In Die Bilanz der Moderne (1904), the literary historian Samuel Lublinski described a paradox particular to modern novelists and poets: namely, that they renewed the Romantic concept of sexuality as “cosmic life” while at the same time emphasizing more fully and openly its “sensual-physiological reality.” Perhaps no other writer embodied this paradox more forcefully than Richard Dehmel (1863–1920), who, when a young Arnold Schoenberg discovered his work, had firmly positioned himself at the forefront of the literary Jahrhundertwende and whose lyric poetry proposed a provocative fusion of the sexual and the religious that triggered either fervent admiration or virulent criticism. In his early twenties when he attempted his first Dehmel settings, Schoenberg quickly joined the ranks of the contentious poet’s supporters. As Walter Frisch has sensitively shown, Dehmel’s verse exerted a decisive influence on Schoenberg’s technical development at the turn of the century, an influence traceable in no less than nine songs for piano and voice, a fragment for baritone and orchestra, and the sextet Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night), all of which were composed between 1897 and 1899. Schoenberg’s efforts to cultivate a language appropriate to Dehmel’s intense worldview, one in which sensory experience formed a bridge between chaos and violence on one side and exaltation and redemption on the other, resulted in an expanded tonal palette and a more integrated approach to motivic development. In particular, the amalgamation of Brahmsian techniques with Wagnerian chromaticism and sequential harmonic language that characterizes Schoenberg’s 1899 works constituted, Frisch argues, the composer’s direct response to Demhel’s

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audacious writing. The poem “Warnung” (“Warning”), Op. 3, No. 3, which Schoenberg drafted in 1899 and revised for publication in 1903, exemplifies the composer’s early forays into extended tonal territory and offers a particularly grim sample of Dehmel’s controversial style. The poem “Warnung” appeared in *Weib und Welt* (*Woman and World*), the 1896 collection that inspired most of Schoenberg’s Dehmel lieder. It expresses a recurrent theme in Dehmel’s oeuvre, that of man confronting his primal sexual drive, and more particularly, that of man “abandon[ing] himself to a sensual passion, and [being] thereby driven by the most painful emotional turmoil,” as Dehmel wrote when defending *Weib und Welt* in court against charges of blasphemy and immorality.

In “Warnung,” the speaker informs his beloved that he has killed his dog for the minor transgression of having growled at her—and threatens her with the same end should she be unfaithful. Whereas critics never fail to acknowledge the aggressive vein that runs through some of Dehmel’s writings, most studies of Schoenberg’s Dehmel-inspired compositions have focused on works that evince less perturbing aspects of the poet’s worldview, in particular *Verklärte Nacht*. Yet the role that this vein plays in his oeuvre, as well as its impact on Schoenberg’s language, bears closer scrutiny. This article probes those aspects of Dehmel’s poetics that engage...
with the predatory dimensions of sexuality and shows how Schoenberg’s Op 3, No. 3 progressively draws out and intensifies the sexual violence latent in the text of “Warnung.” In this song, pathologically aggressive poetry calls forth striking harmonic transgressions and reversals that override traditional syntactical considerations. In particular, Schoenberg develops a tonal syntax that exploits the inverted functional drive of plagal motions and combines it with taut motivic work based on tonally ambiguous collections. Together, these strategies lend musical substance to the unrelenting force of the speaker’s sexual instinct, to his vain attempts at keeping this instinct in check, and to his ultimate surrender to it.

Dehmel’s “Terrible Imperative”

I want it with all of a creator’s furor,  
What in us lusts and burns;  
I do not want to tame my ardor,  
Hot, hungry element.6

Man’s struggle for self-redemption constituted an important theme in Dehmel’s esthetic, as the title of his 1891 collection Erlösungen (Salvations or Redemptions) intimates. Redemption for Dehmel consisted of a mystical integration of the divine and the mundane, a quest for spiritual exaltation that took its source from the core of earthly experiences, a connection with the godly that could only be attained by grappling with all dimensions of one’s own humanity. “Whatever delights, terrifies, shocks man, [this is what] redeems him, since it expands him and fills him with life,” he wrote in Erlösungen.7 For Dehmel, such a quest necessarily involved


7 “Was man entzückt, ensetzt, empört, das erlöst ihn, weil’s ihn außer sich bringt, weil’s ihn mit Leben erfüllt.” Trans. in Otto Eduard Lessing, Masters in Modern
an unapologetic, and at the time shockingly outspoken, affirmation of sexuality as a transfigurative vehicle towards salvation. “In Eros,” suggested Emil Ludwig, an early critic of Dehmel’s work, “he resolved all discord. Love for him was no lyrical theme, no romantic adventure; it had become a sacred service, a rite of procreation and birth.”

