

Webern's "Middle Period": Body of the Mother or Law of the Father?

Julian Johnson

I. Introduction: Webern Reception

Webern occupies an almost unique position in the canon of Western composers. In few cases is there such disproportion between the degree of interest in talking about the music and that in actually performing it or listening to it. After his death in 1945 he had the misfortune to become a banner, a slogan—essentially the name that marked a certain polemical position in contemporary musical debate. Fifty years later the image in which he was cast during the decade after his death remains largely unchanged. His music continues to be primarily associated with the idea of the most rigorous intellectual order. His use of serialism is held up as the apogee of the cerebral, quasi-mathematical organization of musical sound in which the principles of logic, symmetry, and formal economy displace any of the residues of late-romantic “expression” that may still be traced in his early works. Webern the serialist thus becomes the embodiment of Paternal Law applied to music: the heterogeneous element of art is excised in the name of coherence, as the musical material seeks to realize a “purity” whose political implications in the context of Webern’s social *milieu* have not been missed. Webernian serialism, and the musical culture which it unwittingly fathered post-1945, might well be cited as the embodiment of a patriarchal order in musical form. In Kristevan terminology, it is the almost total repression of the

semiotic, an attempt to establish a syntactical Symbolic Order which has eliminated every trace of heterogeneous, material content.¹ In Adorno's terms, it represents the total rationalization of the raw "stuff" of music, mirroring the total rationalization of nature to which a technological culture aspires. Conceived thus, it becomes a purely formal system—akin to mathematics—and, in this way, no longer art at all. In a word, Webern's music embodies a level of abstraction which offends against the balance all art maintains between the corporeality of its material and the intellectual schema of its formal structure. The abstract schema becomes all; the physical, sonorous reality of lesser importance. "Basically, the instruments become more and more immaterial to me,"² Webern wrote to Alban Berg in 1929, suggesting a Hegelian trope which leads from art's gradual negation of its own material medium to a level of

1. My use of the terms "body of the mother," "Law of the Father" or "Paternal Law," "Symbolic Order," and "semiotic chora" are derived from the work of Julia Kristeva, itself deeply rooted in the work of Jacques Lacan. In Kristeva's theory, the use of language implies an absence or lack which is the cause of a desire for an absent plenitude itself beyond language. This absent plenitude is, in the first instance, the infant's memory of the body of its mother. The symbolic activity of language is identified with the paternal figure in Freudian psychology and thus a break with the infant's complete identification with the mother. "Language as a symbolic function," writes Kristeva, "constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother" ("From One Identity to Another," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. L. S. Roudiez [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981], 124-47; 136). The "semiotic" (or "semiotic chora") is thus identified with a stage of pre-signification characterized by totality and heterogeneity (and associated with "the body of the mother"), while the "symbolic" activity of language is associated with Paternal Law and the "Symbolic Order" of society as a whole, predicated upon the abstractions of an "objective" language. Webern's music, I am suggesting, has tended to be presented almost exclusively in terms of the abstraction of a "Symbolic Order."

2. Letter to Berg (3 September 1929), quoted in Hans Moldenhauer, with Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of his Life and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 424.

purely intellectual activity which would, strictly speaking, constitute the death of art.

For many years, the reception of Webern's music was shaped almost exclusively by the concerns of the Darmstadt generation. "Webern's music" was understood to mean, almost without exception, the later serial works. In time, the earlier works became more widely known as part of a general process by which modernism was recovered from the "degree zero" mentality of the postwar avant-garde and understood as a broader and more complex historical phenomenon. In this process of historicizing modernism, the period between the 1890s and the First World War was seen as particularly crucial. A fascination with the idea of transition, and a whole-hearted subscription to the idea of the historical development of musical material, elevated Schoenberg's Second String Quartet to a unique status. If one wanted to speak of a "watershed" between old and new, here was a single work which stood astride the two. In the same spirit, the prewar orchestral works of Berg and Webern were scrutinized for their Mahlerian debts and the early songs and string quartets were "placed" within some generic idea of expressionism and *fin-de-siècle* crisis. A now familiar history was constructed by which one could talk of late-romantic decadence and autumnal over-ripeness, metaphors of organic decay which lead—as surely as spring succeeds autumn—to a corresponding birth of the new, to "the rise of modernism." Of course, the organic image was no arbitrary metaphor; it duplicated the idea (propagated most influentially by Schoenberg) of the logical, developmental process by which one musical style was derived from another.

The scholarly interest in the prewar works was reinforced by their greater familiarity through performance. Webern's *Pasacaglia*, op. 1, or *Six Pieces for Orchestra*, op. 6, continue to appear programmed alongside Mahler symphonies, even if they are unlikely to achieve the wider appeal of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* or the orchestrated version of Berg's *Seven Early Songs*. For many listeners, the poetic brevity of Webern's *Five*

Pieces for Orchestra, op. 10, or the Six Bagatelles for String Quartet, op. 9, are the quintessential Webern, over and above the formal achievements of the serial works. Scholarly interest in Webern's "early period" was fueled by Hans Moldenhauer's spectacular discovery in 1965 of a hitherto unknown collection of juvenilia, sketchbooks, and early manuscripts. This discovery was certainly instrumental in gradually shifting the emphasis of Webern scholarship. Almost all of the works discovered and subsequently published over the next few years were of pre-opus works written between 1899 and 1908 (in which year Webern completed his op. 1). Prior to this discovery there was no evidence of Webern's musical experience before Schoenberg. A composer whose first two published works were in the forms of a passacaglia and double canon respectively, would "obviously" become the composer of the later serial works. But suddenly a host of earlier manuscripts became available that showed the extent of Webern's debt not only to Mahler and Strauss, but to Brahms and Hugo Wolf—influences on a composer who might just as easily have begun studying with Hans Pfitzner in 1904 rather than Arnold Schoenberg.³

In letters to Berg and Schoenberg in the summer of 1912, Webern confided that almost all of his works since 1906 had been connected with the death of his mother, who had died in September of that year. In the case of the Six Pieces for Orchestra, op. 6, this claim was expanded in a letter to Schoenberg (January 1913) in which Webern set out a detailed program for the work through which each movement was explicitly associated with the events of his mother's death and burial. The musical devices employed in the music of this period are sufficiently clear that one could demonstrate that the same "programmatic" concerns permeate the Passacaglia, op. 1, the String Quartets, op. 5 and op. 9, and the Orchestral Pieces, op.

3. A "might have been" explored intriguingly by Derrick Puffett in "Gone with the Summer Wind; or, What Webern Lost," in *Webern Studies*, ed. Kathryn Bailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32-73.

10. The *George Songs*, op. 3 and op. 4, make perfect sense when one considers their addressee as both maternal and, through death, at a distance. The opening line of op. 3/i: "This is a song for you alone" is unequivocal. This somewhat contingent detail of Webern's biography is not in itself compelling, but it serves, rather like a fragment of archeological evidence, to lead to a much broader and more conclusive picture when one excavates a little further. The fact is that Webern was preoccupied with the *idea* of the maternal long before his own mother died. One of the most significant concerns of Webern's life was his idea of nature (and specifically landscape), a maternal construction which is everywhere evident in his early letters, diary entries, the poetry he wrote, and the poetry he copied out. It is also evident in his own music—not just in the settings of literary *Sehnsucht* which crave the ending of the individual's pain through a reabsorption into the body of the landscape, but also in the musical means by which this is achieved, in the instrumental pieces as well as the vocal ones. Webern's early tone poem, *Im Sommerwind* of 1904, is a *locus classicus* of a musical representation of landscape conceived as a maternal totality, as an all-embracing containment. The oceanic D-major totality at the beginning and end of this piece is a conclusive musical statement of a pervasive and profound cultural ideology. It was one that, for Webern himself, united his feelings toward the landscape and people of his Carinthian *Heimat*, with the musical means he inherited from the Austro-Germanic tradition. One of the most fascinating aspects of the first period of his work is the way in which naive landscape evocation changes rapidly into something musically and psychologically much more complex. It seems very likely that the catalyst for this was his mother's death in 1906, after which his music is most often concerned with a fusion of the evocation of specific landscapes and his sense of a spiritual or angelic presence bequeathed by the death of his mother.

Two pictures of Webern begin to emerge. The post-humously published early songs and the tone poem, *Im*

Sommerwind of 1904, inhabit the world of Brahms, Wolf, and early Strauss, yet the late serial works connect Webern to the post-1945 works of Boulez and Stockhausen. Few composers' works incorporate such colossal divisions in musical style yet, remarkably, the tendency of Webern scholarship has been to avoid the obvious question. By dealing with works, or groups of works, atomistically, scholarship has endlessly postponed addressing the significance of a stylistic alchemy which transforms Brahms into Boulez. The key to such a question lies, in part, in what happens in the "middle period" of Webern's published output—in that rather strange group of works from the *Four Songs*, op. 12, to the *Two Songs*, op. 19, works written between 1914 and 1926 (figure 1). These works form a very distinct group in Webern's output, despite the fact that it is not exactly congruent with the divide made by Webern's use of serial technique (which was first evident in the published works with the *Three Traditional Rhymes*, op. 17). All of these eight *opera*, some thirty-two individual songs, are written for voice (or voices in the op. 19 choruses). The voice is joined in some cases by piano and in others by an instrumental ensemble from two players up to a small orchestra in the op. 13 songs. There are, however, no purely instrumental works from this period, which is striking given their predominance in the periods before and after this.⁴ Despite some quite recent scholarly attention, in general it is true to say that the middle period vocal works remain the least performed, the least known, and the least popular of Webern's works.⁵ They constitute a group of pieces far harder to classify than the later and earlier works, and they are more heterogeneous as a group than either the early or late works. In a word, they seem to be more "difficult" to

4. There are, however, some uncompleted sketches extant for instrumental works from this period and three posthumously published works: the *Satz für Streichtrio* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1966), the *Klavierstück* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1966) and the *Kinderstück*—also for piano (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967).

grasp—both for the general listener and for the listener who is also a scholar. As a consequence, they have been largely ignored. My suggestion here is that this has produced a very incomplete understanding not only of these works, but also of the early and late works. The tendency to separate the early from the late, and to deal with them as essentially unconnected has, it seems, inhibited a fuller understanding of both. Understanding of the serial works, in particular, remains curiously ahistorical. The absence of a historical dimension to our understanding of these works has in turn perpetuated the myth of their autonomous, essentially asocial nature. An understanding which reconnects them to the earlier works is not simply a matter of tracing historical, genealogical lines of “development”; it is about uncovering the social elements of this music at the level of musical material.

