THE MUSICAL IDEA AND THE BASIC IMAGE IN AN
ATONAL SONG AND RECITATION OF ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

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The purpose of this article is to demonstrate global coherence in an atonal song and an
atonal recitation of Arnold Schoenberg—specifically, the eleventh song of *Gedichte aus
das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, Op. 15 (1908–09), and the eighth recitation, “Nacht,” from
*Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21 (1912). But before I begin, it is essential to define precisely what I mean
by “coherence,” for the term is understood in a number of different ways in our present music-
scholarly culture, and the meaning I intend may be different from what the reader might expect.

One understanding of “coherence” is based on a subjective listening experience. If I can
create a pattern in a Schoenberg song (as I study the score and listen to it) that seems to make the
song hang together, and if I have the vocabulary to describe this pattern and its elements, I can
describe how the song coheres (for me). Once I derive a coherent way to hear the work, I can
share that with another, who can then “hear it my way” or reject my hearing based on any variety
of reasons. Such an understanding of coherence embraces the countless disputes about “how a
piece goes” that those of us familiar with the music-analytical literature can call to mind. A
favorite example involving a Schoenberg analysis is John Rothgeb’s critique of Schoenberg’s
hearing of the opening theme of Brahms’s Fourth Symphony.¹ Schoenberg describes the theme

¹ John Rothgeb, review of Walter Frisch, *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* (Berkeley and Los
as seven descending thirds (choosing not to emphasize the octave displacement of every fourth pitch) followed by six ascending thirds, to which Rothgeb retorts: “this notion contains not the smallest grain of truth, and is in fact inimical to a correct understanding of the most fundamental properties of Brahms’s tonal language.”² The alternative pathway on which Rothgeb insists for the opening theme is based on a chord progression, i–iv⁶–vii°⁷–i in E minor, with E held as a pedal in the bass. Despite Rothgeb’s unforgiving language, the dispute illustrates well the notion of conflicting subjective descriptions of coherence, driven by different foci—on an abstract notion of melodic interval (“descending third”) in Schoenberg’s case, or on the harmonic progression underlying the compound melody in Rothgeb’s case (which marks him as an orthodox follower of Schenker). To assert that coherence is based on a subjective listening experience would be to allow Rothgeb’s and Schoenberg’s readings to stand side-by-side, admitting that they both describe aspects of how the theme coheres, and also to leave room for alternative readings. David Lewin’s 1986 article “Music Theory, Phenomenology, and Modes of Perception” provides an analytic model within which conflicting understandings of a piece’s coherence can co-exist as separate processes involving different (phenomenological) objects.³ For example, what we tend to think of as “the” fourth note, C, in Brahms’s theme would, following Lewin, actually be understood as multiple things. Two of them (following Schoenberg and Rothgeb respectively) are the “descending third below” C’s predecessor, E (as part of one coherence-producing process), and the “upper neighbor” to the first note, B, as part of another process. Lewin even goes so far as to suggest that listeners typically shift between processes and

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phenomenological objects such as these in hearing a piece, and that the patterns produced by such shifts can be thought of as a kind of large-scale rhythm.

A second, contrasting, understanding of coherence would assert that objective properties make the song or recitation hang together, and that these operate apart from any auditor. This sort of approach claims that a piece of music is like the object of study in scientific research (that is, some aspect of nature). For example, most physicists would assert that atoms cohere because of relations among their constituents, relations that exist independently of whether anyone notices them or interprets them. In studying such an object, the researcher’s task is not to create a description of coherence but to discover the one correct description that is already there. Lewin also alludes to this second approach in his article, associating it with the notion of a “Cartesian” projection of the piece. In such a projection, we cannot conceive of more than one of each element and coherence-producing process in the piece, because each element and process has its own location (x,y) on the piece’s Cartesian grid (Lewin imagines this grid superimposed upon the printed score). Not only does each note exist only once (rather than as multiple phenomenological objects), but there is only one correct way to relate them at a given level. As my brief summary of Lewin’s article in the preceding paragraph suggests, he sees the “Cartesian” approach as the wrong way to hear and understand music. However, it provides the epistemological context within which much twentieth-century analysis (and criticism of analysis) resides. If one takes Rothgeb’s words in the preceding paragraph at face value (with their appeal to “truth” and “a correct understanding”), one can recognize an underlying assumption that there is just one way—or at most a very limited range of ways, i.e., well-formed Schenkerian ones—to

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4 Lewin’s distinction between multiplex and “Cartesian” understandings of objects and processes in a piece also underlies the “transformational attitude” adopted in his *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). See, for example, pp. 158–59.
understand the Brahms theme. And a majority of analyses of twentieth-century music have also taken this tack, including most traditional pitch-class set analyses. The following, from Bryan Simms’s account of “Seraphita,” Schoenberg’s Op. 22/1 (1913), will serve as an example:

There is no doubt . . . that the trichord 3-3 (0,1,4) was in the composer’s mind while he worked out the vocal part. This is the set underlying the principal Gestalt which Schoenberg refers to in his lecture-analysis as constituting the unity of the entire song. In addition to being the most frequent trichord among the contiguous segments of the lines of “Seraphita,” it also serves an important articulative role, occurring most often at the beginnings and ends of lines. . . . Nevertheless, in the completed song this trichord has no harmonic preeminence. It and the other smaller sets are subsumed by the more important larger sets, especially by hexachords.5

Note the reference to “the [one and only] set underlying the principal Gestalt.” This is an assertion that I disputed in print several years after Simms’s article, choosing rather to assign the label of principal Gestalt in “Seraphita” to a collection of eight ordered pitch-interval successions that contained members of set class 3-2 (013) as well as 3-3 (014).6 And then there is Simms’s statement, “in the completed song this trichord has no harmonic preeminence,” which seems to be meant to discourage his reader from looking for generative connections between 3-3 and 6-20 (014589), one of the most important harmonies of the song. (In my case, however, it encouraged the reader to look for such connections.)

In the following analyses, I do not by any means want to suggest that I am “discovering the (one and only) truth” about the coherence of these pieces, or that they only possess one kind of coherence. For these pieces, Lewin’s assertions seem correct to me: that different hearers create coherence for themselves in different ways, and that one’s viewpoint on “the way things

hang together” can even change in the middle of hearing the piece. Nevertheless, I will make statements of the sort “Schoenberg did X” or “the piece does X.” The reader should understand those statements as actually saying “(It is reasonable, in my opinion, to conceive that) the piece does X” or, even better, “(To imagine that) Schoenberg did X (helps me to create for myself an interesting way of hearing the piece as hanging together).” After all, too many references to the fact that I am explaining one of my understandings of coherence in these pieces rather than reporting on “what’s actually there” would cause this article to extend far beyond its page limit.

