Opera, Narrative, and the
Modernist Crisis of Historical Subjectivity

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Abstract

The concept of a crisis of subjective identity and its expression in modernist artworks of the fin-de-siècle and early twentieth century is central to this study of narrative in operas by Franz Schreker (1878-1934) and Alexander Zemlinsky (1871-1942). Focused on modernist operatic expressions of subjectivity in crisis, this project explores and expands ideas of Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), starting from his assertion that modern works of art should be dialectical expressions of the crisis of the individual subject alienated within the instrumental mechanisms of modern society. This study examines individual narrative and musical expressions of marginal subjectivity from several perspectives, including Adorno’s musical aesthetics, Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytical concepts, and literary and gender-based theories.

The study begins by mapping out a constellation of concepts that figure in the discussion to follow: Adorno’s critical theory of authentic expression in modern music; philosophical and psychoanalytical concepts of subjectivity; and the narrative thread running through historical, theoretical, and literary concerns of this project. In the main portion of the dissertation, Adorno’s 1959 essays on Schreker and Zemlinsky serve as points of departure for discussions of four operas: Schreker’s Der ferne Klang (1912) and Die Gezeichneten (1918), with libretti by the composer, and Zemlinsky’s Eine florentinische Tragödie (1917) and Der Zwerg (1921), both based on texts by Oscar Wilde. Adorno criticized Schreker for composing sensually alluring yet technically deficient works that sought to escape rather than authentically express the modernist human condition. This project examines and elucidates Adorno’s case against Schreker, focusing on his criticism of Schreker’s central idea of sound, and defends the critical quality of Schreker’s artistic conception, reinterpreting the Schrekerian sound through close readings of the operatic narratives. Adorno praised Zemlinsky’s eclectic compositional style for its expressivity and socio-historical authenticity; yet he dismissed both Wildean operas, considering their libretti dramatically flawed. However, the present reading finds the subtle psychosexual implications of Wilde’s texts suggestive for re-hearing the musical relationships in both operas, in terms of the issues of subjective crisis they explore. The dissertation concludes by addressing questions of historicity raised by Adorno’s discussion of the historical fate of both composers.
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Introduction

In the words of Jacques Le Rider, “the ‘identity crisis’ really does seem to be the distinguishing mark of Viennese modernity.” Le Rider’s book *Modernity and Crises of Identity* explores literary and cultural tropes characteristic of Vienna at the beginning of the twentieth century as “attempts to rebuild identity on the ruins of the subject.” The concept of a crisis of subjective identity and its artistic expression in Viennese modernist works is at the centre of the present study of opera and narrative. This discussion of modernist operatic expressions of subjectivity in crisis sets out from Theodor W. Adorno’s conviction that modern works of art must express the crisis of the individual subject who is alienated within the rationalized objectivity of modern industrialized, administered society. Individual narrative and musical expressions of modernist subjectivity will be interrogated from various perspectives, including Adorno’s complex theories of expression in modern music, as well as literary, psychoanalytical, and gender-based theories.

The collection of Adorno’s essays entitled *Quasi una Fantasia: Musikalische Schriften II* was first published in 1963. Among several substantial essays on major composers who loomed large in Adorno’s aesthetic-critical enterprise – Mahler, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg – are two relatively short pieces on lesser-known composers: Franz Schreker (1878-1934) and Alexander Zemlinsky (1871-1942). Both essays originated as radio talks that Adorno delivered in 1959. Contemporaries with Schoenberg, these two composers – particularly Schreker – were well known in their own time, but both had faded into almost complete oblivion before the end of the Second World War. Condemned by the Nazi regime for

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2 Stephen Hinton has recently noted that the published versions of Adorno’s radio talks often differ – sometimes considerably – from the version he read for broadcast. Hinton makes this observation in connection with several broadcast recordings made by the Hessischer Rundfunk, which have recently been re-released on a CD collection [*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit: Reden und Gespräche*, selection and commentary by Rolf Tiedemann (Munich: Hör-Verlag, 1999), 5 CDs]. The radio talk on Schreker was given for the Hessischer Rundfunk, but is not included in this collection; the Zemlinsky talk was delivered for the NDR. See Hinton’s review article in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56/1 (Spring 2003), 198-213.
both their racial origins and the character of their art, they saw their music branded as degenerate and banned. By the time the war ended, both composers were dead and their works were nearly forgotten. Thus, Adorno’s short essays drew renewed attention to two composers who were marginalized, and whose works hovered on the periphery of the historical musical scene for several decades. He examined these figures and their music in terms of the modernist context in which their works were produced, a context from which they were later excluded by the predominant historical view of the modernist tradition.

Adorno’s brief studies of Schreker and Zemlinsky provide suggestive starting-points for the present study, which explores selected operas by these composers. Schreker’s *Der ferne Klang* (1912) and *Die Gezeichneten* (1918) and Zemlinsky’s *Eine florentinische Tragödie* (1917) and *Der Zwerg* (1921) are works that, through both text and music, tell stories about the formation and expression of subjective identities on the fringes of society. The plots of these operas surround the struggles for selfhood of marginal subjects inhabiting liminal worlds, variously depicting tragedies of personal ugliness and deformity, sexual transgression and excess, criminality and insanity, as well as artists marginalized in their quests for expressive fulfillment. These themes and figures appear prominently within the Expressionist movement, which typically “looked to . . . the disempowered periphery of society in order to invent a modern art.”\(^3\) In their focus on characters whose very existence is dissonant with societal values and norms, these operas invite multiple critical interpretations in terms of the subjectivities they explore.

As the repeated reference to “narrative” suggests, the interpretive approach adopted here begins with the stories told in the libretti of these operas. Adorno, on the other hand, tends to dismiss the textual components of Schreker’s and Zemlinsky’s operas, and to direct his attention almost exclusively toward musical characteristics. In contrast, this inquiry places emphasis on the importance of the libretto in developing a critical understanding of each opera’s musico-dramatic significance. Close readings of the operas’

texts, in terms of the central issues of subjectivity, identity-formation, and self-expression, allow for reevaluations of the dramatic implications of the musical structures and relationships in these works, which ultimately reveal critical aspects that Adorno overlooked or even denied. Thus, while this project is informed by Adorno, it also adopts an oppositional stance toward him, proposing critical readings of these operas that problematize Adorno's own critiques.

The discussions of these works are not focused exclusively through Adorno, but also draw upon other interpretive schemes, the appropriateness of which is indicated by the content of the texts themselves. Zemlinsky's one-act operas, for example, are mentioned only briefly in Adorno's essay. Despite his admiration for their music, Adorno asserts that they are dramatically marred by their libretti, which he disparaged. Yet these libretti, both drawing upon texts by Oscar Wilde, deal with some fundamental issues of identity formation. Wilde's intricate thematic threads of psychology and sexuality suggest the application of psychoanalytical and gender-based theories, from both contemporary Freudian and more recent post-Freudian perspectives, which compellingly reveal the critical qualities these narratives impart to their musico-dramatic contexts. Schreker's operatic texts, which he wrote himself, expressly foreground questions of subjective expression through art. The explicit focus on problems of modern artistic expression, specifically the conflict between the inner needs and desires of the subject and the exterior reality of social functions and norms, points toward an examination of his works in the terms of Adorno's aesthetics. Yet the critical implications of these features of Schreker's libretti seem to go unnoticed by Adorno, whose essay is mainly centered on the flaws he perceives in the music. However, the same musical features Adorno criticizes may be re-heard through their textual-dramatic contexts, as a reflection on the issues of critical artistic expression articulated in Adorno's own writings.

The remainder of this chapter lays out some of the aspects of Adorno's philosophy that are most pertinent to this inquiry into operatic expressions of modern subjectivity in
crisis. It then traces a genealogy of conceptions of the modern subject that come into play in the course of this study, and finally turns to questions of narrative, examining both the historical situations of Schreker and Zemlinsky and the specific narrative issues arising in their operas. The remainder of the dissertation discusses Der ferne Klang, Eine florentinische Tragödie, Der Zwerg, and Die Gezeichneten in turn, analyzing the issues of subjectivity explored in their texts in order to offer critically nuanced interpretations of their musico-dramatic significance. The dissertation concludes with a consideration of issues of historicity raised by Adorno's discussion of both composers in light of their fate in posterity.

Modernist Fragments

Adorno's memorable description of modern music as "the surviving message of despair from the shipwrecked" evokes a powerful image of the modern musical work as profoundly isolated within society. Adorno (1903-1969), a prominent member of the Frankfurt Institut für Sozialforschung from the early 1930s on, developed his sociological aesthetic in relation to the Institut's interdisciplinary programme of "Critical Theory" and ideology critique. Many of his ideas are concerned with the radical music of the avant-garde, which he regards as an expression of the truth of the human condition under the dominating regimes of modern industrialization and commodity capitalism. The disjunction between the individual subject and the rational-technical machinery of modern society defines the crisis of modernity upon which Adorno's theory is centered. In the context of this crisis, "modern music . . . [had] taken upon itself all the darkness and guilt of the world," mirroring the crisis of subjectivity of the oppressed and suffering individual.


5 Ibid.
Adorno's sociologically-based aesthetics has roots in the modernist debate surrounding art and expression at the fin-de-siècle and the early decades of the twentieth century. The German Expressionist movement of the 1900s arose in response to the oppression of the individual by the external forces of modern society. This oppression bespoke what Adorno and his colleague Max Horkheimer theorized as the failure of the Enlightenment goal of freeing the individual subject through reason.\(^6\) Instead, reason had become an instrument of domination: the individual became a slave to rationality, to the controlling abstraction of conceptual thinking that gave rise to the forces of the modern “administered world.” Nineteenth-century individualism’s goal of subjective autonomy had resulted in isolation and alienation, a lack of identity between subject (the individual) and object (the external world). The problem of modernist Expressionism concerned the situation of individuals within society and the limits it imposed on subjective expression. It questioned whether all individual expression was always externally determined by societal constraints, or whether there existed any possibility for the individual to create, through expressions critical of society, a subjectivity independent of exterior forms and forces. Expressionism’s turn toward radical interiority, attempting to articulate inner emotional states by moving away from objective realism toward formal distortion, claimed to be a creative and authentic expression of the self, free from external intervention. Yet it could be argued that, like all utterance, Expressionist art was always and necessarily predetermined by the external forms of social reality, and was thus subsumed by the preconditions of a larger societal construct. Must art participate in ideology, or might it escape the social framework?

This question was central to the 1930s exchange between Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch, two figures who had earlier exercised considerable influence on the development of Adorno’s critical philosophical aesthetics. While both supported the Expressionist goal to “free the inner spirit from the exterior controls of a bourgeois functionalism,” they also

insisted on an "indissoluble connection between a subjective interior and an objective exterior." Bloch defended the ability of modern art to achieve freedom of expression by rupturing the systems of social functionality from within. Expressionism's violent forms, its propensity to fragmentation and self-destruction, attained both artistic and political meaning. A vital aspect of Bloch's argument is its utopian character, which viewed modern art as successful in breaking through the authoritarian strictures of the corrupt and outworn bourgeois system, and as grasping for the damaged fragment that remained within the ruins of society's disintegration. In *Geist der Utopie* (1918), Bloch included a substantial section on a philosophy of music which, in elaborating a concept of the cultural and historical nature of musical material, asserted the above-mentioned connection between interior expressivity and exterior means. His theory of music history culminated in a metaphysical vision of music's capacity for direct subjective expression as a utopian quality that might transcend ideology.\(^7\)

In contrast, Lukács responded critically to the nihilistic tendencies of Expressionist art toward disintegration and destruction. From his Hegelian and Marxist view of the social system as a totality, he declared the Expressionist goal of fracturing the external frame of social authoritarianism from within its own confines as impossible, and as a false and decadent ideology. Lukács' theory stressed the necessary failure of individualism to achieve complete freedom from any controlling frame, and argued instead that the only possibility for freedom from bourgeois ideology was to focus on replacing it through the creation of a new objective realist totality – cast in the frame of a Marxist consciousness. Like Bloch, Lukács also elaborated upon a concept of history; in calling for a realist stance emphasizing the objective status of total relations among things, he employed a complex

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notion of mediation between the forms of art and their originating socio-historical contexts, whence their meaning once emanated. This corresponded to the mediated relationship between subject and object in the modern age of autonomy and isolation.

Adorno’s theory draws upon and adapts concepts developed by both Bloch and Lukács. It makes use of Bloch’s emphasis on modern disintegrative dissidence, and also retains a version of the utopian dimension of art, albeit always subject to negation. Lukácsian concepts of history and mediation are also crucial in Adorno’s aesthetics. But as many critics have noted, Adorno’s sociology is in some respects far removed from Lukács’ more orthodox Marxism. Evident are a rejection of the closed conception of objective reality as a coherent totality, and a notable lack of emphasis on praxis, as well as, most importantly, a denial of the definition of art as mere economic product; Adorno insists on art’s critical capacity.

Adorno’s position on the problem of subjective expression in the face of totalizing societal constraints emerges within a complex process of dialectical oppositions. But significantly, in his enterprise, the Hegelian dialectic itself becomes a negative dialectic, in which oppositions negate each other without giving way to a synthesis, which would appear as a false illusion of reconciliation between subject and object. Adorno shared Expressionism’s conviction in the necessity for the individual to struggle against the controlling forces of society, and he valourized those features of modernist music (the art to which he devoted the greater part of his attention) that he saw as authentically engaging in that struggle for the formation of a dissident modern subjectivity. He elected the

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9 See ibid., 31-3.

fragment as a critique of totalizing systems, and dissonance as an expression of suffering and alienation, a critique of false ideologies of reconciliation:

In an historical hour, when the reconciliation of subject and object has been perverted to a satanic parody – to the liquidation of the subject in objective presentation – the only philosophy which still serves this reconciliation is one which despises this illusion of reconciliation and – against universal self-alienation – establishes the validity of the hopelessly alienated, for which a “subject itself” scarcely any longer speaks.¹¹

This quotation, pointing to the idealist notion of a union of subject and object as an ideological threat, may be read in light of Adorno’s concept of the “rupture between self and forms” [der Bruch zwischen Ich und Formen], referring to the divide between the expressive needs of modern artists and the objective, reified character of traditional forms and genres no longer adequate to modern expression.¹² In musical terms, this category includes the tonal system, once adequate to subjective expression in an earlier age, but now reified and impotent: it presents a false illusion of reconciliation between society and the individual in the guise of unity, resolution, and universal intelligibility. Radical modern music, however, through the inaccessibility of its atonal language and disintegrated forms, resists the commodification to which the historical forms of tonal music have become subject. Adorno’s theory claims that modern music is at once like society, in its complex and fragmentary composition, and antithetical to society, in its deliberate use of that fragmentation to express the isolation of the subject in the modern world. Modern music’s task is to “reproduce the monolithic force of modern society as refracted in the sufferings of a life process wrecked by it.”¹³ In so doing, it partakes in a dialectical process of critical negation. The task of Adorno’s aesthetic philosophy is to decipher the critical truth about society as encoded in the modern musical work, to “interpret these fragmentary messages


¹² See Paddison, 23.

which nevertheless resist interpretation . . . " It is perpetually engaged with this dialectic between the socially conditioned character of both art and its institutions, and the apparent autonomy of the individual work of art as an expressive articulation of the self. The musical works Adorno values are those that exhibit such a dialectical tension within themselves, "the tension between the conscious and the unconscious, between, for example, the calculation of construction and the spontaneity of expression." For these reasons, the Expressionist and atonal music of the Second Viennese School becomes a locus of authenticity in Adorno's sociological aesthetics. The concept of authenticity, which is linked to the notion of the truth content of artworks, refers both to a work's internal or immanent consistency, which gives it the autonomy status from which it can take a critical stance toward society; and also to the degree to which the work expresses that which is repressed by society. Together these aspects constitute the critical dimension of the work of art. The modernist artwork, in order to be authentic, must demonstrate immanent formal antagonisms expressive of an extremity of alienation and suffering that, in effect, cause its form to shatter. In Adorno's critical view, such truth content is manifest in atonal Expressionist music. It denies false illusions of unity and reconciliation through its dissonant and fragmentary nature, yet maintains a critical awareness of the historical-objective mediation of subjective expression through technique: counterpoint, motivic work, and the value of "developing variation." Furthermore, it embodies the psychological crisis of the lonely individual subject through the extreme alienation of its atonal utterance.

The psychological aspect of Adorno's critical thought mirrors the efforts of the Frankfurt School to affect a theoretical merging of Marx and Freud. Through the late

14 Paddison, 1.
15 Ibid., 129.
16 On the concepts of "authenticity" and "truth content" in Adorno's theory, see Paddison, 55-59.
1930s and 1940s Adorno’s work increasingly demonstrates the influence of Freud, particularly in his interpretation of the music of Schoenberg and Stravinsky through the psychoanalytical terminology of subjectivity in crisis. In fact, Carl Schorske discusses Freud’s own scientific project of psychoanalysis as a response to a threefold crisis he experienced at the end of the nineteenth century. His unique psychoanalytical enterprise arose in part as a product of an intellectual and social withdrawal, in the wake of political, professional, and personal disappointments he experienced at the triumph of anti-Semitic Christian Socialism over Liberalism in Vienna, his failure to receive a university professorship, and the death of his father. His task in the foundational study The Interpretation of Dreams was, in Schorske’s terms, to “neutralize politics by reducing it to psychological categories.”

Freud’s own work thus appears, perhaps ironically, as a product of sublimation in response to the modern social condition. It is marked by a sort of critical reaction against the external world through a turning inward to the realm of dreams and the hidden psyche, an inwardness in turn mediated by the practice of analysis and interpretation, which attempts to view the psyche externally and objectively. Freud’s theories provided Adorno with “concepts which enable him to discuss, in . . . psychological terms, ways in which the outside world is refracted by the Subject and ways in which ‘inner subjectivity’ is able to engage with the ‘objectivity’ of the outside world through the processes of sublimation [and] repression.”

Freud’s own somewhat simplistic model of artistic interpretation through artist psychology is modified by Adorno’s sophisticated dialectical approach to individual expression and socio-historical mediation.

Adorno’s aesthetics thus draws on and uniquely adapts Hegelian dialectics, Marxist sociology, and Freudian psychoanalytical theory. It searches for a historical and social understanding of the increasing fragmentation and alienation characteristic of musical

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19 Ibid., 128.
works of the twentieth century, and seeks therein their capacity for critical expression of the plight of the modern subject, while retaining the utopian glimpse that prevents humanity's fall into hopelessness.

**Phantom Subjects**

Slavoj Žižek begins his book *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* thus: "A Spectre is Haunting Western Academia . . . the spectre of the Cartesian subject. All academic powers have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre . . . ."²⁰ Indeed, since Kant, who declared the impossibility of knowing the "I' who thinks," the unitary subject of the cogito has been undergoing a process of dismantling. In rejecting, as Roger Scruton says, "the priority of the first person," Kant "removes the privileges from subjectivity . . . ."²¹ Nevertheless, Kant's transcendental idealism remains focused on cognitive synthesis: on the subject's spontaneous intuitive perception of its own unity. The immediacy of this perception gives rise to the realization of a necessary objective dimension, and in turn to the distinction between the phenomenal category of objective perception, and the noumenal as beyond the limit of conceptual knowledge. However, Žižek locates a defining point in the process of dismantling the unitary subject in the philosophy of Hegel, wherein the above-mentioned concept of the non-identity of subject and object attains a crucial importance. Žižek asserts that Kant's theory of the noumenal allows for a radically negative stance by postulating the limit of the inaccessible beyond from *within* the subject's spontaneous apperception of its self.²² This negative Kantian moment, Žižek claims, was later seized upon by Hegel, who emphasized how the

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²² Žižek here rehearses a philosophical achievement of Heidegger; see *The Ticklish Subject*, "The Deadlock of Transcendental Imagination," esp. 9-28.
finite/limited quality of subjective imagination isolates phenomenal entities from their only conceivable existence as part of a greater unknowable and noumenal whole. Such negativity characterizes the well-known Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, wherein Hegel defines subjectivity in terms of dissolution:

> To break an idea up into its original elements is to return to its moments, . . . But what is thus *separated* and non-actual is an essential moment . . . [T]hat an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom – this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure 'T' . . . [Spirit] is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then having done with it turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. This power is identical with what we earlier called the Subject. . . .

Žižek grasps here Hegel's notion of subjectivity as "the tremendous power of the negative" which finds itself in dismemberment, holding fast to "death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality." Through emphasizing a concept of subjectivity as negation, he is able to highlight a perhaps unexpected continuity between the tradition of German Idealist philosophy represented by Hegel – in which Adorno's philosophy is a late chapter – and the radical negativity of the subject in the French psychoanalytic tradition represented by the theory of Jacques Lacan. On one hand, this transition is accomplished through the figure of Freud. Insofar as it links the negative, the non-actual, with death, Hegel's "tarrying with the negative" echoes within the Freudian concept of the unconscious "death drive," which in turn becomes a crucial operator in Lacanian psychoanalysis. German psychoanalysis thus becomes a link between German Idealist philosophy and

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24 Ibid.
French psychoanalysis. Lacan's reworking of Freud's legacy of a science of the unconscious occurs, of course, in terms of language. While Freud posited the subject of the unconscious as prelinguistic, language becomes in Lacanian psychoanalysis the determiner of subjectivity. It is language that rends existence from a state of imaginary wholeness, and "hollows being into desire." The subject is thus irrevocably separated from direct access to the world and the fullness of meaning, which it can know only through the mediation of the "symbolic order," as signified by language. The realm of meaning inaccessible to signification is designated the "Real;" and the subject is relegated to the realm of lack, absence, negativity, erased in the perpetual movement of desire between the unconscious and the inaccessible object.

On the other hand, the Hegelian concept of non-identity can be seen as giving rise more directly to the French deconstructive account of semantic instability, in which meaning includes what is not (or cannot be) said. And in fact there are numerous discursive affinities between German and French traditions of philosophical and psychoanalytic thought, some of which implicate aspects of Adorno's theory as well. Particularly relevant, as Martin Scherzinger has recently pointed out, is the long German philosophical/aesthetic tradition of "taking music as a paradigm case for asserting a realm that is beyond the reach of linguistic signification." This notion, which was particularly prominent in nineteenth-century German metaphysics, predates Hegel, and has continued to resonate through into the critical cultural theories of the present. As Scherzinger mentions, some of its various manifestations appear in French poststructuralist theory and psychoanalysis.


Julia Kristeva's work, for example, accomplishes a poetically nuanced extension of Lacanian theory reaching beyond the realms of psychoanalysis and linguistics and into literary theory, cultural studies, and feminist theory. Kristeva has recognized music as a mode for conceptualizing the semiotic dimension of linguistic and subjective formation, as Scherzinger notes; she has also distinguished music, in terms of subjective identification with its symbolic other – the ego ideal or love object – as a type of "the ideal signifier: a sound on the fringe of my being, which transfers me to the place of the Other, astray, beyond meaning, out of sight."\(^{28}\) This example explains why the notion of music as a realm beyond signification is of interest to specifically French psychoanalytical conceptions of subject formation as linked to language: because it functions as an expressive prelinguistic signifier. Specifically, music is suggestive of a mode of expressive subjective utterance without the mediation of language. But in fact we find a similar constellation of expressive subjectivity, language, and music as both non-signifying semiotic system and philosophical limit in Adorno as well: "[Music’s] resemblance to language extends from the whole work, the organized linking of significant sounds, right down to the single sound, the note as the threshold of merest presence, the pure vehicle of expression."\(^{29}\)

And what of the Adornian subject? How does it fit in with Žižek’s interpretation of Hegel, as informed by the radical negativity of subjectivity in Lacanian psychoanalysis? According to Roger Scruton, while Hegelian subjectivity is "an abstraction" granted universal status, it can be regarded, "without distortion . . . as referring also, and primarily, to the individual subject . . . in quasi-historical terms."\(^{30}\) There is no doubt that the subject for Adorno refers to the bourgeois individual. As in Hegel, Adorno’s philosophy


\(^{30}\) Scruton, 168.
demonstrates a temporal emphasis, in terms of the advancement of the subject toward self-consciousness and freedom, through a continuous process of postulation and self-reflection on the nature of its relation to the objectivity of its world. This "historical subject," as the bourgeois individual, represents the state of consciousness of its age. Adorno views works of art as material manifestations of this consciousness, of the expressive subject's interaction with the objectivity of historical-artistic materials, forms and genres. Thus the "musical subject," to which he frequently refers, manifests itself as the objectification of individual subjectivity within musical materials and forms. Further, the notion of advancement or progress of the historical subject is revealed in the progressive articulation of that subject through different historical musical structures. The idea of progress itself becomes complicated, however, for the Hegelian progress of the Spirit toward freedom appears in Adorno's theory as progress of technical means in art (it does not refer to quality). Yet technical progress reflects the increasing rationality which Hegel conceived as leading the subject toward freedom, but which Adorno came to see as a force of oppression (the failure of Enlightenment he theorized with Horkheimer, as mentioned above). For this reason, Adorno's notion of art, as an expression of progressive subject-objectification, is dialectical in the modernist period, because modernist avant-garde art is a contradictory and critical representation of the most advanced consciousness of its age.

Adorno's subject, then, is drawn from Hegel's, though its positive-dialectical advancement toward freedom has, in Adorno's view, been drastically curtailed by the perversion of its own pretensions to progress. But the apparently undeniable survival in Adorno's critical project of the individual subject – though damaged and fragmented – seems resistant to the declaration of its vanishing into absence by French post-structural thought. How, then, can Adorno's ideas be aligned with those of the French tradition that informs Žižek's work? Some significant parallels may be drawn between Adorno's aesthetic-philosophical conception of subjectivity and subjective expression, and Žižek's metaphysical concept of the subject as negativity (notwithstanding the disjunction between
the Heideggerian derivation of Žižek's ideas here and Adorno's wholesale rejection of Heidegger's thought). One might suggest a theoretical affinity between the subject-object relation in Adorno's thought – the two irrevocably severed, yet the subject's existence as always mediated by objective externality – and the subject's relation to language in Lacan, where language, the symbolic order, is external to the subject's being and is yet what constitutes subjectivity. Likewise, there appears a continuity between the subject of Adorno's "rupture between self and forms" – the "subject itself [which] scarcely any longer speaks" through the reified materials and forms handed down to it – and the Lacanian empty subject, its being hollowed out into desire by language, whose subjectivity is only constituted through the language of the symbolic order which always already exists outside itself, and whose only means of significant utterance is this external language.

Another link between Adorno's thought and that of French theorists is the concept of art as critical expression. The work of art for both Lacan and Kristeva (and others) has a critical capability for resistance and rupture, as does the modernist work of the avant-garde in Adorno's aesthetics. Indeed, a dissolution of the subject seems posited within the subject-object relation through the very workings of Adorno's negative dialectic itself. The expressive subject is only saved from utter nihilism, it seems, through the affirmative residue Adorno insists upon (like Bloch) in the utopian character of art. All this is not an attempt to reframe Adorno as a postmodernist, a questionable goal which has been variously taken up, rejected, and critically queried, sometimes at length, in numerous places. It is rather to point out that there are some discursive similarities between these lines of thought, which allow for a productive discussion of them together.

On the other hand, Žižek's "tarrying with the subject" seems to testify to the lingering presence of the subject, even if only as a spectral presence. Even in his own

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radically negative redrawing of the lines of Idealist philosophy, Žižek himself seems to cling to the border between the structure of existence and its annihilation. The survival of a subject is apparently required by his study, which has a political trajectory culminating in the concept of an “ethical act,” by which he means a political act that transgresses the boundaries of the social order. This goal has a utopian ring; and one can imagine ways in which this “truth act” resembles the Expressionist conception of its artistic goal, to rupture the social framework through a creative act of self-expression. It is somewhat more difficult to imagine what such an act might consist in, if the existence of the radically negative subject beyond the limits of the social order is actually non-existence. Yet Žižek’s study acknowledges that subjectivity has unquestionably remained an issue, a problematic, a focus of attention, even as it has become increasingly impossible to grasp or define. This is perhaps, paradoxically, one among the many reasons for the continuing, or rather renewed, appeal of Adorno’s theories in recent years: the retention of a concept of subjectivity, no matter how fragmented, in the face of the postmodern declaration of its disappearance.

Forgotten Narratives

Rose Subotnik has observed that “North American musicologists should have found Adorno sooner.” If they had, they might also have found Schreker and Zemlinsky sooner. Adorno’s essays in Quasi una Fantasia have represented significant founding contributions to the literature on these two figures – a literature that did not really exist at the time – and it has grown in more recent decades (since roughly the later 1970s), alongside a notable revival of interest in their music, which is performed and recorded with increasing frequency. For a long time these composers were obscured from historical view not so much by mists of

32 As Tim Huson realizes in his online review of Žižek’s The Ticklish Subject, accessible at <http://www.siue.edu/EASTASIA/Tim%20Huson_052101.htm>.

time as by barriers thrown up in the writing of history itself. The reasons for this were partly personal, partly political, but mostly musical, for in terms of traditional views of their musical scene – Vienna of the early decades of the twentieth century – their music would seem to fall outside the stylistic periphery. Early twentieth-century modernism has long been viewed almost exclusively in the terms in which it has so far been discussed here: a state of social and individual crisis as reflected in the impulses of an artistic avant-garde which, above all, valued expressions of dissidence; an art of which Arnold Schoenberg was taken to be the iconic musical representative. Schoenberg’s “break” with tonality was accorded high value in terms of history’s privileging of progress; from this point of view, Schreker and Zemlinsky’s continued use of tonal idioms – not fully emancipated from tradition – would seem to exclude them from the mapping of the modernist advance into the future. And yet, “over the decades it became increasingly obvious that this narrative of Viennese modernism was a gross simplification,” as Christopher Hailey has explained. “In recent years other voices have emerged that could not be accommodated into the narrative, including Alexander Zemlinsky, . . . and – most vexing of all – Franz Schreker.”

Hailey couches his call to reexamine the historical view of modernism in somewhat paradoxical terms, in that he implies a sort of reversal of values in the standardized modernist historical perspective. He points toward Schoenberg’s claims to traditional historical continuity through the doctrine of developing variation, rather than to the quality of rupture, the “emancipation of dissonance,” that has seemed more quintessentially modern. In other words, Hailey argues that the continuity of Schoenberg’s legacy throughout the remainder of the century, and the composer’s status in what has become the modernist tradition, has more to do with Schoenberg’s conservative than his radical modernist aspects. To the conservative Schoenbergian values of organic and historical continuity, Hailey counterposes a value of disruption, as “a central category of Viennese

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That he proposes a revised view of Viennese musical modernism through a new emphasis on those very categories of disruption, incongruity, and shock which have always seemed modernism’s accepted features, is evident in his reference to the music of Mahler, another Viennese contemporary of Schoenberg’s whose music was obscured for several decades before being dramatically revived in the 1960s. Citing Mahler as a “radical challenge” (which he was – and is), Hailey notes that the critical incomprehension Mahler’s music met with in his own time can remind us “why this music is still so vital and, if it is to remain so, how to recapture something of its affront.” The tack of Hailey’s argument is that Schoenberg’s primacy in the historical narrative of musical modernism has to do more with the composer’s conservative qualities than with his radical ones, the latter of which Hailey wishes to privilege for the sake of reconsidering the tradition. It is an interesting reversal that has a clear ring of truth, even if it at first appears, well, slightly odd (especially since the compositional idiom of the composer Hailey is most interested in reviving – Schreker – continued to make use of the “traditional” materials of the tonal system).

This is not to detract from the force of Hailey’s discussion, which ultimately takes a direction in sympathy with the present study. By opposing the undeniable conservative elements of the Schoenberg legacy with other, radical aesthetic qualities of discontinuity, Hailey reminds us of the multivalent nature of the Viennese modernist culture in which Schoenberg’s “dynasty” (Hailey’s term) arose. That culture, he says, was characterized by a multiplicity of contradictory styles that coexisted, if not precisely harmoniously, and that together give a more kaleidoscopic view of musical modernism in Vienna. This broader view of stylistic plurality can include representatives of modernity other than the Schoenbergsian brand, such as Zemlinsky and Schreker. Indeed, stylistic multiplicity was more than a feature of the cultural environment; it is a feature of the musical works of Mahler, and of Schreker, as Hailey explains; and it is the focus of Adorno’s essay on

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 3.
Zemlinsky's music as well. In the end, the goal of Hailey's article is to define a viewpoint from which composers who have fallen outside the standard "canon" of Viennese modernism can be seen as also quintessentially modernist. The present study has a similar goal with respect to Zemlinsky and Schreker, but adds to the dimension of musical style a focus on critical features of drama and narrative text in selected operas by these two composers.

"Narrative" is a loaded term, to say the least; it has appeared in two different contexts within the last few paragraphs, referring to both the large-scale musico-historical construction of a modernist compositional tradition and to the small-scale specificity of stories in opera libretti. A range of narrative studies has indeed proliferated in recent musical scholarship, coming into particular prominence in the (early) 1990s. This preoccupation has followed in the wake of what Martin Kreiswirth has termed a "virtual explosion of interest in narrative" over the two decades preceding, which witnessed the steady expansion of narrative theory into a discipline in its own right, spreading across many interdisciplinary fields of inquiry.37 Like numerous applications of narrative-theoretical modes to non-literary disciplines, many music-narrative studies were structurally focused. It is hardly surprising that they were largely inspired by the suggestive affinities between the temporal dimensions of both texted narratives and musical works. For temporality has itself proved one of the most compelling features of narrative, which has increasingly been seen in terms of its value in reflecting and revealing the nature of human experience on both individual and socio-historical levels. Indeed, the philosophy of history has become increasingly dominated by inquiry into the import of narrativity, not only as an unavoidable structural constraint on historiography, but as the nature of historical consciousness itself.

Temporality was also a concern for Adorno, as partially demonstrated in the above discussion of the historical dimension of his subject-concept. That he applied the same critical values to the temporal workings of music, within musical works by individual composers, may seem a rather simplistic analogy. Yet this is to be expected, given his Hegelian-Marxist view of the way both individual subjectivity and the societal structures with which it interacts are shaped by historical forces. This historical-temporal dimension is transferred to the temporal dimensions of the individual work of art, for Adorno viewed artworks as manifestations of the expressive historical subject’s interaction with the received material objectifications of past traditions. For this reason he prized the evidence of temporal progression in the “developing variation” procedures highlighted by Schoenberg, and demonstrated a strong critical bias against the ideological implications of more “atemporal” musical structures highlighting spatial or static textural parameters. This explains his preference for counterpoint and motivic working-out over static juxtapositions of large-scale sound blocks or small repeated rhythmic-melodic fragments, a preference rooted deeply in his critical-philosophical endeavour, rather than in any blind adherence to the Schoenbergeben ideal. The temporal dimension is a crucial factor in Adorno’s highly suggestive and often-quoted assertions as to the “narrative” character of Mahler’s music; for example, in terms of the technique by which strophic “repetitions” are varied in the orchestral Lieder, to create a “flow of the whole” which “carries the individual elements with it.”\footnote{See Adorno, \textit{Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy}, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chapter 4, “Novel,” esp. 76.}

And in fact, this concern for the legitimacy of temporality over the ideology of atemporal rational abstraction is played out in the very complex structures of Adorno’s own writings. For example, Fredric Jameson has noted how the occasional use of the narrative mode becomes in Adorno’s own writing a critical means, which, through its temporality, contradicts the atemporal mode of abstract conceptual thinking.\footnote{Fredric Jameson, \textit{Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic} (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 68; see also Martin Jay, “Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe,” in}
line with – or ahead of – recent critical thinking about the value of narrativity. For it is
often in terms of its rhetorical and discursive capabilities for questioning abstractions of
power and ideologies that scholars have articulated, from diverse disciplinary viewpoints,
the concept of narrative as a mode of understanding that is fundamental to the human
condition.

Also fuelled by the conviction that narrative is a central mode of the human mind is
the reciprocal exchange between narrative and psychoanalytic theory, which has been long-
lasting, extensive in scope, and intriguing in its implications for fields of study even beyond
the literary and the psychoanalytical. While literary theorists have explored first the
psychological implications of specific narratives, and later the mirroring of psychic
processes in plotted structures, psychoanalysts have in turn expressed the inevitability of
the operations of psychoanalysis through a narrative paradigm.40 Freud himself noted
(referring with some chagrin to its seemingly “unscientific” tinge) the unavoidably literary
nature of the analytical process, wherein the patients’ relation of their symptoms took
narrative form, and in turn his written case studies of his analyses turned out like “short
stories.”41 These particular narrative meditations, not to mention his employment of
mythical narratives as psychic paradigms, reveal Freud’s engagement with the relatively
abstract structural and dynamic aspects of narratives, aspects with which many recent
Freudian-influenced narrative-psychoanalytic inquiries have remained preoccupied. Yet
theorists of literature and psychology have repeatedly noted the profound influence of the
literary nature of Freud’s famous case-studies themselves: the stories of Dora, Little Hans,
the Wolf Man, in which “features of analysis are lost in single, combinatorial, linear life

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40 See Kreiswirth, 74-9. All these endeavours layer newer theoretical approaches over practices conducted by Freud himself, who instigated the field of the psychoanalysis of literature in “Creative Writers and Daydreaming” (1908)

histories." The details of the specific stories themselves give rise to the richness of interpretation in which, as Freud said, "overdetermination is the rule." So, although Kreiswirth asserts that narrative inquiry has moved beyond the "what" and "how" of narrative to the "why," the literary-interpretive qualities of these psychoanalytic narratives which have held the attention of theorists and readers for generations point to the continuing importance of the "what" and "how" as well.

The signifying interactions between the "what" and "how" of narrative specificity and music remain the principal interpretive focus of the present inquiry into modernist expressions of subjective crisis in operas by Schreker and Zemlinsky. Aware of the potential ubiquity of narrative-structural interpretations in musical terms, this study of modernist operatic narratives remains geared toward specific moments of music-text interaction in which interpretive issues arise not solely through structural-temporal affinities between musical and narrative dimensions, but from the specific significance of the texts themselves and the musical-representative utterances associated with them. However, structural-dynamic aspects of plot do play an occasional role in this discussion. Sometimes, the texts actually foreground discursive or narrative actions within themselves, and thereby acquire narrative-structural and/or psychoanalytical significance in addition to the multiple layers of meaning already present in their plots. Yet most of the intriguing aspects of these texts are generally passed over by the musical focus of Adorno's essays on both Zemlinsky and Schreker.

Adorno states clearly that opera is central to Zemlinsky's oeuvre. However, he devotes more of his "Zemlinsky" essay to general musical style features in instrumental works and Lieder than to the operas themselves. And, in the event, perceived weaknesses in the texts of both Eine florentinische Tragödie and Der Zwerg led Adorno to overlook them.


almost entirely, although they were the most successful of Zemlinsky's operas during his lifetime, and have regained a similar prominence in the revival of his oeuvre. These texts, both drawing on Oscar Wilde, are characteristically yet subtly overdetermined, rife with quintessentially modern psychosexual implications, which belie Adorno's judgments of them as "Romantic," "crass," and dramatically insubstantial. Rather, their intricacies of meaning are highly suggestive for critical interpretations of their operatic settings, interpretations whose plurality and nuance exceed both Adorno's and Zemlinsky's own understanding of the works' dramatic significance within the discourse of modernity and subjectivity in crisis.

Adorno's criticism of Schreker, on the other hand, focuses precisely on the two operas in question here, Der ferne Klang and Die Gezeichneten. His critical attention, however, fixes almost entirely on Schreker's idea of musical sound: sound as a harmonic-timbral entity that draws attention to itself as sensuous sonority. The pleasurable, fantasy-like quality of this sonority Adorno heard as a willfully blind adherence to an ideology of radically interiorized self-expression, refusing the self-criticism and reflective distance that admit to the reality of the mediation of expression by external social determination. "The essence of modern art," Adorno asserts near the end of his "Schreker" essay, "is that utopia enters into the power of negation, into the prohibition on its own name . . . All this brushed Schreker only fleetingly." 44 However, through their texted narratives, which Schreker wrote himself, the operas provide evidence of the composer's critical awareness of the problematic issues confronting the modern artist, whose expressive needs collide with the limitations of society. While the dimension of musical sound evokes the ineffable qualities of the artist's vision of expressive freedom, the realm of narrative embodies, in sometimes strikingly realistic terms, the all-too-present repressive forces of social reality from which the individual cannot escape. Through these musico-narrative dimensions, his operas can be heard as negating the utopia promised in their dimensions of sound, in a

manner that is "essentially modern" by Adorno's own criteria. Schreker's works actually engage directly in a critical discourse on the challenges of modern artistic expression.

