Balzacian Mysticism, Palindromic Design, and Heavenly Time in Berg’s Music

John Covach

To Glenn Watkins

Introduction

Turn-of-the-century Vienna was an extraordinary place. As the nineteenth century came to a close, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was home to figures who would in many ways set the intellectual and artistic agenda for the twentieth century—figures such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Adolf Loos, Sigmund Freud, and Gustav Mahler. Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin have written that this culture “is, or appears at first sight to be, our own twentieth-century culture in its infancy.” Karl Kraus, in one of his many caustic moments, chose rather to characterize this same Viennese culture as a “proving ground for world destruction.” Over the last three decades or so—a time during which this area of inquiry has become a popular research topic—scholars writing on the Jahrhundertwende have explored a Vienna rich in coffee-house debates, concert-hall scandals, political as well as psychological struggles, and Ringstrasse promenades.

But there was more to turn-of-the-century Vienna than sometimes meets the scholarly eye. In addition to the kinds of figures and topics that tend to reinforce “legitimate” areas of investigation—philosophy, music, architecture, and psychoanalysis, for instance—there was an occult underground present in Vienna, as in much of the German-speaking world. This was a world in which Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Pythagoreanism, astrology, clairvoyance, numerology, and other forms of occult belief played roles—and at times important roles—in the lives of some of the same figures who appear so often in writing about fin-de-siècle Vienna. This tendency of many turn-of-the-century intel-
lecture and artists to take an interest in areas that most scholars today would dismiss as "mere superstition" has not gone completely unnoticed, however. It is, for instance, well-known and acknowledged that Freud was for a time very much under the influence of Wilhelm Fliess's ideas about numerology, and that he even kept an open mind to the possibility of mental telepathy.

Perhaps the most conspicuous instance of occult influence in early twentieth-century German culture is Wassily Kandinsky's 1911 book, Concerning the Spiritual in Art. While not strictly speaking a product of Viennese culture, Kandinsky's short book had great resonance among artists and composers in the Austrian capital. Arnold Schoenberg's admiration for Concerning the Spiritual in Art has been documented, and Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern were each represented in the Blaue Reiter Almanac of 1912. Schoenberg not only respected Kandinsky's ideas, he also formulated some of his own in terms very like those Kandinsky employed. In his 1912 essay devoted to Mahler, for instance, Schoenberg writes: "And this is the essence of genius—that it is our future. This is why the genius is nothing to the present. Because present and genius have nothing to do with one another. The genius is our future."

While the celebration of genius already had a well-established history in German culture by the early twentieth century, Schoenberg's portrayal of the genius as seeing into the future of mankind bears more than a passing resemblance to Kandinsky's characterization of the genius in Concerning the Spiritual in Art. Kandinsky casts the course of the spiritual development of mankind as a large triangle ascending slowly as it moves forward in time. Most of mankind resides toward the lower, broader base of the triangle, while those more spiritually enlightened reside closer to the top: "At the apex of the top segment stands often one man, and only one. His joyful vision cloaks a vast sorrow. Angry they abuse him as a charlatan or madman. So in his lifetime stood Beethoven, solitary and insulted." For Kandinsky, Beethoven's genius afforded him a vision of mankind's future that his contemporaries could not yet perceive. And since the artist-genius has a vision of something that is, in its purely spiritual state, imperceptible to his contemporaries, art undertakes the struggle to somehow bring this spiritual vision to physical articulation. Kandinsky's book owes a significant debt to occult thinking; at one point he even praises the Theosophical Movement and its founder Madame Blavatsky in the warmest of terms. Working from documents in the Kandinsky estate, Sixten Ringbom has argued that Rudolf Steiner's esoteric interpretation of Goethean science, and especially Goethe's Farbenlehre, had a strong impact on Kandinsky's thinking during the period in which his book was written. Steiner lays special emphasis on an ability that might best be termed "supersensory perception"—an ability to see the world in its spiritual form by using the "spiritual eye" ("geistige Auge").

But while Kandinsky was writing in Germany, occult ideas were very much in the air in Vienna, too. In her memoires under the entry "1911," Alma Mahler recalls the following incident:

I saw a lot of a young American woman who tried to imbue me with the occult. She lent me books by Leadbeater and Mrs. Besant. I always went straight to Mahler the moment she left and repeated word for word all she had said. It was something new in those days and he was interested. We started shutting our eyes to see what colors we could see. We practised this—and many other rites ordained by occultists—so zealously that Gucki [daughter Anna Mahler] was once discovered walking up and down the room with her eyes shut. When we asked her what she was doing, she replied: "I'm looking for green."

In the case of this anecdote, the book in question is most likely Leadbeater and Besant's Thought Forms, which discusses the spiritual meanings of colors in enthusiastically Theosophical terms. This same book, according to Ringbom, was also a central text in Kandinsky's theorizing. The only correction one is tempted to offer to Alma Mahler's recollections is that by 1911 occult trends were not so new in Vienna; the circulation of such ideas had a history going back at least to the 1870s, a history of which her husband Gustav would have been well aware. But Alma's entry confirms an important fact: by 1911 it was easy to learn a great deal about matters occult in Vienna, and one seems to have been able to become acquainted with occult ideas without necessarily having to read the books themselves.

The influence of certain occult ideas can be detected in the writings and remarks of the Second Viennese School composers. I have argued elsewhere that Schoenberg's writing on the musikalische Gedanke is indebted both to Steiner's esoteric interpretation of Goethean science (the Farbenlehre especially) and to Balzac's portrayal of Emanuel Swedenborg's mystical philosophy. I have also argued that the Viennese twelve-tone composer Josef Matthias Hauer relied both on Steiner's interpretations of Goethe, and on the writing of his close associate, the theologian Ferdinand Ebner. Webern's high regard for Goethe's Farbenlehre is well known, though connections between his devotion to Catholic mysticism and occult ideas are yet to be explored in detail.
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Into the midst of artists, intellectuals, and occult philosophies in early twentieth-century Vienna, the present study will place the music of Alban Berg. There are a number of features in Berg's music that suggest a fin-de-siècle penchant for things esoteric: secret programs to important instrumental works (the Lyric Suite, Chamber Concerto, and Violin Concerto); a deep involvement with number mysticism; and, most important to this study, a fascination for palindromic procedures and structures. Certainly these features are in many ways intertwined; the secret programs reveal themselves, in part, through Berg's fascination with the numbers 23 and 10—two numbers that had a great deal of personal significance for him. Palindromes can also participate in secret programs, as well as attain numerological significance (as in the Chamber Concerto, for instance).

