

# Berg's Worlds

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Vienna is not the product of successive ages but a layered composite of its *accumulated* pasts. Geography has made this place a natural crossroads, a point of cultural convergence for an array of political, economic, religious, and ethnic tributaries. By the mid-nineteenth century the city's physical appearance and cultural characteristics, its customs and conventions, its art, architecture, and literature presented a collage of disparate historical elements. Gothic fervor and Renaissance pomp sternly held their ground against flights of rococo whimsy, and the hedonistic theatricality of the Catholic Baroque took the pious folk culture from Austria's alpine provinces in worldly embrace. Legends of twice-repelled Ottoman invasion, dreams of Holy Roman glories, scars of ravaging pestilence and religious persecution, and the echoes of a glittering congress that gave birth to the post-Napoleonic age lingered on amid the smug comforts of Biedermeier domesticity. The city's medieval walls had given way to a broad, tree-lined boulevard, the Ringstrasse, whose eclectic gallery of historical styles was not so much a product of nineteenth-century historicist fantasy as the stylized expression of Vienna's multiple temporalities.

To be sure, the regulation of the Danube in the 1870s had channeled and accelerated its flow and introduced an element of human agency, just as the economic boom of the *Gründerzeit* had introduced opportunities and perspectives that instilled in Vienna's citizens a new sense of physical and social mobility. But on the whole, the Vienna that emerged from the nineteenth century lacked the sense of open-ended promise that characterized the civic identities of midwestern American cities like Chicago or St. Louis, or European upstarts like Berlin. This was certainly true in a physical sense because to the east, north, and west Vienna's growth was checked by wetlands and alpine foothills. But the containment was temporal as well. It was as if Vienna were approaching a kind of saturation point in which density, not sprawl, would be the strategy for accommodating modernity.

## The City

Vienna's inner city, the *Innenstadt*, was all that had once been contained within the walls and fortifications that, in another age, had meant the difference between survival and destruction. Now this cluttered warren of shops and churches, apartments and palaces, here the traces of periwigged elegance, there the vestiges of an ancient Jewish ghetto, was suddenly free to look out upon the world past the open spaces and hulking monuments of the Ringstrasse, past its rows of trees and manicured parks toward the surrounding districts of the *Vorstadt*. The *Innenstadt* was Vienna's core, the site of its vast bureaucracy from the imperial court to the myriad ministries that managed the immense, multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire. Within or arrayed along the Ringstrasse were also the institutions of the city's cultural memory, its libraries, archives, museums, and theaters, its schools, academies, university, and conservatory—in short, all that embodied the attainments of ages past. But what brought it all to life were those narrower apertures of the moment, often shoehorned into narrow streets, a cramped courtyard, or along its bustling streets: the editorial offices of its newspapers, the frayed headquarters of its clubs and political organizations, the huddled confabulations of the *Fiaker* stand, and, above all, the edgy *Gemütlichkeit* of the coffeehouse. These were the organs of Vienna's self-reflection, its purchase upon the present.

Berg was born in the very heart of Vienna's central first district. By economic class, religious upbringing, and educational background, he enjoyed a degree of material comfort, social integration, and professional entitlement that set him apart from many of his colleagues within the Schoenberg circle, and most especially from Arnold Schoenberg himself. Though Berg was an indifferent student who had to repeat two grades and had no ambition toward achieving a university degree, he was an obsessive reader. In her Berg "Dokumentation" prepared late in life, Helene Berg is at pains to frame her husband's early aspirations within the bourgeois cult of *Bildung*, or self-betterment through cultural edification:

Since his family had an excellent library young Alban grew up in a world filled with "wonders," that is, immortal works by our great musicians and thinkers! From these he also absorbed those lasting life *values* that deeply influenced his spiritual and intellectual development. Thus, barely 16 years old, he had a thorough knowledge of all classical music and was exceptionally well read. There are 11 volumes [. . .] filled with the most profound and beautiful maxims from the Bible, our great poets, philosophers, and musicians, which



Figure 1. Berg reading in the family residence, Breitegasse, c. 1900.

Alban copied out between the ages of 15 and 20 in order to be able to read and ponder them always.<sup>1</sup>

In Berg's "Von der Selbsterkenntnis" (Of Self-Knowledge), each quotation is assigned a category such as "Beauty" or "Longing" and all are carefully, even pedantically cataloged and cross-referenced. Berg's love of methodical detail is a reflection of his own, sometimes ponderous habits of mind. These habits were cultivated amid bourgeois comforts and pleasures that Berg could not do without, though they might be husbanded when reduced means dictated ascetic privation. But there is pleasure, too, in the savored indulgence, and this was much in keeping with Berg's love of minutiae. His life rocked gently in the wake of *Gründerzeit* opulence. He, too, had a book-lined study—as we see in his *Night (Nocturne)*, introduced in this volume by Regina Busch—and his devotion to his library bespeaks a deeper longing for guidance and the confirmation conferred by authority. In this Berg was a child of an age in which home libraries, the clutter of treasured possessions, and the admonitory gaze of hallowed figures peering down from walls or bookcases reflected a world of interdependent, overlapping social, cultural, and historical sureties. Berg's social psyche was predicated upon the pervasive imbrications of this collective order; his moral compass was set by figures who challenged its authenticity.

From an early age, perhaps exacerbated by the loss of his father in 1900, Berg was drawn to forceful personalities, to writers like Gerhart Hauptmann, Henrik Ibsen, and August Strindberg. Central, however, were four men Soma Morgenstern described as Berg's *Hausgötter*—Gustav Mahler, Karl Kraus, Adolf Loos, and Schoenberg—all of whom exercised a powerful influence in shaping his intellectual and aesthetic universe.<sup>2</sup> They offered orientation, prescription, points of affiliation, and the articulation of deeply held experience. But there was something more, for these were outsiders (three of the four were Jews) who had forced their way into the inner sanctums of Viennese culture and proceeded to castigate the moneylenders in the temples at which they all worshipped. These were scourges of society, Berg's society, who provided conduits for his self-righteous anger. It was an anger that bordered at times on self-loathing.

Berg chose these *Hausgötter* not out of elective affinity but from a pronounced obsession with self-discovery. Consider by contrast Schoenberg, Mahler, Kraus, or Loos. These were men of conquest who erected defiant bastions on terrain they won and held. They found allies and engendered fierce loyalties, but they also made and cultivated enemies. Berg, on the other hand, held no ground, was forever pulling back, lacking the talent for making enemies. Not that he shrank from engaging in polemical battles—as in his public attack on Hans Pfitzner or his debates with the music critic

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Julius Korngold—but he staked his terrain in others' names, never his own. In other issues, such as politics, he was considerably more circumspect, so very unlike his chosen mentors.

