

I

FROM THE EARLY SONGS TO WOZZECK

In a brief essay written two years before his death Arnold Schoenberg recalled his first meeting, forty-five years earlier, with Alban Berg: "When [he] came to me in 1904, he was a very tall youngster and extremely timid. But when I saw the compositions he showed me—songs in a style between Hugo Wolf and Brahms—I recognized at once that he had real talent."¹ The title page of the last of twelve unpublished early songs at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., bears the inscription, "unter Schönberg's Aufsicht," and may well be the first piece that Berg wrote under Schoenberg's, or, for that matter, anyone's supervision. Berg, born February 9, 1885, was already in his twentieth year, and it is difficult to discover what promise Schoenberg could have seen in these puerile efforts.² It seems more likely that Schoenberg's recognition of Berg's "real talent," which induced him to accept the timid young man as a student in spite of his inability to pay for lessons at the time, was based on an estimate of his personal and intellectual qualities.

Two of Berg's student compositions, both presumably belonging to the year 1908, have been published: the song *An Leukon*³ and a set of piano variations.⁴ The variations, a routine exercise in the style of Brahms, were performed on November 8, 1908, at a concert of works by Schoenberg's pupils; at the same concert Anton Webern conducted his *Passacaglia*, Op. 1. The vast

¹ Redlich 57b, pp. 245f.

² For a survey of the early songs, including those composed after Berg began his studies with Schoenberg, see Chadwick 71, *ML*.

³ Reich 37, 63, 65.

⁴ Redlich 57b.

2 disparity between these two works—all the more remarkable when one considers that Webern was hardly more than a year older than Berg and that his studies with Schoenberg had commenced at the same time as Berg's—is a reflection of the great difference in their respective musical backgrounds. "He took piano lessons from his sister's governess," wrote the friend of Berg's youth, Hermann Watznauer (quoted by Reich, who makes no reference to any other musical instruction before the meeting with Schoenberg).⁵ Webern, on the other hand, had studied piano, cello, and theory as a child, and when his lessons with Schoenberg began he had already attended the University of Vienna for two years, taking courses in harmony and counterpoint and studying musicology with the noted Guido Adler. *An Leukon* is more successful than the piano variations, but only because it is less ambitious.

Yet by January 5, 1910, Schoenberg, in a letter to his publisher in which he bitterly complains of the Vienna Music Academy's refusal to offer him a teaching post, was able to describe Berg's progress as

really extraordinary testimony to my teaching ability. . . . [He] is an extraordinarily gifted composer. But the state he was in when he came to me was such that his imagination apparently could not work on anything but *Lieder*. Even the piano accompaniments to them were songlike in style. He was absolutely incapable of writing an instrumental movement or inventing an instrumental theme. You can hardly imagine the lengths I went to in order to remove this defect in his talent. . . . I removed this defect and am convinced that in time Berg will actually become very good at instrumentation.⁶

In the same year Berg published at his own expense two works that may be compared with Webern's *Passacaglia* both for their intrinsic quality and as signposts of the composer's personal style: the Piano Sonata, Op. 1, and the Four Songs, Op. 2.

It is difficult to reconcile the dates of composition assigned by both Reich and Redlich to the former and by Reich to the latter with those assigned to the piano variations and *An Leukon*. Can the Piano Sonata have been completed in the summer of the same year as the variations, an utterly derivative academic exercise by a diligent but inexperienced student who has not yet learned how either to correct or to avoid some elementary crudities in harmony, rhythm, and instrumental writing? Why should this puerile exercise have been selected for public performance in preference to the Sonata? Is it conceivable that the song composer who in the spring of 1908 was still capable of the conventional prosody and primitive chromaticism, the literal formal relationships and mechanical rhythmic patterns, the unimaginative instrumental writing of *An Leukon* could by that summer⁷ compose a cycle of four immensely subtle and complex songs, pieces that show a profound assimilation of the revolutionary

⁵ Reich 65, p. 13. ⁶ Schoenberg 65, p. 23.

⁷ This is the date given in Reich 63 and 65 for Opus 2, but Reich 37 gives the beginning of 1909 for the same work.

stylistic conceptions which were only just emerging in Schoenberg's work at that time? Redlich's assignment of the Four Songs to 1909–1910 seems more acceptable. Perhaps the manuscripts of these two works could tell us something about Berg's remarkable metamorphosis from a diligent but backward student handicapped by his late start into the "extraordinarily gifted composer." Unfortunately, however, they are lost, according to Hans Redlich's descriptive catalogue of Berg's works.⁸

It is doubtful that the tonal setting of "Schliesse mir die Augen beide," published by Reich in a magazine article on Berg in 1930, can serve as an authentic example of a student composition, even though it is dated 1907, for Berg would probably have revised it in 1925 when he composed its companion piece, a twelve-tone setting of the same text.⁹ In this instance as well, scholarly research is frustrated by the loss (according to Redlich) of the manuscript. Nor should one be misled by the date of 1907 that appears on the title page of what some writers have taken to be the original version for voice and piano of the *Sieben frühe Lieder*, published in 1928, which is probably in fact essentially a reduction of the orchestral setting that received its first performance in that year. In this later version, a remarkable evocation of the musical language of late German romanticism reminiscent of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, the original songs must have been revised to some extent, as well as orchestrated.

Gurrelieder and other early tonal works of Schoenberg were an important influence on Berg throughout his career;¹⁰ the final interlude of *Wozzeck*, for example, in its very sound and texture reveals its antecedents in the orchestral interludes of *Gurrelieder*. More important than these external similarities, however, is the general formal conception that both of Berg's operas share with Schoenberg's romantic masterpiece—the integration within a large-scale design of self-contained individual numbers that remain clearly differentiated in spite of thematic and harmonic interrelations. A formal procedure exploited in *Lulu* with the most far-reaching consequences upon both the musical and the dramatic structure of the opera finds its only precedents in two other works of Schoenberg's tonal period, the First Quartet and the First Chamber Symphony. Both of these employ the traditional cycle of movements of the classical sonata, but the four movements are combined into one, and their formal elements interspersed throughout the work. In *Lulu* the formal components of a single

⁸ Redlich 57b.

