The Story of My Life
GA 28

Chapter IV

For the form of the experience of spirit which I then desired to establish upon a firm foundation within me, music came to have a critical significance. At that time there was proceeding in the most intense fashion in the spiritual environment in which I lived the "strife over Wagner." During my boyhood and youth I had seized every opportunity to improve my knowledge of music. The attitude I held toward thinking required this by implication. For me, thought had *content* in itself. It possessed this not merely through the percept which it expressed. This, however, obviously led over into the experience of pure musical tone-forms as such. The world of tone in itself was to me the revelation of an essential side of reality. That music should "express" something else besides the tone-form, as was then maintained in every possible way by the followers of Wagner, seemed to me utterly "unmusical."

I was always of a social disposition. Because of this I had even in my school-days at Wiener-Neustadt, and then again in Vienna, formed many friendships. In opinions I seldom agreed with these friends. This, however, did not mean at all that there was not an inwardness and mutual stimulus in these friendships. One of these was with a young man pre-eminently idealistic. With his blond hair and frank blue eyes he was the very type of a young German. He was then quite absorbed in Wagnerism. Music that lived in itself, that would weave itself in tones alone, was to him a cast-off world of horrible Philistines. What revealed itself in the tones as in a kind of speech – that for him gave the tone-forms their value. We attended together many concerts and many operas. We always held opposite views. My limbs grew as heavy as lead when "oppressive music" inflamed him to ecstasy; and he was horribly bored by music which did not pretend to be anything else but music.

The debates with this friend stretched out endlessly. In long walks together, in long sessions over our cups of coffee, he drew out his "proofs" expressed in animated fashion, that only with Wagner had true music been born, and that everything which had gone before was only a preparation for this "discoverer of music." This led me to assert my own opinions in drastic fashion. I spoke of the barbarism of Wagner, the graveyard of all understanding of music.

On special occasions the argument grew particularly animated. At one time my friend very noticeably formed the habit of directing our almost daily walk to a narrow little street, and passing up and down it many times discussing Wagner. I was so absorbed in our argument that only gradually did it dawn upon me how he had got this bent. At the window of one of the little houses on the narrow alley there sat at the time of our walk a charming girl. There was no relationship between him and the girl except that he saw her sitting at the window almost every day, and at times was aware that a glance she let fall on the street was meant for him.

At first I only noticed that his championship of Wagner – which in any case was fierce enough – was fanned to a brilliant flame in this little alley. And when I became aware of what a current flowed from that vicinity into his inspired heart, he grew confidential in this matter also, and I came to share in the tenderest, most beautiful, most passionate young love. The relation between the two never went much beyond what I have described. My friend, who came of people not blessed with worldly goods, had soon after to take a petty journalistic job in a provincial city. He could not think of any nearer tie with the girl. But neither was he strong enough to overcome the existing relationship. I kept up a correspondence with him for a long time. A melancholy note of resignation marked his letters. That from which he had been forced to cut himself off was still living and strong in his heart.

Long after life had brought to an end my correspondence with this friend of my youth, I chanced to meet a person from the same city in which he had found a place as a journalist. I had always been fond of him, and I asked about him. This person said to me: “Yes, things turned out very badly for him; he could scarcely earn his bread. Finally he became a writer in my employ, and then he died of tuberculosis.” This news stabbed me to the heart, for I knew that once the idealistic, fair-haired youth, under the compulsion of circumstances, had in his own feelings severed his relation with his young love, then it made no difference to him what life might further bring to him. He considered it of no value to lay the basis for a life which could not be that one which had floated before him as an ideal during our walks in that little street.

In intercourse with this friend my anti-Wagnerism of that period came to realization in even more positive form. But, apart from this, it played any way a great rôle in my mental life at that time. I strove in all directions to find my way into music which had nothing to do with Wagnerism. My love for “pure music” increased with the passage of years; my horror at the “barbarism” of “music as expression” continued to increase. And in this matter it was my lot to get into a human environment in which there were scarcely any other persons than admirers of Wagner. This all contributed much toward the fact that only much later did I grudgingly fight my way to an understanding of Wagner, the obviously human attitude toward so signifi-

cant a cultural phenomenon. This struggle, however, belongs to a later period of my life. In the period I am now describing, a performance of *Tristan*, for example, to which I had to accompany one of my pupils, was to me "mortally boring."

