

**Lateness and Brahms:
Music and Culture in the
Twilight of Viennese
Liberalism**

Margaret Notley

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LATENESS AND BRAHMS

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All rights reserved. Used by permission.) I have likewise based much of chapter 6 on “Late-Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music and the Cult of the Classical Adagio,” *19th-Century Music* 23 (1999): 33–61. While other parts of chapter 6 are newly written, one section includes several paragraphs from “Brahms’s Cello Sonata in F Major and Its Genesis: A Study in Half-Step Relations,” in *Brahms Studies*, ed. David Brodbeck (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 1:139–160. The editors of the original four articles, David Brodbeck, James Hepokoski, and Paula Higgins, gave me valuable advice, and I have incorporated many of their editorial suggestions in the revised versions that appear here.

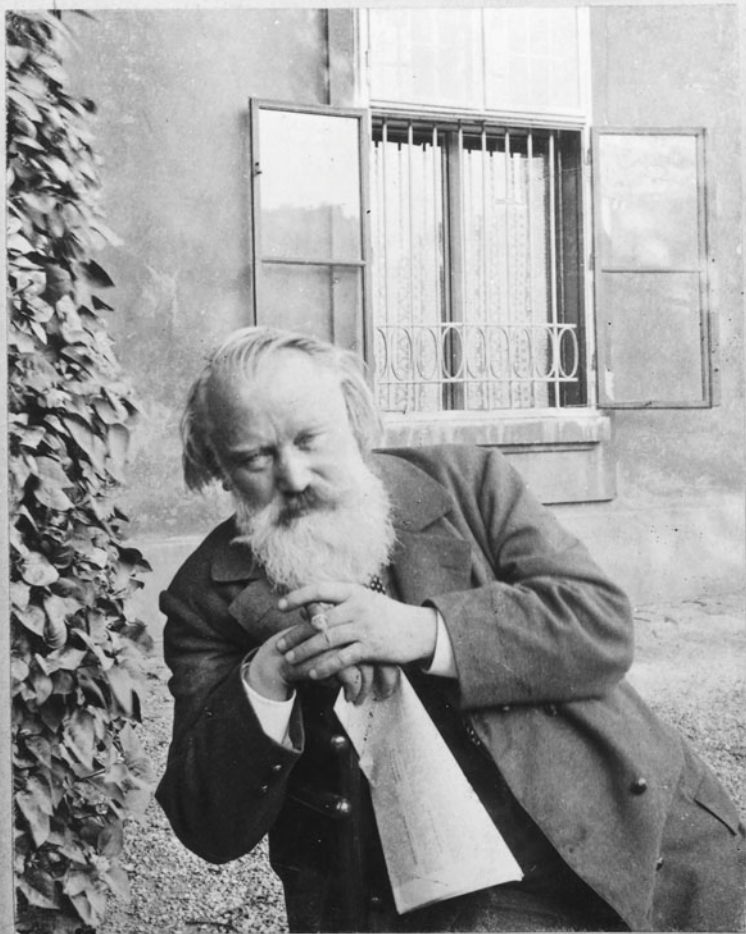
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	Lateness and Brahms	3
CHAPTER 1	Brahms as Liberal, Bruckner as Other	15
CHAPTER 2	Brahms and the Problem of Late Style	36
CHAPTER 3	Themes and First Movements: Questions of Lateness and Individualism	72
CHAPTER 4	Music Pedagogy, Musicology, and Brahms's Collection of Octaves and Fifths: Historical Decline, Personal Renewal	107
CHAPTER 5	<i>Volksconcerte</i> and Concepts of Genre in Brahms's Vienna	144
CHAPTER 6	Adagios in Brahms's Late Chamber Music: Genre Aesthetics and Cultural Critique	169
EPILOGUE	The Twilight of Liberalism	204
APPENDIX	Brahms's Multimovement Works: Dates of Completion and Tempo Designations for the Slow Movements	221
	Bibliography	223
	Index	239



15. Juni 1896. Letzte Aufnahme

MARIA FELLINGER

Brahms on the lawn in front of the Fellinginger family's house. Photograph by Maria Fellinginger with a handwritten note, "15 June 1896. Final photo." Reproduced by kind permission of the Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna.

LATENESS AND BRAHMS

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LATENESS AND BRAHMS

One of the most celebrated moments in Brahms's music comes near the end of the F Major String Quintet's middle movement, completed in 1882.¹ The movement has combined the typically contrasting keys, affects, and tempos of a slow movement and scherzo, three Grave sections in C-sharp minor/major alternating with two interludes in A major, an Allegretto vivace and a Presto. Remarkably, though the two types are contained within one movement, the contrast between them is more striking than usual in Brahms, the keys and types seemingly irreconcilable. The coda of the final Grave, like the two that preceded it, consists of a bare, circular chord progression. (See ex. I.1a and b for the first and third codas.)