⁹ The two songs were dedicated to Emil Hertzka in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Universal Edition, the publishing house he founded. They were originally published as a supplement to Reich 30. M. Reich 63 assigns the first version of the song to 1907. Redlich, in his edition of the two songs (U. E. 1955), disputes Reich and gives the year of composition as 1900, on the basis of a literal interpretation of the concluding sentence of Berg's dedicatory preface: "They were composed—one at the beginning, the other at the end of the quarter-century (1900 to 1925)—by" (there follows a photograph of Berg). The style and quality of the setting, its place in Watznauer's listing (Reich 65, p. 109), and the first letter in Berg 65 support the date given by Reich.

¹⁰ Berg's pupil, Gottfried Kassowitz, reports that in the course of his lessons Berg made frequent use, for illustrative purposes, of the works of Schoenberg, "above all, the tonal compositions of the latter" (Kassowitz 68, *ÖM*).

4 well-defined design are distributed throughout each act (sonata-allegro in Act I, rondo in Act II, theme and variations in Act III) and separated by sections that are not components of that design. Berg's special interest in Schoenberg's early compositions is further reflected in his arrangements of the piano-vocal score of *Gurrelieder* and the piano-vocal score of the third and fourth movements of the Second Quartet; his published thematic analyses of *Gurrelieder*, *Pelleas und Melisande*, and the First Chamber Symphony; and his essay on the First Quartet, "Why Is Schoenberg's Music So Hard to Understand?"¹¹

Only thirty years old when Berg became his pupil, Schoenberg was still close in temperament and outlook to the generation that represents the final florescence of Austro-German romanticism, the generation of Mahler, Wolf, and Strauss. From the beginning of their association with Schoenberg, Berg and Webern shared in the creative experiences that led Schoenberg through a series of radical stylistic changes, beginning with the First Quartet in 1905. With this work Schoenberg turned away from the programmatic content, extravagant timbral resources, and grandiose dimensions of *Gurrelieder* and *Pelleas* toward a more classical conception of formal design and tonal structure that he carried progressively further in the Chamber Symphony, Op. 9, in 1906, and the Second String Quartet in 1907–1908. It was this very attempt to preserve the articulative and integrative possibilities of the traditional tonal system that led Schoenberg to introduce structural elements external to and eventually destructive of that system. The whole-tone scale and series of perfect fourths are thus exploited as additional means of defining and characterizing the harmonic material of the Chamber Symphony. The musical language of Berg's Piano Sonata is unmistakably derived from this work.

With the Second Quartet Schoenberg reverted to the traditional cycle of four self-contained contrasting movements. In spite of the extravagant use of modal mixture, elliptical harmonic progressions, and chromaticism, each of the first three movements is strongly unified around a key center. But in the final movement, though at the very conclusion the tonality of the first movement is restored, the concept of a tonal center as represented in the major-minor system is discarded, its rejection explicitly indicated by the absence of a key signature. A similarly radical questioning of the traditional concept of a tonal center is apparent in each of the three Mombert songs of Berg's Opus 2. The first, with its signature of six flats, is presumably in E \flat minor, but it concludes with a chord of the "augmented sixth" (Ex. 1). The second, in A \flat minor, ends on the dominant harmony of that key. The last song has no key signature, and concludes with a progression and a cadential chord that cannot be defined in terms of the harmonic categories of diatonic tonality (Ex. 2).

Permanent hallmarks of Berg's personal style are already found in this early work, particularly in the concluding song: the rhythmic variation of a re-

¹¹ The arrangements and analyses are published by Universal Edition, the essay in Reich 37, 63, 65.

Example 1

Berg, Op. 2, No. 2

The musical score for Example 1 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a high register and features a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment is in a lower register and features a triplet in the bass line. The dynamic markings are *pp* and *fff*.

Example 2

Berg, Op. 2, No. 4

The musical score for Example 2 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a high register and features a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment is in a lower register and features a triplet in the bass line. The dynamic markings are *pp* and *fff*.

Example 3

The musical score for Example 3 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a high register and features a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment is in a lower register and features a triplet in the bass line.

iterated melodic interval in mm. ♯ 6–9¹²; the symmetrical progression in the left hand of the piano part, mm. 12–14; progressive transformations through the imposition of a strictly ordered pattern of changes in the right hand, mm. ♯ 12–15¹³ (Ex. 3); a statement of the total content of the semitonal scale, through simultaneous white-key and black-key *glissandi*, in m. 15; successive downward octave-transpositions at the climax of the movement, against chromatically ascending minor ninths, mm. ♯ 15–16; a series of perfect

¹² Where it has seemed desirable to indicate exactly at which point in a given bar a cited passage begins or ends, this will be shown by durational symbols giving the portion of the initial and concluding bars comprised in the citation.

- 6 fourths in one-to-one alignment with a semitonal progression moving in the opposite direction, mm. 20–23; and the subtle fluctuations of tempo, expressed both in the notated durational values and in verbal directions to the performer. (It should be pointed out, however, that the characteristic alternation of *accel.* and *rit.* is only found in the later, revised edition.)

The special quality that marked Berg's musical language to the end of his life, the conjunction of an emotional intensity that is typical of full-blown romanticism with the most rigorous and abstract formalism, is already fully asserted in this final number of Opus 2. Though in a technical sense their innovative features are undoubtedly derived in part from Schoenberg's earliest atonal compositions, the Four Songs are fully representative of a personal *Klangideal*.

"I already feel the opposition that I shall have to overcome," wrote Schoenberg in a program note for the première of the first works in which he dispenses completely with triadic functional harmony—the cycle of fifteen songs from Stefan George's *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, Op. 15, and the Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11, both completed in 1909.¹³ In the same year Schoenberg also composed, within the space of a few months, both the Five Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 16, and *Erwartung*, Op. 17. These four works mark not only the beginning of a new period in Schoenberg's creative life but also the beginning of a new era in the history of music. New concepts in the treatment of dissonance had been primary factors in earlier stylistic transformations, but the implications of Schoenberg's "liberation of the dissonance" were far more radical. With the dissolution of the functional relations of the major-minor system, the range of harmonic and melodic possibilities was expanded to the point where all *a priori* restrictions governing the twelve notes of the chromatic scale disappeared.

