

The Paradigm at the Crossroads in the Middle of the Whirlwind: Arnold Schoenberg, João Guimarães Rosa, and the Animating Faust

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Abstract: In the poem *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Anthony Hecht explores the limits of representative art in the attempt to transcend the dichotomy between life and fixture, citing the need for a “Faust” to animate representation. Through the prism of cyberneticist Gregory Bateson’s theories on advanced levels of learning and controlling paradigm shifts, this article explores how the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg and the Brazilian writer João Guimarães Rosa both exemplify Hecht’s concept of an animating Faust. It juxtaposes Schoenberg’s twelve-tone method with Guimarães Rosa’s transrealism in their respective contexts, culminating in a comparison of the latter’s novel *Grande sertão: veredas* with the former’s opera *Moses und Aron* in order to show how they break out of the paradigms of their respective periods, transporting the reader/ listener to the unknowable place that Guimarães Rosa called the “third bank of the river.”

Keywords: Arnold Schoenberg; João Guimarães Rosa; Anthony Hecht; Gregory Bateson; modernism; representation; “As margens da alegria”; *Grande sertão: veredas*; *Moses und Aron*; *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

I. Introduction

The American poet Anthony Hecht is best known for his volume of poetry *The Hard Hours* (1968), winner of the Pulitzer Prize, which recounts, among other things, the trauma and horror of his experiences during World War II. Recognizing the shortcomings of mimesis, he knows that a poem about war will never

be capable of intersecting or coming in true contact with its subject. He analyzes this phenomenon in a poem from his book *Millions of Strange Shadows* (1977), entitled *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, revealing the limits of representative art in the organic process of capturing what he refers to as “the freshness of the world” (115):

The Discus Thrower’s marble heave,
 Captured in mid-career,
That polished poise, that Parian arm
 Sleeved only in the air,
Vesalian musculature, white
 As the mid-winter moon—
This, and the clumsy snapshot of
 An infantry platoon,
Those grubby and indifferent men,
 Lounging in bivouac,
Their rifles aimless in their laps,
 Stop history in its tracks.
We who are all aswim in time,
 We, “the inconstant ones,”
How can such fixture speak to us?
 The chisel and the lens
Deal in a taxidermy
 Of our arrested flights,
And by their brute translation we
 Turn into Benthamites.
Those soldiers, like some senior class,
 Were they prepared to dye
In silver nitrate images
 Behind the camera’s eye?
It needs a Faust to animate
 The wan homunculus,
Construe the stark, unchanging text,
 Winkle the likes of us

Out of a bleak geology
That art has put to rest,
And by a sacred discipline
Give breath back to the past.
How, for example, shall I read
The expression on my face
Among that company of men
In that unlikely place? (113-14)

The dichotomy *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (an obvious allusion to Goethe) is a difficult play on words—or even concepts—to translate: “Wahrheit” is best understood as “truth,” while “Dichtung” can be interpreted as either “fiction” or “poetry.” Beginning at this crossroads of ideas, Hecht navigates through two others—inaction versus movement and life versus death. He cites W.H. Auden, calling us “the inconstant ones,” evoking the connection that Auden makes, in his poem “In Praise of Limestone,” between the body, nature, and perpetual change. How can “such fixture,” that is, static artistic objects, “speak to us?”

Alluding again to Goethe’s dichotomy, Hecht’s immediate answer is to recognize the need for a “Faust” to animate representation. According to legend, Faust was an astrologer or alchemist—ancient disciplines whose mastery requires extensive study. Nevertheless, perpetually shrouded as these fields are in the mystical and unexplainable, they are not easily reduced to a text. Similarly, the ability to give life to art always demands something beyond study: an ineffability, a metaphysical translation to stir the “homunculus,” to “give breath back” to it. As we see, Hecht provides an incomplete solution. Although he recognizes the need for an animating Faust, he does not (and cannot) indicate exactly how one transcends the opposition between life and death.