Thus, working sometimes through Adorno, sometimes against him, this study explores individual narrative and musical expressions of subjectivity in crisis from various perspectives, including literary, psychoanalytical, and gender-based theories. Taking Adorno's "Zemlinsky" and "Schreker" essays as points of departure, it proposes re-hearings of the music of the operas after close readings of the texts, seeking out the potential for critical value offered by interpretation of the music from within the operatic narratives themselves.
Sound that Comes from Nowhere: Adorno and the Case of Schreker

The distinction to be made... is between the secondary talent and the artist who has something to express, even if it is only the crisis of art.¹

During the height of his career, Franz Schreker was widely regarded by his contemporaries, critics and audiences, as a daringly modern and controversial composer. His operas were surrounded by an aura of scandal: their sexual subject matter was racy, and they gave an impression of monstrous difficulty, the huge, complex scores presenting so many technical and interpretive problems for performers and conductors that they often required extra rehearsal time. As a composer, conductor, and teacher, Schreker exercised considerable influence in new music circles. He did his part to promote the music of Schoenberg, campaigning to raise funds for concerts in which he conducted the premières of *Friede auf Erden* (in 1911) and the large and complex *Gurrelieder* (in 1913). Schoenberg in turn showed an abiding personal and professional respect for Schreker, even citing a chord from the latter's opera *Der ferne Klang* in the *Harmonielehre* as an example of one of the first unresolved harmonies of six tones or more.²

Despite the “advanced” sensibilities evidenced by his often highly chromaticised harmonic language and employment of dissonance, Schreker chose not to follow the Second Viennese School path into atonality. Rather, he continued to compose in a chromatic idiom that does not yet completely reject tonality but often suspends tonal function, producing a series of operas whose tremendous initial popularity gave no forewarning of the virtual oblivion to which the composer would later be consigned. The triumphant Frankfurt première of *Der ferne Klang* in 1912 led to performance runs in other major centres like Munich, Leipzig, and Hamburg; its 1917 revival in Dresden paved the way for the enthusiastic reception of *Die Gezeichneten* and *Der Schatzgraber* which propelled

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Schreker to the height of his fame, with his works enjoying demand on stages across German-speaking countries. Christopher Hailey's "cultural biography" of Schreker clearly asserts that he was "the most frequently performed opera composer of his generation."3

Given Adorno's emphasis on the critical value of dissonance and atonality as embodied in the language of Schoenberg's Second Viennese School, Adorno not surprisingly deals harshly with the once-popular opera composer, even while acknowledging Schoenberg's high opinion of Schreker. As presented in his 1959 essay, there are several possible factors behind the Adornian case against Schreker, one of which is his popularity itself, which appears damning in Adorno's point of view. Authentic modern music, after all, should express radical alienation as a critical resistance to the mass appeal of the commodity-driven popular entertainment industry. The well-established generic distinction between opera and operetta, which were firmly separated in their own theatres, testified that the distinction between more challenging "art" music and "lighter" entertainment fare was not new. Adorno shared a suspicion of popular musical accessibility with his composition teacher Alban Berg, as illustrated by an anecdote recounted by Adorno regarding Berg's opera Wozzeck. "After the Berlin première of Wozzeck and the dinner at Töpfer's where [Berg] was feted and, like an embarrassed adolescent, scarcely able to respond, I was with him until late into the night, literally consoling him over his success," Adorno reports. "That a work conceived like Wozzeck's apparitions in the field, a work satisfying Berg's own standards, could please a first-night audience, was incomprehensible to him and struck him as an argument against the opera."4 Berg's uneasiness here demonstrates that, like Adorno, he saw popular acceptance of a work as a possible symptom of its inauthenticity, and hence an index of failure rather than success.


Popularity alone, though, is not the principal problem Adorno has with Schreker's operas; his case against Schreker is not so simple. Nor does the critique amount to a mere accusation against Schreker's continued proximity to tonality. The atonal idiom was valorized for its socio-historical implications, but also, significantly, for its capacity for authentic subjective expression. Yet, as Adorno's own highly respectful and approbatory monograph of 1960 on Mahler testifies, authentic modern subjective expression does not depend exclusively on atonality, but could, in fact, be present also within a tonal framework.⁵ Adorno also praised Zemlinsky for a “stylistic asceticism and direct proclamation of feeling” that attested to his modernity, despite a use of largely traditional methods.⁶ Not only did Zemlinsky's compositional language remain essentially tonal throughout his career, but his textures are persistently homophonic, in contrast to the Schoenbergian preference for counterpoint. Schreker's compositional idiom exhibits both these traits, but its use of often-recogizable tonal materials generally avoids functional progression. Rather than emphasizing developing variation techniques, Schreker's music gives priority to brilliant instrumental colouration, timbral subtlety and carefully nuanced orchestration, in the creation of a dramatically-motivated conception of the realm of sound itself. For this reason, Adorno condemns him as a purveyor of mere sensuous sonority, “complete with kitsch and a halo.”⁷

Even within the context of the prevailingly critical tone of Adorno's “Schreker” essay as a whole, such a comment is jarring. In some moments, criticism almost seems to give way to oblique personal attack; and indeed, there is a personal component to Adorno's Schreker critique. Having attended a performance of Die Gezeichneten as a fourteen-year-old, “Adorno (b. 1903) belonged,” as Hailey notes, “to the generation that had cut its teeth

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on Schreker's works." Adorno professes his disillusionment with *Die Gezeichneten*, claiming that, despite the rumours which led to "visions of some huge, surging monstrosity, something altogether excessive and perhaps even alarming," the music was far easier to understand than he had expected, and, in general, not all it was cracked up to be. To add to this sense of disappointment, it is conceivable that Adorno may have inherited a complex personal animosity against Schreker from Berg. It is an understatement to say that Berg exercised great influence over his pupil. Adorno's great respect and admiration — indeed, his love for his teacher, wells up from virtually each page of his monograph on Berg, especially (but not exclusively) during the chapter of personal reminiscences, emitting a warmth of tone rare in Adorno's writings. Berg's own generally friendly feelings toward Schreker were tinged with an ambivalence which surfaced in occasional comments such as the following remark to Schoenberg in a letter of 1912: "Not long ago I heard Schreker give a reading of his third drama [probably *Die Gezeichneten*], parts of which I liked very much and which is incredibly effective, powerful, and skillfully done — granted, also a bit kitschy." Hailey notes how tensions arose over the piano-vocal score of *Der ferne Klang* prepared by Berg for Universal Edition, which Schreker felt was too difficult to be playable. To add to this, Berg's assistance with Schreker's preparations for conducting the Viennese première of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* put a greater strain on the friendship. In the wake of extreme difficulties in rehearsals, partly due to numerous errors in the score and parts, Berg found himself in an awkward position, trying to fix matters without angering Schoenberg. As though trying to pass the blame, Berg wrote to Schoenberg of Schreker's "filthy ambition," declaring that the latter would rather incompetently conduct a poor performance of a work he did not know than give up "the opportunity to appear before an

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8 Hailey, 317.

9 It is worth noting that Berg's comments must be read carefully, as they could plausibly have been intended more to flatter Schoenberg than to disparage Schreker; a critical tone is nonetheless expressed.
audience, to bow . . . " Yet, though Berg's personal relationship with Schreker was conflicted, Adorno makes note of Schrekerian elements in Berg's music. In particular, he mentions that "[o]ne passage in *Wozzeck*, where the Captain sings that he, too, has once experienced love, sounds like a Schreker parody; one usually parodies the things to which one is drawn, however ambivalently. The parody seems dramatically motivated by the allusion to passionate love and sensuality, expressed, ironically, by the Captain, whose character embodies all the most banally conventional notions of bourgeois morality. Actually, the Berg passage is contrapuntal, in contrast to Schreker's characteristic homophony. The most Schrekerian element here is the harp arpeggio, marked *rauschend*, which is constructed of a series of triadic segments: E flat major, c sharp minor, c minor, b minor, b flat minor, a minor. While the triadic juxtaposition in these bars might be considered characteristic of Schreker's language, the orchestral sonority, specifically the use of harp arpeggio and celesta, is also immediately reminiscent of a Schrekerian sound (see Example 2.1).

Adorno also singles out the orchestral introduction to the first of Berg's *Altenberg Lieder* for a more precise comparison with Schreker's music:

The similarity of the idea behind the sonoral design with that of the opening to the prelude of Schreker's *Gezeichneten* is striking, except that Berg's work, surely written earlier, goes much further in its use of dissonance than Schreker with his polytonally clouded triads; seldom, however, is a certain affinity between the two as palpable as it is here.  

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10 See Hailey, 67-8.

11 Adorno, *Alban Berg*, 19. As Brand and Hailey state in their translators' notes to this volume, Adorno had indicated, in an earlier essay on Berg, that the Schreker parody in this *Wozzeck* passage was pointed out to him by Berg himself (142).

12 Ibid., 64. (When Adorno writes "polytonally clouded triads," he is referring to a distinctive feature of Schrekerian harmony in which larger dissonant chords are composed of superimposed triads. It is doubtful that he is claiming that Schreker's idiom is "polytonality," however such a term might be defined.) Nicholas Chadwick also notes Schrekerian features in the *Altenberg Lieder* in "Franz Schreker's Orchestral Style and its Influence on Alban Berg," *The Music Review* 35 (1974), 29-46.
Example 2.1: Wozzeck, Act II, scene 2 (2 bars after reh. no. 325) – Berg’s “Schreker parody”
More significant than the similarities, however, are the differences between Berg's and Schreker's sonorities, which Adorno goes on to describe. While both employ what he calls a “mixed sonority” \([\text{Mischklang}]\), “Schreker's sound virtually eradicates the individual colors in its shimmering totality,” whereas, “while [Berg’s] simultaneously juxtaposed colors likewise blend into a whole, they at the same time remain unhomogeneous, independently layered: mixed sound without mixture.”

While illustrating Berg's ambivalence toward Schreker, these comparisons, emphasizing a distinction between contrapuntal independence and a pervasively homogenous homophony, also highlight the very aspect of Schreker's style of which Adorno was most critical: the concept of sound, which will be discussed at length below.

Adorno's view of Schreker was possibly coloured not only by Berg's view, but also by Ernst Krenek's, who was a former composition student of Schreker's. Adorno and Krenek were friends who corresponded frequently and at length over the course of many years, and also published debates on twelve-tone music and the nature of musical material. Krenek, along with many of his classmates, turned strongly against Schreker when classroom tensions over the readiness of certain student works for public performance developed into open hostility during the difficult years (1920-32) when Schreker was director of the Berlin Musikhochschule. Adorno was well aware of the students' strong reaction against Schreker, drawing attention to it early in the course of his discussion. The possibility that Krenek's or Berg's feelings toward Schreker influenced Adorno's opinion, and eventually made their way into his writing, is worth considering in an evaluation of the “Schreker” essay.

Adorno's essay is nonetheless much more than a mere polemical or personal attack. It is a dense, and sometimes scathing, but ultimately careful critical look at key aspects of
the oeuvre of a once-modern composer whose virtual disappearance from cultural memory exemplifies that traumatic loss of a sense of historical continuity which was felt across Europe after the second World War. Yet, though it is cited in most of the principal sources consulted for this chapter, few make more than brief mention of the details of Adorno's essay, and none really formulates a comprehensive critical response. It is thus worthy of a closer examination than it has received in the exegetical literature so far.15

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In 1919 the leading German music critic Paul Bekker had proclaimed Schreker to be the greatest dramatic representative of the new music. Bekker refers to Schreker as "doubtless the greatest music-dramatic talent we have known since Wagner," and insists on a unity of dramatic and musical inspiration as the most significant aspect of Schreker's works.16 This unity arose not only because he, like Wagner before him, was both a librettist and composer, but because, as Schreker himself claimed, his literary and musical inspiration were one and the same. "We see here drama growing out of a primary musical vision," stated Bekker.17 According to the Wagnerian principle, and yet managing to maintain a stylistic independence from Wagner, Schreker conceived his dramatic ideas "out of the spirit of music." This, in Bekker's view, gave the operas greater dramatic integrity than could be achieved by merely setting literary texts to music, or providing musical accompaniment for theatrical spectacle.18 Adorno admits that Bekker had studied Schreker more than anyone else, and does not dispute the Wagnerian connection, but


16 Paul Bekker, Neue Musik (Berlin: Erich Reiß Verlag, 1919), 69.

17 Ibid., 57.

18 For a detailed discussion of Bekker's commentary on Schreker's works, see Hailey, ch. 3, "A critical champion: Paul Bekker and the Schreker question."
interprets it in a somewhat different light, which is perhaps not surprising given the generally critical tone of Adorno's own study *Versuch über Wagner*, which appeared in 1952.\(^{19}\)

"In general," asserts Adorno, "like Wagner's other successors, what Schreker borrowed from Wagner was the element of the phantasmagoria which he then made into the centerpiece of his own work."\(^{20}\) This term *phantasmagoria* is at the crux of much of Adorno's case against Schreker, and thus merits elucidation and deeper investigation. Phantasmagoria is originally an English term, which dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and refers to the apparitional quality of magic-lantern effects. Adorno's usage has roots in Marx's *Das Kapital*, emerging in Marx's explanation of the commodity and its role in the social relation between individuals. Though the commodity may be made of "natural" material, its most important aspect for Marx is its mediated quality as a product of human labour. As Max Paddison so aptly explains, "[t]he defining characteristic of the commodity form is that the labour that went into its production is concealed, and that, as a result of this, something that has been made . . . assumes the appearance of nature, as 'natural object.'"\(^{21}\) Labour becomes an abstract entity in relation to the commodity it produces, and the commodity itself takes on a mysterious aspect. People relating to each other through the exchange of commodities, in which their own human labour is mysteriously hidden, are distanced by the apparition of a commerce among the commodities themselves. Therefore the social relation between individuals – producers and consumers involved in commodity exchange – assumes a fantastic aspect; in Marx's terms, "the fantastic form [*dies phantasmagorische Form*] of a relation between things."\(^{22}\) The commodity itself, which presents a naturalized appearance, is viewed by Marx as a manifestation of "alienated labour". So, in theorizing the form of the commodity as

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phantasmagoria, Marx uncovers a spectral nature of the social bond between humans. This spectral world of alienated relations resembles the shadowy deceptive images, the phantasmagoria, of magic-lantern effects. Both these aspects – concealed or alienated labour and magical effects produced by technological illusion – are reflected in the concept of the phantasmagoric as employed by Adorno in his criticism of the music of Wagner, Schreker, and others.

The other problematic aspect of the phantasmagoria is its atemporal character, already suggested, perhaps, by its original definition in spatial rather than temporal terms, as a visual image. In appearing as a natural object rather than a social product, the phantasmagoria denies history in favour of an illusion of timelessness. It conceals its own history, which is the productive process by which it was made, and it attempts to transcend its historical context through a pretense of naturalness: in Adorno’s terms, “time is the all-important element of production that phantasmagoria, the mirage of eternity, obscures.”\(^23\) The atemporality of phantasmagoria is a feature that takes on particular importance in Adorno’s Wagner and Schreker critiques.

What might this concept mean in musical terms? Wagner’s concealment of labour was in fact rather obvious on the surface: his ideal orchestra pit in Bayreuth literally hid the orchestra under a large, black screen. On a deeper level, his employment of mythical plots attempted to present his art as natural and timeless. And indeed, the opening of *Das Rheingold* has always been perceived as embodying the principle of mythological timelessness in musical form, with its slow, static unfolding, the “*ur-*” quality of its pure and primal triadic harmony, arising “naturally” out of the overtone series, and the way it gradually appears as if from the inarticulable mists of time itself, starting so softly it is almost impossible to tell the precise moment when it begins. It really is the quintessence of the Wagnerian illusion of art as eternal nature. Wagner’s compositional technique itself, its seamlessness and careful concealing of joints, points toward a conscious effort to

\(^{23}\) Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 87.
conceal the labour that went into its production, making it appear more nature than art. The whole *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept is, according to Adorno, the prime exemplar of phantasmagoria in Wagner. “For in seeking aesthetic interchangeability,” effacing individual labour and production in the guise of the united totality, “his intention was to obliterate the frontiers separating the individual arts in the name of an all-pervasive infinity” which pretends to a state of nature.24

The phantasmagorical concept can also be seen in Wagner’s efforts to create the illusion of a magical onstage world through technology – the elaborate behind-the-scenes machinery, and especially the orchestral effects, engineered so that the physical means of producing individual instrumental sounds are obscured. In the fifth chapter of *In Search of Wagner*, entitled “Colour,” Adorno focuses in particular on this issue of orchestration, criticizing the lack of contrapuntal independence between instrumental voices, as in the above comparison between Schreker and Berg. He specifies that the typically massed sound of the Wagnerian orchestra, the pervasive use of doublings, especially at the unison, have a tendency to obscure timbral distinctiveness and aim instead for a seamless blending of sounds, in which the individual instruments become less perceptible, one concealing the other. Aided by subtle dynamic shadings between ends of phrases, antecedent-consequent structures in which one instrumental group answers another simply merge together.25 This type of effect Adorno describes primarily in relation to wind instruments, but massed strings also participate in the Wagnerian phantasmagoria. The *Feuerzauber* music from the end of *Die Walküre*, for example, utilizes complex rhythmic subdivisions played at high speeds, in which complete accuracy is unlikely in any single instrument; however, flaws in their realization are not only concealed by the massed effect, but actually impart a more resonant quality to the sound as a whole.26

24 Ibid., 97.
25 Ibid., 75.
26 Ibid., 80.
The art of the nuance in Wagner's orchestration represents the victory of reification in instrumental practice. . . . The history of Wagner's work, particularly in the dimension of colour, is that of the flight from the banal, by means of which the composer hopes to escape the market requirements of the commodity known as opera. But paradoxically, this flight only leads him more deeply into the commodity. The idea that governs his orchestration, that of sound from which the traces of its production have been removed, sound made absolute, is no more immune to the taint of the commodity than was the trivial sound his art had set out to circumvent.  

Adorno made a similar criticism of Schreker. The concealment of labour can also be seen in Schreker's style of the orchestral writing itself. "He really only acknowledged one possible instrument as an accompaniment for opera: the orchestra itself," asserted Adorno. In other words, the orchestral instruments are not individuated, but rather merge into a massive blur of sound. Adorno was not the only one to remark upon the skilful smoothness of Schreker's orchestral writing; the composer was known from the time of his earliest operas as a virtuoso orchestral colourist. The brilliance of his orchestration often caused him to be associated with French Impressionism, a connection which Adorno made as well. "In extreme contrast to Schoenberg," he stated, "the texture is homophonic throughout . . . ." Again, Adorno values counterpoint above other compositional procedures, and deplores a lack of contrapuntal independence in Schreker's textures: "[t]he orchestra is not at all used soloistically, but produces a comprehensive body of sound." It thus conceals the labour of its production beneath an iridescent sonorous veil. The opening measures of the Overture to Schreker's Die Gezeichneten – which, according to Adorno, is a quintessential representation of the composer's oeuvre – provide an example of the orchestral technique referred to here (see Example 2.2).

27 Ibid., 82.

28 Adorno, "Schreker," 135-36. Schreker himself did in fact make comments to this effect, such as the following from his essay entitled "Meine musikdramatische Idee" (1918): "... I only oppose the all too clearly differentiated timbre and would like to recognize only one instrument in service of the opera: the orchestra itself." Later he was dissatisfied with this formulation; see Hailey, 96-7.

29 Ibid., 139.
Example 2.2: Die Gezeichneten, Overture, opening
It opens with a nebulous, shimmering “mixed sonority” somewhat like that described above in Berg’s Schrekerian parody: juxtaposed D-major and b-flat-minor triads (“hexatonic poles” in Richard Cohn’s recent terminology)\(^3^0\) and arpeggios in strings, piano, and notably, harp and celesta, also like the Berg fragment. A melody emerges, and the listening ear strains through the blanket of massed strings to identify its origin. In the score, it is revealed on the top line as a bass clarinet – a unique instrumental timbre, generally immediately identifiable – but the eye travels down the page and discovers the discreet unison doublings in viola and cello which mask the distinctive woodwind quality and cast a veil over the melody’s timbral character.

But Adorno thinks that the notion of the phantasmagoric extends beyond orchestration, to Schreker’s very concept of musical sound and, by extension, his entire compositional style and technique. Once again, the criticism of Schreker echoes that of Wagner, in which, interestingly, Schreker’s name makes an appearance:

The great phantasmagorias that recur again and again occupy a central position in [Wagner’s] work . . . . They are all defined in terms of the medium of sound: ‘Wondrously, from afar, the dulcet tones resound’, as it is put in the Venusberg scene in Tannhäuser, the phantasmagoria par excellence. Until its dissolution with Schreker, the Neo-German school remained loyal to the idea of ‘distant sound’, as the source of acoustic delusion; in it music pauses and is made spatial, the near and the far are deceptively merged, like the comforting Fata Morgana that brings the mirage of cities and caravans within reach and makes social models appear magically rooted in nature.\(^3^1\)

Adorno provides a technical analysis of the Venusberg’s phantasmagorical effect: “Its characteristic sound is created by the device of diminution.” The use of high instruments, soft dynamics, and absence of bass line (which would “mark the harmonic progression and


\(^3^1\) Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 86.
hence the temporal character of music”), all give an illusion of remoteness in time and space.\textsuperscript{32}

In this passage, Adorno in many ways encapsulates the crucial aspects of the phantasmagorical category: evocation of magic and wonder; suggestion of distance and otherworldliness; atemporality or foregrounding of the spatial (read, denial of music’s inherently temporal nature, and by extension of the dimension of history); and finally, “acoustic delusion” which attempts to present itself as natural rather than technologically generated. The same factors apply, according to Adorno, to Schreker’s sound-concept and to the compositional technique used to achieve it. “Schreker’s idea of sound is music that puts down roots in mid-air. It denies both cause and effect, indeed every actual determinant of composition. The factors which usually define the musical structure – developing variation, the logic of composition in its broadest sense – are virtually excluded.”\textsuperscript{33} Such an attack on Schreker’s compositional technique also had considerable precedent in the critical literature of the composer’s own time. The sort of objections often raised to the musical aspect of Schreker’s works include lack of significant progression, poor grasp of harmonic movement, absence of melodic line and thematic clarity, and awkward shifting of chords from one pedal-point to another.\textsuperscript{34} For Adorno, this “loosen[ing] and dematerialis[ation] of the viscous flow of the post-Wagnerian school” exemplified the phantasmagoric concept of alienated labour, making Schreker’s works commodities of the modern culture industry rather than authentic resistances to it.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Adorno, “Schreker,” 134. Note the play on the word “roots” – the sense of “putting down roots in mid-air,” suggesting an instability of (physical) location, is coupled with a reference to the non-functional nature of the harmony, the “roots” of chords remaining unconnected, as it were, “in mid-air.”

\textsuperscript{34} See Hailey, esp. chap. 2, “Der ferne Klang: ‘so ganz etwas Neu’s’,” for details on the criticism encountered by Schreker in the musical press regarding his compositional style.

\textsuperscript{35} Adorno, “Schreker,” 132.
It seems worthwhile to note the unusual effect of Adorno's invocation of the "Fata Morgana" in the passage cited above. Fata Morgana is a natural phenomenon of temperature inversion that causes the appearance of a mirage, typically near a water surface. The phenomenon takes its name from the mythology of a fairy enchantress, skilled in the art of shape-shifting, who lived in a marvelous castle under the sea. Sometimes she would project the castle's image above the waves, luring sailors to their death. In evoking the Fata Morgana as a metaphor for the phantasmagoria, transposed from the visual to the auditory realm, Adorno inevitably, if unintentionally, recalls that the phenomenon is not merely an illusion, but is in fact one generated by a truly natural process, rather than by a technological deception. Further he (perhaps unwittingly) invokes the trope of the feminine as deceptive and fatal seducer, like Venus herself, or, later, Wagner's flower maidens in Parsifal (a trope which also recurs in Schreker, as will be seen). Most of all, the concept of the Fata Morgana embodies the realization that the beautiful mirage is only illusion, is fleeting, and is dangerous; it means the undoing of those who fall prey to its temptations, and as such, it is not a "comforting" phenomenon, but a fearful one. The pleasurable image embodies within itself the idea of its negation. The idea of the Fata Morgana also makes a reappearance in the "Schreker" essay, and takes on an interesting interpretive resonance within a particular scene of Schreker's opera Der ferne Klang, which is discussed below.

According to Adornian aesthetics, the element of Phantasmagoria has socio-philosophical as well as artistic consequences for the significance of Schreker's (and Wagner's) art. In its pretense of naturalness and immediacy, concealing the rational-technical aspects of the labour that went into its production (composition and performance), the music suppresses awareness of the individual subject(s) whose work is hidden therein. The subject's alienation from the product of its labour as commodity, and from other producers also distanced by the market mechanisms of commodity exchange, is
reinforced. The musical phantasmagoria thereby denies the suffering of the individual subject oppressed by the rational-technical force of modern society. It declares itself natural and timeless; it pretends to transcend the dominating regime of modern culture. But if this social force of commodity capitalism is so negative, if it is an ideology under whose weight the individual is crushed, is not transcendence exactly what is needed? Should not authentic art attempt an escape?

Here arises a problem that frequently confronts the interpreter of Adorno's theory: how to distinguish the concealment of suffering from a hopeful prefiguration of utopia. Despite the overwhelming pessimism of his theory, Adorno acknowledges the utopian character of art, which resides even in modern artworks in a so-called “moment of affirmation,” which imagines a possibility for change, as though the world could be different from what it is. This moment of resistance to the immutable is a crucial difference between the authentic modern work, which both acknowledges and criticizes the dominant tendencies of its society, and the nihilist one, which expresses negativity, but accepts defeat. As he states in *Aesthetic Theory*, “Affirmation becomes the cipher of despair and the purest negativity of content contains . . . a grain of affirmation. . . . The constellation of the existing and nonexisting is the utopic figure of art. Although it is compelled toward absolute negativity, it is precisely by virtue of this negativity that it is not absolutely negative.”36 This utopian figure remains only a “moment.” In the case of Schreker, however, Adorno concludes that “the utopia conveyed in these operas is too unsublimated for it to survive.”37

Sublimation refers to a second key concept which must be more closely examined in order to approach an understanding of Adorno’s criticism of Schreker. The term derives from Freudian psychoanalytical theory, aspects of which Adorno employed alongside

Marxist theory in the development of his aesthetics. Freud's ideas on art are based upon the primacy of the unconscious in aesthetic production. According to Freud, sublimation converts the sexual aim of the libido into a cultural one through the mediation of the ego, allowing for the production of cultural phenomena by the essentially radically asocial unconscious. It is a complex process of repression and transformation of unconscious drives into a form more acceptable to society. Through sublimation, the artist "... can transform his phantasies into artistic creations instead of into symptoms." Art is supposed to deal positively with the negative experiences of life. Freud thus characterizes art as an alternative to neurosis, a link between fantasy and reality through which the artist, typically a neurotic personality-type, regains contact with reality. Significantly, art is thus also similar to the Freudian concept of dreamwork, as an objectification of unconscious desire and wish-fulfillment. Through this analogy Freud suggested the applicability of his theories of psychoanalytic dream-interpretation to the interpretation of artworks.

It should be noted, however, that Freud's own ideas about art are not very systematic. His tendency to employ psychoanalysis of artists' personalities in interpreting their works in terms of wish fulfillment has often been criticized as overly simplistic. Freud's sublimation model has the effect of reducing art to a psychological framework for something else. Further, the analogy of artistic creation with dreaming does not account for the aesthetic value of art, much less for the conscious processes of elaboration that produce the aesthetic forms of artworks. While Adorno did find Freud's idea of sublimation a useful tool, he echoed many other critics in dismissing traditional psychoanalytic interpretations of artworks as daydreams: it "confuses them with documents," and "reduces artworks to crude thematic material." Yet even if one accepts a


39 Sources for this criticism are abundant; several are listed in Linda Hutcheon, "Freud, Sigmund," in The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism, ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 312-16.
simple production process of unconscious projection into the artwork (which Adorno does not), the material aspects of the artistic product cannot be neglected by interpretation:

The psychoanalytic thesis, for instance, that music is a defense against the threat of paranoia, does indeed for the most part hold true clinically, yet it says nothing about the quality and content of a particular composition. . . . Psychoanalysis treats artworks as nothing but facts, yet it neglects their own objectivity, their level of form, their critical impulse, their relation to nonpsychical reality, and, finally, their idea of truth.  

By thus complicating the Freudian sublimation model through emphasis on the objective sphere of artistic production, Adorno makes room for the critical dimension so crucial to his aesthetic theory of the authentic (truthful) work of art. 

In Adornian theory, then, musical sublimation is evidenced by the technical means through which given musical materials are rationalized within the logic of the form of a work. The composer's creative impulse must be expressed, but it must also be brought under control by the laws of compositional technique, which impose a coherent form and syntax upon the raw musical materials. "In artistic production, unconscious forces are one sort of impulse, material among many others," he explains. "They enter the work mediated by the law of form; if this were not the case, the actual subject portrayed by a work would be nothing but a copy [of the unconscious]." The mark of an authentic modern work of art is the continuing tension it exhibits between the rational calculation of formal construction and the spontaneity of expression - in other words, between the conscious and the unconscious, as mediated through the process of ego-sublimation.

Perhaps more importantly, however, Adorno objects to the traditional psychoanalytic emphasis on sublimation as an affirmative process through which the individual (artist) becomes better adapted to social reality. For, as emphasized above, negativity is the true and inescapable character of the relation between the isolated individual subject and the

41 Ibid., 9.
modern society to which he finds himself forced to adapt. Yet, in traditional psychoanalytic studies of art, "artists whose work gave uncensored shape to the negativity of life are dismissed as neurotics . . . The negative element is held to be nothing more than the mark of that process of repression that obviously goes into the artwork." But expression of this negative moment in the artwork is, for Adorno, the only authentic outcome of sublimation of the unconscious drives through the transformative ego process. Denial of the negative is a sign of repression rather than sublimation. Adorno finds that Freud's traditional concept does not make a clear distinction between positive and negative ego-functions in artistic production, between sublimation and repression. "Instead," he asserts, "the concept of what is useful or socially productive is rather innocently dragged in. But in an irrational society, the ego cannot perform at all adequately the function allotted to it by that society." (This is why a tension between internal/unconscious and external/conscious, as described above, must be evident within the musical work: it is reflective of the real conflict between the individual subject and society.) So, while Freud characterizes sublimation as positive, Adorno insists on the importance of the negative in the form of the ego's simultaneous adaptation and opposition to external reality. In other words, Adorno's version of the theory of sublimation necessarily includes a critical dimension. The authentic artwork must contain a crucial negative element, which is the trace of the irreconcilable negativity of modern human experience.

Thus, for Adorno, the work of art as a product of sublimation must exhibit both the inspiration and its material mediation, and it must bear traces of both the affirmative and the negative. Schoenberg's atonal expressionist idiom again provides the ideal example of the sublimated musical discourse. Its atonal language and technique of formal, functional, and gestural fragmentation inscribe the confrontation of given historical musical material

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42 Ibid., 8.

(tonality, traditional forms) with the modern demands of culture (tonal dissolution, breaking with tradition). Simultaneously, its dissonant and fragmentary nature reflects the negative aspect of the individual’s confrontation with social reality and an ultimate failure to adapt to it, in fact critically resisting the demand for adaptation. Unsublimated music, then, denies both the demands for social and historical mediation, and the negativity that inevitably arises therefrom.

The criticisms cited above against Schreker’s seemingly faulty compositional technique suggest that the composer’s musical inspiration remains unsublimated by compositional logic. To Adorno’s ears, this music is “the immediate, unconfined promise of sensual pleasure.” Unconscious desire and fantasy are immediately expressed through sensual sound, and given free reign. If art as sublimation replaces neurosis, unsublimated music remains untransformed unconscious fantasy: the music itself is the neurotic symptom. This is what Adorno refers to when he states that “[Schreker’s] music failed, as the psychologists would say, to construct an ego. It stands outside the demands of culture.” Adorno could not hear in Schreker’s music any dialectical dimension that would indicate the composer’s consciousness of a struggle between the desire for immediate self-expression and the need to acknowledge socio-historically-imposed musical laws. This conflict, which he did hear in the musical structure of Schoenberg’s works, was the true stamp of the authentic musical work which expressed the modernist crisis of the individual. Though Adorno admits Schreker’s consciousness of the unattainability of his utopia, this note of negativity is drowned out by the wash of Schrekerian sound. The operas lack that internal tension between expression and form (here this refers not to any specific musical

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45 Ibid., 143. Adorno makes a similar reference to Wagner in commenting on the function of the Leitmotiv and comparing it to Berlioz’s idée fixe: “[T]he idée appears to a man under the spell of an opium dream. It is the exteriorized projection of something secretly subjective and at the same time ego-alien, to which the ego abandons itself as to a mirage. The Wagnerian Leitmotiv remains rooted in these origins. It determines the absence of genuinely constructed motives in favour of a kind of associative procedure. What psychology a century later was to refer to as ego-weakness is something on which Wagner’s music is already predicated.” Adorno, In Search of Wagner, 31.
form such as ternary, sonata, etc., but to the “formed” character of the artistic product), through which authentic modern artworks mirror the crisis of subjectivity of the oppressed and suffering individual.

Yet it must be noted that Adorno acknowledges a critical aspect in the music, which (seemingly accidentally) arises out of that same unsublimated character for which it is condemned:

Because [Schreker's music] springs from a compulsion which is more potent than shame and testifies to the truth of things that culture proscribes, it gives expression to doubts about the value of culture as such. Schreker consciously deserts to the realm which culture has distanced itself from and consigned to the vulgar. The fact that culture has to reject this reminds us of the limitations of its power and, ultimately, of its own failure: unable to effect a reconciliation between the drives and itself, it holds them down by force... Schreker, a minstrel in a world without minstrels, refuses to join in the repression of the drives. 46

It would be going too far to say that Adorno allows here, after all, for an element of authentic social criticism in Schreker. The too-literal rebellion against culture is seen more as a by-product of the composer’s adolescent sensibility, a sort of willful immaturity, than as a conscious statement regarding societal repression of the ‘unacceptable’ unconscious drives of the individual. Still, Adorno finds it worthwhile to dwell on this moment, to acknowledge that the “possibility of transcending culture... is something from which great art is increasingly alienated.” And this possibility which “flashes” from Schreker is “something splendid.” 47 Here a critical fissure opens, and another possibility emerges: that of a critical reinterpretation of Schreker.

Adorno’s critical categories of the phantasmagorical and the unsublimated may be traced throughout Schreker’s oeuvre, and they afford possibilities for looking beyond

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 144.
Adorno's interpretation, as will be demonstrated below with regard to the composer's first major operatic success, *Der ferne Klang* (1912). It has perhaps already become obvious that, in the case of Schreker, the critical categories of the phantasmagorical and the unsublimated intersect in a fascinating way. They merge in their aspects of immediacy and fantasy, and in their rejection, whether through illusion or denial, of the demands of culture. And they do so in the realm of sound.

Yet, in contrast to Adorno, one can argue that Schreker's operas, in a way different from Schoenberg's, may be read as case studies of subjectivity in crisis, in terms of both text and music. The following discussion undertakes a dialectical critique of the critique, as it were, reading both through Adorno and against him, to arrive at an interpretation that recognizes a critical dimension in the dramatic import of Schreker's works. Their plots centre on the struggles for selfhood of marginalized subjects, pitting the desires of the individual against the banal and repressive norms of society. Musically, their emancipated-tonal idiom, characterized in large part by extremes of chromaticism and by untraditional or nebulous harmonic and tonal functioning, conveys a language in crisis, embodying the historical instant of the atonal rupture. Schreker's operas might thus be heard as presenting images of a musical moment of crisis, reflective of the issues of subjective identity in crisis manifest in their plots.

A discussion of *Der ferne Klang* demonstrates how some of these musical and narrative issues may be articulated. More so than in any of Schreker's other operas, the realm of sound here becomes an explicit dramatic and narratological as well as an implicit compositional category, and therefore the concepts of the phantasmagorical and the unsublimated come to the fore on several levels. Fritz, the protagonist of the opera, is a young composer caught up in the pursuit of a haunting "distant sound," which seems to represent to him a vision of his musical identity. In the search for the sound, he abandons his love, Grete, who subsequently falls into a life of moral decline. Desperate at finding that her father has offered her in marriage to the landlord in payment of a gambling debt,
she runs away from home in search of Fritz, but fails to find him; lost in the forest, alone and afraid, she is lured by a procurress into a brothel, where her beauty makes her the star attraction. When Fritz, drawn by the sudden return of his mysterious sound, finds her there, he is aghast at what she has become, and rejects her once again, continuing the search for his ideal. But the ultimate fruitlessness of Fritz's quest for the distant sound becomes apparent years later when his opera, *Die Harfe*, fails at its première. Fritz's belated rediscovery of the elusive sound comes only when he is reunited with Grete at the moment of his death. Though the plot seems to revel in the fin-de-siècle decadence for which Schreker was chastised by more than one critic, it is perhaps most directly heard as a rather stark reflection on a frightening modern crisis: a musical portrait by a composer of a composer who utterly fails to construct a musical identity. The failure of his art is an index of his alienation from society. The *ferne Klang*, a fantasy that the artist fails to transform into a form acceptable to society through his art, seems to typify unsublimation. Yet, like many of Schreker's other operas, this plot, which he penned himself, betrays not so much an escape into fantasy as a painful self-consciousness of potently modern issues.

The *Klang* is not merely a dramatic concept, an idea; it is also an actual, physical sound that appears in the opera. Further, it is not a precise, stable entity, but reveals itself in its various appearances as changeable, though with a few recognizable elements. A closer look at the harmonic features of this sought-after *Klang* highlights the issues more sharply from a specifically musical point of view. The *Klang*-as-chord first appears in Act I, as Fritz describes to Grete the distant sound which calls him away from her (reh. nos. 9-13). Here the *Klang* is represented by a nebulous arpeggiated chord, shimmering in string harmonics, harp, and celesta (see Example 2.3). It is built of a minor third, a perfect fifth, a major seventh and a major ninth over an e bass (e - g - b - d-sharp - f-sharp), which could arguably be conceived as its root. The minor eleventh (a) is added a couple of beats later. This chord may be viewed as a single unitary entity, or as a compound one: an e-minor triad...
Example 2.3: *Der ferne Klang*, Act I scene 1 (reh. no. 11) – Fritz’s *Klangvision*
superimposed with its dominant (seventh). Its structure of two triads, one major and one minor, is similar to the sonority at the opening of the overture to Die Gezeichneten, as described above, where the triads are separated by a major third rather than a perfect fifth, and they are, to be precise, closely juxtaposed rather than directly superimposed in a putative single chord-Klang. As such, the Klang may be analyzed as a chord with a single or a double root; certainly it has the sound of tonic and dominant functions simultaneously.

Another possible analytical interpretation views the harmony as a central augmented chord, with minor thirds added above and below. This analysis is more consistent with later reappearances of the Klang, particularly its recurrence in the opera's final scene as an arpeggiated (b-flat - d - f-sharp - a) chord in the celesta (see Example 2.4 below). Whatever the interpretation, the harmony itself is inherently ambiguous and its function uncertain.

Hailey explains some of the complexities of the Schrekerian concept of Klang:

\textit{Klang} is one of those words so rich in connotation that there is no single English equivalent. “Sound,” “noise,” “note,” “tone,” “colour,” “timbre,” “ring(ing),” and “peal(ing)” are each part of its meaning and there is seldom an instance where only one of these meanings is implied. In Schreker’s music the term usually refers to a combination of orchestration (subtle doublings and instrumental effects) and harmonic ambiguity (sonorities with two functional roots, added non-harmonic tones, indefinite bass).^{50}

Fritz’s \textit{Klangvision} (Example 2.3) corresponds to these details in several ways. Its unique orchestration is as characteristic a feature as is its ambiguous harmonic composition of two superimposed triads. It is likely just such a chord that Adorno refers to when discussing general aspects of Schreker's harmonic style (even though he is here describing all major triads, rather than major and minor):

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48 Fritz's vocal line outlines the dominant harmony (f*-b) above the chord in the orchestra, and in the next few measures his melody continues in a clear B-major profile.

49 Forte class [01348]. Thanks are due to Richard Kurth and John Roeder for making this suggestion during a reading of a previous version of this paper at the University of British Columbia School of Music.

50 Hailey, 49-50.
Example 2.4: Der ferne Klang, Act III, scene ii (1 mm. before reh. no. 75) – Fritz’s hallucination

Frequently groups of dominant-related major keys are stacked one above the other, intensified to a kind of ‘super-major’. Their aim is to re-establish something of the glow that has long since faded from the simple major triad.
Schreker cultivated [this device] as far as it would go and indeed he intensified all the possibilities of Impressionist luminosity with heedless extravagance.\textsuperscript{51}

This chord's harmonic and timbral character pinpoint it as "the Schrekerian phantasmagoria \textit{par excellence},"\textsuperscript{52} like the opening chord of \textit{Die Gezeichneten}, which it closely resembles. In its functional separation from the surrounding harmonies (which often shift by common tones between chromatically altered chords, perhaps linked by chromatically-inflected thirds, but not functionally related to each other), it "stands outside the demands" of compositional laws, unsublimated, as Adorno says. Despite slight harmonic differences in the \textit{Klang} when it recurs later in the opera, it is still immediately identifiable, largely due to consistencies of interval class, articulation and timbre, most noticeable in the prominent role of the harp and celesta arpeggios. Lacking a convincing explanation of the sound in functional harmonic terms, Adorno's suggestion (and, notably, that of other analysts approaching the score), that the purpose of the \textit{Klang} is purely sonorous and sensuous, falling outside the arena of any proper harmonic function, seems unexceptionable. In terms of the operatic plot, this suggestion is also perfectly plausible, considering the concept of the \textit{ferne Klang} that Fritz is seeking. His enraptured description of it — *like when the wind strokes over harps with a ghostly hand, far in the distance* [\textit{wie wenn der Wind mit Geisterhand über Harfen streicht, weit, weit}] — suggests otherworldliness (in fact, it strongly recalls the above-cited description of the Wagnerian \textit{Venusberg}), as does the orchestration itself.

