valid according to formist standards" (p. 621).

[12] Related by Walker, pp. 161–62.

[13] Review for 25 January 1885; Batka-Werner, pp. 137–38.