In their presence Berg could be diffident to the point of obsequiousness. He himself was not a scintillating conversationalist, but was content to sit listening in the background, a tendency exacerbated by his physical self-consciousness. His height was an embarrassment in a world of short men. Moreover, vain as he was, he spent a lifetime cultivating a sensitive, sensuous mouth, whose half-closed lips concealed an awkward and silly gap between his front teeth that undermined his studied likeness to Oscar Wilde. To the acute awareness of his size and appearance were added a perception of internal frailty: he had chronic bouts with asthma and was firm in his belief that his heart was weak and undersized.

To Berg's pantheon of *Hausgötter* Morgenstern adds a fifth name: Peter Altenberg, the apostle of *Natürlichkeit*, a "character" at once provocative and intensely vulnerable, whose eccentricities bespoke a kind of naïve authenticity to which Berg may have aspired but could never emulate. It is through Altenberg that Berg indulged his own vulnerabilities and slipped most easily from Vienna's *Innenstadt* into other, more private environments.

## The Suburb

In the organism that was Vienna, its outermost districts were like lungs, literally cleansing the air through a belt of green but also absorbing ideas flowing in and out of the inner city through the filtering membranes of civic memory. And that daily, rhythmic act of expansion and contraction, going down into the city—*hinunter in die Stadt*—and returning home again along the spokes and arteries radiating from the center and into the crooked weave of neighborhoods, was to slip back and forth in time. To look up from the Ringstrasse into that green haze on the hills that announced spring, or watch autumn disappear as limbs grew bare and the fields above turned brown, was to reconnect with nature's cycles. And to pass through the *Vorstadt* to the *Vororte*, to communities like Hietzing that bled into the countryside beyond, was an ever-present reminder of life outside Vienna—not of the larger world, not that "Draußen" beyond the borders of the land—but of that alpine *Hinterland* and the pastures along the Danube from which the city took its deepest breaths.

If the "memory" of Vienna's *Innenstadt* was the past on display, a feast for the eye and the imagination upon the fullness of time, there was in the *Vororte*, those districts beyond the outer perimeter, a different kind of memory, less public, less constructed, shot through with those little anachronisms

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from the living past that anchor recall in the particularities of place. Here everyday experience offered a refuge for memory under siege from those insistent abstractions and agendas of modernity. Here those barriers of class, culture, education, or generation so carefully cultivated in the *Innenstadt* melted away in daily interactions in shops and markets, on park benches or in trams, among neighbors, in social and family circles, through myriad religious, cultural, or civic affiliations. Compared to the outsized scale of the Ringstrasse, the outer districts represented a parallel universe from another age, still cut to human dimensions and flowing at a slower pace. It was the premodern world extolled by Ringstrasse critic Camillo Sitte, the theorist of urban planning who championed organic growth, the picturesque square and winding street against the tyranny of the apartment block and soulless boulevard.

For twenty-five years, from 1911 until his death, Berg lived in just such a time-forgotten world, in the quiet, leafy Viennese district of Hietzing in a parterre apartment located on what Heinrich Jalowetz described as “a hidden suburban lane that always seemed to conceal its approach from the visitor.”<sup>3</sup> During his studies with Berg, Theodor Adorno made his way there twice a week:

At the time I thought the street incomparably beautiful. With its plane trees it reminded me, in a way I would find difficult to explain today, of Cézanne; now that I am older it has not lost its magic for me. When I went to Vienna again after my return from emigration and looked for Trauttmansdorffgasse I got lost and retraced my steps to my starting point at the Hietzing church; then I simply took off without thinking, blindly as it were, relying on my subconscious memory, and found my way there in just a few minutes.<sup>4</sup>

For Berg, Hietzing was the world of habits and routine, family, friendships, entanglements—and secrets.

Berg's earlier life followed him here. He remained closely involved in family affairs, his own and, increasingly, those of his wife. And despite crises, feuds, even lawsuits, he accepted the responsibilities of a husband, son, brother, uncle, and in-law with the same dogged persistence that characterized his attention to detail in his music. He never lost touch with the schoolmates and acquaintances of his youth, including his fatherly mentor, Hermann Watznauer, whose interest in Berg was tinged with a homoeroticism that may have been reciprocated. Throughout his life Berg inspired devotion from friends and colleagues, and he cultivated close relationships with his students, several of whom he enlisted as couriers in his marital infidelities.

These romantic entanglements, only intermittently physical, were largely relegated to correspondence where he could indulge in adolescent fantasies at a safe remove. His capacity for hopeless infatuation is as evident in his courtship of Helene Nahowski as it is in his relationship with Hanna Fuchs-Robettin. Helene Berg was wise enough to look the other way when her husband went in search of stimulus for his flagging creative potency. He made no intellectual demands upon the objects of his affection or indeed upon those with whom he socialized. He was quite content to sit in on a good round of gossip with his wife and her friends, and though he could be blunt in his assessment of Alma Mahler's flawed character, he adored her company. Their friendship had a central significance for Berg's creative life, which Leon Botstein explores in his provocative discussion of *Lulu*.

Like so many of his Viennese contemporaries, Berg was obsessed with the issue of social morality. He had absorbed the sexual theories of Kraus, Freud, and Otto Weininger, and had read the works of Altenberg and Arthur Schnitzler in which sexual hypocrisy and complex gender relationships are constant preoccupations. It is a world that Berg knew well, having fathered an illegitimate child with a servant girl at the age of eighteen. Moreover, his sister was an outspoken lesbian and his mother-in-law was once the emperor's mistress. Berg loved the role of confidant at the center of these *liaisons dangereuses*.

Berg's capacity for excusing human foibles, his own and those of others, reflects the moral largesse of an avowed sensualist. This is readily apparent in his attention to his appearance and dress, as well as his tastes in food and drink, art and literature. In his youth his favorite painting was Correggio's highly charged *Jupiter and Juno* and throughout his life he retained an aesthete's tactile delight in handicrafts and graphic design, for which he himself showed a decided flair. This is not to say he did not love technology and modern gadgets. He went regularly to the cinema, was inordinately pleased with his first typewriter, listened with delight to the radio and the phonograph, and took childlike glee in owning his own automobile. But he was devoted to the refined sensibilities of another age, to the aesthetic pleasure and meticulous pride one takes in slow, careful craftsmanship.

Tucked away in the folds of the rational, technological world that Berg craved were currents of mysticism and the occult, matters of earnest inquiry in Berg's Vienna and reliable topics of titillation around *Kaffee und Kuchen*. Berg also studied the psycho-biological works of Wilhelm Fliess, consumed the nature writings of Strindberg and Maeterlinck, finding all about him, in the world he observed, confirmation for their theories. He himself was a firm believer in numerology and astrology, and, like Schoenberg and Webern, was stirred by the mystical reveries of Honoré de Balzac's *Séraphita*. He was therefore not at all surprised when, in September 1929,



Figure 2. Berg's study in his Trauttmansdorffgasse apartment in Hietzing.