Despite the interdependence of these three distinctive features in Berg's music, this essay will focus primarily on Berg's use of the palindrome. I will argue that Berg's use of palindromic structures is part of a larger concern in his music for addressing an alternate mode of temporality; this alternate temporal perspective is fueled by Berg's interest in occult philosophy, and especially in Honoré de Balzac's portrayal of Swedenborg's mystical philosophy in his novel, Séraphita. In order to pursue this interpretation of "Berg's time," I will first survey the use of palindromes in Berg's music. This will be followed by a discussion of Balzac's novel, and then by a close investigation of Berg's Chamber Concerto. The study will conclude by considering Berg's exploration of temporal modes with similar features in the music of Schoenberg and Hauer, placing Berg's compositional concerns within the broader contexts of both early twentieth-century Viennese music in particular, and fin-de-siècle Viennese culture in general.

My End Is My Beginning

Berg's use of the palindrome in his music is perhaps one of its most well-known features, and, as Douglas Jarman has noted, "all Berg's mature music, with the exception of the Violin Concerto, includes large-scale palindromes." Mischa Donat writes that "Berg's music is indissociable in the listener's mind . . . from its strong element of mathematical mysticism, which more often than not takes the form of a pervasive use of mirror structures and retrograde formations." He goes on to remark that "In Berg, retrograde movement represents almost a view of life . . ." Referring to Berg's more general concern for formal symmetry in his music, Pierre Boulez writes: "Berg's taste for formal symmetry showed itself very early, but the more his work progressed, the more this mere interest took on the character of a fundamental obsession." Boulez warns us not to exaggerate the importance of the principle of symmetry, but then hits on something that is, I will argue, very important about Berg's music; in a brief discussion of the palindrome that occurs in the sextet in act I, scene 3 of Lulu (mm. 1177-1203, midpoint in m. 1190), Boulez remarks that the section "forms a small parenthesis in the general movement of the scene, a kind of bubble suspended in time [my emphasis]." This echoes the view of Theodor Adorno, who finds that Berg's "propensity for mirror and retrograde formations may, apart from the twelve-tone technique, be related to the visual dimension of his responses; musical retrograde patterns are anti-temporal [my emphasis], they organize music as if it were an intrinsic simultaneity."

Perhaps the most obvious palindrome associated with the disruption of temporal succession occurs in the very heart of Lulu (1929-35), the Film Music. In act 2, scene 1 Lulu shoots and kills Dr. Schön (who is, at this point in the opera, her third husband). Berg's instrumental interlude links the end of scene 1 with the beginning of scene 2, and this music was intended to accompany a film depicting Lulu's arrest, trial, imprisonment, illness, and escape. Figure 1 (see next page) shows George Perle's transcription of Berg's own notes on how the music and the action of the film ought to be coordinated; beginning at m. 656, the palindrome proceeds to its midpoint at m. 687 (marked by a fermata), and the music folds back on itself in retrograde up to m. 718. While on its surface the dramatic action of the film seems to press forward chronologically, Berg's coordination of each event in the first half of this short narrative with a corresponding event in the second half signals an underlying temporal disruption. As one can see readily by comparing the two halves as represented in Figure 1, events after the midpoint reverse those that occur before it; this reversal undercuts the sense that events have moved forward, suggesting instead that things have merely returned to the point at which they began.

The Film Music is positioned at the midpoint of the opera, occurring midway through the second act of a three-act work. There are large-scale correspondences that occur on either side of this instrumental interlude; stated briefly, characters from the first half of the opera come back as different characters in the second half (and are played by the same singers). As a result of this kind of doubling, events in the second half of the work take on, as Perle puts it, "a sense of déjà vu." These transformed returns create an over-arching structural symmetry that governs much of the work as a whole. Douglas Jarman has
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The sequence of the filmed events corresponding to the symmetrical course of the music is likewise to run in a quasi-forward and retrograde progression, wherein corresponding occurrences and associated phenomena are to be matched with one another as closely as possible. In addition to the above confluences (placed side by side) of this sort (in the large: trial-medical consultations, detention-isolation ward, etc.), also those of a lesser and the least sort: for instance, revoler—stetoscope (hypodermic syringe), bullets—phials, generally legal—medical parallels, & cadavers, chains—bandages, prison clothes—hospital clothes, prison corridors—hospital corridors. Likewise personal confluences: judge and jury, medical staff and students, police—nurses.

**FIGURE 1:** Berg's note on the Film Music (in the transcription of George Perle)

Suggested that the Film Music palindrome thus constitutes the "crux of the opera," viewing it as "the focal point of the symmetrical dramatic structure" of the work. Jarman's notion that the Film Music stands as a kind of symbol for the large-scale symmetry of the opera is further reinforced by the fact that Berg himself referred to the interlude—though during its planning stages—as "the focal point for the whole tragedy" that "marks the beginning of the retrograde." Berg also originally planned to introduce, in the second half of the opera and in retrograde order, the characters that double those from the first half, though this plan was eventually abandoned. 

Berg composed his concert aria Der Wein in 1929. Considering the fact that he was already well into the composition of Lulu, which he interrupted to write this three-part orchestral song, it is perhaps not surprising to find that a palindrome figures in the structure of Der Wein. The work sets three poems by Charles Baudelaire (drawn from his Le Vin and translated by Stefan George), and divides roughly into three large sections according to these texts. The palindrome begins in the last two stanzas of the second poem, at m. 112. It proceeds to its midpoint at m. 141, marked, as in the Lulu palindromes, by a fermata. The retrograde continues to m. 172 without the voice, that part being taken over by the clarinet. Measures 112-172 thus function as both a closing of the second large section of the work and as a bridge between the second and third poem. This palindrome is especially noteworthy for the striking visual layout of its midpoint in the score: m. 141 stands in the center of the page, buttressed by harp figures on either side in mm. 140 and 142 and phrase marks that further reinforce the visual symmetry in mm. 137-145. Berg was concerned that the copyist at Universal Edition be certain to arrange these measures on the page to visually project the structural symmetry at this point in the work; he was, in fact, generally concerned that all of his palindromes be visually symmetrical in this manner.

The two retrograde structures discussed thus far, as well as the Sextet Boulez mentions from Lulu, can be classified as strict palindromes: with only minor modifications, the music is literally played backwards. The palindrome that occurs in the third movement of the Lyric Suite (1925-6), however, is somewhat freer in the return of material in retrograde. The forward-running portion of the palindrome extends from m. 1 to m. 69; the retrograde of this material occurs at mm. 93-138. As can be gleaned from comparing the number of measures for each section (69 and 46), some of the material from the first section is omitted in the retrograde repeat. Most of the material is present however, and the important sectional divisions maintain the
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**Berg's Time**

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integrity of the palindromic effect. The beginning of the retrograde section, for instance, does literally and very audibly bring back the end of the first section in reverse, and the end of the retrograde section (mm. 109-38) brings back mm. 1-29 in literal retrograde. Thus, the audible impression of the retrograde is not attenuated much, even if the palindrome is not strict in the same sense as the ones discussed above.