In each of the previous codas, the progression moved twice, relentlessly, from a C-sharp minor triad through an altered A major triad and a Neapolitan chord to a full cadence in C-sharp minor. The coda of the third Grave begins with a C-sharp *major* tonic followed by an unaltered A major triad, but it appears as if the concluding tonic will still be C-sharp. After two statements of the chord progression, however, Brahms rhythmically augments the first two chords and proceeds no further, repeating the chords as if considering which to settle on as tonic: the sense of subjective presence is strong. In an extraordinary plagal cadence, C-sharp major cedes to A major, a D minor triad, the minor Neapolitan in C-sharp major/minor, reinterpreted as the minor subdominant in A major.² In suggesting conscious thought and human agency, the ending conveys a psychological drama unprecedented in instrumental music, a thinking subject seeming to choose a key and the associations it has accumulated in the course of a movement.³

1. See the appendix for a list of Brahms's multimovement instrumental works.

2. In a type of enharmonic reinterpretation motivated by organicist impulses and therefore beloved by nineteenth-century composers, the E-sharp in the altered (augmented) A major triad of the first and second codas becomes F-natural in the plagal cadence of the final coda.

3. The Viennese critic Theodor Helm called the ending "Beethovenian, moving," but no comparable moment occurs in Beethoven. *Beethoven's Streichquartette: Versuch einer technischen Analyse dieser Werke im Zusammenhange mit ihrem geistigen Gehalt* (Leipzig: C. F. W. Siegel, 1885), 318. As Donald Tovey observed, "nothing else like this is to be found in music." "Brahms's Chamber Music," in *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1959), 259.

EXAMPLE I.1a. Brahms, F Major String Quintet, Op. 88 / II, mm. 26–31

This moment has a bearing on several overlapping themes of this book. One theme concerns concepts of genre and especially various kinds of cultural significance assigned to chamber music and slow movements. In this instance, not only does the movement's conclusion depend on Brahms's manipulation of meanings embedded in the genres of slow movement and scherzo but also it is a quintessential chamber-music moment. Critics have often observed that Brahms always composed in chamber style; in doing so, they usually single out the extreme refinement and complexity of the technical details in his music. But inwardness and expressive subtleties are also characteristic of both chamber music and slow movements.

EXAMPLE I.1.b. Brahms, F Major String Quintet, Op. 88 / II, mm. 196–208

The quality of the inwardness in Brahms's conclusion, with its clearly implied reflecting subject, places the Quintet near the turn of the twentieth century: the moment sounds of its time. Interest in the human mind had been strong throughout the nineteenth century, as new frameworks for understanding the psyche were developed, and would culminate toward the century's end in Sigmund Freud's epoch-making work. While the immediate Viennese milieu in the final decade and a half of Brahms's life was a center for innovative ideas about psychology, this particular musical moment resonates more with lingering "premodern"—that is, Liberal—concepts of human reason and agency. Like earlier forms of Liberalism, nineteenth-century variants privileged the rational will of individuals, a position problematized by Freud's discoveries and other aspects of an emerging modernist outlook. A second theme of this book is the specific historicity of Brahms's music.

In certain respects, Brahms's movement can be compared to the "Heiliger Dankgesang" from Beethoven's late A Minor String Quartet (Op. 132, completed in 1825). The "Heiliger Dankgesang" resembles Brahms's movement in that it alternates slow and fast sections, and it conveys a more explicit drama through detailed expressive markings for each: "Holy Song of Thanks to the Godhead from a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode" and "Feeling New Strength." Stark contrast between the F faux-Lydian of the slow sections and the D major of the faster interludes is also essential to Beethoven's movement, but the tonal center is never in question: an earlier composer would not have applied tonality in instrumental music as Brahms did. Although the F Major String Quintet is usually placed slightly before Brahms's personal "late period," he composed it during the late period of common-practice tonality and the genres, forms, and other conventions associated with it. Other themes of this book are lateness within Brahms's oeuvre and in broad historical and music-historical narratives that encompass him and his time.

LATE STYLE AND MUSIC-HISTORIC LATENESS

Motivating my selection of these themes is a wish to counter the common tendency to regard Brahms in neutralized, ahistorical terms. This tendency, which makes the composer and his music seem considerably less interesting than they are, became apparent soon after he died in 1897. In 1912 the Viennese critic Richard Specht observed: "Scarcely any other master of his art has become a 'classic' so quickly after his death as Johannes Brahms," adding that his music was already seen as "timeless." Specht found it problematic that a mere fifteen years after his death Brahms had turned into a canonic figure admired from a distance.⁴ The early metamorphosis of the composer into a transhistorical figure continued in much subsequent scholarship, which has often positioned him only among his friends and family and considered his compositions within those restricted circles.⁵

4. "Zum Brahms-Problem," *Der Merker* 3 (1912): 41 and 46. Here, as elsewhere in this book, the translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

5. See, for example, the admirable life-and-works treatment by Karl Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work*, 3rd ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981). For some new directions in English-language scholarship on Brahms, see work by Daniel Beller-McKenna, Kevin Karnes, and Sandra McColl listed in the bibliography.

