

Auguste Rodin's marble portrait bust of Gustav Mahler: a study of the beneficiality of a dialectical synthesis of opposites in life and art

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In 1909 the composer Gustav Mahler and the sculptor Auguste Rodin, arguably the greatest composer and the greatest sculptor of the time, met in Paris. Both were transitional figures in their respective fields, representing the end of an era in their creative work. Their respective legacies nevertheless also inaugurated new ideas and inspired younger composers and sculptors. Rodin sculpted two portraits of Mahler, one of which — in pure white marble — is the main focus of the article. The refinement and beauty of this work is different from Rodin's male portraits in that the head is stylised like many of his female portraits, an ambiguity compounded by the fact that Alma Mahler, the composer's wife, wrote in her memoirs that Rodin fell in love with his model during the sittings. An understanding of the marble bust calls for an analysis of the life and work of the composer, fraught with ambiguities - as reflected in that superb portrait.

Key words: Gustav Mahler, Auguste Rodin, marble portrait bust, dialectical synthesis of opposites in life and art

Auguste Rodin se marmer borsbeeld van Gustav Mahler: 'n studie van die voordeligheid van 'n dialektiese sintese van teenoorgesteldes in die lewe en in die kuns

In 1909 het die komponis Gustav Mahler en die beeldhouer Auguste Rodin, hoogswaarskynlik die grootste komponis en die grootste beeldhouer van die tyd, in Parys ontmoet. Albei was oorgangsfigure in hulle onderskeie velde, verteenwoordigend van die einde van 'n era in hulle kreatiewe werk. Hulle onderskeie nalatenskap het nietemin ook nuwe idees ingewy en jonger komponiste en beeldhouers geïnspireer. Rodin het twee portrette van Mahler gebeeldhou, waarvan een — in suiwer wit marmer — die hoofokus van hierdie artikel is. Die verfyning en skoonheid van hierdie werk is anders as Rodin se ander manlike portrette, want die kop is gestileer soos baie van sy vroulike portrette, 'n dubbelsinnigheid beklemtoon deur die feit dat Alma Mahler, die komponis se eggenote, in haar memoires geskryf het dat Rodin tydens die sittings op sy model verlief geraak het. 'n Begrip van die marmer borsbeeld vereis 'n ontleding van die lewe en werk van die komponis wat gekenmerk word deur vele dubbelsinnighede - soos in daardie voortrefflike kunswerk weerspieël.

Sleutelwoorde: Gustav Mahler, Auguste Rodin, marmer borsbeeld, dialektiese sintese van teenoorgesteldes in die lewe en in kuns]

Composer Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) and sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) met briefly in Paris in 1909, just long enough for Mahler to sit for a bust by Rodin. Both were transitional figures in terms of their art. The 49 year old Mahler who sat for Rodin was a man full of contradictions in both his life and his art. Setting eyes on Mahler Rodin must have perceived the individual configuration of his face, shaped by his life and art. As an experienced portraitist Rodin must have realised that "[t]he face indeed symbolizes the self and signifies many different facets of the self (Synnott 1989: 607). However, it is not clear how much he knew about the actual circumstances of the composer. An understanding of Rodin's portraits of Mahler calls for an in-depth analysis of his life and work, both fraught with ambiguities - as reflected especially in the marble bust (figures 5 and 11).

Gustav Mahler was a man of paradoxes and genius, and of contradictions and complexities that were in keeping with the magnitude and character of his work. Stuart Feder (1981: 258), a psychiatrist, said of Mahler: "[He] was an extraordinarily complex man, replete with contradiction, paradox, and mercurial shifts. While he could on one hand be aggressive, exacting, hostile, bitter, ironically sarcastic, and readily moved to a smouldering rage, he was

also capable of loyalty, generosity, tenderness, and playfulness." Another biographer, Egon Gartenberg (1978: 46), refers to "Mahler's intricate personality". There are few composers whose music is so obviously and intimately connected to the manifestations of mental life as revealed in biographical sources as that of Mahler.

The complexity that was to be Mahler's heritage and his destiny began with his birth. The date and the location are of considerable importance. The date places Mahler's main productive period within the time span that represented the eventide of romanticism, when one century relinquished its artistic treasure to the next (Gartenberg 1978: 3). As a human being and artist Mahler represented the type of person whose sharp intellect radiated nervousness and impatience, but who was at the same time rooted in the intuitive, transrational world of romanticism. Order, stability, success that necessitated the extreme summoning up of energy, were endangered by crises and repressions. These ambiguities of the social and personal physiognomy, signs of the modernity at the fin de siècle, caused the complexity of the artist Gustav Mahler (Danuser 2004: column 823). The location was in a part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Bohemia and Moravia, that reflected the multinational and multilingual character of much of the Austrian empire. His birthplace, Kalischt, was a Bohemian town, while the nearby city of Iglau, to which the Mahlers eventually moved, reflected a more German background. Czech was universally spoken, but 50 percent of the population was German-speaking. Those with intellectual or social ambitions, many of the Jewish population among them, tended towards the German-speaking islands within the Czech milieu (Gartenberg 1978: 3).

Like the empire that harboured him, Gustav Mahler was neither narrowly German, narrowly Bohemian, nor narrowly Jewish. He was Austrian, an indefinable mixture that had attracted so many before Mahler (and was to attract so many after) because of its intellectual climate, relaxed mode of living, and artistic history. This did not keep him from feeling dispossessed at times. "I am thrice homeless", he used to say: "As a Bohemian in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world. Everywhere an intruder, never welcomed." This was, of course, an exaggeration, a kind of romanticism in reverse, but it reflected an inner insecurity that he never lost and from which he forever fled (Gartenberg 1978:15).

