

PALESTRINA AND THE
GERMAN ROMANTIC
IMAGINATION

Interpreting Historicism in Nineteenth-Century Music

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
1 Historicism in nineteenth-century art, aesthetics and culture	9
Originality: consensus or controversy?	9
‘On the benefit and detriment of history’	12
Hegel, historicism and the ‘Decay and disintegration of Art’	28
2 Romanticism and the problem of church music	36
Hoffmann and the Romantic idealization of Palestrina	36
Palestrina and the Romantic new mythology	47
Palestrina and absolute vocal music	52
Palestrina and the modern composer	57
3 The Protestant Palestrina revival	62
Old Italian music, <i>Bildung</i> and the German <i>Singvereine</i>	62
Quasi-liturgical music: Spohr and Nicolai	69
Mendelssohn and the Berlin Palestrina revival	78
Winterfeld and the historical Palestrina	93
Broader trends in performance and composition	98
Palestrina and the primacy of vocal music	109
4 The Catholic Palestrina revival	133
Tradition and reform	133
Witt and the <i>Allgemeine Deutsche Cäcilien-Verein</i>	144
Broader trends in composition: Palestrinianism	161
Completing Palestrina: Haberl, Haller and the <i>Gesamtausgabe</i>	168
Liturgical function and aesthetic value	173
Liszt, Bruckner and the Palestrina revival	181

5	Palestrina in the concert hall	214
	Palestrina in secular and non-liturgical music	214
	Wagner's 'Stabat mater' and the poetics of arrangement	222
	Liszt, Wagner and allusion	227
6	Interpreting the secondary discourse of nineteenth-century music	241
	<i>Notes</i>	261
	<i>Bibliography</i>	296
	<i>Index</i>	311

*Historicism in nineteenth-century art,
aesthetics and culture*

ORIGINALITY: CONSENSUS OR CONTROVERSY?

The relation between nineteenth-century compositions and Palestrina's music presents an intractable aesthetic problem: how were composers and their audiences able to reconcile the compositional use of the music of the past with the Romantic imperatives of originality, authenticity and contemporaneity? This discussion approaches the wide range of relationships to Palestrina that are distinguished in the rest of the study in more general terms: here, the implications of such relationships for these three postulates – and thus for aesthetic value – are more important than their specific configurations. But, given the existence of compositions whose totality is defined by their relation to Palestrina's language, it is necessary to explore contemporary aesthetic frameworks which not only justify the partial or transformed use of historical styles in modern art, but also legitimize or condone the literal replication of an earlier style. While the composers discussed in later chapters justified their engagement with the music of the distant past in a variety of ways, one factor is constant: they conceived the problem of compositional historicism not in isolation, but in the context of broader artistic trends. Accordingly, in exploring how art historians, critics and philosophers confronted artistic historicism, the aim is not to construct a spurious *Zeitgeist* as a background to contemporary musical activities. Rather, it is to seek provisional solutions to this aesthetic problem from a wide range of sources, solutions which will be refined subsequently in relation to specifically musical debates.

The centrality of the concept of originality to post-Enlightenment aesthetics is indisputable. This concept – uniting the categories of individuality, novelty and spontaneity – stands diametrically opposed to imitation and copying: the artist is permitted to learn from, and to be inspired by the works of the past 'by a sort of noble contagion', but must avoid at all costs any kind of 'sordid theft'.¹ In describing the

status of originality in Romanticism, Leonard B. Meyer comments that 'geniuses are natural innovators (the "Walters", not the "Beckmessers", of the world). And this innate proclivity was encouraged by an ideology that not only placed a premium on originality and change, but highly prized individual expression.'² But to speak of a Romantic ideology of originality is misleading, if it implies that all contemporary writers, artists and composers subscribed to a monolithic and unquestioned doctrine. In early nineteenth-century Germany, conceptions of originality were the subject of debate rather than consensus.

The ideas of Schopenhauer and Goethe represent two different stances regarding originality, and a consideration of their views not only reveals the wide divergence of these opinions but clarifies the issues involved. Schopenhauer emphasizes the difference between the genius who, although steeped in tradition is cut off from the world and creates the original, and the imitator, who – being dependent on the achievements of others rather than his own instincts – lifts elements of previous works whole, producing nothing more than collections of undigested material. The genius, in the moment of inspiration, is able to surrender himself to the representation of the archetypal forms of nature, becoming 'the clear mirror of the inner nature of the world'.³ In contrast, the artist not possessing the gift of genius can only represent what he has earlier experienced in concrete form, in nature or in art.⁴ For Schopenhauer, there is seemingly no middle ground between originality and imitation; artists lacking the inspiration and spontaneity of genius inevitably produce reflective, contrived fabrications:

Imitators, mannerists, *imitatores*, *servum pecus* [imitators, the slavish mob] . . . note what pleases and affects in genuine works, make this clear to themselves, fix it in the concept, and hence in the abstract, and then imitate it, openly or in disguise, with skill and intention. Like parasitic plants, they suck their nourishment from the works of others; and like polyps, take on the colour of their nourishment. Indeed, we could even carry the comparison farther, and assert that they are like machines which mince very fine and mix up what is put into them, but can never digest it, so that the constituent elements of others can always be found again, and picked out and separated from the mixture. Only the genius, on the other hand, is like the organic body that assimilates, transforms and produces.⁵

Schopenhauer's conception of originality, while influential and indicative of the changing status of the artwork in the early nineteenth century, was not shared by all his contemporaries. Goethe repeatedly dismissed the idea of originality, arguing that no artist could rely solely on instinct and inspiration: 'Even the greatest genius would not get far if he wanted

to owe everything to his innermost self.⁶ The idea that the artist can divorce himself from other artworks and produce a work unconsciously from the gift of genius is absurd, and 'so-called creation out-of-oneself' (*Aus-sich-Schöpfen*) produces merely 'false originals and mannerists'.⁷ Rather, every artist is a composite being indebted to a multiplicity of sources, and greatness can proceed only from the 'appropriation of other people's treasures' (*Aneignung fremder Schätze*).⁸ The inevitability of the author being influenced by his predecessors makes it ridiculous for critics to attempt to discredit him by criticizing his dependence on their works:

'It is truly ridiculous', said Goethe; 'people might just as well ask a well-fed man about the beef, mutton and pork which he ate and which gave him strength. We probably have our own talents, but we owe our development to a thousand effects of a great world upon us, from which we pick up what we can and what suits us . . .'.