For the anthropologist, psychologist, and cyberneticist Gregory Bateson, the concept of the most advanced level of learning encompasses the comprehension of closed contextual systems of understanding that human beings construct—paradigms—and how they relate to each other. At this level, which he calls Learning III, we learn to actively analyze and negotiate paradigmatic borders so that our thoughts and ideas are never completely beholden to them. Thus,

the barriers between two ways of thinking, or even between two spheres, can shift, become permeable, or completely open up. When a poet, author, or any other type of artist attains this degree of illumination, he can create works that reflect this, that utilize conceptual oppositions—like life and death—to carry the reader (or admirer of the object) to an encounter with other paradigms. It is at the nexus of these artistic crossroads that the transcendence Hecht seeks in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is realized. The Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) and the Brazilian writer João Guimarães Rosa (1908-1967) understood this concept. They recognized that people need paradigms to be able to coherently develop and critique ideas, but also appreciated their theoretical dangers.

Guimarães Rosa and Schoenberg may at first seem like an unlikely pair. Yet both, finding themselves at crossroads of modernism in their respective times and fields, demonstrated mastery of Bateson's third level of learning, animating the "taxidermy" or "homunculus" of which Hecht speaks as they reworked the paradigms of their surroundings. Both became an animating Faust, comprehending the boundaries of their art and actively influencing them. In this article, we will explore Schoenberg's journey to the twelve-tone method as well as Guimarães Rosa's transrealism in their respective contexts, culminating in a comparison of the latter's novel *Grande sertão: veredas* with the former's opera *Moses und Aron*. As we analyze the innovative aesthetics in the fiction of the one and the music of the other, in order to see how Learning III manifests itself in their ability to surpass the confines of the national / artistic paradigm of their respective periods, we will better understand how both were able to traverse dichotomies and transport their reader / listener to the unknowable third place, known to Guimarães Rosa as the "third bank of the river."

II. Bateson's Three Levels of Learning

Before proceeding with our analysis, a better understanding of Gregory Bateson's three¹ levels of learning is fundamental. In his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, he outlines his theory thus:

Learning I — learning to work within a paradigm—that is, behaviorism or classical conditioning. The quintessential example is that of Pavlov's dog, and can include cases of instrumental reward or avoidance and rote learning in

repeatable contexts, which the organism in question must be able to equate or differentiate (287-92).

Learning II — the ability to experience a paradigm shift. Someone who has reached this level will, in unfamiliar circumstances, “engage in trial-and-error behavior in order to make the situation provide positive reinforcement” (300). In Pavlovian terms, having learned that the buzzer accompanies a food reward in another situation, one would seek out, provoke, or invent a contextual equivalent.

Learning III — Some of the possible indications of Learning III include forming Learning II habits more readily, consciously altering habits acquired therefrom, and even “learning to limit or direct [one’s] Learning II” (303). Instead of just moving between paradigms, this involves playing with their limits, stretching them, expanding them, blurring them. Such behavior often confuses those more entrenched within paradigmatic borders. For this reason, “Learning III is likely to be difficult and even rare in human beings. Expectably, it will also be difficult [...] to imagine or describe this process” (301). Nevertheless, it is thought to occur now and again “[...in] sequences in which there is a profound reorganization” (301).

III. Schoenberg, Tonality, and the Twelve-Tone Method

Both Arnold Schoenberg and João Guimarães Rosa faced questions about the importance and influence of paradigms in the development of art as they rode the modernist wave in their respective countries just before it broke across the bow of an authoritarian regime. A painter, theorist, and important Jewish intellectual (though he was technically Lutheran from 1898 to 1933), Schoenberg taught composition at the Prussian Academy of the Arts in Berlin until the rise of Hitler. Mere days after the burning of the Reichstag, the President of the Academy made the announcement that “the Führer had resolved to ‘break the Jewish stranglehold on Western music’” (MacDonald 71). Fully comprehending the ramifications of the new regime’s cultural trajectory, Schoenberg was one of the first to understand that there was little point in remaining in Germany under Nazi rule and wasted no time in immigrating to America (Brand xiii). Following a short stint teaching composition in Boston and New York,

he rebuffed offers from Julliard — due to concerns that another winter in the Northeast would be disastrous to his health — and settled in California, where he was appointed professor at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1935 (MacDonald 75-76).

