

# A Hero's Life and Nietzschean Struggle in Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*

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## Abstract

Nietzsche influenced Strauss throughout the composer's mature career, from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Op. 30 (1896), which shares the same name as the treatise by Nietzsche, to *Eine Alpensinfonie*, Op. 64 (1911–15), which initially bore the title *Der Antichrist*, after Nietzsche's 1888 essay. Nietzsche, through Zarathustra, stresses the idea of the *Übermensch*, which proposes that the human occupies the stratum between the primal and the super-human. The *Übermensch* is not, however, the zenith for a man. The goal for man is rather his journey toward self-overcoming, his struggle within himself. In *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life, 1898), Strauss incorporates Nietzschean concepts without any direct references to Nietzsche. The designation of a man as a hero, the battle as an obstacle with which one struggles, the alternation between peace and war and the cycle of recurrence in this tone poem all reflect Nietzsche's ideas. This research considers the tone poem from a hermeneutical perspective and argues that Strauss's hero in *Ein Heldenleben* embodies qualities encompassing the true Nietzschean hero.

## Keywords

Richard Strauss – Nietzsche – *Ein Heldenleben*

## บทคัดย่อ

## ชีวิตวีรบุรุษและการต่อสู้ดิ้นรนในแบบนิทเชอในบทเพลง โอน์ เฮลเดนเลเบน ของริชาร์ด ชตราสส์

นิทเชอส่งอิทธิพลต่อชตราสส์ตลอดช่วงที่เขาเติบโตเต็มที่ในฐานะนักประพันธ์แล้ว ตั้งแต่เพลง อาลโซ ชปราก ซาราทุสตรา (ประพันธ์ปี พ.ศ. 2439) ที่มีชื่อเพลงเหมือนกับชื่อหนังสือของนิทเชอ ไปจนถึงเพลง โอน์ แอลป์เบนซินโฟนี (ประพันธ์ปี พ.ศ. 2454–2458) ซึ่งเดิมมีชื่อว่า แคร้ อานทิกิริสท์ ตามชื่อบทความของนิทเชอที่เขียนในปี พ.ศ. 2431 นิทเชอนำเสนอความคิดเรื่อง “ความเป็นยอดมนุษย์” ผ่านทางซาราทุสตรา ซึ่งเขาเสนอว่ามนุษย์อยู่ในช่วงขั้นระหว่างต้นกำเนิดของมนุษย์ที่มาจากลิงและยอดมนุษย์ อย่างไรก็ตาม การเป็นยอดมนุษย์ไม่ใช่เป้าหมายสูงสุดของมนุษย์ เป้าหมายของมนุษย์จริง ๆ แล้วคือการเดินทางไปสู่การเอาชนะใจตัวเอง เป็นการดิ้นรนภายในตัวเราเอง ในเพลง โอน์ เฮลเดนเลเบน (ชีวิตของวีรบุรุษ, ประพันธ์ปี พ.ศ. 2441) ชตราสส์รวมแนวคิดของนิทเชอเข้าไว้ด้วยกันแม้ว่าเขาไม่ได้อ้างถึงนิทเชอโดยตรง การเปรียบเทียบคนหนึ่งตั้งวีรบุรุษสามารถตั้งอุปสรรคที่เราต้องดิ้นรนผ่านพ้นไป การสลัดกันระหว่างสันติสุขและสงคราม และวงจรของเหตุการณ์ที่วนกลับมาอย่างไม่สิ้นสุด ทั้งหมดนี้สะท้อนถึงความคิดของนิทเชอ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มองบทเพลงนี้ผ่านศาสตร์ของการตีความ และเสนอพร้อมเหตุผลว่า วีรบุรุษในบทเพลงนี้ของชตราสส์มีคุณลักษณะดังเช่นวีรบุรุษในแบบของนิทเชออย่างแท้จริง

## 1 Introduction

Although some argue that Richard Strauss's inspirations for his compositions are loosely tied with Nietzschean concepts, even in a work that shares a Nietzschean title like *Also sprach Zarathustra*,<sup>1</sup> some studies claim a closer connection than we previously thought or more than Strauss revealed to the public. Newman (1908: 71), the English music critic and Strauss's contemporary, sees that

