

## The Literary Fragment in the Second Viennese School

In his well-known introduction to Anton Webern's *Six Bagatelles for String Quartet*, op. 9, Arnold Schönberg describes the austerity of these short and seemingly fragmentary works, saying: "A glance can always be spun out into a poem, a sigh into a novel. But to convey a novel through a single gesture, or felicity by a single catch of the breath: such concentration exists only when emotional self-indulgence is correspondingly absent."<sup>1</sup> Some critics have expressed doubts about this statement. Kathryn Bailey, for example, voices her skepticism, saying that it "has sometimes seemed to me somewhat overstated" given that a novel "comprises a complex set of developments and relationships that require time to unfold."<sup>2</sup> While her general point is well taken, the claim that some of Webern's most aphoristic works carry the impact of a novel, compressed into a single musical moment, remains an intriguing idea, especially given the extent to which Schönberg, Webern, and Berg discussed literature in their correspondence during the time these pieces were composed.

Literary references abound in the letters these composers wrote between 1909 and 1914, the years in which they wrote many of their most aphoristic works. They include discussions of Maurice Maeterlinck, Honoré de Balzac, and especially Karl Kraus and August Strindberg. In fact, many of these same authors sought to undo the literary conventions of earlier generations and to confound traditional notions of genre, including that of the novel. They often aimed for the utmost concision in their works – a tendency towards fragmentation as a sign of their modernity. Disputing the common perception of brevity as a "problem" or a sign of a compositional crisis, Joseph Auner has suggested that, "the small-scale works represent the most thorough-going

1 Arnold Schönberg: Vorwort zu Weberns kleinen Quartettstücken (1924) (ASSV 5.1.4.4.); quoted from idem: *Style and Idea. Selected Writings. 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition.*

Edited by Leonard Stein (Berkeley/Calif., Los Angeles, London 2010), 483–484.

2 Kathryn Bailey: Berg's Aphoristic Pieces, in *The Cambridge Companion to Berg*. Edited by Anthony Pople (Cambridge 1997), 83–110, 85–86.

realization of Schoenberg's contemporary compositional and aesthetic ideals."<sup>3</sup> And so in this essay, I build on Auner's idea by looking at several of the works that Schönberg and Webern composed during this period as deliberately fleeting statements cultivating shared aesthetic connections with literary fragments, and addressing similar issues of form, genre and rhetoric.<sup>4</sup>

The aphorism held a great amount of cultural capital in turn-of-the-century Vienna, prompting the historian William Johnston to speak of a "Vienna School of Aphorists" flourishing between 1880 and 1930.<sup>5</sup> Although Johnston takes Karl Kraus as somewhat of an outlier, compared to figures like Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, and Richard Schaukal, Kraus certainly exerted the greatest influence on Schönberg and his students, especially through his periodical *Die Fackel*, which they read avidly. In Example 1, we can see from the marginal annotations in Schönberg's own copy of volume 10/277–278 (March 31, 1909, 58–59) that certain of Kraus's aphorisms seemed to catch the composer's attention in different ways. One of Kraus's aphorisms on the left translates to "*Philosophy is often no more than the courage to step into a labyrinth. But whoever then forgets the entrance gate can easily get a reputation as an independent thinker.*" [Philosophie ist oft nicht mehr als der Mut, in einen Irrgarten einzutreten. Wer aber dann auch die Eingangspforte vergißt, kann leicht in den Ruf eines selbständigen Denkers kommen.]<sup>6</sup> This aphorism is seemingly echoed by one of Schönberg's own, which appeared shortly after Kraus's in the periodical *Die Musik*. In it, Schönberg expounds upon the figure of the expert artist using imagery that is strikingly similar to Kraus's philosopher: "*The artwork is a labyrinth, in which at every point the expert knows the entrance and exit, without a red thread guiding him.*" [Das Kunstwerk ist ein Labyrinth, an dessen jedem Punkte der Kundige Ein- und Ausgang weiß, ohne daß ihn ein roter Faden leitet.]<sup>7</sup> Schönberg goes on to contrast this with the situation of "*pseudo-artists*" [Afterkünstler] who need such a crutch to avoid getting lost in their own clumsy creations. Conversely, on the right side of the page, Schönberg marked another passage with an exclamation point, singling

3 Joseph Auner: Warum bist du so kurz? Schoenberg's Three Pieces for Chamber Orchestra (1910) and the Problem of Brevity, in *Festschrift Jan Maegaard 14. 4. 1996*. Edited by Mogens Andersen, Niels Bo Foltmann and Claus Røllum Larsen (Copenhagen 1996), 43–63, 45.

4 For the purposes of this paper, I am limiting myself to the short instrumental works of Schönberg and Webern which relate most directly to the comparison made in Schönberg's introduction; while Berg's *Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano*,

op. 5 might also be included, they seem to me to present slightly different problems. Likewise, analyzing their settings of aphoristic texts (like those of Berg's *Altenberg Lieder*, op. 4), would expand this study beyond its present scope.

5 William M. Johnston: The Vienna School of Aphorists, 1880–1930. Reflections on a Neglected Genre, in *The Turn of the Century. German Literature and Art 1890–1915*. Edited by Gerald Chapple and Hans Schulte (Bonn 1983), 275–290.

6 Translations are the author's unless indicated otherwise. A digital edition of the entire run of *Die Fackel* can be found at <https://fackel.oew.ac.at/>.