A largely self-taught musician², Schoenberg increasingly felt that he had taken the extended tonality³—or, romantic chromaticism—of composers like Mahler, Wagner, and Strauss as far as he could, steadily ushering himself into a period of experimentation with atonality. As Ethan Haimo remarked, “Schoenberg did not abandon all aspects of tonality between one composition and the next. Rather, there was an extended period in which the syntax and idioms characteristic of tonal music gradually disappeared and nontonal procedures began to take their place” (72). The overwhelming number of possibilities presented by *free* atonality is often difficult for an artist to deal with; and, consequently, many of Schoenberg’s works from this time are somewhat short. Among other things, he discovered first-hand that systems are impossible to avoid; for, without parameters of some kind, it was difficult to make atonal language viable for extended intervals of time without it collapsing on itself. For example, even *Pierrot lunaire*, certainly his most famous piece from this period (remembered for its stunning use of *Sprechstimme*), is still based on structured poetry, follows a circular, static organization, boasts several levels of numerical framework, and incorporates the Western art music tradition of developing variation in the palettes of timbre and color produced. Schoenberg himself admitted as much, and a “comparison of [his] music from before and after his decision to forgo the use of key supports his assertion that atonality was not a revolutionary stylistic change” (Simms 139).

As time went on, Schoenberg became increasingly frustrated with this “free” language; so, he took some time off from composing itself—he produced almost no new music for about ten years—while he contemplated theory and attempted to develop a way of making atonal language a more fruitful medium. In 1922, he inaugurated his solution, the twelve-tone system, commonly referred to as serialism.⁴ Despite the fact that Schoenberg himself called it a “method for composing,” composer and Schoenberg scholar Allen Shawn argues that this is a misnomer, pointing out that it is actually something more

specific: “a method for establishing the tonal [in the generic sense] world of a specific piece out of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale” (198). In other words, it is definitely *not*, as it is sometimes perceived to be, an artificial, mechanical way of generating music. Rather, it is a method for establishing varied, unique tonal paradigms in which to practice the art of composition.

Schoenberg had already been working with a language of intervals independent of conventional tonality for years. Unlike the traditional conception of a tone—such as B-flat, for example—which is more absolute, an interval only exists in the relationship between two opposing tones. The twelve-tone method is essentially a way of organizing a series of intervals through the relationships formed in a sequence of twelve⁵ unique tones called a row (later a series). Schoenberg discovered that when he used such a row as a motivic point of departure, “the ear would hear any other version of the same succession of the *intervals* created by these tones as belonging to the same tonal family” (199). These “other versions” include reversing the row’s pitch, time (called *inversion* and *retrograde*, respectively), or both (*retrograde inversion*). The original plus its three derivations can all be transposed to begin on all twelve tones of the chromatic scale, resulting in a twelve-by-twelve matrix of forty-eight variations of the “theme” which represents the network of relationships between the tones that gives each work a unique, shifting, contingent center, as opposed to the more static diatonic scales of traditional tonality. This matrix—different for each piece of music—provides something of a motivic palette for the process of composition.

With respect to his first published twelve-tone piece, *Suite für Klavier*, “professionals and non-professionals alike have [long] argued the musical validity, the artistic propriety, [and] the historical justification of Schoenberg’s contribution to how we think about music,” a debate that is not yet entirely settled (Thomson ix). Allen Shawn laments how polemicized the composer’s work has become, conceding that “Schoenberg’s reputation as a somehow repellent figure, associated with maddeningly complex, ugly, or calculated music has never truly been dispelled,” before going on to suggest that his music “is no more ‘difficult’ than the work of other early-twentieth-century modernists such as Kandinsky, Eliot, Kafka, or Joyce, for whom even the general public has a feeling of affection, of receptivity, of the kind of trust that one affords great art

in which there is much that one simply doesn't grasp—at first or perhaps even ever”—a description that could easily be extended to Guimarães Rosa as well (xvi, xix). As Shawn notes, a piece's degree of accessibility does not necessarily gauge its musicality or artistic value. Leonard Bernstein paid Schoenberg a famous backhanded compliment by claiming that his Austrian predecessor was “such a musician” that he could coax music even out of the twelve-tone method, of which he himself was not a proponent (229). The imagination, freshness, virtuosity, and impact of Schoenberg's work still speak for themselves, regardless of one's opinion of his methods.