The characterization of the early works as primarily maternally oriented and the later works as the articulation of Paternal Law is not entirely erroneous. Although simplistic, it touches on something central to the broad shift in Webern's technique and aesthetic. It relates closely to Webern's ongoing concern with the idea of nature and with the task of art in respect to that idea. On a purely biographical level, Webern's “expressive agenda” remained essentially unchanged throughout his career. From Mahler he inherited the idea that nature was the site of the utopic, and thus, that “nature music” might exert a utopic function, outside of the formal process of the rest of the piece.

5. In particular the work of Anne C. Shreffler has rectified this gap almost single-handedly with her book, *Webern and the Lyric Impulse: Songs and Fragments on Poems of Georg Trakl* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) and her earlier article “‘Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber’: The Vocal Origins of Webern's Twelve-Tone Composition,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47 (1994): 275-339. Remarkably, I encountered this article only after completing my own and was at first alarmed, then delighted, to realize the extent of overlap between our different and entirely independent approaches. After some thought I decided to make no alterations and let the obvious similarities stand—not least, as additional evidence for the persuasiveness of this interpretation.

But for Webern, the construction of the utopic represented by “nature” came to be the central activity of the piece rather than a revelatory moment within it. In the late serial works Webern was every bit as absorbed with the aesthetic working out of ideas of nature, landscape, and memory as he was in the early pre-opus works. The initial evidence for this is given by the contents of the extramusical outlines that appear in the sketchbooks at the start of his work on four of the purely instrumental serial works—opp. 20, 22, 24, and 28. I have discussed elsewhere how the music relates to these outlines;⁶ suffice it to say here that what is convincing is the fact that we should have evidence of four separate occasions when Webern began one of the late works with an extramusical “program.” Not only did he use the extramusical outline as an initial step in the compositional process several times, he also referred to the same things each time—above all, the landscapes of his own childhood home in which his parents were buried.

Given that Webern’s “expressive agenda” remains constant throughout his work, the question I want to address here is this: how can one understand the relation between the maternal orientation of the first period and the Paternal Law so clearly exhibited in the serial works? How can one reconcile the heterogeneity of nature in the early works with the rigorous abstract order of the later ones? This question is not, fundamentally, one about Webern or his expressive intentions. It is a cultural, historical, and analytical question. It concerns the way in which we understand terms like representation and abstraction in music, and how we relate these ideas to historical labels like romanticism and modernism. It also concerns the means by which music—even apparently the most “abstract”—articulates a discourse that is thoroughly social.

6. See my *Webern and the Transformation of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

II. Paternal Law: Religion and Schoenberg

It is surely no coincidence that one of the principal divides in Webern's *oeuvre* occurs in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War. Much has been made of Webern's initial enthusiasm for both world wars, his naive patriotism and his readiness to submit to authority. He was, in other words, pretty much like everyone else in Europe during the war years. What is interesting from a *musical* point of view, in this context, is the degree to which the war years seem to have acted as a catalyst in his own search for a principle of aesthetic order. The suggestion that Schoenberg fulfilled a paternal role for Webern has often been made. That such a relationship should have been highlighted during the war years is of no great surprise, when the national requirement to bow to authority in defense of the fatherland exercised an individual as well as a collective force. One might reasonably speculate that Webern's sense of obedience and deference to Schoenberg's opinion was increased during this time of great "duty" and curbing of private ambition and desire.

Webern's need for the order conferred by the authority of an absolute law might well appear to be the basic condition of his later enthusiasm and whole-hearted acceptance of the serial method from around 1923-24. But some years earlier, in the works he managed to compose during and immediately after the First World War, Webern had already showed a high degree of faith in the compositional means explored by Schoenberg. The *Six Trakl Songs*, op. 14, in particular indicate a striking and quite considerable debt to Schoenberg. On 13 June 1917, before composing any of the four songs he wrote that summer, Webern wrote to Schoenberg to tell him that he had brought with him (to his father's house in Klagenfurt) the scores of *Pierrot lunaire*, *Erwartung*, and *Das Buch der hängenden Garten*, op. 15. "I am occupying myself almost exclusively with your music.... Every day I play in these works."⁷ Later, on 24 June, just after the completion of "Abendland III" (op. 14/iv), he wrote,

“Gradually, I am gaining clarity again. How much I owe to your *Pierrot*.” This perennial awe of the pupil to the teacher, and the importance to Webern of Schoenberg’s approval, was underlined by a letter to Berg which Webern wrote later that summer from Prague (18 August) where he had moved to take up his post at the Landestheater:

I have gone along the right paths. Schoenberg has confirmed this. Now I am writing quite differently. I have composed four orchestral songs. Homogeneous sounds, in part long themes, altogether something entirely different from before the war. I have felt this for some time.⁸

Writing to Schoenberg on 12 September, Webern had yet more praise for *Pierrot*: “This year I have in truth tried again to follow your *Pierrot* directly... Your judgement of my compositions tells me that I am achieving something really of my own.”⁹

What is beyond doubt is that the loyalty and passionate devotion that Webern felt for his teacher continued well beyond the period for which he was formally a pupil, and that it profoundly characterized the relationship of the two men for the rest of Webern’s life. The particularly close connection between Webern’s own composition in 1917 and Schoenberg’s work is a striking but by no means isolated example of a direct response of the pupil to the master’s work. Webern’s early settings of Dehmel follow hard on the heels of Schoenberg’s settings of that poet, just as his settings of George overlap with his teacher’s. The Five Movements for String Quartet, op. 5, were written in 1909, after Schoenberg’s Second Quartet, op. 10, of 1907-08. The introduction of a soprano voice in the last movement of Schoenberg’s Quartet was followed by Webern’s experiments with the same combination in 1913. Webern’s Five Pieces for Orchestra, op. 10, were being composed at the same

7. Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, 266.

8. *Ibid.*, 267.

9. *Ibid.*

time as he was working on an arrangement of Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra, op. 16, and so on. For Schoenberg's part, he was later to remark that whenever he told Webern anything about his musical ideas the latter would take them up so thoroughly that he (Schoenberg) no longer knew who he was anymore.¹⁰

For all that, Webern's turn to Schoenberg's *Pierrot* is striking even in the context of this peculiar master-disciple relation that characterized their friendship. *Pierrot* was by now five years old, a considerable age given the fast pace of musical change in those heady years. More puzzling is the fact that the stylistic change between the earlier pieces of Webern's summer 1917 (opp. 12/iv, 12/ii, 13/i, and 13/iii) and the later ones (opp. 14/iv and 15/v), consciously influenced by *Pierrot*, is arresting, not to say shocking. If Webern had not conveniently written to Schoenberg on 24 June, just after the completion of "Abendland III" to acknowledge his debt ("How much I owe to your *Pierrot*") then it would not be hard to guess as much. Even a cursory glance at the song reveals hallmarks of the *Pierrot* style: the reduced ensemble of voice, clarinet, bass clarinet, and cello and the consistently dense contrapuntal texture in which all four lines interweave long, busy lines with hardly a rest or silence to be seen (let alone heard). "Fahr hin, o Seel" owes similar debts. Its instrumental ensemble maintains the voice, flute, clarinet, and violin of Schoenberg's *Pierrot* ensemble, but has a harp instead of the piano and a trumpet not a cello. But it is in compositional technique and structure that Webern must have felt he had gained new "clarity" here thanks to Schoenberg. Composed as a double canon in contrary motion, this song displays a concern with canonic structures not exhibited in Webern since his op. 2 canon for chorus, but a concern which here anticipates the obsession with such forms in his later works.

10. Shreffler's "Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber" is instructive on the complex tension between Schoenberg and Webern over the origins of twelve-tone composition.

Hand in hand with the renewed dependence on Schoenberg and the return to strict contrapuntal forms is Webern's more overt interest in religious texts during this period. This is perhaps the clearest sign of his search for some more universal, over-arching order, a search which permeates these works. This characteristic of the middle period songs had been signaled as early as 1915 by the folk song text (a Marian hymn) to "Der Tag ist vergangen" (op. 12/i). Most striking is the fact that, after the Trakl settings of op. 14, Webern set only religious texts in his next four works: the sixteen songs contained in opp. 15-18. In the case of four of the Five Canons on Latin Texts, op. 16, these texts were derived directly from the Catholic breviary—a long way, one might think, from the lyrical poetry of Dehmel, George, or Trakl that had preoccupied Webern at earlier stages of his career. Elsewhere, these religious texts are derived from folk texts (as in op. 17). We now know that at least four of these, previously thought to be anonymous, were found by Webern in his reading of the novels of Peter Rosegger.¹¹ This is not insignificant because, of all the literary influences upon Webern's life, Rosegger was the one who most consistently and profoundly shaped Webern's own articulation of his sense of *Heimat*. It was Rosegger, more than any other, who provided for Webern a model of the means by which artistic work might be produced as the distillation of memory—a distillation in which the memory of one's family was fused into a single image with the memory of one's home and above all its landscape. It was Rosegger's *Waldheimat* that Webern sent to Schoenberg at Christmas in 1912, asking him to read the final section (an account of the death and burial of the author's mother) if he wished to understand Webern's Six Pieces, op. 6, before he conducted them in the following March. The opening paragraph of that novel makes explicit the central function of memory:

11. Peter Andraschke, "Webern und Rosegger," in *Opus Anton Webern*, ed. Dieter Rexroth (Berlin: Quadriga Verlag, 1983), 108-12.