Dehmel strove to tie instinctual impulse to spiritual experience, insisting that he “did not posit the internal world (in the sense of the universal soul [Allseele]) primarily in opposition to the corporeal external world, for it is only apparently that they are opposed…; in reality they form a single, indivisible world.” Thus convinced that the physical was integral to the mystical, Dehmel explored the sexual drive in a variety of poetic guises, and Schoenberg’s absorption with this poetry meant that he, too, created works that refract sexual drives in a wide spectrum of shades. Themes of sexual anticipation (“Aprilwind” and “Erwartung,” Op. 2, No. 1), coy seduction and pressing desire (“Nicht doch” and “Jesus bettelt,” Op. 2, No. 2), and rapturous union (“Im Reich der Liebe” and “Erhebung,” Op. 2, No. 3) run through his Dehmel songs. Schoenberg’s largest Dehmel work, his sextet Verklärte Nacht, engaged Dehmel’s esthetic at its most exalted: the work’s program describes the transfiguration of a nocturnal scene in which a man forgives his lover for carrying another man’s child and in so doing sanctifies their bond.

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9 “Ich stelle die Innenwelt (in der Bedeutung Allseele) gar nicht erst im Gegensatz zur körperlichen Außenwelt, denn sie sind gegensätzlich nur dem Anschein nach, für unser Verstand; in Wirklichkeit bilden sie die eine, unteilbare Welt.” Richard Dehmel to Harry Graf Kessler, August 1, 1899, Ausgewählte Briefe aus den Jahren 1883 bis 1902 (Berlin: Fischer, 1923), 333.

10 At some unknown date Schoenberg recopied by hand a number of Dehmel’s poems, which he may also have considered interesting candidates for songs. The one-page manuscript, held at the Arnold Schoenberg Institute (ASC T50.04), contains the poems “Bitte[]” “Liebe[]” and “Gieb mir” (from the 1893 collection Aber die Liebe; the exclamation marks were added by Schoenberg), as well as “Geheimnis,” “Klage,” and “Mannesbangen” (from Weib und Welt). None of these were set to music except the last.
But Dehmel also wrote several texts that probed darker, more violent manifestations of Eros, texts to which Schoenberg was equally drawn. “Mannesbangen” (“Men’s Fears”), which the composer set in 1899 but did not publish, offers one example. Here, hostile undertones simmer beneath a surface of fear-filled desire:

You must not think I am afraid of you. Only when you with your shy eyes desire happiness and with such quivering hands like daggers run through my hair, and my head lies upon your loins: then, you, sinful woman, I tremble before you—\(^{11}\)

It is perhaps poems of this kind that Rainer Maria Rilke had in mind when he wrote to Franz Xaver Kappus, the recipient of his famous *Letters to a Young Poet*:

[Dehmel's] poetic power is great and as strong as a primal instinct; it... explodes from him like a volcano... When, thundering through his being, it arrives at the sexual, it finds... a world that is not human enough, that is only male, is heat, thunder, and restlessness... Because he loves only as a male, and not as a human being, there is something narrow in his sexual feeling, something that seems wild, malicious... Dehmel's world... is so infinitely afraid.\(^{12}\)

“Warnung” expresses with even more vigor than “Mannesbangen” those traits that Rilke perceived as wild, malicious, and frightened. Like the poems “Verklärte Nacht” and “Mannesbangen,” “Warnung” appeared in *Weib und Welt*, a collection composed in the early days of Dehmel’s liaison with Ida Auerbach (who would become his second wife in 1899) which perhaps most powerfully conveys the paradoxical antithesis that governs Dehmel’s esthetic universe. In contrast to the quasi-sacred tone of “Verklärte Nacht” and its advocacy of sexual morals based on the love and free emotional commitment of both partners, “Warnung” expresses an irrepressible will to power and control. For Dehmel’s quest for

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redemption also involved embracing, or at the very least acknowledging, what he himself called the “animal-like” dimension of the sexual instinct: a force both so elemental and overwhelming that it prevailed over conventional notions of morality.\textsuperscript{13} In a letter to his first wife Paula Oppenheimer, in which he admitted to an affair, Dehmel wrote of the ravenous hunger that certain women aroused in him: “Like a predatory animal flaring its nostrils, something in me becomes feverish: here is nourishment for you, new blood.” He went on to describe the “terrible imperative” (furchtbares Müssen) that compelled one to pluck the fruit of “savage baseness” from the “tree of sin” (die Frucht der wilden Niedrigkeit). This imperative, he explained, awakens in men a primitive but essential consciousness: “And then they open their eyes, and they feel afresh that they are human, and, trembling, they recognize their naked resemblance to animals.”\textsuperscript{14} There is certainly something of the predatory animal inhabiting the speaker of “Warnung,” who scarcely represses a need to own and dominate his beloved. Denying this kind of similarity, in Dehmel’s view, meant repressing the instinctual understanding of the world that he believed was a sine qua non to self-salvation. Any sincere assertion of life instincts, therefore, partook in the intimate connection that he believed linked the “corporeal world” to the “universal soul.” It is this multifaceted exploration of the sexual instinct that connects poems......

\textsuperscript{13} After “Verklärte Nacht” appeared in Weib und Welt, Dehmel integrated it into his epic Zwei Menschen: Roman in Romanzen (Two People: A Novel in Ballads) of 1903, in which the two lovers’ spiritual quest takes a macabre turn. In order to break free of the social bonds that stand in the way of their union, Lukas (the Man) abandons his wife, who subsequently succumbs to grief, whereas Lea (the Woman) murders her blind child. Unsurprisingly, the way in which Dehmel attempts to fold these events into a greater trajectory of redemption has left some critics unconvinced (see, for example, Lessing, Masters in Modern German Literature, 74–77).