'Anyway', continued Goethe, 'the world is now so old, and so many significant men have for thousands of years lived and thought, that little new can be found and said anymore.'⁹

The gulf separating Goethe and Schopenhauer, both of whom expressed these opinions at roughly the same time, is sufficient to confirm that no unified conception of originality existed in the early nineteenth century. Further, the complex ways in which such views will be seen to interact reflects not merely two coexisting mentalities (it would be illusory to label these positions 'Classical' and 'Romantic'), but a plethora of competing ideologies. From the perspective of the compositional emulation of Palestrina, it will become clear that commentators on church music frequently echoed Goethe's equation of originality with mere novelty and mannerism, a gambit that served to buttress the conviction that it was subservient to other concerns. But if the concept of originality could thus be diluted and disregarded, the allied imperatives of authenticity and contemporaneity could not be dismissed so readily. In discussing originality, both Goethe and Schopenhauer formulate their ideas around adjacent authors and works: they do not distinguish between, on the one hand, the relation between an author and his contemporaries or immediate precursors, and on the other cases where the texts involved are not chronologically immediate or where the earlier author has had no significant prior relation to the cultural milieu of the later one. But while such a distinction is seemingly not important to the concept of originality, the 'warping' of history represented by relationships between nineteenth-century works and the art of the distant past raises

its own aesthetic problems. Such relationships risk contravening imperatives which, although often formulated in nebulous terms, were of crucial importance throughout the nineteenth century: the demand that, to be of value, a work must be the authentic expression of its author's convictions and of the world-view of his age, an authenticity that must be reflected in the contemporaneity of its forms. It is necessary, therefore, to explore how authors articulated these criteria in discussing the engagement of modern artists with the art of the past, and to establish the margins within which such relationships could be legitimized.

‘ON THE BENEFIT AND DETRIMENT OF HISTORY’

The relation between nineteenth-century compositions and the music of the distant past cannot be considered in isolation from the rise in historical consciousness at the beginning of the century and its subsequent development. In a provocative interpretation of this paradigm shift, Michel Foucault argues that as a result of the new awareness of the historicity of language, objects and man himself, Western civilization was ‘dehistoricized’; a hitherto uniform and essentially unchanging inheritance shattered into a thousand alien pasts; artefacts came to symbolize fragmentation and transience rather than unity and permanence.¹⁰ History becomes a strategy of retrieval and repossession: the cherishing of objects from the past represents an attempted return to origins, an endeavour to deny the pastness of the past by asserting the pastness of the present.¹¹

Both nineteenth-century and modern commentators have often approached the development of this new historical consciousness – the rise of historicism – by dividing it into two interacting strands, a method that provides a useful provisional strategy for interpreting the complex and seemingly contradictory nature of the relationships between Romanticism and the art of the distant past. These two strands have been characterized by Walter Wiora as retrospective and relativistic historicism: on the one hand, ‘increased devotion to earlier times and their gifts to posterity, for example, the cultivation and copying of varied styles of old music’ and, on the other hand, the belief that all phenomena are essentially historical and determined by the circumstances in which they arose.¹² Similarly, Stephen Bann contrasts the subjective ‘desire for history’ that retrospective historicism represents with the development of a more objectified, relativistic historical consciousness that emerged at the same time.¹³ The tension between these two positions is clear:

while objective historiography sought to represent 'how it really was', it neglected the demands of those whose prime concern was to use the past as a guide to 'how it really should be'. It will become evident that this opposition was a decisive element within Romantic representations of Palestrina, in that the desire for a malleable myth and source for compositional renewal interacted uneasily with the impulse towards the faithful representation of the past.

The relation between these two forms of historicism was addressed by the music historian Philipp Spitta and, more famously, by Nietzsche. Spitta's analysis, in 'Kunstwissenschaft und Kunst' (1883), seeks sharply to distinguish the academic treatment of history from other approaches to the past, and to disentangle the history of art from contemporary artistic concerns. Spitta insists that the value of historical scholarship is not dependent on its potential for reforming contemporary art: the historian's task is to seek after truth through the piecemeal reconstruction of the past, and it is an abuse of history when 'historical points of view are elevated and are supposed to serve as criteria for judgement, where only aesthetic criteria have legitimacy'.¹⁴ While he acknowledges that a crucial part of the historian's role is the recovery of old artworks for the present, the scholar must not attempt to dictate present-day artistic practices through recourse to history: 'Rules which were authoritative in the past are not as a consequence still important for the future. The oft-used phrase "the historian is a prophet looking backwards" [*ein rückwärts gewandter Prophet*] is a dangerous half-truth.'¹⁵

