The Confines of Judaism and the Illusiveness of Universality in Ernest Bloch's *Avodath Hakodesh* (Sacred Service)

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Edmond Dantes, the narrator of Italo Calvino's short story "The Count of Monte Cristo," shares the fate of the story's original protagonist in Dumas's novel of the same title. Calvino's story of the Fortress of If that imprisons Dantes/ Monte Cristo becomes a parable for human existence. As Calvino puts it, the "fortress...grows around us, and the longer we remain shut up in it the more it removes us from the outside."[1] Paradoxically, by working out the possibilities for escape, Dantes is compelled to construe the perfect fortress from which there would be no departure. The story ends with a mapping out of Dantes's theory:

> If I succeed in mentally constructing a fortress from which it is impossible to escape, this conceived fortress either will be the same as the real one—and in this case it is certain we shall never escape from here...—or it will be a fortress from which escape is even more impossible than from here—and this, then, is a sign that here an opportunity of escape exists: we have only to identify the point where the imagined fortress does not coincide with the real one and then find it.[2]

Calvino remains silent about the outcome of Dantes's experiment. We may understand his silence as a warning of the difficulty Dantes faces before making the final, liberating step; for the finding of the point of difference between

1. Italo Calvino, "The Count of Monte Cristo," in *t zero*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 145.
2. *Ibid.*, 151-52.

the real and the theoretically constructed prison may not be easy. Instead of destroying it, Dantes's theory seems to bring the Fortress of If to perfection. Thus the end of the story brings Calvino's main theme, the interchangeability of real and imaginary states, into focus and suggests that the imaginary states have the same power over human existence as reality itself—if not a greater one. Calvino's parable is frightening. It proposes that intellectual constructions have the potential to imprison and that perfection can become a constraining force.

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Calvino's version of "The Count of Monte Cristo" calls to mind the two paradigmatic phases of nationalism in many European countries, the first bringing with it liberating intellectual movements, and the second enforcing xenophobic political constraints. In these processes the confusion between the real and imagined also reminds us of the fusion that imprisoned Calvino's narrator in his imaginary fortress.

Although the oldest European nationalism, that of the English, was modeled on the example of the Hebrews as represented in the Old Testament, Jewish nationalism was more influenced by a contemporaneous European political model than by the ancient biblical one. Thus, from its very conception at the end of the nineteenth century, Zionism or Jewish secular nationalism fluctuated between basing its claims on a real community and on an imaginary one. What might seem to be the most concrete basis for a Jewish community, the ancient, shared religion, could not be used as a focal point for political leaders in the first phase of the new Zionist movement because orthodox rabbis considered it blasphemous to speak of the transformation of sacred belief

into a secular national ideology. "For our many sins," writes the Dzikover Rebbe,

> strangers have risen to pasture the holy flock, men who say that the people of Israel should be clothed in secular nationalism, a nation like all other nations, that Judaism rests on three things, national feeling, the land and the language, and that national feeling is the most praiseworthy element in the brew and the most effective in preserving Judaism, while the observance of the Torah and the commandments is a private matter depending on the inclination of each individual. May the Lord rebuke these evil men and may He who chooseth Jerusalem seal their mouths.[3]

In the absence of religion, the notion of a community in Zionist ideology was based on a supposedly shared cultural tradition, of which the definition was vague and the boundaries elastic. In a 1933 lecture on Jewish nationalism Lion Feuchtwanger compared the undefinable character of Judaism to Israel's nameless and shapeless God. Still, although he admitted that "Judaism is not a common race, not a common territory, not a common way of life or a common language," he succeeded in finding the basis that unifies world Jewry in "a common spirit, a common spiritual attitude."[4]

Similarly, by the 1940s the early disagreements in the history of Jewish secular art music about what was genuinely or authentically Jewish were partially resolved by a more general, and generously vague, definition. In the preface to Gdal Saleski's 1949 monograph *Famous Musicians of Jewish Origin,* the author "wishes to make clear...that the words 'Jew' and 'Jewish' are not used in their religious or national sense. The method of approach"—Saleski assures the reader—"is purely an ethnic one." If after this

3. Letter translated in I. Domb, *The Transformation* (1958). Quoted in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 51.
4. Lion Feuchtwanger, "Nationalisme et Judaisme," *Revue Juive de Genève* 3 (December 1934): 102.

introductory statement the reader expects a rigorously scientific method, the next sentence dispels this illusion. Saleski's reason for isolating these musicians into one volume repeats the old legend of shared spirituality: "all of [these musicians] have in their souls that fire to which the Jewish prophets gave utterance in the time of old Jerusalem's glory."[5]

By the time of Saleski's monograph, definitions of Jewish music tended to use similarly general terms. In a handbook prepared by the National Jewish Music Council to foster the commissioning of Jewish musical works, Isadore Freed defined Jewish music in this way:

> The serious Jewish composer is concerned with...clarity of thought, which is a Jewish essential; with the emotional depth of the Jewish spirit; with abstinence from flowery overstatement; with the expression of that indomitable sense of faith and hope which has kept the Jewish people alive during many dark centuries; with the prophetic demands for Justice and Freedom.[6]

This all-inclusive yet cryptic definition of Jewish music is intimately connected to Freed's teacher Ernest Bloch, the most renowned so-called "Jewish" composer of the first half of the twentieth century. This paper will explore Bloch's role in the creation of this stereotypical notion of Jewish music and also the historical development of this Blochian stereotype: how it replaced the former, folk- or synagogue-song-based definition; how its use gained dangerous power in the hands of Nazi ideologists; and how this means of self-expression and self-identification became a Monte-Cristo-like prison that for some turned into a

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5. Gdal Saleski, *Famous Musicians of Jewish Origin* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1949), xiii.

6. *Commission a Jewish Musical Work! A Handbook of Procedures to Guide Organizations, Local Community Councils and Composers Who Will Participate in the National Jewish Music Council's Nation-Wide Project to Encourage the Creation of New Jewish Musical Works* (New York: National Jewish Music Council, 1963), 17.

gruesome physical reality and for others, like Bloch, a label that doomed artistic imagination to a labyrinth of infinite repetition.

Jewish Musical Nationalism at Its Birth

What came to be referred to as the "renaissance of Jewish music" was initiated in tsarist Russia, a country where even at the end of the nineteenth century the condition of most Jews was practically medieval compared to their condition in other European states. In his monograph *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music* Albert Weisser lists three decisive forces that stimulated assimilated Jewish intellectuals to embrace the idea of a Jewish national art music: the still vital Hashkalah (Enlightenment) movement, the initial excitement surrounding Zionism, and most importantly for musicians, the model of the "moguchaya kuchka," the Mighty Handful.[7]

In 1897 Vladimir Stasov, guardian of the myth of the Mighty Handful, awakened the national pride of Joel Engel (1868-1927), an assimilated Jew, who was then working as assistant editor in charge of music on the Moscow journal *Russkiye Vedemosti* (The Russian Messenger). In a 1947 lecture for the "Jewish Music Forum" Jacob Weinberg reported that Stasov's "words struck Engel's imagination like lightning and the Jew awoke in him."[8] Another chronicler of the history of Jewish music, Israel Rabinovitch, quotes Weinberg's story at greater length. Rabinovitch describes a

7. Albert Weisser, *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1954), 11-12.
8. Quoted by Avraham Soltes, "The Hebrew Folk Song Society of St. Petersburg: The Historical Development," in *The Historic Contribution of Russian Jewry to Jewish Music*, ed. Irene Heskes and Arthur Wolfson (National Jewish Music Council, 1967), 15.

scene in which Engel witnessed how Stasov questioned the assimilated Jewish sculptor Mark Antokolski (1843-1902):

> "How is it," he asked, "that Antokolski is blind to the great field for [*sic*] art, the extraordinary possibilities for sculpture, within the life of his own Jewish people? Tell me"—he exclaimed turning to Antokolski—"what manner of a Russian *are you?* What, for instance, is your name?"
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> "My name," murmured Antokolski in confusion, "is Mark."
>
> "Mark! What kind of an appellation is that? It's not even a Slavic name, it's Latin! You're Mordecai! What a noble and resounding name! Mordecai! Power! Inspiration! But Mark! Really what kind of a Mark are you?"[9]

Stasov's nationalistic passion points to a fourth factor behind the birth of Jewish art music: anti-Semitism, which would always define even assimilated Jewish artists as "others" in need of creating their "own" culture. Even Rimsky-Korsakov's support for Jewish music might have echoed the potentially anti-Semitic divide between "we Russians" and "you Jews" had Rimsky-Korsakov not encouraged equally the Ukrainians, Latvians, Estonians, and Armenians to arrange their own folk music.[10] As a folk-music enthusiast, pieces written on Jewish themes genuinely appealed to him,[11] and after hearing such a piece by his student Ephraim Sklar (1871-1941?), Rimsky-Korsakov urged his Jewish students to emulate Sklar's example:

> Why should you Jewish students imitate European and Russian composers? The Jews possess tremendous folk-treasures; I have

9. Israel Rabinovitch, *Of Jewish Music,* trans. A. M. Klein (Montreal: The Book Center, 1952), 147.

10. M. F. Gniessin, *Mïsli i vospominaniya o Rimskom-Korsakove* (Moscow: Gosmuzizdat, 1956), 208. Quoted by Moshe Beregovski, "Jewish Folk Songs" (1962), in *Old Jewish Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski,* ed. Mark Slobin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 289.

11. According to Rabinovitch, at that time Rimsky-Korsakov had contact with St. Petersburg cantor Eliezer Gerovitch who introduced him to synagogal music. Rabinovitch, *Of Jewish Music,* 154.

> often heard Jewish melodies. Your religious melodies have made the most powerful impression upon me. Jewish music awaits its Glinka.[12]

Indeed, the first composers who became eminent in propagating Jewish art music grew up under Rimsky-Korsakov's protection.

Engel, the originator of the Jewish music movement, did not belong to Rimsky-Korsakov's circle. His efforts were not focused on Jewish art music; he participated in the edition of the folk music collection *Jewish Folksongs in Russia* (1901) by historians Pesach Marek and Saul Ginsburg, gave public lectures, and organized concerts of Jewish folk music in Moscow (1900) and then in St. Petersburg (1901). The success of these lectures and concerts, attended not only by Jews but also by scholarly Russians, encouraged Jewish intellectuals and composers to welcome the notion of Jewish music.[13]

The emphasis, however, shifted from folk music to art music after the Society for Jewish Music—which, due to censorship, was legally registered under the name of *Obshchestvo Yevreyskoy Narodnoy Muzïki* (Society for Jewish Folk Music)—was founded by St. Petersburg Conservatory composers Ephraim Sklar, Solomon Rosovsky (1878-1962), Pesach Lvov (1881-1913), and Alexander Zhitomirsky (1881-1937). Later other composers such as Michael Gnesin (1883-1957), Lazare Saminsky (1882-1959), Lev Mordukhov Tseitlin (1884-1930),[14] and Joseph Achron (1886-1943) joined the Society.

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12. Soltes, "The Hebrew Folk Song Society of St. Petersburg," 20.
13. Rabinovitch, *Of Jewish Music*, 149.
14. L. Zeitlin is sometimes erroneously identified as Lev Moiseievich Tseitlin (or Zeitlin) (1881-1952). About Lev Mordukhov Tseitlin, who was a member of the Society, see Paula Eisenstein Baker, "Who Was 'L. Zeitlin' of the Society for Jewish Folk Music?" *YIVO Annual* 23 (1996): 233-57. I owe special thanks to Baker for calling my attention to this important article.