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he received a letter from one Günter Marstrand informing him of his suspicion that “the composer of *Wozzeck* and none other” was the reincarnation of the Habsburg emperor Charles the Fifth. From the correspondence that followed over the next two months it would appear that Berg took a supportive interest in the project, in the course of which it emerged he was indeed the reincarnation of Charles V, that members of the emperor’s court had been reborn into the Schoenberg circle, and that Schoenberg himself was the latest iteration of the emperor’s mother, the mad Queen Juana.<sup>5</sup> Berg declined Marstrand’s subsequent offer to collaborate on a reincarnation opera, whose libretto involved Brutus, Charles the Bold, Robert Schumann, and the Arctic explorer Robert Falcon Scott, but one could argue that both *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* imply a kind of eternal cycle of return. What intrigued Berg was the interrelationship between human destiny and a higher natural order as revealed in astrological movements, numerological relationships, and cyclic patterns that fed his own obsessions for order and meaning, obsessions buried deep in the technical procedures and structure of his works, as Douglas Jarman shows in this volume in his discussion of Berg’s fascination with retrograde forms.

Berg’s scores can be dauntingly complex, the product of intricate, even mind-numbing calculation. But he is also a Romantic, whose warmth and expressiveness betray his attachment to the past and a commitment to an audience he shaped in his own image. These two sides of Berg stand in productive tension with each other and reflect a personal synthesis of the central dichotomy of Viennese music that veers between the sensuousness of its native musical traditions and the rigor of its classical inheritance, between instinct and reflection.

All this was possible because Hietzing was just outside the *Innenstadt* orbit. Here Berg could insulate himself from the city, quite literally so when, after the success of *Wozzeck*, he re-glazed his apartment windows. “You might say,” he told an interviewer, “that the fact that I had frosted glass installed in my windows is not without deeper significance; they prevent people from looking in on me, but they also spare me from having to see what’s going on in our beloved Vienna.”<sup>6</sup>

## The Countryside

Vienna’s social and cultural season, the world of the *Innenstadt* concerts and performances, balls, boardroom meetings, political rallies, parliamentary sessions, and the cozy companionship of the café, extended from October to April. September and May were months for drifting in and drifting out of the city, but June, July, and August were devoted—for those

who could afford it—to the pleasures of *Sommerfrische*, that enchanted state of being in the countryside, on a lake, in the mountains, whose routine generally involved a productive morning, a leisurely lunch, afternoons in nature, and evenings of conversation, culture, and companionship.

Where one spent one's summer vacation, like the district in which one lived, was a marker of station or at least aspiration. Some were bound by family ties to a particular region or owned property that served as their regular summer retreat. Berg's family had a country estate, Berghof, in Carinthia at the Ossiacher See, and it was here that Berg spent the summers of his youth and adolescence. Watznauer's biographical study of Berg, presented in this volume by Nicholas Chadwick, contains an evocative account of his visits there. This graceful landscape was deeply ingrained in Berg's psyche and the sale of Berghof in 1921 was the cause of much agonizing and heartache. Though he returned as a paying guest in later years, he never recaptured the magic of those early summers, whose echo resonates in the Violin Concerto.

No less dear to him was the small Styrian mountain village of Trahütten, where Helene Berg's parents owned a rustic chalet. In her "Dokumentation," she recalled their life there during the composition of *Wozzeck*:

There was always uninterrupted quiet in the house [. . .] out of respect for his work. From the early morning until noon at the piano, in the afternoon walks with his notebook through the magnificent ancient forests which were extraordinarily useful for his creativity. (His profound love of nature is so clearly evident in the music of *Wozzeck*!) Above all he loved the mountains and next to that the water (lakes, springs)—the great thickets, blue gentian, the mushrooms in the forest clearings, which he liked to hunt, and, in the fall, the clatter of typical Styrian windmills, which sounded so wonderful coming up from the valley. [. . .] In Trahütten he had no social life since he lived only for his work. In the evening a wonderful book until falling asleep.<sup>7</sup>

These were probably Berg's most productive summers and it was in hopes of replicating this undisturbed working environment, as well as recreating something of the magic of the Carinthian vacations of his youth, that he and his wife, having sold Trahütten, acquired an isolated lodge on the southern shore of the Wörther See in 1932. In this "Waldhaus"—out of season, withdrawn from time—he worked on *Lulu* and wrote the requiem that was his Violin Concerto. With heavy, tasteless irony, he called it his "concentration camp."<sup>8</sup>

Berg, like so many others, did most of his composing during his summer vacations, and uninterrupted concentration was certainly a principal



Figure 3. View of Berghof on the Ossiacher See.

appeal. But these were also places in which, freed from social constraints, in an atmosphere of significantly relaxed routine, and surrounded by a natural world that took human concerns into benevolent, if indifferent embrace, one unfettered one's mind to dream and speculate. Here innocence could flirt with terror, nostalgia with the great unknown, and the purity of a snowy landscape suggest blackest tragedy. In the midst of the First World War, writing from the wintry solitude of Carinthia, where he had gone to tend to family business, he wrote to Schoenberg of the horrors of the battles raging to the east:

I heard of a “successful”—I don't know whether it was German or Austrian—military ruse: in order to entice the Russians out of their trenches, a large bell, which on the previous night had been fastened to a tree close to the Russian trenches, was rung by a rope. The curious Russian heads that appeared—there were 25—presented excellent targets for the fatal bullets. It *may* have been curiosity—but *if* for one or the other it was forgetfulness of the situation at the sound of a bell reminding him of a past time and a beloved place—then what is here considered “successful” is *beyond all measure horrible*. [. . .] it *suddenly* occurred to me that only a short time earlier I faced the possibility of having to take aim at people, real people— —and

that—had I been declared fit at the examination—my spirit would surely have broken under this necessity of killing people.<sup>9</sup>

There is no doubt that Berg's own subsequent military experience, its outrages and indignities, flowed directly into *Wozzeck* and that his opera's protagonist carries traces of the composer's self-portrait. But far more important is the evidence this opera provides for Berg's capacity for empathy, for reaching across the chasms of circumstance toward those common bonds of humanity. Schoenberg was skeptical of Büchner's play as a suitable subject for an opera. *Wozzeck* is certainly no traditional hero, just as Lulu is no conventional heroine. In this regard Berg has much more in common with Alexander Zemlinsky and Franz Schreker, whose operas are likewise peopled with outsiders, dreamers, and figures on the margins of society. Marie and Lulu are unthinkable without Grete—or for that matter Schigolch without Dr. Vigelius—protagonists in Schreker's *Der ferne Klang*, for which Berg prepared the piano vocal score.

