

**Note: This is an expanded version of an article appearing in the journal *Green Letters* (2011); it is intended for a literary rather than musical readership, and the punctuation and spellings are British.**

## **The Alps, Richard Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* and Environmentalism**

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### **Introduction**

After love and death, nature may well be European music's preferred theme; it figures significantly in troubadour *cansos*, pastoral madrigals and operas, tone poems, impressionistic preludes, and elsewhere. In light of this it is puzzling how seldom actual nature is invoked in musical discourse. Composers—Richard Strauss among them—have been known to seek out nature in the manner of landscape painters, but there is no similar tradition among the critics, who ground nature-music and their judgments of it not in nature but in other music and criticism. When confronted with the vivid imagery of Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* (1915), contemporaries wrote primarily of the aesthetics of vivid imagery, relegating the images themselves to the level of anecdote. Musicologists are quite adept at exploring the relationship of works to cultural constructions of nature, but relatively few have brought real environments into the discussion of canonical music. There has as yet been no serious consideration of how the Alps might be critical to an appreciation of the *Alpine Symphony*, nor has anyone theorized what the consequences of the *Alpine Symphony* might be for the Alps. Surely it is worth asking whether it metaphorically embodies sustaining or destructive relationships to the environment it represents, if it respects or disrespects nonhuman nature, and if love of nature is contingent on a symbolic domination of it, to name just three questions.

How one could undertake such work is the topic of this essay, and in what follows I look for doors out of the concert hall and into the Alps wherever I can find them. The exits are variously those of philosophy, literary ecocriticism, environmental history, and, of course, music history. I will begin by exploring the environmental implications of the *Alpine Symphony*'s reliance upon Nietzscheism, the insights of which will launch two other considerations: the work's mountain-climbing narrative, and its use of thick description. Finally, I will situate the music in regard to the environmental movement in

Strauss's Germany. Throughout most of this study I resist final judgments regarding the *Alpine Symphony*'s relationship to the environment, focusing instead on what questions must underlie them. The conclusion is an exception, one whose judgmental quality Strauss's contemporaries all but demand. While the tone does change there, the verdict itself, like everything preceding it, is meant to suggest ways in which music and green methodologies could be useful to one another.

### **The Environmental Implications of a Nietzschean *Alpine Symphony***

A discussion of Strauss and Nietzsche is of particular importance to this study for two reasons: first, our understanding of how and to what degree the *Alpine Symphony* is indebted to Nietzsche has grown in recent years, thanks primarily to Charles Youmans (2000; 2004; 2005) but also to Rainer Bayreuther (1994: 242-46; 1997: 125-95). Second the environmental implications of Nietzsche's worldview have generated much discussion in philosophical circles (also recently). To grasp the significance of Nietzsche's impact on Strauss, one must begin by recognizing the metaphysical orientation of art music throughout much of the century preceding the *Alpine Symphony*. In an increasingly 'realistic' age (think of scientific advances, industrialism, and, in the arts, realism, naturalism, and impressionism), music remained a refuge for fantasy, magic, and other irrational impulses (Dahlhaus 1980: 1-18). It held this position largely because German philosophers—and Schopenhauer in particular—felt that it was unique among the arts in its ability to capture what was otherwise inexpressible and perhaps even imperceptible (Gilliam 1999: 57). In Schopenhauer's view, this made music the most significant of the arts, which obviously appealed to composers and in turn encouraged them to write more metaphysical music.

Schopenhauer's understanding of inner and outer worlds and of universal and individual will must also be encapsulated here. As 'imperceptible' implies, music occupied the inner, noumenal realm rather than the outer, phenomenal one that lies within reach of our senses; hence the philosopher's dictum that 'music never expresses the phenomenon, but only the inner nature' (Helfling 1992: 43). Schopenhauer mapped universal and individual will onto inner and outer worlds, respectively, and this reinforces

the value he placed on the inner. Asserting one's individual will meant striving against other individual wills, which inevitably led to general misery. In the renunciation of individual will in favour of universal will, Schopenhauer thus perceived a path out of suffering. Without further unpacking of his ideas (a project beyond our needs here), it is not possible to give a full accounting of how romantic and post-romantic composers treated metaphysics and the denial of individual will in music. Suffice to say that music could be non-representational (and thus embody the very notion of renouncing the phenomenal world), or it could articulate themes of metaphysical profundity and/or renunciation.

It is within this philosophical framework that Strauss came of age, and like so many composers of his generation he struggled to get out from under the shadow of the chief musical proponent of metaphysics, Wagner. Strauss went to the heart of the matter by looking for a way to reject Schopenhauer. This he found in Nietzscheism, which he studied and incorporated into compositions from the 1890s through the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche himself had admired both Schopenhauer and Wagner, but had ultimately turned against them both in the 1870s. He came to view metaphysics and the denial of individual will as weaknesses threatening to undermine humanity, believing that the species could only advance by the fulfilment of its best specimens through direct engagement with the physical world. Pursuit of that fulfilment, or the 'will to power', became a cornerstone of Nietzscheism. If this broad summary gives some indication of what Strauss sought to convey in his music, Youmans makes clear that the composer took the philosophy much further. While avoiding overt musical philosophizing, Strauss nevertheless worked through Nietzscheism meticulously enough that one can recognize distinct readings of its tenets in the one opera and six symphonic works that make up his 'Nietzschean oeuvre'.<sup>2</sup> We will consider these tenets not in the abstract, but rather as we

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<sup>1</sup> By 1893, Strauss had very likely read *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Human, All Too Human*, and *The Birth of Tragedy*. 1896 marks the publication of Strauss's most explicitly Nietzschean tone poem, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Youmans 2005: 90).

<sup>2</sup> The opera is *Guntram* (1892-93); the symphonic works are titled here in whichever language they are the most familiar to English speakers: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (1894-95), *Eine Heldenleben* (1897-98), *Symphonia*

find them in the history surrounding the *Alpine Symphony*.

