

The Method behind the Madness: Schoenberg's *Erwartung*

During the years between 1908 and 1920, Arnold Schoenberg began searching for an alternative to a (worn-out) tonal system — a system which no longer met his expressive needs. In these years, the Atonal Period, before he developed his revolutionary 12-tone system, he stretched the tonal system to its limits, added dissonant elements to traditional chords, denied expected resolutions, clouded cadences with inconclusive harmonies, etc. Searching for some way to anchor these works, Schoenberg spoke of the importance the text assumes in providing unity in extended works.

One of the most important aids to comprehension is clarity of design [...] the music] is assisted by feelings, insights, occurrences, impressions and the like, mainly in the form of poetry [...] compositions for texts are inclined to allow the poem to determine, at least outwardly, their form.¹

Schoenberg explained that he:

[...] discovered how to construct larger forms by following a text or poem. The differences in size and shape of its parts and the change in character and mood were mirrored in the shape and size of the composition, in its dynamics and tempo, figuration, and accentuation, instrumentation and orchestration. Thus the parts were differentiated as clearly as they had formerly been by the tonal and structural functions of harmony.²

An example of the importance the text assumed during this Atonal Period is Schoenberg's monodrama, titled *Erwartung*, generally translated as «Expectation». Schoenberg composed the work in Steinakirchen, Austria, in 1909, when he was on summer holiday from his home in Vienna. There he met a young medical student, Marie Pappenheim, who was also vacationing. Marie Pappenheim had been born into a wealthy and prominent Jewish merchant family in Bratislava in 1882. She had come to Vienna to finish her medical studies in dermatology, a degree she earned in 1910, one year after meeting Schoenberg. At the time she met Schoenberg in 1909, Marie had had some early poems published in Karl Kraus's journal *Die Fackel*.³ When Pappenheim was introduced to Schoenberg by their mutual friend, the composer Alexander Zemlinsky, Schoenberg was impressed enough to ask Pappenheim to write an opera libretto for him. She replied that the most she could write would be a monodrama.⁴

Pappenheim went to the home of some friends in Traunkirchen where she wrote a draft of the text in three weeks. Upon her return to Steinakirchen she presumably gave Schoenberg a handwritten copy of the libretto in pencil. Before she could send him a typewritten copy, he had already begun setting it to music, completing the whole 30-minute score in 17 days, from August 27 to September 12, 1909. When he received the typewritten copy, along with a letter expressing Pappenheim's misgivings about the libretto and her wish to make corrections, Schoenberg responded that it was too late; he had already finished the setting.⁵ As the following analysis shows, Schoenberg must have completed the compositional plan at an early stage. He obviously had had input in the course of some of their preliminary discussions.

The true extent of the collaboration will probably never be known. The textual and musical quotation from Schoenberg's early song «Am Wegrund», appearing in Scene Four of *Erwartung*, has led to speculation that Schoenberg made suggestions in the early stages of their collaboration when the two were considering a monodrama. The handwritten text by Pappenheim has corrections by another hand, most likely Schoenberg's, and is the version that was ultimately published, not Pappenheim's final typewritten version of the libretto.

Perhaps Sigmund Freud's concept that dreams are anarchical, a theory voiced by Freud in 1900, is reflected by his young contemporary, Marie Pappenheim, in her fragmented text with its apparent lack of organization, its several scenes portraying different places in the woods to which the Woman has wandered, and its lack of dénouement. The very text itself, with its short, sometimes incomplete, sometimes incoherent phrases, adds to the impression of the disoriented Woman's dream-like state.

1 Arnold Schoenberg, «Analysis of the Four Orchestral Songs Opus 22», in: *Perspectives of New Music* (Spring-Summer 1965), pp. 2-3.

2 Arnold Schoenberg, «Composition with Twelve Tones (I)» [1941], in: *Style and Idea*, London 1975, pp. 217-218.

3 Eva Weissweiler, «Schreiben Sie mir doch einen Operntext, Fräulein!» Marie Pappenheims Text zu Arnold Schönbergs «Erwartung» in: *NZfM* 145 (1984), pp. 4-8.

