

PART I

Culture and environment

1 Defining home: Berg's life on the periphery

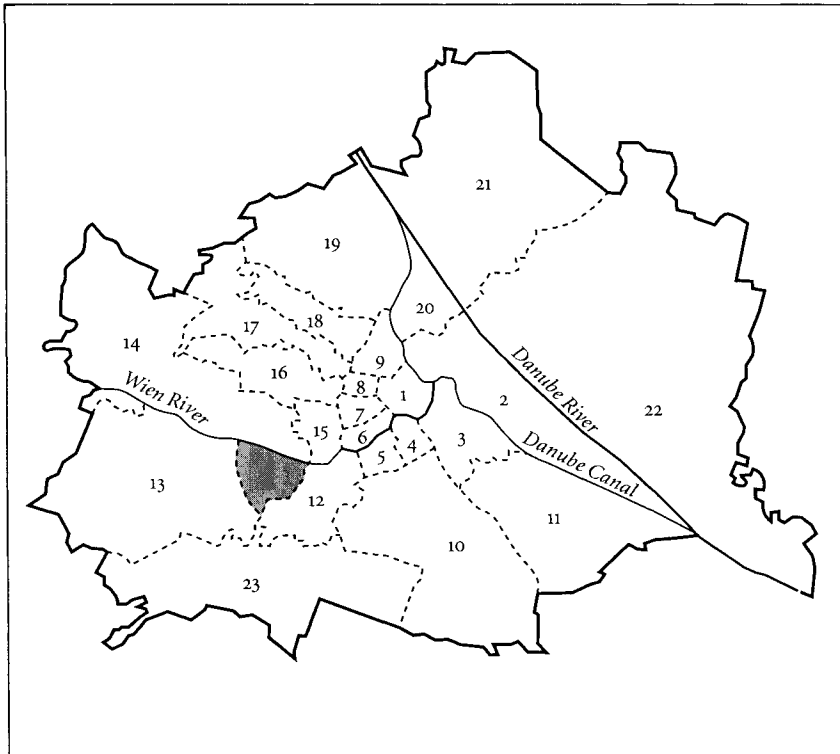
Christopher Hailey

Old Hietzing natives were never in a hurry and others, like myself, who moved there later in life were drawn there because in Old Hietzing one never had to hurry. *Soma Morgenstern*¹

The effervescence of Vienna's turn-of-the-century culture, its spontaneous combustion of ideas, was an explosion of pent-up energies, of unstable ingredients long compacted under the pressure of Vienna's remarkably dense social, cultural and physical geography. Vienna's central first district was a magnet of extraordinary power, the centre, as it were, of a solar system around which its outer districts spiralled in uneven orbit. The sources of that power – the Hofburg and its bureaucratic appendages, the parliament and city hall, the banks and stock exchange, the university and academies, the Court Opera, Burgtheater and Musikverein – produced enough noteworthy activity, intrigue and gossip to fill the columns of the city's more than two dozen newspapers and tabloids, and to fuel agitated coffee-house debates on art, politics, philosophy and sex. But if the first district was the place where everyone met, only a few chose to live there. Peter Altenberg, of course, occupied a small hotel room in the Dorothea-gasse, and Karl Kraus slept by day at his apartment in the Dominikanerbastei, but such creatures of the first district were the exception. It was in the city's orbiting outer districts that the rumblings within Vienna's core found their resonating chamber.

The twenty-one administrative districts of early twentieth-century Vienna were established between 1850 and 1904 (see Map 1) and were part of a process, along with the removal of the inner-city fortifications, the construction of the Ringstraße and Gürtel, the canalisation of the Wien river and the construction of the Stadtbahn, that would forge the city's scattered communities into a single sprawling metropolis.² But differences remained. Geography, history and architecture, local industry and economy, and above all the income, class, occupation or ethnicity of its inhabitants gave each district a distinctive identity, its own perspective; and it was the concert of those perspectives that diffracted the impulses of the first district into the prismatic cultural and intellectual rainbow of *fin de siècle* Vienna.

Map 1 Present-day administrative districts of Vienna (during Berg's lifetime much of what is today the fourteenth district was part of Hietzing). The shaded area shows the location of Alt-Hietzing and the Schönbrunn grounds.



Key

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1 Inner city | 9 Alsergrund | 16 Ottakring |
| 2 Leopoldstadt | 10 Favoriten | 17 Hernals |
| 3 Landstrasse | 11 Simmering | 18 Währing |
| 4 Wieden | 12 Meidling | 19 Döbling |
| 5 Margareten | 13 Hietzing | 20 Brigittenau |
| 6 Mariahilf | 14 Penzing | 21 Floridsdorf |
| 7 Neubau | 15 Rudolfsheim-
Fünfhaus | 22 Donaustadt |
| 8 Josefstadt | | 23 Liesing |

7 *Defining home: Berg's life on the periphery*

By their proximity to the centre the inner districts two to nine shared in the allures of the first district. Those who lived here often did so out of convenience. Mahler's apartment in the Landstraße district was within walking distance of the Opera, Franz Schreker and Josef Marx chose Margareten for its proximity to the Academy, and Sigmund Freud lived in Alsergrund near the University. But these third, fifth and ninth districts were also known as being home for diplomats, vendors and bureaucrats, just as the second district of Leopoldstadt was home for many of Vienna's working- and lower middle-class Jews, and the eighth district of Josefstadt a fashionable address for many of their upwardly mobile cousins. Beyond the Gürtel, the outer ring that had been completed in 1873, lay districts ten to twenty-one. These were the neighbourhoods that anchored Vienna in the surrounding countryside, from the Vienna woods to the Hungarian plain. Here the pace of life slowed. Carl Moll lived in the leafy olympia of the Hohe Warte near the vineyards of the nineteenth district, and Arthur Schnitzler had his villa in the more urban elegance of the eighteenth. For those yearning for the countryside itself, Vienna was ringed by quaint towns and villages such as Rodaun, where Hugo von Hofmannsthal lived and worked, or Mödling, where Anton Webern tended his modest alpine garden.

