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Can Art ever Claim to Be Above Politics?

Taking Sides and Collaboration by Ronald Harwood

L'Arte può dirsi sempre al di sopra della politica?

Taking Sides e Collaboration di Ronald Harwood

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ABSTRACT. *Taking Sides*, a 1995 play by British playwright Ronald Harwood, reconstructs the American investigations, during the post-war United States denazification, of the German conductor and composer Wilhelm Furtwängler on charges of having served the Nazi regime. In *Collaboration* (2008) Harwood dramatizes the artistic cooperation between Richard Strauss and Stefan Zweig on the opera *The Silent Woman*, the political circumstances and repercussions of its première in Dresden and the composer's involvement with Hitler's regime. Considering the similarity of the issues raised by these works, the essay aims to examine, in an historical-juridical perspective, the two dramas as if they were one with the same subject: the fatal confrontation between culture and power and between freedom and compromise.

ABSTRACT. *Taking Sides* è un'opera teatrale rappresentata nel 1995 e scritta dal drammaturgo e sceneggiatore inglese Ronald Harwood, che si ispira alle indagini – svolte dagli Alleati in Germania nel 1945, nell'ambito di un programma americano di denazificazione del Paese – circa la presunta adesione del famoso direttore d'orchestra e compositore Wilhelm Furtwängler al Terzo Reich. In *Collaboration* (2008) l'autore britannico mette in scena il sodalizio artistico venutosi a creare tra Richard Strauss e Stefan Zweig per la realizzazione dell'opera lirica *La donna silenziosa*, le circostanze e le ripercussioni politiche della sua *première* a Dresda e il coinvolgimento del compositore con la dittatura hitleriana. Il saggio esamina in chiave storico-giuridica i due lavori teatrali di Harwood affrontando le problematiche che stanno alla base di entrambe le opere: la possibilità dell'artista di operare liberamente in un regime totalitario e le contraddizioni a cui egli fatalmente va incontro.

KEYWORDS / PAROLE CHIAVE: Harwood, Furtwängler, Strauss/Zweig, Denazification Trials / Harwood, Furtwängler, Strauss/Zweig, Processi di denazificazione

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SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – 2. *Taking Sides*, the Play. – 3. From Stage to Screen: *Taking Sides*, the Movie. – 4. The Historical-Juridical Background of the Denazification Trials of Wilhelm Furtwängler. – 5. Strauss and Zweig: An Artistic Friendship. – 6. From Historical Reality to Fiction: *Collaboration*. – 7. The denazification trial of Richard Strauss. – 8. Conclusion.

1. *Introduction*

Furtwängler: I am an artist and I believe in art. You could say that art is my religion. Art in general, and music, of course, in particular, has for me mystical powers which nurture man's spiritual needs. I must confess, however to having been extremely naïve¹.

Strauss: I have never belonged to any political party, neither of the right nor the left. My party is art, only art. Yes, I met all the leading Nazis on many occasions, I kept in with them, I allowed myself to be courted by them, I thought I could use them by the used me².

*Taking Sides*³ and *Collaboration* are companion pieces by Ronald Harwood (1934-2020)⁴. The first one premiered at the Minerva Theatre,

¹Harwood (2008), p. 147.

²Harwood (2008), p. 73.

³I have done a first analysis of the *pièce* in the conference *Traiettorie criminali. Invenzione artistica e condotte di reato*, University of Verona, December 5-6, 2019.

⁴Born Ronald Horwitz in Cape Town, 1934 and died in Sussex in 2020, Harwood is best known for the stage shows and the screenplays of *The Dresser* (for which he was nominated for an Oscar) and Roman Polanski's *The Pianist*, for which he won the 2003 Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. He was also nominated for the Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar for *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007). Harwood grew up in a traditional Jewish South African home, his Lithuanian father struggling to

Chichester in 1995⁵; the second one debuted on the same stage in July 2008⁶, when the two plays were staged in repertory.

Set in Germany during the denazification processes following World War II, *Taking Sides* pits German conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler against a relatively uncultured American interrogator, Steve Arnold, to, as Harwood has said⁷, examine the role of an artist under a totalitarian state.

The synopsis of *Collaboration* is the following: 1931, the composer Richard Strauss and the writer Stefan Zweig embark on an invigorating artistic partnership. Nevertheless, Zweig is a Jew and the Nazis are on the march. Starting from this plot, the dramatist reflects about two pivotal issues: the separation of artistic aspiration and political action and the thin line between collaboration and betrayal.

In 1942, when Stefan Zweig committed suicide with his wife Lotte in

make a living and his mother resentful that she had to go out to work. His cousin is the other South African theatrical knight, Sir Antony Sher. He left South Africa aged 17 for London to try his luck in the theatrical activities, changing his surname after an English master told him it was too foreign and too Jewish for a stage actor. He was accepted at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and later joined Sir Donald Wolfit's Shakespeare Company, where his experience as personal dresser of the 'Grand Old Man' eventually fuelled his most celebrated play *The Dresser*. Harwood went on to write 21 stage plays, 10 books and at least 16 credited screenplays, typically as an adapter. His work contains a range of Jewish motifs and characters, from *The Barber of Stamford Hill* (a 1960 stage play, then adapted to TV, and expanded into a film in 1963) to *The Pianist*, Harwood's film adaptation of the autobiography of Władysław Szpilman, a Polish Jewish musician who survived World War II in Warsaw. His play *Collaboration* is about the complex relationship between the German composer Richard Strauss and Austrian Jewish writer Stefan Zweig. Harwood's interest in the period of Nazi occupation in Europe and World War II also bore fruit in the 1975 film *Operation Daybreak* (or *The Price of Freedom*), the true story of the assassination of Nazi leader – and architect of the Final Solution – Reinhard Heydrich, Reichsprotektor (Governor) of Bohemia and Moravia, by the Czech Resistance in Prague (based on a book by Alan Burgess). Herman (2020).

⁵ *Taking Sides* opened at the Minerva Theatre, Chichester, on 18 May 1995, starring Michael Pennigton as Major Arnold and Daniel Massey as Furtwängler. Harold Pinter, the British playwright, screenwriter, director, actor and Nobel Prize winner in 2005, was the director. Robinson (2017), p. 204.

⁶ *Collaboration* opened at the Minerva Theatre, Chichester, on 16 July 2008 with the revival of *Taking Sides*, starring Michael Pennigton as Richard Strauss and David Horovitch as Stefan Zweig. Philip Franks directed. Robinson (2017), p. 240.

⁷ Harwood (1995), p. XI. See also Hall (2020), p. 1.

Petropolis, Brazil, Harwood, the son of Jewish emigrants from Europe (Lithuania and Poland) living in South Africa, was eight. After having lived for seventeen years in a State ruled on the basis of racism by a totalitarian government⁸, he moved to England in 1951. Harwood explained his profound interest with issues relating to the Nazism as follows: «The war defined my childhood, the Holocaust my adolescence. That synthesis dominated much of my creative life»⁹. According to this affirmation, his works frequently investigate the way in which artists survive in an authoritarian society and how they respond to stark moral dilemmas. The dramatist, however, never judges his characters, and prefers to etch out them in shades of grey, rather than black and white. That is what has made his plays and screenplays so fascinating¹⁰. Reflecting on his works Harwood has affirmed: «I leave it to audiences to judge as I don't feel equipped as I've never had to face such choices. I've no idea what I would have done in their shoes at a time like that»¹¹.

How does Ronald Harwood seek to communicate historical objectivity in his playwriting? What is Harwood's argument concerning art's role and function in the political sphere and its relation to the state? Answering to these questions, the essay aims to investigate the two plays, in a historical-juridical perspective, as a single theatrical work. This analysis will be developed as follows: paragraph 2 and 3 are an overview of *Taking Sides*, from its original stage version to its passage to screen. Paragraph 4, in order to clarify the differences between historical reality and fiction, is focused on the denazification trials of Furtwängler. Moving on *Collaboration*, paragraph 5 describes the artistic friendship of Richard Strauss and Stefan Zweig, while paragraph 6, analysing Harwood's play, underlines how the writer manipulates biographical facts for aesthetic purposes and reasons of dramatic economy. In paragraph 7, a brief focus

⁸ See Arendt (1973), p. 221.

⁹ Harwood (2005), p. 4.

¹⁰ Herman (2020); see also Harwood (2005), pp. 4-16.

¹¹ Walker (2021).

on Strauss's denazification trial underlines, through the historical-juridical lens, the controversial *liaison* between the composer and the Nazi Regime. In the conclusion, the two plays are analysed together as a single work of art about the fatal confrontation between culture and power, between art and politics, between freedom and compromise.

2. Taking Sides, *the Play*

As well-known, Wilhelm Furtwängler was one of the most prestigious, but also the most controversial orchestra director of his century. Having refused to leave Germany when Hitler took power and having received every honour from the Nazis, he was perceived as a conductor who had contributed to the aesthetic representation of the Third Reich and a collaborator of its propaganda. However, unlike Karajan, Furtwängler never joined the National Socialist party and, as long as he could, protected the Jewish musicians belonging to the Berlin Philharmonic of which he was director. It is also true that, despite having tried several times to mark the border between himself and the Regime, he conducted the Berlin Philharmonic in front of Hitler and his hierarchs. For what concerns the criminal unlawfulness of his behaviour, he was not found guilty of anything. Nonetheless, the reputation of "devil's musician" labelled him forever and ended up prevailing over his legacy as an interpreter and composer.

Before being an historical object¹², Wilhelm Furtwängler has become a cultural object¹³: on the other hand, it is rather, and paradoxically, the "Furtwängler case", which in itself had little interest in historians, to serve as a background for the use of Furtwängler in the cultural sphere.

¹² For a historical point of view of Furtwängler see Prieberg (1986) and (1991); Schönzeler (1990); Shirakawa (1992); Kater (1997); Haffner (2003); Walton (2004); Aster (2011); Roncigli (2013); Allen (2018); Rosenberg (2020), ch. 4, 6.

¹³ See Roncigli (2013), pp. 171-178.

In 1987, Furtwängler is the protagonist of a play by Hartmut Lange, which takes place during the Second World War, entitled *Requiem für Karl-Robert Kreiten*¹⁴. Kreiten, a Dutch pianist born in June 1916, was a great concert performer on the German stages. A pupil in Vienna of Claudio Arrau, he was indicated by Furtwängler as one of the best talents of his generation, and made his debut at the age of 11 in Mozart's *A major Concerto*. Catholic and convinced anti-Nazi, he was betrayed by Ellen Ott-Monecke who denounced him to the Gestapo. He was tried by the *Volksgericht* (Reich People's Court) presided over by Judge Roland Freisler and sentenced to death in September 1943, along with 185 other inmates from the Plötzensee prison. The German press branded him as a "traitor". More than 40 years later, in 1987, the journalist Werner Hofer, who had written particularly violent articles against him, was forced to resign, while a file was opened in Berlin that reconstructed the crimes made in Plötzensee by the Gestapo. Karl-Robert Kreiten's nephew confirmed to the Wilhelm Furtwängler Society the conductor's friendship ties with his family, especially his grandmother Emmy Hartmut. Lange's play reconstructs in a fictional way the arrest and trial of Karl-Robert Kreiten: the protagonists are Kreiten, his mother, Furtwängler, Goebbels, two informants, a Gestapo agent and other inmates.

In the same way as Hartmut Lange also Ronald Harwood accepts the challenge of consecrating an entire work to the "Furtwängler case" and staging the investigation of the trial of the Berlin denazification commission.