Another important difference in the Lyric Suite palindrome is the way it is set in this Scherzo movement; rather than pausing at the midpoint under a fermata, an entire Trio is inserted between the two sections, causing the abbreviated retrograde to be cast in the role of Scherzo da capo. If in the Lulu and Der Wein palindromes the fermata at their center can be thought of as a moment out of time—perhaps as Boulez’s “bubble suspended in time,” poised in the balance between forward and backward—then here that moment is exploded to contain a short Trio estatique. Again but in a different way, the palindrome participates in a disruption of chronological time. Certainly the three strict palindromes were written after the one found in the Lyric Suite. But the large-scale palindrome in the second movement of the Chamber Concerto (1923-5) was composed before Berg’s Scherzo movement. Interestingly, the Chamber Concerto palindrome incorporates features found both in the strict palindromes and in the free one from the Lyric Suite: it is, for instance, even freer in its retrograde section than the Scherzo, while its midpoint is very similar in its symmetry to those found in Lulu and Der Wein. The structure of the Chamber Concerto, and that of its second movement especially, will be explored in greater detail below. Having briefly surveyed a number of palindromes in Berg’s mature works and suggested that they engage issues of musical temporality, I would now like to turn to the issue of temporality as it may have been understood within the Schoenberg circle. For if Berg’s use of palindromes constitutes a reflection on time, we might well wonder what some of the issues surrounding temporality might have been.

Balzac’s Heavenly Vision

As discussed above, occult ideas circulated widely in early twentieth-century Vienna, and I have referred to the circulation of esoteric writing and thinking in the Austrian capital as the Viennese occult underground. This distinction is helpful inasmuch as it points to a body of ideas and attitudes that have been largely overlooked in writing on fin-de-siècle Vienna. In many instances, however, the occult underground was not clearly separable from what might be considered more legitimate—or at least more culturally sanctioned—bodies of knowledge. Certainly there were members from the occult community who positioned themselves at or beyond the margins of Viennese culture, and the stories of Friedrich Eckstein concerning the cast of characters who turned up at the vegetarian restaurant at the corner of the Wallnerstrasse and Fahnengasse provide a colorful glimpse of such activity. But the thinkers who exercised the most influence on the Second Viennese School were cultural crossover figures—writers who could claim a place in both the mainstream intellectual traditions and in those occult. Rudolf Steiner is a good example of such a writer; his occult mysticism is always cast against the background of nineteenth-century German philosophy and literature. Steiner had a wide knowledge of these intellectual traditions, and as an acknowledged expert on Goethe’s scientific writings, could weave occult ideas seamlessly into the fabric of the German tradition. This was, in fact, the key to his appeal; occult notions became an extension of the writings of Goethe, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche.

Balzac was also such a figure for both Schoenberg and Berg, and it was especially his philosophical novels that held both composers’ fascination. Séraphita was the most important Balzac novel for the two composers, and each considered setting the climactic final chapter, “The Assumption,” as part of a large-scale symphonic work. Schoenberg mentions the novel at various points in his own writing. He opens his 1946 essay, “Heart and Brain in Music,” for instance, with a passage drawn from Séraphita describing one of the novel’s main characters, Wilfred. Schoenberg and Wilfred have a certain amount in common: not only is Wilfred of medium height “as is the case of almost all men who tower above the rest,” but he was one of those men “whose heart must be within the domain of his head.” The most famous reference to Balzac’s novel, however, is in Schoenberg’s twelve-tone lecture of 1944; discussing sometimes hidden motivic connections in music, he writes:

But the validity of this form of thinking is also demonstrated by the previously stated laws of the unity of musical space, best formulated as follows: the unity of musical space demands an absolute and unitary perception [Schoenberg’s emphasis]. In this space, as in Schoenberg’s heaven (described in Balzac’s Séraphita) there is no absolute down, no right or left, forward or backward.
integrity of the palindromic effect. The beginning of the retrograde section, for instance, does literally and very audibly bring back the end of the first section in reverse, and the end of the retrograde section (mm. 109-38) brings back mm. 1-29 in literal retrograde. Thus, the audible impression of the retrograde is not attenuated much, even if the palindrome is not strict in the same sense as the ones discussed above.

Another important difference in the Lyric Suite palindrome is the way it is set in this Scherzo movement; rather than pausing at the midpoint under a fermata, an entire Trio is inserted between the two sections, causing the abbreviated retrograde to be cast in the role of Scherzo da capo. If in the Lulu and Der Wein palindromes the fermata at their center can be thought of as a moment out of time—perhaps as Boulez’s “bubble suspended in time,” poised in the balance between forward and backward—then here that moment is exploded to contain a short Trio estatio. Again but in a different way, the palindrome participates in a disruption of chronological time. Certainly the three strict palindromes were written after the one found in the Lyric Suite. But the large-scale palindrome in the second movement of the Chamber Concerto (1923-5) was composed before Berg’s Scherzo movement. Interestingly, the Chamber Concerto palindrome incorporates features found both in the strict palindromes and in the free one from the Lyric Suite: it is, for instance, even freer in its retrograde section than the Scherzo, while its midpoint is very similar in its symmetry to those found in Lulu and Der Wein. The structure of the Chamber Concerto, and that of its second movement especially, will be explored in greater detail below. Having briefly surveyed a number of palindromes in Berg’s mature works and suggested that they engage issues of musical temporality, I would now like to turn to the issue of temporality as it may have been understood within the Schoenberg circle. For if Berg’s use of palindromes constitutes a reflection on time, we might well wonder what some of the issues surrounding temporality might have been.

Balzac’s Heavenly Vision

As discussed above, occult ideas circulated widely in early twentieth-century Vienna, and I have referred to the circulation of esoteric writing and thinking in the Austrian capital as the Viennese occult underground. This distinction is helpful inasmuch as it points to a body of ideas and attitudes that have been largely overlooked in writing on fin-de-siècle Vienna. In many instances, however, the occult underground was not clearly separable from what might be considered more legitimate—or at least more culturally sanctioned—bodies of knowledge. Certainly there were members from the occult community who positioned themselves at or beyond the margins of Viennese culture, and the stories of Friedrich Eckstein concerning the cast of characters who turned up at the vegetarian restaurant at the corner of the Wallnerstrasse and Fahngasse provide a colorful glimpse of such activity. But the thinkers who exercised the most influence on the Second Viennese School were cultural crossover figures—writers who could claim a place in both the mainstream intellectual traditions and in those occult. Rudolf Steiner is a good example of such a writer; his occult mysticism is always cast against the background of nineteenth-century German philosophy and literature. Steiner had a wide knowledge of these intellectual traditions, and as an acknowledged expert on Goethe’s scientific writings, could weave occult ideas seamlessly into the fabric of the German tradition. This was, in fact, the key to his appeal; occult notions became an extension of the writings of Goethe, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche.

