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THE FRAGILE MODERN ARTIST IN SCHREKER'S *CHRISTOPHORUS* AND BERG'S *LULU*

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative reading of Franz Schreker's *Christophorus oder "Die Vision einer Oper"* and Alban Berg's *Lulu*, focusing on how both operas construct and dismantle the figure of the composer from within their dramatic framework. Centring on the characters Anselm and Alwa, the study shows how both libretti depict artistic ambition as increasingly compromised by the narrative systems it helps to generate. Rather than affirming creative mastery, the operas stage processes of self-implication in which the artist's authority gradually dissolves through reflexive dramaturgy, symbolic projection, and narrative constraint. By examining how creation turns back upon its originator, the study reveals a shared concern with the instability of artistic agency in the early twentieth century. Reading Schreker and Berg together highlights convergent strategies for representing the artist's vulnerability and offers a new perspective on how opera approached questions of authorship, control, and selfhood during the Weimar era.

Keywords: Alban Berg, Franz Schreker, *Lulu*, *Christophorus*, artistic autonomy, meta opera

In the volatile musical culture of the Weimar era, opera became a contested site under the pressures of modernity in which inward psychological exploration was increasingly forced to negotiate demands for clarity and immediacy. Franz Schreker (1878–1934) and Alban Berg (1885–1935) were active within overlapping cultural and institutional networks, and were aware of each other's work over many years. They were drawn to musical drama not only as a musical form, but also as a locus for considering the instability of subjectivity, authority, and desire. Their operas are both animated by an

impulse toward theatrical intensity and psychological exposure, and include characters whose inner lives are inseparable from the aesthetic worlds they inhabit. Schreker's *Christophorus oder "Die Vision einer Oper"* and Berg's *Lulu*, shaped by a shared modernist horizon, exemplify this tendency with particular force: each centres on a male artist-figure whose creative aspirations become entangled with, and ultimately compromised by, the dramatic structures he sets in motion. I examine how Schreker and Berg employ the figure of the composer within the drama to interrogate the stability of artistic authority under modernist conditions. Rather than assuming the autonomy of the creator, both operas place it under narrative pressure, a process that unfolds progressively in their dramaturgical structures.

In *Christophorus* and *Lulu*, the libretto becomes a site where the modernist crisis of artistic identity is staged through composer figures, Schreker's Anselm and Berg's Alwa, who are both undermined and destroyed by their own narrative constructions. Both operas deploy a similar dramaturgy – reflexivity, archetypal characterization, and narrative predestination – to dismantle the romantic notion of the autonomous artist. The composer in each narrative becomes victim of the representational systems he seeks to control, rather than a creator of them. As such, this study argues that Anselm and Alwa serve as parallel case studies of the modernist, self-effacing artistic subject, both dramatizing the collapse of authorial agency within the narrative they attempt to influence.

The creator–creation dynamic that generates self-destruction through artistic projection forms the central dramaturgical mechanism under which this collapse unfolds. For Anselm, his opera within an opera becomes a psychological trap. His character begins to exert narrative autonomy, but he loses agency as his creation becomes indistinguishable from his mental state. The libretto stages authorial collapse as a dramatic principle. Likewise, for Alwa, Lulu is the ultimate projection-object: every man "creates" an image of her. Alwa's desire to make Lulu into an artwork crystalizes his inability to see her outside of their joint archetypes of the covetous male and weak intellectual artist (Alwa), and the femme fatale (Lulu). Alwa's artistic impulse is revealed as a symptom of uncontrollable idealism, not creativity. His downfall is framed as inevitable: a victim of the material he hoped to transform into opera. Therefore, both operas depict the modern artist not as a creator, but as a consumer consumed: Anselm is devoured by the narrative world he tries to produce, while Alwa is enveloped by his predetermined narrative world around Lulu. The modernist creator cannot transcend the structures of representation that bind him.

The analysis underscores how the two figures – composer-characters embedded within meta-operatic structures – exemplify how both operas use reflexive dramaturgy to depict the artist as fragmented, overdetermined, and ultimately undone by the narrative systems he participates in. Through their relationships with their respective "creations" (Anselm's opera; Alwa's projected opera about Lulu), *Christophorus* and *Lulu* present a world in which the creator is defeated by his creation, and the narrative predestines this eventuality. Thus, *Christophorus* and *Lulu* articulate a shared modernist anxiety: the erosion of the artist within a world of deterministic narrative structures and objectifying modernity. In the following sections, the study situates each opera within its narrative world before tracing how the composer-figure becomes progressively implicated in, and

ultimately undone by, the dramatic structures he inhabits. This examination will reveal the depth of their parallel trajectories.

This investigation looks at how the reflexive dramaturgy in *Christophorus* and *Lulu* transforms the composer from a figure of creative mastery into a narrative subject whose authority is progressively eroded by the very structures he seeks to command. From these initial insights, the examination constructs an inter-opera comparative framework grounded in narrative analysis. The thematic analyses of the two operas, as derived from their libretti, suggest an overlooked affinity between Schreker and Berg's dramaturgy. Moreover, this approach reinterprets the place of the artist figure in Weimar-era opera, demonstrating a shared representation of modernist symbolisms associated with the relationship between an artist and his artwork. As this study is concerned with how artistic authority is constructed, destabilized, and narrativized, it focuses exclusively on the libretti of *Christophorus* and *Lulu*, and does not undertake musical analysis. In both operas, the crisis of the artist is staged explicitly through dramaturgy, reflexive narration, and symbolic characterization, where conflicts of agency and control are articulated with particular clarity. A libretto-centred approach thus provides a methodological framework for examining how modernist autonomy is imagined and undone in these works.

Dramaturgical Worlds and Narrative Orientation

We will first set out the dramaturgical worlds in which Anselm and Alwa exist, before giving a detailed analysis of them as composer-figures embedded in reflexive narrative structures. Both operas construct tightly controlled narrative systems whose symbolic logic, character relations, and events determine the conditions under which artistic authority is tested and ultimately destabilized. As the crisis of the modern artist in both works unfolds through dramaturgy – via plot progression, narrative entrapment, and the interaction between creator and created – concise synopses are needed for an understanding of how these structural forces operate prior to interpretive analysis. While this study focuses analytically on the composer-figures Anselm and Alwa, the narrative economy of each opera extends beyond any single character, particularly in the case of *Lulu*, whose dramaturgy is organized around a broader network of desire, projection, and predestination. A general synopsis is therefore necessary to clarify the dramatic system within which Alwa's artistic agency is formed, constrained, and ultimately effaced. These narrative outlines are not intended to replace the chronological analytical readings that follow, but rather to establish the structural framework against which moments of reflexivity, authorial collapse, and creator–creation entanglement will be examined in detail. The following synopses of *Christophorus* and *Lulu* foreground the dramaturgical mechanisms that govern the narrative trajectory of both operas, with particular attention paid to how artistic ambition becomes progressively subordinated to forces of symbolic determination.

Schreker's opera unfolds as a layered theatrical vision centred on the young composer, Anselm, whose opera gradually becomes indistinguishable from the dramatic world that surrounds him. The narrative oscillates between staged performance, imagined scenes, and psychological projection, blurring the boundaries between artistic inven-

tion and lived experience. Anselm becomes increasingly consumed by the figures and situations he has brought into being, most notably through his fixation on Lisa, whose shifting identity across reality and operatic illusion destabilizes his grasp on authorship.

As the work progresses, Anselm's creative authority erodes: characters appear to acquire autonomy, narrative events unfold with mounting inevitability, and his role shifts from controlling composer to entrapped participant. The opera-within-the-opera no longer serves as an artistic construct but rather as a dramaturgical force that dictates his psychological collapse. By the final stages of the work, Anselm's artistic vision has effectively absorbed him, staging the destruction of the creator through the mechanisms of theatrical reflexivity he initially sought to command.

Berg's *Lulu* traces the ascent and downfall of its central female figure through a rigorously symmetrical and predestined dramatic structure. Lulu moves through a succession of relationships in which she functions more as a projection surface for male desire, fantasy, and control than as a stable individual. Each man who encounters her attempts, in different ways, to define, possess, or shape her according to his own symbolic framework – as muse, wife, artwork, commodity, or object of obsession.

This network of projections generates a narrative of escalating destruction: marriages collapse, violence erupts, and social positions deteriorate, culminating in Lulu's descent into poverty and death. Throughout this process, the opera emphasizes the impersonality of its dramaturgical logic – events unfold with inevitability, as though governed by forces beyond individual agency. Within this system stands Alwa, who seeks to transform Lulu into an operatic subject, imagining her life as aesthetic material, even as he is drawn ever deeper into the deterministic machinery of the drama. His artistic impulse emerges not as an act of mastery but as another form of submission to the narrative structures that predetermine the fate of all involved. The narrative architectures of *Christophorus* and *Lulu* suggest a shared preoccupation with the compromised position of the modern artist, even before turning to their broader theoretical implications. A preliminary comparison of Anselm and Alwa will help to clarify the convergence of their dramaturgical functions and the distinct systems through which each opera stages the decline of creative authority.

Some initial similarities and differences between Anselm and Alwa will contextualize the extent of their shared situation. Both are composers attempting to create an opera within an opera.[1] Anselm is writing an opera that increasingly overtakes him, while Alwa explicitly expresses the desire to create an opera based on Lulu. Both are emotionally dependent on – and undone by – their subject: Anselm is psychologically diminished by his self-reflexive creation, and Alwa is consumed by the destructive vortex surround-

[1] Donald Bewley writes how the theme of an opera within an opera has been common throughout the genre's history, originating in the eighteenth century, where multiple dramatic works of music could be seen in a single evening and often on the same program. This blending eventually resulted in new genres within opera, such as *opera giocosa* and *opera buffa*. Bewley lists prominent works that contain operas within operas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci* (1892), Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912), Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960), and Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles* (1991). See: BEWLEY, Donald: Opera within Opera: Contexts for a Metastasian Interlude. In: *The Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*. Eds. Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner. Amsterdam : Rodopi, 2007, pp. 335-346.

ing Lulu, unable to impose any shaping artistic will. Moreover, both are represented as artist-types whose sensitivity becomes paralysis: They are modern, hyper-aware, introspective, and lacking heroic agency. They both also illustrate the crisis of the male artist confronted with an uncomfortable female figure: Lisa for Anselm and Lulu for Alwa become the objects that overwhelm the artist's attempts to shape narratives. Schreker describes Anselm as "…the creative version of a young, budding, somewhat degenerate and weak, but very gifted artist, a music student..."[2] Additionally, the two male roles are clearly seen as narrative doppelgängers of their own composers. Anselm is a reflection of Schreker – a staunch defender of his ideals while receiving harsh personal criticisms from the press, and Alwa mirrors many of Berg's experiences in life. Heather Platt states that "like Alwa, Berg was financially dependent on his family, and his relationships to his teacher Schoenberg, his wife Helene, his mistress Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, and his lesbian sister, are all thought to have parallels with Alwa's relationships to the other characters in the opera."[3] Schreker and Berg wrote their own librettos.