The inner city served up the world's imponderables; in the surrounding districts one could assert control over the more manageable dimensions of the *Alltag*, one's daily routine. Here, too, there were restaurants and cafés, but they were neighbourhood establishments with a local clientele. Here in the outer districts were the shopkeepers and tradesmen one knew by name and the neighbours with whom one could discuss such truly profound issues as the weather, the price of meat – and the other neighbours. Here were those first-hand encounters with the earthy wisdom of the *Ur-Wiener*, those interchanges and experiences of everyday life that nourish our deepest notions of calling a place home. These outer districts offered vantage points from which to triangulate the distance from Vienna's inner city to the world beyond.

The heart of Vienna's thirteenth district, Alt-Hietzing, or Old Hietzing, lies along the west wall of the Imperial summer palace of Schönbrunn, where a cluster of shops, bakeries, cafés and hotels gives the spot an air of tidy self-sufficiency.³ At one end the parish church, dating from the early fifteenth century, and the post office, housed in the former summer palace of the emperor's foreign minister, are palpable reminders of the larger spheres of church and state; at the other end tram lines that converge at the beginning of Hietzinger Hauptstraße are the visible links to the metropolitan *Innenstadt* twenty minutes to the east.

Hietzing is a comfortable place. It is a district of Imperial yellow and

varying hues of green, a district of elm, maple, chestnut, birch and plane trees, of squares and gardens, and of shady inner courtyards. In addition to the stately grounds of Schönbrunn, whose palace and gardens were laid out in the early eighteenth century, there are numerous parks, including Maxing Park and Hügel Park, several well-populated cemeteries and the expansive Lainzer Wildlife Preserve.⁴ Despite the traffic that in recent decades has overtaken its principal arteries, the prevailing impression is one of settled quiet. Birds and the odd screech from the Schönbrunn zoological garden (founded in 1752, it is Europe's oldest) punctuate the stillness. There are villas here – it is what is called a Nobelbezirk, an elegant district – but little ostentation. Just as the Schönbrunn Palace and grounds manage to preserve a rural quality despite their formal splendour, Hietzing's estates and high-ceilinged apartment buildings integrate themselves among their less prepossessing neighbours in the shambling warren of its streets.

At the time of its incorporation in 1892, Alt-Hietzing and the surrounding communities of Ober St-Veit, Unter St-Veit, Speising and Lainz, were still predominantly agricultural, with nurseries, dairy farms, vineyards and pastures making up the bulk of commercial activity, as well as a few small industries such as meat processing, and textile and clothing manufacture. By the turn of the century Hietzing had established itself as a place where aristocrats, upper-level bureaucrats and professionals, and a sprinkling of artists, musicians, writers, actors, actresses and singers made their home. Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele worked here, Johann Strauss, who had celebrated early successes at the Dommayer Casino on Hietzinger Platz, built his villa in the Maxingstraße opposite the Schönbrunn grounds; Emil von Sauer lived on the Hietzinger Hauptstraße, and the writers Berta von Suttner and Hermann Bahr were residents, as were the Court Opera soprano Marie Gutheil-Schoder, the actor Hans Moser and the Burgtheater star – and mistress to the Emperor – Katharina Schratt. And it was to Hietzing that Johanna Berg moved with her two youngest children, Alban, 20, and Smaragda, 19, in 1905. With the exception of three years, 1908 to 1911, it was in Hietzing that Alban Berg was to spend the rest of his life, and it was in Hietzing, rather than the inner city where he had grown to manhood, that he developed the strategies by which he transformed the impulses of his youth into the artworks of his maturity.



In the autumn of 1920, Soma Morgenstern – then a law student in his late twenties – moved from a modest furnished room near the University to the outlying thirteenth district, where he hoped to find the peace to study

for his doctoral exams. It was to be a temporary dislocation, for after obtaining his law degree he fully intended to move back into the inner city and begin his career. Instead, he remained in Hietzing for the next twelve years.⁵ One pleasant Friday afternoon in late September 1920 Morgenstern was on his way into the inner city to meet friends in a café before attending a concert. He boarded the 59 tram, which travelled from Hietzing to the inner city, and as he looked around among the handful of passengers his glance fell upon an attractive-looking couple studying a volume held between them. He was struck as much by the intensity of their study (the volume was a score of Mahler's Second Symphony, the work that he, too, was going to hear later that evening) as by their refined appearance. 'Das hohe Paar', he thought – 'a lofty couple' – an impression, he admits, that was stimulated more by his fascination with the woman than by any interest in her companion.⁶

In the autumn of 1920 Helene and Alban Berg were in their mid-thirties and had been married for nearly ten years. Since May 1911 they had made their home in a ground-floor, three-room apartment on Trauttmansdorffgasse, a quiet, tree-lined street of two- and three-storey apartment houses that arcs in a bow from the Maxingstraße to the intersecting Gloriettegasse, creating a configuration of clean, angular lines that reminded Theodor W. Adorno quite plausibly, if incongruously, of Cezanne.⁷ The Berg apartment, which fronts directly onto the corner of Trauttmansdorffgasse and Woltergasse, also looked out upon a large, unruly garden to the rear, a characteristic Hietzing combination of urban rectitude and sylvan lassitude. Hietzing's centre and the Schönbrunn grounds were just a few steps away, as was the villa in which Helene Berg had been born and where her parents still lived.