- 1 Hurwitz (2014: 63–64) dismisses Nietzschean philosophy in Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. He writes “the basic idea behind the work has little uniquely to do with Nietzsche.” This may be a result of Strauss's character, as he did not want to reveal much about his thoughts, as well as the subtitle of the work, which Strauss called “freely after Nietzsche.” As Kennedy (1999: 111) writes “He liked people to think he was non-intellectual,” but Kennedy agrees that “Strauss was incontrovertibly an intellectual by any standard of measurement.” Krause (1964: 241–42) is another author who shares Hurwitz's thinking that the tone poem is less concerned with Nietzsche's philosophy. It is obvious that Krause lacks many sources for Strauss that are more intimate. Krause refers only to the perceptions of Strauss's contemporaries about the work and the information provided to the audience during its first performance. Louis (1992: 308) wrote about *Zarathustra* that “the composer was misled by the fashion of the times to allow himself to be inspired by a spirit with whom he had nothing in common and for whom he had not the slightest *emotional* comprehension.” Louis did not mean that Strauss did not understand Nietzsche but he commented on the discrepancy between the Nietzschean program and the music. He put Strauss's musical interpretation of Nietzsche as “a strange misunderstanding.”

the composer “is striving to make music perform a purely intellectual task” in *Zarathustra*, although he comments that “it is quite unfitted.” Newman (1908: 72n) also analyzes the work and refers to information issued in Germany that is believed to have come from Strauss himself. Ashley (1999: 64) strongly believes that the tone poem *Zarathustra* is “rooted in the philosophy.” He refers to an interview in which Strauss explained both the program and the method of composition, which shows a strong relation to Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*. Gilliam (1999: 63) sees the “growing sense of irony” in Strauss’s programs for his music stemming from “his increasing preoccupation with Nietzsche.” Kennedy (1999: 111) argues that Strauss explored Nietzsche during the composition of *Guntram* (1893) and that this exploration led the composer to alter the third act of the opera. Although Kennedy (1999: 112) doubts whether the tone poem *Zarathustra* is philosophical, as Strauss himself said at the first Berlin performance that “he had not intended to write philosophical music” but had intended a “homage to the genius of Nietzsche,” Kennedy suggests that the most Nietzschean of Strauss’s works is *Eine Alpensinfonie*. Youmans (2005: 83–113) contributes an entire chapter to “Strauss’s Nietzsche,” in which he compares Strauss’s diary with passages that Strauss marked in his own copy of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*. In this copy, Strauss also marked page references to his musical score autograph of *Zarathustra*. This work of Youmans<sup>2</sup> urges a serious relationship to Nietzsche in Strauss’s music. Youmans (2004: 309–42) also includes other tone poems of Strauss in this article, seeing Nietzschean influence in their programmatic ideas. Hepokoski (2010: 78–104) devotes one section to “The Conversion to Nietzscheanism” within his essay on Strauss’s second cycle of tone poems covering from 1894 to 1898.<sup>3</sup> Hepokoski (2010: 79) writes, “The second tone-poem cycle provided a series of endorsements of a Nietzsche-fueled conception of music.” The tone poems of this period are viewed as Nietzsche-inspired, regardless of whether their programmatic ideas came directly from Nietzsche.

As we can see, Nietzschean influence is conspicuous in Strauss’s compositions and this current work proposes, from a hermeneutical perspective,

2 It was initially published one year earlier as a journal article titled “The Role of Nietzsche in Richard Strauss’s Artistic Development” in *The Journal of Musicology* 21, no. 3 (2004): 309–42.

3 In Hepokoski’s essay, he includes four tone poems: *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (1894–95), *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896), *Don Quixote* (1897), and *Ein Heldenleben* (1897–98). Hepokoski regards *Symphonia domestica* (1902–3) and *Eine Alpensinfonie* (1915) as an extension of the cycle but does not include these late tone poems in his essay.

that the heroic tone poem *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life), composed in 1898, although without direct reference to Nietzsche, falls within the Nietzschean context in which the hero fights against his adversaries—the opposition between the individual and the outer world. The highly dissonant passages of the tone poem evoke the hero's battle, which this research proposes is a Nietzschean struggle through everyday encounters. The heroism of the tone poem centers on our all-too-human life, as opposed to the transcendental religiosity of the late Romantic period.

### 1.1 *Strauss's Turn toward Nietzsche*

The Jew Mahler could still find elevation in Christianity.

The hero Richard Wagner came back to it as an old man through the influence of Schopenhauer.

It is absolutely clear to me that the German nation can only attain new vigour by freeing itself from Christianity...<sup>4</sup> (Strauss 1911, quoted in Blaukopf and Jephcott 1984: 153)

This entry in Strauss's diary clearly shows his notions regarding freedom and how it had been leashed by Christianity. With limitation—in life and with other aspects imposed by Christianity—fortitude, strength and tenacity cannot be fully attained. To remove the limitation, Strauss exerted himself using the philosophy of Nietzsche, whose ideas deconstruct this belief.