A key difference is that Anselm is the central character, whereas Alwa is secondary. Schreker builds an entire meta-narrative around Anselm's psyche, while Berg frames Alwa as an archetype within a larger deterministic framework. Anselm seeks to gain authority and fails, while Alwa has already lost it – he never attempts to wield control; Lulu eclipses him long before he imagines his opera about her. These differences reinforce how both operas deny the modern artist the illusion of autonomy via different dramaturgical procedures.

Associations Between Schreker and Berg

Now we will situate the operas within the historical and aesthetic currents that shaped their creation. I will compare how Schreker and Berg resisted the pressure for aesthetic anachronism in their operas using letters and prose texts expressing disagreement with the stylistic and contemporary pressures for conformity in their operatic settings. It will be seen that the modernist crises dramatized in *Christophorus* and *Lulu* were not only narrative constructions, but were deeply entangled with each composer's lived confrontation with changing operatic norms. The following text excerpts convey the extent of each composers' critical insights into the predominant operatic style of the late 1920s that caused a paradigm shift away from the inner-oriented, psychological narratives that both composers favoured.

Following World War I and the tenets of Expressionism that sought to distort reality and reflect a dark and psychological inner angst, a shift ensued where realism and lighter subjects became the prevailing trend of the most popular operas staged in the Weimar Republic. This expressive shift was known as *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or "new objectivity," and its operatic reflection was known as the *Zeitoper*. Against this cultural reorientation

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2 SCHREKER, Franz: Introduction to *Christophorus*. In: *Christophorus oder "Die Vision einer Oper"*. [CD booklet.] Live recording, Opernhaus Kiel June 2002–March 2003, (CPO 999 903-2), p. 66.

3 PLATT, Heather: A Jungian Analysis of Berg's Alwa. In: *Encrypted Messages in Alban Berg's Music*. Ed. Siglind Bruhn. London : Routledge, 2011, p. 279.

toward immediacy, topicality, and external realism, Schreker's and Berg's continued investment in inward psychological dramaturgy increasingly appeared resistant – if not anachronistic – to contemporary institutions and audiences. This style can be described as

> "Topical opera that was firstly a comic genre and typically relied on parody, social satire, and burlesque as dramatic tools. They were expressions and celebrations of modern life, where composers tried to incorporate as many attributes of contemporary life as possible into all facets of the operatic production. The libretti were set in the present; characters were typically everyday people or were presented as recognizable modern stereotypes. The action takes place in locales considered either modern or everyday: office buildings, elevators, train stations, cabarets, and private family dining rooms. Along with the modern setting, composers also relied on theatrical properties of the age: characters talk on the phone, play gramophones, take pictures, and shoot movies."[4]

Schreker in particular lamented the state of his career due to the favoured trends of his time, which he categorizes as art being created by charlatans. He makes this clear in a letter on 4 January 1927 to his friend, the eminent music critic Paul Bekker, writing: "I am currently out of fashion. My 'decline' has been noted by some members of the press and sensationalized and disseminated... What I recognized as right 25 years ago, taught, and created myself, is now being confirmed. But the imitators are praised as the inventors and the heroes."[5] This complaint turned into an altercation when Schreker's publisher, Universal Edition (UE), refused to publish *Christophorus*. Schreker wrote a letter on 30 July 1929 to Emil Hertzka, the director of UE, stating: "There is a certain current at your publishing house that I find difficult to resist. Perhaps you will keep an eye on the publication of my new work, and even if it is somewhat more demanding than what is currently popular, success is quite possible if we find a good venue for the premiere."[6] A few weeks later on 23 August, he received the following reply from Hans Heinsheimer, the opera division head of UE:

> "We have read the revised libretto of *Christophorus* and studied the work very carefully and conscientiously. However, we must inform you with great regret that, as far as we can judge the current attitude of theatres and the mentality of the public, we consider the potential impact of this work to be extremely problematic, and that – in our opinion, which, of course, like all judgments, is subjective – we cannot expect any success from this work."[7]

Schreker threatened retaliation via lawsuit for a breach of UE's contractual obligations for him. Hertzka now intervened and attempted to placate Schreker, who was immovable in his conviction that *Christophorus* would succeed if given a proper chance. He travelled from Berlin to UE's offices in Vienna for a meeting with Hertzka, which

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4 COOK, Susan C.: *Opera for a New Republic: The* Zeitopern *of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith.* Rochester : University of Rochester Press, 1988, pp. 3-4.

5 HAILEY, Christopher: (ed.): *Paul Bekker/Franz Schreker Briefwechsel.* Aachen : Rimbaud Verlag, 1994, pp. 211-212. Unless stated otherwise, all German translations are my own.

6 Quoted in: ORTIZ, Janine: *Nin is alles beim Teufel: Franz Schrekers Späte Opern.* München : edition text + kritik im Richard Boorberg Verlag, 2017, p. 152.

7 Ibid.

resulted in the retraction of his opera with the promise that UE would work harder in the future to support Schreker's music.[8] This situation illustrates Schreker's stubbornness regarding his refusal to compromise his compositional integrity, while also exemplifying the uphill battle he faced against convention. This event mirrors the general angst that Anselm expresses in *Christophorus*, reflecting the hardships that Schreker had to endure due to the doubts cast upon his own opera. Walter Bernhart posits that *Christophorus* is Schreker's most profound inner confession of his selfhood precisely because he composed it at the most troubled point in his life, when he was attempting to reconcile himself with the dramatically altered circumstances of the new operatic style and his own falling out of public favour.[9] Peter Franklin agrees with this view, stating that in *Christophorus*, "Schreker's increasingly painful, almost schizophrenic ambivalence towards the very nature of the art form to which he had devoted his life finds its most remarkable terminal statement."[10]

In his introduction to *Christophorus*, Schreker subtly criticized the aesthetic tastes of his day, while attempting to reconcile Anselm's romanticized ideals within the more constrictive framework of the *Zeitopern*. He writes: "Today the *Räuber* is played in contemporary dress, *Hamlet* and similar things in tailcoats, and so how can it be thought surprising that the boy Anselm understands the events of a past time as modern occurrences and transfers them to the emotions of our everyday life?"[11] The composer further addresses his inclusion of *Zeitoper* tropes in *Christophorus*, writing:

> "The fashion of the day before yesterday, the classicistic symphony (imitation of genuine 'classicism,' which the moderately gifted Christoph writes), the grief music of the tragedy of a woman who is artistically gifted and balks at the miracle of physical conception, the episode of the artistic dance, both events of the switching of music between Wagner and today into the psychological sphere, the fashion of jazz music, and finally the child's melodies resembling a folk song and resulting in redemption through absolute music."[12]

These reflections by Schreker that introduce his libretto demonstrate the extent to which he consciously sought to develop his idiom into more stylistically representational reflections of the popular trends that he was criticized for resisting. The opera was never performed during Schreker's lifetime, so the composer's ability to deliver a hit opera during the *Zeitoper* craze can only be guessed at. We need not hypothesize what could have been, but rather recognize how Schreker was grappling with ways of staying relevant.

Berg's public reactions were more muted as he took care not to express views that could be construed as antagonistic, and which would jeopardize his image. In his article *The "Problem of Opera"* from 1927, Berg writes that:

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8 Ibid., p. 155.

9 BERNHART, Walter: *Christophorus oder "Die Vision einer Oper,"* Franz Schreker's Opera as a Metareferential Work. In: *Self-Reference in Literature and Other Media*. Eds. Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam : Rodopi, 2010, p. 90.

10 FRANKLIN, Peter: *The Idea of Music: Schoenberg and Others.* London : The Macmillan Press, 1985, p. 153.

11 SCHREKER, Ref. 2, p. 66.

12 Ibid., p. 67.

> "The use of means 'suited to the times' – like cinema, revue, loudspeakers, and jazz – proves only that such a work is up-to-date. But this cannot be called real progress because we are already there and cannot go further with such things alone. To say that the art form of opera has developed further – as happened, for example, with Monteverdi, Lully, Gluck, Wagner, and finally in Schoenberg's stage works – requires other means beyond the simple application of the latest acquisitions and things that are in fashion. But must it always 'further develop?' Isn't it enough to take the opportunity to make beautiful music for good theatre, or, better said, to make music so beautiful that – in spite of it – good theatre will result?"[13]

By invoking a lineage of eminent – and strikingly innovative – opera composers, Berg constructs a continuous historical trajectory leading to his own time. He emphasizes that these figures advanced the genre by resisting the dominant tastes and formulaic expectations of their eras. For Berg, genuine artistic advancement arises from introducing elements that diverge from prevailing norms, since what is currently fashionable is already fixed and therefore incapable of pushing the art form forward. Schreker shared this sentiment as early as 1922, where in an essay titled "Führerschaft" ("Leadership"), he derided fleeting fads, stating that "the various movements spring up like mushrooms after fertilizing rain and then vanish into thin air. What is valid today will be laughed at and ridiculed tomorrow."[14]

Berg took a more explicit stance against the tenets of *Neue Sachlichkeit* in his famous open letter to Schoenberg from 1925 in which he discloses some of the hidden meanings in his *Chamber Concerto*. Berg writes:

> "I have smuggled into these three movements the adherents of program music – if there are any left – would be delighted, and the [representatives and defenders of the 'New Classicism,' and 'New Objectivity,] the 'linearists,' 'physiologists,' the 'contrapuntists,' and the 'formalists' would fall upon me in indignation at such 'romantic' tendencies – if I did not make them aware that they too, if they wanted to look, would have their hearts' desire."[15]

In his most direct declaration against the kind of formalism that he and Schreker rebelled against, Berg wrote a response in 1929 to a newspaper survey that asked the question, "Should Wagner Stagings be Modernized?" While he initially stated his agreement with new methods for renewing stage works, as Wagner and Mahler both wanted, he added: "But if you mean by 'modernization' to put on *Tristan und Isolde* as New Objectivity, and do *Siegfried* in tie and tails, and *Die Meistersinger* – where the connections of verse and industry (it need not be just the shoe business) is easily maintained – as *Zeitoper*, then the answer to your question is no."[16] These passages

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[13] BERG, Alban: The 'Problem of Opera. In: *Pro Mundo – Pro Domo: The Writings of Alban Berg*. Ed. Bryan R. Simms. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 216.

[14] Quoted in HAILEY, Christopher: Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Oper *Christophorus*. In: *Franz-Schreker-Symposion*. Eds. Elmar Budde and Rudolf Stephan. Berlin : Colloquium Verlag, 1980, p. 115.

