PART ONE

Background

1 Introduction: a Catholic composer in the age of Bismarck

JOHN WILLIAMSON

Psychology and environment

Within the last two decades, the study of Bruckner and his music has begun to change radically. For long a generalized picture was current that depicted a simple religious man, ill at ease in society, an anachronism in his age who suffered neglect, misunderstanding, and the malice of critics.[1] The martyrdom of the life bred the mysticism of the artist; the social anachronism became the timeless prophet. Much of this rested on flimsy evidence and critical misunderstanding. When the Bruckner number of *Musik-Konzepte* appeared in 1982, Norbert Nagler could still bemoan the tendency of anecdotes to swamp analysis.[2] The evidence of recent Bruckner scholarship suggests that criticism and analysis of his music is now flourishing as never before, and with the full arsenal of modern techniques. Anecdotes have also to some extent given way to more complex questions in the area of biographical study. As a result interpretation has acquired new directions that are not simply to be traced in specialized Bruckner scholarship.

That Bruckner's life and times impinged upon his music is now a given of scholarship, and is reflected in the attention devoted specifically to his personality in recent conferences. At least one distinguished scholar has noted that this was not always the case.[3] It is arguable that what has changed is the need to subscribe to one or other of the myths about Bruckner that enrolled him either as a mystic or as a simpleton. Such constructs lead to value judgements about the work; embarrassment at their inadequacy was just as likely to lead to an exclusion of the life from critical accounts.

A decisive moment came when modern psychological and sociological criticism began to suggest that beneath the standard picture there lay a deeply fractured personality, torn by neuroses that were different from, but hardly less striking than, those of Mahler, with whom for long Bruckner seemed to stand in a musico-biographical comparison. Constantin Floros documents a moment at a symposium in 1977, when a speaker raised the possibility of mental illness in Bruckner, as indicative of a change in the way that he was regarded.[4] Within five years more sophisticated analysis began to appear that related Bruckner's mental life to the world of his music.

Norbert Nagler's essay of 1982 sparked off a reinterpretation that extended to the writings of Peter Gülke and Martin Geck. While it would be inaccurate to say that they share a consistent point of view, they do form a kind of unity, in which biographical, ideological, and critical factors have come together to consider what kind of Bruckner picture should be dominant, at least in the German-speaking world. Factors of historical and sociological provenance shaped Bruckner's personality towards a decisive moment marked by his nervous breakdown of 1867. The transition to psychological analysis does not entirely throw off the world of the Bruckner anecdote, since the new interpretative tradition could hardly exist without the stories that emphasise his 'tendency to necrophilia, counting mania and compulsion to control, and fanatical observation of religion'.[5] Even within this tradition there are misgivings, a fear of 'greedy demands from the psychological or sociological viewpoints'.[6] There is little doubt, however, that Bruckner interpretation has to account for such phenomena, which have passed into general knowledge through the increasing emphasis on late nineteenth-century Vienna as city of 'nervous splendour'.[7] Equally it has to consider how far the old picture served an agenda that had much to do with 'German-ness' in the decades after Bismarck excluded Austria from the new Reich.

Later chapters will address the circumstances of Bruckner's upbringing, Catholic education, and attitude to Vienna. My intention in raising them here is to underline the necessity of seeing that his upbringing in the period of the *Vormärz* (before the Revolution of 1848), his exposure to patriarchal 'despotic-feudal' interaction, the resulting 'subservient mentality', and the 'codified asceticism' of his Catholic education have their place in the new picture of the neurotically driven Bruckner.[8] If these generated a compulsion to overachieve coupled with fantasies of power, then the effect on his artistic personality must have been considerable. In its most remarkable expression, there is the idea that Bruckner 'strangled' his personality in order to realize his inner life in music.[9]

Born into the world of Metternich and Biedermeier, Bruckner passed through the years of revolution, and arrived in Vienna at the point when Liberalism approached its climax. By his death, however, Liberalism had collapsed in Vienna before the forces of what is often regarded as 'irrationalism' in the all too real forms of anti-Semitic Christian Socialism and German Nationalism. This journey from a quasi-feudal world to the verge of the twentieth century is illuminated retrospectively by the widely influential interpretation of Carl Schorske, the representative of a view of the Viennese *fin de siècle* as revolt of the sons against the fathers: crudely expressed, the deflection of failed political Liberalism into an artistic avant-garde. In recent years, this picture from the history of ideas has been

increasingly adjusted in the light of research by students of sociology and politics.