7 Arnold Schönberg: Aphorismen [in „Die Musik“] (1910) (ASSC 1.1.1.1.); quoted from *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life*. Edited by Joseph Auner (New Haven 2003), 64.

Bildung ist das, was die meisten empfangen, viele weitergeben und wenige haben.

Es kommt nur darauf an, sich zu konzentrieren, dann findet man das Beste. Man kann aus dem Kaffeesatz weisagen, ja man kann sogar im Anblick einer Frau auf Gedanken kommen.

Über Zeit und Raum wird so geschrieben, als ob es Dinge wären, die im praktischen Leben noch nie eine Anwendung gefunden haben.

Philosophie ist oft nicht mehr als der Mut, in einen Irrgarten einzutreten. Wer aber dann auch die Eingangspforte vergißt, kann leicht in den Ruf eines selbständigen Denkers kommen.

Wer von Berufswegen über die Gründe des Seins nachdenkt, muß nicht einmal so viel zustandbringen, um seine Füße daran zu wärmen. Aber beim Schuhflicken ist schon manch einer den Gründen des Seins nahegekommen.

Moral ist die Tendenz, das Bad mit dem Kinde auszuschütten.

Daß Hunger und Liebe die Wirtschaft der Welt besorgen, will sie noch immer nicht rückhaltlos zugeben. Denn sie läßt wohl die Köchin das große Wort führen, aber das Freudenmädchen nimmt sie bloß als Aushilfsperson ins Haus.

Die Kinder würden es nicht verstehen, warum die Erwachsenen sich gegen die Lust wehren; und die Greise verstehen es wieder nicht.

Wenn sich die Sünde vorwagt, wird sie von der Polizei verboten. Wenn sie sich verkriecht, wird ihr ein Erlaubnisschein erteilt.

Ich kannte einen Don Juan der Enthaltensamkeit, dessen Leporello nicht einmal imstande war, eine Liste der unnahbaren Weiber zusammenzustellen.

Moderne Musik: Im weiten Reich der Melodienlosigkeit ist es schwer, als Plagiator erkannt zu werden.

Wenn ein Denker mit der Aufstellung eines Ideals beginnt, dann fühlt sich jeder gern getroffen. Ich habe den Untermenschen beschrieben — wer sollte da mitgehen?

Ein Gedankenstrich ist zumeist ein Strich durch den Gedanken.

Als ich las, wie ein Nachahmer das Original pries, war es mir, als ob eine Qualle an Land gekommen wäre, um sich über den Aufenthalt im Ozean günstig zu äußern.

Er hatte so eine Art, sich in den Hintergrund zu drängen, daß es allgemein Ärgernis erregte.

Ich stelle mir vor, daß ein unvorsichtiger Konsistorialrat bei der Liebe Pech hat und sich die Masern zuzieht.

Als die Wohnungsmieter erfahren hatten, daß die Hausbesitzerin eine Kupplerin sei, wollten sie alle kündigen. Sie blieben aber im Hause, als jene ihnen versicherte, daß sie ihr Geschäft verändert habe und nur mehr Wucher treibe.

Example 1: Marked aphorisms in Schönberg's copy of *Die Fackel*, 277–278 (March 31, 1909), 58–59 (Arnold Schönberg Center, Wien [Book F9])

out Kraus's statement "*Modern music: In the wide realm of unmelodiousness, it is hard to be recognized as a plagiarist.*" [Moderne Musik: Im weiten Reich der Melodienlosigkeit ist es schwer, als Plagiator erkannt zu werden.] Kraus's tastes in music were decidedly more conservative than Schönberg and other modernists, but he was often sympathetic with their causes. In fact, it was only a month earlier (in *Die Fackel* 10/272–273 [February 15, 1909], 34–35) that Kraus published Schönberg's open letter to the critic Ludwig Karpath, following the tumultuous premiere of the *String Quartet no. 2*, op. 10.<sup>8</sup> Thus, despite their differences, Kraus and Schönberg took similar positions in the artistic scene of contemporary Vienna.

8 Kraus, however, declined to publish another more polemic contribution by Schönberg. See Arnold Schönberg: *The Second String Quartet in F-sharp Minor*,

op. 10. *Authoritative Score, Background and Analysis, Commentary*. Edited by Severine Neff (New York 2006), 237–44, for their correspondence around these events.

Previous scholarship has noted various facets of Kraus’s influence on the members of the Second Viennese School. Alexander Goehr, for example, has looked at parallels between Schönberg’s conception of the musical idea and Kraus’s theory of language, especially Kraus’s formulation of the idea itself as existing beyond language, while also placing an “*ethical imperative*” on the use of language – something that made Vienna’s contemporary journalists common targets for both.<sup>9</sup> Julian Johnson has also noted how this ethical dimension positioned the readers of *Die Fackel* as a community coalescing around a cultural position, even while, for example, their musical tastes differed from Kraus’s own.<sup>10</sup> Therese Muxeneder has examined Schönberg’s interactions and correspondence with and about Kraus, to show multifaceted connections that cross over from writing to music and even to Schönberg’s painting.<sup>11</sup> Other scholarship has dealt with more specific lines of influence. For example, David Schroeder has commented on Kraus’s worldview as reflected in Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*, and Susanne Rode has written in detail about the profound influence that Kraus’s views had on the main themes of *Lulu*, as well as Webern’s more ambivalent views – something that did not preclude him from reading *Die Fackel* regularly and developing an enduring appreciation of Kraus’s poetry.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Webern gave Schönberg copies of Kraus’s *Worte in Versen* as Christmas presents when the first volumes were published in 1917, 1918, and 1921, and around the same time, he even set some of Kraus’s poetry in the first of his *Four Songs for Voice and Orchestra*, op. 13, in 1917, and in sketches for a set of *Three Kraus Songs* in 1918–20 (AWG-ID<sup>13</sup> M 232, M 236, and M 246).