At the same time, it is important to let the reader know that there is something else contributing to my accounts of coherence in the song and recitation, in addition to my attempts to grasp the pieces by listening and studying the score. The feature that makes my interpretations unique and valuable, I believe, is that they attempt to create frameworks for the pieces that agree to some extent with Schoenberg’s own, written assertions about coherence in his and others’ music. Since my frameworks are inspired by Schoenberg’s writings, they describe coherence in terms of long-range processes across the surface, rather than suggesting quasi-Schenkerian hierarchical structures that represent deeper layers of the music, as many modern scholars have done.7 When Schoenberg himself accounts for coherence in his music and the music of others,

7 Two examples of such a “Schenkerian” approach to Schoenberg’s atonal music are James M. Baker, “Pitch-Class Identity and Long-Range Consciousness in Atonal Music,” paper presented November 1996 at the conference of the Society for Music Theory (Baton Rouge, LA); and Fred Lerdahl, “Spatial and Psychoacoustic Factors in Atonal Prolongation,” Current Musicology 63 (1999): 7–26. At this point, it is necessary to admit that even though I avoid hearing hierarchical structures that extend all the way to a “background” in Schoenberg’s music, I do find it useful at times to refer to pitch and interval successions that reside one or two levels back from the surface. Thus it would be appropriate to say something about how I distinguish between levels in Schoenberg’s music. In another article, I have suggested three criteria for assigning “low middleground” status to a pitch or interval succession: (1) the “middleground” pitches should be emphasized contextually, (2) they should represent a form of some motive in the piece, and (3) the pitches not considered “structural”—i.e., those located in between the structural pitches—should serve a function analogous to that of a tonal ornament (these include atonal “division” or “neighbor” tones, but a “motivic replication” of the structural pitches also qualifies). See Jack Boss, “Schoenberg on Ornamentation and Structural Levels,” Journal of Music Theory 38/2 (1994), 204.
the model he uses is the “musical idea” (*musikalische Gedanke*), which is similar to the Schenkerian viewpoint in one respect: it relates everything in the piece synchronically to a central element or principle, a *Grundgestalt*. But “idea” also has a diachronic ingredient, which Schoenberg emphasizes just as strongly as the synchronic one. His idea not only connects everything to a central element, but it does so through a process in time that has characteristic stages. It progresses from a single basic entity, to an opposition or “problem” between entities, to a drawing-out or elaboration of the problem (i.e., working out its natural consequences), and ultimately to a resolution that allows the basic entity to subsume or incorporate its opponent.\(^8\)

Patricia Carpenter and some of her students at Columbia University, most notably Severine Neff, have demonstrated in a series of analytical studies ways in which Schoenberg’s diachronic idea can be applied to tonal music.\(^9\) But almost no work has been done that questions whether the same model has significance for Schoenberg’s atonal or serial music.

Although I use global frameworks modeled after Schoenberg’s writings such as the “musical idea” to describe coherence of the whole in his music, the vocabulary I use to describe the individual elements and relations within the “idea” comes from a theoretical tradition that

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\(^8\) Schoenberg’s descriptions of and assertions about the “musical idea” are scattered throughout his writings, but a reader seeking to make this concept cohere for him/herself should begin with the following: Arnold Schoenberg, “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea” [1946], *Style and Idea* (1984), 113–24. The manuscript treatise that Schoenberg sketched out from 1934–36 to define and describe his concept has been published as *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique and Art of its Presentation*, edited, translated, and with a commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Carpenter and Neff’s edition also collects together in an appendix earlier statements from Schoenberg about the topic. Finally, in *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, 2nd edn., ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), Schoenberg addresses the nature of the “musical idea,” without naming it, in passages devoted principally to other topics (such as motivic development and parts of form in tonal music).

began only after the composer’s death. Specifically, I have found that certain categories and relations of “classical” set theory are quite effective for describing my ways of understanding the piece. For example, my analysis of Op. 15/11 adopts not only the concept of set class, but also subset and superset relations, as well as Allen Forte’s pitch-class and interval similarity relations from *The Structure of Atonal Music* \( (R_p, R_1, R_2) \).\(^{10}\) The reader should not understand this as an assertion that Schoenberg was familiar with such concepts as we know them today (though, in response to Ethan Haimo, I want to go on record as maintaining that the composer very well could have had his own categories of musical thought that were similar to what we call “set class,” “subset,” and “Forte similarity relation,” despite the fact that there is no obvious representation of such categories in his atonal sketches).\(^{11}\) The reason that the set-class labels and Fortean relations are included in my analyses is simply because they provide the most efficient way I know to describe the individual materials and procedures that elaborate the piece’s large framework (in my hearing). In the Op. 21 recitation, “Nacht,” I will shift my attention to ordered pitch-interval successions and contours, as the easiest ways to describe the elements within *that* framework.

The text of “Als wir hinter dem beblümten Tore,” Song 11 from *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, is provided in Figure 1.\(^{12}\) The story of Song 11 is vague in its outline and

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11 Haimo’s challenge to the notion that “Schoenberg composed with set classes” can be found in Ethan Haimo, “Atonality, Analysis and the Intentional Fallacy,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 18/2 (1996): 167–99. One reason I believe the composer may have been cognizant of categories similar to “set class” and some of the Fortean relations, even though they are not represented in his atonal sketches, is simply that almost no representation of *any* theoretical notion appears in the atonal sketches. Thus they cannot tell us anything about the categories Schoenberg used in understanding his own music’s coherence, except perhaps by comparing the stages of revision to determine if the composer preferred a certain interval or pitch succession or set class to another in some specific context.

12 Stefan George’s text may be found in *Die Bücher der Hirten- und Preissgedichte, der Sagen und Sänge und der hängenden Gärten*, vol. 3 of *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 88; the English transla-
suggestive of various interpretations; those familiar with George’s poetry will recognize these features as characteristic elements of his strong early debt to the French symbolist poets. An attempt at a synopsis follows, representing some of the interpretations suggested to me as I not only read the poem but considered also its context (i.e., the whole Buch) and two of its critiques, by Ulrich Goldsmith and Robert Norton.\textsuperscript{13} The speaking character is a young king—according to Goldsmith it is George’s projection of himself into ancient Babylon in his childhood or adolescent dreams.\textsuperscript{14} In the poems prior to the one on which Song 11 is based, the dream-ruler leads his armies in triumph over a foreign people and lifts his sword against their god, gathers his people around him and teaches them, and becomes involved in an “extramarital” affair. The affair is described in a subcollection of fifteen poems, the same ones Schoenberg set in his Op. 15. It involves a period of courtship of uncertain length (corresponding to the ten poems in the cycle immediately preceding Song 11), and probably culminates in sex, at a time prior to Song 11. In

\begin{figure}
\centering
\scalebox{0.85}{
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textbf{Als wir hinter dem beblümten tore} & \textbf{When hidden behind the flowergrown gate} \\
\textbf{Endlich nur das eigne hauchen spürten} & \textbf{at last alone and breath to breath,} \\
\textbf{Warden uns erdachte seligkeiten?} & \textbf{was our felicity quite what we dreamed?} \\
\textbf{Ich erinnere daß wie schwache rohre} & \textbf{I remember now that like quivering reeds} \\
\textbf{Beide stumm zu heben wir begannen} & \textbf{silently we both began to tremble} \\
\textbf{Wenn wir leis nur an uns rührten} & \textbf{when our bodies only brushed together} \\
\textbf{Und das unsre augen rannen—} & \textbf{and that our eyes brimmed over—} \\
\textbf{So verbliebest du mir lang zu seiten.} & \textbf{You remained like that for long by my side.}
\end{tabular}
}
\caption{Stefan George, “Als wir hinter dem beblümten Tore”}
\end{figure}

Punctuation and capitalization of the German text follows George’s practice; English translation by Robert Erich Wolf.