The title of his play, written and published in 1995, immediately presents all the complexity and the stakes in the story being staged: *Taking Sides* cannot be perfectly translated into French and German: *Der Fall Furtwängler* in Germany, *Kategorie 4: Mitläufer* in Austria, *Furtwängler: à torts et à raisons* in France, *La torre d'avorio* in Italy¹⁵. Ronald Harwood

¹⁴ See Roncigli (2013), p. 172.

¹⁵ The title, which Masolino D'Amico, the Italian translator of Harwood, ascribes to the work, alludes to the isolation of those artists, who presume to be in an "ivory tower" compared to the rest of society, of which they are also part.

has dealt with the “Furtwängler case”, considered as a whole, with the Furtwängler problem, in other words about what we could think of him after the war. The author’s purpose, however, is not to remain neutral, but to encourage the audience to reflect on the moral dilemma that Furtwängler faced. In this regard, it is Harwood himself who clarifies his position in a note to the 2008 edition of *Taking Sides*:

Wilhelm Fürtwangler came before a Denazification Tribunal in Berlin in 1946 which was conducted by his fellow Germans who questioned him for two days. He was cleared of all charges but has never been able to cleanse himself entirely of the Nazi stench that still clings to his memory.

The Tribunal’s evidence had been prepared in the first instance by the British, then taken over, apparently, by two groups of Americans: one, in Wiesbaden, which assisted Fürtwangler with his defence; the other, in Berlin, which was responsible for building the case against him.

Little or nothing is known of the motives and methods of the second group which is focus of *Taking Sides*. What is undeniable, however, is that Fürtwangler was humiliated, relentlessly pursued, and after his acquittal, disinformation concerning him appeared in American newspapers. This may or may not have been justified. It all depends on the side you take¹⁶.

Remembering that Furtwängler thought that music was superior to every human conflict, Harwood often uses the expression grey zone to classify the Furtwängler’s case, neither all white nor all black, a sort of ambiguous situation. The conductor was never a member of the party but sometimes participated with the Berliner in ceremonies of the NSDAP¹⁷.

The *pièce*, reconstructing the American investigations in preparation for Furtwängler’s passage in front of the denazification commission, with two interrogations of the Maestro, takes up the events and characters encountered by Furtwängler during the Nazi era. It is even possible to find

¹⁶ Harwood (2008), p. 79.

¹⁷ The German acronym of the Nazi Party (National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei).

some excerpts from the conductor's harangue presented to the denazification commission¹⁸, or of the sentences he uttered during his audition at the *Spruchkammer* (Denazification Tribunal). Ronald Harwood therefore has won the bet to make a theatrical performance respecting the historical truth of the Furtwängler affair in 1946 and inviting the audience to 'take sides' in this controversial case.

The scene takes place in an office in the American occupation zone of Berlin in 1946. In this post war scenario, the vanquished meets the victors: Wilhelm Furtwängler is subjected to interrogation by an American army officer, Major Steve Arnold, during the investigations of his denazification process.

In the study that Gunther Volk dedicated to Ronald Harwood's plays¹⁹, he underlines that the choice of creating the fictional character of Arnold is not irrelevant. The Major cares little about culture, especially classical music, and he does not know Furtwängler, which guarantees, in the eyes of his superiors, his impartiality. In his opinion, all Germans are guilty, "shits" or "degenerates"; he bases himself on his concrete experiences, the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen camp, and he is terrified from what he has seen. For him, an insurance agent before the war, the investigation becomes a kind of "criminal investigation", in which he searches for a culprit of his nightmares. Only his secretary, Emmi Straube, daughter of an opponent killed on July 20, 1944, is innocent in his eyes.

Arnold tries to make Furtwängler confess by subjecting him to a brutal interrogation and various humiliations, and does not believe a single moment in the conductor's theory of the separation of art and politics. Emmi and the young Lieutenant David Wills, who witnesses the scene, are shocked from the behaviour of Arnold, who the secretary accuses of behaving like a Nazi²⁰.

¹⁸ Bundersarchiv RKK 2301/00003/01 B1 reported by Roncigli (2013), pp. 261-275.

¹⁹ Volk (2004).

²⁰ David Monod writes that in the summer of 1945 the Americans launched a major expulsion of cultural personnel thought to be Nazis or those sympathetic to the Third Reich. Following the purge, in the winter of 1945-1946, only those artists and personnel

Two other characters intervene in the play: Tamara Sachs, the widow of a Jewish musician who fled to Paris thanks to Furtwängler, and Helmut Rode, violinist of the Berlin Philharmonic and Nazi spy in the orchestra. Rode is a sort of opportunist, once a communist, after a Nazi, eventually in the service of the allies.

All the great topics that made up the “Furtwängler case” are touched upon: the letter of 1933 to Goebbels, Furtwängler’s obsessive rivalry with the younger Karajan, his strong resentment for the musical critic von der Nüll, the party demonstrations, his good relation with Albert Speer, the telegram of wishes to Hitler, his relations with Goebbels and Schirach, the Jewish musicians he saved, the accusatory evidence, the official announcement of Hitler’s death on the German radio accompanied by the playing of a 1942 Berlin Philharmonic recording of the Adagio from Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony conducted by the Maestro... In short, a summary of the history of the “Furtwängler affair” which shows the German artist banned from public life, questioned without too much consideration and sometimes without any scruple (Arnold even goes so far as to ask Furtwängler how many illegitimate children he has and how many women he had every night after the concert...) by a representative of the victorious powers, all in a Germany that seeks to resurrect.

Taking Sides opens in February, 1946, «just before nine a.m., freezing cold»²¹ in Major Arnold’s office. Arnold is trying to figure out how to find guilty Furtwängler. Meanwhile Emmi, his German secretary, intends to introduce him to classical music, particularly the pieces conducted by the Maestro. Emmi’s educational efforts are in vain: Arnold sleeps through the conductor’s version of Beethoven’s Fifth, because, he claims, «Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony bores me shitless»²². In add the Major explains to Emmi how he intends to deal with Furtwängler case. Having worked in insurance before the war, Arnold has dealt with a number of

considered “politically clean” were reinstated to their previous positions. Monod (2005), pp. 1-11.

²¹ Harwood (2008), p. 89.

²² Harwood (2008), p. 90.

doubtful cases, and his job was to examine whether the suspects were guilty or innocent. As Julia Novak argues in her analysis of the play: «It is therefore not surprising that his worldview is largely based on dichotomies»²³. «I knew another band leader once», affirms Arnold provocatively, also revealing a hidden antisemitism.

Name of Dix Dixon. Small time. Alto sax. Not bad, not good. But not bad. Played one-night stands in Illinois and Michigan. A house he owned, where he and the band used to stay, burned down. Lost everything. Well, almost everything. But I got him. You know how? Because there's always one question the guilty can't answer. Get a sign writer, write it big. THERE'S ALWAYS ONE QUESTION THE GUILTY CAN'T ANSWER. In Dix's case, it was 'How come, Dix, everybody lost everything except you? You've got your clothes, your sax, how come? Couldn't answer. He was dumb, boy he was dumb. Owed the bookies. You understand, don't' you Emmy? He burned down his house for the insurance money. We used to call that Jewish lighting²⁴.

In the second scene, a new character is introduced: Lieutenant David Wills, a German Jew in the American Army who has escaped in Philadelphia in 1934 and has lost his parents, all killed by the Nazis. David is the new liaison officer of Arnold with Allied Intelligence. In the conversation of the Major and Wills we learn that Arnold has interrogated twenty-eight orchestra members, and every one of them worships Furtwängler and firmly denies any allegiance of the conductor to the Nazis. They all admire Emmi's father, who fought against the Nazis and all tell a hagiographical "baton story" who proves Furtwängler's resistance to the Nazis. In 1935, during the second Winter Assistance Charity Programme, an all-Beethoven concert, it was suddenly announced that Hitler himself was going to attend. Furtwängler does not want to offer the Nazi salute; instead, he holds the baton in one hand and shakes Hitler's hand with his other. For all orchestra members, this image and moment prove Furtwängler's anti-Nazi stance.

²³ Novak (2009), p. 24.

²⁴ Harwood (2008), p. 91.

The third scene is centred on Arnold's interrogation of the second violinist of Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Helmuth Rode. While interviewing Rode, Arnold is exasperated by the "baton story," concluding, «what they're trying to do is cover the band leader in roses in the hope they'll come up smelling just as sweet. But it's difficult to smell sweet after you've crawled through the raw sewage»²⁵.

Following the interview with Rode and right before the first confrontation with Furtwängler, an upset Tamara Sachs enters. She claims having a list of people, mostly Jews, whom Furtwängler helped escape. According to the woman, the Maestro helped her German-Jewish husband, the pianist Walter Sachs, obtaining for him an official permit to leave. The couple went to Paris, where, after some years of happy life, Walter was caught and murdered in Auschwitz²⁶.

David interprets this news as evidence for the defence, but Arnold remains unconvinced: the stories are too convenient, too similar. He is sure that he is going to «nail» the Maestro «nice and proper». In order to reaffirm the concept, he tells David about an episode with a taxi driver, Max. As he and the driver made their way through Berlin, Arnold said, «to think, a million of these people came out to welcome Adolf on the day he entered the city, millions of them, and now look at them».

The taxi driver replied: «Oh, not these people, Major. These people were all at home hiding Jews in their attics». To make sure David has comprehended the message of the story, Arnold exclaims «The point is they're [Germans] full of shit»²⁷, meaning that, if not all, the great majority of the Germans are responsible for the Nazi Regime.

Finally, in the fourth scene, we assist to the first encounter between Arnold and the Maestro. The Major uses his insurer tactics while interviewing Furtwängler. He asks him innocuous questions, and encourages him to confess. But Furtwängler, «arrogant and remote, but also irritat-

²⁵ Harwood (2008), p. 96.

²⁶ Harwood (2008), p. 109.

²⁷ Harwood (2008), p. 112.

ed at having been kept waiting», repeats simply what has been cleared by the denazification tribunal in Austria: he is an Orchestral conductor that never joined the Nazi Party²⁸. Frustrated, Arnold cries out: «Jesus Christ, aren't you going to tell us about carrying your baton in your right hand so you wouldn't have to salute and poke Adolf's eyes out?»²⁹. After a few more questions and details, it appears that Arnold's intuition is correct. We learn Furtwängler worked with the Nazis: it was a Prussian Privy Councillor and Vice-President of the Chamber of Music. The conductor's perspective, however, puts his experience with the Nazi party in a different angulation.

The principal source of Harwood for the Maestro's defence is the 'Furtwängler's memorandum of his actions against the Nazi regime' written to the American delegation in Bern; in *Taking Sides* the conductor explains that as an artist he «always held the view that art and politics should have nothing to do with one another»³⁰. He claims that he wrote against the Nazis because they were destroying music. Their racial policy, in particular, diminished the quality of orchestras³¹. He says he was tricked, oppressed, but he remained in Germany for altruistic reasons: «to give comfort, to see that the glorious musical tradition, of which I believe I am one of the guardians, remained unbroken, was intact when we woke from the nightmare»³². David seems to understand the conductor's position. Although Furtwängler worked with the Nazis, the Lieutenant proclaims: «ever since I heard you, music has been central to my life. My chief comfort. And I've needed comfort. I thank you for that»³³. For Arnold, Furtwängler's defence is fragile: the conductor, in his opinion, wrote against the Nazis when his music was affected, not to denounce the murder of millions of European Jews.

²⁸ Harwood (2008), p. 115.

²⁹ Harwood (2008), p. 115

³⁰ Harwood (2008), p. 117.

³¹ Harwood (2008), pp. 116-117.

³² Harwood (2008), pp. 123-214.

³³ Harwood (2008), p. 125.