Less has been written, however, about Kraus’s writing style as an influence on musical expression. Julian Johnson comes the closest, suggesting that an overlap between linguistic and musical practices “*would not have seemed at all tenuous to members of the Schönberg School – indeed, it was a relationship they were keen to develop.*”<sup>14</sup> As an example of this, Johnson cites Webern’s “*transparent use of the formal elegance of the aphorism, producing paradox through*

9 Alexander Goehr: Schoenberg and Karl Kraus: The Idea Behind the Music, in *Music Analysis* 4/1–2 (1985), 59–71, 65.

10 Julian Johnson: The Reception of Karl Kraus by Schönberg and his School, in *Karl Kraus und Die Fackel. Aufsätze zur Rezeptionsgeschichte | Reading Karl Kraus. Essays on the Reception of Die Fackel*. Edited by Gilbert Carr and Edward Timms (München 2001), 99–108.

11 Therese Muxeneder: *Arnold Schönberg & Karl Kraus* (Wien 2024).

12 See David P. Schroeder: Berg, Strindberg, and D Minor, in *College Music Symposium* 30/2 (Fall 1990), 74–89; idem: Berg’s *Wozzeck* and Strindberg’s Musical Models, in *The Opera Journal* 21/1 (1988), 2–12; and idem: Opera, Apocalypse and the Dance of Death. Berg’s Indebtedness to Kraus, in *Mosaic* 25/1 (Winter 1992), 91–105. See also Susanne Rode: *Alban Berg und Karl Kraus. Zur geistigen Biographie des Komponisten der ‘Lulu’* (Frankfurt a. M. 1988) (Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe 36. Musikwissenschaft 36); and Susanne Rode-Breymann: Anton Webern und Karl

Kraus. Aspekte einer ungewöhnlichen Kraus-Rezeption, in *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 46/6 (June 1991), 313–24.

13 This refers to Anton Webern Gesamtausgabe ID, see [https://app.dasch.swiss/project/ot712nU-SdeXlF17LX\\_h3g](https://app.dasch.swiss/project/ot712nU-SdeXlF17LX_h3g) (09.08.2024).

14 Julian Johnson: The Reception of Karl Kraus, see fn. 10, 104.

*a simple statement and its apparent reversal.*<sup>15</sup> One of the aims of the present essay is to expand on this notion in more concrete ways.

Johnson's observation echoes what literary critics like Melvin Maddocks have observed before: that aphorisms thrive on paradoxes.<sup>16</sup> An aphorism often hinges on a kind of "twist" or "turning point" that reveals an underlying irony, provoking its readers into a sudden realization, a recognition of something left unspoken, spurring them on to further thought. Maddocks also shows how there is a performative element to the aphorism – its proper tone and delivery often hinges on some slight wordplay, which brings about this fundamental change in meaning. Kraus, after all, has described his output as "written acting."<sup>17</sup> One of his aphorisms, alongside a similar one of Schönberg's, demonstrates this rhetorical ploy clearly. In *Die Fackel* (10/275–276 [March 22, 1909], 29), Kraus makes the following statement: "*To write an aphorism, if one can do it, is often difficult. It is much easier to write an aphorism if one can't do it.*" [Einen Aphorismus zu schreiben, wenn man es kann, ist oft schwer. Viel leichter ist es, einen Aphorismus zu schreiben, wenn man es nicht kann.]

In Kraus's aphorism, the second sentence turns the first on its head, taking the off-hand phrase "if one can" and refocusing the second sentence toward the repetition and negation of this same wording, shifting the attention not so much on the act of writing an aphorism but on the short fallings of those who undertake the task too lightly. This same kind of playful, yet biting, inversion can be found in some of Schönberg's aphorisms, for example this similar formulation found in the *Konzert Taschenbuch* (1911) published by Emil Gutmann: "*The artist can depict much less than he is able to imagine, the dilettante far more.*" [Der Künstler kann viel weniger, der Dilettant weit mehr darstellen, als er sich vorzustellen vermag.]<sup>18</sup> Moreover, I will argue in the examples that follow, that this kind of twist can help explain some of the rhetorical effects of his musical practice around the same years.