The problem of Mahler's Jewish origin followed him everywhere (Böke 1992: 4). There are contradictory statements about the influence of Jewish music on Mahler as a child. A contemporary and friend, Paul Stefan, wrote that Mahler never heard Jewish music and that there was little to say about his relationship with Judaism (Stefan 1920:14). Feder (2004:17) states, however, that Jewish music in varied forms was an important feature of the composer's childhood auditory environment. Mahler converted to Catholicism in the beginning of 1897 (Danuser 2004: column 183), and shortly after, in April 1897, became conductor of the Vienna Court Opera. Despite his European eminence, Mahler had been aware of the unwritten rule of the Habsburg court, which forbade that any non-Catholic hold an official position of importance. There can be no doubt that at that stage in Mahler's life and career, his gaining a position in the highest ranking opera house in Europe represented an artistic apex. Such an achievement and the opportunities for artistic fulfillment it represented, meant everything to Mahler, whereas a formal change in religion meant nothing. Had Mahler not converted, another "name" conductor and director would have been found and engaged, even if he presented less impressive credentials (Gartenberg 1978: 47, 67). But although he had embraced Catholicism, his Semitic characteristics, especially his emotional speech and motions, were obvious and unmistakable (Gartenberg 1978: 47).

It is questionable how Christian Mahler really was. Certainly he inclined towards mysticism. The Jewish writer Max Brod sees in the fact that Mahler valued Gregorian chant, of which the origin is regarded as being Jewish-Oriental by many researchers, as a further indication that

Mahler intuitively favoured that in the Christian culture which is disguised Judaism (Böke 1992:14).

According to Alfred Roller (1922: 9), Mahler was "not a card-carrying Jew and at times more attacked for not being so than he was from the other side". With characteristic irony Mahler said during his final period as director of the Vienna Opera, "It is a funny thing, but it seems to me that the anti-Semitic newspapers are the only ones who still have any respect for me". The designation "Godless Jew" does not completely account for the complexity of Mahler's musical thought. Bruno Walter called him "a seeker after God". In his music one finds a constant search for the divine. This is most apparent in the fervent words Mahler wrote for the finale of the Second Symphony (1897, revised 1903), which ended: "You will be carried to God". But it was not a Jewish divine (Feder 2004: 214).

As Mahler moved into his final years, his personal philosophy moved nearer to a position that, at least in the West, would be recognized as sharing common ground with an identifiably "oriental" approach to matters of life and death - an intriguing and significant shift from his adopted Catholicism on the one hand and his Jewish origins on the other. It cannot, of course, have happened only as a result of his encountering the German versions of ancient Chinese poetry collected by Hans Bethge in *Die Chinesische Flöte*, on which he based *Das Lied von der Erde*. That may have seemed a happy and fruitful accident, but according to Donald Mitchell the "discovery" of Bethge "was merely the means of releasing a world of feeling that was already in existence at the deepest levels of Mahler's psyche, awaiting the Word, in a literal sense, that would lend the work-to-be its unique shape and identity" (Mitchell 1985: 448).

In Vienna from 1901 to 1907 Mahler's personality was unquestionably beginning to show signs of strain contrasting with an inner calm: rudeness would collide with compassion, efficiency with absentmindedness, deep despondency with exuberant high spirits. Depending on with whom one spoke he was the tyrannical director or the gentle guide, the man basking in mass adulation or the hermit of the wooden "composer's hut" near his house at Alt-Schluderbach, in which he isolated himself during the summers in order to compose. Such mildly schizophrenic tendencies were bound to enter also into Mahler's art, whose pendulum swung from the massive orchestration of his symphonies to the spare instrumentation of his orchestral songs (Gartenberg 1978:136.). Bruno Walter, who was Mahler's assistant at the Vienna Opera house and a close friend, talking about the "atmosphere of his soul" said he was "stormy and unpredictable" (Jung-Kaiser 1998: 259).

In 1908 in New York, Mahler's personality had unquestionably changed. The loss of his daughter, the spectre of death, inevitable maturing, and his presence in a strange country all contributed to a certain mellowing (Gartenberg 1978:159).

Musicological research has recognized variety and heteronomy as the often recurring elements of the music of Gustav Mahler (Naredi-Rainer 1999: 211). Hermann Danuser writes in 2004: "Mahler has now become a model of musical globalization. His achievement represents directions that completely encompass apparent contradictions: folk music and artificiality, triviality and mannerism, clarity and exclusivity" (column 845). The most obvious of the *coincidentia oppositorum* in his compositions is that he was a master of both the delicate expression of the art song and of the vast symphonic edifice (column 845).

Mahler's works divide into two categories: songs and symphonies. Donald Mitchell (1975: 49) writes: "The interaction - or perhaps tension would be the better word - between song and symphony is the essential and enlightening backcloth against which Mahler's music as a whole may be viewed." He explained:

If I were asked for a single term which described the characteristic flavour of Mahler's music, and which had both emotional and technical relevance, I think I should suggest 'tension' as the most appropriate word. It seems to me that when Mahler is expressing this basic tension - translating it into musical technique - he is at both his most characteristic and most inspired. Tension presupposes some kind of conflict between two opposed poles of thought or feeling, and often in Mahler's music we have just this situation exposed. Sometimes, of course, we have music from Mahler, anguished and turbulent, which does not state the conflict but expresses his reaction to it. Often...Mahler expresses - or achieves - his tension through vivid contrast, through the juxtaposition of dissimilar moods, themes, harmonic textures - even whole movements.

