This book examines the relationship of three very different men who are usually seen as the most important composers of the so-called Second Viennese School – Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern – in the years 1906 to 1921 through a close reading of their correspondence with each other. To date only one of these correspondences, that of Schönberg and Berg, has been published, so the other two sets of letters are not yet widely known. The largely differing personalities of these three men come out clearly in their letters to each other: Schönberg, the master who demands a great many things from his two pupils (long after they have ceased to be that); Berg, from whom he demands the most; and Webern, his most pious devotee. The book covers the period linking the first correspondence between master and pupils in 1906 and the dissolution of the Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen in 1921, the period when these men were most closely bound together.

Kathryn Bailey Puffett has published articles on the music of Bach, Stravinsky, Bartók and Nono, as well as articles on the music of the three composers of the Second Viennese School; she also published two books on Webern and his music (The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern, Old Forms in a New Language and The Life of Webern) and edited a third, Webern Studies. She was a founding member of the Anton Webern Gesamtausgabe at Universität Basel.

Barbara Schingnitz read musicology, literature and media studies at Universität Basel, graduating in 2008, and also trained as a classical singer at the Basel Musikhochschule, where she graduated with a Master’s degree in 2010. She has been an associate of the Anton Webern Gesamtausgabe since 2006.
THREE MEN OF LETTERS
ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG, ALBAN BERG AND ANTON WEBERN, 1906–1921
To Derrick’s memory, he who taught me so much about music, and about life.
— Kathryn Puffett

To my mother and father, and – of course – to Pip!
— Barbara Schingnitz
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Three Men of Letters

reader’s report from Julie Brown. And I want especially to thank all my friends in Cambridge and Basel, who have borne with amazing patience and good will my talking about this book and almost nothing else for many years.

I transcribed and translated Webern’s letters to Schönberg and all the letters in the Webern–Berg correspondence very early on, before these had been prepared for publication in Berlin and Vienna, and I was helped with the tricky bits by many people — Elisabeth Fleming, Elisabeth Giselbrecht, Kimberly Rebernig, Ingrid Metzger, Erika Drucker and especially Margaret Hiley Kroeger — though in the end all the translations in the book are the result of the careful and painstaking scrutiny of Barbara Schingnitz, who came onto the scene in 2014 and who has contributed hugely, both technically and intellectually, and made this book what it is today. Working with her has been an absolute delight, for which I am ever grateful to her. It has been an amazing and most happy partnership, without which this book would have been a great deal poorer. It is so that I can express my thanks to her that I have decided that we should each write our own acknowledgements.

And, finally, I wish to thank Felix Meyer and Simon Obert for their continued help and encouragement, and Michael Hüttler and Sigrun Müller at Hollitzer Verlag for their endless patience and good humour in seeing this book emerge.

— Kathryn Puffett

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— Barbara Schingnitz
CONVENTIONS

In a discussion of these three very different men as seen in their correspondence with each other we have felt it important to maintain as much as possible in our translations their quite distinctive styles of letter-writing. Thus we have tried to present each letter in a style as close to the original as possible, maintaining awkwardnesses, misspellings and incorrect grammar where these occur in the originals and not ‘glossing over’, correcting grammatical mistakes, or adjusting order so as to make sentences more graceful. This is difficult, of course, as the correct order of things is very different in English than it is in German, but we have made every effort to reflect faithfully whether the words used and the order in which they are used are elegant, awkward, correct, incorrect, proper, colloquial or occasionally even profane. We have attempted to translate the same word in the same way whenever it occurs in the writing of each of the three men. We have retained several letters in their entirety for the purpose of illustrating these three men’s very different styles of letter writing.

Webern sometimes moves from Sütterlin to Roman script, usually for names, but occasionally as a way of emphasising a word, or even only part of a word. We have not indicated these changes because we feel that the resulting text would look too cluttered, and this was something that was done anyway in most cases only when writing names. In the letters of all three men things are often underlined, once, twice or even three times. We have not followed the practice used in the Briefwechsel der Wiener Schule series of changing underlinings to italics, since italic font is not something that occurs in handwriting. Instead, we have retained the original single, double and triple underlinings, as these were surely meant to show degrees of importance, and we make the distinction between several words being underlined individually or altogether with a single line. We are aware, however, that this is not completely reliable. In a letter to Berg of 28 November 1913 Schönberg instructed Berg that he should ‘always underline the main points, particularly those I am to answer. It’s hard for me to write to you, since to do so I’d have to read your letter 3–4 times and your handwriting is too illegible for that.’ From this one can assume that Schönberg himself probably underlined things he thought important as he read the letters the first time. (In view of this instruction to Berg and the fact that has been remarked on several times that Schönberg was not a reader and seldom read anything all the way through, one wonders whether he ever did in fact read Berg’s letters completely.) So without seeing the original letters (and possibly not even then) there is no sure way, in letters to Schönberg, of distinguishing Berg’s underlinings from those of Schönberg.

1 Briefwechsel, p. 457; Correspondence, p. 196. (These short forms are explained below.)
Work titles are left as found in the letters, where in some cases they are enclosed in quotation marks but most often are not differentiated in any way from the surrounding text. German words and phrases are frequently quoted in the text but are not italicised.

