Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the [De]Construction of Brahmsian Identity

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1) Brahmsian Minds and Bodies: The Aesthetic Ideology of Control.

> I call the classic healthy, and the romantic sick. The works of today are romantic not because they are new, but because they are weak, sickly or sick. The old works are classical not because they are old, but because they are energetic, hale and hearty.[9]

1.1) Introduction

Despite being tasked with the mastery of a vast repertoire spanning over three hundred years, modern pianists have an uncanny ability to precisely describe the qualities of what they consider to be 'characteristic' Brahms style at the piano. The language of contemporary Brahms style is both highly relative, with desirable approaches to the performance of Johannes Brahms's piano music being distinguished from approaches to that of Frédéric Chopin, Robert Schumann, or Franz Liszt, for example; as well as widely understood, with pianists from opposite ends of the globe able to grasp exactly what is meant when a performance is described as 'Brahmsian.'

In my first encounters with Brahms's late piano music I too was inculcated into the language of characteristic, proper, or 'good' Brahms style: language that is accompanied by a strict set of performance norms as well. When a colleague, reviewer or collaborator comments that my playing of chords in Brahms's piano music is not stylistically correct, I somehow know that what is meant is that these chords are flashy,

[9] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, quoted in Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Selected Essays*, trans. and ed. Francis Steegmuller and Norbert Guterman (London: Lowe & Brydone Ltd., 1965), 5.

extroverted and harsh as opposed to full, resonant, round and warm; implying that some adjustment is needed both in my approach to tone production and in the speed of my attack and release.

The language of Brahms style also implies ways of being as much as it does concrete ways of understanding and doing. Just like Artur Schnabel, through whom my own Brahmsian 'lineage' derives, those pianists specially equipped to handle this repertoire are those noted for their serious and intellectual temperaments, and for their abstention from overt technical display, pretence and cheap sentimentality. While Brahms himself is popularly understood to have disproved of the practices of his more overtly Romantic contemporaries, so too is Schnabel reported to have shunned the glittering Romantic virtuosic warhorses of the repertoire like Liszt's *Transcendental Études, Fantasies and Rhapsodies* in favour of the piano works of Bach and Beethoven. The implication here is that like Brahms, Schnabel is a certain 'type' of musician.

The language of contemporary Brahms style is thus descriptive, prescriptive and subjective, with profound implications for the practices and identities of performers and composer alike. The authority with which this language is wielded and the compliance its associated performance norms command seem predicated upon assumptions of historical validity, and thus upon often unacknowledged or tacit ethical obligations; the implication being that 'characteristic' Brahms performances are those that capture, preserve and communicate some original truth content and intention. Even those performers who do not consciously espouse ethical beliefs in their approaches to Brahms's piano music still view the precepts of contemporary Brahms style as true, proper and correct. Despite the fact that it is how these qualities are borne out in performances today that seem to

distinguish mainstream, historically-informed and even recordings-inspired Brahms from Brahms as he was recorded by those who knew him, few pianists ever question the historical validity of modern understandings of Brahmsian identity.

Indeed, the language of contemporary Brahms style and its associated performance norms are found throughout the historical documentary record, having arisen out of the "fashionable anathemas"[10] that characterized well-documented nineteenth-century dialectics positing Brahms as the classicist antipode to the more 'progressive,' theatrical, virtuosic and coloristic composers of Wagner, Liszt and Berlioz's New German School. Throughout such accounts one finds references to Brahms's hyper-controlled anti-Romantic identity: both from supporters looking to reaffirm his Classicist lineage thereby distancing him from the degenerate practices of his contemporaries; and from detractors looking to label him as staid, old-fashioned and unimaginative in a climate that linked genius with insanity and illness: debilities amply represented by members of the New Germans and by the total mind-body disintegration of Brahms's mentor Robert Schumann. Buttressed by the dialectical writings of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century observers, Brahms's canonic identity and its underlying assumptions of psychological and physical fitness continue to stand as proof that a hale and hearty mind and body can avoid the ills of unchecked Romanticism.

In a grandiose conflation of biography and aesthetic evaluation, this relativist language became irrevocably affixed to Brahms who, like Schnabel, remains representative of a certain *kind* of musicianship: one whose enduring symbolic appeal continues to resist potentially destabilizing discourses, especially with regards to the modes by which it is translated into musical acts. While conformity to contemporary

[10] Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music,* 58, in Taruskin, "Back to Whom," 290 - 91.

Brahms performance norms is seen as both historically and ethically sound, this compliance is thus also rooted in the palatability of the identity these norms protect: that of Brahms himself. In other words, by preserving and communicating the essential qualities of Brahms's canonic identity in performances of his music, so too are pianists revealing themselves to be controlled musicians.

As such, if you ask any pianist to describe a typically 'Brahmsian' performer, style or even composition, what you will hear are descriptors that invariably denote ordered, disciplined, and ultimately controlled psychological and corporeal states. Under the rubric of the mind, take for example words like stoic, clear, objective, absolute, logical, complex, coherent, unified, rational, introverted, conservative, scholarly, and high brow; while those Brahmsian descriptors with bodily implications include organic, restrained, refined, pure, ascetic, chaste, modest, robust, manly, German, noble, powerful and healthy. Even the language of what Brahms style is *not* is grounded in the language of mental and physical abandon, with words like sentimental, sensual, effeminate, irrational, noisy, flashy, affected, extroverted, superficial, vague, exotic and virtuosic.

It is my contention that the gaps observed between performances borne from the language of contemporary Brahms style and its associated performance norms and Brahms as he was recorded are occupied by understandings of Brahms's relativist canonic identity, and particularly by a pervasive aesthetic ideology of psychological and physical control: one that leads pianists to shape their Brahms performances in ways that might never have occurred to the composer. Kevin Korsyn is only partly when he asserts that it is an ideology of unity that runs through the collected papers of the *1983 International Brahms Conference,* to the point where the notion becomes "a Procrustean bed": an "*idée*

fixe [that] forces [one] to ignore any evidence that might contradict his theory."[11] Though Korsyn astutely argues against the suppression of themes such as heterogeneity and ambiguity in Brahms discourse, his critique only focuses on notational categories and external labels such as modernism versus classicism. By ignoring the performative implications of the aesthetic ideology of unity, the much deeper fixation of mind-body control goes unchallenged. As any musician can attest, coherently unified or ambiguously heterogeneous performances or works are those in which an artist has demonstrated some preternatural excellence in the areas of knowledge and execution, or mental and physical control. As such, like all of the descriptors of contemporary Brahms style, unity *and* heterogeneity have deep corporeal or psychological implications for the identities and practices of performers and composer alike.

In this chapter I will examine the dialectical origins of modern understandings of Brahms's canonic identity; how that identity has informed the language of contemporary Brahms style; how this language has given rise to an underlying aesthetic ideology of corporeal and psychological control that continues to be reinforced by concrete norms for the performance of Brahms's piano music; and why we continue to feel compelled to purge Schumann's lovesick poison from Brahms's 'body' of work. The hope is that by confronting the agenda-laden, polemical and historically-situated language of Brahmsian identity, that historically-curious pianists may begin to problematize the relationship between what we think about Brahms and how we wish to hear his music performed.

[11] Korsyn, "Brahms Research," 101.

1.2) Brahmsian Minds

At the core of the aesthetic ideology of psychological control lie pervasive ideas concerning Brahms's preternaturally refined intellect. Like Leon Botstein's assessment of Rudolf Weyr's Viennese sculpture of the composer, through the polemical writings of late-Romantic observers Brahms came to symbolize "the mid-century *Ringstrasse* and its celebration of the values of *Bildung*, culture, refinement, and the historical," while Wagner, Liszt and Berlioz's New German School represented the lowbrow attractions of sensuality, colour and virtuosity. A staunch supporter of social, cultural and political progress (views ironically deemed 'modern' and 'foreign' by the Wagnerians),[12] Brahms's achievements "were seen as analogous to those of the leading scientists and scholars who were his friends...[while] the music of Wagner, with its theatrical conception, [and] symbolic meanings...belonged in a much more populist world of historical romanticism."[13]

The relativist language that continues to mediate how Brahms's cerebral musicality is communicated in performances of his works originates in the dialectical writings of his most ardent supporters and critics. For example, when distancing Brahms from his more overtly Romantic contemporaries who favoured colour over formal rigor, Sigismond Stojowski praises Brahms's "unswervingly logical construction"[14]; while Hermann Deiters asserts that, "We should be glad and thankful that we in Germany possess one artist of the genius and inventive power, of profound education, full of

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[12] Leon Botstein, "Brahms and Nineteenth-Century Painting," *19th-Century Music* 14, no.2 (Autumn, 1990): 155, 158, accessed June 20, 2011, http://www.jstor.org/stable/746200.
[13] Michael Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 233.
[14] Sigismond Stojowski, "Recollections of Brahms," *The Musical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (April, 1933): 146, accessed July 19, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/738794.

enthusiasm for the true aims of art, and who...despises everything petty and false...Such men as Brahms are the salt of our art, and keep it from utter degeneracy."[15] For his part, Richard Binns characterizes Brahms as 'one of the biggest minds of his day,' drawing comparisons with the composer and literary critic Arthur Symons's description of Thomas Hardy:

> You see the brain working with an almost painful simplicity - just saved from being painful by a humorous sense of external things which becomes also a kind of intellectual criticism…There is something brooding, obscure, tremulous, as he meditates over man, nature and destiny.[16]

The language of Brahmsian brainpower also appears in markedly less admiring late-Romantic accounts: often by those who felt that Brahms's compositions were mere academic exercises whose reception was buoyed by the enthusiastic (albeit misplaced) support of his most vocal supporters. After the 1890 premiere of Brahms's *String Quartet* Op. 111, Theodor Helm writes: "[The Quartet] bears the cool reflecting trait shared by Brahms, even if his faction conducted itself in the most enthusiastic manner. But enthusiasm is the very feeling that Brahms never arouses…[it is] more thought rather than felt, more constructed than discovered."[17] Others lashed out against what they perceived as "a certain Pharisaism...fashionable especially among University men, which affects the exaltation of [Brahms] to the disparagement of all other modern writers...due

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[15] Hermann Deiters, "Johannes Brahms: A Biographical Sketch," *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 29, no. 539 (January 1888): 11, accessed December 14, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3359841.
[16] Richard Binns, "Brahms: Some Thoughts towards a Re-Valuation," *The Musical Times* 65, no. 977 (July 1, 1924): 601, accessed December 14, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/911692.
[17] Theodor Helm, *Deutsche Zeitung* 6530 (Morgen Ausgabe, 4 March, 1890): 2, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 236.

to a desire to pose as musically more intellectual than ordinary mortals."[18] Of course there was merit to such grievances, as evidenced by E. Howard-Jones's assertion that:

> [Brahms's] method is terse and epigrammatic, and his utterance makes a demand on both the reasoning as well as the mere listening faculty...[Unless] our attention is emotionally and mentally concentrated we shall not follow his drift; and as we miss that, we may incline flippantly to pronounce the thing uttered as dull or tedious.[19]

While many felt that it was worth "look[ing] for [Brahms's] originality and definite artistic personality beneath a surface that is sometimes difficult of comprehension and even occasionally repellent," others conceded that at his worst he could be "a commonplace and mechanical music-spinner, who could write an elaborate work without once exhibiting so much as a momentary flicker of divine fire."[20] The dialectical fieriness of these debates was such that Brahms's most devoted followers even implored audiences and critics to take his side as an act of solidarity - even in the absence of true comprehension. As Hermann Deiters proclaims, "It is now no longer possible to pass over [Brahms's] works as strange and unintelligible, on the contrary, all true lovers of art must feel constrained to range themselves on his side."[21]

Regardless of the particular partisanship of such late-Romantic accounts, the language of Brahms's intellectualism remains embedded in the aesthetic categories by which we judge interpretations of his music today. Like the unglamorous Schnabel who

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[18] Harding, "Some Thoughts upon the Position of Johannes Brahms Among the Great Masters of music," *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 33rd session (1906 - 1907): 165, accessed December 3, 2011, http://www.jstor.org/stable/765640.
[19] E. Howard-Jones, "Brahms in his Pianoforte Music," *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 37th Session (1910 - 1911): 118, accessed 03/12/2011, http://www.jstor.org/stable/765704.
[20] Ibid., 118; D. C. Parker, "Music and the Grand Style," *The Musical Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (April 1922): 178 - 9, accessed 15/12/2012, http://www.jstor.orh/stable/738228.
[21] Deiters, "Johannes Brahms," 10.

'played with his brain,' good Brahmsian pianists are those who eschew the 'petty and false' degeneracy of crowd-pleasing tricks and overt emotional affectation, and whose performances are 'more thought than felt': a risky venture in an industry of superstar prodigies and standardized performance expectations. After Glenn Gould's infamous 1962 performance of Brahms's *Piano Concerto in D Minor* Op.15 Leonard Bernstein conceded that he "admired [Gould's] intellectual approach, his 'guts' approach, his complete dedication to whatever he was doing."[22] Indeed, the aspirational allure of such unapologetically brainy musicianship leads some Brahmsian pianists to identify with that coterie of highly-educated connoisseurs who proudly 'ranged themselves' on Brahms's side, impervious to accusations of cultish academicism.

> Heralded as an **intellectual** musician, his approach to the instrument is decidedly **academic** and **straightforward**...What the **scholarly** approach to his instrument does bring is a masterful technique, brilliant and crystal-clear voicing, and a complete lack of pretentiousness or over-romanticizing.[23]

> Time and again Brahms's potential for strenuousness and opacity is **clarified** with a superfine musical **intelligence** and technique...you may well wonder when you last heard a pianist with a more **patrician** disregard for all forms of bloated excess or exaggeration.[24]

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[22] Schuyler Chapin, liner notes to the original SONY release of *Glenn Gould with The New York Philharmonic Orchestra and Leonard Bernstein*, recorded April 6, 1962, Sony Classical SK60675 ADD, reproduced in "Bernstein and Gould Play Brahms," http://wssmlsy.wordpress.com/2010/10/30/bernstein-and-gould-play-brahms/.