Childhood days and childhood home!

It is that old song of Paradise. There are souls for whom this Paradise is never lost, long since sorrows have furrowed their brow, or their hair whitened with age; in them God's kingdom continues and rises still purer and more magnificent in the memory than it could ever be in reality; but children are poets and turn back. It is a wonderful quality of our souls—a sign of godliness—that as a rule we find past hardships easy to forget, while the distant flowering of beauty and pleasure of memory remains true, and from the dross of the everyday is abstracted and built in us, an ideal everlasting world.

All men are certainly dreamers, in whom the past plays just as large a part as the present, indeed, as the plans and hopes for the future. The past is sealed and complete, it stands opposite us as a whole. It is a dream, and yet I say, it is the most real good, because it is unchangeable and cannot be lost, so long as the soul lives.¹²

Rosegger's construction of a folk memory had, as its twin poles, the simple Catholic piety of the rural folk, and the landscape in which they lived. Both—and this is crucial—had a central maternal element. The figure of Mary, Mother of God, is not here entirely separable from the maternal construction of a beneficent landscape in which all human life is cradled and supported. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this construction to Webern's own worldview and, moreover, equally hard to emphasize too strongly its role in his own compositional process.

Webern's uncertainty over his own identity and direction at this time extended even to where and how he should live. In 1917 he seriously considered buying a farm. In the end his yearning for the world of Rosegger's *Waldheimat* gave way to his more *bürgerlich* roots, and in 1918 he moved to Vienna's suburbia to be near Schoenberg in Mödling. After they fell out a few months later, he once more considered moving to

12. Peter Rosegger, *Waldheimat: Erinnerungen aus der Jugendzeit*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: L. Staackmann, 1900), 1.

Carinthia, to a property not far from his family home at the Preglhof. The tension between Vienna and Schoenberg on the one hand and his Carinthian *Heimat* on the other, crystallizes geographically his inner dilemma as he struggled to integrate the concerns of a musical avant-garde with an expressive agenda that was by turn both romantic and *völkisch*. It was also a struggle to integrate the dictates of an essentially Paternal Law and his own fundamentally maternal construction of the world. If the latter had predominated in his work before the war, the war years themselves were a time in which he clearly wrestled to square this with his sense of paternal order. Perhaps his Mödling house, with its suburban garden, within reach of Vienna but within view of the *Wienerwald* and the furthest end of the Eastern Alps, was his geographical resolution of this dilemma, just as serialism was later to become for him its musical resolution. Certainly, it is one of the most striking paradoxes of Webern's music that his maternal construction of nature came to be articulated through a language that seems to be the epitome of paternal order. The question of how Webern's essentially feminine proliferation coexists with the rational grid of the serial method can, no doubt, be answered only after detailed scrutiny of these crucial works. In the meantime, perhaps Webern's garden, that quintessential site for the construction of nature within the formal contrivances of culture, might have given us some clue!

Five Sacred Songs, op. 15

The op. 15 songs fall more or less halfway through Webern's thirty-one works published with an opus number. They were completed in 1922, halfway through Webern's composing career of 1899-1945. Moreover, they fall in the middle of the three periods into which Webern's work is often conveniently divided. Without suggesting that there is any particular significance in this far too neat, Webern-like symmetry, these songs serve well to demonstrate one of the most crucial technical

struggles of Webern's career. Understanding this struggle sheds light on both the earlier and the later works. The first of these five songs to be written, "Fahr hin, o Seel'," was published as the last of the set. Dating from the summer of 1917 when Webern was self-consciously studying Schoenberg's works, its debt to *Pierrot lunaire* is obvious both in its instrumental ensemble and its exploration of a strict contrapuntal form—here, a double canon in contrary motion. The use of strict canonic form, in conjunction with the setting of a religious text, of course anticipates the better known Five Canons on Latin Texts, op. 16, but these were written six or seven years later. I shall return to the discussion of canon later when considering op. 16. For now, suffice it to remark that Webern had not used such a strict contrapuntal form since the Passacaglia, op. 1, and the chorus *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen*, op. 2, both of 1908, the year in which he completed his formal studies with Schoenberg. While the use of canon in "Fahr hin" is quite clearly indebted to Schoenberg's *Pierrot*, the text could hardly be more different. In total contrast to the claustrophobic intensity of *Pierrot*, the text of "Fahr hin" is a calm, untroubled hymn of resurrection into eternal life. It derives, as we now know, from Rosegger's novel *Erdsegen*, where it appears as a burial hymn.

How is the gentleness of this burial hymn reconciled with the apparently "unmerciful" strictness of the canonic form? There are very few instrumental doublings in this piece and the canonic imitation is exact, with only two slight alterations in rhythm in the final section (flute, m. 23, harp, m. 25). Nevertheless, the piece is carefully contrived: the final seven bars (the setting of "that better life" to which the soul is traveling) use considerably longer durational values and thus feel considerably slower than the preceding music. This effect is heightened by a gradual "speeding up" toward this final section, not through any tempo changes but through a gradually increased use of shorter durations and shorter phrase lengths, though the interval of time between the dux and comes of both canons

remains one bar (of 3/4) throughout the piece. One of the effects of this speeding up is the apparent (but not actual) overlapping of the two canons between bars 16 and 19. Both canons at this point make use of the same rhythmic figure: three eighth notes preceded by an eighth-note rest. Canon I introduces the figure in the voice (m. 15) and answers it in inversion in the violin, doubled by the harp (m. 16). The flute in bar 17 sounds like part of a canonic imitation but is in fact the dux of Canon II, whose comes is given by the harp in bar 18. This coincides however with a further three-eighth-note motif sounding like an inversion of the same, but is now the dux of Canon I, also answered by the harp in m. 19 (example 1).

Example 1. "Fahr hin, o Seel," op. 15, no. 5, mm. 15-19.

Such symmetries within symmetries, so characteristic of the late serial works, are also played with at the very end of the piece. The end of the vocal line ("bess're Leben," mm. 25-28) is constructed from two descending thirds; the beginning of the vocal line (mm. 1-3) was constructed from two ascending thirds (another pairing may be formed between the G^b-B^b of mm. 4-5 and the inverted E-C of mm. 24-25). The comes of Canon I is of course similarly inverted, allowing the piece to close with the ascending third (to a highly appropriate harp

harmonic!) as a suitable final image of the ascent to a heavenly life depicted in the text.

Such concerns, coupled with the sudden reduction of pace for the last seven bars, make clear that textual and expressive concerns persist despite the apparent abstraction of the form. The final section not only produces a relative stillness, but dissolves timbrally (toward the harp harmonic), dynamically (to *ppp*), and registrally (the voice ends low while the instrumental parts ascend in the last four bars). Perhaps the most significant device here is the descending cadential phrase of the ending which relates to a "topic" of Webern's music used consistently throughout his entire oeuvre. This is established very clearly in a number of the early vocal works, but is found equally in purely instrumental contexts. Consider two examples (from a large number of occurrences): the last four bars of the chorus *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen*, op. 2, and the last four bars of "Kahl reckt der Baum," op. 3/v (example 2).

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a vocal duet. The first system covers measures 24-28. It features a Soprano (S.) and Alto (A.) part on the top staff and a Tenor (T.) and Bass (B.) part on the bottom staff. The music is in 3/4 time and G major. Measure 24 starts with a *pp* dynamic. The tempo changes to *rit.* and then *Slow* (♩ = 60) starting in measure 25. The dynamics drop to *ppp* in measure 26. A box with the number '5' is placed above the staff in measure 26. The lyrics are: "die die - sen Früh - ling, die - sen Früh - ling fül - le, Früh - ling fül - le, die die - sen Früh - ling, die - sen". The second system covers measures 26-28. It starts with a *poco rit.* tempo (♩ = 52) and *ppp* dynamics. The lyrics are: "die - sen Früh - ling fül - le. Früh - ling, die - sen Früh - ling fül - le." There are markings "like a sigh" above the notes in measures 27 and 28.

Example 2a. *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen*, op. 2, mm. 24-28.

12 *rit.* *ppp* *a tempo*
 daß er im Ei - se noch Früh - ling hofft!
zögernd
pp a tempo
 Ped. *
 Ped. *

14
ppp
ppp
 Ped. *

Example 2b. "Kahl reckt der Baum," op. 3/v, mm. 12-16.