In his earliest, pre-Schoenberg compositions—mostly songs written during summer months for performance within the family circle—one can already detect the basic contours of Berg's musical physiognomy, including a pervasive, drooping melancholy that flows directly into Marie's music in the Bible scene in *Wozzeck*. Indeed, the principal idea for this scene derives from an early sonata fragment in F minor that seems to grow seamlessly out of the snug world of a Schumann character piece. The gravitational pull of such music reflects a weariness that could never rouse itself to the kind of breakthrough one finds in the finale of a Mahler symphony, a weariness that has never known the bristling, jittery energy of a Schoenberg quartet. Mahler and Schoenberg likewise knew states of weariness—in *Das Lied von der Erde* or *Gurrelieder*, for instance—but it is the weariness born of a long, hard journey. These are composers whose music is of a piece with their restless worldly wanderings across cultures and continents. Berg, however, was no seeker of adventure, but a creature of habit who preferred a settled life. One is struck by the contrast between the serenity of Berg's Trahütten idyll and the raw emotion of his opera, but in this country environment Berg held both worlds, the vistas and the abyss, within himself.

## Abroad

Even before he began his studies with Schoenberg, Berg was an eager foot soldier in the cause of new music. Richard Strauss, Hans Pfitzner, Mahler, and, of course, Wagner were early passions. After entering Schoenberg's orbit he became involved with progressive cultural organizations, includ-

ing the Verein für Kunst und Literatur, the Tonkünstlerverein, Schreker's Philharmonic Chorus, and Schoenberg's own short-lived Chorverein. After Schoenberg moved to Berlin in 1911, Berg became his point man in Vienna, overseeing donations for the Schoenberg fund, making rehearsal and concert arrangements, and acting as a one-man clipping service. In his work for the music publisher Universal Edition Berg prepared the index for his teacher's *Harmonielehre*, thematic guides, arrangements and piano vocal scores of his works, and even led one or two choral rehearsals for *Gurrelieder*, one of the few instances in which Berg engaged in professional musical activity. These all-consuming tasks were no doubt performed at the expense of his own compositional activity and slowed the dissemination of his works.

Ironically, it was the war, during which Berg was spared from frontline service, as well as a lengthy estrangement from Schoenberg and other members of his inner circle, that gave Berg the freedom to pursue his own projects, most especially *Wozzeck*. The emotional strain of that period is clearly reflected in his play fragment, *Night (Nocturne)*, and displaced, again, in *Wozzeck*.

At war's end in 1918 Berg was thirty-three years old and still relatively unknown in or outside Vienna. He was once again enlisted in Schoenberg's cause, but now, through his writing, he began to establish an independent profile. His principal activity centered around Schoenberg's Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen, for which he wrote a brochure that set the society's agenda: repeated performances removed from the trappings of public concerts; banishment of critics and all signs of approval or disapproval from the audience, unlimited rehearsals in the interests of clarity. What is most significant, however, is that this was not a society for new music but for a new music *audience*, an audience formed on a secessionist model that had a distinguished pedigree in Vienna. As we read in Berg's own words, it was to be an audience of catholic tastes: "No school shall receive preference and only the worthless shall be excluded; for the rest, all modern music—from that of Mahler and Strauss to the newest, which is practically never, or at most rarely heard—will be performed."<sup>10</sup>

The first year's programs included Germans and Austrians well known to Berg's circle, including Mahler, Reger, Zemlinsky, Bittner, Schreker, Weigl, Korngold, Webern, and Berg himself, though not yet Schoenberg. More significant was the number of foreign names, which would eventually range from Bartók, Debussy, Ravel, and Satie to Busoni, Cyril Scott, Scriabin, Stravinsky, and Szymanowski. The society's model was replicated, with variations, across Europe, but it was in Germany that new music found its most intensive cultivation. By 1921, the year the Schoenberg Verein was dissolved, there were new music organizations in over two-dozen cities,

half a dozen in Berlin alone. As with the Verein, these organizations served to overcome the cultural isolation that had resulted from four long years of war and the political and economic turmoil of its immediate aftermath. New music concerts afforded audiences the opportunity to take stock of the enormous multiplicity of styles that had emerged since 1910 and gauge the difference between what was merely “contemporary”—by virtue of chronology—and what was qualitatively “new.” The “now” of the modern was in flux and hotly contested, and the phenomenon known today as the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* (roughly, the “non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous”) was a testament to the accelerated tempo of modern times. For composers and publishers, most especially Universal Edition in Vienna and B. Schott Söhne in Mainz, this meant that a burgeoning new music industry offered lucrative opportunities, particularly for stage works and large-scale concert genres.

One particular manifestation of this sense of temporal urgency lay in the rise of the international new music festival, for which the Amsterdam Mahler Festival of 1920 served as a kind of spiritual progenitor. In Germany the annual festivals of the Allgemeine Deutsche Musikverein (ADMV), founded in 1859, had long served as a sounding board for composers associated with the New German School of Wagner and Liszt, but in the 1920s the organization came to embrace a much broader and all-inclusive agenda. More influential still were the Donaueschingen Chamber Music Festival, begun in 1921, and the festivals of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), founded a year later in Salzburg.

These festivals made the notion of regional schools that had once clustered around such figures as Schoenberg, Schreker, Thuille, or Reger much more difficult to sustain. The “now-ness” of new music meant that styles and aesthetic currents, such as linearity, neoclassicism, *Gebrauchsmusik*, and *Gemeinschaftsmusik*, jazz, or mechanical music leaped across regions to become generational markers, undermining allegiances to individual personalities. It was a culture of slogans fostered by dedicated new-music periodicals such as *Anbruch* and *Melos*, the journalistic organs of Universal Edition and Schott, respectively. This, in turn, encouraged a kind of lateral awareness by critics and audiences in which points of descriptive comparison were more readily drawn from the present than from the past.

It was in this transformed environment that Berg became more widely known, most particularly through his Piano Sonata, op. 1, and his String Quartet, op. 3. But in 1921, when the sonata was performed at the first Donaueschingen festival, it was not a success. “Music of the day before yesterday of the immediate past” opined Hugo Holle of the *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung*, and it was a typical response. Berg’s post-*Tristan* chromaticism—Adolf Weissmann called it “decadent,” “flabby,” and “mollusk-like”

—fared badly in the company of Hindemith’s energetic String Quartet, op. 16, which, virtually overnight, established its composer as the dominant figure of his generation.<sup>11</sup>

Only Berg’s orchestral works—the Praeludium and Reigen from the Three Pieces for Orchestra, performed at the Austrian Music Week in Berlin in 1923, and the premiere of the *Wozzeck* fragments in the 1924 ADMV festival in Frankfurt am Main—finally established him as a major figure in his own right. The link to Vienna, Mahler, and Schoenberg, was of course self-evident, but it was Berg’s foray into opera that established quite different points of comparison, above all with Richard Strauss, Schreker, and even Pfitzner in a debate that still swirled around the viability of the post-Wagnerian opera. The essays in this volume by Sherry Lee and Antony Beaumont examine these and other relationships between Berg and his contemporaries.