[15] BERG, Ref. 13, p. 198. The editor of this volume, Bryan Simms, wrote in a footnote that the bracketed text was likely added or approved by Berg after the article's publication.

[16] BERG, Alban: Should Wagner Stagings Be Modernized? In: *Pro Mundo – Pro Domo*, Ref. 13, p. 392.

demonstrate an aesthetic kinship with Schreker in opposition to an operatic style that they both interpreted as superficial and pandering. Schreker mirrors these sentiments in his 1930 article "Entstehungsfragen der Oper" ("Questions of Opera's Origins"), reflecting on the changes that had occurred to the genre. He writes: "All these purely temporal stylistic shifts have faded as quickly as they arose [...] the worst thing an artist can do is to be controlled by the times in which he lives."[17]

We will now look at direct associations between the two composers and consider how their friendship led to a unity of shared values. Schreker's influence on Berg's musical development has been primarily analysed in the context of Berg's first attempt at writing for the orchestra: his *Altenberg Lieder* orchestral songs.[18] However, the more significant insight into Schreker's impact on the young Berg is the fact that in 1911, Berg prepared the vocal score of Schreker's early opera, *Der ferne Klang*, which was premiered the following year.[19] As evidenced in *Der ferne Klang*, Schreker's preoccupation with intimate chamber-like sonorities that prioritize orchestral balance and colour result in the fragmentation observable in the *Altenberg Lieder*.[20] Moreover, the asymmetrical rhythmic schemes and use of percussion instruments in Schreker's opera anticipate similar patterns in much of Berg's late works, including *Lulu*.[21]

Berg's student and friend, the philosopher Theodor Adorno, also points out a connection between Schreker and the *Altenberg Lieder*. Adorno suggests there are similarities of tone between Berg's songs and Schreker's later opera, *Die Gezeichneten*.[22] Nevertheless, Berg's use of dissonance is more pronounced, Adorno argues, further adding that there is no shortage of associations between the two composers. He cites a duet between Alwa and Lulu as having a similar structure of thematic return as seen in *Gezeichneten*.[23] Adorno also notes differentiation between the two, believing it is justifiable to "call Schreker's technique late-impressionistic, and Berg's early-expressionistic,"[24] insofar as this classification applies to Berg's sound in his orchestral songs. This dichotomous oversimplification was likely already evident in the 1920s, and it was probably a contributing factor in Berg's far greater popularity than Schreker's, following the premiere of *Wozzeck* in 1925.

Despite these associations, Berg was often critical of Schreker's music in his correspondence. In 1912 and 1913, Berg was Schreker's unofficial assistant when the latter was preparing to conduct the world premiere of Arnold Schoenberg's gigantic *Gurrelieder*. Tension ran high as Berg considered Schreker to be an incompetent conductor, and

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17 SCHREKER, Franz: Entstehungsfragen der Oper. In: *Die Bottcherstrasse* 2, no. 2 (July 1930), p. 15.

18 Cf: STENZL, Jürg: Franz Schreker und Alban Berg: Bemerkungen zu den *Altenberg-Liedern* op. 4. In: *Franz Schreker: Am Beginn der Neuen Musik*. Ed. Otto Kolleritsch. Graz : Universal Edition für Institut für Wertungsforschung, 1978, pp. 44-58.

19 CHADWICK, Nicholas: Franz Schreker's Orchestral Style and its Influence on Alban Berg. In: *The Music Review,* vol. 35, 1974, p. 29.

20 Ibid., p. 30.

21 Ibid., p. 32.

22 ADORNO, Theodor W.: *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*. Trans. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 64.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., p. 65.

wrote to Schoenberg to complain of Schreker's ego, as he did not back out of a project that was too much for him. On 10 February 1913, he wrote:

> "I know too well, could have sworn that Schreker would immediately refuse this [to have Schoenberg come to conduct instead] – one chance for a good *Gurrelieder* performance. Because then he wouldn't be named, because his filthy ambition is so overpowering that he would rather conduct – no, beat time – wrong time – to a work he doesn't know – than forgo the opportunity to appear before an audience, to bow."[25]

A few months later, on 31 October 1913, he wrote again to Schoenberg following a concert of Schreker's early music, remarking that the suite he heard was "a totally insignificant work [...] as for a real I. movement theme, Schreker is completely incapable of it! But because of his inability to write a longer melody immediately after certain fragmentary melodic beginnings it starts 'building to a climax!'"[26] Several years later in 1925, when Berg was in Berlin overseeing the world premiere of *Wozzeck* that was days away, he had an opportunity to see *Der ferne Klang*, and reported to his wife on 1 December 1925 that "*Der ferne Klang* had a good production, but the opera is awful."[27]

It is difficult at times to separate Berg's honest opinion from posturing to ingratiate himself (as he often did with Schoenberg), but these remarks from his letters serve to show a more complex relationship with Schreker and his music that cannot be viewed as unanimously supportive or devoid of a wider interpretive spectrum. Indeed, Christopher Hailey astutely comments on the misleading manner in which people at this time carried themselves. He writes:

> "During the entire affair Schreker probably remained unaware of the bitterness of Berg's attacks upon him and even if he had known, it is unlikely that it would have done serious damage to their friendship, such as it was. Then as now back-stabbing and duplicitous diplomacy were mainsprings of Vienna's highly intricate social and cultural mechanism. Tempers flare easily, but reconciliation – in the form of flowery formulas of courtesy and obeisance – comes just as quickly."[28]

This sentiment is most evident in a letter that Berg wrote to Schreker on 4 April 1914, which is diametrically opposed in tone and meaning to the biting criticisms of Schreker's conducting in his letter to Schoenberg. Reflecting on Schreker's performances of *Gurrelieder* and Mahler's E*ighth Symphony*, Berg writes:

> "... you, who, in an extraordinary way, are only granted the privilege of conducting an orchestra for three to four weeks a year, performed these two works with their colossal demands in such a short time, and under less than ideal conditions [...] and yet [...] the whole thing conveyed an impression of complete freedom, of musical liberation: the entire enormous ensemble responded to all the conductor's inten-

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[25] BRAND, Juliane – HAILEY, Christopher – HARRIS, Donald (eds.): *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters.* New York : W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1987, p. 156.

[26] PUFFETT, Kathryn – SCHINGNITZ, Barbara (eds.): *Three Men of Letters: Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern, 1906–1921.* Vienna : Hollitzer Verlag, 2020, p. 253.

[27] GRUN, Bernard (ed.): *Alban Berg: Letters to his Wife.* London : Faber and Faber, 1971, p. 348.

[28] HAILEY, Christopher: *Franz Schreker, 1878–1934: A Cultural Biography.* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 70.

tions, even to nuances that these magnificent works only truly brought to life in the atmosphere and solemnity of the actual performances."[29]

While both composers disdained *Zeitopern*, Berg's views were supported by the fact that he had already produced an operatic hit, whereas Schreker had not. This may also speak to Berg's greater ability than Schreker to ensure *Lulu* was not too antithetical to the tastes of the day. Indeed, Douglas Jarman remarks on this matter that "*Lulu* has much more in common with the music of Weill and Brecht's 'epic opera.' As a man of the theatre, Berg could not afford to ignore, and could not fail to be interested in, what was happening in the 'new opera.'"[30] However, this admission does not translate into aesthetic fidelity for Berg, since his prose suggests a different predisposition – an ability to bend his ideologies to acceptable stylistic parameters without compromising his authentic voice. This observation should not discount Schreker's own attempts at adaptability. As Susan Cook notes, Schreker's opera "contains features of the *Zeitoper*," but also adds that "*Christophorus* lacks the comic spirit of true *Zeitopern*, although Schreker uses parody in his depiction of composition students. The work deals with the role of the contemporary artist in modern society, as does *Jonny spielt auf* [Ernst Krenek's immensely popular *Zeitoper* from 1927], and it incorporates concrete images of modern life."[31] Additionally, Bernhart argues that although Schreker started *Christophorus* optimistically with the aim of succeeding in a new style, his subsequent disillusionment resulted in his recognition that he should not compromise his organic compositional voice to garner the public admiration that he so craved. As a result, Bernhart views the meta-narrative, parodistic elements of *Christophorus* as only having an "episodic character."[32] Opinions regarding Schreker's success at stylistic conformity vary, with David Drew stating that Schreker's "aesthetic was hopelessly at odds with the spirit of the time, and he paid dearly for his refusal to adopt a theatrical style that was foreign to him."[33] Bernhart concurs, adding that Schreker could not aesthetically adapt to *Neue Sachlichkeit* and *Zeitopern*, because his style was predisposed to a rich tapestry of sophisticated sounds, which he was pressured to abandon in favour of rigid and brittle sonorities.[34] Schreker himself reflected on this, observing that "rhythm seems to dominate [and] motor impulses replace passion."[35]

Another similar element between *Christophorus* and *Lulu* is their categorization as metaopera. Frieder von Ammon defines this classification as "an opera in which operatic matters of any kind are commented on (whether musically, verbally, or scenically), or otherwise, in which an opera or parts of an opera are performed, whether in a rehearsal

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29 HELLER, Friedrich C. (ed.): *Arnold Schönberg – Franz Schreker: Briefwechsel.* Tutzing : Verlegt bei Hans Schneider, 1974, p. 11.

30 JARMAN, Douglas: *Cambridge Opera Handbooks. Alban Berg: Lulu.* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 95.

31 COOK, Ref. 4, p. 173.

32 BERNHART, Ref. 9, p. 96.

33 DREW, David: Musical Theatre in the Weimar Republic. *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 88th Sess. 1961–1962, (16 May 1962), pp. 91-92.

34 BERNHART, Ref. 9, p. 88.

35 Ibid.

or in a private or public performance."[36] This definition accurately encapsulated the diegetic operas of both composer characters in the operas in question. Moreover, beyond Alwa's role as a composer in *Lulu*, the opera's prologue announces the narrative that the audience is about to witness, thereby giving the work this extra verbal cue signifying its layered meta quality of overlapping realities. This inherent feature of *Lulu* mirrors the opera within an opera trope that Ammon also notes as being a reflection of metadrama, as seen in the relationship between an overture-type opening and the opera proper.[37] This is certainly also evident in the prologues of *Christophorus* and *Lulu*, which have their own distinct dispositions and function as independent narrative entities before the heightened unreality of post-prologue action commences in both works. *Lulu* takes this further, as it embodies what Ammon refers to as "meta-metaopera, of opera on opera on opera, operatic metareferentiality taken to the highest degree."[38] *Lulu*'s prologue is an opera; the opera proper is the opera on opera; and Alwa's opera on Lulu is the opera on opera on opera.