The constitution of the Society sounds familiar to anyone with a knowledge of national musical institutions. The first phase was the period of collecting, studying, and then harmonizing folk music, then came the free use of folk material by the composer, and last but not least, "the period of modernization and development of individual personal styles of composition."[15]

1: The aim of the Society for Jewish Folk Music is to work in the field of research and development of Jewish Folk Music (sacred and secular) by collecting folk songs, harmonizing them and promoting and supporting Jewish composers and workers in the field of Jewish music;
2: In order to achieve these aims the Society is to:
   a) help print musical compositions and papers on research in Jewish music;
   b) organize musical meetings, concerts, operatic performances, lectures, etc.;
   c) organize a Choir and Orchestra of its own;
   d) establish a Library of Jewish Music;
   e) issue a periodical dedicated to Jewish music;
   f) establish contests and give prizes for musical compositions of Jewish character.
3: The Society has the right to form chapters in different cities of the country in accordance with local laws.[16]

While the collecting was an enthusiastic quest for supposed national treasures, the creation of the "modern Jewish style" in music led to serious debates. The difference of opinion between the Moscow-based Engel and the most vocal member of the St. Petersburg Society, Lazare Saminsky, who served on the editorial board and refused to publish compositions by Engel and his Moscow colleagues, initiated the foundation of a Moscow branch with Engel, Jacob Weinberg (1879-1956), and Alexander Krein (1883-1951) as its most prominent members. Even the proud

15. Soltes, "The Hebrew Folk Song Society of St. Petersburg," 24.
16. *Ibid.*, 22. Point 2f in the original Yiddish text refers to "musical works by Jewish composers."

national cause could not erase the sometimes hostile rivalry between the "intellectual" and "pedantic" St. Petersburg Conservatory and its "over-emotional" and "hysteric" Moscow counterpart.[17]

Saminsky launched his attack against the Society's (read Engel's) erroneous emphasis on Jewish secular music in the Russian-Jewish weekly *Rassvet* (January 1915):

> The first work of the Society does not even touch the rich treasure of religious melody, that melody which stems from age-old sources, and whose creative potentialities and great value for the science of music cannot be overestimated.[18]

In *Music of the Ghetto and the Bible,* published in 1934 after his emigration from Russia to the United States, Saminsky reprinted his side of the debate that had taken place in the press and at public gatherings in Russia from 1915 through 1923. The core of Saminsky's argument was that

> Hebrew art should cultivate the old sacred chant...[and] should abandon the doubtful guiding rod of the banal and trite type of our domestic and chassidic music, a medium doubtful as to both its aesthetic worth and its racial purity.[19]

Saminsky argued that the "racially muddy, wandering pan-Oriental"[20] features of Jewish folk song were due to a strong influence of the non-Jewish neighbors, hence folk song cannot reflect the Jewish "racial mind."[21] He proposed that

> The banal, the racially neutral, the muddy and rickety, the flagrantly borrowed element of our music, should be weeded out mercilessly

17. Weisser, *Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music,* 49.
18. Quoted in Rabinovitch, *Of Jewish Music,* 171.
19. Lazare Saminsky, *Music of the Ghetto and the Bible* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1934), 237-38.
20. *Ibid.,* 243.
21. Saminsky's term, *ibid.,* 67.

> from the cycle of means in use by our young creators. Otherwise this element is a source of feebleness and instability in our budding national-musical organism. And our young composition is doomed to a work nationally insignificant. [22]

Saminsky's fervent intolerance created still more arbitrary dualisms by the time *Music of the Ghetto and the Bible* was published in New York. In his original argument Saminsky opposed the music of the Diaspora to that of the imaginary, pure pre-Diaspora period. Writing from a different perspective in 1934, Saminsky seems to have shifted his focus to the opposition between East and West. He argues that the Jewish composer in the East (read: eastern Europe) lived in undisturbed communion with his race. In the West, in a spiritually heterogeneous and fundamentally alien cultural milieu, "the Hebrew composer's task is weighted down with emotional and racial poignancy." No wonder that in that atmosphere the "creative Jewish musician who has scaled the heights of modern craft, shrinks from the aesthetic suffocation menacing him in his own racial task." "The West," Saminsky continued, "has discolored and distorted the very essence of Jewish habit and behavior, in religion as well as in art."[23]

Regarding the position of Jewish musicians in the West, Saminsky seems to have absorbed Richard Wagner's poisonous ideology, first proposed in his "classic" *Das Judentum in der Musik* in 1850. Saminsky's judgement of Western Jewish musicians curiously echoes Wagner's accusation by stating that

> The Western Jewish composer has unconsciously developed two implements of self-accommodation to the alien art of his non-Jewish neighbors. One,...the mimicry of a national pose; the other, a more modest, a less discernible one, but just as insidious: the honorable attitude of leadership in the musical vanguard.[24]

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22. *Ibid.*, 247.
23. *Ibid.*, 6-7.
24. *Ibid.*, 8.

What Wagner, champion of new music of his time, would never have said, Saminsky stated plainly: "modernism is a strange kind of substitution for Jewishness in music, a sort of escape from an anticipated and feared course."[25] The target of Saminsky's attack on modern music was Schoenberg, in whose "harsh, temporal and domineering voice" there is no trace "of that proud and poised old melos."[26]

Still, recalling the oldest anti-Semitic distinction, Saminsky granted that Schoenberg's compositions belonged to the manifestation of the Hebrew spirit, although not to the "Hebraic" but to the despised "Judaic" angle. This is a strange way to categorize Schoenberg considering that the new binary opposition is based on Saminsky's old distinction between the two kinds of Jewish art music, one based on "pure" religious melos, the other on "contaminated" folk song.[27] "The Hebraic idiom," Saminsky stated,

> the building substance of the age-old religious melos and biblical chant, the "frozen block" of Jewish music, emanates from the spiritually immovable, the rigid stem of the racial mind.... The Hebraic tonal idiom carried in a subtle, yet stubborn way the might of a racial obsession.[28]

The other ingredient of Jewish music, the one that Saminsky named "Judaic," "has emanated from an alien corner, acquired by the Jewish racial psyche; it flows from the mental agility, the calamitous gift of alert self-adaptation to a new cultural quarter."[29] Saminsky's further distinction calls to mind the old opposition between "Western" and "Oriental," but now the two have become the two sides of Jewish heritage: the one carrying the potential for "greatness," the other—the one stereotypically

25. *Ibid.*, 9.
26. *Ibid.*, 69.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, 67.
29. *Ibid.*, 68.

attached to Jewish music in anti-Semitic criticism—the threat of disintegration.

> The old, the Hebraic tonal element is linear, seminal, full of structural potency; it hides a thematic and form-building might. It is full of calm and old magnificence.
>
> The new, the Judaic element is mainly [a] color-bearer; it is a generator of harmonic and rhythmic substances. It is fluid, expressive, episodic; it is feverishly stringent and neurotic.[30]

In praising the use of the old Hebrew idiom in art music Saminsky went as far as proposing a "noble and useful *'hebraization'* of the tonal West."

> Thus the end of Hebrew art may acquire a universal range: the task of helping to restore and reunite the common tonal creed of humanity. A synthesis, where the very problem, the accursed problem of "Jewishness in music," would vanish.[31]

This utopian vision of a synthesis of European and Jewish traits suggests that by 1934, the year of the publication of his *Music of the Ghetto and the Bible,* Saminsky's conception of Jewish music was caught between the desire to create a specifically Jewish idiom and the desire to lend Jewish music the prestige of European art music.

Already in 1915 Saminsky announced that Jewish music had entered its "organic period."[32] The distinction between "organic" and "inorganic" periods brings Saminsky close to another advocate of Jewish music, the Austrian Heinrich Berl, who in 1926 published his own *Das Judentum in der Musik.*[33] Berl's ideas, like Saminsky's, correspond with Wagner's in restating that Jews form a foreign body in Western culture. His thesis is based on three assumptions: (1) the music of the East opposes the music of the West;

30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, 81.
32. *Rassvet* (January 1915). Quoted in Rabinovitch, *Of Jewish Music,* 171.
33. Heinrich Berl, *Das Judentum in der Musik* (Berlin and Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1926).

(2) Jewish music belongs to the Orient; and (3) the "Jewish pseudo-morphosis" (the incongruity between content and form) is the "main cause of the Asian crisis in European music since the Romantic era."[34] In opposing Eastern (Jewish) and Western (European) music Berl revels in binary oppositions: "melody" versus "harmony," "visual" versus "spiritual," "extensive" versus "intensive," "space-oriented" versus "time-oriented," "culture" versus "civilization." (In this last opposition, "culture" in Berl's philo-Semitic account applied to the Jews while "civilization" applied to the Germans.) The list goes on, but while Saminsky was still waiting for the Messiah of Jewish music, Berl had already found his hero in Arnold Schoenberg.

Berl was the first who, in the words of Alexander Ringer, recognized that "behind the new sounds and technical innovations [of Schoenberg's music], there lay a specifically Jewish intonation."[35] The three Viennese composers, Gustav Mahler, Adolf Schreiber (who was the teacher of Max Brod),[36] and Arnold Schoenberg, were for Berl the first whose music contained the "voice" representing a primarily Jewish principle, and whose careers epitomized the fate of the Jewish composer in Western society. But while Berl considered Mahler to have wrestled unsuccessfully with a Western form alien to him, and saw Schreiber's suicide as a result of his racially determined incompatibility with European music, he viewed Schoenberg

34. "Das Buch hat also drei Grundgedanken: Die Musik des Ostens im Gegensatz zu sehen zur Musik des Westens; Die 'jüdische Musik' als zur Musik des Ostens gehörend darzustellen; Die 'jüdische Pseudomorphose' als wesentliche Ursache der asiatischen Krise in der europäischen Musik seit der Romantik zu erweisen." *Ibid.*, 11.

35. Alexander Ringer, *Arnold Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 195.

36. Berl based his discussion of Adolf Schreiber on Max Brod's *Adolf Schreiber: ein Musikschicksal* (Berlin: Im Welt Verlag, 1921).

as one who overcame the handicap of his race by conquering the alien Western forms and opening new horizons.[37]

In spite of Schoenberg's paradigmatic status in Berl's conception, for Berl the solution to the "Jewish problem" in music was a Zionist one. His conviction that the Zionist movement should help Jews transform their "mechanical, inorganic existence" in exile to "organic reality"[38] suggests a separatist solution that would mean that the Jews, while encouraged to find their own voice, would also be denied participation in the culture that surrounds them.

A trait common to many propagators of Jewish music is that they were blind to the correspondences between their principles and those of anti-Semitic ideologues. Even Max Brod, who showed more circumspection in politics than most of his Zionist contemporaries, and who was the chief inspiration for Berl, ignored the danger of labeling when it came to musical matters. Characteristic of Brod's political prudence is that in his "Rasse und Judentum" (Race and Judaism) he distinguished between German and Jewish nationalisms by coining the term "Nazionalhumanismus" (national humanism) to describe an ethically-founded nationalism. Brod's "Nazionalhumanismus" strongly opposes the brand of German nationalism, which, with the incorporation of the new German racial theory, became instrumental in the formation of German Fascism.[39]

But while his analysis of German ideology exhibits political sensitivity, Brod's research on Jewish music, especially the discovery of Mahler's Jewishness, casts an odd

37. "Mahler ringt in gigantischen Anläufen mit der ihm fremden Formwelt, Schönberg überwindet sie und öffnet den Weg, Schreiber aber—zerbricht an ihr." Berl, *Das Judentum in der Musik,* 131.

38. "Denn die Existenz des Judentums in der Galuth ist auf alle Fälle eine anorganische.... Der Zionismus will das Judentum von seiner mechanischen Existenz zur organischen Wirklichkeit führen: das ist seine Aufgabe." *Ibid.,* 125-26.

shadow on his music criticism. "It may be," he wrote in 1916 in Martin Buber's periodical *Der Jude*, "that Mahler's music, though apparently German, is instinctively recognized as being non-German—which is indeed the case."[40] At the time of its publication, Brod's discovery provoked angry protests from assimilated German-Jewish music critics. Paul Stefan accused Brod of being "completely imbued with Zionism."[41] Stefan's aversion, although it may have been a typical reaction for the assimilated, intellectual Jew, also signaled the danger of Brod's achievement.

Brod's desperate efforts to save Mahler—by labeling as typically "Jewish" those characteristics of his music that were criticized by his contemporaries—show how negative criticism played into Brod's and many others' way of thinking. But Brod's *tour de force* also meant that his research proved useful to anti-Semitic critics. Little wonder then that such a fervent advocate of Mahler's music would receive almost grotesquely favorable treatment in the Nazis' infamous guide to *verboten* musical territory, the 1940 edition of *Lexikon der Juden in der Musik* (Dictionary of Jews in Music). "Brod," the authors wrote, "unlike his comrades of the same race, tries to explain the compositions of Jewish composers on the basis of their Jewish mentality."[42] To prove the point the *Lexikon* quotes two long paragraphs from Brod's article on Mahler, the stereotypical Jewish composer,

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39. "Wir brauchen einen neuen Liberalismus, der die Fehler des alten...vermeidet, ohne sich bei diesem Ausweichen an den Faschismus zu verlieren! Die neudeutsche Rassenlehre dagegen ist zum Instrument des deutschen Faschismus geworden; die biologische Theorie von der Herrenrasse und die Ideologie von 'Führung,' 'Diktatur,' 'autoritärer Staatsführung' haben (trotz wesentlicher Unterschiede) die Tendenz, sich gegenseitig zu stützen." Max Brod, "Rasse und Judentum," *Selbstwehr* (Unabhängige Juedische Wochenschrift) 28 (18 March 1934): 8.
40. Quoted in Max Brod, "Jewish Music in the Diaspora," in *Israel's Music* (Tel Aviv: Wivo Zionist Educational Program, 1951), 31.
41. *Ibid.*, 32.

who, however hard he tried, could not free himself of his racial determination.