Nietzsche did not envision an easy exit from metaphysics; nature itself was free of them, as would be the *Übermensch* when he arrived. But other humans would always risk backsliding into metaphysics and the doubt, pessimism, and attitude of renunciation Nietzsche associated with it. This struggle against relapse was central to his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and consequently to Strauss's tone-poem by that name. Strauss originally intended to build the *Alpine Symphony* around it as well. The composition began in 1899 as a rumination on the life and death of the Swiss artist Karl Stauffer (1857-91), in whom Strauss saw the clash of anti-metaphysical and metaphysical impulses. He intended to locate the anti-metaphysical in Stauffer's existence as a 'consciously *working*, joyfully creating artist' living close to nature (Youmans 2005: 109). (Strauss equated work with anti-metaphysics insofar as it kept one in a mentally healthy here-and-now.) The metaphysical would take the form of the doubt and insanity that overcame Stauffer and led to his suicide. Through time Strauss removed Stauffer from the program entirely, retaining only that part of the conception originally meant to oppose metaphysics: an active immersion in nature. To conclude from this that the work migrated from a Nietzschean orientation to one of light tourism would be inaccurate; in 1911 Strauss wrote in his journal that he was resolved to retitle the symphony *The Antichrist* after Nietzsche's book by that name, since it expressed 'moral purification through one's own strength, liberation through work, [and] worship of eternal, magnificent nature' (Gilliam and Youmans 2001; Nietzsche's own invocation of the antichrist reflects his view of Christianity as a source of metaphysical longing).

By now we have ample reason to view the *Alpine Symphony* as Nietzschean, and are thus ready to ask what the environmental implications of that worldview might be. Nietzsche scholars and environmental ethicists have been pondering that very question since 1991 and Max Hallman's essay, 'Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics'. The scope of their debate has grown so large that we would do well to limit ourselves to those threads lying closest to the two principles of Nietzscheism brought out above, attachment to physical reality and the pursuit of individual will (or the will to power). The first tenet is

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*Domestica* (1902-03), *Don Quixote* (1897), and the *Alpine Symphony*. Youmans summarizes the different ways in which these works reflect Nietzsche (2005: 100-101).

clearly relevant to an environmental context, and it leads Adrian Del Caro to hear this question in Nietzscheism: ‘What would life on earth look like, human life in particular, if the earth were treated like the only environment, the only world, the real world?’ (2004: 113). The implication—that humans would treat the planet better—is suggested by Nietzsche himself in the prologue to *Zarathustra*: ‘I swear to you, my brothers, *stay loyal to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! [. . .] The most dreadful thing is now to sin against the earth’ (Parkes 1999: 167). But how to reconcile these sentiments with the will to power as Nietzsche describes it in *Beyond Good and Evil*? ‘Life is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker [. . .] “Exploitation” does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect primitive society; it belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life’ (Acampora 1994: 189 [tr., Walter Kaufmann]). Perhaps staying ‘loyal to the earth’ actually signifies loyalty to the drive to dominate. Or perhaps Nietzsche struggled with contradictions and sought ways of moderating them. Parkes cites these lines from *On the Genealogy of Morality* as evidence that he built into his philosophical system a curb on exploitation, one rooted in a reverence for nature: ‘Our whole attitude towards nature today is hubris, our raping of nature by means of machines and the inconsiderately employed inventions of technology and engineering’ (1999: 182). For Del Caro, the will to power needs no counterbalance at all, because its very purpose requires that it lock horns with a healthy, robust environment: ‘Like an environmentalist, [Nietzsche] needs nature to remain intact, to keep its obstacles’ (114). There are other ways of handling the apparent contradiction: Acampora notes a shift toward anti-environmental elitism in Nietzsche’s later writings (192). Zimmerman feels that the very parsing of individual statements is suspect, at least if it assumes that Nietzsche was addressing our current environmental crises and that he would have agreed with our notions of what constitutes wise environmental attitudes and practices (2008). Drenthen likewise looks past individual aphorisms, not because he questions their relevance, but because in focusing on them we risk missing this larger paradox: Nietzsche defines nature in order to establish an ethical relationship with it, and yet any such definition symbolically controls nature by setting borders around it (1999). Recognizing this paradox is productive for it helps us to understand our problematic

relationship to the environment.

Nietzsche the exploiter or biospheric egalitarian? If the scholarship leaves us uncertain, it has nevertheless been helpful: first, the authors agree that Nietzsche is relevant to environmental ethics; presumably the same applies to Strauss and the *Alpine Symphony*. Second, they have gotten us past general ideas of environmental friendliness to the specific question of whether Nietzscheism—and by association, the *Alpine Symphony*—validate the conquest of non-human nature. Herein lies the specificity we need in approaching a piece whose only recourse to verbal clarification consists of a brief title and twenty-two sectional subtitles. That the *Alpine Symphony* embodies the biospheric-egalitarian Nietzsche is initially suggested by these lines from the tract that partially inspired it, *The Antichrist*: ‘The human being is by no means the crown of creation: every creature is, alongside the human, at a similar level of perfection’ (Parkes 2005: 85). This is but one possibility, however, and music is seldom so straightforward in its meanings.

### **Climbing Mountains**

As we begin to assess the *Alpine Symphony*’s stance relative to conquest, the central narrative of a climb and descent surely demands consideration. That mountain climbing *can* serve as a metaphor for dominating nature is common knowledge, and it did so at least some of the time in Strauss’s Germany. In his history of the German and Austrian Alpine Society published six years before the *Alpine Symphony*, Aloys Dreyer entitles one chapter ‘The “Conquering” of the Alps’, characterizes climbing as a ‘ruthless struggle [...] with a fierce enemy’, and writes of the arrival at the summit: ‘Proudly the conqueror sets his foot on the neck of the defeated mountain and rejoices in the dawn: “Mine is the world!”’ (1909: 45; my translation). A gentler version of this same metaphor is at work in Strauss’s obituary as published by the Alpine Society: ‘[Strauss was] an innovator, a high-alpinist of the musical sphere; overrunning all, he stood on the summit’ (Hofmann 1949: cover page; my translation). But of course not everyone climbs a mountain in this spirit. In his thematic organization of mountain-climbing literature, Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy names ‘conquest’ as but one of three narrative categories, the

other two being ‘caretaking’ and ‘connection’, which lean toward conservation and intimate bonding with the environment, respectively (McCarthy 2008: 160).

The *Alpine Symphony* does not mark the first confluence of Strauss, Nietzsche, and mountain climbing; that would be *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In Nietzsche’s book by that name, Zarathustra’s dwelling on a mountaintop does not symbolize dominion over nature. Rather, the mountaintop measures a distance from humanity, and while it also conveys a rising *above* humanity, even in this context Zarathustra is hardly the conquering *Übermensch*. To the contrary, he is prone to the very backsliding into metaphysics of which Nietzsche (Youmans 2005: 100-101). As mentioned earlier, this threat constitutes a central theme of the book, and Strauss’s score shows his awareness of it. Certainly there is bombast to be had (e.g., the opening music that most of us know as the soundtrack to *2001: A Space Odyssey*), but it is the triumph of a beautiful sunrise, not of Zarathustra himself; it represents a moment of rejoicing in the physical world, one soon lost in a work that ultimately expresses ‘not freedom from metaphysics but the longing for freedom from metaphysics’ (Youmans 2005: 102).

