
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Christopher Wintle

My admiration for Michael Graubart's probing review of Hans Keller's *Music and Psychology* (*Tempo* Volume 58, No.227) is, I have to say, a little qualified by some of his censures over my editing. However, I agree that there are real issues at stake, and that some of these go beyond his own demonstrable errors: HK's piece on capital punishment on p. 31, for instance, is not appended 'without explanation', for the provenance is explained barely an inch above the text; the translators (Irene Auerbach and myself) are not 'not named', but are acknowledged on p. xix; and the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) will tell him that a 'congress' is not just 'a meeting' (the Congress of Vienna), but also a place of assembly (the US Congress) and a political movement (Trades Union Congress): from this last point of view 'Zionist Congress' is far from 'misleading'.

The real issues arise with the translations. It is obvious that 'ich finde nicht die Spur von einem Geist' (Goethe) can be rendered as 'I can find no trace of a spirit' (Graubart), but the rendering is neither clear nor idiomatic (and anyway, I am hardly the first to stumble over 'Geist'). My use of 'individuality' for 'einem' may indeed 'over-egg' Keller's argument, but this is the best I could do in the context (and in any case, German-speaking readers have the original before them). Although Graubart improves my version of Keller's 'und geduldig nur der, der die Ungeduld kennt' with his 'and only the person who knows impatience can be patient', I would still replace his unidiomatic 'know' with 'understand' (Keller uses 'kennen' rather than 'wissen'). The big question, though, as to whether there is 'a slight shadow of doubt over the translation of other, weightier texts', is a genuine worry. I have no doubt that there are points to argue. Keller's German texts all date from the late 1930s and early 1940s when the author (b. 1919) was aged between 18 and, say, 22. In my own judgment, he was still in need of an editor at the time (most teenagers are): the originals are fascinating for their content, but a bit ponderous in expression (others have argued that Keller's German was never as good as his English). My really very 'light' editing tried to bring the translations into line with the extraordinarily stylish English he was able to deploy within a matter of a few years. Readers can

see the kind of thing I have done by comparing Keller's German title on p.31 with my 'lightly edited' one on p. 27.

Beyond this, Michael Graubart has pointed out some irrefutable slips for which I am truly grateful; and as far as the 'gremlins' go, he will be pleased to know that plans for a corrected second edition are already in hand.

Plumbago Books and Arts
PO Box 27832, London SE24 9YG

From Michael Graubart

In replying to Julian Silverman's reply to me, entitled 'Did Anybody have to be Schoenberg?', in the letters pages of *Tempo* Volume 58, no.227, I should like to take the opportunity to respond first to Christopher Wintle's letter above.

Christopher Wintle has, indeed, demonstrated my error in failing to note that the date of Keller's paragraph on capital punishment on p.31 of *Music and Psychology* is mentioned further up the page; though, to be pedantic, a date is neither explanation nor provenance. I apologize for missing that, and also for missing the translators' names (which I had expected to find on a title-page, or at least in 'A Note on the Text' on p. xx) in the Acknowledgements on p. xix.

As for 'Congress', the US Congress is not a place of meeting but an actual standing meeting, just as the word 'Parliament' is prefaced with 'Houses of' when it refers to a place. 'Trade unionism' or 'the Trades Union movement' is a movement; the Trades Union Congress is not; it is a body of people, though I admit that it is referred to as a congress even when it is not sitting. But the talk was not of either of these, but of the World Zionist Congress, which was a meeting, frequently repeated, of Zionists. It was Zionism, not the Congress, that was the political movement. (I do know a little about it, since my father was a prominent contributor to some of the meetings.)

That 'Geist' has a broader meaning than either 'mind' or 'spirit' is well known, and demonstrates the way that a particular natural language limits the concepts and distinctions that can be thought and expressed by the speakers of that language. But my point was not that Christopher Wintle

might have ‘stumbled over “Geist”’. My point was that no German speaker who wished to refer to the uniqueness of an individual ‘Geist’ would construct a clause like Goethe’s, however poetic the context. As for my ‘rendering’, it made no pretence of matching Goethe’s idiom. Wintle built an argument on his reading of the line, and it required a literal translation (which is, I submit, perfectly clear) to refute this argument. It is not German-speaking readers who may be misled but those that have to rely on the English version.