While there is nothing extraordinary about the cadential function of a final descending phrase, Webern's use of this device in the pre-1914 works is very particular. It is generally held back for the final cadence of the piece and, in several cases (as here), is associated with a moment of triadic and diatonic "resolution" unique in the context of the piece in which it occurs. The melodic line usually arrives at the upper note of the phrase by a leap and this upper note is most often the highest note of the melodic line for the whole piece. The consistency of musical characteristics between different occurrences is mirrored by the obvious connection between the lines of text set by versions of this phrase—an associative meaning which seems to spill over into the purely instrumental works. In the op. 2 chorus this phrase articulates the word "Frühling" (spring), and thus supplies the idea which fulfils the yearning of the text at the

same time as the suggestion of G major/minor tonality seems to resolve the unremitting chromaticism of the rest of the piece. In "Kahl reckt der Baum" (op. 3/v) it is once again the setting of "Frühling" which produces this phrase, where once more the utopic fulfillment of the distant spring is coupled with the only occurrence of an unequivocal diatonic triad (F major). In "Himmelfahrt," the last of the *Five Dehmel Lieder* (1906-08), the same musical device occurs at the end of a song whose text constructs an image of mystical union with the night sky as a metaphor for communication with the dead. The example in "Fahr hin," written ten years later than these early examples, is nevertheless entirely congruent with both their musical and extramusical associations. The linking of the idea of spring and resurrection is a common cultural metaphor, but it has a peculiar resonance in Webern's oeuvre in which it recurs across the apparent divide between vocal and instrumental works, as equally across the "boundaries" suggested by major changes in his musical language.

"Fahr hin" was indeed an odd prefiguring of what was to come later, and it was not until four years later that Webern began work on new songs that were to form part of the op. 15 collection, and six years before he developed further his interest in canonic form in the op. 16 songs. Indeed, it was not until 1921 that Webern completed any new work. Webern's biographers, Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, relate that in August of that year Webern had gone on a brief mountain excursion, on the way home from which he had visited the grave sites of both of his parents. Having composed nothing substantial since his father's death two years earlier he now produced in quick succession the first and third of the op. 15 songs—"Das Kreuz" and "In Gottes Namen aufstehen" (completed 28 August and 3 September). Moldenhauer goes on to suggest that these songs were written under the impression of his visit to his parents' graves. This seems perfectly plausible, given the significance to his work of the grave site of Webern's mother since her death in 1906. Again, we know that this preoccupation

continued well into the late period since both the village of Schwabegg (where his mother was buried) and Annabichl (where his father was buried) are mentioned frequently in three of Webern's extramusical outlines found in the sketchbooks for later serial instrumental works. This alone would suggest that these topographical references remained central to Webern's musical thinking, even long after the death of his parents.

Whether Moldenhauer is correct or not in this case, the two op. 15 songs from 1921 demonstrate a neat contrast of maternal and paternal musical imagery. Without ascribing any particular priority to these works, I want to suggest that in this respect they articulate a deep-seated theme in Webern's music and that they do so at a particularly crucial time in his output. "Das Kreuz" (op. 15/i) is addressed overtly to the Mother just as "In Gottes Namen" (op. 15/iii) is equally overtly addressed to the Father.

Das Kreuz

Das Kreuz, das muß' er tragen
bis an die selbige Statt,
wo er gemartert ward.
Maria, die stund auch dabei
und weint ganz bitterlich
um ihren Jesu Christ.
"O Mutter, laß das Weinen!
die Martern, die sind klein,
das Himmelreich ist mein."

The Cross

The cross he had to carry
to the very place
of his ordeal.
Mary, she stood nearby,
weeping bitterly
for her Jesus child.
"Oh, Mother, cry no more,
my sufferings are slight;
the Kingdom of Heaven is mine."

In Gottes Namen aufstehen

In Gottes Namen aufstehen,
gegen Gott gehen,
gegen Gott treten,
zum himmlischen Vater beten,

Arise in the Name of the Lord

Arise in the name of the Lord,
walk toward the Lord,
step before the Lord,
pray to the heavenly Father,

daß er uns verleih'	that he may forearm us
lieb' Englein drei:	with three seraphim:
der erste, der uns weist,	the first to lead us,
der zweite, der uns speist,	the second to feed us,
der dritt', der uns behüt' und bewahrt,	the third to protect and shield us,
daß uns an Leib und Seel'	so that naught may befall
nichts widerfahrt.	our bodies or our souls. ¹³

In the first, the maternally-associated theme of consolation is actually reversed: Christ here seeks to console his own mother. The second concerns the authority of the Father but also his role as leader and protector. Webern's prewar music is suffused with maternal imagery and apostrophes, and "Das Kreuz" employs the phrase structures and desubstantialized textures familiar from the earlier music (particularly the op. 6 and op. 10 pieces). Less common is the evocation of the Father but this is nevertheless achieved in "In Gottes Namen." Here the texture is far clearer, more homophonic, and frequently articulates a metrical clarity lacking in the "mother pieces." In fact, it often makes specific reference to a musical march, a military reference introduced by the drum-beat pattern of the opening viola rhythm combined with an opening trumpet motif of obvious military symbolism. The sense of control in this song extends well beyond the recurrent suggestion of a regular meter and clearer texture. In particular, the use of homophony is striking. In the second part of the song, this complements the repetitive element of the text, with its description of the tasks of the three angels. Each angel receives an instrumental comment consisting of a homophonic phrase in the trumpet and viola, coupled with a more independent clarinet line—see mm. 14, 15-16,

13. English translations are taken from the CD liner notes for *Webern Complete Works* opp. 1-31. Pierre Boulez. ([Austria]: Sony Classical, 1978, 1991) SMK 45845.

and 16-17. The first mention of three angels produces a homophony of all three instrumental parts (mm. 11-12) appropriately in triplets, no doubt to extend the trinitarian symbolism yet further.

These songs from 1921 (particularly "Das Kreuz") suggest a return to the dense polyphonic activity of the op. 14 songs written in 1917 (particularly "Abendland III"). There the similarity ends, however, because while the instrumental texture is complex it lacks the motivic single-mindedness of the op. 14 songs and offers a more genuinely heterogeneous surface. The use of falling cadential phrases, discussed above, is however a key element in the maternal construction of "Das Kreuz." Falling phrases occur throughout the song in both the voice and the instrumental parts, but the expressive focal point of the text and the musical setting place particular emphasis on the final line "das Himmelreich ist mein" (mm. 13-15) and its anticipation in "O Mutter, laß das Weinen" (mm. 10-12). The last phrase of the piece relates to the "Frühling" motif discussed earlier in that it leaps to its highest note before a graduated descent. That the high C \sharp of the soprano part may not always be, in performance, the apogee of spiritual rapture that Webern heard inwardly does not of course undermine the semiotic intent. The anticipation in "O Mutter," without the upward leap, relates to the descending cadential phrase but also to another pronounced topic of the prewar works: a descending phrase in the solo violin beginning in a particularly high register.¹⁴ This is consistently associated with the idea of maternal consolation, although here it is of course addressed *to* the mother rather than *from* her. This link with a solo violin topic is underlined by the fact that the vocal entry in bar 10 is itself anticipated by a similar descending phrase in the viola part

14. Examples may be found in *Im Sommerwind*, Passacaglia, op. 1, Five Movements for String Quartet, op. 5/iv, Six Pieces for Orchestra, op. 6/vi, and the Five Pieces for Orchestra, op. 10 /i, ii, and vi.

(solo, and highlighted by a unique moment of rest in every other part).

The two remaining songs of the Five Sacred Songs, op. 15, were composed in the summer of the following year. Published as the second and fourth songs of the set, these were completed on 22 and 26 July, respectively.¹⁵ "Morgenlied," the first of these, underlines Webern's characteristic optimism through transcendence. The music here, like the text chosen from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, sparkles with luminous imagery. The vocal part is built almost entirely around huge melodic arches which sweep from one extreme of the register to the other. This instrumental use of the voice is a trait of the op. 15 songs in general, and the instrumental parts here employ the same arch shapes. The first stanza (mm. 1-6) contains remarkable writing for the violin which, in conjunction with the harp, produces a sustained example of word-painting. This evocation of sunlight provides some fascinating evidence for a topical analysis. For one thing, it clarifies in retrospect the use of similar gestures and colors in earlier works—for instance, the last movement of the *Orchestral Pieces*, op. 10. Here, the loud, bright chords of bars 9 and 16-17 are no more "violent" than the opening of "Morgenlied"; as the text of the song makes clear, such gestures are associated, at least by Webern, with an overwhelming intensity of light. In "Morgenlied" the violin passage thus initiated goes on to use a collection of now-familiar devices: minor ninth ostinati, left hand pizzicato (m. 1), the spiccato bowing of a repeated note figure (m. 2), high harmonics (m. 3), high stopped notes (m. 4), and glissandi (m. 4). Listening with

15. In his sketchbook Webern had written out, in connection with "Mein Weg," a row form and all its permutations (Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, 310-11). Though Webern was in daily contact with Schoenberg at this time Schoenberg nevertheless insisted that he never mentioned the idea of serialism to Webern. Only in February of the following year did Schoenberg officially "unveil" his method to his closest associates. The whole topic is discussed in detail in Shreffler, "'Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber'."

contemporary ears it is easy to hear the agile warblings of Messiaenesque bird song. The entire song spins out a bright but densely woven web of highly individuated lines; the homophony of "In Gottes Namen" (which follows it in the published sequence) is entirely absent until the three cadential chords of the final bar.