In some respects the *Alpine Symphony* has moved beyond longing, to the freedom itself. The evolving conception of the work supports this view, for as Youmans reminds us, Strauss originally envisioned the climb as an antidote to other sections of the work which were to remain mired in metaphysics (2005: 220); in discarding those other sections, he thus opted to emphasize the physical. At times the *Alpine Symphony* hints that its hiker is the *Übermensch*, whose victory over metaphysics might be symbolized by the conquering of a mountain. Both of the hiking themes are martial in their angular shape and rhythm (‘The Ascent’, beginning, and 1’20” - 1’29”).<sup>3</sup> The second one, with its triumphant brass flourishes, constitutes a fanfare. Strauss scored the piece for over 140 players whose energies are sometimes directed toward overcoming obstacles on the climb and celebrating on the summit. But these points, taken in isolation, distort the overall impression left by the *Alpine Symphony*. To begin with, its narrative is not merely of a climb, but of a climb and descent. The latter takes up a large portion of the work, and is

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<sup>3</sup> All timings refer to a recording I have chosen primarily for its wide availability via the online Naxos database, but also for its inclusion of English subtitles: WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln (cond. by Semyon Bychkov), Profil: PH09065.

hardly the stuff of conquest, given the hiker's sorry dash down the mountain in the face of a thunderstorm and the subdued night-music that closes out the work. (It is worth noting here that Strauss reserves his loudest moment—a brief triple-forte—not for the hiker but for the storm, in 'Thunder and Storm, Descent' at 2'32".) Much of the summiting is unheroic as well: the comedic wrong turn of 'Straying through Thicket and Undergrowth', the fearfulness underlying 'Dangerous Moments', and the pensive—even melancholy—passages on the summit, next to which Strauss scribbled in a sketchbook: 'admiration', 'exhausted delight', 'how beautiful', and 'threatening' (Werbeck 1996: 204). I do not insist on any one reading of these points; the music may or may not approach the condition of metaphysical angst, may or may not convey a laudable respect for the alpine environment. I argue only that they cast doubt over conjecture that mountain climbing in the *Alpine Symphony* symbolizes the domination of nature. I do not insist on any one reading of these points; the music may or may not approach the condition of metaphysical angst, may or may not convey a laudable respect for the alpine environment. I argue only that they cast doubt over the previously entertained hypothesis that mountain climbing in the *Alpine Symphony* symbolizes the domination of nature.

The *Alpine Symphony*'s critical reception offers us one other angle from which to question the meaning of mountain climbing. That most of these writers have been unaware of its Nietzschean basis is worth keeping in mind, but does not invalidate the inquiry; after all, we are asking not what that basis meant to audiences, but rather what it means to the work. While commentary on the *Alpine Symphony* reveals no clear hermeneutical tradition relative to mountain climbing, one might nevertheless generalize that writers have evaluated the piece by the criteria of 'connection' (see Mathes above), which is to say that the music succeeds if the journey up and down the mountain leaves the listener feeling close to nature. Neither 'conquest' nor 'caretaking' significantly shape the work's reception. The sparseness of references to conquest is particularly striking in light of how many writers have tapped the rhetoric to situate Strauss in relation to others; to the quotation from the Alpine-Society obituary (above) we may add these comments elicited by the *Alpine Symphony*'s premiere (my translations):

[Strauss] stands at the summit of life, his self-confidence no longer requiring that he search for novelty (Schmidt: 1915).

The processing of thematic material [...] is worthy of the hand of a master standing at the pinnacle of his fame (Kämpf 1915).

(In arguing for the superiority of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* to the *Alpine Symphony*.)

...we may still see in Beethoven's symphonic art the insurmountable summit, a summit from whose towering heights Strauss's Alps are but modest hills above the musical plain (Istel 1915).

It would seem that the climbing of a mountain has put conquest in the mind of these writers, who then choose not to apply that meaning to the musical narrative. Their reticence has several possible roots. It may reflect a touristic ethos that hovered over the *Alpine Symphony* for much of the twentieth century, one supported by anecdotal references to it as a product of the composer's vacations in Garmisch. It may also be that the music itself discourages the conquest theme. This seems particularly the case for those writers who offhandedly invoke 'conquest' in describing the climb, but who clearly do not hear it as the prevailing spirit of the work, and who stress the reflective quality of the summit-music (Del Mar 1969: 114; Satragini 1999: 104). A third reason for the absence of 'conquest' departs from a point made earlier which I restate aphoristically: the work must conjure up the real Alps for the symbolic domination of them to be compelling; it does not (for the writers), so it is not. Conversely, Strauss's domination of the musical world *is* real to these writers, so metaphors of conquest are followed through on in that sphere. A fourth option, by which natural conquest is so pervasive in classical music that the critics have learned to tune it out, will return in my conclusion, when we are no longer bound to a Nietzschean context.

## **Weighing Thick Description in the *Alpine Symphony***

The narrative of climbing a mountain, if important, is but one means of questioning conquest in the *Alpine Symphony*. The manner in which that narrative is set forth is another, and this brings us to a consideration of thick description. Thick description, or the detailed and intimate representation of one's surroundings, is central to much of the literature ecocritics study. We can also expect it to inform a Nietzschean work, given the philosopher's stance regarding the phenomenal world and the resulting value he placed on 'the closest of things' (Del Caro 2004: 107). No surprise then Strauss's creed: 'I regard the ability to express outward events as the highest triumph of musical technique' (Hepokoski 1992: 140); no surprise either critical reactions to his music like this one by contemporary Julius Korngold (writing of the opera *Salome*): '[The] talents with which this admirable master of technique is endowed lie principally on one side of his art: that of colourful description, of ruthlessly realistic imitation' (Botstein 1992: 349).