4 Helmut Kirchmeyer, «Das Drama der «Erwartung» — Schönbergs Begegnung mit Marie Pappenheim», in: Program Booklet for the Wergo recording, WER 50001, Wergo Schallplattenverlag GmbH (Baden-Baden), p. 8. The article is particularly prized for its veracity by Marie Pappenheim's son, Dr. Hans Frischauf. He stated to this writer in an interview in 1987 that Kirchmeyer spent a great deal of time interviewing and consulting with his mother, who felt his article was accurate.

5 Ibid.

From 1954 to the present, musicologists and theorists have submitted Schoenberg's *Erwartung* to a series of microscopic examinations. They have laboriously counted its intervals, musical motives, phrases, chords, tonal centers, and rhythmic patterns, in an effort to discover the inner logic of Schoenberg's expressionistic, atonal language; but they have largely neglected an element Schoenberg considered essential to an understanding of his vocal works — namely the text.

Erwartung, as Schoenberg has arranged it, has four scenes, the length of which are indicated in Figure 2, «The Length of Scenes in *Erwartung*». The figure shows the number of measures devoted to each scene and the disproportionately lengthy fourth scene. These musical proportions correspond to the action in Marie Pappenheim's text-narrative as summarized by this author in Figure 1, «The Plot Synopsis».

- Scene I* The edge of a wood. A woman dressed in white anxiously takes a path leading into the woods.
- Scene II* Blackest darkness; broad path, high thick trees. The woman imagines things in the dark, hears weeping, runs, stumbling over what she believes to be a body, but it is only a tree trunk.
- Scene III* A path in the darkness, and to the side a moonlit clearing with grasses, ferns, big yellow mushrooms. The woman tries to calm herself, imagines her lover calling, sees giant eyes staring at her, becomes terrified of a giant beast, and calls on her lover for help.
- Scene IV* A broad moonlit road coming out of the wood. Meadows and fields in green and yellow strips. On one side is a house with black shuttered windows. The woman's clothes are torn, face and hands lacerated and bleeding. She stumbles against the body of her dead lover, alternately kisses and reproaches the body for infidelity with the woman in the visible house. She kicks the body, and as dawn glimmers, imagines seeing her lover and wanders away seeking him.

Figure 1: Plot Synopsis of *Erwartung*

SCENES

I: 37 mm.	II: 52 mm.	III: 35 mm.	IV: 302 mm.
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Figure 2: Length in Measures of Scenes in *Erwartung*

Is there a recognizable musical form in Schoenberg's musical setting of this text? What is the relationship between Schoenberg's musical formal divisions and the dramatic structure of Pappenheim's text? Does the music follow the psychological progress of the drama, or does Schoenberg present a different reading of the text?

On the surface, Marie Pappenheim's text gives us little help in recognizing an overall organization. The text, like Schoenberg's musical setting, consists of short, seemingly disconnected fragmentary phrases, designed to portray the irrational mutterings of a deeply disturbed woman. In fact, the only immediately recognizable elements in the work are the prominent ostinato patterns in Schoenberg's musical setting, seen in Figure 3. These ostinatos begin with an incipient eight-note pattern around g^1 and b in the harp (Figure 3), and expand throughout the work, encompassing larger patterns (Figure 4 in the harp and clarinets), and ever-larger gestures which take over the full orchestra (Figure 5), culminating in the work's final lengthy and grand dramatic gesture.