Helene Berg was the third of four children in the household of Franz (b. 1849) and Anna (b. 1859) Nahowski. The oldest, a daughter Carola (b. 1877), was the child of Anna's first marriage with Johann Heyduck, which had ended in divorce. Anna (b. 1882), Helene (b. 1885) and Franz Josef (b. 1889) were to all appearances the children of Franz Nahowski, although family legend has maintained that Helene and Franz were the illegitimate offspring of an eleven-year liaison that their mother had with the Emperor Franz Josef II between 1878 and 1889.⁸ The Nahowski villa on Hetzendorferstraße (today Maxingstraße 46) is indeed located conveniently close to Schönbrunn. For his early morning trysts (usually a breakfast around 4am) the Emperor would leave the palace grounds by a small, inconspicuous garden door, cross the street, and, by a side entrance in the Weidlichgasse, let himself into the villa – he had his own key – and climb a winding staircase to Anna Nahowski's private salon.⁹ With the end of the affair (after the Emperor began his liaison with Katharina Schratz, who lived in nearby Gloriettegasse), tensions in the Nahowski household sub-

sided and the children were raised in an atmosphere of bourgeois respectability and practised discretion.

It was during the 1906–7 season that Alban Berg had first noticed Helene Nahowski at concerts and in the Opera. When he discovered she was a neighbour who lived no more than five minutes' walk from his home he began to haunt her street, dipping out of sight as soon as she appeared. Tall, thin, and youthfully awkward, he was easily spotted by his quarry. Finally, on Good Friday 1907, Helene's brother Franz, sympathetic to the young man's predicament, engineered an encounter, lured Berg to the family garden, and then ran to fetch his sister.¹⁰ At a time when marriages were not infrequently a race against the calendar the four-year courtship that ensued is a testament to strictly observed proprieties. It is also testimony to the strong misgivings that Franz Nahowski had about his daughter's spindly suitor.

There was nothing objectionable about Alban Berg's background.¹¹ His family was very nearly the social equal of the Nahowskis. Indeed in 1905 Alban's sister Smaragda married the son of Alexander Freiherr von Eger, President of the Imperial rail line (k.k. Privilegierte Südbahngesellschaft) in which Franz Nahowski was an official.¹² Alban and Smaragda (b. 1886), who had an extremely close relationship not unlike that of Helene and her brother Franz, were the youngest of four children. Their father, Conrad (b. 1846), had run an import/export firm while their mother, Johanna Braun (b. 1851), managed the family religious supplies shop. Their older brothers Hermann (b. 1872), who lived in America, and Charly (b. 1881), who remained in Vienna, both followed their father in the export business. It was a comfortably prosperous first-district household with several servants, a governess, and a regulated schedule that included leisurely summers at the Berghof, the family's lakeside estate in Carinthia, no more than a hundred miles from the Nahowski's country property in neighbouring Styria.

Berg's parents encouraged cultural pursuits and enjoyed their contacts with some of Vienna's musical celebrities, including the pianist Alfred Grünfeld, a one-time summer neighbour, and Anton Bruckner, an occasional customer in the family shop and visitor in their home. The children were bright, attractive, musical, and quick to take advantage of the cultural opportunities around them. Charly was an ardent Wagnerian, a devout reader of *Die Fackel*, and an enthusiastic supporter of the controversial Court Opera director Gustav Mahler. Smaragda, a student of Leschetizky, was an accomplished pianist who in later years would coach leading singers, including Lula Mysz-Gmeiner, Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, Marie Gutheil-Schoder and Frieda Leider. She was also an intimate in the circles around Karl Kraus, Peter Altenberg, Gustav Klimt, Max Oppenheimer and Egon Friedell, and after her brief marriage she became an

outspoken lesbian. Alban, whose modest vocal and keyboard resources betrayed attentions divided between music, literature and art, was the coddled amateur composer whose *Lieder* were a centrepiece of family musical occasions.

Though Conrad Berg's untimely death in 1900 left the family in some financial uncertainty, the death in 1905 of Julie Weidmann, Johanna Berg's childless sister, brought the inheritance of a small fortune and extensive real-estate holdings, including the villa on Hietzinger Hauptstraße to which the family moved in October of that year. This sudden turn of fortune may well have provoked Berg to rethink his future. He had just begun his second year as an unpaid accounting apprentice in the Austrian civil service, a coveted opportunity for a secure position with generous pension benefits that had been obtained only through the influence of a highly placed family friend. A year later, however, having completed his apprenticeship and won his regular appointment, Berg abandoned this promising career in order to devote himself to music. His freedom had not come easily, but he assuaged his mother's misgivings by agreeing to administer the family's properties. As a marginally employed would-be artist Berg was thus a poor candidate for marriage, and around 1909 even a sympathetic Peter Altenberg gave the couple some half-serious advice. 'A young artist like yourself,' he told Alban, 'doesn't marry the daughter of a court official!'; 'Such a beautiful, genteel girl,' he told Helene, 'doesn't marry such a young Bohemian. He won't amount to anything.'¹³



It was not until June 1923 that Soma Morgenstern finally met the Bergs. By that time they had seen each other frequently and had realised that they had a number of mutual friends. One day as he entered the tram – again it was the 59, this time on its way out to Hietzing – Morgenstern was greeted by Alban Berg. The exchange was cordial but ended abruptly when Morgenstern, who was going to visit his mother in Mariahilferstraße, jumped out with a hasty farewell (having, out of politeness, already travelled well past his stop).