Line breaks are indicated with forward strokes (/), omitted text with [...]. The indication / [...] / means that one or often several complete paragraphs have been omitted. Spaced dots without square brackets indicate elisions in the original letters. Following usual practice, anything in square brackets is an editorial insertion unless otherwise indicated. Both Berg and Webern make quite frequent use of dashes of varying lengths; in most cases these have been retained. We have also kept Berg’s and Schönberg’s frequent (but not consistent) use of roman numerals (and occasionally arabic numbers) with full stops to indicate ordinal numbers, ‘I.’ meaning first, ‘II.’ second and so on.

Both Berg and Schönberg indulge in wordplay on occasion, and we have tried to find English words that replicate this. In cases where this is impossible we have explained the double meanings in footnotes.

* * * * *

In view of the length of the book, we have decided to use abbreviations for the books of correspondence between Berg and Schönberg, which are cited repeatedly. We use Correspondence to refer to The Berg–Schönberg Correspondence, edited and translated by Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey and Donald Harris, published by Macmillan in Basingstoke in 1987, which is a selection of letters in English. For the German edition of all the letters, which is in two volumes, edited by Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey and Andreas Meyer and published in 2007 by Schott in Mainz as No. 3 of the series Briefwechsel der Wiener Schule, we use the abbreviations Briefwechsel I and Briefwechsel II.

In the footnotes we give both sources for those letters from the Berg–Schönberg correspondence that have been translated in Correspondence. In general we have followed the translations in Correspondence, but we have often altered these—sometimes only very slightly, to make them consistent with current UK style or to correct what was obviously a typo, but at other times more extensively, in keeping with our intention to maintain literal translations and to retain awkwardnesses when they occur. We always cite Briefwechsel first, followed by Correspondence, even in those few cases where we quote Correspondence exactly.

One of our sources is the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, which we have indicated only as ÖNB.

We have retained the original German forms of address, greeting and closing in all cases because close translations of these into English (‘my dear’ etc.) would
give them a flavour quite unlike what would be done in similar situations in English today. We have also left the German ‘hoffentlich’ untranslated, since it is grammatically correct in the letters, whereas to translate it as ‘hopefully’ would not only change the meaning slightly, but be grammatically incorrect in English.

We use the spelling Schönberg because this is the way the man spelled his name in the years with which this book is concerned, 1906–21. He changed the spelling to Schoenberg only when he moved to the United States in 1933.
Originally this book was to be an examination of the unlikely but obviously close friendship of two very different young men through their letters to each other, in an attempt to explain how such an affinity could have come about. But it soon became evident that this could not be done without including also the letters to and from their teacher, because Berg and Webern would almost certainly never have become friends if it hadn’t been for Schönberg, and their correspondence with each other is mostly about him. The frequency of his name is staggering: in the 320 or so letters of Berg and Webern to each other between 1910 and 1921 that survive, Schönberg’s name is mentioned more than 940 times, and he or one of his projects is the major subject of most of the letters. The two former pupils coddle him as one might a favourite child, censoring which of the reviews of his music are to be shown to him, searching for ways of supporting him financially and furthering his cause, trying to think of how to persuade someone to grant him a (sufficiently exalted) position in an institution in Vienna, worrying about and trying to prevent his being called up for service in the First World War and then, when he was called up in spite of their efforts, trying to think of someone who could succeed in getting him released. They are for ever anxious about his whereabouts, as he travels around a lot and writes only infrequently, and nearly all their thoughts and hopes and energies are centred on or related to him. Tragically, in Berg’s case this kept his own composition to a minimum during what should have been for him a fruitful decade. So it is that the friendship of the two pupils cannot be considered apart from their relationship with their teacher. A look through their correspondence seems the most appropriate way of observing this at first hand.

All three of the men concerned were intrigued to varying degrees – in one case one might almost say obsessed – with the idea of the palindrome and the possibilities it offers in music. One of us has written at length elsewhere about the overwhelming importance of the palindrome in the music of Webern and also about the palindrome in Schönberg’s ‘Der Mondfleck’ in *Pierrot lunaire*, and a large-scale palindrome is an essential part of Berg’s last opera, *Lulu*. Thus it seems particularly serendipitous that a palindrome of sorts should describe as well the life spans of the three men. The teacher, Arnold Schönberg, lived the longest of

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Three Men of Letters

the three, having been born in 1874 and dying in 1951 at the age of seventy-six. The older of his two pupils, Anton Webern, born in 1883, was killed by a soldier of the American occupation in 1945 at the age of sixty-one. And Alban Berg, the youngest of the three, born in 1885, was also the shortest lived, dying suddenly and quite unexpectedly of blood poisoning at the age of fifty in 1935. Admittedly the palindrome is a very imperfect one, but the three lives can be charted roughly in the following way:

| Schönberg | 1874 - 1951 |
| Webern | 1883 - 1945 |
| Berg | 1885 - 1935 |

Interestingly, the centre of each of these three lives falls somewhere between 1910 and 1915, years that were quite turbulent for all three men. Mahler, who was much admired by the Schönberg crowd, died in 1911, which was also the year in which both Berg and Webern were married, and in which Schönberg suddenly left Vienna and moved his family to Berlin as the result of a violent altercation with a neighbour. In 1912 a collection of adulatory essays written by his pupils and the artists Gütersloh and Kandinsky, a project that Schönberg himself had instigated, was presented to him by his pupils. The infamous Skandalkonzert occurred on 31 March 1913. And Europe went to war in 1914. None of these was an occasion soon to be forgotten.