Such changing perspectives were not really available to Nagler or Gülke when they began their seismic shift in perspectives on Bruckner. For Nagler, there is a clear break between the world of the first compositions, with their emphasis on choral society and church, and the works that followed 1867. In the light of recent research into the phenomenon of 'voluntary association', it may be that Bruckner research has too unthinkingly accepted the Biedermeier image of Bruckner's earliest creative phase. Although social organizations (including choral societies) were notionally apolitical (but nevertheless 'patriotic') before the *Ausgleich* of 1867, it has been suggested that 'voluntary association' in the form of social societies formed the basis for discussions that contained implicitly 'moral and political goals'.[10] Since it was a dogma of Nagler's interpretation that the composer's complete lack of political involvement was a relic of his upbringing in the *Vormärz* and determined his later subservience and social repression, a more sophisticated picture of the social circumstances in Austria after 1849 would have considerable impact on our estimate of Bruckner's personality. Here is one area where the fluidity of current research into Austrian circumstances may inflect our picture of Bruckner.

The moment of Nagler's break, around 1867, is more likely to require interpretation. Andrea Harrandt's chapters show clearly the hesitations and personal ambitions which warred within Bruckner at this fateful point in his career. The Nagler–Gülke interpretation, however, has seen this as also an inner artistic crisis that may reflect the assimilation of Wagner (and of Berlioz and Liszt). When Martin Geck refers in disparagement to a 'Wagner irritation', he may be attempting to create a purely artistic crisis out of what in reality was a combination of personal and artistic factors. More interesting is the idea of a crisis after the First Symphony's composition that arose from an 'unresolved conflict between creativity and the compulsion to conform'.[11]

At this junction, the student of Bruckner is confronted with three strands to interpret the change that came over Bruckner's compositions. The psychological strand, that the later symphonies arose from a brilliant compromise between creative genius and the ritualizing of formal and technical procedures, goes alongside the socio-historical strand of Bruckner's 'gründerzeitliche Monumentale Symphonie': Bruckner's type of symphony after the 'Nullte' was formed in the heady days of the Liberal upswing, shared characteristics with Vienna's rebuilding, and represented a kind of compromise of the 'new' Vienna with older monarchical impulses that still continued and were fundamental to Bruckner's world-view.[12] Slightly apart from this is the brilliantly provocative view of Gülke: if we are to

accept any truth in the interpretation of Bruckner as mystic (and each of the three interpreters has misgivings here), then we must recognize the plebeian insurrectionary element in all mysticism and acknowledge its essentially heretical character: '[Bruckner's] heresy lay in his composing symphonies.'[13]

Conflation of these ideas is really an attempt to answer why Bruckner emerged from his crisis with a radically new style of symphony. The psychological and sociological nexus that scholars sought to explain in the 1980s and 1990s revolved round the perception that such personality traits as Bruckner's counting mania corresponded to features of his music. The compromise between creativity and ritualizing was a matter of replacing 'endless melody' with 'metrical predetermination' (the equation of counting mania with quadratic phrasing is a theme that constantly recurs in more recent Bruckner studies). Bruckner thus was disturbed at a deeply personal level by the experience of Wagner but did not emerge from his crisis as a Wagnerian symphonist. In place of the seamless rhetoric of music drama came the juxtaposition of contrasts, for which literary and architectural comparisons quickly suggested themselves, and an element of violence that stood opposed to the religious elements in Bruckner's symphonies; for the creators of the new Bruckner picture did not reject the religious interpretation of Bruckner (represented here by Derek Scott's reinterpretation in Chapter 8) but placed it in neurotic tension with socio-psychological factors. In the face of such an interpretation, the old certainties of the Bruckner anecdotes crumbled. Even Bruckner's notorious gaucheness amidst the liberal bourgeoisie of Vienna began to look like a strategy; moral cowardice and servility became peasant cunning.[14] In short, Bruckner ceased to seem like an anachronism in pre-Freudian Vienna.