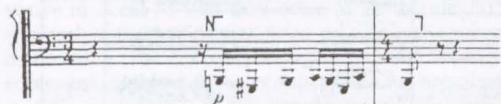


Figure 3: Schoenberg, *Erwartung* (Wien: Universal Edition, UE 13612, 1923). Used by permission of Belmont Music Publishers. Incipient Ostinato, harp, m. 4 (score)

In the first scene the Woman stands frightened at the edge of the forest. In the music, ritornello-like ostinatos occur at regular intervals, dividing the Woman's monologue into four sections suggestive of a strophic Lied. (See Figure 6, The Outline of Structural Ostinatos.) The text is thus divided by these ostinati into syllabic groupings of 34, 45, 42, and 34 syllables respectively. The resultant strophes, nearly equal in their syllable count, may be seen in Figure 7, showing the division of the text into strophes separated by the ostinatos.

Introduction or prelude, three measures (mm. 1-3)

I. ostinato, m. 4, harp, begins with the voice

II. ostinato, m. 9, harp, violas, cellos, bassoons

III. ostinato, mm. 16-18, harp and celeste

IV. ostinato, mm. 24-26, cellos and basses

Postlude or interlude, five measures (mm. 31-35), falling, rising sequences

Figure 6: Scene I, Outline of Structural Ostinatos

I. *Hier hinein?..Man sieht den Weg nicht..
Wie silbern die Stämme schimmern...wie
Birken!...oh unser Garten...
Die Blumen für ihn sind sicher verwelkt..*

m. 9, tritone ostinato

II. *Die Nacht ist so warm.
Ich fürchte mich..Was für schwere Luft heraus-
schlägt..
Wie ein Sturm, der steht..So grauenvoll ruhig
und leer..
Aber hier ists wenigstens hell..der Mond war
früher so hell..*

mm. 16-17, ostinato

III. *Oh noch immer die Grille..mit ihrem Liebeslied..
Nicht sprechen..es ist so süß bei dir..der
Mond ist in der Dämmerung..
feig bist du..willst ihn nicht suchen?..
So stirb doch hier..*

mm. 24-25, ostinato

IV. *Wie drohend die Stille ist..der Mond ist voll
Entsetzen..
Sieht der hinein?..Ich allein..in den dumpfen
Schatten.
Ich will singen..dann hört er mich..*

mm. 31-35, sequences

Figure 7: Scene I, Textual Divisions

In Scene Two, the Woman has plunged into the deep darkness of the woods. The music is more animated than in the opening scene, perhaps to suggest the Woman's increasingly agitated state. The overall musical form of this scene is ternary in design (Figure 8), and contrasts with the previous scene in its quicker pace and more dramatic declamation. The vocal line is characterized by wider, more jagged leaps. Dynamic changes are abrupt and extreme, shifting in an instant from *fff* (*fortississimo*) to *pp* (*pianissimo*). The middle section is a mournful arioso reflecting on bitter-sweet remembrances of her lover. The final section depicts the Woman's sudden return to reality and her present fearful flight through the woods, as she tries to escape from the «beasts» of her conscience. Figure 8 summarizes the form of Scene II.

prelude	A	B	A	postlude
mm. 37- 39	mm. 40- 45	mm. 46- 68	mm. 69-86	mm. 87-99
3 mm.	recit.	arioso	recit.	3 mm.

Figure 8: Form of Scene II

The formal patterns of the Lied, strophic in Scene I, and ternary in Scene II, provide a convincing paradigm for the first two scenes of *Erwartung*. In fact, judging from their Lied-like structures one might expect that Schoenberg conceived *Erwartung* as a song cycle. But the formal model of the song cycle fails to explain the musical organization of the two remaining scenes, which appear to be non-sectional in their layout. Ostinato configurations which were used sparingly in the opening scenes to articulate their Lied-like structures are so pervasive in Scene III that they cease to be meaningful articulators of form. The third scene introduces a new approach to text setting that forces us to reevaluate our initial understanding of the musical organization of the monodrama. The libretto once again provides the key to our understanding of the musical organization of the scene, and, as this author contends, the formal organization of the entire monodrama.