Webern took his place as a colleague of Schoenberg's in the evolution of the new music with his Five Movements for String Quartet, Op. 5, also composed in 1909, and Berg did the same in the next year with his String Quartet, Op. 3, the last work he was to write under Schoenberg's direction. In the String Quartet Berg brilliantly fulfilled, only a few months after Schoenberg's letter of January 5, Schoenberg's prediction that "in time Berg will actually become very good at instrumentation." In its exploration of the sonic resources of the medium the String Quartet already points to the *Lyric Suite* of fifteen years later. Erwin Stein's description of the latter as "essentially unsymphonic . . . in contrast to the pronounced symphonic character of the majority of compositions for string quartet" applies to the earlier work as well. As in the *Lyric Suite*, "the development is not symphonic-epic, but lyric-dramatic; a climax of atmosphere and expression."¹⁴

The headmotif and principal figure (Ex. 4) of the Quartet consists of a five-note segment of the whole-tone scale plus one odd note, a type of pitch-

13 Reich 68, p. 71.

14 Prefatory note to the *Lyric Suite*, 1927.

Example 4

The musical score for Example 4 is a piano piece by Berg, Op. 3. It is in 2/4 time and marked "Langsam". The score consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a sixteenth-note motif. The bass staff starts with a piano-piano (*pp*) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. Dynamics range from *sfz* to *p*. The piece is identified as Berg, Op. 3.

class collection destined to play a significant structural role in *Wozzeck*. The opening bars are filled with characteristic Bergian details: the chromatic expansion of the final semitone of the initial motive; rigorous linear patterns—semitones against perfect fourths—generating the harmonic progression in the viola and cello parts; the abstract rhythmic pattern imposed upon this progression, with the first dyad stated once, the second twice, the third three times; and the symmetrical prolongation of this progression. The significance of the formal conception of the String Quartet and of the relation between detail and large-scale design have been pointed out by Theodor W. Adorno:

At a time when Schoenberg and Webern had been deferring this question of the larger instrumental forms and had contracted the time dimension or had allowed its articulation to depend upon the poetic word, Berg followed the impulse of his own creative drive, which he himself felt to be architectural. . . . He did not obediently receive the larger forms from tradition; he did not pour new wine into old bottles; he did not merely cover the unaltered schemata of the sonata, the variation, and the rondo with chromatics and enharmonics in a modernistic manner. On the contrary, right from the start he shows himself determined to develop them with severity and originality from the motivic and thematic structural principles worked out by Schoenberg and adapted by Berg in the Piano Sonata.¹⁵

"The String Quartet," wrote Schoenberg shortly after Berg's death, "surprised me in the most unbelievable way by the fulness and unconstraint of its musical language, the strength and sureness of its presentation, its careful working and significant originality. That was the time when I moved to Berlin (1911) and he was left to his own devices. He has shown that he was equal to the task."¹⁶

In spite of the "strength and sureness" of the String Quartet, Berg undertook the composition of his first orchestral work and his first work not written under Schoenberg's supervision—the Five Orchestral Songs on Picture-Postcard Texts by Peter Altenberg, Op. 4, completed in the autumn of 1912—with some trepidation. In a letter dated January 17, 1913, he told Schoenberg "how happy your judgment that the songs are not altogether bad has made me. Especially in respect to the orchestration, where I feared, in view of my unfortunate beginnings, that in every bar—though it urged itself upon me with the intensity of something *heard*—I might have committed some imbecility.

15 In Reich 37, p. 36.

16 Reich 65, p. 29.

Even Webern's contrary view (he only saw two songs) could not reassure me. Only the kind words in your letter!" Ten weeks later Schoenberg conducted a concert in Vienna which included two of the *Altenberg Lieder*. A segment of the audience, determined to provoke a disturbance, succeeded in creating enough of a tumult during the Berg songs that the concert could not be continued. For Berg this was no *succès de scandale* like the riotous première of Stravinsky's revolutionary work that took place in Paris two months later, but a humiliation. Yet fifty years later the composer of *Sacre du Printemps*, commenting upon this moment in the history of music, writes: "I did not know then what I know now, which is that Schoenberg had written a body of works we now recognize as the epicenter of the development of our musical language."¹⁷ And of the *Altenberg Lieder* he offers the well-considered judgment that they "are one of the perfect works composed in this century and worthy of comparison with any music by Webern or Schoenberg up to the same date."¹⁸

Two months after the abortive première of the two songs of Opus 4, Berg visited Schoenberg in Berlin. His subsequent letters to Schoenberg show that Schoenberg not only did nothing to reassure Berg as to the excellence of the work, but even added his own censure to that of the critics and the public. Reich suggests that "it must have been the aphoristic form of the latest pieces—the *Altenberg* songs and the Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano, Opus 5, completed in the spring of 1913—that occasioned Schoenberg's vehement censure; they were so brief as to exclude any possibility of extended thematic development."¹⁹ But Webern had written nothing since 1909 that was not "so brief as to exclude the possibility of extended thematic development," and Schoenberg himself had turned to "aphoristic form" in 1911, in his Six Little Piano Pieces, Op. 19, and again in the following year in *Pierrot lunaire*, which Berg heard for the first time during his visit with Schoenberg in Berlin. Why should the brevity of the *Altenberg Lieder* and the clarinet and piano pieces have "occasioned Schoenberg's vehement censure?" It is even more difficult to understand, in view of Schoenberg's invariably uncompromising insistence on the authentic presentation of his own works in performance, why he should ever have been willing to offer the *Altenberg Lieder* in a partial performance that under the best circumstances would have been a fatal misrepresentation of the work. In any event, Berg never again attempted to bring this work, perhaps his finest composition after the two operas and the *Lyric Suite*, to performance. The earliest survey of Berg's work, an article by his fellow student, Erwin Stein, published in January of 1923, introduces Berg as the composer of *Wozzeck* and lists the preceding compositions by opus numbers, but consigns the *Altenberg Lieder* to oblivion, leaving an unexplained gap between Opus 3 and Opus 5.²⁰ In spite of Ernst Krenek's enthusiastic essay on the songs in the memorial volume that appeared shortly after Berg's death, "this astonishing work, which

¹⁷ Stravinsky 63, p. 54.

