

Schoenberg's Musical Representations of Fateful Love Triangles

Arnold Schoenberg and His Poets

Arnold Schoenberg knew his literature and art. An accomplished painter¹ and a close friend of Kandinsky's and the *Blaue Reiter* group, he was acutely aware of the latest developments in the visual arts. In addition, as his vast output of vocal music proves, he was thoroughly familiar with contemporary poetry and drama, drew on it in a variety of ways, and even wrote some very accomplished texts himself (see the libretti for his operas, *Die glückliche Hand* and *Moses und Aron*, and the texts for several of his choral works).

Besides vocal music in various settings—with orchestra, different ensembles, or piano; for the operatic stage, the synagogue, the gathering place of choral societies, or the recital hall—Schoenberg also experimented with other relationships between text and music. His explorations of *Sprechstimme*, first in his *Gurrelieder*, are so well known that they do not need to be recapitulated here; his *Pierrot lunaire* changed forever the way in which we think the human voice can join musical instruments.

A recitation of a text—whether one as artful as Schoenberg's or one more natural, as that in Viktor Ullmann's beautiful Rilke composition *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* “für Sprecher und Klavier”—leaves the literary work closer to the shape intended by the poet than expressive singing allows. But Schoenberg also made a step in the opposite direction when he chose to compose two symphonic pieces that refer explicitly to specific literary works without including the words at all. *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night) after the poem by Richard Dehmel and *Pelleas und Melisande* after the drama by Maurice Maeterlinck are, in fact, among his earliest works; they were composed in 1899

¹After Schoenberg's first solo exhibition in October 1910, he received a letter from Kandinsky, who expressed his admiration not only for his painting but also for his music and his thinking in general. This letter initiated a lasting friendship. Schoenberg subsequently exhibited with the *Blue Rider* group and contributed an essay to the first and only number of the ambitiously conceived *Blue Rider Almanac*.

(the string sextet version of *Verklärte Nacht*, later revised for orchestra) and in 1902-03 (*Pelleas und Melisande*), two and five years respectively after the String Quartet in D Major that marked the beginning of Schoenberg's career as a composer.

The two poets, Maeterlinck and Dehmel, are Schoenberg's close contemporaries. Born in 1862 and 1863, they were twelve and eleven years his seniors.² When Schoenberg died in 1951, he had survived Maeterlinck by two years; Dehmel had been dead since 1920. At the time of composing the two works, Schoenberg had not had direct contact with either of the poets. Maeterlinck he seems never to have met but known exclusively through his published works, which came to his attention early on since he was in close contact with many admirers of the French Symbolists. Schoenberg's musical contribution to the *Blue Rider Almanac* was, significantly, the facsimile of his song *Herzgewächse*, on a poem by Maeterlinck. Dehmel he finally met in Hamburg in 1912. The two men subsequently exchanged letters of mutual admiration. Schoenberg considered Dehmel's influence on his generation of musicians as exceedingly important. As he confessed emphatically to the poet, "your poems have had a decisive influence on my musical development. Through them I was compelled to search for a new tone in poetry. That is, I found it without searching when I mirrored in musical means what your verses stirred in me."³ About a year later he spoke for a larger group of composers when he wrote, "It was you, much more than any model among musicians, who determined the party program of our musical attempts. From you we learned the ability to listen to our inner voices and yet be a human being of *our* time. [...] From you we also learned the opposite: how one can be a human being of *all* times by simply being human."⁴ That these words are no flattery is born out by the fact that Schoenberg's songs on Dehmel poems outnumber those on any other poet.⁵

²For biographical sketches please see pp. 597-601 (Maeterlinck) and 603-604 (Dehmel).

³Letter of 13 December 1912. This letter also contains an interesting request, worded with utter politeness, that Dehmel write a text for an oratorio that, in a vein similar to Strindberg's *Jakob ringt*, would deal with the topic of "how contemporary man, having passed through materialism, socialism, anarchy, having become an atheist, but having retained a small remainder of the old faith (in the form of superstition)—how this modern man wrestles with God ... and finally manages to find God and to become religious." Dehmel, apparently, did not oblige, and Schoenberg ended up writing his own text for what in 1917 he entitled *Die Jakobsleiter*. The music for the oratorio, also begun in 1917 and taken up repeatedly much later in Schoenberg's life, ultimately remained unfinished.

⁴Arnold Schoenberg, letter to Richard Dehmel of 16 November 1913.

It seems significant that Schoenberg, when choosing the texts for his two instrumental transmedializations, settled for two works dealing with the same human problem: the triangular love relationship in which a woman, pregnant with the child of an unloved man, encounters her true soul mate. The treatment of the topic in the works of the two poets is as different as it could be, and correspondingly different are Schoenberg's two ekphrastic compositions. One is Maurice Maeterlinck's drama in which we witness, and briefly accompany, all three persons involved; the other, a poem by Richard Dehmel, is a mere dialogue with the most rudimentary of framing narrations, in which the unloved man plays no role other than that of an obstacle. In the drama, the conflict is largely subconscious and the guilt, as far as it is felt at all, concerns the potential breaking of marriage vows. In the poem, the dilemma is fully spelled out, and what fault is perceived regards the betrayal of one's inner needs in the previous, wrong choice. Both settings, however, suggest the universality of the predicament rather than a specific constellation. Maeterlinck chose quasi-historical and hence aristocratic figures (those were traditionally the only ones to be worthy of our attention and interest), and presented them in a fairy-tale setting in an undefined age. By contrast, Dehmel's concise portrayal implies a modern man and woman, articulate but not otherwise privileged, who—beyond their plight—relate to nature alone, in the timeless manner of a modern moral tale.

Maurice Maeterlinck's *Innocent ménage à trois*

Maeterlinck wrote what became his most famous drama, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, in 1892 (two years before *The Death of Tintagiles*), at age 30 while still a lawyer in Brussels. It was first produced at the Bouffes-Parisiens in May 1893, directed by one of the foremost devotees of Symbolism, Aurélien Lugné-Poë, the future director of the famed Théâtre de l'Œuvre. The drama instantly stirred up more reactions from composers than any other contemporary text. Gabriel Fauré was the first to respond

⁵As W. Frisch has shown, in the year 1899 alone, Schoenberg worked on eight compositions based on poems from the first (1896) edition of Dehmel's collection *Weib und Welt*. These were, in chronological order, *Mannesbängen* (fragment), *Warnung* (op. 3, no. 3), *Gethsemane* (fragment), *Erwartung* (op. 2, no. 1), *Aus schwerer Stunde*, *Im Reich der Liebe* (fragments), *Jesus bettelt* (op. 2, no. 2), *Erhebung* (op. 2, no. 3), and finally the sextet *Verklärte Nacht*. See Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg, 1893-1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 80-108.

with his 1898 suite *Pelléas et Mélisande*, developed from what was originally incidental music for the theatrical production of Maeterlinck's drama. Claude Debussy followed in 1902 with his opera. Almost simultaneously, Schoenberg—who at that time knew nothing of Debussy's work—also considered the drama for an opera but changed his plan in favor of a symphonic poem on the subject (1902-3). Another two years later, Jean Sibelius composed incidental music for Maeterlinck's play, which he also made into a suite. Schoenberg later said that what attracted him to this text was Maeterlinck's ability to lend timelessness to perennial human problems; his French and Finnish colleagues may have felt the same.

Many have remarked that the plot is fashioned after Tristan and Isolde, the medieval romance best known today through Wagner's opera. The similarities are striking. Tristan (or Tristram), nephew of King Mark of Cornwall, grows up at the king's court in Tintagel Castle.⁶ He is sent to Ireland to ask the young Irish princess Isolde (Iseult) to become the aging King Mark's wife. Isolde knows that Tristan has slain her cousin whom she was destined to marry. At the time, drawn to him in love, she decided not to reveal his murder but to allow him to return to Cornwall. Now, on the voyage to Tintagel, she plans to poison him. Her attendant, asked to mix the poisonous drink, prepares a love potion instead. The two are henceforth bound by a fatal passion, which does not abate with Isolde's marriage to King Mark. Finally discovered by the king, they are driven from the palace; they are later forgiven on condition that Tristan leave the country and that Isolde return to Tintagel. In Brittany, Tristan marries another princess, but continues to long for Isolde. When seriously wounded, he believes that only his great love has the power to cure him and sends for her. His messenger is instructed that, should Isolde consent to come, the returning ship should sport white sails; should she refuse, the sails should be black. Isolde hastens to rejoin her unfortunate lover, but Tristan's jealous wife reports to him that the sails on the incoming ship are black, and he dies in despair. When learning of his death, Isolde, too, dies.⁷

⁶For more details on Tintagel Castle, refer back to the preceding chapter.

⁷This is the tale as told by the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman poets Beroul and Thomas d'Angleterre, as well as by Gottfried von Strassburg. Wagner simplified the story somewhat for dramatic effects. When the adulterous love of Tristan and Isolde is discovered, Tristan is seriously wounded by one of the king's knights. He is then taken to Brittany, where Isolde soon joins him in death. King Mark arrives in time to witness Isolde's death and to forgive the fated lovers.

Compare this with the plot of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which is also based on a love triangle involving a beautiful young woman, a legitimate husband about twice her age, and his male relative who is a much more appropriate match, both in age and in spirit, for the young wife. Golaud, the grandson of King Arkel and himself a widower with a little son, is hunting in the forest when he comes upon the lovely young Melisande. She is disoriented and tells about having come from a distant land. Her crown, which has fallen into the fountain, indicates that she is of noble birth. Golaud is enthralled; he soon marries Melisande and brings her to his family's somber castle by the sea. Here Melisande meets not only Golaud's little son but also his half-brother, Pelleas, who is about her age. Pelleas and Melisande spend much time with one another and are clearly drawn to each other, although they do not, at first, seem aware of the nature of their budding feelings. Golaud, however, sees and understands more than the childlike protagonists themselves, and grows jealous. When Melisande cares for him after he has fallen from his horse, he notices that she no longer wears the wedding band. Rather than admitting that she accidentally dropped it into the bottomless fountain while carelessly playing with it, Melisande lies, saying she forgot it in the castle's grotto but knows where to find it. Golaud makes her go and look for it right away, requesting that Pelleas accompany her, and thus brings the two young people together in a situation that is much more intimate than any they would have dared to seek out themselves. Later, Golaud makes his brother walk through the same grotto with him, pointing out its threats. It becomes clear that he is tempted to rid himself of his brother, but he overcomes his weakness. Pelleas has by now understood that he loves Melisande and must leave the castle so as not to bring disaster over them all. When, some time later, Pelleas and Melisande meet for a final farewell, Golaud intercepts them and, believing that he has surprised them in an amorous encounter, kills Pelleas and wounds his wife. Melisande dies shortly thereafter, having given birth to a pitifully tiny baby girl.

The analogies between this drama and the plot of *Tristan und Isolde* go beyond the arrangement of the three protagonists and their respective deaths. Like King Mark, Golaud lives in a somber ancestral castle by the sea; like his model, he ultimately forgives his wife. The striking difference between the two plays, however, is that in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, love is experienced largely unconsciously. As Gaston Compère puts it, "This piece does not present the story of two human beings who know of their love and end up confessing it to one another, but that of two human

beings who end up obtaining lucid awareness of the love they have for each other.”⁸

Also, while we are to understand that the love that unites Tristan and Isolde is primarily passionate and erotic, the feelings between Pelleas and Melisande are presented as much more subtle. Here it is Golaud who loves his wife with what Sturgis described as “the passionate love of a typical man [...] not able to distinguish between physical and spiritual affinities [or to] appreciate the pure affection, free from all sexual taint, which exists between his brother, Pelleas, and his wife, Melisande.”⁹ Thus, as Bettina Knapp explains it, “the rational principle is all but abolished; the existential situation is not taken into consideration, and destruction quite naturally ensues.”¹⁰

Symbolism and Allusion in *Pelléas et Mélisande*

Symbols of a passively suffered fate are pervasive in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. In the opening scene of the drama, the servants are seen washing the doorstep that leads into the castle. But hard as they try, they know that they will never be successful in clearing away the impurities, which are embedded in stone—a symbol evocative of Greek tragedies. When Golaud first encounters Melisande, he finds her next to a fountain. Later in the drama, the fountain again plays a significant role as the place where the girl and Pelleas meet and where she (accidentally, she believes) loses her wedding band. In fairy tales and medieval sagas, the fountain epitomizes the infinite possibilities that await a person. The shallow forest fountain holds her lost crown, which she forbids Golaud to retrieve for her, apparently in a desire to cut all ties to whatever past that crown represented and to explore new facets of her life. The deep castle fountain has swallowed the wedding band that links her to Golaud, but again she is not seriously upset about the loss, only about the anger expressed by Golaud, whom she respects and fears like a young girl would her father. As a symbol for the source of life, for activity and potentiality, the fountain also signifies the unconscious. The fountain in Arkel’s castle is mysteriously referred to as “the fountain of the blind,” suggesting that it

⁸Gaston Compère, *Le Théâtre de Maurice Maeterlinck* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1955), p. 82.

⁹G.F. Sturgis, *The Psychology of Maeterlinck*, p. 38.

¹⁰Bettina Knapp, *Maurice Maeterlinck* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), p. 70.

opens the eyes of people who are unable to see, or have lost sight of essentials. In this sense, the fountain is the decisive place where one encounters one's destiny and learns to decipher the messages of one's inner voice.