\textsuperscript{14} “Wie ein wilder Hunger überkommt es mich, wenn ein Mensch mir nahetritt, der Eignes in sich hat. Als ob ein Raubtier die Nüstern bläht, fängt dann etwas in mir an zu fiebern: da ist Nahrung für dich, neues Blut.” The context of the letter (Dehmel discusses his affair with a certain Käte) makes it clear that “ein Mensch” here means “a woman.” “Und dann tun sich ihre Augen auf, und sie fühlen wieder, dass sie Menschen sind, und sehen mit Beben ihre Tiersähnlichkeit und -nacktheit... ” Richard Dehmel to Paula Dehmel, July 25, 1891, in Ausgewählte Briefe, 47, 48.
so outwardly different as “Verklärte Nacht” and “Warnung”: they stand as opposite sides of a same esthetic coin.

**Applied Subdominants in “Warnung,” Op. 3, No. 3**

Schoenberg’s “Warnung,” a terse ABA’ form in B♭ minor for mezzo-soprano or baritone (Anton Moser premiered it in 1907 with Alexander Zemlinsky at the piano), is a brusque and foreboding statement. It responds to Dehmel’s “terrible imperative” and “savage baseness” with a tense, impassioned declamation, a motivically tight-knit piano part, and an idiosyncratic harmonic language that Edward T. Cone characterized as “superficially tonal.” “The song sounds tonal,” Cone explained, “but it is actually so only in an inverted sense. The chordal progressions that have traditionally taken on the burden of large-scale structure are now demoted to details of succession; the harmonic motion is assigned to progressions once typically subsidiary or even decorative.”

The song’s opening measures already reveal several such “superficially tonal” processes. I shall therefore examine these initial elements in some detail, before tracing how they develop into the slow escalation of tension that accounts for the song’s disturbing expressive power. The poem and its translation appear below:

**Warnung**

Mein Hund, du, hat dich bloß bekürt
und ich hab ihn vergiftet;
und ich hasse jeden Menschen,
der Zwietracht stifft.

Zwei blutrote Nelken
schick’ ich dir, mein Blut du,
an der einen eine Knospe;
den dreien sei gut, du,
bis ich komme.

**Warning**

My dog, you, merely snarled at you,
And I have poisoned him;
And I hate everyone
Who sows discord.

I send you, my blood you,
Two blood-red carnations,
On one of which is a bud;
Be good to the three, you,
Until I come.

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Ich komme heute Nacht noch; sei allein, sei allein, du!
Gestern, als ich ankam, starrest du mit jemand ins Abendrot hinein—Du: denk an meinen Hund!

I’m still coming tonight; be alone, be alone, you!
Yesterday when I arrived, you were staring with someone deep into the dusk—you: Remember my dog!

The song’s opening section is shown in Example 1. Schoenberg immediately captures the faintly disquieting atmosphere conveyed by the first verse, “My dog, you, merely snarled at you,” with hushed dynamics, stunted rhythms in the left hand of the piano, and a hazy tonal environment. The key words here are “Mein Hund, du,” a greeting that initially conceals the beloved’s identity (“du”) behind the dog’s: only with the remainder of the verse does it become apparent that “du” is the addressee and distinct from “my dog.” The music further conspires at folding the two characters into one. “Mein Hund, du” is set to G♭–F–C, in pitch-class terms the collection (016), the so-called “Viennese trichord” which would become a staple sonority of the atonal music of the Second Viennese School. This collection will be labeled motive a. Already its appearance in the voice echoes a briefer statement in the piano (E♭–A–B♭ in m. 1, first beat); as we will see, the subset <G♭–F> that sets the words “mein Hund” also returns at key moments throughout the song. The association of the dog and the beloved with a single, obsessively recurring pitch-class set is indicative of the speaker’s state of mind. At first glance, the action of the poem’s opening strophe could be construed as one of protective affection: the speaker tries to shield his beloved from a snarling dog. But as the song accumulates injunctive “du”s, often in purposefully clumsy grammatical positions—“Mein Hund, du,” “Mein Blut, du,” “Sei gut, du,” “Sei allein, du” and the final, inauspicious “Du: denk an meinen Hund”—it becomes apparent that he fanatically desires to control, not protect.

From the outset, Schoenberg’s highly chromatic language is instrumental in establishing the unsettling emotional temperature of the song. Despite the presence of a five-flat key signature, B♭

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16 Translation slightly modified from Frisch, Early Works of Schoenberg, 88.
Example 1. “Warnung,” mm. 1–10

minor does not forcefully emerge as the home key. Indeed, the sequential nature of the opening two measures, which feature four chords in root position progressing by descending fourths, from E♭ through B♭, F, and C, does much to veil any sense of centricity. Faint clues nevertheless hint at B♭ as the song’s tonic, namely an ornamental raised-leading tone (the incomplete neighbour A♭ in
the opening sonority), a B♯ chord that coincides with the first poetic line ending (on “beknurrt,” m. 2), and more obliquely, an applied dominant of V (the C chord in m. 2). Above this cryptic progression, the melodic lines, too, defeat our normative expectations for an unambiguously tonic-prolongational opening. Example 2 shows how the upper voice of the piano’s right hand forms a 4-3-2 melodic descent (or E♭–D♭–C, mm. 1–2), whereas the vocal part traces a 6-5-4 span (or G♭–F–E♭>, mm. 1–3). Like motive a, these descents (motives b and c respectively) will figure prominently—and at pitch—in the remainder of the song.