Modernist Autonomy and the Fragile Artist: Conceptual Framework

The aesthetic pressures confronting Schreker and Berg – inward psychological dramaturgy and the demand for modern immediacy – reflect a broader modernist crisis surrounding artistic autonomy and creative authority. The dramaturgical crises in both operas reflect broader modernist anxieties surrounding artistic autonomy, authority, and the instability of creative subjectivity – concerns that have been theorized about in discourses on modernity and aesthetic self-definition. To organize the main themes in this study, namely the investigation of the fragile modern artist and the degeneration of autonomy, I now apply a conceptual framework to further anchor this comparative analysis of Anselm and Alwa as paradigmatic of trends that are evident in other contexts. Texts by the critics Matei Calinescu and Clement Greenberg are referenced from which I extrapolate my thematic tropes for comparing Schreker and Berg's operas. Calinescu describes a dualistic split between two factions of modernity, where a bourgeois proliferation of advancement in science and technology during the advent of the industrial revolution, crystalized an orientation towards capitalism. This bourgeois conception of modernity held onto traditions as it embraced new pathways towards practical applications that would bring success to the middle class.[39] This idea is juxtaposed by Calinescu with an aesthetic notion of modernity that was predicated on extreme avant-garde views that stood antithetically to bourgeois ideals. Calinescu describes a course via "rebellion, anarchy, apocalypticism, and aristocratic self-exile" as methods of implementing aesthetic modernism.[40] This attitude morphed into what

[36] AMMON, Frieder von: Opera on Opera (on Opera): Self-Referential Negotiations of a Different Genre. In: *Self-Reference in Literature and Other Media*. Eds. Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam : Rodopi, 2010, p. 68.

[37] Ibid., p. 70.

[38] Ibid., p. 80.

[39] CALINESCU, Matei: *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism.* Durham : Duke University Press, 1987, p. 41.

[40] Ibid., p. 42.

Calinescu called an overall "consuming negative passion."[41] It is this ideological anti-bourgeois sentiment that can be seen as a catalyst for the kind of crisis, alienation, and fragmentation of experience that lead to an ontology of the "fragile modern artist," exemplified by the character embodiments of Anselm and Alwa.

Calinescu viewed the alienation of the modern artist as stemming from romanticism. He pinpoints expressions of the imagination that gravitated towards the fantastical. Interestingly, Calinescu names E.T.A. Hoffmann and his story, *Der Goldene Topf*, with its central character Anselmus, as a representation of this influence.[42] The work is viewed as a modern tale with an idealized sense of emotions over logic and reason. The characters live in a world of their imagination outside of reality, which is a clear prototype for the kind of existential outlook that Anselm and Alwa exemplify. The fragile artist is further defined by this level of irrational immersion in their artistic creations. But perhaps most aptly, Calinescu discusses the ideas of Charles Baudelaire and his projection of the alienated modern artist. Indeed, Calinescu recognizes Baudelaire's conviction that "an artist needs creative imagination to give expression to modernity."[43] The aesthetic split from bourgeois paradigms is facilitated by a level of imagination that is not rooted in reality.[44] These are the historical precursors for the identity of the modern artist, whom Schreker and Berg elevate in their respective narratives of composer-characters in crisis.

A second dimension of Calinescu's framework that illuminates both *Christophorus* and *Lulu* is the degeneration of autonomy, a point he develops not by offering a single monolithic definition but by tracing modernity's tendency to hollow out its own artistic ideals. In his account of the avant-garde, Calinescu cites Leonard B. Meyer's description of radically self-determining art as a process that "directs us toward no point of culmination – establishes no goals."[45] Although this line is not Calinescu's own, its use in his argument exposes the paradox he wants us to see: the modern claim to uncompromised artistic autonomy can dissolve into directionlessness, leaving the artist without the structural or ideological ground he thought autonomy would secure. This conceptualization speaks directly to Anselm's trajectory in *Christophorus*, where his aspiration to pure creative sovereignty becomes indistinguishable from loss of orientation, and to Alwa in *Lulu*, whose putatively independent artistic subjectivity is repeatedly absorbed, redirected, or suspended by forces he neither perceives nor controls.

A related trope emerges in Calinescu's treatment of decadence, particularly in his discussion of Nietzsche's attack on Wagner. Here, Calinescu recounts Nietzsche's charge that "Wagner's perversion of music,"[46] a formulation that crystallizes the anxiety that the artwork – or the aesthetic program animating it – may ultimately subjugate the artist, bending creative agency toward purposes no longer the artist's own. This dynamic resonates with the operatic worlds of Schreker and Berg, where compositional and dramatic structures repeatedly confront their male artist-figures with aesthetic forces that exceed and reshape them. In this sense, the degeneration of autonomy and the

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
43 Ibid., p. 49.
44 Ibid., p. 55.
45 Ibid., p. 132.
46 Ibid., p. 191.

subjugation of the artist are not separate problems, but rather two facets of the same modernist predicament, one that both composers dramatize with remarkable clarity.

Building on Calinescu's account of the fragile modern creator, whose pursuit of aesthetic self-sufficiency risks collapsing into aimlessness or internal contradiction, we can extend this framework by turning to Clement Greenberg's influential essay "Modernist Painting," which offers a complementary – though differently inflected – formulation of modernist autonomy. Whereas Calinescu traces the psychological and cultural erosion of the artist's authority, Greenberg frames autonomy as a formal ideal rooted in the artwork's self-definition, arguing that all art must "eliminate [...] any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from [...] any other art," becoming "self-defining with a vengeance."[47] Read together, their models expose a productive tension: Calinescu shows how the modern artist's desire for independence can degenerate into instability, while Greenberg reveals how the very procedures meant to guarantee artistic sovereignty can generate new forms of constraint. This combined perspective clarifies the modernist fantasy of the self-legitimating, sovereign creator – a fantasy that both libretti systematically undo. In *Christophorus*, Anselm's reflexivity and quest for self-founded artistic authority ultimately overtake him; in *Lulu*, Alwa's creative agency dissolves as he attempts to mould Lulu into an aesthetic object. Both librettos thus dramatize the fragility of modernist autonomy by embedding its male creator within narrative and symbolic structures that pre-empt his control before it can ever fully materialize.

Jointly, these conceptual perspectives illuminate how modernist autonomy operates less as a guarantee of artistic sovereignty than a condition that exposes the creator to fragmentation, subjugation, and narrative predetermination. In *Christophorus* and *Lulu*, the male composer-figures do not merely inhabit modernity's crises – they enact them dramaturgically, as their creative aspirations are progressively absorbed by the symbolic systems they seek to command. With this framework in place, the following analysis turns first to Anselm, whose psychological interiorization of artistic authority becomes the mechanism through which his agency unravels in Schreker's libretto.

Anselm Characterized in the *Christophorus* Libretto

The following section provides a chronological analysis of Anselm and the sustained dramatization of collapsing artistic agency in the opera's plot. The narrative arc of *Christophorus* charts Anselm's progressive loss of authority, a decline mirrored in the libretto by the gradual erosion of his textual dominance. At the beginning of the opera, he is opinionated, argumentative, and arrogant in extended passages of dialogue. As the shape of his own diegetic opera begins to transform his sense of reality – indeed, as these lines are blurred in the narrative – Anselm becomes increasingly a bystander who participates in the progressive dismantling of his control over the ensuing situations. From the beginning, the opera's prologue appears as pseudo-theatre to the extent that specific doors are assigned to particular characters to enter through. This

[47] GREENBERG, Clement: *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume 4, Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*. Ed. John O'Brian. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 86.

initial stage direction and opening scene are choreographed to parody reality in that the setting and circumstance of events are systematized to quickly establish the ideological conflict that will act as the catalyst for subsequent episodes.

Anselm is introduced as an obsessive idealist who is most comfortable in his own imagination. He and Berg's Alwa are the first vocal entries after their respective prologues. And like Alwa who requests to enter – suggesting his movement as Berg's doppelgänger from not-narrative reality to the story of the opera – the opening of *Christophorus* mimics this obfuscation of an implied artificiality. Both operas employ layered representations of multiple superimposed realities as an unsettling feature that is meant to destabilize linear logic and conventional storytelling in both works. In *Christophorus*, the boundaries between Anselm's staged world and his creative imagination gradually dissolve, and the opera's action unfolds as an externalization of his psychological landscape. Lisa, Christoph, and Johann function less as autonomous characters than as surfaces onto which Anselm's conflicting impulses are projected; their identities appear shaped by the demands of his creative process. From his central position in the drama, Anselm directs the constellation of figures who surround him, each occupying a different chamber of his inner life. Lisa exposes the unruly, erotic forces he struggles to repress, while Christoph stands as his counter-image – embodying the moral authority, discipline, and strength Anselm feels he lacks. The tension between these two figures crystallizes a larger polarity structuring Anselm's imagination: unruly desire against the disciplining conscience, which Janine Ortiz suggests echo models of the unconscious set against the demands of the superego.[48]

Opposing factions are immediately established as Anselm's fellow student composers ridicule him for fantasizing about Lisa when they meet in their composition class. We immediately see how fixation on a female induces a subjugating connotation, as the colleagues gossip about how Lisa is making a fool out of Anselm, inciting him to reimagine her. His actions are characterized as that of devilry, with further accusations of Anselm being "effeminate and silly."[49] This was the precise terminology used against Schreker in the press in the early 1920s.[50] Their mocking treatment of him as an outsider solidifies Anselm's mirroring of Schreker, and further exemplifies his recalcitrant attitude to the established status quo of the opera. This resistance will erode his agency until he abandons his pursuit of ideality at the very end, having lost everything that matters to him. Alwa experiences a similar fall, but unlike Anselm, his defeat is rendered permanent with his murder.

Subsequently, Anselm and his fellow students are given an assignment by their composition teacher, Johann, to compose a string quartet based on the legend of St. Christopher. Ortiz notes that Anselm's association with his teacher and fellow students reflects Schreker's own life as a composition teacher in the final years of the Weimar Republic. Anselm's insubordination against the quartet assignment mirrors the common rebelliousness of youth against authority figures, and Schreker perceives himself

48 ORTIZ, Ref. 6, p. 164.

49 SCHREKER, Franz: *Christophorus or "The Vision of an Opera" German/English libretto*. Trans. Susan Marie Praeder. In: *Christophorus* CD booklet, p. 70.

50 HARDERS-WUTHENOW, Frank: The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Decadence: Franz Schreker's Opera *Christophorus*. In: *Christophorus* CD booklet, p. 30.

as Anselm for remaining faithful to his aesthetic convictions while the other students blindly conform to shallow popularity.[51] After Anselm disparages the quartet assignment, the stage direction reads: "Here a fine black veil slowly descends over the set and is suffused with an unreal, mysterious light."[52] The physical presence of this veil implies that a change has taken place. The previous two scenes of the prologue can be seen as an extended introduction that functions as a rational exposition – a kind of home base that is rooted in heightened empiricism – after which the reality-defying centre of the opera unravels as the veil's presence testifies. This can be interpreted as the start of the opera within the opera as the narrative now becomes defined by Anselm's imagination. This phenomenon is rendered circular as at the very end of the opera, the veil is lifted, and a semblance of partial reality is restored. These matters will be addressed subsequently.