While Lawrence Buell neither discovered thick description nor invented the term (its roots lie in the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz; see Chapter 1 of Geertz 1973), his articulation of its value is influential enough that I paraphrase it here. To begin with, thick description informs; through it one comes to a better understanding of the natural world, be it isolated phenomena or the workings of whole bioregions and ecosystems. Thickly descriptive literature helps readers to recover an environmental literacy lost through disconnection from the land (Buell 1995: 107). Thick description additionally keeps humanity in check, for in the 'disciplined extrospection' with which the writer approaches the physical world (and, in turn, the reader the text), Buell finds 'an affirmation of environment over self' (104). For our purposes it is useful to combine the two principles into a quasi-formula: the more—and more accurately—a work informs, the stronger the presence of thick description; and the stronger that presence, the better the justification for hearing an affirmation of environment over self. Buell thus offers a means of weighing conquest in the *Alpine Symphony*, provided that we can translate thick description into musical terms. One word before we begin: while I am aware that much ink has been spilled separating mimesis from description, I make no effort to keep them

apart below, since for our purposes they are similar: both ‘express outward events’ (Strauss), and both thus hold the potential to ‘affirm the environment over self’.

Strauss employs a wide range of representational modes, at one end of which lie the hunting horns near the close of ‘The Ascent’ and the cowbells of ‘On the Alpine Pasture’. Whether or not representation is even the right concept here (the horn calls are quite literally horn calls, the cowbells, cowbells), it is the effect that is important: Strauss conjures up the acoustical reality of the Alps. The storm sounds and bird calls (‘Entry into the Wood’ at 1’46”, 1’50”, and 1’57”); throughout ‘On the Alpine Pasture’ and ‘Elegie’; ‘Thunder and Storm, Descent’ at 3’17”), if not actually storm sounds or bird calls, are nearly as literal in their mimetic quality. The rendering of other aural phenomena moves us away from mimesis and toward something more poetically descriptive; this includes the brook (‘Wandering by the Brook’), the waterfall (in both ‘At the Waterfall’ and ‘Apparition’), and the sheets of rain (‘Thunder and Storm, Descent’). An additional step in the poetical direction takes us out of the alpine acoustical world altogether: the hiker’s first theme graphically illustrates his ascent, and with swirling effects on the flowering meadow and elsewhere Strauss aims for an atmospheric, airy *sensation* (rather than the actual sound of a breeze).

As ‘illustrates’ suggests, we are nearing the realm of images, where musical sounds function as metaphors for sights. At least since the Renaissance, composers have turned musical depictions to this end, so often in fact that the vocabulary surrounding such music actually favours the visual over the aural; music is indeed said to ‘illustrate’ more often than ‘mimic’, tones have ‘colour’, orchestras have a ‘palette’, minor harmonies are ‘dark’ (as in Strauss’s ‘Entry into the Wood’) while major harmonies are ‘bright’ (in ‘Sunrise’), and so forth. Strauss excelled at a particularly literal-minded version of this visual depiction throughout much of his career, and we can sense his enthusiasm for the practice throughout the *Alpine Symphony*. Soft staccato splashes in the woodwinds give us wildflowers as caught momentarily in the hiker’s field of vision (‘On Flowering Meadows’), and they descend in range because the hiker is climbing past them. The mountain theme rises and falls (in the ‘Night’ section and elsewhere) primarily because the mountain does so to the eye. The historically striking quality of this visual exactitude comes through in the reviews elicited by the work’s early performances; one

critic writes that Strauss has taken depiction ‘almost to the point of musical photography’ (Göttmann 1915; my translation), while another finds the ‘painting in tone colours’ so vivid that ‘one can see before him the lush green of Alpine pastures’ (M. R. 1918; my translation, emphasis added).

Are musical moments like these sufficient to ‘affirm environment over self’? The answer depends on what context we apply. If it is that of Nietzscheism, then the bar for environmental affirmation must necessarily be set rather high. After all, thick description in the *Alpine Symphony* cannot automatically rule out a conquering mindset if it does not automatically do so in a philosophy that itself would seem allied to thick description. Strauss’s own efforts in that direction must be particularly convincing, then. For my part, neither its quantity nor quality meets that criterion. True, Strauss reinforces our environmental literacy at least some of the time; the passage from the alpine pasture through a thicket and onto a glacier seems roughly accurate, and the afternoon thunderstorm makes sense in the mid-to-late summer implied by cattle on the pasture. One might also argue that his rendering of sounds and sights increases—however elusively—our awareness of what it is like to experience the actual phenomena. But the contribution seems barely significant in light of all the environmental detail Strauss has chosen not to include. Where exactly does the *Alpine Symphony* take place? Various guesses have been made (the best being somewhere near Garmisch where Strauss built his villa around 1908), but the facts are that the composer did not say and no one knows for certain. His birdcalls may or may not be identifiable (I have tried), and if they are, they may even sound in their proper environments; but again, there is no indication that such details concerned Strauss. Is it unfair to ask that he make known the wildflowers and other flora? The composer who claimed he could distinguish musically a knife from a fork ought to be able to differentiate Edelweiss from Gentian (Gilliam 1999: 81). He could also have provided this sort of information in sectional titles or in a program, of course.

If some of my scepticism reflects the paucity of description in the *Alpine Symphony*, another part is due to a particular quality of that description: nearly every significant moment and landmark is saturated with a human emotional response; the sunrise is glorious, the entry into the woods ominous, the glacier and thunderstorm scary,

the summit transporting, and so forth. I realize that arguments can be made in favour of anthropomorphism and the pathetic fallacy, given their capacity to establish a connection between human and nonhuman nature. To my mind, however, Strauss's anthropomorphized landscapes are not there to establish connections, but rather to give the hiker's state of mind priority over the outer world. We are not seriously imagining that an unease pervades the forest and the creatures that live there, only that our hiker struggles to remain oriented in momentary darkness. Needless to say, passages like this one diminish the value of thick description as formulated earlier. Has Strauss any choice but to compose this way? We are told that Cormac McCarthy has dampened anthropomorphism—and thereby anthropocentrism—in *Blood Meridian* by recording environmental detail with such exhaustive precision that the reader no longer imagines those details as being filtered through a human perspective (Shaviro 1992; Phillips 1996; Lilley 2002). Initially it may seem that music offers the composer no similar opportunity, so inherently geared is it toward emotion. But it does, at least theoretically: Strauss could have composed an alpine *sound*-scape more precise and detailed than any description to be found in *Blood Meridian*. What is more, the direct acoustical connection between symphony and mountain would work to discourage our awareness of mediation; the succession of sounds would mark the hiker's progress up and down the mountain, certainly, but those sounds would no longer be transmitted *through* him.