Brod did not deny that Mahler and Mendelssohn had been "keenly anxious to forget" their origin. But, his argument continues, the "demon is nevertheless present and makes itself felt—in spite of all the polish—in a rather unruly manner."[43] The image speaks for itself. The "demon," or as Brod put it in another sentence, the "Jewish essence," irrepressibly reveals itself, especially in the music of a great composer such as Mahler, who, as Brod stated, draws deeply on subconscious sources. Similarly, in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto the "Jewish tone—albeit unconsciously used—can most clearly be heard, pervading the essence of the work rather than its details."[44]

The notion that the music of Jewish composers unconsciously expresses a kind of "Jewish essence" served as the perfect fishing net for Brod; it was so general that it could snare absolutely every composer of Jewish origin. In fact it probably caught composers of all types, but the gentiles were thrown back without a word. Even when Brod tried to be more specific by collecting "Jewish traits" in Mahler's music, he could not free himself of all-embracing generalities. March rhythms, melodic lines fluctuating between major and minor, and slow beginnings of melodies may indeed be characteristic of Chassidic folk songs, but the same features appear in the music of composers who have neither racial nor cultural relations with Jewish tradition.

By emphasizing the unconscious, Brod created not only the perfect tool for gathering composers of Jewish origin

42. "Im Gegensatz zu dem grössen Teil seiner Rassengenossen versucht Brod, die Werke jüdischer Komponisten aus der jüdischen Mentalität heraus zu erklären." *Lexikon der Juden in der Musik. Mit einem Titelverzeichnis jüdischer Werke,* Theo Stengel and Herbert Gerigk, eds. (Berlin: Bernhard Hahnefeld Verlag, 1940), 41.
43. Brod, "Jewish Musicians in the Diaspora," 26.
44. *Ibid.*, 27.

under the same flag, but also the perfect prison from which there was no escape. The label "Jewish composer," although initially associated with a liberating movement among scholars in the field of Jewish music, not only could be, but in fact was easily turned into a curse.

Ernest Bloch and the Unconscious Expression of the Jewish Spirit

The chief beneficiary of the popularity of Brod's notion of creating Jewish music "unconsciously" was Swiss-born Ernest Bloch. Having been an outsider out of habit (or because he learned early that being an outsider is better than being rejected), Bloch assumed and at the same time redefined the role of the stereotypical Jewish composer. It did not matter that the most vocal advocates of Jewish music unequivocally dismissed Bloch; in fact, one can hardly find another subject on which scholars such as Max Brod, Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, and Lazare Saminsky agreed more.

Brod irritatedly rejected the "journalistic practice of considering Bloch as the leading representative of modern Jewish music."[45] Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, the father of Jewish-music research and at the same time the biggest opponent of the "unthinkingly accepted present-day opinion that the musician, unconscious and ignorant though he be of his people's music and folklore, yet instinctively manifests these racial expressions,"[46] understandably excluded Bloch, who was uneducated in Judaism, from his discussion of Jewish music. Although Bloch occupies an important role in *Music of the Ghetto and the Bible,* Saminsky nevertheless

45. *Ibid.*
46. Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 475.

accused the composer of "unrestrained cultivation of...already contaminated Jewish music with an unspeakable exoticism, common and shallow,"[47] of not being resistant enough to the

> sickly, ghetto-ridden echo, such as the crawling and whining, quasi-Ecclesiastean and pseudo-Jewish first theme of *Schelomo,* the quasi-mystic melopeia of *Adon Olom* in the *Sacred Service,* the banal, penny-Judaism of the *Baal-Shem* suite.[48]

In the face of such resistance, what, then, elevated Bloch to occupy the status of, to use Guido Gatti's pioneering definition, the "sole *Jewish musician*" in music history with a "pregnant racial personality?"[49]

As with every legend, the origin of the awakening of Bloch's Jewish soul is shrouded in contradictory statements, both by the composer himself and by his critics. Bloch himself was ambivalent enough when it came to his background. In a 1933 lecture on his *Sacred Service* he managed to suggest both that he had and that he did not have a Jewish education:

> I made my Hebrew "communion" when I was 13; but, I was not educated religiously and my life was lived among the Gentiles.[50]

With no help from Bloch, his critics tried to locate the beginning of the composer's interest in his Jewish background using Bloch's works as markers. For some, 1912, the date of the first piece in Bloch's "Jewish cycle" (pieces written between 1912 and 1916) marks Bloch's "conversion." A

47. Saminsky, *Music of the Ghetto and the Bible,* 70.
48. *Ibid.,* 117-18.
49. Guido M. Gatti, "Ernest Bloch," *Musical Quarterly* 7 (January 1921): 28. The article was originally published in *La Critica Musicale* (April-May 1920).
50. Lecture given at the San Francisco Conservatory, 16 September 1933. A copy of Bloch's draft is in the Judah Magnes Museum, Berkeley, CA. Special thanks to the staff of the Judah Magnes Museum for their help in my research.

commonly held belief was that as a "result of that 'conversion'," from this time forward Bloch "dedicated his life to the composing of Jewish music."[51] In 1941, when William Lawson sent Bloch a typescript of the composer's biography, Bloch angrily dismissed this commonly accepted view. In the margin Bloch commented:

> I am not sure of this...[it] seems very superficial to me...in 1895-6 I composed a Symphony on "Jewish motifs"—then an "Oriental" one. It is the article of *Robert Godet*, about my C♯ minor Symph. ("Le Temps," Paris, 1903)—and a *few antisemitic criticisms* which, I think, made me *conscious* of what was or could be "Jewish" in my background.[52]

The most curious thing about Bloch's comment is that the composer gave partial credit to French critic Robert Godet for awakening in him a Jewish consciousness. Bloch's memory might have not erred when he attributed to Godet his own interest in the creation of a Jewish musical idiom. It is curious, however, that he recalled this particular review as a primary inspiration for his Jewish aspirations; without making any allusions to the composer's Jewish origin, Godet celebrated Bloch as a young composer with a promising future.[53]

In a 1976 program source book Bloch's daughter, Suzanne Bloch, recalls again the story of the relationship between Bloch and Godet. Brod's "demon" in Suzanne Bloch's story is Godet, the highly cultivated French critic, who, while encouraging Bloch to express his Hebraic heri-

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51. Rabbi Maxwell H. Dubin, "There are Giants in These Days: A Tribute to Ernest Bloch," ABC Radio Network, 25 October 1959. Typescript of the broadcast is found in the Ernest Bloch Collection at the Judah Magnes Museum.
52. Bloch's letter to William Lawson, 14 May 1941. A copy of the letter is at the Judah Magnes Museum. Italics original.
53. Godet's review appeared in *Le Petit Temps* (19 June 1903). Part of it is quoted in *Ernest Bloch-Romain Rolland: Lettres (1911-1933)*, ed. José-Flore Tappy (Lausanne: Editions Payot Lausanne, 1984), 31.

tage in music, was working on the French translation of Houston Stewart Chamberlain's notoriously anti-Semitic *Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, 1899). Suzanne presents Godet as a satanic figure who "coldly observed" Bloch, "applying to him the theories of H. S. Chamberlain."[54] The postwar period colors Suzanne's eerie account. She claims that since Bloch "was immediately aware of the dangers" of the theories of extreme racism, after having received the Chamberlain book he immediately broke all contact with Godet, "the only human being who ever peered into [his] soul."[55] A letter by Bloch from 1934, however, puts Bloch's reception of Chamberlain's book, and with it his relation to Godet, in a somewhat different light:

> I have finished and reread Chamberlain's book—Here you have the key...to the events, in Germany—and soon, possibly, in France—Only that, in spite of its fanaticism and hypothesis—like Darwin or Marx after all—the book is a *great* book. But when it falls on smaller minds, and has to be put into vulgarization and practice, like everything else, it becomes a *terrible weapon*.[56]

Indeed, Bloch himself used Chamberlain's book for explaining Nazi Germany's attitude toward the performance of his *Sacred Service* by the Jüdische Kulturbund in Berlin and Leipzig in 1934:

> I think they [the Jews] can do what they want, between themselves, provided it remains "Jewish" and no "Aryans" are allowed! I heard that even they are encouraged to do "things Jewish," and are

54. Suzanne Bloch and Irene Heskes, *Ernest Bloch: Creative Spirit. A Program Source Book* (New York: Jewish Music Council of the National Jewish Welfare Board, 1976), 28.

55. Bloch's letter to Lillian Hodgehead, possibly late 1920s (University of California, Berkeley, Music Library, Ernest Bloch Collection). I owe special thanks to Judy Tsou, University of California, Berkeley, Music Library, for giving me access to these documents.

56. Bloch's letter to Lillian Hodgehead and Ada Clement, 6 July 1934 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

> not hampered, provided they do not mix with "Germans"—a queer situation, absolutely *understandable*—though I do not approve it of course!—if one reads the Chamberlain, on which all their ideas—political, religious, racial—are based.
>
> The attitude of certain Jews—in Italy![57]—and especially here [New York], towards me—and towards everything—seems to justify in a good degree the actual mentality and revolt of the leaders of Germany.[58]

But even if we do not credit Godet with diabolical power, the other part of Bloch's marginal note, his recollection of anti-Semitic criticism of his music, is worth considering in the light of the Godet story. It is difficult to measure to what extent anti-Semitism fueled negative reception of Bloch's music. The accusation of violent intensity and vehement emotionalism sensed in Bloch's compositions nevertheless fits the stereotypical profile of the Jewish musician almost flawlessly. Even the criticism of his relying too heavily on the Russian and the French schools calls to mind Wagner's *Das Judentum in der Musik.* But although Bloch seems to have reached the conclusion that one must express "the greatness and the destiny of [one's] race" as early as 1906,[59] his widely publicized statements about his race-conscious compositional style did not appear until his emigration to the United States in 1916.

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57. Here Bloch refers to an article that appeared in *Israel* in 1934. "The only nasty dissonance in Italy, at the premiere of the *Sacred Service* (Jan. 1934) the insulting article published—again by Jews!—in the review 'Israel'!" Bloch's letter to Ada Clement and Lillian Hodgehead, 23 December 1950 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

58. Bloch's letter to Lillian Hodgehead, 6 April 1934 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

59. "I have read the Bible. I have read fragments from Moses, and an immense sense of pride surged in me. My entire being vibrated. It is a revelation. I will find myself again in this.... Perhaps you and I will find in this the release of our bonds. The music is in us. It is important that we express it, show the greatness and the destiny of this race.... Yes, Fleg, this idea must enlighten us both." Bloch's letter to Edmond Fleg, 1906. Quoted in Suzanne Bloch, "Ernest Bloch," *Keynote* (July 1980): 20.

Emigration and Its Effect on Bloch's Jewish Identity

The failure of Maud Allan's dance group, in whose company Bloch arrived in the United States in 1916, seems to have bitterly contradicted Bloch's hopes that he would be able to establish himself in the New World. Soon however, he succeeded in contacting Karl Muck, the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who, after listening to Bloch's rendition of the *Trois Poèmes Juifs* promised a premiere, under the condition that Bloch change the title. The composer refused, saying:

> "Dr. M[uck] you speak exactly like my Jewish friends, who advised me to change the title for obvious reasons. My music is not as much Jewish as it is Ernest Bloch's expression. But as long as there are prejudices against the Jews, I will not put my flag in my pocket, and the title shall remain." Dr. Muck came over [to] me, shook hands, saying: "If there were more Jews like you, there would be less anti-Semitism. I will fight myself for this title if necessary!"[60]

Bloch's stubbornness did not hurt the American reception of his works. On 24 March 1917, the Boston Symphony premiered the *Trois Poèmes* with Bloch conducting. H. T. Parker's review in the *Boston Evening Transcript* (24 March 1917), had the headline: "Strange and Signal Music of Ernest Bloch—Three Jewish Poems that Evoke a Composer of Remarkable Idiom and Procedure, Invention, Imagination and Power— Pieces of a Stinging Vehemence."[61] No less enthusiasm characterized a review by Olin Downes, who instantly became an ardent proponent of Bloch:

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60. Bloch's story was written down by Boaz Piller, a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra who maintained friendly relations with Bloch after the composer's debut in Boston (Typescript, UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

61. Quoted in Hugo Leichtentritt, *Serge Koussevitzky, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the New American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 82.