Mahler's conflict - sensed alike by friend and foe - has been explained as the result of his activities tragically split between the tyranny of conducting and the urge to compose. Or there is the sociological viewpoint, that he lived in a disintegrating culture, at the centre of a soon-to-collapse Austro-Hungarian empire, and his music therefore faithfully reflects the social tensions of his epoch. Acquaintance with his music and the inner facts of his life suggest on the contrary that his characteristic tension stems from sources much nearer home, from himself and his early relationship to his family.

There are many instances of these *coincidentia oppositorum* in Mahler's work. A few are:

- At the première of the Eighth Symphony, "Symphony of a Thousand" in Munich on 12 September 1910, there were more than a thousand performers and the audience numbered three thousand. The two movements of the Eighth Symphony are nothing else than a simple idea of unheard of length and breadth, a single idea conceived, surveyed and mastered in the same moment. In *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908) he is capable of producing the briefest and most delicate forms. "This is most extraordinary, but understandable: infinity in the Eighth, the finite nature of earthly things in this work" (Schoenberg 1975: 470).
- Mahler vastly expanded the world of symphonic creation, yet most of his orchestral songs were drafted first for voice and piano and the orchestral songs *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* were first published for voice and piano (Mitchell 1975: 252, 249; Gartenberg 1978: 460).
- Mahler sought to escape into the inarticulate language of old folk-songs but it was against his nature to treat these poems with the straightforward artlessness of earlier composers. He underpinned a folk-like vocal line with a richly scored accompaniment, full of wit, agility and abrupt modulations, produced not on the piano but by the orchestra. The orchestration was unusually large and complex, with three flutes, piccolo, three clarinets, bass clarinet, cor anglais, four horns and two harps. The dichotomy between the concept of "folksong" and this highly elaborate, sumptuous orchestral accompaniment cannot be denied. He accomplished the contrast with extraordinary subtlety and masterly technical skill, however (Hanslick 1900: 76, 77). It was a singular paradox of Mahler's artistic nature that while his melodic ideas were of the folksong order, his treatment of them was of the most extravagant kind, harmonically and orchestrally. This juxtaposition of the quotidian and the sublime is an instance of what Horowitz (1993: 17) calls "the imp of the perverse".
- Many of Mahler's works begin in one key and, contrary to classical custom, end in another.
- A disproportionate number of texts that Mahler selected for musical settings involve irony. More-over life itself had been an exercise in irony: summoned to Vienna to an exalted lifetime position, his tenure came to be in New York; having married to have a family, he was bereft of a child and his marriage faltered (Gartenberg 1978: 212).

According to Schönberg (1975: 467), Mahler was no friend of programme music. But here

again Mahler is full of contradictions. At the premiere of his First Symphony (1888) the work was referred to as a "symphonic poem in two parts". For the second and third performances, Mahler took the unusual step of supplying programme notes à la Berlioz. Most commentators attach too much significance to his passing remark connecting Callot's painting *The Huntsman's Funeral* to the third movement, however. Later he said: "It is true that I got the immediate inspiration from the well-known children's picture - but in this place it is irrelevant.... The only important thing is the mood which should be expressed." (Gartenberg 1978: 253). Although he provided a program for his Second Symphony (1901), he called it "a crutch for a cripple" (Gartenberg 1978: 267). He provided titles for the six movements of his Third Symphony, but dropped them after the first performance (Gartenberg 1978: 280).

Mahler was a transitional figure. He was at a crossroads. While clinging to a medieval romanticism, he searched for a more individualistic, personal expression. Gartenberg (1978: 46) states:

Mahler, despite his unwavering admiration for Wagner, began to develop into a third force, disengaged from and uninfluenced by Wagner's course - veering away from established tonality on the one hand as well as from Brahms's neoclassic anti-Wagnerian tendencies and Bruckner's baroque visions. It was that subconscious, unplanned, but irrevocable development as a third force, leading into the twentieth century, which made Mahler the most influential musical innovator of his time.

These ambiguities, signs of modernity at the *fin de siècle*, caused the complexity of the artist Gustav Mahler, according to Danuser (2004: column 845).

During his lifetime Mahler established a career as a powerful and innovative conductor. His compositions, however, were initially regarded by some people as eccentric, by others as novel expressions of the "new German" modernism widely associated with Richard Strauss. Only during his last decade did they begin to enjoy the critical support and popular success that helped to ensure the posthumous survival of his reputation as a composer beyond the years of National Socialism in Germany and Austria (Franklin 2000: 602).

After Mahler had succeeded in making the breakthrough in Vienna, where the *petite bourgeoisie* anti-Semitism had at an early stage begun to form itself into a political movement, he was constantly the target of anti-Semitic polemics. Rudolf Louis in his book, *Die deutsche Musik der Gegenwart*, awarded the conductor and court director Mahler high, even enthusiastic recognition. Mahler's symphonies could however, not be taken seriously." [H]e stands aesthetically on very foreign ground, in that between him and us, that is those who belong to the western culture and the oriental race, there is a chasm that cannot be crossed", Louis wrote. Without beating about the bush, Louis declares that the "problem of the position of the Jews within our western cultural and spiritual community" is the cause of the defects in Mahler's music" (Böke 1992: 2, 5 and 6).