Of the three men, all of whom were born in Vienna and who together came to be known as the Second Viennese School, only Alban Berg was truly Viennese. He was born of Viennese parents and lived all of his life there, though he spent the summers in his family’s country home in Carinthia, that of his wife’s family in Steiermark and from 1932 his own Waldhaus in Carinthia. Arnold Schönberg inherited Hungarian citizenship from his father, who was born in Szécsény and had come to Vienna by way of Bratislava; his mother was born in Prague. Schönberg was peripatetic, migrating from Vienna to Berlin three times (in 1901, 1911 and 1926) before taking leave of Austro-German lands altogether in 1933, when he quit his job at the Conservatory in Berlin immediately upon being told that he was to be dismissed after three more years because of his Jewish background and moved around between several locations in western Europe, finally emigrating to the United States, where he first spent a short time teaching in Boston and New York before moving to California and settling in Hollywood. At the time of his death he was contemplating a move to New Zealand.4 While he claimed to despise both Berlin and Vienna, Schönberg was officially resident in only these two cities

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until his move to America, though he spent a lot of time in a series of fashionable European locations in the last year or so of his official residency in Berlin. Anton Webern, whose parents left Vienna for Graz in Styria when he was quite young, spent his childhood there and in Klagenfurt in Carinthia, returning to Vienna only when he entered university. He was particularly unsettled in the decade immediately following his study with Schönberg, acquiring and then fleeing from one job after another in fits of distemper.

The three men also came from quite different social backgrounds. Schönberg grew up in Leopoldstadt, the Jewish district of Vienna, the son of a shoe seller. The family was not well off, and Schönberg attended a Realschule, where the emphasis was on practical rather than classical subjects. His father died of influenza when Schönberg was fifteen, and he had to quit school and take a job as a junior clerk in a bank to support the family. His nine and a half years in school were the only formal education he was ever to have; thus he had no classical education and officially no musical training. There is no indication that either of his parents was musical, though his maternal grandfather was a cantor, and both his younger brother Heinrich, a bass, and his cousin Hans Nachod, a tenor who was the first to sing the role of Waldemar in Schönberg’s *Gurrelieder*, were singers in Zemlinsky’s Opera in Prague. In any case, Schönberg himself was entirely self-taught except for what he picked up from associating with his friend and later brother-in-law Alexander Zemlinsky. In a radio interview in 1967 Theodor W. Adorno said of Schönberg: ‘He was extremely far away from the picture of the intellectual. He was an absolutely naïve sort of artist, and his theories had very often the character of auxiliary hypotheses, which he invented in order to justify what he made, but were, as rationalisations, themselves of a rather naïve nature.’

As a young man Schönberg had a Christian baptism and later, in the 1930s, re-embraced Judaism, but there is no indication that either of these conversions was for religious reasons, the first probably being for convenience and the second rather ostentatiously in order to become a public voice against anti-Semitism. There is very little if any mention of Schönberg’s siblings (a sister in addition to brother Heinrich) in his letters. Schönberg married Zemlinsky’s sister Mathilde

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5 When interviewed by Hans Keller on the BBC in 1967, Schönberg’s cousin Hans Nachod said ‘He could not play any instrument really well’, and this seems apparent from Webern’s frequent reports to Berg of having played something to him on the piano. A very well-known photograph of him as a young man shows him with a cello in a group of five young men in rustic dress with instruments (one of whom was apparently Fritz Kreisler), but there is no indication in the literature that he was a competent cellist. Hans Keller, ‘Portrait of Schoenberg’, 1967, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btlxfXcXR0&app=desktop>. Accessed on 18 October 2019.

6 Ibid.

7 According to Adorno, Berg once told him that Schönberg ‘very rarely, if at all, spoke about his parents. You had the feeling of an absolute individual, not linked at all with any family background or national background.’ Ibid.
in October of 1901 and they had two children. All evidence would indicate that it was an unhappy marriage. Mathilde died in 1923, and less than ten months later Schönberg married Gertrud Kolisch, the much younger sister of the violinist Rudolf Kolisch, a marriage that produced three children, two of whom were born in the United States. Schönberg’s family, unlike those of Berg and Webern, owned no country house, and he had no money of his own, but he and his family nevertheless managed to live in rather splendid houses and apartments, always with a maidservant and at someone else’s expense, and spent numerous summer holidays as the guests of one or another wealthy person whose acquaintance he had cultivated. Schönberg was absolutely convinced of his superiority to other men and that as such he was owed a living by them. He lived off money collected from his pupils and various philanthropists for over a decade, while the pupils who were supporting and finding support for him were themselves often near poverty.