¹⁸ Stravinsky 60, p. 122.

¹⁹ Reich 65, p. 41.

²⁰ Stein 23, *Anbruch*.

fell, after its first alarming appearance, like a stone into the abyss of the forgotten from which no one has as yet fetched it"²¹ had still to wait another sixteen years for what was in effect its first performance.²²

Apart from their brevity, these pieces have little in common with the aphoristic statements of Anton Webern. They are miniatures rather than aphorisms; far from excluding "the possibility of extended thematic development," they are perhaps above all remarkable for unfolding, within such circumscribed durational limits, an extraordinarily complex and extensive system of motivic interrelationships. In similar contrast to these limits are the variety and scope of the timbral resources (solo voice, tripled and quadrupled winds and brasses, a large percussion section, glockenspiel, xylophone, harp, celesta, piano, harmonium, and strings, with individual sections of the last sometimes divided into as many as five parts). The aural imagination, skill, and boldness that Berg had displayed in his first work for string quartet are equally evident in this, his first work for orchestra.

The opening bars are a striking musical example of what Sokel calls the "paradox in Expressionism, where the greatest sense of formal abstraction exists side by side with the most chaotic formlessness."²³ Six simultaneous *ostinato* figures, no two identical in duration, create a dense and shifting chaos of sound (at a dynamic level of *ppp!*). In the fifth bar the *ostinato* figures begin to be subjected to different types of sequential ascent: one sequential pattern generates a five-note motive (Ex. 5) that plays a dominant melodic and harmonic role and, both as simultaneity and as melodic motive, brings the cycle to

Example 5



a close; another figure ascends by whole steps; another generates the interval series 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 in its ascent;²⁴ the other figures ascend along the degrees of the semitonal scale. These abstract, but in their aggregate effect chaotic, transformations are brought to a climax by a *fortissimo* statement of a basic harmonic figure (Ex. 6), a signal for the musical "curtain" that opens upon the

Example 6



²¹ In Reich 37, p. 47.

²² For the history of the work in publication and performance, as well as a careful analysis, see DeVoto 66a, the definitive study of the *Altenberg Lieder*. DeVoto 66b, *PNM*, is a revised version of portions of this study.

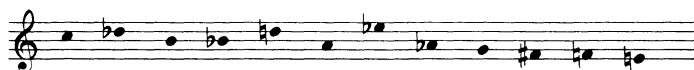
²³ Sokel 59, p. 13.

²⁴ The integers are "interval numbers," showing differences in semitones.

10 soloist as the complex mass of sound is reduced to a quiet “accompaniment.”²⁵ Symmetrically opposed to this in the finale is the reversed statement of the same figure, marking the closing of the “curtain” upon the soloist. The first word of the vocal part, “Seele” (“soul”), is anticipated by two notes that are to be attacked and released “like a breath”; the first, *ppp*, is hummed with lips closed, the second, *pp*, with lips open. Articulate song thus gradually emerges from silence, just as coherent instrumental motives emerged from a mist of chaotic sound in the orchestral introduction.

The first theme of the work (as distinct from its motives) is a twelve-tone series (Ex. 7), apparently the earliest example of an ordered twelve-tone set in the history of music. The final movement of the cycle is a passacaglia based on two subjects, this twelve-tone series and the five-tone series of Example 5.

Example 7



Thus the finale of the *Altenberg Lieder* anticipates, as early as 1912, the twelve-tone passacaglia theme of the scene in the Doctor’s study in *Wozzeck*. The opening and closing bars of the third song present a vertical twelve-tone set, anticipating the twelve-tone chords of *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*. It serves here as a musical counterpart for the word “All” in the line that opens and, with its verb tense changed, closes the text: “Über die Grenzen des All blicktest [blickst] du [noch] sinnend hinaus!” (“Beyond the bounds of the universe musingly you looked [still look]!”) Even the unexpected change of tense from past to present—a delightful example of the singular contrariety of Altenberg’s literary style—is reflected in the musical imagery. The vertical set is dissipated in the opening section of the song, each note, from the lowest to the highest, dropping out in turn. The opposite procedure occurs in the concluding section: the complete chord is built up through the accumulation, in ascending progression, of one note at a time. In the finale there is a leitmotivic association between text and music at the words “keine Ansiedlungen” (“no settlements”); the orchestra at this point recapitulates the setting of “Hattest nie Sorge um Hof und Haus!” (“without a care for house and hold!”) in the third song.

The composer of *Wozzeck* can already be perceived in these musical metaphors and symbols, as he can in the connecting of verbal and musical design in the contrasting ideas of the third and fourth songs. The third song concludes with a twelve-tone simultaneity as a musical symbol for the key word “All”; the next commences with a new, diametrically opposed, key word, “Nichts,” musically represented in the extreme high range of the flute by a single *pianissimo* note that ascends through a semitone into the nothingness of

²⁵ In m. 15 the first note in the second trumpet part should be *f*# (sounding *b*), not *f*♯ (cf. DeVoto 66a, *PNM* p. 134).

space. Even the curtains of *Wozzeck* are suggested at the conclusion of the orchestral introduction to the cycle in the mechanical patterns of the descending figures that accompany the second chord of Example 6 in m. 15: simultaneous series of semitones, whole-tone scales, and diminished-seventh chords.

The sources of the *Altenberg Lieder* may be traced in Berg's own Four Songs and String Quartet, and in the *Gurrelieder*, Second Quartet, and Five Pieces for Orchestra of Schoenberg. The passacaglia seems to have been significantly influenced by the variation movement of the Second Quartet, a conjecture that finds support in the fact that Berg completed the *Altenberg Lieder* a few months after completing his arrangements of that movement and of the finale of the Second Quartet. But whatever its derivations from prior compositions and whatever its adumbrations of subsequent ones, as an artistic entity Opus 4 stands alone among Berg's works, deprived of successors by the traumatic impression that its humiliating "failure" made upon him.