Strauss's inclination toward the philosophy of Nietzsche was established by the 1890s. His influential friend, Arthur Seidl (1863–1928), who studied philosophy and became a friend of the composer in the early 1880s (Youmans 2005: 88), made a remark that struck the composer. On Strauss's *Guntram*, Seidl (1902: 154, quoted in Kristiansen 2000: 92) commented that the composer “has not yet achieved full emancipation from the worn-out ideal of the ‘redemption opera,’ but rather has gotten stuck with one foot, as it were, in the Schopenhauerism as such.”<sup>5</sup> Seidl (1902: 521, quoted in Kristiansen 2000: 92–93) suggested to many Wagnerian composers that they not be bound in pessimism and the Christianity of “the Romantic Schopenhauer” but that they pursue “Nietzsche's modern artishood and anti-Christianity.” Given the similarity of these remarks with the passage from Strauss's 1911 diary, Strauss surely obtained this

4 Strauss's entry in his diary in May 1911, after Mahler passed away on 18 May 1911.

5 The English translation is by Kristiansen, from the original writing in German by Seidl.

notion from his friend Seidl. Strauss and Seidl had discussed Nietzsche by 1894 (Youmans 2005: 90). However, Seidl did not state which books of Nietzsche they discussed—the only evidence is Strauss's own declaration that he had read *Beyond Good and Evil* no later than April 1893 and Seidl in 1896 stating that Strauss had talked about *Human, All Too Human* as the main subject of his tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Youmans 2005: 90).

Although Seidl first became aware of Strauss's interest in Nietzsche in 1893 (Youmans 2005: 91), Strauss's intense study of philosophy began in 1892 during a winter spent in Greece and Egypt, where he was away from conducting work (Gilliam 1999: 56). His diaries during his travels show that he had read Wagner, Plato, Sophocles, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche (Gilliam 1999: 56–57).<sup>6</sup> This was his turning point; after he had finished the first two acts of *Guntram* and moved on to compose the third act, he rewrote the text (Ashley 1999: 56) of this act to agree with his new philosophical view, which he observed fitted perfectly with Nietzschean concepts. His own written statement left behind at his death confirms this: "While I was in Egypt<sup>7</sup> I became acquainted with the works of Nietzsche, whose polemic against the Christian religion seemed to come to me straight from the heart. Ever since my fifteenth year I had had an unconscious antipathy toward that religion, which frees its followers (through confession) from responsibility for their actions, and I now found this antipathy strengthened and given solid foundations" (quoted in Krause 1964: 45). Nietzsche's philosophy served as a platform for him not only to abandon Schopenhauerian concepts, of which he was skeptical, but also to strengthen his anti-metaphysical thoughts.

### 1.2 *Anti-Metaphysics, the Desacralization of Music*

Strauss's anti-metaphysics replicates that of Nietzsche. Referring to the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century, of which one was the publication of Darwin's famous *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Nietzsche totally refutes the miraculous origin of humans. He reasoned in *Human, All Too Human* (1878) that it was easy to believe in the metaphysical world: this belief assures a place for Man and his salvation (Nietzsche 1996: 23–24). He then proposed "privation and renunciation" as the means for Man to free himself to a higher state, as with knowledge, Man can soar toward his freedom (Nietzsche 1996: 30).

6 Gilliam also suggests that he probably read Max Stirner.

7 According to Gilliam and Youmans (in Grove Music Online), Strauss returned to Weimar in the autumn of 1893. Thus, his travels to Greece and Egypt were between late 1892 and the autumn of 1893.

Strauss likewise turned his attention toward anti-metaphysics. His plans for the tone poems composed after 1894 evince a desire to capture more physical, everyday experience as opposed to metaphysical power in the music to serve for apotheosis. Hepokoski (quoted in Youmans 2005: 5) calls this the “desacralization of music.” In *Ein Heldenleben*, Strauss embedded the notion of struggle and the battle against adversaries. The similar Nietzschean idea of struggle is reflected in *Symphonia domestica* (Domestic Symphony), op. 53 (1902–3), which the program depicts as reflecting his domestic life and being imbued with his fight against difficulty in his married life. The works showing direct influences, *Zarathustra* and *Eine Alpensinfonie*, are anti-religious. In *Zarathustra*, Strauss quotes the plainchants *Credo in unum Deum* (I believe in one God) and the *Magnificat*, seemingly treating them with derision. The *Credo*, representing religious belief, is placed in the *Von den Hinterweltlern* (Backworldsmen) section. The *Credo* captures Strauss’s and Nietzsche’s antagonism toward belief in a world created by man. God is “man-made” and the world, unless one is seeking a better place, is all “man-made.” The term “backworldsmen,” according to Del Mar (2009: 136), suggests “a primitive state of spiritual development.” Believing in this fictional world assumes a primitive form of intellect, similar to the “backworldsmen” to whom Zarathustra refers. The plainchant the *Magnificat*, played on the organ, is placed in the *Von der grossen Sehnsucht* (The Great Longing) section. This placement appears to be deliberate when considering the chant’s text and Zarathustra’s statement in the chapter *Von der grossen Sehnsucht*. The chant asserts God’s promise of mercy, whereas Zarathustra questions this kindness. The quotation below is taken from the chapter, translated into English by Kaufmann (1954: 335):