Mahler married Alma Schindler on 9 March 1902. She was considered a great beauty of her time. Much has also been written about Mahler's physical appearance. Several authors describe him as "beautiful". The German conductor and composer Oskar Fried (1911: 16-17) said, "[My] first impression I can only call extraordinarily beautiful.... This man, with his child-like and yet utterly manly head, struck me as positively beautiful to look at. His gaze, which penetrated everything and laid bare his innermost being, the deep bell-like voice, his mouth whose fine cut spoke of unshakeable energy, while its feminine line testified to kindness and inner warmth, and not least the intensity of his gesture and of his whole being - all this together made him irresistible". Gustav Klimt, who depicted Mahler as the knight in his *Beethoven-Fries*, said of Mahler's features in death that he looked "solemnly serene and majestically beautiful" (Blaukopf 1976: plates 330-32).

Even here, there are contradictions. His wife, Alma (1973: 98-9), described Mahler on a boat: "It was a night of brilliant moonlight. Mahler's long white face, his bronze-like forehead had a phosphorescent sheen. He looked frightful. He looked like death masquerading as a monk. Savonarola must have looked as he did that night."

Mahler was death-haunted from birth. Like Beethoven, he was preceded by a brother who died in infancy. Thereafter, the multiple births and deaths of siblings each left its impression in the mind of the growing child (Feder 1980:17; Feder 2004: 14, 15). Throughout life thoughts of death would never be far from Mahler's mind (Gartenberg 1978: 4). An event that heightened the awareness of the passage of time was the turn of the century, an event that universally served as stimulus for both cultural and individual fantasy. The song, *Urn Mitternacht*, a song with orchestra, specifically reflects the trials of this period. Mahler set *Urn Mitternacht* to music during the productive summer of 1901, following a life-threatening illness and subsequent surgery (Feder 1980: 19).

The thoughts of death were exacerbated by the death of his elder daughter Maria Anna who died of scarlet fever and diphtheria in 1907. Mahler expressed all his sorrow and dread in *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908) (Alma Mahler 1973:138; Gartenberg 1978: 119; Danuser 2004: column 820). The void for Gustav and Alma was a nearly unbearable one. During this period, too, Mahler was diagnosed with heart disease and had to change his lifestyle; no more swimming, climbing, rapid walks. His spirit began to wither (Gartenberg 1978: 148). His wife Alma (1973:142) wrote: "This summer was the saddest we had ever spent or were to spend together. Every excursion, every attempt at distraction was a failure. Grief and anxiety pursued us wherever we went. Work was his one resource. He slaved at *Das Lied von der Erde* and the first drafts of the Ninth."

The deaths of children and youths is the theme which permeates the literary and musical aspects of Mahler's entire *oeuvre* from first to last. Long before the literal deaths of children in *Kindertotenlieder* (begun in 1901) it had been a preoccupation from the earliest 'Funeral march' composed when he was five. The youths of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (last songs composed 1899 and 1901) died too, killed in war or hung by order of the military tribunal. In one song, a child dies of starvation. Only in the later works, in the final trilogy of the last two symphonies (the *Ninth*, 1909, and the *Tenth*, which remained only a fragment) and *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908) do we have hints of the youth ageing and that the man facing death is Mahler himself. If the parting friends of *Der Abschied* (the final movement of *Das Lied von der Erde*) are not literally reaching the ends of their lives, the weary crepuscular and valetudinal atmosphere that prevails make them appear to be. In the *Ninth Symphony* it becomes increasingly apparent that it is the composer who is coming to terms with death, and in the unfinished *Tenth* it is explicit, death literally scrawled across the manuscript page in the verbal statements "Tod! Verk!" ~ probably for "Verklärung" and "Todesverkundigen" (Feder 1981: 280, 281).

The artist described in the first part of this article as a man of genius, but also of contradictions and complexities that were in keeping with the magnitude and character of his creative work, has been portrayed by Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951), the composer who also painted, as a strange visionary with one eye looking up and the other down (figure 1). In this way duality is reconciled according to Western symbolism: simultaneously looking up towards the spiritual transcendental and looking down to the elemental earth. It is nevertheless strange that the portrait resembles Schönberg himself more than Mahler (figure 2).

