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Chapter 3
'Wordless Judaism, Like the Songs
of Mendelssohn'? Hanslick, Mendelssohn
and Cultural Politics in Late
Nineteenth-Century Vienna

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Introduction

Mendelssohn's ballad *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* has, in recent years, been understood by a number of commentators as representing the plight of the Jews against the Christians. In his 1998 article 'Mendelssohn and the Jews', Leon Botstein holds that in this work Mendelssohn 'clearly expresses admiration for the predicament of the Jews and their loyalty to their traditions'. 'The pagans in that work', he argues, 'are only thinly veiled surrogates for Jews'.¹ Botstein had already expressed a similar view in his 1991 essay 'The Aesthetics of Assimilation and Affirmation: Reconstructing the Career of Felix Mendelssohn':

The most remarkable example of Mendelssohn's residual psychological loyalty to his Jewish heritage was the secular cantata *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*. ... as Heinz Klaus Metzger has argued, Mendelssohn transformed Goethe's Druids and pagans into Jews who refuse to convert. ... The final scene of the pagans defending their faith against the Christian soldiers while musing on the extent to which Christians perverted the meaning of their religious ideas – although taken straight from Goethe – can be understood, in terms of its emotional lure for Mendelssohn, by its obvious analogy to the historical and contemporary plight of Jewry, particularly in the context of the new anti-Semitism of the 1830s and 1840s.²

Conversely, in her 2002 essay 'Kindred Spirits: Mendelssohn and Goethe, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*', Julie Prandi argues that it is 'distressing to find Mendelssohn's literary taste or musical style being explained as illustrating his

¹ Botstein (1998), 213.

² Botstein (1991); Hauser (1980); Metzger (1980). Michael P. Steinberg claims that a Jewish reference could not but be inferred from Mendelssohn's appropriation of Goethe's text. See Steinberg (2004), 37.

Jewishness’, arguing rather that this work ‘illustrates [Mendelssohn’s] roots in German intellectual life, especially his kinship with Goethe’.³ She counters Botstein in writing:

The *Allvater* of the ballad is not, as one critic has argued, Mendelssohn’s stand in for the God of the Jews, but rather a sign that truth and nobility of feeling are not the monopoly of any one religion: even pagans can know and honour the deity and the light of reason.⁴

That such varying interpretations of Mendelssohn’s work and such divergent views on Mendelssohn’s political and religious ideology in his compositions are so openly discussed in recent musicological writings is a reflection of a freedom on the part of commentators today that did not exist in the musical press of the late nineteenth century. I argue that Mendelssohn’s *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* was understood by at least one of his contemporary critics, Eduard Hanslick, as having Jewish implications; further, being of Jewish descent himself, Hanslick was amenable to understanding the work in this context. However, due to Hanslick’s public denial of his own heritage, and due to the taboo of the discussion of Jewish matters among the Viennese intelligentsia, his acknowledgement of this Jewish element is itself disguised. The present study is not an investigation into Mendelssohn’s alleged autobiographical motivation in setting Goethe’s poem. Rather, it investigates Hanslick’s autobiographical motivation in the writing of his reviews of Mendelssohn’s works, particularly *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*.

The statements cited at the head of this chapter are a taste of the twentieth-century musical writings concerned with Mendelssohn’s motivation in writing *Walpurgisnacht*. Jeffrey Sposato’s 2006 contribution, ‘Lessons from Paulus: A Reevaluation of *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*’, surveys much of this literature and comes to the following conclusion:

For the twenty-two year old Mendelssohn, the decision to set *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* had little to do with any desire to champion Enlightenment sensibilities or to construct an allegory of the history of the Jews in Christendom. Mendelssohn’s motives, rather, found their origin in much less lofty concerns: here was a text which blended well with his current interest in the supernatural and lent itself to numerous musical possibilities.⁵

Central to Sposato’s conclusion is evidence regarding a letter from Goethe to Mendelssohn of September 1831 declaring the poem’s symbolic intent. Kistner’s edition of the *Walpurgisnacht* score included an excerpt from this letter:

³ Prandi (2002), 136.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵ Sposato (2006), 112. I am grateful to Professor Sposato for sharing his then unpublished draft of this text.