[23] Mike D. Brownell, review of *Brahms Piano Concertos 1 & 2*, John Lill (piano), ASV/Resonance 204 (CD), 2006, accessed January 22, 2013, http://www.allmusic.com/album/brahms-piano-concertos-1-2-mw0001388024.

[24] Bryce Morrison, "Brahms - Handel Variations," review of *Brahms - Handel Variations*, Murray Perahia (piano), Sony Classical 88697727252 (CD), 2010, in *Gramophone* (November 29, 2010), accessed January 24, 2013, http://www.gramophone.co.uk/chart/review/brahms-handel-variations.

> Kozhukin evoked both intimacy and majesty, driving the *Andante* with fantastic phrasing, **intelligence** and purity, and infusing the finale with a touch of Beethoven. This repertoire was clearly made for him.[25]

> This is not to say that Mr. Serkin's musical **intelligence** was not also fully engaged.... In the finale, which rippled with contrapuntal clarity and headlong energy, Brahms's debt to Bach was never more palpable. But the Brahms who anticipated Schoenberg also loomed at every turn.[26]

As evidenced by the reviews above, the ideology of Brahmsian psychological fitness is also sustained by ideas related both to the composer's historicism, or the influence of earlier models on his compositional procedures; and his historicity, or his identity as either a backward-looking classicist or a forward-looking modernist and even postmodernist. The language of Brahms's historicism and historicity has palpable consequences for modern Brahmsian performance practices because, like the above-cited review of a performance in which one can hear both Brahms's musical past and future, it posits the composer's profound historical awareness as a respite from the practices of his more overtly Romantic present.

If contemporaneous observers seemed eager to debate Brahms's 'classic' lineage they are not entirely to blame: Brahms once remarked upon studying a Mozart quintet, "That's how it's done from Bach up to myself!"; while Eduard Hanslick observed that the "strongly ethical character of Beethoven's music, which is serious even in merriment...is

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[25] "Recital at Montreux Chateau de Chillon: Haydn, Brahms, Liszt," review of Denis Kozhukhin (piano), September 11, 2011, accessed January 22, 2013, http://deniskozhukhin.com/2011/09/11/recital-at-montreux-chateau-de-chillon-haydn-brahms-liszt/.

[26] Anthony Tommasini, "Brahms With Fire As Well as I.Q.," review of Peter Serkin (piano), in *New York Times Music Review* (March 1, 2003), accessed February 2, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/01/arts/music-review-brahms-with-fire-as-well-as-iq.html.

also decidedly evident in Brahms."[27] Ultimately however, it was Robert Schumann's 1853 "Neue Bahnen" manifesto that framed the potentiality of Brahms's burgeoning canonic identity in the image of his own "tripartite music-historical credo": one "rooted in an intense involvement with the music of the past, bolstered by the expectation of a poetic future, and shaped by a critical awareness of the present."[28]

If the future was indeed to be a higher echo of the past,[29] then Schumann believed that it should be forged by those who shared his historicist outlook, as opposed to those who made claims of progressivity by cutting ties with classical formal procedures. By launching Brahms into the German musical consciousness as a conservative symbol of some nobler dedication to the past as a critique of one's present, Schumann effectively anointed Brahms as "the first and greatest of that terrible species of our age, the artist 'out of joint with his times.'"[30] As Arthur Lourie observes in 1933:

> At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries...the domination of the German musical culture... was based on German classicism. Its spiritual power was created by the Titans of music – Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven. Brahms was, of course, the gifted interpreter of the spiritual meaning and creative significance of the achievements of these three men...The individual poetry of Brahms's

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[27] Alexander von Zemlinsky and Karl Weigl, "Brahms and the Newer Generation: Personal Reminiscences," trans. Walter Frisch, *Brahms and his World* (Princeton, 1990), 206, in Roger Moseley, "Is there only Juan Brahms?" *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131, no. 1 (2006): 163, accessed May 31, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3840474; Eduard Hanslick, *Concerte, Komponisten, Virtuosen, 1870 - 1885* (Berlin, 1886), 165 - 69, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 225 - 26.

[28] Nicole Grimes, "In Search of Absolute Inwardness and Spiritual Subjectivity? The Historical and Ideological Context of Schumann's 'Neue Bahnen,'" *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 39, no. 2 (December 2008): 143 - 44, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25487551.

[29] *Robert Schumann, Tagebücher*, ed. Georg Eismann (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1971), vol. 1, 304, in Grimes, "In Search," 143 - 44.

[30] Joseph Kerman, "Counsel for the Defense," *The Hudson Review* 3 (1950): 442 - 43, in Korsyn, "Brahms Research," 89.

> music, for all its charm, is of a second-rate order. His chief strength lies in the fact that, assisted by the apparatus for musical thinking devised by him – the most perfect and subtle of his day – he...built the bridge whereby a connection is established between German classicism and the method of composition now universally employed. Brahms's method is in no respect contemporary, but his value...[is] of a methodological rather than of any other order.[31]

I've included this rather lengthy excerpt because it is a brilliant illustration of how rhetoric related to Brahms's connection to the spirit and procedures of German classicism gave rise to language that continues to characterize him "as historical rather than futuristic, traditional rather than ground breaking, and ultimately classical rather than *echt romantisch*."[32] More importantly perhaps, Lourie posits Brahms's "most perfect and subtle" musical mind as the driving force behind his anachronistic and [a]historical canonic identity: as "a conservative engaged in a rear-guard action against the forward march of music."[33] As Hermann Deiters writes in 1888: "At a time when men who ought to know better are trying to destroy form without being able to put anything in its place, [Brahms] stands fast by the good old way – the way of masters who were giants, the way worn by the feet of generations."[34] Clearly, Brahms *knew* better.

This theme of cerebral ahistoricity also appears throughout the historical documentary record in connection to the idea of Brahms as symbolic of a kind of 'full stop' in Western musical histories: from H. A. Harding's 1906 assertion that "Brahms...was avowedly a gatherer-up of what was before him," to Guido Adler's 1933

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[31] Arthur Lourie, "The Crisis of Form," trans. S. W. Pring, *Music & Letters* 14, no. 2 (April 1933): 96, accessed December 14, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/728908.
[32] Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), in Moseley, "Is There only Juan Brahms?" 162.
[33] J. Peter Burkholder, "Brahms and Twentieth-Century Classical Music," *19th-Century Music* 8, no. 1 (Summer, 1984): 75, accessed August 8, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/746255.
[34] Deiters, "Johannes Brahms," 10.

observation in that, "[Brahms's] work was more a summing-up than a beginning, most of all, perhaps, a reconciliation."[35] Indeed, in the preface to his 1912 analysis of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony,* Heinrich Schenker inscribes: 'To the memory of the last master of German composition, Johannes Brahms.' Moseley asserts that Schenker's dedication both underlines Brahms's Beethovenian lineage, while gloomily echoing a belief shared by many early-twentieth-century observers that Brahms "represents an elite musical culture that has slid irrevocably into the past."[36] While Schenker could not have predicted recent developments in both art and popular music spheres, his "attempt to seal the canon, [as a] protest at what [he] considered the degeneracy of modern music"[37] is a sentiment that continues to resonate in both scholarly and practice-based Brahms spheres today.

Perhaps this nostalgia for the kind of musicianship Brahms represents explains recent attempts to recast him as a modernist and even postmodernist. In "Brahms the Progressive," Arnold Schoenberg emphasizes the more anticipatory aspects of Brahms's compositional style, from his techniques of developing variation and motivic concision, to his unconventional harmonic and rhythmic innovations.[38] Conversely, discussions of Brahms's postmodernism tend to emphasize his (and our own) backwards gaze. As J. Peter Burkholder observes, the 'music of the future' ultimately belonged to Brahms for his use of past models to solve new problems and his anxiety related to composing music for

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[35] Harding, "Some Thoughts," 160; Guido Adler and W. Oliver Strunk, "Johannes Brahms: His Achievement, His Personality, and His Position," *The Musical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (April 1933): 140, accessed June 22, 2011, http://www.jstor.org/stable/738793.

[36] Moseley, "Is There Only Juan Brahms," 160 - 1. For Schenker's analysis and dedication, see *Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: A Portrayal of its Musical Content, with Running Commentary on Performance and Literature*, ed. and trans. John Rothgeb (New Haven and London, 1992), v.

[37] Roger Moseley, "Reforming Johannes: Brahms, Kreisler Junior and the Piano Trio in B, Op. 8," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 132, part 2 (2007): 279, accessed June 20, 2011, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30161409.

[38] Arnold Schoenberg, "Brahms the Progressive," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (New York, 1975).

audiences familiar with the music of the past.[39] Similarly, Michael Musgrave describes Brahms as a "nascent postmodernist"[40] for his anticipation of our current preoccupation with the study and understanding of past music.

Kevin Korsyn points out that recent re-brandings of Brahms's canonic identity are symptomatic of a re-evaluation of Romanticism, whereby scholars have realized that the boundaries between Romanticist and Modernist musical languages are more porous than previously thought. Korsyn argues for heterogeneity in his assertion that Brahms recruited a plurality of historically-rooted musical languages by becoming "both the historian and the agent of his own language," and by "having to choose an orientation among languages."[41] Like Schoenberg, Burkholder and Musgrave however, Korsyn's arguments focus on notational categories and external historical labels, while being predicated upon the understanding that Brahms was better mentally equipped to handle the challenges of occupying a historical crossroads than his contemporaries. More importantly, each author avoids implicating Brahms in the performative reality of his actual historical context: one that was considerably more *echt romantisch* than many of us are prepared to accept.

In performances of Brahms's music today, pianists exercise extreme restraint in their use of overt Romantic historical markers such as unnotated *rubato*, preferring instead to adopt a highly literal and performer-neutral approach that is closer in sound and spirit to their performances of Bach and Beethoven, as opposed to those of Liszt,

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[39] Burkholder, "Brahms and Twentieth-Century Classical Music," 78 - 81.
[40] Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 283.
[41] Korsyn, "Brahms Research," 90. Korsyn quotes Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 76, and Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 295.

Schumann or Chopin, for example. If Brahms was able to reference his past while anticipating our present in ways that lay beyond the intellectual reach of his contemporaries, then so too are pianists expected to emphasize his (and their own) ahistorical cerebral 'otherness' in performance.

> Getting down to the playing itself, these are interpretations that feel as if they get right to the heart of Brahms the man and the musician with the impression they weave of Romantic expression melded with **deference** to **classical form and sensibilities**.[42]
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> Her impulsive dynamic surges and wide degree of tempo fluctuation arguably undercut the Brahms F minor Sonata's **inherent classicism**.[43]
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> Listeners expecting a semblance of **classical propriety**...probably will cringe at Sokolov's **outsized rubatos**, steroid-induced **dynamic contrasts**, and **highly idiosyncratic** tempo fluctuations.[44]
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> While Kissin often can be a capricious score reader regarding dynamics and phrasings, he follows Brahms' indications **virtually to the letter**, honouring every accent, distinguishing each legato from non-legato articulation, and so forth. Much **thought** and **planning** seems to govern Kissin's interpretation.[45]

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[42] Charlotte Gardner, "A triumph of Brahmsian thought, with playing that gets right to the heart of the composer," review of *Brahms Works for Solo Piano, Vol.1*, Barry Douglas (piano), Chandos CHAN 10716 (CD), 2012, in *BBC Music Review* (March 29, 2012), accessed January 5, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/h8pn.

[43] Jed Distler, "Brahms & Liszt: Piano Sonatas/Cechová," review of Jitka Cechová (piano), Supraphon SU 4021-2 131 (CD), 2010, accessed January 5, 2013, http://www.classicstoday.com/review/review-15746/?search=1.

[44] Jed Distler, "Brahms: F minor sonata; Ballades/Sokolov," review of Grigory Sokolov (piano), OPUS 111 - 30366 (CD), 2005, accessed January 5, 2013, http://www.classicstoday.com/review/review-8520/?search=1.

[45] Jed Distler, "Brahms: Piano sonata Op. 5," review of Evgeny Kissin (piano), RCA 09026-638862 (CD), 2001, accessed January 5, 2013, http://www.classicstoday.com/review/review-9506/?search=1.

For nineteenth-century Brahmsians, the ego-driven excesses and undisciplined coloristic effects of Liszt, Berlioz and Wagner's musical practices were symptomatic of fundamental psychological weakness; while Brahms's grave stoicism, ascetic self-restraint and hermitic dedication to classical formal procedures were a direct result of his formidable mental control. For his part, Harding observes that instead of "trying to cast his utterances in [Liszt and Chopin's] mould, and to achieve thereby something of their meteoric fame and universal acceptance, [Brahms] chose instead the harder path of the purely personal type of utterance."[46] Stojowski remarks that, "Brahms was conservative...and [had] little patience with the indiscretions and absurdities into which hero-worship [was] liable to degenerate"; while Adler notes that Brahms was "a self-effacing artist, not a vainglorious virtuoso...[he] tempered imagination with finished craftsmanship."[47]

Even Deiters seizes the opportunity to make a polemical assertion of Brahms's intellectual otherness in his lamentation of the difficulty of writing a biography about someone who so courted obscurity: "Some are men of thought, others of action...some mark their course through life by the exercise of personal attributes, others are known only through their works. It is the invisible, almost impersonal, men of thought that give the biographer trouble." Indeed, for Brahms's most loyal followers, this reticence towards lionization and public display only reinforced their belief that, "his real life, the object of all his sympathies and energies, [was] that which passe[d] within"[48] - his intellect-driven craft.