> This music has the warmth, the melancholy, the sensuality, the prophetic fervor of Hebraic literature. It is at moments harsh and austere, of a passionate intensity, or it has Oriental grace and languor.[62]

The "passionate intensity," now part of Hebraic expression, as well as the Oriental flavor, were not only acceptable in a Jewish composer, but welcomed as revolutionary novelties. The title *Trois Poèmes Juifs* helped in no small degree. Soon more pieces from the "Jewish cycle" were programmed. On 3 May the "Friends of Music" featured a whole concert of Bloch's Jewish music at Carnegie Hall. For this Bloch was called upon to write program notes and give interviews—in short, to formulate and propagate his aesthetic principles.

In no more than a year the myth that Bloch's music expressed his racial heritage had become a solidly laid foundation for what promised to be a great career. As Suzanne Bloch remembers, "Bloch's rhapsodic statements about his music were printed everywhere, and unfortunately created the impression that he specialized only in Hebraic music."[63] According to Suzanne, "Bloch did not foresee these misconceptions until after his return from Europe with his family to settle in New York in the fall of 1917."[64] But was Bloch really so innocent in the dissemination of his fame as the greatest Jewish composer? If we read closely his much-quoted declarations, we find a more calculated effort to create a personal space for himself than the image of Bloch as a spontaneously passionate and rhapsodic personality might allow.

Soon after his arrival in New York in 1916 Bloch wrote:

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62. Olin Downes, "Three Boston Premieres for Bloch," quoted in *Olin Downes on Music: A Selection from his Writing during the Half-Century 1906 to 1955*, ed. Irene Downes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 57.
63. Suzanne Bloch, "Ernest Bloch," 21.
64. *Ibid.*

> It is my conception of Jewish music, *my* interpretation, and because I felt it deep within me clamoring for release, I expressed it. Artistic affiliations I have none, I hope. [65]

The most frequently quoted declaration of Bloch's Jewishness came a year later. It originated in the program notes of the Boston premiere of the *Trois Poèmes Juifs*. Now in one respect Bloch was more precise—he carefully positioned himself outside any of the Jewish national schools. But in another respect he was also more vague—his expression of the "Hebrew spirit" left Bloch free in terms of musical specifics (or at least so he thought in 1917):

> I do not propose or desire to attempt a reconstruction of the music of the Jews, and to base my works on melodies more or less authentic. I am no archeologist. I believe that the most important thing is to write good and sincere music—*my own* music. It is rather the Hebrew spirit that interests me—the complex, ardent, agitated soul that vibrates for me in the Bible; the vigor and ingenuousness of the Patriarchs, the violence that finds expression in the books of the Prophets, the burning love of justice, the desperation of the preachers of Jerusalem, the sorrow and grandeur of the book of Job, the sensuality of the Song of Songs. All this is in us, all this is in me, and is the better part of me. This is what I seek to feel within me and to translate in my music—the sacred race-emotion that lies dormant in our souls.[66]

The main points can be summarized easily: the moral obligation and the inevitability of expressing one's own race in music; the possibility of presenting race without any specific reference like folk music; the spiritual force of such an expression; and the individuality of the composer who nevertheless represents the most ancient tradition that subconsciously breaks through his personal style and, paradoxically, lends it its personality.

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65. Bernard Rogers, "Swiss Composer's Aim: To Sing Himself," *Musical America* (12 August 1916). Quoted by David Z. Kushner, "A Commentary on Ernest Bloch's Symphonic Works," *The Redford Review* 23 (September 1967): 108.
66. Quoted in Gatti, "Ernest Bloch," 27.

Bloch's use of the elusive term "Hebrew spirit" obliquely answers the question of what kind of music truly represents Judaism. With this shift of emphasis Bloch believed he might obviate questions about his past as well as provide artistic freedom for himself in the future. But just as his past could easily be used to contradict the notion of the "subconscious" outburst of his racial inheritance, his future freedom was curtailed by the stereotype of a composer whose "subconscious" creation cannot escape racial expression.

In an article entitled "The Jewishness of Bloch: Subconscious or Conscious?"[67] Alexander Knapp distinguishes between "direct quotations," "motivic references," and "general traits" in Bloch's music, the "general traits" serving as the "subconscious" layer of Bloch's Jewishness. Knapp succeeds in identifying what he considers ten quotations in Bloch's music. The beginning of the middle section of *Schelomo* is closely related to the *Magen 'Abot* mode; the "Three Pictures of Chassidic Life" contains a quotation from a Yiddish wedding song called "Dee Mezinke Oisgegayben" (I've Given Away my Youngest Daughter); the *Abodach* is a close transcription of the chant *V'ha Kohanim* sung on the Day of Atonement; and the *Tzur Yisroel* (Rock of Israel) from the *Sacred Service* is written in the *'Ahabah Rabbah* mode. Furthermore the *Suite Hébraïque* for viola or violin and orchestra, written in 1951 for a Jewish organization (Chicago Covenant Club), uses five Hebrew themes that Bloch had copied from *The Jewish Encyclopedia* with the intention of using them as possible leitmotifs in his uncompleted opera "Jézabel."[68] To this list Albert Weisser adds the "Nigun" from the *Baal Shem Suite,* which he con-

67. Alexander Knapp, "The Jewishness of Bloch: Subconscious or Conscious?," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 97 (1970-71): 99-112.
68. *Ibid.*, 104-06.

nects to Chassidic music.[69] In Knapp's presentation this group represents the "conscious" side of Bloch's Jewishness.

The discussion of "general traits" that express "the quintessence of Jewish emotion" is quite close to Bloch's own use of the notion of "Hebrew spirit." For Knapp this "spirit" presents itself unconsciously in the "rhapsodic idiom," "emotional intensity," and "immense subjectivity" of Bloch's music. But Knapp also puts stylistic elements such as the frequent use of fourths and fifths at cadences and the augmented seconds and fourths into the "subconscious" category. A strange category, this, for it is rare that fourths, fifths, or augmented seconds are products solely of the subconscious.

More interesting than tracing quotations in Bloch's music is observing the fate of this self-made Jewish composer in the United States, seemingly a rich market for this kind of "spiritually Jewish" music. Again the parable of Calvino's Edmond Dantes comes to mind. As Dantes fabricated the idea of the perfect prison in order to find a way out of the real one and then became stuck in his mental creation, Bloch also remained a captive of his self-constructed idiom, a prisoner for life, in whose music the Jewish spirit could never be silenced, at least not for his critics.[70]

It is with this parable in mind that we might best investigate Bloch's attempts to escape, first by writing demon-

69. Albert Weisser, "Review of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1971-73)," *Musica Judaica* 1, no. 1 (1975-76): 90.

70. By the 1950s Bloch was well aware that his critics read Jewish motives into his works. Reporting on the progress of a work written to the memory of Ada Clement he writes: "This may amuse you! I discovered that the initial motif—in the Basses—before the horn gives the C[antus] F[irmus], which comes later, tormented, 3 meas[ures] before 3, and in major, and 5, is a fragment of Gregorian Chant, which Josquin d. P. used in his Mass "La, sol, fa, re, mi"! I will find the Greg. Mass and tell you where it is!—Surely they will say it is 'Jewish'!!!!" Bloch's letter to Lillian Hodgehead, 24 December 1952 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

strably non-Jewish works such as *America,* and then by fabricating a new category, that of universality, in which everything could be reconciled and dissolved into a non-specific, pan-human expression.

Striving toward Universality: The Sacred Service

In 1925 Bloch described the "tragic story" of his *Israel Symphony* to Ada Clement and Lillian Hodgehead, two faithful confidantes in San Francisco. He considered the incompleteness of this work to be a symbol of his miserable situation as a great composer who, lacking the necessary support, could never accomplish the great work that would save humanity.

> As nobody is helping me—They finance little Jewish violinists, but never a creative man!!—and nobody will help me, I have to struggle to liberate me [*sic*] alone! Perhaps I may do it, in 3, 4, 5 years hard work. Then I will be 50, old, worn out, disgusted, or dead, or insane.
>
> Well! I shall have done my best. I will not be the *loser.* Humanity *will be.* Not *my* fault.
>
> But they are too *stupid* to understand![71]

More significant than Bloch's complaints, a recurring theme in the composer's correspondence, is the idea that was supposed to bring this symphony to its completion:

> Israel?
>
> A sad story.
>
> I started [it] in *1912* —I wanted to write a *synthesis* of the Jewish soul—I thought first of characterizing it with *Jewish festivities,* the great religious Feasts, embodying all the souls of Israel....
>
> This was meant to be *the 1st part of Israël....*
>
> The *second Part* has *not* been written.
>
> There was going to be a kind of *Scherzo,* showing the "sales juifs," [nasty Jews] the renegate [*sic*], the parvenus, the disgrace of

71. Bloch's letter to Lillian Hodgehead and Ada Clement, 23 April 1925 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

Israël, the ones who have sacrificed to *False Gods*. The last movement (conceived in 1912-1914) and of which I have sketches, was meant to signify: "next year in Jerusalem"—but in a *Symbolic* sense. The triumph of *Truth* and *Justice* and *Peace* on *Earth*. At the end, the Bass would...proclaim a *Credo* embodying my ideas of Judaism, of Humanity: "Here *ends* Israel...but here *begins* the realization of its *ideals*, which are those of *all humanity*, according to the great prophets!" proclaiming the *Unity* of Humanity, and a chorus would have sung an hymn of Peace and Love.

In *1914*, I *could* not write these words! The tragedy was too terrible. All faith in Humanity was gone. The War! I thought—*after* the war.

Alas! After the war came the Peace, 50 times worse than the War....

Then, slowly came [an] idea, for the end. And it is going to be...a Mass. Yes a catholic, but symbolical, universal Mass!

...This Mass, which would bring my excommunication from among the Jews, the Protestants, the Catholics, would be a tremendous thing. The text of the Mass combines the whole philosophy of Life—The Kyrie would embody all the sufferings of man, since the beginning of the world—The struggles in the Darkness! The appeals to God... I would use Jewish motives, Protestant Chorales, Gregorian chant!

The Crucifixus will not mean Christ only, but all those who have suffered and been crucified by man's insanity, stupidity, cruelty. And the Resurrexit! and the Dona nobis Pacem!

Then I could realize my whole Philosophy of Life and Thought. Shall I ever be able to do it?[72]

The idea of writing a Catholic mass that would incorporate Gregorian chant, Protestant chorales, and Hebrew psalmody also appears independently of the *Israel Symphony*. This universal mixture, Bloch believed, would shake off the label of "Jewish composer" that by 1925 had become a stigma that hampered Bloch's desire for the status of universal composer: "[The Mass] will destroy the legend that I am a 'Jewish composer'."[73]

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72. *Ibid.*

73. "Il faudra décidément que j'écrire ma Messe! (avec sa mélange de Chant Grégorien, de Chorals protestant et de psalmodie Juive—une Messe symbolique, vivante, humaine, universelle). Elle détruira la légende qui m'entendre 'compositeur juif'." Bloch's letter to Lillian Hodgehead and Ada Clement, 14 January 1925 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

Instead of the Mass, however, he composed *America,* a piece that won him first prize in a competition sponsored by *Musical America.* The critics, however, were not so unanimously enthusiastic. While nobody had protested when Bloch declared that his Jewish works expressed the Hebrew soul, his desire to reflect the spirit and the idea of the American nation in this symphonic rhapsody generated mixed feelings in his adopted country. The final hymn that the composer had written in the desire to create a new national anthem was called commonplace, and the whole composition was criticized for its "doubtful cohesion and unity,"[74] "ranging from the sublime to the ignoble."[75] In other words, Bloch's "elaborately manufactured Americanism"[76] remained unconvincing.

No doubt offended national pride had an important role in the inimical reception of Bloch's *America.* But Bloch's reputation as the composer through whose works the ancient racial spirit of the Jews was communicated to all mankind was equally responsible for *America's* failure. In a 1947 essay on Bloch's late works Dika Newlin felt obliged to explain the failure of Bloch's noble intent in *America* on the basis of Bloch's own statements. Although her article incited Bloch's anger,[77] the argument by which she admitted the composer's failure, but at the same time tried to save a certain image of Bloch, is still worth quoting. Here, in *America,* Newlin argued, Bloch was unfaithful to his own principles

74. Oscar Thomson's criticism in *The Evening Post* is quoted in *Musical America* (29 December 1928): 7.
75. Richard Stokes in *The Evening World, ibid.,* 8.
76. Irving Weil in *The Journal, ibid.*
77. Bloch had this to say about Newlin's analysis: "After 25 years of complete silence about me, the 'Quarterly' published a study (?) which pretends to be technical (!) and shows the total ignorance and stupidity of the so called musicologists! Even the musical examples are appalling! I was itching to answer, to correct these imbecilities, but what is the use!" Bloch's letter to Ada Clement and Lillian Hodgehead, 14 November 1947 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

by trying to reconstruct the music of a nation, in other words by becoming an archeologist. He succumbed to using "specific citations which are meant to illustrate specific life-situations."[78] Specificity was not acceptable from the composer of the racial spirit. Bloch's only work intended to be nationalistic with respect to an actual fatherland did not prove effective in washing off the label "Jewish composer."