In a true sense the poem is highly symbolic in intention.⁶ For in world-history it must continually be repeated that something old, established, proven, reassuring is pressed, shifted, displaced by emerging innovations, and, where not wiped out, none the less penned up in the narrowest space. The medieval era, where hatred still can and may produce countereffects, is here impressively enough represented, and a joyous indestructible enthusiasm blazes up once more in radiance and clarity.⁷

Discussing this excerpt, Sposato argues, first, that this letter was only received by Mendelssohn after completing everything but the overture; and second, it is not referred to in any of Mendelssohn's letters about his setting of the work. Indeed, in 1831 (when Mendelssohn was 22) the piece had very little of its current shape, and no overture. However, the programme that Mendelssohn distributed for the premiere of the work in 1833 did not at all shy away from suggesting societal persecutions of alterity (possibly Jewish, possibly not). The programme reads:

In the last days of paganism in Germany, the druids' sacrifices were subject to punishment by death at the hands of the Christians. Nevertheless, at the beginning of springtime the druids and the populace sought to regain the peaks of the mountains so that they could make their sacrifices there, and to intimidate and chase off the Christians (usually through the latter's fear of the devil). The legend of the first Walpurgis Night is supposed to be based on such attempts.⁸

The presence of the Goethe excerpt in the Kistner edition means that for those referring to this edition of the score Goethe's declaration and Mendelssohn's composition are intricately linked. Yet, the editions available when Hanslick was writing his *Walpurgisnacht* reviews were based on the Rietz edition for the so-called *Gesamtausgabe* and did not include any explanatory note. Therefore Hanslick may not have been aware of Goethe's note. In arguing that Hanslick understood this work to have Jewish implications, it is not implied that Mendelssohn intended the work

⁶ John Michael Cooper disputes the translation of 'hochsymbolisch' as 'highly symbolic', arguing that the 'hoch' does not refer to the degree of the symbolic content but to the nature of that content. He suggests an alternative translation, 'elevated symbolism'. Cooper (2007a), 224. I am grateful to Professor Cooper for allowing me to read unpublished drafts of a number of chapters from this book.

⁷ This translation is taken from Sposato (2006), 109.

⁸ 'In den letzten Zeiten des Heidenthums in Deutschland, wurden von den Christen die Opfer der Druiden bei Todesstrafe untersagt. Trotz dem suchten die Druiden und das Volk zu Anfang des Frühlings die Höhen der Berge zu gewinnen, dort ihre Opfer zu bringen, und die christlichen Krieger (gewöhnlich durch deren Furcht vor dem Teufel) einzuschüchtern und zu verjagen. Auf solche Versuche soll sich die Sage von der ersten Walpurgisnacht gründen.' Programme in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, shelfmark Deneke 356. I am grateful to John Michael Cooper for drawing my attention to this programme.

in this way, nor indeed that Hanslick maintained that Mendelssohn understood it as such. Rather, we are concerned with what we can learn about Hanslick himself from these writings on *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*. What follows is an interpretation of evidence taken from both Hanslick's critical and autobiographical writings. By critiquing the critic in this manner, the aim is to examine what a piece of music can express or reflect of the people who use it. I intend to grasp the meaning behind Hanslick's often perplexing reviews, thereby shedding light on the contemporary reception of Mendelssohn's music and on the personal ideologies that form the background to Hanslick's virulent attacks on Wagner.

Cultural Texts and Cultural Censorships

In his 1883 review of the Vienna performance of Brahms's 1869 cantata *Rinaldo* Op. 50, Hanslick confesses that he has difficulty warming to the whole work: the 'evil lies first in Goethe's poetry, whose deceptive, apparently musical advantages lured the composer into a dangerous enterprise'.⁹ As is typical of much of Hanslick's critical output, he is more interested in hermeneutic matters, or in the cultural context of the work, than he is in formal elements of the work. The issue in this case is the suitability of a particular programme for musical setting. The same review also compares *Rinaldo* with Mendelssohn's *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*:

With *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* Goethe created a masterpiece in musical relationship: as successful attempts have proven, it is remarkably dramatic. It even permits a completely scenic representation,¹⁰ and nevertheless it is extremely simple and clear in its motives and descriptions, that it may not require scenic apparatus at all.¹¹

The comparison of Brahms's *Rinaldo* and Mendelssohn's *Walpurgisnacht* is not an unlikely one. Brahms had conducted *Walpurgisnacht* in Detmold in 1859, and it is widely acknowledged that this work was influential on the composition of

⁹ 'Für das ganze Werk vermag ich mich offen gestanden, nicht zu erwärmen. Der Grund des Übels liegt zunächst in dem Goetheschen Gedichte, dessen täuschende, auscheinend musikalische Vorzüge den Componisten in ein gefährliches Unternehmen gelockt haben.' Hanslick (1886), 383.

¹⁰ Hanslick is not speculating here. Scenic representations of *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* were common in the 1860s. See Cooper (2007a), 303–4.

¹¹ 'Mit seiner "Ersten Walpurgisnacht" schuf Goethe eine Meisterstück auch in musikalischer Beziehung: es ist so dramatisch, daß es (wie gelungene Versuche beweisen) sogar eine vollständig scenische Darstellung zulaßt, und doch wieder so einfach in seinen Motiven, so klar in seinen Schilderungen, daß es scenischer Hilfe gar nicht bedarf. Dadurch überragt die "Walpurgisnacht" hoch den "Rinaldo," dessen Vorgänge dem Zuhörer großentheils unverstandlich bleiben.' Hanslick (1886), 384.