The fourth song in the published sequence, "Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber," was the last to be composed. It employs the most reduced ensemble of the set, using only flute and clarinet with the soprano. Webern, no doubt taking his lead again from Schoenberg's *Pierrot*, varies his ensemble in op. 15 from one song to another. Both of the outer songs use the full ensemble of soprano plus five instruments (flute, clarinet/bass clarinet, trumpet, harp, and viola/violin), but the second, third, and fourth songs progressively reduce the instrumental ensemble to four (bass clarinet, trumpet, harp, violin), three (clarinet, trumpet, viola) and two (flute and clarinet). The reduction of instrumental forces in this song seems to have elicited a contrapuntal discipline and simplicity not evident in the first three songs but which clearly anticipates the extreme discipline of the fifth song. Just as the maternal imagery of "Das Kreuz" had been juxtaposed with the paternal imagery of "In Gottes Namen" the previous year, here the organic proliferation of "Morgenlied" is set against the more ascetic, rigorous order of "Mein Weg." The tone of renunciation is immediately reminiscent of Mahler's "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" from the *Rückert Lieder*, and Webern's setting certainly shares some of the *ruhevoll* tone and simplicity of means that characterizes Mahler's song. Perhaps one can make too much of the fact that this song of renunciation, announcing that with one's earthly journey (*Weg*)¹⁶ now over, one stands at the portals of heaven, produced in Webern's sketchbook his first experiment with a twelve-note row form, written out with all its permutations.¹⁷ The opening vocal phrase (mm. 1-4) sets out a twelve-note row but otherwise there is little evidence to suggest that Webern pursued his experiments any further at this point.¹⁸

One further point of contrast might be noted between these two songs: the durational values in which Webern has chosen to notate them. Whereas "Morgenlied" is written in 4/8 and has the sixteenth-note as its basic durational unit, "Mein Weg" is notated in 3/2 with the quarter note being the basic unit. This may seem a peripheral consideration—if not an irrelevant one, given that a listener will hear the same rhythmic relations no matter what the notation. Nevertheless, Webern spent considerable effort reworking sketches in different time signatures and, it would seem, attached great significance to them. Small durational units are used consistently in settings of texts concerned with spring and the organic proliferation of nature. The most striking example is certainly "Kleiner Flügel Ahornsamen," the second movement of the first Cantata, op. 29, notated in alternating bars of 3/16 and 2/8. Very similar, is the central section of "Herr Jesus mein" (op. 23/iii). In this setting of Hildegard Jone's poem, Webern conspicuously changes the time signature for the middle section which is overtly concerned with spring as opposed to Jesus in the first section and God the Father in the third. There is no obvious, purely musical, reason for Webern's change from the simple time of the first section (3/4 and 2/4) to the compound time of the central section (6/16). Both the durational values and the tempo marking at this point (*Leicht bewegt*) relate

16. Webern's lectures on new music—in part an account of how he, Schoenberg, and Berg arrived at serialism—were of course entitled "Der Weg zur neuen Musik." In the course of these there is a wonderful aside which would seem to confirm that Webern associated serialism with the "up there" with which he referred so often to the landscapes of the high alpine summits, in contrast to the everyday world of common-practice tonality: "when one moved from the white to the black keys, one wondered, 'Do I really have to come down again'." See *The Path to the New Music*, ed. Willi Reich, trans. Leo Black (Bryn Mawr: Theodore Presser Co., 1963), 44.

17. Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, 310-11.

18. This song and its crucial role in Webern's move toward embracing serialism is of course a principal focus of Shreffler's 1994 article, "'Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber'."

directly to the later cantata movement. "Morgenlied" has the related, but slightly different marking of *Zart bewegt*. These works belong to a group of pieces, especially those between op. 15 and op. 20, which cultivate the image of microscopic elaboration through the use of small durational values—the dense "black" scribbblings of works like the *Satz für Streichtrio* (4/16, *ruhig fließend*) of 1925 representing a kind of extreme in this respect. Of course, Webern was hardly the only one to explore time signatures based on sixteen or thirty-two divisions of the quarter note, nor was he the first—the late works of Beethoven are an obvious and significant forerunner. Nevertheless, there is a striking consistency by which their use in Webern's music is associated with the idea of nature as the sum of tiny, highly active parts—a collection of minutiae which forms an overall buzzing, endlessly variegated totality.

By contrast, Webern also explores the "white-note" appearance of pieces using longer durational values—of which the obvious culmination is "Gelockert aus dem Schoße" (from the Second Cantata, op. 31) which even dispenses with bar lines. The deliberate reference to archaic tradition is unmistakable and sits strangely with the ultramodern look of the "black-note" pieces.¹⁹ "Mein Weg" (op. 15/iv) is the first of Webern's pieces to make this deliberate reference, but it was followed closely, and entirely appropriately, by the Five Canons, op. 16 (particularly numbers 1, 2, and 4). It is a striking feature of the first movement of the Symphony, op. 21, (also canonic) where of course it relates to an audible simplicity of the musical texture. Notation may not be the most important element in musical hermeneutics, but the contrast between "Morgenlied" and "Mein Weg" is indicative of a duality out of proportion to this apparently "surface feature" of the musical page (composers will understand this—analysts may not). Inscribed in the

19. The archaic quality of writing in longer, "white-note" durations may well have been suggested to Webern by his doctoral work (1906) on the fifteenth-century Netherlands polyphonist, Heinrich Isaac.

details of these songs is Webern's attempt to grapple with a dichotomy that, in many ways, defines his work: on the one hand, a musical elaboration akin to the heterogeneous proliferation of nature, and on the other, a faith in the "truth" of an absolute and timeless law, manifest in art as the highest degree of formal logic and thus, coherence. Webern's Goethean aesthetic, as expounded in *The Path to the New Music*, suggests that in serialism he found what he believed to be the perfect resolution of this antinomy.

Five Canons on Latin Texts, op. 16

If the op. 15 songs appear to alternate between maternal and paternal imagery, eliciting a corresponding alternation of compositional approach, one might expect the Five Canons on Latin Texts, op. 16, to demonstrate one of the most extreme statements of the rigorous order associated with Paternal Law. Certainly these canons represent a new degree in the level of abstraction and withdrawal in Webern's music. They crystallize tendencies toward a new simplicity and objective order that were already apparent in the op. 12 pieces of 1915 and that had already found expression in the canonic writing of "Fahr hin, o Seel" of 1917.

As if to emphasize the almost exclusive focus on horizontal line, the instrumental forces are cut back from the op. 15 ensemble of five instruments to only two, clarinet and bass clarinet, thus allowing the minimum of timbral contrasts between instruments while preserving the registral range in which voices can be deployed. Rarely would Webern restrict himself to such an extreme degree again. The extent of abstraction in the Canons, with their excision of timbral concerns, might seem to sit uncomfortably with the fact that they are scored for voice, the most corporeal of musical instruments. This is a contradiction which goes to the heart of Webern's music of this time and is a defining element of the Canons, op. 16. The "unvocal" nature of the vocal writing in these pieces, which brings to a head

a tendency evident in opp. 14 and 15, is apt to make the voice sound strident and hard, yet one assumes that Webern envisaged something quite different often at the very moments when this is most exaggerated. The end of the fifth canon, "Crucem tuam adoramus" is a good example, where the *fortissimo* high C \sharp in the soprano occurs on the word "gaudium" (joy). In his treatment of tessitura, just as in his attitude toward rapid changes of register in broad sweeps, often over two octaves, Webern may well be accused of "mishearing" the aural result, of idealizing a soprano sound that remains unlikely to be realized.²⁰ If this is true of his *fortissimo* high C \sharp , how much more so of his *pianissimo* high Cs and Ds?

Within the context of Webern's oeuvre and the Second Viennese School in general there is, however, a wider point at stake here, which is crucial to an understanding of what takes place in these pieces. Every work from 1914 to 1926, a critical period for Webern's move to abstraction, includes the voice. The voice, as the sign of corporeality in music, is subjected to an abstraction that seems to disfigure it. In a heightening of subjective lyricism the voice has to go beyond its own reach, to transcend its own human limits. Thus Webern cultivated registeral limits in the same way that he cultivated the limit between sound and silence, because the point of interest is the interface, the narrow border where one intersects with another. The voice is "beautiful" in these songs as the vehicle of a lyrical subjectivity, but it is disfigured by the extremity of that lyricism. Heightened to such a degree, lyricism turns into a denial of the corporeal limits of the voice, and in its intense, painful desire for transcendence, it is disfigured through asceticism.

Asceticism is perhaps a helpful way of understanding the role of the op. 16 canons which impose the absolute discipline

20. Of particular relevance here is Webern's long-standing and fruitful relationship with the soprano Ruzena Herlinger. The qualities of her voice are attested to not only by these songs but by Berg's *Lulu*, the title role of which was written with her in mind.

of the canonic dux upon the voice—more often an instrumental one, a more-than-human one (in terms of range and agility). This breaks the voice but also produces a unique air of humility and calm. It presents the paradox of an order resting on the precarious balance between the death of the subject through repressive and coercive order on the one hand, and release from the repression that is subjectivity through a "spiritual rule." Perhaps monasticism provides a useful analogy for the understanding of Webern's music, since it, too, functions through a rigorous discipline whose avowed function is liberation.

The first of the op. 16 canons, "Christus factus est," was the last to be composed and postdates both op. 17/i and the *Kinderstück* for piano—Webern's first serial works. Quite apart from the rigorous order of the canon itself (with bass clarinet by inversion), the authority of metrical regularity and rhythmic tightness is striking. Gone are the lyrical nuances of Webern's typical tempo markings and characteristic dynamic hairpins; gone too is any flexibility in the melodic line between duple and triple meters, and the corresponding "blurring" that this produces in contrapuntal writing. Without such nuances the melodic arches of the vocal line seem to become harsh and strident. The contrast between this piece, which sets a text exclusively concerned with obedience to the Law even unto death, and the second canon in the set (but the first to be composed) could not be more striking. "Dormi Jesu" is a lullaby sung by Mary to the infant Jesus. Like the remainder of the set, it has all the nuances lacking in "Christus factus est." A canon in inversion, in only two parts, separated by four beats in slow tempo, this song has a clarity of texture that contrasts strongly with the first piece. Rhythmic flexibility returns with the mixing of duple and triple divisions and the gradations of dynamics are much subtler. A central *ritardando* into bar eight divides the

piece into two halves. The melodic arches that run throughout the song set up the final phrase which relates closely to the descending “Frühling” topic discussed above. This sets the text “orat: blande veni somnule”—i.e., the mother’s prayer for gentle sleep to come to her child, a meaning entirely in keeping with the associations of this melodic shape elsewhere in Webern’s music. Again, it produces the highest note of the piece and is prepared by a melodic leap (from “orat”). In this example, the descending phrase then re-ascends in a gesture of dissolution (example 3).