Harwood's sources are this time, in particular, a bold Furtwängler's letter on 7 April 1933 to Goebbels in response to rumours that Jews were to be banned from all performances. This letter exchange, printed in the major Nazi newspapers at Goebbels' request, epitomised Furtwängler's attempts to negotiate with Nazi antisemitism for the protection of his musical realm. While openly supporting a policy of eliminating 'degeneration' and 'uprootedness', he nonetheless asserted that

I only recognise one line of separation: between good and bad art. At present, the division is drawn between Jew and non-Jew ... while the separation between good and bad music is neglected ... The question of the quality of music is ... a question of life and death³⁴.

The other episode quoted by Harwood is the so-called Hindemith affair. The Maestro had planned to premiere the modernist composer Paul Hindemith's opera *Mathis der Maler* for the 1934/35 season. However, Göring prohibited the performance. Furtwängler threatened to resign unless the boycott of Hindemith was lifted, and wrote open letters to the press defending the composer, without any success³⁵.

The second act opens, as reports the secondary text of the play, «in April, Ten p.m., in a warm spring evening»³⁶. Arnold discovers that Rode, the second violinist, who said he was not a Nazi, was «the Party's man in the orchestra»³⁷. Rode defends himself describing the life of Germans in the totalitarian regime:

absolute power offers absolute certainty and absolute hope...You start by censoring what you say, then you censor what you think, and you end by censoring what you feel. That is the greatest degradation because it means the

³⁴ Correspondence between Wilhelm Furtwängler and Joseph Goebbels (April 1933), https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1574.

³⁵ Shikarawa (1992), p. 186.

³⁶ Harwood (2008), p. 128.

³⁷ Harwood (2008), p. 131.

entire individual will is paralyzed, and all that remains is an obedient husk³⁸.

The speech not only highlights the total lack of freedom in totalitarianism, but it pushes Rode to point out parallels between Furtwängler's and Hitler's methods, giving Arnold what he wants: «A conductor is also a dictator, he is also a terrifying power who gives hope and certainty and guarantees order»³⁹. Rode's description of the 'dictator Furtwängler' seems taken from the Werner Thärichen's testimonies. The timpanist of the Berlin Philharmonic of the early 1950s claims that

the orchestra's tone would alter in the presence of Furtwängler. Someone else might be conducting a rehearsal, but if Furtwängler so much as stepped into the room, the sound would change, drawn from the orchestra by the mere fact of the payers' seeing the great man⁴⁰.

Returning to the play, the second violinist affirms that the Maestro may also have sent one of his critics, von der Nüll, to the Russian front and made anti-Semitic remarks. David dismisses this last evidence: «Show me a non-Jew who hasn't made anti-Semitic remarks and I'll show you the gates of paradise»⁴¹. There's another nodal point in Rode's declaration: he admits that he would have never made second violin without the removal of Jewish musicians. As Ann C. Hall affirms: «Rode's story illustrates that there was also personal culpability. Greed and ambition fed into his decision to remain in the orchestra. With the Jewish performers out of the way he, and others like him, could take their place»⁴².

The final scene of *Taking Sides* is set in «Mid-July, 8.45 a.m. High summer. Intense heat. Arnold is at his desk; Emmi enters carrying a rec-

³⁸ Harwood (2008), pp. 131-132.

³⁹ Harwood (2008), p. 133.

⁴⁰ See chap. *Conducting for Hitler: Furtwängler's musical soul* in Ford (2012).

⁴¹ Harwood (2008), p. 146.

⁴² Hall (2020), p. 6.

ord album. She's glowing»⁴³. The Major asks the secretary to play a recording of Bruckner's Seventh, the "slow movement"⁴⁴, when he gives the signal. Emmi thinks that Arnold is finally become a classical music *amateur*, but the music serves only as a soundtrack for the last dialectical fight between Furtwängler and Arnold. The Bruckner's movement, conducted by the Maestro, was played across Germany to mourn Hitler's suicide. During the final interview, the conductor defends himself claiming that art is, for him, a form of religion⁴⁵. In the totalitarianism, art is the highest form of hope:

I know that a single performance of a great masterpiece was a stronger and more vital negation of the spirit of Buchenwald and Auschwitz than words. Human beings are free wherever Wagner and Beethoven are played. Music transported them to regions where torturers and murderers could do them no harm⁴⁶.

But as in the case of Rode, Arnold proposes a human, practical, and selfish motive reason for Furtwängler's behaviour:

I don't see a great artist. I see a man, an ordinary guy, like a million other ordinary guys. And I ask myself, what keeps him in a situation which he says he did everything in his power to resist, except get the hell out of it? What keeps him here ... I look for ordinary reasons⁴⁷.

Arnold goes further, affirming that the threats the Nazis made towards Furtwängler were not censorship, but competition in the form of a younger conductor, Herbert von Karajan:

Never mind art and politics and symbols and airy-fairy bullshit about liberty, humanity and justice. You were tricked all right because they got

⁴³ Harwood (2008), p. 136.

⁴⁴ Harwood (2008), p. 137.

⁴⁵ Harwood (2008), p. 147.

⁴⁶ Harwood (2008), p. 163.

⁴⁷ Harwood (2008), p. 155.

you where you were most vulnerable. Youth was knocking on the door, and I don't care how great you are, how noble, how fantastic... because it's the oldest story in the book ⁴⁸.

Like Rode, Furtwängler denies the simple conclusion and blames the Nazi Regime:

They controlled the press. Every word that was written, every word that was published. When I resigned from the Philharmonic, when I refused to take part in a film, they made about the orchestra...they were determined to keep me in my place [...] They controlled every aspect of our lives. They manipulated, bullied and imposed their monstrous will. When they finally understood that I would do everything in my power to prevent art from being directed and supervised, they determined to undermine me. They regarded any action of dissent, however small, as a criticism of the state, tantamount to high treason ⁴⁹.

Quoting Ann C. Hall: «For Furtwängler, his sacrifice was working with the Nazis to continue his art. For Arnold, Furtwängler's sacrifice was the murder of European Jews to work with the Nazis who supported his art» ⁵⁰. According to Arnold the conductor profited from the Hitler's Regime favours:

You were their boy, their creature. That's the case against you, old pal. You were like an advertising slogan for them. You may not have been a member of the Party because the truth is, Wilhelm, you didn't need to be ⁵¹.

In Arnold's eyes the conductor was a real supporter of Nazism, and consequently, «When the Devil died, they wanted his band leader to play the funeral march» ⁵².

⁴⁸ Harwood (2008), p. 152.

⁴⁹ Harwood (2008), p. 154.

⁵⁰ Hall (2020), p. 7.

⁵¹ Harwood (2008), p. 161.

⁵² Harwood (2008), p. 162.

At the end of the play, after the conductor has left the office, Arnold realizes that he cannot find «hard evidence» against Furtwängler. Defeated but not broken he calls a «tame journalist» who will help give the conductor a «hard time»⁵³; Harwood slightly suggest to the audience that a new Furtwängler case, created by the press, is coming.

3. *From Stage to Screen: Taking Sides, the Movie*

Ronald Harwood's play had an even greater diffusion with the film adaptation made in 2002 by István Szabó. The Hungarian filmmaker has to his credit several films⁵⁴ such as *Colonel Redl* (1985) and, above all, *Mephisto* (1981), based on the novel by Klaus Mann inspired by the life of Gustav Gründgens, another artist figure in Nazi Germany. Ronald Harwood wrote the screenplay, as he did a few years later for Roman Polanski's *The Pianist*, for which he will receive an Oscar. Even in the case of the film dedicated to the denazification of the conductor, Harwood tries not to «misrepresent Wilhelm Furtwängler, remaining faithful to his defence as well as to the prosecution»⁵⁵.

Music is omnipresent in the film – whose dramaturgy is one of the simplest: introduction, presentation of the themes, development, conclusion – especially in dramatic moments. The movie is based on Arnold's interrogations of Furtwängler imagined by Harwood, and it all takes place in a single scene, the American's office. After the start of the film, with a concert by Furtwängler in wartime interrupted by a bombing, István Szabó has the merit of insert the interrogations in a more general framework, the life of Berliners in the immediate post-war period⁵⁶, as we

⁵³ Harwood (2008), p. 166.

⁵⁴ See Cunningham (2014).

⁵⁵ Harwood (2005), p. 6.

⁵⁶ Like Stanley Kramer filmed a classic of the courtroom dramas, *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), with Spencer Tracy, Marlene Dietrich, Burt Lancaster, Maximilian Schell, Judy Garland, Richard Widmark and Montgomery Clift.

can see in the long shots proposed by the Hungarian director.

Suggested by a montage for contrasts (internal/external, shadow/light), the antagonism between Arnold and Furtwängler becomes the Leitmotiv of the film: they are two worlds that collide, the proletary and practical American way of life (Arnold) against the complexity and the ambiguity of a high exponent of the European cultural tradition (Furtwängler). István Szabó has also included elements extraneous to Harwood's play: a shot of the Nazi eagle falling from the pediment of a palace, the partition of the works of art accumulated by the Nazis among the winning powers or the character of the Soviet colonel Dymshitz who, having proposed Furtwängler as musical conductor of the Berlin State Opera, asks Arnold to shorten the procedure of denazification of the Maestro⁵⁷.

The film is a faithful cinematic transposition of Harwood's play, adding to it a remarkable dramatic tone that is effectively implied in the violence of the verbal and psychological confrontation between Arnold and Furtwängler. The director explains: «I wanted to discover Furtwängler through the eyes of the American inquisitor deliberately eliminating all other points of view»⁵⁸. In a position of strength, Arnold is always the first to attack, to multiply arguments, questions and demonstrations, in front of a Furtwängler often bewildered, intimidated, not at ease. Emmi Straube and Lieutenant David Wills serve as a counterweight: they too, like Arnold and Furtwängler, are confused characters, tossed about by history and subjected to circumstances.

The more the film goes on, the more we listen to Arnold's interrogation, and the more we think about investigation techniques in dictatorships. The Major, determined to achieve his purpose of incriminate Furtwängler, does not hesitate to resort to the Nazi espionage system for his investigation. But the director, according to Harwood screenplay, represents also the motivations behind Arnold 'bad' behaviour, underlining what these denazifications mean for the Germany that is being rebuilt.

⁵⁷ Harwood (2002), p. 138.

⁵⁸ Szabó (2002), p. 29.

Without two charismatic actors, the roles of Arnold and Furtwängler could not have had such a convincing force, such an impact. Harvey Keitel has the traits of the McCarthyist politician *ante litteram*, brutal and determined: a portrait maybe overloaded by *clichés*. On the other hand, the only detail that can be reproached István Szabó is the excessive characterization of his protagonists.

The American officer who ruminates the chewing gum, poorly educated and ruthless; the Russian colonel drunk on vodka, but who wants ensure scientists and artists for his country; the impassive and opportunistic French officers... But there remains the marvellous proof of actor of Stellan Skarsgård (whose resemblance with the German conductor has been pushed to the point of making him a well recognizable scar at the union of the lips), which expresses all the depth and torment of Furtwängler. The actor, in an interview to *The New York Times*, explained that his interest for the role of Furtwängler is focused on «the moral ambiguity of living in a society that does not approve». Quoting Skarsgård, Furtwängler was not seduced by the Nazis, nevertheless he committed «the error of wanting to stay out of politics, which is not possible. Because being apolitical means supporting the regime in office. If you are a member of a society, you become responsible for it. The same goes for the artist». ⁵⁹

At the end of a key scene, introduced by Bruckner's *Adagio* of the Seventh, Furtwängler, ill (Elisabeth Furtwängler had confirmed that her husband was very weak during these interrogations), appears to be defeated and leaves Arnold's office. The play and the film end with Wills placing Furtwängler's recording of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* onto a turntable just as Arnold telephones his superior at Wiesbaden. The Major, irritated, ask to Wills to turn «that goddam thing down». «But David ignores him, sits implacable listening». Furtwängler, exiting from the building, «hears the music but he cannot identify its source. His left-hand trembles but it only his way of sensing the tempo» ⁶⁰. «Turn it off»

⁵⁹ Skarsgård (2003).