To this time belongs still another youthful friendship very significant for me. This was with a young man who was in every way the opposite of the fair-haired youth. He felt that he was a poet. With him, too, I spent a great deal of time in stimulating talk. He was very sensitive to everything poetic. At an early age he undertook important productions. When we became acquainted, he had already written a tragedy, *Hannibal*, and much lyric verse.

I was with both these friends in the "practice in oral and written lectures" which Schröer conducted in the *Hochschule*. From this course we three, and many others, received the greatest inspiration. We young people could discuss what we had arrived at in our minds and Schröer talked over everything with us and elevated our souls by his dominant idealism and his noble capacity for imparting inspiration.

My friend often accompanied me when I had the privilege of visiting Schröer. There he always grew animated, whereas elsewhere a note of burden was manifest in his life. Because of a certain discord he was not ready to face life. No calling was so attractive to him that he would gladly have entered upon it. He was altogether taken up with his poetic interest, and apart from this he found no satisfying relation with existence. At last he had to take a position quite unattractive to him. With him also I continued my connection by means of letters. The fact that even in his poetry he could not find real satisfaction preyed upon his spirit. Life for him was not filled with anything possessing worth. I had to observe to my sorrow, how little by little in his letters and also in his conversation the belief grew upon him that he was suffering from an incurable disease. Nothing sufficed to dispel this groundless obsession. So one day I had to receive the distressing news that the young man who was very near to me had made an end of himself.

A real inward friendship I formed at this time also with a young man who had come from the German Transylvania to the Vienna *Hochschule*. Him also I had first met in Schröer's *Seminar* periods. There he had read a paper on pessimism. Everything which Schopenhauer had presented in favour of this conception of life was revived in that paper. In addition there was the personal, pessimistic temperament of the young man himself. I determined to oppose his views. I refuted pessimism with veritable words of thunder, even calling Schopenhauer narrow-minded, and wound up my exposition with the sentence: "If the gentleman who read the paper were correct in his position with respect to pessimism, then I had rather be the wooden board on which my feet now tread than be a man." These words were for a long time repeated

jestingly about me among my acquaintances. But they made of the young pessimist and me inwardly united friends. We now passed much time together. He also felt himself to be a poet, and many a time I sat for hours in his room and listened with pleasure to the reading of his poems. In my spiritual strivings of that time he also showed a warm interest, although he was moved to this less by the thing itself with which I was concerned than by his personal affection for me. He was bound up with many a delightful friendship, and also youthful love affairs. As a means of living he had to carry a truly heavy burden. At Hermannstadt he had gone through the school as a poor boy and even then had to make his living by tutoring. He then conceived the clever idea of continuing to instruct by correspondence from Vienna the pupils he had gained at Hermannstadt. The sciences in the *Hochschule* interested him very little. One day, however, he wished to pass an examination in chemistry. He had never attended a lecture or opened a single one of the required books. On the last night before the examination he had a friend read to him a digest of the whole subject-matter. He finally fell asleep over this. Yet he went with this friend to the examination. Both made "brilliant" failures.

This young man had boundless faith in me. For a long time he treated me almost as his father-confessor. He opened up to my view an interesting, often melancholy, life sensitive to all that is beautiful. He gave to me so much friendship and love that it was really hard at times not to cause him bitter disappointment. This happened especially because he often felt that I did not show him enough attention. And yet this could not be otherwise when I had so many varieties of interests for which I found in him no real understanding. All this, however, only contributed to make the friendship a more inward relationship. He spent his summer vacation at Hermannstadt. There he sought for students in order to tutor them by correspondence the following year from Vienna. I always received long letters at these times from him. He was grieved because I seldom or never answered these. But, when he returned to Vienna in the autumn, he hurried to me like a boy, and the united life began again. I owed it to him at that time that I was able to mingle with many men. He liked to take me to meet all the people with whom he associated. And I was eager for companionship. This friend brought into my life much that gave me happiness and warmth.

Our friendship remained the same till my friend died a few years ago. It stood the test of many storms of life, and I shall still have much to say of it.

In retrospective consciousness much comes to mind of human and vital relationships which still continues to-day fully present in my mind, united with feelings of love and gratitude. Here I cannot relate all this in detail, but must leave quite unmentioned much which was indeed very near to me in my personal experience, and is near even now.

My youthful friendships in the time of which I am here speaking had in the further course of my life a special import. They forced me into a sort of double mental life. The struggle with the riddle of cognition, which then filled my mind more than all else, aroused in my friends always, to be sure, a strong interest, but very little active participation. In the experience of this riddle I was always rather lonely. On the other hand, I myself shared completely in whatever arose in the existence of my friends. Thus there flowed along in me two parallel currents of life: one which I as a lone wanderer followed, the other which I shared in vital companionship with men bound to me by ties of affection. But this twofold life was on many occasions of profound and lasting significance for my development.