Webern’s father was a mining engineer who worked in a government ministry, and his mother played the piano and taught all her children to play at an early age. Webern also studied the cello in Klagenfurt from the age of twelve and heard a lot of music when he was young, attending and later also participating in musical events in Klagenfurt and – as reported in his early diaries — enjoying concerts, opera performances, plays and exhibitions on occasional visits to Graz and Vienna and once even to Bayreuth with his cousin Ernst Diez. Later he did a university degree in musicology with Guido Adler in Vienna. The family, whose name was von Webern until 1918, when the ‘von’ was dropped in accordance with a government edict, was relatively well off. Webern had two sisters, one older and one younger, to whom he was very close. His mother died in 1906, a loss that had an extraordinary effect on him for the rest of his life. He spent the summers at the Preglhof, his father’s estate in Carinthia, until it was sold in 1912. He married his first cousin Wilhelmine in 1911, and they had four children. Wilhelmine seems to have been the first and only woman with whom he ever had a romantic relationship, and all indications are that they were happy together. His only close relationship with another woman was a platonic one with the married poet Hildegard Jone, whose poems he set exclusively from 1936 onwards. Although he was very interested in writings about mysticism and humanism, he was a devout Catholic, as was, presumably, his whole family and kept a kneeling stool for private prayers in his study for all of his life. In spite of his university education and his wide experience of hearing music and reading – and incredibly, in light of the sort of music he wrote in the 1920s and 1930s – Webern seems to have been rather naïve and childlike, and his letters surprisingly unorganised.

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8 Barbara Schingnitz is currently preparing an edition of the complete Webern–Jone correspondence with commentary for publication by the Webern Gesamtausgabe in Basel.

9 Personal recollection of his daughter Maria Halbich in conversation with Kathryn Puffett.
Like Webern, Berg was born into a middle-class family. His father was in the export business, and his mother owned a shop selling religious items on the Stephansplatz in Vienna. The family was relatively well off and had a country house, the Berghof, on the Ossiachersee in Carinthia, where they spent the summers, but the death of his father when Berg was only ten put a serious constraint on the family’s finances for the next several years. Although Berg didn’t do particularly well in school, he did finish his education and, on his mother’s insistence, in October 1904 got a job in accounting, which he loathed. On the death of her sister in 1906, however, his mother inherited a number of properties in Vienna, and she hired Berg to manage these, so that he was able to quit his job in accountancy, though this new job took a lot of his time and tied him to Vienna for the rest of his life, something that neither Schönberg nor Webern ever seemed able – or perhaps willing – to believe or understand. In 1920 he had to take over the managing of the Berghof as well until it was sold the following year.

Berg was innately a social being, and as an adult he moved in literary and intellectual circles. Personally he seems to have been the complete opposite of Webern: sophisticated, articulate and level-headed. He married Helene Nahowski, who was rumoured to be the illegitimate daughter of Emperor Franz Joseph I and who sang, though never professionally. Their voluminous correspondence leaves no doubt at all of the enduring love they had for each other, in spite of Berg’s occasional attraction to other women and one now very well-known love later in life (which was not reciprocated). They had no children, but Berg mentioned Webern’s children fondly in his letters to Webern.

Berg was continually issued orders and demands, and very frequently complaints, from both Schönberg and Webern for most of the years covered in this book. Schönberg demanded of him a multitude of tasks, and Webern, who was most often not living in Vienna, made constant demands of him as well, on Schönberg’s behalf, always insisting that these things must be done immediately. In the


12 On 22 February 1912 Webern wrote to Berg: ‘I wish for you a child as soon as possible! / Without sentimentality, it’s the most beautiful thing there is.’ Berg had fathered an illegitimate daughter when he was young and still at home with his parents. She never figured in his life, making herself known only after his death.
years of Schönberg’s Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen he worked both Webern and Berg mercilessly, while he himself was frequently away from Vienna, attending conferences or performances of his own music or, in the case of Holland, in residence for several months.

Schönberg seems to have thrived on controversies, as if he were afraid that if his music were accepted he would lose his unique public position. He was extremely rude and scornful where critics and audiences were concerned; the disapproval of others seemed to be his raison d’être, and if it didn’t occur naturally, he found a way of making it happen. He demanded complete loyalty from his pupils to an extent that today is hard to imagine. He claimed to be a great admirer of Mahler, yet when Webern went to Prague to hear a performance of Mahler VIII in 1912, thereby missing a performance in Berlin of Schönberg’s first string quartet, which he had heard already more than once, Schönberg wrote in his diary: ‘He travels to Vienna in order to hear Mahler’s Eighth Symphony. To be sure, I would like to do this also. Shows, however, that he is not as attached to me, after all, as he would like to make believe.’

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THE LETTERS

Of the three sets of correspondence with which we are concerned, to date only that between Schönberg and Berg has been published; both the others are currently being edited for publication. We wish to stress that the present book is not intended to be a scholarly edition of the letters of these three men in translation. We do not include nearly all the letters and, apart from a few exceptions, of those that are included only portions are quoted. In most cases we have not seen the letters themselves, but only scans or transcriptions of them, and we are not concerned with the type of paper used, whether the letters are written in pen or pencil etc., etc., except in those cases where these things impinge on the content, which is the only subject of this study. And this book covers only the years up to 1921, after which the three men’s lives took different directions. The book would not have been possible without the good will and encouragement of the editors of the published letters and the very kind generosity of those who are preparing the rest for publication.