Balzac was also such a figure for both Schoenberg and Berg, and it was especially his philosophical novels that held both composers’ fascination. Séraphita was the most important Balzac novel for the two composers, and each considered setting the climactic final chapter, “The Assumption,” as part of a large-scale symphonic work. Schoenberg mentions the novel at various points in his own writing. He opens his 1946 essay, “Heart and Brain in Music,” for instance, with a passage drawn from Séraphita describing one of the novel’s main characters, Wilfred. Schoenberg and Wilfred have a certain amount in common: not only is Wilfred of medium height “as is the case of almost all men who tower above the rest,” but he was one of those men “whose heart must be within the domain of his head.” The most famous reference to Balzac’s novel, however, is in Schoenberg’s twelve-tone lecture of 1944; discussing sometimes hidden motivic connections in music, he writes:

But the validity of this form of thinking is also demonstrated by the previously stated law of the unity of musical space, best formulated as follows: the unity of musical space demands an absolute and unitary perception [Schoenberg’s emphasis]. In this space, as in Swedenborg’s heaven (described in Balzac’s Séraphita) there is no absolute down, no right or left, forward or backward.
Karl Womer has argued for the significance of Balzac's novel in Schoenberg's libretto to his unfinished oratorio, *Die Jakobsleiter*, and I have elsewhere argued for its value in understanding the mysticism at the heart of Schoenberg's notion of the *musikalische Gedanke*.\(^{36}\)

Berg mentions *Séraphita* in a letter to Webern of 29 July 1912, and both *Séraphita* and *Louis Lambert* in a letter to Schoenberg dated 21 December 1912;\(^{37}\) this is precisely the period during which both composers were making their respective plans to set "The Assumption." According to Hans Redlich, Berg's inclination to mysticism "increased with advancing years," and Redlich believes Berg's strong Roman Catholic upbringing explains "his predilection for Balzac's mystic novel *Séraphita*," as well as "for the works of Swedenborg."\(^{38}\) Wolfgang Gratzer has made a compelling case for the high regard in which Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern held Balzac's novel, as well as for Berg's own interest in the book and its ideas.\(^{39}\) And one of the central ideas of the novel, especially in the final chapter that so intrigued Berg and Schoenberg, was Swedenborg's description of heaven. As Schoenberg's remarks above begin to indicate, space and time in Swedenborg's heaven are different from the way they are in the physical realm. I will focus below on how this conception of otherworldly time and space can be seen to influence the temporality of Berg's music; for present purposes it will be useful to consider what Balzac and Swedenborg have to say about time and space in heaven.

Balzac's novel is set in a small Norwegian village at the turn of the nineteenth century and revolves around a mysterious figure *Séraphita/*Séraphitus. This mysterious being is given to long hours in solitude rapt in intense prayer and devotion. There is a young couple named Wilfred and Minna who befriend this strange figure; *Séraphita/*Séraphitus seems throughout the story to be androgynous, appearing to the young man Wilfred as a woman and to the young woman Minna as a man. In fact, each is strongly drawn to this mysterious person in a very gendered manner: to Wilfred, *Séraphita* is the perfect woman, alluring yet virtuous; to Minna, *Séraphitus* is a wise and courageous man. But *Séraphita*/Séraphitus is in fact neither gender, but is rather an ungendered being—or perhaps better, a "beyond-gendered" being—who is about to ascend into a higher spiritual realm as an angel; the story essentially takes place in the final stages of this transformation. At the climax of the tale, *Séraphita/Séraphitus* is transformed into a purely spiritual being in the presence of the two young people, and it is in this scene that one reads about the nature of Swedenborg's heaven. The reader hears much about Swedenborg's philosophy before this dramatic final chapter; however, in fact, chapter 3 is given over mostly to a summary of Swedenborg's life and writings. It is possible that neither Schoenberg nor Berg read much Swedenborg directly, and each may have taken his knowledge of the mystic's philosophy mostly from this novel, together with additional information gleaned from other sources.\(^{40}\)

In the final chapter of the novel, Minna and Wilfred are present at *Séraphita/Séraphitus's* moment of earthly death. This brief moment is exploded outside of physical time as a long series of events unfold for the trio in the higher spiritual realm. As mentioned above, *Séraphita/Séraphitus* sheds its physical body and ascends into heaven as a purely spiritual being. The young couple experience this and much more in an extended vision of heaven—an experience so powerful in its force that it threatens to completely overwhelm the pair. As their spiritual journey concludes, they find themselves back in their physical bodies next to the now-dead body of *Séraphita/Séraphitus*. The story ends as Wilfred and Minna commit themselves to one another and to a life of worship and prayer together.

There is a clear mention of the nature of time in heaven that occurs in this final chapter; Balzac writes: "But the Spirit was in the infinite, and they did not know that in the infinite time and space are not . . . ."\(^{44}\) A few pages earlier, in the penultimate chapter, we read: "... in fact, to the spirit, time and space are not."\(^{42}\) It is thus very clear how Schoenberg and Berg might have gotten the idea that in Swedenborg's heaven time and space are unified. Balza¡c's rendering of this idea in these passages is not quite in accordance with Swedenborg's actual meaning, however. For Swedenborg, time and space in the spiritual realms were indeed very different. Physical time and space are reckoned from the movement of physical bodies (time is measured by the rotation of the Earth and by its orbit around the Sun) and by the location of bodies in physical space. If there are no physical bodies, there can be no time or space in the same sense. Swedenborg asserts that time and space in the spiritual realms are reckoned instead by "spiritual states," and does not in fact dispense with the notion of events falling in temporal succession or things being ordered in space; he only contends that this kind of time and space is not dependent on the movement or location of physical bodies.\(^{43}\) The notion that in Swedenborg's heaven time and space are unified probably arises from reading Balzac in the context of early 20th-century claims by followers of Swedenborg; the Swedenborgians claimed that Immanuel Kant had gotten the notion that time and space are *a priori* from reading Swedenborg. As it turns out, Kant did read a sizeable chunk of Swedenborg's writing, producing a response in the form of his *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* of 1766.\(^{44}\) But the key to understanding the interpretation that Schoenberg and Berg took away from
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Balzac's novel is the idea that in the spiritual realm time and space are very different from the way in which we typically conceive of them: in heaven, there is an alternate time and space.

It is important that in the final chapter of Séraphita the extended heavenly vision occurs in a mere moment of physical time, and at the precise point of Séraphita/Séraphitus' death. The similarity between this aspect of Balzac's final chapter and a very similar feature of Schoenberg's Erwartung (1909) and Die glückliche Hand (1910-13) is unmistakable. The action of these two works unfolds inside of a single moment: in Erwartung, it occurs within the moment when the woman finds her lover's murdered body; in Die glückliche Hand, the moment occurs around the appearance of the winged monster with its teeth in the man's neck. According to Adorno, these two Schoenberg pieces were Berg's "first loves."\(^4\) It thus might follow that, at least for Berg, Balzac's Séraphita suggested that music concerned with evoking the higher spiritual realms must also somehow disrupt our normal sense of temporal unfolding, and Schoenberg's two stage works tended to confirm this.