The most compelling nineteenth-century analysis of the relation between these forms of historicism, that of Nietzsche, presents a wholly different perspective. In *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* (1874) he depicts subjective historicism as being of benefit to modern life if not depended on excessively, while it is objective historicism, the treatment of history as a quasi-scientific intellectual pursuit, that is the deviant, detrimental offshoot from true historical perception. Nietzsche describes the burden that the historical orientation of his and the preceding two generations has placed on modern life and creativity; this is the result of the failure to use history as a means of serving present needs: 'Certainly we need history. But our need for history is quite different from that of the spoiled idler in the garden of knowledge, even if he in his refinement looks down on our rude and graceless requirements and needs. . . . Only so far as history serves life will we serve it.'¹⁶ The subordination of history to present-day culture is impossible if history is elevated to the status of a science, since the need to maintain the dynamics of historical research

and writing results in modern life no longer being 'the sole ruler and master of the knowledge of the past'.¹⁷ Scholarly objectivity 'neuters' the use of history for life; Nietzsche characterizes objective historians as a 'race of eunuchs' guarding the 'great historical world-harem', whose vain pretension to being servants of truth renders them impotent in serving the present.¹⁸ In a typically oracular utterance, he sums up the mistaken perspective of the objective historian: 'Overproud European of the nineteenth century, you are mad! Your knowledge does not complete nature but only kills your own. Just measure your height as a knower by your depth as a doer.'¹⁹

In opposition to objective historicism, Nietzsche discusses three ways in which history may be used to enhance the understanding of the present and to serve contemporary needs: 'it belongs to him in so far as he is active and striving, in so far as he preserves and venerates, and in so far as he suffers and is in need of liberation'.²⁰ These three kinds of history – monumental, antiquarian, and critical – constitute the possible subjective relationships to the past that he perceived in contemporary life, and are capable of being both of benefit and of detriment to it. Monumental history serves the present by providing modern man with a classicizing perspective, forming a chain linking mankind's highest cultural and artistic achievements: it provides inspiration through giving the knowledge that greatness was once possible and may be possible again.²¹ Instead of the distortion that arises through the monumental way of viewing the past, antiquarian history views all past events and artefacts as equally significant, but is concerned solely with preserving life, not with generating it.²² In contrast, critical history provides a means of 'judging and annihilating a past' in order to create a new present.²³

While, for Nietzsche, these three perspectives combine to form a complete picture of contemporary subjective historicism, his categories, taken individually, provide valuable critical tools for assessing the impact of successive developments in German historicist thought on aesthetics and criticism. As will be shown in the next chapter, the appropriation of the ideas, constructions and terminology of earlier art and literary historiography – exemplified here by the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Wolfgang Goethe and the Romantic circle – played a crucial role in facilitating and shaping the idealization of the church music of the past, and in encouraging the elevation of Palestrina. Crucially, Nietzsche's tripartite scheme also provides a means of elucidating shifting attitudes towards both the use of historical elements in modern art and its aesthetic implications.

Monumental history

The twin strands of retrospective and relativistic historicism emerged in German art history in Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764), a work whose ideas and language, transmitted both directly and indirectly, resonate throughout nineteenth-century descriptions of Renaissance music. This study was considered in the early nineteenth century to have marked the birth of a new historical sense and outlook; Winckelmann represents ancient Greek artworks as characteristic products of their cultural context, and describes them in terms of a succession of styles rather than merely as timeless aesthetic objects. The greatest significance of Winckelmann's work for the nineteenth century, and the factor which most clearly links him to Nietzsche's monumental history, is his initiation of a tradition of historical writing whose primary justification was its relevance to perceived problems in contemporary art: he viewed his history as 'no mere narration of successive periods and developments', but rather 'an attempt to produce a didactic system [*Lehrgebäude*]', a means of freeing contemporary art from the inauthentic restrictions of French neo-classicism.²⁴ Winckelmann's historical outlook reflects a critical uneasiness with his own time; he contemplates the decline of art, in a description much alluded to by the Romantics, 'as a woman on the seashore gazes after her departing lover without hope of seeing him again; her weeping eyes follow him into the distance and believe they can see the shadow of her beloved on the sails of his ship'.²⁵ By idealizing the art of ancient Greece and placing the zenith of artistic perfection in the distant past, he decisively contradicted *Aufklärung* notions of linear artistic progress, fulfilling Nietzsche's description of those for whom 'monumental history is the disguise in which the hatred of the mighty and the great of their time parades as satisfied admiration of the mighty and great of past ages'.²⁶

In spite of his longing for the past, Winckelmann's history is orientated around present-day reform: as Herder saw it, his conception of ancient Greek and Renaissance art was entirely determined by the desire to awaken a new Raphael among modern German artists.²⁷ For Nietzsche, the insistence of monumental historiography on elevating illustrious models as exemplars for imitation results in a distortion of the past: those portions of the past considered unworthy of modern attention are ignored or vilified, while that which remains is 'reinterpreted according to aesthetic criteria and thus brought closer to fiction [*freien Erdichtung*]'.²⁸ Nietzsche considers that monumental historiography fictionalizes history

by forcing 'the individuality of the past into a universal form', in which 'all sharp corners and lines are broken off for the sake of conformity'.²⁹ This notion of fictionalization provides a means of approaching two key concepts that early nineteenth-century commentators on church music appropriated from art historiography: the idea of a golden age in the distant past and the organic model of narrative construction. Winckelmann's deployment of these concepts has a firmly didactic role; he presents a triadic historical scheme consisting of a golden age, its decline and fall, and a third stage, the hope of a future art and culture revived through a return to earlier artistic principles. This basic scheme is underpinned by one of the most elemental modes of narrative emplotment: the organic model, the tracing of the successive stages of artistic development by analogy with the processes of organic life. For Winckelmann, a history of art should teach its origin, growth, development and fall; using this basic plan of the life cycle of an organism, he traces the successive stylistic developments of ancient Greek art.³⁰ The older style lasted until Phidias: it was forceful but harsh, powerful but lacking in grace, and was hidebound by rules that distanced it from nature. Art flourished with Phidias and his contemporaries; while traits of the older style remain, the 'great and lofty style' is freer and more sublime. The age of Praxiteles, Lysippus and Apelles is characterized by a greater degree of gracefulness and agreeableness, but the 'beautiful style', maintained by their school, descended in the hands of imitators into mannerism and eclecticism, leading gradually to the fall of art. Winckelmann employs a similar emplotment in his treatment of Renaissance painting, and in so doing reveals the malleable nature of the organic model:

