MORE WRETCHEDLY masochistic self-portrait of an artist is difficult to imagine than Alexander von Zemlinsky’s one-act opera Der Zwerg (1919–20). The tragic force of the work is the cruel treatment of a repulsive but tender-hearted creature known simply as “the Dwarf.” That this character represented Zemlinsky himself was plainly understood; even his closest family and friends regarded the composer as physically repellent. His great nephew records, “Believe me, he really was ugly,” and Zemlinsky’s own self-deprecat ing analysis reads, “Face and nose: impossible . . . . Hence summa summarum: hideous”\(^1\) (See Example 1). Particularly degrading then was Alma Schindler’s expression of “horrible dwarf”—this from the woman he loved.\(^2\) It was in the spirit of self-loathing that Zemlinsky asked Franz Schreker, who had recently been working on his ballet version of Oscar Wilde’s short
story *The Birthday of the Infanta*, to prepare a libretto on “the drama of an ugly man” in 1911. But ultimately it was the minor playwright Georg Klaren, after completing his monograph on Otto Weininger’s highly volatile and misogynistic *Geschlecht und Charakter*, who adapted Wilde’s story, making the character of the Dwarf resemble Zemlinsky and that of the young Infanta exemplify the cruelest personification of womanhood. As Beaumont observes, Wilde’s ‘half-wild’ Dwarf now bears noble origins and is reputed to be a famed musician—Zemlinsky himself? The opera became one of the many uncomfortably intimate works—such as *Der Traumgorge* and *Die Seejungfrau*—that portrayed the crushing blow Zemlinsky received when his beloved Alma married Gustav Mahler in 1902.

The highly personalized opera thus becomes an allegorical articulation of the composer’s failed love relations, but one in which the coordinates of desire are distorted—in short: a fantasy. Zemlinsky elevates (or degrades) his experience of mundane, everyday reality into a supposedly autonomous artwork that breaks away from its roots and adopts a much looser structure that can more fully articulate his desires.
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and their lack of fulfillment, which is also fully inscribed in the opera). Zemlinsky was no stranger to this idea; his earlier Der Traumgörge laid the foundations on which he was to build throughout his career. The principal character of this opera—the peasant Görge—lives by the maxim that Traume müssen lebendig werden (Dreams must come alive). Görge’s journey into a fantasy world, whilst failing to secure the princess he pursues, at least allows him to better structure his perception of reality when he realizes the character of the princess in his own wife. So too in Der Zwerg, Zemlinsky’s sixth opera, does the Dwarf live entirely within the fancy of his over-productive imagination. In fact fantasy is ubiquitous at every level of the opera rendering it a perfect platform for a discussion of a dramatico-musical theory of fantasy based on a strictly psychoanalytical (Lacanian) premise. Fantasy, for Jacques Lacan, holds a fundamental connection to our everyday lives; as neurotics we produce fantasies in an attempt to substitute for the loss we experience through our acceptance of symbolic communication; it is our response to the fundamental question of human desire: what do other people want from us? In short, fantasy is a way of enunciating desire. As Lacan affirms, “[desire] is satisfied essentially by hallucination”; “Phantasy is the support of desire.” How could this work in music? Whilst one could consider the notion of fantasy in its most literal musical representation—the fantasias of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries—this paper proposes a model of how concentrated moments of fantasmatic theatre in song and opera can articulate desire at a deep harmonic level. To my mind, the key to all of this is a nuanced reading of particular fin de siècle approaches to harmonic-progression, in which sequences of seemingly freely-associated conventional chord-types in such fantasy scenes are driven by a deep-rooted cycle of fifths. This, as I attempt to illustrate by means of Lacanian semiotic theory, can encapsulate the flow of musical desire.