Example 2. Melodic Descents in mm. 1–3

Both Cone and H. H. Stuckenschmidt single out the initial “pile of falling fourths” of mm. 1–2 as the song’s harmonic hallmark; these and later descending fourths are precisely what Cone has in mind when he speaks of “progressions once typically subsidiary” taking control of the harmonic motion and establishing B♭ minor in an “inverted” manner. In a purely descriptive

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17 The C chord on the last beat of m. 2 at first seems to imply a dominant function in F minor instead, but that fleeting moment of functional clarity fails to materialize as a genuine tonal area. Note that the applied dominant’s third is missing, but that it will sound in the corresponding measure in section A’.

nomencalature (see Example 1 above), mm. 1–2 read as “iv – i – v – V/v.” The analysis just given, however, obscures the recurrent plagalisms of mm. 1 and 2, that is, the successive plagal motions to B♭ and C, two chords whose special role in the replicative chain of fourths are underscored with an accent and a hairpin respectively. As a means of highlighting these plagalisms, we might borrow some of Schoenberg’s own analytical techniques. In his *Structural Functions of Harmony*, the composer analyzes altered sonorities as diatonic scale steps that feature chromatic substitutions in one or more voices. He explains that “crossed Roman numerals, VⅣ, V, Ⅳ, Ⅳ, Ⅳ, etc., indicate that the chords are altered through the use of substitute tones,” and he illustrates this concept with abundant musical examples. The composer later adds that “from the standpoint of structural functions only the root of the progression is decisive.” According to this scale-degree oriented outlook, mm. 1–2 in “Warnung” read as “iv – i – iv/Ⅳ – Ⅳ.” Though Schoenberg’s nomenclature has not entered mainstream analytical discourse, and, in the case of “Warnung,” perhaps claims a stronger sense of tonal orientation that the densely chromatic harmony actually projects, it nevertheless reveals a key aspect of the song’s compositional logic. Indeed, Schoenberg’s notation nicely captures the plagal trajectory of ascending scale-steps that, as we will see, turns out to underlie the remainder of the A section as well as the lied’s gripping conclusion.

After the opening plagal gestures to i and Ⅳ, the song immediately proceeds to the altered mediant. As Example 1 shows, when mm. 1–2 repeat at mm. 3–4, the C chord of m. 2 is replaced by a D♭7 chord. D♭7 functions locally as an applied dominant to the

20 Ibid., 46.
21 One issue with this notation is its vagueness, as several types of chords may be subsumed under a single crossed roman numeral. For example, Schoenberg lists twelve substitute chords for the supertonic, which include an applied dominant of V, half-diminished and fully diminished seventh chords, a French-sixth sonority, and the Neapolitan chord. See *Structural Functions of Harmony*, 35 (ex. 50); and Norton Dudeque, *Music Theory and Analysis in the Writings of Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951)* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 74–79.
subsequent vi chord, but also acts as an altered $\text{III}_7$ in Schoenberg’s notation. The next scale degree that this rising progression leads us to expect, the subdominant, materializes not only as a chord but also as a tonal region; at m. 7, the song modulates to $E\flat$ minor, the subdominant of the home key. The progression leading to this modulation consists of vagrant whole-tone sonorities deployed above a bass-line built on an expanded motive $c$ ($G\flat–F–F\flat–E\flat$, mm. 5–6).\textsuperscript{22} The last chord in this progression, a whole-tone sonority on $E\flat$, functions locally as the applied dominant of the following $A\flat$ chord; but just as importantly, it also serves as the altered subdominant of $B\flat$ minor ($\text{IV}_7$). As such, it caps an ascent through “i $\rightarrow$ $H$ $\rightarrow$ $\text{III}_7$ $\rightarrow$ $\text{IV}_7$” that spans mm. 1–6. The subdominant then blossoms into a tonal area in its own right, one that twice recalls the opening plagal progressions “iv $\rightarrow$ i $\rightarrow$ iv/ii $\rightarrow$ ii” (mm. 7–10).

As a whole, the processes at work in Section A resonate with Dehmel’s ambivalence towards the “terrible imperative” that he believed lay in every man, and which he regarded as frightening and repulsive on the one hand, but irresistibly attractive on the other. The inverted functional drive of the plagal gestures in Section A—as Cone implies, the syntactically backward progression of a circle of fourths, the retrograde of a cycle of fifths—thus projects the speaker’s striving to bridle his jealousy. At the same time, the stepwise rise from tonic to subdominant, together with the rise in register and augmentation of rhythmic activity over mm. 1–10, underscores the compulsive allure that this “terrible imperative” holds for him. Throughout, the halting, off-beat interjections in the left hand of the piano compound the sense of the protagonist’s agitation and suggest his inability to master his primal impulses.