The grotto is another symbol of the unconscious. Pelleas leads Melisande there for a dual reason: to cover her as she pretends to be searching for the wedding band and thus help her conceal that she actually lost it, and to share with her a particularly stunning and mysterious part of his home, one that he describes as "very large and very beautiful, filled with blue shadows; when one lights a little lamp, one has the impression that the vault is covered with stars like the sky." Yet what they find when the darkness is finally pierced by some light is not the innocent and detached beauty they expect, but three white-haired old paupers huddled close to each other, sustaining each other in their sleep. Maeterlinck scholar Marcel Postic interprets these figures as an image of their own condition. Pelleas and Melisande have set out in the hope of some lucidity to read their own souls. Instead they encounter three poor beings, manipulated by destiny. These, Postic believes, mirror the triangular impasse into which they themselves are locked.¹¹ Just as the sleeping paupers, Pelleas, Melisande, and—to a degree—Golaud are asleep in a spiritual sense: oblivious of the rising tide of emotions that, when acknowledged, will sweep them away.

Light and darkness also epitomize spiritual lucidity and instinctive, unconscious behavior respectively. Melisande at the castle is initially associated with darkness, not only in the figurative sense of her somewhat somnolent emotionality, but also literally: she observes that the castle, its gardens, and the forests around it all lack brightness, and the grotto is gloomy. But when she has finally become aware of her love for Pelleas, she suddenly welcomes light. "Laissez-moi dans la clarté," Maeterlinck has her beg (act IV, sc. 4), playing with the dual meaning of the word "clarity." In the same understanding of dark and light and a similar *double entendre*, Golaud hopes to prevent the young people's full comprehension of their own feelings when he directs his little son, who is shining a lantern at them and comments on their tears, "Don't put so much light under their eyes" (act III, sc. 1). When the two brothers descend to the grotto, Pelleas is alarmed when he sees that the lamp Golaud carries trembles. He knows that he is safe as long as his mature older brother is lucid and rational, but instinctively fears the moment when Golaud might also give

¹¹Marcel Postic, *Maeterlinck et le Symbolisme*, p. 77.

room to the subconscious. (We understand that Golaud may have had the vague intention of arranging the drowning by accident of his brother and rival, but ultimately recoils from this deed.)

The symbol of Melisande's hair is related to both water and light. When the abundant hair is loosened, it flows and "becomes a wave that trembles and sparkles."¹² Longer than her arms (as she claims in conversation with Pelleas), her hair is also that part of herself that is out of her control: it gets caught in the branches of a tree. (In *Hérodiade*, Mallarmé has explored this topic even more explicitly; see part IV of this study.)

Dreams and omens also play a role. Melisande's innocence and purity is represented by the presence of pigeons. When Pelleas holds her captive by clutching her hair, they fly away, denoting a change of perception that she herself does not yet grasp. In connection with the eerie synchronicity of Melisande's loss of her wedding band and Golaud's horse-riding accident, Melisande has a frightening dream. And the old Arkel observes that Pelleas "has the solemn and kindly face of those who won't live long."

Finally, the names the dramatist chose for his characters add a revelatory facet of their own. As Alex Pasquier reminds us, "Pelleas" was one of the Knights of the Round Table and thus more intimately related with Tristan than merely by the similarity of the love story.¹³ "Mélisande" is strikingly similar in sound to Mélusine, the prototypical French siren. The siren's forces are irrational and hardly known to herself. She entices men by instinct and often ends in self-destruction. Her elements are the water (see Melisande's portrayal near a fountain in all significant scenes of the drama) and the moon (for Melisande, the dimly lit). Last but not least, Golaud's name is reminiscent of another deceived husband associated with Tintagel castle: Gorlois. However, in his regard the tables are turned. In that tale (part of the twelfth-century sagas around King Arthur), it is a King who falls madly in love with his duke Gorlois's beautiful wife, betrays and murders the inconvenient husband, and marries the woman. The adulterous lover is neither innocent nor attractive here, while the much more appealing loving husband dies. One may wonder whether Maeterlinck intended further to layer his drama's message with this allusive name, diverting the sympathy of the audience away from the two charming young people and towards the deception and mortal wound inflicted upon the man who sees himself as a loving husband. Like

¹²Postic, *Maeterlinck et le Symbolisme*, p. 124.

¹³Alex Pasquier, *Maurice Maeterlinck* (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1950), p. 155 footnote 1.

Gorlois in the medieval tale, Golaud is initially shown as a relatively serene and balanced man who only in the course of the drama becomes more and more tormented, anxiously searching for a way to rescue his marriage from the vastly more potent rival. Yet all is not that simple: Golaud's competitor does not win, as does Gorlois's, by brutal power, but by being "in every way the better man."¹⁴ Correspondingly, the deceived husband is not portrayed as nobly defending his love and his wife's honor (as is Gorlois) but as debasing himself and her when, in a scene driven by hideous jealousy, he drags Melisande on her knees through the hall, handling her braids as reins, and in this brutal act killing the last spark of love she once had for him.

Dehmel's *Verklärte Nacht*: Anxiety, Reassurance, and Symmetry

In the German literary world during the period just prior to 1900, Richard Dehmel was an intriguing figure. Influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche and socialist in his political outlook, he aimed to write poetry that would be accessible to the general reader. This, he felt, included a frank handling of the theme of human love and all its irregularities; it was this aspects that shocked the conservative segment of his audience. Even a poem like *Verklärte Nacht*, perceived today as inoffensive, was daring in his day. Interestingly, it was the first from the collection that caught Schoenberg's attention.¹⁵

In terms of structure, speech attitude, and allusions, two works in Dehmel's extensive œuvre provide pivotal secondary information for the understanding of the poem that fascinated Schoenberg, *Verklärte Nacht*. One of them is a poetic dialogue in direct speech, also contained in the collection *Weib und Welt*, entitled *Herr und Herrin* (Master and Mistress). Like *Verklärte Nacht* it confronts a man and a woman who feel very differently but argue with perfect, even stylized, equality. Unlike *Verklärte Nacht*, its dialogue is not framed by any narrative. The sixteen lines are distinctly musical in their structure and remarkable in their emotional "reasoning."

¹⁴Sturgis, *The Psychology of Maeterlinck*, p. 43.

¹⁵*Verklärte Nacht* appears on p. 61 of the 1896 edition of *Weib und Welt*. As J. Mægaard in his thorough study of Schoenberg's development has shown, the composer completed or sketched fourteen settings of Dehmel's poems, in addition to two uncompleted orchestral works and the sextet *Verklärte Nacht*. See Jan Mægaard, *Studien zur Entwicklung des dodekaphonen Satzes bei Arnold Schönberg* (Copenhagen: Hansen, 1972).

EIN MANN:

Da du so schön bist, darf ich dich beschwören,
 erzeuge nicht mein leicht erregtes Blut.
 Da du so schön bist, kann ich dir nicht wehren,
 daß deine Hand zu sehr in meiner ruht.
 Da du so schön bist, muß ich dich begehren,
 denn alle Schönheit ist mir freies Gut.
 Da du so schön bist, will ich dich zerstören,
 damit es nicht ein Anderer tut...

DAS WEIB:

Da du so stark bist, darfst du mich begehren,
 doch meine Schönheit bleibt mein freies Gut.
 Da du so stark bist, kannst du mich zerstören,
 wenn dir die Tat nicht selbst zu wehe tut.
 Da du so stark bist, mußt du mir beschwören,
 daß du beschütze mich mein schutzlos Blut.
 Da du so stark bist, will ich dir nicht wehren,
 daß deine Hand in meiner ruht...

A MAN:

Since you are so beautiful I may urge you,
 Do not arouse my easily arousable blood.
 Since you are so beautiful I cannot refuse
 To let you rest your hand too much in mine.
 Since you are so beautiful I must desire you,
 For I consider all beauty as a free good.
 Since you are so beautiful I will destroy you,
 So that no other does it...

THE WOMAN:

Since you are so strong you may desire me,
 Yet my beauty remains my free good.
 Since you are so strong you can destroy me
 If the deed does not hurt you too much.
 Since you are so strong you must vow to me
 That you will protect my unprotected blood.
 Since you are so strong I will not refuse
 To let you rest your hand in mine.

The other work that provides a larger interpretative background for the poem Schoenberg chose is Dehmel's novel in verse, *Zwei Menschen*, into which *Verklärte Nacht* was later incorporated and whose title echoes its framing lines.¹⁶ I will return to this after discussing the poem itself.

The poetic structure in *Verklärte Nacht* is as highly symbolic as is the imagery in Maeterlinck's drama. What seems at first sight to unfold with relaxed ease if not eccentric unevenness reveals itself, at closer examination, as artfully wrought in support of the underlying message. Overleaf is the full text, together with my deliberately literal rather than poetic translation.

Walter Bailey, in a study that is as careful with regard to the music as it is superficial with regard to the text, short-changes Dehmel's poem when he remarks merely that "its form is irregular, the five stanzas are of unequal length, as are the individual lines, and the rhyme scheme is not consistent."¹⁷ This confuses a first impression with a careful study. Indeed, the two initial lines, while linked in a traditional rhyming pair and cast in simple iambic meter, differ in the number of feet: a pentameter is

¹⁶By the time of the second edition of *Weib und Welt*, in 1901, Dehmel had completed *Zwei Menschen*, into which he integrated the poem. This novel in verse began appearing serially in *Die Insel* in 1900-01 before it was published in book form in 1903.

¹⁷Walter Bailey, *Programmatic Elements in the Works of Schoenberg* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), pp. 27-38: p. 28.

Verklärte Nacht

- 1 Zwei Menschen gehn durch kahlen, kalten Hain,
der Mond läuft mit, sie schaun hinein.
Der Mond läuft über hohe Eichen,
kein Wölkchen trübt das Himmelslicht,
in das die schwarzen Zacken reichen.
Die Stimme eines Weibes spricht:
- 7 Ich trag ein Kind, und nit von Dir
ich geh in Sünde neben Dir.
Ich hab mich schwer an mir vergangen.
Ich glaubte nicht mehr an ein Glück
und hatte doch ein schwer Verlangen
nach Lebensinhalt, nach Mutterglück
- 13 und Pflicht; da hab ich mich erfrecht,
da liess ich schaudern mein Geschlecht
von einem fremden Mann umfassen,
und hab mich noch dafür gesegnet.
Nun hat das Leben sich gerächt:
nun bin ich Dir, o Dir begegnet.
- 19 Sie geht mit ungelenkem Schritt.
Sie schaut empor; der Mond läuft mit.
Ihr dunkler Blick ertrinkt in Licht.
Die Stimme eines Mannes spricht:
- 23 Das Kind, das Du empfangen hast,
sei Deiner Seele keine Last,
o sieh, wie klar das Weltall schimmert!
Es ist ein Glanz um alles her,
Du treibst mit mir auf kaltem Meer,
doch eine eigne Wärme flimmert
von Dir in mich, von mir in Dich.
Die wird das fremde Kind verklären,
Du wirst es mir, von mir gebären;
Du hast den Glanz in mich gebracht,
Du hast mich selbst zum Kind gemacht.
- 34 Er fasst sie um die starken Hüften.
Ihr Atem küsst sich in den Lüften.
Zwei Menschen gehn durch hohe, helle Nacht.

Transfigured Night

- Two people walk through barren, chilly grove
The moon moves along, they gaze into it.
The moon moves over tall oak trees,
No cloud obscures the sky's bright light
Into which the black peaks reach.
A woman's voice speaks:
- I bear a child, and not from you,
I walk in sin alongside you.
I trespassed gravely against myself.
I no longer believed I might find happiness
And still I had a strong yearning
For a full life, the joy of motherhood,
And for duty. So I had the impudence,
So, shuddering, I let my sex
Be embraced by a stranger
And even blessed myself for it.
Now life has taken its revenge:
Now I have met you, oh you.
- She walks with awkward gait,
She glances up; the moon moves along.
Her somber gaze drowns in light.
A man's voice speaks:
- May the child that you have conceived
Be no burden to your soul;
Oh, look how bright the universe shimmers!
There is a radiance around all things,
You drift with me on a cold sea,
But a unique warmth flickers
From you into me, from me into you,
It will transfigure the stranger's child.
You will bear it to me, as mine;
You brought the radiance into me,
You made myself into a child.
- He clasps her around her strong hips.
Their breath kisses in the air.
Two people walk through bright, vaulted night.

followed by a tetrameter. As one reads on, it becomes clear that all feet are iambs.¹⁸ Moreover, only the first and the last lines of the poem have five accents, while all other lines have four stressed syllables, albeit with a mixture of masculine and feminine endings. This arrangement sets the first and last lines apart as a framing device; and that is what they are, both in terms of structure and with regard to content. The verbatim repetition of the initial words, “Zwei Menschen gehn durch ...,” not only draws the reader’s attention towards the reference to Dehmel’s epic poem *Zwei Menschen*, but also literally sets the stage for the narration (two people, walking ... outdoors, at night) and for the inner development (from the barren chill of the grove to the brightness of the vaulted sky).

These framing lines lead to two further observations, which are apparently at odds with one another—at odds in the same way that many features in the poems are, contradictory at first but ultimately complementary. In their function as part of the narrative envelope they alert us to the fact that the poem alternates between the descriptive comments of the observer (lines 1-6, 19-22, and 34-36) and two agents of direct speech (in the two larger blocks surrounded by the narrator’s reflections). This divides the poem into five uneven segments. The manifest differences in length (6 + 12 + 4 + 11 + 3) are reinforced by the dissimilar density of images. Much in the third and fifth stanzas is a varied repetition of what is heard in the first, so that the overall impression is one of two weighty, longer sections embraced by three shorter, lighter ones that are linked by related material; musical readers are reminded of a rondo structure. At the same time, if we acknowledge the narrator as a third person and contrast the three separate descriptive passages as an additional “voice” with those of the two lovers, the balance appears shifted. The resulting pattern consists of [6+4+3 =] 13 + 12 + 11 lines. Considering that the narrator’s 13 lines contain much repetition¹⁹ and that one of the man’s lines (line 29),

¹⁸I am tempted to attribute the single exception in the entire poem, found in line 12, to a later addition—a result either of oversight at some level or of deliberation. There is no logical reason to repeat the preposition “nach,” which also does not, of course, recur preceding the third component of the chain of things longed for: duty. Could an original plan have featured the simpler “nach Lebensinhalt, Mutterglück / und Pflicht”? And if so, did Dehmel himself decide to break the regularity of the iambic meter here to express the woman’s disturbed state of mind, expressed also, as observed a little later, in her awkward gait?