The work in which Bloch aspired most explicitly to achieve universality was, curiously enough, the only composition that he wrote to a Jewish liturgical text, his *Avodath Hakodesh* (Sacred Service). The idea for the commission came from Reuben R. Rinder, cantor of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco and founder of the Society for the Advancement of Synagogue Music, but the $10,000 honorarium intended to draw "one of the greatest musical geniuses of our time into the field of liturgical music"[79] came from Gerald Warburg, son of banker-philanthropist Felix M. Warburg, cited by the *Encyclopedia Judaica* as one of the three most "elite" figures in New York's Jewish community.[80]

Bloch accepted the commission and, with a $2,000 advance in hand, he moved to the Swiss-Italian border for the peace of mind needed for working on such a grandiose project. He sent regular and long reports to Rinder about his progress, letters that Rinder had typed and later used in his lectures and articles on the composer. Under the guidance of Rinder, and later by himself, Bloch started to learn and interpret the Hebrew text of the Sabbath morning service, taken from the *Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship*, the official prayer book of North American Reform Synagogues.

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78. Dika Newlin, "The Later Works of Ernest Bloch," *Musical Quarterly* 33 (October 1947): 454.
79. "Sets New Music to Jewish Service. Ernest Bloch, in Switzerland, is Composing Liturgic Harmony for Use in Synagogues." *New York Times*, Sunday, 19 October 1930.
80. *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1971-72), 1115.

Bloch patiently memorized the Hebrew and English text, recited it to himself, and absorbed it until he had fully internalized it, until the words of the Jewish service became the text that he "always wanted to express, since [his] youth."[81] Gradually the task of writing a Jewish service was transformed into the realization of Bloch's dream of the universal Mass that he had wanted to write as the ending of the *Israel Symphony.* "Of course, I will write a *service,* as I said, for a Reform synagogue Service," he assured Rinder, but he also felt that

> such a text [is] too big for one conception.... It becomes imperious [*sic*] for me to give such [a] Poem a larger and still more elaborate Form.— And it will become a huge *Cosmic Poem* for Orchestra, Cantor, and chorus (containing naturally the whole Service as it will exist for the Synagogue, but with orchestral interludes which will replace the "words" spoken.)[82]

Bloch's first concern was the lack of unity he found in musical settings of the service Rinder had shown him as models.

> They were only small fragments, unrelated arias, recitations, choirs, with no connection, no nervous system, no circulatory system, no directing brains in them.[83]

Rinder approved the unity Bloch wanted to achieve in his *Service* not only as the composer's requirement for a work of art but also as the basis of Jewish religion. In the margin of Bloch's letter Rinder interpreted the composer's intention: the "central theme [is] Monotheism."[84]

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81. Bloch's letter to Rinder, 8 September 1930 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).
82. *Ibid.*
83. Bloch's letter to Rinder, 26 November 1930 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).
84. Rinder's typescript of Bloch's letter, 26 November 1930 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

Bloch's "central theme" was, however, not tightly bound to any religion. On 12 September 1930 he declared to Lillian Hodgehead that the work "far surpasses a 'Jewish service,' ...it has become a cosmic poem, a glorification of the laws of the universe."[85] Bloch proclaimed that he wrote it not "for the Jews—who probably will fight it—nor the critics!," but for himself. The work "has become a 'private affair' between God and me."[86] When Warburg, due to financial difficulties, postponed the payment for the work, Bloch interpreted Warburg's hesitation as justification of his misgivings about future Jewish reception. Otherwise refusing to admit that he had a material interest in artistic creation, Bloch now became furious. "If the *Jews* do not *pay* for it, as they promised, *they* shall *not* have it. *Humanity, yes.* They deserve a little lesson, anyhow, the Jews,"[87] he grumbled. To show that his fury was not in any way caused by financial disappointment, he assured his friends who were passionately interested in the new Communist enterprise in Soviet Russia that

> If I were in S[oviet] Russia, I would *give* it, naturally!! Only they would have to change *the words!* and put all what was *inside* of me, the real, true, deep human philosophy—much greater than a "Jewish service."[88]

But even without the Jewish text, Soviet Russia in the 1930s, as Bloch himself soon realized,[89] would hardly have been the best place for the unconstrained expression of the *Service*'s universal, "deep human philosophy." It would

85. Bloch's letter to Lillian Hodgehead, 12 September 1930 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).
86. *Ibid.*
87. Bloch's letter to Lillian Hodgehead and Ada Clement, 7 January 1933 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).
88. *Ibid.*
89. Bloch's correspondence in the 1930s shows that apart from his first enthusiasm he always kept a sober distance from the politics of Soviet Russia.

also have been hard to find another text since the tight structure Bloch constructed for his composition was intimately tied to the religious service. As demonstrated in table 1, recurring words or ideas recall the same or similar musical material and thus create a text-inspired musical structure.

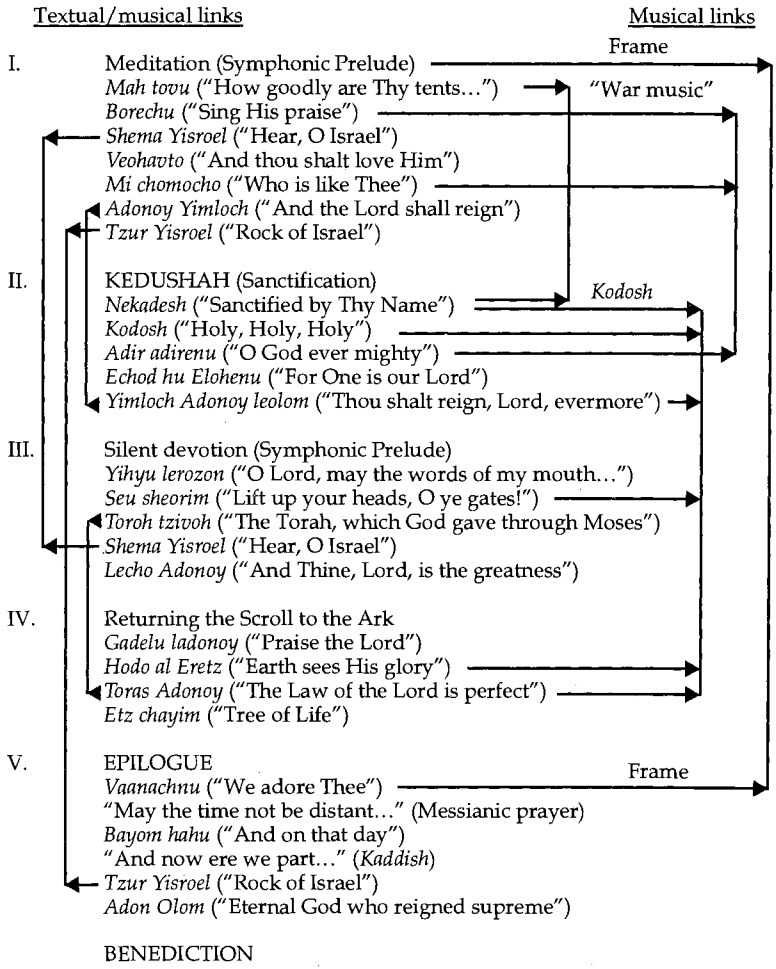
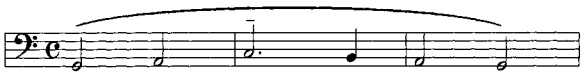


Table 1. Structure of words and music in Bloch's *Sacred Service.*

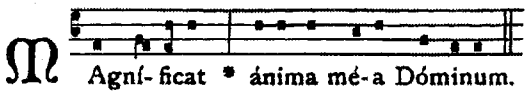
Bloch brings back the music of *Shema Yisroel* (Hear, O Israel) from part one with the *Shema* of part three; he recalls the mechanical ostinato figure that accompanies the *Adonoy Yimloch* (the Lord shall reign) in the first part when the text *Yimloch Adonoy leolom* (Thou shalt reign, Lord, evermore) appears as the closing section of part two; and he brings back the melody and the text of *Tzur Yisroel* (Rock of Israel) from the conclusion of part one in the *Kaddish* of part five. References to the Law in the text—*Toroh Tzivoh* in the third and *Toras Adonoy* in the fourth part—also recall similar musical characteristics and thus create a musical link between the two parts.

Structural ties inspired by the text, however, did not satisfy Bloch's desire to transform the *Service* into an abstract, organic unit. In order to give musical as well as spiritual unity to the *Service* Bloch built the whole work on an abstract musical idea, a single motive. A revival of old *cantus firmus* technique on the one hand, Bloch's idea is also a maximalization of Wagnerian leitmotif technique, which provides the unifying power appropriate to a large-scale work. But in its maximalization Bloch's leitmotif technique also becomes an extreme simplification of the Wagnerian idea. Bloch, in order to express in music an unadulterated ideal, an "essence" that permeates the entire composition, makes the presence of his single leitmotif almost didactically obvious in the *Service*. There are hardly any portions of this fifty-minute composition in which Bloch relieves his listeners from this mark of unity that labels expressively different parts of the *Service* as belonging to fundamentally the same idea.

Indeed, Bloch's leitmotif is universal, so much so that one is tempted to call it a musical *locus communis*, or if we connect it to religious topoi, a musical *locus oecumenicus* (examples 1a-g). To start with, this six-note figure is a



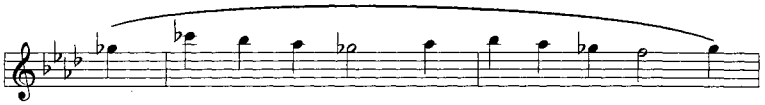
Example 1a. The leitmotif of the *Sacred Service.*



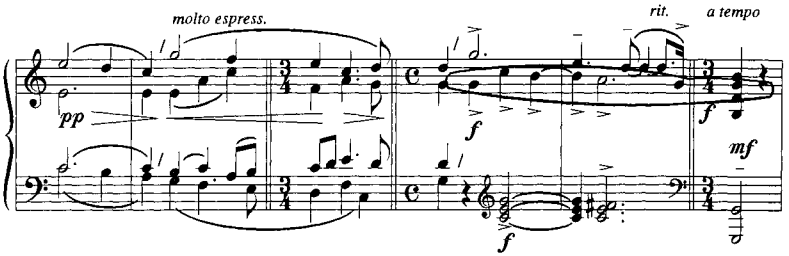
Example 1b. First line of the Gregorian *Magnificat.*

Example 1c. The motto of the Finale of Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony.

Example 1d. "Grail" motive in Wagner's *Parsifal.*



Example 1e. The motive of "faith" in Wagner's *Parsifal.*



Example 1f. Version "e" of the motive at the final "Amen" of the *Service* (rehearsal number 95).

Example 1g. *Adonoy-Moloch* mode.

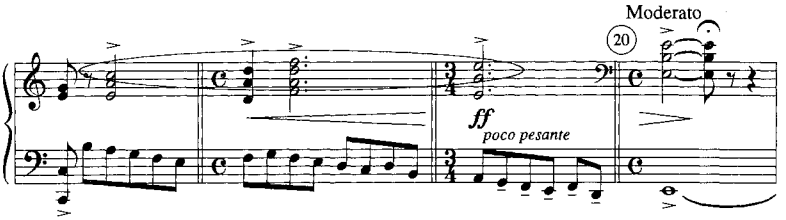
simplified version of the beginning of the eighth-mode Gregorian Magnificat melody, an association whose presence Bloch justified by relocating the melody's origin to the old synagogue in Jerusalem[90] (examples 1a-b). Saminsky connects the first four notes of this Magnificat melody (and with it Bloch's motive) to the emblem of the Finale of Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony*[91] (example 1c). The motive is also closely related to the "Grail" motive and, with the omission of one note, to the motive of "faith" in Wagner's *Parsifal,* reminiscences of which lend the *Service* its air of grandiose mysticism[92] (examples 1d-e). The first five notes of the "e" version, highlighted by the first horn and second trumpet, appear most explicitly at the final "Amen" of the *Service* (example 1f). The Mixolydian mode of the motive might also be connected to the *Adonoy-Moloch* mode that constitutes a considerable number of Jewish liturgical songs (example 1g). It is doubtful, however, whether Bloch was aware of this Jewish component of his "universality."