Let us shift now to another context, that of prevailing musical aesthetics in Strauss's Germany. Here the composer's thick description gives a very different, 'greener' impression than it did before. Two observations open the door to this perspective: first, despite Strauss's having identified no mountain, probably no bird species, and not a single species of tree, bush, or wildflower, many critics of the premiere echoed Korngold's reference to 'ruthlessly realistic imitation' (which is presumably how Strauss himself heard his music). Second, most critics meant this negatively. ('O this infamous exactitude!', moaned the reviewer of another of Strauss's works from around this time [Robert Herschenfeld, quoted in Botstein 1992: 335].) Their complaints make sense in light of music's reputation as the 'interior' art to which the phenomenal world was an anathema. Critics weaned on that understanding were naturally shocked and dismayed at Strauss's depictive passages. More than one condemned the work for

embodying a reversal of Beethoven's statement regarding his *Pastoral Symphony*, 'more an expression of feeling than painting' (Istel 1915; Kalbeck 1915).

Reactions like these drive home the point that a little thick description grows quite meaningful in a world nearly entirely hostile to it. The option of composing a chain of sound effects (implied above) is in fact only theoretical, for the tradition in which Strauss composed had no room for a piece of this sort. Little wonder then Strauss's pursuit of aural metaphors for visual phenomena; as explained previously, they had a place in the musical tradition, where they were accepted most likely *because* of the mediation they projected. Strauss obviously took them beyond what many were willing to allow, and indeed, often beyond the limits of where music can go without collapsing into contradiction. Both light and dark are rendered through descending melodic lines in the first 'Night' and in 'Sunrise' because in the mountains at sunrise the line between light and dark falls. Why then the descending melody when night comes on at the end of the work? Strauss shifts rather awkwardly here to a literary reference ('nightfall' or '*Einbruch der Dunkelheit*'). Earlier we noted the hiker climbing through (descending) wildflowers: if the musical technique of counterpoint (i.e., the counterbalancing of rising and falling lines) is to be understood as visual representation, then do not the inversions of the first hiking theme (in 'The Ascent, 20" – 26") tell us of hikers passing one another up and down the mountainside? The question is justified given that Strauss repeatedly inverts the theme for programmatic purposes in 'Thunder and Storm, Descent'. Strauss's literal approach to representation demands that we consider the overlapping of rising-theme statements as further evidence of multiple hikers ('The Ascent', 48" – 51"). Multiple hikers do not belong in this work; Stauffer was the original protagonist, and Nietzsche's mountaintop is a solitary place. References to a hiking party nevertheless surface in commentary on the symphony (Del Mar 1969: 109; Bellemare 2003: 307), encouraged perhaps by problematic circumstances such as these. To return to the bigger point: Strauss's willingness to court contradiction suggests an ideological commitment to thick description significant enough to justify hearing an affirmation of environment over self.

## **Coda to Thick Description**

If thick description is environmental, is less thick description less environmental? The question is very important in light of the aesthetic tradition leading up to and largely underlying the *Alpine Symphony* (pace Strauss and his critics). As emphasized in my earlier, ‘negative’ assessment of the symphony’s thick description, Strauss’s hiker sees relatively little of the mountain he climbs, so focused is he on his inner feelings. And those critics: how often they alchemize their own indifference to environmental detail into a defence of ‘depth’ or ‘profundity’ (my translations):

One might almost say that every drop of rain gets its musical illustration. There will perhaps be some admirers of the ancients who prefer Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony, in which ... the emotional impression affects the soul of the listener in its depths (Anon. 1915).

We come to the heart of the problem: did Strauss strive to dig more deeply than the purely picturesque, and if so, did he succeed? (Weissmann 1915).

Since deeper emotional problems in the program are not available, this music naturally cannot stir the depths of the soul as do the symphonies of Beethoven, Brahms and Bruckner (Kämpf 1915).

Old objections to music that imitates the external world re-emerge, and indeed the climber can be accused here and there of a lack of depth (Korngold 1915).

Their values may encourage a disinterest in the environment, but then again they may not. As Janice Koelb makes clear, the invocation of nature for symbolic purposes, and the de-emphasis of environmental nuance that inevitably results, are not automatically suspect: ‘When we encounter a literary mountain (or a literary rose or nightingale) offered as a figuration, we surely cannot simply conclude that, because it pays what we

consider to be insufficient attention to the object's physical attributes, the author or his culture must not have liked mountains (or roses or birds)...’ (2009: 447). In the case of the *Alpine Symphony*, the critics clearly expected nature to serve depth. This strengthens Koelb's point, given that in the musical tradition these critics lived and breathed, the ideal of depth had roots in notions of organicism (Watkins 2004). Some of these critics were thus indirectly holding Strauss accountable to natural processes. Finally, there is the matter of Schopenhauer, whose worldview the critics knowingly or unknowingly reflected, and whom Strauss had by no means entirely left behind, as should be clear by now. Greg Pritchard argues that Schopenhauer's privileging of noumenal over phenomenal realms can have an ethical environmental dimension to it: as the location of universal—not individual—will, the noumenal world is where all being interconnects and where compassion takes the place of striving and egoism (2006: 27, 30). According to Schopenhauer, one path to intuiting this world lies in the ‘calm contemplation’ of natural objects (25). This calls to mind the summit of the *Alpine Symphony* and a hiker who, gazing upon the world, seems to feel at one with it.

### **Environmentalism in Wilhelmine-Era Germany**

A vast front of interrelated alliances sprang up during the Wilhelmine Era (1890-1914) primarily in reaction to Germany's rapid industrialisation. *Naturschutz* and *Heimatschutz* (‘nature protection’ and ‘homeland protection’, respectively) no doubt constitute the largest subdivisions of this movement, but the *Jugendbewegung* with its *Wandervogel* groups, and the *Naturfreunde* (originating in Austria), the *Dürerbund*, and the network of alpine societies deserve mention as well (Lekan 2004: 19-73). These and the other 260-plus organizations one contemporary listed (Dominick 1992: 58) surely constitute the largest-scale environmental movement to that point in history, one justifiably receiving a lot of scholarly attention in recent years. As might be expected, the groups represent such demographic and ideological diversity—when taken together and when viewed individually through time—that generalizations about them prove risky. Membership ranged from the young to the middle-aged and included rural and urban dwellers, students and teachers, artists, writers, botanists, and others. While conceptions of nature

overlapped, *Naturschutz*-ideology tended to focus on non-human nature, *Heimatschutz*-ideology on peopled environments. What needed protecting differed accordingly, with the *Naturschutz* movement favouring individual species, ‘natural monuments’, and relatively undeveloped areas, and the *Heimatschutz*, lifestyles, cultures, and cultural landmarks (and nature insofar as the character of all three were dependent on it). Why these things needed protecting depended not only on which group’s literature one reads, but on a host of considerations relative to the time and place as well; arguments could appeal to regional sentiment or patriotism, and were based alternately on aesthetic beauty and, as Raymond Dominick makes clear, the emerging science of ecology (1992: 36-41). If industrialisation was the general culprit, the form it took varied according to time and place and politics; pollution was a common concern, as was development and a tourism facilitated by the expansion of railways.