¹⁹There are entire strings with identical wording: “Zwei Menschen...,” (2x) “Der Mond läuft...” (3x) “Die Stimme ... spricht” (2x).

owing to its internal rhyme, has a weight almost equivalent to two, the emotional balance of the three blocks seems delicately evened out.

There is, furthermore, a third structural reality underlying this poem. In their subject matter, the framing lines with their repeated "Zwei Menschen" emphasize what matters most in this poem—"two people"—thus prompting us to look for indicators of a binary perspective. These can indeed be found, and as it turns out, they matter greatly. While I do not consider the binary aspect any more or less valid than the division into five segments or three voices, I would like to linger a little on this last approach to point out a number of significant details.

Beneath the irregularity within the poem's thirty-six lines, which are unevenly grouped as 6 + 12 + 4 + 11 + 3, one can discern two halves of 18 lines each. The first half, by means of its direct-speech portion associated with the woman, characterizes her as much through its patterns as through its substance. With its single stanza of six lines followed by what appears at first sight like a double stanza of two-times-six lines, this half of the poem is regular and largely conventional. One could even call it predictable: the rhyming pattern in the first stanza ([a a b c b c], where a and c have masculine endings while b is feminine) is reproduced faithfully in the first six lines of the second stanza. Thereafter, another rhymed pair suggests to a listener (who is not aware of the missing paragraph break in the printed image) the [a a] of a third stanza. Hereafter, however, the predictability is shattered, at the very moment when the woman relates the unexpected fact that she has "let her sex be embraced by a stranger." Suddenly, as if at a loss for words over what she has done, she is short of new rhymes and has to take recourse to sounds already introduced.²⁰ Also as if resulting from her confusion, the previously established pattern of masculine and feminine endings is now overthrown.

If the line endings thus tell the story of a woman brought up to believe in traditional values and a well-ordered life, tangibly shocked and confused when her emotions do not match expected behavior, the words with which her lines begin reveal considerable insecurity. Her phrase structure is utterly simple. Four times in a row (lines 7-10) she begins with *ich*. As the concern she expresses makes clear, this is not the self-

²⁰Line 15 picks up the "-angen" rhyme from lines 9 and 11, and line 17 chimes in with the "-echt" heard twice at the beginning of the third stanza. The same device of an extra third line echoing the rhyme of an earlier pair recurs only once, at the very end of the poem, where the line that closes the overall frame of "Zwei Menschen gehn" responds to the "-acht" introduced in the final rhyme pair of the man's reply.

centeredness of vanity but rather an obsession caused by an overwhelming sense of her own guilt. Twice she links consecutive thoughts with the awkward repetition of an indistinct temporal connective (lines 13/14: *da*, which means both “so” and “then” here, and lines 17/18: *nun* = “now”). A third kind of word repetition stresses that all her hopes for a change of her lot, for love and security, are focused on the man she has met. Her direct speech begins with two lines that do not relate to one another in a true rhyme but use, with the repeated *Dir*, the (poetically awkward) identical line ending. In symmetric correspondence, her final line picks up the same word in the internal repetition “*Dir, o Dir.*” Finally, another irregularity at a line beginning also seems highly significant. While the sentences the woman speaks are generally straightforward and short, one of them ends in an unexpected carry-over. This enjambment—the only one in the entire poem—coincides with the onset of her confusion. Moreover, it lends emphasis to the one word that does not fit into the expressions of her search for self-fulfillment: duty.

The second eighteen-line block, owing to the direct speech embedded in it perceived as shifting attention over to the woman’s new love, characterizes the man in relation as well as in contrast to her. The narrator’s four-line stanza that opens this half of the poem seems to imply that both the impersonal observer and the involved lover are watching the woman walk, with a gait that, like some of her speech patterns, reflects the awkwardness she feels so acutely in this situation of guilt, confession, and new hope. The repeated *sie* at the outset of the first two lines mirrors this awkwardness one more time, while the reference to her gazing at the moon that moves along reminds us of the as yet unchanged external circumstances. The subsequent line pair, however, introduces a new level of intensity. While the rhymes recall those of the initial framing stanza (“*Licht*” and “*spricht*” are taken up verbatim; line 22 establishes a direct, almost formal parallel to line 6), the distinctive words describing her “dark gaze” as “drowning” suggest, for all their obvious romantic clichés, profundity and passion; the anxiety expressed in the patterns of the woman’s confession may have given way to surrender.

The structural features in the man’s speech characterize his state of mind as eloquently as those in the poem’s first half portray hers. He is responsive to his lover’s outcry, keeping to a similar rhyme pattern with masculine and feminine endings. His repetitive *du* at the beginning of lines 31–33, the final sentences of his reply, corresponds symmetrically with the repetitive *ich* at the outset of her speech; where the woman was

guiltily focused on herself, the man is confidently and kindly centering his thoughts on her. Moreover, what appears in her wording as simple internal repetition (“Dir, o Dir”) is here transmuted to the more complex and mature reciprocity of “von Dir in mich, von mir in Dich.” It seems crucial to note that this line is the only one whose ending is not coupled with any other. However, as briefly mentioned above, focusing on the fact that the line itself consists of two rhyming halves, and emancipating it for a moment to an actual pair (of dimeters), one notices with wonder that Dehmel has secretly allotted both lovers the same number of lines: twelve, the number of perfection and completion.²¹

Beyond these structural aspects, the man's response is distinguished from the woman's speech also by its rhetorical figures. She remains close to her story, which she presents in the manner of a confession, laying it out in a simple sequence without any recourse to sophisticated metaphors. He answers her poetically. In his aim to reassure her he draws on the shimmering of the universe and the radiance around all things (the basic goodness of the material world?), which he contrasts with the cold sea on which they are both drifting (the unsympathetic society that will not recognize that the truth of their love is superior to formal marriage vows?). He is confident where she was insecure, trusting that the unique warmth he feels emanating from her will transfigure the child and effectively erase the fatherhood of the man who is a stranger to their love. Not only is she not guilty in his eyes, she is rich and generous. Through the child that she is carrying she will be giving him the radiance of the universe and the blessing of making him feel once more like a child.

The poem's overall development towards greater self-reliance and sensuality is further intensified in the three final lines. No longer just gait and gaze, the woman now has a body. Her hips, which her lover holds without shame or shyness, are described as ample, suggesting confident motherhood. Meanwhile, their kiss—not of their mouths but of their

²¹In other respects, too, Dehmel has apparently striven to approach the perfect balance between the two protagonists that his poem *Herr und Herrin* displayed in a much more simplistic form. Superficially, many more lines in the poem deal with the woman than with her lover. In addition to the twelve lines of her direct speech, whose logical subject is she herself (whatever the grammatical subject may be), most of the lines in the man's reply center on her as well. Beneath that, however, the rhyme scheme speaks a subtle but significantly different language that shifts the accent to the man. His reply turns on six rhyme sounds whereas she, in her confusion taking recourse to extra echoes, only presents five; also, taking the gendered language of metric endings symbolically, twenty-three of the entire poem's lines end as masculine, while only thirteen are feminine.

breaths, that is, their life forces, their souls—happens “in the air,” lifting them above the dreariness of unwanted marriage partners and narrow-minded notions of the legitimacy of children. Correspondingly then, as the “two people” exit the scene we have witnessed, their environment is no longer described as barren, cold, and earth-bound. Instead, the poet now observes that the night is bright and presents itself with a vaulted sky reminiscent of a cathedral ceiling.

At this point I would like to return to the link between *Verklärte Nacht* and Dehmel’s much longer musing on “Zwei Menschen.” I do not wish merely to confirm the relationship between the poem and the novel in verse, a fact many Dehmel scholars have pointed out. Rather, I wish to suggest that *Zwei Menschen* may have originated as an outgrowth from the single poem, spinning forth both its central ideas and its structural play.²² A brief look at external features confirms this.

- Like the poem, the novel develops within a frame, made up of a twelve-line “Eingang” at the beginning and a four-line “Ausgang” at the end.
- Contained within this frame are three sections; each comprises an eight-line “Leitlied” followed by thirty-six poems of thirty-six lines each. Thirty-six is, of course, the exact number of lines in the original poem, which has remained entirely intact in its move from the collection *Weib und Welt* to number 1 in the first section of the “Roman in Romanzen.”
- The lines in the components that stand outside the threefold 36×36 —that is, those in “Eingang,” three “Leitlieder,” and “Ausgang”: $12 + 8 + 8 + 8 + 4$ —add up to 40, i.e. slightly more than the 36 of the inner units. This balance is similar to that in which the narrator’s thirteen lines in the poem surpass the twelve lines of the woman’s and the eleven (or, indirectly, also twelve) lines of the man’s speech.
- Like the original *Verklärte Nacht*, the corresponding first full-length poems in sections II and III of *Zwei Menschen* also feature framing lines that echo the title of the novel.

²²Dehmel himself was apparently aware of having created in *Verklärte Nacht* a small form teeming with potential for something larger. As he expressed it, he believed to have found “the form for the new ballad, which owes nothing to the old-fashioned masquerade; it is a form that permits the entire life of a soul and human fate to be depicted in a thousand variations.” Translated from Richard Dehmel, *Ausgewählte Briefe aus den Jahren 1893 bis 1902* (Berlin: Fischer, 1923), p. 225.

II, 1 1 Zwei Menschen reiten durch maihellen Hain ... //
 36 ... Zwei Menschen reiten in die Welt

Two people ride through a May-bright grove... //
 ... Two people ride into the world.

III, 1 1 Zwei Menschen gehn durch nebelnassen Hain ... //
 36 ... Zwei Menschen stehn, als sei ein Schwur gefallen

Two people walk through a fog-soaked grove... //
 ... Two people stand as if an oath had fallen.²³

The Schoenberg biographer, Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, shows convincingly that the composer's earliest involvement with the intense eroticism of Dehmel's *Weib und Welt* coincided with his courtship for Mathilde Zemlinsky.²⁴ The overt and ultimately unrestrained acceptance of sensuality as a good that may rank above conventional considerations of propriety comes with a moral message, one that was expressed even more directly in the "novel in verse" *Zwei Menschen*, into which *Verklärte Nacht* was incorporated —or, as I prefer to see it, into which it evolved. As Dehmel himself characterized it, *Zwei Menschen* is not only about the power of profound love and the joy of life that results from its satisfaction. In it he aimed "to present in a thousand variations an entire human destiny or life of the soul in harmony with the external world, with time and eternity."²⁵ Dehmel scholar Harry Slochower analyzes the epic as a three-step process through different philosophical and moral stances. A first exposure shows how the two people break the fetters of philistrous convention and do not recoil from any means to obtain the fulfillment of their egocentric wishes. The second step portrays them as basking in their power, in Dionysian drunkenness proclaiming God dead and establishing themselves as measures for everything. Finally, in a third step, the two

²³Among musicologists, Richard Swift seems to be the only one who has gone to this source. Strangely enough though, the musical conclusions he draws when he returns to Schoenberg do not seem to take the insight into the connection into consideration, or for that matter, an understanding of the striking significance of the framing lines. (Cf. Richard Swift, "Tonal Relations in Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*," *19th-Century Music* I/1, July 1977, p. 3-14[.])

²⁴Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg: His Life, World, and Work*, trans. Humphrey Searle (New York: Schirmer, 1978), p. 40.

²⁵Translated after the quotation in Paul Johannes Schindler, *Richard Dehmel: Dichtungen, Briefe, Dokumente* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1963), p. 292.

lovers are compelled to experience once again the force of agencies outside themselves; they must bow before God and recognize with new clarity of insight the illusion of a lawless ego.²⁶

Despite the balance of guilt and sweet reassurance, *Verklärte Nacht* has some of the obsession with a Nietzschean self-determination that defines the first section of *Zwei Menschen*. The two protagonists do not concern themselves at all with the “stranger” who is the natural father of the child and the woman’s former partner—loved or not. According to the synopsis of the poem that Schoenberg provided many years later,²⁷ the composer himself, apparently unquestioning of late-nineteenth-century societal norms, surmised that this “stranger” was the soon-to-be-discarded husband in an arranged marriage, although Dehmel’s wording is far from clear about the nature of the woman’s previous relationship. All the more significant, then, seems the fact that this man’s possible feelings regarding the child he has fathered are not reckoned with in the least. What matters exclusively here is what the allusive lines spell out: *two people*; these two people and their gratification, no-one else.

²⁶For a more extensive synopsis see Harry Slochower, *Richard Dehmel, der Mensch und Denker* (Dresden: Carl Reissner, 1928), p. 155.

²⁷This interesting synopsis, given here without the music examples to which I will later return, reads as follows:

“Promenading in a park in a clear cold moonlight night, the wife confesses a tragedy to the man in a dramatic outburst. She has married a man whom she did not love. She was unhappy and lonely in this marriage, but forced herself to remain faithful, and finally obeying the maternal instinct, she is now with child from a man she does not love. She even had considered herself praiseworthy for fulfilling her duty toward the demands of nature. In desperation she now walks beside the man with whom she has fallen in love, fearing his sentence will destroy her. But ‘the voice of a man speaks,’ a man whose generosity is as sublime as his love. / Harmonics express the beauty of the moonlight. The [next] section reflects the mood of a man whose love, in harmony with the splendor and radiance of nature, is capable of ignoring the tragic situation: ‘The child you bear must not be a burden to your soul.’ The duet between violin and ‘cello ... leads finally to another new theme, which corresponds to the man’s dignified resolution: this warmth ‘will transfigure your child’ so as to become ‘my own’. / A long coda section concludes the work. Its material consists of themes of the preceding parts, all of them modified anew, so as to glorify the miracles of nature that have changed this night of tragedy into a transfigured night.” (Schoenberg, Program Notes to *Verklärte Nacht*, Capitol L-8118 [1950]; see also *The Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, vol. 2, Columbia M2S 694 [1963], pp. 22-27.)