The third scene, as the libretto reveals, divides dramatically into three parts, labeled Reality, Illusion, Reality (see Figure 9), that correspond to the vacillating psychological states of the Woman. (The libretto, in English translation by Arthur Jacobs and published in a Universal Edition, is used for easier viewing of the psychological states of the Woman.) Schoenberg's music reinforces these dramatic divisions in Pappenheim's libretto. When the Woman reacts to her surroundings and is functioning in the present moment, psychologically speaking (Reality), Schoenberg uses a recitative-like texture to define those moments; when her actions are directed inward and her behavior is motivated by memories of her lover (Illusion), Schoenberg changes from a

declamatory, recitative-like setting of the text to a more lyric vocal style that is closer to arioso. These musico-dramatic relationships are summarized in Figure 10.

Measure No.		Dramatic Divisions
Scene 3.		
<i>The path still in darkness. To the side of the path, a broad strip of light. The moonlight falls on a clearing, where there are grasses, ferns, big yellow fungi. The woman comes out of the darkness.</i>		
90	I see a light ! Ah, just the moon . . . how good . . .	REALITY
<i>Again half afraid</i>	There something is dancing . . . Something black there . . .	
<i>quickly controlling herself</i>	Silly fool . . . it's only shadows . . .	
98	Oh ! how your shadow falls upon my white walls . . . But you have always to go . . . Calling ?	ILLUSION
<i>tenderly thoughtful</i>		
<i>a rustling. She stirs, looks round her and listens for a moment</i>		REALITY
<i>again dreamily</i>	To wait for evening weems so long . . .	
<i>a light puff of wind she looks again</i>	Isn't the shadow moving . . . Yellow, open eyes	
<i>sound of shuddering creaking noise in the grass</i>	I see rising as on stems . . . How they stare !	
105		REALITY
<i>terrified</i>	No beast, dear God, no beast ! Oh I feel such a fear . . . Dearest, my dearest, help me . . .	
110		

Figure 9: Schoenberg, *Erwartung*, Op. 17, Monodrama, libretto, poem by Marie Pappenheim, English version by Arthur Jacobs (Wien: Universal Edition, 1962). Used by permission of Belmont Music Publishers. Libretto, Scene III, Dramatic Divisions (libretto)

Present = Reality = Declamatory Style
Past = Illusion = Arioso Style

Figure 10: Psychological States & Musical Style

Instead of using ostinato configurations to organize the text, as he apparently did in the opening scenes, Schoenberg now relies on textural, or stylistic contrasts to make the dramatic divisions of the third scene of Pappenheim's text comprehensible. The organization of Scene III, then, when examined from the viewpoint of the libretto, is not a through-composed movement, as originally thought, but a tripartite structure based on textural contrasts that alternate between recitative and arioso styles, in accordance with the character's changing emotional states.

Scene III thus continues a formal pattern that was actually already present in Scene I. The pattern proves to be the organizing principle by which Schoenberg integrates the entire monodrama, a fact that has escaped the attention of earlier scholars. But the import of the pattern is not readily apparent unless one carefully examines the libretto. (See Figure 11, «The Libretto, Scene I: Dramatic Divisions».) Looking back now to Scene I, one finds that the libretto consists of a rapid succession of regularly-alternating Reality-Illusion pairs and focuses attention on the middle pair that introduces the poetic image of the cricket's song — a metaphor for the Woman's Lament.

The musico-dramatic structure of Scene I thus divides into four sections (A B A B), as seen in Figure 12.⁶ The framing three-measure instrumental prelude, mm. 1-3, and five-measure instrumental postlude, mm. 33-37, which were shown in Figure 6, have not been included in the diagram of Figure 12 in the interest of saving space.

6 Lines 16 and 17 in the English version by Jacobs («Cowardly...») are ambiguous and may be interpreted either as belonging to Reality or Illusion. In his musical reading of these lines, Schoenberg, through the use of his ostinati, includes these lines with the preceding Illusion group. I have included these lines in the Reality group in my dramatic analysis of Scene I. Either reading, musical or dramatic, shows virtually simultaneous beginning and ending points, and confirms the basic principle discussed here, the division of the scene into four equal groups.