9 *p* 10 *p*
 ma - ter plo - rat, in - ter fi - la

11 12 *pp* 13 *dim.*
 can-tans o - rat: blan-de ve - ni som - nu - le.

p *pp* *dim.*

Example 3. “Dormi Jesu,” op. 16, no. 2, mm. 9-13.

III: From the Maternal to the "Mater Gloriosa"

Three Folk Songs, op. 17, Three Songs, op. 18, and Two Songs, op. 19

The maternal reference preserved even in the op. 16 canons comes to the fore in the last three works of this vocal middle period. Webern's approach to the topic of nature in his pre-1914 music had been largely mediated through the associations surrounding his mother. This idea is not so much lost in the middle period works as radically reworked. In the more retrospective pieces a very similar approach can still be found—as in "Der Einsame" (1914), for example, which displays obvious similarities with the 1913-14 Orchestral Songs. The first of the op. 12 songs, however, "Der Tag ist vergangen" of January 1915, introduces a definitive transformation of the "mother" theme of Webern's earlier evocations. The memory of the composer's own mother is now transposed to the figure of a universal mother—Mary, Mother of God. The transition is made smoothly in this text which preserves the connection of the universal mother as source of rest to both the living and the dead, a source of comfort represented in nature. The simplicity of means and its orientation toward the "ewige Ruh" of the last line make a clear connection with the world of "O sanftes Glühn der Berge" of two years earlier.

The significance of this shift of emphasis in Webern's mother imagery, from the personal to the universal, can hardly be overestimated. The importance of hymns to the Madonna in the "middle period" works is a legible sign of the transformation of Webern's preoccupation with the idea of the maternal in the early works. This preoccupation is not lost in Webern's struggle to find a more objective, rigorous ordering principle for his music, but takes on a more universal, symbolic aspect in place of the highly personal, idiosyncratic form of the early works. If Rosegger, and the *völkisch* version of Catholicism which his writings embody, were a principal literary influence

in this change of orientation, the musical articulation of a Madonna symbolism that Webern found in Mahler seems to have been equally important.

In September 1910 Webern had traveled to Munich to hear the premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony, a trip which also afforded him his last opportunity to talk with Mahler. Two years later, in June 1912, Webern played the celesta part in performances of the Eighth Symphony in Vienna and Prague. The celesta plays only in Part II, and then only rarely. When it does play, however, it has a vital part. It enters in the E-major section (beginning at figure 106) which is the music that introduces the vision of the Mater Gloriosa, and for the rest of the piece the use of the celesta is linked to that vision and to the associations of the Assumption. It is a prominent sonority in the remarkable passage (from figure 196) which precedes the intoning of "Alles Vergängliche" by the Chorus Mysticus. As the corporeal sonorities of the rest of the orchestra evaporate, Mahler's heavenly vision is carried by the arpeggiations of celesta and high piano. Martin Zenck has already suggested that there is a correlation between the text of "O sanftes Glühn der Berge" (1913) and the ending of Goethe's *Faust*. Certainly, the reading of *Faust* which Webern received through Mahler's Eighth Symphony seems to have been formative.²¹ Several key words of the passages set by Mahler recur in Webern's text to "O sanftes Glühn": the "neige" (figure 149), the "Jungfrau, Mutter, Königin" (figure 102) immediately preceding the visionary shift to E major, and the same text phrase, sung with greater emphasis first by Doktor Marianus alone (figure 180), and then by chorus (figure 190). "Jungfrau, Mutter, Königin, Göttin, bleibe gnädig" are the last words heard before the transition to the Chorus Mysticus.

21. Martin Zenck, "Weberns Wiener Espressivo," in *Musik-Konzepte, Sonderband: Anton Webern I*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: 1983), 179-206.

Moldenhauer, attempting to explain Webern's description to Berg of his op. 18 songs in 1925, offers the following biographical gem:

The relationship between the three songs to which Webern alludes is perhaps explained by an anecdote related by his eldest daughter, Amalie. When her father wanted to express special affection for her mother, he would call her "Minna-Mutter-Königin!" Minna (Wilhelmine) was for Webern, to begin with, the "Schatzerl" (sweetheart). Beyond this she represented the incarnation of motherhood and, symbolically, she reigned as queen over the family. The sequence of songs in the cycle follows these images. While none of Webern's compositions was ever officially dedicated to his wife, the present cycle, more than any other work, would appear to have been created in homage to her.²²

I will return to the op. 18 songs in due course. For the moment, it seems eminently plausible that Webern's affectionate "Minna-Mutter-Königin" had its direct origin in Goethe's text as mediated through Mahler's Eighth Symphony.²³ This would be of no more than biographical interest if it were not also related to a highly significant musical topic of Webern's music. A cursory comparison of the orchestration of the third of the Five Pieces for Orchestra, op. 10, and that of the music associated with the Virgin Mary in Mahler's Eighth, will show an immediate kinship: harmonium, harp, celesta, glockenspiel, mandolin, and even solo violin. The vast Part II of Mahler's symphony ascends gradually to this high altitude, demarcated as a new space by sonorities unprecedented in the rest of this symphony.

22. Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, 317.

23. This point is underlined by Shreffler, who not only remarks that Webern was preparing to conduct Mahler's Eighth Symphony at this time, but also quotes from Webern's letter to Hertzka (2 February 1926) about the op. 18 songs: "The three songs, the first on a folk-like bridal song, the second on a Wunderhorn song 'Erlösung,' the third on a Latin Marian hymn, form a complete whole, something in the sense of Dr. Marianus's invocation from the second part of 'Faust': 'Virgin, Mother, Queen of Heaven'" (Shreffler, "Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber," 330-31).

In op. 10/iii, Webern starts in this world without preamble. Of course, this group of instruments is not confined to the rather remarkable example in op. 10 but is employed quite frequently in works of this period: it has an important part to play in all three of the Orchestral Songs (1913-14) and in the Two Songs, op. 8, which at one time Webern had considered grouping with them. It is also an important element throughout op. 6, op. 10, and the Orchestral Pieces (1913).

Webern set six overtly Marian texts in the collections of songs opp. 12-19. Three of them (op. 17/ii and op. 18/ii and iii) were written in 1925, the summer before he conducted Mahler's Eighth Symphony for the first time in April 1926. Given that Mahler's work seems to have been instrumental in crystallizing this topic for Webern in the first place, it is fitting that Webern's most intense exploration of the topic (throughout opp. 17, 18, and 19) should take place while he was preparing to conduct Mahler's score himself.²⁴ The summer of 1925 saw the composition of op. 17/iii and op. 17/ii (completed on July 11 and 17 respectively), and also a *Klavierstück* for piano, and a *Streichtrio* as well as a number of other short sketches. In the early autumn of that year he wrote the three songs of the op. 18 collection (completed 10 September, 27 September, and 28 October). A much-quoted letter to Berg on 8 October 1925 sheds interesting light on his method of composition and the associations that these pieces held for him. Having enthused about Berg's ascent of the Koralpe and the wonders of the mountain landscape, he continues:

The sense of those flora, impenetrable: that is the greatest magic for me. I perceive there an unheard idea. And I can well say: to give back musically, what I perceive there, I have already strived my whole life to do. A principal part of my musical production feeds back to that.

24. Freud refers to an obsession with the mother as "the Mary complex," one which he identified in Mahler himself. See Jacques Le Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-siècle Vienna* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

Namely: just as the scent and the form of these plants—as a pattern given from God—reaches to me, so I want it from my musical forms. I wouldn't want that to sound presumptuous; for I add at once: it is a fruitless effort, to grasp the ungraspable. But perhaps you will understand if I say, in connection with this folk song, which I have recently told you about, that it was—so to speak—given its direction by: rosemary.

I now have the second of these song rows ready: "Erlösung" from "des Knaben Wunderhorn." The third will be a Latin song (*Marienlied*): "Ave, regina coelorum, ave domina angelorum.... Sei gegrüßt, Herrin der Engel." What connections exist for me between these three songs, I will tell you at some point in person. I am still working on the third. Twelve-tone composition is now a perfectly clear thing for me. Obviously all these songs are written in it. And this work gives me a pleasure as hardly ever before. I am burning with desire to show you what is accomplished with it and what will be.²⁵

The relationship that Webern outlined to Berg at this time is fascinating. He reaffirms the intimate relationship between his experience of nature and his music but, at the same time, underlines the abstraction involved in that relationship. Just as the scent of flowers may be literally "abstracted" from their origin, their scent "distilled," so Webern would like his music to be in relation to nature. And already he sees this being achieved through formal patterning rather than representation of phenomena. For all that, Webern can still say that op. 18/i was "given its direction" by the scent of rosemary!