The fate of art in more recent times is basically the same as that of antiquity with regard to periods: likewise, four chief changes occurred, but with the difference that art did not gradually decline from its peak as with the Greeks, but rather suddenly fell back again . . . as soon as it had reached the highest possible level of perfection in two great men. The style was dry and stiff up until *Michelangelo* and *Raphael*; with these two men the re-establishment of art reached its peak; following an interregnum ruled by bad taste came the style of the imitators: the *Caraccis*, their school, and their followers, and this extended up to Carl *Maratta*.³¹

Winckelmann's organic construction serves two purposes, both of which were crucial to nineteenth-century representations of Renaissance music. He characterizes it as a universal model for art history, an inevitable natural law whose existence may be presumed in individual cases even in the absence of evidence; it provides a means of creating a

coherent picture in spite of 'the shortcomings of our knowledge of ancient art'.³² Just as important, it serves a didactic purpose, by directing practising artists towards those beautiful monuments which are most suitable for 'contemplation and imitation'.³³ The artists of Winckelmann's second golden age, the Italian Renaissance, owed their success entirely to having learned 'good taste from its source', and Raphael attained his high level of excellence through imitating the relics of antiquity.³⁴ For Winckelmann, 'the only way for us to become great, and even, if it is possible, inimitable, is by imitating the ancients'.³⁵ Greek artworks achieve their status as models for modern art because of their technical perfection and good taste, not primarily as a result of their venerable status as relics of a golden age; modern artists and connoisseurs must free themselves from the prejudice that the only benefit to be gained from imitating them emanates from the 'rust of antiquity' (*den Moder der Zeit*).³⁶ Winckelmann does not consider that modern painting can obtain the chief qualities of ancient Greek and Renaissance art – 'noble simplicity' (*edle Einfalt*) and 'calm grandeur' (*stille Größe*) – merely by being inspired by it or emulating its spirit; the only way to achieve these qualities is by transferring the techniques of Greek sculpture directly to modern art.³⁷

It will become clear that the Romantic idealization of Palestrina was, in some ways, related to the classicizing dimension of Winckelmann's monumental historicism, to his view that the value of ancient artworks lies not in their pastness but in the universal norms of perfection which their techniques epitomize. It should not be assumed, however, that the historical origin of Palestrina's music and language was immaterial for their nineteenth-century revival. For Dahlhaus, 'the Palestrina style, though historical in origin, was extrapolated from his work and placed outside history. Combining textual intelligibility, a "pure" texture, and a "seraphic tone", it was an ideal that burst the bonds of history... a musical verity that would remain true regardless of when it happened to be uttered'.³⁸ The problematic linguistic identity in German, discussed earlier, between the style of Palestrina as evinced in his works and the abstracted Palestrina style is readily apparent here. This identity encourages the view that the Romantic idealization of that language exclusively reflects a classicizing impulse, the honouring of universal compositional rules. It will become clear, however, that while the nineteenth-century cultivation of the Palestrina style can represent an adherence to time-honoured norms, the appeal to Palestrina's language is a historicist 'return to origins'. Winckelmann advocated the imitation of the Greeks as a means of revealing their true nature, which for him had been obscured

by the prescriptions and proscriptions of neo-classical poetics. Similarly, the shift in perceptions of Palestrina in the early nineteenth century reflects the impulse to reveal the true nature of his language, as distinct from the contrapuntal abstraction of the Palestrina style codified by Fux.

Winckelmann's notion that the rejuvenation of modern art requires not merely the emulation of the spirit of Greek art but the imitation of its techniques raises problems fundamental to the Palestrina revival. This notion reflects the continued flourishing in the eighteenth century of a mimetic model of artistic production, whose tenets were justified by the belief that to imitate illustrious works of art was analogous to imitating nature. The replication of Palestrina's language in nineteenth-century compositions might seem initially to represent the perpetuation of this model. For Dahlhaus, church music was exempt in the nineteenth century from the aesthetic criteria applicable in other fields of composition, an exemption which granted legitimacy to imitation.³⁹ The idea that imitation in liturgical compositions could be legitimized by aesthetic concepts outmoded in other fields cannot be dismissed entirely, but it will be seen that, in general, church music was not exempted from the postulate of originality by virtue of its functionality. The idea of such an exemption would have granted church music the possibility of attaining value not in aesthetic terms, but solely in relation to the success with which it fulfils its function. Not all liturgical pieces were considered to be merely functional by their composers, and even those that were regarded in this light risked being condemned by contemporaries as 'copies' or 'slavish imitations'. Church music as a whole was not exempted from aesthetic criteria, and consequently the idea that the cultivation of Palestrina's language in the nineteenth century represents a continuation of earlier mimetic conceptions is not unproblematic. Certainly, it does not suffice on its own as a means of explaining the intentions of Romantic composers whose works are related to this language.