However, Adorno's condemnation of Schreker's purely sonorous pleasure-seeking misses the conflict that arises through the dramatic context. While the sought-after sound is presented as otherworldly and, in its vague harmonic and functional definition, somehow ungraspable, Fritz declares his determination to find it. The sound is followed by a motive in which he continues to describe his quest (Example 2.5), a clear c-sharp minor motive

\textsuperscript{51} Adorno, "Schreker," 137.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 140.
with a dotted rhythmic profile whose naively Romantic, even Wunderborn-like tone, evokes the Wanderer setting forth into the world. There is no suggestion, though, as to where he might go. Meanwhile, the text conveys a telling contradiction between dreams of otherworldly transcendence and worldly success: “when I hold that sound I shall be rich and free, an artist of God’s grace . . . then I will return, a famous man . . .” [und hält’ ich den Klang, bin ich reich und frei, ein Künstler von Gottes Gnaden . . . dann keh’ ich zurück: Ein berühmter Mann]. Divine inspiration’s goal is reduced to one of bourgeois commercial achievement. From the moment it sounds, the musical phantasmagoria rapidly dissolves into a gesture that is at once touching in its naïveté and striking in its banality – mocking, even? – a contrast highlighting the gulf between fantasy and fulfillment. As an unsublimated unconscious projection, the Klangvision suggests its own negation; it conveys insecurity and fragility as much as the “incorrigible immaturity” of which Adorno accused the composer.

**Example 2.5:** Schreker, *Der ferne Klang*, Fritz’s quest motive (3 mm. after reh. no. 12)

The apparent lack of significant harmonic progression in the Klangvision passage – typical of Schreker’s style, as Peter Franklin notes⁵³ – is an important aspect of Schreker’s concept of sound that Adorno criticized as phantasmagoric, denying both cause and effect. Yet Bekker, who made a closer study of the music than any other contemporary critic, claimed to find beneath the surface a linear foundation to Schreker’s harmonic language that was missed by critics listening for more conventional cadential periodicity. The harmony, according to Bekker, follows closely the nuances of the melodic line, which in turn is intimately connected to the momentary meanings of the text. As such, it is dramatically

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authentic at each moment. Thus, what sounds at first like causelessly shifting blocks of sound is in fact a deliberate flexibility of formulation, which Adorno recognized as having an unexpected potential critical component – by default. “To [this] extent Schreker may be seen, remarkably enough, to participate in the critique of the traditional conception of melodic line,” he says. “If there is anything at all topical about Schreker, then it lies in such elements as this.”

So there is a possibility for an alternate view of the lack of clear melodic and harmonic definition typical of Schreker's style, a possibility that Franklin seizes. He characterizes Schreker's language as both interrupted and fragmentary. As Franklin realizes, “the fact that Schreker never finally or systematically renounced the full affective vocabulary of [tonality] is what gives his often highly expressionistic style so radically a different character from Schoenberg’s.” Franklin notes that closer analysis reveals fragmentation of the material, unexpected interruption of progressions, gestures half-made and withdrawn, even the use of small ostinato figures, which, despite the vast difference in overall sound, seem to suggest that, in one respect at least, Schreker's compositional technique is closer to Schoenberg's than Adorno would care to admit. In fact, these aspects of Schreker's style offer the resistance to interpretation which is a mark of authenticity in Adorno's theory of the radical modern musical work.

This same difficulty in analyzing the nature of the Klangvision raises an interesting issue from another point of view: that of narrative voice. Of course, the sound literally emanates from the pit orchestra, but, within the context of the opera's narrative, where precisely is it coming from? There is a hint that it may be audible to both Fritz and Grete on stage, a circumstance suggestive of Carolyn Abbate's category of the noumenal, which intrudes from “beyond” into the phenomenal world, transgressing traditional narrative

55 Franklin, 143.
boundaries. It is possible to suggest that at its first instance the sound merely accompanies Fritz’s verbal description of it and is not a phenomenal sound-event in the stage world, but this idea is called into question by the return of the Klang near the close of Act III, when Fritz exclaims, “[d]o you hear the sound?” [hörst du den Ton?] (emphasis mine). The sound is thus an orchestral entity which rends the diegetic fabric of the narrative and intrudes upon the phenomenal world of the stage. Schreker does employ other intradiegetic music in the opera, most notably through various onstage ensembles in Act II, but the Klang is clearly separate from those musics as well. Although it is first heard at the moment of Fritz’s description of it, it is difficult to conceive of it as emanating from his consciousness, in that he describes it as something elusive he must search for, rather than something he knows. It is, above all, reminiscent of Schreker’s description of his own inspiration: “the mysteriously inward struggles for musical expression.” In citing this statement, Franklin suggests that “Schreker’s ‘mysteriously inward’ is in fact to be interpreted in a Freudian light.” Though couched within the context of Franklin’s defense of Schreker’s authentically “expressionist” style, the “Freudian” assertion somehow ends up replicating Adorno’s accusation that the music is unsublimated. What else is the “mysteriously inward” but the radically interior unconscious? If, as Adorno elsewhere implies, the psychological dimension of Schoenberg’s fragmentary Expressionist style takes on a “case-study disposition” through its quality of objectivity, then perhaps Schreker’s own expressionistic style aims to represent the irrational flow of unconscious subjectivity, manifest in sound. The unconscious dimension self-replicates in the description of Schreker’s composition and Fritz’s fantasy-sound. Fritz is not Schreker – but the sound is a symptom for them both.


57 See Franklin, 147-48.

For Fritz, then, the *Klang*, ringing from an indeterminate location, is an element in his unconscious, which he vaguely senses and struggles to bring forward to consciousness. But moments before the end of the opera, during a scene in which he seems to be dreaming or hallucinating, hovering in a state of semi-consciousness, the sound source of the representative *Klang* is physically relocated from the orchestra to a celesta *behind the stage*, further problematizing the issue of the narrative locus of the sound (see Example 2.4 above). The dimension of sound-as-symptom is nowhere clearer than here, where it is projected as a manifestation of delirium. Curiously within this hallucinatory context, the elusive sound suddenly seems more concrete through its isolation, in that it is specifically and uniquely *located*. It is more present, and it defines itself as separate from a mere accompanying role as part of the orchestral mass. Yet at the same time it remains a liminal moment, hovering just beyond the boundaries of the stage world. Paradoxically, as it attains a more concrete specificity by so clearly becoming a separate and unique sound, its status as a dramatic entity becomes more unstable. It exists in a nether region, apart from both the orchestral background and the onstage world.

Adorno’s answer to the problem of the location of the sound – and surely he had this particular *Klang* in mind during his general condemnation of Schreker’s concept of sound – places the entire construct within the category of the phantasmagoric:

> What is conjured up is the idea of something which resounds but comes, as it were, from nowhere and returns to the same place. It is suddenly there, as if strings had been plucked. Like an auditory Fata Morgana it hangs in the air, colourful, transparent and denatured. It proves too elusive to grasp and then disappears. In the shape of a phantasmagoria it aims to snatch music from time and conjure it up in space.”

But when we recall Paul Bekker’s assertion of the centrality of *drama* to Schreker’s musical conception, we remember that this sound is so much *more* than mere sound. Both Schreker’s and Fritz’s sounds function as symbols, pointing beyond themselves. And, like

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Freudian dream-symbols, the *Klang* is characteristically overdetermined. As it sounds and re-sounds at different moments in the opera, it changes, and its possible meaning shifts with its context, frustrating attempts at any definitive interpretation of its significance. This shifting quality suggests another compelling interpretation of the concept of the *Klang* and its musical-dramatic significance. If we accept, in terms of the plot, that the *Klang* represents the composer’s sought-after musical identity, then from a psychological point of view, its instability – of harmony, function, and locus – suggests a problematic identity that offers the subject no security. Schreker’s own painful consciousness of the issue of identity – evident in the way he situates the musical fantasy-object within a dramatic context which negates it – imbues the *Klang* with all the unconscious weight of a modern crisis of subjectivity.

This is not the limit of the *Klang*’s significance as subjectivity or symptom. While it manifests itself as a symptom of the artist (Fritz, and ultimately Schreker), sound becomes the symptom of Grete’s trauma as well. As Fritz departs on his idealistic search for the fantasy-sound, she becomes the centre of the drama, perhaps its more proper protagonist, left behind and thrust into the harsh world of reality. In addition to Fritz’s *Klang*, Grete in fact hears her own music: the music of the forest “magic” that overcomes her the night she runs away from home, and which she describes in Act II as a song that she still hears. Both sounds resonate throughout her failed attempts to escape after Fritz, then to adapt to a world far from ideal. In contrast to Fritz, whose sound-fantasy remains elusive, Grete is haunted by her sound-phantasm [*phantasmagoria*], in sleep and in waking dreams. His is distant; hers is all-too present. Grete’s role in the opera does not merely reinforce the centrality of sound to the drama. It also adds to the radical overdetermination of the *Klang*, by suggesting the additional possibility that she herself is inseparable from its source.

As suggested above, Adorno’s essay on Schreker tends to focus on the musical aspects of the operas to the exclusion of the textual dramatic elements. Indeed, he advises that, for
those who do not know Schreker's music, the best starting-points from which to develop an acquaintance with his oeuvre are the Chamber Symphony and the overture to Die Gezeichneten. If it seems strange that Adorno would refer to purely instrumental pieces as most characteristic of the style of a composer known almost exclusively for his operas, it does make the interpretive bias unusually clear. Sidestepping issues of textual interpretation (not to mention singing voices), he thus makes relatively little comment on the overall dramatic significance of the works. Other critics, including Franklin, Carl Dahlhaus, and, of course, Bekker, develop their views of the authenticity of Schreker's modernism through examinations of both text and music, recognizing that, particularly where this composer is concerned, the two are inextricable. "It is a special merit in Schreker," stated Bekker, "and the mark of his thoroughly music-dramatic gift – that one cannot speak of his scenes without meaning his music, nor speak of his music without thinking of the scene." From this viewpoint, Bekker saw Schreker as a truly modernist opera composer, indeed, the only such of his generation. One wonders whether Schreker's art might be viewed more positively, even through Adornian eyes, if the significance of the operas was judged according to both narrative and musical elements, functioning together to create the drama.

This is not to say that Adorno ignores Schreker's texts completely. In commenting on how easy critics found it to "snipe at the tastelessness of [Schreker's] texts, he proceeds to do just that. He isolates the following stage direction from Act I, scene 7 of Der ferne Klang as an example of the kind of passage to which the music – presumably equally tasteless – was "only too well suited" (not least because of its invocation of a "magical" merging of nature and music):\(^6^1\)

She raises her arms, as if to leap into the lake. At this moment the moon rises and transfigures the landscape. The lake glitters in its light, glow-worms

\(^6^0\) Bekker, Klang und Eros, 26.

\(^6^1\) Adorno, "Schreker," 132.
dance, a nightingale sings and deer go to the lake to drink. Sultry breezes envelop the girl. The magic of the forest (*Waldzauber*) by night. Nature breathes love and promise. Grete stands silently, lost in wonder at the view.

Even Schreker's apologists agree that there are moments when his libretti are somewhat undisciplined, marred by a tendency "to go over the top."\(^{62}\) *Der fene Klang* certainly has its excessive, melodramatic moments which are open to this criticism. Yet, despite such flaws, the overall implications of the drama point beyond the level of literary detail, a fact to which Dahlhaus draws attention in his discussion of the dramaturgy of Schreker's opera:

> If Adorno thought it was enough to expose a stage direction of *Der fene Klang* taken out of context as a "literary monstrosity" for Schreker to be dismissed as a librettist, a victim of the deadly quotation technique, he failed to realize that in opera it is not the verbal detail that counts, however dreadful it may be, but only the scenario: the configuration of affects that impel the characters in the action and of the situations in which they become entangled.\(^{63}\)

When the scenario is examined, it becomes clear that Schreker's drama is extremely complex, mixing naturalism with symbolism, joining traditional, modern, and fairy-tale elements, employing layers of dramatic space juxtaposed with multiple narrative levels, and attempting an explicit blend of art and modern life which openly addresses modern artistic questions. In particular, an emphasis on the act of narration itself, and on the repeated narration of events already-occurred, gives a case-study aspect to many portions of the opera, especially to those scenes of a confessional nature, wherein a character tells details of his or her personal past. Many of these aspects of the text show how the musico-dramatic narrative of Schreker's opera displays his acute consciousness of the state of crisis that his art was reaching during his time.

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\(^{62}\) Franklin, 147.

\(^{63}\) Dahlhaus, "Schreker and Modernism," 194.
Within the frame of the opera's story, the act of narrating takes on an importance that seems strange in a dramatic context, wherein literal enactment of events, rather than telling of them, is the normal mode. This feature of the opera is another element that is reminiscent of the Wagnerian music drama, wherein narration often dominates the action for long stretches of time. Techniques of both narrative and spatial layering are present virtually from the beginning of Act I. After an overture, the Act opens upon a farewell scene between Fritz and Grete. Boisterous sounds of drinking and gambling from the pub next door warn them that they are about to be interrupted, so Fritz quickly departs. Soon, the rather intoxicated crowd from the pub noisily enters the house in a state of high excitement over the results of a game of skittles, which had been heard in progress from offstage during the previous scene. The game moves from background to foreground, as an actor steps forward dramatically to tell the women of the events. He reveals that Grete's father had staked her hand in marriage in the game, and lost to the landlord. Grete is horrified and refuses at first to believe the story, whereupon it is told again, this time by the character of Dr. Vigelius. He narrates the process of the game step-by-step, switching from past to present tense to describe each stage of play, as though he is reporting the game as it occurs. His re-narration of the events is almost like a re-occurrence of the game itself, punctuated by the cheers of the crowd of "onlookers," who in fact already saw the game in the pub but are more than happy to participate in its dramatic re-telling. The structure of his tale involves threefold repetition (as in fairy tales) of the description of each throw of the dice – "Die Kugel rollt – es fallen die Kegel" – which becomes a recurring refrain. The scenario of the game and the act of storytelling are in fact a foreshadowing of events to follow in Act II.

Dahlhaus refers to the game of skittles as an element of operatic Naturalism that yet takes on a Symbolic aspect, when “seen as the allegory of a hopeless fate,” as in the novels

of Zola. Though Adorno did not address this scene of Der ferne Klang in detail, Dahlhaus's comment is reminiscent of Adorno's discussion of the Card Trio in Bizet's Carmen, wherein the gypsy girls' "unproblematic refrain" ironically becomes an expression of the irrevocable nature of fate and death: "the immanence of Fate . . . becomes an immanence of form." An "absence of transcendence and meaning" in the Card Trio, and in Carmen as a whole, is compared with the tone of Flaubert's novel Madame Bovary. With explicit reference to Nietzsche, Adorno thus reads Bizet's opera – and the musical banality of the Card Trio in particular – as a critical denial of the nineteenth-century (specifically Wagnerian) ideal of redemption and transcendence through music. Schreker's drama participates in this critical denial in a similar way, symbolically in this scene, but more explicitly in others. (What is Fritz's Klangvision but a dream of musical transcendence, a promise that he seeks but manifestly does not find?) This idea of transcendence and its denial recurs later in the opera.

It is the second Act of Der ferne Klang which is the most commented-on for its textual and musical complexity, its various narrative levels and juxtaposed orchestral and onstage musics giving rise to a counterpoint which some critics found an impressive demonstration of technical skill, and many others dismissed as merely confusing and disorganized. Act II is dominated by one scene of narration after another, the different acts of storytelling embedded at different levels. It takes place ten years after the end of the previous act, in La Casa di Maschere, a dance establishment which is "a rendezvous for the gallant world of Venice on an island in the gulf." Grete, now called "Greta," is its main attraction, the favourite of all the male guests.

When she enters the scene she is at once the centre of attention, and receives numerous compliments on her beauty, but she is depressed. She begins to tell her story to

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66 See Adorno, "Fantasia sopra Carmen," chapter in Quasi una Fantasia, especially 55-61.
all those around her, beginning with the night when she fell asleep in the woods, musing that her life since then has been like "a wild dream... within a dream," as though she never truly awoke from her slumber. She recalls not only the night when she ran away from home in search of Fritz and became lost in the forest, but also the enchanting music of that scene, the "trees rustling a wonderful song." Then she was asleep and dreaming; now she describes it as a dream within a dream. As she recounts the trauma of past events, her Waldzauber music recurs like a sound-symptom, part of the unconscious realm of dreams. Even after so many years, she is haunted by it. Now she feels herself trapped within the round of her loose life, laughing and dancing with the others while holding back her true feelings and her love for Fritz. The social world of the Casa and the inner world of the dream remain in conflict, a conflict that materializes in the clashes between the music of Grete's dream and the noisy, banal dance music of the scene's onstage gypsy band.

Greta's onstage audience is dismayed at her bad mood, so she represses her dream-trauma again and attempts to lighten the atmosphere by suggesting a game. She offers herself as a prize to the gallant who tells the best story. The Graf, a character who is particularly enamoured of Greta, is the first contestant. After a formal exhortation to everyone to listen, he sings a ballad. Schreker entitled it "Die glühende Krone. Eine Ballade," in the score, as though to make a point of separating it as an imbedded set piece from a different genre. The narrative resonates in several ways with that of the opera in which it is embedded. The subject of the tale is a king with a cursed crown that burns his forehead whenever he tries to love another. After years of suffering alone for the sake of his duty to his throne, the king feels a great love in his heart. He seizes the cruelly glowing crown and flings it into the sea. From the waves come the muffled strains of music (tellingly, poly-triadic chords and arpeggios in harp and celesta); a pale woman "with a mad look" rises, reaches for him, and pulls him under with her. This woman, who appears on the ocean surface like the Fata Morgana invoked by Adorno, is both the literal visual and musical manifestation of the phantasmagoria. The ballad, in traditional form, has a refrain
structure featuring regularly repeating musical and textual refrains. Furthermore, its story has some notable parallels with the opera’s narrative: Fritz’s duty to his artistic ambition has drawn him away from his love; his distant sound, like the music from the waves, brings him eventual ruin rather than success. “Der glühende Krone” thus fits the paradigm of the nineteenth-century reflexive narrative ballad, which was a prominent feature of much nineteenth-century German opera. Its mirroring on a small scale the overall operatic plot is characteristic, as is its supernatural subject matter. Even the Graf’s opening exhortation, “So hört,” fits the nineteenth-century convention of a reflexive narrative ballad embedded within an opera.68

But how does it fit into Schreker’s opera? It is so consciously employed in its archaic form within its modern setting, that it seems it can only be a conscious parody of the nineteenth-century tradition. Its subject matter is also a further echo of the Märchen genre, hinted at in the closing scenes of Act I. Finally, the ballad contest is an obvious parallel to the song-contests central to both Wagner’s Tannhäuser and Die Meistersinger, except that the contest takes place within the obscene realm of the Venusberg/Casa di Maschere, and the maiden who is the object of Schreker’s contest is not quite a chaste Elizabeth nor a pure Eva (though perhaps she is more like a Venus). This short song embedded within Der ferne Klang suddenly appears remarkably problematic and laden with significance when read from a narrative point of view. While it is manifestly a nineteenth-century gesture, it is also clearly a uniquely modern one, in the very self-conscious nature of its employment, in its montage-like relationship with the music that surrounds it, and in the complex, contradictory web of relations it sets up between itself and the rest of the opera.

The story-telling contest should also be understood as a narrative echo of the skittles game of Act I. As will be recalled, that game took place offstage, partially heard as

fragmentary interruptions from another space. It only came into focus in the form of Doctor Vigelius's narrative of it. Here, the act of narration itself becomes the game. Once again, Grete becomes a commodity, a prize to be played for and won, but this time, she sets herself up as the object of exchange. The dramatic gesture as a whole is doubly reflexive: the narrated game becomes a game of narration; the prize who once resisted her fate in the name of true love now willingly offers herself in a mockery of love.

The scene prompts a Freudian reading. In recounting the tale of her past, Greta's behaviour mimics that of an analysis patient on the couch. In his psychoanalytic practice, Freud also observed in many of his patients the tendency to repeat the events of their past traumas, both in dreams and symbolic reenactments, rather than merely remembering them as part of the psychoanalytic process. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, he speculated that the process of repetition as working-through might be viewed as an attempt at retroactive mastery of the past traumatic situation. The compulsion to repeat is seen as the work of the unconscious repressed. Thus, Greta's unconscious is at work during her recall of the Waldzauber music, and her reenactment of the trauma of paternal betrayal in the song contest. Yet the irony of the scenario points up the remarkable psychological change wrought in her character in the intervening years, and suggests her self-consciousness. Not only is the fallen woman of the Casa di Maschere the victim of the events of her past: she is fully aware of her situation and its ironic aspect, and enacts that irony to both her onstage audience and to the audience in the opera house.

A Chevalier steps up to challenge the Graf's story with another tale, one deliberately contrasted with the sad tone of the preceding ballad. "Das Blumenmädchen von Sorrent" is a racy story of a not-so-innocent flower maiden who gives her favours to men who buy her blooms. The more they purchase, the more she gives in return. Unfortunately for the narrator, the flower maiden also happens to be his wife. This song too has a refrain structure, the recurring chorus supplied by the onstage audience members, who eagerly

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participate in high spirits. It also has an element of reflexivity, in that the behaviour of the flower maiden has parallels with that of the dancing girls in the Casa di Maschere, and particularly with Greta, who has offered herself as a prize to the winner of the contest of which the song is a part. In fact, the name of “La Casa di Maschere” makes an appearance in the last line of the song. Further, the motive of the seductive flower maiden is another Wagnerian reminiscence, linking Act II of Der ferne Klang this time with the magic garden realm in Act II of Parsifal.

Not surprisingly, the crowd enjoys this spirited tale more than the depressing one offered by the Graf. The Chevalier is declared the winner, and the Graf, angry, demands to know why Greta treats his offers of love so scornfully. As the rest of the crowd draws away, the Graf makes her an offer of marriage, an escape from her life of ennui in the Casa di Maschere. In refusing, Greta again embarks on a narration of her history, this time telling the Graf of the memory of her former love, to which she clings amid the emptiness of her life. She thus repeats in a modified form the narration of her past, which she first cited to the crowd upon her entry. Insisting that it is too late for her to escape, and that she has relinquished hope and love, she turns to leave.

Meanwhile, members of the crowd have been excitedly watching the approach of a ship to the island in the midst of a storm. When it finally lands, Fritz emerges. The onlookers exclaim over his pale appearance, and compare him playfully (yet tellingly) with the pale king of the Graf’s ballad, now emerging from the sea. Fritz himself enters the Casa, and after a moment spies Grete. It takes her a while to recognize him, but once she does, she eagerly demands that he tell her where he has been for so many years, and what has happened to him. Fritz proceeds to narrate to her the fruitlessness of his quest for the “distant sound,” and of his failure to find her upon his eventual return to their hometown. While searching for her, the sudden return of the Klangvision drew him into the dance establishment: “I hear it again, the blessed sound! I hear it again, the sound of the harps.” Overjoyed at having unexpectedly found her again, he does not make the connection
between his rediscovery of her and the return of the *Klang*. Somehow Fritz is unaware of the nature of the situation he has entered, and does not realize that his Grete has become "Greta." Nor does he know that his arrival has interrupted a storytelling contest to win Greta's favours. Yet the act of telling the audience the tale of his fruitless search over the past several years ironically places him in the arena of competition for Greta, through his act of narration. When he discovers the prize he has unwittingly won, and who she has become, he recoils from her in disgust. "Can he really be so naïve?" questions one of the dancing girls in disbelief. Indeed, he can. Clinging to his idealism, he leaves the *Casa di Maschere*, abandoning Grete to her fate once more, as he did in Act I. He fails to make the connection between her presence and the return of the *Klang* which drew him to the *Casa* in the first place. This instance is one example of a classical dialectic dimension at work in Schreker's drama. As Dahlhaus explains, "[t]he conflict in which Fritz finds himself involved in the second Act is . . . borrowed from the repertoire of traditional dramaturgy . . . Fritz turns his back on Grete because she has become what he has – unintentionally – made her."70 Fritz leaves, and Greta commands that the onstage gypsy band play, filling the "painful silence" of the stage directions with worldly dance music, the greatest possible contrast to *ferne Klang* and *Waldzauber*. Her attempt to master the situation takes the form of sound. The scene closes clangorously.

Act II's noisy conclusion is one of many moments in the opera that pit one type of sound against another. Different sounds and musics are layered throughout, and often interrupt and conflict with each other. Schreker's musico-dramatic structure repeatedly embeds not only reflexive narrative layers, but also musical ones, whose interaction takes on symbolic significance for the drama as a whole. Some of Schreker's sounds are worldly – music, like that in the *Casa di maschere*, or everyday noises; some of them are otherworldly phantasmagoria. In the Act I *Klangvision* passage described above, Fritz's description to

70 Dahlhaus, "Schreker and Modernism," 197. This interpretation is one-sided; it may be accurate for Fritz, but suggests a total lack of agency for Grete, as though she had no other choice.
Grete of the sound-fantasy that calls him away from her is repeated verbatim a few moments later (reh. 20), as Grete joins him in the evocation of the sound, a repetition that gives a sort of refrain structure to this portion of the scene. This moment presents an interpretive problem, giving rise again to speculation on the nature of the *Klang*. Is Grete merely repeating what she heard Fritz sing earlier, or is she joining him in describing a phenomenon that she too can hear? It seems that they both have an ear for distant, otherworldly music. But Fritz and Grete’s joint reverie is interrupted by other sounds, noises from the neighbouring pub, where Grete’s father is drinking and gambling with their landlord. Fritz departs, drawn by the distant sound, driven away by the nearer one.

When Grete is faced with the intolerable prospect of marriage to the landlord, she decides to run away, and finds herself lost in the forest at night. In despair over her situation, alone and abandoned by Fritz who she has been unable to find, she contemplates suicide in a nearby lake. Her expression of fear at the cold darkness of the water, accompanied by rippling arpeggiated figures in the harp, gives way to a suicidal fantasy in which she imagines being cradled to sleep by the waves, and awaking in paradise. However, when a moonrise transfigures the landscape, she finds her mood transformed as she contemplates the natural beauty around her (see Example 2.6). This is the *Waldzauber* scene, and the point of the dubious stage directions quoted by Adorno, as mentioned above. Adorno’s suggestion that Schreker’s music is “only too well suited” for such a dramatic situation is borne out by the compelling quality of the mimetic musical effects employed in the passage. Rocking motions of the syncopated tonic-dominant pedal in the cello suggest the watery cradle Grete imagines, and a modulatory shift upward from C-sharp to E major accomplishes the transforming effect of the moonrise. The continuing rippling harp arpeggios, as well as the barcarolle-like rhythm of the passage, evoke the

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71 As well, the act of the two characters singing in unison may be variously interpreted. At first it may seem to indicate total understanding and sympathetic communion between them, thus participating in a nineteenth-century convention for operatic duets. Perhaps Grete is momentarily swept away by her lover’s idealism. But in light of her previous resistance to Fritz’s quest, it may also be read more pessimistically (from a feminist viewpoint), as Grete’s capitulation to bourgeois convention, in accepting the superiority of male ambition to her own feminine needs and desires.
Example 2.6: Der ferne Klang, Act I, scene 7 (reh. no. 78) – Waldzauber music
motion of the water, while touches of the triangle and celesta provide the otherworldly atmosphere suggested both by Grete's dream of paradise and by the "magical" transformation of the landscape by moonlight. As Grete, emotionally exhausted, lies down on the ground and falls asleep, "the forest" – according to the stage directions – "sings a lullaby" [Der Wald singt ein Schlummerlied]. Like a phantasmagoria, nature and magic come together again in the realm of sound.

But, like the Klangvision, this otherworldly music is also interrupted by a more present sound, with the entry of a mysterious old woman, who turns out to be the procuress of the Casa di maschere. The ensuing scenario is odd enough that it appears somewhat unreal, though it actually serves as a transition from the magical forest scene to a reality even harsher than the one Grete has escaped. Standing near the sleeping Grete, the old woman sings a story in the present tense that describes the details of the very scene we are witnessing, the girl's lonely and friendless situation, and the danger she faces alone in the woods at night. Stranger still, the woman includes herself in her third-person narration: "along comes a good, old, dear woman/ who will take the girl with her to a splendid house." Her song, sung in a stiffly regular rhythm like a schoolchild reciting a rhyme, takes on the tone of a fairy tale, with herself and Grete as stock characters. This fairy-tale quality suggests that the figure of the old woman plays a symbolic role in the drama. The sudden intrusion of the world of Märchen into the context of Schreker's modern, worldly drama is curious. Interestingly, Grete herself introduced the term in the preceding moments of the Waldzauber scene, when she described the beautiful moonlit landscape as "ein Märchen!" The gesture perhaps makes reference to the genre of the Märchenoper which rose to popularity in the preceding decades of post-Wagnerian opera composition; certainly it points to an unusual and seemingly contradictory mix of generic elements in Schreker's work, a mixture of dramatic styles which is itself modern. But it is the sound of the old woman's voice that gradually rouses the sleeping Grete, who is at first too tired and

72 See Dahlhaus, 194.
discouraged to move, but eventually is charmed by the promise of the “splendid house” to which the woman promises to take her. The two depart together as Act I closes, Grete singing of how happy she expects to be in her new life. If the fairy tale tone of this scene is strange in its context, it also serves as another invocation of the theme of fantasy-like removal from the everyday world, like the *Klang* and the *Waldzauber*, which are counterposed to worldly sounds around them.

Another striking sound-juxtaposition occurs in Act III, which takes place first outside a theatre in a large city, and then in Fritz’s composition studio. The Act opens on the scene of Doctor Vigelius and the actor from Act I, who are drinking in a sidewalk café before the theatre. Their conversation turns to a recollection of the long-ago skittles game at the pub, and the sad fate of the poor gambler’s daughter, a rehearsal that suggests a sort of symmetry between Acts I and III. Shortly thereafter Grete herself enters, assisted by a policeman; she was attending the performance inside the theatre and became unwell. Vigelius comes to her assistance and recognizes her.

Meanwhile, choristers and guests passing in and out between the café and the theatre are discussing the progress of the performance inside. Its title is “Die Härfe;” it is actually Fritz’s opera, and bits of it can be heard from offstage. Initially it goes well, and a great success is predicted, but during the third Act the audience reaction turns sour. By its conclusion, the opera is denounced as a scandal and a failure. This is yet another explicitly reflexive element in Schreker’s opera, the most striking so far. In fact, in an earlier draft of the work, Schreker had considered titling his own opera *Die Härfe*.73 Those strains from the embedded opera performance which drift through and mingle with the onstage music are familiar: clearly Fritz’s opera is actually *Der ferne Klang* itself. And yet, in its incarnation as an opera-within-an-opera, it fails badly during its third Act – the same Act of the larger opera in which it is embedded. The actor sneers at the very title of the work: “Is that a title? ‘The Harp!’ Ridiculous!” His words convey the sense of a sharp, ironic distance.

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73 See Franklin, 148.
The gesture as a whole is not subtle. Yet this makes it all the more striking, that Schreker should not only boldly stage the general image of the failure of an opera-composer, but could also imagine therein the failure of his own work, and set this fearful idea before his public. A clear example of sublimation on the part of the composing subject, this gesture also emphasizes that the work is a commodity, and reveals it as a flawed product of labour by a fallible human subject.

Grete hears from the surrounding café guests that “Die Härfe” has failed, but also that its composer is gravely ill. She becomes extremely agitated, insisting that she must go to him. Reminded of her repeated trauma of abandonment, the musical symptom recurs. Suddenly she hears again her distant sound — “Oh, the wild music!” — and declares her desire to finally find rest in death at Fritz’s side. The meaning of the sound has been transformed, from that of desirable ideal to a motive of death. In its pessimism, its shift toward negativity, this motive has an almost Adornian echo of negation. Grete, distraught and ruined, now explicitly links the sound with her own demise. Vigelius, moved by remorse for his actions so many years ago, promises to take her to Fritz.

The composer, considerably aged, pale and suffering, reflects on his past folly: his search for what he was unable to find, which drove him to abandon Grete. His friend Rudolph enters to discuss the previous day’s failure of “Die Härfe;” the producer wants a revision of the third Act. Despite Rudolph’s encouragement that the drama bears within itself the potential to be a great work, Fritz refuses to revise it, feeling his lack of strength. He knows it is too late to make changes, in his work or in his life. As Dahlhaus observes:

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\ldots \text{his resigned ‘Doch nun ist’s freilich zu spät’ in the penultimate scene is unmistakably a motive from Ibsen: that the passing of time as such, and not what happens in the course of it, gives rise to a tragic situation which would not be totally explicable on the basis of the events alone is an idea that Schreker took over from the modernist, non-classical dramaturgy of the late nineteenth century.}\]

74 Dahlhaus, 199.
Fritz wants instead to learn more about the woman he heard of, who became ill during the performance. Rudolph has discovered that she is merely a whore, a fallen woman. Fritz is sure it is Grete, and sends Rudolph to find her. He then falls into a strange reverie, the seemingly hallucinatory state described above, in which he hears once more his Klangvision, ever more clearly. Doctor Vigelius comes in and interrupts Fritz’s sound-reverie, telling him the story of the woman who is waiting outside to see him. Although the opera audience has already seen the events of Grete’s life unfolding onstage, these events are now retold, the act of narration being foregrounded once more. At first, Fritz hardly listens, and continues to exclaim over the Klang, which is still ringing in his ears. But when Vigelius reaches the part about the woman’s previous residence in a dance-house on an island in the Gulf of Venice, he catches Fritz’s attention. Finally, Grete herself enters.

The final scene wherein the lovers are reunited is predictable in some sense. Though the two begin with declarations of devotion, Fritz’s attention soon turns back to the overwhelming presence of the Klang. Here the sound, the symptom of illness and delirium, is again linked with death. It is also linked, for the third time, with Fritz’s proximity to Grete. Desire is the intersection between his misconceived relationship to her and his unconscious fantasy of artistic inspiration. This time he does not turn away from her, or from the Klang. In an ecstatic state, he declares to Rudolph his renewed intention to revise the third Act of his opera, now that his inspiration has returned, but a moment later he dies. The dramatic reversal in the final moments of the opera is this: although it is Grete who expresses a longing for death – the ending is almost like a Liebestod – it is Fritz who dies, and just when he declares his resolution to continue, having finally found (he believes) the “distant sound” for which he searched all his life. Grete is the one left with the music of the Klang, her would-be lover dead in her arms. A seemingly Wagnerian moment of transcendence in music and in death – recall the unheard music at the end of Tristan – is somehow thwarted by the exchange that cheats both characters of their sought-after
goals.75 Music has the final word, so to speak, but not the music of the Klang. The curtain falls to the same fortissimo e-flat-minor cadence that ended the second Act of Die Härfe (at the opening bar of Act III, scene 2). The solid tonic triad, for once an “unmixed” sonority, is, ironically, utterly inconclusive. There is no revision of Fritz’s failed third Act; and no closure to Schreker’s third and final Act, which ends with a gesture of narrative embedding that throws it backward into the midst of the staging of its own failure. This ending has an almost Adornian pessimism about it: the sought-after utopia proves unattainable.

This reading of the dramatic events of Der ferne Klang, highlighting discontinuities and juxtaposed narratives, musics, and symbols, is consistent with Dahlhaus’s interpretation of the dramaturgy of Schreker’s opera, wherein the authentic mark of modernism resides in part in its divergent and at times contradictory “non-classical” dramatic tendencies. Beyond the general level of dramatic genre and structure, however, Schreker’s opera contains blatant gestures that point directly toward his struggle to grapple with the modernist crisis of his art. These moments exhibit a modernist self-awareness, but are also the indices of a critical dialectic dimension arising from the conflicting interplay between text and musical structure. Most notably, Schreker went so far as to stage the failure of his own opera within the opera itself, and then to musically recapitulate that failure for his own work. It is hard to imagine how the significance of such a gesture could have been lost on a critic so perceptive as Adorno usually was. In speculating on the reasons for this curious aporia, Adorno’s objections to the music again come to the fore. Perhaps in this case, despite his usual gift for penetrating observation, he was unable after all to see – or to hear – past the overwhelmingly sensual surface of Schreker’s music, the seemingly impressionistic features of which he was so harshly critical. As Hailey points out:

Impressionism . . . was a movement little understood in Germany and it met with a good deal of critical resistance born partly of chauvinism, but more importantly, of aesthetic aversion. At the heart of this antipathy was a deep-

75 On the resonances of the conclusion of Der ferne Klang with both Wagner’s Der fliegende Holländer and Tristan und Isolde, see Dahlhaus, 199-200.
seated distrust of the sensual, hedonistic roots of the style so at odds with Germany's own more austere and cerebral musical traditions.\textsuperscript{76}

Adorno claimed that his response to his first encounter with Schreker's music was one of disappointment. Perhaps he also experienced (as did so many other audience members) a uniquely visceral response to the sensuality of the music, against which his intellect later rebelled. The peculiarly physical dimension of sound, which Schreker's effects depended upon, may have been in the end an element which Adorno could not get past, though he would not have been the only critic to be "moved against [his] will" by the force of the Schrekerian sound.\textsuperscript{77}

Yet Dahlhaus asserted that "the music of Der ferne Klang raises a protest, so to speak, against the dramaturgy of the bourgeois tragedy and its moral implications. It is the expression of an interior action which virtually contradicts the exterior one."\textsuperscript{78} His statement suggests that a dialectic is indeed present in Schreker's work, but shifted, as it were, from the locus of the music, to the horizon where the music and drama connect and interact. The present reading of the musico-dramatic structure proposes an alternative interpretation to Adorno's, in an effort to critically reimagine and find new significance within the realm of the phantasmagorical and the unsublimated to which his criticism consigned it. More specifically, this re-reading attempts to highlight certain narrative details of the text ignored by Adorno, perhaps because he found the text marred overall by the presence of dramatic clichés and maudlin gestures. Yet several of the critical textual features described above, through their dramatic interaction with the music, suggest a different understanding of the musical features Adorno criticized. Ultimately, a dialectical dimension is revealed within the musico-dramatic structure that Adorno found missing from the music itself. Circumventing the central Adornian critique by privileging – as

\textsuperscript{76} Hailey, \textit{Franz Schreker, 1878-1934}, 41.

\textsuperscript{77} See the review of \textit{Der ferne Klang} by Alexander Berrsche in \textit{Die Musik} 13/13 (April 1914), 50, cited at length in Hailey, 52-53.

\textsuperscript{78} Dahlhaus, "Schreker and Modernism," 198.
Bekker's technical-analytical method did— a different logic of composition that Adorno failed to understand, is insufficient. The task is rather to confront the crux of Adorno's criticism head-on: the focus on the Schrekerian sound. In *Der férne Klang*, sound itself becomes the locus of interaction between art in crisis and the modern world. It is foregrounded over and over again, in various forms, to point up that very disjunction between the artist's individuality and the rational-technical world from which he is alienated, and which yet impinges on his autonomy and threatens his subjective identity.

There are multiple instances in which a musical gesture that seems regressive or phantasmagorical on first hearing, sounds much more authentically critical after the significance of its dramatic context is examined. One such example is the *Klang* itself, a seemingly beautiful, sensuous sound that, through its harmonic instability, as well as the elusive— indeed ungraspable— quality of its very existence, betrays the insecurity of the dramatic concept of subjective identity which it is intended to convey. Yet there is more than one 'distant sound' in the opera, and this is a crucial point. The many sounds which may be thus described, seem to fall into two categories: the first, magical, otherworldly and transcendent, as opposed to the second, the naturalistic, worldly, and intrusive. The latter type of sound frequently breaks through rudely and disrupts— or even shatters— the illusionary mood of the former. This effect is present from the opening scene of the opera, when we first hear the *Klang*. Recall the description of the scene from above: as Fritz and Grete sing together of the sound, and as it resonates in the orchestra and all around them, their enraptured moment is interrupted by 'distant sounds' that filter in from the pub next door. Loud noises of drunken gambling provide a sharply contrasted worldly counterpoint to the mysterious, otherworldly *Klang*. Fritz departs hurriedly: he would rather chase the dream than face sordid reality; it is as though he senses that the former cannot exist in the presence of the latter. Years later, though he claims it is the sudden return of the "distant sound" which draws him into the *Casa di Maschere*, he is quickly driven out again by the worldly reality he finds therein, which fills him with disgust. Again, in Act III, Fritz's art is
forced into competition with the tumult of the real world. Bits of sound from the ill-fated performance of his opera drift through the noise of the café crowd outside. It is the crowd's unsympathetic critical murmur that wins the day, and the work of art that fails. In these scenes, Schreker is dramatizing issues that had grown in importance throughout the nineteenth century and that preoccupied musical modernism well into the middle of the twentieth century and beyond: the question of musical/artistic autonomy, and the modernist idea of a purity of sound. All the artist's subjective insecurity comes to the fore as, in a pessimistic vein that resonates with Adorno's own philosophy, the composer postulates the failure of art's autonomy, its downfall in the face of the onslaught of the rational-technical world of modern administered society. Schreker's Klang manifests the condition of Adorno's message in a bottle [Flaschenpost], the cry of despair from the shipwrecked, the alienated gesture par excellence.79

Another, somewhat different gesture of worldly intrusion into the otherworldly moment occurs near the end of Act I, when Grete escapes from home through the forest, hoping to find Fritz (see Example 2.7). The passage is built on the "Wanderer" motive of Fritz's quest (Example 2.5 above); its consequent phrase, repeated in solo horn, English horn, oboe, and clarinet, is gradually rhythmically augmented while the dynamic diminishes, as though it is moving further away, sounding across a longer distance. The motivic fragment's repeatedly inconclusive ending on the third scale degree of d minor, rather than the tonic, has the effect of leaving the sound hanging, as it were, and suggests the dramatic uncertainty of the outcome of both Fritz and Grete's searches. But the scene is also signaled by another sound, the "distant sound" of a train-whistle heard over the orchestra. In his 1912 review of Der ferne Klang, the critic Richard Specht referred to the sound of the train as a "symbol of awakening," situating the nighttime forest scene in the context of "reality, in the brutality and mercilessness of life."80

79 See Adorno, Philosophy of Modern Music, 133; and see also my discussion of this point in chapter 1.

Example 2.7: *Der ferne Klang*, Act I, scenes 6-7 (1 mm. before reh. no. 71) – train whistle
both symbolic and real – in fact, it seems likely to be the train on which Fritz is leaving. As
the motive of the quest fades into the night, to give way to the magical nocturnal music of
the forest, the sudden train-whistle marks an intrusion of modern technology into nature,
and into the fantasy-realm of the sought-after dream.