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[46] Howard-Jones, "Brahms in His Pianoforte Music," 122.
[47] Stojowski, "Recollections," 143; Adler and Strunk, "Johannes Brahms," 130.
[48] Deiters, "Johannes Brahms," 9 - 10.

Brahms's quiet devotion to historical formal compositional procedures was naturally posited as musically and intellectually superior to Wagner's reduction of "the musical to a handmaiden to excite the superficial feelings of the viewer...by pandering to the decorative and the sensual...[and] play[ing] to a crowd of dilettantes and philistines."[49] Conversely, the Wagnerians interpreted Brahms's eschewal of fame and coloristic effect as proof that he was "ungifted, pretentious, [and] lacking in all creative power," due to a "lack of charm, soul and personality." In their opinion, Brahms was the creator of "bad, ugly, dead music," and a "pompous duffer."[50] Indeed, as Hermann Abert remarks, "Wagner's scintillant [sic] power of radiance is something [Brahms] lacks completely; far more inclined to outline than to colour, he reveals the multiple, interlaced web of his voices with a certain acerb [sic] realism...[leading] Wagner fanatics [to] have accused Brahms of lacking tone sense, of being dry and academic."[51]

Pianists often find it difficult to communicate Brahms's antipodal stance on virtuosity and effect in an industry that bills them as larger-than-life virtuosos. As Harding cautions, Brahmsian pianists should not "intrude that aggressive personality which they are accustomed, and are expected, to exhibit in playing Schumann and Chopin...for with [Brahms], self-abnegation is even more absolutely necessary: the identity of the executant must be entirely lost in the work he interprets."[52] Indeed, many pianists leave the performance of Brahms's solo piano works for the more autumnal

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[49] Botstein, "Brahms and Nineteenth-Century Painting,"162, adapted from Feuerbach's critique of Makart (one of Wagner's favorite painters), in Julius Allgeyer, *Anselm Feuerbach*, ed. Carl Neumann, vol. II (2nd edn. Berlin, 1904), 450 - 59. Botstein argues that Feuerbach's contempt for Makart was based on the same elements Brahms loathed in Wagner.
[50] Harding, "Some Thoughts," 160 - 61.
[51] Hermann Abert and Frederick H. Martens, "Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms," *The Musical Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (April, 1927): 342, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/738416.
[52] Harding, "Some Thoughts," 163.

stages of their careers, having already forged their reputations on the extroverted mettle-proving warhorses of the nineteenth-century piano repertoire. Once established as capable virtuosos, only then do they feel comfortable assuming the ascetic temperament required in the performance of Brahms's piano works: where musical expression is expected to emanate from the music itself, unfettered by the ego-driven intrusion of a mentally unrestrained performer.

> Everything is kept **smartly** on the move, nothing sounds rushed, ill-focused or merely streamlined. This is equally true of his Brahms where, once more, there is never a hint of anything **portentous or inflated**.[53]

> What unfaltering **poise** and tonal translucence he achieves...his playing is so finely 'worked' and **controlled** that even here he captures a **reflection** and nostalgia at the heart of such music... [K]eeping its exultance on **a tight rein**, he remains **musicianly** to his fingertips...locat[ing] an underlying poetry denied to less **subtle** or less engaging pianists.[54]

> Radu Lupu is not the most charismatically compelling of performers. He trudges onstage, sits down at the piano like a court stenographer at a **tedious** trial, and proceeds **dispassionately** to do his job. It's just that the execution of his particular job results in beautiful music. What he lacks in flair, both personally and musically, Mr. Lupu makes up in **poetic seriousness** rendered by what might be called **self-effacing** technique. He doesn't dazzle with pointillistic runs and cosmic banging.[55]

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[53] Bryce Morrison, "Brahms - Haydn - Schubert," review of Rudolf Firkusny (piano), BBC Legends/IMG Artists D BBCL4I73-2, (CD), 2006, recorded live January 4, 1969, in *Gramophone* (Awards Issue, 2006): 101.
[54] Bryce Morrison, "Brahms," review of Libor Novacek (piano), Landor LAN285, (CD), 2008, in *Gramophone* (October 2008): 85.
[55] John Rockwell, "German Bill by Radu Lupu," review of Radu Lupu (piano), in *New York Times Music Review* (January 29, 1991), accessed December 29, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/29/arts/review-piano-german-bill-by-radu-lupu.html?gwh=A7D31769948DA4FCE162E27842A872D2.

> In these pieces, Mr. Zimerman was at his **poetic** best, and he showed his listeners an unusual form of **virtuosity**: not the **self-aggrandizing** kind, but the kind that **magnifies** the music.[56]

It is no coincidence that many of the aforementioned reviews praise pianists whose onstage personae evidence some self-effacing communion between artist and work, as late-Romantic discussions of Brahms's psychological control often use expressly spiritual language. Take for example ideas related to his ascetic devotion to absolute composition; his moralistic renunciation of effect and virtuosity; or his self-abnegating deference to the composer-deities of the past: "Bach and Mozart were his musical gods; [and in] Beethoven's gigantic footsteps he followed deferently [sic] and devoutly."[57] Even Brahms's ahistorical otherness is frequently described in religious tongues, as evidenced by the obituary notice calling him "the true apostle who will write revelations which many Pharisees will be unable to explain, even after centuries."[58]

As usual, Brahms's most vocal supporters catalysed this quasi-religious trope in the pursuit of their own anti-Wagnerian agendas. As Nicole Grimes points out in reference to observations by Daniel Beller-McKenna and Constantin Floros, Schumann's "Neue Bahnen" article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* introduces Brahms as "the chosen one," "the one who would and must appear," and "by whose cradle heroes stand guard": a potent mix of biblical and mythological imagery from Romantic literary

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[56] Allan Kozinn, "An Evening Given to Brahms," review of Krystian Zimerman (piano), in *New York Times Music Review* (May 2, 2002), accessed December 29, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/02/arts/music-in-review-classical-music-an-evening-given-to-brahms.html?gwh=C8BAB101CFA95296F3A1E53218754123.
[57] Adler and Strunk, "Johannes Brahms," 121.
[58] "Johannes Brahms," *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, (May 1, 1897): 298.

traditions and the Christian Gospels, intended to resonate with both readers and Brahms alike. Around the same time, Schumann also describes Brahms as "eagle": a well-known moniker for John the Apostle, author of the Book of Revelation.[59] As Sandra McColl observes, all of this could very well have been interpreted by the more devoutly religious as idolatry or blasphemy, were it not for the fact that Schumann only ever refers to Brahms as the Messiah of German music.[60]

Just months after the publication of "Neue Bahnen," a reviewer for the *NZfM* appropriates Schumann's religious language after Brahms's first public Leipzig concert, writing: "We find ourselves in the presence of one of those highly gifted natures, an artist by the grace of God."[61] Brahms's first formal teacher of composition, Edward Marxsen, is also reported to have described his student as "a future priest of art, who should proclaim in a new idiom through his works, its high, true, and lasting principles"; while Brahms's *Musical Times* obituary notice extolls "that asceticism mingled with poetic mysticism which is so characteristic of Brahms's genius," and "the catholicity of his taste."[62]

Schumann's designation of Brahms as the 'Messiah of German music' assumed profound philosophical and nationalistic implications in 1859, when Franz Brendel (the Hegelian-minded editor of the *NZfM*) announced that the *Neudeutsche Schule* belonged

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[59] Robert Schumann, "Neue Bahnen," *NZfM* 39, no. 18 (1853): 185 - 86; Daniel Beller-McKenna, "Brahms, the Bible, and Post-Romanticism," 24 - 34; Constantin Floros, *Brahms und Bruckner* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1980), 102 - 7; and 'Brahms: Der 'Messias' und 'Apostel.' Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des Artikels 'Neue Bahnen'; in Grimes, "In Search of Absolute Inwardness," 154 - 55.

[60] Sandra McColl, "A Model German," *The Musical Times*, 138, no. 1849 (March 1997): 10, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1003516.

[61] Ferdinand Gleich, "Kleine Zeitung," *NZfM,* 40, no.1 (1 January, 1854): 8, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 214 - 15.

[62] Charles M. Joseph, "The Origins of Brahms's Structural Control," *College Music Symposium*, 21, no.1 (Spring, 1981): 9, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375155"; "Johannes Brahms," *The Musical Times* (May 1, 1897): 298 - 99.

to Liszt (a Hungarian), Berlioz (a Frenchman) and Wagner. As Richard Taruskin asserts, in the post-Hegelian/revolutionary context of Brendel's statement, a new conception of German-ness had emerged whereby "one showed oneself a German not ethnically but spiritually, by putting oneself in humanity's vanguard." Given this context, the language of "Neue Bahnen" thus references a mixture of nationalistic and pietistic ideology essential to Schumann's argument that the saviour of German music ought to at least be German.[63]

Schumann also describes Brahms in "Neue Bahnen" as "a musician who would reveal his mastery not in gradual stages but like Minerva would spring fully armed from Kronos's head."[64] According to Grimes, Schumann's invocation of the Roman goddess associated with wisdom, owls and philosophy can also be seen as an attack on Brendel, whose 1845 inaugural address as newly-appointed editor of *NZfM* contained a passage from the preface to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."[65] For Brendel, Minerva symbolized his belief that philosophy, in the form of music criticism, should prescribe how music ought to be. Grimes convincingly interprets Schumann's article as an attempt to "banish Minerva's owl, returning to the goddess herself [music] the importance she was due, but that had been eclipsed in recent years in the journal in favour of the significance of the owl."[66]

Alongside such pietistic, nationalistic and philosophical language, one also finds frequent references to the notions of loftiness and immortality in late-Romantic

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[63] Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 422, in Grimes, "In Search of Absolute Inwardness," 154.
[64] Schumann, "Neue Bahnen," *NZfM* 39, no. 18 (1853): 185 - 86, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 66.
[65] Franz Brendel, 'Zur Einleitung,' *NZfM* 22, no.1 - 2 (1 January 1845): 1, in Grimes, "In Search of Absolute Inwardness," 155.
[66] Grimes, "In Search of Absolute Inwardness," 156.

discussions of Brahms's canonic identity. Harding describes Brahms as having a "high ideal of art and lofty conceptions of duty in regard to it," while Parker asserts that Brahms's music reaches "the heights, like a spiritual Matterhorn, and carries us definitely to the rare and elevated places."[67] Schenker again evokes Brahms's classicist lineage in his observation that "Brahms's rejection of mere appearance results from his deep involvement with...strict counterpoint...which Beethoven termed 'the eternal religion'"; while Max Reger states that, " Brahms's immortality will never be just [his] 'inclination' to the old masters, but...that he knew how to release his newly breathed spiritual moods on the basis of his own spiritual personality."[68] Even Max Kalbeck's obituary for Brahms evocatively reinforces his great friend's musico-religious canonic identity:

> What would rise in the spirit must descend in the flesh; what would live, must die. The cruel law of an inevitable and puzzling dark will of fate, which even the Son of God could not escape...Ah, and even he, the creator of immortal works, the singer of eternal songs, the first among the musicians of the present and one of the greatest masters of all peoples and times, the saviour, the upholder, and the guardian of German music, the worthy and equal successor of a Bach and Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann, must pay to nature the due sacrifice![69]

In our tendency to conflate the anecdotal biographical minutiae of Brahms's life with the aesthetic categories that mediate performances of his works, themes of asceticism, devoutness and deference continue to be reflected in our highly literal and

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[67] Harding, "Some Thoughts," 159; Parker, "Music and The Grand Style," 162.
[68] Heinrich Schenker, quoted and trans. by Paul Mast, "Commentary on Brahms's Octaven und Quinten u. A.," *Music Forum*, 5 (1980): 151, in Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 280; Max Reger, "Degeneration und Regeneration in der Musik," *Neue Musik-Zeitung* 29 (1907): 51, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 256 - 57.
[69] Max Kalbeck, 'Feuilleton: Johannes Brahms,' *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* (7 May 1897): 1, in McColl, "A Model German," 10.

solemnly self-effacing interpretations of Brahms's scores; while lofty, timeless and eternal Brahms performances are those that conscientiously transcend overt historical markers. Performers who successfully capture the rarefied, pensive and emotionally austere nature of Brahms's music are said to have conquered the seduction, immorality, heresy and hedonism of the cults of virtuosity and effect.

> The Schumann Sonata, hectic and flecked with finger-slips, is not impressive. However, there is a gorgeous, **hymn-like simplicity** to his unfolding of the selection of Brahms intermezzos.[70]
>
> **Tough love** is a prevailing Brahmsian trait, and here it is condensed into something not only **ascetic** but also uncharacteristically short. Such tension runs through the entire Brahms corpus: **austerity**, militantly enforced, **beating back** the lyrical rushes of sentiment and effusiveness.[71]
>
> Angelich's absorption into this **rarefied** world seems totally **unselfconscious** and complete.
>
> The slow movement banished **hedonism**. Even its most **heavenly** moment - as the piano climbs in steep intervals against two suspended clarinets - took on a **moral** tone. Mr. Brendel's final B-flat chord was not a fond farewell but a clear-eyed **affirmation**.[72]

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[70] Andrew Clements, "Brahms: Ballades; Intermezzos; Schubert: Piano Sonata in E Minor D566; Schumann: Piano Sonata No. 2 in G minor," review of Wilhelm Kempff (piano), BBC Legends BBCL 4114-2, (CD), 2001, recorded live at Queen Elizabeth Hall London in 1969 and 1972, in *The Guardian* (June 27, 2003), accessed January 3, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2003/jun/27/classicalmusicandopera.artsfeatures2?INTCMP=S

[71] Bernard Holland, "Trios From Brahms: Challenges for All Involved," review of the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, in *New York Times Music Review* (November 2, 2006), accessed January 3, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/02/arts/music/02trio.html?gwh=02AE32F637D7EE04BC55380D74451D6F.