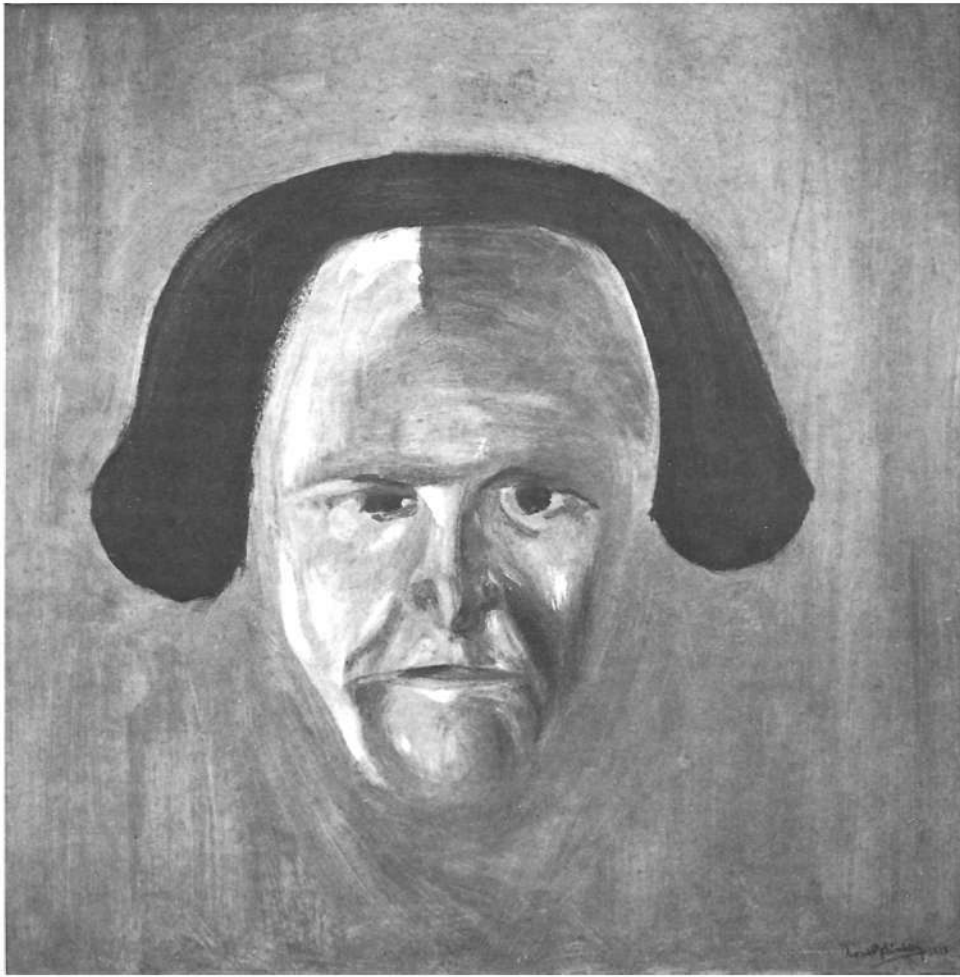


Figure 1
Arnold Schönberg, *Gustav Mahler*.
Oil on cardboard, 24x23 cm. Collection Lawrence and Nuria Schönberg Nono.
(Source: Kallir 1984: 21)



Figure 2
Photograph of Mahler (in the foreground) and Schönberg.
(Source: Cd cover, *Lieder*, Mahler and Schönberg)

Schönberg (1975: 468-9) also wrote a most revealing psycho-analytical meditation on Mahler by viewing some photographs taken of him. It is worth quoting in full since this part of the article deals with his physical appearance in portraits:

Here is one which shows him at the age of about eighteen. Everything is still unrevealed. This is a youth who still does not foresee what will take place within him. He does not look like those young artists to whom it is more important to look great than to be great. He looks like one who is waiting for something which is about to happen, but which he does not yet know about. A second picture shows him about twenty-five years old. Here something has already taken place. Curiously, the forehead has become higher; the brain obviously takes up more room. And the features! Formerly, in spite of all their striking seriousness, they were almost those of one who wants to gather a little more strength before he sets to work; now they are tense. They betray that he already knows the good and evil of the world, but they are almost arrogant; he will soon make all of them look small. But now we skip to the head of the fifty-year old man. This development seems miraculous. It shows almost no resemblance to the youthful pictures. The development from within has given it a form which, I might say, has swallowed up all the previous phases. Certainly they too are contained in the final form. Certainly anyone who can see has already detected the whole man in the youthful pictures. But, when one looks backward at the earlier stages - though they themselves are certainly expressive, it is as difficult to discover the expression of the mature man in them as it is to see the beams of a lesser light next to a very bright one. One must avert one's eyes from the certainties of the older face for a long time before one can again see the potentialities in the younger one. Here the thoughts and feelings that moved this man have created a form.

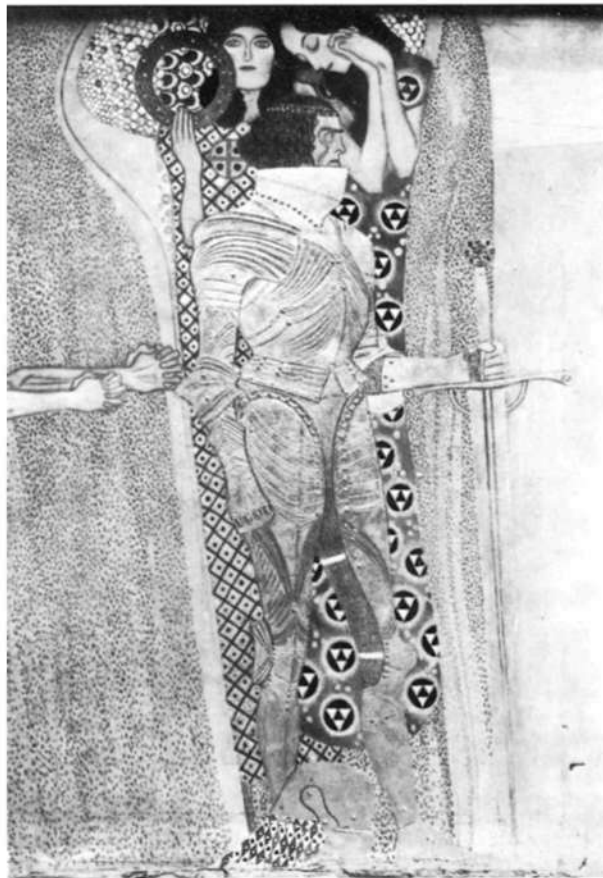


Figure 3
Gustav Klimt, *Sehnsuch nach dem Glück*, detail of the *Beethoven Frieze*, Vienna.
(Photo: EA Maré)

There are a great many photographs of the composer from which one can gather what Mahler looked like in various stages of his life, but few portraits were painted or sculpted by renowned artists. Besides the one by Schönberg, Gustav Klimt (1862-1917) portrayed Mahler in his *Beethoven Frieze*, Vienna, as a heroic warrior in armour (figure 3).