The third scene of the prologue, with the lowered veil, begins with Anselm's detailed descriptions of his imagined female operatic lead. He fantasizes: "But the female element is lacking, the sweet, tempting, devilish woman [...] I choose for the drama: Lisa, Lilith, the snake, our dear Satan. Ah, my goodness! Lisa, you most beautiful, I adore you."[53] Immediately after this, Lisa appears with no stage direction for her entrance. It is as if she has been manifested through the suggestion of Anselm's imagination. Her initial words underscore her femme fatale inclinations and early domination over Anselm. Ortiz concurs, describing Lisa's entry as that of a "seductress; the femme fatale who cannot resist her sensual nature and uses her charms to lead men to their doom."[54] Anselm mirrors Alwa in this moment due to his complete idealistic devotion to Lisa, who exhibits Lulu-like traits of manipulation through seduction. Following this exchange, Christoph, another composition student, and best friend of Anselm, and romantic liaison to Lisa, enters and rebukes Anselm for allowing a woman to hit him, as Lisa slaps Anselm to demonstrate her dominance over him. Ortiz posits that Christoph's entry after the lowering of the veil suggest he is a figment of Anselm's imagination.[55] Christoph's reaction is ultimately subtext for a deep jealousy of Anselm and an insecure possessiveness of Lisa. Christoph's aesthetics and desires are then immediately expressed, as he proudly states he wants to serve art, which he views as life's most virtuous pursuit. He is subsequently ridiculed as an idealist by another student, after which the prologue, with its four scenes, ends. The complex and subtly sexualized tension between Anselm, Lisa, and Christoph is established and will become a narrative paradigm as the first act ensues.

The start of the first act commences one year later in precisely the same manner as the prologue: Anselm is neurotically murmuring ideas for his opera. The structure of an entire act in his work is taking shape, which he admits is causing him distress.[56] The time jump of an entire year mirrors the same span of time that is passed over in *Lulu* within the parameters of that opera's central Film Music Interlude, which accompanies a silent film depicting Lulu's arrest, trial, incarceration, and escape from prison. These are examples of how both operas deviate from an unbroken linear narrative expression.

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51 ORTIZ, Ref. 6, p. 142.
52 SCHREKER, *Christophorus libretto*, p. 75.
53 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
54 ORTIZ, Ref. 6, p. 163.
55 Ibid., p. 172.
56 SCHREKER, *Christophorus libretto*, p. 77.

Moreover, the aftermath of both time jumps can be seen as the start of a precipitous decline in the fortune of all the characters. In addition, Hailey writes that in a previous version of *Christophorus*, Schreker planned to include several film interludes.[57] Once again, we see the manner in which both composers looked to incorporate artistic innovation into their operas. Schreker likely opted against this path in his final version of *Christophorus* in an attempt to streamline the work to enhance the practicality of its performance requirements.

The second scene of the first act introduces the character Starkmann, a music critic. This individual has been characterized as the embodiment of the negative critical media attention that Schreker received in the 1920s, as stated above.[58] The older man is pushy and self-aggrandizing, and his dialogue with Anselm resembles a sort of imagined conversation between Schreker and his literary opponents in the press. The specific criticisms levied against Schreker in the press are the same comments that Anselm receives from his colleagues, further bringing Schreker and his narrative alter-egos into parallel focus. Schreker's own youthfully-inflated sense of self is characterized when he has Anselm state to Starkmann: "I don't have any money, and I'm a genius."[59] An argument follows when Starkmann praises Christoph's value as a composer, with Anselm retorting that he is talentless. Anselm adds: "Wherever in the world there was found a dilettante with modern airs, you beat the drum for him."[60] This line represents Schreker's explicit argument against the aesthetic tastes of the late 1920s, as he considers the popular styling of Neue Sachlichkeit as a fleeting and shallow preoccupation with cultural and artistic trends that do not reflect the more substantive values to which serious art should be attached. As noted earlier, this was a conviction that Berg also shared, but it did not prevent either composer from copying a few of its key trends in order to gain popularity.

After Starkmann's exit, the third scene begins with Anselm contemplating his opera, but with even greater reality-bending implications. Part of his monologue includes the following text in the opera's second act: "...the role I intended for myself is in doubt and not without danger."[61] He states the challenges that lay ahead, complaining that he does not know how to complete his work. His thought process reflects the trope of an opera within an opera, with an additional self-referential layer evident in Anselm's plan to have his own doppelgänger feature in the work. One might be led to wonder if Berg's Alwa had been given more to say about his own planned opera about Lulu, whether he too would have contemplated his own presence in that narrative.

The fourth scene revisits the subtle frictions and hostilities between Anselm, Lisa, and Christoph. As they argue about the quality of Christoph's music, Lisa sides with her romantic interest, proclaiming Anselm as both their and the world's enemy.[62] In an attempt to further provoke Anselm, Lisa seductively flaunts her body, stating: "But look! Am I not beautiful? My neck, radiating in the splendour of pearls! My arms, white and

57 HAILEY, Ref. 28, p. 246.
58 ORTIZ, Ref. 6, p. 142.
59 SCHREKER, *Christophorus libretto*, p. 79.
60 Ibid., p. 80.
61 Ibid., p. 81.
62 Ibid., p. 84.

dazzling, like precious jewels – you've adorned me like a queen."[63] Despite the undermining tactic, Lisa privately says to Anselm that she will bend to his will, implying her faith in the operatic role he is creating for her. At the same time, she is seducing her partner's best friend, while outwardly denouncing him to placate Christoph. Her actions are of an opportunist who, not unlike Lulu, schemes and manipulates in her own interests. Nevertheless, when Lisa is alone with Anselm in the next scene, she expresses vulnerability amidst an inner conflict that she feels where she wishes to be good for Christoph, but feels an equally authentic inclination towards a more sinister sense of self that Anselm exacerbates within her. To this, Anselm, in his convoluted and poetically-verbose manner, admits that he is enslaved by his feelings for her: "I've been chained, fettered to you."[64] He also expresses his dismay over the fact that she has chosen Anselm's inferior, Christoph, whom he now views more antagonistically. Upon his sudden exit, Lisa is left alone in a brief scene where she confusedly calls Anselm's previous reflection as an admission "from another world."[65] This may be viewed as a subtle allusion to Schreker in the other world of reality, which Lisa does not understand, as she herself is a mere invention. She despairs and calls out to Christoph.

In the tenth scene of the opera, Lisa and Christoph are married. Ortiz notes that this shift for Lisa compels her to leave her role as a seductress to become a mother, which she vehemently objects to.[66] Anselm presents the bride with a gift: the first act of his tragic opera. He quotes the closing textual passage from his work, which ends with the words: "Think of the weak. The weak is eternal, and it clarifies life and the world."[67] The endorsement of weakness, and the subsequent classification of strength as ugly, is another parodying allusion to Schreker and further testament of Anselm's infatuation with Lisa. The scene concludes the first part of Act 1, about two thirds of the way through the opening act. Anselm's gift presents Lisa with a way back to her former self, and an escape from her current self-loathing of marriage and childbirth. Lisa's chance to dance again is coupled with Anselm's subtle subversion of Christoph that plants the seeds of resentment regarding his strength in favour of weakness, namely, Anselm's own attributes. Ortiz describes this as Anselm "reconstructing" Lisa into the archetype of the dark side of femininity, as only in this way can she serve his operatic vision, [while] Christoph stylizes his wife as a super-mother, thus invoking the oft-cited contrast between "whore and saint."[68]

The second part begins with a marital argument between Lisa and Christoph, where the dark tenets of Anselm's opera start to find expression in the reality of the characters. Lisa is unhappy with the ageing of her body following the birth of their first child, believing that she is no longer beautiful. Christoph tells her that he wants more children, to which Lisa retorts prophetically: "Never again – even if you kill me!"[69] She then embarks on a long monologue that describes the nature of her suffering, ultimately calling herself

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., p. 87.
65 Ibid.
66 ORTIZ, Ref. 6, p. 191.
67 SCHREKER, *Christophorus libretto*, 94.
68 ORTIZ, Ref. 6, p. 194.
69 Ibid., p. 98.

weak while recognizing Christoph's strength and goodness. This explanation mirrors Anselm's quote from his opera of praising weakness and denouncing strength. It now becomes clear that this was Anselm's subtle ploy of driving a wedge between the married couple, emphasizing his own greater compatibility with Lisa given their shared weakness. This admission leaves Christoph crushed, prompting him to reflect: "I recognize that a dream world is crumbling away, disappearing, vanishing like a phantom."[70] The irony of Christoph's statement is that his ideality was based in reality but not truth. Anselm's opera will invert that previous dynamic by embracing truth within an abstract non-reality. When the two dualities ultimately blend into one another, the phantasmagoria of uncertain reality will fully usurp any final semblance of personal agency due to the diegetic opera's takeover of all character perceptions.

Matters reach a climax in the third scene of Act 1, Part 2. Anselm enters, and upon seeing the sleeping Lisa, he comments on her beauty and prophetically claims that "the great scene begins."[71] It is almost as if Schreker is speaking from his own reality to signify the beginning of a decisive narrative moment. Anselm's extended monologue begins, building upon his reaffirmed love for Lisa. He recognizes that his love is as "creation and true being weaving together to form a unity."[72] Tellingly, he recognizes that "when peace leaves me, the creator's cool calculation yields to the raging spirits around us and in us, to the spirits of the senses."[73] This is Anselm's most direct admission of the loss of his agency in context of his submission to his impulses. Furthermore, as if wishing to completely submerge into this ideality, he shuns "the material world [that] threatens."[74] As his frenzy increases, the stage direction describes his articulation as that of a "vision," amidst the complete absence of rationality. As he continues to sing to the sleeping Lisa of childlike pleasures, his waking reverie ends as he likens himself to a dance master, who could be seen as a marionette on a string in terms of his powerlessness to resist the temptation of his fantasized creation. In this moment, Ortiz suggests, Anselm reinstates Lisa's position as a seductress.[75]

In the next moment, Lisa wakes, recognizes Anselm, and professes fatigue. Anselm replies: "Your weariness will disappear as soon as you give yourself to the work, to the art."[76] Lisa admits to feeling burdened, as if she's still carrying her child, to which Anselm placates her by saying: "You've passed the test, the supernatural saves you. Your body is blossoming."[77] He is essentially telling her that her salvation is coming in the embrace of non-reality. Lisa is suddenly infused with a wild energy, proclaiming a kind of rebirth of her vitality. Anselm capitalizes on the intoxicating enthusiasm, telling her that she will now dance to the scene in his opera, the command of which, as the stage direction reads, is "whispered in the manner of a hypnotist."[78] Anselm begins to recite the words

70 Ibid., p. 100.
71 Ibid., p. 101.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., p. 102.
74 Ibid.
75 ORTIZ, Ref. 6, p. 200.
76 SCHREKER, *Christophorus libretto*, p. 103.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., p. 104.

from his opera, with Lisa embodying a dancing flame that "flies through space [...] a soaring dream [...] beauty, weakness, music, and song."[79] These are all emancipatory metaphors that free Lisa from the bondage of her reality, further fuelling Anselm's desires as a result. This moment marks a temporary illusion of authorial mastery that only accelerates Anselm's subsequent loss of control, as his creation begins to dictate the terms of reality, rather than obey them.