Time in the Chamber Concerto

Considered in terms of the compositional desire to explode a moment of physical time in order to evoke a timeless realm of the spirit, the palindrome is an attractive music-technical solution: it starts out from a particular spot, reaches a midpoint, and turns back on itself to return to the place from which it began. Even the progress of the palindrome up to its midpoint, which could be thought of in conventional temporal terms, is undone by the subsequent retrograde. If, following Adorno, Berg's palindromes are anti-temporal, this resistance to temporality has to be understood as a disruption to chronological time as it is known in the physical realm; these palindromic structures are, of course, not anti-temporal in any strict sense, since they ultimately must unfold in chronological time no matter what one writes about them. It is probably more fruitful to view these mirror structures as resisting the inevitable forward progress of chronological time, disrupting our normal temporal expectations as a way of suggesting an "other" world—or even simply an "otherworldly" state—in which temporality is transformed in a meaningful way.

The palindrome that occurs in the second movement of Berg's Chamber Concerto is perhaps the most famous one in all of his music; this is perhaps because he wrote about the piece at length, even provid-
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ing a detailed analytical diagram, in a widely published open letter to Schoenberg, to whom the piece is dedicated in honor of his fiftieth birthday. This palindrome provides a strong example of how such a mirror structure can disrupt musical temporality. In addition, the three movements in the Chamber Concerto taken together contain a number of other procedures that further suggest temporal disruption as one of the work's basic premises. When considered along with Balzac's novel and the depiction of Swedenborg's heaven that appears there, these technical characteristics shed considerable light on the secret program of the Chamber Concerto as discussed by Brenda Dahlen.

As mentioned above, the palindrome in the Chamber Concerto is freer than the strict ones found in Lulu and Der Wein. Comprising the entire second movement, it is also more extended than any discussed thus far. The movement begins at m. 241, and the first half of the piece—up to the midpoint—is an ABA' form with the subsections containing 42, 48, and 30 measures respectively. At the juncture between measures 360 and 361, the piece turns back on itself, producing an A'BA form with the subsections in reverse order, now spanning 30, 48, and 42 measures respectively. Strictly palindromic passages occur at mm. 356-60/361-65 (the midpoint), mm. 283-311/410-38 (in the B sections), and mm. 271-82/439-50 (in the A sections); otherwise all important thematic and motivic material returns in retrograde, but treated freely.

The midpoint of the piece is arranged visually across two facing pages of the score; there is no fermata but rather a tolling of twelve low C's/D's in the piano and bassoon—six on either side of the center—accompanied by chords in the horns and trombones and a high, lyrical and sustaining line in the solo violin. Redlich captures the mood of this passage nicely, citing the "mystical mood" that precedes the midpoint and the "twelve mysterious chimes given out by the piano and double bassoon, six on either side, which ring in the hour of musical ghosts...."

Working from Berg's sketches for the piece, Dahlen has been able to determine that the notes sounded in the first horn, A-B-D-E (then in retrograde), constitute a musical anagram for the name of Schoenberg's first wife, Mathilde. Of course, the Chamber Concerto is well-known for its use of three musical anagrams in the opening motto of the work: Arnold Schönberg (A-D-E-C-B-E-G in the piano), Anton Webern (A-E-B3-E in the violin), and Alban Berg (B3-A-B3-E-G in the horn); and Dahlen has further shown that variations in the theme-and-variations first movement were inspired by personal characteristics of additional members of the Schoenberg circle (the use of piano and violin as solo instruments in the piece already points generally but clearly to Eduard Steuermann and Rudolf Kolisch, respectively).
Mathilde Schoenberg died on 18 October 1923, and this loss affected her husband Arnold deeply. Dahlen posits that Berg would already have begun the work by the time Mathilde passed away, but altered the piece after Mathilde’s death to include her passing in the secret program to the work. Dahlen reinforces her reading by showing that Berg also includes references in the piece to Schoenberg’s tone poem Pelleas und Melisande (1902-3), which, following Maeterlinck, features a love triangle as a central aspect of its plot. She argues that Berg’s quotations of Schoenberg’s tone poem may refer to the love triangle that developed when Mathilde had an affair with the painter Richard Gerstl—an affair that ended with Gerstl’s suicide and Mathilde’s subsequent psychological collapse.52 But as Dahlen remarks, it seems somewhat odd that Berg would hide such references in a piece dedicated to Schoenberg in celebration of his birthday. Indeed, such a gesture might be viewed as cruel and mean-spirited. Dahlen reasons that this might constitute one reason why this aspect of the program remained secret.

In light of Balzac’s novel, however, another reading is far more plausible: the midpoint of the second movement represents Mathilde’s moment of death and ascent into heaven. As in the novel, horns resound—in Séraphîta they are trumpets—at the moment when Mathilde is admitted to this highest spiritual realm. The references to Pelleas may indeed signal a love triangle as Dahlen suggests, but if so, it is one that ends—like the one in Séraphîta—in spiritual transformation, or perhaps more in the Schoenbergian spirit: a spiritual transfiguration. The midpoint of the piece thus becomes a moment out of which the rest of the movement expands in opposite directions, simultaneously toward its end and beginning. Such a reading not only comports better with Berg’s stated intention to honor his teacher, but also turns out to resonate sympathetically with the rest of the work.

The formal design of the first movement also reflects an attempt to evoke the Swedenborgian-Balzacian vision of heaven. The movement is a theme with five variations. After the statement of the motto for the work as discussed above, a theme is presented that consists of six different melodic passages in succession (mm. 1-30); in the first variation (mm. 31-60) the solo piano reprises these six passages in the same order in which they were initially presented. The second variation (mm. 61-120), however, reworks each passage in free retrograde and presents the original succession in retrograde order. The third and fourth variations (mm. 121-150 and 151-180) continue this practice by bringing the thematic material back in inversion and retrograde inversion respectively. The fifth variation (mm. 181-240) reprises the original prime forms. Of course there is more at work in this movement than the large-scale repetition of thematic material according to Schoenberg’s four forms of twelve-tone transformation. The movement can also be seen, for instance, to unfold a sonata form in which mm. 1-60 comprise the exposition, mm. 61-180 make up the development, and mm. 181-240 form the recapitulation. Further, the inscriptions above the initial motto of the piece reads “all good things . . .” (come in threes), and the number of measures found in each subsection is divisible by three. But in light of Schoenberg’s supporting the four standard twelve-tone transformations with the idea of a unitary conception of musical space drawn from Séraphîta, and considering the palindrome in the second movement and the preceding discussion of it, this first movement can also be seen as a further working out of the mystical idea of time and space in the spiritual realm. Here however, it is not so much temporal disruption that occurs; rather, the movement engages Schoenberg’s notion that a musical object retains its identity under retrograde, inversion, or retrograde inversion. By bringing the material from the theme section back under these transformations in the context of a theme-and-variations movement, Berg is making the unitary conception of musical space the basis for the operative large-scale structure of the movement.