Adorno made no direct comment on this particular dramatic phenomenon but it may
be interpreted in various ways. At first, it may seem like yet another instance of
phantasmagoria, in the sense of the use of technological illusion for dramatic effect. Yet,
sharply juxtaposed with the fantasy-character of Fritz’s Klang-quest (and Grete’s hopeful
attempt to follow him), the gesture of the train-whistle takes on a contradictory, even a
negating, effect. While compositional and orchestration techniques give the
phantasmagorical effect of the fantasy fading into the night, becoming an ever-more-
distant sound, the shrill train-whistle snaps the scene back into a harsher, more realistic
focus. It is a moment of music-dramatic self-criticism on Schreker’s part. Recognizing the
impossibility for nineteenth-century dreams of musical transcendence within a modern
context, he brings in an intrusive musical sign that shatters the dream: a sonic embodiment
of the dominating and alienating effect of modern technology. One phantasmagorical
gesture cancels another.

This phantasmagoria leads to another: the music of the Waldzauber scene, the “magic
of the forest by night,” which gently gives way to the Schlummerlied, as “the forest sings a
lullaby” to the sleeping Grete. Yet even the phantasmagorical nature of the Waldzauber
music itself may be questioned. Dahlhaus discusses this portion of the drama, in which the
“abrupt change” in Grete’s character between Acts I and II seems at first like a dramatic
flaw, but is in fact “typical of the modernist, non-classical dramaturgy which Schreker made
his own in Der ferne Klang.” He refers to the Waldzauber as representative of “a mythical
power similar to that portrayed in Maeterlinck’s dramas, where it holds sway over people’s
lives in an unfathomable and absurd manner.”

81 It is therefore a locus of modern music-

81 Dahlhaus, 196.
dramatic transformation, through which Grete falls asleep an innocent maiden, and awakes a fallen woman. Once again, the Wagnerian resonance is immediate. Grete's magic sleep in the forest echoes Brünnhilde's sleep in the ring of magic fire, which transformed her from immortal to mortal. The Waldzauber music, then, parallels the Feuerzauber music, which Adorno also criticized as phantasmagorical:

While the manner of its production is completely concealed in its string section, harmonically, its progression is most ingeniously that of a state of rest. Not only do the constant harmonic changes produce no new progression; at the same time systematic modulation through the changing surfaces of different keys makes the music dance around the basic harmonies which remain constant at any given moment, like a fire that perpetually flickers without ever moving from the spot.\textsuperscript{82}

Schreker's Waldzauber music and the succeeding Schlummerlied rework both the harmonic stasis and the “flickering” texture described above, in the form of long pedal points and fleeting harp arpeggios. If read as deliberately reenacting a Wagnerian past, it can no longer be considered atemporal, like the Wagnerian phantasmagoria, for in this reference Schreker's music acknowledges its historical mediatedness, rather than denying it through a pretense to immediacy, as the phantasmagoria does. The whole gesture becomes uniquely self-aware.

Like the skittles game as described by Dahlhaus, the train sound which breaks the spell is an element of naturalism which takes on a symbolic aspect. What about the opera's other distant sound, the Klang with which the present discussion of the opera began? It is obviously symbolic: is there ever a moment when it might be real as well? In other words, is the sound ever actually heard \textit{as sound} by any of the characters onstage, or does it remain an imaginary construct, which points beyond itself? The only certain moment when the Klang music is real occurs in the opening scene of Act III, during the performance of Die Härfe. Brief strains that occasionally drift out of the theatre and into the street café are unmistakably distant echoes of the Klang vision passage from Act I. In its new context it is

\textsuperscript{82} Adorno, \textit{In Search of Wagner}, 89.
fragmented, and more distant than ever; and its futility is most clearly conveyed at the same moment when its existence, through its framing, seems most concrete. This irony is intensified by the critical realization that Fritz's opera, produced after fifteen years of searching for inspiration, sounds exactly like his musical ideal at the beginning of his quest. Having traveled far, he has gone nowhere, and the intervening years are virtually eclipsed by his failure. The music's "immediate, unconfined promise of sensual pleasure," which Adorno condemned, is never fulfilled.
Zemlinsky: Composing the Self

An originality which is on a par with the achievement of the age, but does not spring from a knowledge of that which is essential to it, does not count.

After the title, more than three full pages of Adorno’s brief 1959 essay on Alexander Zemlinsky pass before the composer’s name is finally mentioned. The essay’s opening paragraphs are devoted to a seemingly abstract discussion of the concept of eclecticism in art. The eclectic, Adorno asserts, is, in a sense, like its supposed opposite, the mannered. Both represent a lack of balance. Whereas mannerism focuses exclusively on a single feature, to the exclusion of wholeness, eclecticism takes in everything around it, without developing a truly individual style. The ideal of balanced wholeness, which both eclecticism and mannerism shun, is based on an ideal model of the personality, which is supposed to expand “in a natural, organic fashion into a comprehensive totality,” and at the same time be utterly autonomous, “like a windowless monad.” A model, in other words, of a completely unified modern subject. “But it never really works out like that,” states Adorno flatly; for – as the present study has taken as a premise from the outset – no subject is so internally whole and so completely independent of all resources outside itself. “The artist’s productivity never forms the perfect fit with his individual subjectivity that is required by the concept of genius,” he explains. “Even his most individual qualities are secretly the products of a collectivity and, by the same token, his idiosyncrasies exhibit the marks of the collective, of the historical context.” Adorno here takes an ironic stab at the cult of genius which assumes that, if individual wholeness has become a historical impossibility, the great artist should still be able to achieve a synthesis in the work of art. (The coinciding compositional model here is, in fact, that of the heroic-period Beethoven; but it was undone by Beethoven himself in the works of his late period, as Adorno’s

1 Adorno, “Zemlinsky,” in Quasi una Fantasia, 115.
2 Ibid., 111.
3 Ibid.
Beethoven criticism shows.) In short, the ideology of the artistic genius, upon which the traditional criticism of eclecticism is based, is flawed, as is the outdated aesthetic which still clings to it, designating mannerism and eclecticism as indices of individual failure. Even composers as important as Webern and Debussy were once accused of mannerism, he notes, but “what is mannerism and what is style can only be established conclusively after the fact.”

Equally problematic for Adorno is the notion of eclecticism as an attempt to organize and unify various dimensions of divergent musical styles. This approximates the type of attack leveled at Mahler, for the seeming naïve and crude juxtapositions of varied and sometimes wildly contrasting “topical” references, specifically the use of the everyday, the banal, the familiar. But Adorno is quick to assert that Mahler's originality comes precisely from his unconventional foregrounding of the eclectic elements through their non-harmonious presentation. Adorno moves on to an explanation of the roots of the (particularly German) cultural dislike of eclecticism. The eclectic supposedly embraces the values of civilization – what is more ‘civilized,’ for example, than that despised category of Kapellmeistermusik? – over those of nature. It also breaches the taboo on similarity. “The composer who does not avoid resemblances like the plague does more than violate the cult of property,” says Adorno, with more than a hint of sarcasm; “[h]e also confesses that he has too great a liking for music – that is to say, the music of other composers.” Like the model of personality described above, the modern work of art is supposed to be autonomous; it must above all display originality, the mark of the artist’s individual creativity, the value of ‘newness,’ and the conviction that it stands for itself, exists for its own sake. For Adorno, however, the claim to absolute autonomy is as problematic for the work of art as for the individual subject, for both are always products of society, history, culture. “ Particularly in the modern age,” he suggests, “when every work, independently of

4 Ibid., 112.
5 Ibid., 114.
its author, simply by virtue of its complexion, aims to be wholly itself and not painted from any model, eclecticism contradicts and gives the lie to its own claim to objectivity.\(^6\)

The phrase "not painted from any model" signals that the eclectic is in fact subsumed under the larger category of mimesis. This becomes clearer in the following passage, which draws on Walter Benjamin's reflections in essays such as "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction:"

Since in reality everything stands under the spell of equality, of absolute interchangeability, everything in art must appear to be absolutely individual. That archaic taboo on mimesis, the dislike of resemblances with which man has been inoculated for millennia, becomes fused with the prohibition on betraying the secret that works of art are interchangeable.\(^7\)

The implication here is that eclecticism is subject to the same accusation as the mimetic, which has often been maligned in modern and postmodern aesthetics and cultural criticism as naïvely representational.\(^8\) It devolves to imitation, the weakness of mere repetition, the falsity of the copy. Further, if the double must never be mistaken for the original, it is likewise dangerous to trust its apparently self-opposing insinuation of the primacy and self-sufficiency of that original. But as Martin Jay explains, the category of mimesis is a positive invocation in Adorno's critical theory. His conception of mimesis, though, implies a distinction from what is generally taken as its synonym, "imitation." He remained distrustful of naturalist and realist qualities of referentialism, aware of the potential for imitation to become a harmful instrument of mimicry and mockery. In contrast, the positive power of mimesis lies at bottom in its contrast to conceptual thinking. Rather than taking a dominating stance toward the object by naming it with the abstract concept, which "reduces [its] uniqueness" to an example of a general category, the

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\(^6\) Ibid., 113.

\(^7\) Ibid, 114.

mimetic subject takes a nonviolent approach of "assimilating" itself to the object. Mimesis thus opposes itself to instrumental rationality, and as such it becomes a crucial category in Adorno's (and Horkheimer's) criticism of the dominating forms of enlightenment. In art, mimesis is the mode of expression: not merely of the psychology of the individual artist, but the expression of human suffering, past and present, in the form of its resistance to the repressive forces of civilization. It takes on a utopian quality in its effort to reassimilate humanity with nature, to envision an ideal past. As critics have noted, Adorno's valorization of mimesis has even left its mark on his own critical enterprise in the forms of his prose itself. Jay refers to what Fredric Jameson has termed "narrative" moments in Adorno's writing: simply put, 'miming' the temporal processes of narrative becomes a way of opposing the spatial atemporality of rationalist conceptual thinking. Max Paddison has similarly observed the way "[Adorno's] writing about music mimetically traces the cracks and fissures of the modernist work of art."

What the idea of mimesis has in common with that of eclecticism is, clearly, the operation through resemblance, and the denial of autonomous separateness. Adorno's stress on the relational character of mimesis as a means of opposing conceptual rationality explains in part the value he is able to find in the assimilative behaviour of eclecticism. The eclectic work of art takes part in the positive quality of mimesis through its very similarities to and affinities with things outside itself, the way it makes itself up out of likenesses with its objects, and exhibits itself as a product of the influences around it. "In aesthetic mimesis in particular," explains Jay, "what is preserved – as well as transformed – is the sedimented 'material' of past artistic endeavors, which suggest a historical and natural 'other' worthy of assimilation."

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 126-7.
11 Paddison, 13.
12 Jay, 124.
which, in addition to its “contradiction” of “claim[s] to objectivity,” Adorno characterizes in terms of its “internalizing” tendency, its qualities as a product of collectivity and historical context.

Thus, by the time he is ready to broach the case of Zemlinsky, he has already carefully laid out a defense for the composer who, at the time of Adorno’s 1959 radio lecture, was all but forgotten. Perhaps surprisingly, Adorno does not seek to exonerate Zemlinsky of the charge of eclecticism so often leveled at him: quite the opposite. As though there were no possibility for such an argument, he states clearly, “Alexander Zemlinsky, who originates from the same spiritual ambience as Mahler, made more of the compromises characteristic of the eclectic than any other composer of rank of his generation.” Rather, as the above paragraphs demonstrate, by problematizing the notion of the eclectic from the outset, he tries to make clear that the derogatory judgment of this very real feature of the composer’s style is a historical stigma rather than an individual failing. Put another way: Adorno attempts to purge the word “eclectic” of its pejorative connotations, so that he can investigate it as a positive aesthetic feature. Eclecticism becomes in Zemlinsky’s case, as in that of Mahler, an index of genuine expressivity.

It refers then, principally, to the ways in which Zemlinsky’s music resembles that of other composers. Some similarities of form and subject draw immediate attention: the *Lyrische Symphony*, in seven movements, with poetry by Tagore and soprano and baritone soloists, recalls the form and Asian subject of Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*; and *Eine florentinische Tragödie*, a one-act opera on a text by Oscar Wilde, “at once recalls [Strauss’s] *Salome*.” These comparisons may seem superficial, but Adorno realizes first how important it is to take a contextual view, to understand the multiplicity of interconnections between contemporary writers and artists. “It is to these links that we may well owe rather more of the collective authority of an individual achievement than may first be supposed,”

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14 Ibid.
he says. "Looked at from this point of view Zemlinsky was one of the most remarkable figures of his generation." The web of Zemlinsky's connections spans influences on his earliest development, namely those of Wagner and Brahms, to those among the younger generation who were influenced by him in turn, notably his prodigious pupil Korngold, but especially Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern. It also includes relationships with his contemporaries, such as Mahler and Schreker. Not least are influences from the works he conducted by other composers; Adorno makes particular mention of an interest in French music, citing Debussy and Dukas.

Clearly, the issue of Zemlinsky's eclecticism and its significance for his stylistic contribution to musical modernism is bound up as much with his historical situation as with his personality and his compositional technique. Adorno's essay draws all these factors together, describing the "impressionability" of Zemlinsky's sensitive musical imagination, which so readily absorbed the stylistic ideas and influences he encountered. "The presence of eclectic features in the texture of his works cannot be denied: they reflect the conductor's love for the masterpieces of his age, a love from which his sensibility is unable to draw back when he comes to compose." Yes, this statement does contain an undertone of apology, perhaps even a suggestion of a naïve quality in the composer's response to the musical influences he incorporated willingly into his own works. It is only the first hint in Adorno's essay that Zemlinsky's compositional achievement is a qualified one. Nevertheless, Adorno emphasizes the critical value of the music despite some of its shortcomings; even when "an intermittent paralysis prevents him from making what he borrowed fully his own... his eclecticism shows genius in its truly seismographic sensitivity to the stimuli by which he allowed himself to be overwhelmed." Through the presence of borrowed stylistic elements, cultural-historical material (in the Adornian sense of the term)

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15 Ibid., 115.

16 Ibid., 114.

17 Ibid., 115.
is sedimented in his music in the most concrete way: it bears the stamp of its status as a product of its society. Making no attempt at concealment for the sake of the notion of genius as individual and separate, it is palpably contingent. For Adorno, this is a mark of authenticity in Zemlinsky's oeuvre.

Even if he had wished to conduct a more exhaustive study of Zemlinsky, the composer and his music were so unknown at the time that it was extremely difficult for Adorno to even locate scores and basic biographical information. Instead he offers a sort of survey of some of the more salient features of the composer's musical legacy, as observed from selected works. Suggestions of the influences evident in Zemlinsky's style are presented side-by-side with assertions as to the influence he had on others. For "[t]he respect in which Zemlinsky was held by his Viennese friends was based on the fact that . . . conflicting currents had come together in his works in a way that created the most productive tension imaginable;" his music was authentic, in its preservation of the dialectical tension Adorno most prized in modernist art, and, for the same reason, it proved influential. Thus Adorno presents Zemlinsky as a figure whose oeuvre created a space which allowed for the modernist developments that followed him. A quality of simplicity, even asceticism, is highly praised, from the early works on. According to Adorno, "compositional understatement," rather than formal ambiguity and orchestral colouration, was the principal lesson he drew from Debussy, and this "art of omission" Adorno sees as leading to the aesthetics of Les Six. He also detects a strong influence on Alban Berg, particularly in the quality of Zemlinsky's intensely lyrical and expressive melodic utterance. It is no surprise to see Adorno's emphasis on this quality, given his prioritizing of melody as the carrier of musical subjectivity; and it is no stretch to assume that Berg in turn influenced Adorno's opinion of Zemlinsky, passing on the high degree of respect with which he was regarded by the Schoenberg circle.

\(^{18}\) See Adorno's complaint to this effect, ibid., 120.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 117.
The importance of the relation to Schoenberg himself is not downplayed in the welter of names Adorno's stylistic survey invokes. He finds evidence of a reciprocity of influence between the two composers who seemed ultimately to take such divergent paths. If Schoenberg's contrapuntal skills are seen as surpassing those of Zemlinsky, his erstwhile teacher – whose adherence to homophony was due in part, Adorno guesses, to a recognition of his own limitations – Zemlinsky's advanced harmonic language often matches that of the 'emancipator of the dissonance,' extending to characteristically altered chords and quartal harmonies. Zemlinsky's contribution to forging the path to new music, even though he ultimately did not follow it far, is Adorno's emphasis. He is prepared to "venture the cautious formulation that Zemlinsky and Schoenberg more or less simultaneously succeeded in combining Wagnerian chromaticism with the Brahmsian legacy of movement that proceeds harmonically, step by step, avoiding the crutch of the sequence."\(^{20}\) Alongside the stylistic comparisons which form the main part of the discussion, Adorno does not forget to point out some important differences: when Adorno invokes Wagner, the negative is not far away. Here, typically, Zemlinsky's adherence to the (Schoenbergian) ideal of developing variation is counterposed to the perceived Wagnerian weakness of non-developmental succession, the sequential "crutch." Later paragraphs allude indirectly to some marked differences from Schreker. Adorno praises Zemlinsky's tendency toward rhythmic flexibility and metric irregularity, his "readiness to interrupt . . . never pursuing a rhythmic impulse beyond the point where it naturally comes to rest: the antithesis of anything mechanical," and admires his "highly transparent" homophonic style, "which never lapsed into the banal or amorphous."\(^{21}\) These qualities contrast directly with Adorno's pointed criticisms of Schreker's "absence of thematic

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 118.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 119, 123.
clarity . . . and the frequently amorphous rhythms," through which, eventually, "[v]agueness becomes a formula."\(^{22}\)

Beside these implicit contrasts with Wagner and Schreker is the explicit opposition Adorno sees between Zemlinsky and Richard Strauss. Parallels are often drawn between these two composers. If comparison is initially invited by the fact that Zemlinsky, following Strauss's example in *Salome*, wrote two one-act operas based on Oscar Wilde, the stronger similarity lies in their harmonic language, their usage of post-Wagnerian chromaticism, taken at times to extremes, while remaining within the confines of tonal functioning. Though he acknowledges points of Zemlinsky's oeuvre which are similar to Strauss's— not only in the text-source and form of the above-mentioned *Florentine Tragedy*, but in other works also— Adorno makes it clear that Zemlinsky avoids those shortcomings of which his critique has (at times virulently) accused his more successful contemporary:

\[ \ldots \text{[I]t would be a grave mistake to compare him with Strauss, purely on the basis of the components [of his harmonic style]. 6/4 chords and unexpected harmonic intrusions are not enough to provide a definition of music.} \]

Zemlinsky stands at the opposite pole from Strauss, since in his work such moments are never conceived as effects, but are developed functionally from the harmonic progression.\(^{23}\)

This statement is of interest. In it Adorno continues to add to the various lines of influence and similarity which form a portrait sketch of Zemlinsky's eclectic individuality, demonstrating the skill with which he avoided the potential for heterogeneity to dissolve into incoherence. "On the whole, closer scrutiny compels us to modify our initial impression of Zemlinsky's eclecticism," he says, describing how the Schoenbergian quartal harmonies in one of Zemlinsky's Maeterlinck Lieder are not incongruous, but are made to blend in with the functional harmonic context of the rest of the song. This contrasts with Adorno's accusation that Strauss's use of "unexpected harmonic intrusions" is a means of

\(^{22}\) Adorno, "Schreker," 132, 141.

\(^{23}\) Adorno, "Zemlinsky," 122.
compensating, through "effect," for a lack of musical logic. An example is the notorious dissonance in the irregular C-sharp-major cadence at the end of Salome's final monologue (see Example 3.1, second harmony in bar, 1 m. before reh. no. 361), a dissonance whose "shock value" has given rise to an extraordinary number of extreme critical responses.\textsuperscript{24}

**Example 3.1:** Strauss, *Salome* final monologue, after the kiss (2 mm. before reh. no. 361)

This chord's vulgar aspect, arising chiefly from the bald cross-relation between the a-natural in the bass and the a-sharp in the treble, it appears as a prime instance of what Adorno saw as the use of "surprise effect" as technique, a cheap harmonic shock-effect. "Strauss's irrationalities," he says elsewhere, "are technically designed means for bringing about the calculated total effect. . . . [His] technique is irrational insofar as the logic of composition determines neither the surprises nor even the resolutions . . . ."\textsuperscript{25}


comparison Adorno draws here seems a means of highlighting the superiority of Zemlinsky's technical compositional abilities over those of his contemporary. Also implicit in Adorno's opposition of Zemlinsky and Strauss, though, is a now-familiar invocation of the sincerity and authenticity of Zemlinsky's compositional intention, as becomes clearer in the sentences that follow. This critical line extends ultimately to an assertion of Zemlinsky's deliberate avoidance of the theatrical techniques which Adorno found so dubious in the commercially successful Strauss. The opening gesture of Salome provides the perfect example (see Example 3.2). “[Strauss's] most brilliant operas have no overtures but begin with the rising curtain,” Adorno says:

Certain conductors and directors of Salome betray . . . little understanding of the Straussian spirit when they timidly allow the scene to become visible without music and only afterwards have the clarinets play their passage, which refers not only to the serpentine gliding of the princess but also to that of the curtain, with which it must be synchronized and yet still clearly audible.26

Example 3.2: Strauss, Salome, opening gesture (mm. 1-4)

Adorno thus points to the musical gesture as deliberately structured purely for dramatic and technical effect – and there is no denying its effectiveness. Had it been more

attention-grabbing, had it not refused to put itself forward, Zemlinsky’s music, too, might have been more successful – but less modern. “In his works for the stage,” Adorno continues, “which are primarily lyrical in nature, he scorns all shrill, overemphatic gestures. . . the content has an untheatrical, wholly unfeigned warmth. It is the direct proclamation of feeling, not its imitation.” The language here (“direct proclamation of feeling”) again implicitly points to Adorno’s mimetic category, manifest in Zemlinsky’s music amidst the very eclectic qualities for which it might be despised. Yet the next phrase (“not its imitation”) also highlights a tension between the mimetic-assimilative quality Adorno valorized, and the mimetic-imitative category of which he was wary. However, what Adorno does not note, here or elsewhere, is the fact that Zemlinsky’s operatic music is also often mimetic in the most straightforwardly programmatic sense – in contrast to Adorno’s subtly nuanced critical usage – in that it “imitates” or “mimics” extramusical ideas or events, at times quite literally. As will be seen below, this feature would seem to problematize the critique considerably, and particularly calls into question the assertion of the music’s “untheatrical” and “unfeigned” nature, which originates from Adorno’s praise of the mimetic “direct proclamation of feeling.”

Most of the stylistic description and commentary in the essay relates to selections from Zemlinsky’s symphonic and chamber works and the considerable body of Lieder. Yet Adorno acknowledges that “the center of gravity of Zemlinsky’s work lies neither in the songs, nor in the orchestral music,” but in the operas. He describes in Zemlinsky’s two final works in this genre, *Kleider machen Leute* (1909; rev. 1922) and *Der Kreidekreis* (1932), values of simplicity, asceticism, and understatement which seem to presage the theatre of Brecht and Weill. Yet for all the composer’s earlier stage works, including his two best-known mature operas, *Eine florentinische Tragödie* (1917) and *Der Zwerge* (1921), Adorno has few words, even fewer positive ones. In his brief dismissal of these two works in particular,

27 Ibid.

he implies that their music is praiseworthy, but their libretti are weak. This would seem reason enough for him not to investigate them in greater detail at all, in terms of either text or music, despite the fact that they were – and remain – the two most successful pieces in Zemlinsky's operatic output. It will become apparent from the closer discussion of these two works below that, had Adorno not cursorily dismissed them, he would have found reasons to criticize their music as well as their texts, the latter of which are far richer than he acknowledged. Their music also raises some interpretive obstacles to maintaining the distinction of “theatricality” between Zemlinsky and Strauss.

The most obvious problem arises in part through the programmatic-mimetic moments alluded to above; and there are many of them, at various levels. Gestures in the Florentine Tragedy, for example, imitate the motion of a spinning wheel, and the strumming of a lute (Example 3.3). Chords ascend stepwise in imitation of the steps of a ladder. The image of a satyr chasing a nymph is accompanied by leaping and scampering figures in triplets and staccato eighth notes, which diminish and then give way, predictably, to rests at the invocation of “silence.” In Der Zwerg the strumming lute reappears for the Dwarf's performance at the court; and a motive associated with the Dwarf's character uses dotted rhythms to mimic the stilted movement of his twisted limbs, and crass glissandi to suggest his grotesque and uncouth appearance. Other examples could be cited. Clearly, such naïve referentiality is rather far from the critical quality of mimesis that Adorno prized, falling instead into the imitative category of which his critical theory remained suspicious.

Perhaps more to the present point, music that is mimetic in this sense is, literally, “enacting” extramusical concepts, and is thus nothing other than dramatic. As such, it is difficult to conceive of Zemlinsky's employment of these devices for any motive other than their theatrical effectiveness. They are often extremely obvious; and beside them are those moments which, if not as clearly mimetic, are certainly shrill, even grotesque. The latter

include the dramatic glissando that follows Guido’s dying words in *A Florentine Tragedy*, and the harmonic pandemonium that ensues when the Dwarf spies the fateful reflection in the mirror. These gestures do not seem properly characteristic of a composer who “never tolerates mere stimuli and never composes *ad auditores.*” So, despite Adorno’s assertions of the understated quality of Zemlinsky’s dramatic works in general, the operas are not devoid of what can only be termed “effects;” neither is a general commonality of harmonic idiom the only similarity between his music and Strauss’s. And if Zemlinsky was not the astute self-promoter his contemporary was, it was definitely not because he held himself aloof from popular success.

**Example 3.3:** *Eine florentinische Tragödie*, opening of Simone’s “lute song” (reh. no. 75)

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Adorno's Zemlinsky essay is unusual in his output, partly because of its seeming willingness to depart from the critical line in favour of a descriptive tone. In this respect it differs dramatically from its contemporary partner, the essay on Schreker. This is not merely because its overall verdict on its subject, its basic tenor, is generally positive rather than negative. Rather, it is because the whole essay is almost unrelentingly apologetic in tone. Overshadowed by the word “almost,” it focuses more on what the composer attempted to do than on where he succeeded, even if his failures are attributed to the impossibility of the task or to the injustices of “bad” society, rather than to the artist's individual weaknesses. Not that those weaknesses are denied; and some of the composer’s positive traits are described as though they resulted in spite of his failings, as in the following passage:

[T]he task facing Zemlinsky's generation was one of unification. Only now can we see that this task was incapable of fulfillment. But he faced up to it to the point of self-immolation with a musical intelligence devoid of all prejudice and preconception. . . . Weakness which never pretends to be creative acquires the strength of a second nature. The unreserved sacrifice of the pathos of personality becomes a critique of personality and hence something intensely personal.31

This is a problematic passage: it revels in paradox. The “strength of a second nature” is a dubious strength, in that “second nature,” a concept Adorno learned from Lukács, refers to an illusion of nature that is actually socially conditioned – hence, to reification. He implies that Zemlinsky’s compositional weakness, his ultimate failure to assert a distinctive musical style through the elements he borrowed, eventually becomes its own convention. The original meanings of the elements of disparate compositional styles and intentions, “each of which had their own validity,” are forgotten.32 That this feature is redeemable is due, really, to the coincidence of Zemlinsky’s compositional approach and the state of musicohistorical material at the time; it comes back to the privileging of eclecticism. The “pathos

31 Ibid., 115.
32 Ibid.
of personality” – the cult of individual genius referred to critically at the opening of the essay – stands revealed as a pretense that individual artistic creativity actually had the power to be completely original. That this guise is false, in that all works of art are always necessarily mediated by their socio-historical contexts, is critically revealed through the work of a composer whose own individual style consists, paradoxically, in a lack of individuality. Adorno ends up finding value in Zemlinsky’s music virtually by default.

“But at all events,” Adorno observed from his standpoint in 1959, “the overwhelming proportion of what passes for opera nowadays is vastly inferior to him both formally and technically. Indeed a level of uncreativity has been reached compared with which his feeblest and most fragile work would surely merit a revival. . . .”33 Yet Adorno felt unable to predict any such future success. Given that at least two of those works which Adorno least valued have indeed experienced a significant revival in the past twenty-five years or so, it seems worthwhile to evaluate them for critical qualities that go beyond their eclectic features. This is the project of the remainder of this chapter and the one that follows.

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A Florentine Tragedy, or Woman as Mirror

*The eyes of a woman should not mirror her thoughts, but on the contrary, mine.*34

In his “Zemlinsky” essay Adorno described the composer’s one-act opera *Eine florentinische tragödie* (1917) as “hardly performable any more, despite . . . undoubted musical qualities.” The problem with the work, in his view, lay with its text. It has, he said, “one of those crass neo-Romantic libretti which . . . deserve only to be consigned to the flames.”35 Blame for the work’s dramatic unsuitability thus falls upon Oscar Wilde, whose play of the

33 Ibid., 129.


same name, in a quite literal German translation, was set almost in its entirety by Zemlinsky. Wilde had intended the play to be one of a dramatic trio on the theme of, in his words, "love's cross-purposes." Its richly poetic verbal imagery and death-ridden atmosphere are familiar features from the fluent pen of one of the fin-de-siècle's most notorious self-declared prophet-poets of aesthetic decadence and artistic nihilism.

As a conductor of opera Zemlinsky knew and admired Strauss's Wildean opera Salome, with which the latter composer had achieved a notable success a dozen years before. Whether or not Zemlinsky aimed to imitate this result, Adorno remarks that the Florentine Tragedy at once recalls Salome. Both plays take place in a nocturnal, moonlit atmosphere, the moon at times attaining a symbolic prominence which almost makes it a character itself. Also common to both works is a heightened sense of aestheticism as conveyed in lush poetic description of sensual decorative detail and scenic surroundings. More significantly, the two plays share the intermingling of eroticism and death, love and murder, which we associate with the decadent fin-de-siècle spirit. Yet Adorno's epithet of "neo romantic" seems hardly an apt description for either of the dramas, steeped as they are in the Wildean ethos of symbolism and nihilism associated with the rise of that spirit which we now call modern. In their disturbing psychological complexities, glazed over but never concealed by rich aesthetic surfaces, they look not backward to the individual romantic subject, but anxiously forward to the tormented and divided modern one. The dramatic text which Adorno disparaged, in fact, confronts subjectivity in crisis, an issue at the heart of Adorno's own aesthetic philosophy.

Another problem with Adorno's dismissal of the opera because of its flawed libretto is that it implies a separation between texted and musical components: while the music has

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36 A second of the three planned plays was begun, but left in a very fragmentary state. Entitled "La Sainte Courtisane," it features a prostitute who attempts to seduce a holy hermit. He converts her to Christianity, but then succumbs to the temptations she has offered him, only to be scorned by her adherence to her new faith.

37 Anthony Beaumont suggests that this was Zemlinsky's intention: "With a setting of Oscar Wilde, Strauss had caused a furore; why should he not follow suit, with A Florentine Tragedy?" See Beaumont, Zemlinsky (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2000), 242.
“undoubted qualities,” the libretto is no longer acceptable. This separation, to the detriment of textual interpretation, is similar to the lacuna in Adorno’s criticism of the lack of modernity of Schreker’s operatic works, as discussed in the previous chapter. Yet even if we may discuss elements of text and music separately, surely we must also attempt to view them as they work together, in order to assess the dramatic viability of the work.

In the case of Zemlinsky’s Florentine Tragedy, the composer’s expressed view of the subtle and intricate text was apparently quite surprisingly simplistic; yet close hearings and re-hearings of the music, in light of a detailed critical examination of particular issues in the play, allow for a musico-dramatic interpretation that restores to the opera some of the significant shadings of Wilde’s drama.

Despite Adorno’s opinion of its “performability,” A Florentine Tragedy has reentered the repertoire, if somewhat tentatively. It is still far from being as well known to us as Salome, enough so that the unfamiliar narrative requires some expository discussion. The drama, set in sixteenth-century Italy, involves only three characters: Simone, a cloth merchant and cuckolded husband; his younger wife Bianca; and her lover Guido Bardi, a young Florentine nobleman. The curtain rises upon the two lovers, who are interrupted by Simone’s unexpected return home. From the moment of his entrance he clearly dominates the stage. The entire drama revolves around him, and the two other characters’ contributions are virtually always in direct response to him. Simone is a clever, manipulative man with a sadistic streak that reveals itself in the cruel cat-and-mouse game he plays with the lovers throughout the drama, fooling them with a pretense of ignorance into betraying further their guilt. He pretends not to realize the import of the situation that greets him, feigning the assumption that if Guido is not a visiting relative, he must be a customer. Accordingly, Simone opens his pack and begins to display his costly wares, rhapsodizing at length and in sensuous poetic detail over their rich beauty and exquisite workmanship. The arrogant young prince agrees to buy everything at an exorbitant price, allowing himself to be drawn into a game of sexual blackmail, wherein the real object of
desire being bartered for is Bianca. Tension grows beneath the surface of the beautiful yet seemingly meaningless dialogue, finally erupting when Simone, apparently in jest, challenges Guido to a duel. In a surprise ending, Simone kills his young rival, then turns toward his wife to murder her also. More surprising still, however, is the disturbing denouement, in which Simone and Bianca reunite in a passionate embrace over her lover’s dead body. “Why did you not tell me you were so strong?” she asks, to which he responds, “Why did you not tell me you were beautiful?”

After his release from prison, Wilde spoke of his plans for further work on the Florentine Tragedy, which would indicate that he did not consider it finished. His friends also seemed to consider that it was unfinished at the time of his death, and that an opening love scene between Guido and Bianca was still to be written. However, the scenario as it exists stands quite well on its own – it might be called a complete fragment. The opening dramatic situation is immediately understandable, without any expository preceding scene; and perhaps only further stage directions would have been necessary to finish the existing portion. In spite of this, many – Zemlinsky among them – felt that the drama wanted an additional opening scene. He asked Max Meyerfeld, the German translator of the play, to provide an opening scene, but Meyerfeld refused. Zemlinsky’s prelude had to stand in, then, for a missing dramatic introduction, and this is how it is generally understood. It has long been heard as a musical depiction of the lovemaking between Bianca and her lover. Its lush harmonies and timbres, and the prominence of motivic material which later dominates the love duet between the two, provide ample suggestion for its supposed sensual representation. Though he did not refer specifically to Zemlinsky’s opera, Adorno did, in 1928, comment rather sarcastically on the general phenomenon of musical representations of sexual pleasure:

There is one sphere in which the previous generation has failed us after all: musical pornography. Tristan's ecstasies between night and day, the complex and resonant soul of Princess Salome, and, lastly, the cosmic utterances of Alexander Scriabin—however exalted their aspirations may have been, their goal ultimately was always the musical representation of a consummated sexual intercourse. But this they were unable to achieve. Notwithstanding Schreker's notable experiments and Scriabin's valiant efforts, the orchestral euphoria remains paltry when compared with the ecstasies of physical intercourse. . . . So the belief that the erotic music of the nineteenth century was impotent is more than just psychologically valid . . . .

Zemlinsky's prelude need not necessarily be understood as a representation of a love scene (whether impotent or not). Apart from the idea of a quasi-programmatic representation of a missing opening scene, the prelude may more plausibly be read as being concerned with other issues. This is apparent from the opening measures, which present not the love duet motif, as a love scene in medias res, but the fanfare motive associated with Guido, and then the agitated music of Simone's entrance with which the following scene begins. Taking issue with the common interpretation of the opera's opening as "a wordless ersatz for Wilde's missing love scene," Anthony Beaumont describes the overture as "dramatically ambivalent." While he hears the opening gesture as a "phallic symbol," and the following section, based largely on the motive later associated with "love," as "conveying the ecstasy of coitus," he notes that the overture continues with music associated with Simone and his wares, rather than with the lovers. 40 Motivic analysis shows, in fact, that the overture consists of a series of passages constructed on most of the significant motives of the opera (which are shown in Example 3.4), and as such, it appears quite conventional, structured in the manner of innumerable overtures since Weber: a quasi-symphonic piece which also introduces the motivic material to come. Even if we prefer the more interesting interpretive route, which conveys some dramatic significance to the music that is


40 See Beaumont, 246-47.
suggestive for the scenario previous to the opening scene, it need not be read as literally miming what we find out must have happened – that the lovers have shared an amorous moment together before the ill-timed return of the husband. The motivic content of the opening measures (mm. 2-3) is dominated by Simone's musical presence even in his physical absence; it takes precedence over the music of "love" and is even able to disrupt it before he arrives (see Example 3.5 below). As will become apparent from the following discussion, the dramatic ambivalence of the "love" music itself calls even Beaumont's more critically aware interpretation into question. Overall, the conjunction of motives relating to all characters suggests, if anything, the dramatic complexity of their interrelationships, which will be explored at length in the coming pages. If the overture carries dramatic import, it is suggestive in particular for the relationship between husband and rival, as well as that between lovers.
Example 3.5: Zemlinsky, *Eine florentinische Tragödie*, opening of overture

Comments Zemlinsky made about this drama actually suggest his intent to make a moral statement in favour of marriage with this opera,⁴¹ in contrast to both the more

⁴¹ See Alfred Clayton, “Zemlinsky’s One-Act Operas,” *Musical Times* 124 (1983): 474-7. Clayton refers to the following words Zemlinsky wrote to Alma Mahler: “The husband’s passion for his work leads him to overlook his wife’s beauty, while the woman at his side, finding herself cheated of her youth and physical appeal, becomes a slave to apathy, dejection and open hatred. To bring the
“romantic” view of love as essentially outside the constraints of morality, and the rather nihilistic view Wilde seems to have held. The perverse nature of the drama’s ending surely belies Zemlinsky’s naive interpretation that a terrible catastrophe was necessary to bring back to reality a husband whose passion for his work led him to neglect his wife. Perhaps emphasizing this neglect, Zemlinsky cut even further the few lines Wilde had given to Bianca, such that her character seems subsidiary at best. Indeed, she speaks hardly at all throughout the play, yet she plays a role that is unexpectedly revealing at crucial dramatic points. She is the centre around which the two men dialogue and spar, with weapons of words and steel. More notably, she becomes the critical foil against which their character weaknesses are revealed through their attitudes and words toward her. Finally, she is revealed as the residue of subjectivity in a drama of male narcissism. Simone treats her unkindly and even cruelly, from the moment of his entrance. Few if any of his words can be taken at face value, in light of the ruse he is perpetrating, but even if insincere they are cutting. He disparages Bianca along with all her sex, saying apologetically to Guido, “I trust my honest wife, most honest if uncomely to the eye, hath not with foolish chattering wearied you, as is the wont of women.” Roughly, he then orders her to kneel on the floor to undo his pack of merchandise, saying, “you are better thus.” Though he constantly refers to her (albeit sarcastically) as a “good” or “honest wife,” perhaps wishing her to be so, other thinly veiled comments reveal that he sees her as a faithless whore. When he commands her to sit down at her distaff and spin, he explicitly links the place of domestic duty with the site of sexual transgression, saying, “So Lucretia was found by Tarquin. So, perchance, Lucretia waited for Tarquin.” The mythical female character is transformed back to reality, a terrible catastrophe is called for. This is a real tragedy, because one life has to be sacrificed to save two others.” Undated, unpublished letter, cited in Beaumont, 245.

42 As William Benjamin commented on an earlier version of this passage, the notion of romantic love as amoral, an impersonal force controlling human relationships, fits with the title of “Tragedy,” a destruction of the characters that is somehow inevitable. Adorno may have had this notion in mind when condemning the play’s “romanticism,” though this reveals a misunderstanding of Wilde.
from rape victim to adulterous and treacherous seductress. "Who knows?" Simone continues. "I have heard strange things about men's wives."

Guido Bardi, in contrast, is courtly, yet his flowery poetic praise of her charms distances Bianca as an admired object, as in the age-old tradition of courtly love poetry. Yet this objectification of her "pure" beauty is false, in that he simultaneously possesses her sexually; she is at once an abstraction and a physical body, an ideal and a whore. Thus, the two men, scornful husband and ardent lover, view her differently, yet for both of them her status is that of object rather than subject. Both also display an ambivalence toward her as Woman which is typical of contemporary antifeminist prejudices.

This antifeminist position is perhaps nowhere more notoriously expressed than in the virulently misogynist and anti-Semitic writings of Otto Weininger, whose monograph Sex and Character was first published in Vienna in 1903. Shortly thereafter, its author's sensational suicide at the age of 23 drew a great deal of attention to his dissertation, which became widely influential. Weininger used a shaky scientific and psychoanalytical apparatus to "prove" that woman does not possess a truly autonomous self. She is therefore undeserving of basic freedoms, let alone equality with man, who represents reason, morality, and the transcendent self. While man's true nature is intellectual and spiritual, woman's is purely sexual, as she endlessly strives to seduce man. Following an idea in current theories of psychology and sexual pathology, Weininger postulated that each individual is bisexual, possessing traits of both man and woman in varying degrees. The concept of woman, therefore, as the opposite of man, represents the weakness of humanity, and – here he makes the dangerous leap from the general concept of femininity to the specific "feminine" person – the individual woman is the embodiment of this sin of

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44 See ibid., 48-9.