\textsuperscript{14} Goldsmith, Stefan George: A Study of His Early Work, 64.
the four poems after Song 11, the affair dies down, and the object of the affair (who remains silent throughout the cycle) leaves (or is banished?). (One of the strengths of the fifteen poems describing the affair is George’s effective use of “growth” images from plant life [such as a gate blooming with flowers] to parallel the growth of the affair, and images of plant decay [wind-blown leaves, withered grass] to parallel the dissipation of the affair.) The person who is the object of the king’s tryst is vague in gender. On the one hand, it could be a young woman to whom sexual access is forbidden. Lines 2 and 3 of Song 4 suggest (to me) a female member of the harem of the young king’s father, and this interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Songs 5 and 15 use the word “she” to refer to the silent character. But this person could also be a boy, given George’s own sexual inclinations and his framing of the cycle as autobiographical.15 As we begin Song 11, the young dream-king is (in the absence or presence of his gender-unspecific beloved) trying to recall whether their sexual union was real or only imagined (and in exactly what way was it blissful?), but he is unable to do so in a conclusive way. He calls up remembered sensations of “feeling only our own breathing” and “trembling as our bodies lightly touched together,” and in the last line he remembers enough to make a somewhat more definite statement—“You remained like that for long by my side.” (Though more definite, it seems to fall short of a complete or explicit description of their sexual activity. But it could represent a more explicit thought.)

It seems that Schoenberg, for his part, made this story coherent in a way meaningful to him and translated it into music in a way typical for him. Schoenberg’s concern, as far as I know,

15 Goldsmith claims the Hanging Gardens poems are “[George’s] only artistic record of a satisfactory relationship with the other sex” (Stefan George, 71) and suggests a female model for the cycle’s “other”: Ida Coblenz, whose six-year friendship with George overlapped with the time period in which he wrote the Hanging Gardens poems as well as Das Jahr der Seele (Stefan George, 80). Norton, in contrast, argues for a same-sex interpretation, based on the reasons given above and the paucity of uses of the pronoun “sie” in the cycle (Secret Germany, 179–80).
was not with portraying an affair between man and boy. But there was a “forbidden” relationship of a different kind that was preying on his mind at the time he wrote his setting of Song 11. In 1907 Schoenberg and his first wife, Mathilde, made the acquaintance of a young painter, Richard Gerstl, who served as painting tutor to both of them. During that year and the first part of 1908 (the year in which Schoenberg began to compose Op. 15) the friendship between Mathilde Schoenberg and Richard Gerstl developed into an affair, and in the summer of 1908, Mathilde left Schoenberg and their children to live with her new lover. After a short time, Anton Webern and other friends persuaded Mathilde to return, and in November 1908 Gerstl committed suicide after destroying his documents and works.16 Joseph Auner’s recent anthology of Schoenberg’s writings reproduces a draft of Schoenberg’s Last Will and Testament that he made right after Mathilde’s betrayal. This document portrays, rather starkly, Schoenberg’s emotional disassociation from her (“My wife can only be faithful. Therefore she was not my wife . . .”), and in another place expresses his uncertainty that the marriage ever happened (or perhaps his wish that it never had).17 It is not entirely fanciful, then, to assume that Schoenberg interpreted Song 11 in terms of a heterosexual marriage relationship that was once “blissful” in some sense, but was destroyed through an extramarital affair. In this reading, the betrayed husband tries valiantly to recall specific sensations from the sexual relationship he once had with his wife, but other, stronger images associated with the betrayal crowd in and nearly prevent him from doing so.18

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18 My analysis proceeds from some of the same assumptions as Allen Forte’s massive survey of the Op. 15 songs, “Concepts of Linearity in Schoenberg’s Atonal Music: a Study of the Opus 15 Song Cycle,” *Journal of Music Theory* 36/2 (1992): 285–382. Forte’s main concern is to show how numerous linear entities in the songs are derived from pitch motives in Song 1 through pitch and order transformations. But he also claims that several of these lines, as well as certain individual pitch classes, are ciphers for “Arnold Schoenberg,” “Mathilde,” and “Richard Gerstl.”
Schoenberg’s way of translating his version of “Als wir hinter dem beblümtem Tore” into music could be called “depictive” text painting; it consists of making musical elements stand in for the characters in the poem, the two Babylonian dream-lovers or the betrayed husband and unfaithful wife. Two pairs of set classes, 4-17 (0347) and 4-18 (0147), and 4-4 (0125) and 4-5 (0126), are presented in such a way that the trichord subsets common to each pair are first hinted at, then realized as intersections between the parent tetrachords, then “broken off” so that they appear without their parent tetrachords, and finally—at the song’s end—realized as intersections once more.\(^{19}\) The passage where two tetrachords literally intersect in a common trichord (mm. 8–9) can be thought of as an “ideal state” that is, in turn: contradicted by the common trichords appearing alone (without tetrachord supersets) in mm. 11–12 (the “opposition” or “problem”); striven toward through a process (in mm. 16–24) in which common trichords appear within non-intersecting tetrachords as common pitch-class sets and interval successions; and reasserted in mm. 21–23 (the process and its culmination constitute the song’s “solution”). At the same time, a rhythmic process unfolds by which several dislocations between grouping and meter that appeared in the opening measures are “solved” in the closing measures. Both processes together suggest (to me) an image of two bodies lightly brushing together, perhaps uniting sexually at some point, followed by a more definite image of their union at the end of the song. In addition, both processes contribute to a framework within which pitch and rhythmic problems are presented, elaborated, and eventually solved—a musical idea.

A score of mm. 1–7 is provided in Figure 2. The opening measures of the piano introduction present the four set classes mentioned above, 4-17 and 4-5 horizontally in mm. 1 and 2, and their respective “partners,” 4-18 and 4-4, vertically in mm. 2 and 3. Each of these pairs demon-

\(^{19}\) These trichord subsets are illustrated in Table 1.
Figure 2. "Als wir hinter dem beblümt". from *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, Op. 15/11: mm. 1-7
strates both pitch-class similarity ($R_p$) and interval similarity ($R_1$ or $R_2$) according to Allen Forte’s *The Structure of Atonal Music*; see Table 1. Set classes 4-17 and 4-18 are in the $R_2$ relation; in addition, these set classes can be represented by pitch-class sets with common trichords (the defining characteristic for $R_p$) in a number of ways, two of which are shown on Table 1. These common trichords all belong to set classes 3-11 (037) and 3-3 (014). Likewise, 4-4 and 4-5 are in the $R_1$ relation; and they exhibit the $R_p$ relation in a number of ways—all of which form set classes 3-1 (012) and 3-4 (015).²⁰

As Schoenberg works out the musical idea through “Als wir hinter,” he uses the $R_p$ relations—the possible common trichordal subsets—to reflect the text’s imagery. In the piano introduction, mm. 1–7, common trichords between 4-17 and 4-18 are emphasized contextually within their parent tetrachords, but not as common pitch classes. For example, 3-11 is created by