Frames and Voices in Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*

At the time of conceiving his piece, the twenty-five-year-old Schoenberg could not have had any knowledge of the entire layout and message *Zwei Menschen* would eventually embody. Nonetheless, the composer's interpretation, drawn from the poem itself and its context in *Weib and Welt*, was apparently right on the mark—if we are to believe the one who should know best, the poet. How pleased Dehmel was with Schoenberg's musical reaction to his poem can be gleaned from a letter he wrote to the composer after having heard the sextet performed, and from the homage-like poem he attached to it.

Dear Mr. Schönberg!

Yesterday I heard *Verklärte Nacht*, and I should consider it a sin of omission if I failed to say a word of thanks to you for your wonderful sextet. I had intended to follow the motives of my text in your composition; but I soon forgot to do so, I was so enthralled by the music. Besides, Bändler performed it quite perfectly with his partners; I think that you, too, would have enjoyed it thoroughly, even though this work is now ten years behind you. With cordial greetings, your

Dehmel

O glorious sound! my words now ring,
in tones to God re-echoing;
To you this highest joy I owe;
On earth no higher may we know.²⁸

Contemporary music critics, however, judged differently. Zemlinsky, who had submitted his friend and later brother-in-law's score to the board of directors of the *Tonkünstlerverein*, was informed that "it sounded as though someone had wiped over the still-wet autograph of *Tristan*."²⁹ Schoenberg, however, took such rejection as a compliment; and indeed, the work became one of his most popular compositions.

²⁸Quoted in English translation in Josef Rufer, *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg: A Catalogue of His Compositions, Writings, and Paintings*, trans. Dika Newlin (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), pp. 24-25. The German original of the poem is "Ein Wörtlein Dank — o schöner Schall: / des Schöpferwortes Widerhall. / Uns allen ahnt kein höher Glück: / nun tönt die Welt zu Gott zurück."

²⁹"Das klingt ja, als ob man über die noch nasse 'Tristan'-Partitur darübergewischt hätte." Quoted in Willi Reich, *Arnold Schönberg oder der konservative Revolutionär* (Vienna etc.: Fritz Molden, 1968), p. 18.

The structural layout is generally described as comprising five sections, in accordance with the five irregular stanzas of Dehmel's poem.³⁰ This interpretation, which follows Egon Wellesz's early analysis, remains convincing; it honors the poetic source, although it does not, I believe, account for all there is to Schoenberg's transmedialization. Other scholars have concentrated more narrowly on the development of the tonal³¹ or motivic³² material, without relating their findings significantly to any extra-musical stimulus. My aim in what follows is to account for the musically significant features in Schoenberg's composition and interpret these in view of the poetic structure and message.

Schoenberg himself gave three different, complementing explanations about this work: in *Style and Idea* about his transformation of compositional ideas of the past, in "Konstruktives in der *Verklärten Nacht*" about the motivic connection among the various components, and in the above-mentioned program notes about the relationship between the music and the poem. Regarding the musical influence that helped to shape *Verklärte Nacht*, he wrote in his *Rückblick* that there was, on the one hand Wagnerian technique, for instance in rhetorical structures like model

³⁰Swift, in "Tonal Relations in Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*," also writes extensively about structure; however, I find his carefully laid-out arguments not too convincing, in which he suggests a design comprising "two intimately related sonata movements, the first of which has a truncated—if not to say impacted—recapitulation of first group materials only. The two sonata structures are preceded by an Introduction, and they are linked by a transition in which the materials of the Introduction return and are provided with a new cadence. Sonata II has a normal recapitulation." (Swift, "Tonal Relations ...," p. 6) Tempting as it may be to find beneath the five-section design a binary layout that would match the duality of the protagonists, I fail to see what one gains from this interpretation. On the musical side of the argument: once we acknowledge that the form differs from traditional models of sonata movement (as do, of course, many sonata movements in the 19th century), that the tonal layout is uncommon as well (Swift argues simultaneously for a *do-re-mi-fa* as underlying progression), and that motivic material is shared between the two sonatas and the surrounding segments, what is the advantage of "recognizing" the traditional form? Or, in view of the poem: If the woman's and the man's speech were rendered in this preconceived pattern, how would that reflect the peculiar relationship between, and concerns of, the "two people"? (For a more detailed critique of Swift's hypothesis, see also Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, pp. 114-115.)

³¹See above all Richard Swift, "Tonal Relations in Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*," and Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, pp. 127-130.

³²See particularly Walter B. Bailey, *Programmatic Elements...*, and Christian M. Schmidt, "Formenprobleme in Schönbergs frühen Instrumentalwerken," *Bericht über den 1. Kongreß der Internationalen Schönberg-Gesellschaft, Wien, 1974*, ed. Rudolf Stefan (Vienna: Lafite, 1978), pp. 180-186.

and sequence above a moving harmony, on the other hand constructions formed after what he liked to call Brahms's "technique of developing variation." Indeed, both the Wagnerian and the Brahmsian heritages are easy to ascertain; much has been written about them, but they will not concern us here. Schoenberg explained the motivic interrelationship between the sixteen thematic components he found worth listing with a focus on their common interval patterns and on the bitonal backdrops he discovered beneath the melodic contours—as he claims “during a sleepless night (breathing problems) in Barcelona, 1932!!!!”³³ Finally, the matching of musical themes with poetic ones that accompany the recording is helpful only to a degree. Integrated into the purposefully light prose of program notes, musical excerpts follow segments of the poetic summary rather than receiving a more profound translation or commentary.³⁴

In fact, the relationship of structure, material, and message between the music and the poem are much more far-reaching, and much subtler, than Schoenberg cares to let us know. Interestingly, he touches on most of the essential details at some point, but his conversational description (in the liner notes) and facetiousness (in the memo “Konstruktives in der Verklärten Nacht” from 1932) has proven to conceal rather than reveal the depth of thoughts hidden behind each compositional decision.

The overall layout, as most scholars since Egon Wellesz concur, is indeed in five sections. It corresponds to the five poetic stanzas as follows:

stanza I	(narrator)	section I	mm. 1-28
stanza II	(woman's speech)	section II	mm. 29-187
stanza III	(narrator)	section III	mm. 188-228
stanza IV	(man's speech)	section IV	mm. 229-369
stanza V	(narrator)	section V	mm. 370-418

³³See his two-page sketch “Konstruktives in der Verklärten Nacht.” The manuscript has been reprinted and discussed more recently in Bailey, *Programmatic Elements in the Works of Schoenberg*, pp. 31-32, 36-37, and Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, pp. 123-126; see also the earlier examination in Ulrich Thieme, *Studien zum Jugendwerk Arnold Schönbergs: Einflüsse und Wandlungen* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1987), pp. 216-221.

³⁴To give a sampling, Schoenberg's album notes begin as follows: “Promenading in a park (Ex. 1) in a clear cold moonlight night (Ex. 2 and 3), the wife confesses a tragedy to the man in a dramatic outburst (Ex. 4).” Since Ex. 2 turns out to be a development of Ex. 1, labeling in the style of Wagnerian leitmotifs is obviously not Schoenberg's aim. Furthermore, some “examples” are merely described as “theme” or “duet,” and only their place in the synopsis provides clues as to what they are meant to denote.

The deviations of the musical layout from the poetic model are in themselves very regular and consistent. Where the narrator's interjections decrease in length throughout the poem (from 6 through 4 to 3 lines), the corresponding musical sections grow in extension in roughly equal proportion (I = 28, III = 40, V = 49 measures). While the poem, when divided in two halves, appears grouped as 2:3 stanzas, the grouping is 3:2 in the music. As for the musical half-way mark, the very noticeable caesura at mm. 228-229 speaks a clear language; in addition, Schoenberg confirms its structural significance explicitly. Having guided the listener up to the juncture at the end of section III, he writes in his program notes, "The preceding first half of the composition ends in E flat minor...."

The thematic material of *Verklärte Nacht* contains a wealth of symbolic information—much beyond the programmatic labeling Schoenberg provided for the benefit of the record's audience and the purely musical comments he added in *Style and Idea*. A direct correlation to Dehmel's text begins with the distribution. Of the passages musically referring to the poetic narrator, sections I and III build entirely on what I call motifs 1 and 2;³⁵ section V uses motif 1 along with three motifs from the man's section and one seminal phrase from the woman's. Section II (the woman's speech) presents eight motifs. Not once does this music recall the two motifs from the framing section: "her" utterings are far from any objectivity and, in Schoenberg as in Dehmel, do not acknowledge the moonlit night or the world outside. The man's section, by contrast, introduces only five new motifs. In addition, "his reply" incorporates three of the woman's motifs as well as—if only once—the narrator's motif 1 (implicitly reminding us of the time and place where the dialogue unfolds). The reminiscences both to the woman and to the narrator represent reflections of what Dehmel portrays. As I have shown above, the poetic stanza containing the man's speech echoes with a recurring *du* in response to the woman's repeatedly invoked *ich*. Moreover, Dehmel shows the man as aware of the surroundings ("look how bright the universe shimmers!"), an observation the woman leaves to the narrator.

Within each section, the motifs are interrelated in different ways. The two motifs in the framing sections lay the ground, as it were. Motif 1

³⁵To facilitate comparison in the score, I have numbered all thematic material chronologically throughout the composition. For a cross check with the numbers given in the excerpts inserted in Schoenberg's program notes this means, for example, that I have omitted his Ex. 2 (which is a development of motif 1) but have added the initial melodic idea in the woman's section. I also include, albeit as a separate category, the seminal phrase he discusses at length in theoretical contexts but does not mention in the liner notes.

introduces D as the key note of *Verklärte Nacht*³⁶ and the plaintive descending D-minor scale as a distinctive atmospheric component. Motif 2 presents descending chromatic scales (especially prominent in the accompanying voices, but intermittently also in the melodically leading part) and turn figures; both elements will recur as modules of later motifs. The chromatic descent particularly—the figure known as *passus duriusculus* that has expressed grief, anxiety, and sorrow for three hundred years of Western music—is used in just this rhetoric spirit.



EXAMPLE 9: Schoenberg, *Verklärte Nacht*,
the two motifs in the framing sections

The Woman's Voice

In the musical ekphrasis of the woman's speech (see ex. 11 below), Schoenberg works in often dense contrapuntal play with eight motifs. They are melodic entities that draw around themselves different accompaniments in a variety of homophonic and polyphonic textures. In addition to these eight components of the thematic material, a brief homophonic phrase is of particular importance (ex. 10).

Schoenberg gives only one of two significant reasons why we should take a closer look at the source phrase when he deplores that it was the forbidden inverted ninth-chord here (and its "impossible" resolution) that

³⁶In section I, this D sounds as a pedal note through thirteen of the twenty-eight measures (mm. 1-8, 13-17) and in an ornamented variation through the four intermittent bars (mm. 9-12).



EXAMPLE 10: *Verklärte Nacht*, the woman's "source phrase"

EXAMPLE 11: *Verklärte Nacht*, the woman's motifs in section II

prompted contemporary concert organizers to reject the entire composition.³⁷ What is at least as crucial is that the phrase in mm. 41-45 functions as a quarry for almost all components of the woman's musical signature. Six of the eight motifs can be shown to be derived directly from this

³⁷Schoenberg has discussed this phrase particularly with regard to the use of the inverted ninth chord. For a thought-provoking study on this single aspect of the composition, and the composer's satire of the "concert society" of his day, see David Lewin's "On the 'Ninth-Chord in Fourth Inversion' from *Verklärte Nacht*," *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 10: 45-63.

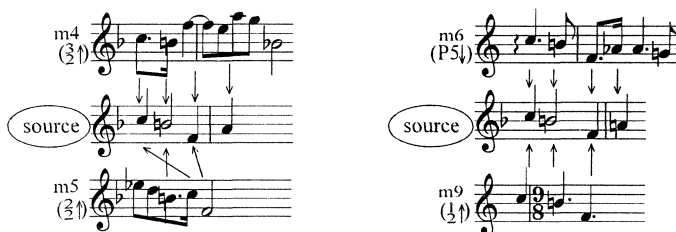
common source which, while not the *Grundgestalt* of Schoenberg's later years, is clearly a predecessor of that compositional procedure.

The melodic elements in the treble of this phrase comprise a descending chromatic scale of seven pitches (filling a tritone), followed by the falling tritone interval, and rounded off with an ascending third. The bass line contributes the complementary ascending chromatic scale, interrupted by an escape note; this is followed by a tritone interval (here falling, in a later variation rising), and a resolution by half-step into A, the current tonal mooring.



EXAMPLE 12: *Verklärte Nacht*, the framing voices in the source phrase

Embedded in both the treble and the bass lines is a three-note segment that, as I will show, plays a pivotal roll in informing many of the section's melodic motifs. I have labeled it as "semitone-tritone pair."



EXAMPLE 13: *Verklärte Nacht*, the source phrase in the woman's motifs (1)

The way in which the melodic motifs of section II are related to the source phrase is ever different. Motifs 4, 5, 6, and 9 are all transpositions of the semitone-tritone pair; two of them, motifs 4 and 6, also include the final ascending third (in the major or the minor mode, depending on the tonal environment). Motifs 6 and 9 retain the intervallic direction; motif 4 redirects the tritone, and motif 5—furthest from the model—exchanges the pitches in the semitone.