### **The Aphoristic Twist in Analysis: Arnold Schönberg op. 19, no. 4 and Anton Webern op. 9, no. 3**

To demonstrate how the rhetorical flow of an aphorism might translate into musical expression, and what our analyses might gain from this context, I turn now to a couple of pieces by Schönberg and Webern composed around the same time as the aphorisms discussed above: the fourth of Schönberg's

15 Ibidem.

17 Quoted ibidem, 172.

16 Melvin Maddocks: The Art of the Aphorism, in *Sewanee Review* 109/2 (Spring 2001), 171–184.

18 Arnold Schönberg: Aphorismen [im "Konzert-Taschenbuch"] (1911) (ASSV 1.1.1.2. | T14.13), 104.



*Six Little Piano Pieces* (written February 19, 1911) and the third movement of Webern's *Bagatelles* (Summer 1911). Bryan Simms, in his study of Schönberg's Opus 19, focuses on many of the more traditional features of the pieces in the set. He describes the fourth piece, for example, as a scherzo whose "developmental ternary form is fully evident as the opening theme returns in a *martellato* diminution in measure 10."<sup>19</sup> While from a certain perspective, Simms's description sets out an accurate and clear picture of the piece's structure, if we are to recognize that an aphorism's manner of delivery can have a decisive effect on its meaning, then the reprise here is anything but a return to the opening. The character has shifted from light and playful (*p* and "leicht" in lilting dotted rhythms) in mm. 1–5 to much more forceful and acerbic (*f* and *martellato* with heavy accents) in mm. 10–13, and rather than confirming what Simms terms the opening period's antecedent and consequent, many of the elements stand in direct contradiction (see Example 2). After the first five notes in m. 10, the theme liquidates, diverging in every aspect other than contour. The punctuating chord at the end of the antecedent (F $\sharp$ /B $\natural$  in m. 2) now appears after the condensed version of the whole, and its interval content is changed – substituting a perfect fourth (B $\sharp$ /E $\natural$  in m. 11) for the tritone. Even if we take the A $\sharp$  in mm. 4–5 as the concluding note of the period, before B $\natural$  initiates a looser development of ideas in the middle section, these notes stand in a markedly different relationship in the final phrase. The corresponding B $\flat$  in m. 12 is forcefully displaced by a *fortississimo* B $\natural$  conclusion in a final gesture of contradiction. Thus, while the repeated pitch sequence marks a return to the opening, there are both subtle differences in structure and more dramatic differences in character that resemble the wordplay and resulting shift in meaning found in many aphorisms, and through which the reprise seems not so much to confirm the opening, but to question its very premise.

The third piece from Webern's *Bagatelles*, op. 9, shown in Example 3, provides another instance of a short form hinging on a rhetorical turning point. The sense of contradiction here is in some ways more radical than in op. 19 and – as with many good aphorisms – the result has been the subject of some puzzlement. Allen Forte simply states that "*The form of III does not lend itself easily to description in traditional terms*" and limits his observations to the pitch structure of the first four measures only.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Mark Sallmen focuses his analytical attention on the start of the movement, observing how the initial viola "recitative" (as Adorno has termed it) has a particular sway over the opening: for example, the viola's melodic intervals <–1, –1, –7, –6> are inverted by the violins in the first half of m. 4 <+1, +1, +7, +6>, and the return of the exact

19 Bryan Simms: *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908–1923* (New York 2000), 85.

20 Allen Forte: *The Atonal Music of Anton Webern* (New Haven 1998), 181.

## Opening Period

Rasch, aber leicht (♩)

1 2 3

p p f

## Loosely Developed Middle Section

4 poco rit. - - 5 leicht 6 pp p

pp pp

ped. - - - -

7 poco rit. 8 9

p

## Diminution of the Opening

10 f martellato 11 ff sf 12 ff 13 sf fff

f martellato ff sf ff sf fff

Example 2: Arnold Schönberg: *Six Little Piano Pieces*, op. 19 no. 4, annotated score





pitch-class content [D $\sharp$ , E $\flat$ , E $\sharp$ , F $\sharp$ , G $\sharp$ ] helps join the second and first violin parts in the second half of this measure.<sup>21</sup>

The second half of the movement, however, takes a pivotal twist in mm. 5–6, suddenly swelling to loud tremolo and pizzicato chords which take over for the rest of the movement and never return to a melodic idea. If we venture to read this piece rhetorically, we might also notice a familiar aphoristic device. The first of these pizzicato chords (m. 6), which is also the dynamic climax of the upper voices, contains exactly the same pitch-class content as the second violin part in mm. 2–3: the oscillating B $\sharp$ –F $\sharp$  tritone (which also appears as the final sonority in the low strings in mm. 8–9) as well as the next three notes, E $\flat$ , C $\sharp$ , and E $\sharp$ . In other words, the second violin’s material, which was presented unobtrusively in the first half as a quiet response to the opening viola statement, is transformed from an emergent melody to a harmonic idea, and forcefully recast to initiate the series of sharp pizzicato chords that become the primary focus of the second half of the movement.<sup>22</sup> As with Kraus’s aphorism, this shift of emphasis coincides with a shift in tone and meaning as the relationships of the opening are overturned by the chords that push the continuation of the movement in a new direction. Unlike Kraus’s aphorism, however, the effect is not so much of a biting and sarcastic commentary, but rather of a profound upheaval, a revelation brought about by a radical change of perspective on the material of the piece. Perhaps a better parallel to this shift from melodic to harmonic focus is found in one of Hofmannsthal’s aphorisms, highlighting a similarly paradoxical connection between seemingly opposed concepts: “*Depth must be hidden. Where? On the surface.*”<sup>23</sup> By focusing on the performative aspects of the piece, I hope to show how the presentation of material can provide rhetorical contrast within an underlying structural coherence, and moreover, how that contrast or change in perspective can be meaningfully related to the expressive form of an aphoristic twist.

21 See Mark Sallmen: Motives and Motivic Paths in Anton Webern’s Six Bagatelles for String Quartet, op. 9, in *Theory and Practice* 28 (2003), 29–52, and Theodor W. Adorno: Anton Webern: Sechs Bagatellen für Streichquartett op. 9, in *Der getreue Korrepetitor. Lehrschriften zur musikalischen Praxis* (Frankfurt a. M. 1976), 277–310, 289–291 (Gesammelte Schriften 15).