The premiere of *Wozzeck* in Berlin at the end of 1925 was the event of the season. Nothing of similar length, coherence, or sheer emotional power had emerged from the post-tonal world of the Schoenberg circle. Still, given the musical preoccupations of the period, it was less Berg’s harmonic language than his use of closed vocal and instrumental forms to shape his scenes and acts that caused the most immediate stir, provoking comparisons with such works as Busoni’s *Doktor Faust* and Hindemith’s *Cardillac*. And it is this aspect that Berg himself, for varied and complex reasons, would continue to emphasize—almost to the exclusion of all else—in his articles and lectures on the opera. It was in part a strategy to undercut his growing reputation as a “Romantic,” just as his elaborately constructed serial relationships would later serve to offset his music’s pervasive references to tonality.

After the success of *Wozzeck*, Berg’s life changed dramatically. He was now an international celebrity, a rising star of a powerful publishing house. For the first time in his life he was earning a living from his own music, engaging on his own terms with a world outside Vienna. His travels to performances of his music took him to Germany, Switzerland, England, Belgium, Holland, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, as well as the Soviet Union. He was in correspondence with leading figures in the arts and culture at home and abroad, and over time his circle of friends and acquaintances widened to include both conductors and composers such as Erich Kleiber, Karl Böhm, and Gian Francesco Malipiero, who were otherwise far removed from the sphere of the Second Viennese School. Berg’s allegiance to Schoenberg himself remained firm and was manifest on multiple levels, not least in his adoption of his teacher’s twelve-tone method. And yet he resisted physical proximity to Schoenberg, be it in Schoenberg’s suggestions of a shared vacation or Schreker’s repeated offers of an appointment at

the Berlin Musikhochschule. Berg remained steadfast in his devotion to the environments that had nurtured him.

For all his travels and newfound contacts, Berg may have been most directly involved with contemporary musical life through his service on the juries of the festivals of the ADMV (in 1928, 1931, 1932, and 1933) and the ISCM (1928 and 1931).<sup>12</sup> The apparent ease with which he dealt with fellow jurors of all aesthetic stripes, including Alfredo Casella, Désiré Defauw, Gregor Fiteberg, Hans Gál, Joseph Haas, Philipp Jarnach, Emil Nikolaus von Reznicek, Ernst Toch, and the same Hugo Holle who once dismissed his piano sonata, attests both to his diplomatic skills and his commitment to the task at hand. Evaluating hundreds of scores, many in manuscript, was time-consuming and wearying work, but Berg was diligent and regularly met his deadlines. His notes and correspondence reveal his understandable efforts to win performances for members of the Schoenberg circle, but they are also evidence of a remarkable catholicity of tastes. One striking example involves the preparations for the 1929 ADMV festival in Duisburg, for which the local opera proposed its recent production of Szymanowski's *King Roger*, premiered in October 1928. The press had been nearly unanimous in its rejection of the work ("the most impotent opera to appear in years," wrote the critic of the *Kölnische Zeitung*), and the members of the festival's central committee were largely in agreement.<sup>13</sup> Things had reached an impasse when Berg wrote to ADMV president Hermann Bischoff, assuring his colleagues that though he found Szymanowski's work every bit as bad as they did, he nonetheless suggested that a performance might not be out of place.

[It is,] after all, one of the styles in which operas today are written; I liken it to Schreker and Korngold, a category which is not otherwise represented in the Duisburg program, while all other styles, from the most conservative to the most modern, are. That is also why our program is so good. Atonal music is represented by Schönberg and Groppe; the last of the Wagner epigones by Kick-Schmidt; the genre of the successful master operas by one each by Strauss and Reznicek; the Pfitzner school by Braunfels; a dance work by Tiessen. Finally, with *Maschinist Hopkins*, the latest kind of up-to-the-minute topical opera with all the requisite elements like jazz, crime, and social-political issues. [. . .] So, as I say, why shouldn't there be an opera along the lines of Schreker or Korngold to complete the picture?<sup>14</sup>

Berg's reasoning leaves his real motives strangely veiled. He would have the jury believe he was simply inspired by a concern for a fair representation of existing compositional styles. This is certainly in keeping with



Figure 4. Berg with members of the ISCM Jury, Oxford, 1931.

what we know about his even-tempered deliberations in other juries. But it is just as possible that his advocacy for Szymanowski—and for that matter Schreker and Korngold—sprang from a genuine affection, even affinity, that he would have been reluctant to admit.

The central problem with *King Roger*, which in the end was not performed at the festival, had more to do with the fact that Szymanowski was not a German or a German-speaking composer (Austrians and Swiss composers were regularly included in the ADMV festivals). By the later 1920s German chauvinism had reemerged as a force in cultural politics, and defining “German-ness” went far beyond questions of language and passports. Two of Berg’s categorizations—the “atonal” and the “topical”—might well have described *Wozzeck*, and both attributes made his opera a target for conservative critics. For critics on the left, on the other hand, the opera’s implied social criticism served to position it in the company of works far more politically engaged. In reviews, commentary, and program books it is apparent that the opera had begun to be read in ways that Berg could not have foreseen.

Berg was not necessarily displeased with this politicized reading of *Wozzeck*, a factor that contributed to its success when it was performed in Leningrad in 1927. He himself, however, avoided overt engagement with politics or issues of social justice. His sympathies with Red Vienna, the Socialist regime that governed the city during the 1920s and early 1930s,

had more to do with personal loyalties and the largesse of its progressively minded cultural policies, of which he was a beneficiary.<sup>15</sup> Before 1918 he had been a monarchist, and following the brutal civil strife of 1934 he became a committed supporter of the Austrofascism of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg. However, as a disciple of Kraus he maintained his right to an oppositional stance—on principle—which was easy enough from the privacy of his study in Hietzing.

The belated discovery of Büchner's *Woyzeck* fragment had inspired numerous stagings and multiple treatments, including a second *Wozzeck* opera by Manfred Gurlitt. Berg found the appearance of this second *Wozzeck*, likewise published by Universal Edition and premiered just a few months after his own opera, particularly awkward. In a letter to Erich Kleiber he wrote, "I've already had a look at the piano vocal score of the Gurlitt *Wozzeck*. I am objective enough to be able to say that it's not bad or unoriginal—but I'm also objective enough to see that the broth in the kettle of this opera, that is, in the orchestra, is too watered down, even for 'poor folks' [*arme Leut'*]."<sup>16</sup> Berg's perspective, still heavily indebted to Wagnerian notions of musical drama propelled by a cohesive symphonic argument, reveals both the strengths and limits of his own setting. Gurlitt's opera, with its lean, simplified textures and stylistic heterogeneity, is far less emotionally manipulative and much more in keeping with the aesthetic of the 1920s one hears in the music of such contemporaries as Hindemith or Kurt Weill. It better captures the fragmentary, dry-eyed objectivity of Büchner's play and, with its choral interpolations, addresses the wider social context more directly. Gurlitt in fact offers a powerful interpretation of the play that deserves a hearing.