Though Opus 5 is paired with Opus 4 as Berg's only other essay in the "aphoristic form" that was characteristic of all of Webern's atonal music and that Schoenberg had temporarily adopted, it is a work which departs radically in style and means from its predecessor. Where the *Altenberg Lieder* has motives and themes, the Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano has only cells. The clarinet and piano pieces employ the procedures of repetition, symmetrical structures, chromatic inflection, and progressive transformation patterns that in the last song of Opus 2 generate what might be described as "normal" harmonic continuity in an atonal idiom (procedures that play a far larger role in the "free," i.e., non-dodecaphonic, atonal works of Berg than they do in those of Schoenberg and Webern). Where the earlier work was diffuse and lacked direction, Berg now knew how to use these procedures to give each of the Four Pieces extraordinary structural coherence, unity, and direction.

Webern's Six Bagatelles for String Quartet, written in the same year, exists in another world of musical time and rhetoric from Berg's Four Pieces. Berg's is in effect a large-scale work based on traditional conceptions of overall balance and contrast. Adorno calls attention to the analogy with the four-movement classical sonata: the relatively more complex and extensive outer movements of Berg's miniature cycle correspond to the sonata-allegro and finale of the classical model, the second movement to the adagio, and the third to the scherzo.²⁶ Such correspondences, in spite of the disparity in dimension and in means, point to the composer of *Wozzeck*. The basic harmonic language of the two works is also the same, though Opus 5 has neither room for nor need of "themes" or such special structural devices, described in Chapter Five, as vertical sets, chord series, or tone rows. Even the "expressive" character and dramatic power of the opera is foreshadowed, as far as this is possible in a miniature piece of "absolute" music for two instruments.

Redlich's suggestion that "the psychological roots of the Three Orchestral Pieces [Op. 6] can be traced back to a personal crisis in Berg's life"²⁷ is

26 In Reich 37, pp. 49ff.

27 Redlich 57b, pp. 66ff.

12 confirmed by the attitudes and concerns expressed in Berg's letters as well as by the character of the work itself. A few weeks after his return from Berlin, Berg wrote to Schoenberg (July 9, 1913) of his plans for an extended symphonic work: "If in the last few months I have given so much and such intense thought to the working out of a symphony, this has surely happened chiefly because I wanted to make up for that which I would have had the benefit of doing *under your direction*, dear Mr. Schoenberg, *had you remained in Vienna*." The "symphony" did not materialize, however, though portions of the projected work found their way into the *Präludium* of the Three Pieces for Orchestra.²⁸ Berg's continuing self-doubt is still painfully evident in a letter to Schoenberg dated July 20, 1914, in which he referred to his work on the Three Pieces for Orchestra: "But I must always be asking myself whether that which I'm expressing there . . . is any better than the last things I've done. And how can I judge this? Those I hate, so much so that I've been close to destroying them, and of these I have no opinion yet, since I'm right in the middle of them."²⁹ On September 8, 1914, he sent Schoenberg the first and third movements of Opus 6, with the hope that the work was "something I could confidently dedicate to you without incurring your displeasure." Self-criticism and the outbreak of the war ("the urge 'to be in it,' . . . to serve my country") slowed work on the second movement.³⁰

If the composition of the Three Pieces was to some extent conceived as a project in self-improvement and as a means of winning Schoenberg's approval by the successful completion of a large orchestral work, it seems also to have been strongly motivated by Berg's intense preoccupation with and affection for the music of Mahler. The overwhelming impression that the Ninth Symphony, above all, had made upon him—the first performance had taken place in Vienna in June of 1912—is affirmed as clearly in the Three Pieces for Orchestra as it is in his letters.³¹ The Ninth Symphony, in its fragmentation of thematic material, its prismatic distortion of simple diatonic motives, its pointillistic orchestration, its sudden expressionistic outbursts, its grotesque juxtaposition of the grandiose and the banal, its disruption of the tonal balance that is the very basis of the symphonic form (the four movements are in the keys of D major, C major, A minor, and D \flat major, respectively), may be said to have as its "program" the demise of the classical-romantic tradition of which it is one of the last significant products. Berg's Three Pieces persists in this tradition beyond Mahler, and with explicit reference to Mahler, while affirming the collapse of the musical language on which the tradition is based. More specifically, those

²⁸ Berg 65, p. 258; Berg 71, pp. 162f. According to Redlich 57a, p. 65, the final symphonic interlude of *Wozzeck* incorporates a fragment of the unrealized symphony. Presumably, this refers to the principal theme, in D minor, and the sections based upon it, since everything else in the interlude is derived from material found elsewhere in the opera. But Willnauer 66, *NZfM*, p. 133, cites as the source of the D minor theme an unfinished piano-piece that Berg had planned for his wife and to which he refers in Berg 65, p. 253 (Berg 71, pp. 158f.).

²⁹ Redlich 57a, p. 358.

³⁰ Redlich 57b, p. 68.

³¹ Berg 71, pp. 147f.

characteristic aspects of Mahler's style which play such an important role in the Three Pieces persistently reappear in Berg's work to the end of his life: in both *Lulu* and the Violin Concerto, his last compositions, there are episodes that still show the strong influence of Mahler, and that still stand close to the Three Pieces.

If the Three Pieces is, in a sense, retrogressive, coming as it does after Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra, *Erwartung*, and *Pierrot lunaire*, and after Berg's own *Altenberg Lieder* and the clarinet and piano pieces, it was nevertheless essential preparation for the composition of *Wozzeck*. The musical idiom of *Erwartung* and *Die Glückliche Hand*, the two works for the musical theater which Schoenberg had completed in 1909 and 1913, respectively, but which were performed for the first time only in 1924, two years after Berg had completed the opera, could not serve the musico-dramatic conception of *Wozzeck* beyond providing suggestions for incidental details. Essential elements of the musical idiom to serve that conception were evolved by Berg in the Three Pieces for Orchestra.