In a sense then, diversity is one valid generalization of the German environmental movement. A second holds that the reactionary character long attributed to these groups is inaccurate. The obvious point, that concern over environmental degradation is forward looking, is but one grounds for reappraisal. Celia Applegate and others have revealed the degree to which the *Heimat* movement was aimed at identify-formation *in the context of modernity* (Applegate 2000: 111; see also Rollins 1997: 1-26). Like those who ‘buy local’ in the early twenty-first century, *Heimat* activists pushed for sustainable alternatives to prevailing models of progress. A third broad characterization is that these groups were not proto-fascist, another misassumption effectively dampening research on this topic for much of the twentieth century. There were right-wing elements among them, to be sure, and environmentalism was appropriated by xenophobic nationalists after World War I (Lekan 2004: 74-98; Olsen 1999). But much about these groups was out of alignment with the future national socialism. This includes the *Heimat* adherents’ wariness regarding industrialism, as well as their frequent emphasis on regional over national identity, which ultimately translated into international pacifism (Applegate 1990: 86 and 108). Among the Alpinists, individualism trumped a group mentality at this time (Keller 2006: 8).

Before going any further, I must highlight the challenge of searching for rapprochements between the *Alpine Symphony* and the environmental movement. It is not

just that we lack a Youmans to spell out musical and biographical connections as we had when discussing Nietzsche; it is additionally that no one has ever proposed—even cursorily—that there are connections to be made. We’re on our own, in short, and my approach to the subject is suitably cautious and hopefully transparent. In that spirit, the previous two paragraphs and the rest of this one carry no heavier load than that of justifying the search. The movement’s diversity suggests that there were many possible points of contact between it and Strauss. The progressive quality corresponds loosely to Strauss’s outlook, as does the movement’s misalignment with future Nazi ideology.<sup>4</sup> Moving beyond these general observations, I offer five clusters of points meant to strengthen the possibility of links between the *Alpine Symphony* and the environmental movement; I have chosen them because they involved the Alps and/or Bavaria:<sup>5</sup>

1. The *Alpine Symphony* caps a time of unprecedented interest in alpinism: the German and Austrian Alpine Society grew from sixteen sections in 1869 to 353 in 1908 (Emmer 1909: 46), and from a membership of 18,000 in 1886 to 46,500 in 1900 (Dreyer 1909: 131), to 100,000 around 1912 (Erhardt 1950: 57).
2. The Munich chapter of the Alpine Society advanced legislation to define and protect natural monuments in 1904 (Hölzl 2006: 33), and the larger organization’s annual meetings in the teens concerned strategies to fend off logging and other perceived industrial threats (Keller 2008: 99-100).
3. 1902 saw the formation of ‘The Association for the Conservation of the Beautiful Landscape around Munich, with Special Emphasis on the Isar Valley’ (better known as the Isar Valley Society; Hölzl 2006: 33); the founder’s brother, Emanuel von Seidl, would design Strauss’s Garmisch villa five years later.
4. The battle against a proposed hydroelectric plant at Walchensee (in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps) began in 1905 and was still raging in 1915 (it was completed in 1924).

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<sup>4</sup> Strauss would have a troubled relationship with Nazism, condemning it privately while attempting—ultimately unsuccessfully—to steer clear of censure himself in hopes of protecting his Jewish daughter-in-law; Gilliam and Youmans 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss worked in Berlin for many years leading up to the completion of the *Alpine Symphony*, which suggests that environmental developments in northern Germany should be studied as well (a project not undertaken here).

5. In 1905 the Bavarian State Committee for the Care of Nature came into existence. In 1908 it sought to establish a legal framework for the protection of endangered species (Hölzl 2006: 33), and in 1913 a private society was spun off of it, the *Bund Naturschutz*, which would become the single most important environmental association over the next decade (37).

How might the environmental movement be ‘heard’ in the *Alpine Symphony*? The non-adversarial version of mountain climbing considered earlier might constitute an answer, but only if we resist the temptation of imagining it as a polemic; I have yet to find any mention in the early twentieth century of a musical work seeking to express environmentally friendly attitudes or practices, to capture the wonders of a region currently under attack, or to engage in any other form of explicit environmental activism. This does not rule out Strauss attempting one or more of these things, of course, but it does argue against the likelihood of it. Moving on: if we limit the search to those aspects of the work registering concern about contemporary environmental conditions, then a few possibilities arise. Trees have little place in the *Alpine Symphony*; ‘Entry into the Forest’ marks the only subsection explicitly including them, and the brunt of the music is devoted to tree-less landscapes (‘On Flowering Meadows’, ‘On the Alpine Pasture’, ‘On the Glacier’, and ‘On the Summit’; note: I am not arguing that Strauss could have forested these locations, only that he could have devoted proportionally less of the music to them). By contrast, water plays a role large enough to make it a central theme of the work; the hiker traces a brook upstream to a waterfall (‘Wandering by a Brook’, ‘At the Waterfall’, and ‘Apparition’) and later descends through a deluge (‘Thunder and Storm, Descent’). Water thus works its way down the mountain for a total of over seven minutes, claiming our attention to a degree that only the mountain itself, the hiker, and the gaze from the summit can surpass. Periodically throughout several decades leading up to the *Alpine Symphony*, the Alps had experienced dramatic floods, and the common wisdom of the day attributed them to deforestation at the higher elevations. It has since been argued that—in Switzerland, at least—the theory was a Trojan horse advanced by lowland politicians in hopes of gaining control over the highlands (Radkau 1997: 234). The waterlogged *Alpine Symphony* might nevertheless register an environmental concern of

its day, particularly during the storm. How much louder the waterfall now ('Thunder and Storm, Descent' at 1'00") than when the hiker encountered it on the way up ('At the Waterfall'), and how suspiciously like flooding the chromatically rising lines below that waterfall, where earlier the hiker had wandered by a gentle brook ('Thunder and Storm, Descent' at 1'30"). This reading is indirectly reinforced by the fact that Marquartstein, the town in which Strauss was married and spent considerable amounts of time, was itself a site of flooding; in an important year for the conception of the symphony (1899), his wife Pauline wrote him from her parents' home there that the current flooding was deemed the worst since 1840 (letter of 14 September; Strauss, Franz 1967: 126-27).