[72] Bernard Holland, "Exploring Brahms's Dual Nature," review of Alfred Brendel (piano) and the New York Philharmonic, in *New York Times Music Review* (May 19, 1990), accessed January 23, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1990/05/19/arts/review-music-exploring-brahms-s-dual-nature.html.

> Also, slow movements could have a still more **inward** quality to convey that brooding **self-communion** which is so characteristic of this composer.[73]

If one imagines God as an all-knowing master architect, it is no wonder that contemporaneous expressions of Brahmsian spirituality tend to coexist alongside ideas related to his mastery of musical form, unity, coherence and organicism. Take Adler's assertion for example, that "in Brahms's music the intellectual element often predominates…he buil[ds] with the most laborious precision, as if acknowledging...the validity of the biblical admonition, 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.'"[74] Underpinned as always by assumptions about Brahms's unwavering psychological control, the idea of Brahms as "the archetype of a master musical engineer,"[75] later becomes further entrenched in the writings of Schoenberg, Schenker and Tovey: men for whom Brahms's cerebral constructionist procedures held almost religious appeal.

As Kevin Korsyn points out, concepts such as unity, organicity and coherence carried profound religious and philosophical connotations in the nineteenth-century, after properties previously attributed to the soul by theology (immortality, indivisibility, unity, integrity) became attached to the Romantic work of art in the wake of sceptical philosophy. In an example of what Korsyn calls our "tendency to use art to recuperate stable and reassuring ideas of selfhood,"[76] we continue to be invested in the concept of musical unity because it is in fact our own unity that is at stake. Perhaps this self-preserving ideological obsession with unity explains the ardour with which Brahms's

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[73] James Jolly, "Brahms's Piano Sonatas," review of Julius Katchen (piano), Decca London 455 247-2LC6 (CD), 1997, recorded 1962 - 66, in *Gramophone* (September 2012), accessed January 23, 2013, http://www.gramophone.co.uk/editorial/brahmss-piano-sonatas.
[74] Adler and Strunk, "Johannes Brahms," 125.
[75] Joseph, "The Origins of Brahms's Structural Control," 7.
[76] Korsyn, "Brahms Research," 91.

contemporaries championed his rigorously controlled and coherent formal procedures, to the detriment of the Wagnerians' lowbrow preference for coloristic effect. Critic Adolf Schubring explicitly connects formal coherence to the control of one's intellect, writing:

> He who does not understand how to work up the individual motives and motivic particles of the theme into new characteristic shapes by means of mosaic combination, continuation, expansion; he may for a while - if he has the tools - delight the untutored multitudes with his potpourris, or startle them with prickling harmonies, tone colours, and orchestral effects achieved by simple means. But a logical musician he is not.[77]

Brahms's masterful organic formalism is also frequently mentioned in accounts bemoaning the death of German classicism, especially with regards to some impending 'atrophy' of the organizing principles of rhythm, harmony, tonality and form. As Burkholder notes, "Wagner is preeminent in such histories, which view the prolonged dissonances, delayed resolutions, and yearning chromaticism of *Tristan und Isolde* as harbingers of the coming collapse, [while] Brahms is typically bypassed as a conservative in a progressive epoch, fighting a losing battle for 'classical' musical values and forms."[78] In 1933, Lourie invokes Brahms's use of the unified musical language of German classicism to criticize early-twentieth-century impressionist and atonal practices: "[Such currents] abjur[e] this unity and pursu[e] an undeviating course towards a state of extreme instability...Free will enters on the scene, and the caprice of the composer creates an endless series of individual, artificial scales."[79]

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[77] Adolf Schubring, "Die Schumann'sche Schule: Schumann und Brahms. Brahms's vierhändige Schumann-Variationen," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 3 (1868), 41 - 42, 49 - 51, trans. Walter Frisch, "Brahms and Schubring," 275, in Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 271.
[78] Burkholder, "Brahms and Twentieth-Century Classical Music," 75 - 76.
[79] Lourie, "The Crisis of Form," 99.

Brahms's cerebral constructionist practices were a bitter point of contention amongst opponents who accused him of hiding a paucity of genuine poetic inspiration behind his rigorous formalist procedures. As the great Wagnerian conductor Felix Weingartner asserts in 1897: "[Brahms's music is] scientific music, composed of sonorous forms and phrases; [but] it is not the language of humanity...which moves and stirs us up to the depth of our being, because...[such] music is artistic [while Brahms's] is artificial."[80] One year later, Walker responds to such allegations by explicitly correlating formal control with the control of one's intellect and even sanity:

> [Brahms] do[es] not look upon design as a mere academic framework nor as a hindrance to imaginative flights, but as... a thing of beauty in itself, and none the less beautiful for being subject to a certain restraint....[He] balances his emotions by the necessity of their presentation in beautiful form, so he balances his structure by the necessity of the beauty of the material it has to deal with. I cannot personally understand how some people cannot find beauty and emotion in Brahms...The beauty, no doubt, is quiet, and the passion is sane; but to deny that the beauty and the passion are to be found in Brahms's work as a whole is, I think, to show oneself...incapable of distinguishing between beauty and sensuousness, and between emotion and hysteria.[81]

Walker goes on to further praise Brahms's avoidance of programmatic associations and coloristic nuances by stating that, "it is always the mood, not the thing that is painted. And though the mood is always represented with matchless fidelity, it is not painted word by word, but as a whole, and consequently structural interests never

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[80] Felix Weingartner, *The Symphony Writers Since Beethoven*, trans. A. Bles (London, 1897), 60 - 61, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 238.
[81] Ernest Walker, "Brahms," *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 25th Session (1898 - 1899): 118, accessed May 26, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/765156.

suffer."[82] Here, Walker hints at yet another fundamental element of Brahmsian coherence: the suppression of local emphasis, colour and effect in favour of overall line and form. Indeed, 'good' Brahms performances are those that are first and foremost structurally elucidative: where the composer's meticulously crafted chordal, contrapuntal and rhythmic textures are clearly delineated, yet never to the detriment of the unity and coherence of a work's larger structure.

In order to accomplish this, pianists tend to link Brahms's local phrases into long horizontal metaphrases; they maintain consistent moods and tempi within sections of works, while creating dramatic contrasts between those sections; and they tend to restrict their use of unnotated expressive devices like *rubato* to the outer boundaries of these unified musical spaces. Some pianists push the notion of unity even further by linking multi-sectioned works with a single fundamental underlying rhythm. Interestingly, successfully structural Brahms performances are often described in linguistic terms: by 'accounts' where 'phrases' and 'arguments' are 'articulated' cogently, without subverting the overall 'message' or 'paragraph' by succumbing to the 'rhetoric' of virtuosity or effect. In performances of Brahms's cerebral master blueprints, everything must be in its rightful place: in deferential service to the whole.

> In his last three sets of piano pieces, all unnecessary **rhetoric** is purged from Brahms's music. There is no **hectoring** or **lecturing**, no celebration of **virtuosity** for its own sake. Lars Vogt is the perfect kind of **thoughtful**, **unflashy** pianist for **emotionally contained** world; his playing never attempts to **impose** his own interpretative ideas on music that has its own **organic coherence**.[83]

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[82] Walker, "Brahms," 124.
[83] Clements, "Brahms: Intermezzi Op. 117; Piano Pieces Op. 118 & 119," review of Lars Vogt (piano), EMI Classics 7243 5 57543 2 5 (CD), 2003, in *The Guardian* (March 5, 2004), accessed

The multifarious strands of Brahms' dense, complex and contrapuntal writing are beautifully **balanced**, with a sure **structural** grasp that carries the ear and sustains the musical **argument** equally **convincingly** across individual phrases and long, multi-sectioned pieces.[84]

Throwing caution to the wind, Mr. Zimerman nevertheless maintained a fine **equilibrium**...In the last fortissimo outburst, the bubble finally burst, and the passage lost **coherence**.[85]

Displays an instinctively warm and sensitive style that befits the lyrical side of Brahms's **intricately textured** shorter works. A **calm** demeanour and smooth **sense of line** help sustain his **muted, introspective** conception of the Op 118 group's A major Intermezzo, together with his **measured** pacing of the concluding E flat minor piece.[86]

In [Brahms's] "Handel" Variations, Mr. Lorango also showed the **foresight** to bind many segments together with what was basically a **common tempo**.[87]
Notable both for the full-bodied, golden tone of the piano and his ability to **hold together** both long movements and large **structures**.[88]

October 25, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/mar/05/classicalmusicandopera.shopping1.

[84] Gardner, "A Triumph of Brahmsian Thought," in *BBC Music Review* (March 29, 2012).

[85] James R. Oestreich, "Krystian Zimerman Brings Balance to Brahms and Liszt," review of Krystian Zimerman (piano), in *New York Times Music Review* (March 29, 1990), accessed January 9, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/29/arts/review-piano-krystian-zimerman-brings-balance-to-brahms-and-liszt.html.

[86] Jed Distler, "Brahms," review of Romain Descharmes (piano), *Brahms Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 5., Six Pieces, Op. 118*, Claudio CR5786-2 (CD), 2007, in *Gramophone* (April 2008): 80.

[87] Bernard Holland, "Piano: Thomas Lorango," review of Thomas Lorango (piano), in *New York Times Music Review* (February 7, 1988), accessed January 9, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1988/02/07/arts/piano-thomas-lorango.html?gwh=37DA005A03DA4643EE080808F10776C3.

[88] James Jolly, "Brahms's Piano Sonatas," review of Antti Siirala (piano), Ondine ODE1044-2 (CD), 2004, in *Gramophone* (September 2012).

> The music emerged with **multi-levelled**, **thoughtfully** contoured textures that were full-bodied, **clear and cogent**...Every piece told a **story** in **sweeping paragraphs and long phrases** that allowed Brahms' cross-rhythmic operations their due.[89]

As in Walker's invocation of the trope of sanity with reference to Brahms's adherence to classical formal procedures, discussions of the coherence and cogency of composers' mental states are found throughout the documentary historical record. As Brahms's obituary in *The Musical Times* reads: "We ought to be doubly thankful for the gift of those...whose genius has reached its full maturity, and who have passed away before any sign of weakness or senility was apparent in their work."[90] Aside from Brahms's lengthy and productive career however, it seems that his supporters had more metaphysically portentous reasons to emphasize his hale and hearty mind.

In his 1926 polemic on genius and health, J. F. Rogers cites Bernard Shaw's definition of a genius as being "a person who, seeing deeper than other people, has a different set of ethical valuations from theirs and has energy enough to give effort to this extra vision." Rogers later observes that, "idleness and introspection are ruinous to health. Health is developed most by the exercise of all one's faculties in absorbing work."[91] In light of the turn-of-the-century Brahms-Wagner dialectics and Goethe's distinction of the healthy Classic from the sick Romantic, Rogers's statements were likely read as a confirmation of Brahms's genius and a denial of the New Germans', whose musical practices were seen as mere products of their fantastic and brooding inner poetic reveries.

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[89] Jed Distler, "Everything's coming up Rose," review of Jerome Rose (piano), in *Gramophone* (July 2011), accessed December 29, 2012, http://www.gramophone.co.uk/blog/piano-notes/everythings-coming-up-rose.
[90] "Brahms," *The Musical Times* (May 1, 1897): 297.
[91] James Frederick Rogers, "Genius and Health," *The Scientific Monthly* 23, no. 6 (December 1926): 509, 518, accessed December 14, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/7670.

In 1919 however, Cyril Scott evokes the language of psychological disease in his observation that *both* factions of the Brahms-Wagner dialectic were guilty of a kind of monomania: a term he takes from Nietzsche, but that flourished in turn-of-the-century literary, musical and medical discourses:

> For on the one hand, there are those who commit the fault of looking upon the whole of modernity...as a kind of moral disease; a kind of temptation of St. Anthony to allure them away from the path of old musical righteousness; or, on the other hand, there are those who...look upon modern music as the only music, condemning its forerunning creators as 'good for noughts' or antiquated idlers.[92]

Indeed, Francesca Brittan links nineteenth-century artistic discourses on monomania to the concept of the *idée fixe*, which she traces back to E. T. A Hoffman's 1814 story "Automata." In this tale, a young artist becomes obsessed by an exquisite melody sung by a mysterious woman, to the point where woman and song become "inextricably linked as a malignant musico-erotic fetish that begins to exert a hostile influence on [the artist's] 'whole existence' ...[as] he gives way to a 'distracted condition of the mind.'"[93]

In most of the tales surveyed by Brittan, the afflicted suffer from severe obsession, melancholy, restlessness, hallucinations, suicidal despair and madness: symptoms that occur at the musico-autobiographical intersection of Berlioz's own obsessive amorous fixation, and that of the protagonist in his *Symphonie Fantastique*. As

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[92] Cyril Scott, "The Two Attitudes," *The Musical Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (April 1919): 151 - 52, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/738072.

[93] E. T. A. Hoffman, "Automata," trans. Major Alexander Ewing in *The Best Tales of Hoffman,* ed. E. F. Bleiler (New York: Dover, 1967), 100 - 101, in Francesca Brittan, "Berlioz and the Pathological Fantastic: Melancholy, Monomania, and Romantic Autobiography," *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 3 (Spring, 2006): 212, accessed January 13, 2013, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncm.2006.29.3.211.

