

ARIABELLISSIMA

A Dialogue Between the Artist and the Psychoanalyst (continued)¹

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"Perhaps the voice is, strictly speaking, the scansion (emphasis) I am using to be able to tell you all of this."

J. Lacan le 9 avril 1974

Why does sound, the sound of music, possess the power to determine the destiny of a speaking being, despite the fact that it would at first appear that words would be the ones to do this?

Arabella walks into one of the halls of the conservatory, glides onto a *chaise longue* and savors the pleasure of the moment of relaxation that awaits her amidst its familiar ambiance. Her thoughts turn to the twelve-tonal music of Schoenberg she had just been discussing with one of her pupils.

Suddenly she is re-seized by the same feelings of doubt she had felt a short while before when referring to the unfinished finale of his *Moses and Aaron*, Act II. The memory of this moment imprisons her.

Then after a while, for how long it is hard to say, she remembers her analytic session from that morning, but this time with an added twist. She still sees the bold-faced letters **A** and **S** from her dream, but now she hears something previously unperceived in the voice of her analyst when he interrupted her and spoke them aloud.

This unexpected element gives her a feeling of release, and quietly she murmurs:

“During this morning’s session I laughed at the idea of my having the same initials as Arnold Schoenberg, and refused to entertain the things that came to mind regarding these two letters. I can hardly believe it, but I even sang a little.”

“But now I remember clearly that as I was leaving I said to myself it isn’t done to show off one’s voice in front of one’s analyst – I guess my judge caught up with me in the hallway.”

“He came back just in time to torment me, and I couldn’t help but heed him.”

“What’s even more unbelievable though is that fact that he had to remind me of his authority in order to calm me about his disappearance. This is how things happened as far as I can see: He had to question whether all my knowledge and university titles really belonged to me, in order for me to be able to gain access to something truly my own that I was unable to know outright, because it came to me through the voice of my analyst.”

¹ Written in the aftermath of *Mozart and the Cry of Don Juan. A Dialogue Between the Artist and the Psychoanalyst*, in *Insistance* No 1. pp 37-43.

Time and space are not the same since Arabella consented to hearing this change that was being transmitted by the inflection of something rightly put (*juste inflection*), which she heard in the voice of the Other.

In the night that falls on the backdrop of the world stage, something new mixes with that which is already there. This is the moment, unheard and unseen, when silent immaterial beings emerge. Secreted away, in the shadows of the wings, because the image-conscious beings of daylight were unable to hear them, they suffered their fate in silence, unacknowledged as the pure signifiers they were.

And yet, they knew a day would come when a certain tempo, just right, would in the blink of an eye free them from the effects of the signifieds that were forever causing them to dissipate.

Greeting with thanks this Human not too human who called them forth, they offer to stage a play with her whose story has never taken place.

Arabella does not yet realize she too has been awaiting this unforgettable moment.

The curtain rises.

Spurred on by Arabella's doubtful musings, Schoenberg points out that the true story of *Moses and Aaron* is something that painstakingly reveals itself, and is not to be found in books.

He never kept secret the fact that from very early on he envisioned doing some sort of tragic theater, but it was in 1906, following *Und Pippa Tanzt*, that the idea of creating a dramatic work first came to him. He also already knew the all-too familiar laws of tonality would never enable him to make heard the message he sought to convey.

But this is why he gave up on the idea at first, because it required him to seek out the notes that are produced when dissonance is freed from these laws.

In his view, the unexpected step forward Arabella had made in her experience with her analyst's voice was clearly a kind of purely a-consonant dissonance.

"What a passage!" he suddenly exclaims.

Naturally predisposed to fear the judgments of the others, he himself shunned the spotlight whenever possible, but was forced to appear in order to publicly convey the idea of this Other scene.

His detractors were not easy with him, and he spent many a sleepless night following the first public performances of his Second String Quartet in December 1908. Still he kept faith in the call that only he alone could hear.

Alone he was indeed, like a prophet who hears only his own invocation, refusing to eat and sleep until he unearths his answer, Schoenberg soon realized that it was God who was calling him, and that the others therefore would be unable to hear what he heard.