22 Another analytical path can be drawn from the opening chord in the violins, which introduces the pizzicato element and many of the intervallic ideas prevalent in the work (especially around the pitch-class sets [0146] and [01256]), even if its exact pitch-class configuration is not repeated in as clear a way as the ones that shape the present analysis. This soft (*ppp*) accompanimental chord can be taken as another background element that is foregrounded and transformed by the twist in m. 5. My thanks to Thomas Ahrend for calling my attention to some of these extended relationships.

23 This aphorism is found in Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Book of Friends* [1922], in Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Selected Prose*. Trans. by Mary Hottinger and Tania & James Stern (New York 1952), 362 (Bollingen Series 33).

## Expanded Aphorisms and Related Genres

The aphorism has many different modes of expression and a wide variety of forms. Moreover, it is not the only literary genre that tends towards brevity and fragmentation. In his article, “From Impression to Epiphany: The Aphorism in the Austrian ‘Jahrhundertwende,’” Richard Gray discusses the range of aphorisms produced in this period as being delimited by a continuum between two different types.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand there is the “*aphorism of impression*,” which is concerned with expressing momentary truths, is relativized, and often less critically reflective; these are, as Hermann Bahr describes, “*momentary disconnected pictures*” [unverbundene Augenblicksbilder].<sup>25</sup> This kind of aphorism tends to present a single, often generalizing thought, while leaving further reflection open to the audience. Here we might think about how Webern described the third piece of his Opus 6, in a letter to Schönberg from January 13, 1913 – as “*convey[ing] the impression of the fragrance of the Erica [a kind of heather], which I gathered at a spot in the forest very meaningful to me and then laid on the beer.*”<sup>26</sup> Or in a similar vein, we might think of Schönberg’s op. 19, no. 6, written after the burial of Mahler. While Gray considers this an aphorism of impression, others might take this as another type of fragment – perhaps a more singular, unironic maxim, or, given the funereal connotations, an epigraph.

On the other end of Gray’s continuum is what he calls the “*aphorism of epiphany*,” often aiming “*to re-create for the reader this momentary flash of insight.*”<sup>27</sup> While this kind of fragment may rely on a twist in order to trigger a moment of realization, it can also be seen as distilling a hidden meaning out of a complex scenario or suddenly laying bare the truth of a situation. In one of her best-known examples of the form, cited in *Die Fackel*, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach has described the aphorism as “*the last ring in a long chain of thought*” [Ein Aphorismus ist der letzte Ring einer langen Gedankenkette].<sup>28</sup> At times this last ring is presented in isolation as an epiphany, and at other times the author sets up this moment by presenting a little more of the context that introduces the aphorism itself. It is here where I think the model of Strindberg comes into consideration for Schönberg and Webern.

24 Richard T. Gray: From Impression to Epiphany. The Aphorism in the Austrian ‘Jahrhundertwende.’, in *Modern Austrian Literature* 20/2 (1987), 81–95.

25 Quoted *ibidem*, 85.

26 Paul Sacher Stiftung (Rudolf Gumbacher Collection) | [ASCC 22419](#); translated in Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer: *Anton von Webern. A Chronicle of His Life and Work* (New York 1979), 126.

27 Richard T. Gray: From Impression to Epiphany, see fn. 24, 89.

28 Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Aphorismen, in *idem: Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9 (München 1960), 7. This is paraphrased approvingly by Adolf Grote in *Die Fackel* 11/287 (September 16, 1909), 31.

While Strindberg is not always thought of as an aphorist in the same way as Kraus, he also tended towards terse and stylized statements. Coming from the perspective of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of genre, Gary Morson has noted that short forms, including the aphorism, proverb, and dictum regularly work "as carriers of world views," and that they "may sometimes be expanded into longer forms."<sup>29</sup> For example, he takes Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* as an expanded expression of what he terms the "aphoristic consciousness" and Oscar Wilde's comedies as witticisms that are spun out into entire plays.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, each of these expanded forms contains within it many paradigmatic examples of shorter aphorisms or witticisms embedded within the longer work. Arthur Babillotte has noted a similar tendency in Strindberg's *Blue Books*, which were conceived of as a kind of breviary, containing short instructive anecdotes and small, digestible words of wisdom, sometimes quoted from Swedenborg, Goethe, or others, and sometimes penned by Strindberg himself. At the end of the first *Blue Book*, Strindberg is upfront and direct about this goal: "A prophet should be born to teach men the simple meaning of life in a few words. It has already been so well summed up: 'Fear God, and keep His commandments,' or 'Pray and work.'"<sup>31</sup>

Strindberg, too, held great sway within Schönberg's circle. His plays, novels, and other writings were collected in their libraries and discussed frequently in their correspondence. Michael Robinson has noted the breadth of the writer's influence on musical expressionism in Vienna, and more recently Susana Zapke has chronicled these connections in detail, from Alban and Helene Berg's early correspondence to the growing authority Strindberg accorded within all three composers' letters.<sup>32</sup> She also identifies certain prevailing themes that aligned across Strindberg and the Schönberg school at this time, including a trust in sensory experience and instinctive methods as being guided by forces beyond human control, a belief in the symbolism of the natural world, and a predisposition towards certain gender roles. Friedrich Buchmayr has also noted that Strindberg's emphasis on concise expression and on the one-act play employing a reduced number of characters had an influence on Schönberg's early music dramas, and many have observed the similarity in both form and content between a work like *To Damascus* and Schönberg's *Die Glückliche Hand*, op. 18, or Webern's stage play *Tot*.<sup>33</sup> It remains

29 Gary Saul Morson: The Aphorism: Fragments from the Breakdown of Reason, in *New Literary History* 34/3 (Summer 2003), 409–429, 411.