O my soul, I gave you all, and I have emptied all my hands to you; and now—now you say to me, smiling and full of melancholy, “Which of us has to be thankful? Should not the giver be thankful that the receiver received? Is not giving a need? Is not receiving mercy?”

The questions Zarathustra raises about giving and receiving, and his doubt about their necessity and mercy, are a part of pitying that Nietzsche aims to attack. He writes in the chapter *Von den Mitleidigen* (On the Pitying) in Part 2 and refers to it again at the beginning of Part 4: “God is dead; God died of his pity for man.” The mercy of God, his pity for man, causes suffering to man. The receiver and the giver are shameful. Giving reduces the receiver’s pride. Receiving results in shame. Zarathustra says (in the chapter *Von den Mitleidigen*) “beggars should be abolished entirely! Verily, it is annoying to give to them and

it is annoying not to give to them" (Kaufmann 1954: 201). Both of these plainchants appearing in the tone poem reflect more of the derision Strauss intends to convey in the music.

Strauss's last tone poem, *Eine Alpensinfonie*, although written between 1911 and 1915, was first sketched in 1899 (Youmans 2005: 109), one year after the completion of *Ein Heldenleben*. According to Gilliam (1999: 94), the music that found its way into the last version of *Eine Alpensinfonie* was planned in early 1900 and called *Der Sonnenaufgang* (Sunrise); both *Eine Alpensinfonie* and *Zarathustra* have a "Sunrise" section. In July 1900, he called it *Eine Künstlertragödie (Der Sonnenaufgang)*, and in its programmatic content, Strauss referred to Zarathustra and the Hero of *Heldenleben*, who both suffer from doubt, as does the artist who is the main protagonist of *Eine Künstlertragödie* (Gilliam 1999: 94). In 1911, Strauss worked on this last tone poem and intended it to represent his anti-metaphysical thought by naming it *Der Antichrist*,<sup>8</sup> apparently taken from the title of Nietzsche's essay of 1888 that was published in 1895. Strauss's emphasis on anti-metaphysics in his programmatic ideas evinces his preference for personal strength, the eradication of predestined power and a proposal of the central Nietzschean idea *der Wille zur Macht* (the will to power) in his music.

## 2 The Nietzschean Hero in *Ein Heldenleben*

Nietzsche's *der Wille zur Macht* relies entirely on one's own strength. *Macht* (power) is *machen* (to do). The hero in *Ein Heldenleben* knows well that he will experience recurrent obstacles without surrendering. Strauss once titled this tone poem *Held und Welt* (Hero and World) (Boyden 1999: 140) to reflect a hero (an individual) and the outer world. Depicting an individual as a hero reflects Nietzsche's imposed *Übermensch* (superman) as the ideal toward which Man should go—the *Übergang*—as opposed to toward the *Untergang*, the state of a beast. However, *Übermensch* is not the end aim for a man; one will experience recurrent hurdles in a life with *Übergang* and *Untergang* like the recurring sunrise and sunset. The hero in *Heldenleben* is all too human.<sup>9</sup> Strauss named the six sections of the tone poem I. *Der Held* (The Hero), II. *Des Helden*

8 Strauss declared in his 1911 diary, quoted earlier, that he urged the German nation to free itself from Christianity. He continued: "I shall call my *Alpen[sinfo]nie* the Antichrist, since it embodies: moral purification through one's own strength, liberation through work, worship of eternal, glorious Nature" (quoted in Blaukopf and Jephcott 1984: 153).

9 Strauss claimed that "*Heldenleben* was the general and free ideal of great and manly heroism" (quoted in Boyden 1999: 141).



*Widersacher* (The Hero's Adversaries), III. *Des Helden Gefährtin* (The Hero's Companion), IV. *Des Helden Walstatt* (The Hero's Battle), V. *Des Helden Friedenswerke* (The Hero's Works of Peace), and VI. *Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung* (The Hero's Retirement from this World and Consummation).