In this connection I must mention especially a friend who had already been a schoolmate of mine at Wiener-Neustadt. During that time, however, we were far apart. First in Vienna, where he visited me often and where he later lived as an employee, he came very close to me. And yet even at Wiener-Neustadt, without any external relationship between us, he had already had a significance for my life. Once I was with him in a gymnasium period. While he was exercising and I had nothing to do, he left a book lying by me. It was Heine's book on the romantic school and the history of philosophy in Germany. I glanced into it. The result of this was that I read the whole book. I found many stimulating things in the book, but was vitally opposed to the manner in which Heine treated the content of life which was dear to me. In this perception of a way of thought and order of feeling which were utterly opposed to those shaping themselves in me, I received a powerful stimulus toward a self-consciousness in the orientation of the inner life which was a necessity of my very nature. I then talked with my schoolmate in opposition to the book. Through this the inner life of his soul came to the fore, which later led to the establishing of a lasting friendship. He was an uncommunicative man who confided very little. Most people thought him an odd character. With those few in whom he was willing to confide he became quite expressive, especially in letters. He considered himself called by his inner nature to be a poet. He was of the opinion that he bore a great treasure in his soul. Besides, he was inclined to imagine that he was in intimate relation with other persons, especially women, rather than actually to form these ties into objective fact. At times he was close to such a relation, but he could not bring it to actual experience. In conversation with me he would then live through his fancies with the same inwardness and enthusiasm as if they were actual. Therefore it was inevitable that he experienced bitter emotions when the dreams always went amiss.

This produced in him a mental life that had not the slightest relation to his outward existence. And this life again was to him the subject of tormenting reflections about himself, which were mirrored for me in many letters and conversations. Thus he once wrote me a long exposition

of the way in which the least or the greatest experience became to him a symbol and how he lived in such symbols.

I loved this friend, and in my love for him I entered into his dreams, although I always had the feeling when with him: “We are moving about in the clouds and have no ground under our feet!” For me, who ceaselessly busied myself to find firm support for life just there – in knowledge – this was an unique experience. I always had to slip outside of my own being and leap across into another skin, as it were, when I was in company with this friend. He liked to share his life with me; at times he even set forth extensive theoretical reflections concerning the “difference between our two natures.” He was quite unaware how little our thoughts harmonized, because his friendly sentiments led him on in all his thinking.

The case was similar in my relation with another Wiener-Neustadt schoolmate. He belonged to the next lower class in the *Realschule*, and we first came together when he entered the *Hochschule* in Vienna a year after me. Then, however, we were often together. He also entered but little into that which concerned me so inwardly, the problem of cognition. He studied chemistry. The natural scientific opinions in which he was then involved prevented him from showing himself in any other light than as a sceptic concerning the spiritual conceptions with which I was filled. Later on in life I found in the case of this friend how close to my state of mind he then stood in his innermost being; but at that time he never allowed this innermost being to show itself. Thus our lively and long arguments became for me a “battle against materialism.” He always opposed to my avowal of the spiritual substance of the world all the contradictory results which seemed to him to be given by natural science. Then I always had to array everything I possessed by way of insight in order to drive from the field his arguments, drawn from the materialistic orientation of his thought, against the knowledge of a spiritual world.

Once we were arguing the question with great zeal. Every day after attending the lectures in Vienna my friend went back to his home, which was still at Wiener-Neustadt. I often accompanied him through the streets of Vienna to the station of the Southern Railway. One day we reached a sort of climax in the argument over materialism after we had already arrived at the station and the train was almost due. Then I put together what I still had to say in the following words: “So, then, you maintain that, when you say ‘I think,’ this is merely the necessary effect of the occurrences in your brain-nerve system. Only these occurrences are a reality. So it is, likewise, When you say ‘I am this or that,' ‘I go,’ and so forth. But observe this. You do not say, ‘My brain thinks,’ ‘My brain sees this or that,’ ‘My brain goes.’ If, however, you have really come to the opinion that what you theoretically maintain is actually true, you must correct your form of expression. When you continue to speak of ‘I,’ you are really lying. But you cannot do otherwise than follow your sound instinct against the suggestion of your theory.