A straight line of development can be traced from the Piano Sonata through the String Quartet to the Three Pieces. The problem explored in these three works is that of generating, in an ambiguous harmonic idiom, a large-scale musical structure by means of complex thematic operations. The articulative procedures of tonality that still serve in Mahler's Ninth to establish stable referential patterns, to differentiate these from subordinate and transitional material, and to limit the range of variational possibilities, are no longer available to Berg. The distorted form in which the principal theme of the first movement of the Ninth Symphony is recapitulated (Ex. 8) is recognizable as a chromatic transformation of a simple diatonic melody (Ex. 9) whose priority is never in doubt. In the Three Pieces for Orchestra, on the contrary, it is often impossible to say which explicit version of a given theme is to be regarded as its normal form, since the referential elements are frequently definable only in terms of their general shape and rhythmic character. Thus the first more or less

Example 8

Mahler, Symphony No. 9

ff < > < > *ff* < > *ff* < > *f* < <

Example 9

ibid.

pp

- 14 extended melodic idea in the *Präludium* (Ex. 10) is almost immediately restated in an inverted form (Ex. 11) whose contour only approximately complements that of the model. An upbeat figure (Ex. 12) that occurs six times in its original form and four times in its inverted form between mm. 27 and 44 of the *Marsch*

Example 10



Example 11



Example 12



employs different intervals at almost every restatement, a procedure that clearly foreshadows the concluding scene of Act I of *Wozzeck*. In the major-minor system such deviations would reflect a change in mode or in the position of the given pattern relative to the scale degrees. Thematic transformation is still dependent on such harmonic factors in the Ninth Symphony, though there the scope of thematic variation is drastically and even dangerously extended, embracing banal and primitive assertions of traditional tonal functions at one extreme and extravagant uses of harmonic mixture and chromaticism at the other. The diffuse and ambiguous harmonic language of the Three Pieces for Orchestra, however, provides no comparable rationale for thematic transformation.³²

An insufficiency of harmonic criteria leaves a composer so many possible ways of handling his themes that chaos, in conjunction with abstraction and literalness, is likely to ensue. These are opposite sides of the same coin. We have again the "paradox in Expressionism, where the greatest sense of formal abstraction exists side by side with the most chaotic formlessness." In tonal music exact imitation (except at the octave and to a restricted degree at the

³² The harmonic language of the second movement of the Three Pieces is discussed in Archibald 68, *PNM*.

fifth), exact inversion, and exact sequential displacements (such as occur in the *Marsch* at mm. 84–86) are rarely to be found, since the preservation of the semitonal content of each interval of the original pattern would contravene the tonality of that pattern. In the absence of the restrictive criteria of simultaneity and progression that are characteristic of tonal music, a rigorous contrapuntal scheme such as the three-part fugue, exact double canon in diminution, and exact triple canon in retrograde, simultaneously unfolded in the seven polyphonic voices of the eighteenth number of *Pierrot lunaire*, is not the formidable achievement that it is often taken to be. Employment of such strict polyphonic devices was a new departure in Schoenberg's atonal music and may have suggested the canonic episode at mm. 115–120 of the third of the Three Pieces, where three three-part canons occur simultaneously. Exact as well as approximate inversions appear in profusion throughout this movement. The simultaneous *ostinato* figures of unequal duration in mm. 83–93 of the second movement recall the opening bars of the *Altenberg Lieder*.

The primary themes of all three movements have their genesis in the *Präludium*. As in the opening bars of the *Altenberg Lieder*, coherent musical ideas emerge only gradually. The *Präludium* commences with vague figures in unpitched percussion instruments, against which the timpani enters *pianissimo*. The obscure pitch values of the timpani are gradually clarified by doublings in other instruments. Against a continuing harmonic background from which the percussion instruments gradually withdraw, an isolated *a* \flat appears in the top line, then *g-a* \flat , then *e-g-a* \flat , the primary melodic cell of the work. The further evolution of linear and harmonic material is interrupted at mm. 9–11 by a special rhythmic motive, enunciated in a single reiterated note against sustained chords. This rhythmic motive, which recurs in mm. 13–15, 36–37, 42–44, and at the conclusion of *Reigen*, is an early example in Berg's work of a device that plays, in a much more sophisticated treatment, an important role in both operas. The evolution of thematic material is resumed with a melodic motive entirely generated by the basic cell (Ex. 13); it will return, at its original pitch level and with its original harmonic background, near the conclusion of the finale (mm. 160–161).

Example 13



There follows, after an emphatic restatement of the rhythmic motive, an episode that anticipates the music of Act I, Scene 5 of *Wozzeck*, a complex polyphonic development of melodic themes whose linear contours are subtly varied at each repetition. The basic cell marks the beginning of this episode (mm. 15–17); the inverted basic cell marks its climax and initiates (mm. 24–27) a

- 16 second section, culminating in a *fortissimo* presentation of one of the two chief themes of the second movement (Ex. 14). A recapitulation of the initial statement of the rhythmic motive introduces the second of these themes (Ex. 15) and is followed by a quasi-retrograde version of the opening section, with the

Example 14



Example 15



return to the single note, *ab*, of the basic cell, the gradual disappearance of the pitched instruments except for the timpani as the unpitched instruments return, and finally the disappearance of the timpani as well, so that the movement ends as it began, with a single stroke on the tamtam. The obvious symmetry of the overall formal design is in striking contrast to the elusive quality of the thematic content. There are unmistakable correspondences with the first movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony—in the character and function of the opening and closing sections, in the melodic material, and in the monotone rhythmic motive.³³

Stravinsky describes Berg as "the only one to have achieved large-scale development-type forms without a suggestion of 'neo-classic' dissimulation. . . . The essence of his work is thematic structure, and the thematic structure is responsible for the immediacy of the form. However complex, however 'mathematical' the latter are, they are always 'free' thematic forms born of 'pure feeling' and 'expression.'" He cites the Three Pieces for Orchestra as "the perfect work in which to study this."³⁴ The second movement of this work, *Reigen* (round-dances), is based on the idiomatic stylistic features of the waltz and *Ländler*, and the third movement on those of the march. Thus, they share with the music of the later neo-classical tendency a dependence on pre-established and widely known conventional "forms." Stravinsky's point is nevertheless well taken, and Berg himself dismisses any attempt to "connect

33 Redlich 57b, pp. 69ff.

34 Stravinsky 59, pp. 71f.

this employment of old forms in *Wozzeck* with the atavistic movement 'Back to——,' which incidentally started much later."³⁵