45 Ibid., 51.

46 See ibid., 47-8.
man. In fact, it is man's fall into the weaker, sexual side of his nature which creates woman—she does not really exist, but her ontological status is that of a symptom of man—and his guilt in creating her causes him to attempt to rescue her by loving her. In so doing, he projects onto her his own ideal qualities, and this projection is the source of her beauty. Therefore woman's beauty is performative: she is beautiful because man regards her so. Loving woman is thus an act of egoism and cruelty which, in idealizing her, fails to recognize her true nature. (Here is unwittingly uncovered the truth behind the tradition of courtly love.) So Weininger can conclude, within the space of a few pages, that “woman's beauty is the love of man,” and that “love is Murder.”

Zemlinsky very likely read *Sex and Character*; it would seem that everyone else in Austria and Germany did. Schoenberg himself was interested in Weininger, whom he described in the preface to the first edition of his *Harmonielehre* as an “earnest thinker.”

Georg Klaren, librettist for Zemlinsky's next opera *Der Zwerg* (also based on a Wilde text), eagerly espoused Weininger's ideology, having completed a biography of Weininger in 1919, and for Zemlinsky's libretto he freely overlaid Wilde's text with a veneer of sexual pathology. He was apparently prompted to volunteer his services as librettist to Zemlinsky by admiration for the *Florentine Tragedy*, in which he thought he detected many psychologically revealing elements. In particular, he viewed the scene wherein Bianca holds the torch while her husband and lover fight the duel as exemplifying Weininger's theories of the domination of the feminine as the downfall of man.

According to Slavoj Žižek, “Weininger hauled into the light of day the ‘sexist' fantasmatic support of the dominant ideology.” Žižek performs an unexpected reading of Weininger in light of Hegelian philosophies of the subject and Lacanian psychoanalytic

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49 See Beaumont, 259-60.

formulas of sexuation, ultimately reversing the import of Weininger's thesis that woman has no subjectivity of her own. Žižek recognizes that in Weininger "the male dread of woman which so deeply branded the Zeitgeist of the turn of the century" emerges as linked with the traditional ideological ambivalence toward, on the one hand, Woman as wife and Mother, and on the other, Woman as Whore. This ambivalence, which runs like a bi-coloured thread throughout the narrative of the Florentine Tragedy, is cited by Žižek as the root of the fear of the feminine which permeates the works of numerous twentieth-century artists. In Weininger's denial of woman's ontological status, Žižek sees a precursor to Lacan's "La femme n'existe pas," which replaces the "eternal feminine" enigma once neatly opposed to the masculine, with one subject torn by internal antagonisms in fundamentally different ways. But Žižek also hears an echo of Hegel's characterization of the self from the Jenaer Realphilosophie manuscript, as "abstract negativity . . . the night of the world:"

The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity – an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him – or which are not present. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye – into a night that becomes awful.52

Here is where Žižek discovers the true failure of Weininger's argument in conceiving of woman as the object of man. He effects this striking bouleversement: "What Weininger fails to accomplish is a Hegelian reflective reversal of recognizing in this 'nothing' the very negativity that defines the notion of the subject." In ascribing to woman an infinite striving, "Weininger attributes to her a constitutive negativity, and thereby fails to see in his characterization of 'the infinite craving of Nothing for Something' the ontological predicament of all subjects."53 Every subject suffers from the unbridgeable gap between its

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51 Ibid., 106.


53 Ibid., 102.
being and its definition within the symbolic order. There is no subject, male or female, whose subjectivity is not defined by that order, and who is not also irrevocably severed from its objective dimensions: this is the fundamental subject-object paradigm (as defined by Hegel and linguistically configured by Lacan). Weininger's woman, then, is not the object, but the Hegelian subject *par excellence*. The import of Weininger's entire sexist theory is reversed, like a reflection in a mirror.

Žižek's essay allows a way to read into the *Florentine Tragedy* a dramatic reversal for Bianca, whose role as silent centre becomes the empty night of the subject within this nocturnal setting. That Simone and Guido continue to see Bianca as object indicates that they look at her without really seeing her. In this respect, Guido's words of love during his duet with Bianca are telling to say the least, revealing clearly the egotistical character of his affections for her, almost like Weininger onstage. As the duet intensifies, he sings to her, "... loose the falling midnight of your hair and in those stars, your eyes, let me behold mine image, as in mirrors" (3 mm. after reh. no. 117). He rhapsodizes now not of her beauty, but of his own reflected image which he sees when he looks at her, and with which he is clearly enamored. What he is in love with, then, is an idealized image of himself, and this is all he sees when he gazes at her. Love is a sham, suddenly revealed as narcissistic self-love, and as uniquely focused on self-image rather than self-knowledge or knowledge of another. On this theme, Wilde once told the following parable to a group of friends:

When Narcissus died, the flowers of the field were desolate and asked the river for some drops of water to weep for him. "Oh!" answered the river, "if all my drops of water were tears, I should not have enough to weep for Narcissus myself. I love him." "Oh!" replied the flowers of the field, "how could you not have loved Narcissus? He was beautiful." "Was he beautiful?" said the river. "And who should know better than you? Each day, leaning over your bank, he beheld his beauty in your waters." "If I loved him," replied the river, "it was because, when he leaned over my waters, I saw the reflection of my waters in his eyes."54

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The story encapsulates Wilde's idea of love of others as self-love, and the misunderstanding and isolation arising therefrom, an idea recapitulated in *A Florentine Tragedy*.

We have seen how the words of both male characters in the play display their ambivalence toward the feminine. Guido's ardent flattery of Bianca, distancing her as a passive ideal even while he possesses her, is merely the other side of Simone's denigration of her. Interestingly, while Simone links sexual transgression with the home as the site of wifely domesticity, he also links it with music. Like his feminized description of the moon, which "hides her face behind a muslin mask as harlots do when they go forth to snare some wretched soul in sin," music wears a guise, and can betray the listener into corruption. Simone alludes to this power when, seeing Guido's lute nearby, he asks the prince to play, thus:

... I have heard that by the simple fingering of a string, or delicate breath breathed along hollowed reeds, or blown into cold mouths of cunning bronze, those who are curious in this art can draw poor souls from prison-houses. I have heard also how such strange magic lurks within these shells and innocence puts vine-leaves in her hair, and wantons like a maenad. Let that pass. Your lute I know is chaste. And therefore play: ravish my ears with some sweet melody ... ⁵⁵

Zemlinsky's musical setting of this text begins mimetically (as shown in Example 3.3 above), with mandolin chords imitating the strumming of the lute which, on stage, remains silent—it mimics, perhaps, the music Simone imagines might be played. This would explain why, as he continues his description of music's power, the orchestra gradually whips up into a frenzied waltz, calling up all the complex cultural and social associations of the "dangerous" dance of the nineteenth century with sexual corruption and excess. Guido actually confirms Simone's insidious hints by whispering to Bianca that he will reserve his music for when they are alone together. He refuses to play for Simone, however, saying, "I am content with the low music of Bianca's voice, who, when she speaks, charms the too

⁵⁵ Apparently, "innocence" as "wanton" could be male as well as female. A letter of 1897 from Wilde to the poet Ernest Dowson reads "Do I see you tomorrow? ... Come with vine leaves in your hair." See Ellmann, 506-7.
amorous air, and makes the reeling earth stand still, or fix his cycle round her beauty.” So another link is made between the woman and sexual corruption, this time through the musical sound of her voice.

But if Bianca’s voice is so remarkable, we have certainly heard precious little of it in this opera. Not only are her lines few and far between, but many are set in a most unmelodic fashion. To Simone’s loquacious arioso, flexible, lyrical, and highly expressive, she responds sullenly, with short phrases, flat in pitch profile, rhythmically impoverished, and low in her range. Recent theories of opera have taught us to hear in the woman’s operatic voice the cry of the subject, which resounds above the rest of the texture and refuses to be silenced by the pessimistic plotted fate of female operatic characters. Yet here, attempts at interpreting a musical reversal for Bianca were severely limited by Zemlinsky’s persistent unvoicing of her character. Only briefly, in the love duet with Guido, is her voice unfettered (5 mm. before reh. no. 121).

The duet is one of the primary instances wherein the connection between motives tends to complicate their dramatic significance (see Example 3.6 below). A “love” motive in triplet rhythm heard in the orchestra during Guido’s response to Bianca continues to accompany her words that close the duet, words that, like so many others in this drama, are laden with double meaning: “You know that I am yours for love or death.” The orchestra also foreshadows a four-note descending motive, which dominates as the motive of “death” in the murder scene. When this music reappears in the orchestra during the opera’s critical closing scene, the quieter undertones of its significance become audible.

The closing scene (see Example 3.7 below) is a strange moment for several reasons. The husband-and-wife embrace over the murdered body of the lover seems perverse, to say the least, and the sound of the “love” motive from the earlier duet ringing out in the orchestra is unsettling in its new context. Further, if the moment does not seem

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Example 3.6: *Eine florentinische Tragödie*, end of love duet (7 mm. after reh. no. 124)

Appropriate for renewed marital romance, their words—"why did you not tell me . . ."—seem stranger still, especially given that they are sung to the descending "death" motive, which resounded relentlessly in the orchestra and vocal line as Simone strangled Guido moments before. Bianca's wonder at her husband's strength is understandable. She is used to seeing him as he has described himself: an old, tired man from whose body youth has fled. But Simone's surprise at his wife's beauty is not so easy to understand, for surely her appearance is self-evident. Bianca might almost have answered him with Salome's question to Jokanaan: "Ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me . . .? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me." Simone has, of course, looked before. Yet it is only in this

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57 On one level, the reversal plays into the conventional paradigm of the fickle female – Weininger again.
Example 3.7: *Eine florentinische Tragödie*, concluding scene (4 mm. after reh. no. 150)

*Noch ruhiger.*

*Bianca* (in zarter Begeisterung).

W*ar um hast du mir nicht gesagt, daß du so sehr zart.*

*Stark?*

*Simone* (indem sein grenzenloses Erstaunen in Bewunderung ihrer Schönheit übergeht.)

W*ar um hast du mir nicht gesagt.*
extreme moment that his attention is drawn to her image, and it is what he sees when he looks at her that stays his hand and saves her life.

As Miklaus Bek observes in an article on the operatic dramaturgy of the *Florentine Tragedy*, contemporary critics did not like the abrupt reversal at the end of the play, and some attempted to explain it away by saying that Simone had actually loved his wife all along. Other commentators have confronted the interpretation of the reversal more successfully. According to Bek, the dramatic reversal becomes more convincing as opera than as stage play, because Zemlinsky's combination of musical "love" and "death" motives was virtually an operatic commonplace, suggesting a constellation of opposites familiar and acceptable to an audience steeped in the Wagnerian ethos of love and death. In his liner notes to the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra recording, Peter Dannenberg offers a more subtle dramatic interpretation, saying that "Bianca has only become interesting to her husband through her infidelity; Simone only attracts his wife's attention by becoming a murderer." Yet is it really Bianca's transgressive sexuality that attracts Simone? It seems unlikely. In fact, his words to Guido during their fight — "Now to the death of one, or both of us, or all the three it may be" — make it clear that he plans from the outset to kill Bianca too, if he can. When he rises from Guido's dead body and turns to her, with the words "[a]nd now for you!" it is obvious that his intent is still murderous rather than amorous. Yet Dannenberg comes closer to the mark in stating that the characters suddenly see in each other what they had not noticed before. Regenia Gagnier's monograph *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, discusses this moment of the drama in terms of the effect of commercial materialism in commodifying human relationships. She suggests that "Simone can only love what he sees, and what he sees is made visible not by its value, but by its price: the logical conclusion of the play is that the husband and wife see each other for the first time, value each other for the first time, because the strength of one

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has been activated, and the beauty of the other has been objectified, by a competitor."\textsuperscript{59} Gagnier's suggestion that Simone loves only what he sees is apt not only for his character but, it would seem, for the others as well, in varying degrees. The preoccupation with visual detail and verbal imagery of the visual, the love dialogue between Guido and Bianca, and at last the final reconciliatory moment between Bianca and Simone, all confirm the play's theme of tragic misunderstanding between individuals, who relate to each other in only the most superficial manner. As Wilde's said, it is about "love's cross-purposes," through which love somehow becomes the competition of individual purposes.

It is surprising that, although the music blatantly links this scene to the earlier duet between Guido and Bianca, no commentator seems to make more than a surface connection between the two moments. The musical motive that dominates in both places is assumed to signify a general idea of "love," not specific as to the actual lovers. In fact this so-called "love" motive, at once indeterminate and overdetermined, provides a musical answer to the puzzling reversal in the drama's final moments. This is a drama in which the characters love only what their eyes can see, yet they see without understanding: love is dictated by image. But what Gagnier, Dannenberg, and Bek all mistake is precisely what it is that Simone sees at this moment, which apparently re-ignites his love for his wife. The answer lies in Guido's words to Bianca, whose import reechoes in the music of the love duet once again pouring from the orchestra in a lyrical torrent. Like the ill-fated prince, Simone looks into Bianca's eyes and sees – only himself. He responds to his idealized image reflected in her, as she now becomes his mirror, as she was Guido's. The motive in the orchestra highlights what is common in both these moments: not love, but narcissism, and ultimately, the failure of individuals to relate to one another.

Through its relationship to Wilde's text, Zemlinsky's music sings the truth of the tragedy of the \textit{Florentine Tragedy}, which is not, as Zemlinsky stated, that "one life has to be

sacrificed to save two others.\textsuperscript{60} It is Wilde's tragedy of “love’s cross-purposes,” as so beautifully conveyed in his parable of Narcissus and the river – the tragedy that leaves the individual subject fundamentally alone in the night of the world. The “resolution” Zemlinsky intended for the final moment is none; it is musically belied by the motivic significance accrued from one so-called love duet to another. Hearing Zemlinsky's music through Wilde's text adds to Adorno’s “undoubted musical qualities” a critical quality of reflection on the way the character of an individual woman mirrors the universal fate of the subject.

This reading of the opera seeks out a site for feminine subjectivity through a reversal of a traditional concept of masculine subjectivity. It is a site which remains elusive, though; it is glimpsed only as in a glass darkly. We never really see Bianca as subject. However, the drama may also be read – in a manner perhaps more faithful to its contemporary context – as a project for imagining another marginal subjectivity: that of the homosexual male. In fact, various conceptualizations of male homoerotic desire are present in Wilde’s play.

The idea that the play may contain an undercurrent of homoeroticism is perhaps unsurprising in a drama by Wilde. What is surprising is that it is not mentioned at all by Wilde’s authoritative biographer Richard Ellmann (who, admittedly devotes no more than a few lines to discussion of the work – perhaps assuming that its “incompleteness” renders it relatively unimportant in Wilde’s oeuvre). Neither does the notion surface in any of the critical discussions of the opera or play mentioned above. Homosexuality is commented on only obliquely during Anthony Beaumont’s discussion of Zemlinsky’s opera, and then in light of a possible biographical link with Wilde. Beaumont goes so far as to suppose that Simone, the older and wiser man with a sharp wit and a tongue given to flights of fluid poetic imagery, may be a type of Wilde himself. Guido, then, he surmises, could represent the young and beautiful Lord Alfred Douglas, third son of a nobly titled and dysfunctional family. This parallel is suggested to Beaumont in part by Simone’s description of Guido as

\textsuperscript{60} In Zemlinsky’s letter to Alma Mahler; cited in note 40 above.
“the gracious pillar of [your father’s] house, the flower of a garden full of weeds,” a description that might be taken as a slur on Douglas’s father, the Marquess of Queensberry. That the two men in the play might specifically represent Wilde and Douglas themselves is likely only speculation, but there is indeed some suggestion in the play of an erotic component in the relationship between the merchant and the prince.

The clearest and simultaneously most subtle manifestation of homosocial (and potentially homoerotic) interaction between the two men is the way in which they relate to each other through Bianca. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers several literary-theoretical, psychoanalytical, and economic conceptualizations of the nature of social bonds between men, the position of women in the male homosocial sphere, and the dialectics of identity and power arising therefrom.61 In particular she focuses on the schematic relationship between male rivals for a woman in the typical erotic triangle, such as the one in *A Florentine Tragedy*. Referring to René Girard’s *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, she affirms the intensity and potency of the bond linking the two rivals in any erotic rivalry: “the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love,’ differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent.” What becomes apparent in Girard’s study is how often the choice of a lover is dictated by the fact that she has been chosen by the chosen rival; thus the connection between the rivals in the erotic triangle is actually “stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved.”62 The dramatic nature of the erotic triangle in *A Florentine Tragedy* is such that each of the men in turn takes an active role. The first action is Guido’s, and takes place outside the scope of the drama *per se*, before its beginning, as it were. In choosing Bianca as love object, he literally, whether

61 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Sedgwick uses the term “homosocial desire” to designate what she attempts to theorize as a structural continuum of relationships among men, ranging from homosocial to homosexual. “Homoerotic” points toward an eroticized component in homosocial desire, which may not necessarily imply genital homosexual desire or activity.

62 Ibid., 21 and ff.
inadvertently or no, chooses Simone as sexual object as well. (That his object-choice of the man who is Bianca’s husband is deliberate – even if he has no prior relationship to Simone himself – is strongly suggested in the play, by Simone’s remarks to the effect that Guido has a reputation for conducting affairs with married women.) As Sedgwick notes, “‘to cuckold’ is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man,” and as such it raises the interpretive possibility of “heterosexual love . . . as a strategy of homosocial desire.”

Interestingly, Guido’s seeming position of power is somewhat diminished by the fact that, at this point, Simone’s words suggest that he has already relinquished Bianca as love object. (As mentioned above, he continues throughout the drama to deny her suitability as object for either his own or Guido’s erotic desire; and it is indeed his lack of desire for her – and hers for him – which makes the culminating dramatic reversal difficult at first to comprehend. It also suggests, of course, that his desire lies elsewhere.) Equally interesting is the pivoting of the determining role such that, from the opening of the play, Simone becomes the active rival. His engagement with Guido may suggest that he is again choosing Bianca as object, and is therefore willing to compete for her; but in fact, it signals at the same time his choice of Guido as object of homosocial desire.

It is worth noting here that the erotic triangle configuration echoes the more primary schematic of the Oedipal triangle, as Sedgwick realizes. The Oedipal scheme, situating the (male) child between mother and father, dramatizes the role of the feminine as well as the masculine in the formation of the subject and its sexual self. Freud theorized heterosexual and homosexual subject-formation through an interplay of identification with and desire for each parent. Put simplistically, the young male child (and in Freud’s theories the child is virtually always male) who comes to identify with his father and choose his mother as erotic object-choice – the “positive” version of the Oedipus complex – takes on a heterosexual identity; the opposite pattern, the “negative” version of the complex, results in

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61 Ibid., 49.
a homosexual identity. But in Freud's later writings he came to see that most (if not all) subjects underwent some form of both the positive and negative versions of the complex (i.e., the "complete" complex), and thus that the development of heterosexual identities for both sexes passes through a homosexual stage, which makes the heterosexual stage a "normal" possibility. In other words, the male child initially experiences a homoerotic identification with his father, involving an "effeminate" subordination to the father, which allows for the establishment of the male as role model in an ultimately heterosexual outcome. Further, while the infant boy's sense of self initially arises in relation to the feminine, in the context of his original union with his mother, his masculinity is constituted in opposition to the feminine. These observations point to the fundamental role of the feminine in the necessarily triangular development of both heterosexual and homosexual male subject-identities.

Finally, the triangular configuration repeats once again in Freud's theories of different possible paradigms for homosexual subject-types, which are explained and schematized by Kaja Silverman in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. Most significantly for the present discussion, Silverman describes, in addition to the negative Oedipal schematic, Freud's concept of male homosexuality that hinges on narcissistic object-choice. This configuration positions the homosexual subject in an identity relationship to the father (significantly, a masculine identity, rather than a feminine identity with the mother, as in the "negative" Oedipus complex), and a desiring relationship to a phantasmatic of the self. Possibilities for the narcissistic object choice include self-love, love of what the subject

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65 The phantasmatic is defined as a recurrent unconscious fantasy that invokes a repeated scene of desire, which comes to shape an individual's object choices, identifications, and psychic life "as a whole;" see Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), 317.
once was, love of what the subject desires to become, and "love for someone who was once part of [oneself]."66

All this is by way of showing the multiple significances of the erotic triangular scheme around which *A Florentine Tragedy* is constructed, in terms of self-identity and erotic relationships. More to the point is the way in which *A Florentine Tragedy* dramatizes the instability of male subjectivity constituted under the stress of the triangular model, as discussed at length by both Sedgwick and Silverman (and numerous other theorists as well).67 Figure 3.1 below demonstrates this multiplying of homosocial relations between the drama's male characters, as they relate to each other both directly and indirectly in terms of trade, rivalry, and homosocial desire.

Homosocial, yes . . . but homosexual? At first glance the homosocial relationship between men here is not obviously sexual, although, as will be discussed below, certain details of the play (and of the opera) designate this desire as erotically inflected on both sides. What is perhaps more obvious on the surface of the drama is the economic interaction between the men, and its implications for the commodification of relationships, as mentioned above in the discussion of Gagnier's interpretation of Wilde's play. These implications go beyond the designation of human "worth" in terms of "competitive value," as Gagnier frames it. The power asymmetries of gender come into play. Sedgwick reasserts the by now fairly well-established feminist critical viewpoint that "patriarchal heterosexuality can best be discussed in terms of one or another form of the traffic in women: it is the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for

66 See Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), ch. 8, "A Woman's Soul Enclosed in a Man's Body: Femininity in Male Homosexuality," esp. 362-73. Silverman also describes a third triangular schematic which she dubs "the Leonardo model," but it is less relevant to the present discussion than the second, narcissistic paradigm, "the Greek model."

67 Incidentally, Simone's words to Guido during the death scene, "your father when he is childless will be happier," could allude to the fundamental father-son conflict traditionally associated with the positive Oedipal complex paradigm.
the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men."\textsuperscript{68} Economically, women's exchange value has traditionally been linked with their sexuality, as viewed in terms of either the reproduction of children, or prostitution. The \textit{Florentine Tragedy} does allude more than once to prostitution, in the guise of Simone's veiled accusations of his wife's infidelity, as well as his sensualized description of the moon. However, this drama makes no allusion to the economy of family. Significantly, Bianca does not seem to be a mother.\textsuperscript{69} What she does (re)produce is \textit{cloth}: she \textit{spins}, and usually at her husband's command (though

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 25-26.

\textsuperscript{69} Ellmann documents Wilde's well-known repulsion at his wife's pregnancy (it was while she was carrying their second and last child that he ceased sexual relations with her altogether, and began an active pursuit of homoerotic and homosexual relationships with various young men). He thus seemed to exhibit very strongly what Kristeva has analyzed as a primary fear of the maternal power of women, which is likely at work in the notable absence of images of motherhood, aside from the negatively comic, in his works. His relationship with his own mother, who remained a powerful force in the lives of Oscar and his brother Willie for most of their lives (all, in Oscar's case - she outlived him) is another factor of undoubtedly psychological importance which obviously falls outside the scope of this discussion, but its importance is alluded to throughout Ellmann's study.
on this occasion her refusal to do so arouses his anger). This activity highlights her productive value for Simone, as well as further implicating her in his seeming obsession with his trade, and his open exchange with Guido: the Lucca Damask and the cut-velvet robe of state for 100,000 crowns.

The latter extravagant offer from Guido draws from Simone great excitement and effusive exclamations of pleasure and gratitude. “A hundred thousand! My brain is dazed,” he exclaims. Zemlinsky’s operatic setting of this moment marks Simone’s excitement with a flurry of sixteenth-note arpeggios, but also inserts a sevenfold repetition of Simone’s dotted motive, as if asserting that, through this monetary coup, control of the situation now lies with him. He attempts to kiss the prince’s hands, and declares that that “this night shall prove the herald of my love, which is so great that whatsoever you ask it will not be denied you.” In reply, Guido suggests that he might ask for — Bianca. This request at once implicates her again in the trappings of trade, and also makes explicit the sexual aspect of the commodity exchange between the men. But such entanglement of sex and commerce is unsurprising when the author is Oscar Wilde, for it characterized his own homosexual relationships, both the transient and the more enduring ones. In particular it summed up the nature of his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas. After an initial period, the sexual contact between these two seems more often than not to have been conducted through third parties, especially the numerous boy prostitutes whom Douglas picked up and shared with Wilde; though of course, it was the older Wilde rather than the young Lord who supplied most of the money for their “entertainments,” despite continually depleted resources and ever-mounting debt. If Wilde had been known for habits of extravagance since his early days at Oxford, he more than met his match in Douglas, who spent staggering sums and continually demanded more funds from the increasingly beleaguered Wilde. As Ellmann remarks, “[s]ince neither Wilde nor Douglas practiced or

70 As David Metzer commented on an earlier draft of this chapter, Simone displays characteristics that fall into typical Jewish stereotypes at the time, types which also consider the Jewish character as effeminate and possibly homosexual (as construed, for example, by Weininger); these features, including his loquaciousness and obsequiousness, serve to further identify him as a marginal subject.
expected sexual fidelity, money was the stamp and seal of their love." Further, if we find in Wilde a commercialization of eros, we may also read an eroticization of commerce, such that the trade relationship itself implies an erotic subtext between the merchant and the nobleman in the Florentine Tragedy. This idea is highlighted in the opera by the nature of the themes for the “Lucca Damask” and the robe of state (discussed below), whose lush, full orchestral textures and surging, “rauschend” qualities give them character of love themes. So, complex linkages between sex and commodity exchange should probably be considered implicit from the outset. They are in place as soon as Simone decides to take material advantage of Guido’s compromising situation, which already implies the third (female) party. He then asks Bianca to join him in bartering and persuading the prince to purchase his wares, making explicit the triangular configuration of their trade relationship and its sexual basis.

This triangular configuration of libidinal economies has long historical precedent: Sedgwick traces numerous literary examples of male homoerotic relationships conducted, as it were, “through” women, notably in Shakespeare’s sonnets. Also evident in Wilde’s text, however, is this more contemporary notion of the feminizing of the homosexual male, a stereotype that became immediately associated with his class, the effeminate gay “dandy,” and has persisted to a certain extent (alongside an increasing plurality of other self-styled homosexual subject-positions) into the present. On several occasions, Simone’s words place Guido in a feminizing context, through allusions to physical beauty, sensuality, and seduction; at the same time he also denigrates or denies these “feminine” qualities in Bianca. Even while virtually blackmailing the nobleman caught in a compromising situation into purchasing his wares at an exorbitant price, Simone seems to take great pleasure in the idea of dressing Guido in the most beautiful, luxurious, ornamental, and

71 Ellmann, 365.

72 This observation is not meant to imply that male homosexuality is constituted or defined through hatred of women or the feminine, a presumption which would be homophobic; it simply points out the shifting of the qualities of desire from the female to the male object.
costly of the garments in his store. "I have the fancy to see you in this wonder of the loom amidst the lovely ladies at court like a flower among flowers," the merchant says, as he tries to settle a price for the Venetian velvet robe of state. (It is the second time he has compared Guido to a flower.) While associating with Guido the feminine qualities of fashionable adornment and flower-like beauty, the most crucial effect of this speech is to place Guido in the feminized position of the object of the male gaze, the position later occupied by Bianca.

Simone's lute song, quoted above as an example of the dramatic associations between music, corruption, and femininity, also contains his most blatantly homoerotic words. The fact that he openly asks Guido to "ravish" his soul through musical performance — and that on an instrument often used to accompany love songs and serenades — gives homosexual nuance to the already highly eroticized context. It also suggests sexual violence, not for the first time (recall the earlier reference to the rape of Lucretia), but here in an exclusively male context. (Once the door to violence is opened, it figures repeatedly in the text until real violence ensues in the climactic duel.) Finally, the imagery of the lute song places the prince once more in the feminized position already described, that of musical seductress; but at the same time, it places Simone in the passive feminine position of the one being "ravished."

If Simone's discourse is homoerotically inflected, so, at times, is Guido's. He in turn attributes a feminized quality to Simone when he tells Bianca, "this common chapman wearies me with words," suggesting that the merchant's loquaciousness is like the wearisome "foolish chatterings" that Simone earlier said were "the wont of women." Further, there is a doubled ambiguity in Guido's remark that "Princes must be ransomed,

73 Flowers often carry homoerotic associations in Wilde, both in the literary (particularly poetic) oeuvre but also in his personal life and letters; as well as the famous green carnation, the importance of both lilies and hyacinth in his eroticized references to young men and male beauty is noteworthy.

74 It is probably Kaja Silverman who has most extensively theorized the position of the homosexual male as feminized object of the gaze; see Male Subjectivity at the Margins, especially ch.3, "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look, and Image."
and fortunate are all high lords who fall into the white hands of so fair a foe.” Presumably the white hands and fairness refer here to Bianca, though it is unclear why she might be considered a foe. But the latter reference becomes clearer when, a little later in the play, the first references are rendered ambiguous by Bianca’s description of Simone’s hands as white. Is Simone the true foe whom Guido finds fair? It is literally the merchant’s white hands into which Guido has fallen by the time he is strangled to death at the end of the play. This ultimate struggle, culminating in direct physical contact between the men, is precipitated by Guido’s words whose phallic imagery carry what is perhaps the clearest homoerotic innuendo in the whole play: “Naught would please me better than to stand fronting you with naked blade.”

The climax of the escalating erotic tensions in *A Florentine Tragedy* is, disturbingly, a collapse of the triangle through violent murder. If the Wildean slippage between eros, commodification, and configurations of desire has proven tricky to theorize, analysis of the eruption of violence, which resonates as homophobic within this context, becomes even more difficult and unstable, especially given a relative lack of theoretical apparatus through which to approach it. Again, Sedgwick's attempt summarizes some historiographical investigations of homophobic violence, and locates correspondences with (Victorian) “homosexual panic” within the spheres of novelistic and psychoanalytical literatures. Her analyses of the Gothic novel tradition uncover the tendencies in literary erotic triangle mechanisms toward violent ends. Sedgwick traces the outlines of two erotic triangles selected from the novels of Charles Dickens, both of which subsume homoerotic subtexts, and both of which end in homophobic murder with strong suggestions of accompanying male rape. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the character of Bradley Headstone murderously attacks two other male characters, notably from behind; the first of these is his rival for the love of Lizzie Hexam. The language in which these attacks are described is heavily suggestive of

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75 Simone’s proposal of the duel as a test of whether his sword or Guido’s is “better tempered” is an obvious game of “who has it (the phallus)” and “whose is better (bigger, stronger).”
male rape in its use of the imagery of an iron ring (Sedgwick reads “sphincter”) and gripping embraces from behind, as Sedgwick shows in quoting, for example, the following passage:

Bradley had caught him round the body. He seemed to be girdled with an iron ring . . . Bradley got him round . . . and still worked him backward . . .

"I'll hold you living, and I'll hold you dead! Come down!" [ . . . ] When the two were found . . . he was girdled still with Bradley's iron ring, and the rivets of the iron ring held tight.\(^{76}\)

As Sedgwick points out, this ring imagery is recapitulated in Dickens' last, unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and recalls too the iron shackles of the convict Magwitch in *Great Expectations*, whose murder of Compeyson is also described in terms of a violent deathly grip. Note the similarities to Simone's words as he wrestles with Guido in the darkness, gripping him with strangling hands: "Ah, devil! do I hold thee in my grip? . . . You are caught in such a cunning vice that nothing will avail you, and your life narrowed into a single point of shame ends with that shame and ends most shamefully." Here is echoed the imagery of grappling and holding, but it is the invocation of shame which seems to suggest more strongly that rape is implied.\(^{77}\) Like the Dickens characters Sedgwick discusses, Simone "is bound, through a woman whom he is incapable of loving, to a far more intense relation with a man toward whom he can express nothing but the most intimate violence."\(^{78}\)

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\(^{76}\) Quoted in Sedgwick, 169. See Sedgwick's explanation of the significance of the “ring” imagery, ibid., 192.

\(^{77}\) Zemlinsky's stage directions for his libretto version of Wilde's play specify that Simone strangle Guido from in front, throwing him down and placing a knee on his chest. However (perhaps because of the incompleteness of the play), Wilde's stage directions are more ambiguous; they state simply that "Simone overpowers Guido and throws him down over [the] table." They thus leave open the possibility that this attack in the dark, like those in Dickens, is precipitated from behind.

\(^{78}\) Sedgwick, 193. Kaja Silverman also explores, to a greater extent, nonsexual and sexual violence inflicted on both heterosexual and homosexual male bodies, but does so within the frameworks of crises in historical typings of masculinity in the former, and masochistic subject-positions in the latter (which, incidentally, imply a "feminine" type of subjectivity for the homosexual male). Thus her psychoanalytical interest in subject positions does not focus on theorizing homophobic violence as such. See especially ch. 2, "Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity," and ch. 6, "Masochistic Ecstasy and the Ruination of Masculinity in Fassbinder's Cinema."
Two things are intriguing about this male homosocial reading of *A Florentine Tragedy*: first, how it eventually merges with the reading of "woman as mirror," and second, how it is supported by the motivic-dramatic structure of the music of Zemlinsky's opera. The homoerotic reading is implied all along by the woman-as-mirror analysis, even inscribed within it, in the form of the Freudian psychoanalytic conceptualization of male homosexuality as narcissistic object-choice. As Silverman describes it, the subject in this paradigm has a masculine identification, yet also desires a masculine object, which is ultimately a phantasized image of the self. The love object reflected from Bianca's eyes back to Guido, and then to Simone, is a *male* image. Thus, as suggested by the Freudian paradigm, the reading of the feminine subject position in this drama is intimately bound up with the subjective constitution of the homosexual male.

Christopher Hailey asserts of the *Florentine Tragedy* that, "although there are themes identified with such abstractions as love and death, there is no effort to develop a network of associative leitmotifs." And yet there are several motives (as shown in Example 3.4 above), other than the "abstract" ones for love and death already discussed, that recur with dramatic significance throughout the work, and the score is virtually littered with motivic references. Under the influence of the homosocial reading of the drama, the musical motives of its operatic setting may be variously heard as signifying in terms of both identity and desire. The first two measures of the overture directly juxtapose the motives associated with Guido and Simone, and then follow them immediately with the "love" music. Perhaps unexpectedly, Guido and Simone's motives are interrelated, in terms of their rhythmic profiles. Beaumont has pointed out the similarities between these two motives (see Example 3.8). He goes so far as to suggest that the second motive in the overture, Simone's, originates in the first, Guido's. Both use dotted-note rhythms – the most obvious link – and also triplets, and in their various versions throughout the opera.

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80 See Beaumont, 246-47.
they at times share intervallic qualities as well. Though Beaumont does note the association of the stepwise dotted motive with Simone, he does not connect Guido with the more leaping dotted motive, whose upward thrust suggests to him a "phallic symbol;" yet it appears clearly and repeatedly in association with the character of the prince. And Beaumont does not attribute dramatic significance to the motivic similarities he has noticed, yet the nuances of Wilde's drama suggest the appropriateness of understanding these motivic similarities in terms of homosocial object-identification.

Example 3.8: comparison of Simone's and Guido's motives (a: Simone; b: Guido and Simone's motives in the overture; c: Simone referring to Guido later in the opera)
As mentioned above, Zemlinsky's voluptuous setting of the episodes of both the Lucca Damask and the robe of state convey not only the lovely sensual description of the fabrics, and Simone's rapturous excitement in handling and displaying them, but Wilde's sensualization of commerce as well; and it positively electrifies the commercial exchange between the two men. The Lucca Damask music in particular, which recapitulates almost exactly the second thematic section of the overture, contains the “love” motive embedded in its second phrase (see Example 3.9), suggesting that the damask might also be viewed as a love object exchanged between the men. It continues to be associated with Simone and his obsession with his trade, ultimately having more to do with commerce than with the

Example 3.9: Zemlinsky, *Eine florentinische Tragödie*, “Lucca Damask” motive in the overture (3 mm. before reh. C)
sensual qualities of the robe itself. Perhaps most important, though, is the new significance which may be imputed to the ambivalent love motive, already problematized in terms of its meaning for the two heterosexual duets in the opera. It proves to be even more heavily overdetermined when its possible homoerotic connotations are considered. Not only is the "death" motive present with the "love" motive in both love duets, but the "love" motive may also be heard during the murder scene (Example 3.10). Between Guido and Bianca, the Wagnerian conflation of love and death can suggest (as do her ambiguous words) the price he will pay for their forbidden affair. Between Bianca and Simone, the decadent association of love and death echoes the tragedy that allowed their reunion, and hints at the darker side of their emotion. Between Simone and Guido, though, the music of love and death suggests – what? – the motivation, perhaps, behind their encounter, and its truly ambivalent nature. Like the desire that has surfaced, unnamed, in earlier moments of the drama, only to be extinguished finally in violence, the motive of a "love that dare not speak its name" is gradually drowned out by the forceful motive of "death," which saturates the score to a greater degree than any other passage in the opera. It seems as though the descending four-note motive takes on a mimetic quality here, not in terms of signifying death, but through the violence with which it dominates the texture. It takes over the direction of virtually the whole texture, which is effectually overwhelmed by the motive's gravitational pull, and the entire orchestra is caught in its grip, sliding inexorably downward: a musical enactment of the overcoming of love by violence, as Simone tightens his hold on Guido's throat. Repeated rushing sixteenth-note scales in the bass begin by ascending the full octave from F\textsubscript{3} to F\textsubscript{4}, but gradually lose height, reaching only to E\textsubscript{2}, then D\textsubscript{2}. High in the orchestra, the love motive recurs in a descending sequence, falling first by semitone and then by whole tone. The death motive itself, sung by Simone with chordal accompaniment, sequences downward by whole tone, then by minor second, as though he is picturing Guido's body sinking in the water: "the dumb river shall receive your corpse and wash it all unheeded to the sea."
Example 3.10: Zemlinsky, *Eine florentinische Tragödie*, murder scene (3mm. after reh. 147)
Example 3.10: continued
Example 3.10: continued

Even after death finally occurs, the motive continues, joined again by the "love" motive for the final love scene. In Bianca's vocal phrase "why did you not tell me?" the eros latent in the "death" motive is made explicit, and Simone echoes her, his phrase a mirror of hers. As Richard Kurth commented on an earlier version of this chapter, the murder of Guido may be understood as Simone's vehement rejection of the homoerotic tendencies mirrored in Guido's "courtly" and "feminized" qualities, which in turn reflected the feminized characteristics of Simone himself: both his stereotypical Jewish/effeminate features, and his de-masculinized state in the wake of Guido's usurping of the phallic power he asserts over his wife. In the abrupt reversal at the drama's end, Simone re-embraces his phallic identity; but his erotic identity, whether homo- or hetero-, remains narcissistic.
The Spectre in the Mirror, or Confronting the Self

Only the shallow know themselves.¹

The mirrored self-image subtext in *A Florentine Tragedy* is a topic that Wilde had already dealt with explicitly several years before, in the short story he considered his best, “The Birthday of the Infanta.” Already utilized by Schreker for a dance-pantomime setting of the same title in 1908, it became the subject of Zemlinsky’s next opera, *Der Zwerg* (1921). Wilde set his tale in the imperial court of Spain, just before the turn of the 17th century, in an atmosphere of opulence, artificiality, and the cruelty of the age of the Inquisition. The twelfth birthday of the Infanta is being celebrated with extravagant ceremony. Among the lavish entertainments provided are singing and dancing gypsies, a chained bear and barbary apes, and an African juggler who charms snakes and performs magic tricks. The favourite of everyone, though, is an ugly, deformed little dwarf. Son of a poor charcoal-burner, he was found in the forest the previous day. The dwarf’s awkward, clumsy dancing and bowing cause great amusement in the court. Unaware of his grotesque appearance and the reason for his audience’s laughter at him, he smiles and nods with delight, laughing along with them. He is enraptured by the prettiness of the Infanta, who at the conclusion of his performance throws him the white rose she was wearing in her hair. This he takes as a token of her affection, and on hearing that she wishes to see him dance again later that day, he excitedly imagines that she loves him and will run away with him to the forest. For the moment she has disappeared, though, for her birthday banquet and afternoon siesta. In the garden where he awaits her, he exclaims his delight to the birds and lizards, who like him for his kind nature and do not mind his ugliness; but the flowers are disgusted by his hideous appearance and, unbeknownst to him, mock him cruelly. At length the Dwarf wanders into the palace in search of the Infanta, crossing one magnificent hall after another, until he enters a room with a large mirror. Taken aback by a strange image that

¹ Oscar Wilde, “Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young,” in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 1205.
suddenly confronts and advances toward him, he at first imagines that he has met with another little creature who, though ugly and misshapen, mimics his movements. But gradually, as he sees that all of his surroundings, including the treasured white rose, repeat themselves beyond the cold, clear surface he cannot penetrate, he comes to realize in horror that the image is his own. The knowledge that he is so pitiful and hideous, and that the Infanta and her friends were laughing cruelly at him rather than happily with him, breaks his innocent heart, and he dies. The petulant princess, on learning that her new toy has so soon been broken, shrugs her little shoulders and goes out into the garden, declaring that those who come to play with her in future should have no hearts.