Western Marxism, with its utter commitment to historical perspectives, offers one vital alternative. Especially in the years between the two world wars, accounts informed by Western Marxist ideas tried to bring order to the musical heritage of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the middle-class era, when Liberalism and the free-market capitalism associated with that worldview had been ascendant in Europe. The authors, who include such significant figures as Theodor Adorno, Ernst Křenek, and Paul Bekker, regarded the *bürgerlich* culture of tonal music as having come to an end and, consequently, that music as a closed repertory they could contemplate in its entirety. Hence Bekker wrote a highly influential brief survey of the symphony from Beethoven to Mahler.⁶ Writers concerned with music and social history, and especially those working within Marxist critical traditions, recognize Brahms's importance as a crucial representative of that culture in its late phase.

Lateness is indeed a central concept in this vein of criticism: Brahms composed during a late historical period, using conventions of common-practice tonality that had grown old and at the same time become so customary as to seem rooted in nature. Georg Lukács, a seminal Western Marxist literary critic, made a related point about the social milieu that gave rise to the novel, using the term "second nature" to signify "the world of convention."⁷ Adorno latched onto this idea in his philosophical and sociological writings, as well as in his work on music, where he repeatedly invokes second nature in reference to tonality and its semblance of naturalness. Thus in *Philosophie der neuen Musik* he writes: "The second nature of the tonal system is historically formed appearance." And he connects the structure of tonality directly to that of capitalism, "whose own dynamic strives toward totality and with whose fungibility that of all tonal elements corresponds most profoundly."⁸ Adorno's reinterpretations of Lukács's evocative concept have wide applicability to the late nineteenth century, when the putative naturalness of the Liberal worldview came under growing critical scrutiny, and more particularly to Brahms, who in his late works had to force meaning back into the second nature of tonality's conventions. No one thus far appears to have given sustained attention to implications for Brahms studies of ideas sketched by Lukács, Adorno, Bekker, and others.

Adorno's own neglect of Brahms is most surprising. In many references, usually short and fragmentary, he revealed how important Brahms was for his understanding of music history. To be sure, he did develop his ideas about the composer at some length in three books: *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, *Einleitung in der Musiksoziologie*, and a manuscript on Beethoven unfinished at his death and published much later. But he devoted no extended work exclusively to Brahms, merely a short, posthumously published essay that dates from 1934 and a peripherally important review, published in 1932, of an edition of the piano music.⁹

6. *Die Sinfonie von Beethoven bis Mahler* (Berlin: Schuster und Loeffler, 1918). Many writers, including Adorno, place the beginning of the middle-class era earlier.

7. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 63. Lukács completed the book in 1916; it was first published in 1920.

8. *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976), 20.

9. The essay, "Brahms aktuell," and the review, "Eduard Steuermanns Brahms-Ausgabe," both appear in vol. 18 of *Gesammelte Schriften: Musikalische Schriften V*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Klaus Schultz

For the most part, Adorno left only a number of frustratingly brief but suggestive allusions to the composer. Beyond a few vague references to “the later Brahms,” moreover, he never addressed late style in Brahms, although he made substantial contributions to late-style theories in essays on Goethe, Wagner, and Beethoven.¹⁰ Late-style criticism, as represented in these essays, focuses on stylistic development within an artist’s lifework. In this portion of his oeuvre, Adorno was working within a tradition, largely German-language, that had no necessary ties to Marxism. While late style and music-historic lateness are based on different assumptions, both concepts offer valid frameworks for considering Brahms’s later music and can be brought into illuminating alignment, each conditioning the other. They stand in a dialectical relationship.

When Adorno wrote about Brahms’s music, he usually focused on matters of themes, motives, and form as part of a broad historical narrative that presents the composer as a link between Beethoven and Schoenberg. An artist’s style, however, transcends single types of technical features such as these. It appears that Adorno could not closely consider Brahms’s style in all its complexity, much less the possibility of stylistic change, because the idea of music-historic lateness so strongly colored his perspective. Consequently, the composer’s oeuvre emerges as a more or less undifferentiated group of works. Still, Adorno’s late-style criticism and his few scattered comments about Brahms have unexplored potential for understanding the composer’s late music.

More recent German writers have brought other valuable perspectives to bear on Brahms studies. Tibor Kneif, for example, emphasizes that he was a middle-class composer: in Kneif’s words, “middle-class in the nineteenth-century sense,” that being the only century “truly dominated by the middle class.”¹¹ Christian Martin Schmidt likewise notes that his habits as artist and as private individual exemplified middle-class virtues, and he observes three topoi in Brahms reception: chamber-music composer, Classical or last Classical composer, academic composer.¹² While neither Schmidt nor Kneif connects these personal traits of Brahms and themes in the reception of his music to an immediate context, they took on charged, local significance in late nineteenth-century Vienna.

(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984). The unfinished manuscript was published as *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

10. “On the Final Scene of *Faust*,” in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1:111–120; “On the Score of *Parsifal*,” trans. Anthony Barone, *Music and Letters* 76 (1995): 384–397. “Alienated Masterpiece: The *Missa Solemnis*,” trans. Duncan Smith and Richard Leppert, and “Late Style in Beethoven,” trans. Susan H. Gillespie, are both reprinted in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 564–583. “Ludwig van Beethoven: Six Bagatelles for Piano, Op. 126” is reprinted in *Beethoven*, 130–132. This posthumously published book offers many additional insights into Beethoven’s late style.