Rinaldo.¹² The relationship between these two works certainly invites further comparison in that, as Hanslick notes, the poem 'Rinaldo' appears after 'Die erste Walpurgisnacht' in Goethe's collected works. Furthermore, both poems belong to a group of works in which Goethe juxtaposes pagan and Christian rites. Assuming Hanslick to have interpreted the pagans in *Walpurgisnacht* as 'thinly veiled Jews' – to borrow a phrase from Botstein – let us consider the distinction he draws between the two works. *Rinaldo*'s Christian comrades win out at the end of this cantata, with the 'evil' of Goethe's poetry standing in the way of Hanslick warming to the work. On the other hand, the Christians flee at the sight of the wild pagan (read Jewish) ritual in *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* which Hanslick considers to be a 'masterpiece in musical relationship'. Moreover, Hanslick acknowledged that Brahms had been faithful to Goethe's text and that the music was consistent with Brahms's musical ideals, clearly indicating that it was to Goethe's text, and not Brahms's music, that Hanslick objected.¹³

Hanslick's 1900 review of a performance of Mendelssohn's *Walpurgisnacht* is again concerned with Goethe's texts. In this instance, he takes issue with textual alterations to Goethe's poem that were put in place for this particular Viennese performance, and outlined in the concert programme: 'With Goethe, as is well known, the heathen guards sing "Come! With prongs and pitchforks/ and with fire and rattling sticks – let us terrify them with their fabled devil/ These foolish-cleric Christians/ Let us make proper fools of them!"'¹⁴ Hanslick outlines that the censor for this performance has changed 'Pfaffen Christen' from Goethe's original – a term which Julie Prandi understands as a derogatory word coinage for Christians dominated by parsons or priests¹⁵ – to 'diese Christen' (these Christians). Further, he outlines the change of words from 'let us terrify them with their *fabled* devil' to 'let us terrify them with the devil whom they *fear*' (my emphasis.) These textual alterations remove words that may be construed

¹² For a detailed discussion of the influence of Mendelssohn's *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* on Brahms's *Rinaldo* see Ingraham (1994), Part I, 'Brahms and Dramatic Music'; Brodbeck (1998); Melhorn (1983).

¹³ For a more detailed discussion of the public response to Brahms's *Rinaldo*, see Ingraham (1994), 106–17. Ingraham writes: 'Eduard Hanslick reviewed the 1883 performance of *Rinaldo* in Vienna. Hanslick, usually a Brahms supporter, criticised Goethe's text. Like other critics, he was confused by the second appearance of Armida but unlike Billroth, he thought Brahms's musical setting at this point to be "not vivid enough". He wanted to see "einige Tropfen Tannhäuserblut" in the hero's character. Hanslick acknowledged, however, that Brahms had been truthful to Goethe's text and that the music was consistent also with Brahms's musical ideals' (106).

¹⁴ 'Allgemein aufgefallen sind die Abänderungen des Goetheschen Gedichtes, welche das Wiener Konzertprogramm aufweist. Bei Goethe singen bekanntlich die heidnischen Wächter: "Kommt mit Zacken und mit Gabeln und mit Glut und Klopferstöcken – Mit dem Teufel, den sie fabeln, wollen wir sie selbst erschrecken. Diese dumpfen Pfaffenchristen, laßt uns keck sie überlisten!"' Hanslick (1900), 96.

¹⁵ Prandi (2002), 141.

as undermining the Christian faith. One may fear a devil that exists, but one that is fabled does not exist. It seems that for this particular censor, who remains anonymous, Goethe's text in its original form was insufficiently respectful to the Christian faith. Hanslick addresses the broader issue at stake here:

We think this 'improvement', dictated by anxiety and arrogance, celebrated through Mendelssohn's music in all circles of the native poetry of Goethe, must have crept out of the *Vormärz* in to our day unnoticed. However, it is not so! As a student, I heard Mendelssohn's *Walpurgisnacht* sung in Prague and Vienna, always with Goethe's original text. The extraordinarily religious sensitivity of our authorities is thus a small plant blossoming anew.¹⁶

Hanslick draws an analogy between the *Vormärz* era and the present time in which he writes. Each of these eras saw a worsening of the plight of the Jews. A revival of legal restrictions on Jews took place after 1819, with anti-Semitism being given a new lease of life in the 1820s and 1830s. There was little additional legislation on the Jews until the revolutionary months of 1848–49. From then until 1867 a series of laws and constitutional decrees gradually removed all of the remaining restrictions on Jewish life. Emperor Franz Josef's Constitutional Edict of 1849 granted Jews equality with Christians under law. Finally, with the creation of the Dual Monarchy (Austria-Hungary) in 1867, the state proclaimed the full political emancipation of the Jews.¹⁷