Brittan points out, the condition suffered by Berlioz and his protagonist would have been quite familiar to nineteenth-century doctors, as a burgeoning field of 'medicine of the imagination' was making mental function finally accessible to rational examination, thus bringing insanity to the attention of the medical community. In 1810, Jean Étienne Dominique Esquirol theorized a new disorder of the nervous system called 'monomania': a mental state whose primary symptom was a pathological fixation on a single idea - the *idée fixe.* Brittan surmises that Berlioz, as a former medical student and son of a doctor, would probably have been aware of Esquirol's work.[94]

Furthermore, in contemporaneous literary works featuring monomania, the disease almost always manifests in artistic, introverted, sentimental, passionate and heroic figures, thus "establish[ing] monomania as a quintessentially Romantic illness," and creating a long-standing linkage of insanity and imagination.[95] Perhaps for the Romantics, monomania carried with it the aspirational mark of true poetic inspiration. Indeed in Esquirol's opinion, those most susceptible were: "Nervous-sanguine temperaments, persons endowed with a brilliant, warm and vivid imagination; minds of a meditative and exclusive cast, which seem to be susceptible only of a series of thoughts and emotions; individuals who, through self-love, vanity, pride, and ambition, abandon themselves to their reflections, to exaggerated projects and unwarrantable pretensions."[96]

To nineteenth-century Brahmsians, Berlioz must have represented the ultimate conflation of Romanticism and insanity: here was a lovesick poet-receiver of ecstatic inspiration who spun the products of his idle introspections and monomaniacal

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[94] Brittan, "Berlioz," 220, 223.
[95] Ibid., 228.
[96] Jean Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales: considèrées sous les rapports médical, hygiénique et médico-légal*, vol. 2 (Paris: Baillière, 1838), 29, in Brittan, "Berlioz," 221.

hallucinations into 'exaggerated projects and unwarrantable pretensions,' while succumbing to a hostile and distracted condition of the mind. It isn't clear whether Cyril Scott's use of the term 'monomania' was intended to invoke Berlioz's condition and Romanticism in general, but perhaps we are beginning to understand the urgency and ferocity with which Brahms's supporters underlined his thoroughly hale and controlled mind in contemporaneous musical dialectics. Unfortunately however, Berlioz's insanity bore a rather inconvenient resemblance to yet another intersection of Romanticism and disease: the total mind-body disintegration of Brahms's mentor, Robert Schumann.

We began this chapter with Korsyn's discussion of the *idée fixe* of unity in scholarly discussions of Brahms's life and music. I argued that unity, like many so-called 'characteristic' Brahmsian qualities, could be distilled to an even deeper fixation of psychological control. Through Cyril Scott we've discussed how the *idée fixe* can also be related to dialectical beliefs on both sides of the Brahms-Wagner divide, and to intersections of insanity in Berlioz's life and work. I have also shown how the ideology of psychological control continues to mediate performances of Brahms's piano music, to the extent whereby it has itself become a kind of 'malignant musico-erotic fetish': a "species of veneration...which causes one to sink into a condition of stagnating contentedness."[97]

> Mr. Lorango has neither an overpowering technique nor a brilliant tone...but when this music demanded sustained, concentrated power...it seemed to fade...to a wanness I suspect was as much **mental** as **physical**.[98]

[97] Cyril Scott, "The Two Attitudes," 151 - 52.
[98] Holland, "Thomas Lorango," *New York Times Music Review* (February 7, 1988).

1.3) Brahmsian Bodies

> The great man as a rule is of superior physique and vigour, and the greater the man of genius the more regard he has for the physical foundations on which his work depends.[99]

While the theme of Brahmsian psychological control continues to be enthusiastically reinforced in both scholarly and practice-based circles, the language of modern Brahms style has important corporeal subtexts that tend to be conspicuously under-explored. Like the trope of mental fitness, discussions of Brahms's hale and hearty body are found throughout contemporaneous musical discourses, and gave rise to words such as modesty, robustness, power, masculinity and German-ness: terms that are still used to describe successful Brahms performances today, though usually as related to temperament as opposed to a particular bodily state.

Indeed in the years since WWII, Brahms has increasingly come to be seen as so corporeally controlled that he is no longer 'of his body': probably as a result of our continued attempts to rescue him from the scourges of lovesick Romanticism as so tragically exemplified by Schumann, and from the uncomfortable chauvinistic and nationalistic realities of his actual historical context. It is my belief however, that to sever Brahms from his body for reasons of modern aesthetic ideology and historical hindsight is to dissolve a fundamental epistemological link to understanding the aesthetic categories by which we still evaluate performances of his music today.

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[99] James Frederick Rogers, "The Health of Musicians," *The Musical Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (October 1926): 619, accessed December 14, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/738343.

Brahms's modesty of physical appearance seems to have been a favourite topic of discussion amongst late-Romantic observers who were often shocked to discover that he didn't look the way he sounds in his music. In 1926, J. F. Rogers links Brahms's humble stature to his classicist lineage by remarking that 'great men' "have usually been of medium stature, the best height for concentration of bodily power: Beethoven was five feet five, with broad shoulders and firmly built... [and] Brahms was rather short, square and solidly built, the very impersonation of energy."[100] Robert Schauffler also remembers Brahms's unassuming physique: "When one looked above the homespun body to the admirable head... the great, blue eyes, the aristocratic modelling of the nose...there the poet began - the tone-poet of genius."[101]

Schauffler goes on to describe the composer's style of dress as one that "would have been a windfall for a comedian playing the country cousin," as Brahms hated collars, ties, cuffed shirts, and frequently sported jackets with patches on the elbows - betraying "his industry and Spartan economy."[102] Upon overhearing a discussion on the subject of fine men's stockings at a dinner party one evening, Brahms is reported to have mischievously responded, "'See how elegant mine are.' And, raising his trowser's [sic] leg...revealed his bare ankle." It seems as though Brahms's modest country manners could also astonish those meeting him for the first time, as recalled by Dr. Otto Julius Bauer:

> [Brahms] gave me a glass to hold, poured cognac into it, and intentionally made it overflow. Then he seized my dripping hand and licked it off. I was stupefied with

[100] Rogers, "Genius and Health," 510.
[101] Robert Haven Schauffler, "Brahms, Poet and Peasant," *The Musical Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Oct., 1932): 554, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/738938.
[102] Schauffler, "Poet and Peasant," 549 - 51.

> surprise, and asked him why he did that. 'Oh,' was the answer, 'the doctors forbid me to drink; but they do not say a word about licking.'[103]

On the subject of Brahms's habits of food and drink, while Rogers notes that great men have been excellent eaters and drinkers because they need "an adequate supply of fuel to keep [their] engine working at such a pitch of perfection," he again invokes the trope of modesty by comparing Brahms's epicurean self-control to Beethoven's: whose "breakfast was usually coffee and his supper a plate of soup." According to Rogers, "the great man has been as temperate in drink as in meats...[because] he is too keenly conscious of the depressing effects of alcohol not to avoid its influence."[104] Apparently, the mental control of great men can also help them resist the temptations of gluttony.

While few pianists are aware of Brahms's rather squat physical proportions, preferring instead to imagine him as they imagine his music (broad, powerful, solidly built, square, energetic, industrious, economical), still fewer realize that much of this language stems from descriptions of the composer's surprising physical *modesty*. In any case, the notion of sheer muscular power tempered by subtly modest restraint forms the basis of the aesthetic ideology of Brahmsian corporeal control: whereby pianists are expected to adopt a deep, resonant, weighty, straightforward, and full-bodied physical approach to tone production; where difficult passages are to be easily dispatched without descending into display or aggressiveness; and where melodic material is to be plainly declaimed as opposed to whispered or coaxed.

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[103] Ibid., 557.
[104] Rogers, "Genius and Health," 513 - 15.

Every pianist has a special sound world of his own. Rubinstein's is **light** and **translucent** rather than **deep** and **saturated**, and from that point of view I would not call him the ideal Brahmsian.[105]

American pianist Garrick Ohlsson is presenting a **solid** Brahms diet. Last week, he headed a **subtle**, **muscular** reading of the *Piano Concerto No. 1*.[106]

Kissin tosses off the first-movement development's treacherous octave jumps better than other pianists manage single notes. He **grasps** Brahms' thick, widely spaced chords with the **force** and **grip** of a magnet sweeping up piles of nails.[107]

It takes the **whole body** to play the Brahms concerto. You cannot dispatch this thick, chord-strewn work with fingers alone...Gould's playing sounds **anything but effortless**. He gets through it, but **not easily**.[108]

It is tempting to imagine [Brahms] as he sounds, especially in his piano music: **big and burly**, with hands like huge maws, able to swallow octavefuls of notes at a gulp. One imagines, in fact, someone as **strapping and powerful** as Garrick Ohlsson... Many pianists can **grapple** with this music, but few **command** it with such apparent **ease** as Mr. Ohlsson, who...produced **great masses of sound** that never became clangourous, thanks as much to his open-throated Bösendorfer piano as to his **tremendous facility**.[109]

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[105] Joan Chissell, "Brahms: Piano Works," review of Artur Rubinstein (piano), RCA SB6845 (LP), 1971, in *Gramophone* (July 1971): 204.
[106] Clive O'Connell, "Ohlsson Plays Brahms," review of Garrick Ohlsson (piano), in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (November 26, 2012), accessed January 2, 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/ohlsson-plays-brahms-20121125-2a1e2.html.
[107] Distler, "Brahms: Piano Sonata Op. 5," review of Evgeny Kissin, http://www.classicstoday.com/review/review-9506/?search=1..
[108] Anthony Tommasini, "For Glenn Gould, Form Followed Fingers," review of *Genius Within: The Inner Life of Glenn Gould,* White Pine Pictures, 2009, in *New York Times Music Review* (September 24, 2010), accessed January 2, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/26/arts/music/26gould.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.
[109] James R. Oestreich, "The Piano at Full Power in Brahms," review of Garrick Ohlsson (piano) and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, in *New York Times Music Review* (January 12, 1998), accessed January 9, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/12/arts/music-review-the-piano-at-full-power-in-brahms.html.

As evidenced by the aforementioned reviews, the language of Brahms's 'strapping and powerful' corporeal control is often positively associated with pianistic approaches that are inherently masculine: indeed, it is difficult to imagine a female pianist today who possesses even a modicum of Garrick Ohlsson's commandingly physical and unapologetically manly onstage presence. As usual, this conflation of gender and aesthetic evaluation stems from polemics in which Brahms's superior cerebral control was posited as directly symptomatic of his thoroughly masculine body; thereby implicating the more effusively lyrical, coloristic, sensual and programmatic compositional practices of his Romantic contemporaries with the less controlled bodily state of femininity. As Adler asserts, Brahms's "harmony is robust, never effeminate, and as far removed from sentimentality as his melody."[110]

In response to late-nineteenth-century insinuations that "musicians are as a class wanting in the manlier qualities," one observer argues that just as "there was no lack of virility in the character of Beethoven," "Brahms's music is the outcome of a thoroughly masculine nature": proof that "effeminacy [was] an accidental attribute in a disciple of Melpomene."[111] D. C. Parker also uses highly gendered language both to emphasize Brahms's classicist lineage and to attack the New German's repudiation of the musical past in his assertion that, "Bach's music is strong, deep, and vigorous, flowing, steady and true like a great river, and not a thing of erratic bubbles and splashes, however beautiful."[112] Clearly, the insinuation is that the hearty and hale Classic is intrinsically masculine, while the sick and weak Romantic is necessarily feminine.

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[110] Adler and Strunk, "Johannes Brahms," 129.
[111] "Manliness in Music," *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 30, no. 558 (August 1, 1889): 460 - 61, accessed January 4, 2013, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3360514.
[112] D. C. Parker, "Music and the Grand Style," 163 - 64.

Throughout late-Romantic discussions of Brahms's genius, physicality and masculinity, one also encounters the related themes of stamina and athleticism. As Rogers stipulates, "the accomplishment of the great man...depends on his general physical development and the care which he takes of his bodily machine," because "such powerfully built bodies were storehouses of energy so abundant that it not only displayed itself in work but slopped over into muscular play."[113] This notion of a composer's body as a finely-tuned machine equipped for both toil and fun resonates in Clara Schumann's granddaughter Eugenie's memory of encountering Johannes Brahms as a child: an account that, as Moseley observes, introduces "the blond, athletic hero of a *Kinderszene* whose physical prowess stands as an auspicious metaphor for his musical gifts":[114]

> A young man with long, blond hair is performing the most daring gymnastics. He hoists himself from left to right and up and down; at last he raises himself firmly on his arms, with his legs high in the air, and a final leap lands him below in the midst of the admiring crowd of children. We Schumanns were the children, and the young man was Johannes Brahms.[115]

While posterity remembers Brahms best as an aged bearded master, his virile and "athletic musical stamina"[116] was often invoked to attack the formal weaknesses of the New Germans, who were said to "overlook the fact that musical rules are on par with the drill of the soldier: not that he may perform gymnastics when actually at war, but that he may gain the necessary strength and discipline to wield his weapon."[117] A clue to the

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[113] Rogers, "Genius and Health," 509, 510.
[114] Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 253.
[115] E. Schumann, *Erinnerungen*, 13 - 14, in Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 252.
[116] Binns, "Some Thoughts," 600.
[117] Scott, "The Two Attitudes," 158.

metaphorical clout of the trope of athleticism might be found in Brahms's purported reaction upon learning that Wagner had scaled a tree in order to escape a pack of dogs. As Kahn recalls, Brahms quickly retorted that, "he too had accomplished considerable things in tree climbing...boast[ing] still further of other gymnastic feats: for example, he had had some virtuosity in walking on his hands upside down."[118]

The language of Brahmsian masculinity and athleticism naturally conjures the opposite (and implicitly negative) states of effeminate frailty and fussily idiosyncratic affectation: qualities that, being associated with a paucity of both mental and physical control, are thus thoroughly unwelcome in Brahms performance practices today. Indeed, performances that successfully communicate Brahms's manly and athletic physical prowess are those described as healthy, robust, martial, agile; or with innuendo-laden terms such as deep, virile, strong, vigorous, thrusting and penetrating. Moments of tenderness and levity are to be noble and sportive rather than sweet and frivolous, while passages requiring sheer brute physical strength are to be executed easily, dignifiedly, and with acrobatic finesse.