Some days later he met Helene Berg on the steps of the Hietzing post office. When he told her how pleased he had been to make her husband's acquaintance she looked surprised. Berg, it seems, had returned home that day out of sorts because Morgenstern's sudden departure – 'at a stop where no Hietzinger would ever have had any reason to go' – seemed like an excuse to end the conversation. When Morgenstern explained the circumstances Helene was visibly relieved and urged him to call on her hus-

band: 'He seriously believed that he had annoyed you. That's the way Alban is. That's the way they all are, the Schönbergians, all of them [...] On the one hand very arrogant and then on the other full of feelings of inferiority. I don't understand how those two things go together. Perhaps you can explain it to me some time.'¹⁴ That afternoon Morgenstern paid his first visit to Trauttmansdorffgasse 27.

To enter the Bergs' apartment was to enter a domain of well-ordered bourgeois comfort. The furniture was solid and tasteful, though of no prevailing style. The pictures and photographs that hung on the walls or cluttered the surfaces depicted admired personalities – mostly musicians and writers – or were reproductions of masterworks, interspersed with a few cherished originals. As one entered Berg's study, one of the two front rooms that faced Trauttmansdorffgasse, one found along the back and left walls the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves that housed his library. Berg's library was not particularly large, but it was well selected. The major classics of literature and music were there, as were numerous reference books. The heart of the collection was a body of works that belonged to the canon of *fin de siècle* Viennese predilections. The plays of Ibsen, the works of Strindberg, scattered volumes of Balzac and Maeterlinck, and above all works by Vienna's own: Kraus's *Die Fackel*, Peter Altenberg's slender volumes, writings by Bahr and Kokoschka, Hofmannsthal and Loos, among others.

Among those men Morgenstern identified a central pantheon of five *Hausgötter*, or household gods – Peter Altenberg, Karl Kraus, Gustav Mahler, Adolf Loos and Arnold Schoenberg – who were formative influences and continuing guides for Berg. They were the reflection of that fusion of acerbity and sentiment, fatalism and passion, so characteristic of his own psychic constitution. Mahler was, of course, a childhood idol, whose symphonies were redolent of the Austrian character and countryside. The admiration for Loos, Vienna's architect of austere villas and functional office buildings, came during the Schoenberg years, when the deaf architect was a vocal supporter of unpopular music he could not hear. Altenberg, the gentle apostle of fresh air, nature, a vegetarian diet and pre-pubescent girls, was for most Viennese a source of harmless bemusement, as if their good-natured toleration of his eccentricities were sufficient inoculation against the jaded callousness he exposed in their midst. For Berg he was a saint. Kraus, on the other hand, was opinionated, strident, mistrustful and litigious – an irate moral prophet whose tirades against the status quo aroused fierce passions. The flourishing readership for his journalistic alter-ego, *Die Fackel*, was likewise a tribute to Vienna's capacity for self-inoculation.¹⁵

Berg's association with Schoenberg went back nearly twenty years, to the time when the older man, in Vienna again after two-and-a-half years

in Berlin had failed to make his career, began taking private students. Schoenberg was a self-taught outsider, a second-district Jew with no connections to the Academy or the University and few of the skills that might have distinguished him as a performer or conductor. His brash personality and evident genius had won him some prominent supporters, including Gustav Mahler, but that support had been of little use when in 1904, together with his brother-in-law, Alexander von Zemlinsky, he launched an ambitious concert organisation, the *Vereinigung schaffender Tonkünstler* (Association of Creative Musicians), for the propagation of new music. It folded after one season.¹⁶ Of greater long-range significance were the energies Schoenberg devoted to teaching, for in Vienna an outsider could derive a significant measure of authority from his capacity to attract disciples. Karl Kraus had done as much for himself through the readership of *Die Fackel*.

Slowly Schoenberg had gathered his own circle – the first generation of what came to be called a ‘school’ and included Anton Webern, Heinrich Jalowetz, Erwin Stein, Josef Polnauer and Alban Berg – that would authenticate his presence in the Viennese cultural landscape.¹⁷ Those early years, roughly 1904 to 1911, had been both exhilarating and harrowing for the teacher and his flock, and included in rapid succession artistic breakthroughs, premieres, openings, scandals and controversies, as well as personal and marital crises and a dramatic suicide.¹⁸ The Chamber Symphony, Second String Quartet and *George-Lieder* established notoriety for Schoenberg the composer, his paintings thrust him into the vortex of the Austrian avant-garde, and performances of his students’ compositions earned him esteem as a teacher. These were years during which lasting allegiances and alliances were formed. Mahler, Kraus, Loos, Altenberg, Klimt, Kokoschka, Wedekind, Strindberg, Balzac, Dehmel, George: for the Schoenberg circle these were more than the names of admired heroes, they were a call to arms. These were the years when this circle, drawn closer by conviction, made stronger by opposition, took on those brittle qualities of arrogance and inferiority that Helene Berg found so puzzling twenty years later. These were the years that transformed a clique of disciples into a phalanx of true believers.