The period from 1867 to the mid-1890s has been recognised by many as the era of Liberalism in Vienna. In 1895, as Carl E. Schorske has written, 'the liberal bastion, Vienna itself, was engulfed in a Christian Social tidal wave'.¹⁸ In 1897, despite opposition from Emperor Franz Joseph and the Catholic hierarchy, Karl Lueger was ratified as the mayor of Vienna. Herewith, as Schorske writes, 'the Christian Social demagogues began a decade of rule in Vienna which combined all that was anathema to classical liberalism: anti-Semitism, clericalism, and municipal socialism'¹⁹ – a point addressed by Margaret Notley in her essay 'Musical Culture in Vienna at the Turn of the Twentieth Century': 'the fact remains that Lueger was the first European mayor elected as an open anti-Semite and that his rhetoric

¹⁶ 'Wir dachten, diese von Ängstlichkeit und Hochmut diktierte "Verbesserung" einer gefeierten, durch Mendelssohns Musik in allen Kreisen heimischen Dichtung Goethe's müsse aus dem Vormärz sich unbeachtet in unsere Tage eingeschlichen haben. Allein dem ist nicht so. Ich habe vor dem Jahre 1848 als Student Mendelssohns "Walpurgisnacht" in Prag und Wien singen gehört, immer mit dem Goetheschen Originaltext. Das außerordentlich kirchliche Feingefühl unserer Behörden ist also ein neu aufgeblühtes Plänzlein. "So weit gebracht!!" singt der alte Druide.' Hanslick (1900), 96.

¹⁷ Kieval (1988), 6. See also Wistrich (1989) and Beller (1989).

¹⁸ Schorske (1981), 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

helped create a climate in which the aggressive expression of prejudice became acceptable'.²⁰

In this political atmosphere, the censorship of Goethe's poetry (a poet who was a self-proclaimed heathen)²¹ and Mendelssohn's music (a composer who was increasingly viewed as Jewish towards the close of the nineteenth century)²² is typical of what Notley refers to as the 'blend of anti-Semitism and revitalised Catholicism' central to the cultural politics of Luegerian Vienna.²³ I venture that Hanslick may well have been objecting to precisely these cultural politics when he referred to the extraordinarily religious sensitivity of our authorities as a 'small plant blossoming anew'. Indeed, he ends this particular review by allowing the pagans to have the last say, using words that were originally penned by Goethe and which come at the dramatic high-point of Mendelssohn's ballad; he writes: "'So weit gebracht!!" singt der alte Druide.'²⁴

Liberal or Autobiographical Motivations?

One possible reading of Hanslick's condemnation of the censorship of Goethe's text is to view it as a result of his liberal tendencies. Along with such critics as Richard Heuberger, Gustav Dömpke and Max Kalbeck, Hanslick is considered to be part of the liberal elite in Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁵ As acknowledged by Notley, 'much of the criticism in [Vienna] fit into a clear ideological framework in which musical tastes lined up with political affiliations,

²⁰ Notley (1999).

²¹ Cooper notes that Goethe had a 'fascination with the concept of heresy and the ideas of individuals historically deemed heretical'. In a letter to Johann Caspar Lavater he wrote that he was 'neither anti-Christian nor un-Christian, but decidedly non-Christian', 29 July 1782 (Beutler (1950–71), 18: 680): '[I]ch (binn) [sic] zwar kein Widerkrist, kein Unkrist aber doch ein dezidierter Nichtkrist'. Quoted in Cooper (2007a), 90. On Goethe's attitudes towards Christianity see Nisbet: 2002. Julie Prandi writes that 'Goethe's ballad originated in the 1790s, the decade when the most anti-Christian statements flowed from his pen. Poems from this era include the tragic ballad "Die Braut von Korinth", which, like "Die erste Walpurgisnacht", deals with the clash of pagan and Christian world-views, much to the disadvantage of the latter.' She further writes that 'although a self-declared "heathen", Goethe respected Jesus as a teacher and honoured individual Christians and their beliefs, even if he was at times critical of Christianity'. Prandi (2002), 140 and 142 respectively.

²² Indeed, as Jeffrey Sposato writes, 'after Mendelssohn's death in 1847, the tendency to see him as Jewish intensified over the course of the century as the anti-Semitic movement accelerated'. In Sposato (1998), 191.

²³ Notley (1993), 116.

²⁴ "'It has come to this!!" the old Druid sings.' Hanslick (1900), 96.

²⁵ For more on the political backdrop to the musical debates of late-nineteenth-century Vienna, see Notley (1993), Notley (1999) and Grimes (2008), Chapter 4.

at least within the context of the newspapers for which the reviewers wrote'.²⁶ And indeed, Hanslick wrote for the liberal newspaper the *Neue Freie Presse*.