Antiquarian history

The impact of Winckelmann's organicism and embryonic relativism is evident from Goethe's *Italienische Reise*: 'Through Winckelmann we were urged to separate the various periods and to recognize the different styles used by different peoples, and to see how they gradually emerged over the course of time and finally ended in decadence.'⁴⁰ It was these aspects of Winckelmann's writings, rather than his monumentalist conception of Greek art, that were most significant for eighteenth- and early

nineteenth-century thought; they provided a means for reassessing the art of other peoples and periods, crucially the art of the Middle Ages. Herder, while acclaiming Winckelmann as 'the best historian of ancient art', condemned the didactic thrust of his monumental classicism; for Herder, the belief that the principles of classical art represent universal norms is wholly unjustifiable: 'What legitimacy have the decrees of praise and rebuke which we shower on all the world as a result of being besotted with a favourite people of antiquity!'⁴¹ Since Winckelmann's eye was 'formed by the Greeks, and his spirit filled with the Greek ideal of beauty', he was unable to appraise the art of other nations and periods on its own terms; Herder considers such prejudices to be omnipresent in Enlightenment Germany, in that all art that fails to exhibit the Greek rules of beauty is condemned as barbaric: 'a Greek temple must therefore for us be valued more highly than a Gothic church, Greek beauty more than Chinese beauty, Greek wisdom in literature and history more than the passionate enthusiasm [*Schwärmerei*] of the Arabs'.⁴²

Herder's relativism provided a means of reassessing medieval and Renaissance art on what he saw as its own terms, rather than subjecting it to criteria derived from classical antiquity. The reappraisal of Shakespeare, for example, required the realization that the standards of classical and neo-classical drama were not universal norms, an idea whose radical novelty can be seen in Herder's emphatic repetition: 'In Greece drama developed in a way that it could not develop in the north. In Greece it was what it could not be in the north. In the north, therefore, it is not and should not be what it was in Greece.'⁴³ Similarly, Goethe's 'Von deutscher Baukunst' (1772), the essay which initiated the German Gothic revival, is reliant on the emancipation of his critical perceptions from the norms of neo-classical taste. Goethe writes that on first visiting Strasbourg Minster, his head was full of 'universal perceptions of good taste':

Under the heading *Gothic*, as in a dictionary entry, I had drawn together all the synonymous misunderstandings concerning the ill-defined, the disordered, unnatural, cobbled together, patched-up, and overcrowded which had ever come to my mind. With no more wisdom than a people which terms barbaric all the world that is strange to it, I termed *Gothic* whatever did not fit my system.⁴⁴

Nietzsche expressly identifies Goethe's interest in Strasbourg Minster as an example of antiquarian history. Nietzsche's antiquarian historian reverences the past as a means of gaining contentment with his surroundings and a sense of deep-rootedness; Goethe's empathetic identification

with the architect of the Minster, Erwin von Steinbach, allowed him to disregard the precepts of neo-classicism and view the architecture of the distant past as ancestral: 'in the tempest of his [Goethe's] emotions the historical cloud cover spread between them tore, and for the first time he saw the German work again "exerting its influence out of a strong robust German soul".'⁴⁵ But while the contentment and security that antiquarian history can provide are for Nietzsche a positive service to life, antiquarianism also has negative aspects which greatly contrast it with classicizing monumentalism. While antiquarian history encourages the reappraisal of artworks, styles or periods previously viewed as primitive or barbaric, this tendency contains the danger that 'the time will finally come when everything old and past which has not totally been lost sight of will simply be taken as equally venerable'.⁴⁶ The promiscuous idolization of everything that is old leads to a 'blind lust for collecting', 'a restless raking together of all that once has been'.⁴⁷ Nietzsche's diagnosis calls to mind one of the most tangible symptoms of the antiquarianism of the *Goethezeit*, described by Theodore Ziolkowski as the 'museal impulse': the desire to gather together a hoard of old cultural artefacts in a temple-like building and call the result a museum.⁴⁸ Although the museal impulse, like Winckelmann's monumentalism, elevates old artworks to the sphere of timelessness, their indiscriminate veneration – epitomized by the potpourri nature of the early museum – cannot provide exemplars for modern artists or encourage new composition. While Winckelmann's monumentalism is orientated around the possibility of modern artistic renewal, antiquarianism stems from a belief in 'the old age of mankind . . . the belief of being a latecomer and epigone': it understands merely how to preserve the art of the distant past, not how to generate new art or to sustain its possibility.⁴⁹

Accordingly, the antiquarianism of Goethe and Herder discourages not only the imitation of classical art, but also the idea that modern art can be renewed through recourse to old models. Herder dismissed Winckelmann's doctrine of classical imitation as a vain delusion, considering the time of the 'beloved sweet simplicity' of ancient art to be irretrievably lost: 'the dream of our memories, our histories, studies and fervent desires will not reawaken it'.⁵⁰ While both Herder and Goethe reject *Aufklärung* notions of artistic progress – in Herder's phrase, the assumption that 'human destiny is marching forward in giant steps' – their conception of human and artistic development is nonetheless based on organic growth: 'the tender roots full of sap, the slender flourishing shoot, the mighty trunk, the thrusting entwined boughs, the broadly

radiating airy twigs – see how all these rest on each other and grow out of each other! . . . If all the branches and twigs wanted to be the trunk and the roots, what would become of the tree?’⁵¹ For Herder, every age can touch the ‘electric chain of destiny’ at only one point; no country can ‘take a backwards step and become for a second time what it was before’.⁵² Similarly – despite condemning the ideas of originality and creation ‘out-of-oneself’ – Goethe dismissed attempts to revive earlier styles, even if these are transformed through the addition of modern elements: ‘You choose yourselves a model and mix it with your individuality: that is all your art amounts to. No thought for any principle, schools, or successors; all is arbitrary and just as it occurs to you.’⁵³ In spite of his enthusiasm for Gothic architecture, Goethe condemned the idea that it could be imitated, believing that further historical and critical investigations would dispel the desire to copy medieval buildings; it is a false tendency to seek to bring back to life those aspects of the past that are treasured, because they developed under ‘completely different conditions’.⁵⁴ Thus, for the antiquarian, the relativistic awareness of the different conditions under which the art of the past was produced prevents any single style being elevated as a universal ideal, or being adopted as a paradigm for modern art.