At the time of Morgenstern’s first acquaintance with Berg, Berg’s association with Arnold Schoenberg was perhaps his chief claim to fame. Schoenberg was a frequent topic of their conversations, and Berg never failed to speak of his teacher with love and reverence, prompting Helene once to

interject: 'You'd never believe how infatuated they all are with Schoenberg! Whenever they were discussing something and Schoenberg got up and wandered around the room, one of them always ran around after him with an ash tray.' – 'Even Alban?' I asked. – 'Him? He was the worst!'¹⁹

Such idolisation bespeaks an equal measure of awe and trepidation, and Berg was candid about his difficulties in freeing himself from the overbearing influence of his teacher. It was a dilemma that Berg once described as the central problem of his life, 'a problem I've carried around with me for decades without being able to solve it and which will be my downfall'.²⁰

By 1911 most of Schoenberg's first-generation students were on their own. Webern, Jalowetz and Stein had embarked on their conducting careers, and in May of that year Berg had finally been allowed to marry Helene Nahowski.²¹ Berg still derived his living from administering the family real-estate income, but proof-reading, preparing piano-vocal scores and teaching a few private students gave him at least the appearance of professional consequence, as did the couple's Hietzing address.²²

Things were falling into place for Schoenberg as well. In 1909 he had signed a general contract with Universal Edition, Vienna's newest and most prestigious music publisher, and among the first works to appear was his widely heralded *Harmonielehre* of 1911. Schoenberg was at last being recognised as a teacher of consequence, and during the 1910–11 academic year he was granted permission to teach private courses in harmony and counterpoint at the Academy. The success of these courses gave him every expectation of an official appointment to the regular faculty – an offer that finally came in 1912.

Music history might have taken a different course had Schoenberg remained in Vienna, accepted the position at the Academy, and allowed himself to become a settled member of the city's establishment. But in the summer of 1911 he abruptly left Vienna and in the autumn moved again to Berlin.²³ It was an ill-considered decision that put Schoenberg's Viennese students and supporters in a state of disarray and over the next five years, from 1911 to 1915, consumed inordinate quantities of their time, energy and resources in supplying their master with his needs.²⁴ The concerts, lectures and publications they arranged during these years, which included the triumphant *Gurrelieder* premiere and the notorious *Skandalkonzert* of 1913, served to keep the absent Schoenberg a controversial presence in Vienna. But these years of proven devotion were also years of increasing tension, a tension that sprang from Schoenberg's artistic crises and self-doubts as well as from those of his students, who were attempting to establish their own artistic and professional identities.

Anton Webern may have suffered the most. He came to Schoenberg as a

self-assured young man of considerable training and accomplishment. When he left Schoenberg he was a bundle of nerves and insecurities – as well as a composer of genius. His attempts at establishing a conducting career failed miserably, and he spent more than a decade hovering near the teacher who rewarded him with the intimacy of a friendship that left him scarred. Schoenberg's domination lay not just in his demands upon his students' time and loyalty; it was also the result of his capacity to get his students to suffer his agonies and to internalise the moral imperatives that drove him.

Unlike Webern, Berg did not initially come to Schoenberg with much more than his enthusiasms. Lacking Webern's skills and training he was more naturally diffident, and in consequence more unproblematically dependent. He had too much to learn to suffer profound doubts; those would come later. For fifteen years Berg was Schoenberg's most diligent student and chief fund-raiser; he wrote guides to his works, proof-read his scores, prepared the index to the *Harmonielehre*, and was throughout that time – and until the end of his life – a loyal correspondent.

Such loyalty was sorely tested, for Berg's psyche was the frequent object of blistering assault by a man who maintained the right to interfere with nearly every aspect of his life. In his letters and their intermittent personal encounters Schoenberg made it clear that he felt his student was by turns lazy, slovenly, passive, too slow a worker, a cloudy thinker, negligent of his health, preoccupied with his ills, too financially and emotionally dependent upon his mother and his wife's family, and too much caught up in their petty gossip and taken in by their social pretensions. 'You're angry that I accused you of dreaming!' Schoenberg wrote in May 1915, 'But I would like to make you still angrier. So angry that you jump up and bash me over the skull ... !'²⁵ Berg's many convoluted confessions, abject apologies and resolutions of reform did little to assuage his teacher, or indeed to alter his own patterns of behaviour, and by the end of 1915 there was a rupture between the two men that lasted more than a year.²⁶



One evening in March 1925 Soma Morgenstern went to the Konzerthaus to purchase a ticket for a performance of Mahler's First Symphony. At the door he saw a very agitated Helene Berg, who implored him for help. Apparently a young man from Frankfurt who wanted to study with her husband had been invited over at three that afternoon and then had simply refused to leave:

He stayed for *Jause* and even after the *Jause* he didn't leave, and he talked away at Alban until Alban was quite pale from exhaustion. Alban had no idea what he was babbling on about. After the *Jause* we told him that we had arranged to go to the concert with Alma and had to leave early to go into the city. He said he'd come along. And he did not leave. He rode with us, bought himself a ticket, came straight to our box, and now is standing in front of Alban talking away at him. Alban sent me down here. After the concert we are invited to join Alma. He'll certainly want to go. You must rescue us!²⁷

Morgenstern entered the hall, and what he saw confirmed Helene's description. 'Standing in the box where Alma and her entourage sat, was Alban and in front of him a small and, compared to Alban, very short figure that was indeed talking away at him. When Alban saw me he raised both arms high above his head, but not in greeting but like a drowning man.'