Throughout the performance, Lisa dances as personifications of fire, a wave of water, and finally sin itself. While the words of Anselm's libretto vary between guises, a few key phrases repeat, chief among them being how this new existence that Lisa is embodying is "ruinous for the strong man who resists it."[80] Once again, a direct allusion is made to Christoph, who represents strength, reality, marital bondage, physical decay, and who resists the freedom granted by an idealized disavowal of these constricting tenets. When she becomes sin, Lisa takes over the libretto recitation from Anselm, delivering all of the sensualized allusions of an unrepentant and sexually-charged sin that empowers its avatar. As she concludes the recitation, the stage direction reads that "she throws herself into Anselm's arms."[81] Her following remark to him ends the scene: "You've created me as you wanted it. You've called the devils dancing in me."[82] In a manner of speaking, the operatic performance has led to Lisa's rebirth into a fantasy realm away from her husband.

In the final scene of the first act, Christoph appears and covertly observes Anselm and Lisa. The pair are now finally singing in unison, which was not the case prior during Lisa's thematic enactments. With Anselm still presumably embracing Lisa as they sing of knowing lust and no limits, this moment is the closest that Schreker's opera gets to embodying a romanticized love scene. While undoubtedly intimate, there are no additional scene descriptions or other indications to suggest that the pair are in love and planning to consummate their union. When they see Christoph, the latter begins his own monologue of distraught heartbreak. Upon seeing Lisa produce a slight smile, he is overcome by a heightened frenzy and shoots her. Lisa's final words are: "It was only a game..."[83] Although Christoph is immobilized in disbelief, Anselm jumps into action. Despite calling him a madman and murderer, Anselm still whisks Christoph away to safety, telling him that he loves him. The first act ends with this admission. Interestingly, there is no indication that confirms Lisa's death – only that she fell to the floor without a noise upon being shot.[84] Anselm states there was a murder, so it is highly likely, but one may surmise that the lack of definitiveness here is a strategic ploy to further blur the lines between reality and illusion when Lisa briefly returns in the epilogue. We are left to wonder whether it really was a game to Lisa, or a downplaying of the truth to spare Christoph. Anselm's own reaction of proclaiming fraternal love to the man he has been disparaging and undermining for the entire opera, especially in the immediate aftermath of him murdering his wife – whom Anselm loved – adds an additional layer of absurd

79 Ibid., p. 105.
80 Ibid., p. 106.
81 Ibid., p. 108.
82 Ibid., p. 109.
83 Ibid., p. 111.
84 Ibid.

obfuscation regarding a consistency of intent, or lack thereof. Ortiz describes Anselm's emotional shift towards Christoph thus: "Within the opera's vision, Christoph can be understood as the personified superego of the young composer. For Anselm, confronted by Lisa and overwhelmed by his own unleashed drives, now turns, like a pendulum swinging equally back and forth, to the powerful Christoph. The conscience he had previously denied is now as dear to him as his own life."[85]

The second act of *Christophorus* opens in a modern setting firmly rooted in reality. Anselm and Christoph are incognito, but working as a musical duo, performing at a dance bar. They are miserable, but are enduring their situation for the time being. However, the atmosphere of the setting starts to shift back to unreality when the singer, Rosita, begins to sing a text written by Anselm filled with existential angst and reflection that again reflects Schreker's personal feelings of inadequacy and neglect. The suggestive significance of the moment is rendered even more fantastical as the stage direction states that Rosita's voice gradually changes to that of Lisa's.[86] Schreker's libretto oscillates between expressions of basic, everyday dialogue when concerning the unburdened lives of subsidiary characters, to a convoluted psycho-philosophical jargon when quoting text from Anselm's opera. Therefore, whenever the narrative shifts to expressing something that Anselm created – in this case, a work of his that Rosita is performing – the modality of meaning instantly adopts this abstract ideality that invariably gravitates to an association with Lisa. Despite the lack of indication, it is clear that this event is a projection of Anselm's obsession, and is another example of his lack of agency regarding the hold that his muse still exerts over him. As such, reality fractures every time that Anselm's vocal music is diegetically performed.

In the next instance, a séance is held in an attempt to contact Lisa. Anselm and Christoph at first believe they are in the presence of ghosts. Christoph is more invested in the activity while Anselm's skepticism is growing. He cautions Christoph to be discreet regarding the information that he divulges concerning Lisa's death. He then adds: "I'm ruined. My last act turns out kitschy and sentimental!"[87] This is a fascinating admission because it demonstrates how Anselm interprets his own reality as an extension of his opera. His experience parallels his opera's narrative like some interactive installation, further blurring the lines of his work and that of Schreker's. Moreover, if Anselm is subtly admitting that he exists in an opera, this is the voice of Schreker critically commenting on his own unwanted situation, exacerbated by an unsatisfactory conclusion to his present work, *Christophorus*.

The séance is abruptly interrupted by the sudden arrival of the destitute child of Christoph and Lisa, who laments being a beggar and ill because his mother is dead and his father is "depraved."[88] Christoph goes to his son, and the second act ends with their reunion. Following this event, *Christophorus* ends with an epilogue. Reality is now entirely absent, as all of the dialogue in this scene emanates from Anselm's imagination. The epilogue begins with a dismembered voice of unknown origin that sounds from a distance, and quotes a long text. Throughout *Christophorus*, the quoted text is always

[85] ORTIZ, Ref. 6, p. 210.
[86] SCHREKER, *Christophorus libretto*, p. 119.
[87] Ibid., p. 126.
[88] Ibid., p. 130.

associated with Anselm's opera. The text resembles a kind of allegorical dénouement with a moral summation that addresses one who "recognizes his male strength and yet abides in female weakness."[89] This is the familiar voice of Schreker personifying his reflexive predilection once more in the final reflections of Anselm's opera. Upon the conclusion of the text, the stage direction discloses that the setting has returned to the scene at the start of *Christophorus* in the music room.[90] Anselm is gripped by a vision where Christoph, Lisa, and Johann, his composition teacher, are present. Anselm is experiencing a complete break with reality while contemplating his opera's narrative, likely imagining its ending. Hailey describes this moment, observing that "Anselm stands between vision and awareness of reality. His visionary figures pursue him into his own world, while Lisa and Johann penetrate his consciousness."[91]

Anselm seemingly admits to his inability to stop contriving his existential fantasies into narrative fodder, recognizing: "As a moth to light, I'm drawn to him. He, my wish dream, becomes my doom."[92] The level of unreality is elevated in this epilogue to signify the most extreme disintegration of Anselm's psyche because he is imagining his characters speaking to each other now about him. Lisa states: "He's out of his mind. He's talking about someone whom I don't see."[93] Johann replies: "He lives in his work."[94] Anselm is aware of his own lack of agency and projects it into the observations of his characters. To compound matters, Christoph indicates that he (referring to himself), has "lived only a stage existence."[95] Anselm concurs: "Painful truth! Tragic recognition! He becomes the creator; we're only sketchy images."[96] Here the fantasy of artistic sovereignty fully inverts itself: Anselm recognizes that the creator has become subordinate to the structures of representation he imagined himself to command. The emergence of these realizations further deepens the existential ambiguity with Anselm accepting that he too is a dramatic invention of sorts. He knows he is a character in his own opera because he cannot remove himself from it. This is another subtle indication of Schreker's self-referential puppeteering in an allusion to the concept of creatorship.

Anselm is despairing over the helplessness of his imagination, which Christoph comments on thus: "all the art and artifices of my creator – he's at his wit's end.[97] Anselm knows that these projections of his opera's story are nearing their conclusion, but he is still at a loss on how to end it: "The end, the end! Help, master, help!"[98] Could this be a plea directly to Schreker for guidance? The answer partially presents itself as the child appears (with the stage direction, "in a feverish dream"[99]), and beckons to Christoph to take him and put an end to his torment. As they depart, Christoph's final words are:

89 Ibid., p. 131.
90 Ibid., p. 132.
91 HAILEY, Ref. 14, p. 131.
92 SCHREKER, *Christophorus libretto*, p. 132.
93 Ibid., p. 133.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., p. 134.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 135.

"The world of the theatre ends, sinks."[100] Anselm observes that the voices are receding, but not before Johann interjects one last time: "Your characters live in you, become you yourself. Far away from the world of light, from the world of appearances, the end of the legend of St. Christopher becomes for you: music and nothing more – a quartet movement, my son."[101] In response to this, Anselm next speaks the tempo indication of "Andante con rigore" as a reference to the original string quartet assignment, which he seems to be returning to at the expense of his opera. However, the final text of *Christophorus* is a quote, meaning text from Anselm's opera, which reads: "He carries the child, the child, who takes him, along the lonely path..."[102] This ending is steeped in ambiguity. We are presumably presented with the ending of Anselm's opera – depicting Christoph departing with his child – but after he has seemingly decided to pursue the string quartet project. It either suggests that he has found his conclusion, or that he is still enslaved by his obsession and to the work that robs him of his agency. It is difficult to imagine that he will ever be rid of the work that has defined his entire being and character, so ending *Christophorus* with a final indication of the opera within an opera is dramaturgically the most satisfying ending due to a slightly inconclusive arrival that accentuates the ethos of the entire work.

Representations of Alwa in the *Lulu* Libretto

This section presents a focused analysis of Alwa – a full linear synopsis is unnecessary due to the familiarity of the *Lulu* narrative and Alwa's smaller dramatic role. On his entrance in the opening scene of the opera, and after visually comparing Lulu to her portrait, Alwa's imagination immediately gravitates to creative idealization, exclaiming: "If only I could have engaged you as my leading lady!"[103] Lulu's response is full of suggestive innuendo, remarking that "for this new piece of yours, you need more than my dancing..."[104] Lulu's coy subtlety towards Alwa in the very first exchange establishes their dynamic of the wanting male artist and the seductress, who senses a self-serving opportunity. This dialogue immediately establishes Alwa's tendency to translate desire into aesthetic fantasy, a reflex that will repeatedly substitute imagination for agency.