Motifs 7 and 10 draw on the melodic material of the source phrase in its entirety, including the escape-note feature originating in the contrapuntal bass line (marked with asterisks in the example). Motif 7 recalls the pitches of the phrase's treble untransposed; motif 10 begins with the original pitches but shifts transposition twice as it unfolds.



EXAMPLE 14: *Verklärte Nacht*, the source phrase in the woman's motifs (2)

Motif 3 has an entirely different association with the source phrase. As the composer reveals towards the very end of section II, he has intended a sequential chain of the motif to act as a counterpoint to the phrase.



EXAMPLE 15: *Verklärte Nacht*, the source phrase in the woman's motifs (3)

Among the recurring melodic elements in section II, the line that I have called motif 8 is the only one not derived from or otherwise related to the source phrase. Interestingly, this is also the one motif with which the composer's program notes deal quite indirectly: he lists it merely as part of a long continuation of another motif (see example 7 in Schoenberg's text). And indeed, a contracted version does recur, following motif 7 in mm. 107-110 and repeatedly from there onwards. But this is some

time after the original shape was introduced.³⁸ I will return later to this apparently alien element.

The eight motifs Schoenberg invented to represent the woman's perspective in Dehmel's poem are thus characterized by the fact that all but one of them are closely interrelated, sharing the chromatic progression and the tritone interval as conspicuous features. All but one are derived from (or, in the case of motif 3, designed as a possible counterpoint to) a phrase that was considered harmonically unstable in Schoenberg's time and, because of its improper resolution, "verboten." Could there be a better musical depiction of the situation in which Dehmel portrays the woman? She comes across as insecure. Her thoughts proceed in narrow steps comparable to those in a chromatic scale. They are confined to her present "scale" of things: her guilt, her hopes, her despair at having met true love at a moment that seems just a little too late. As we see her walking, her gait is unsteady, awkward and in conventional terms imperfect, as is, in conventional terms, the tritone interval in a melodic phrase. Her speech consists of brief, mostly simple phrases which, with a high degree of word repetition, appear breathless and urgent; Schoenberg achieves a corresponding effect with his many short thematic units which reword, as it were, a single source message. The reason why her inner harmony is so shaken is the pregnancy that, given her new relationship with another man, will lead to the "improper resolution" that troubles her so much, one which society deems very much "verboten." (At the risk of overinterpretation, even Schoenberg's "escape" note could be read as a symbol for the way she will deal with her commitment to the father of her child.)

The Man's Voice

As mentioned earlier, section IV, corresponding with the man's speech in Dehmel's poem, introduces only five motifs of its own. The new tone is set by motif 11, on which Schoenberg commented (possibly with some irony): "the voice of a man speaks, a man whose generosity is as sublime as his love." Instead of tritones and chromatic lines, a distinct triadic outline characterizes the melody. The harmonic backdrop, too, is entirely consonant, relying predominantly on root-position chords.

³⁸One wonders why Schoenberg, who was, after all, not making any explicit points about motivic relationships, went to such lengths to obfuscate an originally independent motif that he apparently did not want to leave unaccounted for either.

The image displays five musical motifs, labeled m11 through m15, from the work *Verklärte Nacht*.
 - **m11**: Written in bass clef, starting at measure 229. It features a complex texture with multiple voices, including a prominent eighth-note pattern. Dynamics range from *f* to *mp*.
 - **m12**: Written in treble clef, starting at measure 255. It begins with a sequence of perfect-fourth intervals, followed by a triad. Dynamics include *p*.
 - **m13**: Written in treble clef, starting at measure 259. It features a triadic structure with accents. The instruction *ausdrucksvoll* is present.
 - **m14**: Written in treble clef, starting at measure 279. It contains a sequence of perfect-fourth intervals and a triad. Dynamics include *mf* and *mp*.
 - **m15**: Written in treble clef, starting at measure 320. It is a short motif featuring a perfect-fourth sequence. Dynamics include *p*.

EXAMPLE 16: *Verklärte Nacht*, the man's motifs in section IV

The other four motifs with which the composer portrays the man in Dehmel's poem follow the gist of the leading theme: motifs 13 and 14 are similarly triadic, motif 12 sets out with sequences of perfect-fourth intervals before it, too, ornaments a triad, and motif 15 excerpts only the perfect-fourth sequence.

With this strong foundation on triadic contours and "perfect" intervals, the man is shown as secure in his footing. The contrast between the two main sections—major and minor chords versus chromaticism, perfect fourths versus tritones, and the grounded harmony of motif 11 versus the "improper" inverted ninth-chord of the woman's source phrase—provide a consummate musical characterization of the two poetic protagonists.

Another difference between the material typical for the woman and that unique to the man is their respective textural environment. Among the eight motifs of section II, all except the "alien" motif 8 (with its tetrachordal [filled perfect fourth] beginning and its broken triads) are set with doubling voices in a way that amounts to only three different parts; their manners of superimposition describe a narrow scope between some degree of polyphonic independence and variations of chordal homophony.

By contrast, the man's motifs—including motif 8, now that we know of its cross-over significance—exhibit a wide variety of textures. These range all the way from monodic settings to complex contrapuntal textures. On the one hand, there are drawn-out chords as in motif 11 or rhythmic patterns as in motif 14; on the other, motif 15 is introduced with the woman's motifs 4 and 8 as counterpoints, and motif 14 is developed in a unique imitative display in which the original and its inversion begin by answering one another until they are sounded simultaneously. The greater variety and complexity in which the six voices engage in section IV corresponds with the larger outlook Dehmel's poem attributes to the man.

In addition to the five motifs newly introduced in the musical representation of the man's speech, section IV recalls motifs 3, 4, and 8 from section II. Schoenberg thus brings the total number of motifs to eight, matching the number in the woman's section just as Dehmel matched the man's lines of speech with the woman's twelve by using the trick of an inner rhyme. Furthermore, motifs 3 and 4, one recalls, are the first melodic figures with which the woman is introduced. While, as we have seen, they do not represent the "source" of her predicament, they certainly depict her state of mind at the moment she begins her confession. Schoenberg's decision to incorporate these motifs into the man's section seems analogous to a detail I pointed out in Dehmel's linguistic patterns: the fact that the man's generally more articulate style accommodates the repetitive line beginnings observed at the outset of the woman's speech. In both Dehmel and Schoenberg, this conspicuous echoing of elements known to belong to the female lover functions as a rhetorical means to express the man's sympathy with the woman's situation.

As for motif 8, the case may well be reversed. With a melodic shape distinctly based on broken chords, this motif "belongs" to the man. It is thus the woman who (pre-)echoes it in her section. Embedded in the semitone and tritone material of her distress, the triadic component fulfills a role similar to that performed in Dehmel's second stanza by the two-fold paired *Dir*: it releases her mind for a moment from her self-absorption and focuses her future on the man whose love is the cause of her new hope.

Finally in the account of Schoenberg's motivic work in *Verklärte Nacht*, the concluding section V recalls motif 1 three times but omits motif 2 ("the moon"). In addition, three of the man's signifiers (motifs 12, 13, and 15) recur, as well as the woman's source phrase in a slightly new variation. Schoenberg who, as I pointed out earlier, turns the 2:3 grouping

of the five stanzas as well as the durational proportion of Dehmel's three narrating sections around, goes one step further and allows the more confident man extra space in the coda. The last word before they walk away, however, is heard from the woman, who is present with her source phrase, that is, with all that defines her feelings.

The Third Voice

I now turn to Schoenberg's transmedialization of two other features observed in Dehmel's poem: the narrative envelope and its third voice. Like so many other poetic details, Dehmel's framing device also finds its correspondence in Schoenberg's composition. Intriguingly though, even in this purely structural respect the composer follows the poet not literally but in spirit. Where Dehmel combines the identical wording that launches the first and last lines with the declarative content, "Two people," Schoenberg splits the framing idea and allots one frame each to his protagonists. In the woman's confession, the source phrase, introduced shortly after the beginning of section II, is taken up prominently as the element that concludes the section. Correspondingly, the man's emblematic motif 11, with which his reply commences, recurs—similarly emphasized—shortly before the end of section IV. What is more, the way the two protagonists' frames are placed is perfectly symmetrical:

On occasion of the second of these framing motifs, the recurrence of the man's theme, Schoenberg mentions another symmetrical device. In his sketches from the famous sleepless night in Barcelona, he points out that the theme's D major is approached once (at the end of section III) from E \flat major, while it is later (towards the end of section IV) reached via D \flat major. He was apparently rather pleased that he had managed, in the context of a tonal composition, to surround the keynote of his composition with the tonalities of its two adjacent semitones.

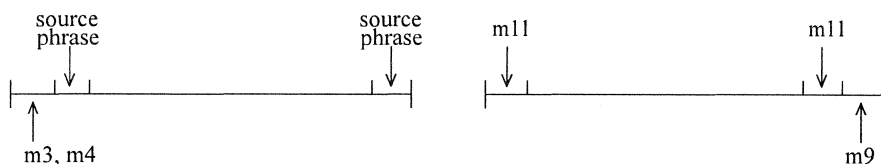


FIGURE 2: Framing in Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, II and IV

What he did not mention explicitly but left for us to detect in his sketches is the fact that the same secret tonal play defines four of his most significant motifs—two each in the man's and the woman's sections. His comments on the construction of the thematic components include what appears at first sight as a very curious analysis of the melodic contours, which he shows to be merged from two interlocking triads (see the example below). Only the reiteration of the same three keys— $C\sharp/D\flat$, D , and $E\flat/D\sharp$ —helps to see the overall pattern, which involves the key tonality and the chords on its two adjacent semitones. In both sections II and IV, D appears as an incorporated triad first in the minor, then in the major mode. In the woman's section, motif 4 presents the D minor triad interpolated with the pitches of the minor triad on its lower semitone neighbor, $C\sharp$, while motif 6 consists of the interlocking pitches of D major and its higher semitone-neighbor triad, $E\flat$ major. The symmetry is mirrored and further varied in the man's section. Here, motif 12 begins with pitches taken from the upper adjacent triad, in the minor mode, and concludes with those of the lower neighbor, in major; the two triadic pitch collections thus surround an implicitly suggested but conspicuously absent D . In motif 14, the leading voice combines a straightforward major triad on the lower neighbor with an overarching minor chord on the semitone above D ; the secondary voice, specifically included in Schoenberg's sketch, leads to D as if to a center towards which these two tonal fields gravitate. (Note the striking symmetry with which Schoenberg distributes the upper and lower neighbors, and the similarly balanced combination of the two modes.)

The image contains four musical sketches, each with two staves representing different voices. Above each sketch are labels for the triads involved:

- m4:** The upper voice is labeled "C# minor" and the lower voice is labeled "D minor".
- m6:** The upper voice is labeled "E♭ major" and the lower voice is labeled "D major".
- m12:** The upper voice is labeled "D# minor" and the lower voice is labeled "C# major". A central "(D)" is written between the two labels, indicating a central pitch.
- m14:** The upper voice is labeled "E♭ minor" and the lower voice is labeled "D♭ major".

EXAMPLE 17: Bitonal melodic contours in Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* and their gravitation towards the central D

It may not be warranted to interpret this tonal threesome in a single programmatic respect. However, should such a correlation be attempted, it seems important to remember that there are several overlapping triangles in Dehmel's poem. The most obvious, but the least consequential on a more profound level, is that of the three speakers; the narrator's is the third voice we hear, besides that of the two lovers. Another candidate for the third person present is the embryo that prompts the particular gist of the woman's confession. The most important third person to my mind is the one who is conspicuously absent: the father of the child-to-be, the unloved husband or, in Dehmel's words, the "stranger."

Schoenberg may not have decided on any of these options. Nonetheless, the message implanted in the tonal features of his composition draws attention to the undefined third agent by whom the "two people" are so distinctly determined.

The Unfolding of the Tragedy in *Pelleas und Melisande*

I composed the Symphonic Poem *Pelleas and Melisande* in 1902. It is inspired entirely by Maurice Maeterlinck's wonderful drama. I tried to mirror every detail of it, with only a few omissions and slight changes of the order of the scenes. Perhaps, as frequently happens in music, there is more space devoted to the love scenes.³⁹

Three years after *Verklärte Nacht*, in 1902-1903, Schoenberg wrote his second symphonic composition inspired by a work of literature; several intermittent attempts remained fragments. As in the case of Dehmel's poem, he chose a work that represented the *Zeitgeist* at the turn of the century. Maeterlinck's drama had been published less than ten years earlier, and was considered important enough to appear in a German translation already in 1897.

The authorial information we have about *Pelleas und Melisande* is even sketchier than that relating to *Verklärte Nacht*. As in the latter case, the most extensive commentary from the composer's own hand exists in the form of liner notes to a recording, written almost a half-century after the composition itself. The style of these notes is similar to that discussed above; a very sketchy synopsis is interspersed with musical examples listing some of the musical motifs and matching them with the characters of Melisande, Golaud, and Pelleas, as well as with the forces of Fate,

³⁹Schoenberg, "Analysis: Pelleas and Melisande," album notes (Capitol recording, 1950).

Jealousy, Love, and Death. Furthermore, the composer identified a few musical sections in relation to specific events in Maeterlinck's drama, such as the loss of the ring, Pelleas's play with Melisande's long hair, the brothers' walk through the grotto beneath the castle, the farewell scene and subsequent murder, and Melisande's death.