11. “Brahms—Ein bürgerlicher Künstler,” in *Johannes Brahms: Leben und Werk*, ed. Christiane Jacobsen (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1983), 9–13.

12. *Johannes Brahms und seine Zeit*, 2nd ed. (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1998), 56–64 and 163.

BRAHMS IN THE TWILIGHT YEARS OF VIENNESE LIBERALISM

Until the 1990s, commentary on the older Brahms rarely situated him in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, the city of Gustav Mahler and Freud, among others.¹³ Brahms's position within this turbulent milieu must account for the oversight. In Vienna, as elsewhere in Europe, the advent of the first wave of modernism in about 1890 virtually coincided with the movement toward mass democracy and the decline of classic middle-class—Liberal—culture. To both supporters and critics of Liberalism in the city's music circles at the time, Brahms had little to do with the new; rather, he embodied the waning culture.

A number of scholars have explored the paradoxical confluence of coarse-grained politics and extraordinary intellectual and artistic vitality in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Several closely spaced events suggest the rapid pace of change in the city. Shortly before Brahms died in the spring of 1897, Karl Lueger took office as mayor after having ousted the Liberal incumbent through a strategic blend of politicized, anti-Semitic Catholicism and rabble-rousing, at times German-nationalist populism. During that same spring, forty members of the Künstlerhaus (Artists' House) resigned and formed the Secession to promote innovation in the visual arts; half a year later, Mahler, though Jewish, assumed leadership of the city's preeminent cultural institution, the Hofoper (Court Opera). Two facts in themselves situate Brahms squarely in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna: Dr. Josef Breuer, who had collaborated with Freud on *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895, served as Brahms's physician in his final illness; and Lueger, whom Brahms had despised, attended the composer's funeral in his official capacity as the city's mayor.¹⁵

In the decade and a half before the watershed of 1897, longstanding antagonism between so-called progressive and conservative musical factions had taken an intensely politicized turn in Vienna. Progressivism in music was associated above all with Richard Wagner, whose death in 1883 happened to coincide with the formation of a viable anti-Liberal movement in Vienna. Wagnerism went on to play a critical role in that movement and the attendant transformation of political conduct, the emphasis on theatricality and appeals to emotion that enabled Lueger's rise to power. Many of the Wagnerites challenging the Liberal worldview in the final decades of the nineteenth century were young people in revolt against a society that privileged middle age over youth and reason over instinct and emotion.¹⁶ As a matter of course, they disdained Brahms as much as they revered Wagner and other progressive composers.

13. Leon Botstein, "Brahms and Nineteenth-Century Painting," *19th-Century Music* 14 (1990): 154–168; and Margaret Notley, "Brahms as Liberal: Genre, Style, and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna," *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 107–123.

14. See, especially, two collections of essays by Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), and *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

15. Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 4 vols. (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1976), 4:498–499 for Breuer and 4:521 for Lueger.

16. See Schorske, "Generational Tension and Cultural Change," in *Thinking with History*, 141–156.

Brahms's very status as, in Schmidt's words, "chamber-music composer" acquired political meaning in late nineteenth-century Vienna. Critics who favor a broad view of music history, such as Adorno and Bekker, as well as Schmidt, often oppose symphonies to chamber music: the one aimed at a wider audience and thus supposedly more direct in its appeal, the other reserved for an elite few. Within the narrower context of late nineteenth-century Vienna, ideas about genre became overtly political for activist musicians who took the implications of those ideas seriously. Thus the populist sentiments of the time tended to give the allegedly more accessible genre of the symphony even greater stature than it already possessed. Yet the symphony, like the other genres that had developed with tonality, had itself gone into a widely recognized decline. In a recent book about Brahms's Second Symphony, Reinhold Brinkmann writes about the aging of the symphonic genre and writes eloquently, as well, about contemporary artists' perceptions that their time was a late period.¹⁷ General themes of historical lateness and a perceived decline in music but also of historical aspects of Brahms's music more specific to the time and place likewise converge in my consideration of him and his milieu.

A sense that an era had ended emerges clearly in writing from the early twentieth century. After the death of Brahms and the almost simultaneous dissolution of Liberal hegemony, some former rebels came to regard him with greater sympathy, without, however, tempering their emphatic rejection of the culture in which he had played a central role. Such selective rewriting of history no doubt fostered the transformation of Brahms into a "timeless" classic. Passages in essays by the Austrian writer Hermann Bahr illustrate the bifurcated view of Brahms and the Liberal milieu I am referring to. In 1911, Bahr described Austrian Liberals as "people living only from the brain, possessing nothing other than a fine little collection of ideas, ideas imported from the West with which they now intended to take care of everything."¹⁸ Bahr continued to look down on his father's ideology of reason, part of the "religion" of blind assumptions that had supported the interests of the Liberal middle class. But in a 1912 essay about Brahms, he made it clear he had changed his mind about the composer, with whom he had earlier found similar fault.