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²⁰ Forte’s $R_2$ relation signifies that in the two “interval vectors” summarizing the set classes’ total pitch-class interval content, four corresponding entries have the same value. $R_1$ signifies the same condition, but indicates further that the remaining two entries in both vectors have the same values, which exchange locations from one vector to the other. See Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music*, 46–49, for a more detailed description of his interval and pitch-class similarity relations.
the first three pitch classes of 4-17, \{B\flat,D\flat,F\}, in m. 1, and by the top three pitch classes of 4-18, \{B\natural,E\natural,G\natural\}, in m. 2. When 4-17 returns in mm. 4 and 5, the 3-11 subset \{F\natural,A\natural,C\natural\} is separated rhythmically from the remaining pitch class, G\natural. All of these highlighted 3-11s would form what Forte calls “weakly represented” \(R_p\) relations between their parent 4-17s and 4-18s; that is, the common trichords are not common in the sense that the same pitch classes recur, but only in that they belong to a common set class. Meanwhile, 3-4 (015), the common subset between 4-5 and 4-4, does occur twice as common pitch classes, in the form \{C,C\natural/D\flat,F\}: from the first three sixteenth notes in the piano left hand in m. 1 to the top three pitches of the second chord of m. 3, and from that trichord to the one formed by the bass and top two pitches of the second chord in m. 4. None of these common trichords cause an overlapping of their parent tetrachords, however, and by the time we reach mm. 5–6, the 4-4 projected over most of those two measures retains a new subset of three pitch classes with its predecessor set class 4-5 in m. 4: \{B/C\flat,C,D\flat\}.\(^{21}\) This new subset belongs to set class 3-1 (012). Between the 4-4 and 4-5 trichords in mm. 1–7, then, there are two strongly-represented \(R_p\) relations of one kind followed by a strongly-represented \(R_p\) of another kind.

With the entry of the voice in m. 8 comes the most obvious manifestation of pitch-class similarity we have yet heard; see Figure 3. The first vocal phrase, “Als wir hinter den beblümten Tore,” overlaps members of set classes 4-17 and 4-18 on three pitch classes (if the B\natural on “-ter” can be interpreted as a passing tone). The overlapping pitch classes are \{A\natural,E\natural,C\natural\}, forming the common trichord 3-11. Here, then, \(R_p\) is not only strongly represented but also facilitates another kind.

\(^{21}\) Even though set class 4-4 in mm. 5–6 is spread out over two measures, I do not think of it as hierarchically superior to the other more-compact chords in the passage. It also is a “surface” phenomenon in my reckoning of the song. Later (mm. 14–15) I will speak of pitch successions that I consider to be at the “middleground” level, that have other, ornamental pitches interleaved between the “structural” ones.
FIGURE 3. “Als wir hinter dem beblümten Tore,” Op. 15/11: mm. 8–12
actual *intersection* between 4-17 and 4-18—that is, what was hinted at or partially realized in mm. 1–7, through the weak and strong representations of common trichords, comes to fruition in mm. 8 and 9. This depicts quite well the text’s image of two bodies standing apart yet full of desire for one another and then (perhaps) coming together in some kind of sexual union: common trichords “stand apart” either temporally or transpositionally and then unite in an overlapping of three notes.

The passage immediately following mm. 8 and 9 seems to step back gradually from this super-strong $R_{p}$ relationship between 4-17 and 4-18. All four of the tetrachords we have been discussing appear within a short span, from the end of m. 9 to the beginning of m. 11: 4-17 twice in the voice on “das eigne Hauchen spürten,” then, in relatively rapid succession as verticals, 4-4, 4-18, and 4-5 in mm. 10 and 11. During the first two of these verticals, the right hand of the piano forms another member of 4-17. The 4-17s in the voice at mm. 9 and 10 are transpositions of the original piano motive from mm. 1 and 2 at $T_{10}$ and $T_{2}$, and the subsequent piano 4-17 in m. 10 is a transposition at $T_{3}$. Joseph Straus has suggested that the tendency of these transpositions to “echo the opening gesture in a slightly off-center way” represents the singing character’s inability to remember clearly what happened during his tryst, an insight that fits well with the notion of stepping back from an intimate union.\(^{22}\) At the same time, the verticals in mm. 10 and 11 step back from what had been accomplished in the voice two bars earlier, in that the common trichords are no longer explicitly realized as overlappings. However, both pairs still demonstrate a strong $R_{p}$ relation, so we have not gone all the way back to the merely suggestive connections between 4-17 and 4-18 found in mm. 1–2, and between 4-5 and 4-4 in mm. 4–6. The 4-17 in the

piano at m. 10, and the 4-18 on the last beat of that measure, share three pitch classes, \{E\#,G\#,F\#\}, forming set class 3-3; and the 4-4 vertical in m. 10 shares pitch classes \{C\#,C\#/D\#,F\#\} (set class 3-4) with the 4-5 in m. 11. Notice that the particular pitch-class set held in common between 4-17 and 4-18 here highlights the other common trichord from that emphasized in mm. 1–2 and 8–9 (here it is 3-3, before it was 3-11). It seems like Schoenberg is elaborating his “problem” (how can 4-17 and 4-18, as well as 4-4 and 4-5, have common elements with one another?) by hinting at (but not yet realizing) a number of possible solutions.

The question in the poem’s third line—“warden uns erdachte Seligkeiten?”—inspires yet another step away from the intimate union of mm. 8 and 9. Where the singer expresses uncertainty about whether their bliss was real or imagined, Schoenberg removes references to all but two of the four parent tetrachords; 4-4 does occur twice, and 4-17 once. But the set classes that seem more salient in mm. 11 and 12, made so by changes in melodic contour, are the trichords that had been n-1 common subsets in the earlier music; they now appear not as links but on their own, as part of what Schoenberg would call a “liquidation” process.23 “Warden uns” yields 3-3, “erdach” gives 3-4 (expressed as an interval expansion from the previous trichord), and the two sets are linked by \{G\#,B\#,G\#\}, another member of 3-3, which breaks off the last three notes of the 4-17 in m. 1, and gives them in retrograde and transposition. Then Schoenberg begins to focus on interval classes 1 and 2 in “Seligkeiten,” yielding two forms of set class 3-1, which had originally been a link between 4-4 and 4-5, but does not function as such here. I believe that the liquidation down to common trichords in mm. 11–12, together with the reduction in texture to the voice alone and the lowering of dynamics to \textit{ppp}, portrays the singer’s losing track of his memories of the union in mm. 8–9.
The next five measures (13–17) are a valiant attempt to regain some of those memories, marked by a drastic increase of rhythmic activity; see Figure 4. David Lewin has described the singer’s and pianist’s function in these bars as (among other things) building excitement through increasing rhythmic diminution, ascending repetition, and eventual interval expansion within the opening 4-17 motive. The piano left hand leads the way with ordered pitch intervals $<+3,+4,-3>$ at their original pitch location on B♭, repeats that interval motive on C♯ in m. 14, then pulls it up to the right hand and presents rhythmically diminuted forms on B♭ and D that overlap with one another as well as the preceding form; all of this creates a *stretto* that gradually picks up speed through the employment of ever shorter durations. (It is interesting that Schoenberg, when he pulls $<+3,+4,-3>$ up to the right hand at the end of m. 14, also pushes what had been mm. 13–14’s right-hand material down into the left hand. This does not create invertible counterpoint in the sense that vertical intervals are complemented, as the motives line up differently in m. 15 from the way they had in m. 14—but it does create what might be called a “motive exchange.” Later I will say more about the function of the “countermelody” with which $<+3,+4,-3>$ exchanges hands.)