No picture so tidily captures the difference between Alban Berg and Arnold Schoenberg as this image of Berg gasping for air under the importunate attentions of the young Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno.²⁸ Schoenberg would never have suffered such an assault without immediately asserting control and giving the puppy a few swipes for good measure. But the difference goes beyond Berg's lack of assertiveness or deficient authoritarian instincts. It was also a question of capacity. Berg simply could not process a barrage of new information and ideas quickly. Adorno implies that there was a certain coyness to Berg's claim that he was unable to grasp a Karl Kraus poem on first hearing,²⁹ but it was no pose. Hermann Watznauer, the fatherly mentor of Berg's youth, made these telling observations of his teenage friend:

His features and bearing often seemed tired and weary, and when in concert or in the opera he listened to a new piece of music he held his mouth a little open, which made an unfortunate impression. It was as if he were unable to grasp what he was hearing. He was different at times of relaxation and peace, of security, in the quiet circle of his friends. Then the compelling magic of his spiritualised youth glowed from his large clear eyes.³⁰

In the security of his Trauttmansdorffgasse apartment Berg could take in the impulses from the outside world at his own pace and, with the help of liberal doses of his favourite cognac, even engage in heated debate, although Morgenstern tells us that his debating skills stood in an inverse ratio to his eagerness to wade in.³¹ At home Berg could likewise give himself over to pleasures that in earlier times had earned him Schoenberg's haughty disdain.

One afternoon, Morgenstern, who was now himself living on Trautt-

mansdorffgasse, stopped by the Bergs' apartment to find them in the middle of a very lively *Jause*. Berg, surrounded by five women – Helene, Smaragda and three of her friends – was clearly having a grand time. Morgenstern stayed only a moment and as Berg accompanied him to the door he said with obvious glee, 'You have no idea how they gossip! It is intoxicating!'³²

The truth is that Alban Berg liked gossip, he liked card games, and he enjoyed the little ceremonies of entertaining and socialising that were the rituals of his class. For the mildly bohemian Morgenstern, the Bergs, who lived in a world in which invitations to lunch, tea and dinner played a large role, were decidedly bourgeois. Even during the early 1920s, when inflation severely reduced their income, Helene's careful management of their resources made it possible for her to cater to her husband's sensuous appetites. Berg, Adorno noted, 'dignified everyday events relating to pleasure'. He recalled their home in these terms:

The atmosphere always had something upper-class about it, to use the term in its proper sense. This was primarily because of the matter-of-fact attitude of those accustomed to a good life. [...] Nothing in their lifestyle was bohemian. Rarely have I seen a home in which I felt more comfortable; there was something spacious, large, corresponding precisely to Berg's ideal of the jovial.³³

The comfort of routine fostered Berg's slow, methodical work habits and afforded him the means of partitioning his day to allow him his share of rewards and satisfactions. Such domesticity was seductive, and under its influence even Adorno learned the value of a little self-deprecation. 'I was deadily earnest in those days,' he later wrote, 'which could get on a mature artist's nerves. Out of pure veneration I tried never to say anything I did not consider particularly profound.' 'At times,' Adorno further noted, 'Berg no doubt relegated my own philosophical ballast to the category he termed tedious [*faad*]; I joked about it once and he did not seriously contradict me.'³⁴

Tolerant and liberal are words that Adorno uses to describe Berg the teacher. Berg's teaching had none of the hectoring quality that kept Schoenberg's students on their toes. He was a patient and methodical guide through harmony and counterpoint, and taught composition by means of measured, carefully considered encouragement. Although Schoenberg's teaching lay at the core of his own, there was nothing doctrinaire about Berg's approach. His musical tastes were catholic and included a number of contemporary French, German, Italian and Eastern European composers who had little or no relationship to the atonal revolution. Berg's approach was never threatening, edgy or aggressive, and he was

distinctly ill at ease with the presence of those qualities in his teacher's teaching and music. Lessons were usually given in his study and often concluded with four-handed music making at the piano, a visit to a café, or a lengthy stroll around the Schönbrunn palace grounds.

Berg's students were no circle of fawning disciples. They helped their teacher as Berg had helped Schoenberg – in preparing his scores, copying parts and correcting proofs – but they did not join him on his vacations and only rarely accompanied him on his travels, although they were generally welcome to participate in certain cherished routines of everyday life, including concerts, theatre, cinema and football matches.³⁵ Only a few of his students developed lasting personal ties with their teacher; most went their way after their studies. There was no doubt a good deal of friendly indoctrination into those topics dear to Berg – above all those Viennese *Hausgötter* Altenberg, Kraus, Loos and Mahler – and he certainly tried to instil an overriding sense of allegiance to the larger Schoenbergian cause. But Berg's students were not sent into the trenches of cultural warfare as Schoenberg's had been. Times had changed. More importantly, as Adorno observed, Berg's tolerance set him apart from other Schoenbergians, as did 'the need of this extremely sensitive and vulnerable man to avoid as far as possible the tyranny of the collective'.³⁶

After their rupture in 1915 Berg's relationship with Schoenberg had slowly healed, and by 1918 Schoenberg had proffered his former student the familiar 'Du' form of address. During the early post-war years the Schoenberg circle cut a lower profile on Vienna's cultural horizon. The great pre-war scandals and controversies were a thing of the past, legends of another age. Now the sporadic public performances of their music were greeted with respect from a self-selected audience of new-music enthusiasts and with equanimity from the public at large. Their Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen (Society for Private Music Performances), founded in 1918, inherited the mantle of the Vereinigung schaffender Tonkünstler, although the modest scope of its performing forces, members-only audiences and ban on reviewers considerably reduced its public exposure.³⁷ The cessation of regular concerts in 1921 and the organisation's official demise in 1923 were scarcely noticed by Vienna's cultural community.