Yet, though Schoenberg may have (repeatedly) reshaped the foundations of harmony and melody, the twelve-tone method owes more to convention than most people realize. When asked to comment on jazz's influence on German art music, the composer replied: “The occasional use of several themes and the addition of foreign color to several phrases has never changed the essential: the body of ideas and the technique of its presentation” (290). In many ways, he could have said the same for the twelve-tone method—of which the “technique and presentation” was not much altered. For example, in 1941 he affirmed that the “first creative thought” of a twelve-tone piece was the motive that generated the base row, which in turn was developed (Simms 62). Just as he could not wholly give up certain traditional structures during his free atonal phase, he still (deliberately) composed and elaborated motivic frameworks in an almost old-fashioned style, even after 1922.

Of course, Schoenberg's ingenuity in creating and manipulating motivic and harmonic ideas blinded his contemporary critics to the surprising conservatism of some of his larger organizational choices. In 1949, the painter Oskar Kokoschka perfectly described the state of Schoenberg's career (possibly due to parallels with his own):

Although Schoenberg's work was heralded and reviled during the first quarter of this century as the embodiment of radical modernism, from the vantage point of the last quarter of this century he may turn out to have been [...] the last great exponent of a late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century tradition of music and music making. [...] In the name of Schoenberg's

innovations a modernism entirely foreign to Schoenberg's own work had come into being during the 1940s. (Botstein 3)

The obvious irony was that Schoenberg's music revealed "that the Viennese rhetoric of defense on behalf of hallowed cultural values masked a deterioration of the very values conservatives claimed needed protection from an arrogant new generation of artists" (4). In Schoenberg's own words, "One should never forget that what one learns in school about history is the truth only insofar as it does not interfere with the political, philosophical, moral or other beliefs of those in whose interest the facts are told, colored or arranged. The same holds true for the history of music" (qtd. in Shawn 221). According to Leon Botstein, "Schoenberg pointed out to the powerful—affluent Viennese middle-class music lovers and amateurs—that they were naked, as it were, when they paraded around defending classical notions of beauty and refinement;" moreover, "Schoenberg's music explicitly asserted a traditional ideal of musical discourse that exceeded the capacities of the audience" (4). The "radically modern" was only a reincarnation of the past.

IV. João Guimarães Rosa and the Brazilian Paradigm of JK

Malcolm MacDonald has observed, "It used to be said that [Schoenberg] was the only great composer who was more talked about than played" (xii). Unfortunately, one might make an analogous statement about João Guimarães Rosa, despite the indelible mark he has left on the literature and national consciousness of Brazil. Known for his rich, dense prose, permeated by linguistic experimentation (semi-baroque in its complexity), a certain mysticism, and, above all, a fascination with the *sertão*, traditional literary categories are not viable in the attempt to describe his genius. Throughout the years critics have celebrated and lamented the immense difficulty of distilling the essence of his work in the hundreds of pages of a large volume, not to mention in a few short paragraphs. Jon S. Vincent depicts the challenge that critics face thus:

[Guimarães Rosa's work] is a performance replete with contradictions and logical inconsistencies: certain canons of form are violated and other, older

ones are enshrined in their place, only to be themselves replaced in the next volume; time and space gratuitously expand and contract; precision of expression produces ambiguity of purpose; truths keep emerging from the lies. Worse, it is all done in a nonexistent, anti-grammatical style, which keeps forcing the reader to do more than his share of work. [...] If reading these books is often perplexing, writing about them is even more so [...]. (156-57)

Despite all this, Vincent confesses to nurturing an evangelical zeal for Guimarães Rosa's unique and captivating books. Mary Daniel adds that they constitute a "rompimento das barreiras formalistas da tradição estilística," shaking up the literary paradigm of his time much like Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, and their colleagues (not to mention Schoenberg in Vienna) did in the twenties (2). Antonio Candido, writing about the "extraordinária obra-prima *Grande sertão: veredas*," says that, between its covers, "há de tudo para quem souber ler, e nela tudo é forte, belo, impecavelmente realizado," a comment that could very well refer to the author's fiction in its totality (294).

During Guimarães Rosa's most productive years, the national experience of the 1950s and 60s was defined by the heavy industrialization of Juscelino Kubitschek. JK's five-year term as president from 1956-1961 is often characterized as the Brazilian golden age of the twentieth century. A master of systematic organization, he shook off the political memory of the populist Getúlio Vargas with his optimistic, progressive promise of fifty years of progress in only five. He transformed the country with his *desenvolvimentismo*—development at any cost—improving the transportation infrastructure, jump-starting the domestic automobile industry, generating an alphabet-soup of abbreviations for federal entities, and, above all, undertaking the construction of the new federal capital, Brasília, aiming to elevate Brazil to the modern Western ideal.