This God was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the voice Moses heard in the Burning Bush. The fact that he had converted to Protestantism in 1898, (most likely in order to gain better access to the culture of Goethe, Bach and Beethoven), made it even easier for him to hear this unique God distinct from the God of the Christians. His conversion never devolved into apostasy.

In fact dissonance means being alone, like Moses, and consonance means being one of the crowd of familiar others, like Aaron. *Moses and Aaron* had already taken up residence within him well before he began to think about it officially.

It was not he who sought to mount the operatic stage, but the operatic stage that already awaited him. This was definitely the case, though he had never thought about it before in such clear-cut terms:

“Glorious music, Guardian of the secrets that words shall never reveal to human thought!”

Thus dissonance had finally found a messenger unwittingly willing to take the risk, in a thirty minute drama entitled *Erwartung*, written over the course of two weeks, from August 27th to September 12th, 1909.

“Just two weeks!” he repeats.

He sought out the poet Marie Pappenheim to write the libretto, and to further emphasize the element of dissonance in its newfound freedom, the only part was that of a solitary feminine voice.

Arabella hears the high-pitched “B” of the “Hi-” in “Hilfe” (“Help”), the first syllable the woman sings when she discovers the body of her lover.

This “B,” the highest register in the vocal portion of the score, distracts our attention from the thundering *tutti* of the orchestra that accompanies her, which might as well exit the theater entirely at this point, finding itself not entirely welcome.

Why? Because only the sound of mute thunder could make heard the silence of this music that is not heard with the ears:

And then she hears the tempo in the voice of her analyst’s “dashed-saying,” **A-S**.

And then the silent music of the spheres that *only* Pythagoras heard begins to resound.

It is conveyed through a cry made heard by the vowel-continuum of the long-e sound of the high “B.” It is the silence conveyed by this solitary note.

And then everything is revealed and yet remains veiled after a 14-note descent to low C-sharp...

A doorway opens onto a world in which everything Arabella has seen and heard before becomes suddenly new: *parlando*, *arioso*, *bel canto* become her guides, leading her onward to the opera’s high point, this long “e,” this vowel beckoning toward any and all meanings.

All wandering may now cease: “Oh, bist du da...Ich suchte...” (Oh here you are, I was looking...).

Schoenberg himself can hardly believe it: given the fact that he is now completely open to what Arabella hears, it becomes clear this was what he himself heard unawares in 1909, the voice of the Other, a woman’s voice that still greets him again today. Why the necessary detour?

An idea comes to him: he was *still* hearing the silence out of which this cry emanated when he felt impelled to begin composing a second musical drama immediately after *Erwartung* entitled *Die Glückliche Hand* (The Fortunate Hand).

But then why did he stop composing it several times? Why did it ultimately take him three years to finish it? Why did he turn away from it and towards another, *Pierrot Lunaire* (*Moonlight Sparrow*, 1912)?

Arabella’s voice answers him: the song of signifyingness is fleeting, the signified always reasserts its predominance once the activity of thought is unleashed. She knows what she’s talking about.

Words and their meaning had won the day, or so it would seem, but Schoenberg was increasingly rebellious against the Viennese Gentiles who no longer heeded him, just as Aaron no longer heeded Moses. In an act of stubbornness, therefore, he decided to rent one of Vienna’s largest concert halls, the Musikverein, in order to give a concert where he and his school would take cover under Wagner and two well-known Jewish musicians, Zemlinsky and Mahler.

Again, the music itself would be his firmament.

But the effects of the signified finally won out on March 31, 1913: Wagner’s works were pulled for being insufficiently prepared, and Mahler’s were interrupted when the concert was shut down.

Alma Mahler, he remembers, would later reveal to him the anti-Semitic rumors that were circulating in the Bauhaus circles of the day, and of the connivances of his friend Kandinsky.

This incessant preoccupation with recognition that was holding him back was something not entirely foreign to *Die Glückliche Hand*. In fact the words of the libretto allude to it. A man undergoes a series of ordeals leading him to realize the fundamental truth uttered to him in the first scene: Even one transcendent truth is something that exceeds all earthly fortune (*Glück*).