The ambiguity of ‘Geist’ in German is matched by the ambiguity of ‘know’ in English. Keller does, indeed, use the word ‘kennen’ (or rather ‘kennt’) and not ‘wissen’ or ‘weiss’ – for the simple reason that it is impossible in German to say ‘...der, der die Ungeduld weiss’. ‘Kennt’ in this context means ‘having experienced’, as ‘knows’ does. As for the latter being unidiomatic, I am sorry Christopher Wintle does not – in the other sense of the word – know this idiom; I do.

But as I said in my review, these (perhaps with the exception of the Goethe passage) are trivia, and even the ‘slight shadow of doubt’ cast over the ‘weightier texts’ that are only printed in English translation (so that even German speakers cannot verify their accuracy) cannot take away from the importance of the book; it is good news that a corrected second edition is in preparation. Since it will then be possible to find the references to indexed names, I may, I hope, be allowed to add a small piece of information: the ‘H. Grotte’ referred to but not identified in the book was Hans Keller’s uncle and a Viennese lawyer who, like his nephew, came to London as a refugee.

As for Julian Silverman’s flatteringly long response to my small article, ‘What are twelve-note rows/ really/ for?’ in the July 2003 *Tempo* (Vol. 57 No. 225) – it was Conrad, I believe, who said that he did not read his reviews, he measured them – the trouble is that I agree with most of what he says. That is no way to keep a discussion going, so let me try another tack: he has completely misread my article.

May I summarize my position?

1. A good composer does not need formal serial technique in order to ensure motivic coherence.
2. It is a psychological truism to say that the real reasons why we do things are not always the reasons we are conscious of.
3. Any stimulus, restriction or set of self-imposed rules is justified if it fires the composer’s imagination and lets him or her produce an audibly good piece of music. Whether ‘audibly’ in this context means that the listener responds directly to the

techniques employed by the composer is an open question.

4. As Schoenberg himself said, the choice of different forms and transpositions of a note-row can be used analogously to the definition of different key-areas in tonal music for the purpose of formal articulation. (He did not talk about goal-directedness as such; see 2. above.)

The third of these statements has its philosophical problems. When Schoenberg told a listener who could not hear certain manipulations of a note-row that the way the piece had been made was *his* business, hers was what the piece actually was, he seemed to ignore the fact that the way a piece is made *determines* the sounds we ultimately hear. A musician of my acquaintance (astonishingly, he had had some philosophical training) once came out with the amazing statement that Bach’s fugues would be just as good if they were not fugues. How could they be the same pieces if they were not fugues? But Schoenberg was not talking about the identity of his piece; he was directing the listener’s attention to what she should be listening for: expressive intervals, exciting irregular rhythms and phrase-lengths, recurrences and variations of surface elements like themes, and so on.

Julian Silverman seems not to appreciate the difference between ‘would’ and ‘should’. I do not understand how anyone can read my suggestion that one *would* have to undertake psycho-acoustic research in order to find out whether innocent listeners actually respond to the goal-directedness of a 12-note row as meaning that composers *should* undertake such research before deciding whether to adopt serial technique or not. (I was obviously implying that such research is a waste of time as far as composition is concerned; anyone who cannot trust her ears should not call herself a composer.) I do disagree with Julian Silverman a little, though, about the work at IRCAM which he mentions so dismissively. It *would* have been interesting: not in order to assist in the composition of music, but as research in the scientific discipline of the psychology of perception and pattern-recognition. But then my own early training was as a scientist, and I have not lost a certain curiosity about how ears and brains work.

I hope Julian Silverman’s hilarious suggestion that I implied that ‘atonal’ = ‘good’ (with its corollary, ‘tonal’ = ‘bad’) needs no comment beyond my pointing out that I was talking *about* atonal music.

18 Laitwood Road,
London SW12 9QL