One other contemporary environmental concern possibly reflected in the *Alpine Symphony* is that of endangered wildlife. Little fauna crops up in the work, which is striking in light of the attitude toward animals expressed in *The Antichrist* (see the quotation that concludes the 'Nietzsche' section, above). The birds sing relatively briefly, and while we hear hunters, we neither hear nor 'see' what they're after. Beyond the suggestion of cattle on the alpine pasture, no quadruped big or small inhabits Strauss's mountain. Efforts at preservation around this time were generally directed at flora and—among fauna—songbirds, a circumstance reflecting the high number of botanists and ornithologists among the nature-enthusiasts, and reflecting as well the hunting lobby's considerable political sway. (Many of the hunters were aristocrats whom the environmental groups balked at challenging, according to Keller [in private conversation].) At the same time, the decimation of the chamois and ibex through overhunting had been a source of concern for several decades by this time (Boner 1860: 236-37; Grauer 2009; Aulagnier et. al. 2010). Their absence from the *Alpine Symphony* might indicate Strauss's own disquiet, or it may simply reflect the reality of animals so rare that Strauss forgot to imagine them.

The day may come when points like these belong to a larger web of connections between the *Alpine Symphony* and the era's environmentalism. At present it does not appear that any such web exists. In short, Strauss left behind no evidence that the groups interested him, and they took little notice of the *Alpine Symphony*. As no one has ever argued otherwise, I will linger only long enough to note an exception, the Strauss-obituary published by the Alpine Society in 1949. There, 'the creator of the *Alpine*

*Symphony*' (as the title identifies him) is lauded at great length for his skill in musical landscape-painting, and we are told that he belonged to the Society 'in spirit', a comment that obviously cuts both ways (Hofmann 1949: cover page). The author further notes: 'In his last weeks of life he did our Alpine Society and the *Naturschutz* a special service in lending the weight of his famous name to the preservation of our magnificent Partnach landscape' (cover page). Hofmann is referring to another battle over a proposed hydroelectric plant, this time won by the environmentalists (Dominick 1992: 127-28). One might deduce from this that Strauss had in fact followed the protracted battle over Walchensee three decades earlier, or, less generously, that he was simply feeling the spirit of NIMBY-ism ('Nimby' as in 'Not In My Backyard'). Whatever the case, Hofmann's eulogizing cannot fill in the silence with which the Alpine Society had greeted the *Alpine Symphony* in its earlier years.

It is difficult to fathom why a work celebrating the Alps would go unclaimed by any of the period's environmental groups. Perhaps the *Alpine Symphony* was not participatory enough, restricted as it necessarily was to professional musicians in selected concert halls in large urban centres. Provincial musical organizations and home music-makers, two significant contributors to the social cohesion of the *Heimat* movement (Applegate 2007), could have had little truck with it. Given the Alpine Society's periodic announcements of songbook publications (in the *Mitteilungen*), it would appear that music's participatory potential—and perhaps its portability—mattered in that sphere as well.

The disinterest of environmental groups in the *Alpine Symphony* might also result from the latter's vagueness regarding place. We know already that *Heimat* ideology sought to preserve what was local. The Alpine Society likewise dwelled less on 'the Alps' than on specific places within them. Here are some of the articles appearing in the *Zeitschrift des Deutschen und Österreichischen Alpenvereins* of 1916 (my translations): 'The Low Tauern'; 'Snowshoeing in the Schladminger Tauern'; 'The Stubachtal: A Nature Preserve of the Future'; 'Snowshoeing in the Ötztaler Alps'; 'Mountain Climbing and Hiking in the Adamello Region'. Poetic tastes ran along these lines as well; in the 1918 issue of the *Mitteilungen*, Eduard Fedor Kastner is lauded for verses inspired by the Predil Pass (near the border of Italy and Slovenia), the Maltatal valley (Austria), and

other explicitly identified places (Jahne 1918: 130). While it is unclear whether a place-specific title would by itself have made Strauss's symphony more attractive to hikers, there existed another option very likely to have caught the attention of the alpinists: Strauss could have infused the *Alpine Symphony* with regional folksong, publications of which are mentioned frequently in alpine literature. Instead, he paraphrased several international works (Youmans 2005: 228), which by contrast reinforces the symphony's rootless quality.

The Nietzschean legacy of the *Alpine Symphony* may account for the distance between work and contemporary environmentalism as well. If knowledge of that legacy was not widespread, it is still worth noting that none of the major organizations embraced the philosophy (a point I have not read mentioned by the Nietzsche scholars consulted earlier). More importantly, at least two of the *Alpine Symphony*'s Nietzschean qualities harmonize poorly with the movement. First, the symphony lacks a communal spirit. Strauss tells of a personal quest, and if we allow for some awareness of the Nietzschean framework, he implicitly champions individualism over a herd mentality. While the personal-quest narrative roughly matches contemporary thinking within the alpine movement (see above), it is out-of-step with the emphasis on community of other wings of environmental movement (and the *Heimat* wing in particular). Second, the symphony is insufficiently metaphysical, a theory I construct by reading between the lines of Dreyer's 1909 book on alpinism. In a section entitled 'The Aesthetic Moment' Dreyer locates the primary artistic outlets for the alpinist movement in painting and poetry (150), the latter having earned its place by forsaking haziness for a 'calm, masculine clarity and certainty' ('*männlich-ruhiger Klarheit und Sicherheit*'; 151). If these attributes help to explain Dreyer's neglect of music, it makes one wonder why the allegedly extrospective *Alpine Symphony* did not better resonate in the alpinist-community six years later. As it turns out, Dreyer does find room for music in alpinism, and in a way that ultimately answers the question. Music arrives on the summit, evidently summoned by his inability to articulate what the hiker feels. Music thus continues its century-long association with the inexpressible:

On the summit of Ankogel, Ruthner says: 'There I looked out over the distance spread in all directions before me, full of emotions which, because they are

inexpressible, could only be desecrated by words or illustrations' [. . .] The **emotional scale** ('*Gefühlsskala*') of the high-altitude tourist runs through an entire **development-series** ('*Entwicklungsreihe*'), [and] his inner being awakes with each step from the valley-bottom to the summit. And entirely in **harmony/unison** ('*Einklang*') with this stands the constantly changing swarm of landscapes that glide by the eye (147-48, bold print added).