The singer begins building excitement a bit more slowly—he has to be nudged by the pianist. He starts his first $<+3,+4,-3>$ a quarter note later in m. 13, and on C♯ instead of B♭, which suggests that he still can’t remember his tryst (or marital union) all that clearly. His second attempt at the motive, in m. 14, starts on C♯ (as does the pianist’s) and this time he is only a triplet eighth-note late, so he is beginning to pick up speed. But he is also starting to lose control

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**Figure 4.** "Als wir hinter dem beblümten Tore," Op. 15/11: mm. 13–17
in his excitement at remembering how their bodies silently trembled like reeds; so his motive, which begins m. 14, expands to $<+3,+4,-6>$, and the next one, which follows fast and furiously on the D in m. 14, expands even further to $<+5,+6,-5>$. By the time he gets into m. 15, he breathlessly (but still quietly) cries out a fragment, $<-3,+4>$, which is the retrograde inversion of the original’s last three notes (and a member of set class 3-3, one of the subsets uniting 4-17 and 4-18). Then, in m. 16, his rhythmic excitement subsides sharply, although the motivic strategy remains the same—that is, interval expansion. “Beben wir” returns to the same specific pitches as “warden uns” in m. 11, signifying a return to a questioning attitude. Schoenberg then expands (and reverses) the $<-3,-1>$ of that set to $<-2,-3>$ on “begannen,” and following are further expansions to $<-4,-2>$ and $<-2,-4>$ on “leis nur an uns rührten,” which evoke the whole-tone scale.

What comes through to my ear, starting at m. 16, is a sense of quiet and relaxation brought about by combining interval expansion with a decrease in rhythmic activity. Lewin, on the other hand, has characterized the same music as “frustration over the singer’s forgetting the question (of mm. 11 and 12),” and he makes a convincing argument based on the sudden rhythmic inactivity in the piano and the motivic liquidation of mm. 11–12’s question in mm. 16 and 17, not to mention the melodic stasis in the voice (coming as it does after a pronounced upward chromatic drive in the preceding measures). But I would counter by arguing that a sudden lapse into inactivity and stasis, and a sense that a directional motion has been cut off, can signify (instead of frustration) a state in which the singer ceases striving for an answer to his question (at m. 16), only to have that answer gradually slip into his mind after he quiets down (mm. 17–23). This reading seems to fit better my view of what happens at and after m. 18.

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25 Lewin, “Toward the Analysis of a Schoenberg Song,” 68.
One contrapuntal strand in mm. 13–17 has not yet been explored: the “countermelody” of the piano right hand in mm. 13–14 and left hand in mm. 15–17. The countermelody begins in m. 13 with a vertical pitch-interval profile borrowed and inverted from the 4-18 chord in m. 2. From the top down, it proceeds <-6,-5>, creating a member of set class 3-5 (016). Schoenberg then immediately contracts the <-6,-5> to <-5,-5>, and adds another -5 to create a perfect-fourth chord, a member of set class 4-23 (0257). That set class, its subset 3-9 (027) represented by two perfect fourths or fifths in succession, and interval class 5 in general begin to dominate the countermelody thereafter. Set class 3-9 appears repeatedly as the second, third, and fourth notes of every group of four thirty-second notes, and it is often followed immediately by an ascending perfect fourth. But interval class 5 also leaves its mark on the middleground that is ornamented by all these 3-9s and perfect fourths. Observe that the pitches at the end of each slurred five-note group, B₅–F₅–B₄ in mm. 13–14 and E♯₃/F₃–B₂–E♭₂–A♭₁ in mm. 14–15, are (with the exception of the first B♯₃–F♯₃), connected by descending perfect fifths. (These pitches are highlighted with brackets in Figure 4.) Moreover, the descending tritone and perfect fifth between these middleground notes in mm. 13–14 creates set class 3-5, and the three descending perfect fifths between the middleground notes in mm. 14–15 creates 4-23; as a result, mm. 13–15 project a “hidden repetition” of the right hand of m. 13. After the rhythmic action subsides in m. 16, the interval class 5s continue to be just as salient, now represented by the ascending perfect fourths that had ended each slurred group. D♯–G♯ in m. 16 leads to G♯–C♯ in m. 17, which projects set class 3-9 one last time; then we hear E♭–A♭, which forms 3-11 with the last pitch (C♯) of the preceding perfect fourth, a foreshadowing at the same pitch classes of the overlap to come in mm. 21–22.

Now, after my detailed description of the importance of 4-23, 3-9, and interval class 5 in mm. 13–17, the reader may wonder just what significance these elements have within the song as
a whole, as 4-23 is not one of the four parent tetrachords that generate the piece. We hear 4-23 for the first time in the piano introduction, mm. 6–7, where it is prominently displayed as two ascending whole steps a (compound) perfect fourth apart. (Refer again to Figure 2 for mm. 6–7.) This initial 4-23 had functioned as a kind of “call” to the singer to remember and produce the 4-17 and 4-18 “bodies” intersecting in 3-11. When 4-23 is developed extensively in mm. 13–17, it seems to call even more insistently for a return to the music of “Als wir hinter dem beblümten Tore,” which I believe represents the intimate union the singer is trying to remember. My association of mm. 13–17 with mm. 6–7 is strengthened considerably by Schoenberg’s references to the earlier measures in the piano right hand of m. 16: E♭–F♯ has changed to E♯–F♯, and they are an octave lower, but almost every other characteristic is the same.

The expected music of “Als wir hinter dem beblümten Tore” does not appear immediately in m. 18, however. Before Schoenberg returns to the voice’s starting point, he ties up several “loose ends” of pitch and rhythm, and this process, together with the return of the music from mm. 8–9 in mm. 21–23, constitutes the “solution” of this song’s “problem,” and the completion of the musical idea; see Figure 5. The voice in mm. 18 and 19 puts forward two variations of the pitch-interval motive of m. 1 (<+3,+4,-3>), and neither is quite right. The first starts correctly on B♭ and moves the requisite +3 to D♭, but then jumps +8 to A♯, and falls -3 to F#. The second variation starts to invert m. 1’s motive, but ends up contracting its intervals, forming set class 4-12 (0236). Almost immediately (m. 19) the piano right hand corrects the singer, producing the true inversion of the opening motive.

At the point where it corrects the singer in mm. 19–20, the piano had already begun the process of returning the song step-by-step to the situation of mm. 8 and 9. The three chords that had appeared in mm. 10 and 11 return in mm. 18 and 19, strongly representing the common
FIGURE 5. "Als wir hinter dem beblümten Tor," Op. 15/11: mm. 18–24
trichords 3-4 between 4-4 and 4-5, and 3-3 between 4-17 and 4-18. This trend continues in the left hand of m. 20, where the common trichord 3-1 between 4-5 and 4-4 is not strongly represented as a set of pitch classes, but its ordered pitch-interval succession <-1,-1> is clearly shown to be a link between the <-1,-1,-4> of 4-5 and the <-1,-1,-3> of 4-4. At the same time, because Schoenberg sustains the \{E^\flat,G^\#,B\} of m. 2 in mm. 20 and 21, letting the descending 4-4s and 4-5s play against it, he shows us that that 3-11 is common to both 4-17 (formed when A\flat and G appear in the bass) and 4-18 (formed when F appears in the bass). This last common trichord is what I have called a “super-strongly represented” R_p relation between 4-17 and 4-18: not only do the members of 3-11 appear as the same three pitch classes, \{E^\flat,G^\#,B\}, but they actually create an overlapping of tetrachords. Still, the segments creating 4-17 and 4-18 are not as obvious in mm. 20–21 as they were in mm. 8–9 (or will be in mm. 21–23).