In the scherzo of Schoenberg's Second Quartet, simple diatonic functionality, as opposed to the chromatic and elliptical harmony of the remainder of the work, is consigned to the domain of the popular and the vulgar in the literal quotation of a Viennese street ballad, *Ach, du lieber Augustin*. A similarly grotesque exploitation of quotations and pseudo-quotations of banal *Ländler* and march tunes dominates many of the movements of Mahler's symphonies. The idiomatic elements of waltz, *Ländler*, and march in the Three Pieces for Orchestra are more abstract, since they are removed from their conventional harmonic context, unlike the necessarily (in view of their dramatic function) more realistic dance and march episodes in *Wozzeck*. They are nevertheless an adumbration of the latter, and also of the popular elements in the later works. Above all, the significance for Berg's subsequent development of *Reigen*, the *Marsch*, and the *Altenberg Lieder* passacaglia is that in these three movements he discovered the essential role that traditional forms and traditional stylistic details could play in restoring the possibility of coherent large-scale structure which the dissolution of the classical tonal system had destroyed. For Berg this restoration was a pressing need, whose conditions he worked out independently almost a decade before Schoenberg resolved the same problem for himself in the principles of the twelve-tone system.

The thematic organization of the Three Pieces for Orchestra integrates the separate movements into a single large-scale design. In this respect Berg's work is totally unlike Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra (1909) and Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra (Op. 6, 1913) and Five Pieces for Orchestra (Op. 10, 1913). For the thematic techniques on which this integration chiefly depends Berg is indebted to the pre-atonal works of Schoenberg—above all, perhaps, to the First Quartet, the First Chamber Symphony, and *Pelleas und Melisande*. In these works complex transformation processes, germ motives, and the assignment of multiple functions to individual thematic elements (so that variants of the same theme or motive are employed at one point melodically and at another as subordinate accompanying figures) are elaborated to a degree that goes significantly beyond comparable thematic procedures in the works of Schoenberg's immediate forerunners and contemporaries. In this respect Berg remains as much a devoted disciple of Schoenberg in the Three Pieces for Orchestra as he was in the Piano Sonata and the String Quartet. The transformation of the sextuplet figure of Example 14 into the "slow waltz" theme of the second movement of Opus 6 (Ex. 16) and the transformation of the upper line of Example 15 by inversion and rhythmic revisions into one of the principal subjects of the *Marsch* (Ex. 17) are entirely representative of thematic procedures found in Schoenberg's First Quartet.

35 In Redlich 57b, p. 267.

Example 16 shows a musical score with two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line starting with a circled '20' above the first measure. The first measure has a 'p' dynamic marking. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accidentals. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with dotted and eighth notes. The word 'ibid.' is written at the end of the upper staff.

Example 17 shows a musical score with one staff in treble clef. The melody starts with a 'p' dynamic marking and is followed by a long slur covering several measures. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals. The word 'ibid.' is written at the end of the staff.

Though its harmonic language is obviously dependent to a certain extent on conceptions underlying those atonal works of Schoenberg that had preceded it, these conceptions do not play a comparably extensive and obvious role in *Opus 6*. The *Five Pieces for Orchestra* had been performed by the time Berg composed the *Three Pieces*, but *Erwartung* and *Die Glückliche Hand* had not. Berg commenced the work, beginning with the third movement, in March of 1914, shortly after a trip to Amsterdam where he heard the *Five Pieces for Orchestra* for the first time. He referred to the influence of this work on his own composition in a letter to his wife (July 11, 1914): "I shall be dedicating the new pieces for orchestra to Schoenberg. As my teacher he has long been due for a large-scale work dedicated to him by me. He asked for it outright in Amsterdam as a present for his fortieth birthday. He 'ordered' it, in fact, and was my inspiration for it, not only through my listening to his own pieces for orchestra (but remember, mine don't derive from them, they will be utterly different), but because he urged and advised me to write character pieces."³⁶

The *Marsch* was completed in the weeks immediately following the assassination at Sarajevo and is, in its feeling of doom and catastrophe, an ideal, if unintentional, musical expression of the ominous implications of that event. Fragmentary rhythmic and melodic figures typical of an orthodox military march repeatedly coalesce into polyphonic episodes of incredible density that surge to frenzied climaxes, then fall apart. It is not a march, but music *about* a march, or rather about *the* march, just as Ravel's *La Valse* is music in which *the* waltz is similarly reduced to its minimum characteristic elements. In spite of the fundamental differences in their respective musical idioms, the emotional climate of Berg's pre-war "marche macabre" is very similar to that of Ravel's post-war "valse macabre." The composer's own conception of the expressive character of the *Marsch* is suggested in his next work, *Wozzeck*, by *Wozzeck's*

³⁶ Berg 71, p. 159.

portentous words, "Es wandert was mit uns da unten!" ("Something's following us down there below!") in Act I, Scene 2, the musical setting of which is drawn from the *Marsch* (mm. 79–84).

It is even possible that the passage is derived from material that Berg had originally sketched for *Wozzeck*. Berg had seen the Vienna première of Büchner's play early in May and, according to a letter he wrote to Webern three years later, "at once decided to set it to music."³⁷ Gottfried Kassowitz, who was studying with Berg at the time, reports that Berg began sketches for two scenes almost immediately after seeing the play for the first time.³⁸ In addition to the explicit quotation mentioned above, a number of passages in the opera are strikingly anticipated in the Three Pieces: the curtain music at the conclusion of Act I (mm. 113–119 of *Reigen*); the canonic episode that represents Marie's struggle with the Drum Major in I/5 and *Wozzeck's* struggle with him in II/5 (mm. 72–77 of the *Marsch*); the famous *tutti* unison at the conclusion of the murder scene (m. 135 of the *Marsch*); and the rising semitonal transpositions of a single chord as *Wozzeck* drowns (mm. 161–163 of the *Marsch*).

The date, "August 23, 1914," that stands at the conclusion of the published score of the Three Pieces evidently refers to the completion of the scoring of the last movement rather than to the completion of the work as a whole. The second movement was finally sent off to Schoenberg twelve months later, just about the time of Berg's induction into the Austrian army. In the *Altenberg Lieder* and the Three Pieces for Orchestra Berg had brilliantly fulfilled the prerequisites for the next project he boldly set for himself, composition of the first full-scale atonal opera, but he could not have known this. The partial performance of the *Altenberg Lieder* did not contribute to his self-assurance, as we have seen, and the Three Pieces were performed for the first time only after he had completed the opera. Thus the work was composed and scored without Berg ever having had the experience, so important to the maturing composer, of comparing the imagined sound of an orchestral score of his own creation with the actual effect in performance of its abstract symbols.