In a sense, then, the topical relevance of Berg's opera was accidental. Under the influence of such thinkers as Weininger, Kraus, and Strindberg, Berg's reading of the play was not so much societal as characterological. A curious page, preserved in the Berg *Nachlass*, bears on this subject. It is the plan for a trilogy, in which *Wozzeck* was to have been the first of three operas—*Wozzeck*, *Vincent*, *Wolfgang*—representing three ascending degrees of the male persona: Servant (*Knecht*), Friend (*Freund*), Master (*Herr*). *Wozzeck* was of course the *Untermensch* or *Knecht*; Vincent (van Gogh) the *Freund* (of Gauguin); and Wolfgang (Amadeus Mozart) the *Herr*.<sup>17</sup> Little more is known of this project, which does not appear to have progressed beyond this initial sketch. Nonetheless, it would appear that Berg, like the doctor of Büchner's play, viewed *Wozzeck* as a specimen. He does not question the hierarchy—Servant, Friend, Master—but relativizes its significance by subsuming all difference in larger patterns of fate. This is given symbolic significance in the central Van Gogh opera in which the second half was to have been the mirror image of the first half, an idea that survives

in miniature in the retrograde of the orchestral interlude at the very center of *Lulu*.

Only after 1925, when Berg began casting about for his next operatic project, did it become apparent how caught up he still was in prewar preoccupations. His first choice was Gerhart Hauptmann's *Glashüttenmärchen* (Glassworks fairy tale) of 1906, *Und Pippa tanzt!* (And Pippa dances!) a play that had once tempted both Schoenberg and Schreker but by the mid-1920s seemed rather dated.<sup>18</sup> Still, it is a beguiling work with many enticing musical allusions. Berg's decision to move on to Wedekind's *Earth Spirit* tragedies, which had more to do with questions of royalties than real preference, was, if anything, a step back toward fin-de-siècle obsessions with the femme fatale/femme fragile dichotomy. To be sure, Wedekind would provide material for G. W. Pabst's masterful *Lulu* film featuring the inimitable Louise Brooks (*Pandora's Box*, 1931), though an updated setting and Brooks' bobbed flapper look do much to disguise the passé plot. Berg's choice of *Lulu* seems odder still at a time in which composers were grappling with weighty societal issues in a remarkable series of *Bekennnisoperen* (confessional operas) that included Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*, Weill's *Bürgschaft*, Schreker's *Der Schmied von Gent*, and Krenek's *Karl V*.

By 1933 Berg realized he was caught in a bind. Like the great majority of Universal Edition's composers, his works would have ever fewer performances in Nazi Germany, with a substantial loss to his royalties. As his correspondence with his publisher and various conductors makes clear, he remained convinced that his works could overcome any objection purely on their aesthetic merits—their beauty and dramatic strength.<sup>19</sup> Universal Edition urged Berg to expunge all explicit text passages in his *Lulu* excerpts since a number of conductors, including Otto Klemperer, had already raised moral objections to the opera's subject matter. For Wilhelm Furtwängler the question was less one of morality than of politics. In a letter of 23 May 1934 he addressed the issue with remarkable frankness:

You have no need to prove yourself a German composer to me. I have known you and your music for a long time and would have no qualms about accepting "Lulu" if it did not seem to me that this text, given the public sentiment in Germany *at this particular moment*, is completely impossible. This has nothing to do with the question of race—Wedekind was in fact "Aryan"—rather with the fact that these days one cannot imagine how a performance of this *Earth Spirit* tragedy would have the least prospect of success.<sup>20</sup>

Furtwängler's letter was written a year and a half into Hitler's regime, during which time events had moved with remarkable speed. By April of 1933 the infamous Law for the Reconstitution of the Civil Service had led to the dismissals of Schoenberg and Schreker from their teaching positions at the Prussian Academy of the Arts, an institution in which Berg was a member.<sup>21</sup> Berg had his own first taste of the new political order in correspondence with the central committee of the ADMV. On 9 May 1933, Joseph Haas wrote to Berg that "the music political situation in Germany has made immediate personnel changes in the music selection committee unavoidable," and that "you, dear Herr Berg, are the exponent of an artistic direction to which the German national movement is most vociferously opposed. The central committee respects your artistic beliefs but sees no way for you to continue to represent those convictions in the music selection committee. For that reason the central committee has concluded that the most forthright way to resolve this tricky question would be for those members of the music selection (including you), who are likely to become the focus of the debate, to offer their voluntary resignations now."<sup>22</sup> In a letter of 17 May 1933 Berg resigned with grace, but not without pointing out and offering proof that he did not have "a single drop of Jewish blood."<sup>23</sup>

Berg was fully aware of the racial policies of National Socialism. He had already seen its consequences for Schoenberg and Schreker and received heartrending letters from Jewish friends and colleagues such as Jalowetz, who faced summary dismissal from his conducting position in Cologne.<sup>24</sup> Yet at no time could he bring himself to take a public stand against anti-Semitism. Decades later, in a soul-bearing letter to Helene Berg, which he drafted but never sent, Soma Morgenstern recalled an incident from these very years in which Berg came to see him, saying:

"I have something unpleasant to show you. I've received these forms to fill out. The people from the *Reichsmusikkammer* [in Germany] have asked me to send proof of my 'Aryan' origins. I don't need to tell you how repugnant this is to me. But I have to do it." I could see how repugnant it was to him. But I didn't agree that he had to do it. "I wouldn't advise you *not* to do it," I said to him, "if I knew that it would be useful to you. Your music isn't 'Aryan,' and it's not going to seem any less 'degenerate' to Dr. Goebbels just because you have proof that you're 'Aryan.'" [. . .] "But what should I do with this rubbish [*Wisch*]?" —"Ernst Krenek also received this rubbish and he told me what he did with it." —"What did he do?" —"He threw it in the wastebasket—perhaps because he didn't want to plug up his toilet." —With a sigh Alban said: "Ernst Krenek isn't married to Helene."<sup>25</sup>