It is odd that the apparent incongruity of musical technique and literary text in Webern's first published serial work has gone unremarked.²⁶ That op. 17 should be a setting of "Drei Volkstexte" is surely curiously at odds with his first major piece using the ultramodern serial method of composition. Webern himself does not appear to have seen any irony or incongruity in the simple folk rhymes of both op. 17 and op. 18

25. Dieter Rexroth, ed., *Opus Anton Webern*, 90-91.

26. Once again, with the exception of Schreffler, "Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber," 322ff.

being set to music that remains almost as impenetrable to most ears now as it was then, over 70 years ago. Instead, it seems that this unlikely coming together was an expression of his own confidence that in serialism music had found the same fundamental “natural” (and therefore “timeless”) order that was expressed in the simple rhymes and religious songs of a rural *Volk*. What is striking about these first serial works is that their dominant effect is not of the ascetic rigors explored in the Five Canons, op. 16, but rather the heterogeneous proliferation of songs like “Morgenlied.” All three of the op. 17 songs are full of the “ornithological” activity of the op. 15 song (its violin part in particular), demonstrating a reaffirmation of the importance of coloristic and textural elaboration after the exclusively linear concerns of the songs in canonic form. This is a feature of the six songs (op. 17 and op. 18) as well as the two choruses (op. 19), and, indeed, is carried over into the String Trio, op. 20, the first of the purely instrumental works following Webern’s exclusively vocal “middle period.” What these works have in common is the tendency of the “accompanying” instrumental ensembles to elaborate a musical space through which the vocal line is delivered. In each case this is constructed by a kind of kaleidoscopic proliferation which gives every impression of being independent of the vocal line. In other words, the instrumental ensemble elaborates a musical space which is essentially spatial rather than linear, and permutational rather than shaped by directed motion.

This is particularly obvious if one considers the instrumental writing in the Two Songs, op. 19, before comparing it with that in the earlier songs of op. 17 and op. 18. The Two Songs, op. 19, are scored for mixed chorus (SATB), celesta, guitar, violin, clarinet, and bass clarinet. The instrumentation thus brings together the ensemble of the op. 16, op. 17, and op. 18 songs. The celesta writing is so closely bound up with the guitar part that it may be considered as an extension and amplification of what the guitar has to carry on its own in op. 18. Both songs use the instrumental ensemble in the same way: once the

voices enter, the violin and clarinets have (almost) no material of their own and are used to double the vocal lines, while the guitar and celesta are used more independently although harmonically also closely related to the voices such that they sometimes double single notes of a choral part. The nature of the doubling of the first group, however, is far from straightforward. A glance at the score shows that the instrumental parts not only fragment the vocal lines by hopping between different lines, but also enliven each pitch with rapid repetitions (generally in sixteenth notes in the first song and thirty-second notes in the second). This creates two effects which go well beyond the normal idea of instrumental doubling. First, it literally makes each note "vibrate" by rearticulating it several times, a division of the note which is directly comparable to Klee's "divisionism" or the earlier fragmentation of single areas of color in Klimt's landscapes. The effect in both cases is to make the surface "come alive." Second, since the instrumental parts pick out a different melodic path through the pitches of the chorus, their *Klangfarbenmelodie* is not the same as that of the vocal parts even though the sum of the pitches is identical. Again, Klee comes to mind (in paintings like "Mediation," 1935), where the shapes created by the direction of the line and the shapes created by color are related but not identical.

If one temporarily ignores the choral parts and concentrates on the instrumental parts the sense of line is largely lost. Instead one has a continually vibrating, buzzing texture which is essentially static while highly active within its global boundaries. This kind of textural background to the principal melodic line has a long genealogy in Webern's music, but, with a few obvious exceptions (such as the Six Bagatelles, op. 9, or the third of the op. 10 pieces), it is only in the later works that this topic fulfils its global tendency and permeates an entire piece rather than functioning as a delimited space or moment within a piece. Certainly, this quality of the op. 19 pieces is directly related to the op. 17 and op. 18 songs. What these examples have in common is the creation of a paradisaical space which functions

as the kaleidoscopic, endlessly changing environment in which the melodic line is delivered. Although there are clear devices for beginning and ending, the presentation of a line of melody in no way implies a directional or teleological thrust, which is absent here. This paradisaical space is entirely in keeping with the imagery presented by the texts. The green meadow about to burst into bloom with myriad flowers (op. 19/ii) is an image of the immanence of heaven, just as the early-flowering white narcissus (op. 19/i) is an image of the immanent grace of the Virgin Mary. Both songs relate to the texts of op. 15/ii, "Morgenlied," op. 17/ii, "Liebste Jungfrau," and op. 18, especially op. 18/iii, "Ave Regina." The music of op. 17/i and op. 17/iii shows that Webern understood their texts in this way, as if the music transforms the "rudeness" of the text.²⁷

The op. 19 choruses seem a long way from the intense restraint of the op. 16 canons. It seems that the immediate consequence of Webern's adoption of serialism was a loss of anxiety. Now assured, perhaps, by the method of the formal rigor and inner coherence of the music, Webern allowed himself to bring back the coloristic elements into his music, "purified" as they are now, of any motivic redundancy. That these two aspects of Webern's style are reunited in these works is not unrelated to the return of nature imagery through Goethe's texts. Natural images and religious symbols mix freely here as a maternal nature and Marian imagery become equally the symbol for the immanence of the kingdom of heaven.

The third song of the op. 18 set is striking in this respect, its epithets for Mary again recalling the text of Part II of Mahler's Eighth Symphony: *Regina coelorum* (Himmelskönigin), *Domina Angelorum* (Herrin der Engel), *Virgo gloriosa* (Jungfrau). The guitar and clarinet have to work hard to

27. One might also mention in this context the abandoned "third" piece for the op. 19 choral pieces—a setting of Goethe's couplet "Auf Bergen, in der reinsten Höhe, tief rötlich blau ist Himmelsnähe" [In the mountains, in the purest heights, deep red-blue is the closeness of heaven].

produce a texture which is more adequately fulfilled by the extended ensemble of the op. 19 songs. One can certainly relate the use of both guitar and E^b clarinet to the "folk song" aspect of these pieces, but, at the same time, the guitar writing foreshadows the function of the celesta with which it overlaps in op. 19. By the time Webern returned to using the orchestra (in four of the late works), the guitar has disappeared altogether, being replaced by the harp-celesta combination familiar from the early orchestral works. The "celestial" associations of this combination should not go unremarked, no matter how obvious they may be. "Ave, Regina coelorum" epitomizes Webern's reconciliation of his preoccupation with the maternal and his search for a principle of order. This hymn to the Virgin Mary should be understood in conjunction with the Goethean hymns to nature set in op. 19, whose sense of organic proliferation it shares. The sense of an internal elaboration of a basically static, closed space is not simply a product either of the busyness of the parts or of the notational conventions employed here. Permutation is of course the basic principle of the music. This is underlined by Webern's particular use of the serial method here, which uses only untransposed versions of the row and its permutations (i.e., P₀, I₀, R₀, and RI₀). The static level of transposition is complemented by Webern's permutational treatment of motivic groupings, over and above the simple atomistic disposition of pitches. This is most readily heard (and seen) as a rhythmic feature. A glance at the score shows the extent to which the motivic surface of the music is the result of the permutation of a few basic rhythmic figures.

The op. 17 and op. 18 songs, as one might expect, show Webern experimenting with his new compositional method. The peculiar treatment of serial technique here (as compared with the works from op. 20 onward) contributes directly to the "paradisial" metaphor I have outlined above. In the first case, Webern initially deployed his rows not as strictly ordered linear patterns, but as "fields" from which all the parts (including the voice in op. 17/i) draw their pitch content. Kathryn Bailey

points out that such a deployment of the row, especially when combined with the "extensive use of repeated accompanying figures" so evident in these songs, produces "a wash of sound" which she compares to passages in Debussy and Stravinsky.²⁸ The static quality of the accompaniment's endlessly varied repetitions is underlined further by the fact that Webern did not use transposed versions of the row until op. 19, and only in op. 18/ii did he begin to experiment with the principal permutations of the row (i.e., retrograde, inversion, and retrograde inversion) but here these too are untransposed.

The effect of this may be observed, by way of example, in "Schatzerl klein," op. 18/i. Here the row is still deployed in "fields" rather than in discrete linear rows, and the entire pitch content of the piece is derived from repetitions of the untransposed prime (twenty-two cycles in all). Given Webern's later analogy between the untransposed prime and the function of a tonic key, the absence of any transposition here, as elsewhere in op. 17 and op. 18, suggests that Webern's conception of these pieces (perhaps retrospectively) were as simple musical forms that never quit the "tonic key."²⁹ While this may be in further keeping with their folk song associations, it inevitably recalls the idea (though not the sound) of the extensive and very particular use of tonic pedals in the early works. The repetition of the same "kinds" of chord in any one piece is of course a salient feature of serialism in general, but is especially the case in Webern's mature serial works where the restriction of interval types guarantees the endless turning over of the same three or four note sets. While the row itself, in "Schatzerl klein" is less economical in this respect than later ones, the fact that it is never transposed means that not only the same chord "types" recur, but they have a greater tendency to do so at exactly the same pitch.

28. Kathryn Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern: Old Forms in a New Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 34.

29. Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, 54.

P^o Row for Op. 18/i

The image contains two musical staves. The top staff is in treble clef and shows a single melodic line representing the prime form of the row for Op. 18/i. The notes are: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bottom staff is in bass clef and shows two types of triads. Triad (a) consists of a perfect fourth below and an augmented fourth above. Triad (b) consists of an augmented fourth below and a perfect fourth above. The triads are shown in various transpositions across the staff.

Example 4: Prime form of row for op. 18/i.

The row itself contains no less than four augmented fourths (including the 12th note returning to the 1st) and one perfect fourth. These intervals, as one would expect, dominate the harmony, but the fact that the row is deployed as a “field” from which all three parts are drawn ensures that the composer has control over the amount of exact repetition that takes place.³⁰ In fact, a glance at the guitar part shows fairly quickly how Webern makes use of this potential for exact repetition while, for the most part, avoiding it. Consider the chords of three or more notes as found in the guitar part.³¹ This is a very partial picture of the resultant harmony of the ensemble but illustrates relatively simply a general tendency of the piece. With one exception, all the triads are versions of two basic types: (a) a perfect fourth below and an augmented fourth above; (b) an augmented fourth below and a perfect fourth above. The first of these is heard at four different levels of transposition, the second at five—these transpositions being the result not of a transposition of the row but of the repetitive properties of the prime itself (example 4).