The focus of this section is an analysis of the artistic renderings of Mahler, done by Rodin in 1909 (figures 4 and 5). It needs to be introduced by a discussion of the sculptor whose ambiguous status as both a renewer of his art and the last nineteenth-century traditionalist, runs parallel with that of Mahler.

Both Rodin and Mahler were artists at the end of an era, arguably the greatest in their field. When they met in 1909, neither of them could actually renew their art to the extent that it became the clarion call of modernism, but both their oeuvres are seminal of the renewal in their genres in the twentieth century. Both artists share this paradoxical position. Pierre Boulez, who conducted Mahler's works on many occasions, said in an interview with Jörg Königsdorf (which originally appeared in German in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on January 16, 2007) about the composer:

It is precisely his position between two different epochs that makes him so fascinating. For me, Mahler's music is closely associated with that of Alban Berg, the same sensibility is present in both. It's just that Berg used a new vocabulary, while you can still listen to Mahler through 19th-century ears without being overly disturbed. I believe Mahler attempted to achieve a unity that had ceased to be attainable. Take his third symphony: The bombast of the first movement is followed by theatrical episodes, the Nietzsche movement is then followed by the "Bim Bam" of the boy's choir and then by the finale, which invokes the spirit of Beethoven by means of virtually literal citations. It's completely illogical as a totality — but comprehensible in light of Mahler's own biography. [Translated]

What Boulez says about Mahler is *mutatis mutandis* also true of Rodin, that viewers still look at his figurative work through nineteenth-century eyes. Born in 1840 and from a modest background, Rodin failed to gain admission to the prestigious *École des Beaux-Arts* and learnt his trade working for industrial ornament-makers. His breakthrough came in the 1870s with a life-sized figure in bronze, the *Age of Bronze*. During a trip to Italy Rodin had seen classical sculpture, and especially also works by Donatello. For the rest of his life he was a figurative sculptor. Notwithstanding the realism of his figurative sculptures he explored the human body in emotive poses and achieved the restoration of the sculpture's status and inspired many modernists even though he never attained the status of being a modernist.

In a catalogue to an exhibition of 20th century sculpture the author, Jean-Louis Prat (1981), testifies to the influence of a new visual language, which developed over the first half of this century. The author suggests that this language, comprising traditional elements, yet also signifying a break with tradition, evolved as a result of social and political change, and scientific advances, and was particularly reflected in the sculpture produced during this period. Included were works by Archipenko, Hans Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Georges Braque, Alexander Calder, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Henri Laurens, Jacques Lipchitz, Henri Matisse, Henry Moore, Antoine Pevsner, Pablo Picasso, and Vladimir Tatlin. Not only the factors that Prat mentions, but also Rodin's genius and personality contributed to the change. According to Catherine Chevillot (1994) Rodin may be credited with the revival of French sculpture, due to his ability to infuse his works, which moved away from the polished realism of his peers, with passion and energy. His impassioned subjectivity is, according to John Smith (1978: 12) Rodin's "major claim to originality, for before him no sculptor of comparable skill had stepped so far away from the Greek classical ideal". He nevertheless "occasionally lapses into mawkish sentimentality and vulgarity" (Smith 1978: 12), and in this sense his worst works are flawed, in much the same way that Mahler's works are sometimes flawed by "bombast" (according to Boulez).

It has become a vogue among art historians to evaluate artists from the past by gauging their incipient modernity. In fact, Rodin fails this test because he was not very modern at all, remaining true to the ideal that sculpture has always been and should be concerned with representational imagery. Like Mahler who had "a pivotal position between Romanticism

and modernism" (Filler 2003: 43) Rodin was also pivotal between these two eras. Therefore, Hilton Kramer (1996), who examines the influence of Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) on American sculpture states that, by the time of his death, Rodin was already considered passé by many European artists, including Brancusi and the Cubists. Citing an essay in the catalogue to the April 1996 exhibition at the National Academy of Design in New York entitled "The Figure in American Sculpture: A Question of Modernity" by Susan Fort, he disputes Fort's claim that Rodin's influence accelerated the development of modernist sculpture in the USA, suggesting that many inferior sculptors merely reproduced Rodin's mannerisms. He observes that the best American sculptors of the first half of the twentieth century, amongst whom he ranks Elie Nadelman, Gaston Lachaise, Isamu Noguchi and Alexander Calder, actually rejected Rodin in spirit and in style.

On their return from New York in 1909 Mahler and his wife Alma (1879-1964) stayed in Paris for some time. On this occasion, they visited Rodin's studio where Gustav sat for a bust commissioned by Carl Moll, Alma's stepfather and an eminent Viennese sculptor.