Alwa's next entrance comes at the end of the second scene, just after the painter has committed suicide, with Alwa breaking down the door and finding the dead man. Lulu uses the event to feign distress and emotionally lean on Alwa to prompt his pity and to subconsciously instil a saviour complex in him towards her. As he sits with Lulu, reflecting on the painter's suicide, Alwa suggests that the painter "didn't want to let fate get in his way," adding that "he had what a person can only dream of."[105] This short exchange further punctuates Alwa's inclination towards destiny and fantasy. His

[100] Ibid., p. 136.
[101] Ibid., pp. 136-137.
[102] Ibid., p. 137.
[103] BERG, Alban: *Lulu: Opera in 3 Acts (7 Scenes), after "Erdgeist" and "Büchse der Pandora" by Frank Wedekind, English/German Libretto.* Trans. Arthur Jacobs. Vienna : Universal Edition, 1978, p. 5.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., p. 31.

invocation of a dream also signifies an allusion to his own predetermined fate, where the concept of dreaming will emerge as an idealized trope for Alwa. It will act as his catalyst for detaching from reality and taking refuge in his imagination. This practice will become paradigmatic, and will facilitate the forfeiture of his agency against the backdrop of his blind devotion to Lulu.

The first significant expression of Alwa's ideality as a composer merging with his fantasy of Lulu occurs in the third scene of the first act when he is with Lulu in her dressing room at the theatre where Alwa's music is playing. Lulu is revealingly dressed as a ballerina, and asks Alwa if he remembers when he first saw her. Lulu is manipulating the occasion to get Alwa to speak fondly of her, knowing the effect that she has on him. This is reinforced by the stage direction that describes Alwa's reaction to her appearance: "painfully affected, almost blinded by the sight of her, Alwa presses his hand to his heart."[106] He replies to her question by stating that "I saw something so infinitely superior to me in you."[107] His subservience in this moment demonstrates again that he has no agency in the context of his infatuation with Lulu. When she exits to perform and Alwa is left by himself to ponder, we are presented with the opera's most direct example of Alwa acting as Berg's doppelgänger when he states:

> "Couldn't some clever composer take her story and make an opera from it? For the first scene: there's old Dr. Goll... No good! It's the same sort of howling as in a zoo when they put the food in front of the animals. – Then the next scene: The painter... that seems even worse! And the third scene: will things really go on like this?"[108]

At the start of this short monologue, the orchestra plays a passage from *Wozzeck*, Berg's first opera, confirming that a clever composer is indeed up to the challenge of composing an opera about Lulu. The idea of the opera within an opera, with autobiographical references steeped in reality, is further crystalized by the mention of the zoo and animals. This is a subtle reference to the animal tamer's prologue, which exists outside of the narrative proper, demonstrating Alwa's multi-layered function not only as Berg's representative, but as the bridge between reality, illusion (the opera in which he himself is a character), and diegetic illusion (the fantasy that he is crafting in his own opera).

In the first scene of Act 2, Lulu is entertaining her male admirers, with Alwa among them. Lulu begins to seduce him, attesting to his strength and ability to protect her. Alwa's smitten demeanour compels him to express his emotions more openly, but not before uttering an objective truth: "The gods created you to bring the people around you to corruption. I am also flesh and blood!"[109] In a moment of rare clarity, Alwa admits to an awareness regarding the authentic destructiveness of Lulu's nature, yet admits to his own fallibility, as if accepting his own weakness and yielding to the temptations paraded before him in the guise of Lulu's allure. Moreover, the phrase "flesh and blood" is another reference to *Wozzeck*, where it is used to signify the truth of one's nature. With this remark, Alwa's agency is forfeited and the illusion of Lulu as a conduit for his artistic

106 Ibid., p. 35.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., p. 55.

imagination will henceforth inform all of his actions, with the sole exception coming at the end of the scene when he gives Lulu up to the police for murdering his father.

Moments later, when Lulu gives him her hand, Alwa is transported into his fantasy and speaks a reality-defying phrase that foreshadows his own death at Lulu's side. But now, the idealized ecstasy inspires him to say: "A soul rubbing the sleep from its eyes in the next world... oh, this hand."[110] In relation to this, Calinescu remarks that "eternal half beauty" finds its afterlife only through the encounter with modern beauty,[111] which casts Alwa's reverie about the soul in a distinctly modernist light. Alwa treats Lulu not as a stable aesthetic ideal but as the volatile, fleeting medium through which an "afterlife" of beauty momentarily flares into being, revealing both his longing for transcendence and the instability that will undo his creative agency. Lulu capitalizes on his transfixed state of mind, asking what comes next. Alwa then excitedly proceeds to list Lulu's arm, then her body, and with full passion, yells out "Mignon". The moment she is called a name other than her own, Lulu realizes that Alwa is sexually objectifying her, which she finds irritating when it is done via the projection of the male gaze, and when the identity being assigned to her is accompanied by a false name. The moment she removes her hand from his grasp, Alwa's desperation surfaces, and he launches into his subservient need: "Destroy me! Finish me off," and later, "Mignon, I love you!"[112] Lulu's reply to Alwa's proclamations demonstrates both the absurdity of loving her, and the irrational devotion that comes with a complete loss of agency. She coldly states: "I poisoned your mother."[113] Alwa is unfazed by this revelation, further attesting to a level of submission that shockingly disregards reality. Platt comments on this moment in the narrative, stating that Lulu's calculating seduction of Alwa and savage words to him when she admits that she murdered his mother equate to castration.[114]

Shortly thereafter, Dr. Schön emerges from his hiding place, having covertly observed the entire event between Lulu and his son, enraged by his wife's sexualized flaunting. During the ensuing altercation that leads to his murder, Dr. Schön unleashes a tirade foreshadowing doom, saying how Lulu's actions will result in Alwa swimming in his own blood.[115] After additional dramatic and accusatory dialogue, Lulu shoots her husband, who in turn calls to Alwa. Before dying, the older man prophetically tells his son not to let her get away, adding that he, Alwa, will be Lulu's next victim.[116] In a rare moment of reality-based assurance and free will, Alwa rejects Lulu's pleas not to report her to the police. It is to be the last time that Alwa acts independently of Lulu's will. The scene closes with Lulu's arrest.

Between the first and second scenes of the second act, the silent film interlude plays, the second event in the opera after the prologue to take place outside of standard narrative time. As with *Christophorus*, the action moves forward by one year, breaking linear continuity and triggering the start of a consistent unravelling, all of which was similarly

110 Ibid., p. 57.
111 CALINESCU, Ref. 39, p. 50.
112 BERG, Ref. 103, p. 57.
113 Ibid.
114 PLATT, Ref. 3, p. 291.
115 BERG, Ref. 103, p. 59.
116 Ibid., p. 61.

evident in Schreker's opera. When the second scene begins, Alwa is eagerly awaiting Lulu's return following her escape from prison. Although he was the one who helped to put her there, it was clearly only a momentary deviation from his true identity as Lulu's idealizing acolyte. As Alwa waits, he enters into an argument with the acrobat, who accuses Alwa of general uselessness, adding: "You composed a lurid opera in which my bride's calves are the main characters, and no court theatre will stage it."[117] This is another critical moment in the opera within an opera theme, connecting to Berg's reality and his awareness that his own *Lulu* opera is lurid and will likely face trouble from the censors.[118] It also shows how similarly to Anselm's peers, other characters see Alwa's *Lulu* opera as a meaningless reflection of its composer's obsessiveness over a woman. The symmetry between Anselm and Alwa's operas demonstrates their shared emotional dependency on composing their respective operas, further illustrating how consumed they are by their imaginations. They wrote works that were not commissioned and that stand no chance of being performed, signifying how both composers have twisted reality to such an extent that they are incapable of seeing the truth, preferring to live in their creations. This was evident for Anselm, as his invented characters spoke to him, and is clear with Alwa when he disregards Lulu's admissions of brutality.

Alwa's blindness is at its most visceral when he is reunited with Lulu at the end of the scene. Lulu beckons for a kiss, bringing Alwa fully under her control. As his excitement grows, Lulu's cruelty emerges when she reminds him that she shot his father. Alwa predictably ignores this, saying: "Yet I still love you nevertheless for it! Come! A kiss! A kiss! A kiss!"[119] Even amidst his euphoria, Alwa is still able to mobilize sufficient objective foresight to prophetically state: "If it were not for your two childlike eyes I look into, I should say you were the most designing of whores and bitches who ever inveigled a man to his doom."[120] In the next instance, his composer's intuition surfaces, where he again waxes poetically and covetously over Lulu's body in musical terms. He muses:

> "Under this dress, I perceive your figure like music. These ankles – a grazioso. This enchanting roundness – a cantabile. Then your knees – misterioso; and then the powerful andante of lust. How peacefully the two slender rivals nestle together, aware that neither can equal the other in beauty, until the capricious mistress awakens, and the two rivals recoil like two poles. I will sing your praises until your senses are overwhelmed..."[121]

This is another direct allusion to Berg, as the tempo indications that Alwa names correspond to those same indications found in Berg's *Lyric Suite* – the musical testament he composed for his own illicit and secret muse – Hanna Fuchs. Greenberg's reminder that formal autonomy inevitably hardens into constraint[122] clarifies Alwa's

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117 Ibid., p. 69.

118 This subtle nod towards censorship and Berg's awareness of his opera's sordid controversies is detailed in a study of the history of *Lulu*'s plight with censorship, see: NOTLEY, Margaret: *"Taken by the Devil:" The Censorship of Frank Wedekind and Alban Berg's Lulu.* New York : Oxford University Press, 2019.

119 BERG, Ref. 103, p. 75.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., p. 77.

122 GREENBERG, Ref. 47, p. 89.

impulse here: the more rigorously he tries to aestheticize Lulu according to his internal norms of beauty, the more he binds himself to the very limitations that will later erode his agency. His creative freedom contracts precisely because he attempts to secure it through a self-defined aesthetic logic. Alwa next discloses in full honesty his complete subjugation to Lulu, stating: "You've driven me mad," to which Lulu replies with a cold dose of reality: "Isn't this the sofa on which your father bled to death?"[123] The second act ends with Alwa imploring her to be silent as he once again rejects the reality of truth in favour of his invented unreality. Platt observes these tendencies in Alwa's psychology, stating that "his passive attitude is also emblematic of his weak personality, and because of his willingness to let events whirl around him, like many introverts, he becomes the victim of stronger characters."[124]

The first scene of the third act is an expository event to set up the second and final scene of the opera. The large number of characters and extended dialogue characterize Lulu's disintegrating stature as she deals with multiple blackmail threats and the loss of her (or rather Alwa's) fortune in a botched investment, which leaves them penniless. Lulu, Alwa, Geschwitz, and Schigolch escape from this situation by fleeing to London, where Lulu works as a prostitute, becoming the group's only source of income in an ironic twist of fate – she previously only took, and now is the only one capable of providing. There is a connection here where we can associate the fleeing Alwa and Lulu with Anselm and Christoph, as the latter pair also run from the law. After Lisa's death, Anselm tells Christoph that he loves him – a new seducer has taken Lisa's place and invokes the same unconditional devotion from Anselm, who now handcuffs himself to Christoph and saves the murderer, as Alwa does with Lulu.