The song’s middle section at first offers a welcome respite from this nervous energy. A mellow passage in the warm key of the submediant $G\flat$ major (shown in Example 3a) ushers in a much more relaxed tempo, while a flowing vocal part, which Stuckenschmidt has compared to Tristan und Isolde, and broad, legato piano lines replace the stifled gestures of section A.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} See Frisch, Early Works of Schoenberg, 91 on the extensive revisions that mm. 5–6 underwent.

\textsuperscript{23} Stuckenschmidt, Arnold Schoenberg, 39.
Lyrical in tone and text, this passage cleverly reconfigures the initial iv–I plagal gesture and motives \( a \) through \( c \) so as to accompany the speaker's gift of carnations. At m. 14, motive \( c \) appears in the bass, now tonally adjusted to G\( \sharp \) major and with a 6-5-4 chromatically dilated into a 6-6-5-4; interestingly, this line can also be understood as the initial motive \( b \) sounding at pitch. This motivic bass now supports a modified version of a subdominant prolongation. Were the last bass eighth-note in m. 14 a C\( \flat \) instead of a C, the whole measure would express a vi\( ^7 \)–IV progression; IV would then proceed by a plagal motion to I in m. 15. As it is, vi\( ^7 \) slides to a diminished-seventh chord, which acts as a common-tone link to the subsequent tonic. As a result, that tonic is not approached by a descending perfect fourth, but rather by the tritone C–G\( \flat \) of motive \( a \) (D\( \flat \)–C–G\( \flat \)) in the bass.

The opening measure of Section B may also be understood as an enlargement of the song's very first beat. While the subdominant forms the structural harmony of m. 1, beat 1, the ornamental \( \Lambda \) in this measure also generates an incomplete, second-inversion diminished-seventh chord with the pitches E\( \flat \) and G\( \flat \) (C is missing; see Example 3b). Fleeting as this diminished coloration may be, the composite opening sonority (iv ~ vii\( ^6 \)) is nonetheless rich in harmonic potential. Not only does Schoenberg use the diminished chord to create a hint of directed motion to B\( \flat \) within the iv–I pair of chords, he also revisits both aspects of this
sonority, which I will call the “alpha chord” (“α”), throughout Section B. This happens for the first time in m. 14, where Schoenberg places the two components of the alpha chord, the E♭-minor and the A⁷ chords, at the beginning and end points of the modified plagal approach to G♯.

Example 3b. “Warnung,” m. 1, “alpha chord”

These motivic and harmonic reworkings of mm. 1 and 2 profoundly alter their original expressive effect. Now, the quasi-plagalism of mm. 14–15 supports a 3-2-1 descent in the local key of G♯ that, in contrast to mm. 1–2, clearly projects a local tonic. The passage also conveys a strongly directional harmonic progression that is oriented towards the song’s first unequivocal dominant in m. 16, a progression in which the alpha chord’s vii⁴ serves as a complete, enharmonically respelled vii⁷/V in m. 15. Finally, the easeful atmosphere of mm. 14–16 contrasts with the lied’s pervasive harmonic restlessness and emphasizes the only words in the poem, namely the gift of flowers, that do not implicitly convey a threat.

This reprieve, however, is short-lived. In mm. 17–18, the piano again sounds the “carnation” music of mm. 14–15 at the singer’s mention of a budding flower, but from mm. 20–25 the speaker adopts a more aggressive tone and issues a direct admonition: “sei gut, du, bis ich komme” (“be good, you, until I come”). Accordingly, Schoenberg ratchets up the harmonic tension with
even tighter motivic work. As Example 3c shows, mm. 20–21 superimpose motives a and b, the latter adjusted to its G♭ major environment through the addition of a C♭. Schoenberg also reintroduces the alpha sonority’s two components, the characteristic pair of E♭ minor and A♭7 chords.

Example 3c. “Warnung,” mm. 17–23
Even though an applied dominant of vi (of E♭) sounds at m. 19, the subsequent motive in m. 20 is not harmonized with an E♭ chord, but rather with A⁰⁷; one constituent of the lied’s initial sonority thus substitutes for the other. An E♭ chord finally materializes at m. 22, where it launches a reappearance of the song’s menacing opening materials in the piano’s right hand.

When the “carnation” music appears a third and final time at mm. 26–27 (Example 3d), it offers only illusory respite and cannot long ward off the song’s degeneration into further violence.

Example 3d. “Warnung,” mm. 26–30

In a grisly reminder of the dog’s demise, appoggiaturas in the piano’s right hand at mm. 28–29 retake the G♭–F semitone that had set the words “Mein Hund” at the beginning of the song. This semitone now underscores the warning “sei allein” (“be alone”) over what is probably the strongest dominant function of the song. Significantly, Schoenberg thwarts any sense of resolution: instead, the music ascends through a chain of thirds (m. 30) and the motivic semitone expands into a full (016) motive in mm. 29–30 as the
speaker raises his voice, both registral and dynamically, to insist:
“be alone, you!” “Or else” is clearly implied.