Strauss introduces the Hero theme (see fig. 1) in E-flat major at the beginning of the work. This theme recurs and threads through the entire course of the tone poem, being changed to different keys and put in different contexts to reflect the hero in various circumstances. This triadic motif is reminiscent of the one in the *Eroica* Symphony, which Strauss refers to. He later stated that he composed *Ein Heldenleben* because "Beethoven's 'Eroica' is so little beloved of our conductors and is on this account now only rarely performed... that to fulfill a pressing need I am composing a largish tone poem entitled *Heldenleben*, admittedly without a funeral march, but yet in E flat, with lots of horns, which are always a yardstick of heroism" (quoted in Del Mar 2009: 164).<sup>10</sup> There is no real war in *Heldenleben*; hence, there is no funeral march as in *Eroica*. Strauss had composed the tone poem long before the World War arrived and he acknowledged that the music was conceived during peacetime.<sup>11</sup> War and heroism in *Heldenleben* are therefore purely quotidian matters. *Heldenleben* also contrasts with the coeval *Don Quixote*, which Strauss said "is only fully and completely comprehensible when put side by side with *Heldenleben*" (quoted in Del Mar 2009: 165). The heroism in *Don Quixote* is only fictional (and false), whereas that in *Heldenleben* is generic, earthly and worldly.



FIGURE 1 The Hero theme, mm. 1–2

10 According to Krause (1964: 249), Strauss nearly named this work a "new tone poem 'Eroica'."

11 Strauss wrote to Hofmannsthal in February 1915: "This great epoch serves merely as a pretext for people to bring their mediocre products into the open, who seize the opportunity to decry real artists as hollow aesthetes and bad patriots, who forget that I wrote my 'Heldenleben', the 'Bardengesang', battlesongs and military marches in peacetime, but am now, face to face with the present events, keeping a respectful silence" (quoted in Ashley 1999: 113).



Strauss proclaims the Hero theme boldly with the orchestra in unison at the beginning. The heroic dotted rhythm extends the theme, and chromaticism is introduced. The tonic key E-flat major is reaffirmed again when the Hero theme returns with a firm, accompanying pulsating tonic triad (m. 17). This appears to be very stable but Strauss suddenly shifts the music to B major (m. 21) and then D major (m. 24). The instability continues as the Hero motif returns in many key areas in this first section. The tonic key becomes more stable from m.84 onward, and Strauss ends this introductory section with a prolonged dominant harmony (Bb7), proposing that there is more to come.

The second section, *Des Helden Widersacher*, has triggered the belief in many that the hero's adversaries are Strauss's critics. In Rösch's analysis of *Heldenleben* (quoted in Boyden 1999: 144), the music portrays "fault-finders and adversaries" and some critics supposed that they were being identified, while the hero was Strauss. However, Strauss wrote that this is "only partly true" (Boyden 1999: 144). Without any clear explanation of the program, the adversaries appear to be more abstract—the opposition between oneself and one's enemies. Being put in the imitative texture, Strauss uses the woodwinds to play the Adversaries theme (fig. 2) in 3/4 and marked it "very sharp and pointed"; it is first heard in the flute then later in the E-flat clarinet and echoed in the flute and piccolo. This theme overlaps more intensely before the transformed Hero theme (fig. 3) comes in, at which point the time signature changes back to 4/4. Here, the character of the section changes, as the strings arrive for the first time in the section and the Hero theme is now in a minor key (G minor). The sound of strings seems to appease the enemies, as the Adversaries theme drops away but is replaced by a motif (fig. 4) that anticipates the Companion theme of the next section. When the Adversaries theme returns in m. 169, unlike at the beginning of the section, it is now set in 4/4, congruent with the Hero theme, which persists underneath in a lower register all in minor keys. The Hero theme moves through the section, which ends with a glorious motif (fig. 5) from the first section in the tonic key.



FIGURE 2 The Adversaries theme, mm. 118–119

FIGURE 3 The Hero theme in mm. 137–139 in the *Des Helden Widersacher* section

FIGURE 4 Mm. 144–146



FIGURE 5 Mm. 188–189

As the lyrical motif (fig. 4) anticipates, the Companion theme (fig. 6) is now fully established in the *Des Helden Gefährtin* section. Strauss uses the solo violin to represent his wife Pauline. He talked about the Hero's companion in *Heldenleben* in response to a question by the French writer Romain Rolland:

It's my wife I wanted to show. She is very complex, very feminine, a little perverse, a little coquettish, never like herself, at every minute different from how she had been the moment before. At the beginning the hero follows her, and gets into the mood in which she has just been singing; she keeps going further away. At last he says 'No, I am staying here.' He remains wrapped in his own thoughts, back in his own mood. Then she comes to him.... (quoted in Del Mar 2009: 171)