Bloch's universal motive takes on several different roles. Its contrapuntal elaboration in the symphonic prelude at the beginning of the *Service* establishes the modal character of the composition. Its appearance also functions as a structural device: framing sections, as for example in *Mah tovu* (How goodly), helping transitions, or fulfilling both roles at once as in the symphonic interlude that accompanies the "Silent Devotion" (rehearsal number 44). It permeates the vocal and instrumental parts equally, both as fragmentary references (example 2a) and forceful *cantus*

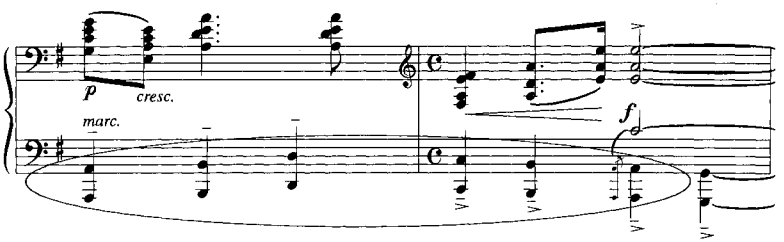
90. "...a kind of Jewish Magnificat which, though using my initial motive, is curiously related to the Magnificat of the Gregorian Chant—very, most probably, originating from our old Synagogue in Jerusalem! and which I will restore to Us!!" Bloch's letter to Rinder, 26 November 1930 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

91. Saminsky, *Music of the Ghetto and the Bible,* 176.

92. Bloch heard rehearsals of *Parsifal* in Bologna during his Italian sojourn in the fall of 1931. See Bloch's letter to Ada Clement and Lillian Hodgehead, 25 October 1931 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).



Example 2a. Fragmentary reference to the leitmotif in *Mi chomocho* (rehearsal number 20).

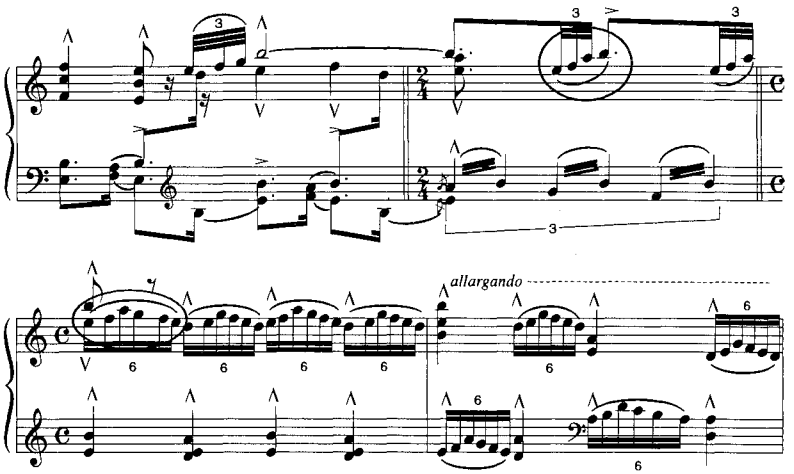


Example 2b. The leitmotif as forceful *cantus firmus* in *Seu sheorim* (6 mm. before rehearsal number 42).

firmi in the bass (example 2b). Its recognizable fragments appear as ornamentation (example 2c), and threateningly mechanical ostinatos (examples 2d and 2e). Its authoritative voice dominates both peaceful and triumphant endings (examples 2f and 2g).

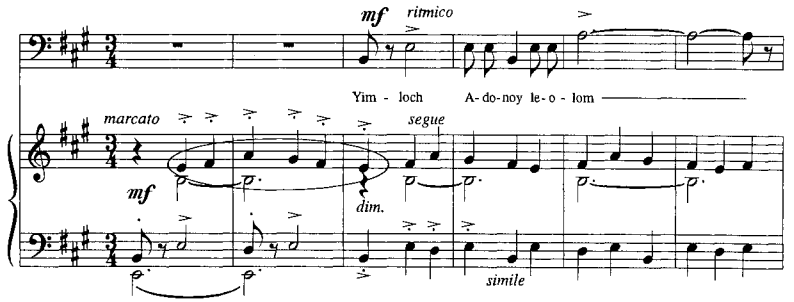
Besides its Mixolydian, Dorian, and Phrygian incarnations, the *Service*'s leitmotif also has a form that Bloch called "oriental."[93] This chromatic version accompanies the *Kaddish*, the mourners' prayer in the last part of the *Service*.[94] The transposition of the motive by a tritone results in an octatonic set, a musical device that for Russian

93. "My initial motive comes 'misterioso' and in a completely different key and 'oriental mode' in the basses." Bloch's letter to Rinder, 5 March 1931 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).
94. The *Kaddish* is an Aramaic prayer in praise of God; it is also the prayer said in memory of the dead.



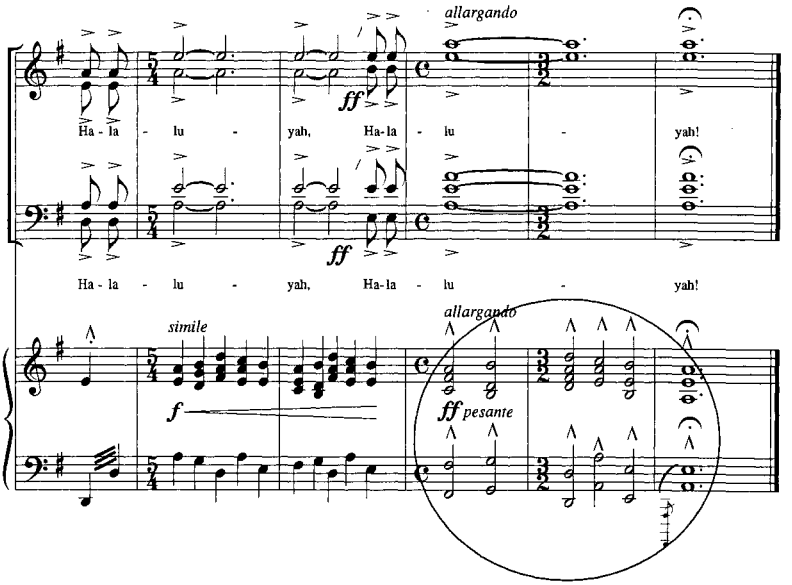
Example 2c. The leitmotif as ornamentation in *Borechu* (3 mm. after rehearsal number 10).

Example 2d. The leitmotif as ostinato in *Adonoy Yimloch* (rehearsal number 21).



Example 2e. The leitmotif as ostinato in *Yimloch Adonoy* (rehearsal number 32).

Example 2f. The peaceful ending of *Etz Chayim*.



Example 2g. The triumphant ending of *Yimloch Adonoy*.

Example 3. The "oriental" version of the motive (with tritone transposition).

composers signified the oriental "other" (example 3). This oriental version foreshadows the return of the *Tzur Yisroel* melody that Bloch brought back in the last part to accompany the original Aramaic recitation of the *Kaddish* prayer.

Tzur Yisroel is the only "traditional" melody in the *Service*. Bloch received the melody from Rinder, who, according to his wife, set the *Tzur Yisroel* himself in the *Ahavah Rabbah* mode.[95] Ironically the presence of Rinder's setting in the *Service* was taken as proof of the authenticity of Bloch's Jewish inspiration.[96] The *Ahavah Rabbah* mode, however, does not represent an ancient layer of synagogue music, for it is missing from the Biblical modes. Because of its extreme oriental flavor this mode was the first target of Reform Judaism's attempt at purification.

Indeed, the *Tzur Yisroel* melody stands apart even in Bloch's *Service*, since its melody resists being assimilated to

95. Rosa Rinder, *Music, Prayer, and Religious Leadership, Temple Emanu-El, 1913-1969* (oral history transcript, tape-recorded interview conducted by Malca Chall in 1968-69) (Regents of the University of California, Regional Oral History Office, 1971), 51. Typescript at University of California, Berkeley, Music Library.

96. "When the critics first heard it, they said, 'By this you can tell that Ernest Bloch has a fine Jewish background, a real understanding of Jewish music'." *Ibid.*

the modal language of the rest of the composition. At its two appearances harmonic motion ceases and the chord, built on A in the first part, and on B♭ in the last part of the *Service,* is held for the duration of the melody. The ostensibly Jewish/oriental tone of this melody stands apart from the universal aspirations of Bloch's message. It functions as a reference to something outside of the composition, a citation that does not become part of the fusion of styles intended to carry the universal claim of Bloch's composition. Coupled with the *Kaddish* at its second appearance and thus associated with the service for the dead, the melody of *Tzur Yisroel* also leaves the present tense and submerges into an undefinable past. Indeed, Bloch tried to place it so far back in time that it would lose its Jewish specificity; hence his instruction that the performers must sing it "as a *far distant lamentation* of *all mankind* "[97] (example 4).

During the messianic prayer in part five, which Bloch included at the suggestion of Rinder, there is another quotation, this one from Bloch's own *Schelomo.* In the prayer against whose inclusion Bloch had first rebelled, he later recognized the

> *Key* to the whole service!...a Human *Credo*! The Faith that "it can be done" on Earth—as opposed to Christianity "in the other world."(!!)
>
> Thus I decided to do what I wanted to do at the *End* of Israel.... A preacher was to come, and before the final chorus, proclaim to the *world* these same hopes, and truth, about the *Unity*...of man, of the Universe! Thus, after the *Hakodosh Boruch Hu,* almost immediately, and *during* the symphonic music, the *minister...talks* "May the time not be distant" in a *measured way*....
>
> Of course, *this* will be in *English* (or in *French, German, Italian* etc.—in the language of the country, when performed—which will be very striking and symbolic!
>
> I had to condense and modify a little the text—but very little, in fact—I changed "idolatry" into "fetishism" which is much *stronger*

97. See Bloch's performance indications at the bottom of page 78 of the piano reduction (Boston: C. C. Birchard & Company, 1934).

* "At the Temples, the MINISTER could start here, in Hebrew, the "Kaddish" prayer-- In such case CHORUS and CANTOR must sing all the following till the end of page 80, *ppp, as a far distant lamentation of all mankind.* The Answer to this lamentation, -- this cry for help, -- is then the Adon Olom --"

Example 4. *Tzur Yisroel* in the first and last parts of the *Service* (3 mm. after rehearsal number 23; rehearsal number 76).

> and more general—and truer—for it contains all *forms* of false gods men adore (Law! Money! beliefs in cure-alls, *isms* of all kinds!) I divide this *text* in several parts. When "O may *all men* recognize that they are brethren..." till "for ever united"—which I repeat—"*for ever united* before Thee" comes, I used, in the instrumental part, one of the most beautiful motives of *Schelomo* and at "Then, shall *Thine Kingdom*" a new motive which is from my never finished "*Jeremiah*"!![98]

But why do the quotations from Bloch's Jewish works *Schelomo* and *Jeremiah* appear in a part of the *Service* that strives for a Beethovenian, all-inclusive brotherhood? Seen in terms of Bloch's reinterpretation of the text, one is tempted to see these quotations as an attempt to wash off the Jewish stigma and retroactively elevate these pieces along with the *Service* to Bloch's universal human Credo.

But as the universal amalgam of Bloch's style was incapable of dissolving the traditional melody of *Tzur Yisroel,* other Jewish elements of the *Service* remained similarly unadaptable to all-embracing universality. In Bloch's human universe the most strikingly indissoluble element is God himself. Inside the expressive possibilities of Western musical tradition, Bloch's portrayal of God is remarkably untraditional. Little wonder that in his review of Bloch's new work, *Commentary*'s critic Kurt List singled it out as the most unassimilable Jewish feature of the *Service:*

> by depicting the spirit of the Scriptures, Bloch has created such a uniquely separatist and Jewish world that it becomes radically unassimilable for the Western world.[99]

Although Bloch bitterly rejected List's review,[100] it is hard to refute List's description of the *Service*'s God as the ancient spirit of the Old Testament, whose descendant Bloch so often claimed to be. Not only Bloch's music, but

98. Bloch's letter to Rinder, 5 March 1931 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).
99. Kurt List, "Ernest Bloch's *Sacred Service*: Musically Untraditional, but Authentically Jewish," *Commentary* 10 (December 1950): 589.

even his correspondence during the time of the *Service*'s conception approve the image of a frightening God before whom man is reduced to nothingness. His presence makes man realize his smallness, his ignorance, his nakedness and complete defenselessness. "We do not know anything," Bloch wrote to Rinder,

> about Life, Death, Time, Space, Matter, about all what [*sic*] is *important.*
>
> And thus, we have to bow humbly and accept...and go on...and do our best or what we think deeply, in our conscience, *is* the best...but how *lost* we are, in face of that ultimate Truth![101]

In the *Service* the arrival of this God in *Shema Yisroel* is introduced by bellicose music built on a myriad of repetitions of a Phrygian variant of the leitmotif. The dotted rhythms and the use of brass announce the proximity of a fearsome God (example 5).