Experience offers you a different group of facts from that which your theory makes up. Your consciousness calls your theory a lie." My friend shook his head. He had no time to reply. As I went back alone, I could not but think that opposing materialism in this crude fashion did not correspond with a particularly exact philosophy. But it did not then really concern me so much to furnish, five minutes before the train left, a philosophically convincing proof as to give expression to my certitude from inner experience of the reality of the human ego. To me this ego was an inwardly observable experience of a *reality* present in itself. This reality seemed to me no less certain than any known to materialism. But in it there is absolutely nothing material. This thorough-going perception of the reality and the spirituality of the ego has in the succeeding years helped me to overcome every temptation to materialism. I have always known "the ego is unshakable." And it has been clear to me that no one really knows the ego who considers it as a form of phenomenon, as a result of other events. The fact that I possessed this perception inwardly and spiritually was what I wished to get my friend to understand. We fought together many times thereafter on this battlefield. But in general conceptions of life we had so many similar sentiments that the earnestness of our theoretical battling never resulted in the least disturbance of our personal relationship.

During this time I got deeper into the student life in Vienna. I became a member of the "German Reading Club" in the Hochschule. In the assembly and in smaller gatherings the political and cultural phenomena of the time were thoroughly discussed. These discussions brought out all possible – and impossible – points of view, such as young people hold. Especially when officers were to be elected, opinions clashed against one another quite violently. Very exciting and stimulating was much that there found expression among the youth in connection with the events in the public life of Austria. It was the time when national parties were becoming more and more sharply defined. Everything which led later more and more to the disruption of the Empire, which appeared in its results after the World War, could then be experienced in germ.

I was first chosen librarian of the reading-room. As such I found out all possible authors who had written books that I thought would be of value to the student library. To such authors I wrote "begging letters." I often wrote in a single week a hundred such letters. Through this "work" of mine the library was very soon much enlarged. But the thing had a secondary effect for me. Through the work it was possible for me to become acquainted in a comprehensive fashion with the scientific, artistic, culture-historical, political literature of the time. I was an eager reader of the books given.

Later I was chosen president of the Reading Club. This, however, was to me a burdensome office. For I faced a great number of the most diverse party view-points and saw in all of these

their relative justification. Yet the adherents of the various parties would come to me. Each would seek to persuade me that his party alone was right. At the time when I was elected every party had favoured me. For until then they had only heard how in the assemblies I had taken the part of justice. After I had been president for a half-year, all turned against me. In that time they had found that I could not decide as positively for any party as that party wished.

My craving for companionship found great satisfaction in the reading-room. And an interest was awakened in a broader field of the public life through its reflection in the occurrences in the common life of the students. In this way I came to be present at very interesting parliamentary debates, sitting in the gallery of the House of Delegates or of the Senate.

Apart from the bills under discussion – which often affected life profoundly – I was especially interested in the personalities of the House of Delegates. There stood every year at the end of his bench, as the chief budget expositor, the keen philosopher, Bartolemäus Carneri. His words were a hailstorm of accusations against the Taaffe Ministry; they were a defence of Germanism in Austria. There stood Ernst von Plener, the dry speaker, the unexcelled authority in matters of finance. One was chilled while he criticized the statement of the Minister of Finance, Dunajewski, with the coldness of an accountant. There the Ruthenian Thomeszuck thundered against the politics of nationalities. One had the feeling that upon his discovery of an especially well-coined word for that moment depended the fostering of antipathy against the Minister. There argued, in peasant-theatrical fashion, always intelligently, the clerical Lienbacher. His head, bowed over a little, caused what he said to seem like the outflow of clarified perceptions. There argued in his cutting style the Young Czech Gregr. One felt in him a half-demagogue. There stood Rieger of the Old Czechs, altogether with the deeply characteristic sentiment of the organized Czechs as they had been built up during a long period and had come to self consciousness during the second half of the nineteenth century – a man seldom shut up to himself, a powerful mind and a steadfast will. There spoke on the right side of the Chamber in the midst of the Polish seats Otto Hausner – often only setting forth the results of reading spiritually rich; often sending well-aimed shafts to all sides of the House with a certain sense of satisfaction in himself. A thoroughly self-satisfied but intelligent eye sparkled behind a monocle; the other always seemed to say “Yes” to the sparkle. A speaker who, however, even then often spoke prophetic words as to the future of Austria. One ought to-day to read again what he then said; one would be amazed at the keenness of his vision. One then laughed, to be sure, over much which years later became bitter earnest.