When Adorno arrived in Vienna two years later he was surprised to find the Schoenberg circle less tight-knit than he had supposed:

Schoenberg, remarried, lived in Mödling; his elegant young wife, so it seemed to the old guard, kept him rather isolated from the friends of the old heroic days. Webern probably already lived out in Maria Enzersdorf. They did not see much of one another. Berg particularly lamented the fact that he so seldom saw Webern and Steuermann, of whom he was very fond, and blamed it on Vienna's size, which was hardly formidable.³⁸

Post-war Vienna, reduced to little more than the provincial capital of a small alpine republic, was no longer the cultural powerhouse it had once been, and the honour of being one of her outsiders was losing its savour. Her creative artists began to look beyond the narrow confines of the Austrian hinterlands for cultural resonance. The Verein, for example, established links to new-music circles abroad and served as a model for the International Society for Contemporary Music, founded in 1923. Indeed the Vienna chapter of the ISCM, the Verein für neue Musik, essentially resurrected the Vienna chapter of the Verein für musikalische Privat-aufführungen, mixing familiar faces from the old guard with such younger members of the circle as Schoenberg's brother-in-law Rudolf Kolisch, whose quartet became an international champion for new music.

Schoenberg, too, sought teaching and conducting opportunities abroad, and at the beginning of 1926 he left Vienna to accept a master class at the Prussian Academy of the Arts in Berlin. It was his third sojourn in the German capital, and when he arrived an opera by Alban Berg was the talk of the town.



Recognition as a composer came late to Berg. His first wide exposure, the 1913 premiere of two of the *Altenberg Lieder* Op. 4, had ended in a scandal, after which the work disappeared without trace.³⁹ Other works, including his Piano Sonata Op. 1, Four Songs Op. 2, String Quartet Op. 3 and the clarinet pieces Op. 5, had appeared in student recitals or within the confines of the Verein concerts, but they had had little exposure outside Vienna. It was not until April 1923 that Berg signed a contract with Universal Edition, having by then already published his first three opus numbers and the *Wozzeck* piano-vocal score at his own expense. Later that year, performances of two of his Three Orchestral Pieces Op. 6 in Berlin and his String Quartet at the Salzburg Festival created a stir, but it was the performance of the *Wozzeck* excerpts at the International Music Festival in Frankfurt in the summer of 1924 that transformed Alban Berg into the celebrity whom Adorno was trying so hard to impress a few months later. It was also this performance that laid the groundwork for the stunning triumph of the Berlin *Wozzeck* premiere in December 1925. At the age of forty Berg was no longer just a member of the Schoenberg entourage but a personality in his own right. The *Wozzeck* premiere had made him famous and, for a time, financially prosperous.

During the last ten years of his life Berg assumed the public persona of a celebrated composer. Performances of his works took him to cities around

Germany, and to Prague, Brussels, Paris, Winterthur and Leningrad. Even Vienna paid tribute to its native son with a brilliant production of *Wozzeck* at the State Opera. He lectured on his music, received honours for his achievements, and was quoted in newspapers and interviewed on the radio. He sat on juries and attended festivals in England, Switzerland, Germany and Italy, where he conferred with colleagues and numbered among his professional acquaintances Béla Bartók, Edward J. Dent, Gregor Fitelberg, Zoltán Kodály, Charles Koechlin, Gian Francesco Malipiero, Albert Roussel and Ernst Toch. He socialised with politicians, blue-blooded aristocrats and red-blooded financiers. Through his friendship with Alma Mahler and Franz Werfel he was introduced to Gerhart Hauptmann and Sinclair Lewis; Viennese literary figures such as Hermann Broch, Stefan Zweig and Elias Canetti boasted his acquaintance; and admirers from abroad, including George Gershwin, found their way to his Trauttmansdorffgasse door. Affluence enabled Berg to buy a car, a Ford cabriolet; he now wrote his letters with a typewriter; and in 1932 he purchased a villa, the Waldhaus, on the Wörthersee. Like Schoenberg, Berg was offered enticements to leave Vienna. Positions in France, England or even America would have been his for the asking, and at least twice, in 1925 and 1930, Franz Schreker offered him a position at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. Despite strong encouragement from Schoenberg, Berg turned down both offers.

It was not the flattery of official recognition that kept Berg in Vienna. In 1924 he graciously accepted the Kunstpreis der Stadt Wien, but when he was offered the honorary title of professor he is said to have turned it down with the laconic observation, 'too late – Alban Berg suffices!'⁴⁰ Perhaps he had spent too many years on the periphery to feel comfortable on the inside, that milieu to which, unlike Schoenberg, he had been born and bred. Even after the success of *Wozzeck* it is said that he occasionally returned to see an opera from the standing room. He continued to be an avid reader of *Die Fackel* and in 1932 was a founder of the *Fackel*-inspired cultural journal *23. Eine Wiener Musikzeitschrift*, edited by his student Willi Reich.⁴¹

One reason for staying in Vienna was that family affairs and responsibilities continued to play a large role in the Bergs' life, particularly as their parents grew older.⁴² Berg remained close to Smaragda and Charly (Hermann had died in America in 1920), and Helene's brother Franz, to whom both she and Alban were bound by deep affection, was becoming increasingly incapacitated by severe and dangerous bouts of paranoia. Ties of friendship were no less important reasons for remaining in Vienna, especially now that Berg's enhanced income enabled him to enjoy more fully the sensuous comforts of his native city.