In addition to this published commentary, Walter Bailey mentions three unpublished statements from Schoenberg's hand: a text fragment with a brief synopsis of the musical motifs, a note on the sketch of the score, and a 1918 letter to Zemlinsky (which, besides a vivid and extensively argued rejection of suggested cuts, gives rehearsal numbers and thus more details relating musical sections to parts of the program).⁴⁰ Most important among the three sources is the note in the sketch. It includes a table in which Schoenberg lays out the music for Maeterlinck's five-act drama as consisting of three large blocks. The first comprises Melisande in the forest, her encounter with Golaud, and "fate"; the second centers on Pelleas, spanning from his first meeting with Melisande and concluding with his murder from Golaud's hand; the third is reserved for Melisande's death and Golaud's despair.

Finally, there is Alban Berg's "brief thematic analysis" of 1921. This document, presumably endorsed by the master, reiterates many of Schoenberg's own statements, but also contains a number of important differences. Berg goes further than Schoenberg was to go in 1950 in aligning programmatic content to musical ideas, thus providing us a few additional labels. More significantly, his assessment of the structural layout deviates from that in Schoenberg's sketch. Apparently keen to assuage those who might reproach a possible formlessness (an reservation also expressed with regard to *Verklärte Nacht*), Berg tried to fit the symphonic poem into a complex mold: that of a four-movement symphony overlaid with a sonata-movement form. The first movement functions as the sonata exposition and the last movement doubles as recapitulation. Framed by these is not one single internal movement—as one might expect for the sonata development and as the composer himself perceived it, if we are to believe his sketched notes—but two hybrids. One is a scherzo, whose movement-defining form is called into question by Berg's so-called "added episodes"; the other is the symphonically anticipated slow movement, much of which is, however, not really slow at all.

⁴⁰Walter B. Bailey, *Programmatic Elements in the Works of Schoenberg* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984).

Carl Dahlhaus, apparently valuing Berg's authority over the composer's own statements when assessing Schoenberg's program music, expands the twofold reading outlined above, observing that there are no fewer than four separate conceptions of form interacting with each other in this work.

This fourfold planning—as a succession of musical scenes, as a narrative told or suggested by the changing configurations of leitmotifs, as four-movement symphony and as sonata allegro—implies aesthetically that the musical form, by virtue of its complexity, is able to accommodate the literary subject without abandoning its own autonomy. The drama is not forced into an inappropriate musical scheme, nor is the music made dependent on a dramatic plot under whose influence it would become amorphous.⁴¹

Finding sonatas and symphonies hidden beneath long one-movement compositions is, of course, a favorite pastime. Provided one interprets the rules governing such structures loosely enough, such a search will always yield results. But one may question whether these really account for the most relevant aspects of the composition.

The question of structural layout, while interesting in purely musical respects, is not crucial with regard to the transmedialization of the poetic text. One wonders whether Berg, attempting to prove a hidden symphonic form, did not merely seek to defend his master's through-composed work, which was considered too long by many (including Zemlinsky, who conducted it and asked for cuts). Rather than structure, it is the tonal design that lends logic to Schoenberg's work. Fitting this aspect into the composer's sketched outline, one finds that there is a delicate symmetry at play that is lost in Berg's redefinition:

- I Melisande in the forest under the spell of "Fate" (Rehearsal nos. 0-2) and her encounter with and subsequent attraction to Golaud (RNs 3-8) are held in D minor / F major / D minor. The first section thus centers in the tonic (which, as in *Verklärte Nacht*, is D minor), with an excursion to its relative major.
- II The second section according to Schoenberg contains six segments. They relate to the first meeting of Pelleas and Melisande (RNs 9-13, E major), the reminder of Melisande's marriage to Golaud (RNs 14-15, F major), Melisande's play with her wedding band (RNs 16-24, A major), Pelleas's playing with Melisande's hair at the tower (RNs 25-30 [+4], A major), Golaud's taking Pelleas into the grotto (RNs 30 [+5]-35, D minor), and the farewell and love scene of Pelleas and Melisande (RNs 36-49, E major).

⁴¹Carl Dahlhaus, "Schoenberg and programme music," in *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. D. Puffett and A. Clayton (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), pp. 94-104: 99.

- III The final section begins with Melisande returned to her initial loneliness and helplessness (RNs 50-54, C# minor), centers in Golaud's jealousy and despair (RNs 55-58, D minor) and Melisande's death (RNs 59-61, E \flat minor), and ends with an epilogue in D minor (RNs 62-69). This section thus revolves in semitones around the key of D minor—reminiscent of a similar, albeit more large-scale and pervasive, circling around the central D in *Verklärte Nacht*.

The tonal layout, then, can be represented as

$$I^* \text{ — II — } I^{**} \text{ — V — V — } I^{**} \text{ — II — } I^{***}$$

where I^* represents a palindromic motion from D minor to the relative major and back, I^{**} alternates the two tonic representatives, and I^{***} stands for the chromatic turn around the central D minor. The long second section, which Schoenberg sees as dramatically framed by the appearance and disappearance of Pelleas, is palindromic in its tonal representation.⁴²

Not surprisingly in the master of pitch organization, Schoenberg's play with motifs is even more fascinating than the structural design. Subtle interrelationships between the various musical units and other symbolically eloquent devices of development speak a language that divulges as much about the composer's interpretation of the love triangle as about the meaning he attaches to individual intervals. The rhythmic shaping of each unit as well as the instrumentation add to this musical portrayal of the old love triangle and the particular form it takes in Maeterlinck's drama.

Schoenberg's motifs come in five categories. Three groups are associated with the three protagonists; a fourth explores the interpersonal realm, and a fifth is designed to represent feelings, concepts, and generic experiences such as fate, love, jealousy, and death. As I will show, every single interconnection that exists between these motifs is symbolically meaningful. Even more than in *Verklärte Nacht*, Schoenberg follows the tradition of eighteenth-century *Affektenlehre* perfected, among others, by Bach, in which—to mention just the most obvious components—chromatic contexts indicate human fragility while the “perfect” fourth, fifth, and octave express self-assurance and (divine or secular) endorsement, in which the tritone, long perceived as a dissonant *diabolus in musica*, stands for the not-quite-accepted, while triads, emblems of consonance, express conformity with conventional views.

⁴²For a summary of arguments (many of them also brought forward by Bailey) against Berg's proposal for the structural understanding of the work, see Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, pp. 169-177.

The following table shows the correlation of dramatic scenes and musical passages.

Maeterlinck

Schoenberg

Act I

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 At the gate of King Arkel's castle: servants scrub the threshold. They express fear that it may never be cleansed and foreboding of a future blood crime. 2 In a forest: Golaud, King Arkel's older grandson, discovers the mysterious girl Melisande, weeping in distress beside a fountain. He offers to retrieve her crown from the water, but she refuses. 3 In the castle: Golaud's relatives read his letter in which he tells how he met, fell in love with, and married Melisande. 4 In the castle garden: Melisande, who has just arrived with Golaud, comments on the gloominess in and around the castle. Pelleas, Golaud's much younger half-brother, enters and meets Melisande. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Golaud discovers Melisande 2 Golaud's wedding 3 Fate 4 Pelleas 5 Reprise of wedding music |
|--|---|

Act II

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 At a fountain in the park: Pelleas and Melisande frolic, Melisande plays with her wedding band, which falls into the bottomless fountain. 2 Golaud's chamber in the castle: Melisande cares for Golaud who, as she recognizes with alarm, has injured himself in a fall from his horse at the very moment she lost his ring. He notices the absence of the ring; she lies that she has left it in the castle grotto, and he orders her to go and find it. 3 The grotto beneath the castle: Pelleas, whom Golaud ordered to accompany Melisande, conveys his impressions of the grotto. Entering, they find three sleeping beggars. 4 In the castle: Arkel once more prohibits Pelleas, who wishes to attend to a dying friend, from leaving the castle while his father is sick. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Melisande loses her ring |
|---|--|

Act III

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 In the castle: Pelleas and Melisande, accompanied by Golaud's little son from his first marriage, wait for Golaud's return. | |
|---|--|

- 2 At the castle tower: Melisande, bantering with Pelleas, leans out from her window; he catches her long hair and wraps himself in it, discovering his feelings for her. They are surprised by Golaud, who leads Pelleas away.
- 3 In the castle grotto: Golaud, walking with Pelleas through the dark grotto, points out its instability; one senses that he struggles with his jealousy and harbors thoughts of getting rid of his half-brother but restrains himself.
- 4 Outside the grotto: Golaud warns Pelleas to stay away from his wife.
- 5 In front of the castle: Golaud lifts his son towards a window, urging him to describe what Pelleas and Melisande are doing.

7 Pelleas and Melisande at the castle tower

8 In the castle vaults

Act IV

- 1 A hall in the castle: Pelleas prepares to leave now that his father is recovering. Melisande agrees to meet him at the fountain to bid farewell.
- 2 In the castle: Golaud announces to King Arkel, who is chatting with Melisande, that Pelleas's departure is imminent. He is enraged when he sees his wife calm, and abuses her cruelly, using her hair to drag her on her knees across the room.
- 3 A terrace in front of the castle: Golaud's son observes a lamb that has run away. Golaud responds by speaking about poverty and life's hardship in general.
- 4 At the fountain in the park: Pelleas and Melisande, about to take leave, discover the nature of their feelings for one another. Golaud, having overheard them, kills his brother and throws him into the well. He also wounds Melisande.

9 Love scene and murder of Pelleas

Act V

- 1 The servants' hall: the servants discuss the tragedy.
- 2 Melisande's chamber in the castle: the serving women silently enter one after the other. Melisande, having given birth to a pathetically tiny baby-girl, dies.
Golaud is in despair, for losing his young wife as well as for not knowing whether or not she betrayed him. Yet he forgives her.

10 Reprise of the music depicting Melisande alone

- 11 Golaud's despair
- 12 Melisande's death
- 13 Epilog

The Protagonists and Their Threefold 3 + 1 Motifs

Melisande's first motif (M1),⁴³ which opens the composition, is cast in the gentle swaying of twelve-eight time. This metric mold, strongly identified with rocking motions like those in a *berceuse* or *barcarole*, prepares the pictorial background. Whether the image is that of a child rocked to sleep or of a barge on the ocean, the implication is of a helpless person exposed to elements that cannot be controlled or even fully understood. Schoenberg's performance indication, "Die ♩ ein wenig bewegt — zögernd" (the ♩ somewhat moving, hesitating) underscores the impression of insecurity and vulnerability. This creates an appropriate musical image of how we find Melisande in the forest. She has lost her way, is weeping in distress, and insists on cutting herself off from her past (she will later threaten to kill herself should Golaud retrieve her crown from the shallow water). The interval pattern confirms this portrayal. After rising gingerly in a few small (chromatic) steps, the line falls back in a tritone. A renewed effort to rise results in the same plunge, and a third attempt is cut off by the motif signifying "fate" (as Schoenberg informs us unmistakably). It will take many more attempts for Melisande to achieve some kind of stability; few M1 statements are allowed to stand without the plummeting tritone.

The instrument in which the female protagonist is first presented is the English horn, supported by the viola. The timbre of the English horn in particular and of other woodwind instruments in general will remain typically associated with her.

Melisande's second motif depicts the lovely but lonely young woman Golaud encounters. Nothing has changed yet in her situation, but the meeting with the stranger adds fear to her feelings of misery. The tempo, correspondingly, becomes "somewhat more moving," and while the background motion remains in the swaying stasis of twelve-eight time, her own melody is now cast in the "common time" of human expression, four-four. Her enunciation, "very expressive" and more extensive than the

⁴³For the sake of simplicity, I label the three protagonists' motifs with their initials followed by consecutive numbers. This is not a strictly correct representation of Schoenberg's choice; I will take this opportunity to point to some of the finer distinctions. Melisande's musical signifiers, M1, M2, and M3, are three independently conceived motifs, while Golaud's G1, G2, and G3 constitute a continuous development of a single idea. In the case of Pelleas, P1 and P2 are introduced as a consecutive line (albeit with a drastic change of instrumentation) showing, presumably, two aspects of his personality; P3a as a variation of P1 and P3b as a development of P2 then trace the dilemma into which these two aspects draw him.

brief first motif, consists of two chromatic progressions: an initial descent, which slows down, and later an ascent in increasing speed. Each chromatic motion ends in a descending leap of a minor sixth,⁴⁴ an interval more humanly plaintive than the “strange” tritone.⁴⁵



EXAMPLE 18: Schoenberg, *Pelleas und Melisande*,
Melisande's basic lonesomeness (M1) and agitated helplessness (M2)

Once Melisande is thus introduced in both her basic condition and her state of mind as she is met by Golaud, Schoenberg's music turns to the portrayal of her husband-to-be. That he is already present, visible at least to Melisande and, through her music, indirectly also to us, is manifest not only in the greater agitation of her second motif. Even more evocative is the play in which this motif is shown in subsequent bars. After three presentations in descending woodwind instruments,⁴⁶ her motif enters into stretto imitations with itself. Two three-part stretti, in which all three voices launch the unit from the same pitch class, are followed by a protracted twelve-part stretto in which the entries of M2 ascend in a two-octave whole-tone scale. This expansive gesture, as if motioning to the

⁴⁴In the original M2, the first of the falling leaps is written as an augmented fifth. However, in subsequent entries of the motif, Schoenberg changes the spelling to that of a minor sixth, confirming that he notates—as he does throughout the composition—with complete freedom of enharmonic definition. Consequently, in what follows I will name intervals as neutrally as possible. For a detailed account of the harmonic background of this motif, striking in its reminiscence of the Siegmund-Sieglinde duet in the first act of Wagner's *Die Walküre* (another love triangle!), see Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, pp. 163–164.