> Arthur Rubinstein plays it with remarkable **vigour**. He brings out the rhythmic **urge** unmistakably, thereby helping the player-pianist over the **difficulties** of the cross-rhythms...The work unquestionably displays the composer at the **height of his powers**.[119]

[118] Robert Kahn, "Memories of Brahms," *Music & Letters* 28, no. 2 (April, 1947): 105, accessed January 4, 2013, http://www.jstor.org/stable/855522.
[119] William Delasaire, "Player-Piano Notes," *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (February 1, 1926): 148 - 49, accessed February 5, 2013, http://www.jstor.org/stable/912957.

> Eccentricity rules Lazic's Brahmsian roost...Extreme rubatos stop no. 1 dead in its tracks, to say nothing of no. 2′ s arch distensions – and why all of that ugly, **emasculated**, detached articulation in no. 3?[120]
>
> Mr. Ohlsson also has a...delightful **sportive** sense, which came into **play** in the **gambolling** finale.[121]
>
> The playing tells us at once that the challenging variations in sixths held no terrors for him, and the **athleticism** here is matched by a fluency in the leggiero writing of the variation that follows.[122]
>
> The best playing of program came just before the intermission, in the four Brahms Piano Pieces (Op. 119). The first three had a delicious, Chopinesque grace, delicate but never **unmanly**, and the Rhapsody **sauntered** forward with **martial** assurance.[123]
>
> Kissin opens the F minor Sonata with an **imperious thrust**...[124]
>
> A master of inwardness, he also sets the storm clouds scudding menacingly across No 6 and shows that he's as **swashbuckling** as the best of them in the early F sharp minor Sonata, resolving every **thorny and perverse** difficulty with **ease and lucidity**.[125]

Brahms was also known for his passionate love of long vigorous walks through the German countryside - a habit that naturally drew comparisons with Beethoven who,

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[120] Jed Distler, "Liaisons Volume Two," review of Dejan Lazic (piano), Channel Classics 27609 SACD LIASONS vol. 2 (CD), 2009, accessed December 29, 2012, http://www.classicstoday.com/review/review-15050/?search=1.
[121] Oestreich, "The Piano at Full Power," review of Garrick Ohlsson, in *New York Times Music Review* (January 12, 1998).
[122] Jolly, "Brahms's Piano Sonatas," review of Julius Katchen, in *Gramophone* (September 2012).
[123] John Rockwell, "Watts offers Four Brahms Pieces," review of Andre Watts (piano), in *New York Times Review* (April 9, 1981), accessed January 3, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/09/arts/recital-watts-offers-4-brahms-pieces.html.
[124] Jolly, "Brahms's Piano Sonatas," review of Evgeny Kissin (piano), in *Gramophone* (September 2012).
[125] Jolly, "Brahms's Piano Sonatas," review of Libor Novacek (piano), Landor LAN285 (CD), 2008, in *Gramophone* (September 2012).

"whether it rained or snowed or hailed, or the thermometer stood an inch or two below the freezing point, took his walk in double quick time of five miles or more into the country."[126] While this might have been an example of what the Wagnerians deemed as Brahms's "play-acting as Beethoven's successor to the point of duplicating the Titan's devious ways,"[127] they had ample reason to be threatened by the comparison. As one contemporaneous observer notes, "travels and adventure and a love of Nature [have], in many great cases, proved powerful incentives to the geniuses of composers."[128]

In a further conflation of musical genius, classicism, stamina and now even Nature too, many of Brahms's supporters report that these forays "were certainly not suitable for everyone, for in spite of his alarming corpulence, Brahms always marched forward at top speed, hat in hand, so that even we young people found it hard to keep up with him."[129] Brahms's frequent walking companion Joseph Widmann recalls coming home "exhausted from trying to keep pace with the conscientious Master, who insisted on making the most of each moment...[as] the *Dithmarscher* in him always made the journey strenuous."[130] Widmann recalls one particularly perilous expedition while on vacation with Brahms just three years before the composer's death:

> His downhill pace resembled that of a rolling ball, and his companions frequently found it hard work to keep up with him, as was also the case with us that afternoon....Brahms was far ahead and, missing the way found himself on the edge of a quarry down which he

[126] Rogers, "Genius and Health, 512.
[127] Stojowski, "Recollections of Brahms," 150.
[128] "Manliness in Music," 461.
[129] Kahn, "Memories of Brahms," 103.
[130] Schauffler, "Poet and Peasant," 548 - 49. A *Dithermarscher* is a person from *Dithmarschen*: a marshy windswept district in the northerly state of Schleswig-Holstein, Germany.

> clambered and probably would not have reached the bottom safe and sound had not a man who was working close by seen him and come to his aid.[131]

Aside from concerns that these accounts would merely further encourage metaphorical associations related to Brahms's classic heritage and musical stamina, the Wagnerians had more pressing reasons to be wary of Brahms's physical engagement with Nature. As evidenced by Widmann's invocation of the term *Dithmarscher*, Brahms's outdoorsy-ness was often allied to powerful notions about the German soil, *volk* and nationalism. As Schauffler asserts, "Brahms' [sic] music is as healthy, sound, unpretentious, and vitally near the soil as the folk-tunes from which so much of it derives...and it is no mere coincidence that these are all open-air products."[132] Even Brahms's habits in performance were connected to the rough habits of the humble *volk* from which he came: "The gross sounds...that issued from [Brahms] at the keyboard were somewhat reminiscent of noises made by robust peasants in sleeping, or eating, or during violent exertion."[133]

As Moseley asserts, even Eugenie Schumann's account of Brahms's youthful athleticism suggests that he was involved with the German gymnastic movement *Turnbewegung*, whose popularity was tied to nineteenth-century German nationalism.[134] Indeed, in the wake of Schumann's polemical designation of Brahms as the 'Messiah of German Music,' Brahms's German-ness became a ubiquitous rallying cry amongst those aghast at the New Germans' claims of hyper-nationalism. This was especially true of Max

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[131] J. V. Widmann, *Johannes Brahms in Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1898), 170, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 208 - 9.
[132] Schauffler, "Poet and Peasant," 548.
[133] Ibid., 555.
[134] Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," see footnote on page 252.

Kalbeck, who saw the composer as adrift in a Vienna whose former enlightened Liberalism was being eroded by the conservative anti-Semitic policies of the clerical-political coalition of the 1880s.[135] To Kalbeck, both factions had conspired to use Wagner's music against that of the 'free-thinker and heretic' Brahms,[136] though Sandra McColl is right to point out that it was Kalbeck who pitted the two against one another in 1877 by writing: "Wagnerian music has...been made into a kind of religious and patriotic matter, so that all are confronted with the demand to nail their colours to the mast."[137]

Once aesthetic evaluations of musical works became entangled with a composer's perceived German-ness, Brahms's supporters often invoked his racial lineage in their attempts to imply that the compositional practices of the Hungarian-French-German trifecta at the head of the *Neudeutsch Schule* were less German than they claimed. As Adler asserts, "Brahms kept faith with himself, never straining for external effect, ending as he began, a German down to the ground."[138] In fact, Stojowski reports that Brahms's 'Olympian' head was even used "in a text-book of geography, as a perfect racial specimen - of which, it [was] said, Brahms felt not a little proud." Schauffler confirms this account, pointing out that "studying a good portrait of him, one feels how grossly this claim of typicality flatters, not the composer, but the so-called 'Caucasian race'" itself.[139]

Brahms's supporters also used the language of the outdoors, bodily vitality, genius and race to condemn what they perceived as the New Germans' infatuation with the exotically-flavoured works of Russian and French nationalist composers and *vice versa*.

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[135] Margaret Notley, "Brahms as Liberal: Genre, Style, and Politics in Late 19th-Century Vienna," *19th-Century Music* 17, no. 2 (1993): 107, in McColl, "A Model German," 9.
[136] Notley, "Brahms as Liberal," 107, in Ibid., 9.
[137] Max Kalbeck, *Das Bühnenfestspiel zu Bayreuth: Eine kritische Studie* (Breslau: Schletter, 1877), 10, in Ibid., 9.
[138] Adler and Strunk, "Johannes Brahms," 123.
[139] Stojowski, "Recollections of Brahms," 143; Schauffler, "Poet and Peasant," 554.

As D. C. Parker observes, having "approached the West and breath[ed] its intellectual air, [Russian composers are] like the Chinaman who wears his native garb, but lends it piquancy by adding one or two European garments." Parker extends his painfully racist rhetoric to the French, likening German music to the oak tree, while French music is a poppy that "needs rain from the clouds to give it a fresh complexion, and a healthy appetite...if it is not to suffer the loss of vitality that results from a lack of blood-mixture."[140] Indeed according to Stojowski, the "iridescent mosaics of tones [of the French] do not proceed from the same principles that were inculcated into Brahms through the German tradition embodied in sound, word, and philosophy."[141]

Brahms biographer Walter Niemann was also particularly fixated upon the composer's corporeal German-ness, singling him out as "among the 'classicists' of the nineteenth century not only for his strongly stamped national character but for his racial makeup as well."[142] For Niemann, differences between national schools of composition were natural, desirable and directly attributable to race; and though he never explicitly singles out the Teutonic race as superior, the implication is clear. For example, he describes Germany as "the musical school mistress... the catalyst and teacher of national music in foreign lands. One gives, the other receives." In 1920 he even differentiates Brahms's racial lineage from that of his Viennese predecessors, writing:

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[140] Parker, "Music and the Grand Style," 175, 177.
[141] Stojowski, "Recollections of Brahms," 146 - 47.
[142] Walter Niemann, *Die Musik der Gegenwart und der Letzten Vergangenheit bis zu den Romantikern, Klassizisten und Neudeutschen*, 9th - 12th ed. (Berlin: Schuster and Loeffler, 1920), in Daniel Beller-McKenna, "The Rise and Fall of Brahms the German," *Journal of Musicological Research* 20 (2001): 191.

> With Brahms...lineage and race impressed a direct and immediate stamp upon his art. Only with difficulty would one hear...that the proudly free and wild Beethoven comes from the sunny lower Rhein; that Mendelssohn, master of Italian beautiful lines, comes from the stormy and melancholic Hamburg; or that the deeply inward and impetuously fantastic Schumann comes from soft and friendly Saxony. They speak to all people, to the folk. In Brahms's music, conversely, the characteristics of his lineage, of his race...speaks completely clearly only for the people of his stock.

Interestingly, Niemann's more extensive differentiation of Brahms from Schumann draws on themes of race as well as gender:

> Brahms's character-differentiation from Schumann is easiest to grasp from a racial standpoint. As a *Niederdeutscher*, Brahms took on Schumann's heavy, serious, melancholy side...That which was Saxon in the charming disposition of Schumann, the smoothly folk-like, naive and happy character of his sunniest themes showed itself from the beginning....[but] as one of a harsh, manly and Beethovenian nature, however, [Brahms] favoured serious epic pathos. So in general the woman supported Schumann, the man supported Brahms.[143]

This is all strong stuff indeed, especially given the cataclysmic world events that would unfold just years later. While I'm inclined to agree with Daniel Beller-McKenna who points out that "supposing nationality as a predictive element for character and behaviour [did] not necessarily carry the extremely negative connotations we are

[143] Walter Niemann, *Die Musik*, 32, 43 and 277, in Beller-McKenna, "Brahms the German," 192, 193, and footnote 14 on page 208. Niederdeutsch or 'Low German,' according to Beller-McKenna, is used here to evoke "the supposed original Germanic tribe of Northwestern Germany on which some ultra-nationalist writers at the turn of the century pinned their belief in a pure blooded and culturally superior Teutonic past." Also see footnote 11 on page 207.

compelled to associate with such assumptions (particularly among Germans) following World War II," by 1947 there is a conspicuous absence of commentary on the topic of Brahms's German-ness - even from authors who had enthusiastically championed the idea just years before.[144] Indeed, in the years since we've rescued Brahms from the inconvenience of historical context by emphasizing his connection to the past and future, his popularity with Jews in the twilight of liberal Viennese classicism, or by adopting Schoenberg's 'Brahms the Progressive' rebranding: one that can be understood as Schoenberg's attempt to subvert the 'Brahms the Conservative' and 'Wagner the Progressive' labels, thus "reclaim[ing] an icon of the German cultural past from a conservative political outlook that had little resonance with the composer's own Liberal sensibilities."[145]

To deny however that Brahms's physical German-ness was discussed by contemporaneous observers as an essential component of his identity is to again claim him for a meta-historical narrative that protects our own notions of selfhood, while also severing an epistemological link to the language that informs aesthetic evaluations of Brahms performance practices today. In his discussion of the 'escapism' of recent scholarship on interwar music, where "the concept of purity...is anxiously sentimentalized and construed as benign," Taruskin asserts that, "to conceive of that history as mere style history is to engage in mythmaking and cosmetics."[146] Similarly,

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[144] Beller-McKenna, "Brahms the German," 192, 203. Beller-McKenna points out that Karl Geiringer's 1934 biography of Brahms, originally entitled *Johannes Brahms, Leben und Schaffen eines Deutschen Meisters* [Johannes Brahms, Life and Work of a German Master], was later de-Teutonized in the 1936 English translation as *Brahms: His Life and Work*. Geiringer's discussion of Brahms as 'a guardian of German musical traditions' in the German 1934 edition was also omitted in the 1936 English version.