In sum, the song’s central section retreats from the extended
tonal processes of section A in favor of less dissonant harmonies
and phrases oriented towards the dominant. But if the speaker
feigns intimacy by clothing motives \(a\), \(b\), and \(c\) and the alpha chord
in a harmonically mellifluous guise with the “carnation” music, the
subterfuge is quickly disclosed when dissonant recalls of the song’s
opening measures repeatedly intrude. Harmonic explicitness and
tonal stability thus prove fragile and deceptive in this song, a fitting
illustration of the protagonist’s thin veneer of self-control. By
surrounding Section B with two intensely chromatic and sequential
strophes—\(A’\) is about to introduce the highest degree of harmonic
restlessness yet—Schoenberg reverses the traditional narrative arc
(stability to tension to renewed stability) common to so many
ternary designs, thereby denying traditional harmonic syntax the
capacity to resolve the protagonist’s psychological conflict.

The song’s final section, shown in Example 4, reveals the
speaker’s jealousy in its full pathological depth. When, in m. 35, he
recalls finding his beloved with another man at sunset, the music
erupts in a cycle of fourths that threatens to spin out of control. In
a striking harmonic and motivic summary, Schoenberg reprises
the song’s opening plagalisms, now as the model for a relentless
sequential pattern in which each supertonic determines the
transposition level (or the new tonic) for the next iteration of that
pattern. As Example 4 shows, mm. 35–36 sound the initial plagal
progression “\(iv – i – iv/\text{II} – \text{II}\)” in the tonic B\(\flat\) minor (cf. mm. 1–2).
This progression is then sequentially repeated in C minor, itself
the altered supertonic of B\(\flat\) (see the boxed \(\#\) at m. 37). From there,
the sequence proceeds to D minor with the progression “\(iv – i^6 –
iv/\text{ii} – \text{ii}^6\)” (mm. 39–40)—D minor being, of course, the main key’s
raised mediant.

These compulsively ascending chord roots not only resonate
suggestively with the growing violence of the protagonist’s speech;
they also offer structural parallels with the rising scale steps of the
song’s opening section. Example 5 elucidates the relationships
between sections A (top half) and \(A’\) (lower half) by showing how
Schoenberg intensifies the harmonic ascent of \(A\) in the sequential
Example 4. "Warnung," A' Section

Example 4. "Warnung," A' Section
plagalisms of A'. Compare mm. 1–4 (leftmost column) with the model/sequence of mm. 35–40 below: here, the recursive plagalisms of section A' form a chromatic enlargement of the harmonic ascent of the song's opening. That is to say, the tonic, supertonic, and mediant sonorities of mm. 1–4 (boldfaced in the table; the subdominant has yet to appear) all function as “tokens” that receive their own discrete set of plagal motions in mm. 35–40. The rigorous cyclical organization of mm. 35–40, which strongly prefigures Berg's trademark cyclical gestures, accounts for the appearance at m. 39 of the raised mediant D minor in place of the diatonic third scale-step D♭. Sounding D minor in place of D♭ at this juncture projects a sense of transgression, as though the speaker's possessiveness were bursting its bounds at the sight of his beloved with another. The music gets back on track, so to speak, in mm. 41–46 through a chromatic expansion of the corresponding passage in section A, as the middle column of Example 5 shows. As the speaker utters his last, most threatening "du" (mm. 41–42), a half-diminished seventh chord built above C♯ enharmonically substitutes for the diatonic mediant D♭. This chord connects with the altered E♭ chord of m. 45 by way of vagrant whole-tone sonorities, very much as in the corresponding passage in mm. 5–6.

24 The term “token” is borrowed from Brian Alegant and Don McLean's article “On the Nature of Enlargement,” Journal of Music Theory 45, no. 1 (2001): 31–71. They call “tokens” the individual elements of an ordered string of pitch-classes that successively serve as the initial pitch classes for subsequent strings.

25 A half-diminished sonority on IV appears in ex. 55b in Structural Functions of Harmony, 38.
Example 5. Enlargement of the opening "I – \( \text{IV} \) – \( \text{III} \) – \( \text{IV} \) – \( \text{II} \) – \( \text{I} \)" string in the A1 section

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The identical vocal lines in these two passages, moreover (cf. mm. 5–6 and 43–45 in exx. 1 and 4), lend chilling eloquence to the speaker’s final warning. Indeed, the vocal contour at the words “Denk an meinen Hund” in mm. 43–45 (G♭–G♮–A♭–G♮) is identical to that at mm. 5–6, where we first learned of the dog’s sad fate. The warning remains audible as the A♭–G semitone on “Hund,” itself a replica of the song’s pervasive “Mein Hund” G♭–F semitone, ripples through the following measures.