This first of four backdrops is particularly telling: faces appear and disappear through twelve small skylights – their gazes trained on a man lying face-down against the floorboards.

But the music never left Schoenberg’s side: the two-person chorus alternates between singing, spoken dialogue and a new form of vocal expression called *Sprechgesang* (sung-spoken) – the performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* in Berlin on the night of October 12th, 1912 bathed him in the aura of the artist once more.

What a message for a Jew besieged by anti-Semitic hatred! Though at times he seemed to have himself given up on music, music would never fail him.

Arabella, stunned, is taking every last bit of this in. Is it possible that Schoenberg had forgotten that what transported him elsewhere, what binds him to the musicians who came before him and at the same time anticipates the liberation of dissonance he introduced, is the knotting of word and music he himself wrote while composing the *Gurre-Lieder* in 1900-01?

Did he forget that it was there that he adopted the audacious innovation first used by Beethoven, the inclusion of the human voice in a symphony, but more importantly still that this was the first appearance of his new signature musical wagger, the *Sprechsang*, which he used to fuel the high melodrama of the solo number in part III?

Interestingly, because the pitch of the *Sprechsang* notes was only pre-defined in approximate terms, this entirely new musical form offered the human voice an unconscious choice.

The voice of Moses, announcing the end of Act II of *Moses and Aaron*, resonates with evocations to this *Sprechsang* as well:

“O wort, du wort, das mir fehlt” (O words, you words, that fail me).

Whatever it is that speaks without knowing it in Moses’ voice is saying more than it knows. Arabella hears it, she feels a presence inside speaking to her body directly.

It is the operatic scene itself, which has made its appearance at just the right moment.²

What it has come to say is completely disconcerting: Moses’ voice is not making heard a disenchantment linked to the disappearance of the nominative power of words, but the unheard (of) mode inherent to the process of “enchantment” itself. Psychoanalytic theory rightly depicts this as the mode in which the Real which has been unchained from the Imaginary and Symbolic may be conveyed via a new Symbolic force, the essence of dissonance.

Arabella no longer believes Schoenberg was unable to unearth the music needed for an Act III. The music of Act II is not in fact unfinished – its undreamt-of tone is simultaneously made heard and seen through its rendition of Moses’ invocation.

She looks at him, inquisitively. He smiles, and she smiles back.

This smile introduces their symbolic separation: he smiled because he had been heard, she for having heard this answer he had been seeking.

This unforeseen event reshuffles the deck. The effects of the signified withdraw, creating space for the unseen, unheard and immaterial elements of signifyingness to appear. This story is indeed addressed to whosoever may be prepared to listen to it, and to hear...

² Insofar as it does not belong to any specific historical period exclusively. It is something that accords, in the quasi-musical sense of the term, with the birth of time itself – an ever-elusive tempo that will furnish the inspiration for the remainder of this essay.

Preyed upon by doubts, Moses faces the disappearance of the being conferred upon him by words, what Aaron aptly referred to as *images*.

Before then he had made good use of them to maintain his image as the divine message's sole keeper, which he then used to accuse Aaron of being overly image-conscious and thus only interested in the pretty figure he struck, which ever so easily lent itself to be seen.

But as Aaron reminded him, his position was no stranger to images, because it was itself deceptive to maintain the truth of dualisms as he did. His essentially Imaginary position was also revealed by the anger that drove him to break the tablets of the law.

Thus he had to be overwhelmed by doubt in order to finally be able to tear himself away from the stage of this world and turn his face towards its Other Scene, dragging Schoenberg, alone, along with him.

"Ungottstellbarer Gott!	(Unrepresentable God!
Unaussprechlicher, vieldeutiger Gedanke!	Inexpressible and multiple Idea!
Lässt-du diese Auslung zu?	Will you permit this interpretation?
Darf Aron, mein Mund,	Aaron, does my mouth have the right
diesen Bild machen?	To formulate this image?
So habe Ich mir ein Bild gemacht,	Thus have I made myself an image that is,
falsch,	false,
wie ein Bild nur sein kann!	As all images are!
So, bin Ich geschlagen!	Thus I have been vanquished!
So, war alles Wahnsinn,	Thus everything I believed
was ich gedacht werden	Was mere folly
und kann und darf nicht gesagt werden!"	And may never nor should ever be uttered!)