⁴⁵Schoenberg's own writings invite the allocation of M1 and M2 to Melisande. His album notes give what I call M2 as “Melisande's helplessness,” and his letter to Zemlinsky states simply that “the motive of the beginning (12/8) refers to Melisande.” By contrast, we owe the identification of Melisande's third motif to Alban Berg, who links what he identifies as the closing theme in the symphonic exposition to “Melisande's growing love for Pelleas,” a reading I will question. The hybrid unit that I list below as the female protagonist's fourth motif has not, to my knowledge, been written about at all in the literature on Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*.

⁴⁶See the seven measures at and after RN 1: oboes 1 and 2; English horn; bass clarinet/bassoon.

man whose presence the thematic material has not made explicit, prepares for and envelopes the first motif that brings Golaud to the foreground.⁴⁷

Golaud, as we know from Maeterlinck, is hunting. Like Melisande, although presumably for different reasons, he has lost his way in the forest—a symbol for his deviation, in the midst of darker feelings, from the conventional path prescribed for a royal heir. Schoenberg's portrayal reflects these nuances. He presents the older of his male protagonists in three motifs that show progressive stages rather than a static character.

The image shows three musical staves labeled G1, G2, and G3. G1 is for horns, G2 for vc, and G3 for 1 horn and E.H. Each motif is marked with a rehearsal mark (RN3, RN4, RN5) and dynamic markings (p, mf, f, pp subito). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

EXAMPLE 19: *Pelleas und Melisande*, Golaud's three motifs

In terms of pitch, Golaud's motifs play around triads, by far the most conventional form of consonant pitch relationships. Maeterlinck, too, depicted this middle-aged man, whose temples, as Melisande observes, are already gray, as conventional and settled. Yet ambiguities lurk everywhere, Schoenberg tells us. In all three motifs, the initial note suggests one kind of truth on the vertical axis but another in its horizontal progression. In G1, for instance, the initial D is harmonized with a D-major-ninth chord, which one expects to resolve to G; horizontally, however, it supports a broken B-minor triad. Hardly is the D-major triad later realized horizontally than it is followed by a suddenly hushed, harmonically abrupt C-major chord. In terms of rhythm, Golaud's basic motif shows a similar ambivalence. On the one hand, it introduces what I will call the "hunting call," a dotted-note figure with note repetition at the upper third, which forms part of all his musical utterances. The light-heartedness suggested in the pictorial gesture is counteracted by the remarkable number of syncopations: the first half of the motif contains not a single down- or middle-beat articulation but instead four syncopations, an evocative picture of what one could read as a consciously ignored grid of propriety.

⁴⁷See ob/E.h./clar.1, b.clar. at RN 3 [-4 to +2]: D-E-F♯-A♭-B♭-C-D-E-F♯-A♭-B♭-C.

(One thinks of the misgivings Golaud has about how his family will accept his spontaneous commitment to the unknown young woman.)

When Golaud's first motif has come to a sudden halt in the hushed C-major chord that betrays how startled he is by his own emotions, Melisande returns briefly to her initial, lonesome state (portrayed in M1). But soon her lure towards him surfaces again, this time in a three-part stretto of M2 with entries ascending in semitones. Once more, Golaud responds. His second utterance towards her as well as his third, made after a fleeting moment of passionate, highly dissonant, eruption (see "Heftig" before RN 5), trace the rapid development of his attraction to the mysterious stranger. Schoenberg's music thus witnesses, as it were, what Maeterlinck's drama expresses only in retrospect: the incredibly swift progress from first sight to marriage. When Golaud speaks for the second time, he begins with the previous, syncopated rhythm, but doubles his hunting call while shifting it to a metrical position. The ambiguity of a horizontally minor and vertically major-triad beginning is retained, but subsequent chords are exclusively in the minor mode. His third statement, launched once more under the same harmonic conditions, abandons the two remaining syncopations in the motif's first half in favor of a tangibly more "settled" position for the hunting calls. The second half of G3, however, couches its ascending A-minor triad in three syncopations. Some vacillation remains, which only subsequent entries will leave behind.

The conclusion of this third stage in Golaud's response to Melisande contains a figure to which I will return repeatedly. It consists of a curve built from three adjacent pitches followed by a plunging sixth—the interval that, in M2, first divulged Melisande's agitation at the sight of the stranger. As I will show, the figure recurs, in various shapes, whenever a strong emotional reaction between her and one of the brothers is at issue, noticeably in the motif Schoenberg assigned to the depiction of LOVE. I therefore refer to this melodic component as the "love flourish."

The gradual change in rhythmic characterization and tonal components that maps Golaud's receding ambivalence and growing emotional certainty towards Melisande is specified in Schoenberg's instrumentation. Motif G1 is presented by three horns in unison and thus identifies that particular brass color as the emblem of the hunting prince. G2 is still carried by two horns; they are, however, now joined by one string section, the celli. The string timbre, as I will show later, is firmly linked to the concept of love; this is true both for the LOVE-motif itself and for all those evolutions of the

signature motifs of the three protagonists that come about under the influence of love. Not surprisingly then, G3 is sounded by only one horn, doubled in the first violins, the first division of the celli, and, most significantly, the English horn—Melisande's signature timbre.

"Pelleas is contrasted distinctly by the youthful and knightly character of his motif," Schoenberg explains in his liner notes. Introduced with the sound of the orchestra's most dashing instrument, the trumpet, he shares with his brother the timbre of the brass family. The portrayal of his relationship to Golaud even extends to some rhythmic traits. Like Golaud, Pelleas employs conspicuous dotted notes (albeit without the note repetition of the hunting call); the second of these falls syncopated on beat 2 of the second bar, thus matching the same syncopation in Golaud's initial motif. The intervals in the young man's motifs are the perfect fifth and fourth and the octave—intervals both "purer" and more exuberant than the subdued minor triads his brother prefers. Once he is established as a pure young man, it becomes clear that he has more in common with the young woman his brother has brought home than with his own kin. After four "perfect" intervals at the outset of P1 (see the two examples below), Schoenberg reveals another side to Pelleas's character when he adds a second segment dominated by two ascending chromatic progressions, thus recalling Melisande's semitone steps. The two rising half-tone components are linked by notes that, owing to a small slur, evoke two falling intervals at once. On the surface, the descending leap that links to the second chromatic segment is a minor seventh, E-F#. At closer inspection, however, one notices that the E is slurred to the preceding C as a kind of passive afterthought. On the level of active pitches, then, the falling interval links the arrival point of the first chromatic ascent with the point of departure of the second, that is, C with F#. This is, of course, an echo of the tritone plunges with which Melisande has earlier entered the scene.

Schoenberg now slows down the tempo to allow a three-chord group in the strings to "signify destiny," as he puts it in his album notes.⁴⁸ Out of this sequence of swelling chords Pelleas's second motif rises brilliantly.

⁴⁸Schoenberg mentions the first two of the chords specifically, explaining that the progression (from a dominant-seventh-chord on G# in first inversion to a dominant-seventh on B) is "designed to represent the destiny" (liner notes). According to his harmonies, his interpretation of destiny seems to rely on the conviction that things do not resolve as they are anticipated to do: the inverted G#⁷ does not lead to C# but instead to B; the seventh-chord on B is not followed by the expected E but instead by an inverted A-minor triad. The composer's dynamics corroborate this reading: each chord increases in volume, only to be surprised by the (much softer) entry of an unforeseen resolution.

Ascending and descending semitone groups are connected by the same two intervals that characterize the surface in the second half of P1, the rising major third (here notated as a diminished fourth) and the falling minor seventh. The most accented interval in P2, the falling minor sixth that concludes the motif,⁴⁹ picks up another interval characteristic for Melisande (the falling minor sixth is emphasized twice in M2), thus reinforcing the affinity between the two young people.

The instrumentation chosen for Pelleas's second motif confirms his position between the loyalty to his brother and his inner resonance with his sister-in-law. The trumpet has given way to (Golaud's) two horns; these are doubled by (Melisande's) woodwinds, including her signature timbre, the English horn, and (love's) strings.⁵⁰

EXAMPLE 20: *Pelleas und Melisande*, blood relationship with Golaud and inner affinity with Melisande

After this first encounter with and reaction to his brother's young wife, Pelleas is heard for a while with only the Golaud-related first half of P1, as if to reassure himself and everybody else of his fraternal loyalty (see RN 10, horns). After a while, however, the tempo once again slows down and he recalls a portion of his second, Melisande-oriented motif (RN 11, horns + woodwinds + strings). This leads to a brief dialogue between the two young people in which Melisande's second motif is answered by Pelleas who, however, clings to the perfect-interval first half of his brass-colored initial motif.

⁴⁹Harmonically, Pelleas's second motif does not conclude until one bar later, after a traditional cadential formula brought about by some of the instruments involved in presenting it. It seems significant that Schoenberg in his program-note listing of motifs marks P1 as closing with the falling minor sixth, thus stressing the importance of this interval.

⁵⁰The most comprehensive harmonic analysis of the phrase comprising the two motifs as well as the fateful chords between them is found in Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, pp. 164-165.

At this point, Schoenberg introduces the third motif to represent Melisande. I am not entirely convinced by the label chosen by Berg, who believed that the gesture depicts the female side of the growing attraction between the fated lovers (“Melisande’s growing love for Pelleas”). This interpretation does not only contradict Maeterlinck’s careful provision to keep Melisande innocent of her nascent attraction towards her young brother-in-law until the farewell scene; it also seems to ignore Schoenberg’s own musical symbolism. As I have shown above, Pelleas starts out presenting himself with perfect fifths framing a perfect fourth and an octave, while Golaud is musically portrayed in ubiquitous triads (more often minor than major). When Melisande’s musical utterances first depart from the earlier patterns with chromatic progressions cut off by a sudden leap—patterns observed in both M1 and M2—we hear two minor triads, one of them direct (F# minor), the other interspersed with two passing notes (C# minor): clear reminders of her husband.



EXAMPLE 21: Melisande’s third motif

In addition to (Golaud’s) minor triads, there are three features within M3 that are conspicuous. One is a rapid turn figure, a gesture that may be read as a sign of the young woman’s growing playfulness, a relief from the shadows of her past that made her music creep so cautiously when Golaud first met her. The second distinctive detail is even more exceptional. On the seam between the F#-minor triad and subsequent ornament and the C#-minor context, Schoenberg devises an ascending step whose augmented second, E \sharp -F \sharp , arrives at the artificial leading-note to the new chord’s fifth. Emphasized by both the drawn-out value of a tied half-note and the reiteration on the downbeat of the following bar, this highly charged pitch expresses a yearning that may well be related to love but is not specified with regard to love’s object. Finally—and this may have prompted Berg’s interpretation—the motif ends with a variant of what I called the “love flourish” (doubled by the solo violin, thus corroborating the “love” aspect). This figure, however, was so far only heard in Golaud’s motif G3; it thus echoes the husband’s affection, not that of Pelleas.

That Melisande is indeed, at this juncture in the musical development, emotionally close to the man whom she has recently married is motivically born out further within the same passage. Twice we hear her second motif in its original rhythm (albeit without the concluding leap); twice it is followed by her third motif, contrapuntally juxtaposed with Pelleas's emblematic ("pure") P1.⁵³ Finally, oboes and bass clarinet enunciate a version of M2 whose repeated dotted rhythm, inserted note repetition, and syncopation replicate the characteristics of Golaud's motifs.

Soon thereafter (at RN 14), Golaud reasserts himself with a combination of the beginning of G1 and the "love flourish" of G3. Melisande, apparently eager to answer, juxtaposes a diminished M2. When Pelleas is next heard, his motifs are intertwined and conspicuously changed—so much so that I have decided to distinguish them with new numbers. P3a is a version of P2, that motif which divulges the young man's affinity with his sister-in-law. Heard in the clarinet (one of Melisande's woodwind instruments), the melodic contour combines many traits of the earlier motif with an ornamental scroll that echoes the one just introduced in Melisande's third motif. P3b is based on the Golaud-related segment of P1. Sounding in the horn (Golaud's instrument), it substitutes a minor seventh for the idiosyncratic octave—a significant deviation that will, much later in the development, be surpassed by the recasting of the initial perfect fifth as a tritone.



EXAMPLE 22: Pelleas, expressing his dilemma of loyalty (P3a) versus attraction (P3b)

In response to this confession of the young man's emotional confusion, Melisande is heard with a rapid succession of utterly playful, doubly diminished versions of M2. This leads up to what Schoenberg called his "scherzo section" (from RN 16) which, as the composer explained, portrays "Melisande's playing with the ring which falls to the bottom of the fountain" and "Golaud's jealousy."

⁵³See in *Langsamer*, from RN 12 [+3]: M2 in flute, M3 in clarinet 1 with reinforcement in the solo violin, P1 in double bass/violoncello and contra bassoon/bass clarinet; from RN 13 [-2]: M2 in flute, M3 in solo violin, P1 in oboe 3, English horn, and violoncello.

the falling fifth appears as a tritone and the soaring octave as a major seventh. More significantly still, the continuation in distorted sequences leads directly into a doubly diminished M2! This is as close as Schoenberg's Pelleas comes to losing his allegiance to his brother in his attraction towards Melisande. He soon regains his perfect intervals and never again links himself so unmistakably with the woman who cannot be his.



EXAMPLE 24: Pelleas, momentarily lost in his feelings for Melisande
("distorted" P1 beginning, conclusion in M2 variation)

True to Maeterlinck, Melisande's reaction occurs much later in the musical development. Long after Golaud's intervention that ends her flirtatious play with Pelleas at the castle tower (RN 27), and after her husband's abundant expressions of the jealousy (RNs 28-30) that prompt him to lead his brother into the grotto (RNs 30-32), it is well into the farewell scene with Pelleas (from RN 33) that she recognizes the nature of her feelings. In fact, this scene still sets out with alternating bars in which her allegiance with Golaud (M3 over a variant of G3) struggles with her affinity with Pelleas (M2 over P2). When she finally acknowledges her inner connection with Pelleas, she does so in a melodic gesture that is a structural mirror image of the one in which the young man expressed the corresponding understanding: five times she combines a diminished version of her signature motif M2 with a variant of P1 in which the soaring octave is no longer diminished but either restored or even enlarged to a major ninth (to the scope of two superimposed fifths).⁵⁴



EXAMPLE 25: Melisande, momentarily lost in her feelings for Pelleas
(M2 + P1 in enlarged intervals)

⁵⁴This combination is heard a sixth time at the end of the piece (see RN66 [+3]), in what is structurally the recapitulation and dramatically, at the moment of Melisande's death, the recall of all essential experiences.