Consequently, as artists of the period attempted to conceive anew their national literary voice, their endeavors to animate Hecht's "wan homunculus" were carried to term in an industrial womb. For example, Haroldo de Campos, in his manifesto on concrete poetry, "Contexto de uma vanguarda," quotes the father of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener—"Viver efetivamente é viver com a informação adequada"—to substantiate his claim that "só é contemporâneo o

homem que se situa no âmbito de um sistema informativo proporcionado ao tempo em que vive” (151). In other words, an authentically modern man must live in a modern paradigm. This, Campos continues, serves as an incubator for “a produção e o consumo de uma arte verdadeiramente contemporânea” (151). His brother, Augusto, maintained that the fundamental theme of concrete poetry was synchronizing language with technology from the modern world (Santaella 29). So, it comes as no surprise that they ideologically associated themselves and their movement with the construction of Brasília—itself often considered the first concrete poem. Haroldo, in his aforementioned manifesto, cites “a arte atualíssima de Niemeyer,” the architect of Brasília’s most iconic structures, as an important hallmark of modernity, and goes on to portray the construction of the city as the supreme indication of Brazil’s burgeoning importance as a bastion of true contemporary art and architecture (151).

Guimarães Rosa, a man of exceptional talents, diplomat and doctor by profession, was as familiar with the continuing development of the country as the *concretistas*. However, unlike them, depictions of modernity almost never appear in his work. Such being the case, the exceptions, the very few times that the writer permits progress and technology any space in his writing, are of great interest. The most important of these is doubtless the short story “As margens da alegria” from *Primeiras estórias* (1962). Its mere five pages present an implicit manifesto concerning the value of aggressive industrialization to the country and analyze the impact of the constant tension of this crossroads in the Brazilian soul. The story parallels the construction of Brasília, although it is never mentioned by name, as a boy accompanies his aunt and uncle on a visit to the future site of the new city. The uncle appears to be one of the chief engineers responsible for the overall project, and he wants his nephew to see the city that will so affect the destiny of his generation.

Taking a plane to the uninhabited central plateau is already, to some extent, arriving at Brasília—a large airplane⁶ that men have placed in the middle of nowhere. Like the ideal of the modern city, an airplane is a complex of closed systems, efficient and complicated. It is a safe environment that attempts to distract the boy with artificial entertainment: candy, gum, magazines, etc. “E as coisas vinham docemente de repente; seguindo harmonia prévia, benfazeja,

em movimentos concordantes: as satisfações antes da consciência das necessidades” (3). Nevertheless, the boy leaves everything piled up on his lap. Sitting by the window, he is much more interested in the world on the other side of the glass. Why trace the route of the plane on the map that his uncle and aunt have given him when he can simply look out the window to see the corresponding reality? It is the feeling of the vast world at his feet that captivates him the most: “Assim um crescer e desconter-se—certo como o ato de respirar—o de fugir para o espaço em branco” (3). From his perspective, he views the world in “visão cartográfica.” Yet, instead of seeing political borders on the landscape, he contemplates the ground “repartido de roças e campos,” a stark contrast with the metropolis that will soon arise. This constitutes the first margin of the story, the interstice between urban civilization and nature. “O menino tinha tudo de uma vez, e nada, ante a mente,” everything, in the sense of the material objects in his lap, and nothing, since he remains separated from the real world, encircled in the unnatural space of the plane by the metal walls of the fuselage.

His uncle’s house is also on a margin: the dividing line between the city, which is still in the initial stages of construction, and the “semi-ermo”; all around there is a “breve clareira, das árvores que não podem entrar dentro de casa” (4). In this intermediate range, the boy encounters a vain and colorful turkey. He finds this small spectacle, representing the exuberance of nature, more interesting than any of the technological wonders of the airplane. However, as is to be expected, the joy the turkey provides him with is fleeting. He is soon called to go sightseeing; and, when he returns the turkey is already dead, sacrificed to anticipate his uncle’s hunger.