Both of the correspondences involving Webern are unfortunately very one-sided as the result of the destruction and corruption of a large number of Webern’s papers when soldiers occupied the house that the Weberns had deserted when they fled into the mountains near the end of World War II. Of Schönberg’s letters to Webern prior to 1922, all of which one can be sure Webern would have kept, only three survive. Berg’s letters to Webern suffer in the same way, though not quite as catastrophically. Compared with 232 letters and cards from Webern to Berg – and evidence suggests that there were many more than this – only perhaps 91 or 92 letters or portions of letters from Berg to Webern survive, 27 of these being small fragments that almost certainly represent fewer than 27 letters.

14 Briefwechsel and Correspondence.
15 Briefwechsel Arnold Schönberg – Anton Webern, ed. Regina Busch, and Briefwechsel Anton Webern – Alban Berg, ed. Simone Hohmaier and Rudolf Stephan, Briefwechsel der Wiener Schule 2 and 4 respectively, both forthcoming from Schott in Mainz.
16 Dr Werner Riemerschmid’s account of his visit in December 1945 to the house in Maria Enzersdorf where the Weberns lived just prior to their flight to Mittersill in the last days of the war is reproduced in Kathryn Bailey (Puffett), The Life of Webern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1–2. Most of Webern’s papers had been eaten by rodents, burned by soldiers to keep warm or otherwise destroyed and defaced.
17 Berg often numbered sections of his letters, and 20 of the 27 fragments begin with a number, usually centred, at the top: six with the number I, four with the number II (or in one case ‘–2–’), five with III, four each with IV and VII, and one with V. A few of these can be tentatively placed as coming from the same letter, but in most cases they cannot be grouped together with any certainty. Many other fragments, unnumbered, either begin or end, or perhaps both, mid-sentence, making it obvious that they come from the middle of a larger document.
Luckily most of the letters Webern wrote to Schönberg have survived, and scans of most of these are now available online from the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna. We can get some idea of the number of letters from Schönberg that are missing from this correspondence by examining the surviving letters from Webern that begin with thanks for or contain some other reference to a recent letter or card from Schönberg that no longer exists. We can be sure from evidence in Webern’s letters that during these years there were at least 109 letters from Schönberg, and 60 postcards.

Of the 519 known pieces of communication between Schönberg and Berg from the years 1906 to 1921, only 223 are from Schönberg, a large majority of the first 40 of these, from 1906 to July of 1910, when Berg ended his lessons with Schönberg, consisting of simply one or two sentences making arrangements for Berg’s upcoming lessons. Of the remaining 183, eighteen are telegrams; 63 are postcards; 26 are picture postcards (many of the postcards and picture postcards are from Schönberg and several other people, who either are visiting a place of particular interest together or have just attended a concert) and eight are printed cards of one sort or another (visiting cards, thank-you cards, death or marriage announcements or folded cards with a message written on the inside, these also sometimes being not from Schönberg alone). Only 68 are letters, most of which cover less than one page, and many of these consist of only three or four lines, the longer ones being either instructions to Berg concerning the many and various jobs that Schönberg demanded of him or complaints about the way in which Berg was carrying these out, or both.

The postcard was in fact a favoured and often used means of communication, especially between Webern and Schönberg. Webern, as far as we can know, holding the record. In a correspondence that spanned altogether 35 years (1906–1941) Webern sent Schönberg 203 postcards, only 33 of which were picture postcards, these representing, as one would expect, places Webern was visiting or greetings from a group of Schönberg’s pupils who had gathered together on some occasion. The preponderance of ordinary (pictureless) postcards were from the years 1906–1915, which of course included the first two years of the war; Webern sent Schönberg 42 postcards in 1914 alone, and 39 in 1915. In 1914 he complained on several occasions of the uncertainty of letters reaching their destination because of censorship and postal disruptions, as sealed letters were returned to the sender. On 23 August 1914 Webern wrote, ‘I am writing a card, because I believe that is more likely to reach you’ and on 18 September, ‘I am always writing cards because I believe that they are more likely to arrive.’ He continued to write letters occasionally; on 14 December 1914 he told Schönberg ‘I sent this letter already yesterday. Today it came back here, because I had glued it shut’ and on 25 May

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18 Although Briefwechsel I and II contain 525 entries from the beginning, in 1909, to 1921, some of these are either to or from (or both) the wives or some other relative or acquaintance.
1915, ‘It has never happened until now that I posted a letter to you and sealed it. [Apparently memory failed.] This time I did, unfortunately. Today it came back.’ Thus the wartime postal restrictions were at least one of the reasons for the large number of postcards during the war years, though Webern had made much use of this form of communication already before this, having sent Schönberg 54 postcards in the years 1908 to 1913. Altogether, in the years we are concerned with here, 146 postcards and 24 picture postcards from Webern to Schönberg survive, and 78 postcards and ten picture postcards from Webern to Berg.

Berg, on the other hand, in the years 1910 to 1921, sent Schönberg only 48 postcards and 19 picture postcards, a relatively small number compared to his 222 letters in the same years.