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Morgenstern may well have imagined this anecdote a devastating indictment of Helene, but it is in reality more revealing of Berg, whose duplicity was only compounded by his willingness to shunt the blame upon his wife. In point of fact as early as 1925 Berg fired off a card to Wilhelm Wymetal protesting an article that had implied Berg was a Jew and offered generations of genealogical proof to support his assertion.<sup>26</sup> It was a gambit he repeated whenever such suspicions found their way into the press, as, for instance, in an article in the *Westdeutscher Beobachter* from 1931 or again at the end of 1933, when a program on the Bavarian Radio likewise implied that he and Webern were Jews.<sup>27</sup> In a detailed letter of protest of 20 December 1933 Berg not only included his family tree up to the generation of his great-great grandparents, but ridiculed the “absurd idea” of his Jewishness by stating that “everyone knows [. . .] I could not be a Jew or of Jewish extraction and still be a member of the Prussian Academy [of the Arts].” He demanded a retraction “in accordance with the German spirit and Aryan decency [*Redlichkeit*].”<sup>28</sup> Not long thereafter he could lament to his non-Jewish friends and acquaintances that in Germany he suffered from being *thought* a Jew, while in Vienna he suffered from *not being* one.<sup>29</sup> It is telling that at the end of 1934, as Margaret Notley shows in documents from this fateful year, when Berg wrongly assumed that Erich Kleiber was a member of the Nazi Party, his only concern was that this might dim Kleiber’s prospects for a position in Austria, where the Nazi Party was outlawed.<sup>30</sup> It is anybody’s guess how Berg might have responded to the events of 1938. He would never have lapsed into Webern’s naïve patriotic jingoism, but it is highly unlikely that this deeply rooted *Lokalpatriot* would have chosen exile or resistance.

## The Irretrievable Self

The three environments that shaped Berg’s temporal and psychological universe—Vienna, Hietzing, and the mountains and lakes of Styria and Carinthia—represented, in turn, the authority of history and its collision with modernity, the pleasurable, plodding habits of routine, and the timeless amorality of nature. One is almost tempted to draw parallels to Freudian notions of superego, ego, and id, as a reading of Berg’s dramatic fragment *Night (Nocturne)* might suggest. Here, voices from tomes on a looming bookshelf, followed by reveries on a divan, the comforts of alcohol close at hand, and, finally, an imaginary trek through a snowy mountain dreamscape, all suggest a journey of self-discovery through the archaeology of psychic environments.

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It was only in the final decade of his life that Berg was lured out of his cocoon to travel widely, meet new friends and colleagues, and engage with music across a broad aesthetic spectrum. Berg's own success placed him at the crossfire of music and politics, and by the end of his life that crossfire had followed him back to Austria. Throughout this period of heady success and political, economic, and ideological turbulence Berg maintained his allegiance to the settled temporalities of city, suburb, and countryside that continued to nourish his work. He always returned to his womblike shelter, an artist at once fully contemporary and yet strangely out of time.

Berg himself, like his protagonist Lulu, was an enigma to those who knew him, or, rather, he was all things to all people. Morgenstern's defense of his friend echoes the almost universal affection Berg enjoyed in the reminiscences of his contemporaries, as the memorial issue of the journal 23, translated by Mark DeVoto in this volume, attests. And, as in the Morgenstern letter quoted above and in much postwar scholarship, it is often as not Helene Berg whose reputation had to suffer in order to protect Berg's own, even when it was she who was betrayed. Helene was no doubt aware of Berg's desperate, feeble affairs, but through her eyes we see only the devoted husband, whose heavily edited letters chronicle a story-book romance from courtship to the fumbling intimacies of his final illness. If we are to believe Morgenstern, Berg even encouraged him to have an affair with Helene Berg, an anecdote that raises questions about Berg's own sexuality and points up the misogyny so characteristic of the period: "Alban had the nobility, the honesty, by his very nature, to say to me, loud and clear, that he was no jealous husband, and he gave us *plein pouvoir*. [. . .] I declined. Not because I was so timid. Not because I believed in 'outdated taboos.' Simply because I myself was not so pure and free of jealousy as Alban was."<sup>31</sup>

Helene Berg's own tone in writing of her husband is strangely detached, as if describing a much loved and admired stranger:

Those of us closest to Alban all experienced him *most profoundly* and *loved* him! I was and always will be—indeed, more and more—deeply moved by the nobility of his soul and his great spirit!—and it is part of the magic of his being that, in addition to all else, he was a "high-spirited child" with a thousand pranks and jests.<sup>32</sup>

The metaphor of "high-spirited child" is emblematic because, like so much else, it serves to remove Berg from accountability. Part of the hagiographic tone of much of the writing about Berg springs from a desire to bask in the glow of the "magic of his being." He was no doubt gentle, kind,

and caring, and countless letters and drafts bear witness to his solicitous sense of occasion for a birthday, an anniversary, a death. But there is always something *unverbindlich*, noncommittal, about his sincerely expressed concern, a politeness that is a form of self-protection, a surface geniality that bespeaks a profound reserve. Adorno said as much when he called Berg the “foreign minister of the land of his dreams.”<sup>33</sup>

It is certainly curious that Berg, born to bourgeois comfort, should have chosen two of opera’s grittiest subjects, but he was careful to select texts by authors fully sanctioned by the *Innenstadt* circles he looked to for guidance in matters of taste. Who knew that stories of abuse, tawdry passion, and gruesome murders could be set to music that is so deeply satisfying and appealing?

Berg prided himself for his ability to enlist our sympathies for his protagonists, but these protagonists, *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*, remain elusive. We know a great deal about their tormented lives, their victims, and their own ghastly ends. But their outbursts—“*Wir arme Leut*” and *Lulu*’s song—though heartfelt, are strangely oblique, as if their raw pain and passion were sublimated beneath the artist’s compositional refinement. These are protagonists without an *Ich*, as they are passed from hand to hand, from one situation to another. It is significant that the other potential opera text to which Berg was drawn, Gerhart Hauptmann’s *Und Pippa tanzt!* is likewise centered around an unknowable waif.

Berg was keen in his indictment of society’s hypocrisy, which concerned him far more than its injustice, but the true object of his concern was himself. Hermann Gail, a music critic from Berlin and would-be Berg biographer, once observed about *Wozzeck*: “Berg’s music is of such profound feeling and ethical depth that it leaves even the inspired play far behind.”<sup>34</sup> In approaching these subjects of depravity and decay, Berg never abandons the vantage point of bourgeois moral privilege. Through careful dramaturgy and lavish compositional detail he invites his audience to view this world through the prism of high art. His is an empathy that at its deepest level bespeaks self-love and satisfaction with its own moral righteousness. This is why both operas, despite their subject matter, have entered so comfortably into the repertoire in a way that the far more radical works by Schreker have not. Schreker’s music eschews the comforts of “high art” and keeps its bourgeois audience off balance in a manner that oddly adumbrates the distancing effects of Brecht and Weill.

Berg wrote music to be savored, music that serves up dramatic experience that is conscious of its place within a darkened auditorium. Adorno’s story about the hours he spent trying to console Berg after the success of the Berlin premiere of *Wozzeck* rings hollow, an obligatory sop to the notion that modern art disdains its audience.<sup>35</sup> Berg, as a card-carrying modernist,

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may well have fretted about appearances—the implications of success for the quality of his music, but only in the eyes of his fellow modernists; he himself would have adored his newfound operatic public because it was a public from his world. He enlisted their empathy for his wretched protagonists, knowing full well that his success in doing so was a special plea for his own noble sentiments—and, by extension, their own.