Strauss's wife Pauline was a soprano. The choice of violin to represent her is clear, especially when Strauss states that she is the one who has just been singing, as the string instruments are often associated with the human voice. The character of the solo violin is similar to Strauss's description of his wife—changing every minute. It starts very calm (*ruhig* and *calando*), hypocritical and languishing (*heuchlerisch schmachtend*), and then impetuously faster (*beinahe doppelt so schnell*). The orchestra calms everything down (*wieder sehr*



FIGURE 6 The Companion theme, mm. 191–194

*ruhig*, again very calm) when the solo violin pauses (mm. 209–213), but her impetuosity persists. Marked *leichtfertig* (thoughtless), this theme (fig. 7) derives from a fragment of the Adversaries theme and it seems to oppose the hero, now represented by the B-flat major Hero theme (fig. 8), which is in a more peaceful state. When the solo violin becomes prominent, the hero seems to be yielding to his wife. The opposition now becomes obvious, as Strauss uses polymeter, changing the solo violin part to 12/8 against the remaining orchestra in 4/4. Although 12/8 meter is written only for two measures (mm. 229–230), when the solo violin plays alone, this 12/8 meter continues with sextuplet and triplet figures written in 4/4. The character of the companion alternates between calm, kind and sensitive feelings and lively, playful, racing and even angry feelings (*zornig*, m. 263). The loving depiction from the section's beginning returns (m. 276) but she seems to maintain her argument by using the sextuplet figure, which is reminiscent of the contrasting meter of 12/8. Strauss introduces *Thema der Siegegewissheit* (Certainty-of-conquest theme) (Hepkoski 2010: 102) in m. 288 (fig. 9). After this, the companion theme (transformed and extended) becomes part of the full orchestra (mm. 302–308), in a manner reminiscent of Strauss's description: "Then, she comes to him." The hero and his wife are in harmony, and the wife follows or responds to where she has been led—the imitation of the solo violin answering the oboe (fig. 10) and, later, the B-flat clarinet (fig. 11). After the solo violin imitates, they play together in unison (mm. 313–314 and mm. 321–322). These household matters—opposition and arguments—resolve at the end of the section, when the hero encounters the outer world again, first with the returning Adversaries theme and later with the trumpet battle cry.

To reflect upon how the hero is presented in the *Des Helden Widersacher* and *Des Helden Gefährtin* sections, the depiction in the former section seems to be more obstinate—presented in full and more boldly—whereas the depiction in the latter is more restrained. The hero struggles to assert himself and only appears in full twice (mm. 215–217 and mm. 345–347), although this Companion section is much longer. We, however, hear his attempt throughout, with the rising perfect fourth motif (fig. 12) derived from the Hero theme. This motif tries to assert itself starting at m. 205 (F#-B). It returns in m. 210 and continues to deviate from the normal Hero theme (fig. 13); then the full Hero theme in B-flat (fig. 8) appears. This rising fourth returns in m. 223 (B-E) and mm. 225, 226,

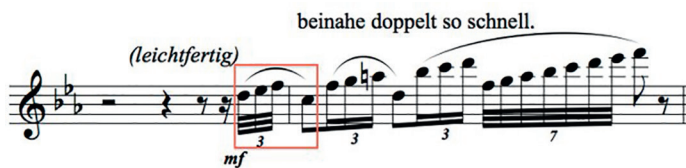


FIGURE 7 Mm. 213–214



FIGURE 8 B-flat major Hero theme in mm. 214–217

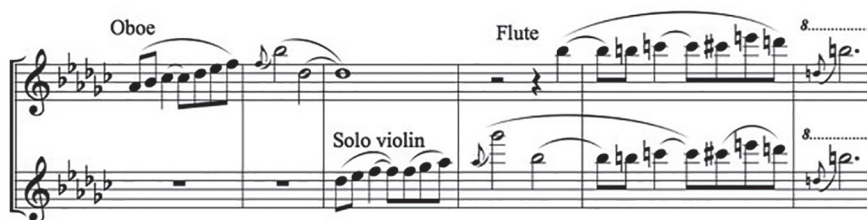
FIGURE 9 *Thema der Siegegewisheit*, mm. 288–295

FIGURE 10 Mm. 309–314



FIGURE 11 Mm. 316–322

and 234 (F-Bb); in mm. 235, 240–243, and 255–262, it continues with a figure similar to *Till Eulenspiegel* (see figs. 14–15). In mm. 274–275 and 279–280, this rising fourth continues with a new figure (fig. 16). The hero's attempt to follow his wife ends here, when the rising fourth figure no longer appears and the Certainty-of-conquest theme starts. A rising fourth figure is often associated with heroism.<sup>12</sup> These fourths in the Companion section have an assertive, determined quality, perhaps because this interval is characterized by a dominant moving to its tonic. This fragment of the Hero theme struggles to make itself heard in full. It persists, as it appears many times. This persistence is the quality of a Nietzschean hero who insists with his will to stay his course. The hero finally makes himself heard in full (mm. 345–347) at the end of the section, ready to fight with his adversaries (the Adversaries theme reappears in mm. 354–362) and in a real battle in the next section.