If the first movement is devoted to the issue of heavenly space, and the second attempts to evoke heavenly time, the third combines both of these ideas together in a remarkable way. It recapitulates the first two movements simultaneously, bringing back material from both in the original order, in an elaborate formal scheme that further extends the idea of evoking the higher spiritual realms through music-technical procedures.53 By placing both movements together in a single movement, Berg disrupts temporality by having both pieces, in a certain sense, sounding at once. There is a fascinating kind of recursiveness at work here in that the two movements that are recapitulated together in the service of disrupting musical time and space are already, taken separately, involved in the same kind temporal-spatial disruption. Berg’s manipulation of the temporal and spatial domains in this movement anticipates developments in composition that are more usually associated with the post-World-War-II avant-garde, and with composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Elliott Carter; his overall concern with temporality in the service of religious mysticism also anticipates in some ways the same sets of concerns in the music of Olivier Messiaen.54 While there are clearly additional compositional strategies unfolding throughout the Chamber Concerto, one central concern of the piece is pursuing various means of evoking the unitary time and space of Swedenborg’s heaven.
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While there are clearly additional compositional strategies unfolding throughout the Chamber Concerto, one central concern of the piece is pursuing various means of evoking the unitary time and space of Swedenborg’s heaven.
The Aesthetic of Temporal Disruption

There is nothing new in suggesting that Berg’s music tends to be concerned with temporality. In his “The Eternal Return: Retrograde and Circular Form in Berg,” Robert Morgan demonstrates in a compelling manner that palindromic structures in Berg’s music are just one technical symptom of the composer’s larger obsession with musical temporality. He also examines retrograde procedures and symmetrical structures generally in the music of Berg, finding that Berg’s fascination with such techniques and structures not only extends across his output, but that it can be traced back to many of his earliest pieces as well. Morgan generalizes Berg’s practice in terms of what he calls “circular recurrences,” which can culminate in formal structures “in which an opening gesture returns at a composition’s close, thereby joining the music’s temporal extremes.” Indeed, he finds Berg’s concern with musical temporality ubiquitous to the composer’s work:

Musical time, turned back on itself, circle-like, reattains its point of origin, collapsed into an instant by having gone forward only to end where it began. The remarkably consistent appearance of such circular motions in Berg, achieved through both “progressive” and “retrogressive” means, suggests that they formed an essential component of his basic compositional orientation.65

Morgan’s characterization of Berg’s practice adds a crucial factor to the discussion of palindromic and retrograde structures in this music. His use of the word “circular” here is meant to capture the sense that Berg’s music does not simply turn back on itself; rather, it drives forward to return to the place from which it began. And for Morgan, Berg’s music drives forward according to a traditional tension-release pattern inherited from nineteenth-century music. Berg’s strict palindromes, for instance, do not achieve their effect by sounding as if they turn around and go backward (though Morgan would admit that the sense of reversal is audible immediately surrounding the midpoint); instead, Morgan argues, “Berg applies an innovative technique—retrograde—to achieve an essentially traditional result.”66 It is in this sense, then, that Berg’s music tends—as enigmatic as the idea may seem—to drive forward to its beginning, tracing a circle in one direction only. Morgan’s emphasis on the forward-directed character of the retrograde halves of Berg’s palindromes offers a corrective to the readings that often privilege the mirror aspects of the structure (and my descriptions above are a good example of this latter tendency). But Morgan’s reading of Berg’s procedure risks overcompensating somewhat for other authors’ emphasis on the static nature of Berg’s symmetrical structures; for if we follow his metaphor of the circle strictly, one is largely unaware of a temporal disruption until the beginning material mysteriously reappears at the end of a work. Because he privileges the forward-directed quality of the circular motion, the static reading of symmetrical structure tends to be replaced with a dynamic (though enigmatic) one.

Morgan suggests that Berg’s thinking about circular form may have been influenced by Nietzsche’s writing on the eternal return, an idea that first arises as a “thought experiment” in The Gay Science (1882) and plays a crucial role in his later philosophy, and in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-5) especially.67 Morgan argues that for Nietzsche time itself is a circle, and the relevance of this view for Berg’s music is “its close affinity with the belief that everything is in a state of constant change and mutation, of ‘becoming’ as opposed to ‘being.’ It is precisely because all things are in flux, undergoing continuous metamorphosis, that the idea of eternal recurrence acquires significance.”68 The eternal return requires an affirmation of the moment, “wrested from the constant, whirling passage of life, offering a measure of stability for a world otherwise condemned to unmediated transience and change.”69

Morgan puts his Nietzschean reading forward as a positive one, setting it in contrast to the more “negative” one of Douglas Jarman. In his discussion of Wozzeck, Jarman writes: “The musical palindromes stand as a symbol of predestination and of man’s inability to affect the course of events. Like the circular images in the text, the palindromes, returning to the point at which they began, closing the circle and thus symbolically negating their own existence, represent the eventual and inevitable end of these predetermined events.”70 He goes on to write that “the inhuman mechanistic universe depicted in Wozzeck represents Berg’s own view of the universe, a natural world governed by uncaring, mechanical, predetermined processes which operate irrespective of the fate and feelings of the individual.”71 As Morgan points out, Jarman interprets the palindromes, and retrogrades generally, as symbols of negation, “their reversal of musical time mirroring a desire to erase temporal passage and its inevitable consequences.”72

Berg’s symmetrical structures are not circular in precisely the way Morgan argues, nor are they representative of a melancholy worldview as Jarman would have it. They are, rather, part of a central concern in Berg’s music: to evoke Swedenborg’s heaven as described in Balzac’s Séraphita. The three movements of the Chamber Concerto provide a strong point of departure for testing this interpretation; for in this piece,
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as I have argued, Berg evokes the spiritual realm as part of the secret program for the work. The other palindromes tend to support this Swedenborgian-Balzacian reading. The palindrome in Der Wein, for instance, comes at the end of the setting of the second Baudelaire poem. This poem, unlike the other two, could almost pass for a description of the otherworldly experience of Wilfred and Minna in the novel. In discussing the work, Berg all but confirms this. In a letter dated 19 January 1932 Schoenberg asks Berg about the meaning of the retrograde at m. 142; Berg responds on 16 February 1932 that “the return of the retrograde repetition after the IIIrd song is supposed to correspond to the return from the realm of this song to that of the IIIrd song, which is the same as that of the first.” In other words, the first and third songs are in the earthly realm, the second is in the heavenly one. The palindrome of the Film Music from Lulu could also be viewed in terms of the same general kind of mysticism: the events in the film could be seen to play out Lulu’s rebirth—her retreat from life and return to it. This is, broadly speaking, the same idea that lies at the heart of Schoenberg’s Die Jakobsleiter, in which disembodied souls wait in the spiritual realm for rebirth in the physical one.