David Lewin’s 1984 article on tonal substitution in Wagner’s Parsifal considers the means by which chords and keys find enharmonic substitutes that cipher the metaphorical exchanges of characters in the drama. He examines the Act III prayer of Amfortas, consisting of two Stollen in D minor and an Abgesang in D major. During the first of the Stollen, D minor is substituted for D♯ to reinforce the idea that Titurel has died in place of Amfortas; in the second, Db replaces D minor when Titurel substitutes the Holy Mother, “interceding with the Redeemer on Amfortas’s behalf.” The symbolism of Béla Bartók in Duke Bluebeard’s Castle is also ear-marked for its chordal substitutions by Ernő Lendvai. Seemingly, the opera is
structured around four minor-third-related pillars that substitute each other despite bearing the same Tonic function. But whilst tonal substitution can clearly reinforce the switches between different levels of poetic “reality,” it is also shown to hold a purely musically metaphorical function. Exploring current metaphor theory, Michael Spitzer examines a moment in Chopin’s E major prelude when we can “metaphorically hear I-VI-III ‘as’ I-IV-V.” This kind of metaphorical processing of chord progressions “as” different ones is redolent of Lendvai’s theories of axial substitution by which four individual chords relate so intricately that they can each represent the same tonal function—the Riemannian T, S, or D₁⁰ (See Example 2). For Lendvai, the three prevailing chords that bear these functions—the so-called primary triads—can be substituted by the tritone-related or relative-minor secondary triads. Lendvai’s Axis System—a mechanism that arose from his studies of Bartók—develops the Funktionstheorie of Hugo Riemann, perhaps most recently explored by Daniel Harrison.¹¹ Riemann proposed mechanisms by which a major chord could be substituted by its relative minor; thus a C major triad can be replaced by an A triad and still bear the same function. For Lendvai, these minor third substitutions can be extended in either direction (C/A or C/E♭), leading to the tritone relatives of each of these keys (F♯ acts as the modal relative of A, whilst E♭ serves as a relative of C). If these chords comprise the T axis, then the S axis includes D, F, B, and A♭, whilst the D includes G, E, C♯, and B♭. In Lacanian semiotic terms, as outlined in “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious,” Lendvai-

![Example 2: Lendvai's 'Axis System']
Riemannian *Funktionstheorie* is metaphorical because the secondary chords can each express the primary chord for which they substitute. Whilst Lacan’s formula for metaphor is the substitution of “one word for another,” we might propose a musical paraphrase of ‘one chord for another.’ By these lights, an A minor chord metaphorically represents C major. Yet in a different sense we might regard *Funktionstheorie* as metonymical (specifically synecdochal) because “the part” (the chord) represents “the whole” (the function); A minor substitutes for C major, whilst both may indicate the T function.

But when we speak of metaphor and metonymy in Lacanian terms we are obliged to return to the concept of desire as Lacan grafted these concepts onto the Freudian unconscious. Because desire is articulated in fantasy, it is subject to a metaphorical mapping and must accept a fundamental loss of meaning in the process. But Lacan shows human desire to be a force whose motion is confined to a circular orbit around an object that it can never fully attain, as highlighted in Seminar XI. Thus, in its pure form, Lacan shows desire to be fundamentally metonymical, because there is a constant slide between contiguous objects, none of which can ever fully satisfy it: “desire is a metonymy.” To this extent the cycle of fifths, and its projection of dominant motion, represents the musical model of the desire par excellence. Each link in the chain, if expressed as a seventh-chord, drives towards the next to construct a circular path that never reaches fulfillment (See Example 3). These two concepts—metaphorical

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**Example 3: The Rotation of the Cycle of Fifths**
substitution and metonymical desire—coalesce when, under specific conditions, a sequence of chords that metonymically “rotates” the cycle of fifths is interrupted by metaphorical substitution. If $C_7 \rightarrow F_7 \rightarrow B_b^7 \rightarrow E_b^7$ represents the potentially endless metonymic circuit of desire, then $C_7 \rightarrow F_7 \rightarrow E^7 \rightarrow A^7$ hinges on a metaphorical axis as a switch between $E$ and $B_b$. Of course, if a sense of tonal orientation around a tonic is established, the rotary motion around the cycle of fifths produces a rotation of tonal functions: $T \rightarrow S \rightarrow D \rightarrow T$. This revolving procession of tonal functions then corresponds to desire’s metonymic status because these three units constantly rotate (or desire to), precisely replicating Lacan’s perpetual sliding motion.