30. The opening of the vocal part, no doubt in keeping with the folksong association, actually repeats the C[♯] and F[♯] in order to emphasize its identity with the fourths of the harmony already outlined in the introductory phrase of the guitar and clarinet.

31. To simplify matters I have not considered here the larger chords formed by the resonance of a lower note attaching itself to a later sonority—as for example would obviously happen in the case of bar 2.

(x1) (x2) (y1) (y2)
 [9-12] [12-3] [2-5] [6-9]
 (x-y) Pentad: (z)
 [9-12] [3-7]

Example 5: Tetrads.

There are four basic types of tetrad (four-note chord) (example 5). Two of these are formed by eliding the two forms of the triad. Thus: (x1) perfect fourths above and below with an augmented fourth in the middle; (x2) augmented fourths above and below with a perfect fourth in the middle. Two further tetrads are formed by the introduction of a third interval type—the minor third. These are: (y1) minor third below, augmented fourth in the middle, and perfect fourth above; and (y2) minor third at the bottom, perfect fourth in the middle, and augmented fourth above. In the example below it will be seen that (x1) appears at two different levels of transposition while the other three appear at only one. Chord (y1) however appears twice, and chord (y2) also appears in a transposed inversion (x-y) which (more accurately described) is simply a re-disposition of the pitch classes of one of the versions of (x1). There is one 5-note chord (z) which may be interpreted as the result of eliding a triad of two perfect fourths with triad (b). The one pentad (5-note chord) and four tetrads all arise from contiguous notes of the row; of the triads, all four transpositions of (a), but only one transposition of (b), are similarly constructed.

If one considers the cycling of pitches through the guitar part, a clear structural role for these chords becomes apparent. Most prominent is of course the pentad (z) which occurs twice, without transposition (mm. 5 and 6). This complements the exact repetition of the vocal phrase, which in turn takes its lead

from the textual repetition of "eh' das Jahr vergeht" in mm. 3-4 and 5-6. The guitar pentad is highlighted by the fact that it occurs within a passage suddenly characterized by more densely chordal writing for the instrument. While the pentad is formed from notes 3 to 7 of the row, the tetrad which follows it in m. 6 (x2) is formed from notes 12 to 3. This tetrad has been carefully prepared by the triads at the beginning and end of m. 5 whose elision forms the notes of the tetrad. The "holding over" of the F \sharp (note 12) had begun as early as m. 3 (second guitar chord) in order to form first the triad of m. 5 (first chord) and then the root of the tetrad in m. 6. The device returns twice in quick succession in m. 10 (third and sixth guitar chords) but most prominently in the final bar of the piece where it supplies a local voice-leading function to the penultimate low E, a function it had also served in mm. 6-7. The only other use of the guitar's lowest open string highlights the climactic setting of "Rosmarin" in the voice.³²

The first triad to appear in the guitar part is a version of (a) in m. 4 (second chord). This is the first appearance of a chain of triads using notes 5 to 8 of the row which recur consistently throughout the piece (example 6). In m. 11, three of these pitches become part of a tetrad (y2) repeated twice in quick succession and without transposition, in similar fashion to the repetition of the pentad (z) in mm. 5 and 6. In fact, proportionally, the repeated tetrad (y2) appears in the same position in the second half of the piece as the pentad does in the first half of the piece. The piece is generated from twenty-two successive statements of the row; the pentad (z) first appears in the sixth sounding of the row (in bar 5 out of 13), the tetrad (y2) first appears in the seventeenth sounding of the row (in m. 11). A similar relationship is established by the two statements of the tetrad (x1) formed from notes 9 to 12 of the row. This

32. See Webern's letter to Berg, in which he suggested the piece was "given its direction" from rosemary, in Dieter Rexroth, ed., *Opus Anton Webern*, 90-91.

The image shows a musical score for guitar chords, organized into five staves. Above the staves, bar numbers 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 are circled. The staves are labeled on the left as follows: (12-3), (2-5), (3-7), (6-9), and (9-12). Each staff contains musical notation for chords, with numbers 1 through 22 placed under specific chords to indicate their cycle. A vertical dashed line is drawn between bar 8 and bar 9. Arrows and brackets connect the numbered chords across the staves, showing their relationships and repetitions. For example, in the (12-3) staff, chords 6, 7, 9, 16, 21, and 22 are marked. In the (2-5) staff, chords 10 and 20 are marked. In the (3-7) staff, chords 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, and 21 are marked. In the (6-9) staff, chords 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 21 are marked. In the (9-12) staff, chords 11 and 22 are marked.

(*) Numbers under each chord indicate which of the 22 cycles of β^0 the chord occurs in.

Example 6: Structural relations of guitar chords in op.18/i.

tetrad occurs at the very end of the piece and halfway through. The first appearance, although in m. 8 (second guitar chord), occurs at the very end of the eleventh cycle of the row, just as the last chord of the piece occurs at the end of the twenty-second cycle.

Example 6 above summarizes the structural repetition of tetrads and pentad, showing at the same time their relations to the repeated triads from which they are formed. It would require a far more exhaustive analysis than this to demonstrate fully how the combination of harmonic “cycling” and untransposed repetition interacts with the permutation of a limited number of motivic figures in all three parts to produce the characteristic texture of these songs. My epithet “paradisaal” is not merely a bow to Webern’s own conception of these pieces nor to the imagery of the Madonna which their texts frequently evoke. It is meant to suggest that the formal processes of the

music—as well as the more intuitive effect produced by the music—elaborate a profound and enduring cultural construction of the utopic. This is characterized above all by a sense of infinite play (of elaboration and proliferation) without the coercion of a teleological or syntactical structure. In this way, I suggest, one might understand the wider cultural significance of Webern's own sense of enthusiasm for the new means of composition. In these pieces one may well find a coming together of the apparently disparate, or even antithetical, areas of Webern's musical enterprise—the maternal construction of nature and the paternal imperative for syntactical order.

IV: Conclusion: Webern, Nature, and Abstraction

In 1926, after he had completed the settings of Goethe in the *Two Songs*, op. 19, Webern turned back to purely instrumental composition, which he had almost entirely abandoned since the *Three Little Pieces for Cello and Piano*, op. 11, of 1914. He had completed three such works, and was at work on the fourth (the *Concerto*, op. 24), before he composed any more vocal music. All the texts he set after this time (1933), were by Hildegard Jone, whose poetry exercised a huge influence on the later serial works. Five of these works were based on her poetry—the songs of op. 23 and op. 25, *Das Augenlicht* for chorus and orchestra, op. 26, and the two cantatas for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, op. 29 and op. 31. In Jone's poetry Webern found the union of elements he had hitherto only found separately. The evocation of landscape and organic nature, a fascination with death and darkness as the prerequisite of revelation and new life, a conception of God as both the embodiment of Law and as a gently nurturing presence, the intense luminosity of the high alps as a utopic image of the kingdom of heaven—all these preoccupations of Webern's earlier song texts find expression in Jone's imagery.

But this is not simply a matter of texts. What a study of the middle period shows is that Webern did not shed his earlier concerns but radically transformed them, apparently beyond recognition. If the early tone poem *Im Sommerwind* (1904) shows Webern as a young man fully subscribing to the idea of musical representation, his late serial works show a level of abstraction paralleled, one might think, only by Bach's *Art of Fugue* (to which Webern frequently referred). But abstraction is the abstraction of something, some *thing* preserved even in its absence. This is surely what Webern himself referred to in the letter to Berg (quoted above) in which he outlined his aspiration that his music should be something akin to scent. In other words, that it should be (literally) an abstract, a distillation, a highly concentrated "essence" which, while having no visual or tangible link with its origin, contains the power to summon huge chunks of the past into the present, to evoke the presence of people or landscapes with an intensity surpassing the merely visual.³³

Webern's struggle to reconcile his maternal construction of nature with a profound sense of an absolute, logical order is inscribed in his music. If it were not, then it would be only a matter of biographical or psychoanalytical interest. Instead, it provides a rich example of the relation between the contingencies of individual biography and a cultural, social, and historical phenomenon that exceeds the limits of the merely individual. Webern's attitude toward his mother's death or toward the landscape of his Austrian *Heimat* may be of little interest to the serious musicologist or cultural historian. But

33. Webern regularly collected mountain plants and herbs on his climbing trips. A delightful letter to Eduard Steuermann in the United States (24 August 1936) included a selection of these dried herbs with detailed instructions of how to make an infusion from them. Breathing in their scent, suggested Webern, would be enough to transport one to the landscape from which they came. "Aus dem Briefwechsel Webern—Steuermann," Regina Busch, trans. in *Musik-Konzepte Sonderband: Anton Webern I*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: 1983), 23-51; 24-27.

considered as the points of intersection between the individual and an ideology of nature that is profoundly social, such details take on new significance. In this case, they are unusually significant because the real object of our scrutiny is not Anton Webern, an example of a bourgeois Austrian in the first half of the twentieth century, but the music which bears his name. This music reveals a profound reworking of the social construction of nature—a reworking which covers the distance between *Im Sommerwind* of 1904 and the Variations for Orchestra of 1940. It does so not primarily through the texts that it sometimes sets or because the composer suggested as much in his correspondence, but because of its particular treatment of musical material—material saturated through and through by the historical construction of nature.