[145] Beller-McKenna, " Brahms the German," 188.

[146] Richard Taruskin, "Back to Whom?" 300.

Beller-McKenna observes that, “some of our own most common platitudes about Brahms’s music – universality, objectivity, timelessness – derive in part from an earlier, long-standing tradition of German cultural chauvinism and, by extension, nationalism.”[147]

While it is fairly uncommon to hear critics explicitly referring to modern Brahms performances as 'German,' behind closed doors performers often use the term to describe an approach that is physically imposing, dourly sober, emotionally limited, unflinchingly square, and fanatically pure and conservative: a construction of German-ness in music that indeed seems to have been filtered through a post-WWII lens. Unbeknownst to many performers however, many of the more widely applied aesthetic categories of Brahmsian corporeal control (modesty, power, stamina, athleticism, outdoorsy-ness, vitality, health, masculinity) were fundamentally implicated in late-Romantic discussions of the composer's racial heritage.

In the future it could be fruitful to explore how German-ness might have sounded to the likes of free-thinking turn-of-the-century Viennese liberals such as Brahms and Kalbeck: men for whom the concept may actually have been translated into musical acts closer to the 'deeply inward, impetuously fantastic, charming, smoothly folk-like, sunnily naive and feminine' spirit evidenced by Niemann's description of Schumann's music - and by the recordings of Brahms and his female pupils, for that matter.

> Mr. Lupu's...playing was properly **German** in its **sobriety** and formal **rigor**, but leavened with a poetic grace that, if you subscribe to national stereotypes, perhaps derives from his Romance heritage.[148]

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[147] Beller-McKenna, "Brahms the German," 206.
[148] Rockwell, "German Bill," review of Radu Lupu (piano), in *New York Times Music Review* (January 29, 1991).

> I was left thinking: "What's **German**?" Against the landmark Otto Klemperer-Philharmonia recording, live performances I have heard with Herbert Bloomstedt, Helmuth Rilling, and many others [are] all characterized by a **brisk**, **straightforward**, **unsentimental**, and, well "**German**," approach.[149]

> At the opposite end of the spectrum, music as **Teutonic** and **severe** as Brahms'... can be tricky to bring to life, tending as it often does toward **squareness**.[150]

Aside from issues of race, there is also an absence of references to illness, disability and 'lateness' in contemporary dissections of Brahms's life and output. According to Joseph N. Straus, a composer's 'late style' can include elements of nostalgia, concision and authorial belatedness: themes that are indeed explored at length in Brahms scholarship, and usually to underline his superior mental fitness. However if Straus is right that late style works also represent "impaired bodies or minds and their failure to function in a normal way,"[151] then perhaps it is no wonder that such themes are notably absent with respect to a composer whose canonic identity seems deliberately constructed to repel questions of illness and disability. Indeed, in their comprehensive survey of publications on the subject of composers and illness, Saffle and Saffle note that every

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[149] Janos Gereben, "San Francisco Symphony's Un-Teutonic *German Requiem,"* review of the San Francisco Symphony, in *San Francisco Classical Voice* (November 17, 2011), accessed February 7, 2013, http://www.sfcv.org/reviews/san-francisco-symphony/san-francisco-symphonys-un-teutonic-german-requiem.

[150] Evan Mitchell, "A Romantic Night Out: Dvořák, Tchaikovsky and Brahms at the Dallas Symphony," *Bachtrack* (January 15, 2013), accessed February 7, 2013, http://www.bachtrack.com/review-dallas-symphony-gonzalez-benedetti.

[151] Joseph N. Straus, "Disability and 'Late Style' in Music," *The Journal of Musicology* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 12, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jm.2008.25.1.3.

single author discusses Mozart and Beethoven, while only one discusses Brahms.[152] We will return to this notion of 'lateness' in the next chapter as related to alternate readings of the biographical and metaphorical contexts of Brahms's 'late' piano works beyond narratives designed to buttress understandings of his mental and physical control.

Indeed, just as Robert Schumann implied that Brahms sprung fully-armed like Minerva into the German musical consciousness, so too are we to believe that he exits with his mind and body firmly intact: a theme reinforced throughout nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discussions of his classicism and genius. Goethe's phrase "the classic is the hale man, the romantic the sick man"[153] is found throughout such accounts - often with the explicit implication that Brahms's genius was a symptom of his superior physical health and *vice versa*. In the following excerpt Rogers summarizes many of the themes already explored in this section, while hinting perhaps at the rarity of Brahms's *mens sana in corpore sano* in late-Romantic musical circles:

> In Brahms, however, we have a being who wholly refutes the theory that genius is allied to disease...At twenty it was remarked that 'his constitution was thoroughly sound; the most strenuous exertion scarcely fatigued him, and he could go soundly to sleep at any hour of the day he pleased.' Hegar described him at thirty-two as in 'extraordinarily sound health'...Henschel went swimming with him and admired his burly, well-knit, muscular body, 'the very image of strength and vigour.' He resembled Beethoven in his passionate fondness for the out-of-doors and in his pedestrian excursions into the country. At sixty he took long tramps in the Alps...'with head thrown back'...He was prepared at

[152] Michael Saffle and Jeffrey R. Saffle, "Medical Histories of Prominent Composers: Recent Research and Discoveries," *Acta Musicologica* 65, no. 2 (July - December, 1993): 82, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/932980. The lone survey mentioning Brahms is A. Neumayr's *Musik und Medizin: Am Beispiel der deutschen Romantiker* (Wien: J & V Edition, 1989).

[153] Goethe, quoted in P. E. Vernon, "The Personality of the Composer," *Music & Letters* 11, no. 1 (January, 1930): 42, accessed December 14, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/726846.

> all times to do ample justice to good cookery, and good wine and beer...'but he was, at no period of his life, a glutton or a wine-bibber...Brahms' [sic] music may be 'muddy' (or was the critic who invented this phrase muddy?), but it is never sickly or weak. *He knocks into the proverbial cocked hat the idea that genius inhabits an unsound brain and crazy body*.[154]

If Brahms's supporters felt that Romanticism in music was symptomatic of an impaired or abnormal body, then it is no surprise that his opponents invoked the language of disease and death in their polemical attacks on his compositional style. Hugo Wolf once criticized Brahms's *Piano Concerto in D Minor* Op. 15 in 1884 "for the risk that its low temperature posed to the audience's health": "Through [it] there blows a draft so icy, so damp and cold, so foggy, that one's heart freezes, one's breath is taken away; one could get the sniffles from it. Unhealthy stuff.'"[155] In 1898, the great Wagnerian conductor Felix Weingartner observes: "I can admire [Brahms's] work, the construction, but...I feel the same powerless frigidity that doctor would feel in making himself try to put life back into the dissected corpse."[156] As a consequence of his deep Brahmsian connections perhaps, Hans von Bülow's pianism receives similar criticism:

> The corpse is carefully dissected, the organism's most subtle details are traced, the viscera studied with the fervour of a haruspex, and the course in anatomy is under way...always presenting us with nothing but the note-skeleton and concerning himself above all with the artful relationship of the musical organism's big and little bones, he turns every work of art into a dance of death... Bülow's technical equipment is, indeed,

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[154] Rogers, "The Health of Musicians," 619 - 20. Emphasis is mine.
[155] Hugo Wolf, 30 November 1884, in *Hugo Wolfs Kritiken im Wiener Salonblatt*, ed. Leopold Spitzer and Isabella Sommer, 2 vols. (Vienna, 2002), i, 65, in Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 289.
[156] Felix Weingartner, trans. Maude Barrows Dutton, *The Symphony Since Beethoven* (Boston, MA, 1904), 60 - 61, 58, translation adapted in Ibid., 291.

> astounding, as is its unfailing reliability...But when it comes to breathing life and soul into the corpse, he lacks the necessary serum. He is merely a skilled surgeon.[157]

Naturally such accounts only served to further distance Brahms from the practices of his less hale contemporaries, while giving rise to many of the pervasive aesthetic categories that continue to pre-structure performances of Brahms's music today. Indeed, Wolf's attack on Bülow's careful delineation of local complexities or the 'organs' of works, his elucidation of their overall structure or 'skeleton,' and his emotionally detached surgical precision might as well be entitled, 'These are the qualities Brahms most prefers in a pianist.'

Roger Moseley expands this surgical trope to Brahms's extensive revision of his *Trio in B* Op. 8 and his friendship with surgeon Theodor Billroth. Moseley argues that just as Billroth pioneered the removal of carcinomas, so too does Brahms rid the early version of his Op. 8 of the notational corruptions of his association with Robert Schumann and their shared fascination with E. T. A. Hoffman's Kapellmeister Kreisler: elements such as the trio's extra-musical pastoral, archaic and heroic topoi; its departures from the strictures of sonata form; and its "capricious shifting of meters and textures…suggest[ing] the allusive and episodic nature of a recounted story."[158] Through his editorial practices, Brahms thus "restitch[es] Op. 8's corpus into the unassailable work of a hale and hearty Brahms rather than the unhealthy outpourings of a lovesick Kreisler Junior."[159]

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[157] Wolf, February 6, 1887, in *Hugo Wolfs Kritiken*, i, 188, in Ibid., 290.
[158] Jonathan Bellman, "*Aus alten Märchen*: The Chivalric Style of Schumann and Brahms," *Journal of Musicology*, 13 (1995): 117 - 35, in Ibid., 263.
[159] Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 293 - 94.

Moseley astutely asserts that Brahms's revisionist practices were catalysed by the intense dialectical and critical pressures he encountered once leaving the safety of Schumann's inner circle. In 1862 for example, critic Adolf Schubring scathingly points out Op. 8's eccentricities of form, remarking: "The whole thing disintegrates into a frenzied rout…Here passion and character celebrate their triumph, while beauty covers her face in sorrow."[160] While Moseley is right that Brahms later excised the notational corruptions of his youthful style in favour of clarity, succinctness, organic integrity and the primacy of sonata form; it is my contention that those corruptions seemed to represent something far more dangerous: namely, Schumann's syphilitically diseased mind and body, and each man's musico-psychological fixation with the madcap character of Kreisler in Hoffman's *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* and *Kater Murr*.

Indeed, the dialectical metanarrative of Brahms's evolution from lovesick Romantic to hale and hearty Classic, and its lurking Procrustean subtext of mind-body control, would never have been possible had he not distanced himself from these youthful intersections of madness and disease. In fact it is no wonder why Brahms's contemporaneous supporters worked so tirelessly to underline his psychological and physical fitness as compared to his more overtly Romantic counterparts: as Eric Sams observes, "if Schumann had syphilis, then Schumann's was not the only music, nor the only happiness, nor the only reputation, nor the only physical and mental health, to be thereby affected."[161]

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[160] Adolf Schubring, "Schumanniana Nr. 8: Die Schumann'sche Schule, IV: Johannes Brahms," *NZfM* 14 (1862): 109 - 10, trans. Frisch, "Five Early Works by Brahms," 116 - 17, in Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 270.

[161] Eric Sams, "Schumann's Hand Injury," *The Musical Times* 112, no. 1546 (December, 1971): 1159, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/954772.

Brahms seems to have identified with Hoffman's wildly romantic, idealistic and restless character Kapellmeister Kreisler before meeting Schumann in September 1853, as he signed a number of works composed between 1852 - 53 as 'Joh. Kreisler jun.,' 'Jean de Krösel le jeune,' or some other combination thereof. He is also known to have kept a collection of literary quotes whimsically titled, 'Young Kreisler's Little Treasure Chest.' Soon after being taken into Schumann's coterie however, Brahms began to emulate his mentor's psycho-musical fixation with Florestan and Eusebius, by designating pieces in his *Variations* Op. 9 with a 'Kr.' or a 'B,' just as Schumann had labelled pieces either 'Florestan' or 'Eusebius' in his *Davidsbündlertänze* Op. 6.[162] The autograph of Brahms's *Trio in B,* Op. 8 (1853-4) is the last to bear the pseudonym; and while Joachim and Grimm refer to Brahms as 'Kreisler' in letters up until November 1854, after that the name vanishes from all correspondence between members of the Brahms circle.[163]

Many fascinating intersections between Hoffman's Kreisler tales and Brahms's early version of the *Trio* Op. 8 have recently been explored at length: particularly those that reinforce the metanarrative of Brahms's external evolution away from the notational corruptions of his poetic youth, toward the clear-eyed coherence of his mature style. In *Kater Murr* for example, the story of Kreisler's life is recounted while interspersed with reminiscences of a tomcat: a fragmented narrative style that may have informed that capricious, shifting, allusive and episodic quality in the early version of Op. 8. In *Callots Manier*, themes of dual personalities may have resonated with Brahms's duelling poetic and formalist urges, as he writes to Clara in 1854: "I often quarrel with myself – that is, Kreisler and Brahms quarrel with one another. But usually each has his decided opinion

[162] Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 260.
[163] Siegfried Kross, "Brahms and E. T. A. Hoffman," *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 3 (Spring, 1982): 194, accessed December 15, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/746459.

and fights it out. This time...both were quite confused, neither knew what he wanted."[164] Kreisler seems similarly torn in *Callots*:

> I so assiduously searched out at the piano melodies and chords, which often had much expression and coherence. But I often wanted to weep bitterly…for whenever I touched the keyboard...unknown songs that I had never heard before flowed through my soul, and they seemed to me not my father's song, but rather those songs which sounded around me like ghostly voices.[165]

While Siegfried Kross traces the parallels between Brahms and Kreisler's artistic-psychological trajectory from poeticism to coherence, like Moseley he focuses upon the notational categories of that metanarrative while ignoring its deeper metaphorical implications. In *Kater Murr* for example, Hoffman describes Kreisler as someone who "had the fixed notion that insanity was lurking near him, like a wild beast thirsting for its prey, and that it would sometime suddenly tear him to pieces."[166] As Kreisler later grows more satisfied with his artistic work, "its fragmentary, 'bizarre' character disappears"; and when he sees his image reflected in water he observes "a calm, thoughtful man who, no longer buzzing wildly around in vague, endless spaces, holds firmly to the established path."[167] Though Hoffman asserts that the artist only appears 'mad' to normal society, he - tongue firmly in cheek - urges the public to rise up against artists by invoking the language of mental health:

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[164] *Clara Schumann-Brahms Briefe*, I, 9, trans. Avins, *BLL*, 51, in Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 259.
[165] E. T. A. Hoffman, "Johannes Kreislers Lehrbrief," *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier*, v. 4, *Kreisleriana*, no. 7), *Werke* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1967), I, 274, in Kross, "Brahms," 196.
[166] Hoffman, *Kater Murr*, 114, 133, in Ibid., 197.
[167] Hoffman, *Kater Murr*, 233, 216, in Ibid., 199.