However, on the basis of a consideration of Hanslick's relationship to Jews and Judaism, I would argue that along with this liberal motivation is an autobiographical one. According to Czech police records, Hanslick's mother, Karoline Hanslik, was born in 1796 to the German Jewish salesman Saloman Abraham Kisch. In order to marry her former piano teacher, the Catholic Joseph Hanslik, she converted to Catholicism in August 1823, marrying Joseph in September of that year.²⁷ Referring to the 1854 publication *Vom Musikalisch Schönen*, Wagner's 1869 edition of *Das Judenthum in der Musik* alleges that Hanslick 'now wrote a booklet on the "Musically-Beautiful", in which he played into the hands of Music-Jewry with extraordinary skill'.²⁸ This comment provoked two responses from Hanslick: one in the *Neue Freie Presse* in 1869, immediately following Wagner's publication,²⁹ and the other in his autobiography *Aus meinem Leben* published a quarter of a century later.³⁰

This second response represents a rare instance of Hanslick discussing his religious background in an open forum:

Wagner could not suffer any Jews; therefore he considered anyone he did not like to be a Jew. It would be flattering for me to be burnt on the same pile as Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer by Pater Arbuez Wagner; unfortunately I must decline this honour, as my father and all of his forefathers, as far back as one can trace, were arch-Catholic peasant sons, from a countryside where Judaism has been known only in the form of wandering peddlers.³¹

²⁶ Notley (1999), 45.

²⁷ See Ludvová (1986), 37.

²⁸ 'Dieser schrieb nun ein Libell über das "Musikalisch-Schöne", in welchem er für den allgemeinen Zweck des Musikjudenthums mit außerordentlichem Geschick verfuhr'. Wagner (1869), 37.

²⁹ Hanslick (1869).

³⁰ Hanslick (1894), II, 10.

³¹ 'Wagner mochte keinen Juden leiden; darum hielt er jeden, den er nicht leiden konnte, gern für einen Juden. Es würde mir nur schmeichelhaft sein, auf ein und demselben Holzstos mit Mendelssohn und Meyerbeer von Pater Arbuez Wagner verbrannt zu werden; leider muß ich diese Auszeichnung ablehnen, denn mein Vater und seine sämtliche Vorfahren, soweit man sie verfolgen kann, waren erzkatholisch Bauernsöhne, obendrein aus einer Gegend, welche das Judentum nur in Gestalt des wandernden Hausierers gekannt hat. Wagners Einfall, meine Abhandlung Vom Musikalisch-Schönen ein "mit außerordentlichem Geschick für den Zweck des Musikjudenthums verfaßtes Libell" zu nennen, ist, milde gesagt, so unglaublich kindisch, daß er vielleicht meine Feinde ärgern konnte, mich selbst gewiß nicht.' Ibid., 10. This statement was also published in the *Deutsche Rundschau* (1894), 56.

Hanslick's self-identification is less than candid, as he fails to mention the religion of his mother. He could have said that his mother was Catholic, but instead he neither affirms nor denies that he is of Jewish descent. This can perhaps be understood as giving a word to the wise; those in late nineteenth-century Germany and Vienna who were not familiar with Jewish traditions would most likely not have questioned Hanslick's patrilineal disavowal of his Jewishness. A person becomes a Christian by being baptised, and the Catholic Church insisted that if a Catholic married a non-Catholic the children had to be baptised Catholics, regardless of whether it was the father or the mother who was the Catholic. However, anyone with any knowledge of Judaism would know that it was matrilineal, thereby making the mention of the religion of Hanslick's mother noticeable by its absence.³²

I would go so far as to suggest that this can be understood as defying the anti-Semites. Given the anti-Semitic attitudes of the day it seems that Hanslick is saying as much as he can get away with. Moreover, he openly voices his admiration for the Jews, regarding it as an 'honour' and 'flattering' to be considered one of them. A comparable approach was taken by Jorge Luis Borges in response to a similar accusation made against him in 1934 in the ultra-nationalistic Argentine magazine *Crisol*. 'Many times it has not displeased me to think of myself as Jewish', writes Borges, going on to say that 'I am grateful for the stimulus provided by *Crisol*, but hope is dimming that I will ever be able to discover my link to the Table of the Breads and the Sea of Bronze; to Heine, Gleizer, and the ten *Seirot*; to Ecclesiastes and Chaplin.'³³ Moreover, Hanslick's allegiance to the Catholicism of his father's ancestors is entirely at odds with the condemnation of the 'Christian' censorship of the Vienna concert programme that he was to pen six years later.