At some level, the turkey functions as the Jungian *symbol* of the story. According to Carl G. Jung (1875-1961), the father of analytical psychology, the symbol is an abstract expression of something unknown that cannot be rationally explained. “Symbolic thinking is nonlinear, right-brain-oriented; it is complimentary to logical, left-brained thinking” (Sugg 424). It is the suggestion of an intangible or unsayable desire or ideal. It is revealed through metaphors and captivating images that are impossible to articulate verbally. The symbol attracts two opposing elements to a confrontation that results in what Jung calls the *transcendent function*, a third, reconciliatory entity, united and

whole, a perspective capable of harmonizing the tension and mediating the influences of both the conscious and the unconscious. Thus the turkey constitutes the central axis of the story. A bird (an organism) that does not fly (at least, not too well) confronts the great city, an airplane (an industrial, artificial bird) that does not fly, in disputed territory. They are opposite concepts meeting at the point of impact. On this margin between two forces, man and the land (a sort of Euclidean crossroads), a struggle begins.

Nevertheless, the transcendent function is not fully realized. There is no reconciliation; the turkey is killed, the conscious invades the unconscious, the airplane triumphs. And it continues massacring everything else, irretrievably destroying the balance between the two worlds. Soon thereafter, a tree—a *buriti*, a symbol of the miracle of life in the severe climate of the *sertão*—is cut down by the blade of a bulldozer. There had been no need, it was simply a demonstration of force. The boy feels its loss: “Trapeara tão bela. Sem nem se poder apanhar com os olhos o acerto—o inaudito choque—o pulso da pancada” (6-7).

The forest becomes hostile in the face of these transgressions against its natural harmony. The others are caught in their progress-minded paradigm—not unlike the concrete poets—while the boy, who still retains the innocence of youth, remains capable of perceiving what is really going on. He becomes depressed and mourns nature’s defeat, even if he cannot articulate the reason. Another fleeting moment of joy appears when he sees the first firefly of the evening (again, out in the margin); however, this too is soon snuffed out, even more quickly than the turkey. Modernity ends up bulldozing the moment of transcendence.

V. Synthesis: Learning III, *Grande sertão: veredas*, and *Moses und Aron*

Antonio Candido notes that, like “As margens da alegria,” *Grande sertão: veredas*, published in 1956, also depends on the same three-pronged crossroads of Euclides da Cunha’s *Os sertões* (295). It establishes the superstructure that encompasses all its other oppositions in a labyrinthine complex of paradigms in flux. In the words of its protagonist, Riobaldo, the book’s essence could be summarized thus: “É, e não é. O senhor ache e não ache. Tudo é e não é...” (27). Among other things, the narration travels through territory of good vs. evil, god vs. the

devil, masculine vs. feminine, love vs. pain, truth vs. lies, and so forth in an infinite list, all revolving around another tripartite symbol composed of Diadorim, the devil, and the *sertão*. Schoenberg's unfinished opera, *Moses und Aron*, set to his own libretto and composed between 1930 and 1932, runs a similar gamut of dichotomies, including god and the golden calf, the oracle Moses and his brother / spokesman Aaron (his retrograde), faith vs. knowledge, and the tension between the inexpressibility of communion with god and how it is orally transmitted. Like the failure of Jung's transcendent function in "As margens da alegria," these two works share an irresolvable aesthetic that exemplifies Gregory Bateson's Learning III, preparing the way for the "breath" of life referred to in Anthony Hecht's poem.

Willi Bolle describes the conflicts in *Grande sertão: veredas* with the appropriately musical term "counterpoint" (385), while José Carlos Garbuglio calls this element of Guimarães Rosa's narrative style "bipolar" (21). Suzi Frankl Sperber goes so far as to apply Garbuglio's description to the entire book. She explains that this "não implica uma ambiguidade, nem uma dialética [...] porém uma unidade bi-polar. Devemos 'achar e não achar' ao mesmo tempo. Porque não apenas as noções expostas são e não são, senão 'tudo é e não é'" (110). This idea of the bipolar whole manifests itself in the novel's ethics, religious philosophy, and narrative point of view. It brings together epic characteristics such as the quest, the hero's journey, and the warrior princess of Boiardo, Ariosto, or Tasso with folklore and provincialism, echoing the oft-overlooked conservatism of Schoenberg's work. The author creates a unique language like Joyce or Stein, a linguistic experimentation based on the typical way of speaking in the *sertão*, but literarily elaborated, introducing a lyrical voice into the prose. It anticipates the fusion of high culture (the epic, the novel, etc.) with so-called low culture (*jagunços*, orality, traditional *cantigas*, etc.) of the *tropicalistas* and post-modernists. All of this prompts Wilson Martins to dare to declare the novel "a obra total":