> Poets and musicians are joined in a very dangerous pact against the public. They intend nothing less than to drive spectators out of the real world, where they feel really comfortable, and…to torment them with all possible emotions and passions highly dangerous to their health.[168]

In my opinion, what Brahms really risked by maintaining his early musico-psychological fixation with Kreisler was being implicated in the trope of Romantic insanity. Just as Rogers asserted that 'idleness and introspection were ruinous to health,' whilst under the spell of the fantastically brooding reveries of their early poeticism, Brahms and Kreisler experience the ceaseless sounds of 'ghostly voices'; a state of 'endless buzzing wildly around in vague, endless spaces'; a 'fixed notion of insanity'; and they find themselves psychologically fragmented and confused. As they move towards controlled coherence in their respective artistic practices, each escapes the comorbidity of insanity and Romanticism as represented by Berlioz, and the added threat of corporeal disintegration should one's mental affliction go unresolved, as exemplified by Schumann.

Like the autobiographical intersections between Berlioz's monomaniacal 'distracted condition of the mind' and those of his protagonist in the *Symphonie Fantastique*, the 'ghostly voices' and 'lurking insanity' experienced by Kreisler are remarkably similar to the ceaseless aural hallucinations Schumann suffered as a result of his poisoned syphilitic body. According to Eric Sams, Schumann suffered from a complex array of psycho-physical impairments including: "continuous general malaise, tinnitus, vertigo, insomnia, headache, depression, premonitions of insanity, numbness, cramp, difficulty in writing, speech disturbance, memory failure, stroke, pains in bones and joints, florid psychosis, general paralysis of the insane, and deterioration to death." It

[168] Hoffman, *Werke*, I, 276, in Ibid., 198.

seems however, that many of Schumann's physical symptoms were probably more attributable to mercury poisoning than to syphilis itself, as the chemical was a common treatment at the time.[169]

German composers of the nineteenth-century were not unfamiliar with the causes, symptoms and consequences of syphilitic infection: 1820s Vienna had a reputation for being positively rife with the disease, and both Schumann and Hugo Wolf seem to have contracted it there around 1828. Like Schumann, Wolf is also reported to have experienced symptoms such as aural hallucinations and insanity before attempting a drowning suicide of his own.[170] Indeed, syphilis as a disease of the mind and body was a palpable cause for concern in nineteenth-century musical circles: not just because Germany's cities were teeming with it, but because the theme of syphilis intersects with a number of those already explored in this chapter, many of which have a bodily facet.

Joseph Straus maps the concept of resolution in tonal music to yet another 'master narrative' whereby the musical work undergoes "a dramatic trajectory [as it] moves through a state of threatened disability to a state of health restored."[171] Straus cites Edward Cone, who examines what he calls 'promissory notes' in Schubert's music: notes whose indicated resolution is in some way thwarted. Cone argues that in Schubert's *Moment Musical in A flat Major* Op. 94, no. 6, the failure of an E♮ to resolve to an F, though at first barely noticeable, catalyses a sequence of increasingly unsettling harmonic moves, including the tonicization of E Major: an element that frequently returns, and ultimately takes control of the unfolding work. Even when this foreign body seems to be

[169] Sams, "Schumann," 1157 - 58.
[170] Ibid., 1158.
[171] Joseph Straus, "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 149, accessed January 7, 2013, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jams.2006.59.1.113.

tamed, "it bursts out with even greater force, revealing itself as basically inimical to its surroundings, which it proceeds to demolish."[172]

Cone relates this dramatization of Schubert's promissory note to "the effect of vice on a sensitive personality, and, more specifically, to Schubert's experience of syphilis, including its disabling psychological and physical effects."[173] Here, Cone seems to be referring to 'vice' and 'sensitive personalities' in terms of the taboo elements of 'non-normative' practices such as homosexuality, promiscuity, lack of personal hygiene, lack of self-control, obsession and addiction: stigmas that continue to be wrongly associated with sexually-transmitted diseases. Straus asserts that in Schubert's historical context, the debilitating psychological and physical impairments of syphilis would have endowed him with a culturally stigmatized, non-normative body.[174]

Straus and Cone astutely make the connection between a non-normative body and a musical work: just as Schubert's syphilis was contracted through sexual contact, whereby 'alien substances' or 'poisons' entered the composer's body; so too can Schubert's promissory notes be seen as foreign intruders into the body of the *Moment musical*. [175] Like Schubert's promissory note which seems at first to be unimportant but later takes on a dramatic and ultimately destructive role, so too was Schubert's syphilis treated for a time, while remaining ultimately incurable. The devastating psychological and physical effects of such an incurable and stigmatized disease leads Straus to assert

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[172] Edward T. Cone, "Schubert's Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics," *19th-Century Music* 5 (1982): 233 - 41, in Straus, "Normalizing," 150.
[173] Cone, "Schubert," 240, in Ibid., 151.
[174] Straus, "Normalizing," note 98, 153.
[175] Eric Sams, "Schubert's Illness Re-Examined," *Musical Times* 121, no. 1643 (January 1980): 17, in Ibid., 173.

that in Schubert's music one hears "a recurring tale of exploration, banishment, exile, and eventual homecoming."[176]

Drawing upon Straus's definition of a master narrative in tonal music whereby a musical body is engaged in a dramatic trajectory from a state of threatened disability to one of restored health, perhaps Schumann can be seen as the promissory note in Brahms's evolving canonic body. As Schumann's syphilis was both degenerative and incurable, the resolution of Brahms's promissory note was blocked, causing his mentor's culturally-stigmatized and non-normative body to unravel to ultimately destructive and tragic consequences. Schumann's poetic Romanticism, his vivid musico-literary fixation on the characters of Eusebius and Florestan, and his contraction of a sexually-transmitted disease also evoke Cone's discussion of the effect of vice on 'sensitive personalities,' and Esquirol's definition of those most at risk for developing monomania: 'persons endowed with a brilliant, warm and vivid imagination; minds of a meditative and exclusive cast.'

Through the dialectical writings of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century observers, Brahms's more controlled mind and body rescues him from the dangers of Schumann's poisons. As a result, the metanarrative of his transition from the threatened disability of his early lovesick Romanticism to the restored health of his hale and hearty later Classicism is successfully resolved. As Walker observes: "When Schumann broods, he is only too often inclined to wander: when Brahms strikes a more or less similar vein of thought…he is sternly concise in design. He always saw straight from start to finish [and] was never led away by side issues."[177] As we will see however, this metanarrative

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[176] Fisk, "Returning Cycles: Contexts for the Interpretation of Schubert's Impromptus and Last Sonatas," *California Studies in 19th Century Music* 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 267, 278 - 80, in Ibid., 174.
[177] Walker, "Brahms," 11.

does not satisfactorily demonstrate Brahms's internal resolution of his earlier Schumannian-Kreislerian tendencies, nor or does it account for issues of performance. Indeed, few pianists of the Schumann-Brahms circle 'played' Brahmsian structure in the ways we've come to expect, even when faced with the cool logic of Brahms's more structurally coherent later works.

Only a handful of contemporaneous commentators ever explicitly reference their desire to purge Schumann from Brahms's canonic body, preferring instead to focus their dialectical energies on the musical practices of the New Germans. While Deiters asserts that some of Brahms's later works "indicate a temporary relapse into the intense subjectivity"[178] of his early Schumannism; Harding remarks that, "these dreadful tendencies were eventually controlled by the chastening influence of [Brahms's] massive intellect."[179] A Mr. Langley seems in wholehearted agreement when he states that, "the greatest mistake made about Brahms is that he is ever held up as a follower of Schumann," and "let me say how thoroughly pleased I was to hear Dr. Harding dissociate Brahms from the name of Schumann."[180]

[178] Deiters, "Johannes Brahms," 11.
[179] Harding, "Some Thoughts,"167.
[180] Walker, "Brahms,"130, 170.

1.4) Coda

Pianists who innately understand what it means when someone describes their performances as 'a little too much Schumann and not enough Brahms' are the inheritors of powerful ideas about Brahms's relativist canonic identity: an identity protected by a pervasive aesthetic ideology of mind-body control and reinforced by contemporary Brahms performance norms: mores to which pianists adhere both for ethical reasons and because of our 'tendency to use art to recuperate stable and reassuring ideas of selfhood.' It is important to challenge these ideas however, because what we think about composers affects how we wish to hear their works performed. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson has shown how the Schubert recordings of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau "shaped the things people thought and wrote about the composer, bringing to him a new seriousness and psychological depth that was not there…for earlier listeners"; and Jim Samson has argued that you can hear the differences between various nationalistic perceptions of Chopin (from French, German, Russian and English perspectives) in the early recordings of representative pianists from each country.[181]

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, modern understandings of Brahms's controlled mind lead to performances of his works that are described as intellectual, serious, profound, restrained, structural, stoic and spiritual; while his corporeal control is communicated by performances described as robust, solid, healthy, German, modest, masculine, athletic, robust, vital, vigorous and powerful. Despite assumptions of

[181] Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, "Recordings and Histories of Performance Style," *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 246; Jim Samson, "Chopin, Fryderyk Franciszek," section 11: Reception, *Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2012), in Leech-Wilkinson, *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, 246.

historical validity, this conflation of biography and aesthetic evaluation often ignores the agenda-laden, polemical, and historically-situated nature of late-Romantic accounts of Brahms's life and work, resulting in an approach to performing Brahms's piano music that doesn't reflect his own early-recorded performance style and those of his pupils.

This sounding evidence instead seems to point to a performance ideology that is more informed by a madcap Kreisler figure than by some purified ideology of control. When listening to Brahms's 1889 cylinder recording of his *Hungarian Dance in G Minor* or his pupil Ilona Eibenschütz's 1903 recording of his *Ballade* Op. 118 no. 3, one struggles to hear the Brahms who was "no revolutionary, but rather was weighed down with the baggage of the entire spiritual musical feelings of three centuries; like a fortress, protected by a barricade of classical musical forms."[182] Instead, what I hear is the young 'Joh. Kreisler jun.' described in an 1854 letter between Grimm and Joachim:

> [Brahms] is pestering me and wants to go up the Grafenberg, where we want to lie in the woods by the light of the moon. He is chock-full of crazy notions - as the Artist-Genius of Düsseldorf, he has painted his apartment full of the most beautiful frescoes in the manner of Callot, i.e. all kinds of grotesque visages and Madonna faces - so that he may have worthy thoughts while doing his daily business.[183]

Eerily, Brahms himself predicted what would happen once he shed his early Schumann-Kreisler psycho-musical affinities. In a letter dated 1853 he laments:

> Did I not bear the name Kreisler, I would now have the weightiest of reasons to lose courage, to curse my love of art and my enthusiasm, and to withdraw as a hermit

[182] Max Graf, 'Brahms-Studie,' in *Wagner Probleme und andere Studien* (Vienna, 1900), 101, in Botstein, "Brahms and Painting," 154.
[183] Grimm, *Briefwechsel* v, in Avins, *BLL*, 42 - 43.

> (scribe?) into the solitude (of an office) and lose myself in silent contemplation (of the documents to be copied).[184]

Thus to truly "criticize the frame around the discipline, the mental enclosure that pre-structures and limits the field by restricting the questions that are asked," I propose a renunciation of the ideological baggage of control and a re-evaluation of the documentary and recorded historical evidence of Brahms's contexts. The wide gaps between the loci of ethics, evidence, and act that are currently the *status quo* in contemporary Brahms performance practices will only be elucidated when pianists confront how such ideologies continue to mediate the modes by which we evaluate historical traces, as "it is ideology, after all, that keeps us in our places."[185]

To continue this process of peeling back the layers of our fixation with Brahmsian mental and physical control, in the ensuing chapter we will explore the notion of 'lateness' as related to Brahms's piano works Op. 116 - 119 and the possibility that these miniatures reference bodily and mental states that are less reconcilable with understandings of Brahms's controlled anti-Romantic canonic identity. By re-examining documentary evidence of the historical, biographical and metaphorical contexts of Brahms's late piano works, particularly as found in the composer's collected correspondence, it is hoped that less resolved traces of Brahmsian identity may be unearthed, thereby catalysing a retelling of what a 'characteristic' performance of these works might be.

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[184] Brahms, *Briefweschel*, v, in Avins, *BLL*, 12.
[185] Korsyn, "Brahms Research," 91, 101.