Measure No.		Dramatic Divisions	
Scene 1.			
At the edge of a wood. Streets and fields lit by the moon; the wood tall and dark. Only the first tree-trunks and the beginning of the pathway (through the wood) are also lit by the moon. A woman comes; delicate, dressed in white; on her dress, red roses which have partially shed their leaves. She wears jewellery.			
WOMAN, hesitating		Through the wood ? . . . I see no pathway . . . Like silver the trunks are shining . . . Like birches ! . . .	REALITY
abstracted, looking at the earth		Oh, our garden. The flowers for him Have faded away. The night is so warm	ILLUSION
in sudden fear	11	I'm frightened . . .	
listens in the direction of the wood, oppressed		An oppressive air attacks me Like a storm that waits . . .	REALITY
wrings her hands, looks back		So horribly quiet and void . . . Yet around me still it is bright . . .	
looks up		The moon just now was so bright . . .	
crouches down, listens, looks away in front of her	17	Oh, again the crickets It is a song of love . . . Don't speak now . . . it is so sweet with you . . . The moon is growing fainter now . . .	ILLUSION
getting up	23	Cowardly ! — would you not seek him ? . . . Then you may die . . .	
turns round towards the wood		How baleful the silence is . . .	
looking about, timidly		The moon is full of terror . . . Does it see there ? . . .	REALITY
fearful		I'm alone . . . in the gloomy shadows.	
TRANSFORMATION			
summoning courage, she goes quickly into the wood		If I sing now he'll hear my voice . . .	ILLUSION

Figure 11: Libretto, Scene I, Dramatic Divisions

A	B	A	B
Reality/ Illusion	Reality	Illusion	Reality/ Illusion
mm. 4-9	mm. 9-16	mm. 17-24	mm. 25-32

Figure 12: Libretto, Scene I, Musico-Dramatic Divisions

The Reality-Illusion cycle, highlighted by Schoenberg's textural changes, continues unbroken through to the end of the monodrama. Schoenberg organizes the composition so that the moods swing back and forth between Reality and Illusion, setting up a rhythm like an ever-widening arch of a pendulum that leads in the final scene to a single Reality-Illusion pair. The six-section Reality-Illusion cycle of the opening scene is spread out over the next two scenes, while the final scene initiates a third, incomplete cycle. Which ever way one interprets the cycles, Schoenberg has designed them so that they are open-ended. The diagram in Figure 13 summarizes the Reality-Illusion cycle for Scenes I through IV, showing the ever-expanding durations of the Woman's vacillating moods and the parallel musical expansion of Schoenberg's musical units.

Scene I	Scene II	Scene III	Scene IV
RI R I RI	R I R	R I R	R I
37 ms.	52 ms.	35 ms.	302 ms.

Figure 13: Libretto, Scenes I-IV, Dramatic Divisions

Scene IV, the final scene in *Erwartung*, is the longest in the monodrama, 302 measures in length, and comprises a single Reality-Illusion pair. (See Figure 14. The Reality section is some 75 measures, while the Illusion section is almost exactly three times as long, encompassing 224 measures.)

A	B	Postlude
Reality	Illusion	1 m.
mm. 125- 200	mm. 201-425	m. 426
recit.	arioso	instru.