Critical history

While the subjective historicism of Winckelmann and of Goethe and Herder reflects, respectively, a preponderance of Nietzsche’s monumental and antiquarian histories, the historicism of the Romantic circle reveals a predominance of Nietzsche’s third category of subjective historicism: critical history. For the Romantic circle – Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Novalis and Jean Paul Richter – the revival of the art of the distant past provided a means of breaking free from more recent tradition:

The genuinely new grows only from the old,
Our future must be founded on the past!
I shall not support the stifling present
I shall bind myself to you, eternal artists.⁵⁵

A. W. Schlegel’s condemnation of the ‘stifling present’ reveals a critical attitude towards the artistic and intellectual legacy of the *Aufklärung*. For Nietzsche, the modern man of action whose impulses are curbed by tradition ‘must have the strength, and use it from time to time, to

shatter and dissolve something to enable him to live: this he achieves by dragging it to the bar of judgment, interrogating it meticulously and finally condemning it'.⁵⁶ The judgement and conviction of the immediate past, and the use of the more distant past as an authority was not of course unprecedented before the nineteenth century. W. Jackson Bate comments in relation to English poetry of the eighteenth century that, for the artist, invoking the art of the more distant past is 'pleasing because it is not an authority looming over you but, as something ancestral rather than parental, is remote enough to be more manageable in the quest for your own identity'.⁵⁷ The use of the distant past, the ancestral, permits one 'even to disparage the parent in the name of "tradition"'.⁵⁸ But for Nietzsche, any attempt to manufacture 'a past from which one would like to be descended in opposition to the past from which one is descended' brings its own problems.⁵⁹ However successfully a critical historicist is able to implant a second nature within himself and make his first nature wither away, 'second natures are mostly feebler than the first'.⁶⁰

In his polemical obituary for the early Romantics, Heinrich Heine emphasized the extent of their dependency on the art of the Middle Ages as a means of rejuvenating literature and turning German culture away from the French Enlightenment.⁶¹ He notes that the Romantics' ideal of, in Goethe's ironic phrase, 'neu-deutsch-religiös-patriotische Kunst' was set up in opposition to the French neo-classical tradition, being a reaction against the 'sober imitation of ancient classical art'; the anti-French fervour of A. W. Schlegel led him to 'conspire against Racine in the same way that Minister Stein conspired against Napoleon'.⁶² According to Heine, the Schlegel brothers viewed medieval art and culture as the only means of providing rebirth for the belated modern writer:

Our poetry [*Poesie*] is stale, said the Schlegels, our muse is an old woman who knits, our cupid is no youthful blonde but a shrivelled dwarf with grey hair, our feelings are withered, our fantasy is spent: we must refresh ourselves, we must seek out the buried streams of naive, simple medieval poetry, since here bubbles the draught of rejuvenation . . . They plunged into this miraculous fountain and drank, slurped and guzzled with profligate greed.⁶³

Friedrich Schlegel explored the predicament of the modern artist and the role that the art of the distant past should have for modern art in his *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800). Schlegel – or rather his character Ludoviko – comments that the modern artist lacks a firm foundation for his activity: 'Our poetry, I assert, lacks a focal point, such as mythology was for the ancients; and one could summarize all the essentials in which modern

poetry is inferior to the ancients in these words: we have no mythology. But, I add, we are close to obtaining one or, rather, it is time that we earnestly work together to create one.⁶⁴ Modern art lacks the coherent and communal world-view that provided the basis of classical and medieval poetry, lacking its basis in religion, which should be the 'actual soul, the kindling spark of all poetry'.⁶⁵ In the absence of such a mythological foundation, it is impossible for art to have a content; without a relation to the infinite artworks are 'quite simply empty and pointless'.⁶⁶ As a consequence, such a foundation must be created synthetically, through recourse to older works and systems of belief: 'to accelerate the genesis of the new mythology, the other mythologies must also be reawakened according to the measure of their profundity, their beauty and their form.'⁶⁷

Schlegel and his circle come closest to Heine's polemical caricature in discussing how Catholic fine art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance might aid the modern painter seeking to regain such a foundation for his activities. The conception of old Italian and German painting present in the criticism of the Schlegels and Wackenroder evinces a complex combination of Winckelmann's monumentalism and Herder's relativism. All three authors condemn or contradict Winckelmann's insistence that Raphael's excellence is the result of his adherence to classical precepts: for A. W. Schlegel, 'if one judges modern painters merely by their distance from or proximity to the ancients one will be unfair to them, as is undoubtedly true of Winckelmann with Raphael'.⁶⁸ But while seeking to divorce Renaissance art from classical principles, they nevertheless construct golden ages according to the organic model and assert that the peaks of these periods represent a universal ideal. Schlegel's golden age of old Italian painting presents two broad subdivisions instead of Winckelmann's four; this scheme is also borrowed, as Schlegel reveals in commenting that Italian painting is divided into old and new schools, 'just like Italian poetry'.⁶⁹ Following Winckelmann's pattern, Schlegel's oldest style of Italian painting is characterized by 'strict, even meagre forms in sharp outlines' and a 'childlike, good-natured simplicity and restrictedness'; while the strictness of the older school remains present up to Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael – alongside Titian, Correggio, Giulio Romano and Michelangelo – initiated the newer school, and thus is ultimately responsible for the 'ruination' (*Verderben*) of art.⁷⁰ The decline of art into effect and theatricality begins with the last works of Titian, and it is doubtful whether later painters and schools have a place in the history of art.⁷¹ Schlegel's construction, like Winckelmann's, has a clear didactic

purpose. He shares Winckelmann's conviction that works of art from the peak of his golden age remain a valid model for modern painting, emphasizing that only through the 'living use of earlier achievements' can art be rejuvenated and the abuses of the Enlightenment redressed.⁷²