At the meeting of the two men the contrast between the physical appearance of the prematurely aging Mahler whose appearance became increasingly ascetic and Rodin the robust man whose sensuous tastes did not decline with age must have been obvious. However there are severe misconceptions about the history of the bronze portrait that Rodin modelled of Mahler in his Paris studio and the later marble portrait in the Rodin Museum in Paris. For example Elsen (1967: 125) states - presumably about the marble bust: "[Rodin's] portrait of *Gustav Mahler* was made from the sculptor's secretary, Mario Meunier, who bore a striking resemblance to the composer; while Mahler's likeness in turn inspired the bust of Mozart done in the following year." This is a rather confused and inaccurate account of the Mahler portrait and it certainly contributed to the neglect of this masterpiece by art historians. Because of the dearth of information and publications on the Mahler busts, Alma Mahler's statement is quoted in full as the most reliable in understanding the meeting between the composer and the sculptor:

Rodin fell in love with his model; he was really unhappy when we had to leave Paris, for he wanted to work on the bust much longer. His method was unlike that of any other sculptor I have had the opportunity of watching. He first made fiat surfaces in the rough lump, and then added little pellets of clay which he rolled between his fingers while he talked. He worked by adding to the lump instead of subtracting from it. As soon as we left he smoothed it all down and next day added more. I scarcely ever saw him with a tool in his hand. He said Mahler's head was a mixture of Franklin's, Frederick the Great's and Mozart's. After Mahler's death Rodin showed me a head in marble, which he had done from memory, and pointed out how like it was. A custodian of the Rodin Museum in Paris actually labeled it "Mozart" (Alma Mahler 1973: 148).

Saying that Rodin fell in love with "his model" is not the same as saying that Rodin fell in love with Gustav Mahler. The latter scenario would really be saying something about one of the greatest womanisers of his era. (Surprisingly, Rodin did not fall in love with Alma, a great *femme fatale*) What did Rodin fall in love with? It is tempting to explain that Rodin, the old satyr (see Sutton 1966), for once looked beyond gender and fell in love with his opposite on a spiritual level. This inspired Rodin to create a "spiritual" bust of Mahler, unmistakably of a man, but with a beauty, not effeminate, but spiritual. Mahler apparently inspired Rodin to think in terms of the *coincidentia oppositorum* that characterises his life. However, it is not clear at all what Rodin knew about Mahler's life or work as a conductor and composer.

The bronze bust (figure 4) is the commissioned bust but also an understudy for the later marble bust; it shows a non-classical portrait of a sensitive man no longer in the prime of life, seemingly calm, but nevertheless with tensed features, and fixing his eyes on some distant point.

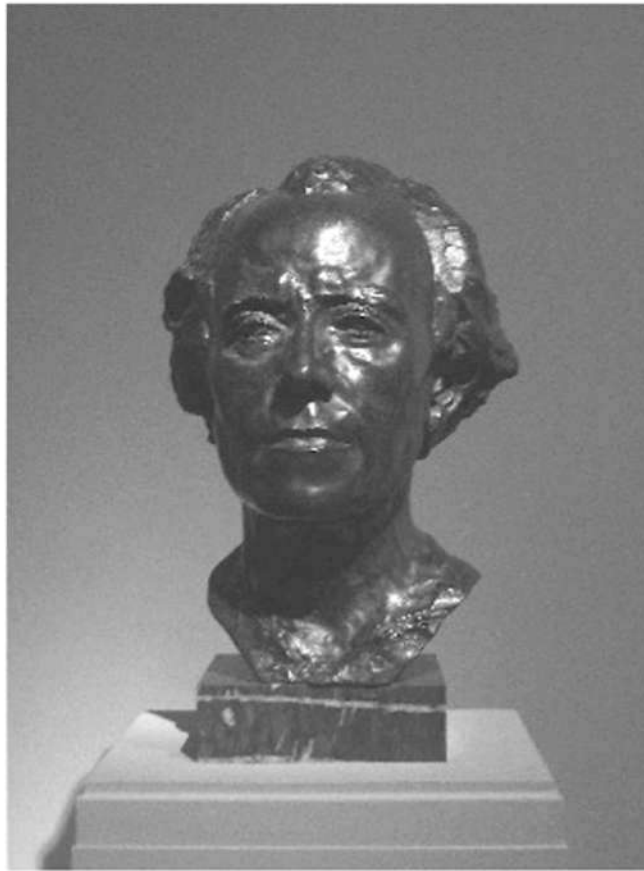


Figure 4
Auguste Rodin, Bust of Gustav Mahler, frontal and side views,
1909, bronze, 41x27.5x27 cm, Rodin Museum, Philadelphia.
(Photos: EA Maré)



Figure 5
Auguste Rodin, views of the bust of Gustav Mahler,
1909-10, marble, 25x30x17 cm, Musée Rodin, Paris.
(Photo: EA Maré)

Why Rodin said that he did the marble bust of Mahler from memory is strange because he had the clay model of the commissioned work in his possession. However, there are radical differences between the bronze and marble busts. The surfaces are completely different. The white marble face is highly polished, rising from an uneven, hacked stand.

Harking back to what Schönberg, a keen visual observer, wrote about the traits that photographs of Mahler reveal, one finds them again in the marble bust by Rodin in which the man is revealed both as mature and as somebody "who still does not foresee what will take place within him". He does not look like anybody "to whom it is more important to look great than to be great". Also Rodin saw him as "one who is waiting for something which is about to happen, but which he does not yet know about". It is not surprising that an artist should portray another artist as calmly awaiting the future which will change both life and art. Wisdom and talent are expressed in the high forehead and obviously the brain takes up much room, a feature that Rodin did not need to exaggerate. And the other features in the sculpture are not tense at all: they "betray that he ... knows the good and evil of the world". While Schönberg sees no resemblance to the youthful picture in the head of the fifty-year old man, he nevertheless concedes that "certainly they too are contained in the final form" and "anyone who can see has already detected the whole man in the youthful" man- also in the features of the man that Rodin portrayed at the age of 49, two years before his death. In 1909 Mahler's youth is not in his physical being but in his ideal being as an artist. According to Schönberg: "Here [in the older face] the thoughts and feelings that moved this man have created a form."