Political implications of a non-political life

If Bruckner became a man of his time, however, there is now considerable debate as to what kind of time he represented. Scholars have revalued the picture of late nineteenth-century Vienna from two angles that impinge on Bruckner studies. The school that sees a strong interpenetration of artistic factors with social and political history, the descendants of Schorske, has begun a process of self-criticism that may yet trickle into ideas of Bruckner. At the same time, the study of the circumstances of Viennese musical life has advanced to the point that Bruckner studies must start to take account of it. This point of view, more directly related to Bruckner the musician, has remained in the background by comparison with the historico-political complexities of the first.

The picture painted by Nagler of a 'monarchist' Bruckner in a liberal age had the advantage of fitting the little that was known about Bruckner's political views. It also rendered Bruckner relatively easy to locate in Vienna's intellectual map, defined as a gradual substitution of 'an aristocratically based *Gefühlskultur* for the liberal culture of reason and law' which 'was a decisive symptom of Austrian society's sickness unto death'.[15] The Bruckner whose upbringing took place in the *Vormärz* instinctively and without need of revolution anticipated Schorske's elevation of art and culture over rationality; it was hardly surprising that in the half-century after his death Bruckner interpretation should have been overgrown by the irrationality documented in Chapter 16 by Christa Brüstle.

Some of the most striking research into aspects of Bruckner in recent years has concerned this irrationalism in the form of the use made of his music in the Third Reich. Various scholars have considered a number of ways in which Bruckner's life and works were coordinated with the cultural policy of the Nazis. Inevitably this has led to some consideration of the extent to which Bruckner's career had prepared this nemesis. The degree to which he was infected with anti-Semitism is central to this and follows naturally from the Nagler–Gülke interpretation. Already in their writings, it was noted that he was no stranger to religious anti-Semitism, though it is surprising how grudgingly this has trickled into general accounts.[16] In practice it would have been surprising, given Bruckner's connections, if he had not been anti-Semitic. This is less a matter of his Wagnerian associations and visits to Bayreuth than of specifically Austrian circumstances.

The question of the origins and nature of Viennese anti-Semitism is peculiarly complex. Although it found a characteristic home in Karl Lueger's Christian Socialism, it was also present within the liberal movement. The traditional view of Austria's socio-political development has been to stress the manner in which the question of the Habsburg Empire's various nationalities destroyed the liberal dominance. More recent research has tended to show that Liberalism was compatible with Nationalism, which could and intermittently did advocate a liberal agenda. Since Nationalism in this form stressed inclusiveness, both anti-Semites and Jews could find places within movements that promoted liberal ideas and programmes. The unfortunate effect was to legitimize anti-Semitism even within Liberalism.[17]

To place Bruckner within a kind of aristocratic-monarchical *Gefühlskultur* or to emphasize his connections to German Nationalism does not really differentiate him sufficiently from his liberal contemporaries in such a shifting political landscape. An additional problem is that, under close examination, Schorske's thesis of a revolt by Vienna's artists at the turn of the century began to appear implausible. The constitutional monarchy mostly contained the strains, largely because of the extent to which it was

involved in artistic life and decision-making.[18] Bruckner may be said to have anticipated this without any particular effort on his part. His recognition in Vienna extended to rewards from official circles.

Yet the sense of Bruckner's marginality within Vienna has always been strong, whatever the point of view of the writer. Marginality in the wider sense has been defined in terms of 'different social backgrounds and positions, different religions and political affiliations'; at its most extreme this could become ' "multiple marginality", a growing alienation from the threatening reality of Vienna'.[19] Bruckner's admirers laid particular weight on the degree to which he, the authentic German, had been rejected by the liberal (with more than undertones of Jewish) opinion makers. Even without this extreme formulation, there is a sense in which Bruckner represented something marginal to the more intellectual classes of the capital city. This lay in his Catholicism.

The most authoritative look at the rise of Liberalism's nemesis, the Christian Socialist movement, has revealed the degree to which anti-Semitism grew out of the mixture of 'racial hatred' and 'economic protest' of the artisan class, but has also noted the manner in which a radicalized clergy gave it a helping hand.[20] In Bruckner studies, there is little need to place excessive weight on the 'subculture of crackpot journalists and district political leaders' that underlay movements such as Schönerer's Pan-Germanism.[21] The church provided him with a model closer to hand.