30 Ibidem, 411–412.

31 August Strindberg: *Zones of the Spirit*. Edited by Arthur Babillotte; republished in

*The Collected Works of August Strindberg*, eBook edition (Hastings, East Sussex 2018), 5435, 5639.

32 Michael Robinson: Strindberg and Musical Expressionism in Vienna, in *Studies in Strindberg* (London 1998), 135–148.

Susana Zapke: Der gedruckte Geist. Ein Beitrag zum intellektuellen Referenzsystem

der Wiener Schule, in *Strindberg, Schönberg, Munch. Nordische Moderne in Schönberg's Wien um 1900*. Edited by Christian Meyer, 75–111 (Wien 2008).

33 Friedrich Buchmayr: "Könnte von mir sein". Arnold Schönbergs Bewunderung für August Strindberg, in *Musikologica Austriaca* 20 (2001), 9–28.

a curiosity that despite Schönberg and Berg discussing potential operas based on Strindberg's works, Webern was the only one of them to actually set Strindberg to music. Moreover, Webern's only setting is his treatment of a short poem embedded into the end of the *Ghost Sonata*, whose later lines read like a set of fragmentary proverbial utterances: "*blessed is the man who enjoys performing good works. Do not make amends with malice for the angry deed that you committed*" [jeder Mensch genießt die Werke, selig, der das Gute übet. Für die Zornestat, die du verübtest, büße nicht mit Bosheit].<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, I hope to point out other ways that Strindberg's aesthetic had an influence on their compositional thinking.

Webern seems to have responded strongly to the laconic and fragmentary aspects of Strindberg's works. In a letter to Schönberg on June 18, 1913, around the same time he was working on what would become the outer movements of op. 9, Webern praises Strindberg's *Fröhliche Weihnacht*, the German translation of Strindberg's *The Black Glove*, saying "*Hardly ever was Strindberg's thinking clearer to me than with this piece.*"<sup>35</sup> [Wie wunderbar ist die "Fröhliche Weihnacht." Kaum jemals war mir Strindbergs Denken klarer als bei diesem Stück.] This miniaturized play is numbered as "opus 5" of Strindberg's Chamber Plays. Its five short scenes, hardly 60 pages in total, condense many of the themes found in the autobiographical novels, *Inferno* and *Legends* – including trials and redemption, faith in unseen forces, and an acceptance of the limits of human knowledge. All of this is presented in a mixture of stylized dialogue, verse, and strategic silences, supplemented with symbolic use of color and lighting. Strindberg also prescribes several specific works by Beethoven to be played as part of the staging, suggesting an interchange between musical and verbal modes of expression.

Webern seems to have read Strindberg's *Legends* in a similar manner. On August 6, 1913, after visiting the psychoanalyst Alfred Adler (with whom he would also, evidently, discuss Kraus's aphorisms criticizing Freud), he wrote to Schönberg about his experience. Expressing some skepticism to that manner of analysis, Webern invoked Strindberg: "*I do not believe that these are self-generated pains, but rather, they are imposed. And so, such investigations can only make sense if the 'that' in the Swedenborgian-Strindbergian formula 'Do that not' can be identified.*" [ich glaube nicht, dass das selbsterzeugte Schmerzen sind, sondern

34 Webern set this text as the third of his *Four Songs*, op. 12 in 1915, but he had also started a version for women's chorus in 1913/14 (AWG-ID M 198). The translation here follows Lionel Salter's in the liner notes to *Anton Webern: Complete Works* (compact disc, DG 457 637-2, 2000), 188.

35 Anton Webern to Arnold Schönberg, June 18, 1913 (The Library of Congress, Washington D. C., Music Division [Arnold Schoenberg Collection] | [ASCC 21997](#)); my sincere thanks to Regina Busch for allowing me to consult her transcriptions of the correspondence.

verhängte. Und solche Erforschungen können nur dann einen Sinn haben[,] wenn dabei das “Das” aus der Swedenborg-Strindbergschen Formel “Thue Das nicht” erkannt werden kann.]<sup>36</sup> Here, Webern is referring to the end of the fifth chapter of Strindberg’s *Legends*, where, after suffering physical and psychological torments, insomnia, and other ill omens himself, Strindberg diagnoses a friend undergoing similar troubles and begins to recommend the solution he himself found in Swedenborg. However, despite being begged by his friend, as he describes in his narrative of increasing intensity, he states that:

My courage sank, and has failed me every time that the possessed man has asked for this formula of exorcism. But here I write down the four words which are worth all the doctors’ regulations, ‘Do this no more.’ Everyone’s conscience must interpret the word ‘this’ for himself.<sup>37</sup>

The progression of this story, is in its own way an expanded aphorism of epiphany: the build of intensity to a moment of revelation – a realization of the utmost simplicity, undercutting the complexity of the world. In Strindberg’s handling, it ends with a caveat that demands further introspection and risks casting the whole endeavor back into doubt. Indeed, Strindberg’s own troubles continue for pages to come, suggesting that for both artists, the realization of what behaviors to avoid was no simple matter after all.