But the most important factors keeping Berg in Vienna were the requirements of his own creative persona. During the last decade of his life Berg worked hard to overcome the predisposition toward indolence and vacillation that had slowed his productivity in earlier years. As Soma Morgenstern observes, 'From the time of the sensational success of the *Wozzeck* Suite at the Music Festival in Frankfurt am Main, where he had, as it were, tasted blood, he had become an extremely diligent worker.'⁴³ In this he had the full support of his wife, who did everything she could to create an environment conducive to his needs. Morgenstern reports that she would even lock him into his study to force him to work, although Berg claimed that on such occasions he consoled himself with the bottle of cognac he kept hidden under the sofa.⁴⁴

It is of little import whether Helene knew about the cognac or not. After Berg's death she claimed that she did; Morgenstern is sure she did not. What is important is that Berg thought he had a secret, one secret more he could share with a friend. Berg's love of secrets and his compulsion to gossip kept each other good company.⁴⁵ His marital infidelities – the relationship with Hanna Fuchs-Robettin was but one of several affairs and sexual liaisons – were a favourite topic, and friends like Soma Morgenstern and Rudolf Kolisch, as well as the closest of his students, were frequently enlisted as confidants and go-betweens. Nor should one attribute undue significance to the confessional contents of Berg's correspondence. Letters were his preferred medium for cultivating friendships and channelling passions, but they were at bottom another strategy of reserve, a method of using others to mask the location of a self that lay at some point of infinite regress beyond. In any event Helene Berg probably knew about or suspected most of these affairs and may well have had several of her own, including a near-affair with Soma Morgenstern, who had Berg's permission and encouragement. Morgenstern changed his mind, not, as he insists, out of bourgeois scruples, but because Helene's love for Berg and his profound dependence upon her seemed more important.⁴⁶

The sacrifices of those around Berg were inspired by his own detached regard for his creative needs. Adorno once remarked that Berg

treated his own person with both care and indifference, like the musical instrument he was to himself. He liked talking and writing about himself, still more about his music. But there was no trace of vanity in this; it scarcely sounded as if he identified the two aspects of himself with one another, rather as if he were reporting about the composer Alban Berg whom he esteemed.⁴⁷

'Berg's empirical existence,' Adorno writes elsewhere, 'was subordinate to the primacy of creative work; he honed himself as its instrument, his store

of life experiences became solely a means of supplying conditions that would permit him to wrest his *œuvre* from his own physical weaknesses and psychological resistance.⁴⁸ Food, drink, gossip and romantic entanglements were among the elements supplying the conditions of that creativity, and it was Berg's capacity for sharing his enjoyment that effaced any hint of egoism. But the physical precondition for Berg's creativity, the pendant of his own detachment from the creative self, was an environment that allowed him to participate in the world from a secure remove.

It is the irony of the last decade of Berg's life that the more fame drew him into the mainstream the greater his physical and psychological detachment became, and the more his comforts and passions created a wall around his works and were integrated into their texture. And the more the political horizon was darkened by events that doomed his cultural universe, the more he withdrew – to his life in Hietzing and to his rural retreat at the Wörthersee, a place he called his 'concentration camp' because it enabled him to shut out the distractions of the outside world. It was black humour tinged with the shame of a man who was incapable of overt resistance.⁴⁹ Adorno observed that in his last years Berg counteracted his growing isolation with a strategy of diplomatic dissimulation. 'I called him the foreign minister of the land of his dreams and he laughed.'⁵⁰



Artistic choices are about perspectives and a point of view. Every artist must find a centre and Berg, a creature of habit, a product of place and environment, found his centre in a world he created in an outlying district of Vienna, a place he variously referred to as 'the back of beyond' and 'the end of the world'.⁵¹ It was a place of bourgeois respectability and discreetly shared secrets, a place sheltered from confrontation, where he could absorb at his own pace the impulses from Vienna's inner district and assimilate the stimuli from the world beyond, a place where he could gently shoulder his way into the future while gazing back at the world of his parents. Its comforts were a precondition for his work and a context for his languorous, layered and secretive scores. Those comforts were also his buffer against challenges to his equilibrium, whether from the consequences of emotional entanglements, the moral compromises exacted from a world descending into madness, or the imperatives of the restless and driven man who was his teacher and master.

Of the household gods Morgenstern enumerates, Schoenberg stands apart. In Kraus, Loos, Altenberg and Mahler, Berg found reminders of his

own identity and experiences – of the acerbity of the first-district coffee-house tirade, of the utopian vision for a regulated life in the districts beyond, of the fragile, tragic beauty of the human soul, or of the grand and melancholy solitude of his beloved Carinthian landscapes. Ultimately these lives and the works they produced reinforced Berg's own sense of place and belonging. Arnold Schoenberg, on the other hand, knew no home, was neither contained within space nor defined by place. His erratic moves, frequent travels, agitated summers and bewildering succession of apartments reinforced no pattern of belonging. They speak rather of a man who inhabited a sphere of ideas, of history and destiny; a man of ambition, of propulsive, protean energy, always in the process of transforming himself, always restless to conquer new terrain and move on. Berg's lifelong allegiance to Schoenberg was an exhilarating and terrifying orbit around a continually shifting axis. Schoenberg offered a traveller's compass to a man clinging to an anchor.

For all his loyalty to Schoenberg, Berg kept his distance. He resisted Schoenberg's urgings, both before and after the First World War, to join him in Berlin, and in later years he used evasion to avoid Schoenberg's repeated invitations that they vacation together. He may even have felt some relief when in 1933 Schoenberg left for America, a place where Berg knew he could not follow. Throughout his relationship with Schoenberg, Berg used his sedentary life, his family, his habits and environment as a bulwark behind which to construct his own very different identity and aesthetic persona, a persona forged from a synthesis of the dichotomous impulses of his native city, of sensual instinct with critical analysis, of timbral voluptuousness and emotive affect with painstaking design and structural intricacy.⁵²

Berg constructed the land of his dreams on the outskirts of his youth. The models he followed, the texts he chose and the themes he pursued derive from that agitated and contradictory pre-war world of first-district passions. These impulses were filtered through a life on the periphery, through a world of unhurried comfort where within the sanctuary of settled propriety Alban Berg could indulge the sweet decay of his character and create a body of works that spring from the lingering embrace of two worlds.