As Jitka Ludvová has argued in her 1986 article 'Zur Biographie Eduard Hanslicks', autobiographical inconsistencies are not uncommon in Hanslick's writings.³⁴ It seems that following Hanslick's move to Vienna there were many parts of his former life and upbringing that he wished to leave behind, perhaps for reasons of social acceptance or career advancement (such as his level of fluency in

³² Henry Pleasants observes that Hanslick refers only to his father's side and notes that 'the concept of half-Jew, or Mischling, had not the significance then that it gained subsequently under the Nuremberg laws'. See Pleasants in Hanslick (1950), xix–xxvi (xxiii, footnote 5). Pleasants is correct with regard to the Nuremberg laws; however there was still a certain amount of anti-Semitism in the audience for whom Hanslick was writing which would have prevented him from expressing himself as explicitly as he might otherwise have done.

³³ Borges (1999), 110–11. The essay was originally published as 'Yo Judío', *Megáfono* 12 (April 1934). Manuel Gleizer fled Russia in 1908 and subsequently set up the first publishing house in Villa Crespo, Buenos Aires, publishing authors such as Borges, Mallea, Lugones, Jacobo Fijman and Leopoldo Marechal. Charlie Chaplin was not a Jew, but was often taken to be one as a result of his 1940 film *The Great Dictator*.

³⁴ Ludvová (1986).

the Czech language or the spelling of his name, which he changed from the Czech Hanslik to the more Germanic Hanslick). Wagner's accusation and Hanslick's response provide one of the most telling examples of these inconsistencies.

Behind Questionable Identities

Hanslick's paternal defence of his religious heritage takes on a further dimension when considered as an allusion to the suspicion that Wagner had a Jewish father.³⁵ As we know, the mystery of Wagner's paternity has never been solved. According to Bryan Magee 'it could have well been either his legal father or [the actor Ludwig Geyer]; [...] it is possible that even his mother herself did not know which of the two men it was; [...] there is no way now that the matter can be solved'.³⁶ It was in 1868 that Wagner discovered a series of letters (now lost or destroyed) which made him doubt his paternity and led to his self-generated fear that he might be of Jewish stock. At this time, Nietzsche was a close family friend of the Wagners and was entrusted with seeing the first three of the four volumes of Wagner's autobiography through the press. In this trusted and intimate proximity to the family, Nietzsche would have been privy to Wagner's doubts, which he later chose to betray. To this effect he added a footnote to the afterword of *Der Fall Wagner* (1888) stating that 'ein Geyer is beinahe schon ein Adler'.³⁷ The suspicion of Wagner's dubious paternity and religious heritage was referred to and circulated in a number of literary sources. Indeed as Magee has argued, 'many other writers who, like the more mature Nietzsche, wanted to punish Wagner for his anti-Semitism greeted with glee the idea that he might himself have been half-Jewish, and pounced on it, and promoted it in all seriousness'.³⁸ One such

³⁵ The history of Wagner's supposed Jewish ancestry has its roots, as Leon Botstein points out, not only in Nietzsche but also in the writings of Ludwig Speidel, who wrote a report for the *Fremdblatt* of the first production of the *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1876, and Daniel Spitzer, the great Jewish Viennese satirist who wrote a weekly newspaper column called 'Wiener Spaziergänge'. Spitzer's satirical badgering of Wagner reads: 'It is said that Wagner fears most of all the discovery of his own Jewish ancestry and dislikes when he sees his name shortened to R. Wagner because he fears it could be read as easily to mean "Rabbi Wagner".' Spitzer (1879), 3: 351, as cited in Botstein (2009), 156.

³⁶ Magee (2000), 339.

³⁷ The footnote reads: 'Was Wagner a German at all? There are some reasons for this question. It is difficult to find any German trait in him. Being a great learner, he learnt to imitate much that was German – that's all. His own nature contradicts that which has hitherto been felt to be German – not to speak of a German musician. – His father was an actor by the name of Geyer. A Geyer [vulture] is practically an Adler [eagle]. – What has hitherto circulated as "Wagner's Life" is fable convenue, if not worse.' Nietzsche (2000), 638. Whereas 'Adler' means eagle in German, it is also a common Jewish surname. I am grateful to David Conway for a fruitful discussion on this topic.

³⁸ Magee (2000), 361.

case is a caricature (without a specific year) by Theodor Zajaczkowski in the satirical journal *Der Floh*. Zajaczkowski's cartoon depicts Wagner in four stages of Darwinian evolution: from a Jew wearing a *yarmulka* and holding a *schofar*, to a conductor wearing the type of hat that Wagner frequently did and holding a Maestro's baton.³⁹ In this context, the declaration by Hanslick that he was not a Jew based on his paternity might be read as drawing attention to Wagner's uncertain paternity. Moreover, it could well have been understood as such by his contemporaries.