The question is: what form did Rodin create? The marble bust of Mahler follows the pattern of the numerous busts that Rodin made of society women (figure 6), for example Lady Sackville, which shows the smooth female face rising above the textured stand which differentiates the surface treatment of the parts of the single block of marble.



Figure 6
Auguste Rodin, Bust of Lady Sackville,
1914-16, marble 57x75x57 cm, Musée Rodin, Paris.
(Photo: EA Maré)

However, the Mahler bust resembles the treatment of a 1886 marble sculpture Camille Claudel (1864-1943, Rodin's assistant and lover from 1882-93), titled Thought (figure 7). It represents an idealised female face deeply attached to the roughly textured marble stand. This technique of synthesising opposing textures was also followed by Constantin Brancusi (1876-1917) in his first version of his Sleeping Muse of 1906 which depicts a fragmented female face (figure 8).



Figure 7
Camille Claudel, Thought, 1886, marble,
25x15x16 cm, Musée Rodin, Paris.
(Photo: EA Maré)



Figure 8
Constantin Brancusi, Sleeping Muse,
1906, marble, 27,5x40 cm,
Museum of Art, Bucharest.
(Photo: EA Maré)

Most probably Claudel and Brancusi's technique of not uniformly finishing the entire bust derives from Michelangelo's "captive" figures in the Galleria Accademia, Florence. Most certainly Rodin acquainted himself with Michelangelo's works in the Louvre and also during his journey to Italy. The (unintentional) pathos evoked by the unfinished state of figures such as the slave figures "exerted a tremendous impact on Rodin who recognised in them expressive possibilities that would be lost in a 'finished' piece" (<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/M/michelangelo.html>). His disciples, Claudel and Brancusi, were surely also aware of the pathos that drastic contrasts in texture evoke in figural sculpture. Though Michelangelo considered figures such as the four slave figures as unfinished, it became a modernist convention to show figures, more especially faces, as emerging from the stone that enclose or keep them captive; alternatively merging back into the material in which they are partly embedded.

Rodin was a sculptor of figural works in the long Western naturalistic tradition since the Renaissance, but it was in his approach to portraiture that his originality was unprecedented, as Catherine Lampert (1996: 312) states: "Where no precedent for Rodin's thinking and methods exists is in his reliance on the model to excite his imagination... ". The model's role in determining the sculptor's psychological and artistic interest is too subjective to determine, but the question that may legitimately be asked is: how close to reality is Rodin's portrayal of Mahler? Art historically the marble bust is a mixture of idealisation, symbolisation and realism. Did Mahler at the age of 49 really resemble the marble bust? Clearly, it does not resemble

Mozart. This can only be gauged by comparing a photograph of the composer taken in 1909 (figure 9).



Figure 9
Photograph of Gustav Mahler, 1909.
(Source: Blaukopf 1976: plate 308)



Figure 10
Emil Orlik, mezzotint engraving of Gustav Mahler, 1902.
(Source: Blaukopf 1976: plate 203)



Figure 11
Auguste Rodin, profile view of the marble bust of Gustav Mahler.
(Photo: EA Maré)

Rodin told Alma on a return visit to Paris that the marble portrait was done from memory. He also asserted that it represents an amalgamation of personalities, as quoted in Alma's statement above. It actually shows Mahler as much younger than he was in 1909, when judged by the evidence of the photograph. When Emil Ortik's 1902 portrait of Mahler (figure 10) is compared with Rodin's marble portrait (figure 11) it is clear that both artists idealised the composer.

How was the idealisation achieved? The polished surface of the face is juxtaposed with the purposeful roughness of the stand, as if idealised beauty needs some chaos to rise above. This is reminiscent of Umberto Eco's (2004: 148) idea of "ugliness as a requirement of beauty". Texture and modelling which generate great psychological force in Rodin's most illustrious works are subdued in the portrait of the composer whose face has often been described as ascetic. He is portrayed by Rodin as serene, calmly awaiting the future, while contemporaries described him as nervous and impatient, but becoming more mellow later in life. Furthermore the idealisation of the portrait is enhanced by the ambivalence of a somewhat feminine beauty, achieved by the formal treatment, as described above. In this marble bust the ambiguities so characteristic of the composer's life are brought to a dialectic synthesis and, once again, Rodin proves that his great merit as a sculptor who realised that "[t]he face indeed symbolizes the self and signifies many different facets of the self (Synnott 1989: 607). This is the last irony in Mahler's life that his wife could refer to his beauty when his death mask (figure 12) taken soon afterwards reveals his physical devastation.



Figure 12
Gustav Mahler's death mask, taken by Carl Moll.

Notwithstanding her unfaithfulness Alma accompanied Mahler on his last journey to Vienna where he died, and looking at him in his most devastated physical condition on a stretcher during his fatal illness she referred to his "beautiful face" (1973: 199). Art and life made Mahler's face, as Schönberg understood when contemplating photographs of the man he knew well. Rodin understood equally well by looking at a man he met for the first time that the beneficiality of opposites in life are also beneficent in the art of creating a "beautiful face".

Note

The authors are collaborating on a series of articles dealing with monuments dedicated to and works of art depicting composers, In the case of this article we shared all aspects of the research and writing and thus claim an equal partnership.

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