As it did previously in m. 6, the E♭ chord of mm. 45–46 functions as the last element in a string of ascending scale steps from B♭ to E♭. In both contexts (shown in the last column of Example 5), E♭ forms V in B♭ minor and proceeds locally to an A♭ sonority (m. 7, beat 1 and m. 47 respectively), which itself introduces a more structural, unaltered subdominant E♭ (m. 7, beat 2 and m. 48). In section A′, this formal juncture is a dramatic moment. On the downbeat of m. 47 (see Example 4), A♭ sounds not as a triad but as the launching point for a chain of tightly interlocking (016) trichords. These overlapping instances of motive a can be partitioned in two significant ways, either as ascending fourths, which the pattern of accentuation makes aurally prominent, or in successive semitones, the interval directly associated with the dog throughout the song.26 The last of these (016) trichords ushers in the return of the lied’s opening materials, while the bass A♭ of m. 47 plagally approaches E♭ in m. 48. Thus we return to where we began: the subdominant E♭ reinstates, in condensed form and by way of conclusion, an echo of the plagalisms that underpinned so much of the song. The double plagal motion to i and II that opened “Warnung” returns twice as a concluding frame in mm. 48–49 and 50–51, before progressing onwards to III♭ and iv. The lied ends with a final iv–i progression (mm. 53–54), which activates for the last time the G♭–F semitone associated with “Mein Hund.” This unspoken warning reverberates three times, a Parthian shot that mutely reminds the beloved of the sinister fate that awaits the protagonist’s foes.

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26 Friedheim notes that with the m. 47 unisono passage, Schoenberg presents eleven of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale. Philip Alan Friedheim, “Tonality and Structure in the Early Works of Schoenberg” (PhD diss., New York University, 1963), 94.
“Warnung” and Beyond

When Schoenberg turned to Dehmel’s poetry in 1897 and 1899, he discovered an oeuvre that depicted sexual instincts with unprecedented forthrightness—many said coarseness—as a vital force that could both redeem and debase, and which one could not escape, since it resided at the very core of human nature. For two intense years of composition, Schoenberg found the poet’s blunt lyric verse irresistibly compelling and drew from it the inspiration for an increasingly advanced, and often strikingly idiosyncratic, harmonic language—the shock value of which is compounded in Op. 3, No. 3 by the conjunction with the text. I would like to conclude by offering some thoughts on how we may situate the song’s disturbing subject matter within Schoenberg’s musical output in the years when his style shifted into highly extended tonality and, eventually, atonality. Though (so far as I know) the composer never commented directly on “Warnung,” he nevertheless offered insights into the creative process of his formative years when he wrote in his 1911 Theory of Harmony that technical innovations in musical language, in particular “that which is new and unusual about harmony,” result from the necessity for “the true composer” to find an expressive outlet for “something that moves him, something new, something previously unheard-of.”

Dehmel’s volatile blend of traditional lyric forms and provocative themes, his refusal to admit a chasm between the human and the godly, his embrace of the sincere self at all costs, and his faith in the redemptive power of sexuality clearly provided Schoenberg with such a stimulus. A composer finely attuned to the innovative literary and poetic currents of his time, as his later engagement with the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and Stefan George also attests, he heard in the works of the “fervent child of his age” (as a contemporary fellow poet put it) a modernist voice inciting—even compelling—the development of equally modernist musical means.

For Frisch, the result was an unprecedented level

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28 “…der so ganz inbrünstiges Kind seiner Zeit ist.” Joseph Winckler also described Dehmel’s poetry as “the consciousness of the age” (“das Gewissen der
of thematic integration and harmonic advances that place “Warnung” in the orbit of the First String Quartet, Op. 7; for Cone, Op. 3, No. 3 can literally be heard as a prophetic warning that the song’s daring harmonic syntax would inevitably lead to the development of new, more radical means of expression in subsequent years. Interestingly, by Schoenberg’s own standards, the accumulation of plagalisms discussed in this article also constituted a form of harmonic transgression, at least according to the precepts laid down in the Theory of Harmony. There Schoenberg classifies chord progressions into three categories according to root motion, namely “strong” or “ascending” (roots ascending by fourths and descending by thirds), “weak” or “descending” (descending by fourths and ascending by thirds), and “superstrong” or “overskipping” (ascending or descending in seconds). He then emphasizes that “in planning our root progressions we shall give absolute preference to the ascending progressions [Schoenberg’s italics].” The song’s signature plagal conceit thus effects a hierarchical reversal in relying precisely on the “descending/weak” model, the use of which Schoenberg goes on to restrict. Although Schoenberg would abandon entirely the appellation “weak” in favor of “descending” in Structural Functions of Harmony, it seems somehow fitting that “Warnung” conspicuously employs what the composer considered to be subordinate progressions as the expressive vehicle for a masculine sexuality that, despite its tempestuous attempts at domination, ultimately appears to be, as Rilke put it, “so infinitely afraid.”

Schoenberg’s interest in texts such as “Warnung” does not imply, of course, that his musical language of circa 1900 can or should be read along the same hermeneutic lines that this article has advanced. Nor do I wish to propose that the composer personally endorsed the violent portrayal of masculinity of

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29 Frisch, Early Works of Schoenberg, 91; Cone, “Sound and Syntax,” 28.