⁶⁰ Harwood (2008), pp. 166-167.

howling Arnold to Wills as the light fade to black out.

The film, unlike the play, is closed by a rather surprising ellipsis: István Szabó uses historical reality and the famous 1942 archive video which shows Furtwängler shaking hands with Joseph Goebbels after a concert. The conductor surreptitiously wipes his hands with a cloth after touching the Propaganda Minister.

Contrary to Ronald Harwood, who does not want to influence the public, the Hungarian director seems to choose for him. But ultimately it is the public who has to “take sides”.

Certainly, in the work of Harwood and in the film by Szabó, which derives from it, the historical-juridical arguments do not prevail, despite their punctual and rigorous elements, but the philosophical-cultural motivations that underlie them. In this perspective, it is necessary to recognize them two great reasons of interest, having allowed the general public to know the “Furtwängler case” with two richly documented and argued works, and having invited it to reflect independently on the identity of an artist under an authoritarian regime.

4. *The Historical-Juridical Background of the Denazification Trials of Wilhelm Furtwängler*

Audrey Roncigli points out that instead of the Furtwängler case, it is more correct to refer to the Furtwängler cases. They can be divided chronologically as follows: the opposition of the conductor in 1933 to the Nazi regime; the Maestro indicated a little later onwards as a collaborator of the Nazis, especially by the American press; the denazification processes of the orchestra director in 1946; the new attacks to Furtwängler, nominated conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1947, coming again from the American press, «which sees in him a symbol, a scapegoat of collective responsibility for the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis during the Second World War»⁶¹.

⁶¹ Roncigli (2013), p. 104.

The denazification trials of Furtwängler in Vienna and in Berlin – the latter one artistically evocated by Harwood in *Taking Sides* through the fictional encounters between Arnold and the conductor – constitute the only incursion into the judicial sphere of the “Furtwängler case”. The two proceedings also represent the willingness of the Allied Forces to judge Furtwängler under the rule of law. From 1933 to 1945 the Maestro had been the symbol of Nazi culture abroad: it seems comprehensible the convincement of the victorious powers (especially the Americans) of asking him to clarify his position before the denazification commissions. Moreover, far from being just a new expression of the “Furtwängler case”, the Furtwängler’s trials also implied the infighting between the United States, England, France and the USSR about the future of Germany.

Little is known about the Viennese commission, except that the process is very swift. Furtwängler arrived in Vienna in February 1946, responding to an invitation to conduct, not on his initiative. Without a legal reason, he spent a night in a cell in Innsbruck, in the French occupation zone, from February 6 to 7, during which he wrote an essay on symphonic music. In order to work in Austria, it was first necessary a denazification proceeding, according to the rules dictated to the Austrian government by the allies. A commission carefully examines his file and declares, on March 9, that he is free to conduct in Austria, stating:

[...] Dr. Furtwängler represents an evident element of interest in the cultural reconstruction of Austria. He clearly expressed his willingness to participate in Viennese musical life, in case of rehabilitation [...] He also explained that he considered his duty to [...] protect Viennese musical life, and had demonstrated his anti-Nazi position to the whole world⁶².

The government, taking advantage of the situation, offers him Austrian nationality, but Furtwängler refuses, having in mind to return in Berlin and Germany. Furtwängler’s passage before the Berlin commission is much more documented and interesting for historians: in February 1945,

⁶² Riess (1953), p. 281.

in Yalta, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin agreed «the unanimous will of the victorious allied forces to annihilate German militarism and Nazism». The denazification of the active representatives of the Hitler's regime, the military, senior officials, scientists and artists who are members of the NSDAP is linked to this goal. At first, Furtwängler is not really worried: in June he wrote the cited memorandum of his actions against the Nazi regime to the American delegation in Bern. The conductor then does nothing more to return to the podium, preferring to compose. He no longer doubts that the Allies want to put into practice a profound "regeneration" of Germany that begins in December 1945, when they publish a list of musicians and personalities from the world of culture who must submit to the passage of denazification. Furtwängler is included, not as an old member of the Nazi party, never having been one, but as a *Staatsrat* (State counsellor) who played a political role in the Reich.

As Herbert Haffner has explained, the denazification did not have the same meaning and interest for the occupying world powers involved in the process: for the Americans, it was a political and moral procedure, destined for the return of Nazi personalities to the culture. The French and the British showed little interest, and the Soviets were more anxious to find artists for their zone of occupation than to punish them. During the trial, Furtwängler will be the subject of these divergences of interests, especially between the Americans and the Soviets. The Maestro, furthermore, was being the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, situated in the American zone of the city, therefore he was subject to the will of US decision makers.

Audrey Roncigli quotes a letter from Furtwängler to Andrew Schulhof, concert organizer in New York, dated December 1945, in which he notices:

The problem can only be explained in political terms. The question is not to have clues against me – there are none – but I was a representative personality for Germany well before the Nazis, and I remained so even during their rule. The Allies do not want such people now in Germany,

and I believe this policy is psychologically wrong: it is directed against those with whom they are supposed to cooperate⁶³.

Furtwängler also declares, in this letter, that he has contacted General Eisenhower, who had decided to rehabilitate him without a denazification procedure. The reason is certainly to be found in the fact that Eisenhower had absolutely no interest about the denazification. But a trial had to be: the Soviets wouldn't accept a decision taken by the American generals in the last months of 1945 which signs the birth of the Cold War, and in which Germany will be one of the major stakes.

A few days after the conductor's departure for Vienna and the beginning of his passage under American denazification, General McClure, head of the Information Control Division, publishes an article that pre-announces to Furtwängler all the difficulties of his return to Berlin:

It is an undeniable fact that Furtwängler, through his activity in the most prestigious cultural circles, identified himself with Nazi Germany. [...] he not only occupied an official post under the regime, but was also a sort of adviser to the ProMi, allowing that his name appear on tours abroad, financed by Goebbels. It is therefore inconceivable, in these times when we are trying to extinguish all traces of Nazism, to let such a person return to Germany⁶⁴.

Furtwängler replies immediately that «he is ready to come to Berlin and submit to the procedure, but on two conditions: that his case be dealt immediately and objectively and that he can return to Switzerland»⁶⁵. But a few days later, the orchestra director will commit a gross “diplomatic” mistake. On March 10, Alexander Abusch and Klaus Gysi propose to him the direction of the *Staatsoper*, in Soviet territory, and Furtwängler flies to Berlin, «which begs him to return»⁶⁶, in a Soviet

⁶³ Roncigli (2013), p. 142.

⁶⁴ *Die neue Zeitung*, 21 February 1946, quoted by Roncigli (2013), p. 143.

⁶⁵ Furtwängler (1966), p. 128.

⁶⁶ *Berliner Zeitung*, 16 February 1946, in Roncigli (2013), p. 143.

plane. Upon his arrival in Adlershof, he was greeted by representatives of the Soviet administration who organized a press conference to ensure maximum visibility to the event. Responding about his future programs, he affirms that he is only in Berlin in a private capacity. He absolutely did not intend to accept the job, understanding that it would prevent him from returning to the Berliners, which operated in the American zone. He came to Berlin only to find a way to meet General Clay more quickly, as Curt Riess reports⁶⁷.

A few hours after the Soviet press release, McClure confirmed the ban on performing for Furtwängler and his obligation to appear before the commission⁶⁸.

Only on 11 December 1946 the Maestro's trial begins in Berlin, six months after the start of the proceedings. Many commentators, including Sam H. Shirakawa, have seen this retard as a sign of malevolence of the occupying powers, especially by the Americans. But, more objectively, the delay has been accumulated after the allies had transferred the dossier to the German court, the *Spruchkammer*. In December 1946 Berlin was governed by a quadripartite command of the allies. A cultural affairs committee linked to denazification had been created, which in turn included a denazification subcommittee with the charge of informing it of the issues and procedures followed. The office of this subcommittee was located in Schlütterstrasse, in the British sector, in the old buildings of *Reichskulturkammer* (RKK) with a secretariat of the Intelligence Section of the British Information Services Control (ISC) and a *Spruchkammer* of German citizens, located in the same place. The *Kammer*, constituted by German members, had the task to listen to the 250,000 members (or similar) of the RKK and give them a work permit. The decisions of the *Spruchkammer* had then to be ratified by the allies, but in fact they were rarely refused.

In April 1946 is held a preparatory meeting of the subcommittee,

⁶⁷ Riess (1986), p. 339.

⁶⁸ Furtwängler, «a pawn in the nascent Cold War», notes Haffner (2003), p. 352.

which, examining Furtwängler's file, concludes that the process can only end with a rehabilitation. But once again a difference of opinion between the Americans and the Soviets comes into play: Arsenij Guliga, Stalin's representative, hoping to bring the Maestro to the *Staatsoper*, demands an immediate rehabilitation⁶⁹. But the other three powers, especially the USA, pretend the legal application of the procedure and refer the dossier to the *Spruchkammer*. As pointed out earlier, Furtwängler will only be tried six months after this preparatory meeting.

When the *Spruchkammer* session opens on 11 December, in room 304 of the Schlüterstrasse building, it seems somehow that the games have already been made. As Roger Smithson points out, the Americans will hardly take part in the trial, limiting themselves to be present at the deliberations. The court is headed by Wolfgang Schmidt, chief judge, a former resistance member, and Alex Vogel, a communist but also V-Mann (informant) of the Gestapo at the Russian embassy. The charges found by the subcommittee regarding Furtwängler are: his appointment to *Staatsrat*, two concerts held during Nazi party ceremonies and an anti-Semitic accusation against the conductor Victor de Sabata.

Vogel opens the session declaring: «the investigations showed that Furtwängler was not a member of any Nazi organization, that he tried to help those persecuted for racial reasons and that he even avoided [...] outward aspects such as the Nazi salute to Hitler»⁷⁰.

Furtwängler, assisted by his Viennese secretary, Agathe von Thiedemann, expects a brief interrogation, about twenty minutes: he will be listened to for more than four and a half hours during which he will ask that «the truth emerge from his actions [...] that he never supported, with his concerts, the Nazi regime, but the German people and that he always presented himself abroad not as a representative of Hitler but as a German musician»⁷¹.

⁶⁹ Smithson (1996), p. 4.

⁷⁰ Smithson (1996), p. 5.

⁷¹ Muck (1982), p. 199.

The trial is characterized by extreme confusion: Berta Geissmar had collected hundreds of dossiers which she had, at the request of Furtwängler, transmitted to General McClure. The files mysteriously disappeared in Berlin, just when they were supposed to be forwarded to the commanding general of the American occupation zone. The Furtwängler's memoirs, moreover, had no legal value for the allies. The discovery of concentration camps pushes Schmidt formulating theories about Furtwängler's supposed anti-Semitism: «it is possible that, without being anti-Semitic, you nevertheless thought that some things should not be played by Jews». Hans von Benda, a former employee of the Berlin Philharmonic, retracts his accusation of anti-Semitism against Furtwängler during the trial. Fred K. Pnberg refers about the resignation of a member of the *Spruchkammer*, Karl Fischer-Walden, who had protested against the 'special procedure' used for Furtwängler, explaining that the dossier files had been blocked and that one day before the opening of the trial had taken place a meeting, the subject of which is still unknown ⁷².