Before fin de siècle composers fully began to avail themselves of substitution possibilities to the extent that Lendvai found in Bartók, the distinction between reality (in a general sense rather than the Lacanian Real, which I discuss at the end of this paper) and fantasy was already being drawn by motion around this same cycle of fifths. When the young Schubert set Gretchen am Spinnrade in 1814 he purposefully discriminated between the isolation of Gretchen’s room and her means of escape through dreams of Faust. He encapsulated the former through the claustrophobia of the D minor refrain with its mesmerizing added ninth (See Example 4). Whilst reveling in her neurotic misery (“My peace is gone / My heart is heavy / I will find it never / and never more”), Gretchen is unable to leave a closed tonal universe. Only when she slips into fantasy (“His tall walk / His noble figure / His mouth’s smile / His eyes’ power / And his mouth’s / Magic flow / His handclasp / and ah! His kiss!”) does she embark on a journey around the cycle of fifths, moving upwards in sequential

EXAMPLE 4: “MEINE RUH IST HIN”
V7→I progressions (See Example 5). Gretchen climaxes in the region of B♭, which Schubert transforms into a German sixth chord in D minor. This marks a hasty retreat to reality as the fantasy dissolves and the spinning wheel stops. As Gretchen plays out her visions one final time, Schubert completes the cycle by retracing his steps to D minor from B♭: Gretchen picks up where she left off and, after pushing her fantasy to its limits, returns to her mundane reality (Example 6).

EXAMPLE 5: “SEIN HOHER GANG . . .”
But the cycle of fifths here is far from literal. Each V7→I "discharge" (to borrow Daniel Harrison’s nomenclature) in the chain is transposed upwards, in all but one instance by a whole-tone. This sequence, in combination with Lendvai-Riemannian substitution, allows tonal function to “rotate” relentlessly. In Example 6, for instance, Bb7→Eb, C7→F, D7→G, relies on the substitutive links between axial partners Eb/C and F/D; this creates a potentially continuous S→D→T→S (in D minor) sequence of rotating functions to produce the illusion of a cycle of fifths. Of course when Gretchen’s foray into fantasy dissolves, the circuit terminates. As part of the general fantasmatic scenario these metaphorical switches and their metonymic succession strictly follow the metaphorical/metonymical patterns of the text as Gretchen
describes Faust’s walk, his figure, his eyes, his kiss (she tastefully breaks the fantasy before going too far). But Lacan’s theory of fantasy runs much deeper than this coincidence of cross-domain metaphorical engagement; it structures our thoughts at the most primitive level through our adoption of an Ideal-ego in the celebrated mirror stage, marking the point of a fundamental fantasy, which, in itself, is highly metaphorical (a substitute for who we “really” are) and metonymical (desires are articulated within it). Such theories, and their correspondence with the dramaturgy of Zemlinsky’s opera, will be explored following a more general consideration of the role of chordal substitution in a cross-section of works from Zemlinsky’s broad oeuvre.

I

Axial substitutions were common currency even in Zemlinsky’s earliest pieces and helped to maintain a degree of tonal discharge that avoided outmoded cadential gestures. Zeller describes the harmonic progressions of Der Traumgörge and Eine Florentinische Tragödie as “non-functional,” ascribing this to the psychological-aesthetic zeitgeist in which Zemlinsky composed:

As the consciousness of a human being—even one less inclined to dreaming than Görge—is completely fluid and constantly changing, it can never be said to have reached a point of arrival or stasis. This concept was central to the art of the Symbolists, and Zemlinsky understood that the arrival of a musical cadence was antithetical to the Symbolist dream-state.