Much like Anselm at the end of *Christophorus*, Alwa's condition at the end of *Lulu* marks his lowest point in every regard. He is sick with a venereal disease he contracted from Lulu and jealously disapproves of her work as a prostitute. However, when Geschwitz enters carrying Lulu's portrait – the physical manifestation of her allure onto which all observers project their lustful and possessive desires – Alwa's demeanour changes entirely. It triggers a delusional nostalgia that reflects his previous domination by Lulu via imagery of her body parts that was previously always associated with inspirations for his music. Upon seeing the portrait, Alwa waxes: "With this picture before me, I feel my self-respect has returned. I understand the fate that compels me. Whoever stands before those lips with their promise of pleasure, before those innocent childlike eyes, before this white and rosy-ripened body, and still feels safe within his bourgeois code of rules, let such a man cast the first stone at us!"[125] Platt reflects on Alwa's general obliviousness, citing that "although Alwa believes himself to be rational and in control, in reality he is not [...] he is governed by events and the sensations they produce, rather than by rational judgment."[126]

After further observation, Alwa continues: "The childlike expression in her eyes is still exactly the same, despite everything that she has experienced since then. But the fresh dew covering her skin, and the fragrant breath before her lips, and the radiant

123 BERG, Ref. 103, p. 77.
124 PLATT, Ref. 3, p. 286.
125 BERG, Ref. 103, p. 105.
126 PLATT, Ref. 3, p. 284.

light spreading from her white forehead, and that incomparable glow of youthful flesh on her neck and arms..."[127] Alwa's consistent referral to Lulu as childlike signifies the irrational extent of his ideality, as he eternally views a murderous manipulator, fugitive, and common prostitute as innocent and virtuous. His inability to reconcile himself with the truth of Lulu's character, and the dire situation in which he finds himself, demonstrates the apex of his forfeiture of agency and fundamental incapability to divert his fate from the catastrophic results that he has articulated multiple times. Lulu murdered both of his parents; perpetuated his social collapse and destitution; destroyed his health by giving him venereal disease, and yet he still views her as childlike. This acute level of denial and naiveté stems from the fact that Alwa is himself childlike in terms of his emotional development, the implications of which will soon cost him his life, and to the sorrow of no one. Moreover, this classification of Alwa's own immaturity obliquely parallels an accusation that Theodor Adorno made of Berg when he said "Berg was the most unfatherly man one could imagine; his authority was the total absence of authoritarianism. He successfully avoided becoming an adult without remaining infantile."[128] It is another interesting link to consider in the autobiographical chain that unifies Berg with his doppelgänger.

Prophetic allusions to Alwa's pending demise abound when he attempts to bar Lulu from returning to the streets to find another client. He tellingly states: "You shall not go down there again, not while I'm living."[129] Shortly thereafter, Lulu returns with a black man who then manhandles her. After Alwa tries to pull him away from Lulu, he is hit over the head and killed by the black man, who prophetically speaks to the dead Alwa: "Sweet dreams are coming. (To Lulu.) Dreams of you!"[130] This moment refers back to Alwa expressing the idea of a soul rubbing the sleep from its eyes in the next world. That world is now death, and Alwa will be dreaming in it permanently. The opera ends soon after with the murders of Lulu and Geschwitz by Jack the Ripper. Alwa's end in the narrative was an unavoidable event that was sealed because his creative and idealizing impulses overrode his sense of reality and self-preservation. Like Anselm, his agency was the price he paid to remain close to his destructive muse. As such, both narrative composers met with ends that emanated from their shared obsession of fantasies-turned-operatic, from which neither could contrive existential independence.

Nevertheless, Alwa differs from Anselm in regard to his ability to recognize and express Lulu's destructive nature, whereas Anselm never reaches such depths of introspection. Other characters need to verbalize it as manifestations of his subconscious. So although Anselm is cognizant of it on some level, his realization is not as explicit as Alwa's. This key difference perhaps renders Alwa as the more tragic (or pathetic) figure, as he capitulates in the wake of awareness. The severe repercussions of this – a fate that Anselm avoids – are that his murder prevents any chance for personal redemption. Anselm's survival at the end of Schreker's opera grants him a modicum of mercy, even if he exists in a fractured reality of doubtful stability.

[127] BERG, Ref. 103, p. 105.
[128] ADORNO, Ref. 22, p. 34.
[129] BERG, Ref. 103, p. 107.
[130] Ibid., p. 109.

Conclusion

This study examines *Christophorus* and *Lulu* as responses to a cultural moment in which opera was compelled to renegotiate its aesthetic priorities amid rapid social and artistic change. Schreker and Berg, working in close historical proximity and sustained professional awareness of each other's work, approached musical drama as a medium capable of bearing extraordinary psychological and symbolic weight. Rather than offering stable narratives of creative mastery, their operas foreground figures whose identities fracture under the pressures exerted by the dramatic worlds they inhabit. In both works, the composer-character becomes the focal point through which anxieties surrounding authorship, authority, and desire are exposed and destabilized. By bringing Schreker's and Berg's operas into dialogue through a libretto-centred approach, this study has argued that *Christophorus* and *Lulu* articulate a shared modernist anxiety: the erosion of artistic agency within worlds governed by deterministic narrative logics that the composer-figures themselves help to construct and sustain. Drawing selectively on the conceptual insights of Calinescu and Greenberg, the study frames this erosion through the intertwined dramaturgical tropes of the fragile modern artist and the degeneration of autonomy as they emerge across both operas.

The analyses of Anselm and Alwa reveal how these tropes operate not abstractly but through direct and carefully constructed dramaturgical mechanisms. Anselm's reflexive operatic project gradually absorbs him, erasing the distinction between author and artefact, while Alwa's efforts to aestheticize and control Lulu dissolve into a loss of creative agency as she resists fixation. In both cases, artistic authority is not violently seized from the composer-figure but quietly undermined by the structures he helps to establish. These parallels are sharpened by Schreker's and Berg's decision to fashion their protagonists as unmistakable composer-doubles, figures whose professional aspirations, aesthetic anxieties, and historical positioning mirror their creators' own negotiations with modernity. The operas thus operate on two levels simultaneously: as narratives about artistic failure and as self-reflective commentaries on the precarious position of the composer within early twentieth-century operatic culture, where creativity increasingly confronts forces of commodification, determinism, and psychological fragmentation.

Read in this light, *Christophorus* and *Lulu* participate in a broader modernist reconfiguration of opera as a self-reflexive medium – one in which the act of creation becomes a subject of dramatic inquiry. Unlike earlier theatrical self-referential gestures that foregrounded illusion or satire, these works internalize reflexivity within the psychology of the artist-figure, transforming meta-operatic structure into a mechanism of existential collapse. Rather than affirming creative mastery, Schreker and Berg expose composition as a process that entangles the artist within narrative systems that exceed his control. This study reframes meta-operatic dramaturgy as a modernist exploration of agency's disintegration under aesthetic and social pressures, rather than playful self-awareness.

Considered against the stylistic climate of *Zeitoper*, the divergent yet related trajectories of *Christophorus* and *Lulu* also invite reflection on their likely reception within contemporary musical discourse. Schreker's opera, with its self-reflexive premise, sym-

bolic architecture, and sustained inward focus, was resisted by audiences and critics who were increasingly attuned to topical immediacy, technological fascination, and social legibility. Its psychological density and meta-operatic concerns stand apart from the surface accessibility often prized during the period. *Lulu*, by contrast, while no less disturbing in its implications, engages more directly with themes of circulation, spectacle, and commodification, factors that may have rendered its modernity more immediately intelligible – even as its formal rigor and moral ambiguity continued to provoke unease. Framing the two works in this way clarifies the stakes of their comparison, revealing how each negotiates contemporary stylistic pressures while arriving at a shared critique of artistic autonomy.

Finally, the comparative framework developed here suggests broader avenues for investigating artist-figures across German-language opera of the 1920s and 1930s. Works such as Hindemith's *Cardillac* (1926), Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* (1927), and Weill's collaborations with Brecht similarly foreground creative or quasi-creative figures entangled in systems that constrain, redirect, or negate their agency. Although these operas differ markedly in idiom and ideological orientation, they share a concern with exposing the limits of artistic sovereignty under modern conditions. By emphasizing dramaturgical reflexivity and narrative predetermination, this study positions Schreker and Berg not as isolated cases, but as central participants in a wider operatic meditation on creativity, selfhood, and the structural limits of artistic authority in the early twentieth century.

Summary

The Fragile Modern Artist in Schreker's *Christophorus* and Berg's *Lulu*

This study investigates the dramaturgical relationship between Franz Schreker's *Christophorus oder "Die Vision einer Oper"* and Alban Berg's *Lulu* through the parallel figures of Anselm and Alwa, composer-characters whose artistic identities become destabilized by the narrative worlds they inhabit. Situating both operas within the cultural climate of the Weimar period, the study argues that Schreker and Berg engage with a shared modernist concern surrounding the fragility of artistic authority under conditions of psychological fragmentation, reflexive narration, and aesthetic over determination. Through a comparative, libretto-centred methodology, the study demonstrates how both operas transform the composer into a dramatic subject whose creative aspirations gradually erode through his own imaginative projections. The study further frames these trajectories through the interconnected concepts of the fragile modern artist and the degeneration of autonomy, drawing selectively on the writings of Matei Calinescu and Clement Greenberg to illuminate how modernist self-reflexivity increasingly exposes the instability of artistic sovereignty.

The analyses of Anselm and Alwa reveal that both operas construct reflexive dramaturgies in which artistic creation assumes an autonomous force that reshapes the consciousness of the creator himself. In *Christophorus*, Anselm's opera within the opera progressively absorbs the boundaries separating imagination, reality, and authorship, producing a state in which the composer can no longer distinguish his artistic invention from his own psychological condition. In *Lulu*, Alwa's idealization of Lulu as both muse and aesthetic object gradually dismantles his capacity for judgment, leaving him entrapped within the destructive systems of desire and spectacle that structure the opera's world. By placing these figures into dialogue, the study argues that Schreker and Berg reconceive meta-operatic dramaturgy as a mechanism for exploring the collapse of agency within modern artistic culture. The argument ultimately positions *Christophorus* and *Lulu* within a broader operatic tendency of the 1920s and 1930s in which composer-figures, performers, and creative subjects become increasingly entangled in structures that redirect, fragment, and undermine their autonomy.