Even in Wozzeck, the work to which both Morgan and Jarman return so often in their interpretations, it is possible to see evidence of Balzac’s novel. Besides the opening scene with the Captain—in which the Captain seems to be even more melancholy about the inevitable forward progress of time than Jarman would have us believe Berg is—there are numerous references to Wozzeck’s “visions.” If one bears in mind that otherworldly visions can be both of heaven and of hell (and Wilfred and Minna do visit hell at the end of their spiritual experience), then Wozzeck can be understood not so much as hallucinating, but rather as having uncommon access to the darker realms. In almost every case Jarman presents, this reading is plausible if one only allows that Wozzeck may really be seeing something; it may just be that those around him are incapable of perceiving it. Like a darker version of Gambara, Frenhofer, or Louis Lambert in the Balzac novels, Wozzeck cannot get his head out of the spiritual world, nor readily distinguish between this world and the other—a failing that leads, as in the Balzac stories, to tragedy.

It would be mistaken to argue, however, that every instance of a palindrome, retrograde, or symmetrical structure in Berg’s music leads to a meaningful interpretation in terms of Sérospita. It is more likely that Berg had both a penchant for symmetrical structures (as Jarman and Morgan have shown) and a great love for Balzac’s novel. These two tendencies may reinforce one another often in Berg’s music, but they need not do so in every instance to make those in which this does occur meaningful; it is certainly possible that in one case a palindrome can denote fate, while in another it may evoke the spiritual realm (or in the case of the Chamber Concerto, both). Reading Berg’s concern for temporality in his music in terms of Sérospita expands and reinforces Morgan’s notion of circular form. I remarked above that Morgan’s emphasis on the forward drive of many of Berg’s retrograde sections unduly privileges the dynamic aspect. If one posits that the dynamic drive Morgan describes so effectively constitutes the forward progress of chronological time, and the symmetrical structures (the palindromes especially) constitute the static, eternal temporality of heaven, then the dialectic played out between the static and dynamic aspects of the music could be seen to reflect the dialectic played out between the physical and spiritual realms in Swedenborg’s philosophy.

If symmetrical structures can be seen to evoke the spiritual realm at least some of the time in Berg’s music, then the question arises in regard to exactly how it is that the notion of heaven is aesthetically operative in the music. Are we to understand Berg as representing heaven in his music? or are the pieces constructed in such a way that they provide a vehicle for the spiritual experience itself? When one considers Berg’s interest in mystical ideas along with the music and theories of both Schoenberg and Hauer, it becomes clear that each composer is fascinated with the spiritual realm while having a distinct manner of invoking it. In the music of Josef Matthias Hauer, the twelve pitches of equal temperament constitute a kind of twelve-tone universe; this universe provides the only direct access to the spiritual realm. Each piece of music is a kind of contemplation of the twelve-tone universe, and the value of a musical work is the spiritual state it offers to the person engaging it as composer, performer, or listener. For Hauer, then, twelve-tone music does not represent the spiritual realm, it should instead take one there. Schoenberg had a similar conception of the role of music, but for him it was not the twelve-tone universe that constituted the spiritual in music, but rather the musikalische Gedanke. The Gedanke resides in a realm outside of time and space—as in Swedenborg’s heaven (described in Balzac’s Sérospita)—and the composer, the genius who has the vision, is charged with rendering the vision within the realm of the physical. For Schoenberg, the Gedanke is not only outside of time and space, it is also outside of style. Thus, it does not matter whether the resulting music is tonal, atonal, or dodecaphonic; the only considerations in this regard are historical ones.

It is therefore just as possible for Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, or Schoenberg to project the Gedanke of a work in whatever style is
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In the context of the music and aesthetics of these two other composers, Berg's fascination both with temporality in music and with the mystical writing of Swedenborg is not exceptional. Berg's music is different in that it seems to be far less concerned with offering a vehicle for the spiritual experience than it is with representing such an experience. It is the presence of secret programs in his music that sets it apart from the music of either Hauer or Schoenberg. For how is one to experience a spiritual realm in which characters and their actions in the physical realm—incidents drawn from Berg's own personal life—have already been placed? If we return for a moment to the dialectic suggested above between chronological, physical time and static, spiritual time, it is possible to posit that Berg may in fact be offering us the representation of a world in which time presses forward in the physical realm while the static spiritual realm resides behind it. Considered from this point of view, the fact that unreal, unlikely, and even grotesque events unfold in Lulu against the backdrop of a structurally symmetrical design begins to suggest that perhaps the opera is more optimistic about life than critics and scholars have so far perceived it to be. No matter how absurd the course of events in the physical realm may become, Berg might be saying, the higher reality of the spiritual realm is always there.

Berg's interest in matters occult is also not exceptional for fin-de-siècle Vienna. Morgan's suggestion that Berg may have had Nietzsche's philosophy in mind is probably accurate. But in early-twentieth-century Vienna Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return was likely blended with notions of reincarnation, genius, and visions of the spiritual realm in ways of which the philosopher would never have approved. As I have argued elsewhere, Schopenhauer's philosophy was appropriated to mystical ends as well, and Wagner and Wagnerism played an important role in promoting Schopenhauer's writing in Germany and Austria. Thus, embedded within the fin-de-siècle Vienna that usually emerges from scholarly writing there is also another layer of cultural activity, the sometimes even more colorful word of the Viennese occult underground. Turn-of-the-century Vienna was an extraordinary place....

NOTES


2Karl Kraus, Die Fackel 400 (Summer 1914): 2; cited in Janik and Toulmin, Wittgenstein's Vienna, p. 67.


4Of the books cited above, for instance, only McGrath's mentions Friedrich Eckstein. Eckstein was a central figure on the Viennese occult scene and at various points was in close contact with Freud, Mahler, Viktor Adler, and especially Hugo Wolf. For an account of Eckstein, see James Webb, The Occult Establishment (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1976), pp. 41-47.

5Freud's relationship with Fliess as well as his interest in telepathy are discussed in Peter Gay's biography, Freud: A Life for Our Time (New York: Norton, 1988).


12Thought Forms was originally published in English in 1901. Kandinsky worked from a German translation, Gedankenformen (Leipzig, 1908); see Ringbom, The Sounding Cosmos, pp. 62-3 esp. The Mahlers could easily have known this edition. For the curious reader, there are six shades of green appearing in a full-color chart that accompanies the book; the brightest green represents "sympathy."
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John Covach

Mahler’s involvement in Viennese occult circles is discussed at some length in McGrath, Dionysian Art, see especially Chapter Three, “Aesthetics and Activists,” pp. 87-99.


See Perle’s discussion of the Film Music on pp. 150-57 of his Lulu. Figure 1 reproduces his Diagram 3, which appears on p. 152; Perle reproduces Berg’s original notes as Plate 7.

Perle discusses multiple roles in detail in his Lulu, pp. 60-67.


See Joan Allen Smith, “Interview with Eugene Wolf,” International Alban Berg Society Newsletter 13 (spring/summer 1985): 8. As Perle has pointed out, the Lulu full score is relatively successful on this count, though the Lulu Suite score is even better and the Lulu piano/vocal score far worse (see Perle, Lulu, p. 150). Of the pieces discussed below, the palindrome in the Chamber Concerto is visually symmetrical, that in the Lyric Suite (for perhaps obvious reasons) is not.