As in the dream-state of fantasy when all manner of metaphorical/metonymical images erupt, so too when chord progressions become seemingly disjointed and connections blurred, can a theory of harmonic metaphor/metonymy betray a functional element to otherwise chaotic successions. Of course, Lacanian desire is ultimately produced “symbolically” through the linguistic operators of the symbolic order; our desires, for Lacan, are given to us from outside. And as musical desire is articulated in fantasy, it naturally follows symbolic coordinates: the functional labels $T$, $S$, and $D$ are categorized by Lendvai himself as symbolic: “the most specific characteristic of the axis system is that the individual harmonic functions receive a symbolic meaning.” Whilst perhaps unintentionally Lacanian, Lendvai’s substitutions nonetheless structure the course of desire as it is articulated in fantasy.
Even in Zemlinsky’s earliest works, the *Ländliche Tanze*, the final four bars of no. 8 lead towards a simple cadential F7→B♭ gesture, which is preceded by a substituted form of ancillary dominant—A7 rather than C7 (See Example 7). At the point at which the rising bass scalic motion would arrive naturally at octave Cs, a displaced form of secondary dominant intervenes. Of course, this kind of progression was common currency in music of the nineteenth century as it utilized the common link between relative major and minor keys. This is nonetheless an “axial” substitution, but other such auxiliary dominant substitutions were even more prevalent: augmented sixth chords (based around a G♭ sonority in B♭ major), effectively drew from the same axis (C, A, G♭, E♭). But in Zemlinsky’s later works, these and more complex substitutions became aligned most clearly with the concept of desire and its foundation in fantastical scenes. In Zemlinsky’s song-setting of Franz Werfel’s *Ahnung Beatricens*, the grieving lover tries to recollect memories of his lost love, singing with a clear grounding in C♯ minor, a key in which the song both begins and ends (this despite the “atonal” key signature). The fact that the infinite cycle of fifths (*qua* metonymically sliding desire) itself carries the promise of desire-fulfillment becomes apparent at only one fleeting moment towards the end of the song when the lovers unite in fantasy, “We meet in dreams; in sleep our hearts are mended” (see Example 8). At this moment, a dreamy and loosely articulated Ebm7 chord “resolves” to an Ab7 chord, which immediately moves to Db7 and, in turn, to a hazy melodic expression of G♭. The indistinct character of this underlying process supports the wistful atmosphere of the text, but this fantasy of wholeness, found only in dreams, is the only point in the poem in which the lover finds any sort of satisfaction (incomplete though it must always be), and this is surely why the pure cycle of fifths underlies it. After this close encounter, each of the subsequent

 EXAMPLE 7: LÄNDLICHE TANZE, OP.1, NO. 8
images of the text emphasizes the lovers’ alienation, an alienation that is explicitly created through metaphor. For Lacan, metaphor attempts the crossing of “the bar” (the signifier reaches for the signified), but there is always an unbridgeable gap between, a gap in which the subject is located. When the bereaved lover summons up metaphorical images of his dreamy union (“You come to me when I stop by a lake. In smoky taverns you still share my supper”), their failure is articulated by the gap (“And no one knows how far away we are”) (see Example 9). The music follows suit. This example sees the T axis (C#, G, Bb and E) exchanged in rotation with the S axis (C, A, F# , E) and the D axis (D, F, B, Ab). Underlying this moment then, is a form of substitutional rotation of function: \( D \rightarrow T \rightarrow S \rightarrow D \rightarrow T \) (See Example 10). \(^{18}\) The opening bar of the extract, and indeed its modified repeat in the second, moves from a D minor triad through a passing chord to a homogenized D minor and Bb, the comingling of these two chords illustrating their shared function. The prolonged passage of D concentration that precedes the final C#m chord emphasizes the “true” dominant (G#7)
EXAMPLE 9: AHNUNG BEATRICENS MM. 25–30


EXAMPLE 10: REDUCTION OF CLOSURE OF AHNUNG BEATRICENS
but switches to the B/D substitutes to produce the final “cadence.” Coinciding with the metaphorical imagery in the poem, the harmonic substitutional passages such as this reinforce the wistfully inarticulate form of desire invoked by the fantasmatic text.