A remark by Hugo Wolf that Bahr quoted in his 1912 essay demonstrates the extreme antipathy both had felt toward Brahms in the late 1880s. In conversation with Bahr, Wolf voiced an opinion many young people in Vienna seem to have held at the time: he dismissed the older composer's works as "brain music" (*Gehirnmusik*).¹⁹ In 1912, however, Bahr probed subtleties of expression he and his contemporaries had ignored when the composer was still alive; like other members of his generation, he retrospectively corrected his earlier exaggeration of Brahms's reliance on intellect. Viewing a recently completed statue of the composer displayed in the Berlin Secession had reminded Bahr of the deep affinity its forward-looking

17. *Late Idyll: The Second Symphony of Johannes Brahms*, trans. Peter Palmer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

18. *Austriaca* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1911), 9.

19. Bahr, "Brahms," in *Essays* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1912), 41.

sculptor, Max Klinger, felt for Brahms's music.²⁰ More fundamentally, Bahr could revise his attitude toward Brahms because new forces and ideas had successfully confronted the hegemonic culture with which the composer had been so closely linked in Vienna.

In a number of respects, an era can be said to have come to a close around the turn of the twentieth century.²¹ Some recent historians of course suggest that the "long nineteenth century," which began with events leading up to the French Revolution, concluded only with the dissolution of the German, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires after the First World War.²² No doubt more profound changes did occur in the wake of the First World War than at the close of the nineteenth century. Even the supposed end of tonality, the "first step on a new path" Arnold Schoenberg took in 1908 or 1909, did not occur until more than a decade after the political eclipse of Viennese Liberalism.²³ Yet Brahms rightly considered himself to be the last in a line of composers, as the final distinguished product of pedagogical traditions he had had to reconstruct for his own purposes.²⁴ Bahr's revisionism in 1912 notwithstanding, the tradition that ended with Brahms had in fact placed high value on a kind of intellect in music. And the types of coherence his own conception of "musical logic" encompassed were for the most part not only particular to tonal music but also linked temporally and ideologically with the ascendancy of the Liberal worldview in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Brahms thus wrote his late music during the twilight years of Liberal politics and musical culture in Vienna.

While cultural historians have given the Viennese *fin de siècle* a great deal of attention, the decades before the turn of the century have received less notice, as has the more conservative art that continued to be produced even as modernism increasingly overshadowed it.²⁵ The irredeemable dreariness of much establishment art from the late nineteenth century, especially in comparison with the new art's excitement, goes far toward explaining the disproportion. Still, Brahms's compositions, many of which have long been staples of the concert repertory, derived from, indeed helped create, the culture that went into decline around the turn of the century. The very

20. On Klinger, see Botstein, "Brahms and Nineteenth-Century Painting," 165–168; and Thomas K. Nelson, "Brahms's Fantasies: In Accord with Max Klinger," *American Brahms Society Newsletter* 18/1 (spring 2000): 1–5, and 18/2 (fall 2000): 4–7.

21. Carl Dahlhaus argues for considering the years between 1889 and 1914 a period in musical as well as social and political history. *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 330–332. As Mary Hunter pointed out to me, the long nineteenth century comes into conflict with a potential long twentieth century in these attempts at periodization.

22. David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

23. "How One Becomes Lonely," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein and trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 49.

24. See chapter 4.

25. An exception is *Pre-modern Art of Vienna 1848–1898*, ed. Leon Botstein and Linda Weintraub (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Edith C. Blum Art Institute, 1987). William J. McGrath explored an earlier period but focused on the developing anti-Liberal movement in *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

sense of being outdated, the tension between Brahms and the changing times, may have given rise to a body of compositions in his oeuvre that have the peculiar, ambivalent qualities of “late works.”

OTHER SOURCES, METHODOLOGY, AND OVERVIEW

The historical perspectives in this book, then, are of two kinds. On the one hand, throughout most of this book I attempt to understand Brahms and his music in the context of late nineteenth-century Vienna by exploring both what I conjecture to be his positions and what I interpret as prevailing “climates of opinion.” Many of the attitudes in question concern musical genres and aspects of musical logic. On the other hand, I also develop the theme of lateness in its various manifestations. At certain points the two perspectives come together. As I discovered in the course of reading a great deal of journalistic criticism, ideas about music formulated most fully in the twentieth century by Bekker, Adorno, and others have traceable origins in the late nineteenth century. This is not surprising, since Marxism developed out of Liberalism, in response to both its strong points and its shortcomings. Because Brahms composed his late works at the end of an era, furthermore, historical lateness as explored in Marxist writing converges at times with the separate tradition of late-style criticism. Both perceptions of lateness warrant further elaboration and, even more important, offer a hermeneutic point of entry into compositions by the older Brahms. For my abiding love of that music was the fundamental impetus for writing this book.