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In a letter of 25–26 September 1911 Berg told Schönberg that there could be no question of his discarding anything associated with Schönberg: ‘How could I throw away so much as a piece of paper bearing a word of yours or a brushstroke, or even a note.’ And so it is that the Berg–Schönberg correspondence begins with four years – 1906 to 1910 – of notes from Schönberg to Berg, almost all of only one or two sentences, all carefully saved. There are, however, no letters from Berg to Schönberg until June of 1911, after Berg’s marriage in May. Perhaps Schönberg didn’t consider letters from Berg worth saving until 1911, though this lacuna may result from a reticence expressed by Berg in a letter to his future wife dated 1 September 1909.

I was sincerely looking forward to a correspondence with Schönberg; but the moment I began the first letter I realised that I couldn’t write in the conventional way to him, to whom I am attached in more than ‘profound devotion’. I realised that these should be letters like those that I write to you, perhaps not as often, but full of meaning and offering a deep insight into my soul! And I hadn’t enough resources for that. One can write only one such letter a day – and that one was for you! […] I wouldn’t have been capable of writing a letter starting roughly like: ‘I have been in the country for 14 days now, the weather … etc. etc.’, and thus it happened that I didn’t write the least thing, not even a picture postcard, to Schönberg, for whom I had intended the most beautiful things …

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19 A musical note. Briefwechsel I, p. 76; Correspondence, p. 20. Correspondence gives the date of this letter erroneously as 26–27 September.

On 1 June 1911 Berg sent Schönberg a postcard, giving him the address in Payerbach where he and his new wife were staying, and on 16 June he finally wrote Schönberg a proper letter, of the sort that would continue to issue from him from that moment on. Although we can no longer know the nature or the frequency of his letters prior to 1911—or, indeed, whether there were any—, those from 1911 until Berg’s death in 1935 attest to a poetic and imaginative nature and a real affection. The earlier of these, those written before and during the First World War, at times express his devotion in ways that readers of today may find embarrassing, though even by today’s standards they never quite cross the line between the affectionate and the maudlin. Berg seems to have been an urbane and sensible person who thought things through and didn’t share Webern’s habit of flying off in all directions or Schönberg’s misanthropic egotism. His letters are thoughtful, literate and fluent—windows into the mind of a gentle, reasonable man whose one area of poor judgement seems to have been his inability to say no to Schönberg. There are long paragraphs, constructed of long sentences, with many ellipses and dashes. Unlike Webern’s letters, which are chaotic and repetitious, returning again and again to continue or repeat a subject dealt with earlier, and unlike Schönberg’s, which are mostly only about his own current situation and usually demanding, Berg’s often express original and interesting thoughts and ideas that are unrelated to the matters at hand. There are occasional drawings in his letters to Schönberg, though not nearly so many as in his letters to his wife, in which there are quite remarkably skilled sketches and caricatures, evidence of a talent that was never exploited. His letters to Schönberg were long and frequent, explaining things patiently and accepting blame for things that can in no way be seen as his fault. Only in 1915 did he finally accept the fact that it was not in his power to satisfy Schönberg in anything, and even then he seemed to see this also as his fault. One may wonder if Berg somehow needed Schönberg’s approval and perhaps even thrived on attempting the impossible in fulfilling all of Schönberg’s demands, since he put himself in this position for such a long time. But alternatively this can be seen as the result of an over-generous nature and a lack of self confidence.

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While the earliest letters from Berg to Schönberg to survive are from 1911, Schönberg began to get (and keep) letters from Webern in 1906. The literacy and reason that distinguish Berg’s letters set him apart from Webern, who was a man of hyperbole: adulation or loathing, both expressed in the most extreme language,

21 Briefwechsel I, p. 30.
22 Briefwechsel I, pp. 31–33; Correspondence, pp. 3–4.
The Letters

of unbelievably confident optimism or utter and hopeless despair, with apparently no middle ground. He always thanks Schönberg from the bottom of his heart for Schönberg’s ‘liebe’ cards and is scathing about anyone who has in some way offended Schönberg (which was incredibly easy to do – often, one suspects, unintentionally), a man given to exaggeration and excessive over-reaction: derisory and bitter, but at the same time religiously devoted to Schönberg and Mahler.

Webern’s letters to Schönberg in the earlier years of the period under scrutiny here read as if they had been written by a child: chaotic, a tumble of disparate thoughts pouring out in no particular order, interrupting each other, backtracking and repeating. He begs Schönberg for advice about everything, seemingly unable or unwilling to make the smallest decision for himself, hounding Schönberg (‘Was soll ich thun?’) repeatedly, as a child might a parent. For several years nearly every sentence in his letters begins on a new line, so that paragraphs cannot be said to exist, with respect to either form or content, as his thoughts jump back and forth unpredictably between often unrelated subjects, as he jots down his thoughts. His sentences, which closely resemble actual speech, are incomplete, the beginning of a new thought often marked only by a line break (as if he were writing a poem or a dramatic monologue) and the text punctuated with dashes. Thus, while on the one hand the letter resembles a stream of consciousness, jumping from one idea (or insult) to another, on the other hand at times he uses poetic images that probably required some consideration before writing down. The result has more the appearance of a list than a letter, even though on occasion several sentences on successive lines do in fact relate to the same subject and thus to each other. He repeats himself endlessly, sometimes saying the same thing or asking the same question several times in the same letter, frequently repeating it almost exactly in successive letters, perhaps for weeks or months. He often remarks to Schönberg that he has told him this or that in a previous letter, without further comment. Certain things seem to burst out unexpectedly, almost as if beyond his control, in the middle of a discussion of something else. Foremost among these are his never-ending questions about Schönberg’s plans and what he is currently working on – a sort of incessant nagging – and his constant requests that Schönberg write to him immediately, something that may be said three or four times

23 When interviewed by Hans Keller in 1967, Schönberg’s pupil Roberto Gerhard said:

To me Schönberg was […] rather terrifying. […] He had to adopt a defensive attitude. When I say ‘defensive’ I mean of course ‘aggressive’. […] And you had to be very careful, because he was constantly on the watch-out for something which he might have felt he could not let pass, and you were always in danger of having your head bitten off.

in the course of a single letter, as if Webern’s need to hear from his master is an irrepressible desire lying always just beneath the surface of his thoughts.