That liberalism of an anti-clerical kind and anti-Semitism were at loggerheads within Vienna was part of the peculiarly poisonous circumstances of Bruckner's society. Among liberal voices, the charge that the church was anti-Semitic was virtually a topos and inspired much animus within the world of Vienna's press. This was a particularly critical issue in the light of the restored position of Catholicism and its hierarchy within society and education as a result of the Concordat of 1855; Catholicism and the role of the clergy were of critical importance in Austria (in contrast to the situation in Germany, where the 'Catholic bourgeoisie was slowly driven to a sort of internal exile out of disappointment with the conservative attitude of the clergy').[22] The suggestion that this became a canker within the liberal outlook and contributed substantially to its eventual downfall is a central part of the argument put forward by John Boyer. In one of the most striking, yet 'ineffective and degrading', episodes of the conflict between state and bishops, Bruckner's patron Bishop Franz Rudigier of Linz was sentenced to fourteen days imprisonment (subsequently commuted by Franz Joseph) for his contribution to a 'wave of Episcopal anarchism'.[23]

This dramatic confrontation between church and state on the question of (*inter alia*) the supervision of schools took place in the year that Bruckner moved to Vienna. It is hard to imagine that Bruckner, however unpolitical,

had no opinion on this matter. Unfortunately, even in the most recent treatment of the Rudigier episode it is difficult to find substantial evidence that bears directly on Bruckner's life; a strong element of supposition therefore marks the conclusion that to speak of his religious anti-Semitism is to overlook that it carried a distinct political charge.[24] In the German Reich anti-Semitism became a means for Catholics to prove their national credentials in the face of a Protestant ascendancy.[25] The Austrian way was less 'political' in a modern sense but no less destructive. From Rudigier at the mercy of the liberals to the radicalized clergy of a generation later was a short step once the church entered the political arena. It was also to shape the political mainstream far more than the Pan-Germans whose anti-Semitism was combined with, rather than opposed to, anti-clericalism.

Bruckner's Catholic background was augmented by the German-National activities of his various admirers referred to by Andrea Harrandt in Chapter 3 and dealt with by her more fully elsewhere.[26] How this made the leap from specifically Viennese circumstances through such channels as the 'mystic' and the 'German' Bruckner to the era of the Third Reich is explained by Brüstle in Chapter 16. The full extent of the taking over of Bruckner in a full party- and state-promoted ritual in 1937 was made clear to an English readership by Bryan Gilliam in a twice-published essay.[27] In an unexpected way this also made an impact on Bruckner's music.

Ethics, editions, and performing styles

Since the 1960s, the issue of which versions of Bruckner's symphonies to sanction had tended to run in favour of the first *Gesamtausgabe* of Robert Haas, for reasons that are reviewed by Benjamin Korstvedt in Chapter 10. Although few Bruckner specialists were unaware of individual oddities in that *Gesamtausgabe* from the purely musicological point of view, Gilliam stressed to a greater extent than before its entanglement with the cultural politics of Germany, Austria, and the approaching *Anschluss*. Whereas an earlier Bruckner biographer like Erwin Doernberg had noted regretfully that Haas' achievements had been threatened by 'the political events of the last twenty-five years', it quickly became apparent that Haas' reputation had more than musicological sins to expiate.[28] The unity of Bruckner's life and works was once more revealed in an all too startling manner.

The first publication of Gilliam's essay prompted a controversy in the pages of *The Musical Quarterly* that was side-tracked to some degree by allegations of lack of communication between German- and English-speaking Bruckner specialists, which may have been true of earlier generations but could hardly apply to the highly impressive work done by American scholars

in the last ten years. Manfred Wagner raised an objection that the speech by Goebbels marking the state ceremony of 1937 was of minor significance because it had merely reassembled a ragbag of clichés already present in Bruckner's own time and stated particularly forcefully in obituaries.[29] That the continuity or revival of this 'intellectual tradition' in the 1930s was of some interest to Bruckner scholars seemed to be by-passed by Wagner.