During more than a decade of research, I read countless reviews and articles from contemporary newspapers and music journals. These have a value like that of music dictionaries, treatises, textbooks, and so on, in that they provide firsthand glimpses of musical and general cultural life in Vienna and elsewhere. While I do not consider contemporary reception necessarily to have a privileged position over other criticism, it helped me understand the origins of the twentieth-century interpretive traditions that interest me. Contemporary reception, moreover, sometimes suggests an unforeseen angle on the music, allows one to uncover fresh critical categories that otherwise would not have come to mind. For me this is the greatest reward these sources have to offer. In the beginning, Brahms’s absence in, for example, Carl Schorske’s accounts of Viennese culture perplexed me. By working with neglected contemporary sources, including passages in Max Kalbeck’s biography of Brahms, I came to understand why scholars had overlooked his role in the culture.

I did not start out with a methodology; if I had, it would have predetermined what I found. Rather, I developed a methodological framework as I began to see possible patterns in the reception, which I tested against other ideas and scholarship using basic procedures of critical thinking. Through lengthy immersion in the journalistic sources, I became acquainted with the various writers’ strengths and limitations, as well as with the overall tone of the periodicals they wrote for. Then, as now, certain critics are unilluminating, even incompetent; I have therefore rarely

included their work. In those instances when I have chosen, say, to cite an anonymous review, I do so because the journalist best expresses a view that appears in other reviews, as well. The critics whose work I use most extensively wrote for papers or journals significant for one reason or another, or had important careers, usually not confined to journalism.

Thus a number of the critics played several roles in the city's music worlds, which tends to make their reviews more valuable than most music criticism, by definition an ephemeral kind of writing. They include the authors of the first substantial biographies of Brahms and Anton Bruckner: Kalbeck, who also translated opera librettos, and August Göllerich, a former student of Liszt who was active as a pianist.²⁶ Kalbeck's work as a critic is relatively well known, especially in the Bruckner literature, where his reviews are cited as evidence of the abuse Bruckner endured in Vienna. Göllerich, who briefly wrote reviews for a significant anti-Semitic newspaper in the city, oddly enough has received almost no attention.²⁷ Knowing the journalistic work of both writers and their place in Viennese music life makes it easier to understand blind spots in their biographies, both of which contain documentary evidence of the time, all the more interesting because of the authors' clear biases.

The sheer bulk of the information in these biographies and other sources causes problems. Although Brahms's famous self-protective reticence makes it difficult for scholars to conduct certain kinds of research, the wealth of other types of documents means that potentially enlightening passages sometimes go unnoticed.²⁸ At least several volumes of Brahms's letters, for instance, contain material of unrecognized importance, as does perhaps the most useful source of all, a diary kept by the Viennese musician and journalist Richard Heuberger, in which he recorded conversations with the composer.²⁹ Working with these printed sources, as with the journalism of the time, usually entails additional research to reconstruct and elucidate obscure events and attitudes the authors allude to.

Brahms's personal library, most of which he left to the archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, provides other insights because of his habit of marking in books and journals as he read them. The Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde also owns valuable manuscripts of Brahms: the autographs of much of the music discussed here, as well as an unusual extant sketch, which I discuss in chapter 3, and his so-called collection of octaves and fifths, the topic of chapter 4.

26. Göllerich, *Anton Bruckner: Ein Lebens- und Schaffens-bild*, 4 vols. in 9, vols. 2–4, ed. Max Auer (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1974).

27. Other anti-Semitic critics who supported Bruckner come up in recent literature on him, but Göllerich is oddly absent. I discuss this in "Bruckner and Viennese Wagnerism," in *Bruckner Studies*, ed. Paul Hawkshaw and Timothy L. Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54–71.

28. Brahms burned most of his compositional sketches and drafts, as well as much of his early correspondence with Clara Schumann, and he became guarded about personal matters in his later correspondence.

29. See the published correspondence listed in the bibliography. I shall refer to volumes published by the Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft as *Brahms Briefwechsel*. Heuberger's diary appeared as *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms: Tagebuchnotizen aus den Jahren 1875 bis 1897*, ed. Kurt Hofmann, 2nd ed. (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1976).

The chapters move between detailed treatment of certain musical pieces—and critical traditions relevant to them—and consideration of the contexts in which Brahms's late style developed. After lengthy examination of the available sources, I concluded that a person of his acuity was capable of modifying his political outlook and that he seems in fact to have done so; for me, this conclusion was crucial for understanding his late works. I explore his political views in chapter 1 and the epilogue, with emphasis in the former on the 1880s and in the latter on the 1890s. Beyond beginning a discussion of Brahms's politics, chapter 1 places the composer in the Vienna of his later years by focusing on the politicized conflicts between the factions around Bruckner and Brahms and suggesting that genres and musical logic had significance beyond that attributed to the concepts today. In chapter 2, I introduce the topic of late style, still working with contemporary reception but also with twentieth-century criticism devoted to the topic.

Chapters 3 and 4 have to do with both music-historic lateness and Brahms's late style. Chapter 3 moves away from the immediate context to address the more general tradition of regarding Brahms as a middle-class composer, a tradition represented in the work of Kneif and Schmidt, as well as Adorno and other Marxist critics. My musical commentary concentrates on questions concerning thematic style in a late form and in Brahms's own late period. In chapter 4, I connect the manuscript collection, which he worked on in his final years, to the new field of musicology, arguing that together they served as one source of renewal for his final chamber compositions, the F Minor and E-flat Clarinet Sonatas.