Then the words die down, as the activity of thinking which sustained them withdraws.

Alone, a chromatic melody of violins in unison reveals while it veils the silence of the voice of God...

Moses' long and continuous "O" that then resonates forth is in answer to it:

"O wort, du wort, das mir fehlt" (O words, you words, that fail me).

A long, solitary F-sharp played by the strings makes heard that the two have finally met, and nothing is as it was before.

Hearing the singing at the end of Act II, Arabella becomes Schoenberg's conveyor (*porteur*), who was himself passing on to us the creative power of music, by means

of the human vocal chords, which had remained unrecognized since March 10th 1932 in Barcelona.

Operatic theater was awaiting this divine moment. The psychoanalyst may indeed assert that the God of Moses is one name for the Real.

Rimbaud, who had previously held his peace, stands up. He has just understood that he stopped writing because he no longer had any hope for a moment such as this to occur for him.

Touched to the core, he recites his sonnet *Voyelles* (Vowels)³

"A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu : voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes :
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfes d'ombre; E, candeurs des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombrelles ;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes ;

U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux ;

O, suprême clairon plein des strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges :
- O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux !"

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origins:
A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies
which buzz around cruel smells,

Gulfs of shadow; E, whiteness of vapours and of tents,
lances of proud glaciers, white kings, shivers of cow-parsley;
I, purples, spat blood, smile of beautiful lips
in anger or in the raptures of penitence;

U, waves, divine shudderings of viridian seas,
the peace of pastures dotted with animals, the peace of the furrows
which alchemy prints on broad studious foreheads;

O, sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing sounds,
silences crossed by [Worlds and by Angels]:
-O the Omega! the violet ray of [His] Eyes!⁴

³ Arthur Rimbaud. *Œuvres complètes*. (Complete Works). Le livre de poche. pp. 279-280

⁴ TR: Translation from <http://www.doctorhugo.org/synaesthesia/rimbaud.html>.

And now it is Baudelaire's turn to say, *again (encore)*.

Vowels is not about facts in the sensible realm. What is being made heard in it is strictly speaking the right meter, in which the musical silence of the structure of language joins forces with the unthinkable opposition between black-white and red-green, in another world, the world of the vowel O.

Intent on making himself heard, Baudelaire appeals to *the painter of modern life* who proclaimed: "modernity is the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent, one half of art itself, whose other half is the eternal and immutable."⁵

Modernity is not the new suppressing what is now old and passé, it is a new tempo that hits the mark because it knots the eternal with the contingent:

"...Odors, colors and sounds respond to one another..."⁶

Baudelaire, without knowing it, was announcing the arrival of a *psychoanalyst of modern-day life* who would be able to hear the right moment when the eternal and silent breath of language offers its hand to the sulfur of words that awoke it in the first place.

Arabella hears the voice of her analyst again, his hyphenated-saying of the A-S.

Silence! (*Motus!*), "words are not of this world,"⁷ she sighs.

Rimbaud is satisfied that he has been heard.

"It is odd indeed to imagine that words are not of this world," Hofmannstahl adds.

This crazy idea came to me in a letter I wrote to my friend Edgar Karg (July 18, 1895), telling him I had finally gotten through an experience of "unspeakably stifling solitude," and I crossed paths with it again in 1902, while writing my *Lord Chandos Letters*.

I heard an impulse, like some kind of music that had begun to reside in me with my blessing, but which the words of this world could never express. I decided to write that Chandos found peace with himself at the sight of a watering can, a harrow or a dog, just as I had been healed by Van Gogh's painting.

I was saddled with what I had stumbled upon, unrelated as it was to both said and saying...

⁵ *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (The Painter of Modern-Day Life). Baudelaire Critique d'art. folio Essais. 2005 p. 355

⁶ Charles Baudelaire. *Correspondances*. Les Fleurs du mal. Classiques Larousse p.21

⁷ Hugo von Hofmannstahl. *Les mots ne sont pas de ce monde*. *Lettres à un officier de marine*. (Words Are Not of This World: Letters to a Maritime Officer). Rivages poche. Petite bibliothèque. Payot.p.126

So I hid behind the pseudonym of Lord Chandos, who was the one who supposedly wrote to Francis Bacon apologizing for having given up all literary activity.