Wilde's story finds its context in Diego Velázquez's most famous painting, *Las Meninas*, whose apparently haphazard arrangement of a casual group at court gives a "natural" effect sometimes likened to that of a snapshot. Its central figure of the young princess closely resembles Wilde's Infanta. The little fairy tale's coolly detached tone also reflects in some sense the effect of the realism of Velázquez's painting, which not only incorporates the seemingly out-of-the-frame royal observers of the scene reflected in the mirror on the back wall, but also foregrounds pitilessly the melancholy expression of the ugly dwarf-servant in the right front of the portrait. It contrasts sharply with the pale silver-and-blonde image of the delicate young Infanta, posed stiffly in the elaborate artifice of her regal attire.

Jeremy Tambling points out that the detached tone of Wilde's narrative results from the use of "indirect free discourse, which means that it does not come from a single viewpoint; it presents matters from neither the dwarf's perception nor the court's but shifts between these so that its sympathies are ambiguous." The heartless stress on external aesthetic qualities renders the text nihilistic, denying humanistic values as illusory, even sadistically mocking them. He insists that the story "refuses the possibility of a traditional
humanist reading which would allow for the introduction of feeling.”

But does he go too far? Is there really “no residual humanism” in Wilde’s tale? Tambling suggests that it “mock[s] the dwarf’s romantic naïveté as much as court artifice.” Yet the very exaggeration of the Dwarf’s defects by the improbably chatty flowers of the garden – which is, by the way, almost the only spoken dialogue in the story – reveals that the mockery is directed at the mockers themselves. Elegant roses, snobbish tulips, and haughty lilies object to the Dwarf’s uncouth appearance in their presence in the strongest terms, declaring that “he should certainly be kept indoors for the rest of his natural life;” but when no less an objectionable plant than the cactus screams, “he is a perfect horror!” the whole passage becomes ridiculous in its extremity. The profound effect of a sad puppet play on the Grand Inquisitor, not quite the personification of humane sympathy, is another joke at the court’s expense; and as Tambling notes, the story’s final line “suggests that it is the princess who has no heart.”

Though nihilist in scope, the story stands out, with The Picture of Dorian Gray, as one of Wilde’s denunciations of excessive aestheticism, and is, as he said of the reputedly immoral Dorian, almost “too moral.” Far from refusing readers the possibility of a humanist point of view, “The Birthday of the Infanta” pushes them into that position; its unrelentingly detached tone of cruelty begs a spontaneous response of sympathy for its innocent victim. This makes it, as Clifton Snider says, one of Wilde’s saddest fairy tales, in which the author “repeatedly attacks the worship of beauty.”

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2 Jeremy Tambling, Opera and the Culture of Fascism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 212. Tambling is asserting a dichotomy between humanism as a focus on human values and worth, concerned with human interests, needs, and welfare, and philosophical nihilism as a rejection of all distinctions of moral values as baseless. He does not refer to the cultural/intellectual Renaissance humanist movement emphasizing secularity, or to a political nihilism involving violent anarchy.

3 All quotations from Wilde’s (English) tale are taken from Oscar Wilde, “The Birthday of the Infanta,” in The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, 234-47. Quotations from Georg Klaren’s (German) libretto version for Zemlinsky’s opera are translated by the author, and accompanied by Klaren’s original German phrases.

4 Tambling, 212.

Snider also mentions that the Dwarf, as scapegoat, is a type of Wilde himself, imprisoned for the stigma of his homosexuality and cynically abandoned by so many of his friends as he fell. As the story of the Dwarf predates Wilde’s trial and imprisonment, Snider’s comparison may be chronologically misleading; but it is true that Wilde, throughout his career, was maligned in the press for his opinions and behaviour, and his distinctive personal appearance – not necessarily conventionally attractive – was ruthlessly caricatured.\textsuperscript{6} This sounds a theme that becomes central to the criticism of Zemlinsky’s operatic version of the story: the biographical connection. At times the overwhelming insistence in the literature on this work’s links to Zemlinsky’s personal life becomes almost tedious. Admittedly, given the glaringly obvious parallels that may be drawn, this focus comes as no surprise. And, as with Mahler or Schoenberg, the element of the personal infringes so palpably on Zemlinsky’s creative activity that it might well be considered pertinent to an examination of certain of his works. \textit{Der Zwerg} is the principal case in point. Both the composer’s own physical appearance and his relationships with women factor into his engagement with the subject matter of his chosen libretto, and his musical response to that subject in his opera. Nearly every source that discusses the work says as much from the beginning.

Indeed, Zemlinsky articulated his own brutal physical self-assessment – “Hideous!” – which coincides with that of Alma Schindler, who famously called him a “hideous dwarf” in her diaries. Photographs and contemporary descriptions of him demonstrate some of the features which Alma found so objectionable: “chinless, small, with bulging eyes…”\textsuperscript{7} She called him a caricature, and the specimens produced of him in that genre are really quite harsh enough, even within the necessary expectations of exaggeration, to demonstrate that the public shared Alma’s view of his physical appearance. Apart from his “incredible

\textsuperscript{6} “The Birthday of the Infanta” was published in the collection entitled \textit{A House of Pomegranates} in 1891; Wilde’s trials took place in 1895.

\textsuperscript{7} See Beaumont, \textit{Zemlinsky}, 27 and 74ff.
ugliness," she also complained of "his smell," and not least, his Jewishness (the fact that she melded these negative characteristics together shows the typical anti-Semitic stereotypes she espoused), and her fears of his potential lack of professional success.\(^8\) Though she nevertheless found her revulsion overcome by the attractions of his personality, intelligence, and undeniable talent, such that their relationship progressed from that of composition student and teacher to an ardent love affair, her passion for him was quickly forgotten when she met Gustav Mahler, to whom she was engaged a few short weeks later. There is no doubt that Zemlinsky was devastated by this encounter with feminine cruelty and caprice; Beaumont says it was "the most shattering set-back of his life."\(^9\) But Alma was not his first love; and though he was aware of his physical appearance, and the sometimes tenuous nature of his career prospects, well before his relationship with her, it does not seem to have affected his affairs with other women, nor his self-confidence in his compositional abilities. Yet apparently, by popular account, it was only as reflected back from Alma that his image became so acutely painful to him, such that he sought catharsis (nearly twenty years later) through the composition of a work such as \textit{Der Zwerg}.

Beaumont discusses \textit{Der Zwerg} as one among "a series of works written in the hope of dispelling the evil star of Alma, which now hovered persistently over him – but to no avail."\(^{10}\) While the biographical parallels with the cruelly fateful encounter between the Dwarf and the beautiful but cold Infanta are obvious, he also sees Alma personified in two of Zemlinsky's previous operas, \textit{Der Traumgörge} and \textit{Eine florentinische Tragödie}. The latter's scenario of marital infidelity is supposed in part to mirror Alma's affair with Walter Gropius during her marriage to Mahler, but Beaumont also points out undeniable similarities with the equally tragic outcome of the triangle involving Schoenberg, Mathilde – his wife and Zemlinsky's sister – and her lover, the ultimately suicidal Richard Gerstl,

\(^8\) As documented in Beaumont, ch.5 "Alma gentil" (74-84), and ch. 6 "Alma cruel" (85-99).


\(^{10}\) Ibid.
once a family friend." (Interestingly, Simone has, still according to Beaumont, a third biographical double in Zemlinsky himself, as another “ugly man;”
if one accepts Richard Ellmann’s assertion that Simone is a Jew, the similarity is strengthened.) But Alma and her taunts at the composer’s ugliness remain most central in Beaumont’s interpretive approach to Zemlinsky’s creative output. However, what is really at stake in terms of the biographical connection is Zemlinsky’s decision to choose this particular dramatic subject; it seems unnecessarily speculative to read any more into it than that.

Even if we expect Adorno’s criticism to steer clear of the obvious, it is still interesting to note that he does not make any mention whatever of Zemlinsky’s appearance in his essay, though the composer’s ugliness was such a well-known characteristic. This omission cannot be because Adorno considered the composer’s physical character irrelevant. In the “Reminiscence” chapter of Alban Berg, Adorno does discuss Berg’s physical appearance, his stature, his physiognomy, his gait and movements, his expressions; and in fact links these characteristics to his musical-compositional style. And yet though Zemlinsky’s physical traits clearly influenced the subject of some of his compositions – especially Der Zwerg, of course, but also the Lied “Der Bucklichte Mannlein” (as discussed by Beaumont) – Adorno chooses to ignore this aspect of the composer’s person. Alma, too, is given only the briefest mention, when Zemlinsky’s Opus 7 songs are discussed as being dedicated to “Maria Schindler, who later became the wife of Gustav Mahler.”

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11 See ibid., and also Zemlinsky, 240 and 245.
12 Opp. cit.
13 See Ellmann, 388. The play does not seem to make any obvious reference to Simone’s race, and the reasons for the assumption that he is Jewish are not stated by Ellmann. He may assume the stereotype of Jews as merchants and tradesmen; the merchant’s loquacious, obsequious, and “feminized” qualities, as described in Chapter 3, also play into Jewish stereotypes of the time.
14 Adorno, Alban Berg, 9-34.
16 Adorno, “Zemlinsky,” 118. It might be noted, though, that Adorno generally does avoid biographically-based interpretations of works, even (particularly?) in those cases in which the
As suggested above, though, most critics do deal with "the Alma factor" when discussing Zemlinsky, especially in connection with this work (and the present study does not exempt itself). But fortunately, it is not such a crucial factor for them as she herself (now so notorious for incessantly narcissistic self-mythologizing) would have us believe. While asserting that the story of Der Zwerg was "[close] to [Zemlinsky's] own heart," Christopher Hailey also notes that, "Ironically, Zemlinsky's own final reckoning with the mirror [in Der Zwerg] was written during a time he had found happiness in a relationship with Luise Sachsel, the singer and painter who would become his second wife."\(^7\) He had already managed to move his personal life well past the Alma tragedy. As well, there were other conditions in Zemlinsky's life, such as his Jewishness, the refusal of the Viennese public to accept his work, and his "exile" to Prague for the central years of his career, which would have caused him to identify with a character marginalized by society and wounded by their lack of acceptance.

The present study does not seek to imply, as Adorno's omission may seem to, that the resemblances between Zemlinsky's own situation and that of his Dwarf character are not of interest, or even pertinent to a discussion of the work; quite the contrary. However, although these biographical links (upon which Beaumont's interpretation in particular relies so heavily) may be significant, they are ultimately not sufficient for an evaluation of the work, for they reduce it again to the naïve-Freudian concept of sublimation, the work of art as the substitute for the neurotic symptoms brought on by the experience of emotional trauma.\(^18\) (Though not precisely, since Zemlinsky's motivations for dealing with this subject matter in this way can hardly be considered unconscious.) What the strictly biographical-psychoanalytical approach most crucially misses, however, is the historical

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\(^7\) Hailey, "Zemlinsky's Mirror."

\(^18\) Beaumont's bias is understandable: Zemlinsky's biography is, after all, his principal concern.
factor of the pertinence of the story’s themes to the ideas of European society at large. Wilde’s tale engages the subject position of “a whole range of marginal figures, who must look at themselves in a mirror not of their own making.” It also finds its place among many works in Wilde’s oeuvre concerned with the central themes of image: mirrors, narcissism, poses, masks and self-imagining, artistic images and portraits, to name several notable manifestations. Nor was this fixation on image anything like a uniquely Wildean preoccupation; it was common throughout fin-de-siècle Europe. (Thomas Mann’s “Der kleine Herr Friedemann” of 1897 is another literary example.) As Hailey expresses it, Zemlinsky’s obsession with the play of appearances, which recurs in so many of his works, links him with contemporary Viennese writers, artists, and composers ranging from Freud, Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler, and Klimt to Schreker and Berg. And this, in turn, helps account for the nearly universal veneration with which Viennese artists and intellectuals held the works of Oscar Wilde, a writer for whom masks and guises were pivotal categories of aesthetic truth.

One such Viennese intellectual was Georg Klaren, the librettist for Der Zwerg. He took Wilde’s story and adapted it “freely” according to his own interests in contemporary theories of sex and psychology. In the event he changed the original a great deal.

As with the Florentine Tragedy, Adorno discovered problems with the libretto of Der Zwerg that detract from its suitability for the stage, despite its “undoubted musical qualities.” Oscar Wilde’s “immortal tale,” he asserts, “does not have enough substance to yield a full-scale dramatic work. It provides enough material for a single situation and whatever goes beyond that necessarily degenerates into dramatic padding.” As with the earlier work, the blame is apparently laid at Wilde’s feet. The operatic version supports

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19 Tambling, 214.
20 Hailey, “Zemlinsky’s Mirror.”
22 Adorno, “Zemlinsky,” 125.
Adorno's judgment of insubstantiality to some extent, in that it adds so much to Wilde's original material: new characters, dialogue, and added plot features, but also several "decorative" scenes, like the bedecking of the birthday-gift table, playing ball in the garden, and a pompous congratulatory processional. Berg also had critical comments to make, however, which seem to presage Adorno's, although they respond, significantly, to the opera, and not directly to Wilde's story. "It contains much that is undramatic," Berg wrote, "and the dramatic scenes, on the other hand (such as the first entry of the Dwarf), are so agonizingly tragic that one can scarcely bear it. What a shame for the glorious music." It would not be surprising to learn that Adorno's comment of "dramatic padding" was made in direct reference to Berg's. Yet Adorno's criticism may also echo part of that of Franz Werfel, whose comments on a lack of dramatic substance were, like Berg's, made not in relation to the Wildean original, but to the operatic version. Werfel disparaged "literature opera" in general, including Strauss' Wildean Salome, asserting that the words of a libretto, and even its dramatic effectiveness, were less important than its provision for "musical situations." He did find that Klaren had provided such situations for Zemlinsky's music; given his impassioned response in favour of the music of A Florentine Tragedy, he may have enjoyed the musical setting of Der Zwerg as well, even if he had misgivings about its literary text.

A certain amount of adaptation of the original story was absolutely necessary from the outset, of course, if only to convert Wilde's idea from the narrative to the dramatic mode. Unlike Schreker's pantomime version, the opera required dialogue for singing, all of which had to be fabricated. And, rather than retaining Wilde's nihilist tone, Klaren explicitly inserted the humanist element that Tambling asserts was absent in the Wilde, in the form of an additional character, Ghita, lady-in-waiting to the Infanta. In order to set

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up the scenario of the Dwarf's entrance, and make clear his unique lack of self-knowledge, a speech was added in which Don Estoban, the Chamberlain, pauses in his supervision of the birthday party preparations to describe the most extraordinary of the gifts. "The Sultan has sent a Dwarf," he intones, "a jest of cruel Nature" [Der Sultan sandte einen Zwerg, als Spiel der grausamen Natur]. He goes on to describe the remarkable fact that the Dwarf, having never seen a mirror, is ignorant of his ugliness and deformity, and directs that the mirrors in the palace be covered, for "the truth would mean death for the poor fool" [Wahrheit war' für den armen Narren Tod]. This obvious foreshadowing, also evident in the Dwarf's lute song (described below), is absent in Wilde's more refined version of the story, which eschews such unsubtle contrivances; but it is, nevertheless, not inappropriate from the point of view of the operatic tradition.

If some rather crude dramatic devices suited Klaren's purpose, there was at least one other which occurred to him, but which he avoided:

In Wilde [the Dwarf] dies of a broken heart; for me as librettist it would have been a cheap effect to let the Dwarf, in the depths of despair, strike out at the mirror and bleed to death — but this was unnecessary. He dies simply because he loved, because with such a love he cannot live.\(^5\)

Thus the most crucial theme of the story, the confrontation with the self, is reconfigured as confrontation with the feminine other represented by the princess, specifically, to accord with Klaren's current interest in Otto Weininger. As already mentioned, Klaren was the author of a monograph on Weininger, and his version of Wilde clearly demonstrates his preoccupation with Weininger's ideas on sexual pathology. The Dwarf's encounter with the mirror remains a crucial episode, but Klaren made it clear that his crisis is erotic in nature, precipitated by the desire generated in his ultimately devastating encounter with the Infanta. She is herself transformed by Klaren, from a child of 12 years to a girl of 18,

\(^5\) Georg Klaren, "Der Zwerg und was es bedeutet," Kölnische Zeitung, 17 June 1922; cited in Beaumont, Zemlinsky, 301 -02.
“not yet an adult but no longer a child.” Thus the sexual tension is heightened considerably between the Infanta and the Dwarf, now no longer a happy, innocent child raised in the forest, but a cavalier with a gallant manners and a melancholy air. Klaren composed a song for the Dwarf to perform in the court, in which a blood orange pierced by a hair pin and then discarded serves as an obvious metaphor for a heart cruelly broken; Zemlinsky set it as a lute song with mimetic, strummed accompaniment that recalls somewhat Simone’s lute song from the *Florentine Tragedy*. A long duet scene between the Dwarf and Infanta was also inserted, for which there is equally no precedent in Wilde’s narrative. In it the Infanta deliberately toys with the Dwarf, who has fallen hopelessly in love with her; his love is not a childlike affection, as it is in Wilde, but rather erotic in nature, as is evidenced by his attempt to kiss her, a gesture from which she withdraws in unfeigned horror and repulsion.

Beaumont insightfully describes the Weiningerian influence on the libretto, but also attributes significant changes to Wilde’s text to a desire on the librettist’s part of bringing the Dwarf character into closer similarity with Zemlinsky himself. The fact that he is rejected because of his ugliness by a cold-hearted, Alma-like princess was not likeness enough; he had to be made into a musician, a singer and a poet (hence Beaumont’s insistence that he is actually a composer) whose “reputation . . . precedes him from distant lands” [*Ein Ruf als Sänger eilt ihm voran aus fernem Land*]. As well, by making him a gift from the Sultan, rather than the son of a charcoal-burner captured one day in the woods, the Dwarf is Orientalized, and hence, according to Beaumont, brought closer to Zemlinsky’s Jewish origins. However, if Klaren meant to suggest Jewishness, whether as a resemblance to Zemlinsky himself or simply under the influence of Weininger’s anti-Semitic theories, Klaren insightfully describes the Weiningerian influence on the libretto, but also attributes significant changes to Wilde’s text to a desire on the librettist’s part of bringing the Dwarf character into closer similarity with Zemlinsky himself. The fact that he is rejected because of his ugliness by a cold-hearted, Alma-like princess was not likeness enough; he had to be made into a musician, a singer and a poet (hence Beaumont’s insistence that he is actually a composer) whose “reputation . . . precedes him from distant lands” [*Ein Ruf als Sänger eilt ihm voran aus fernem Land*]. As well, by making him a gift from the Sultan, rather than the son of a charcoal-burner captured one day in the woods, the Dwarf is Orientalized, and hence, according to Beaumont, brought closer to Zemlinsky’s Jewish origins. However, if Klaren meant to suggest Jewishness, whether as a resemblance to Zemlinsky himself or simply under the influence of Weininger’s anti-Semitic theories,

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26 Ibid.

27 One wonders why Klaren chose the metaphor of the “blood orange” for the Dwarf’s lute song, when Wilde had already supplied the (at least equally evocative) image of “pomegranates split and cracked with the heat, and show[ing] their bleeding red hearts” in the palace garden. *Rote Granatapfel* would even have yielded the same number of syllables as *blutende Orange*, but perhaps he simply preferred the sound of the latter, or the more obvious use of the word “blood.”
the "Oriental" connection was unnecessary. Already the ugly, dark-complexioned dwarf fit the common Jewish stereotypes that Wagner drew upon for his dwarf characters, Alberich, and especially the ill-treated Mime. Wagner’s original description coincides so closely with that of the Dwarf: “Mime . . . is small and bent, somewhat deformed and hobbling. His head is abnormally large . . . .”

Even the grotesque nature of the Dwarf’s movements and gestures marks him like the Wagnerian Jewish caricature: “When he stumbled into the arena, waddling on his crooked legs and wagging his huge, misshapen head from side to side, the children went off into a loud shout of delight.” These features were present in Wilde’s original version, before Klaren’s intervention.

If Klaren’s changes exaggerate the Dwarf’s Oriental, Jewish qualities, their effect is to feminize the character, again in the mode of Weininger, whose theory notoriously ascribed the amoral qualities of femininity to Jews as well. And this racial marker is really only the beginning. Was Klaren aware of the extent to which his reconfiguration of the tragedy into a confrontation with the feminine not only staged the undoing of the male character, but radically feminized him? It seems paradoxical, given Klaren’s declared intention to represent “the confrontation of every man with every woman . . . as Weininger teaches . . .” – in other words, a fundamental opposition between spiritual masculinity and egoless femininity. Yet, as Tambling realizes, “at the end the dwarf dies in a state of hysteria, marked by fate in every sense, deformed and feminized.”

Throughout the opera, the Dwarf, as spectacle, is placed in the feminine position of object of the gaze. He is further feminized, in light of Silverman’s theory, by his increasingly masochistic tendencies, perhaps most readily exemplified in the violent and sexually-nuanced lute song he sings about the blood orange. Beyond the obvious self-abasement of the song’s text, its real

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29 Klaren, op. cit.

30 Tambling, 211.
masochism arises in the phantasmatic that places the subject in a passive, feminine sexual position, that of an orange being penetrated by the pin. Even further, it configures a drastic reversal of the “normal” libidinal economy by assigning the phallic role of penetration to the explicitly feminine position: that of the Maiden who wields the pin. The Dwarf's subject-position at this point verges upon that of the masochistic homosexual male, while at the same time retaining a feminine object of desire – albeit an active, phallic feminine. The pin thus acquires the character of a fetish. It locates the Dwarf's erotic crisis at the point of the castration crisis, figuring his sexuality as infantile (a final twist which, ironically, seems to reconfigure Klaren's adult, sexually aware Dwarf into a childlike state closer to Wilde's). In terms of its location within the drama, the blood orange phantasmatic does not simply mirror the relative positions of the characters, the Dwarf as passive victim of the active Infanta; it actually makes these positions possible, for its expression in the lute song reveals to the Infanta – and to the whole court – the (sexual) vulnerability of the Dwarf. (A biographical reading of the libretto here, such as those so often applied to the opera with relation to Zemlinsky, would suggest a repressed masochistic homosexuality in Klaren.)

Clearly, theorizing the psychosexual outcome of Klaren's reinterpretation yields results far more radical than has been imagined until now. Ever since the opera's première, though, critics have been remarking on the incongruity caused by Klaren's reworking of

Silverman has theorized a male homosexuality paradigm (mentioned as the third “Leonardo” paradigm in Chapter 3, note 56) in which the subject position vacillates between passive feminine identification and desire for the feminine object, which is in fact “the phallic mother;” see Male Subjectivity at the Margins, ch. 8, “A Woman's Soul Enclosed in a Man's Body: Femininity in Male Homosexuality,” 366-73. This paradigm focuses on oral sexuality, though, which is not suggested by Klaren's text; it also situates the desire for the feminine from an infantile masculine position, rather than the masochistic-feminized position Klaren's text suggests. In fact, Silverman would perhaps take the present interpretation one step farther, to figure the sexuality enacted here as lesbian, the Dwarf in a feminized subject-position and a feminine object of desire, as in her discussion of Proust at the end of the same chapter. However, the focus there is, again, on orality, whereas Klaren's phantasmatic remains phallic.

Incidentally, this might be the point to suggest another line of questioning of the traditional interpretation of this work in terms of Zemlinsky's personal life: as Klaren is the author of the text, why is it not assumed to inscribe his biography, rather than, or equally with, that of the composer?
Wilde’s principal character, whereby the Dwarf as innocent child of nature becomes a cavalier. The question is raised repeatedly in the contemporary critical responses to the work: how is it possible that Klaren’s Dwarf, who is clearly no longer an uncultured being, has never seen his own reflection in a mirror? It does pose a problem. Even Siegfried, the child of nature raised in the wild forest by a dwarf, has seen his reflection before, in pools of water. But criticism of this “flaw” of Klaren’s libretto is slightly inaccurate, for, though critics all seem to ignore it, the text makes it clear that the Dwarf has in fact seen his reflection before. He tells Ghita of his first sighting of it, in the shining blade of a sword; and he demonstrates this to her, pulling out his dagger. “Here, you see, here it is, the image,” he says. “Haha, it is tame, it crouches on the blade, grins and mutters and makes fun of me with the same gestures. What a silly spirit!” [Da, siehst du, da ist es, das Bild. Haha, es ist zahm, es hockt auf der Klinge, grinst und murmelt, narrt mich mit Gleichem fort. Welch ein dummes Gespenst!] He simply has not recognized it for what it is: a “true” image of himself. At that first moment, he struck out at the image, but was unable to destroy it. If the narrow blade of a shining knife provides only a limited viewing surface, the difference is more than a matter of perspective. For the Dwarf has often seen “the bad one” since that first time, he says, “in dark glasses and in shining marble,” or like an evil Narcissus, “treacherously submerged in flowing water.” In Siegfried’s case, he has been able to recognize himself in the water’s surface, but he has also, crucially, recognized his (racial) difference from his “father,” Mime. If he does not yet know precisely or fully what he is, he knows surely what he is not: he has experienced a fundamental misrecognition between his image and that of the father. The Dwarf, though, has not recognized himself as being significantly different from others, which is why he misunderstands their seeming acceptance of him. More precisely, he has misrecognized his own image as other than himself.

33 See Beaumont, 302.
As this last statement suggests, there is a way to mediate conceptually the apparent contradiction here. In both Klaren's version, which stages the confrontation of the self with the feminine (the princess), and Wilde's original tale, which conceptualizes a confrontation with the self, the central mirror episode is figured as confrontation with the other. Wilde's parable of the horror of the subject confronted with his Self is explanatory for both his and Klaren's conceptions:

A man saw a being which hid its face from him, and he said, "I will compel it to show its face." It fled as he pursued, and he lost it, and his life went on. At last his pleasure drew him into a long room, where tables were spread for many, and in a mirror he saw the being whom he had pursued in youth. "This time you shall not escape me," he said, but the being did not try to escape, and hid its face no more. "Look!" it cried, "and now you will know that we cannot see each other again, for this is the face of your own soul, and it is horrible."34

This little narrative of Wilde's, which doubles that of his fairy tale, makes clear that the Self is conceived as an Other. It is the shock of realizing that the other is in fact the self that causes the fatal crisis. Actually, here is a curious twist on the méconnaissance of the mirror stage conceptualized by psychoanalysis.35 There, the child's recognition of the mirror image as its self—which is actually, as Lacan and Kristeva point out, a misrecognition, for the image is an object outside the self—gives rise to, in Lacan's terms, "jubilation." But here, the ultimate recognition of the self (which is also a misrecognition) follows the initial misrecognition of the image as an Other (in some sense a recognition that the image is outside the self); and this self (mis)recognition gives rise not to joy, but to horror. The painful image, "evacuated of ideality," as Silverman says, becomes the site of the ruination of the subject.36 Traditionally, psychoanalysis has seen the mirror stage as that which

34 Quoted in Ellmann, 532.

35 The mirror stage is infantile, as is the Dwarf: small, immature, and, in Wilde, childlike.

36 See Silverman's discussion of the sado-masochistic enactment of the mirror stage in Male Subjectivity at the Margins, 223-24.
allows the child to form a concept of the self that is distinct from the concept it is able to conceive of as Other. This would suggest that what the Dwarf sees in his reflection, that which kills him, is not merely his objective image, but the realization of how others see him. At this moment his subjectivity is (re)constituted. The crisis ensuing from the loss of his idealized self-conception (as a cavalier) “breaks his heart”: that is, it causes a literal (as well as a psychic) rupture, which is fatal.

It is interesting to remember at this point that Wilde’s Dwarf is not initially afraid of his reflection. It is ugly, “the most grotesque monster he had ever beheld,” but his first response is principally one of curiosity. He plays with the image. Only when he realizes that he cannot reach it as a real object does he become anxious:

The little Dwarf frowned, and the monster frowned also. He laughed, and it laughed with him, and held its hands to its sides, just as he himself was doing. He made it a mocking bow, and it returned him a low reverence. He went towards it, and it came to meet him, copying each step that he made, and stopping when he stopped himself. He shouted with amusement, and ran forward, and reached out his hand, and the hand of the monster touched his, and it was a cold as ice. He grew afraid, and moved his hand across, and the monster’s hand followed it quickly. He tried to press on, but something smooth and hard stopped him. The face of the monster was now close to his own, and seemed full of terror.

The image’s fear is apparent to the little Dwarf almost before he is aware of his own. Klaren’s Dwarf, however, is immediately terrified by the reflection. This reaction is not simply because the image is so ugly it frightens him; rather, the horror comes from his instant recognition of the image he has seen before. “Is it you, you fiendish image? Get

In Lacan, this is a linguistic moment, wherein “self” and “other” are conceptualized according to the symbolic order (see Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” in *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), esp. 1-7); Kristeva actually sees it as the result of a process previous to the mirror stage, the realm of semiotic meaning that precedes the symbolic (see Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, partial trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); and “Julia Kristeva in Conversation,” in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), 335).

In this respect his response is somewhat like that of others toward him, as David Metzer noted when reading a previous version of this chapter.
away from me!” he cries. “Have you escaped from my sword? Have you grown?” [Du bist es, feindliches Bild? Geb fort von mir! . . . Bist du aus meinem Schwert entflohen? Bist du gewachsen?] In the opera, then, the mirror encounter takes on features of the Unheimliche, wherein the frightening is also familiar. Even before the recognition of the self is accomplished, the image’s mimicry, in both Wilde’s and Klaren’s versions, pinpoints it as the type of the uncanny double: its behaviour is recognized as repeating the behaviour of the self.

In Strangers to Ourselves, Julia Kristeva explores Freud’s concept of the Unheimliche as his “investigation into anguish generally speaking and, in a fashion that is even more universal, into the dynamics of the unconscious.” 39 Freud’s essay on the uncanny begins from a semantic study of the term heimlich and its antonym, revealing the latter concept as already latent within the meaning of the former. Kristeva explains how this etymology prepares his psychoanalytical assertion that the uncanny is experienced first as other, something outside the self “where fright had anchored it,” but relocated inside – “the other is my (own and proper) unconscious.” 40 Freud continues on to theorize the infantile subject’s projection of what is feared or dangerous in itself onto an Other, a demonic double, as a repressive defense mechanism. The uncanny experience arises in the context of recurrence, the return of what was repressed; and the phenomenon is itself characterized by obsessive repetition and recurrence. This is a crucial point: the uncanny experience is characterized as much by the phenomenon of its recurrence as by the fearfulness of the repressed element that returns. Freud then reveals some conditions in which the uncanny surfaces: the first is confrontation with death, the second, confrontation with the feminine; in Kristeva’s terms, “the end and the beginning that engross and compose us, only to frighten us when they break through.” 41 We know the Dwarf experiences the second condition; but


40 Ibid., 283.

41 Ibid., 285.
he actually brings the two together in his conversation with Ghita, wherein she attempts to reveal the truth to him. Wondering aloud what she can possibly have to tell him, he says, smiling softly and caressing the cherished white rose from the princess, “I know that I love [...] do you want to pronounce my death?” [daß ich liebe, weiß ich ... Willst du mir Tod verkünden?]

Confronting the image of death invokes an ambiguity between fear of mortality and the (religious) hope of immortal survival, represented by the apparitions, ghosts and spectres of literature which inspired Freud’s study of the uncanny. These, too, make an appearance in the opera. Wilde’s Dwarf thought the creature he suddenly encountered for the first time in the palace was a “monster;” but the Dwarf in the opera refers to it as both “Gespenst” and “Spuk,” terms which variously mean ghost, nightmare, and haunting. He assigns to it an unreality: crying “I don’t want to dream you!” [Ich will dich nicht träumen!], he places the image in the realm of the (recurring) nightmare. Strangely, when he at last recognizes it as his own image, the image retains its ontological status, but the Dwarf himself becomes a ghost.42 From his initial stage of denial – “No, no! You are a ghost, not me!” – he comes at last to the horrifying realization that “I am the spectre.” [Nein, nein! Du bist ein Gespenst, nicht ich! ... So ich bin der Spuk.] It is as though his subjectivity were effaced at the moment it is constituted – he ceases to have any real existence. The encounter and misrecognition in the mirror scene even suggests that he has been a ghost, unreal, all along. “How do you recognize a ghost?” asks Derrida. “By the fact that it does not recognize itself in a mirror ... The ‘proper’ feature of specters, like vampires, is that they are deprived of a specular image, of the true, right specular image (but who is not so deprived?)43

The Dwarf’s encounter with his double incites a sense of loathing and disgust that goes beyond the disturbing feeling of the uncanny, and verges on Kristeva’s category of the

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42 In Wilde, the recognition does not have the same uncanny, uncorporeal effect, but it does de-humanize the Dwarf: “He crawled, like some wounded thing, into the shadow, and lay there moaning.”

abject. Kristeva asserts that abjection is different from, and more violent than, uncanniness. She has explained the concept of abjection as

an extremely strong feeling . . . which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace, but that it may menace us from the inside. So it is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so – whence the element of crisis which the notion of abjection carries within it. Taken to its logical consequences, it is an impossible assemblage of elements, with a connotation of a “fragile limit.”

The first sentence reveals the similarity between the concepts of the uncanny and the abject, but the abject carries with it the more vehement reaction of disgust, like that of the Dwarf, who found his reflection “horrible . . . foul to look at and grotesque.” The fragile limit here, the boundary, is the cold, hard, smooth surface of the mirror, which separates and at once joins the subject with the abject, the disgusting image which is at once Other and Self.

While Klaren’s recasting of Wilde’s fairy tale yields drastic psychic consequences for the subject of the narrative, the break between the two versions is not always as radical as it first seems. Both enact a fundamental confrontation with the self. While the psychosexual intricacies of the operatic version arise from Klaren’s attempt to recast that fundamental confrontation, to dislocate the otherness from the self onto the feminine (personified by the Infanta), this move is revealed as that infantile repression which gives rise to the uncanny – and the feminization undergone by his Dwarf makes clear the extent to which the fearful feminine Other is inscribed in the Self. So the Infanta is a catalyst, a condition for the emergence of the uncanny, but the basic confrontation remains, as in Wilde, with the Self. Wilde’s tale somehow encompasses Klaren’s from the outset; and if this is not such a surprising conclusion, it is because the story grapples with issues fundamental to modernist (male) subjectivity, attempting to come to grips with the crisis of the

44 Julia Kristeva, from “Interview with Elaine Hoffman Baruch on Feminism in the United States and France,” in The Portable Kristeva, 375.
destabilization of inner and superficial identity. It is as implied by Derrida’s description of the spectre that lacks a “proper” specular image: “... but who is not so deprived?”

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There are certainly some features of Zemlinsky’s setting of Der Zwerg that smack of Adorno’s accusation of “dramatic padding.” “Almost a third of the opera is given over to embellishment,” Beaumont notes; it is “almost as much an entertainment as a psychoanalytical case study.” Games, dancing, play and tomfoolery, decorating for the celebration, and presentation ceremony, take up a seemingly disproportionate amount of this “tragic” opera. The music of these passages has what both Beaumont and Hailey term a “neoclassical” quality. It is lightly orchestrated, clearly phrased, and largely harmonically consonant, and a dancelike feel and overall simplicity of texture predominate. Beaumont suggests that this emphasis serves as a foil for the intense tragedy of the opera’s later scenes, which employ a more expressionist idiom. Even further, it might be suggested that the proportion of embellishment tends to detract from the tragic quality of the work as a whole. Perhaps it even serves as the musico-dramatic correlate to the detached, nihilist tone of Wilde’s narrative. Like the idea of “burlesque” as a counterpoint to horror, it focuses on the external, on surface, as clear and cool as the smooth glass of the mirror. The “decorative” music of the opera’s opening scenes also contains a definite quality of strangeness, evoked by Zemlinsky’s incorporation of “exotic” elements. Altered scales, parallel chords and strokes of percussion (including tambourine, triangle, and cymbals) punctuate the short orchestral introduction (Example 4.1 below) with an orientalizing quality. These measures present the Infanta’s motive, a mordent-like figure whose essence

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46 Precisely: the vocal score of the opera is 162 pages long (discounting the title page, etc.); of the first 56 pages before the Dwarf enters, 52 are occupied by the decorating (and re-decorating) of the birthday-table, the gossip of the ladies-in-waiting, the ball game in the garden with the princess and her companions, and their playful assault on the birthday table. (The Chamberlain’s foreshadowing description of the Dwarf to the curious ladies-in-waiting takes up the other four pages.) Later the ball scene, wherein the Infanta dances with the Dwarf, occupies another seven pages.
Example 4.1: Zemlinsky, *Der Zwerg*, introduction (mm. 1-28)

Lebhaft und sehr rhythmisch, doch mäßig bewegt (\( \text{\textit{L}} = 126 \)).
is ornamental, combined with the "birthday" motive, whose four-note descent features a strongly accented lowered seventh degree.

Beaumont cites the decorative elements of Wilde's tale as an attraction the subject must have held for both Zemlinsky and Schreker. Though Zemlinsky knew Schreker's ballet-pantomime, and the latter's opera Die Gezeichneten which draws on similar subject matter (for more on this see the following chapter), Beaumont says that the music of Der Zwerg has "nothing in common" with that of the dance work, and cites Zemlinsky's comments as to the dramatic difference between his own opera and Schreker's. However, Der Zwerg does exhibit some Schrekerian features. The musical similarity to Schreker that some other critics, Adorno included, have missed, is pointed out by Horst Weber. He observes that Wilde's setting of the tale "at the Spanish court, always known for its cultivated passion for the horrible," made for a subject well-suited to the post-World War I "aura of bizarreness and shocking sensuality," for which Schreker's theatrical works were known. Zemlinsky, he suggests, in hopes of an operatic success like Schreker's, "instinctively drew towards" the Schrekerian style in his own dealing with such dramatic elements. In particular, Zemlinsky's harmonic style in Der Zwerg strays at times from the adherence to functionality that Adorno praised him for; instead, it draws nearer in certain moments to the non-functional and coloristic style of Schreker.

Weber demonstrates these harmonic qualities in relation to two key motives/themes of Der Zwerg, in which Zemlinsky ranges widely through distant key implications without modulation or functional progression. The harmonies are connected not through conventional fifth relations which, despite the high degree of chromaticism, still govern the underlying tonal motion of the idiom Zemlinsky shared with Strauss (still evident in the

Florentine Tragedy); rather, the chords are more loosely related through constellations of thirds, and are either simply juxtaposed, or linked, explicitly or implicitly, through functional transformations of shared pitches (which may or may not be present). The initial example is provided in the principal motive connected with the Dwarf, the motive we come to connect with his true self (Example 4.2). It is first heard when the Chamberlain describes the Dwarf to the ladies-in-waiting as "a jest of cruel nature," and reappears with the entrance of the Dwarf himself. Weber, Beaumont, and Clayton all refer to the dark timbral quality the English horn imparts to the melody, whose first two bars, constructed essentially quartally, present a slightly altered form of the "birthday" motive. Harmonically the motive moves from implications of a minor to f-sharp minor, passing on the way through F major (implied), d minor, b-flat minor, and d-minor again. The pitch A functions as either the root, or the third of F (both are implied in the first chord), and then as the fifth of d; F as (possible) root and then as the third of d, becomes the fifth of b-flat, then the third of d again; next, A as the fifth of d becomes the third of f-sharp.

Example 4.2: motive of the Dwarf’s true self (4 mm. after reh. no. 87)

When, a few moments after the Dwarf's entrance, he first gazes on the beautiful Infanta, a new motive appears (Example 4.3). Zemlinsky's performance directions indicate the dreamlike quality of the moment, which prompts Weber to suggest that this, and not the
confrontation with the mirror, is the decisive psychological moment for the Dwarf. The motive itself is associated thereafter with the Dwarf’s love for the Infanta’s image.

**Example 4.3**: motive of the Dwarf’s love for the Infanta’s image (1 mm. before reh. 93)

As Weber explains, these keys are connected as a constellation of thirds surrounding A major/minor and F major/minor (A major and f minor again representing hexatonic poles): the root A provides the third of F major, while the third of a minor provides the fifth of F, both major and minor; f minor’s third in turn provides the root of A-flat. (Both these brief passages may also be described in a neo-Riemannian scheme of semitonal voice-leading patterns, rather than in terms of common-tone links between third-related triads.) Weber describes both motives in terms of their emphasis on colour. In place of harmonic progression *per se*, they are curiously static, shifting between tonal spaces centered around common tones and non-functional third-relationships. He hears in each of them a “pedal-point” structure/principle, which “hinders the progress of the harmony and paralyses modulation.” No parallel example from Schreker is given to illustrate Weber’s point, but the following passage from *Die Gezeichneten* (Example 4.4) shows striking similarities to the harmonic technique Weber describes (though it does not explore the hexatonic region, as Zemlinsky’s does). Its broad progression from e minor to d minor is accomplished by

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48 “*Der Orgelpunkt hindert den Fortgang der Harmonie und paralysiert Modulationstendenzen.*” See Weber’s analysis of both motives, 60–62.
third-related motion by common tone: the third of e becomes the fifth of c minor; the root of c serves as the third of a minor; a’s third becomes the fifth of f minor, whose root provides the third of d minor.