The first day ends rather badly for Furtwängler, who will say about this experience: «I could not have undergone that denazification every week» ⁷³. On the second day of trial, December 17, Furtwängler presents his witnesses, including Annaliese Thieler, who explains that Edwin von der Nüll, musical critic and untired supporter of von Karajan (cited in Harwood's *Taking Sides*), has been subjected to Göring's orders. One after another, Klemens Herzberg, Max Reinhardt and Boleslaw Barlog testify. Letters from Arnold Schönberg and Yehudi Menuhin in favour of Furtwängler have been read.

The newspaper *Die Welt* transcripts the words of Herzberg, who quoted a sentence by Reinhardt from 1933, when the latter had just emigrated:

Fortunately, Furtwängler remained in Germany. Such people had to stay. The courage Furtwängler had in writing a letter to Goebbels in defense of Jewish artists speaks for itself. That is why I ask you to respect

⁷² Prieberg (1991), p. 26.

⁷³ Höcker (1979), p. 93.

Furtwängler if you go to Germany, and to express my deep gratitude to him ⁷⁴.

The attitude of the Americans changed between March and December 1946, certainly not spontaneously (the pressure of the Soviets on Furtwängler, the Berlin Philharmonic in the American zone), to such an extent that Herbert Haffner speaks of «active positions taken by officials and American officers during the trial in favour of the director, with the aim of ending the trial as quickly as possible and protecting Furtwängler» ⁷⁵.

On the second day of the trial, after two and a half hours of discussions, the *Spruchkammer* expresses the verdict that classifies Furtwängler in *Kategorie 4, Mitläufer* (supporter), which allows him to resume his activities in all the occupied areas. The normal procedure provided for the immediate transmission of the dossier to the allied command for ratification, but this only happened after several months. Two official reasons: the number of cases to be dealt with and the lack of paper to type the documents. The ratification by the occupying powers was signed in March 1947. Furtwängler then conducted four concerts in Italy and reunited with the Berlin Philharmonic on May 25, after an absence of more than two years.

Instead of the testimonies of Furtwängler and his witnesses, opposed to those of the allied accusers, which in the end constitute nothing more than the extension of the “Furtwängler case” existing abroad, it is worth to underline some important aspects in this denazification process. The political and moral will of the allies to “purify” Germany of Nazism is real, but the subpoena for Furtwängler is not procedurally and legally correct, according to the law n. 104 *zur Befreiung von Nationalsozialismus und Militarismus*, also called *Befreiungsgesetz* (Law for the Eradication of Nazism and Militarism). Indeed, as we have said several times, Furtwängler was never a member of the Nazi party. He had been accused for his title of *Staatsrat*, but very quickly the subcommittee has evidence

⁷⁴ *Die Welt*, 19 December 1946, in Roncigli (2013), p. 148.

⁷⁵ Haffner (2003), p. 357.

that this honour was bestowed on him without his knowledge and that he could not, despite his wishes, renounce it. The problem is that all the other *Staatsrats* were members of the NSDAP; thus, Furtwängler was a kind of embarrassing exception⁷⁶.

It would therefore seem that the trial was more linked to moral values than to juridical aspects. It could be said that what is put at the bar is the Furtwängler symbol of German culture, used by the Nazis, the musical representative of Hitler and Goebbels, rather than the State counselor. In conclusion, it seems that the allies were obliged to try Furtwängler. The Maestro was a man who had played a leading cultural role, known for his art throughout the world and who, for this reason, had divided the public opinion. Furtwängler's importance derived from his artistic activity, not from his title of *Staatsrat*: is the musician, not the "politician", that was accused, even if, from a legal point of view, it was almost impossible to find him guilty.

5. *Strauss and Zweig: An Artistic Friendship*

In 1931 the German composer and conductor Richard Strauss (11 June 1864-8 September 1949), after the successes of *Salome*, *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, was at the height of fame. The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig, seventeen years younger (28 November 1881-22 February 1942), was an established novelist and biographer. Their correspondence (published for the first time in 1957) which has been developing since 1931 to 1936, revolves around the creation of the *Schweigsame Frau* (*The Silent Woman*), a comic opera that Zweig freely drew from Ben Jonson⁷⁷. Char-

⁷⁶ See Roncigli (2013), pp. 149-150.

⁷⁷ «Richard Strauss' *Die Schweigsame Frau* (*The Silent Woman*) might be the only opera in the entire oeuvre with a central character who dislikes music. Sir Morosus, a retired British naval officer is allergic to noise of any kind. He disinherits his nephew Henry for joining an opera troupe and for marrying an actress. When Morosus' barber Schneidebart suggests that Morosus should find a quiet wife, Henry conceives of a plan to regain his uncle's favor. Henry's wife, "Aminta", under the guise of "Timidia" mim-

acterized by a constant profound deference (“My dear Herr Doctor”, “My Dear Herr Zweig”), the letters become more and more cordial: Zweig is always ready to accept Strauss’s requests and Strauss is increasingly enthusiastic about his new “librettist”, whose collaboration he does not intend to do without it in the future. But we are in the early 1930s and Zweig is a Jew. Both the musician and the writer believe that Nazism is a passing phenomenon. As clearly affirmed by Zweig in his autobiography *The World of Yesterday*:

One cannot easily dispose of thirty or forty years of deep faith in the world inside of a few brief weeks. In the clutch of our conceptions of justice we believed that there was a German, a European, a world conscience and were convinced that there existed a measure of barbarousness that would make its own quietus, once and for all, because of mankind ⁷⁸.

Zweig eventually, waiting for better times, proposes to postpone the first performance of the *Schweigsame Frau*, scheduled in Dresden for June 24, 1935 ⁷⁹, for a couple of years. Strauss, who retains his art superi-

ics a quiet young thing, and once married to Morosus turns into a shrieking harridan! Strauss declared it the “best libretto for a comic opera since Figaro”, and it was the Austrian playwright Stefan Zweig who adopted the story from Ben Jonson’s comedy “*Epicoene*”». Predota (2018).

⁷⁸ Zweig (1947) p. 275.

⁷⁹ *The Silent Woman* was first performed at the Dresden Semperoper on 24 June 1935, conducted by Karl Böhm, with Friedrich Plaschke as Sir Morosus and Maria Cebotari as Aminta. After the fall of the Nazi regime, the opera was revived in Dresden (1946) followed by Berlin, München and Wiesbaden. Outside Germany, the work was produced in February 1936 at Graz in Austria (attended by his son and daughter-in-law, Franz and Alice), at La Scala of Milan in March with Gino Marinuzzi conductor, in Prague on 8 June conducted by George Szell and in Zurich in October 1942 (with Strauss attending the performance on 18 October). The work had its United States premiere at the New York City Opera on 7 October 1958. It was performed at The Santa Fé Opera in 1987 and 1991, and also at Garsington Opera in 2003. In Britain, The Royal Opera House, London, presented the work in English with the UK premier on 20 November 1961 and the opera formed part of the Glyndebourne festival in 1977 and 1979. More recently, there were productions at the Dresden Semperoper in 2010 and the Bavarian State Opera, Munich, in 2010, 2014 and 2015. On 22-24 July 2016 Pittsburgh Festival Opera put on two performances sung in English.

or to any political regime and has accepted the position (little more than honorific) of president of the *Reichsmusikkammer* (the government commission for music), has direct contacts with Minister Goebbels, and submits to Hitler the libretto of the Opera. The Führer “exceptionally” gives his approval and the opera goes on stage with mixed success.

The events that precede the world première of *The Silent Woman* are described by Friedrich von Schuch (the son of the conductor Ernst von Schuch), administrative director of the *Staatstheater* of Dresden, as follows:

At the time I was the head of the administration of the state theatres and therefore representative of the general manager, Paul Adolph. My boss who, after prolonged efforts, has obtained permission for the world première of the work, even though the libretto was by Stefan Zweig, decided that the librettist’s name should not appear on the program. Incomprehensibly, however, he failed to have an understanding about this with Strauss, although, since we knew Strauss’s mind well, we pointed out repeatedly that a clarification was necessary⁸⁰.

Two days before the première of *The Silent Woman*, Strauss demanded to see the program and discovered with enormous surprise that Zweig’s name was not on it. As reported by Friedrich von Schuch⁸¹, Strauss’s face flushed in hot anger: «You can do as you damn please», he erupted. «I am leaving tomorrow morning». No one who knew Strauss doubted for a minute that he meant what he said, even though Hitler and Goebbels were expected to attend (as it happened, they were absent⁸²). In the end, the name of Stefan Zweig was placed on the program. Paul Adolph, responsible for the decision to do so, was dismissed from his post of intendant of the Dresden Opera soon thereafter.

⁸⁰ von Schuch cited in the Editor’s note of Strauss, Zweig (1977), p. 120.

⁸¹ von Schuch (1951), p. 133.

⁸² In the *History of The Silent Woman* – written on Strauss’s notebooks and inserted in the published epistolary of Strauss-Zweig – the composer reported: «Hitler and Goebbels did not attend the Dresden performance – either on purpose or, as was announced, prevented from flying by a storm in Hamburg». Strauss, Zweig (1977), p. 109.

Already before this episode, Zweig, aware of the present difficulties, no longer wants to collaborate under his own name and offers Strauss to assist other librettists anonymously and free of charge, in particular the writer and historian Joseph Gregor. But Strauss does not want to know, he just wants Zweig, and on May 17, 1935 he wrote to him: «Once and for all, please stop urging new poets upon me!»⁸³. This leads to the letter of June 17, 1935, in which Strauss, exasperated by Zweig's «pride of race» and «feeling of solidarity» with the Jewish community, writes:

Do you believe that I am ever, in any of my actions, guided by the thought that I am a “German” (perhaps, *qui le sait*)? Do you believe that Mozart composed as an “Arian”? I know only two categories of people: those with and those without talent. The people exist for me only at the moment they become audience. Whether they are Chinese, Northern Bavarians, New Zealanders or Berliners leave me cold. What matters is that they pay the full price of admission⁸⁴.

This letter never reached Zweig's hands. Intercepted by the police, the unambiguous reported affirmations cost Strauss a forced resignation from the presidency of the *Reichsmusikkammer*. Zweig, who in those years travelled the world keeping his distance from Germany, emigrated to Brazil and on 23 February 1942 committed suicide with his second wife, Lotte.

It is worth mentioning that the epistolary relationship between Stefan Zweig and Richard Strauss begins in a singularly analogous way to the one between Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Strauss himself, started thirty years earlier and destined to remain, in terms of duration and intensity of contents, probably the most significant document of a collaboration between artists⁸⁵. In both cases, it is the man of letters who, implicitly assuming the role of the proposer, takes the initiative to address the interlocutor with an initial proposal of collaboration. In both situations the proposition in question is the subject for a ballet, *Der Triumph der Zeit* in

⁸³ Strauss, Zweig (1977), p. 92.

⁸⁴ Strauss, Zweig (1977), pp. 99-100.

⁸⁵ Strauss, von Hofmannsthal (1952).

the case of Hofmannsthal and *Marsyas und Apoll* in that of Zweig. The two proposals are politely but firmly rejected by Strauss with a tone and a surprisingly similar epistolary style when one thinks of the thirty-one years between the two answers. However, equally significant are the differences between the two approaches: in Hofmannsthal's case, the proposal is made in the first instance to Strauss, and furthermore the latter's rejection results in a pause of more than five years, before the agreement for *Elektra* (which precedes the resumption of the correspondence between the two). Vice versa, in the case of Zweig, the refusal is immediately counterbalanced by the acceptance of the secondary proposal (*The Silent Woman*) that the writer simultaneously made to the composer. More importantly, Zweig was not new to initiatives of this kind, as he remembered in his autobiographical and definitive book: «Since Max Reger has sent my first poem to music, I had always lived in music and with musicians. I had close friendship with Busoni, Toscanini, Bruno Walter and Alban Berg»⁸⁶.