Chapter 5 demonstrates connections between concepts of genre in Brahms's time and later formulations by Bekker and others and asserts the relevance of Jürgen Habermas's well-known monograph on the public sphere to ideas about the symphony. In chapter 6, I reconstruct a critical tradition of viewing the adagio as a genre. This perspective, an example of the fresh critical category I mentioned earlier, now seems self-evident to me because of the centrality of adagios in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music. Yet I arrived at it empirically by reading many reviews and other documents from that period in which I noted recurrent idealizing references to adagios and the occasional transformation of the adagio into a metaphor. Chapters 5 and 6 both discuss the role of genre concepts in narratives of decline, which became prominent in late nineteenth-century public discourse. In these chapters and elsewhere, I take for granted that choices of language often matter a great deal, a premise that comes into play in several ways, for example, in analyzing imagery linked with particular genres. More broadly, uses of language had become vital in Brahms's Vienna in transforming the sociopolitical status quo.

When I write about his music, I assume the validity of concepts of structural levels, and thus of structural dominants and tonics, ideas associated most closely with the writings of Heinrich Schenker, a younger contemporary of Brahms. But I have used other theoretical approaches when they had something to offer for understanding a particular piece or passage. Again, I did not want to predetermine what I would hear in the music by limiting myself to one methodology. Within this eclectic theoretical framework, I attempt to answer a number of questions. In what respects does Brahms's late music sound different from his earlier music? How has he addressed the problems caused by the aging tonal conventions he worked with?

Where did he find renewal, both within and outside traditions of common-practice classical music? Ideas of late style and historical and music-historical lateness provide an illuminating foundation for understanding, in context, music that has too often been separated from the culture it helped create and the music-historical approaches it partially inspired. The music of a historical Brahms takes on rich and nuanced meaning not possible when it is considered in isolation.



BRAHMS AS LIBERAL, BRUCKNER AS OTHER

In an account of Brahms's dissatisfactions with Vienna, Kalbeck recalled that after Wagner's death, "music got mixed up with politics, and obscurantists from various parties had their hands in the matter." His biographer was referring to Brahms's anger in the 1880s at the "anti-German" policies of the Conservative Czech-Polish-Clerical coalition then in power in the Austrian government: the composer believed that priestly machinations lay behind the unsatisfactory state of affairs. Kalbeck added that "musical conditions in the imperial city also did not please him." Using the religious theme of *Parsifal* as a tenuous connective to the previous topic of suspected Catholic intrigues, he seized the opportunity to lash out at "sanctimonious demagogues" who had found Wagner's music useful because it "suppresses the intellect and unleashes the senses."¹ This remarkable account, which mingles the perspectives of Brahms and Kalbeck, displays a complex of attitudes that students of nineteenth-century Austrian cultural history will recognize as basic aspects of the Liberal worldview: pro-German sentiment, antagonism toward the Catholic Church, and profound distrust of anti-intellectual trends.

Kalbeck's treatment of the opposition, Bruckner, within the Brahms biography is no less telling. According to Kalbeck, part of Bruckner's appeal after Wagner's death lay in a politically motivated reaction against Brahms: "The troops called up to arms against Brahms received fortification from extremists of various reactionary religious, political, and social congregations."² While Kalbeck acknowledged the unwarranted harshness of Brahms's own stance toward Bruckner, he carefully avoided mentioning the vicious journalistic assaults on Bruckner in the 1880s that Carl Dahlhaus later deemed "one of the sorriest chapters in the history of music criticism."³ Ample evidence supports Dahlhaus's view. The attacks on Bruckner by the critics Eduard Hanslick, Gustav Dömpke, and Kalbeck himself were both brutal and personal: in one well-known, scurrilous review, Dömpke called the com-

1. *Brahms*, 3:402–403.

2. *Brahms*, 3:404.

3. *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 271.

poser an “Untermensch” and said that he composed “like a drunk.”⁴ But Dahlhaus’s further judgment that these attacks “struck a man who, unlike Wagner, was largely unable to defend himself” requires some qualification. Bruckner received ardent support in the conflict from an unexpected journalistic source: the press of the Pan-Germans and the Christian Socials, the most important of the right-wing anti-Liberal parties formed during that decade.

In a curious twist of fate, some of the broader cultural dimensions of the Bruckner–Brahms controversy survived in Bruckner scholarship but, despite the tantalizing leads in Kalbeck, disappeared in the literature on Brahms.⁵ Indeed, when I began dissertation research, I discovered I could find out more about Brahms’s Viennese milieu by reading work on Bruckner than on Brahms himself. An array of factors, including smoldering resentment about the mistreatment of Bruckner, no doubt caused the disparity in the reception histories of the two composers; one result, an ahistorical Brahms, fits into a familiar pattern.

What ostensibly lay at the center of the Bruckner–Brahms dispute was an artistic disagreement concerning the relative merits of melodic inspiration and logical elaboration, stereotypically opposed musical desiderata that were linked to the contrasting connotations of the symphonic and chamber genres.⁶ The argument, though, was not solely aesthetic. As Kalbeck claimed, it acquired political overtones and is best understood within the context of late nineteenth-century Vienna.