### **The Aphorism of Epiphany as a Musical Model: Schönberg’s *Three Pieces for Chamber Ensemble, no. 1*, and Webern’s *op. 10, no. 1***

The idea of organizing a brief musical statement around a moment of epiphany, like those found in Strindberg, is especially pertinent to these instrumental miniatures. In *The Musical Idea*, Schönberg himself has commented on how an artwork can operate like one of these literary fragments, revealing or producing a sudden insight:

It thus works like the proverb, which abstracts from many experiences an often meager bit of wisdom but a wisdom whose meaning becomes immediately and unquestionably comprehensible. And the aphorism, too, operates in a similar way, in which usually a certain imbalance – a not-being-brought-into-balance – of contrasting

36 Anton Webern to Arnold Schönberg, August 6, 1913 (The Library of Congress, see fn. 35 | [ASCC 22008](#)); see also his letter to Schönberg from September 29, 1913 (ibidem | [ASCC 22023](#)): “Kraus’s attacks against psychoanalysis in the last *Fackel* perplexed me. I spoke out about it with [Alfred] Adler. He told me that it all has to do with Freud and his followers (especially [Fritz] Wittels). Kraus takes an entirely different position toward him. And what Freud does is

also, as Adler tells me, something completely different.” [Die Ausfälle des Kraus gegen die Psychoanalyse in der letzten “Fa[c]kel” haben mich stutzig gemacht. Ich sprach mich mit Adler darüber aus. Der sagte mir das gehe alles auf Freud und dessen Anhänger (namentlich Wittels)[.] Ihm stehe Kraus ganz anders gegenüber. Und was der Freud macht ist auch, wie mir Adler erzählte, ganz was anderes.] Webern is referring to a series of blistering aphorisms

criticizing psychoanalysis, which appeared in *Die Fackel* 15/381–383 (September 19, 1913), 74–76, continuing another earlier set of attacks in *Die Fackel* 15/376–377 (May 30, 1913), 20–22.

37 August Strindberg; *Legends: Autobiographical Sketches*; republished in *The Collected Works of August Strindberg*, see fn. 31, 5688.



*Rascher* **Basic idea** *midrange* **I Varied restatement** **Continuation** *rascher* *beschleunigt*

*rit..... languanza* **High point (vln. I)** **Moment of revelation**

8/2. 1916

The image shows a handwritten musical score for 'Three Pieces for Chamber Ensemble, no. 1' by Arnold Schönberg. The score is annotated with blue and red boxes highlighting specific musical cells. The score is divided into sections: 'Basic idea', 'I Varied restatement', 'Continuation', 'High point (vln. I)', and 'Moment of revelation'. The instruments listed are Oboe, Clarinet, Horn, Violin I and II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, dynamics (pp, p, mf, f), and performance instructions like 'col legno' and 'rit.'. The date '8/2. 1916' is written at the bottom right.

Example 4a: Arnold Schönberg: *Three Pieces for Chamber Ensemble, no. 1*, annotated score (Arnold Schönberg Center, Wien, MS62, 1299)  
 Red indicates chromatic cells, blue indicates cells containing (014)



Example 4b: Arnold Schönberg: *Three Pieces for Chamber Ensemble*, no. 1, details from m. 1 and mm. 10–12

elements, a certain exaggeration of contrasts and a rudimentary presentation of conflict, aims at an excitement that, as with intuitive knowledge, lifts us above the necessity of examining details, or secondary circumstances, and produces the effect of a revelation.

[Sie verfährt hierin, wie das Sprichwort, welches aus vielen Erfahrungen eine oft magere Weisheit abstrahiert, aber eine deren Bedeutung sofort und unzweifelhaft auffassbar wird. Und ähnlich verfährt auch der Aphorismus, in welchem meist eine gewisse Unausgeglichenheit, Nicht-Ausbalancierung kontrastierender Elemente, eine gewisse Uebertreibung der Kontraste und die rudimentäre Darstellung der Konflikte eine Erregung bezweckt, die wie bei intuitiver Erkenntnis, uns über die Notwendigkeit hinaushebt, die Details, die Nebenumstände, zu prüfen und die Wirkung einer Offenbarung ausübt.]<sup>38</sup>

With this in mind, we may find a similar rhetorical arc in the first of Schönberg's *Three Pieces for Chamber Ensemble*, composed February 8, 1910 and shown in Example 4a. The piece has a sentence-like structure; its initial idea consists of an interval cell of a minor second and a minor third, adding up to major third (pitch-class set [014]), which is interspersed with chromatic interjections. This basic idea is presented in mm. 1–3 and then restated in varied forms in mm. 3–5. Its continuation builds to a dynamic, textural, and registral climax in the first violin in m. 8. The texture then dissipates, giving way so that the solo violin can have the last word. This final statement in mm. 10–12 also synthesizes much of the complexity of the opening into a more digestible and succinct form (see Example 4b): the opening motivic cell is represented twice in the last three bars: E $\flat$ –D $\sharp$ –B $\sharp$  (a direct transposition of the oboe's opening line down a fourth) and B $\sharp$ –G $\sharp$ –G $\sharp$  (an inversion of the same intervallic cell returning two of the oboe's three notes). Moreover, the intervening A $\sharp$  eighth note completes the return of the pitches of the opening accompanimental figure