But Strauss for Zweig is in the Olympus of the composers and the possibility to work with him a dream come true.

There was no productive musician of our time whom I would more willingly have served than Richard Strauss, last of the great line of thoroughbred musicians that reaches from Handel and Bach by way of Beethoven and Brahms to our day⁸⁷.

The collaboration between the composer and the writer is mostly idyllic, as testified by the letters themselves and by Zweig's *The World of Yesterday*:

Thus developed between us the most cordial relation imaginable; he came to our house and I would visit him at Garmisch where, with his long thin fingers, he played for me on the piano little by little, from his sketch, the whole opera. And without contract or obligation it was taken for granted

⁸⁶ Zweig (1947) p. 278.

⁸⁷ Zweig (1947) p. 278.

and accepted that, after finishing this opera, I should outline a second one, the plan for which he had already fully approved in advance⁸⁸.

A such intense collaboration had to stop abruptly and without warning, arousing in opera's lovers' enormous despair even if not excessive surprise. Strauss's last letter of December 31, 1935 is certainly aggressive and final, but the argument it deals with – Zweig's unsuccessful attempt to represent *The Silent Woman* at the Vienna State Opera, without advising Strauss – has really limited relevance and Zweig's calm response it does not foreshadow consequences. The writer's apolitical moralism with his humanistic and viscerally pro-European (and initially anti-Zionist) approach was compatible with Strauss's substantial "apoliticism" and his moderate nationalism only within a static and immutable international context. In 1933, the different worldviews still seem to cancel each other for an initial common underestimation of the Nazi phenomenon and a mental attitude based on the belief that Hitler's rise to power would have been an event without excessive traumas.

But the reading of the correspondence Strauss-Zweig through the years clearly highlights the divergence between the two positions and the two different interpretations of Nazism. The progressive irreconcilability of the two views causes the abrupt interruption of the Strauss-Zweig relationship, without, however, an open quarrel between the two. In fact, Strauss and Zweig both believed in the saving and purifying power of art and in its ability to create brotherhoods between men. In this *Weltanschauung*, the arts can elevate every individual into a common space of dialogue above any historical and political storm.

Strauss continues to snub the Nazi phenomenon and to have an ambiguous and wavering attitude towards him, considering himself, above all, an untouchable personality who runs no risk. Zweig, on the other hand, soon realizes the implications deriving from Hitler's presence and his condition as a writer of German language and of Jewish origin. The intellectual relationship and friendship between the two are abruptly

⁸⁸ Zweig (1947), p. 281.

interrupted, has been said. On the one hand, the composer, after the ‘affair’ of *The Silent Woman*, can only exploit his personal prestige while trying to keep a low profile given the political situation. However, Zweig, uprooted from Europe mentally and physically⁸⁹, will only be able, as an exile, to add Strauss in his gallery of myths of the past – described in the aforementioned autobiographical essay *The World of Yesterday* – to which he feels he belongs with ever increasing desperation.

The conclusion of the human lives of Strauss and Zweig could be reassumed through the straight words of the translator’s postscript of their *Briefwechsel* Max Knight:

Richard Strauss, despite the intercepted letter of June 17, 1935, remained in Nazi Germany, where he conducted operas and concerts in the following years and throughout the war. After the war he moved to Switzerland, but in 1949 he returned to Garmisch, where he died, highly honoured, on September 8, aged 85.

Stefan Zweig moved to England shortly before Hitler’s takeover of Austria in 1938, later to the United States and to Brazil. His books were burned in Germany. Exhausted by years of homeless wandering and despairing at the world, he and his wife Elisabeth died on February 22, 1942, by their own hands. He was 60⁹⁰.

6. *From Historical Reality to Fiction: Collaboration*

Starting from the cited correspondence between Strauss and Zweig⁹¹, Ronald Harwood, with his play *Collaboration*, returns here to one of his favourite themes: that of the political responsibility of an artist, and he does so by representing the story of the partnership between Richard Strauss and Stefan Zweig.

⁸⁹ See Prochnik (2018).

⁹⁰ Knight (1977), p. 111.

⁹¹ For a detailed study of Harwood’s source material, and his creative appropriation of it, see Weiss (2015), pp. 381-402.

In *Collaboration*, as we will see, the dramatist combines the story lines of Richard Strauss and Stefan Zweig, reconstructs timelines – creating theatrically effective scenes from biographical historic data – and inserts «historical figures in fictional encounters to forge suspenseful or moving scenes with the flavour of a plausible fictional reality»⁹².

Harwood takes some liberty with facts dramatizing the first encounter between Zweig and Strauss in the two first scenes of his drama. The play opens like a sort of Woody Allen's domestic comedy in which Harwood presents Richard and Pauline Strauss as an old married couple. The composer is portrayed like an «embattled, angry, frustrated»⁹³ human being, controlled by the pragmatic efficiency of his wife Pauline, accustomed to her husband's outbreaks and obsessed with cleanliness. Strauss is in crisis: as we know Hofmannsthal, the librettist of his most famous operas, is dead and without the inspiration of a good libretto the composer is no longer able to work. But there's another great writer in Austria, who could help him: Stefan Zweig. Strauss believes that Zweig is too important and too rich to accept being his librettist, but his wife Pauline urges his husband to ring Anton Kippenberg, director of the publishers Insel-Verlag, asking him to establish a connection with the writer.

In the second scene, set again in the Strauss villa in Garmisch in November 1931, Harwood brings Strauss and Zweig together for the first time. The dramatist, for the description of this important moment, uses the correspondence between Strauss and Zweig as one of his primary sources, taking some details of the first three letters between librettist and composer, in which Strauss invites Zweig to Garmisch and the writer tell him to be a difficult guest and therefore prefers the privacy of a hotel room⁹⁴. In reality, the first encounter of the composer and the writer was

⁹² Weiss (2015), p. 381.

⁹³ Harwood (2008), p. 7.

⁹⁴ Weiss (2015) p. 383.

on 20 November at the Hotel *Vier Jahreszeiten* in Munich⁹⁵. The dramatist manipulates biographical facts for aesthetic purposes and reasons of dramatic economy: instead of locating the meeting in the public space of a hotel, he transfers it into the domestic space of Strauss's home, including Pauline in the dialogue, who serves as a kind of funny countermelody. Thus, also avoids the inclusion of a minor and merely functional character like Kippenberg, who, in any case, has been evocated by Strauss's wife in the first scene.

In the third scene, set in Zweig's villa, Salzburg, June 1932, a fourth character is introduced: Lotte Altmann, Zweig's secretary. The absence of Frau Zweig stimulates Pauline's curiosity for a possible more intimate relationship between Lotte and Zweig. In a dialogue between an inquisitive Pauline and a reticent Lotte, Frau Strauss tries to unveil the family secret. Again, Harwood manipulates biographical facts for aesthetic purposes. At this point of time, Zweig had not met Lotte yet. He made the first encounter with her, emigrant from Silesia, only in the spring of 1934, while he was in London and looking for a secretary. Ironically, it was Friderike, Zweig's first wife, who played an important role in choosing Lotte Altmann as the best candidate for the job⁹⁶.

The presence of the Jewish Lotte Altmann in Salzburg is also essential for the next scene, set in April 1933. Lotte, who has just posted the second act of *The Silent Woman* to Richard Strauss, and her friend Leah are attacked and humiliated by two young Nazis. This entirely fictional scene is a medium to show the spreading of anti-Semitism in Austria and to give the audience a clue that times are dramatically changing⁹⁷. The stage directions at the end of this scene also indicate the birth of love between Stefan Zweig and Lotte Altmann:

She suddenly puts her arms round Zweig's waist and clings to him. At first, he is tense, then gradually relaxes, strokes her hair. Gently he loos-

⁹⁵ Gilliam (1999), p. 144.

⁹⁶ Cfr. Matuschek (2006), p. 274.

⁹⁷ See Weiss (2015), p. 386.

ens her embrace, kneels, takes out a handkerchief and wipes her nose clean. They stare at each other, long and hard. He kisses her gently on the forehead. She runs from the room⁹⁸.

In the following scene, set in April 1933 in two parallel locations, Garmisch and Salzburg, Harwood describes Strauss's progress with the composition of *The Silent Woman*: Pauline holds the receiver in her hands to make listen Zweig and Lotte to the other end of phone the composer playing and singing the first act of the opera. A few moments later the writer «puts his arm around her shoulders, ostensibly to draw her closer to the receiver but it is tantamount to an embrace»⁹⁹.

The second act, set in Zweig's villa in Salzburg, April 1933, «immediately focuses on the political sphere»¹⁰⁰. The first scene is based on two letters, one from Stefan Zweig to Richard Strauss of 3 April 1933 and Strauss's response of 4 April¹⁰¹. We meet a worried and infuriated Stefan Zweig, while Pauline and Richard Strauss try to calm him down. Goebbels, in a broadcast, has quoted «an infamous passage from the writer Zweig»¹⁰² without using the first name. The Propaganda Minister referred to Arnold Zweig, a German writer and anti-fascist activist, who had published an anti-Nazi statement in which he «incites violence»¹⁰³. Zweig demands a correction because, as a pacifist, he distances himself from Arnold Zweig's attitudes. In the course of this scene, Stefan Zweig develops his pessimistic premonition of a future world dominated by Nazism. Strauss repeatedly assures Zweig that he has influence in political circles and that he will make sure that a retraction will be published. In addition, he affirms incongruously that National Socialism is only a passing phenomenon: «But, Zweig, it will blow over, take my word for it. It

⁹⁸ Harwood (2008), p. 37.

⁹⁹ Harwood (2008), p. 37.

¹⁰⁰ Weiss (2015), p. 386.

¹⁰¹ Weiss (2015), p. 286.

¹⁰² Letter of Zweig to Strauss, April, 3, 1933, in Strauss, Zweig (1977), p. 33.

¹⁰³ Harwood (2008), p. 39.

can't last. The Nazis will never be able to practise what they preach»¹⁰⁴. The central core of the scene reveals once more Strauss's cynic pragmatism, saying to Zweig: «Look on the bright side. They understand the importance of the arts. They intend to support culture, German culture». Zweig bitterly responds: «No. They intend to control culture»¹⁰⁵. It is also in this scene that Strauss – completely dissociated by the difficult political situation and by the exploding of anti-Semitism that complicate enormously his librettist's life – implores Zweig to individuate «another subject for an opera»¹⁰⁶.

The following – entirely fictional – encounter, is set in Strauss's villa in Garmisch in November 1933. Strauss is visited by Hans Hinkel, a high functionary in the Reich Culture Chamber, an emissary of Josef Goebbels. He informs the composer of the most recent order concerning the German stages: «No works by Jews are to be produced. Or even those works in which a Jew has participated»¹⁰⁷. This decision could cause the disappearing of Strauss's works from the repertoire of German opera houses because – as Hinkel subtly refers – Hofmannsthal is a «quarter-Jew». Moreover, at that very time the composer was collaborating with the Jewish Zweig. In response to this «Strauss explodes»¹⁰⁸ and exclaims: «This is contemptible. I will protest to the highest authorities. I will appeal to the Führer himself. I am not going to obey this order. And you may tell that to Dr Goebbels. And if you won't, I will. If necessary, in Berlin. In person»¹⁰⁹. These remonstrations do not impress Hinkel at all.

HINKEL (*steel*) Your daughter-in law is a Jew, am I right? Your grandchildren are therefore also Jews. Half-Jews [...] Dr Goebbels wanted me to make it clear that you are very important to us. He urges you to sup-

¹⁰⁴ Harwood (2008), p. 41.

¹⁰⁵ Harwood (2008), p. 41.

¹⁰⁶ Harwood (2008), p. 46.

¹⁰⁷ Harwood (2008), p. 46.