In his 1999 article 'Mendelssohn's Music and German-Jewish Culture: An Intervention', which was involved in the debate over whether Mendelssohn was Jewish or Protestant, Michael Steinberg posits that Mendelssohn's cultural moment and biographical formation can be understood as 'a paradigm of a multicultural and uncertain moment in German-Jewish history that was available only to the Biedermeier generation, i.e., the generation of 1815–1848'.⁴⁰ Since Hanslick was born in 1825, there can be no doubt that as a youth he was constantly reminded of his mother's religious background with the frequent anti-Semitic outbursts in Prague.⁴¹ Even if the family considered themselves to be Catholic, despite their mother's Jewish origin, these anti-Semitic acts are bound to have had a psychological impact. If the political changes that were going on around Hanslick as an adult in Vienna were not enough, Wagner's less than tactful reminder would have driven the point home. Indeed, in Hanslick's mind, he and Mendelssohn were so inextricably bound up with Wagner's anti-Semitic outpourings that they might have been united in solidarity against anti-Semitism. That his response to Wagner's 1869 accusation came in the form of a denial negated the need to defend his own Jewish heritage, but did not prevent him from referring to being Jewish as an 'honour'. This may well be one reason for his defence of Mendelssohn's work against the works that he considered to question the integrity of Judaism, and writings – or censorships – that he considered to compromise the honour of Mendelssohn's Jewish heritage.

Hanslick's View of Mendelssohn, Brahms and Wagner: A Reevaluation

Hanslick is certainly not remembered as one of Mendelssohn's most influential supporters. With regard to his reception of Mendelssohn's music in general, he perpetuates a notion that became a commonplace following Mendelssohn's death, that Mendelssohn's music is more a product of artful work, than of inspiration, or a product of intellect over feeling, as evidenced in his reviews of the 1840s. Hanslick's

³⁹ See Jens Malte Fischer (2000), 31.

⁴⁰ Steinberg (1991), 32.

⁴¹ Frequent violent outbursts and workers' demonstrations directed against Jews in Prague in 1844 and 1848 would have reinforced the view in the minds of Jewish notables that the Czech population was fundamentally anti-Semitic. See Kieval (1988), 8.

1845 comments on Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3 describe it as 'more a product of artful work, than immediate inspiration [. This] ought not to disconcert us with one of Mendelssohn's works, as this predominance of rationality over inspiration has grown inseparably into the individuality of the composer'.⁴² In 1848 the 'fine, exemplary building, full of the most interesting details' of Mendelssohn's *Rondo Brillant*, Op. 29, left him 'somewhat frosty'.⁴³ Yet Hanslick holds Mendelssohn in high regard as a composer of spiritual music, admiring both *Elias* and *Paulus*. On a number of occasions he refers to Mendelssohn as the spiritual heir of Bach (Bach's 'Sohn im Geiste').⁴⁴ In 1875, however, Hanslick's favour for the leading composer of spiritual music is transferred from Mendelssohn to Brahms, whom he considers to compose spiritual music of a 'deeper seriousness and stronger character than Mendelssohn'.⁴⁵ Between the 1850s and 1880s (the period following the revolution, leading to the era of Viennese liberalism when restrictions on Jewish life were removed) Hanslick wrote comparatively little on Mendelssohn. In the 1890s (a decade in which anti-Semitic prejudices became socially acceptable) he mentions him with greater frequency. A remarkable instance is offered by Hanslick's 1892 review of the choral works of Mendelssohn, Brahms and Bach:

The last *Gesellschaft* concert had a true repentance and fasting programme! To begin with we called on Mendelssohn, the God of the Jews, to implore a blessing on the house of Israel and the house of Aaron;⁴⁶ the cruel God of the Pagans shattered us in Brahms's 'Parzenlied'. Finally, the favourite Protestant theme, comfort in death, and the longing to leave this world of sin as soon as possible, was impressed upon us in Bach's motet 'Komm Jesu, Komm.'⁴⁷

⁴² 'Daß jedoch auch die neue Symphonie mehr ein Product kunstvoller Arbeit, als unmittelbarer Begeisterung ist, darf uns bei einem Werke F. Mendelssohn's nicht befremden, dieses Ueberwiegen der Verstandesthätigkeit über das Gefühl ist mit des Komponisten Individualität unvertrennbar verwachsen.' Hanslick (1993), I/1, 23.

⁴³ 'Das Rondo brillant hat mir, wie der größte Teil der Mendelssohn'schen Salonstücke etwas Frostiges, Gemachtes. Daß es musterhaft feinen Baues und voll der interessantesten Details ist, kann hier wenig in Betracht kommen.' Hanslick (1993), I/1, 131.

⁴⁴ See Hanslick (1993), I/1, 212 and 120.

⁴⁵ 'Heute gilt der Ausspruch nicht mehr vollständig. Man macht in unserer Zeit wieder geistliche Musik von tieferem Ernst und mächtigerem Gepräge, als jene Mendelssohnsche. Das heißt, man macht sie nicht, aber Brahms macht sie.' Hanslick (1886), 139.