Later we are told that the mountains themselves are 'like giant instruments, on which air, sun, moon, clouds, in short everything atmospheric, plays in all its diversity' (Dreyer quoting Ratzel, 149).

This ethereal understanding of music does not bode well for a professedly anti-metaphysical composer, but it is only part of the problem. Jon Mathieu (2006) points out that European mountains themselves were increasingly sacralised from the sixteenth century forward, evidence of which we find in the words that launch Dreyer into his musical metaphors: 'The religiously inclined, like Thurwieser (the mountain climber in robes), feel "closer to the great architect of the world" up here, and the mountains strike more than a few alpinists as bridges leading from earth to heaven' (147). This way of seeing the mountains was no doubt circumscribed by the recreational nature of contemporary alpinism. One can nevertheless conclude that mountains had a spiritual dimension prone to trigger a musical response, given classical music's historical link to that realm. Certainly the *Alpine Symphony* retains much of this tradition; we have heard more than echoes of it on the summit and in the emotionally charged landscape traversed before and after. But we have also perceived a sensitivity in Strauss's commentators, one allowing them to detect his subversive embrace of the tenets of Nietzscheism. To them, the *Alpine Symphony* resisted what it was assumed to do best, and what was required of it in the mountains.

## **Conclusion**

The *Alpine Symphony* played no measurable role in one of the most significant accomplishments of its time, the founding of an environmental culture. That problem is not convincingly put to rest by the patchwork of theories just offered, for they do not add

up to an impermeable barrier between work and environmental movement. Imagine the music evoking women rather than mountains, and imagine it premiering in the midst of a thriving women's movement whose members greeted it with indifference or perhaps even silent disdain. This analogy is useful in reaching beyond isolated misalignments to the prospect of fundamental reservations regarding the work's motives. One misgiving may have been that it was at its core industrial. By this theory, Strauss's wildflowers are outshone by rows of metallic buttons flashing across the orchestra. Flashing buttons and synchronized bowings may well have coalesced into the vision of an intricate machine, one at odds with the mural of the Alps adorning it. Or perhaps the *Alpine Symphony*'s gaze felt pornographic. Lydia Millet's description of 'ecoporn' loses none of its meaning if we substitute the *Alpine Symphony* for the twin-albatross picture and equate 'social cost' and 'uncomfortable demands' with 'environmental activism':

At first glance, a girl-girl spread in *Hustler* has little in common with a twin-albatross picture in an Audubon engagement calendar. But both are clearly porn. They offer comfort to the viewer: They will always be there, ideal, unblemished, available. They offer gratification without social cost; they satiate by providing objects for fantasy without making uncomfortable demands on the subject (2004b).

The *Alpine Symphony* fits particularly well here when we recall its graphic emphasis and the over-the-top sensory impact delivered by more than 140 musicians. At the very least, a pornographic *Alpine Symphony*—like an industrial one—looks disingenuous. At the most, it is actually complicit in environmental destruction, for while the fantasy of consent is a longstanding feature of pornography (Slade 1984: 153), subjugation and exploitation are often at work behind the scenes (Millet 2004a: 147; Welling 2009: 57-58).

That such a dark statement is applicable to the *Alpine Symphony* might seem far-fetched at first, but it really is not. Two ways of thinking about music have conspired over the ages to make it a particularly apt vehicle for the metaphor of environmental exploitation. First, music has long been equated with nature itself. This understanding has changed over the centuries, but some version of it has nearly always been there. To give one example, it is recognizable in the ancient notion of *harmonia mundi*, by which the

basic proportions underlying music's most beautiful sounds are none other than the building blocks of the universe. It is not necessary to locate the theme throughout time, however, for it is implicit in the second way of thinking about music, by which musical innovation is characterised as the processing of natural resources. Linda Phyllis Austern explores how natural scenes painted on the lids and soundboards of seventeenth-century virginals put into allegory the transformation of raw materials into musical instruments, and, more broadly, 'the control of the natural world through music' (2001: 42). The Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick reveals that such thinking remained alive and well in the nineteenth century: 'Nature does not give us the artistic materials for a complete, ready-made tonal system but only the raw physical materials which *we* make subservient to music' (1986: 72). This view has firm footing in the early twentieth century as well: cultural theorist Theodor Adorno writes that 'all naturalistic art is only deceptively close to nature because, analogous to industry, it relegates nature to raw material'; composer Anton Webern describes musical advances as 'the ever extending conquest of the material provided by nature'; likewise Warren Story Smith: 'This tapping of music's expressive resources so enthusiastically pursued during that time [the nineteenth century] may be likened to man's greedy quest for those of the earth. If a ton of coal or a barrel of oil may be burned but once, so a new chord or progression may be used effectively but a limited number of times' (Adorno 1997: 66; Webern 1963: 17; Smith 1932: 24; discussed further in Toliver 2004: 351).

How exactly the *Alpine Symphony* whispers its ominous thoughts, and how they coexist with the often reverential foreground, are by no means clear and are certainly best left for another paper. (For a reading of environmental conquest in Ferde Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite*, see Toliver 2004.) If those whisperings gave contemporary environmentalists reason to stay away, they counsel us not to. For as important as it is to have some artworks love nature, it is surely a good thing for others to love and destroy it. The era was not exclusively defined by those who cared about the environment squaring off against those who did not, after all. It was rather a time much like our own, when many lamented the Walchensee project while accepting its benefits. Cultural and environmental histories of the period make it easy to imagine scenarios such as this: an industrial worker applies his earnings toward a recuperative trip to the Alps, one

facilitated by the very railway whose steel his job provides and whose environmental toll he (as an amateur botanist) tries to overlook. None of this means letting the *Alpine Symphony* off the hook for whatever bad behaviour it might have tacitly encouraged. It does, however, mean valuing it for what it stands to tell us of the contradictory impulses that have historically shaped our encounters with nature.

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