In his introduction to the controversy, Leon Botstein acknowledged this by accusing Wagner of pushing to the margin the question of the continuity of an Austro-German tradition in the origins and development of National Socialism, and it is precisely in this area that one important 'Bruckner problem' lies: why Bruckner's career attracted a German-National mentality that in the larger historical framework proved ruinous for Austria.[30] Austrian treatment of the problem seems as yet not to have made up its mind about this. In a recent essay by Monika Glettler, we meet again Bruckner as friend of Rudigier, as composer of choral works oriented towards a German-National standpoint, and as perhaps more deeply implicated in cultural politics through his relationship to the Wiener Akademischer Gesangverein. She draws to a close, however, by noting that 'open politicization' did not make significant advances before 1914, and by repeating Wagner's objection against the 'American' thesis that seemed to claim that Goebbels had some priority in assimilating Bruckner to a 'German' image: again the 'clichés' of the obituaries stood against consideration of issues that Gilliam had only implicitly raised (as his reply to Wagner noted, continuity had not been his primary concern; nor was he in any sense describing Goebbels as a pioneer in the politicization of Bruckner).[31]

Gilliam's article, as he pointed out, had as underlying issues the myths of martyrdom and religion that underlay the old Bruckner picture; by religion, he was thinking specifically of the Nazi concept of *Gottgläubigkeit*, but there is a more general sense of this issue, in that religion in Bruckner studies is an extensible concept.[32] Far from leading to Biblical hermeneutics and sophisticated deconstruction such as colour Scott's chapter below, earlier concepts had a flavour compounded of German romantic mysticism and nationalism of which the banalities of *Gottgläubigkeit* are only one dimension. Perhaps the non-comprehension which Wagner and Glettler displayed towards Gilliam came from the belated manner in which German musicology had addressed these. Underlying the controversy, however, was not the degree to which Bruckner could be considered a 'Nationalist' or a 'forerunner'. There was also the problem of how to perform Bruckner.

In this context it is hardly surprising that there is both an ethical and an aesthetic dimension. In the course of the *Musical Quarterly* controversy, Botstein referred to his fears that to perform Bruckner in the 'original

versions' (to use the language of the liner notes and CD covers) was to risk 'perpetuating a set of aural signifiers closely linked with radical evil'.[33] In itself this is worrying both as a possibility and for what it implies about musical texts. It would be easy to dismiss it for purely 'common sense' reasons (one instinctively, perhaps mistakenly, recoils from the idea that musical texts can be implicated of themselves in the kind of evil to which Botstein refers), but, if it is to be refuted, it really has to be done on solid theoretical grounds. I suspect that musicology, sooner rather than later, will make such an attempt. For the moment, however, Botstein has presented a problem that would be rich in comic potential were it not so serious. Calling for 'a new scholarly methodology', he advocated the resurrection of the versions in which 'the contemporaries of Mahler, and later Schoenberg and Hartmann, got to know Bruckner in the first place' with the object of 'reinventing' a 'new but oddly traditional pre-Nazi Bruckner'.[34]

Most major orchestras nowadays hold copies of both Haas and Nowak editions. Whichever is performed, audiences or buyers are assured that they are hearing 'original' Bruckner. For musicology to step in and say that, on reflection, it should have thought a little longer and harder about endorsing these 'originals' risks the wrath of too many interested parties. But a reconsideration of the supposedly discredited and now seldom performed versions associated with Bruckner's friends and disciples is precisely what musicology is currently doing, both in Austria, through Thomas Leibnitz's careful re-evaluation of the relationship of Bruckner and his disciples, and in America.[35] A by-product has been to muddy the pool even further by revealing that some of the disciples, notably Josef Schalk, had made their own contribution to 'evil' by spreading the image of the 'German Bruckner' in the composer's lifetime.[36] That Bruckner's image can be reinvented in quite the way that Botstein advocates seems doubtful; nonetheless, true to his word, Botstein subsequently recorded the now rarely heard Schalk score of the Fifth Symphony, a performance to which I shall return in Chapter 15.

If the ethical issue is as yet unresolved, the aesthetic argument (which is by no means independent) is also open and goes beyond the question of which versions should be played. Here it is a matter of how the versions are to be played. An argument against the disciples' scores had always been that they represented 'Wagnerized' versions that distorted the block sonorities and contrasts of the originals. American scholarship in particular has pointed out that this is a simplification, perhaps even a misconception. Their implication is that a 'Wagnerized' way of performing Bruckner now exists, even among conductors who have used the 'original' scores.[37] Has the legacy of the Nazi reading of Bruckner been the recordings and performances of the post-war era? Oddly enough, some of those German conductors who lived through the Nazi period have left recorded evidence of a more 'mercurial'