Webern’s handwriting is very uneven: in some letters it is quite neat and easily readable (much more so than either Schönberg’s or Berg’s, both of which are consistently difficult to read), in others, particularly when he is upset about something, it is nearly illegible. His writing nearly always runs downhill, but at times of stress this is exaggerated. He expresses himself awkwardly and ungrammatically, in series of short and often incomplete sentences. His spelling reflects a regional dialect, and words and names are frequently misspelt (Jalowec, Cöniger, Schreck- er, Maeterlink, Klark). His punctuation is erratic: many full stops are omitted and commas may be replaced by dashes, and although he writes a large number of questions, these are only very seldom followed by a question mark. A particular habit is simply to state a fact, occasionally preceded by ‘Dass’, but more often not, – usually repeating something that Schönberg has told him – without any comment as to why he is mentioning it. This is something that others do as well, of course, but such a statement is customarily followed by an exclamation mark, which Webern seldom uses in these situations, though his letters are peppered with them elsewhere, often two or three at a time. This seems to correspond with his desire to know everything that Schönberg is doing and thinking and to show Schönberg, however clumsily, that he remembers everything Schönberg has told him. Because of this habit of just repeating something he has been told, we can know many of the things Schönberg has said to him in letters that no longer exist.

There is nearly always more text – often quite a lot more – tacked on after the closing and signature of a letter, another indication of a lack of organisation and forethought. This frequently entails a second closing formula and signature, and in Webern’s case this is no small matter, as his closing formulae in letters to Schönberg tend to be very lengthy.

Although Webern goes over the top in his thanks to Schönberg for his letters, he often also complains that they are so short, or that he has been waiting for one for so long. He himself writes to Schönberg very frequently, often every day or every second day, whether or not he has anything to say. He is also for ever insisting on absolute secrecy (about all sorts of things, usually without any apparent reason).

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Schönberg, the mentor, was not much of a letter writer. He was also a very bitter man, but without Webern’s wild enthusiasms for the things he loved. He wasted no time on niceties. He was quite cavalier about keeping in touch with his friends and former pupils, who obviously depended on his letters, though he was very de-
manding that they should keep in touch with him and upbraided them when they
didn’t write as often as he thought they should. Unfortunately, since most of his
letters to Berg from these years survive, while almost none of those to Webern do,
our knowledge of how he wrote to his two star pupils is very one-sided. He very
seldom wrote a letter to Berg just to keep in touch or to inquire after the health of
Berg and Helene or to ask what they had been up to. On the rare occasion when
a letter ventured into something of a more personal nature, it was about himself,
ot about them. He wrote a letter because he wanted something, and he insisted
on knowing the details of Berg’s success in raising money or doing other work for
him. The tone of these letters, like – from all reports – his manner personally,24
was peremptory and autocratic. And as the things he asked for were seldom done
to his satisfaction, many of his letters are complaints, expressions of displeasure
and irritation. Occasionally he asks Berg why he isn’t doing any composing, when
it is quite obvious that Berg couldn’t possibly find the time to compose because he
is being kept frantically busy with jobs that Schönberg demands of him. In his let-
ters to Berg he occasionally shows a dry humour or indulges in wordplay, things
one has to suppose would not have been in his letters to Webern, who seems not
to have had a sense for such things. Like Webern, Schönberg was, at least until
1918, always unhappy in whatever place he happened to be in at the moment. This
is a marked characteristic of both men, though Webern, unlike Schönberg, on oc-
casion says something good about the place he was in previously, about which he
had of course had nothing good to say when he was actually there.

Schönberg, the writer of abrupt and businesslike letters to his friends, criticised
Berg for his style of letter-writing on at least two occasions, of course using his
own letters as the model of perfection. On 28 November 1913 he wrote to Berg:

be more concise. You always write so many excuses, parenthetical asides, ‘de-
velopments’, ‘elaborations’ and stylisations that it takes a long time to figure out
what you’re driving at. I think one should work on oneself in such matters, too. A
letter must be kept in telegram style and a telegram indeed must be of absolutely
telegraphic brevity.25

And two years later, on 8 April 1915:

Thus, please: plentiful, factually detailed information. One sentence on each
matter, clear and precise and without regard to style, but thoroughly annotated,
so I know where I stand. And without forgetting anything! Surely by now you
must have learned from my letters how to handle such matters!26