Schlegel's endeavours to create firm foundations for modern painting and literature through the idealization of medieval art and, eventually, by adopting Catholicism were derided by Heine: Schlegel was 'a prophet looking backwards [*einen umgekehrten Propheten*]', who 'regarded the agonies of our time not as the pains of rebirth but as the agonies of death, and fled from this death-angst into the tottering ruins of the Catholic church'.⁷³ In Heine's view, the enthusiasm with which Schlegel and his circle embraced medieval art not only legitimized and encouraged its imitation, but resulted in their works consisting of little else: 'What then was the Romantic school in Germany? It was nothing other than the revival of the poetry [*Poesie*] of the Middle Ages, as it manifested itself in songs, sculpture and architecture, in art and life.'⁷⁴ According to Heine, Tieck's novel *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798) and Wackenroder's *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1797) exhort artists not only to emulate the 'piety and childlike quality' of medieval poetry, but also to imitate its 'clumsiness of technique'.⁷⁵ Despite Heine's remarks, the Romantic circle's elevation of earlier art cannot be regarded as encouraging or legitimizing imitation. Friedrich Schlegel condemns imitation by linking it with mass-production: imitators are 'strayed economists' whose art is 'vacuous and tradesman-like [*handwerksmäßig*]'.⁷⁶ Similarly, A. W. Schlegel dismisses the products of imitation as 'lifeless school exercises' (*tote Schulübungen*), since material appropriated from earlier art must be reborn within the artist in order for it to emerge poetically.⁷⁷ Significantly, the Schlegels and Jean Paul focus their discussions of imitation on neo-classicism, as if imitation cannot be an issue in Romantic art. In Jean Paul's taxonomy, imitation encompasses not only the appropriation of phrases and idioms from Greek poetry but also the attempt to emulate its simplicity and plainness.⁷⁸ Furthermore, even unintentional dependency on earlier styles or works is equated with imitation: Jean Paul introduces the potentially useful concept of 'reversed' imitation to describe authors who are so deeply immersed in Greek literature that the language unconsciously shapes their German prose.⁷⁹

Crucially, both Jean Paul and Friedrich Schlegel consider the replication of earlier works or styles not only to be illegitimate in theory but impossible in practice: even authors who attempt to replicate earlier styles

precisely inevitably include modern elements, with the result that they produce parodies of the originals. Jean Paul considers the chief offence of the imitator to lie not in his theft of forms and material, but in his 'reenactment – often against his will employing parody – of what is most sacred in the original, the imitation of the innate'.⁸⁰ Similarly, for Schlegel the 'important concepts of unintentional parody and passive wit' can readily be seen in the imitation of classical poetry.⁸¹ The idea that the desire to imitate a work or style results – unintentionally – in parody brings us closer to establishing how the use of earlier materials could be justified for the Romantic circle: through the corollary that if the treatment of such materials is consciously parodic, or at least mediated by the critical reflection of the artist, it acquires legitimacy. While the imitator responds to the artworks of the past solely through objective calculation, and the 'feminine, receptive or *passive genius*' described by Jean Paul responds solely through uncritical creation, Romantic irony offers a means of response that combines subjective creation and objective reflection.⁸² The broader metaphysical and aesthetic ramifications of Romantic irony are explored later; most important here are its implications for the two central components of originality, novelty and spontaneity. While Schopenhauer's original genius creates spontaneously and instinctively, for Friedrich Schlegel the work of genius must also be the product of reflection: 'In every good poem everything must be intentional, and everything must be instinctive. That is how the poem becomes ideal.'⁸³ Irony is not merely the habitual self-criticism of the artist, a factor that even Schopenhauer saw as necessary to artistic production, but a mode of reflection pervading all parts of the artwork and all stages of the creative process: 'There are ancient and modern poems that breathe the godly breath of irony in their entirety and in all their parts. . . . Internally, in the mood that looks over everything and lifts itself infinitely above everything conditioned, even above its own art, virtue, and genius; externally, in performing the mimic manner of a mediocre Italian clown [*Buffo*].'⁸⁴ But while such reflection enables artists to free themselves from the contingencies of instinctual creation, Schlegel nonetheless warns against the opposite extreme of unlimited arbitrariness, 'otherwise caprice will turn into self-destruction'; further, self-creation, the invention and enthusiasm of the artist, must attain fruition before self-restraint is applied.⁸⁵ The knowing ironic artist produces *Poesie* (i.e., literature) that arbitrarily combines spontaneous, instinctual creation with critical reflection, the naive with the sentimental, the fruits of inspiration with wilful caprice:

Intention taken to the point of irony and with the arbitrary appearance of self-destruction is just as naive as instinct taken to the point of irony. Just as the naive plays with the contradictions of theory and practice, so the grotesque plays with strange transferences of form and material, liking the appearance of the random and bizarre and flirting with unconditional caprice.⁸⁶