[...] uma leitura atenta [...] demonstra que *Grande Sertão: Veredas* é um romance de extraordinária estrutura, construído com mão de mestre, evocando fundos problemas espirituais, situado intelectualmente na encruzilhada das grandes correntes da ficção, desde a Idade Média aos nossos dias, e tendo criado, no plano das figuras humanas, um tipo literário, que é,

como se sabe, a ambição suprema e a finalidade mesma de toda a prosa de ficção. O romance de Guimarães Rosa, sendo igualmente original e inventivo na língua, no estilo, no conteúdo e na configuração dos personagens, não está longe, portanto, do que se poderia denominar a *obra total*, quaisquer que sejam, ao nível do pormenor, as reservas que se lhe possam opor. [...É a] primeira obra verdadeiramente revolucionária a surgir na prosa artística brasileira depois do Modernismo. (13)

As we have already established, Schoenberg's musical language is every bit as complex, innovative, and elaborate as Guimarães Rosa's, not to mention grounded in a similar crossroads of tradition and innovation. It is in this tongue that Moses sings in *Moses und Aron*,⁷ though only once (and only one tone row). Like Schoenberg, he hears a call in the wilderness and must offer his people not what they most want (the golden calf / a traditionally catchy tune), but "the deepest and truest thing he has to give" (Shawn 231). This "deepest and truest thing" permeates Schoenberg's sacred works, reflecting Jewish ideas about the unknowable divine and the impossibility of representing it. God cannot be defined in the absolute, yet inhabits the complex of shifting connections between god, man, and creation mirrored in the music's own compositional matrix. This is especially true of *Moses und Aron*, which, not unlike the infinite oppositions in *Grande sertão: veredas*, challenges one's sense of absolute reference or fixation with its relationship of opposites and permutations that spring from tone-row motives.

Guimarães Rosa's *sertão* is the musical motive around which his novel is constructed, bridging a complex of inversions, retrogrades, and retrograde inversions in the counterpoint that Willi Bolle identifies. Klára Móricz, speaking of the idea of god in *Moses und Aron* (which could just as adequately refer to Guimarães Rosa's *sertão*) further explains:

The 'idea' is also an "instantaneous creative vision," an inspiration or thought that, like Schoenberg's God in *Moses und Aron*, is indescribable in words: it is, as the composer put it in 1931, the 'unnameable sense of sounding and moving space, of a form with characteristic relationships; of moving masses whose shape is unnameable and not amenable to comparison' (233-34).

This idea, the Jungian symbol, perhaps, struggles to reach the reader / listener through several levels of opposition or permutation, god—Moses—Aron—music / *sertão*—Riobaldo—interlocutor—text, and is left ultimately unnameable.

Guimarães Rosa plays with so many borders and paradigms that, as Paulo Rónai says, “Any attempt to explain [his work] ends, however unwillingly, by filling in the outline of forms whose magic lies in the blurring of their contours, for it gives mathematical expression to a whole in which there are no perfect equations” (qtd. in Shelby xi). Jon S. Vincent agrees: “[...] precision is difficult to extract from discussions of works of intentional fluidity” (157). All this can be attributed to the fact that Guimarães Rosa is, as Tristão de Ataíde affirms, “um criador, isto é, um iniciador de recursos novos, um desbravador de caminhos. [...] Há sempre um *mistério* que cerca a paisagem, as figuras, os atos e as palavras do narrador. É uma aura transrealista, que refoge a qualquer limitação dos sentidos” (142-43). Similarly, in Arnold Schoenberg’s music, “internal conflict is not resolved” in the perfect authentic cadence of tonality; instead, “closure in ‘perfection’ instead of being the only possibility becomes an impossibility” (Cherlin 2). It is telling that Schoenberg never finished *Moses und Aron*, leaving the libretto of the third act unscored, a culmination of “the inability of Moses to express the pure idea of God in music” (Móricz 235-36). To use tonal terminology, the second act cannot resolve to an absolute “tonic” in the third.