All the revelations of common trichords just described prepare the listener for the ultimate common trichord: the 3-11 intersection \{A\flat,E^\flat,C\} between 4-17 and 4-18 in mm. 21–23. Notice that this intersection, which had set the relatively insignificant syllables “dem beblüm” in m. 8, now sets “du mir lang,” the three words that most directly signify the two lovers or husband/wife in some sort of physical contact for a long time. Hence, mm. 21–23 signify, to me, a definite image illustrating what the tryst or union was like—what the singer has been striving for, ever since m. 11.

Schoenberg also ties up a number of rhythmic loose ends in mm. 18–24. From reviewing Figures 2–4, the reader can see that until near the end of the song, significant motives rarely enter on the downbeat. The opening right-hand 4-17 comes on a quarter-note pickup to m. 1, and the left-hand 4-5 arrives one eighth-note later (still before the beat). The first 4-18 chord comes in on the third beat of m. 2. The singer enters one sixteenth-note after the downbeat of m. 8. And
the beginning of the song’s second part features the piano anticipating the downbeat of m. 13 by an eighth note, and the singer coming in on an eighth note after that same downbeat. In general, there is confusion through most of the song about the relationship between the rhythmic shapes of the piece and the underlying meter.

Schoenberg begins the process of dispelling that confusion in mm. 16 and 17, where the singer accents (through melodic contour and crescendo) two consecutive downbeats. The piano helps with an accented E♯ in the right hand on the downbeat of m. 16, followed in m. 17 by ascending fourths in the low bass, on the second and fourth beats (the “back beats,” so to speak). The singer’s D♯ emphasizes the downbeat of m. 19 with a slight swell. All of these downbeat emphases set the stage for what happens in mm. 20–21. Schoenberg not only brings the 4-18 of m. 2 back squarely on the downbeat of m. 20, but he then follows it on the third beat of m. 20 with a metrically corrected version of the descending bass line from the opening of the piece. Now, each group of four starts on the beat, rather than an eighth note before as they had in m. 1.

Thus, in the few measures preceding the return of the music from “Als wir hinter dem beblümten Tore,” Schoenberg solves the problem of dislocation between rhythm and meter, reminds the listener that 4-4 and 4-5 have two common trichord subsets (3-4 and 3-1), and realizes the common 3-11 super-strongly (as an overlap) between 4-17 and 4-18 (initially with less salient segments, then super-strongly with salient segments on “du mir lang” in mm. 21 and 22). These processes lead me to hear all of mm. 16–24 as resolving problems created earlier in the song, marking Op. 15//11 as a complete idea involving problems, elaborations, and solutions. The idea lines up with significant aspects of the text, namely the image of two bodies brushing together, coming apart, and then staying together more permanently, as well as the parallel image of a memory (of the bodies together) coming into the singer’s mind, then disappearing, then
returning again. It is thus possible to interpret one of the earliest “free atonal” songs as the composer fleshing out a framework similar to that which he used to explain coherence in his music and the music of others.

We shall now turn our attention to “Nacht,” Op. 21/8. The recitations of Pierrot Lunaire in general are less easy to explain in terms of the opposition, elaboration, and resolution characteristic of a complete musical idea, but instead seem to translate some more primitive visual image (suggested by the text) into a musical equivalent. According to Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, during the time Schoenberg was composing Pierrot he wrote in his diary that he had found a “new kind of expression” that portrayed “sensual and spiritual emotions” in an “almost too immediate way.”26 The text of “Nacht” provides one of the most frightening visual images in the whole cycle; it is given in Figure 6.

A brief discussion of the text and the possible connotations of its principal image will precede my analytic remarks on the music. The German text, by Otto Erich Hartleben, is a paraphrase of the original French poem “Papillons noirs,” from Pierrot Lunaire by Albert Giraud.27 The English translation of Hartleben’s work, in my example, is by Andrew Porter.28 Note that Porter translates Hartleben’s “Riesenfalter” as “black gigantic butterflies,” not “gigantic moths.” It is true that in German, a “Falter” can be either a butterfly (“Tagfalter”) or a moth (“Nachtfalter”). But “black butterflies” is a more accurate translation of Giraud’s original

26 Stuckenschmidt, Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work, 198.
27 Giraud’s original (with an English translation) can be found in Gregory C. Richter, Albert Giraud’s Pierrot Lunaire (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000), 38.
“Papillons noirs,” and carries certain connotations that would be lost if we referred to these gigantic insects as moths. For example, in some cultures, the black butterfly is generally understood as a symbol for death (in parts of Mexico, for instance, people believe that a black butterfly landing on the door is a presentiment of the death of someone in the household).  

I have found it quite difficult to locate instances of black butterflies that represent death in the poetry of Giraud’s and Hartleben’s time and place(s). There is one reference to a single “papillon noir” in Paul Verlaine’s “Crimen amoris,” written in 1873 and published as part of Jadis et naguère in 1885. In the seventh stanza of that poem, a black butterfly appears on Lucifer’s brow as an expression of the despair he feels before throwing down the torch that turns his glorious abode into a flaming furnace, causing it to pass completely out of sight and memory. (R. C. D. Perman understands Lucifer in this poem to represent Arthur Rimbaud, and the story of

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“Crimen Amoris” as an allegory for Rimbaud’s attempt to “free himself and the world from Original Sin” and the ultimate failure of that attempt.\(^{30}\)

Giraud’s/Hartleben’s image of the swarm of black butterflies descending on the hearts of men also calls to mind two images in Stefan George’s *Algabal* (which was published in 1892, the same year as Hartleben’s paraphrase and eight years after Giraud’s cycle, so that Schoenberg perhaps would have been familiar with it). The first image is that of Algabal’s “gross schwarze blume” (great black flower) from the last poem of Part I (“In the Subterranean Kingdom”), which commentators such as Ernst Morwitz, Ulrich Goldsmith, and Robert Norton have interpreted as representing the endeavor to produce something organic by artificial means—e.g., a child without female participation, a “world” of poems, or a piece of atonal music. Norton reminds us that Algabal’s historical predecessor, the third century Roman emperor Elagabalus, had an operation performed to give him a vagina, led a bisexual lifestyle, and attempted to take on the woman’s role in sex as well as childbirth. Norton then transposes the notion of homosexual procreative frustration, signified by the giant black flower, onto the level of poetic endeavor. He claims that the attempt, common to symbolist poets like George, Verlaine, and Rimbaud, to “replace the world with the poet’s word [led] inexorably to precisely what the symbolists sought to escape: a kind of suffocating death, a forced silence imposed by a tacit acknowledgement of the futility, or rather impossibility, of the venture.”\(^{31}\) Norton’s image also closely parallels the first two parts of the narrative that Susan Youens claims Schoenberg was


trying to create when he chose twenty-one poems for *Pierrot Lunaire* from Hartleben’s fifty. As she puts it, Schoenberg tells “the tripartite tale of a creative artist’s rebellion and frenzied *dérèglement des sens*, the sterility and despair that follow, and, finally, the journey home.”  

Such a story could be understood as Schoenberg predicting the frustration he would later feel with his supposed inability to create larger organic forms using pre-serial atonal techniques. (However, he seemed to be rather successful at creating *small* organisms using such techniques, as this article is trying to prove.)