The reflection of the ironic creator not only contravenes the postulate that originality necessitates spontaneity, but also the requirement for substantial novelty: instead of being tied to one mode of representation, form or style, the artist may juxtapose and combine a wide variety of materials. For Schlegel, modern Romantic poetry must 'now mix and now fuse poetry and prose, genius and criticism, art poetry and folk poetry [*Naturpoesie*] . . . fill and saturate the forms of art with strong cultural material [*Bildungsstoff*] of every kind'.⁸⁷ The poet's reception of the cultural products of different ages and cultures has the result that he contains within himself 'a whole system of personae' and can transport himself arbitrarily into a multitude of spheres: he can tune himself at will, 'as one tunes an instrument' to being 'critical or poetic, historical or rhetorical, ancient or modern'.⁸⁸ Importantly, Schlegel considers the *Poesie* of the reflective modern artist to consist not merely of the mixing of a variety of earlier styles and forms, but to constitute the fusion of poetry and criticism. The modern poet's use of earlier styles and elements of earlier works is not merely the end product of critical reflection, but can itself embody an act of criticism, indeed, 'poetry can be criticized only through poetry'.⁸⁹ Schlegel represents Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* as the archetype of both the ironic juxtaposition of disparate materials and of Romantic *Poesie* functioning as a critical interpretation of an earlier work (in this case, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*). The relationship between play and novel is not one of repetition but of supplementation; the poetic critic that Goethe exemplifies contemplates an earlier work of art and represents it anew: 'he will supplement the work, rejuvenate it, and newly shape it'.⁹⁰ The ironic attitude of the author is what unifies his disparate materials and guarantees the originality of his work: originality resides in the author's imagination, not in his materials.

Although Schlegel's conceptions of irony and critique are clearly related to his desire to establish new mythological foundations for art, these ideas interact problematically. The ironic adoption of earlier world-views could not adequately provide the modern artist with the firm foundation that Schlegel sought, and it will become clear that his later writings – especially those on fine art – confirm Heine's notion of a withdrawal into the certainties of medievalism and Catholicism. Heine's rejection of the

Romantic circle's engagement with the past as imitation is, in part, the result of his more radical conception of irony and critique, which will also prove important in later discussions. Although he dismissed early Romantic attempts to duplicate the simplicity of medieval *Volkslieder* as resembling 'artificial spa water' and 'German moonshine', he nonetheless viewed the folksong as a touchstone for modern poetry.⁹¹ In theory and practice, Heine advocates two ways for the modern poet to respond creatively to the medieval folksong. He praised Wilhelm Müller for capturing the spirit of the old song forms without imitating them, through a 'sensible avoidance of all antiquated expressions and turns of phrase'.⁹² In addition to the avoidance of the most antiquated elements of medieval poetry, Heine also engages with it through irony, which serves as a means of asserting the impossibility of *naïv* poetry in the modern age.⁹³ Heine's use of an abrupt parodic twist at the conclusion of a *Volkslied* – the *Stimmungsbrechung* – effects a departure from the prevailing style and mood of the rest of the poem: 'Heine, at first still a Romantic himself, moved away from this by affixing to all his poetry the little devil of frivolous irony which joyfully proclaims: "look how pretty this is, good people! But don't kid yourselves that I myself believe in such stuff!" Almost every one of his beautiful poems ends with such a suicide.'⁹⁴ This device can be seen at the end of *Wahrhaftig* from the *Buch der Lieder* (1827), where the final quatrain ironically comments on the neo-medieval topics and imagery (the joys of spring, minstrels, love songs) of the preceding lines: 'But songs and stars and little flowers, and little eyes and moonlight and sunshine, however much this stuff pleases, it is nowhere near being the whole world.'⁹⁵ Heine's irony is more than a comment on the futility of modern attempts to manufacture the *naïv*: it also highlights the inadequacy of the content and expression of medieval poetry to modern sensibilities. By subjecting medieval poetry, neo-medievalism and his own creativity to critique, Heine not only confronts the predicament of the reflective modern poet but 'gives evidence of it through every nuance of his form'.⁹⁶

While Nietzsche's conception of critical history can be said to apply to the Romantic circle's reaction against its immediate predecessors, Heine's critique confronts not merely the immediate past (for him, the Romantic school) but also its golden age. In assessing the relation between Romantic ironic reflection and the various ideational strategies sustaining the compositional products of the Palestrina revival, it will be necessary to take into account Heine's brand of irony as well as that of Schlegel. While it will become clear that the reflective construction

of a mythological basis for modern creation provides a useful perspective in examining the Palestrina revival, Heine's subversion of such a foundation through the 'little devil of frivolous irony' may seem a less helpful means of approaching Romantic church music. Yet the presence of similarly abrupt stylistic shifts in some of the compositions of the Palestrina revival will be seen to function in a comparable, if not identical way. By asserting the presence of modernity within works that otherwise replicate the language of Palestrina, such stylistic shifts may suggest that these compositions also reflect the combination of spontaneity and reflection, critique and self-critique, embodied by Romantic *Poesie*.

HEGEL, HISTORICISM AND THE 'DECAY AND DISINTEGRATION OF ART'

It will become evident that the three strands of historicism discussed above collectively provided an impetus for the revival and idealization of Palestrina, and individually played important parts in shaping the critical and historiographical reception of Renaissance music. In addition, clear relationships exist between the strategies with which Winckelmann and the Romantic circle justified the use of earlier styles, and the ideas which shaped compositional responses to Palestrina. It is crucial to recognize, however, that while Winckelmann and the Romantic circle provided frameworks within which the use of earlier styles could be legitimized, these ideas had to compete with more pervasive and compelling aesthetic criteria. Consequently, while these ideas provide valuable perspectives for interpreting compositional historicism, they cannot be assumed to correspond with the ways in which composers justified their engagement with earlier styles.

A central aspect of these rival imperatives has already become apparent in the relativism of Herder and Goethe: their conception of the historicity of style is inimical to the warping of history that an artistic return to origins involves. For some early nineteenth-century critics, the increasing concern for historicity served not only to militate against compositional historicism, but to preclude it entirely: any work dependent on an earlier style inevitably infringes the demand for contemporaneity of expression and is thus an inauthentic product of its age. This rigid stance was advocated by the classicist Ludwig Schorn, in the sole article dedicated to the subject of originality to appear in the Leipzig *AmZ* in the