Instead of merely alternating between paradigms, a hallmark of Learning II, Arnold Schoenberg and João Guimarães Rosa show a stunning ability to play with their limits, expand them, obscure them, and contain them at will. They reach into the stratosphere of Learning III, effectuating change from the inside out. Shifting the long-standing tradition of tonality, Schoenberg did not necessarily create a new paradigm; rather, he cultivated a better understanding of it than his contemporaries by jumping in and out of it, playing around with its constricts, and then imposing himself on its limitations. Though his twelve-tone method’s prominence in praxis has waned over the decades, his horizon-expanding influence has not. Composers like John Cage, Harry Partch, and others continue to direct and actively negotiate the boundaries of Western art music, forever keeping Schoenberg’s memory at the forefront of a perpetual, self-renewing vanguard. Similarly,

Guimarães Rosa not only comprehended the literary paradigm of his time, he manipulated it. He traversed it from various different angles, unmade, reconfigured, and multiplied it. These two artists were masters of their Learning II, directing it as they saw fit and enacting the “profound reorganization” of which Bateson speaks. As Bateson advises us, like the Jungian symbol or the Jewish concept of the divine, this process is “difficult to imagine or describe” (301). Everyone must experience it for him or herself. Perhaps Riobaldo best captured it thus: “sertão é onde o pensamento da gente se forma mais forte [...]” (41). Antonio Candido was right, these works offer something of everything; and it is all sublime.

Part of what made Schoenberg so adamant about avoiding any traditional tonal references in his twelve-tone pieces was the fact that tonal expression carries aural obligations for what follows, for how things are to be resolved. Tonality not only represents a certain paradigm, but more precisely a paradigm about conveying resolution, culminating in perfection. This sense of non-resolution in Schoenberg’s twelve-tone method and in the work of João Guimarães Rosa is what transcends the resolved, static structure of the Discus Thrower in Anthony Hecht’s poem, granting movement to their creations. Like Hecht, they acknowledge the impossibility of mimesis; therefore, instead of trying to refer to an absolute, they animate their art through the openness of shifting interconnectivity. This struggle to “embrace opposing influences,” according to Malcolm MacDonald, is “the essence of artistic creation—itself a highly paradoxical activity” (89). Like the animating Faust that Hecht describes (an irresistible Mephistophelean link to the subtitle of *Grande sertão: veredas*), Guimarães Rosa and Arnold Schoenberg give “breath” to art and return us “to the freshness of the world” (115). They create their own *imago*. In this way, they not only overcame the crossroads of their times; rather, for Brazilian literature, Western art music, and their admirers, they *became* crossroads, truly transcendent, animating symbols that “Winkle the likes of us / Out of a bleak [closed] geology.”

Notes

¹ Bateson also identifies a level 0 and 4, though they are not relevant to our current analysis.

² Schoenberg famously taught himself to play the cello by modifying a viola with zither strings and holding it between his knees, which Allen Shawn calls “a metaphor for Schoenberg’s life in music” (4). Furthermore, the fact that he was never a performing pianist, in many ways the physical incorporation of centuries of evolution in art music tradition, was likely one less tether for him to loosen or sever as he developed his more revolutionary ideas.

³ A full understanding of the implications of the word *tonal* is essential to comprehending Schoenberg’s innovations. A *tone* refers to what is commonly thought of as pitch, such as A, but is not differentiated by register—that is, there are several A’s on a piano keyboard, all of which are different pitches but still the same tone. “Tonal music” or *tonality* refers to the conventional theory and praxis of the Western music tradition, centered around diatonic keys and scales. However, tonal can also be used as an adjective simply meaning “relating to tone” in the generic sense. Hence, *atonal* or *nontonal* refer to music that rejects conventional tonal structures, not music that does not use tones. Thus the unique “tonal centers” to be explored in Schoenberg’s method refer to different ways of organizing the relationships between tones, which are nevertheless atonal from a theoretical perspective.

⁴ Though often casually used to refer specifically to the twelve-tone method, *serialism* is a more encompassing term denoting a composition based on a series of tones, the twelve-tone method being just one such possibility.

⁵ Procedurally, this entails using each of the twelve tones of the chromatic division of the octave one time in a row.

⁶ Lúcio Costa’s protestations that it was a butterfly notwithstanding

⁷ The second *a* in “Aaron” was omitted not just to avoid the title having thirteen letters, but also to ensure twelve.

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