24 See memories of Schönberg from people in the Schönberg circle in Chapter 2.
25 Briefwechsel I, p. 457; Correspondence, p. 196.
26 Briefwechsel I, p. 546; Correspondence, p. 233.
Reading Schönberg’s surviving letters to his pupils it is rather difficult to understand the almost fanatical devotion they felt for him.\textsuperscript{27} It is of course possible—and, from the evidence of Webern’s responses, very likely—that he wrote to Webern in a quite different way than he did to Berg. He obviously favoured Webern over Berg personally. It is easy to imagine that this had something to do with size—both Schönberg and Webern were quite short, and Berg was very tall—and, in spite of the fact that he had originally taken Berg on as a pupil for no payment because he couldn’t afford lessons, Schönberg also seems always to have thought that Berg was wealthy, though this was not the case, and Schönberg despised wealthy people. Helene’s family was well off, but it is clear that her money was tied up in such a way that she couldn’t get at it. And it is very tempting to wonder if Schönberg, almost certainly unconsciously, also saw Berg as a more likely competitor, musically as well as socially—the combination of his description in 1910 of Berg as ‘an extraordinarily gifted composer’\textsuperscript{28} and his lukewarm reception of \textit{Wozzeck} when it was a big success in the 1920s\textsuperscript{29} would seem to support this—whereas Webern was infinitely adoring and constantly seeking advice, which would have fed Schönberg’s insatiable ego and probably made him feel rather protective: a father’s feeling for a needy child. Webern was given the right to address Schönberg with the familiar Du in March 1912; Berg had to wait for another six years, until the last week of June 1918, for a similar invitation.

In the years we are concerned with all three men signed letters with their last names only, on rare occasions including their first names, but none ever used his first name alone. Later, as their friendship matured and their identification as something besides Schönberg’s protégés grew, we find ‘Lieber Toni’ and ‘Lieber Alban’ often taking the place of ‘Lieber Freund’ in the letters of Berg and Webern, and Berg starts signing with his first name alone as well, though Webern appears never to have done this.\textsuperscript{30} Schönberg signed his letters ‘Schönberg’ even

\textsuperscript{27} When interviewed by Keller, Egon Wellesz, speaking of Webern’s and Berg’s submission to Schönberg, said: ‘In England I think it would be quite impossible to act like these grown-up people did, rather a little ridiculous.’ Keller, \textit{op. cit.}


\textsuperscript{29} In his letter to Berg quoted in note 71 on page 46 below.

\textsuperscript{30} Only once, on 11 May 1938, after Schönberg had moved to America, did Webern use the greeting ‘Liebster Arnold’, and this same one and only letter was signed ‘Sei umarmt von Deinem alten Anton’ (Be embraced by your old friend Anton.)
when writing to his brother-in-law, Alexander Zemlinsky, who always signed his letters to Schönberg ‘Alex’. Zemlinsky chided him about this in 1911, but to no avail. Schönberg’s salutation in letters to Zemlinsky was ‘Lieber Alex’, and the two used the familiar form of address with each other, but he continued to sign his letters to Zemlinsky ‘Arnold Schönberg’ (reminiscent of Homer Simpson’s signing a Valentine to his wife ‘Homer J. Simpson’), or the more informal ‘Schönberg’ alone, occasionally preceded by ‘Dein’. Although the absence of his letters to Webern from the years 1906 to 1921 makes it impossible to know how these were signed, several letters from later years survive, and here the signature is, again, either ‘Schönberg’ or ‘Arnold Schönberg’, though nearly always with ‘Dein’.

The differences in the salutations and the various closing formulae used offer an insight into the characters of the three men and their feelings for each other. The simplest and least personal forms to be used by the three were, of course, those used by Schönberg. Although it is impossible to know for certain what form of salutation Schönberg used in his letters to Webern in these years, one can make fairly certain assumptions. On 31 August 1918, in a letter of considerable frustration with Webern, the salutation was ‘Lieber Webern’, but on 1 November of the same year, after normal relations had been resumed, Schönberg addressed Webern as ‘Liebster Freund’, which, with a very few exceptions was the form used from that time on.

In contrast, we know how Schönberg opened and closed his letters to Berg throughout these years. In his earliest letters to Berg he addressed him as ‘Lieber Herr Berg’ (on one occasion ‘L.H.B.’) or ‘Lieber Berg’. Twice, on 18 and 30 September 1909, this became ‘Lieber Freund’, but he then immediately reverted to ‘Lieber Berg’ until 27 September 1911, when ‘Berg’ was again replaced with ‘Freund’. One or other of these two greetings was then used for the remainder of the period we are concerned with here. On 8 September 1920, more than two years after he had invited Berg to use the familiar form of address, Schönberg began a letter to Berg with the greeting ‘Liebster Freund’. This is used only once more, on 9 August 1921, with all other letters from September 1920 onwards using ‘Lieber Freund’.

Schönberg’s closing formulae were, predictably, short and to the point. In his earliest letters to Berg he used ‘Besten Gruß’ and ‘Herzl. Gruß’, or even simply ‘Gruß’, only very occasionally expanding this to ‘Viele herzl. Grüße’. On 25 August 1911 he included both wives in his closing – ‘Viele herzliche Grüße auch an Ihre Frau, auch von meiner Frau’, and something of the sort appeared occa-

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32 Events surrounding these letters are discussed on pages 471–76.