But my inability to use words to express myself was not the real issue. I know now that at the time I was still looking for an Auditor able to make me hear what I did not yet know I was hearing: “a language I didn’t know a single word of, a language in which mute things speak to me and that I may yet justify one day in the grave, before an unknown judge.”⁸

I was waiting for Lacan and what he called the “written” (*l’écrit*).⁹

Arabella’s thoughts turn to Lacan’s *Ecrits*, and how the meaning of words is able to transmit a false image.

Suddenly this thought brings her back to the music of Hofmannstahl’s words:

“Did he end up becoming a librettist because he knew opera would enable him to make the mute, otherworldly language of words resonate on its scene? Did Richard Strauss have an intuition of this language that spoke to Hofmannstahl in secret? Was this the wager that brought them together?”

What enchants Arabella so about this idea, is the fact that *Arabella*, the opera they chose to create in 1927, pushed them both to the edge of these limits: Strauss’s Arabella was forced to give up her own identity to save her family’s honor; whereas Hofmannstahl’s was, like she is, the conveyor (*passante*) of a tempo that invokes its listener into existence.

“This is clearly not an everyday use of words!” she exclaims.

Right in the middle of Vienna’s quickly fading aristocratic façade (Waldner’s finances were in ruins, her sister Zdenka’s masquerade as a man, etc.), Arabella had learned to listen and heed what she saw of herself with her own eyes.

Her parents’ plans to save the family by finding her a rich suitor do not particularly trouble her. Despite what everybody else believes based on their received ideas, she herself is on the cutting edge of what is new.

Alone, she awaits the *stranger*, finding strangeness itself her only suitable guide.

"Er! Das ist er! *Mein Fremd!* (Him! He’s the one! *My Stranger*)

And Mandryka was the one indeed, not only because he came from outside the masquerade of Viennese aristocracy, but above all because he was *Richtige*, the right one at the right time, the right meter to lead her into an encounter with the odors, colors and sounds of the Croatian forests she had never before seen or heard.

⁸ Hugo von hofmannstahl. *Lettres de Lord Chandos*. (The Lord Chandos Letters) Nrf. Poésie Gallimard. p.51

⁹ Jacques Lacan, Seminar *Encore*. (Seuil 1975). Seminars from January 9th and 16th, 1972.

Since she knows Nature is animated by the impulse to be found in the human voice, she has faith she will one day hear it:

“I’d like to hear the sound of his voice. His voice!”

“The transformation (*Verwandlung*) already being written in July 1912, the one that revealed it to the world, was the life of life itself, the true mystery of Nature as experienced through its creative activity.”

“Ariabellissima,” Arabella is surprised to hear herself sing. (Silence). “Ah yes, of course, that was the slip I failed to make with my analyst.”

The emergence of the operatic voice brought her back to the moment of the creation of Arabella itself.

And yet a question still haunts her:

“After the success of *The Knight of the Rose*, why did Strauss and Hofmannstahl join forces to stage yet another opera depicting Viennese decadence?”

Did Strauss sense that Hofmannstahl would enable him to transcend the scene of success and gain access to an Other scene? The way Act I was written, and ended, was to focus almost exclusively on Hofmannstahl’s words, allowing the music to come later.

The surprising thing is that Hofmannstahl never knew the enthusiasm Strauss felt when listening to these otherworldly words.

Strauss did however manage to at least make him aware of it, but then, just two days after the suicide of his son Franz, an apopleptic seizure killed him on July 15th, 1929 before he could come to know its true extent.

Father and son shared the secret of the sound of a music that was familiar to the scene. The latter believed his fate was to disappear along with Vienna, then in decomposition; thereby enabling the departure of the former, not poet enough (*pohâtassé*)¹⁰ to manage to, in the end, create the music that would “one day justify (him) in (his) grave before a judge unknown.”

Paris, May 2006

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¹⁰ Jacques Lacan. Seminar, *L'insu que sait de l'une bévue*, May 17th, 1977.