¹⁰⁸ Harwood (2008), p. 46.

¹⁰⁹ Harwood (2008), p. 47.

port our endeavours to cleanse German music from degenerate influences. If you do, you have his word that no harm will come to any member of your family. I'm sure you understand now. I'll be perfectly frank. We need you. To that end, I have the honour to inform you that my Minister invites you to become President of the Reich Chamber of Music. Silence. I will take your silence as acceptance¹¹⁰.

Essentially, it is a free dramatization of Strauss's justifications of his collaboration with the Nazis for the safety of his Jewish daughter-in-law and his two grandchildren. Threats against the composer's Jewish relatives were part of what Michael H. Kater calls «the carrot-and-stick treatment», but only after 1935. Kater reports:

Perhaps to keep Strauss in check, the authorities planned to arrest Alice during the 9-10 November pogrom [of 1935], but she was away at the time. Instead, her young children, Richard and Christian, were physically molested and taken to the Garmisch square, where, in tears, they were forced to spit at Jews already rounded up there. Later they suffered at the hands of 'Aryan' schoolmates. Alice Strauss was kept under curfew in the Garmisch villa for a time, and her personal papers were confiscated indefinitely¹¹¹.

The facts described are certainly of extreme gravity, but are not related with the Strauss's nomination as president of the *Reichsmusikkammer* that happened in a ceremony at the *Berliner Philharmonie* on 15 November 1933... In this scene Harwood not only manipulates dates and historical facts, but also seems to provide an apology for Richard Strauss. As Weiss hypothesizes: «Harwood attempted to avoid the simplistic juxtaposition of perpetrator and victim (Strauss and Zweig) and strove for a more balanced reception of his two major characters»¹¹².

The next scene is set in August 1934, when «Zweig actually visited

¹¹⁰ Harwood (2008), pp. 48-49.

¹¹¹ Kater (1997), p. 208.

¹¹² Weiss (2015), p. 392.

Salzburg, although at the time he was already living in London»¹¹³. The dialogue in this scene between Strauss and Zweig focuses on two subjects: the political obstacles that have to be overcome to stage *The Silent Woman* and Strauss's repeated request for a new libretto from Zweig. Harwood elaborates artistly his usual sources: the correspondence between Strauss and Zweig – in particular Strauss's letter of 17 June 1935, which was intercepted by the Gestapo –, Zweig's *The World of Yesterday*, and Strauss's memorandum entitled *The History of The Silent Woman*.

The following scene, set in the Hotel Belvedere in Dresden, shortly before the world premiere of *The Silent Woman* in June 1935, summarises, using the mentioned von Schuch's testimony, the conflict about the presence of Zweig's name on the poster and the programme between Strauss and the intendant Paul Adolph.

The next moment (with no dialogue) shows Zweig, who is listening to a broadcast of the performance in his Salzburg villa. It is an entirely fictional stage moment, because «Zweig had never lived in his house in Salzburg since 1934», that serves underlining the growing heaviness of Zweig's personal situation, «in despair over the destruction of his world at the hands of the barbarians who have turned him into an outcast»¹¹⁴. The stage directions of the play report: «After a moment he weeps silently. His whole body shudders. His face contorts as he controls his pain»¹¹⁵.

The following scene, also fictional, takes us one step further: after has received a Strauss's call – who clarifies for good to Zweig that the composer lives in a castle of dreams, ignoring the political situation – the writer and Lotte leave forever their villa in Salzburg, starting a life of “wandering Jews” being around the world in search of freedom and peace¹¹⁶.

¹¹³ Weiss (2015), p. 392.

¹¹⁴ Weiss (2015), pp. 395-396.

¹¹⁵ Harwood (2008), p. 62.

¹¹⁶ «LOTTE. There is nothing for it then. We will become wandering Jews. That's no bad thing, is it? It's a perfectly honourable tradition. He laughs. The sound of a car

In *Collaboration*, the second visit of Hans Hinkel is constructed in contrast to his first appearance in the first act¹¹⁷. The second encounter also conveys an aggravation of the composer's situation, his falling from favour with the regime. In the first act, Hinkel blackmails Strauss into accepting the position of the president of the Reich Music Chamber, in the second he forces him to relinquish it. In this sequence, Harwood elaborates the ample literature about the deposition of Strauss and its particulars. Scholars agree that the central issue was Strauss's letter to Zweig of 17 June 1935, which was intercepted by the Gestapo and never reached its addressee¹¹⁸. However, there has been a debate as to other circumstances which might have had a bearing on the decision of Goebbels. There is some evidence that Strauss's enemies in the institution had intended to remove for some time the cumbersome president, who followed his own agenda presiding the RMC – for example, copyright questions and the repertoire and management of opera houses – and neglected other duties, being rarely present in Berlin. As Riethmüller affirms, «the Nazis, above all Goebbels, wanted to be rid of Strauss and had merely waited for a suitable occasion to arise, which the letter of 17 June provided»¹¹⁹.

This fictional last encounter between Hinkel and Strauss is followed – after a time gap of almost seven years – by an intimate scene between Lotte and Stefan Zweig, set in Petropolis. We are present at the final moments of their lives, as Zweig is writing and revising his suicide note. Harwood adapts faithfully Zweig's *Declaração* representing the moving adieu à la vie of the couple.

[...] Every day I learned to love this country more, and I would not have asked to rebuild my life in any other place after the world of my own language sank and was lost to me and my spiritual homeland, Europe, destroyed itself.

hooter, insistent. ZWEIG. (*a smile*) Very well, then. Let the wandering begin». Harwood (2008), p. 64.

¹¹⁷ Weiss (2015), pp. 396-397.

¹¹⁸ See Weiss (2015), p. 396 and Walter (2010), p. 238.

¹¹⁹ Riethmüller (2004), p. 270.

But to start everything anew after a man's 60th year requires special powers, and my own power has been expended after years of wandering homeless. I thus prefer to end my life at the right time, upright, as a man for whom cultural work has always been his purest happiness and personal freedom – the most precious of possessions on this earth.

I send greetings to all of my friends: May they live to see the dawn after this long night. I, who am most impatient, go before them ¹²⁰.

In the penultimate scene, the dramatist portrays the famous encounter between Richard Strauss and American troops, which were moving into Garmisch at the end of April 1945. As Alex Ross reports:

On April 30, 1945, the day of Hitler's suicide, a squad of American soldiers rolled up the driveway of a quaint, green-shuttered villa in the Alpine resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in Bavaria, and found themselves face to face with the eighty-year-old composer and conductor Richard Strauss. "I am the composer of 'Der Rosenkavalier' and 'Salome'" Strauss said, in English. The G.I.s had intended to commandeer the house as a temporary headquarters. After listening to Strauss play excerpts from "Rosenkavalier" at the piano, they let him be, and moved on to another destination ¹²¹.

The episode is put on the stage by Harwood without renouncing at the comic potential of the situation. Pauline, with her usual temperament, replies to the American officers who asks Strauss for an autograph: «If you want my husband's signature, come round to the back of the house. And don't forget to wipe your feet» ¹²².

The final scene (set in Munich, 1948) presents an eighty-four-year-old Strauss at the end of the war who must justify his collaboration with the Nazis. He is preparing his defence before his appearance in front of the denazification board affirming that he was forced to cooperate with the Regime in order to save his family. He remembers Zweig and how much he loved him and cries, claiming – and it is a remarkable *coup the de théâtre*

¹²⁰ *Declaração* of Stefan Zweig, cited and translated by Prater (1972), p. 339.

¹²¹ Ross (2014).

¹²² Harwood (2008), p. 72.

tre of Harwood – that the Austrian writer was a real collaborator: the Nazis wanted him dead, and he satisfied them by committing suicide. Strauss sobs and the audience begins to hear an extract of Strauss *Four Last Songs*. Although the dramatist does not specify which of the four songs is being heard, it can only be, as Weiss brilliantly noticed, «“Im Abendrot”, which Strauss finished on 6 May 1948, the remaining three were only completed after the verdict of 7 June»¹²³. This group of songs is Strauss’s major work of his old age¹²⁴. They were first performed in London on 22 May 1950, with the Philharmonia Orchestra, Kirsten Flagstad as the soprano soloist. The conductor was, by a curious irony of fate, Wilhelm Furtwängler¹²⁵.

In conclusion, Harwood, through his drama, has shown a larger audience the interchange between two highly gifted, intelligent, articulate and well-read artists with two entirely different characters and temperaments. Moreover, *Collaboration* is at the end a study of two intellectuals trying to cope with the Nazi regime.

7. *The denazification trial of Richard Strauss*

As we said, *Taking Sides* is a dramatization of the Furtwängler’s process of denazification, an ‘historical courtroom drama’, while *Collaboration* is the portrait of the complicate friendship between two geniuses in hard times. Only at the end of the *pièce*, settled in Garmisch, Strauss, pushed by the ‘suggestive questions’ of his wife Pauline, reconsiders critically his position during the Nazism. It is a narrative mirror, superbly conceived by Harwood, of the ‘real’ process of denazification of Richard Strauss.

¹²³ Weiss (2015), p. 400.

¹²⁴ May (2010), pp. 190-191.

¹²⁵ Without doubt Richard Strauss would have been very unhappy about the choice of maestro, because, as Kater argues, Furtwängler was “anathema” to Strauss. See Kater (2000), p. 233.

In early 1947, rumours were circulating about Strauss's past role in the Third Reich, and German tabloids gossiped whether Strauss, after a formal court trial, could be classified as a Nazi activist.

The German denazification trial against Strauss¹²⁶ began in Garmisch and in Munich in early 1947, after it was established that he had never been a member of any Nazi party organization, but had held the presidency of the *Reichsmusikkammer* from 1934 to 1935 and that he deliberately had resigned to prevent the threatened expulsion. There were other allegations: that, like Furtwangler, he had been State counsellor; that he had contributed to the Aryanization of the Jewish publishing house Fürstner; that he had cultivated ties with the regime's highest leaders; that he had directed substituting Bruno Walter in Berlin and Hans Knappertbusch in Munich. German media, such as the Hamburg newspaper *Die Welt*, went further, claiming that using his political connections to protect his Jewish daughter-in-law was 'irregular' and that Strauss had secured privileges for her after composing the *Festmusik* for the Japanese government.

This mixture of accusations testifies how poorly prepared the court in general was, as happened in many denazification processes, but it also highlights the occupiers' misconceptions about cultural life in the Third Reich at the time, and particularly about Richard Strauss. The composer had never been a Prussian State councillor. Fürstner's Arianization had not been commendable, «but it was a comparatively orderly business: whatever part Strauss had played in all of this had been in helping Fürstner, on his way to London, as much as possible, letting him keep his rights as a foreign citizen»¹²⁷. Bruno Walter's replacement in 1933 was once again distorted and the court mistakenly assumed that Knappertbusch, who was supposed to have been substituted by Strauss in 1935, had been released from his post for "political reasons". Ironically, it was far from the truth, because Knappertbusch had been a Nazi relieved

¹²⁶ See Kater (2000), pp. 259-263.

¹²⁷ Kater (2000), pp. 261-262.

of his position by Hitler, who did not like him, and it was not Strauss but Clement Krauss (an obvious but unforgivable confusion of names) who eventually directed the orchestra in Munich in his stead after 1936¹²⁸. The newspaper's accusation of Alice Strauss had not a juridical value: in 1947-48 no one seems to have known the real background of the genesis of *Festmusik*, including the fact that the Japanese government either did not want or did not stop the cheating against her.

Strauss was authorized, for health's problems, to await the outcome of the trial in Switzerland.