By 1935 Berg was quite literally out of time. For some period he had begun to feel old beyond his years. In a March 1933 letter to one of his “lovers,” Anny Askenase, the wife of his friend the pianist Stefan Askenase, his tone is apologetic, though tinged with the faint aroma of his narcissism: “When you see me again you’ll be horribly disappointed because in your memory, given the year-long separation and flattering photos you have, you’ll have a much more beautiful image in mind, younger, thinner, when in reality I’ve only grown much more repulsive [*schiech*].”<sup>36</sup> He may well have been haunted in this last year by the early deaths of both his father (at age fifty-four) and his brother (at age forty-nine); perhaps, too, with thoughts of Mahler, dead at fifty, whose *Kindertotenlieder* must have been much on his mind as he composed his requiem for Manon Gropius. The Violin Concerto is the only one of his mature works that he wrote, as it were, in real time. Shortly after its completion an insect bite led to a carbuncle in his lower back from which he suffered throughout the fall. It was Helene Berg’s attempt to lance the abscess that inadvertently led to the blood poisoning from which Berg died on 24 December 1935.

In 1885, the year of Berg’s birth, the physicist Ernst Mach published *Die Analyse der Empfindungen* (The analysis of sensations) in which he posited the individual as a passive record of sensory impulses and coined the phrase “Das Ich ist unrettbar” (The self is irretrievable) to describe the sense of self that is never the same, constantly in flux, at every instance unrepeatable and ultimately unknowable. This concept had a particular resonance for the writers of *Jungwien*, Austria’s literary impressionists, including Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and especially Hermann Bahr, who were entirely attuned to the notion of modernity that Baudelaire had described as early as 1863 as “the fleeting, the ephemeral, the contingent.” It is the concept of a self that is wholly subject to time.

Everything in Berg revolted against this notion—his settled habits and sedentary life, his gravitation toward fixed compass points (though not of settled morality), his belief in overarching controlling forces, from numerical patterns to the alignment of the stars. He was a man of obsessive preoccupations with the hoarding instincts of a pack rat. Ironically, Berg read and set Baudelaire’s texts in *Der Wein*, but in his understanding time was not so much “fleeting,” “ephemeral,” or “contingent” as viscous, tactile,



Figure 5. Berg in front of the Waldhaus in Auen on the Wörther See, summer 1935.

and even reversible. Adorno made much of Berg as the composer of music forever in transition but whose changes were incremental and might be reduced to a single, insignificant link, be it a gesture or a note from which all else flows. One might take this link to be the core, but it was something that Berg sought in vain to find within himself.

Contradiction and paradox are central ingredients of Berg's persona and of his music. He was a man of open amiability and of many secrets; a faithful friend and an eager consumer of malicious gossip; a composer of fierce modernism who courted popular appeal. The elusive qualities of his character make it easy to be sucked into a vortex of eternal regress and self-absorption. Berg, the man, we follow at our peril. Berg, the composer, however, transformed the spinning vortex of his unknowable self into extraordinary music that reaches beyond the self toward a common understanding of the human condition.

Berg's music is Viennese, heavy with memory and layered with associations. His capacity for accommodating the city's contradictions gives him a special place among its musical modernists. Through Schoenberg's instruction and example he was completely immersed in the precepts of Viennese Classicism, that line of development from Haydn and Mozart through Beethoven and Brahms that placed great emphasis on rigorous construction, motivic development, and structural coherence—in short, what one might call a syntax of organicism. Berg's music, however, also has a lyrical, expansive, even discursive quality that looks back to Schubert, and to aspects of Viennese popular music. These contrasting compositional and aesthetic impulses are by no means mutually exclusive, as we see in Mahler; but among composers of the so-called Second Viennese School Berg stands apart in making the tension between these worlds a productive component of his creative persona, as well as a tangible part of our experience of his music. It is precisely the sensual appeal of Berg's music, rather than the rigor of its construction, that has made him the most "popular" member of that famous trinity of "Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg"—a popularity that has made him suspect to more doctrinaire modernists.

This was precisely the quality that enticed so many musicians into his orbit, including a remarkable number of Americans. The composer Ruth Crawford spent an hour and a half visiting Berg in his home in May 1931 and wrote to thank him for the "inspiring conversation" about her own music and "modern music in general":

May I too express again to you—(probably more intelligibly in English than I did in my very inadequate German)—that the experience of hearing *Wozzeck* last August in Aachen was one of the most memorable ones in my life? And, after this last season in Berlin, during which I heard many performances of new music, it stands far on the heights in comparison, unapproachable in beauty by any works I heard there. I am seldom so "convinced" by modern music as I was by *Wozzeck*.<sup>37</sup>

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This is praise that returns over and over in Berg's correspondence, and it is not infrequently combined with criticism of Schoenberg. The Italian composer Malipiero, whom Berg got to know in 1931, wrote an earnest *cri de coeur* soon after they began using the intimate *Du* form of address in the autumn of 1934:

I want to tell you quite honestly that I admire Arnold Schoenberg deeply but that his works do not affect me in a way that would justify calling them art. I find *Pierrot lunaire* very stimulating but the earlier works leave me cold and the others are alien to me. [. . .] In contrast you are the *only* Schoenberg “descendant” who has remained independent and whose relationship is only theoretical, *not* spiritual. When I hear *Wozzeck*, your *Lyric Suite*, *Der Wein*, I forget *where* it comes from. You remain yourself and the theoretical *disappears*.<sup>38</sup>

To Crawford and Malipiero, Berg's music suggested another, more expansive kind of musical modernism, one that even today can serve to break down those arbitrary distinctions that have hampered a fuller understanding of the aesthetic crosscurrents of early twentieth-century music. It is a curse that harmonic language—the evolution toward atonality and serialism—has become such an exclusive arbiter of musical “progress” and that this tonal/atonal divide has blinded—and deafened—audiences, critics, and historians to many more obvious shared relationships between Schoenberg's circle and other, still tonal (or differently “atonal”) Viennese contemporaries, like Zemlinsky, Schmidt, Schreker, Hauer, Weigl, Marx, and Korngold. The epithet “Second Viennese School” has proven a remarkably inelastic and unproductive historical category that can no longer accommodate the multifaceted nature of Viennese musical modernism. Though Berg was himself committed to this historical construct, his music gives it the lie. Berg's works, with their Janus-faced forward and backward-looking aspect, straddle the divide in ways that redefine such terms as “new,” “modern,” and “progressive” within specifically Viennese parameters. This, together with the range of his concerns, the subject matter of his operas, and the expressive immediacy of his music, makes Berg, both as a historical figure and a musical personality, the true center of early twentieth-century Viennese music, perhaps the most thoroughly characteristic and all-embracing representative of this remarkable cultural environment.