30 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 115–23, quote on p. 120; he revisits this threefold categorization in Structural Functions of Harmony, 6–9.
“Warnung” as some kind of ethical credo—nothing in Schoenberg's biography or writings remotely suggests so. Rather, Schoenberg is far more likely to have agreed with Dehmel that it was the artist's task to “help the human soul open its eyes to its bestial urges,” as the poet wrote in an attempt to justify his verse against censorship. And as Joseph Auner has sensitively emphasized, Schoenberg's whole output was distinguished by a dogged—no pun intended—determination to leave no stone in the realm of human emotional and intellectual experience unturned.

Nevertheless, it seems significant that practically all the texts that Schoenberg borrowed from Dehmel deal explicitly with aspects of sexuality—in contrast, for example, to Webern's Dehmel songs, in which lovers' feelings are more indirectly expressed through, or even subordinated to, delicate natural and spiritual metaphors. And if these and other Schoenbergian portrayals of sexual themes cannot be reduced to the aggressive ethos of “Warnung,” that song may nevertheless be seen as the first of a series of published works in which dismal, unforgiving depictions of sexuality act as catalysts for technical innovation. For when Schoenberg eventually emerged from his Dehmel absorption and turned to other literary sources, a number of sexually charged poems continued to mark watersheds in the development of his progressive techniques prior to World War I. Kurt Aram's “Lockung” (“Temptation”), for example, reads like a darker version of the seduction narrative of Dehmel's “Nicht doch” (“Come now” or “Enough”), a poem that the composer had set in 1897. The concluding sections of both texts suggests that the narrator has convinced a reluctant beloved to yield to his advances,

31 Dehmel, open letter to the imperial district court, June 23, 1897, trans. in Frisch, Early Works of Schoenberg, 81.


but the images of terror and screaming at the end of “Lockung” appear far more coercive than beguiling.

Dehmel, “Nicht doch” (last strophe)

Siehst du, Mädel, war’s nicht nett
so an meiner Seite heute?
Das ist was für junge Leute,
alte gehn allein zu Bett—
Was denn, Kind?
weinen, Schätzchen?
Nicht doch—isch, der Abendwind
schäkert mit den Weidenkätzchen…

Do you see, maiden, wasn’t it nice
to be by my side today?
That kind of thing is for young people;
Old folks go to bed alone!—
Well now, child?
Are you crying, treasure?
Come now—look, the evening breeze
is flirting with the willow catkin…

Aram, “Lockung” (second half)

Komm, mein Mäuschen,
Niemand da, da sind wir ja
Hier in dem Eckchen,
pst! hast du keine Scharren,
wie glüh’n deine Bäckchen,
jetzt hilft kein Schrein,
mein bist du, mein!

Come, my little darling,
Oh, just look, we’re there!
Here in the little corner,
pst! don’t be afraid,
How your little cheeks are burning,
Now no screaming will help,
You are mine, mine!

Aram’s poem would elicit one of Schoenberg’s most dissonant and tonally advanced songs, his Op. 6, No. 7 of 1905, which he famously cited as an instance of “fluctuating” or “suspended tonality.” And about a decade after Schoenberg’s breakthrough encounter with Weib und Welt, the poetry of emasculation in Stefan George’s Das Buch der hängenden Gärten, in which sexuality becomes a destructive and paralyzing force, famously marked the composer’s first vocal foray into atonality. One might be hard pressed to find two poets more dissimilar than Dehmel and George: where the former employed direct and vigorous brush strokes, the latter chiseled cryptic symbols and mesmerizing allusions—perhaps unsurprisingly, the two came to detest each

34 Trans. from Frisch, Early Works of Schoenberg, 73.
other. Despite the obvious stylistic differences between *Weib und Welt* and *Das Buch*, their common images of anxiety-ridden sexuality offered analogous spurs to Schoenberg’s creative imagination. Lawrence Kramer has observed that the composer’s “harsh reading of George’s texts” prefigures “the relentlessly tragic view of sexuality that shapes his other expressionist vocal works, *Erwartung*, *Die glückliche Hand*, and *Pierrot lunaire*.”37 This harsh reading, one could argue, may well have begun some ten years earlier, for with “Warnung” the composer had begun exploring in earnest notions of musical syntax and expressions of sexuality from a premise of tension rather than of resolution. As we have seen, in this song Schoenberg confers architectonic status upon the atonal collection (016), the harmonically ambiguous alpha sonority, and most of all the opening series of plagal progressions, thereby undermining the conventional workings of tonal hierarchy and harmonic progression. Each of these elements is, in some way, dual in nature: the motivic (016) signifies both the dog and the beloved, the composite alpha sonority may express either a stable triad or a dissonant diminished seventh, and the reverse directionality of the plagal motions is countered by the ascending path they follow. These dualities work together to convey the conflict between the speaker’s primal sexual drive and his attempts to master it, and the outburst of violence that this conflict engenders. In particular, the recurrent plagalisms of Section A form an ominous precursor to the enlarged structure of Section A’, which itself gives vivid musical voice to the jealous lover’s tortured state by discharging all of his pent-up violent impulses into inexorable sequences. The mastery with which these processes pace the song’s emotional curve magnifies the disturbing impact of the final ultimatum: “Remember my dog.”