Tellingly, the proclamation of the unity of God recalls a sharp dissonance. A B-major triad rubs against A minor under the culminating D♯ of the vocal line (example 6). Although this musical gesture also lends emphasis and serves as the musical symbol of the unification of seemingly irreconcilable harmonies (such as diminished sharp-subdominant seventh combined with the leading tone at one measure before rehearsal number 48; tonic D and dominant A chords at four measures after rehearsal number 71), the sharp dissonance that recurs whenever the text focuses on unity suggests that this unity is not only absolute but frightening (example 7a-b).

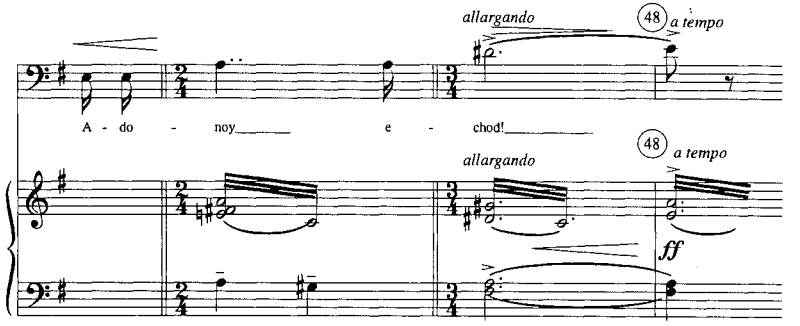
---

100. "I still receive warm echoes from Chicago—It compensates me for the horrible article by Kurt List, in 'Commentary' (Dec. 1950) which they had the nerve and cruelty to send me, even asking for a...commentary! This same magazine had kept Hastings waiting for 3 months, finally refusing to publish his article! They are 'Schoenbergians' and, thus, hate me—I am 'in the way,' apparently." Bloch's letter to Ada Clement and Lillian Hodgehead, 23 December 1950 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

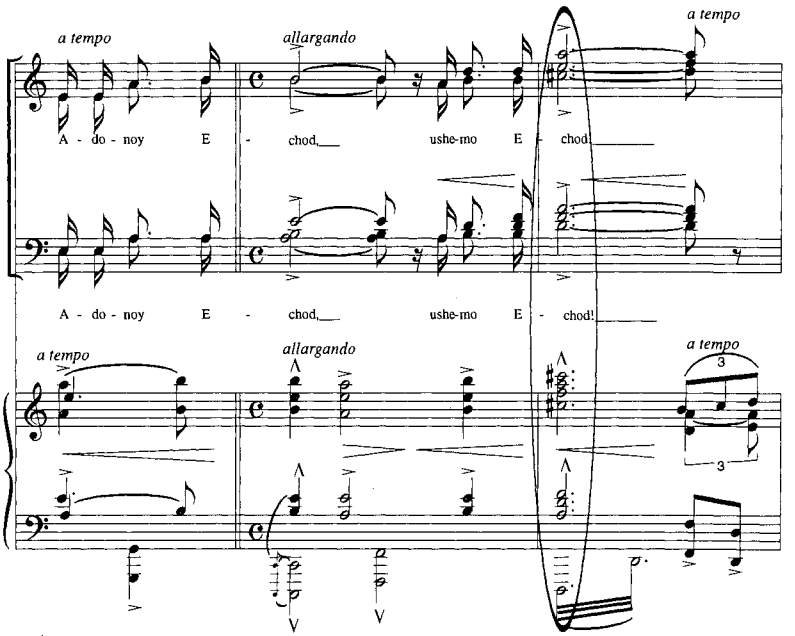
101. Bloch's letter to Rinder, 5 March 1931 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

Example 5. "War music" announces the arrival of a fearsome God in the *Shema*.

Example 6. The dissonant unity of God in the *Shema* (rehearsal number 11).

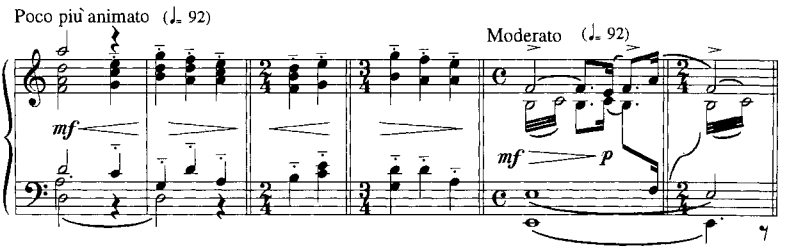


Example 7a. Diminished sharp-subdominant seventh combined with the leading tone (one measure before rehearsal number 48).



Example 7b. Tonic D combined with its dominant (4 mm. after rehearsal number 71).

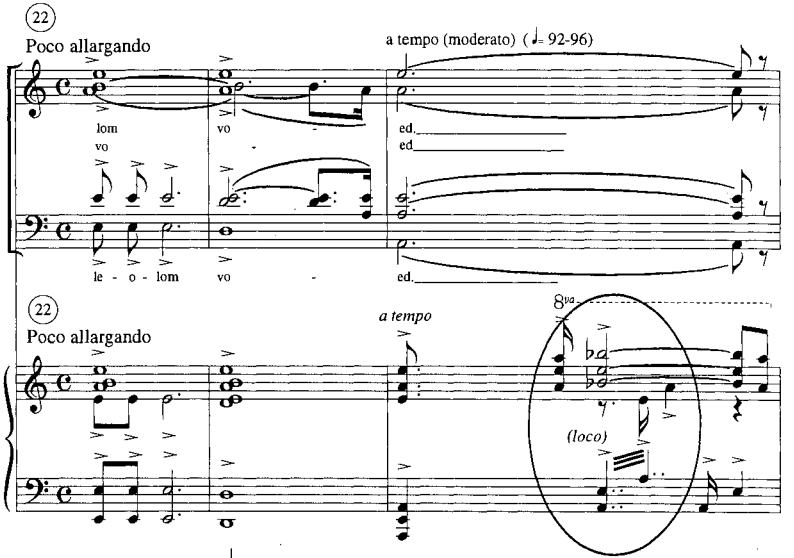
Dissonances and mechanical ostinato patterns are equally connected to the music of Bloch's frightening God. The two-measure orchestral transition that leads to *Mi chomocho* (Who is like Thee) brings back the "war music" of the *Shema,* now transposed a fifth higher (rehearsal number 18). The same music comes back also before *Echod hu Elohenu* (For One is our Lord) in the second part of the *Service.* But there its character changes; it comes softly, as a slight reference to the God of the wars (example 8).



Example 8. "War music" before *Echod hu Elohenu.*

Example 9. Ostinato figure in *Mi chomocho.*

Bloch evokes a similar image through the use of the figure that accompanies the *Mi chomocho* chorus's rigid rhythmic motion, which is built on a four-note segment of a Phrygian pentachord pattern (B-C-E-F♯) (example 9). Another recurrence of a mechanical ostinato based on Phrygian melodic fragments accompanies the *Adonoy Yimloch* (And the Lord shall reign) section. The *fortissimo* ending of this part culminates in a dissonant B♭ opposed to the fifth A-E (example 10).



Example 10. B♭ opposed to A-E at the end of *Adonoy Yimloch.*

It is hard to argue with List that this music might be interpreted as the musical image of a strict and avenging God that is not clearly separated from the depiction of the inexplicable universe over which He reigns. Still, Bloch's representation of this God carries more human concerns. What his music communicates most is Bloch's anxiety in the face of this unknown, terrible thing, be it God, the Universe, or anything existing outside of human control—a God whose infinite being makes humans realize their finite existence, their mortality. That is why the closeness of this God awakens fear, and the music's dissonance signals not only the religious concept of God's unity with Himself but also the contrast between His eternity and humans' ephemerality.

Although the *Service*'s ritual contains an invocation of death in the form of the *Kaddish,* Bloch also drew the conclusion of the fifth part, the medieval poem *Adon Olom,* into the realm of death. In the program notes written for the *Service*'s New York performance in 1934 he stated:

> I interpreted the last strophe, *"Beyodo afkin ruchi":*
> "Into His hand I commit my spirit
> And with my spirit, my body.
> The Lord is with me—
> I shall not fear"
> by the idea of Death—accepted death—as accepted Life—with serenity, confidence and the conviction that man is too small, too limited, imprisoned in the narrow wall of his senses, to be able to understand the Infinite, the Absolute.[102]

In Bloch's interpretation death and its liberating acceptance are both present in *Adon Olom.* The music of *Adon Olom,* however, does not spell out the fear of death. Besides *Tzur Yisroel, Adon Olom* is the only part of the *Service* in which the motive that represented the assuring presence of an undefinable essence of the world is repressed until its

102. Bloch's program notes to the New York performance of the *Sacred Service* (Schola Cantorum, 25th season, 1933-34, 11 April 1934), 9.

purified version appears at the very end. Still, this chorus "out of time, out of space"[103] is tightly linked to Bloch's vision of God. In the "primitive, wild, primeval"[104] atmosphere of *Adon Olom* Bloch completed and reformulated his ideas about unity, progressing toward a human aspect of it—the unity of life and death—thus leaving the religious spheres of God.

But before the music takes its more human shape,[105] Bloch invokes again the fearsome God of the universe. Here the "war music" that announced the arrival of God before the first *Shema* and the dissonances that marked God's unity with himself fuse into what Bloch heard as the music of the infinite cosmos,

> hoarse sounds, coming through the Ether, from inhuman voices, thousands of years back...before the Earth existed...or was only fire—or gas—or nebula![106]

The section preceding *Adon Olom* ends with a pianissimo invocation of the "war music" (example 11). B♭ and then A♭ in the bass grate against the D-A fifth of the upper voices to create dissonant harmonies already familiar from the chords Bloch used to represent the unity of God. In the instrumental introduction of *Adon Olom* Bloch uses a similar

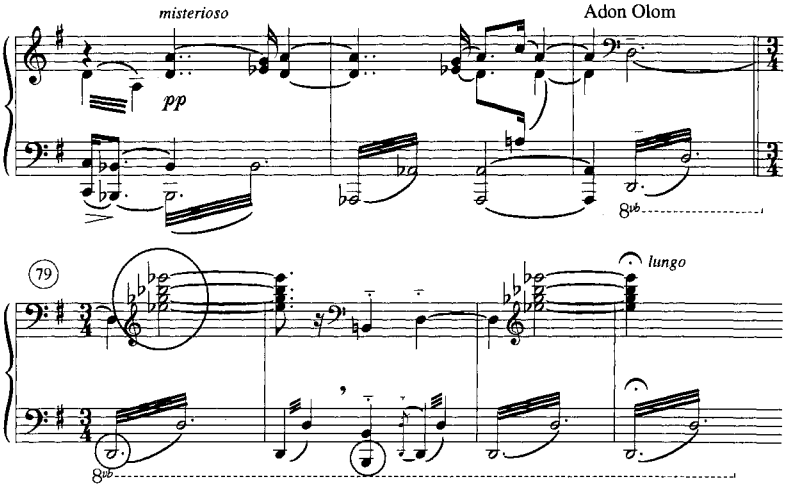
---

103. *Ibid.*

104. "I am attempting once more the final chorus, which is so terribly difficult to me.... Every note counts! The whole work is so clear, so simple, so diatonic and tonal that the slightest 'impropriety' is felt! and now I have to deal with such a primitive, wild, 'primeval' atmosphere that it is extremely hard to create it, in itself, and however in style with the rest." Bloch's letter to Ada Clement, 1 March 1932 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

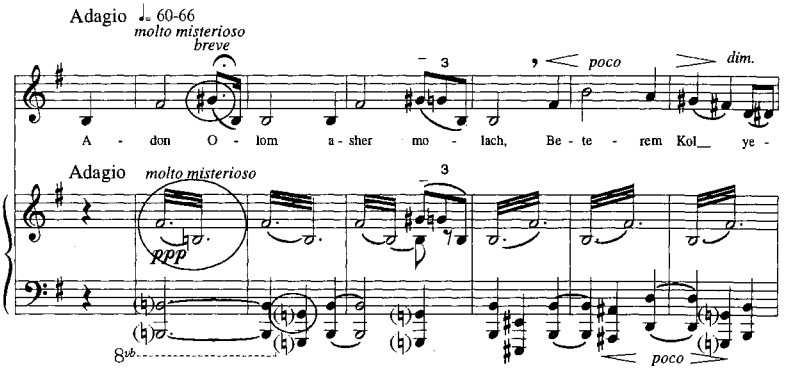
105. "The two last strophes are quite different—no more Cosmos, but Earth and Man—The microcosm, after the macrocosm—It is God leaning towards man—as the Jehovah of the Cosmos.... And in the last strophe, it is man toward God—." Bloch's letter to Rinder, 26 November 1930 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

106. Bloch's letter to Ada Clement, 3 May 1931 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).



Example 11. Pianissimo invocation of the "war music" before the *Adon Olom* (3 mm. before rehearsal number 79) and D-B pedal opposing the E♭ minor chord of the upper strings and woodwinds (rehearsal number 79).