While there is now no doubt about the deep feelings that link the two young people (the following LOVE scene expands on what is only a moment on Maeterlinck's stage), Schoenberg makes a clear statement about what this realization means for each of them: he concludes the section that brought Melisande's awareness with a final statement in which M2 and P1 are once again untangled, juxtaposed in the strings (love's timbre), complementary but free, and finally whole again! It has been a long while since we have last heard Melisande's signature motif with its original concluding falling interval; here it appears, after protracted lingering, not as a minor sixth but enlarged to mirror Pelleas's characteristic minor seventh. At the same time, Pelleas's distinctive signature motif sounds with its original, "perfect" intervals restored. Instead of turning from these, in the second half of his motif, to the chromatic progressions expressing affinity to Melisande's M1-loneliness, he now ends with an ascending major sixth, an interval otherwise only heard in the context of the motif representing the concept of love (see below).

Motifs of Fate, Jealousy, Love, and Death

This brings me, in conclusion, to the four motifs signifying not attributes of persons, but larger concepts to which they are all subjected: fate, jealousy, love, and death.



EXAMPLE 26: *Pelleas und Melisande*, the FATE motif (with rhythmic liquidation)



EXAMPLE 27: *Pelleas und Melisande*, the JEALOUSY motif (also contracted, its beginning now resembling FATE)

The motif of FATE, or destiny, is one of the very first in the composition, launched from the upbeat to the second full measure of the piece. With its pronounced double-dotted rhythm and intensely charged initial

interval, it is easily recognizable. FATE thus highlighted shows its face at six moments in the drama. It is very prominent in the scene that depicts Melisande's lonesomeness in the forest, her arrival at the castle as Golaud's new wife (before she has met Pelleas), and Golaud and Pelleas's walk through the castle grotto. In addition, the motif sounds once each at the moment immediately before Pelleas's violent death, at the very moment of the fratricide, and at Melisande's passing away.⁵⁵

The way in which the composer works with this motif says much about his interpretation of the force of *Schicksal*, its origin, and its doings. He seems to be telling us that fate is perceived differently at its initial impact in our lives than when it influences us in protracted lingering. The motif is introduced in an explosive rhythmic shape that, with what amounts almost to two "crushed-note" upbeats, speaks with fierce relentlessness. In subsequent repetitions, however, it regularly softens until its rhythmic power is liquidated (as Schoenberg will later call such processes), blending with whatever environment it encounters. The intervallic structure seems to confirm the message imparted by the rhythm. A skyrocketing dissonance, a major seventh, is followed by the very conventional falling major triad. Fate, then, strikes us as threatening at the moment it enters our life, but soon becomes a quotidian reality when the initial impulse spins out into its ramifications.

Closely related to what Schoenberg seems to regard as the basic concept in this piece is the motif symbolizing JEALOUSY. It shares with the FATE motif the rising major-seventh interval, presumably pointing to the fateful consequences this human emotion so often generates. Both the threefold syncopation and the repetitiveness of rhythmic segments specify that the person in the grip of this passion is Golaud, for whom vacillation and the frames of conventional, repetitive expression are characteristic (see both the direct note repetitions in his motifs and the reiteration of his hunting call in G2 and G3).

The JEALOUSY motif makes a first, isolated appearance at the end of the scene in which Melisande drops her wedding band into the fountain (RN 24). It becomes more prominent in response to Pelleas's play in Melisande's hair (end of RN 27). From there on, we witness a veritable

⁵⁵My count yielded seven statements of the FATE motif before rehearsal number 1 (Melisande alone), four in RNs 7-8 (Golaud bringing Melisande home), eleven during the brothers' walk through the subterranean vaults (RNs 30-33), and one each in sections 48 (before Pelleas's death), 49 (Golaud's murder of Pelleas), and 54 (Melisande's approaching death).

surge: statements of the motif follow each other at the distance of two bars (RN 28), then in a hemiolic pattern with four entries spaced over three measures, followed by a thirteen-part stretto with statements attacking consecutive beats (RN 29). Thereafter, JEALOUSY abates. However, another single recurrence precedes the farewell scene, signaling musically Golaud's offended awareness of the impending encounter (end of RN 32). The last two statements may come as a surprise to those who do not take Maeterlinck as seriously as Schoenberg apparently did: JEALOUSY is still present in the music, albeit in a rhythmically softened form, when Golaud takes leave of his dying wife (RN 57).

The motif that embodies LOVE is conceived as a complex melodic phrase—the longest musical entity in the composition.⁵⁶ Like JEALOUSY, a feeling intimately connected with Golaud which in its musical form echoes his propensity for triads, LOVE, too, is not a concept detached from the specific feelings of one of the protagonists for another. On the contrary, Schoenberg's compositional choices confirm a suspicion we may already have harbored. Although all three persons are involved in the unfolding love tragedy, the dynamics of any typical love triangle seem to imply that the rightful husband, perceived as an obstacle to the young passion, cannot possibly have equally strong affection as the youthful lover. Correspondingly, the conspicuous surface features of the LOVE motif seem primarily to credit Pelleas with true love, Melisande in second instance, and Golaud only indirectly. Gestures and intervals reminiscent of Pelleas's first motif are heard in the first, second, and fourth measure of the motif, while Melisande's chromaticism (a feature shared, from the beginning, with Pelleas) governs the third, fifth, and sixth bars.⁵⁷ Such hierarchy of musical reference mirrors the fact that Pelleas is the one who is honest enough both to admit his infatuation to himself and, by deciding to leave the castle, to want to avoid its disastrous consequences. Melisande, by contrast, remains apparently guileless for the longest time. In this sense, then, Schoenberg's LOVE motif seems less than it purports to be:

⁵⁶Frisch gives a very thorough account of the large-scale tonal development in the phrase itself and its immediate continuation. See *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, pp. 166-169.

⁵⁷The entire phrase as well as various segments of it are heard throughout RNs 36-41, 44-47, and again in RN 65, after Melisande's death. The initially introduced instrumental timbre is that of the strings, particularly the unison of violin and violoncello. While all other instruments eventually partake in assertions of love, strings always play a prominent part. Observing this has allowed me to interpret the addition of string color to motifs originally cast in different instrumental timbre as the evocation of a love component.

the description of anecdotal facts rather than a deep exploration of the entire situation. The two final measures, however, paint a different picture. They present slightly different variants of the “love flourish” that plays a role in G3 and M3, thus vindicating the bond between Golaud and Melisande as one of love after all.



EXAMPLE 28: *Pelleas und Melisande*, the LOVE motif

EXAMPLE 29: *Pelleas und Melisande*, the LOVE motif and its recursors in G3 and M3

The instrumental color associated with the LOVE motif, as I mentioned earlier, is very consistently that of the strings. In this regard, too, Schoenberg uses a trait specific to the “conceptual” motif to strengthen the nuance of signification imparted in the protagonists’ emblematic gestures. When Golaud’s love to Melisande becomes a reality for him, his third motif sounds with its idiosyncratic horn timbre reduced to a single horn, which is now accompanied by (Melisande’s) English horn as well as the first violins and the first division of the violoncelli. Melisande’s third motif, in which, as I have shown, she expresses her fond allegiance to Golaud, is scored for clarinet now doubled by the solo violin. Finally, the Melisande-oriented component of Pelleas’s third motif, while initially presented in the first clarinet and imitated by the first oboe, also enlists the strings: it is further playfully expanded by interlocking ornamental figures in first violin and violoncello.⁵⁸

⁵⁸See RN 15: bars 1-2, P3a in the first clarinet (complemented by P3b in the fifth horn); bars 3-4 P3a in the first oboe (complemented by P3b in the first and second bassoons); bars 5-7, free variation of the beginning of P3a in violin I and violoncello.

The fourth of the concepts Schoenberg casts as independent motifs is DEATH. This is, as both the instrumentation (with English horn, bass clarinet, and solo viola) and the introduction after Golaud's murder of Pelleas show, not death in general, but Melisande's death. Interestingly though, the musical parameters specify both who is dying and for whom this death occurs—and in this, Schoenberg gives Maeterlinck's text an intriguing reading. In addition to the woodwind timbres that have been the young woman's signature sound throughout the composition, the twelve-eighth time, reintroduced to suggest that she is once more lonesome (after the death of the man whom she had only just discovered she loved, and given the presumed alienation from her husband in the wake of his jealous act of fratricide), links this motif powerfully with Melisande. At the same time, the interval pattern is conspicuously triadic and thus points to Golaud as the actual cause for her death. The fact that the broken chord expanded twice in the course of the motif is an augmented triad—musically as startling and difficult to accommodate as the dramatic denouement threatens to be—is particularly noteworthy; only in the motif's third segment is the ascent redressed to Golaud's familiar minor-mode triad. Even the rhythmic development speaks of the tension between Melisande and her husband. In the first segment, the triad reproduces the lilting rhythm of her first motif; in the third, it has assumed the regular four-eighth-note form that characterized Golaud's utterances after he had overcome his doubts and decided to link his life to this young woman. This rhythmic feature, however, has to override the prevailing metric order: the quadruplet jars with the berceuse rhythm of the backdrop that, in extension of its original translation as "lullaby," now refers to Melisande's final sleep.⁵⁹



EXAMPLE 30: *Pelleas und Melisande*, the DEATH motif

As the composer points out in his liner notes, Melisande's passing away is musically expressed in a chorale played by trumpet and trombone, with a counterpoint in the flutes. The combination is heard two-and-a-half

⁵⁹Schoenberg's DEATH motif is heard repeatedly in RNs 50-54. It is also echoed one more time in RN 61.

times over a single suspended pedal chord in the section marked with rehearsal numbers 59-61. After its closing fermata, the final section of the piece is an eighty-one-measure epilogue that I take to be attempts to depict the feelings of the one protagonist who is still alive, Golaud. Snippets and new variations of his third motif—his secure affection for Melisande—are heard in virtually all instruments before they give way to reminiscences of her and of Pelleas. The fated young lovers, however, seem vindicated in their innocence. The motifs as they appear here, alternating, juxtaposed, and interlocking, are those that either characterize the two young people individually (M2, P1, M1) or speak of Melisande's commitment to her husband (M3). There is no sign of either Pelleas's affinity with his brother's young wife or any of the compound units that capture the moments of confusion in this love triangle. The recurrence of the LOVE motif, sounding one last time before Golaud's own motif reestablishes itself and prepares the closure of the composition, reminds us that it is LOVE and its terrible power, rather than any specific act of betrayal, that brought about this tragedy.

Summary: Schoenberg's Characters and Their Development

The principal means Schoenberg employs for the portrayal of Maeterlinck's characters, the representation of their relationship to one another and the musical suggestion of generic forces (be they subjective like fear and guilt or objective like fate and death), is the relation between pitches. This is true both globally, where tonal centers are set out in reference to one another, and locally, particularly with regard to intervals.

In both compositions here explored, D provides the tonal center; also in both, the chords and tonal realms based on the two semitones above and below D play a pivotal role. The choice of the key-note itself does not invite to be read in a symbolic way; after all, D major and D minor were Schoenberg's favorite keys at the time, used successfully in the two string quartets which, in terms of the dates of their creation, frame the two symphonic poems. The use of three adjacent tonalities seems at first glance more specific, and especially appropriate to compositions that deal with triangular situations. Yet here again, too straightforward a matching would distort Schoenberg's subtle play in a simplistic way. In *Verklärte Nacht*, the most prominent motif of the man (= the newly loved partner) presents the most conspicuous thematic materialization of D major; in

Pelleas und Melisande, a similarly direct realization appears in two of the motifs associated with Golaud (= the no longer loved partner). Yet nothing justifies a belief that any one tonal center is representative of any one protagonist.

With regard to actual pitch sequences, especially recurring interval patterns, it is possible to come closer to establishing a symbolic vocabulary. In both compositions, chromatic progressions are contrasted with triadic ones; each time, the literary source, together with the composer's hints as to the correspondence of musical and poetic sections, allows to posit a link between chromaticism and insecurity combined with distress on the one hand, and between triadic progressions and certainty combined with self-control on the other. Yet insecurity may stem from full awareness and a guilt-ridden conscience (as with Dehmel's female character) or from a largely unconscious, naive attitude towards life, experienced by a child-woman (as in *Melisande*). Certainty can result from feeling firmly embedded in conventional patterns (as with Golaud) or from the inner strength that chooses freedom of self-determination over a reliance on traditional values (as with Dehmel's male character).

Schoenberg's distinction of various textures and timbral associations is straightforward. In the original string-sextet version of *Verklärte Nacht*, he contrasts the vastly similar degree of moderate complexity in the woman's motifs with the wide variety of differentiated settings used in the man's motifs, thus recreating in musical means the very different attitudes both have towards the "larger picture" of complexity. In the orchestral composition *Pelleas und Melisande*, deliberately employed timbres serve as musical signatures and, by extension, as a short-hand for evolving feelings and relationships.

What distinguishes Schoenberg's two important transmedializations of literary works is not the fact that he employed conventional building blocks of musically portrayed affects and rather typical color contrasts, but the way in which he develops nuances from within this material and supports them with qualities of rhythm and meter, texture and timbre.