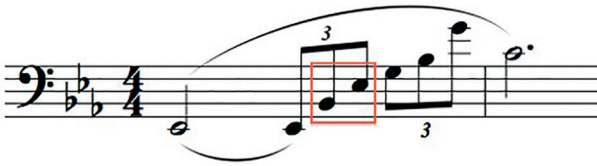


FIGURE 12 The rising fourth in the Hero theme



FIGURE 13 Mm. 209–213



FIGURE 14 The theme from *Till Eulenspiegel*, mm. 6–12

12 Smith (2005) referred to heroic scenes in operas. In his work, he interpreted a rising fourth as representing the masculine and a descending chromatic line as representing the feminine.

FIGURE 15 Mm. 257–262 of *Heldenleben*

FIGURE 16 Mm. 273–275

### 3 Dissonance and Nietzschean Struggle

The *Des Helden Walstatt* section features the famous cacophonous passages. This section starts with a battle cry from a distance, played by three off-stage trumpets. The dissonance steadily increases, with the superimposition of many layers in the texture. This results in polychords and pedal points that crash between different layers as they sound together. The crashing of sound is such that it recalls a real battle. This musical onomatopoeia is by no means straightforward. Strauss inserts themes and motifs from the previous sections among the battle sounds. These themes represent three groups of protagonists: the hero, the companion and the adversaries.

The Hero theme as it first appears in this section is in 3/4, as in the beginning of the Adversaries section, instead of being in 4/4 as normal. The Hero theme adjusts to this new time signature by appearing in a different character (fig. 17) in B-flat minor.

Unlike the bold Hero theme at the opening of the tone poem, which is in a major key with a melodic perfect fifth at the end of the figure (G-C in fig. 1), the theme is now in a minor key similar to the one in the Adversaries section (fig. 3) but it ends with a tritone (Db-G in fig. 17). At this point, it is harmonized with a diminished seventh harmony (C<sup>#</sup>°7) with a Gb pedal point. This dissonant chord establishes the grisly atmosphere that the hero is about to encounter. However, the hero is not alone; the Companion theme follows (fig. 18). It is altered (fig. 19) and now is played out through imitation by the string instruments (mm. 409–419). The Battle theme (fig. 20) represents the hero's adversaries, as it derives from the Adversaries theme. The first four measures

FIGURE 17 The Hero theme in mm. 378–381 in the *Des Helden Walstatt* section

FIGURE 18 Mm. 384–389

of the Battle theme have the same melodic intervallic structure as the Adversaries theme but the rhythms are altered. The degree of opposition is high, as the free moving battle theme often crashes with the C and G pedal points in the bassoon and the strings. During most of this section, the upper registers have nothing in common with the ostinato in the lower register. The upper registers also create a polychord among them, such as in mm. 440–442 between the flutes and the clarinets. At a broader level, the themes are superimposed; first at mm. 449–454 between the Hero and the Battle themes. The music becomes more intense when different versions of the Hero theme appear next to the Companion theme (mm. 475 onward), then the battle cry together with the Battle theme, and then the Hero theme joins in (mm. 506 onward). Both the hero and the companion finally get through the battle. The glorious theme (fig. 5) returns at m. 616, and the Companion theme takes part at this point (mm. 618–621) through the horns and the strings. Everything is settled again when the Hero theme appears with stable pulsating chords in the tonic key, and the Companion theme joins in at m. 653. This peaceful and stable moment leads to the introverted next section.