The second image from George’s *Algabal* that parallels Giraud’s/Hartleben’s descending swarm of black butterflies in significant ways comes from the fourth poem of Part II (“Days”). In it, Algabal asphyxiates his guests at a banquet by dropping masses of red and yellow roses from the ceiling. Here is a different expression of the same notion represented by the giant black flower—that something created to bring pleasure and fulfillment can, if used in an unnatural way (in this case, overused to an extreme), bring suffocation and death. In other words, the fourth poem of “Days” could also represent the ultimate failure and “suffocating death” of the poet or musician who would create a “world” unnaturally, as well as the death of his/her audience (although my case would certainly be stronger if Algabal’s suffocating roses were black).  

Giraud’s/Hartleben’s descending black butterfly swarm (standing for the creative frustration of Elagabalus, symbolist poets, or atonal composers) is the primitive visual image that Schoenberg seems to be carrying over directly into music in “Nacht.” Three elements of that

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33 Norton discusses the fourth poem of “Days” in *Secret Germany*, 120–21.
image translate into the intervallic realm: (1) the shape of the individual butterfly, with wings pointed down or up, becomes the interval successions \(+3,-4\) and \(-4,+3\); (2) the descent of the butterflies becomes a melodic contour mostly dependent on long downward motions; and (3) the notion of “swarming” becomes stretto and diminution techniques in which the successions \(+3,-4\) and \(-4,+3\) are multiplied. In addition, the largeness and heaviness of the butterflies translates into the ponderous tone colors of bass clarinet, ’cello, and the lower registers of the piano.

Before describing in detail how I comprehend Schoenberg’s portrayal of the descending butterfly swarm in “Nacht,” I would like to consider issues of form and counterpoint that influence the ways the swarm is portrayed. As is the case with every poem in the Pierrot cycle, “Nacht” is built around a line-repetition scheme (characteristic of its poetic form, the rondel) that brings back the first and second lines as the seventh and eighth, and the first as the thirteenth. Such a repetition scheme divides the poem into two parts, lines 1–8 and 9–13, and Schoenberg’s settings invariably reflect this division in some way. In “Nacht,” the division comes between mm. 16 and 17 (look ahead to Figure 12, p. 40)—it is marked by a return to the opening tempo (after the Etwas rascher in mm. 11), a change in dynamics from \( ff \) to \( pp \), introduction of slurred passages in the bass clarinet and ’cello, and a texture change in the piano.

Another feature of “Nacht” that contributes significantly to its coherence and its descriptive power is Schoenberg’s use of four canons, which are more quickly obliterated by the butterfly motives as the piece progresses. These begin at mm. 4, 11, 17, and 21; there are two in the first part of the recitation and two in the second, and the first three correspond to stanza beginnings in the text. The first canon involves all voices save the Sprechstimme (bass clarinet, ’cello, and piano right and left hands) and continues on through m. 9. The second and third
canons are increasingly attenuated and given to fewer voices; in the second, three voices (’cello, bass clarinet, and piano right hand) continue for about four measures (mm. 11–15), and in the third, two voices (’cello and bass clarinet) go for about a measure before being interrupted by swarms of “butterflies.” The fourth canon, given solely to the piano, combines the butterfly motive with its retrograde inversion to trace a gradual downward motion through three measures and almost three octaves. This last canon, along with the swarms that frustrated the second and third canons, is the clearest expression of the song’s central image, and we can understand the canons themselves as the artistic activity that is “killed off” by the descending butterflies. (Schoenberg did return to the canon frequently throughout his career as a form of artistic expression.)

Let us now take a more careful look at the E–G–Eb “butterfly” motive and the ways in which Schoenberg develops it. I will consider only the two sections of Part I in detail, mm. 1–10 and 11–16. The reader may consult Figure 12 for a general picture of what is happening motivically in Part II (and should also consult Jeffrey Gillespie’s analysis of “Nacht” for a detailed description of the networks of “butterfly” motives in Part II).34

As Figure 7 illustrates, a three-measure introduction stretches registrally from E₁–G₁–Eb₁ up to E₂–G₂–Eb₂. Including those two forms, it contains no fewer than six <+3,-4> butterflies; see Figure 8, a pitch-class map of mm. 1–3. It also contains four <-4,+3> retrograde inversions of the

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34 Jeffrey Gillespie, “Motivic Transformations and Networks in Schoenberg’s ‘Nacht’ from Pierrot Lunaire,” Intégral 6 (1992): 34–65. Gillespie gives thorough and detailed descriptions of what I call “butterfly swarms” as networks of transformations of the <+3,-4> motive—including combinations using the intervals of the motive as transposition intervals and RI-chains (about which see n. 35)—that gradually grow larger and more complex. Gillespie, unfortunately, calls <+3,-4> “MOTH,” but fortunately also associates his networks with the image of swarming insects. Besides our disagreement about the precise insect under consideration here, my analysis complements Gillespie’s in that it shows how the networks of butterfly motives have a specific function with respect to the rest of the recitation—that is, to dissipate the three canons and thus portray the notion of curtailing human artistic activity. My analysis also allows the Sprechstimme to play a greater role in portraying the basic image.
butterfly motive, not shown in Figures 7 or 8. Since these butterflies neither descend nor displace canons, I understand “Nacht’s” first three measures as a portrayal of the swarm at rest. In m. 4 (portrayed in Figure 9), the swarm is set in motion and begins to consume canons. As the first canon makes its entries at mm. 4, 5, 6 and 7 (marked by boxed numbers in the example), each entry begins with a butterfly motive, with a descending chromatic scale appended to it. This chromatic “tail” serves two purposes: it not only portrays the inexorable descent of the butterflies, but also has the effect of decreasing their sheer density from that of the introduction—we only hear one <+3,-4> per bar. This gives Schoenberg a place from which to begin the gradual multiplication of butterfly motive-forms that will reach terrifying heights by the end of the recitation.

By m. 8, the butterflies start to proliferate. While the first canon is still going on in the other voices, the bass clarinet states the middleground butterfly E♭–G♯–E♭ at m. 8, and each of those pitch classes is decorated with its own foreground butterfly. The piano left hand takes over the same idea at m. 9. Simultaneously (at the beginning of m. 9), the canon breaks down in the ’cello and piano right hand. After it has destroyed the canon, the swarming comes to a temporary halt in m. 10, as the reciter sings a single butterfly in her lowest register (possibly

35 Philip Lambert portrays mm. 1–3 as a transformational network incorporating all six <+3,-4> butterflies and four <-4,+3> retrograde-inverted butterflies as nodes. These nodes are connected by the Lewinian transformations RICH (RI-chain, that is, retrograde inversions overlapping in n-1 notes), TCH (transpositions overlapping in n-2 notes), and BIND (retrograde inversions that share outer notes), in addition to 'T'. He builds a similar but more complex network to describe mm. 24–25a. (See Lambert, “On Contextual Transformations,” Perspectives of New Music 38/1 [2000], 50–55.)

36 The descending chromatic scale can also be heard as a variation of the butterfly motive: the extension by repetition of the -1 ordered pitch interval formed between the motive’s first and last pitches.