**Example 4.4:** Schreker, *Die Gezeichneten*, Act II, scene 2 (1 mm. before reh. no. 550)

Another passage in *Der Zwerg* not pointed out by Weber is even more strikingly like Schreker. This is the scene where the Infanta and her companions are playing in the garden (see Example 4.5) – which, incidentally, evokes Wagner’s flower maidens in Klingsor’s enchanted garden in *Parsifal*, as does Schreker’s reflexive “flower maiden” song in Act II of *Der ferne Klang*. Zemlinsky’s scene begins with flourishes that are positively Schrekerian: high chromatic arpeggiations on muted strings, piccolo, harp and celesta, ascend and descend between a tritone pedal sustained by strings five octaves apart. This wide spacing, combined with the long sustained notes and weak rhythmic articulation, lends the texture a floating, suspended feeling. Running passages in the harp are punctuated by the triangle. The melody of the soprano-alto chorus is echoed in a timbrally strange doubling of high solo cello and trumpet. Crystalline textures, timbral blurring and
Example 4.5: Zemlinsky, *Der Zwerg*, opening of the game in the garden (reh. no. 20)
harmonic ambiguity: the passage is saturated with hallmarks of Schreker's “phantasmagoric” style. Not only are the decorative plot elements common between the works by Schreker and Zemlinsky, but Zemlinsky appears to have associated Schreker's musical style with the decorative. The “garden” passage is like a quotation of the phantasmagoric feature that pervades Schreker's style – Zemlinsky's phantasmagoria is once-removed, isolated as a set-piece.

While analysts have commented on the deliberate differentiation in style and harmonic language between the music of the Infanta – “neoclassicist” – and that of the Dwarf – “expressionist” – they have generally failed to note that Zemlinsky also, significantly, implies the fundamental distinction between them through his use of meter. Almost throughout the entire work, the music of the Infanta and of the court is in triple meter, while the Dwarf's music is duple. Exceptions occur when they are explicitly interacting with each other: for instance, the Dwarf's lute song, which he performs for the court, is in triple time, while portions of the Infanta's part of their later duet are in duple meter. Generally, though, the duple-triple distinction predominates, even on the small scale; for example, the Dwarf's entrance, accompanied by his motive, is in a duple time which interrupts the triple meter for a mere five measures, which are nevertheless of the greatest significance. Obviously the metrical distinction is made with dramatic intention. The implication to be drawn is that the Infanta and her world are metrically allied with the dance; it is the world of the social, of manner and artifice. With this world, the Dwarf's true nature is, figuratively and literally, out of step.

The motive which represents the Dwarf as he is seen by others is one that is, apparently, directly mimetic (see Example 4.6a below). Its dotted rhythms, which Beaumont describes as “frog-hops,” mimic and mock the limping of the little creature, as he moves on his stunted limbs. There is, in addition, a grotesque quality to the string glissandi, which add to the mocking tone. Its cruelty goes beyond naïve referentiality. How far this cruel mimicry is from the sympathetic, assimilating quality of mimesis Adorno
described! Here, mimesis is apparently "combined with the instrumentality it generally oppose[s] – a potential realized precisely in the mocking Nazi mimicry of the Jews and duplicated in the culture industry at its most repressive;" the mimetic potential of which, as Jay explains, Adorno’s critical enterprise was always wary. Indeed, this motive takes a distinctly objectifying stance. Instead of a mimetic approximation of the Dwarf himself, it might be thought of as the musical equivalent of the gaze, of which he is the object.

Example 4.6: a, the Dwarf as seen by others (reh. 88); b, the Dwarf as he presents himself in the court (1 mm. before reh. 89); c, the Dwarf’s “double” (3 mm. after reh. 217)

There is no doubt that Zemlinsky mimetically reflects the mirror theme of the drama within the musical-motivic structure by employing dramatically significant musical motives.

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49 Jay, 121. Adorno’s Strauss critique provides an example of this insidious kind of musical mimesis/mimicry with reference to the music of the Jews in Salome; see Adorno, “Richard Strauss.”
with inversionsal and retrograde relationships. Several motivic relationships have dramatic connotations that hint at the level of psychology, at the “uncanny” nature of the Dwarf’s confrontation with his self in the mirror. Motives that are employed to reflect dramatic oppositions recognize each other in their musical similarities. For instance, the similarities between the mockingly mimetic motive of the Dwarf as viewed by the court, 4.6a, and his own motive with which he gallantly presents himself to the Infanta, 4.6b, are fairly obvious. Both begin with stepwise ascending motions; 4.6b then continues with a stepwise descent in a dotted rhythm, inverting the opening dotted ascent in the bass of 4.6a. In both motives, the primary structural interval is the fourth: 4.6a includes parallel quartal trichords and melodic segments spanning a fourth, and fourths are prominent in the melody of 4.6b (G sharp-C sharp, E-B, C sharp-F sharp). Furthermore, the second phrase of the Dwarf’s “courtly” motive 4.6b twice employs the same G sharp-C sharp-F sharp trichord of the first phrase, but inverts the general direction, tending downwards rather than up; it is like a slightly distorted reflection of the first phrase, suggesting the way that the double in the mirror, while Other, is part of the Self. Finally, a predominant motive from the conversation with Ghita, wherein the Dwarf describes to her the mocking but “tame” image that appears on the blade of his sword (4.6c), is also clearly related to these first two. It incorporates the opening stepwise ascent, and also features the G sharp-C sharp-F sharp trichord from 4.6b, but with the order reversed, again like a reflection. Ultimately, this whole complex of three motives is related to the original motive of the Dwarf’s “true self” (Example 4.2) through their quartal construction. Later, the anguished motive of the Dwarf’s denial (see Example 4.7 below) – “Tell me that it isn’t true” – is drawn from the same original motive associated with him: the melodic setting of the words “daß es nicht wahr ist – daß ich nicht häßlich bin” again utilize the descent through the interval of a fourth (transposed upward to begin on B flat rather than G), while the orchestral accompaniment opens with a dotted fourth gesture E flat-B flat. At that moment he reveals that he knows it is true, that he sees himself as he has been seen all along. His melody renders his words
Example 4.7: Zemlinsky, *Der Zwerg*, the Dwarf’s denial (2 mm. after reh. no. 268)

false and impotent, while expressing the truth of his anguished cry, which comes from his very self. All these musical relationships are dramatically telling, and point toward the themes of mirror reflection and uncanny doubling. They reveal, on one hand, that the
Dwarf regards his elusive evil double similarly to the way the members of the court, in turn, regard him; this is not so surprising. Yet the thinly veiled relationship between his views of the double and of himself reflects the dramatic theme of abjection, the horror with which the horrible is found to be part of the self.

Interestingly, much of the Dwarf’s conversation with Ghita is structured over an ostinato bass figure (Example 4.8), a technique whose static quality might have drawn Adorno’s criticism, but which has an effect of particular dramatic relevance for the scene. Zemlinsky’s use of the ostinato here recalls parts of the Florentine Tragedy. Beaumont discusses the ostinato in Der Zwerg (which he calls a chaconne) in terms of its dramatic implications: it suggests to him that the Dwarf is unable to escape his delusions, as Simone had declared his soul to be “in a prison-house.” Equally, its lack of progression mirrors the futility of Ghita’s attempt to enlighten the Dwarf. While Beaumont’s dramatic interpretation of “imprisonment by delusion” is plausible, the comparison he makes with the Florentine Tragedy is somewhat muddled, as he does not draw any musical connection between the works here. There are, however, some musical correlations between the two operas, which relate to the ostinato structure of the Dwarf’s exchange with Ghita. Though Beaumont states unequivocally that the ostinato in Der Zwerg is a device that Zemlinsky “had never used before,” he is in error, for there are three similar effects employed in A Florentine Tragedy. Simone’s spinning song – though not the lute song to whose text Beaumont refers – uses just the same technique (see Example 4.9). The spinning song is built on a one-measure ostinato pattern, and is in triple meter, like the one in Der Zwerg. Each pattern is subject to occasional variation as it goes along, through transposition or extension, but in both passages it returns after a break to its original form, before gradually petering out. In the Florentine Tragedy, the ostinato is – or at least, begins as – a fairly simple mimetic device.

50 Beaumont, 308.
51 Ibid.
Example 4.8: Zemlinsky, Der Zwerg, the Dwarf's conversation with Ghita (reh. 208)

It mimics the motion of the spinning wheel, in its mechanically repetitive rhythm, its whirring tremolo, its recurring low-pitched downbeat that suggests the thump of the treadle, and its overall circularity. In Der Zwerg, however, the ostinato is not so obviously mimetic. Its dramatic significance rather likens it to two other, slightly different ostinato-
like textures that appear in *A Florentine Tragedy*. In the first (5 mm. before reh. no. 102), Simone, while pouring out a glass of wine for Guido, notes a spot of wine on the table, and meditates ominously on its similarity to blood. A C-octave pedal-point in horns and violas, reiterated in a hemiola rhythm, recurs throughout the span of twenty-five measures, then shifts up to C-sharp for an additional thirteen measures. The rhythmic pedal ostinato signifies or mimics Simone’s fixation on the image of spilled wine as suggestive of spilled blood. As Simone’s words foreshadow the murder to come, the pedal’s immovability holds the passage in suspense, as though waiting for tragedy to strike.

**Example 4.9:** Zemlinsky, *Eine florentinische Tragödie*, Simone’s spinning song (reh. no. 47)
Moments later, when Simone jumps up abruptly and leaves the table in agitation over Guido’s open flirtation with Bianca, another pedal enters the texture. This time a tremolo between C-sharp and D stretches over twenty-five measures, then continues for another six measures between F and G-flat, while Simone somberly describes how his mood is poisoned by “some thought that like an adder creeps from cell to cell.” The musical device again mirrors that sense of obsessive entrapment, of mental imprisonment, that Beaumont described in relation to both Simone and the Dwarf. All of these passages employ static ostinato or pedal figures to similar dramatic effects: they mimic ideas of fixation, but also lend to the sense of foreshadowing in the text, in simultaneously suspending and hinting at the inescapability of the tragic outcome. Thus, the ostinato in *Der Zwerg* demonstrates musically that the Dwarf’s confrontation with the mirror is as inevitable as Guido’s confrontation with Simone, and as fatal. In this sense of inevitable fatality, both operas are tragedies. Most essentially, though, like the recurrences of common elements in the “mirroring” motives relating to the Dwarf, the obsessive repetitive nature of the ostinato points again toward the phenomenon of uncanny recurrence. The Dwarf’s fear in facing his evil Other responds not merely to its ugliness, but to its familiarity: it is always with him because it is always his Self.

Zemlinsky’s opera thus confronts one of the most fundamental issues of the psychological formation of subjectivity – the recognition of the Self in the Other – within the context of grappling with the personal tragedy of physical ugliness, a tragedy he knew first hand. “To compose an opera on so sensitive a theme as his own physical appearance seemed a particularly distressing form of self-abasement,” says Beaumont, noting that Zemlinsky’s friends attempted to dissuade him from setting it.52 But even as a self-portrait the opera may be viewed in a more positive light, and not merely in terms of the cathartic qualities Beaumont asserts it held for the composer. Zemlinsky made a very pointed musical distinction between the expressive realm of the subject, and the objective realm of

52 Beaumont, 309.
the cruel society that rejects him. The latter world he couched in terms of externality: reified gestures of formality, rhythmic rigidity and ornamental artificiality. For the former, he reserved the highly lyrical, rhythmically flexible, and harmonically nuanced language of his most characteristically expressive utterances. What seems clear is that Zemlinsky intended, musically, to speak for the subject, and he did so in terms of the greatest authenticity.
Gezeichneten: Portraits of the Artist as a Marked Man

'Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter.'

'It often seems to me that art conceals the artist far more completely than it ever reveals him.'

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.¹

When Zemlinsky asked Schreker in 1912 to write him a libretto on “the tragedy of the ugly man,”² he could hardly have imagined that not one, but two operatic works would result from this idea. Given Schreker's claim that musical and literary inspiration coincided in his compositional approach to opera, it is not surprising that, as he fashioned the text Zemlinsky had requested, he found his own musical ideas for its setting forming in his imagination, and was loath to give them up. He ended by asking Zemlinsky to relinquish the libretto so that he might set it himself, and Zemlinsky, understanding, agreed. In the event, Schreker's Die Gezeichneten, composed between 1913–1915 and premiered in 1918, predated by several years Zemlinsky's Der Zwerg, which was not completed until 1921.

Like Wilde's Florentine Tragedy, Schreker's drama is set in sixteenth-century Italy. Its principal character is the Genovese nobleman Alviano Selvago, a hunchback and a cripple, with “great shining eyes” [grosse leuchtende Augen].³ He has tried to sublimate his stunted desire for beauty, love, and erotic passion through the creation of Elysium, an island pleasure-paradise. However, he never goes there to enjoy its beauties and seductions; rather, those who benefit from them are his dissolute young friends, Count Tamare and a group of other noblemen. In a secret grotto on the island they conduct orgies with women

¹ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, 21; 94; 17.


³ From Schreker's physical description of Alviano in the stage directions. All quotations from the opera are from Die Gezeichneten, piano-vocal score (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1916), and are translated by the author, with the original German provided in brackets.
kidnapped from the city. These women are not only being raped, but murdered as well, and Genoa is becoming anxious over the mysterious disappearance of its daughters from all walks of life. Partly to atone for these wickednesses, and partly to assuage his bitterness at his own exclusion from the sensuous pleasures his friends enjoy, Alviano decides to give his island to the city, and all the young noblemen’s protests cannot change his mind.

Tamare’s current object of desire is Carlotta, who has aroused his anger by mockingly refusing him. For the moment, she is in fact more interested in the ugly and misshapen Alviano. She explains to him that she is a painter – a painter of souls, she claims; though she paints other subjects too, as will be seen. Despite his suspicions that she is mocking his deformities, she persuades Alviano to come to her studio and sit for a portrait. There, she declares that she loves him, and his wild happiness at being loved at last brings to his eyes the ecstatic expression Carlotta desires to capture in paint. By the next day, however, the portrait finished, she seems to have lost interest in him. He searches for her distractedly among the crowds at the gift-celebration on Elysium, but, overcome by the magically seductive atmosphere of the place, she has run off with Tamare. She is discovered in the grotto, near death; Tamare boasts of his violent conquest of her, and when he mocks Alviano, the tormented man draws a dagger and stabs him. With her dying breath, though, Carlotta calls for Tamare, and the devastated Alviano staggers away, mentally unhinged.

That there are parallels between Schreker’s libretto and “The Birthday of the Infanta” is clear, and Schreker was, of course, already familiar with Wilde’s fairy tale from his earlier dance-pantomime setting of it. Magali Zibaso emphasizes these parallels by conducting her discussion of Schreker’s pantomime and opera together: “Vom Spanischen Fest zu den Gezeichneten.” Though Schreker did not directly say so, the Wilde story is generally considered the source upon which the opera is based, partly because of the connection with Zemlinsky, which can quickly lead to a convolution of similarities and possible sources and influences. The “close similarities” Adorno finds in the two libretti

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4 See Magali Zibaso, Franz Schrekers Bühnenwerke: Eine Biographie in Selbstzeugnissen und Analysen seiner Opern (Saarbrücken: Pfau Verlag, 1999), 82-100.
are, he says, "obviously more than a coincidence." These are partly owing to the radical changes Klaren wrought in Wilde's innocent Dwarf, as described in chapter 4, which bring him closer to the figure of his operatic predecessor Alviano Selvago than to Wilde's original character. That Zemlinsky's own conception of his Dwarf character remained a naïve one, in contrast with that of Klaren, is clear from the following quotation, which responds to the comparison between his and Schreker's 'ugly men': "In Schreker it is a case of conscious disfigurement, while my Dwarf seeks his fortune in fairy-tale-like ignorance of his deformity, and thus becomes tragic." Wilde's little Dwarf character is, physically if not psychologically, akin to Schreker's small, ugly and hunchbacked nobleman. As well, both Alviano and the Dwarf become victims of the whims of a rather heartless woman who toys with their affections. And, generally, themes of image and the value of beauty are foregrounded in both texts. (Connections with other stories are easily drawn as well; Hellmut Kuhn has pointed out, for example, that there are also affinities with Rigoletto. In comparing Verdi's Duke of Mantua to Tamare, and Rigoletto to Alviano, Kuhn notes also how both deformed men, embittered by society's rejection, have obsessive personalities. And in terms of setting, the grotto on Elysium resembles nothing so much as the luxurious secret cave on the island of The Count of Monte Cristo.) However, "[t]he Wilde short story is only source material here," as Tambling admits; Die Gezeichneten “took the Wilde plot much further." Indeed, the differences between the narratives are almost as numerous as the similarities, not merely in terms of the principal character's psychological makeup, but in innumerable details of the plot as well. What seems to pass without comment is that there is an even greater degree of similarity between Schreker's drama and another narrative of Oscar Wilde's: namely his novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, which encapsulates the tension

5 Adorno, "Zemlinsky," 117.

6 Quoted in Beaumont, Zemlinsky, 303.


8 Tambling, Opera and the Culture of Fascism, 215.
between surface appearance and inner nature that became a central theme of fin-de-siècle aesthetic culture. This common preoccupation explains the fervent enthusiasm with which Viennese artists and intellectuals greeted the works of Wilde, for whom masks and guises were “pivotal categories of aesthetic truth.”

*Dorian Gray* contains all the elements of transgressive sexuality, flouting of social mores in pursuit of hedonistic pleasure, and meditation on art and artists and their relation to their subjects, which find their way into *Die Gezeichneten*, but are surely not present in “The Birthday of the Infanta.” True, Dorian’s unusual physical beauty appears the exact opposite of Alviano’s hideousness. But it is Dorian, not the hapless Dwarf of the other tale, who has his portrait painted by an artist who is obsessed by him and by his looks; it is Dorian who keeps the rather unsavory company of morally dissolute male friends; it is Dorian whose own depravity leads to ruin and death for women, and not only for Sibyl Vane, the first woman he had loved. Dorian’s influence leads to the corruption and death of other young men as well, as he was shown the way to corruption by Lord Henry Wotton; similarly, the group of young men surrounding Alviano and Tamare share a homosocial bond through their traffic in women, and these activities are also criminal. Really, both Alviano and Tamare have traits of Dorian Gray. The first, while ugly, is driven by an insatiable lust for beauty, and pours his wealth and energies into the creation of a sensual paradise, as Dorian continually collects for himself all the strange and beautiful things he can acquire: jewels, tapestries, exotic musical instruments, and the like. The other has all the beauty of Dorian, and all his success with women, and is equally selfish and ruthless, using others purely for his own pleasure, even (or especially) if it means their ruin. While Dorian is implicated through gossip in numerous crimes, it is he who murders the painter, Basil Hallward; Tamare is guilty of an unknown number of rapes and murders of women before he finally rapes and kills the painter Carlotta.

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9 Hailey, “Zemlinsky’s Mirror.”
In yet another parallel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* contains mention of a novel – a "poisonous book" with a yellow cover (probably Huysmans’ *A Rebours*) – whose main character has "a grotesque fear of mirrors,"¹⁰ like Alviano, who has "banned mirrors from [his] house." And so the mirror theme from Wilde’s fairy tale appears here, too, in both *Dorian Gray* and *Die Gezeichneten*. Self-image remains key, but is transferred from the medium of the mirror reflection to that of the painted portrait, and so to the realm of art. Portraits are among the most interesting commonalities between novel and operatic libretto. The novel in fact makes a crucial connection between mirror and portrait, which seem at first to be rather different types of images. But Dorian’s portrait, through some mysterious affinity between life and art, becomes a sort of mirror. In the first weeks following its completion, he is enchanted by it, in awe that it is really his own image, and that he is really so beautiful, so physically perfect. "Morning after morning he had sat before the portrait, wondering at its beauty, almost enamoured of it, as it seemed to him at times . . . Once, in a boyish mockery of Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips," Wilde tells us, evoking the notion of the picture as reflection.¹¹ It is on the night that Dorian’s cruelty to Sibyl Vane drives her to suicide that he first notices a change in it, "a touch of cruelty about the mouth." His horror gives way first to curiosity – how could this possibly happen? – and then to a kind of excited pleasure. The picture, and not himself, bears the consequence of his sins; in the years to come, it will age, and wither, but he will remain youthful, handsome, and most importantly, free of the signs of corruption, with which the portrait instead will be marked. As Dorian realizes, "[t]his portrait would be to him the most magical of mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would

¹⁰ Though Wilde does not name the book Dorian reads, he did say at his trial that it was – almost – *A Rebours*. Yet, though many references to Huysmans in *Dorian* seem clear, Ellmann also notes that they are "deliberately inaccurate," including misleading chapter references. The hero’s dread of mirrors, for example, is not mentioned in relation to Des Esseintes, though, as Ellmann points out, he does read in Mallarmé about Herodias, who has this fear. See Ellmann, 298-99.

reveal to him his own soul."12 Basil Hallward, the painter of the portrait, decides from the moment of its completion that he will never exhibit it, because he feels that it reveals too much truth, not about its subject, but about him, the artist; he believes he sees reflected in it the "curious artistic idolatry"13 he has conceived for Dorian (not to mention the homoerotic attraction Wilde clearly implies). Later he changes his mind and declares the reverse: the first two quotations which head this chapter are both, in fact, spoken to Lord Henry Wotton by the character of Basil Hallward. Perhaps he is correct on both counts; but in fact the portrait reveals something quite different from what he imagines.

The story makes a presumption which is in its way somewhat remarkable: that the physical body, and particularly the expression of the face, eyes and mouth – but also the hands – bear outward traces of the inner moral and psychical constitution of the individual. The fact that Dorian never physically bears any marks of either age or moral decrepitude exonerates him of the many suspicions that arise against him, as rumours about his activities and character accumulate and his companions fall from grace (or worse) one by one. His portrait takes on for him the physical consequences of his life; hiding the truth, he carries on the life of an image of beauty, charm, and cultivation, of purity and goodness. In a sense, he has become the portrait, and the portrait has become him. The novel’s shocking verismo conclusion brings to light the true depth of the affinity between man and portrait, and the latter is revealed as so much more than a reflection. When Dorian strikes out at it with the knife that killed Basil Hallward, he kills himself. This conclusion is foreshadowed in the early pages of the novel, when, the portrait just completed, Basil assumes that Dorian does not like it, and makes a move to destroy it. But he is prevented from doing so by Dorian himself: “With a stifled sob the lad leaped from the couch, and, rushing over to Hallward, tore the knife out of his hand, and flung it to the end of the studio. ‘Don’t, Basil,
don’t!’ he cried. ‘It would be murder!’ In the event, it is suicide, as Dorian threatens that same day, in grief over the fact that he will one day lose the youth and beauty depicted in the painting: “When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself.” Years later, after Basil is dead and disposed of, Dorian himself carries through the interrupted act of destruction on the painting, through which it reverts to its original, beautiful, unmarred state, while his body becomes the corpse of his true self: hideously ugly . . . like Alviano.

It is fascinating to examine the way these curious affinities proposed by Wilde’s novel, between inner being and outward appearance, and between art and life, are reflected in Schreker’s libretto. Fittingly, they are mirrored and yet altered. Alviano’s character embodies, on one hand, a disjunction between the inner being and the physical body: while his outward form is marked (gezeichnet), twisted and deformed, his soul craves aesthetic and physical beauty, with a passion that is continually frustrated as his ugliness renders him an object of repulsion rather than desire. His inner self thus repressed, he must express his desires through art – the creation of the island paradise, which is made by other artists, but for which he “gave only – the longing” [ich gab nur – die Sehnsucht]. And yet his inner nature is visible through one part of his physical aspect: his great shining eyes. The expression of these eyes is what Carlotta, the painter of souls, so desires to capture in order to complete her portrait of him. As in The Picture of Dorian Gray, art in Schreker’s opera is able to reflect the inner being, to act as a mirror of the soul. This, at least, is the suggestion, though when Alviano asks, “can one do that – I mean, can you – paint souls?” [könnt Ihr das – ich meine, gelingt’s Euch – Seelen zu malen?], Carlotta responds that she is not really sure. Carlotta herself has shining eyes – it was a glimpse of them through the carriage window that first attracted Tamare in the street. They seem to suggest that her soul is like Alviano’s. Of course, she is also marked physically, like Alviano, not by ugliness but by a congenital heart condition; yet, like Dorian, her mark is internal, and is hidden beneath an

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14 Ibid., 35.

15 Ibid.
outward aspect of beauty. Her art, as will be seen, is concerned not only with portraits of others’ souls, but mirrors her own inner self as well; mirrors, in fact, her markedness, her stigma both physical and emotional. Carlotta does not only paint portraits of souls; she also paints hands. Hailey confuses the two types of paintings, stating, “in the opera’s central scene we learn that these ‘portraits’ [of souls] are in fact studies of hands,” but the hand paintings do seem to fall into a unique category. For example, the focus in her painting of Alviano is his eyes, but she does not paint his hands. Further, the hand images – at least, one of them in particular, but perhaps all – are symbolic self-portraits with distinct psychological connotations, which Carlotta herself explains in part as she speaks with Alviano in her studio. Her art, then, is deeply implicated in a Wildean ethos in which art both reveals and conceals hidden psychological and moral truths, about both its subject and its author. In Schreker’s opera, as in Wilde’s novel, the outward appearance conceals the inner being, for better or worse, yet this inner being is mirrored in the painter’s art.

While the symbolic aspects of Wilde’s novel thus postulate an imaginative shifting of the boundaries between art and life, they also challenge the boundaries separating the visual, spatial art of painting from the temporal art of literature. He created in the medium of words the image of a painting that, in defiance of its nature as visual art, changes over time – and this task was itself something that only a temporal art such as literature could accomplish. “That literature and painting could not exchange their roles was the idea which Dorian Gray would alter; . . . by bringing together . . . the exalted moment and its disintegration,” Ellmann says.\(^{17}\) A similar claim might be made for Schreker’s opera, which takes up the theme of artistic image through the temporal art of music, and attempts to transform both spheres. The realm of alluring and effervescent sound, the idea of a Klang that “proves too elusive to grasp and then disappears,”\(^{18}\) both symbolically postulates

\(^{16}\) Hailey, *Franz Schreker*, 66.

\(^{17}\) Ellmann, 294-5.

exaltation and its own dissolution,\textsuperscript{19} and, as Adorno recognizes, hovers transgressively on the border between the temporal and the spatial.

Indeed, Adorno’s “Schreker” essay is filled with metaphorical evocations of the visual and spatial character of the Schrekerian sound. Even the mirror image carries over into Adorno’s criticism of Schreker. His analytical discussion of the prelude to Die Gezeichneten refers to “the iridescent mirror of [Schreker’s] orchestral sound.”\textsuperscript{20} The metaphor here refers not so much to an image as to a quality of reflecting light – the characteristic timbral “shimmer.” Along with the theme of artistic image, Schreker’s opera does deal explicitly and symbolically with concepts of both light and sound, and furthermore, they come together, as they do on a more abstract level in Adorno’s critique. For Adorno, of course, the light is the flickering glow from the magic lantern – the phantasmagoria once again. This Schrekerian effect is never more potent than in Die Gezeichneten, the opera that, Adorno asserts, is “unquestionably his best.”\textsuperscript{21} He is not alone in the feeling that, with Die Gezeichneten, Schreker reached a high point in his oeuvre. It certainly receives more descriptive, analytical, and critical attention in Adorno’s essay than any other of Schreker’s works. “Despite the rapidity with which stimuli are blunted in the history of music,” he says, “we can still feel the impact of the beginning of the overture to Die Gezeichneten, so original was it when it was first heard.”\textsuperscript{22} This beginning, already briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, is notable first for its singular timbral quality, which makes use of the string harmonics, harp, and celesta we have come to expect in the Schrekerian sound, and also touches of the triangle, “which Krenek, [Schreker’s] disciple, denounced as a ‘load of

\textsuperscript{19} See also above, pp. 47-48.

\textsuperscript{20} Adorno, “Schreker,” 141.

\textsuperscript{21} His best, which Adorno differentiates from “his most successful work, Der Schatzgräber, [which] is not able to sustain the quality of the earlier opera [Die Gezeichneten].” Ibid., 141.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
rubbish." Schreker-like moments in Zemlinsky's Zwerg make use of it for sharp exotic accents; Schreker's use here is subtler. Its occasional touches are like flashes of brightness from within a suffused glow: "the individual detail lights up for an instant and then subsides into the mass . . . ."

Adorno's analysis turns, with uncharacteristic specificity, to the harmony of the opening passage. He points out the initial polytonal complex, which is actually quite similar to that of the Klang in Der ferne Klang, except that here, instead of major and minor triads a fifth apart, they are hexatonic poles, as mentioned earlier: a major triad on D oscillates rapidly with a minor triad on B flat (at times enharmonically respelled – see Example 5.1; for the full orchestral version refer back to Example 2.2). Still, they give rise to a similar harmonic quality, in that putting them together creates an imbedded augmented sonority; actually, the pitches of the two may be reconfigured to yield two augmented triads, B flat – D – F sharp and D flat – F – A. It is, at least in part, the symmetrical nature of this imbedded augmented sonority that gives the harmony its static quality, which Adorno so strongly disparaged in his critique of phantasmagoria. (The augmented sonority is also present, as was noted in Chapter 4, in Zemlinsky's opening harmony for his Schrekerian scene of the Infanta and her companions playing in the garden; it, too, exhibits a similarly static quality, which allies it harmonically with Schreker's style, along with the notable timbral similarities.) But the whole spatial/phantasmagoric impression is given dimension by the combination of harmony and rhythmic texture, almost at the micro-level. As the D major and B-flat minor triads oscillate rapidly within sextuplet-sixteenths, they fall alternately on slightly stronger or weaker sub-pulses, as influenced by the hemiola between different parts playing in duple or triple subdivisions. At times the major sonority receives a subtle rhythmic accent; at other times it falls on the minor sonority. This major-

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23 See ibid., 135.
24 Ibid., 136.
minor alternation gives rise to the a “flickering” effect, what Adorno termed the “Schrekerian chiaroscuro,” a quality of “light” and “dark” aptly described as a “shimmer.”

Example 5.1: Schreker, Die Gezeichneten, Vorspiel (mm. 1-3)

In fact the D and B flat have tonal and structural implications for the rest of the Vorspiel, despite Adorno’s assertion that it is “devoid of schematic construction throughout.” While D major serves as the tonic of several principal themes, and of the

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25 Ibid.
Vorspiel as a whole, B flat intrudes consistently as an unstable harmonic and melodic
element, introducing an idiomatic element of slippage between major and minor. The
opening theme features a strong melodic emphasis on B flat (see the 5/4 bar in Example 5.2
a). The harmonic implications of the melody itself vary between B flat major, d minor
(especially the segment from the a in m.2 to the first a in m.3), and g minor (the latter
hinted at particularly by the presence of the c-natural in combination with the D-major
triadic harmony). As the third thematic element (Example 5.2 c) continues, two prominent
B-flat appoggiaturas influence its harmonic motion from D through F major and E-flat
seventh harmonies (at reh. 3), before cadencing on D. Two bars later, a move from D to B
flat (in the 2 mm. before reh. 4) ends the opening thematic section.

Example 5.2: Schreker, Die Gezeichneten, Vorspiel, three introductory themes
(a: mm. 2-5; b: reh. no. 1; c: reh. no. 2)

B flat then has a strong harmonic role in the allegro section of “processional” music
(beginning at reh. 5), which is constructed around the pitches of the E-flat major triad, but
retains an a-natural, so that its melodic and harmonic components alternately imply E-flat,
B-flat, and g minor, before finally moving in the bass from B-flat back to D to begin a
second, clear D-major theme (Example 5.3 below). Next, Tamare’s D major theme (at reh. 10) is also coloured by an accented move to B flat (major) in its fourth measure, an effect that darkens the rest of the theme, essentially a repetition of its opening, with the minor mode (see Example 5.4 below).

**Example 5.3:** Schreker, *Die Gezeichneten*, second Allegro theme (5 mm. after reh. 5)

The last bars of the Vorspiel again place a strong emphasis on B flat in the bass before coming to rest on a high, sustained D major chord. Ultimately, this D/B flat pairing in the Vorspiel foreshadows the end of the opera, which, in a final recall of the Vorspiel, avoids its D major conclusion and slips into d minor.
Example 5.4: Schreker, *Die Gezeichneten*, Tamare's theme (Vorspiel reh. 10)

From the opening "opalescent resonance of countless orchestral timbres all blended in together," which set up "the Schrekerian phantasmagoria par excellence,“\(^{26}\) the first of three introductory themes emerges. Wolfgang Molkow finds its gesture (in m.2 – see Example 5.2 a) of a rising minor sixth from A to F, followed by a descent through E flat to D, reminiscent of the opening bars of *Tristan*; no surprise then that he labels this theme with dramatic connotations of *Sehnsucht*, as do other analysts.\(^{27}\) Molkow’s comparison is not entirely convincing, as Schreker’s theme lacks the quality of chromatic slippage so characteristic of *Tristan*. But it also seems worthwhile to note, as Molkow does not, that in its continuation, Schreker’s introduction does slip into a reliance on the Wagnerian “crutch

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 140.

\(^{27}\) Wolfgang Molkow, “Die Rolle der Kunst in den frühen Opern Franz Schrekers,” in *Franz Schreker Symposium*, 85; for the latter point see also Zibaso, 93, and Kühn, 104-6.
of the sequence" that is much more reminiscent of the Tristan prelude. A second thematic element ensues (Example 5.2 b), or rather, slips in almost imperceptibly, with a rising dotted gesture (which descends thereafter). Itself sequentially constructed, it is set against the same hexatonic triad complex, transposed to A/f, and then back to the original D/b flat; it then sequences into a repetition over E/c to A/f. The third thematic element (Example 5.2 c) contains repeated rising chromatic crescendo gestures that eventually break through the prevailing subdued dynamic to a high fff climax, culminating in a long chromatic ascent (at reh. 3) with a much stronger Tristan-type feeling than the opening thematic profile Molkow describes. So Schreker’s reputedly most characteristic score starts out as perhaps his most blatantly Wagnerian up to that point. It exhibits a sort of Tristan-like continuity, in that the thematic elements slip one into the next almost seamlessly, evolving from sequential variation rather than being clearly defined; and they remain largely subdued beneath the murmur of the oscillating “shimmer” texture. For Adorno, “[t]he result is paradoxical: the clangour moves into the foreground, the three themes become peculiarly insignificant, as if they were only counterpointing their own accompaniments.”

After the opening section, an allegro begins (reh. 4); its two themes (the second shown in Example 5.3) anticipate the processional music of the island festivities in Act III. They are both repeated verbatim (at reh. 6). Adorno sounds typically scathing in commenting that the “colouring is exaggerated to the point of burlesque,” but the criticism proves redundant, as Schreker himself marked “Burlesk” in the score (reh. 9). To the noisy melody, shrill in flutes and piccolos, is added a xylophone doubling and various other percussive crashes. Loud and crass, it rattles its way to a climax at “the Italianate theme of Tamare, the ladies’ man,” which is undeniably kitschy. In D major, it has a Puccini-like sweep and

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28 Adorno, “Zemlinsky,” 118.
30 Ibid., 140.
a clear tonal profile (see Example 5.4), and is so like a cliché operetta tune that Schreker’s “burlesque” description is revealed as a sort of indicator of the spirit of caricature dominating the whole passage.

A much quieter group of themes related to Carlotta constitutes the Vorspiel’s penultimate section, beginning with a slow chromatic ascent high in the strings. Two themes (Example 5.5 a and b), the first marked “klagend,” expand the opening motive of the introductory Sehnsucht theme (in 5.2 a), and another theme (Example 5.5 c), adopting the rising dotted gesture of the second introductory theme (5.2 b), is counterpointed with a striking transformation of the second allegro processional theme. Hardly a transformation, really — up an octave, reorchestrated, slightly softer and barely rhythmically altered, but harmonically and melodically identical — yet its entire marchlike character is radically altered. Its new, almost dreamy state will serve to link subliminally Carlotta’s character with the spirit of orgiastic revelry on Elysium, to which she finally succumbs.

**Example 5.5:** Schreker, *Die Gezeichneten*, Vorspiel – Carlotta’s themes as transformations of earlier materials (a: 5mm. after reh. 14; b: 4 mm. before reh. 15; c: reh. 16)

![Example 5.5](image)

Schreker marks “Traumhaft” for the final moments of the Vorspiel (reh. no. 17), which return to the phantasmagoric texture and theme of the opening. Is the shimmering
harmony the dream, or the motive of longing; or was all that came between the opening and the end a vivid dream that has faded back into intangibility? The last bars come to rest on a high, sustained D major chord, played ppp, barely there and fading to nothing. Adorno hears the themes drift from clear diatonic delineation through modal elusiveness – geheimnisvoll, klagend, espressivo – finally dissolving back into sound: "[b]y the end the whole thing, which is devoid of schematic construction throughout, slips back imperceptibly into the clangour of the introduction."\(^\text{31}\)

Phantasmagoria resurfaces as the central category of Act III, which takes place on the enchanted island of Elysium. The visionary, magical, and sensuous character, which was implied by the ferne Klang and suggested by the sound of the Gezeichneten Vorspiel, here becomes more than an abstracted criticism of the philosophical implications of dramatic and compositional technique: it is explicitly made the main element of the plot. Even more so than the brothel on the Venetian Gulf Island in Act II of Der ferne Klang, Elysium is Schreker's own Venusberg. In his stage directions for the scenes Schreker indulges in an extravagance that could well inspire serious headaches for urtext-minded set designers. Adorno disparaged "the crude accumulation of all possible precious materials in Wilde's Dorian Gray, where the interiors of a chic aestheticism resemble smart antique shops and auction halls, and thus the commercial world Wilde ostensibly disdained."\(^\text{32}\) A similar comment might be made about Schreker's scene: though he takes care to give it an outdoor setting, to invoke a mythological atmosphere amidst "nature," it could hardly be more contrived. In addition to its visual wonders – gardens, fountains, erotic statuary, and mythical pagan inhabitants including bacchantes, fauns, and naiads – its air is filled with heady perfumes and, of course, music, which here makes its entrance as heard music, an element of the plot, as it did all throughout Der ferne Klang.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

Image, as discussed above, is the central theme in *Die Gezeichneten*, as in *Der Zwerg*, "The Birthday of the Infanta," and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. But this is in fact something of a departure for Schreker, for the central theme of virtually all his other stage works is not image, but sound – not mirrors, portraits, or painters, but music, composers, and musicians. *Der ferne Klang, Das Spielwerk und die Prinzessin, Der Schatzgraber, Der singende Teufel, Christophorus oder die Vision einer Oper* – all have musicians and music itself as key figures in their plots. In this respect *Die Gezeichneten* stands apart, though commentators tend to gloss over this distinction by asserting that all Schreker's works are about art and artists (which is generally true). Here we find that image, light, the visual element and the visual arts, are foregrounded; and yet Schreker's medium is music, his material is sound – and so, in *Die Gezeichneten*, the stimulus of visual image is brought together with that of musical sound. Further, it is transformed into sound, into music.

These themes come together explicitly in the Act III scenes on Elysium, wherein music is heard as music. There is a great deal of it to be heard, and it becomes part of the overwhelming whirl of sensory stimuli that pervade the island's atmosphere. Music accompanies the fantastic processions of pagan creatures, who are themselves playing tambourines, cymbals, and syrinxes. Distant music can be heard drifting across the water from the city of Genoa, including the tolling of the angelus (m. 92); the sounds of urban reality waft through the atmosphere of magic on the island, and the sacred music comes into direct conflict with the pagan, causing the musical mythical creatures to hide as a temporary hush falls over the scene. Once the angelus ends, though, they return, and while some of the visiting citizens are enraptured and carried away by the sensual and erotic atmosphere, many more are worried that it is dangerous. Music as dangerous seducer of the senses, as in Wilde, reappears here. The mayor, Carlotta's father, declares himself both "dazzled" and "confused" [geblendet, verwirrt] by the sensory stimuli around him (m. 260). High voices sing in chorus of the beauties of the night (m. 532 ff.); Schreker describes them
as “frightening.” And there is mysterious music in the distance, the characteristic auditory shimmer, emanating from the secret grotto, which glows with a strange blue light.

It is this latter music that is Die Gezeichneten’s equivalent of the ferne Klang, for it shares a similar problematic of liminality and questionable ontological status. It is audibly embodied within the opera as music, it is located backstage, and yet some of the characters within the opera cannot hear it, raising the difficult question of whether it is to be understood as a real or imagined/hallucinated sound. In the midst of the festivities on Elysium, the Captain of Justice and “The Eight,” mysterious and feared enforcers of the law, appear and interrogate Alviano over the disappearances of Genoa’s women, but he seems unable to respond to their charges. Distracted and worrying about where Carlotta might be, he exclaims, “Do you not hear? – Music: cymbals, flutes, harps and wild singing...” [Hört ihr denn nicht? Musik: Zymbeln, Flöten, Harfen, und wilden Gesang]. Harps would seem indispensable here: the harp Adorno despised as “the major symbolic prop of Art Nouveau;”33 the harp Fritz heard in the distance, played by the ghostly hand of the wind, the instrument after which he titled his ill-fated opera. But the wild singing is that of Carlotta and Tamare, whose intoxicated words to each other have suddenly become audible as song, music as music, like that behind the scene, distinct from the other sung parts of the opera. Those around Alviano think he is mad, or possessed [“Ihr seht, er ist besessen, aus ihm spricht der Dämon”]. Like the ailing Fritz, he hears, in clear detail, a distant music that others around him who are more rational somehow do not hear – though we in the audience do hear it – and it is calling him toward his fate. The crowd may not be able to hear what he hears, but they can see whence it emanates: “Come, I will take you!” he cries, as the opera’s opening phantasmagoric sonority returns in the music offstage, configured as an arpeggio, B-flat, D, F-sharp, A. “You see – the blue light above there? Do you hear? Listen – is that not music?” [“Kommt, ich führe Euch! Seht ihr – dort oben den blauen Schein? Hört Ihr? Lauscht doch – ist’s nicht Musik?”] His anguish question is never answered. Is it

not music? Might it really be – phantasmagorically – light, that mysterious blue glow? The two stimuli, light and sound, seem to come together here; what the rationally minded can see, the irrational and intoxicated both see and hear.\textsuperscript{34} It is perhaps not surprising if, in this context, Schreker’s music deliberately adopts the very qualities Adorno criticized in it, for all of Elysium seems a fantasy, phantasmagoria. But from its beginning measures the whole opera has focused on both the realm of sound, the “shimmering” Schrekerian sound, and on the visual dimension: image, beauty and ugliness, the portrait. Moreover, the glow from the grotto is not the only mysterious light featured in Schreker’s plot. The other is seen, and heard, in the studio scene in Act II.