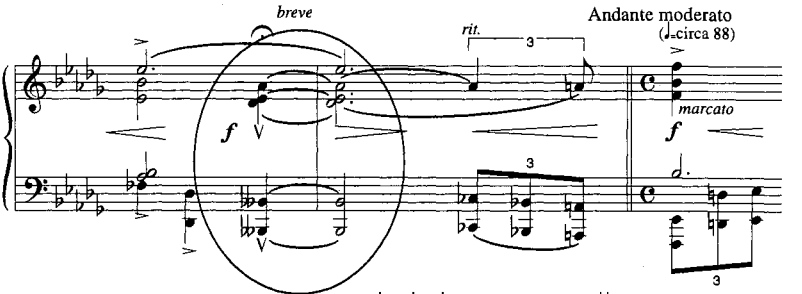
technique (continuation of example 11). In the bass a D pedal, alternating with B, generates dissonance against the E♭ minor chord of the upper strings and woodwinds. When the unison chorus enters, the pedal shifts to B, now alternating mainly with G. This G stands against the accompanying fifth B-F♯. The melody not only circles around the same fifth, but by introducing the G♯, it produces more tension between melody and its bass (example 12).



Example 12. G in the bass opposing the fifth B-F♯ and the G♯ in the melody (5 mm. after rehearsal number 79).

In the corresponding measures that precede the second strophe ("Veacharey kichlos" [And after this, if chaos comes]) the double pedal B-G stands in conflict first with a pianissimo C-minor triad and then with a climactic augmented chord built on F♯ (example 13). The text at the culmination point of this strophe alludes again to the concept of unity ("vehu hoveh, vehu yih'yeh" [and One He is, and One shall be]) thus adumbrating the main idea of the third strophe. At the end of the second strophe the dissonance emphasized by a fermata under the syllable "yeh" ("yih'yeh" [he will be]) consists of two fifths (D♭-A♭-E♭) and a B♭♭ in the bass (example 14).

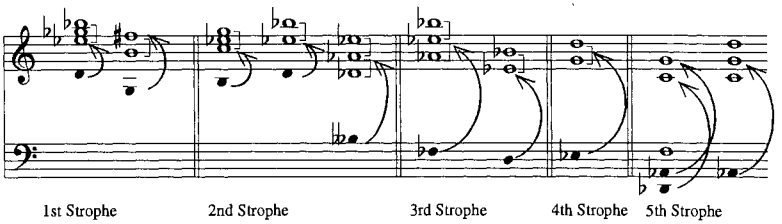
Example 13. Double pedal B-G in conflict with a C-minor triad and an augmented chord built on F♯ (rehearsal numbers 81 and 82).



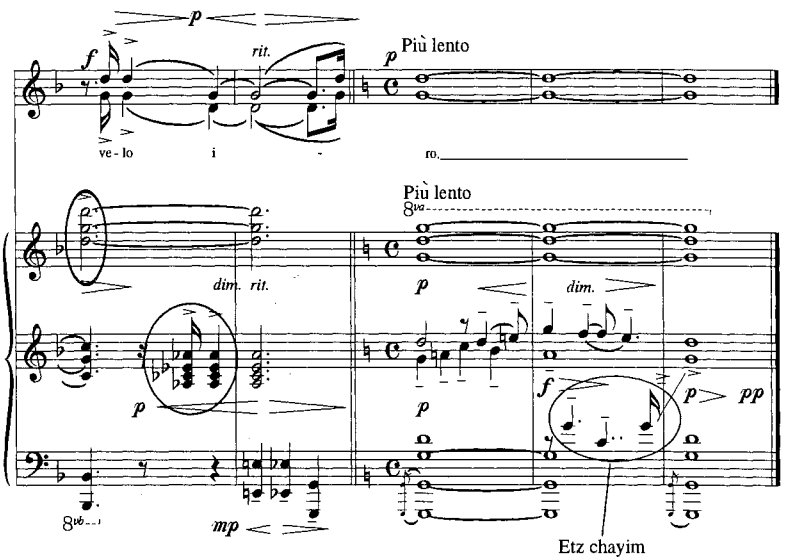
Example 14. The two fifths (D♭-A♭-E♭) opposing a B♭♭ in the bass (4 mm. before rehearsal number 84).

Similar combinations of perfect fifths and minor seconds against either component of the fifth characterize Bloch's musical language throughout the five strophes of *Adon Olom* (example 15). The last dissonance before the final, purified appearance of the *Service*'s leitmotif is a fifth G-D in the chorus and orchestra opposed by an A♭ minor triad in the horns (example 16).

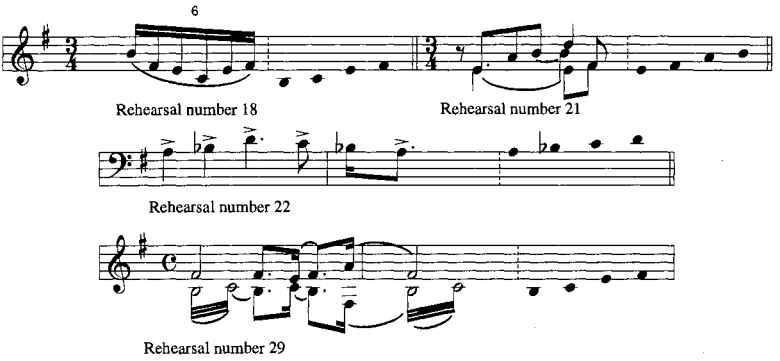
But it is not merely the dissonant sound that creates an intimate connection between the harmonies of *Adon Olom* and the music of the *Shema*. Stretched out as a melody, most



Example 15. Combinations of perfect fifths and minor seconds against either component of the fifth in the *Adon Olom*.



Example 16. G-D fifth opposed by an A♭ minor triad (3 mm. after rehearsal number 93).

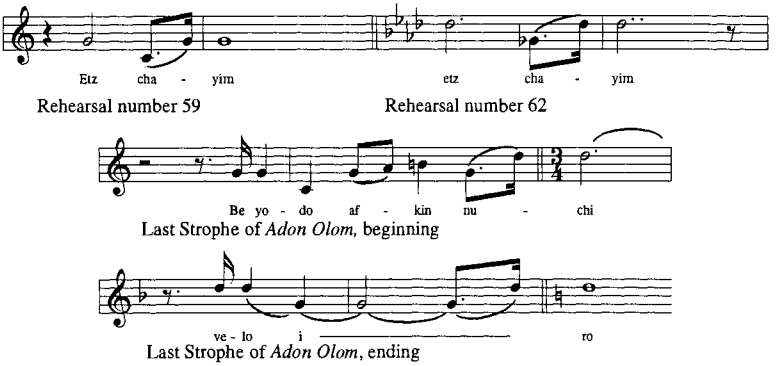


Example 17. Phrygian versions of the leitmotif.

of these harmonies reveal themselves as variations of the Phrygian version of the leitmotif, which preceded *Shema* and then accompanied *Mi chomocho* (2 mm. after rehearsal number 18) and *Adonay Yimloch* (rehearsal numbers 21 and 22) and emerged several times as reference to the "war music" (example 17). The Phrygian versions of the leitmotif and their related harmonies are connected to the idea of God's otherness, a space in the universe he occupies and which scares human beings. This fear is what Bloch, in his letter to Rinder, spelled out as the fear of the unknown "Death, Time, Space and Matter."[107]

To dissolve this fear Bloch attempted to reaffirm life at the end of the fifth strophe of *Adon Olom*. The shape of the *Adon Olom* motive—its rising fifth that, after stepping upward another major second, falls back to its note of departure—is an inversion of another motive, the one that characterized the "peace song" *(Etz chayim* [Tree of Life]) at the end of the fourth part of the *Service* (example 18). Its falling then rising fifths appear twice in that movement, first starting from G (rehearsal number 59), then from D♭ (rehearsal number 62). The same motive permeates the

107. Bloch's letter to Rinder, 5 March 1931 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).



Example 18. The *Etz chayim* motive.

beginning and the ending of the last strophe of *Adon Olom*. At the end, although contradicted by the horns' A♭ minor triad, it sounds forcefully in the chorus on the last words, "velo iro" (I shall not fear). In the penultimate measure the horns take it over, and combine it with the purified version of the *Service*'s leitmotif (see example 16).

It is no accident that both the last melodic gesture of the horn recalling the *Etz chayim* and the beginning of the strophe use G as their points of departure and arrival. It is not the entire *Adon Olom* but this G, along with the original form of the leitmotif, that functions as the ultimate liberator and as a musical and human "Erlösung."[108] From the beginning of *Adon Olom* the course of musical events is determined by a desperate search for this place where the leitmotif can be reassuringly restated from G. When we first hear the melody of *Adon Olom*, the G appears as the dissonant pedal. The same G rubs against the "war music" in the instrumental postlude of the third strophe, then a few

108. According to Bloch the ending should be "such a moving music that people must fall in each others' arms—and leave the Temple better men, more human, with more compassion, love, generosity, indulgence for each other...." Bloch's letter to Rinder, 5 March 1931 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).

measures later supports the minor-sixth version of the *Adon Olom* motive now played starting on G by a solo trumpet and then by a solo oboe (3 mm. before rehearsal number 87). After Bloch recalls the music from the "Silent Devotion" (part three) at the end of the fourth strophe in order to invoke the idea of the purification of heart,[109] the violins quote the original form of the *Adon Olom* motive starting on G (rehearsal number 90). The same G remains the central note for the last strophe with its melody built around the axis of fifths C-G-D. Appearing in the bass when the last chord is sounded by the chorus, the last segment of the *Adon Olom* motive falls back to G (4 mm. after rehearsal number 93). But it is only in the last three measures that Bloch re-establishes the purity of the G-based harmony and at last suspends the dissonances that signaled disturbance and alarm when facing the God of the Universe.

But if in the *Sacred Service* this characteristic dissonance evokes a fearsome unity, the purified ending with its return to the point of departure relapses into a utopian vision that inspired Bloch to address his *Sacred Service* to all mankind. Ultimately Bloch could not distinguish between the specifically Jewish characteristics of his composition and those convictions that Judaism shares with the "universal" concerns of mankind. In Bloch's formulation Judaism was simply the birth:

> The more I dwell on this Text—of the *Service*—the more symbolic it becomes to me, of a *philosophy* which *starts* from Israel, but *radiates* towards the *whole world*, addresses itself to *all mankind* (as in

109. "Then in the enormous silence, outside of space, comes an impersonal voice, with the Law of Eternity, that everything was and will be, that He Is, He Shall Be, without beginning, without end. Then the Christianity comes in, God becoming more in the shape of man—'He is my God, my Living Liberator.' Then the motif of the third part when the man is purified of heart." Bloch's description of the fourth strophe in a lecture given at the San Francisco Conservatory, 16 September 1933. (A copy of Bloch's draft is in the Judah Magnes Museum, Berkeley, CA.)

> *America!*) a broader "Zionism," a bigger "Fatherland" justified by Science and the latest Philosophy, this *little* and biggest *Truth* that Israel proclaimed first to the World.[110]

Bloch's effort to bring out the "universal" qualities in his arguably most Jewish composition is heartening—for it attempts to bring Judaism out of a perceived ghetto of concern for only one group of people—and yet it is ultimately unsuccessful; how can we critique the *Sacred Service* without considering its specific religious orientation? Even Kurt List, always quick to defend Bloch against potential ghettoization on the basis of his Jewish works, summarized Bloch's message in the *Service* with reference to its religious underpinning:

> for Bloch, as for the Hebrew prophets, God is immutable Law, and the central question is not that of faith but that of truth.[111]

What is this "truth," though, at which Bloch kept hinting? In spite of his lengthy explanations, the mysterious, universal message of his Jewish *Service* remained as elusive as the Jewish spirit he had so passionately claimed to express in his earlier works. This undefinable truth may not be the feature that unites Bloch with the Jewish community so much as it is the belief that this truth can be expressed—that belief also unites him with all nationalists. But if Judaism was the seed that developed into Bloch's striving for the universal, it remains a potential prison the confines of which must be resisted in every effort to appraise his work.

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110. Bloch's letter to Rinder, 5 March 1931 (UCB, Ernest Bloch Collection).
111. Kurt List, "Ernest Bloch's *Sacred Service*," 588.