Figure 14: Libretto, Scene IV, Musico-Dramatic Divisions

The scene is far too long and too complex to deal with here, but it should be noted that it contains an important musical quote from one of Schoenberg's own early songs, «Am Wegrund», («At the Edge of the Path»). The musical borrowing, first mentioned by Alban Berg's philosopher friend, Theodor Adorno⁷, and expanded upon by Herbert Buchanan⁸, contains the important melodic cells which are the basis for the entire work. It is also noteworthy that the theme of the song's text, like Pappenheim's libretto, deals with betrayal, a subject which may have had a special significance for Schoenberg at the time of the song's composition. By the end of 1905, when «Am Wegrund» was composed, Schoenberg's wife Mathilde and the young painter living in their home, Richard Gerstl, were romantically involved, a fact which may explain the passionate sense of being left alone at the edge of life voiced by Schoenberg in this earlier song. In the summer of 1908 Mathilde had run away briefly with Gerstl, but returned to Schoenberg and their two small children.⁹ We may imagine that, in the summer of 1909, as he read Pappenheim's text for *Erwartung*, Schoenberg remembered the meaning of his own early song «Am Wegrund», and identified with the utter devastation of someone betrayed by a loved one. Richard Gerstl, the «other man» in Schoenberg's personal situation, had died by his own hand in November of 1908, less than nine months before. With such personal trauma so recent, it is no wonder that Schoenberg wrote this highly-charged work in the exceptionally brief time of 17 days.

There is no denying the all-important role Schoenberg's self-borrowing plays in the musical organization of *Erwartung*, and the significance the song's text may have had for the composer personally. If, however, we examine the work in the manner outlined here, namely in terms of Schoenberg's reading of Pappenheim's text, we begin to appreciate more fully the meaning of Schoenberg's comment quoted at the outset of the paper, that «compositions for texts are inclined to allow the poem to determine, at least outwardly, their form». The analysis of *Erwartung* proposed here reveals the extent to which virtually every facet of this monodrama may be understood in relation to Pappenheim's Expressionistic libretto, from the work's inner psychological form to the very idea that gives shape to that form: expectation.

In *Erwartung*, expectations, verbal and musical, are set up through allusions to some of the time-worn conventions of opera and melodrama. Some are overt, some are cleverly disguised. Like the work's ambiguous tonal language, expectations generated by familiar conventions are set up only to be denied. Despite the complex web of referential meaning that results from Schoenberg's manipulation of these conventions, *Erwartung* is not, as some have asserted, a formless, incoherent work. Behind the ramblings of a madwoman is a well-conceived, well-planned work whose structure is firmly rooted in the past even as it points to the future. And that is precisely what makes it such a difficult, and at the same time, such a compelling work of art. In *Erwartung*, Schoenberg combines familiar conventions in new and intricate ways to manipulate the listener's expectations. Suggestions of opera, with its scene-like divisions into recitative and lyric, aria-like passages give way by the end of the monodrama to a genre whose main goal is the exploitation of extreme emotions: melodrama. Thus, the monodrama's emotional peak reaches its greatest intensity in the final moments of the drama. The score itself gives the visual impression that the notes quite literally go off the outer limits of the page, exceeding the very limits of our hearing; there is no dénouement, or sense of tonal closure as expected in opera.

Such an open-ended gesture musically and dramatically flies in the face of another operatic convention involving the staging of the work. In *Erwartung*, the curtain is left open. Thus, Schoenberg denies our expectations visually as well as tonally and dramatically. The intensely dissonant music that Schoenberg writes to accompany the Woman as she continues to wander through the trees, out of sight of the audience, is a fitting metaphor for the Woman's never-ending madness. Utilizing chromatic scales in contrary motion that exceed the outer limits of our hearing, Schoenberg creates, in this final film-like fadeout, a dramatically and musically compelling ending to his monodrama; an ending that is all at once the culmination of gradually expanding ostinatos and ascending and descending patterns, and the final expansion process of the work. It is the inevitable conclusion of Schoenberg's compositional method, inspired by Pappenheim's disturbing portrayal of a familiar emotional dilemma; it is the method behind the madness.

(Dallas)

7 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. by Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, New York 1980, pp. 46-48.

8 Herbert H. Buchanan, «A Key to Schoenberg's «Erwartung» (op. 17)», in: *JAMS* 20 (1967), pp. 434-449.

9 Jane Kallir, *Arnold Schoenberg's Vienna*, New York 1984, pp. 23-28. Ms. Kallir cites details given by Gerstl's brother, Alois Gerstl, to her grandfather Otto Kallir. She also quotes information from Schoenberg's «Testamentsentwurf», located at the Arnold Schoenberg Institute, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, USA.