⁴⁶ We are later informed that the Mendelssohn work performed was the Psalm 115, Op. 31 (1831) 'Nicht unserem Namen Herr'. It is surprising that it was not Psalm 114, 'Da Israel aus Aegypten zog' (When Israel out of Egypt Came), that was sung rather than Psalm 115, as this would have been consistent with what Hanslick refers to as 'a blessing on the house of Israel and the house of Aaron'. However, the Hanslick source clearly states that it was Psalm 115.

⁴⁷ 'Ein wahres Buß und Festenprogramm das des letzten Gesellschaftsconcert! Zu Anfang heißt uns Mendelssohn den Gott der Juden anflehen um Segen für das Haus Israel und das Haus Aaron, dann zerschmettern uns in Brahms' Parzenlied die grausamen Götter

In 1897, on the fiftieth anniversary of Mendelssohn's death (and the year in which Lueger was ratified as mayor of Vienna), Hanslick refers to Mendelssohn's more popular works in an article titled 'Zur Erinnerung an Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy', filled with nostalgic reminiscences:

His *Walpurgisnacht*; his symphonies in A-major and A-minor (the works of a 22-year-old youth!), his concert overtures, finally his *Paulus* and *Elias* are, nevertheless, still effective with intact freshness and power. ... In more recent times, elements from the outside have been used against Mendelssohn – the Wagnerians and anti-Semites united in hate and presumption. We allow them this sad business.⁴⁸

In the one area in which he did champion Mendelssohn in his earlier critical writings, spiritual music, he favours Brahms in later years. In this light, his 1893 review of *Rinaldo* and *Walpurgisnacht* is all the more remarkable since it is based more on a judgement of the poetic texts than the music itself, as is the 1900 review of *Walpurgisnacht*. There are many autobiographical parallels in the lives of the composer and the critic which, for Hanslick, could not have gone unnoticed. Both grew up negotiating their Jewish origins or heritage, and thereby their cultural identity; and both were the subject of anti-Semitic writings. Mendelssohn's posthumously emphasised Jewish identity provided a public platform on which Hanslick could defend his hidden Jewish heritage.⁴⁹ In this sense, Hanslick's *Walpurgisnacht* reviews can be read as a manifestation of the critic's hidden identity. Further, from our vantage point in the twenty-first century they provide a window through which we can view a cultural moment of the late-nineteenth century, and its implications for the reception of the music of Jewish composers. And, indeed, these reviews allow us to see that Hanslick's assaults on Wagner were not only motivated by aesthetic ideologies but, more importantly, by a personal ideological agenda.⁵⁰

der heiden, zuletzt wird uns in Bachs Motette Komm, Jesu komm, das protestantische Lieblingsthema, das Vergnügen am Sterben, eingeprägt und die Sehnsucht, aus dieser Sündenwelt so bald als möglich fortzukommen.' Hanslick (1892), 314.

⁴⁸ 'Seine "Walpurgisnacht", seine Symphonien in A-dur und A-moll (Werke eines zweiundzwanzigjährigen Jünglings!), seine Concert-Ouvertüren, endlich sein "Paulus" und "Elias" wirken trotzdem noch mit unversehrter Frische und Macht. "Ewig" ist ein leeres Wort für musikalische Schöpfungen – aber auf sehr, sehr lange hinaus werden sie alle Freunde edler, ernster Kunst erquicken und erheben. In neuerer Zeit haben auch Elemente von außen her sich gegen Mendelssohn gekehrt: die in Haß und Überhebung vereinigten Wagnerianer und Antisemiten. Gönnen wir ihnen das traurige Geschäft.' Hanslick (1899), 416–17.

⁴⁹ On Mendelssohn's posthumously emphasised Jewishness, see Cooper (2004) and Sposato (2006).

⁵⁰ On Hanslick's criticism of Wagner, see the essays by Thomas Grey and David B. Dennis in Vazsonyi (2002) at 98–119, 165–89 and 190–208.

By way of conclusion let us return to Botstein's contention that the 'most remarkable example of Mendelssohn's residual psychological loyalty to his Jewish heritage was the secular cantata *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*'. It seems fitting in this context to apply such a statement to Hanslick in suggesting that the most remarkable examples of Hanslick's *conscious* loyalty to his Jewish heritage are his *reviews* of the secular cantata *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*. In terms of its emotional lure for Hanslick, the *Walpurgisnacht* can be understood by its obvious analogy to the historical and contemporary plight of Jewry. This reading obtains a particular relevance when considered in the context of the anti-Jewishness of the 1830s and 1840s witnessed by Hanslick as a child, as well as the *fin de siècle* anti-Semitism he witnessed as an adult.