37 The terms “middleground” and “foreground” are used here to evoke the same notions of distance from the musical surface that they signify in Schenkerian analysis, though the criteria for assigning pitches to a certain level is different here from what it would be in such an analysis. My own description of criteria for determining structural levels in Schoenberg’s music can be found in “Schoenberg on Ornamentation and Structural Levels,” and are summarized in n. 7 of this article.
FIGURE 7. “Nacht,” from *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21/8: mm. 1–3

Part Ia

![Part Ia notation](image)

FIGURE 8. Pitch-class map of “Nacht,” Op. 21/8: mm. 1–3

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<tr>
<th>m.</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>Es</td>
<td>E♭</td>
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<tr>
<td>G♭</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D♭</td>
<td>B♭</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>A♭</td>
<td>A♭</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Part Ia, continued**

Canon 1.

3-3 (014): <-1, +9>

1. end

2. end

3. end

4. end

$<+3, -4>$ “butterflies” at two levels (swarming):
representing the notion that the silent horizon is blocked from the poet’s or composer’s view by that gigantic E♭–G♭–E♭ butterfly).

At m. 11, concurrent with the beginning of the poem’s second stanza, the second canon begins in the ’cello. (See Figure 10 for a reproduction of mm. 11–16.) The bass clarinet makes its entry in m. 12, and the right hand of the piano in m. 13. Already this canon is starting to show some imperfections (caused, no doubt, by the swarming butterflies!). The bass clarinet starts imitating the ’cello a minor third lower, but after two notes imitates at the octave below, then in m. 13 it begins imitating the ’cello at the major sixth below. The right hand of the piano imitates the bass clarinet an octave above during m. 13, then switches to imitating the ’cello at the unison. But all this imitation comes to a halt at the end of m. 15, as the butterfly swarm reaches its peak.

The butterfly motives in mm. 11–16 are distributed among several voices—the bass clarinet has three in m. 11 before it starts participating in the canon, arranged in an enharmonic stepwise descent. The right hand of the piano has two of the motives moving together in parallel major sevenths in mm. 11 and 12, then later (in mm. 14–15) the right hand fills in two <+3,-4> motives with chromatic passing tones. Even the Sprechstimme gets into the act, producing an ornamented butterfly on “Aus dem Qualm verlorner,” a retrograde-inverted butterfly on “Tiefen/steigt,” and an interval-expanded inverted butterfly, <+8,+9>, on “ein Duft.” This leads the voice in mm. 12 and 13 into a passage that begins as if it were an entry of the second canon, but it “loses steam” dynamically after one and a third measures and disappears. Appropriately enough, this attenuated canonic entry sets the words “Erinnrung mordend!” (“to murder memory”).
FIGURE 10. “Nacht,” Op. 21/8: mm. 11–16

Part Ib

Canon 2.

Increasing density of \(<3,-4>\) “butterflies”
Figure 11. “Nacht,” Op. 21/8: pitch-class map of piano left hand, mm. 14–15
But, by far, the voice that most effectively portrays the canon-devouring butterfly swarm in mm. 11–16 is the left hand of the piano. It begins with a single E♭–G♭–E♭ butterfly in m. 11, then takes a further step towards infestation in mm. 12 and 13 as the left hand plays the same motive ornamented by replications of itself. Finally, mm. 14 and 15 bring the swarming activity back up to the same level as in mm. 1–3. Figure 11 illustrates the situation using a pitch-class map: not only is each note of the motive decorated by a replication, but the middle note of each of the replications has a <+3,-4> growing out of it, paralleled by another <+3,-4> a minor third above.\(^{38}\) The other way in which the left-hand butterfly swarm portrays the imagery of the text is through its slow, measured descent by minor thirds, also illustrated in Figure 11.

The vast majority of the pitch and pitch-class materials of Schoenberg’s recitation can be interpreted as serving a single end: to portray as graphically as possible the image of giant black butterflies, the unnatural creations of modern poets and composers, making a slow and relentless descent onto those artists’ hearts and rendering them helpless. The basic motive, which calls to mind a pair of wings pointing downward (or upward in the case of the retrograde inversion), the almost exclusive use of descending motive chains and chromatic scales, the gradually increasing motivic density through the first two subsections and second part of the recitation, the low register and thick timbres, and Schoenberg’s technique of starting canons, then breaking them off under the weight of the ever more dense butterfly swarms—all these things portray the poem’s basic image.\(^{39}\) As such, “Nacht” is exemplary of a kind of motivic-harmonic framework

\(^{38}\) Gillespie divides up the piano left hand of mm. 14 and 15 in a different way. He characterizes the layers of <+3,-4> motives a minor third apart in the upper voices (this includes the two butterflies that are highest in register within each half-note beat on Figure 11) as duplication in parallel (“DOUBLETRIMOTH”) of the bass clarinet’s combination of m. 8. He then explains the remaining pitches, B♭–A♭–D♭–C♭–A♭–A♭, etc., as “a bass line, which presents reordered forms of the MOTH motive.” (See Gillespie, “Motivic Transformations and Networks,” 40–43.)

\(^{39}\) The motive <+3,-4> is a member of set class 3-3 (014), and as such it represents Schoenberg’s own “unnatural creation”—a dissonant three-note chord that seems to take on the role of the consonant triad in much of his atonal
different from the “musical idea.” It replaces the opposition, elaboration, and resolution of the idea with a pattern based on a visual image.

I have tried to show that long-range coherence in two of Schoenberg’s atonal vocal solos can be understood in terms of diachronic processes that stretch from beginning to end of the piece—a “musical idea” and a “basic image.” The two analyses offered above were motivated by and provide partial support for a more sweeping assumption: that the listener and analyst can use these two basic frameworks, supported by a variety of elements and relations, to hear a majority of Schoenberg’s atonal songs and recitations, as well as the tonal and serial ones, as “coherent.” Ultimately, my article should encourage music scholars and critics to rethink their characterizations of Schoenberg’s atonal music as a “free” or contextually-organized interlude between his chromatic tonal period and his attempts to restore order through the twelve-tone approach. I firmly believe his tonal, atonal, and serial music ought to be understood as different, equally effective manifestations of a single desire that motivated Schoenberg throughout his career: to create (and encourage listeners to recreate for themselves) large-scale coherence.

and serial music. It is appropriate, then, that this motive and set class are portrayed as stifling the canon composer’s activity in “Nacht.” Maybe this could be understood as representing a more general stylistic situation in Schoenberg’s atonal music, in which 3-3 and its associated dissonant harmonies are the principal agents that prevent Schoenberg from creating longer forms.
FIGURE 12: “Nacht,” Op. 21/8: mm. 16–26

Part II
Canon 3.
Tritone above cello
Unison with cello

Canon 4.
WORKS CITED


Schoenberg’s songs and recitations—tonal, atonal, and serial—can be understood by the perceiver as elaborating two kinds of framework, the musical idea and the basic image. The musical idea generally comprises an opposition of elements, an elaboration of that opposition, and an ultimate resolution. The basic image translates a visual image of some kind into a musical shape, which then serves as a starting point for further development. This article shows how the motivic and harmonic structures of two atonal works—Song 11 of Das Buch der hängenden Gärten, Op. 15, and “Nacht” from Pierrot Lunaire, Op. 21—can be heard as growing out of, respectively, a complete idea and a basic image, and how these frameworks and their motivic/
harmonic elaborations parallel the structure and meaning of the texts. Since the article’s insights about harmonic elements and relations are presented using the language of pitch-class set theory, the article also demonstrates ways in which Schoenberg’s notions of coherence intersect with conventional models of pitch-class set coherence.

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