Work on the composition of *Wozzeck* was brought to an abrupt halt by Berg's induction into military service, and he was only able to return to it, or rather to begin once again, two years later, while still in the service. In spite of his precarious health—seven years earlier he had suffered his first attack of the bronchial asthma which was to plague him recurrently for the rest of his life—he underwent the usual basic training. After a serious physical breakdown he was judged unfit for active service and assigned to guard duty in Vienna, but the conditions and rigors of his military life remained harsh. Transferred at last to an office job at the War Ministry, where he remained until the end of the war, he was eventually able to resume work on the opera, at least intermittently. On August 13, 1917, during a leave of absence, he wrote to Schoenberg: "The musical setting of Büchner's play, *Wozzeck*, planned more

37 Reich 53, *SM*, p. 50.

38 Kassowitz 68, *ÖM*.

than three years ago, occupies me again. But it cannot come to the coherent writing down of any considerable section, for in another week my freedom will be gone again, and once more my slavery in Vienna will begin, and continue, perhaps, for years." A year later, on leave again, he informed Webern that he had been able "to finish something." The same letter, dated August 19, 1918, indicates that he had already made some progress toward the unique formal conception that governs the work:

It is not only the fate of this poor man, exploited and tormented by *all the world*, that touches me so closely, but also the unheard-of intensity of mood of the individual scenes. The combining of 4–5 scenes into *one* act through orchestral interludes tempts me also, of course. (Do you find anything similar in the *Pelleas* of Maeterlinck-Debussy!) I have also given thought to a great variety of musical forms to correspond to the diversity in the character of the individual scenes. For example, normal operatic scenes with thematic development, then others *without* any thematic material, in the manner of *Erwartung* (understand me rightly: this is a question of *form*, not of the imitation of a style!), song forms, variations, etc. Up to now I've completed one scene and I hope to complete another, a large one, here.³⁹

A few weeks earlier he had written Schoenberg that he had "once again seized upon [his] old plan of composing *Wozzeck*, after several unsuccessful attempts to write some piano pieces, or chamber music." The composition of smaller works for one or a few instruments would certainly have seemed a more reasonable endeavor, considering the circumstances under which Berg had to work and the long periods during which work was impossible, but his self-identification with the poor soldier of Büchner's tragic drama had made the composition of the opera a spiritual necessity that could not be fulfilled by the composition of "piano pieces, or chamber music." "There is a bit of me in his character," he wrote to his wife on August 7, 1918, "since I have been spending these war years just as dependent on people I hate, have been in chains, sick, captive, resigned, in fact humiliated."⁴⁰ The project he had first conceived under the overwhelming impression that the staged drama had made upon him a few months before the outbreak of the war could only be resumed after the composer's own experiences in the intervening years had led to this self-identification. That first impression had been temporarily obliterated when Berg, like so many other persons of refinement, sensibility, intellect, and culture, succumbed to the war fever and joined the general chorus of philistine banalities. Can it be the composer of *Wozzeck*, under the spell of Büchner's spirit, who writes to his wife of his indignation at the sight of an Englishman because the latter "is merely required to report every other day" while "in England the Austrians are imprisoned and starving in unheated stalls,"⁴¹ and who sends her this New Year's message (December 31, 1914): "Yes, the war has to continue. . . . The war's great surprise will be in the guns, which are going to show a frivolous generation their utter emptiness. Perhaps the truth will

³⁹ Reich 53, *SM*, p. 50.

⁴⁰ Berg 71, p. 229.

⁴¹ Berg 65, p. 266.

dawn then—that there exist different values from those which up to now have been taken as the only salvation. . . . The war must go on until its true task is completed.”⁴²

Berg’s experiences during the war years and the change in his outlook it effected are summed up in a letter (November 27, 1919) to Erwin Schulhoff, an early admirer and promoter of his work and a radical antimilitarist. By that time Berg had forgotten that he had ever supported the war. He described himself as a “fierce antimilitarist” whose “strongest support” in August of 1914 was Karl Kraus:

Believe me, though I was not in the field and not wounded, I suffered no less than you in the military service (somewhere Kraus says, “It is still worse to be forced to salute!”). I was in the ranks for three and a half years, in “training” for months, until, at Bruck, my weak constitution (I am asthmatic) broke down completely; then hospital, frightful details as sentry, relief duties; finally the war ministry, where *daily for two and a half years* from 8 o’clock in the morning until 6 or 7 o’clock in the evening I was occupied with the most difficult paperwork under a frightful superior officer (an idiotic drunkard); these long years of suffering endured in the rank of *corporal*, not composing a note—oh, it was dreadful, so that today, though I am actually freezing and have nothing to live on, I am *happy* in comparison to that period, when *physically* it was still bearable. I don’t think you will soon again find such an enraged antimilitarist as I am.⁴³

Berg goes on to cite as opponents of chauvinism and militarism, in whom Germans can take pride, the murdered communist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht: “What names does the Entente have (outside of Russia) that ring of idealism as these do?” he asks.

Knight’s argument against the interpretation of Büchner’s drama as a *pièce à thèse* in support of the social revolution is convincing and applies equally to Berg’s opera: “A political or social or economic moral can be drawn from it all, but . . . one will draw that moral at one’s own risk; the dramatist has not told one to do so.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the revolutionary impeachment of that social order for whose overthrow Büchner had called in his seditious tract, *The Hessian Courier*, is implicit in every line of his drama, and the musical setting of that drama was written against a background of war and revolution that bridged the gap between an author who was only beginning to emerge from the obscurity in which he had died eighty years earlier and the still-unknown composer.

⁴² Berg 71, pp. 177f.

⁴³ Vojtěch 65, pp. 52f. Schulhoff, a pianist and composer, died in a German concentration camp in 1942.

⁴⁴ Knight 51, p. 132.