Adorno refers to the scene in Carlotta’s studio as Schreker’s “most successful.”\textsuperscript{35} For several reasons, it might be considered the most interesting in the opera. In it Carlotta completes her portrait of Alviano, and as she works they converse. While Adorno’s mention of its “refrain-like formations”\textsuperscript{36} is somewhat imprecise, it still offers a useful analytical insight into the way Schreker constructed this huge scene of 330 mm through repetition. This structure is not obvious, partly because of the size of the scene and its sections, which make it difficult to retain in memory. More to the point, the repetitions are often restricted to the orchestral accompaniment, while the more prominent voice parts carry on, parlando or arioso-like, giving a more continuous, even through-composed feeling to the scene. Yet blocks of material of varying length do recur, though not in a completely systematic manner, as the word “refrain” would suggest. Another level of repetition characterizes this scene, aside from its internal repetitive structuring. It incorporates both thematic references from, and, more prominently, exact recapitulations of, large sections of the Vorspiel, so that a significant portion of the scene is a recurrence

\textsuperscript{34} In Act II, when Tamare ecstatically describes the grotto to the Duke, he too invokes light and sound: “Betrittst du die Grotte, umglitzert dein Augen ein blauer Schein. Schwere Düfte verwirren die Sinne dir, Irrlichtern gleich lokken röthlich zuckende Flammen, ferne Musik und leise Gesänge dich tiefer und tiefer.”

\textsuperscript{35} Adorno, “Schreker,” 131.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 136.
of the opening music of the opera. The analytical chart in Figure 5.1 gives one account of the way the scene is laid out, showing where significant blocks of thematic material return.\(^{37}\)

**Figure 5.1:** Recurring Thematic Materials in *Die Gezeichneten*, Act II, scene 2  
(V=Vorspiel, th=theme, var=variation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
<th>MEASURES</th>
<th>TEXT/DRAMATIC ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>501-08</td>
<td>orchestral introduction to scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>511-19</td>
<td>&quot;Unsre Zeit ist voll seltsamer Dinge&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b, varied</td>
<td>520-48</td>
<td>Carlotta's descriptions of the various hand paintings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>549-56</td>
<td>&quot;Doch das Seltsamer war ein Bild&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>557-69</td>
<td>&quot;Nur ein schwach purpurn Leuchten&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>570-75</td>
<td>&quot;Wollt ihr, Signor, nich ein wenig heben den Kopf&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new, varied materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carlotta's interpretations of the painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>607-19</td>
<td>&quot;Meine Freundin kranke seit früher Jugend am Herzen&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>620-22</td>
<td>&quot;...[Sie] hat ihre Schmerzen gemalt&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>623-27</td>
<td>Alviano observes how Carlotta is moved by her story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>628-33</td>
<td>&quot;Doch Signor, euch zu malen ist wahrlich kein Kinderspiel&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>634-39</td>
<td>&quot;So setzt euch zu mir, kommt, laßt uns rasten&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>640-44</td>
<td>&quot;Wollt ihr Wein?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new, varied materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>they talk about Alviano's ugliness, isolation, fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>731-39</td>
<td>&quot;An sonnigen Tagen gingt ihr nie aus&quot; (Carlotta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>751-58</td>
<td>&quot;Doch wenn ihr an einem prangenden Tage&quot; (Alviano)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V th ta var 1</td>
<td>783-88</td>
<td>&quot;sprecht nicht, und blickt mich nur an so ganzvoll&quot; (Carlotta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V th tb</td>
<td>805-24</td>
<td>Carlotta completes the portrait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>831-35</td>
<td>Alviano recognizes the revealed hand painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>839-47</td>
<td>&quot;Du Süße, du Arme, du Schönste!&quot; (Alviano)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V th ta var 2</td>
<td>848-67</td>
<td>they embrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>868</td>
<td>servant announces Duke's arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamare's th</td>
<td>871-end</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{37}\) While some of the thematic materials given new letter designations – a, b, etc. – repeat or vary thematic elements from the Vorspiel, as described in the text below, the use of the designation "Vorspiel" ("V") in the chart refers not merely to themes, but to large-scale blocks in which long sections of the Vorspiel are recapitulated in full.
The opening presents, by way of orchestral introduction, thematic material labeled \( a \) in the chart. It is strongly reminiscent of theme \( c \) from the introductory section of the Vorspiel (Example 5.2 c), opening with a rhythm of a dotted quarter, eighth, and triplet sixteenths, followed by a longer value and ending with a rapid descent. Its melody also approximates the d-c sharp-a sharp descent of the same Vorspiel theme, by falling d-c-a in the same part of the bar. “Our time is full of strange things,” says Carlotta as the scene opens \([\text{Unsere Zeit ist voll seltsamer Dinge}]\), and indeed the scene itself is full of strangeness.

Carlotta tells a story of a woman friend of hers, another painter, and the revelation near the end of the scene that she was really speaking of herself comes as no surprise. Her narrative thus unfolds as a kind of confession, similar to Greta’s narrative of her past in Act II of Der ferne Klang; although Greta does not attempt to conceal the identity of her story’s protagonist, she does assert the sense of distance she feels from the history – like a dream within a dream, she says – a distance similarly invoked by Carlotta’s third-person narration of her own story. Both women speak like a patient on the couch; and Carlotta’s tale also involves a self-analysis. To the accompaniment of material \( b \), which is the Vorspiel’s second variant of its opening theme \( a \) (refer to Example 5.5 b), she says that this “friend” of hers painted pictures of hands. After describing briefly several of the paintings, she lingers over the description of the “strangest” of them, while \textit{pianissimo} winds play material \( c \), which begins with descending chords built on the pitches of an e-minor triad, and passes through harmonies of c-minor, a-minor, f-minor, and d-major/minor, en route to a g-minor chord (as described in the previous Chapter, Example 4.4). Carlotta’s description of the painting continues over the material of \( d \), whose ending dovetails into a repetition of the end of \( c \). This rather disturbing painting depicted a pale hand, like that of a dead person; its “uncannily long, gaunt fingers” \([\text{unheimlich langen, dürren Fingern}]\) held an object that could not really be seen. Only a weak purplish light shone out between the ghostly fingers. But this light, Carlotta says, was “like a silent lament, like stifled whimpering tears and like a restrained cry of deathly fear, a suppressed cry for release” \([\text{wie stumme Klage, wie} \ldots]\).
unterdrücktes, wimmerndes Weinen und wie ein Schrei, verhalten und todesbang, wie ein verhaltener Schrei nach Erlösung]. Curiously, she describes this visual image in terms of muted sound, to the accompaniment of an orchestra hushed to pp and ppp.

The music of a returns as she pauses in her story to ask Alviano to adjust his pose. When he inquires as to the meaning of the hand picture, she offers, in fact, two interpretations, both involving theories of sublimation on the part of the artist. First, she suggests that the painter had never experienced “what inspires the artist to great deeds: the happiness of love, or the longing for it” [was den Künstler begeistert zu großen Taten: der Liebe Glück, oder Sehnsucht nach solchem]. Carlotta suspects that the woman secretly feared being overpowered by the “magic” of such a great event in her life. Then, to the return of thematic materials d and c which first accompanied her description of the painting, she reveals another explanation of its meaning: that the woman was driven by a pain that was not emotional, but physical. All her life she had been ill with a weak heart; the painful spasms she experienced were, she fantasized, like a cruel hand that gripped and crushed her heart to death. Thus, the painting represented her physical suffering. The b material recurs as Alviano notes how strongly Carlotta is affected by her narrative. “She was dear to me . . .” Carlotta replies; when he asks whether the woman is dead, she says no, she believes she is still alive.

This tale is followed immediately by three successive recurrences of a. Carlotta is having difficulty capturing the expression she is seeking from Alviano, and takes a break from her painting. She pours him a glass of wine and sits down to talk, shifting the focus of the conversation toward him. A long section ensues which does not utilize earlier materials, but does often employ shorter chunks, sometimes of only one or two measures, that are immediately repeated or sequenced. Carlotta notes Alviano’s ill-humour, which is spoiling the portrait sitting; he responds that he is afraid she is flirting with him merely to amuse herself. Her friendship is like a dream to him, and he cannot understand her interest, and is afraid of being hurt. She tries to encourage him to have more self-
confidence; why is it so hard for him to believe that, in the whole world, there could not be even one woman who might love him? To this suggestion he reacts wildly: love him, who hates himself so much that he has banned mirrors from his home? But Carlotta assures him that he is overrating the importance of physical beauty, which is, after all, a passing thing. One might find consolation from sadness even on a rainy day, in the glance from the simple eyes of an ugly old man passing on the road, she sings to a new, lilting 6/8 theme in G-major (e). “Yet,” responds Alviano suggestively, to a slightly transformed version of the same music, “if, on a beautiful day, in a bed of lovely flowers, you find a hideous monster to spoil your mood?” Carlotta dismisses his self-characterization as a “monster,” but it only becomes clear later that she is the monster. His words in fact foreshadow what will happen to him, when he finds her lying on the bed of roses in the grotto, having abandoned him for the sake of lust.

For the moment, though, Carlotta realizes that he is still upset. “As your gaze avoided me earlier, so now you avoid me with words” [Ihr weicht mir aus: wie früher mit Blicken, so nun in Worten], she accuses, but insists that she will press him to open up to her. Despite his protests, she plays her emotional trump card: “You should know that I love you.” Though her phrase begins (at m. 770) with a molto accelerando and crescendo, it builds only to die sharply in a sudden decrescendo (mm. 772-73) as she speaks the crucial words. Perhaps its surprisingly understated culmination gives a clue to the lack of conviction behind her declaration. But Alviano misses this point. Ecstatic, he cries out her name, and she exclaims, “For God’s sake, sir, what eyes you have. Take my hands, and kiss them quickly! Now leave me to work! I need your eyes for my picture – they seem right like this” [Ihr sollt es wissen daß ich euch liebe ... Um Gott, Signor, was macht ihr für Augen. Da habt meine Hände und küßt sie rasch! Doch läßt mich zur Arbeit! Ich brauch' eure Augen zu meinem Bilde – so sind sie mir recht].

This final section of the scene, as Carlotta completes the portrait, is set to a large-scale recapitulation of the opening materials from the Vorspiel. Alviano wants to embrace
her, but she insists that he remain sitting, without speaking, so that she can finish the painting. Again she speaks to him while she works, as though trying to hypnotize him [ganz in ihre Arbeit versunken, ihn mit ihren Worten gleichsam hypnotisierend]. She asks, ironically, that he will love her gently and not hurt her. As she triumphantly throws away her brush, the portrait finished, she is overcome by a weak spell and staggers, clutching at her heart. When she grasps an easel behind her for support, the cloth covering it slips away, revealing a painting of a pale, long-fingered hand, with a reddish light shining through the fingers (as shown in Example 5.6). The music has a mimetic quality: the motion of rising and falling sixteenth notes might imitate the motion of the drapery slipping from the painting, while the high, soft, sustained chord fixates on the revealed image. The return of material c, the theme to which Carlotta first described the strange painting by her “friend,” signals the true meaning of her story. Seeing the image, Alviano understands, but says nothing, moving instead to take Carlotta in his arms, as material b returns.

**Example 5.6**: Schreker, *Die Gezeichneten*, Act II scene 2, the painting revealed (m. 828-30)

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38 The music may suggest something about the stage directions: that, in order to follow the mimetic suggestion in the score, the cloth should be pulled off the painting from the back, so that it slips upward, revealing the image, then falls downward to the floor behind the easel.
As they embrace, the varied music from the Vorspiel (again, Example 5.5 b) concludes the scene, ending with Tamare’s theme in the minor mode, as a servant announces the arrival of the Duke, come to plead Tamare’s cause with Carlotta. Perhaps significantly, Carlotta’s music throughout, which makes up the larger portion of the scene by far, seems more repetitively structured than does Alviano’s. The violence of his emotions is conveyed by his interjections of rhythmically and harmonically turbulent and melodically erratic material within what is essentially a monologue for her.

Schreker’s portrait of the artist, Carlotta, is disturbing; he paints her as manipulative and cruel. Her confessional narrative seems at first to reveal her affinity with Alviano through her own vulnerability and suffering; yet it may be read in other ways. Perhaps she makes a false plea for sympathy as a way of securing his affections. Worse, by making the source of her emotional and physical suffering a defect of the heart, Schreker suggests that her heartlessness, which is ultimately revealed, is congenital: it is part of her nature. It seems clear that she tells Alviano she loves him simply to inspire the facial expression she wants to paint. The spectre of Weininger appears again in this opera, for Carlotta is clearly, here and in other scenes as well, a Weiningerian woman. In this respect she is much like others among Schreker’s female characters. As Hailey has noted, the influence of Weininger was clear even to critics in Schreker’s own time. Bekker in particular chided him for his repeated depiction of women as sexually pathological.\(^{39}\) In Act I Carlotta toys with Tamare, then rejects him outright when he seriously offers himself to her. Though she seems interested in looking below the surface into Alviano’s soul, it turns out that her aims are shallower, and she merely manipulates him as well, and then loses interest in him once she has what she wants from him. She makes a pretense to a higher, spiritual existence through her art, but in the end, on the island, she is unable to resist her true, sexual nature,

and succumbs to the sensuality that Weininger would assert is her true and only essence. Carlotta is marked—gezeichnet—not merely by her illness, but by her sex.

And what of Carlotta’s self-portrait, her sublimated expression of her own inner weakness and fear? Though her portrait of Alviano’s “soul” focused on his eyes, she has not painted her own face and gaze, as Schoenberg did. The symbolic hand paintings, though, in particular the strange one she describes in such detail, do certainly reflect an inspiration Schreker drew from Schoenberg the painter. Schoenberg’s expressionist “Hände” watercolours date from around 1910; one of these he later inscribed to Schreker, apparently acknowledging the homage in Die Gezeichneten.\(^40\) A hand motif recurs frequently in the opera. Carlotta’s unsteady hands betray her agitation to Alviano as she relates her confessional narrative in the studio. When she declares her love for him, she offers him her hands to kiss. Later, when she encounters the masked Tamare on Elysium, she exclaims twice over the softness of his hands; she places them over her heart, asks if he can feel it beating, and urges him to handle it carefully. As she enacts the content of her painting, she assumes that Tamare’s soft hands are different from the cruel, dead hand she has imagined and feared; but she is wrong, for she dies at Tamare’s hands. Hands are something of a motif in Dorian Gray as well, where they stand, like the visage, as indicators of moral character. Lord Henry Wotton’s soft, white, long-fingered hands are repeatedly described as “languid.” Dorian’s own hands have finely tapered fingers; he notes the contrast between them and the hands of the portrait, which have become “coarse and bloated,” bearing the marks of sin. After he has murdered Basil Hallward, Dorian notes with horror a new change in the painting: a “loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening, on one of the hands, as though the canvas had sweated blood.”\(^41\) Though the deathly hand Carlotta has painted is pale and unstained, it too is murderous. The image of the hand grasping a

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., 65-6. Hailey dates this gift to 1929, but according to the website of the Arnold Schönberg Centre, the inscription actually reads “1919.” The painting may be viewed on the Schönberg Centre website at <http://www.schoenberg.at/6_archiv/paintings/works/abstracthtms/ritter_95_e.htm>.

\(^{41}\) Wilde, Dorian Gray, 133.
glowing object is highly suggestive in several respects. Tambling, referring to Derrida’s reflections on Heidegger and Fascism, proposes that “the cult of the hand suggests the cult of the leader, the impulsion towards the fascist, perhaps the desire to be possessed.”

Carlotta’s interpretation of her painting does imbue it with a quality of force. But as Molkow points out, Carlotta mentions several different “hand” paintings, some of them reaching out, some paired and clasped together; and he speculates that they signify her simultaneous longing for and fear of contact or intimacy, as suggested in her confessional narrative to Alviano. Of course, Schoenberg’s Die glückliche Hand also leaps to mind; there, the “hand” seems symbolically linked to the creative artistic act. Delving into synaesthetic theories for its scenic setting, Schoenberg’s work also engages the theme of coloured light, and its connection with sound. And this theme too appears, as mentioned above, in Schreker’s opera, in the form of the phantasmagoric blue light and music emanating from the grotto (another common feature with Die glückliche Hand), but also in the form of the reddish/purple light emitted from the hand in Carlotta’s painting.

For Carlotta, the light represents her heart; and her daydream, her nightmare, her sublimated phantasy is the crushing of her heart by the fingers of the “cruel hand,” a pictorial representation of the painful spasms that grip her own weak, sick heart. Yet, as already described, she offers an additional interpretation of the painting’s meaning, wherein the image evokes the failure of love and intimacy, which she names as the source of creative artistic inspiration: was den Künstler begeistert zu großen Tate. Schreker draws together these elements of heart and artistic inspiration, and melds them with the element of musical sound. Remember that, curiously, Carlotta has already made this leap, when she described the light in terms of sound, of utterance – or, in terms of sound that is muffled or silenced: “like a silent lament, like stifled whimpering tears and like a restrained cry of deathly fear, a suppressed cry for release.” In Schreker’s musical setting of this image, this silently

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42 Tambling, 215.
43 Molkow, 84.
speaking light, music utters what was unutterable. When the concealing cloth falls from
the painting, and Alviano catches sight of the image Carlotta described, the light glowing
through the deathly fingers, Schreker composes a single, sustained, shimmering chord (refer
to Example 5.6), whose quality of stillness and harmonic stability (it is a simple c-sharp
minor triad) contrasts sharply with the activity of the surrounding texture, and stands out
as sonority – a sonority which represents an image, or more specifically, a light. Far from
appearing merely for sound's sake here, sonorous effect is once again used for specifically
dramatic reasons, which Adorno failed to articulate.

As Schreker always asserted – and as his critics, including Adorno, agreed, for better
or worse – musical sound itself was always his primary creative inspiration. To recall
Bekker's assertion, "He is a musician whose entire work has its origin in a tone vision
[Klangvision], whose work is created only to serve the purpose of giving this tone vision
comprehensible visual representation."44 Carlotta's hand painting in *Die Gezeichneten* seems
to do exactly that: Schreker represents in sound the artist's inspiration, which is in turn
represented visually in Carlotta's vision of the glowing light in the hand. A painting of a
hand holding a hidden object, which appears only as a faint light, also embodies a paradox
of representing what is concealed, what cannot be seen. This theme of representing –
musically – the unrepresentable, both the musical Idea/inspiration and the Divine, was also
a central preoccupation of Schoenberg's, and appears at the heart of several of his works.45
Like Schoenberg, Schreker at times linked the creative inspiration, the musical Idea, with a
divine quality: God, or "the Master," as Fritz says in *Der ferne Klang*. As Schreker wrote in


45 This theme of image and representation of the Idea and the Divine in Schoenberg's thought and
oeuvre has been dealt with several times in the literature, beginning, apparently, with Adorno; see
in particular the recent study by Richard Kurth, "Schönberg and the Bildverbot: Reflections on
Unvorstellbarkeit and Verborgenheit," forthcoming in *Journal of the Arnold Schönberg Centre*, vol. 5. See
also Kurth, "Pierrot's Cave: Representation, Reverberation, Radiance," in *Schoenberg and Words: the
Publishing Inc., 2000), 203-41, which deals specifically with Schoenberg's play with representation
of image and light – radiance and reflection – though sound, musical and textural reverberance.
the forward to Das Spielwerk, “The ‘Master’ or ‘God’ or ‘Nature’ has placed something mysterious in the human heart [Brust], something strangely vibrating, (re)sounding, as it were, that reveals itself in haunting [geisternden] harmonies, when any longing is awakened by the melody.”46 As the quotation shows, Schreker also imagined the inspiration metaphorically as residing within the heart, as does Carlotta’s painting, wherein the glowing light evokes both the heart of the artist and the quality of inspiration. That the light symbolizes a creative metaphor for inspiration as a quality of the artist’s heart may recall Schoenberg’s discussion of “Heart and Brain in Music,” wherein he discusses the apparent distinction between emotional and logical-constructive sides of compositional creativity, and ends by asserting their inseparability in the creation of musical works. Where Schoenberg quotes Balzac – “The heart must be within the domain of the head”47 – he could as well have quoted Dorian Gray’s Lord Henry Wotton – “If a man treats life artistically, his brain is his heart.”48 And likewise, when Schoenberg concludes his essay with the following –

... the real creative genius has no difficulty in controlling his [sic] feelings mentally; nor must the brain produce only the dry and unappealing while concentrating on correctness and logic. But one might become suspicious of the sincerity of works which incessantly exhibit their heart; which demand our pity; which invite us to dream with them of a vague and undefined beauty and of unfounded, baseless emotions ... whose sweetness is artificial and whose appeal attains only to the surface of the superficial. Such works only demonstrate the complete absence of a brain and show that this sentimentality has its origin in a very poor heart.49


48 Wilde, Dorian Gray, 161.

49 Schoenberg, op. cit., 76.
we might almost be reading a passage directly from Adorno’s criticism of Schreker. Schoenberg’s phrase about the “complete absence of a brain” particularly reminds one of Adorno’s reference to Schreker’s “musical stupidity.” But even more importantly, the Schoenberg passage suggests the critical quality Adorno looked for in modern art, in which the presence of constructive rationality linked intimately with emotional expression takes on a critical quality and itself becomes authentically expressive. This heart/brain (expression/construction) pairing draws upon the opposition discussed above in Chapter 4, that of mimesis and rationality, or “spirit.”

“Artistic expression comports itself mimetically,” Adorno claims, while, “In artworks, spirit has become their principle of construction.” And as Jay explains, spirit and mimesis, or construction and expression, exist together in a state of tension and the authentic work of art must sustain this tension. Here, once again, is where Adorno felt that Schreker’s art fell short: in foregoing technical discipline in favour of the goal of untrammelled expressivity, his music lacks the dialectical dimension Adorno sought.

He whose conception of opera issued a challenge to the spiritualization of music . . . was also prevented by that conception from going beyond it. The sensuous realization he aspired to . . . itself stood in need of the spirit, and Schreker was by nature incapable of this. He was able to compensate for the technical shortcomings of his method of composition by an increased facility, but he was not able to rethink it . . . only where there is a controlling energy can a composition fulfill its potential.

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50 The concept of “Spirit” as rationality encapsulates the conundrum of 19th-century German idealist philosophy, as explained above in Chapter One: whereas Hegel saw increasing rationality as the Enlightenment path of the spirit’s progress toward freedom, rationality later came to be seen (as in Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) as an instrument of oppression, the cause of the unfreedom of the individual.

51 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 110, 118. It is important to note that Adorno cautions repeatedly against a simple opposition of the two terms: “Art is not to be reduced to the unquestionable polarity of the mimetic and the constructive, as if this were an invariant formula, for otherwise works of high quality would be obliged to strike a balance between the two principles.” The relationship is, obviously, one of a (negative) dialectic. See *Aesthetic Theory*, 44, and passim.

The notion of technical construction as control has implications for the social character of the artwork. In this line, Tambling's interpretation of the painting in terms of a Fascist "cult of the hand . . . the cult of the leader" suggests the hand as a controlling impulse; and this implication of control might in turn be applied to the interpretive idea of artistic inspiration as represented in the painting. More than a gesture of homage to Schoenberg, the painted image, as it is described in the opera, symbolically represents a conception of inspired artistic creativity – perhaps Schreker's own conception. In this sense, it would appear highly significant that Schreker's "hand," the controlling energy or constructive compositional impulse – brain, spirit – crushes inspiration in its cruel grip. And it is also dead. Indeed, in Die Gezeichneten, through the heavily overdetermined image in Carlotta's painting, Schreker seems almost to be protesting, expressing as a creative philosophy the very problem Adorno (and so many other critics in Schreker's own time) accused him of, when he inspected Schreker's technique and found it deficient, found his music to be "unsublimated," lacking constructive discipline. As in Der ferne Klang, maybe even more so in Die Gezeichneten, the unsublimated character of Schreker's sound betokens the utopic impulse, the promise of which, Adorno asserted, the composer would never relinquish, in defiance of culture's prohibition on its fulfillment. The painted image in Schreker's opera invokes a grasping at the ineffable, an attempt to hold the disembodied; indeed it might be said to reach toward the state of music itself.

Yet, as in Der ferne Klang, the textual dimension of Die Gezeichneten problematizes the interpretation of the music's utopian dimensions. The music's evocation of subjective interiority, of desire and a fantasy of its fulfillment, forms a negative dialectical counterpart to the exterior objectivity of the text, in which the utopian promise is unfulfilled, even forbidden by societal forces. What Schreker's music seems to reach for, his plot categorically denies. Indeed, this denial itself might seem to go too far, to submit to the Fascist influence of domination and control suggested to Tambling by Carlotta's painting. Both artistic vision and sensual pleasure are crushed within the opera by the grip of the
deathly hand of dominant social reality. The law, ever-present throughout the work in the sinister form of “The Eight,” punishes not only the dissolute criminals, but Alviano also, who is arrested. His creation is destroyed, satisfying the wishes of the narrow-minded bourgeois citizens who react to the island’s sensuousness with fear and mistrust. The fate of Elysium, Alviano’s unsublimated utopia, is fire: a conflagration similar to that which ended Schreker’s previous opera, Das Spielwerk und die Prinzessin; similar also, perhaps, to the final conflagration in Götterdämmerung. When the individual’s artistic fantasy affronts social reality, it is condemned to perish; this Elysium becomes a kind of hell. The irrational and dangerous is thus stamped out by “The Eight,” just as sinister cultural elements of racial and sexual aberration and decadence would be branded “degenerate” and eradicated by the National Socialists. And Carlotta’s death in the grotto indicates, as Tambling realizes, “the triumph of male sadism.” As her death and Alviano’s descent into madness make clear, Die Gezeichneten also rejects the possibility of the redemption of the artist through art. And finally, although it does engage a theme of sensual longing that seemingly transcends the physical to the realm of the soul, the opera avoids, as does Der ferne Klang, the romantic/Wagnerian cliché of redemption through love. After all the noteworthy similarities, this is where Schreker parts most decisively from Wagner. Had he subscribed to the Wagnerian doctrine of redemption, perhaps he might have escaped the critical and political censure to which he was eventually subjected; but his modern consciousness refused this reconciliation, opting instead for a much more negative conclusion. “In the music, in the degenerate characters of this work is the collapse of Germany, in fact the decline of our culture,” said Schreker wryly of the contemporary critical view of Die Gezeichneten. Hardly a utopian impression, that. Adorno ought more properly to have

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53 Tambling, 215.

54 “In der Musik, in dem degenerierten Charakter dieses Werkes ist der Zusammenbruch Deutschlands, ja der Untergang unserer Kultur . . . .” Quoted in Schreker-Bures et al, Franz Schreker, 22 (no date is given for Schreker’s statement).
criticized Schreker not for an unsublimated utopian vision, but for a *fin-de-siècle* pessimism that verged on the nihilistic aesthetic of Wilde.

"*Fin de siècle,*" murmured Lord Henry.

"*Fin du globe,*" answered his hostess.

“I wish it were *fin du globe,*” said Dorian with a sigh. “Life is a great disappointment.”

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**Questions of Historicity**

*Things that are modern do not just sally forth in advance of their time.*

*They also recall things forgotten.*

By the beginning of the 1930s, with the rise of the National Socialists, both Schreker and Zemlinsky found themselves marked men: marked, like Schoenberg, by their race and by the palpably dangerous modernity of their music. Unlike Schoenberg, neither Zemlinsky nor Schreker survived the Nazis – not musically or personally. For both, the stress of their social and aesthetic stigmatization led to physical breakdown and death, and the works of both fell prey to the label “entartet.” As Neil van der Linden notes, the National Socialists’ denunciation of Schreker’s music as degenerate was “a deliberate and populist refusal to distinguish . . . between what an artist knows and what he wants the world to be like.” The nature and content of his works made him unacceptable under the new regime; yet even had his operatic plots avoided “sexual-pathological aberration,” his racial background and his sympathy with the modernist avant-garde branded him as surely as it did Zemlinsky, whose works were also banned, and whose listing in the *Lexicon der Juden in der Musik* as “half-Jew” was appended with the comment that he was related to

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55 Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 137.

56 Adorno, “Vienna,” in *Quasi una Fantasia*, 216.

57 Liner notes to the Opera Rara recording of *Die Gezeichneten*, dir. Edo de Waart (Marco Polo 8.223328-330, 1990), 10.
Schoenberg, whose music he supported. Condemnation enough to drive both composers and their works from Germany.

Yet even before his ill-fated emigration to the United States, Zemlinsky had long been an exile. Despite his successes conducting in Prague, Vienna remained for him the centre of importance, and the Hofoper was the stage he longed to conquer. His prolonged professional and artistic exclusion from its critical circle of acceptance hurt and bewildered him for many years. His frustrated, almost pleading question, “Am I not Viennese?” gives painful voice to his own sense that, musically as well as physically, he was forced out of his own city. Unlike that of Schoenberg, this musical exile from Vienna, was marked not by hostility, scandal, or outrage, but apparently, by mere indifference: “Everyone should know and does know that my heart has always been in Vienna and that I long to regain a footing – but nobody thinks of me.”

Even more so than Zemlinsky, Schreker had led a life marked by geographical dislocation that might well have given rise to a sense of homelessness. Born in Monaco, he was shifted around Europe during childhood, from Brussels to Paris and other locations in between, until his mother settled in Vienna after the untimely death of his father had impoverished the family. Hailey realizes that the instability of Schreker’s earlier years must have made the security brought about by his mature success that much more valuable to him. Being dismissed by the National Socialists, and cast adrift again, was too much for him to bear. Broken down by a stroke, he died in Berlin, missing out on the chance to join so many of his colleagues in becoming a political exile in America. Schreker and Zemlinsky thus shared a “solidarity with life’s outcasts and misfits,” which was also manifest in the subjective portraits within their dramatic compositions, as demonstrated here.

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Adorno's 1959 radio portraits of these two composers represented an attempt to call them back from their long exile. His effort has gradually been rewarded, but he, too, had died before the musical world began to take serious notice of those whom he had once been nearly the only one to remember. As to the questions of why they had been forgotten, or why indeed they should be remembered, he offers suggestions, but no pat answers.

Zemlinsky never enjoyed half the popular success Schreker did at the height of his fame; indeed, few contemporaries did. However, the truth is that Schreker's popularity had already begun to decline by the late 1920s, and his success was definitely on the wane before his persecution by the Nazis began. After his death, what remained of his reputation quickly disintegrated, and the operas that had dominated Germany's stages simply vanished. Adorno in fact attributes this less to the politically influenced aesthetic climate than to certain qualities in Schreker's music itself. In particular, the intoxicating nature of the Schrekerian sonorous blend "may give us a clue to the otherwise scarcely comprehensible fact that a famous composer should have been able to disappear in so short a time, not just from public consciousness, but that he should have been buried by oblivion as if beneath a heavy stone. The fermentations of the Schreker sound have been entirely absorbed by light music." Adorno repeated this observation several years later, commenting on the way "the culture industry sucks more and more of the products of so-called high culture into itself." He suggests that some art music, like Schreker's, already inclines toward popular usage, presumably because its sensual qualities appeal to unfocused emotional enjoyment on the part of the listener, rather than requiring an effort of concentration:

In much late romantic, ostensibly serious music, there is already a gradual transition to light music; ... Fifty years ago, Franz Schreker was still modern;

at the time, Paul Bekker described him as the authentic exponent of modernism in opera. Many of his achievements in sound, which fascinated musicians at that time, have meanwhile sunk to the level of pop music.\footnote{62}

That Schreker’s “sound fermentations,” resulted from a potent stylistic mixture, an “aesthetic multiplicity,” in Hailey’s terms, has always seemed evident: the names of Wagner, Strauss, Debussy, Ravel, and Puccini all appear not only in the contemporary critical reports on Schreker (comparisons not necessarily couched in negative terms, either), but in Adorno’s own essay as well. But for some reason, Adorno did not characterize Schreker’s music, as he did that of Zemlinsky, in terms of the category of eclecticism, which his own criticism elevated to a level of historical-aesthetic authenticity. This might be, ironically, because Schreker succeeded nevertheless, in developing – Hailey opts for the stronger yet more problematic term of synthesizing – from all these components a style, an idiom, which was recognized as uniquely his own within his own time. Hailey cites press comments on Die Gezeichneten which particularly demonstrate this measure of success, recognizing a sound that might have recalled Strauss or Debussy, had not been “ultimately so entirely Schrekerian.”\footnote{63} In this measure he would seem, according to Adorno’s criteria, to have succeeded where Zemlinsky failed. “It is quite common,” Adorno says, “for composers to be credited with having achieved a synthesis even though they would have been labeled eclectics if they had been less successful.”\footnote{64} Adorno was able to interpret a critical value in eclecticism after the fact, but during Schreker and Zemlinsky’s time it was not only unappreciated from an aesthetic viewpoint; it also proved


Peter Franklin has also more recently described Schreker’s sound in terms of the “popular” and “light” genre of film music. With relation to the dramaturgy of Der ferne Klang, he describes how the “promise of unconfined pleasure” Adorno decried in the music partakes in the “feminine” and emotionalizing role of background music in the mass-entertainment cinema of Hollywood. He cites Wagner-style harmonies, orchestrations, and melodic-arioso techniques as eminently suited to the melodramatic fantasy genre of the classical romantic film. See Franklin, “Distant sounds – Fallen music: Der ferne Klang as ‘woman’s opera?’” Cambridge Opera Journal 3/2 (1991), 159-72.

\footnote{63} See Hailey, Franz Schreker, 84.

\footnote{64} Adorno, “Zemlinsky,” 112.
politically dangerous. That Schreker’s stylistic multiplicity had a distinctly “international” flavour could not have stood in him good musical stead within a politically-driven cultural atmosphere that sought to eradicate all that might be construed as “un-German.” Zemlinsky too was ultimately damned for an eclecticism that revealed the “degenerate” (modernist, Jewish) influence of Mahler and Schoenberg; he was accused of “attempting to smuggle that music back into Germany whose leading exponents (Schoenberg, Schreker) have at last left the country.”

Ultimately these composers were exiled not only by political persecution, geographical dislocation, and critical misunderstanding, but by history itself. In the wake of the War many of those figures who had been submerged beneath the waves of National Socialist oppression simply never resurfaced, and the face of Viennese musical modernism assumed the countenance the defining features of which were the emancipation of dissonance and the establishment of serialism: that of Schoenberg and his pupils Berg and Webern. “It is a tidy narrative,” Hailey comments, “and one largely established in the years after the Second World War by a generation of students and disciples intent upon reasserting disrupted continuities. That such continuities never existed is beside the point . . .”

Adorno, as a student of Berg and champion of the modernist avant-garde, and particularly of the Schoenbergian doctrine of developing variation, was concerned with this continuity-oriented revisionism, as suggested by the opening sentence of his essay on Schreker: “Music has not been left unscathed by that loss of a sense of historical continuity after the Second World War which has been so widely remarked on in Germany.”

Adorno played no small part in the perpetuation of the Schoenbergian legacy, though he mistrusted the implications of Schoenberg’s self-proclaimed doctrine of his brand of modernism, and its assurance of superiority for the musical future – a future from which . . .

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65 In an article by Rudolf Bilke in Die Musik 26/6 (March 1934), 445-56; cited in Beaumont, 407.
Schreker’s type of modernism was apparently to be excluded. In the wake of the postmodern dismantling of monolithic historical meta-narratives in favour of philosophically self-aware narratives of aesthetic pluralism, the revisionist nature of this account has become increasingly evident (if, admittedly, musicology and music theory have come typically late to the recognition of it, only lagging behind largely biographical-account-driven attempts at its correction). In fact, Dahlhaus already placed his finger directly on this problem decades ago, when he noted that Schreker had to be “sacrificed” to make way for Schoenberg and the “new music.”  

Schoenberg’s preeminence on the historical stage of twentieth-century modernism has drastically obscured the roles of numerous composers who were his contemporaries, Schreker being one. However, it was largely through his connection to Schoenberg (and Berg) that Zemlinsky was initially known when his music started to regain attention. As Schoenberg’s erstwhile teacher, he acquired something of an aura that was not entirely eclipsed by the petty assertions that he had been surpassed by his pupil. His music must have contained something extraordinary that hovered on the brink of a great breakthrough, bearing within it the impetus behind Schoenberg’s great iconoclastic genius. As Adorno said, “Zemlinsky’s music, like that of few others, contains impulses that brought the new into being. They were then left by the wayside,” he continued, “but their sacrifice says something about the price that had to be paid for progress.” Thus the undeniable historical and musical connection with Schoenberg did prove something of a link between Zemlinsky and posterity, though he, too, had to be “sacrificed,” as was Schreker, whose music, seemingly lacking so clear a connection to that of the Second Viennese

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69 Adorno, “Zemlinsky,” 120.
"triumvirate,"\textsuperscript{70} had to make its own way into the future. But Dahlhaus realized that, 

"[h]owever remote Schreker may be from twentieth-century modern music (whose adherents branded him a "late romantic"), he is fully representative, along with Strauss and Schönberg, of musical modernism at the outset of the century."\textsuperscript{71} Schoenberg recognized as much when he wrote ruefully to Schreker during the latter 1920s that the two of them, who had once been sarcastically branded "Neutöner,"\textsuperscript{72} were apparently already being consigned to the scrapheap of "Romanticism" by the younger generation. But it was Schoenberg who survived the stigma, physically and historically. As well, Schoenberg influenced his pupils in a manner that seemed to have assured their future discipleship and continued propagation of his ideas, but neither Zemlinsky nor Schreker so strongly asserted the force of their own wills or compositional personalities on their students. Nor did they, like Schoenberg, construct in a sizeable body of writing any claim for their own position in the history or future of music, even any apology for themselves. Perhaps ironically, this task of defense was left to Adorno.

That he took it up, even on the relatively small scale of two radio talks, says something of its significance for him. Adorno certainly did not waste words on topics he did not consider important, though he was by no means confident of the power of his words to retrieve the possibility of a future for the music of Schreker or Zemlinsky. He opts for engagement rather than dismissal, even when his tone is most critical. The same cannot always be said of those who, in continuing the task of recovering these lost narratives to an infinitely fuller extent, realized that they could not ignore the somewhat problematic contribution of Adorno, who had been before them. It would obviously be

\textsuperscript{70} Hailey's term ("Schreker and Modernism," 5); he describes the "historical concept" of the Second Viennese School as "hover[ing] somewhere between an inspired marketing strategy and a bold coup d'état" (2).

\textsuperscript{71} Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, 357.

\textsuperscript{72} Karl Kraus' term of abuse, which also puns on "Newtonians;" see Adorno, "Vienna," 204. Schoenberg's letter to Schreker is quoted in Schreker-Bures et al., Franz Schreker, 31.
easier to mine his essays on Zemlinsky and Schreker for pithy aphoristic selections which can then be wholly endorsed – if they happen to be positive – or wholly denied – if they are negative – and used for launching a counter-attack on the narrowness of Adorno’s view of modernism.

Yet such a judgment on Adorno’s modernist bias can only be formed from a selective reading that misses or ignores those crucial passages in which Adorno questions the validity of the ultimate outcome of the Schoenbergenian enterprise, and seeks expressive modernist possibilities for other paths:

The pressure to dissolve all existing practices may perhaps have expressed itself before the First World War in a variety of categories, and not just in those of the great historical trend. But today, when that trend threatens to become universal and mechanical, we have to revaluate many things which previously appeared to be of minor importance.  

As Adorno saw it, the progression toward complete rationalization of all the components of musical composition, which carried on from Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique, had resulted in the dissolution of any residue of musical subjectivity in favour of the obsessive objectification of the system itself. That “the great historical trend” seemed to have culminated in a move toward integral serialism which, in its extreme emphasis on abstract rationality and controlling predetermination, smacked of totalitarianism to Adorno, was a condition he was clear-sighted enough to both pinpoint and trace back to its origins, wherein he could also envision that alternatives had existed. In fact, the post-war disappearance of Zemlinsky and Schreker from the history books and concert halls was a reflection of Adorno’s realization that “[t]he survival of works of art of the past does not follow automatically from their once palpable modernity.” Modernity proved a questionable quality in the judgment of Schreker and Zemlinsky’s works even during their time, when they were alternately accused of lacking it or possessing it in undesirable ways.


degrees. Yet Adorno held out the possibility that the judgment of posterity might uncover other criteria through which their music might attain a more lasting value. "Once works of art have lost the tension of their immediate here and now, they reveal quite different dimensions from those visible in the material at the time," he observed. "On occasion they often prove more durable in the retrograde art of a past era than in the erstwhile avant-garde."75 The retrograde glance of Adorno's "Schreker" and "Zemlinsky" essays does indeed discern such different dimensions. They offer his attempt to revise "a historical judgment which proves that the power of chance and the injustice of the world also hold sway in the realm of art."76

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75 Adorno, "Zemlinsky," 128.
76 Ibid., 129.
Selected Bibliography