To reflect the battle that the hero has finally passed through, Strauss established cacophony in the music, as if to depict difficulty, hardship or a struggle that challenges the hero and his will. The determination of the hero to cleave to his standpoint—the freedom of his spirit, which is not easily moved by strong forces—proves that the hero has the strong will of a Nietzschean hero. In the chapter “On War and Warriors” from *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche urges “Your enemy you shall seek, your war you shall wage” (Kaufmann 1954: 159). “To a good warrior ‘thou shalt’ sounds more agreeable than ‘I will.’ And everything you like you should first let yourself be commanded to do” (Kaufmann 1954: 160). “Thou shalt” (“du sollst”) and “I will” (“ich will” or “I want to”) are the phrases that Nietzsche emphasizes. “Du sollst” here illustrates one’s determination to do or “machen.” To become stronger, one should seek the “enemy” and “war” as





FIGURE 19 Mm. 409–412



FIGURE 20 The Battle theme

if they are a “friend.” Likewise, Nietzsche wrote in the chapter “On the Friend”: “If one wants to have a friend one must also want to wage war for him: and to wage war, one must be capable of being an enemy” (Kaufmann 1954: 168). “Friend,” “war,” and “enemy” for Nietzsche are interchangeable and these concepts from Nietzsche are reflected in the three main symbolic musical themes that Strauss intertwines in the *Des Helden Walstatt* section.

#### 4 The Hero's Battle and the Eternal Recurrence

Nietzsche stated in *Ecce Homo* that the “fundamental conception” of *Zarathustra* is “the idea of the eternal recurrence” (Kaufmann 2000: 751). He also brought the concept from *Zarathustra* back in two places in *The Gay Science* (Kaufmann 2000: 752). Within *Zarathustra*, events return again and again, and time seems to be circular. The alternation between two opposites is also common: peak-abyss, sunrise-sunset, solitude-marketplace, danger-refuge and peace-war. Nietzsche wrote in the chapter “On War and Warriors”: “You should love peace as a means to new wars—and the short peace more than the long” and “It is the good war that hollows any cause” (Kaufmann 1954: 159). The same sentences are repeated again in the chapter “Conversation with the Kings” (Kaufmann 1954: 359). Nietzsche urges the alternation between peace and war and he often turns *Zarathustra* toward solitude after meeting people. The alternation is clear in *Heldenleben*. After the Hero's Battle, comes the Hero's Works of Peace. This section features contemplation of past events in solitude. Strauss quotes themes from his earlier works: *Don Juan*, *Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, *Tod*



FIGURE 21 The Hero theme as an accompaniment figure played by the harps, m. 699



FIGURE 22 Mm. 717–720, the figure first appears in the Hero section and is set in a canon in the Hero's Works of Peace section



FIGURE 23 Another figure that returns like a refrain

*und Verklärung*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Guntram*, *Macbeth* (Del Mar 2009: 177), and two of his songs<sup>13</sup> (Ashley 1999: 71). These chunks of themes come as a stream of consciousness, presented in the manner of a collage. The Hero theme, first appearing in this section at mm. 692–694, is later used as an accompaniment played by the harps (fig. 21). Being an accompaniment, the figure repeats itself like an ostinato. The theme from the first section (fig. 22) is set in a canon—a round that is reminiscent of the concept of recurrence. This canonic theme seems to act like a refrain section for the tone poem as well—the second half of it ends both the Adversaries and the Hero's Battle sections. Another figure shown in fig. 23, having a similar function, ends the first and the fifth sections of the tone poem.

13 They are *Traum durch die Dämmerung* (A Dream at Twilight) and *Befreit* (Freed).

The Hero theme in the last section is extended with the repeating whirling figure. Although the title *Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung* (The Hero's Retirement from this World and Consummation) seems to describe the hero's escape from the world, Strauss has everything return, including the battle. The peace here is a means to a new war. The solo violin from the Companion section joining with the theme from the Hero's Works of Peace section leads to the end.<sup>14</sup> The tone poem is similar to *The Gay Science*, in which Nietzsche "offers the beginning of *Zarathustra*" (Kaufmann 2000: 752) at the end; Strauss here offers the beginning of his *Zarathustra* at the end of *Heldenleben*. The Sunrise theme<sup>15</sup> from *Zarathustra* ends the tone poem, as if everything returns to the beginning again as it does in the cycle of *Übergang* and *Untergang*.

In conclusion, throughout the tone poem, Strauss incorporates important Nietzschean concepts: the designation of an individual as a hero, the battle or obstacles that one encounters and through which one struggles, the alternation of opposites and eternal recurrence. The hero that Strauss depicts is not the final state for a man. Like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, the life of a hero is a journey toward self-overcoming. Strauss's hero in *Ein Heldenleben* proves his personal strength, his striving with persistence, his self-renunciation, and his will to power—all qualities comprising a Nietzschean hero.

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14 According to Ashley (1999: 71), Strauss withdraws at the end: "I am not a hero" and "I haven't the necessary strength. I prefer to withdraw." Despite his admitted withdrawal, what Strauss said evinces the notion of hero with the necessary strength as the core idea of the tone poem. The strength is not that of a real warrior in a battle but of an individual striving with the Nietzschean will.

15 It is often labeled the "Nature" theme.

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