The composer's defence was organized, like the prosecution, in extreme confusion, not least in the handling of the evidence presented by witnesses. One of them, for example, emphasized that Strauss had always been a Democrat of the purest kind and therefore could not approve of the Nazis. Strauss, an apolitical¹²⁹ with elements of conservatism, who had initially high hopes about Hitler, may have been many things, but never in his life was a Democrat. In order to simplify a complex matter, his lawyer Karl Rosen organized his defence strategy, reporting that in June-July 1935 Strauss had played the role of president of the *Reichsmusikkammer* and had become, after the Zweig affair, a troublemaker for the Nazi regime. Then, after Strauss had thoroughly organized every-

¹²⁸ Kater (1997), pp. 40-55.

¹²⁹ Strauss rarely got involved in political matters: in 1914 he had refused to join the war-hysteria and did not sign up to the Manifesto of German Artists in support of the war effort, affirming that «Declarations about war and politics are not fitting for an artist, who must give his attention to his creations and his works». However, with *Friedenstag*, a one act opera, he made an exception, perhaps out of loyalty to Zweig, or perhaps due to his growing dislike of the Nazi regime. Stefan Zweig came up with the idea of the opera, which he outlined in a letter to Strauss following up a meeting between the two at the Salzburg Festival in 1934. While the idea for the story was from Zweig, he then suggested Gregor as a "safe" collaborator for the actual writing of the libretto. Strauss reluctantly agreed. Zweig's influence on the work nonetheless remained in its form and dramatic substance. The libretto and draft of the opera were completed quickly, by 24 January 1936 and the orchestration six months later on 16 June. Musicologist Pamela Potter argues that Zweig and Strauss constructed an opera whose surface aesthetic was acceptable to the Nazis, but had within it a clear pacifist and humanist message. Potter (1983), p. 420.

thing and wanted to realize his ideas, Goebbels had to let him go¹³⁰.

In any case, after several months of proceedings, evident falsehoods and misunderstandings were clarified and it was stated that Strauss was not assimilable in any of the Nazi categories; therefore, the proceeding ended. On June 7, 1948, Strauss was declared not culpable by the applicable criteria of Nazi political involvement. His attorney Rosen explained to the composer that the proceeding had taken a long time for the existing formalities scrupulously observed: any formal errors might have provided the press an excuse to start sensationalizing and, moreover, Strauss, like Furtwängler in Berlin, could have been called upon to testify in person. Rosen congratulated Strauss on getting this positive verdict just before his 84th birthday. One year later, curiously, Strauss received an honorary doctorate in law from the University of Munich¹³¹.

Nevertheless, Strauss's acquittal has not discouraged past nor present scholars from providing their own opinions concerning the composer and his works composed during the "Third Reich"¹³². A "Strauss case", like the "Furtwängler case", is still on the table.

8. Conclusion

The writing's genesis of *Taking Sides* helps to understand Harwood's interest in the Furtwängler case. The writer reports in the autobiographical book *Speak well to me*:

My wife joined me in Manchester and brought with her a book she had just finished and strongly recommended. This was *Berlin Days* by George Clare, the celebrated author of *The Last Waltz in Vienna*. The moment I read the first few pages I knew at once that there was a play to be written

¹³⁰ Kater (2000), p. 263.

¹³¹ See Panofsky (1965), p. 344.

¹³² Moss (2010), p. 66.

on a moral issue that was of profound importance to me and my excitement was great ¹³³.

The reading of Clare's own life and career stimulate Harwood's curiosity and interest. George Clare, an assimilated Viennese Jew, had fled Nazi persecution only to return to the conquered Third Reich in the uniform of a British intelligence officer. His role was to investigate the doings of prominent individuals who had been deprived of their positions under Control Council Directive No. 24 sub headed 'Concerning the Removal from Office and Positions of Responsibility of Nazis and Persons Hostile to Allied Purposes'. His first assignment was to put together a file on Wilhelm Furtwängler, the orchestra director of Hitler's Germany. His findings were at once clear and ambiguous. Furtwängler had conducted beneath the swastika on the eve of Hitler's birthday and also before a Nuremberg rally, but he had also helped many Jewish musicians escape from persecution. Moreover, he had incurred the wrath of Joseph Goebbels by publicly criticizing the party's totalitarian 'cultural policy'. After completing his dossier for the denazification tribunal in Wiesbaden, Clare could not decide whose side to take: that of the uncompromising and perhaps vengefully superiors at the Control Council or that of the many music lovers who firmly believed that Furtwängler was an honest man who has tried to make the best he could in a dangerous and difficult political situation. Clare recalled:

When I finish my work and the file was ready to go to Major Sely, I sat and looked at the closer folder for a long time. The Spruchkammer [Denazification tribunal] would have to give its verdict, but on what? That no one could live under a brutal dictatorship without becoming tainted? Compromising with evil to prevent worse, a defence I was to hear many times, is always futile but to know after the event was as easy as, except in a very few cases, it is difficult to recognize malignancy in its infancy ¹³⁴.

¹³³ Robinson (2017), p. 200.

¹³⁴ Clare (1989), p. 89.

This presented the central moral problem of Harwood's *Taking Sides* and of the later play *Collaboration*. The two dramas do not give the audience any pre-packaged answers. The dilemma faced by Furtwängler and Strauss is summarized by Lieutenant David Wills in *Taking Sides*: «I wonder how I would have behaved in his position? I'm not certain I'd have 'acted courageously'»¹³⁵. The very questions Ronald Harwood wants us to ask ourselves. According to the Lieutenant Wills Furtwängler and Strauss could be considered as «inadequate human beings. They can lie, they can fornicate, they can drink, they can deceive. But they can still put God into the mouths of the faithful»¹³⁶. Harwood, therefore, in his two dramas, seems to understand more the Strauss's and Furtwängler's justifications than the accusations moved by Arnold or Zweig, but he has the ability to show the audience the two sides of the coin. Consequently, Furtwängler appears rather than ridiculous when he exclaims to the 'unacculturated' Arnold «I believed that I could, through music, preserve something *practical*. Liberty, humanity and justice»¹³⁷. The Major can easily reply with a sardonic answer: «That's a thing of beauty, I'm going to remember that».

After a grotesque phone call with Strauss who informs him of the success of the première of *The Silent Woman* in Dresden, Zweig, now aware of the tragic political situation, said to his lover and future second wife Lotte:

He [Strauss] behaves as if everything is normal, as if music and the theatre were as they always were, central to our lives, while out in the void there are men who permit freedom or compel slavery, who destroy us or spare us, who determine peace and war¹³⁸.

The artist cannot live in an ivory tower pretending not to have knowledge or experience of the practical problems of everyday life. Art

¹³⁵ Harwood (2008), p. 165.

¹³⁶ Harwood (2008), p. 166.

¹³⁷ Harwood (2008), p. 147.

¹³⁸ Harwood (2008), p. 63.

could be a consolation but it is not superior to the tragedy of history. Furtwängler has to admit that he was extremely naïve believing that art and politics were kept separate during Hitler's regime¹³⁹. Against the Maestro's high justifications, Major Arnold's replies sound much more effective and 'true':

Have you ever smelled burning flesh? I smelt it four miles away. I smell it. I smell it now. [...] Have you seen the crematoria and the gas ovens? [...] You talk to me about culture and art and music? You putting that in the scales, Wilhelm? You setting culture and art and music against millions put to death by your pals? The pals you could call to save a couple of Jews when thousands, millions of them, were being annihilated? Yes, I blame you for not getting hanged, I blame you for your cowardice¹⁴⁰.

Terminated his last interrogation, Furtwängler finally breaks down and stammering has to admit «Yes, yes, Yes, yes it would have been better if I'd left in 1934, it would have been better if I'd left». After this 'confession' he suddenly retches.

In the eyes of many, Richard Strauss was compromised by his seeming acquiescence under the National Socialist Government that came to power in 1933¹⁴¹, taking over from the conductors threatened by the regime or from those, like Toscanini, who refused engagements under the

¹³⁹ As we said many times, the Furtwängler affair is still on the table. An interesting point of view, who is open to debate, is given by Rudolf Michael Ondrich. The author, in a legal philosophy perspective, applying Schmitt's idea of sovereignty as 'he who decides on the exception' to Furtwängler's 1942 performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* in Berlin, argues that Furtwängler protects the love and humanism of the music by suspending it and by doing so preventing it from being associated with Nazism. See Ondrich (2018), pp. 349-387.

¹⁴⁰ Harwood (2008), p. 163.

¹⁴¹ About the ambiguous relation of Strauss with the Nazi party and his controversial anti-Semitism see: Kater (2000), p. 243; Gillespie (1992), pp. 193-196; Schuh (1976); Del Mar (1972); Altshuler/Dawidowicz (1978); Elon (2002), p. 219; Marek (1967), pp. 54-59; Kennedy (1980), pp. 219-220; Schuh (1945), pp. 8-37; Erhardt (1953); Kraus (1955), p. 38; Wulf (1963); Potter (1992); Jameux (1971), pp. 46-151; Splitt (1987); Kater (1997) e (2000); Herrmann (2002), p. 225; Werbeck (2014) p. 45; Pekacz (2004); Haynes, (2013), p. 12; Prokert (2020).

prevailing circumstances. In particular, his acceptance in 1933 of the position of President of the new *Reichsmusikkammer* established by Joseph Goebbels, with Furtwängler as Vice-President, brought later criticism and hostility, although Strauss's actions may be seen as defending his Jewish daughter-in-law¹⁴² and his own grandchildren from the obvious dangers that the Third Reich presented. After 1945, he withdrew for a time to Switzerland, returning to his own house at Garmisch only four months before his death in 1949.

At the end of *Collaboration*, as said before, Strauss, in 1948 at the age of 84, in a sort of soliloquy, reflects on his human and intellectual experience in the Nazi period. He begins stating that he never belonged to any political party because his party is only art, but soon he has to admit he was a collaborator of the Nazis for the cited human and understandable reasons:

You must understand that if I ever appeared to collaborate with the Nazis it was because I did my utmost to protect my Jewish daughter-in-law, Alice, and my grandchildren. To some extent, I succeed, though several members of her family, including her mother, were slaughtered. [...] Alice herself was humiliated, became ill, was not even permitted to attend performances of my operas. But she and the children survived. [...] I was compelled to protect my family. For that I feel no shame. My motives may not have been pure, but at least they were human¹⁴³.

Hitler's favourite conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, in Harwood's *Taking Sides*, is not simply a 'villain', any more than the composer Richard Strauss. They are complex characters full of contradictions, like they were in real life.

In his two plays, Harwood does not take sides but indirectly shows the

¹⁴² Marek mentions Strauss's anti-Semitism directly, claiming that his daughter-in-law, Alice, who had Jewish family members, contributed to Strauss's losing the anti-Semitic prejudice instilled in him by his father, and by Alexander Ritter and Hans von Bülow. But in truth he had lost most of this prejudice with maturing age, as the collaboration with Zweig testified. See Marek (1967), p. 252 and Prokert (2020), p. 14.

¹⁴³ Harwood (2008), pp. 73-74.

viewer the impossibility for art or music to be a protection from politics and, in the case of the Nazi regime, against barbarism. Great artists such as Furtwängler and Strauss, who agreed to remain in Hitler's Germany, inevitably became collaborators of the regime, as they could not be free men.

Another cultural figure, that of Arturo Toscanini¹⁴⁴, presents the commitment of an artist in the difficult twenties and thirties of the twentieth century, up until after the World War II. It is the path of an orchestra director and intellectual who choose the exile for the cause of liberty, «liberty that, in his view is the only orthodoxy within the limits of which art may express itself and flourish freely»¹⁴⁵.

But that is another story...

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¹⁴⁴ See Chiodi (2020), pp. 81-138.

¹⁴⁵ Toscanini (1943), quoted by Chiodi (2020), p. 81.

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