38 Der musikalische Gedanke und die Logik, Technik und Kunst seiner Darstellung (1934/36) (ASSV 2.3.5.i.); quoted from idem: *The Musical Idea, and the Logic*,

*Technique, and Art of its Presentation*. Edited by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York 1995), chapter "Principles of Construction," 114–115.

an octave lower, effectively integrating the chromatic interjections with the melodic statements. The result is the realization of a sudden, clear, and focused connection between the juxtaposed elements of the opening.<sup>39</sup>

As a final example, I would like to consider the first movement of Webern's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, op. 10, no. 1, which was completed on June 28, 1911 and has a remarkably similar design to Schönberg's piece. The opening presents a chromatic neighboring figure: B $\sharp$ -C $\sharp$ -B $\sharp$ , split across different instruments in a kind of *Klangfarbenmelodie* (see the reduced score in Example 5). This motive develops into other closely-spaced chromatic ideas: the celesta's trill, starting in m. 3, and the neighboring and wedge-like figures stretching across different instrumental configurations, in the harp and strings and then in the brass, followed by the flute. In contrast to these, which often remain in the background, there are three main melodic segments in the clarinet, violin, and harp, which feature widely spaced melodic statements, often incorporating tritones – especially evident in the clarinet's line in mm. 3–6. These develop in density and expand in register up through the violin solo of mm. 7–10, at which point all of the complexity subsides and only the harp continues in a moment of clarity and revelation. Moreover, the harp combines the tritone-heavy melodic ideas (026) with the closely-spaced chromatic-wedge motif, and in the process, returns three of the four notes of the earlier clarinet melody, in a remarkable moment of synthesis and concentration. The final note, however, both completes the recall of the clarinet's pitches but also – like Strindberg's caveat – threatens to cast this moment of clarity into question once more, as the distinct timbre of the harp solo reverts to a scattered succession of instrumental colors. If there was ever a moment in Webern's music that could substantiate Schönberg's description of "a novel in single gesture" this would be a strong candidate, alongside the *Six Bagatelles*. The initial unrest and building intensity, a simple epiphany, and the weight of that final note – suggesting on one hand the possibility of completion, but on the other, the risk of lapsing back into doubt – seems to match the narrative arc and underlying worldview of Strindberg's novels so aptly, concentrating so much expressive potential into the most succinct gesture.

By taking Schönberg seriously in his comparison of Webern's *Bagatelles* to models from literature, and by examining the particular literary sources that they often discussed as these pieces were composed, I hope that the interdisciplinary orientation of my analyses has been a productive way of understanding the modernity of these works. My analyses have not attempted

39 In this regard, one could think of this piece as presenting and resolving a tonal problem, along the lines of those discussed by Carpenter and Neff (*ibidem*, 62 and

subsequent) and more recently expanded by Jack Boss: *Schoenberg's Atonal Music. Musical Idea, Basic Image, and Specters of Tonal Function* (Cambridge 2019).

**Sehr ruhig und zart** (♩ = 50)

glock. 8va

hrp. trp. cel. & vla. fl. clar. fl. solo vcl. vla. vln. trp. trb. cel. tr.

$F\sharp_2 - A\sharp_2 - B\sharp_2 - E\sharp_2 - B\sharp_2 - F\sharp_2$

7 solo vln. (vln. & glock 8va) trp. fl. cel. fl. cel. tr. hrp. hrp. vcl. & cel.

$A\sharp_2 - B\sharp_2 - E\sharp_2 - F\sharp_2$

Example 5: Anton Webern: *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, op. 10, no. 1, reduced score  
 Pitch and instrumentation are indicated without dynamics and other markings  
 Red indicates chromatic neighbor figures; orange indicates chromatic wedges and related figures;  
 blue indicates figures containing (026)

a comprehensive account of every note of the piece, but rather, have focused on moments that are highlighted by certain marked relationships; thus, they differ from many other kinds of pitch-class set analyses, which often aim to demonstrate the unifying effect that intervallic cells have on the structure of these short atonal works, in order to explain their novel and distinctly modern musical language.<sup>40</sup> Without denying the insights that pitch-class analyses

40 See, for example, the analysis of Webern's fourth *Bagatelle* in Jan Maegaard: *Some Formal Devices in Expressionist Works*, in *Dansk Årbog for Musikforskning* 1 (1961), 69–75. Maegaard is explicit about his aim to counter the apparent disunity of timbres, registers, playing techniques,

dynamics, and rhythms by demonstrating an underlying harmonic consistency, and thus to help rectify the prevailing tendency (at the time of this early analysis) to explain expressionist music by “enumerating what it is not” rather than “stating what it is.” (69)

provide into the innovative harmonic and melodic vocabulary, the intervallic consistency, and construction of works from this period, I have tried to show that within this new musical language, degrees of meaningful contrast and differentiation can be established by attending to the means by which these ideas are presented in performance – what I have been thinking of as the rhetoric of these works, rather than their structure. Moreover, I hope that by arguing for a certain sensitivity to these considerations, my analyses have revealed another aspect of what makes the musical language of these works distinctively modern: the ways in which the kinds of statements these works make – through their use of unexpected twists and contradictions, sudden changes in perspective, or revelatory moments of synthesis – run in parallel to the rhetoric of the aphorism and other literary fragments that circulated around the artistic circles of early-twentieth-century Vienna.