Both composers lived permanently in Vienna from the late 1860s until their deaths in 1896 (Bruckner) and 1897 (Brahms). Their residence thus corresponds closely with the brief period of dominance of political Liberalism in the city: 1867–97. Austrian Liberals resembled other nineteenth-century European Liberals in their general belief in progress and each individual’s right to self-fulfillment and in their espousal of scientific methods and laissez-faire economics. And like other European Liberals, many Liberals in Austria overlooked the fact that most of the population neither benefited from the economic system nor enjoyed the privilege of self-realization, a shortsightedness that would contribute greatly to Liberalism’s undoing.

What distinguished the Austrian variant from Liberalism in other parts of Europe was its short ascendancy and its circumscribed constituency within the multicultural empire. Despite the strong presence of the Catholic Church, Austrian Liberals tended to be resolutely anticlerical, and the party drew its members from an

4. Dömpke wrote in the same review, of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony, “explanations for abnormalities must be sought,” *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 March 1886, quoted in Manfred Wagner, *Bruckner: Leben-Werke-Dokumente* (Mainz: Schott, 1983), 174.

5. In addition to Wagner, *Bruckner*, see his “Bruckner in Wien: Ein Beitrag zur Apperzeption und Rezeption des oberösterreichischen Komponisten in der Hauptstadt der k. k. Monarchie”; and Johannes-Leopold Mayer, “Musik als gesellschaftliches Ärgernis—Oder: Anton Bruckner, der Anti-Bürger: Das Phänomen Bruckner als historisches Problem.” Both essays are in *Anton Bruckner in Wien: Eine kritische Studie zu seiner Persönlichkeit*, ed. Franz Grasberger (Graz: Akademischer Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1980).

6. Constantin Floros calls the aesthetic issue “Einfallsapologetik gegen Verherrlichung der Ausarbeitung,” in *Brahms und Bruckner: Studien zur musikalischen Exegetik* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1980), 30–34. See also Bryan Gilliam, “The Two Versions of Bruckner’s Eighth Symphony,” *19th-Century Music* 16 (1992): 60–61.

intellectual elite: the educated, culturally formed German and Jewish-German middle and upper middle classes, the so-called *Bildungsbürgertum*.⁷ In 1867, Austria had ratified a constitution that implemented Liberal ideas of religious freedom and equality before the law. Viennese Jews felt an especially strong allegiance to the Liberal party, often referred to as the *Verfassungspartei* (Constitution Party), for the “1867 Constitution was from the standpoint of Austrian Jewry the culmination of the long struggle for emancipation.”⁸

Still, the Liberals maintained a majority in the central government only until 1879, and they were increasingly under attack in Vienna thereafter. The 1880s witnessed a growing cleft in Viennese society, with the rise of political leaders representing various dissatisfied constituencies—the lower middle and working classes, Slavic nationalists, Pan-German extremists, and discontented Catholics from every social stratum, including the aristocracy—who eventually broke the Liberals’ hold on the city. Rebellious university students figured especially in the Pan-Germans, the group on the outermost part of the right-wing fringe. Of the leaders to emerge during that decade, however, the most successful proved to be Lueger, who received much of his initial support from the lower Catholic clergy and the newly enfranchised lower middle class. When Lueger took office as mayor in 1897, it marked the end of political Liberalism in Vienna.

The Bruckner–Brahms conflict played out against the backdrop of this socio-political upheaval. Like the political situation, the musical controversy grew more and more heated during the 1880s, as political matters increasingly spilled over into the city’s musical life and Bruckner finally gained a voice through his supporters’ efforts. Articles in contemporary anti-Liberal newspapers and books about Bruckner written soon after his death drew an analogy between anti-Liberal political activity and the struggle to gain a hearing for his compositions, adding that the two causes shared the same enemy: the Liberal establishment and in particular the Liberal press. One article, for example, protested an obituary by Brahms’s colleague Heuberger, which had suggested that advocacy of Bruckner’s music was politically motivated, arguing, to the contrary, that opposition to Bruckner “was and is a factional matter.” The author, Heinrich Schuster, attributed the antagonism toward Bruckner to “the camp that represents in the musical sphere what the old Liberal does in the political” and linked the circle around Brahms with waning Liberal hegemony. Writing that the Liberal musical and political factions “use the same press organs, in fact often consist of the same people,” Schuster added that these camps were “at last in the process of dying out.”⁹

Each side thus accused the other of factionalism; extramusical motives were at work on both sides. On the one hand, Liberal critics of Bruckner belittled his close

7. For two commentaries on Austrian Liberal culture, see Schorske, “Politics and the Psyche: Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal,” in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 5–10; and Albert Fuchs, *Geistige Strömungen in Österreich: 1867–1918* (Vienna: Globus-Verlag, 1949), 10–12.

8. Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 145.

9. Both the *Neue Freie Presse* and the *Wiener Tagblatt* had printed Heuberger’s obituary. Most of Schuster’s article (*Deutsche Zeitung*, 5 November 1896) is reprinted in Wagner, *Bruckner*, 221–223.