As Douglass Green has pointed out, the way in which the rhythmic components are retrograded can be based either on a retrograde of the durations themselves or on a retrograde of the attack points; see his “The Allegro Mysterioso of Berg’s Lyric Suite: Iso- and Rhythm Retros,” Journal of the American Musicological Society 30 (1977): 507-16. With regard to the palindromes considered in this section, Dave Headlam observes that only one of the Lulu Suite employs attack-point retrograde; see his The Music of Alban Berg, p. 215.

Robert Morgan gives a detailed accounting for these sections in his “The Eternal Return,” pp. 125-28, see also Green, “The Allegro Mysterioso.” In regard to Berg’s fascination for the number 23, it is worth noting that both 69 and 46 are multiples of this personal figure.

Eckstein’s observations can be found in his Alte unerzählbare Tage. Erinnerungen siebziger Lehr- und Wanderjahren (Vienna, 1936), p. 105, cited and excerpted in McGrath, Dionysian Art, p. 95.

See my “The Music and Theories of Josef Matthias Hauer,” pp. 83-98, for a more detailed treatment of Steiner’s ideas and influence in in-de-sutele Vienna.

See Gratzer, Zur wunderlichen Mystik: Alban Bergs, pp. 57-72, for an account of both composers’ plans to write Seraphita works.

Schoenberg’s copies of Balzac in his personal library are preserved at the Arnold Schoenberg Institute in Los Angeles. Seraphita is contained in the volume Philosophische Erzählungen (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1910), which also contains Louis Lambert, among other stories; see item marked B13 in the institute collection. Schoenberg has underlined passages throughout Seraphita, and a number of his crossings out and editing marks suggest that he compared the German translation to the original French version. There is a marginal note in Louis Lambert that indicates that Schoenberg also read that study very closely.


Arnold Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones (1),” in Style and Idea, p. 223.


Redlich, Alban Berg, p. 226.

Douglas reproduces Press, California Dave Press, University ed. Robert and The Companion, Sacred 17 "The University McGrath, 87-99. 26 14 1986), Theodor Berg's See Rudolf also Secret my Quest 1986), Morgan's roles in his p. Lulu, Schoenberg on his p. 152; Berg's letter to Schoenberg of 7 August 1930, in The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters, ed. Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey, and Donald Harris (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1987), pp. 405-6. 22See Joan Allen Smith, "Interview with Eugene Wolf," International Albion Berg Society Newsletter 13 (Spring/Summer 1985): 8. As Perle has pointed out, the Lulu full score is relatively successful on this count, though the Lulu Suite score is even better and the Lulu piano/vocal score far worse (see Perle, Lulu, p. 150). Of the pieces discussed below, the palindrome in the Chamber Concerto is visually symmetrical, that in the Lyric Suite (for perhaps obvious reasons) is not. 23As Douglas Green has pointed out, the way in which the rhythmic components are retrograded can be based either on a retrograde of the durations themselves or on a retrograde of the attack points; see his "The Allegro Mysterioso of Berg's Lyric Suite: Iso- and Retrorhythms," Journal of the American Musicological Society 30 (1977): 507-16. With regard to the palindromes considered in this section, Dave Headlam observes that only the one from the Lyric Suite employs attack-point retrograde; see his The Music of Alban Berg, p. 215. 24Robert Morgan gives a detailed accounting for these sections in his "The Eternal Return," pp. 125-28; see also Green, "The Allegro Mysterioso." In regard to Berg's fascination for the number 23, it is worth noting that both 69 and 46 are multiples of this personal figure. 25Eckstein's observations can be found in his Alte unerinnbare Tage. Erinnerungen siebzig Lehr- und Wanderjahren (Vienna, 1936), p. 105; cited and excerpted in McGrath, Dyonisian Art, p. 95. 26See my "The Music and Theories of Josef Matthias Hauer," pp. 83-98, for a more detailed treatment of Steiner's ideas and influence in fin-de-siècle Vienna. 27See Gratzer, Zur "wunderlichen Mystik" Alban Bergs, pp. 57-72, for an account of both composers' plans to write Séraphita works. 28Schoenberg's copies of Balzac in his personal library are preserved at the Arnold Schoenberg Institute in Los Angeles. Séraphita is contained in the volume Philosophische Erzählungen (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1910), which also contains Louis Lambert, among other stories; see item marked B13 in the Institute collection. Schoenberg has underlined passages throughout Séraphita, and a number of his crossings out and editing marks suggest that he compared the German translation to the original French version. There is a marginal note in Louis Lambert that indicates that Schoenberg also read that study very closely. 29Arnold Schoenberg, "Heart and Brain in Music," in Style and Idea, p. 53. 30Arnold Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones (1)," in Style and Idea, p. 223. 31See Karl Wörner, "Schoenbergs Oratorium Die Jakobiter: Musik zwischen Theologie und Weltanschauung," Schweizerische Musikzeitung 105 (1965): 250-57 and 333-40; and my "Schoenberg and the Occult" and "The Quest of the Absolute." 32An excerpt from the letter to Webern is given in H. F. Redlich, Alban Berg: The Man and his Music (New York: Abelard-Schuman Ltd., 1957), pp. 65-6; the letter to Schoenberg appears in The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence, pp. 134-6. 33Redlich, Alban Berg, p. 226. 34Gratzer, Zur "wunderlichen Mystik" Alban Bergs, pp. 55-81.
"Gratzer suspects this of Berg (Zur "wunderlichen Mystik" Alban Bergs, p. 76), and I have written the same about Schoenberg ("Schoenberg and the Occult," p. 106). Gratzer is able to confirm that Webern did read some Schoenberg directly, however. There is a Schoenberg volume preserved in Schoenberg’s personal library, but many of the pages remain uncut. See Clara Steurmann, “From the Archives: Schoenberg’s Library Catalog,” Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute 3/2 (1979): 218.


Balzac, Séraphita, p. 143.


6Adorno, Alban Berg, p. 23.


8Dahlen, “Freundschaft Liebe und Welt.”


10Redlich, Alban Berg, p. 113. While Redlich thinks of these repeated notes as striking the midnight hour, Morgan might have taken the opportunity to support his Nietzschean reading of Berg’s palindromes by viewing these notes as evolving the “Great Noontime,” which arises in the philosopher’s later writings in connection with the eternal return. Morgan’s reading is considered at length below.

11Dahlen, “Freundschaft Liebe und Welt,” p. 158. Note that in German, the pitch B is called H, while B♭ is referred to as B; thus B here represents the H in the name. Dahlen also finds most of the anagram SCHônBErG (B♭-C-B-B♭-E-G) in the second horn and trombone parts, with B and E from the first horn doubling for the required pitch classes.


14The scope and format of this study does not permit me to present an analysis of this movement in detail. The reader is referred Dave Headlam’s masterful analytical description of this movement, and the piece generally, in his The Music of Alban Berg, pp. 217-41. Headlam’s Figure 5.1 (pp. 220-21) elegantly summarizes the way in which Berg recapitulates material from the first two movements in the third.

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