It would seem natural that a composer who wishes to express a static form of desire—one that is not articulated metonymically—would completely avoid such rotation of function and would focus instead on a single metaphorically interchanging axis; indeed, another fin de siècle composer, Alexander Skryabin, achieves this expertly through his obsessive alternation of minor-third related chords.\(^{19}\) In this regard, Zemlinsky’s Der Wind des Herbstes (Autumn Breezes), Op. 27, no. 6 outlays a solitary matrix which, through the use of seventh chords, nominally presents itself as the dominant of the key of G by using the seventh chords of D, B, A\(_b\), and F to organize the song, generally above a D pedal point (See Example 11). As the light of the “cool and clear” moon consolidates the images of nature’s stillness, the picture is complete and Zemlinsky moves towards a B\(_b\) 7 chord in first inversion. This is approached from a D minor chord rather than a more clear-cut F7 (D) chord, creating a substituted perfect cadential discharge between two extremely “parsimonious” chords.\(^{20}\)

II

To illustrate the consolidation of harmonic substitution across a larger passage of music and study the methods by which this theory of composition can reinforce the structures of desire and its basis in fantasy, we turn to Der Zwerg’s “Lieder die schwere Menge träumt ich,” a vital scene positioned two-thirds into the opera. The tormenting Infanta fuels the Dwarf’s smoldering imagination and, whilst he begins to slip into a new persona—a gallant knight who rushes to rescue the Infanta from a dragon’s cave—she sadistically structures his fantasy by supplementing it with scenarios of her own. She establishes herself as his muse, and amuses herself by stimulating his delusions, only to deepen his descent into tragedy when he confronts his ugliness in the mirror and his life-long fantasy of being a handsome knight is shattered—an unusually sadomasochistic form of dramatic irony (sadistic from the Infanta’s perspective; masochistic from Zemlinsky’s).

The entire song, leading to the Infanta’s cruel declaration of love for the hideous Dwarf, rotates tonal function by utilizing axial substitution to allow for a continuous chain of discharges. These procedures are shown in Example 12,\(^{21}\) which tabulates the libretto in correspondence
EXAMPLE 11: DER WIND DES HERBSTES (AUTUMN BREEZES), OP. 27, NO. 6

Dwarf
My will slips away like a swallow in storm, I
feel myself waiting by your side but
know not what for.
(The Infanta sits on the thrown steps.)

Infanta
You must tell me the story!

Dwarf
I dreamt of a great abundance of songs, and they disappeared.
Vanished by something more than a dream.
(He sits at the feet of the stairs.) I know only three
things. An old house in which my mother died, and ten
years at sea, and you—yet let me compose.
(improvising.) A rock-cut tomb, and you captured by a lind-
worm, then I with a fiery steed, from slaughter and hunt to
the king’s court, hear the baffling tale! And
fortified with God and my spear,
over bridges and canyons, I free you! I am a brilliant hero!

Infanta
You dazzling hero! I sing onward. The dragon
is dead and my champion victoriously takes me
by the hand to the city! Madrid is in ruckus,
sweeping festivities, flags are raised, cloths
fluttering, and all the spring flowers are blooming, thrown
to your feet, sweet blooms to the young hero
who freed me from the woe of death, and the armor
glistens, radiating light in the sun, and you are
strong and beautiful like Donatello’s David! A King
welcomes Infanta Clara and her consort Don Adonis.

Dwarf
No, I am different, almost no longer earthly. Where I
draw near, pain is lifted away, restfulness shines from me
and a soft cheerfulness, immense goodness in a strange world,
for all who see me laugh: they are happy.

Infanta
How lovely! You wish to become my hero! Always at my
side, like my green parrot, or my wind chime, for this you must
know, that I love you!

Dwarf
That you love me, Princess, your soul knows not
what your mouth spoke! I have not asked you, Princess, no, I
have not dared to ask that. I know not what love is ... but if it is
fear, Princess, then I love you! (He gazes at her with yearning)

EXAMPLE 12: CHORDAL/FUNCTIONAL PATTERNS IN THE DWARF’S
“INVENTION” SCENE
with tonal progression. (Some chords are functionally analogous to Schenkerian neighbour-note progressions i.e. $T \rightarrow D \rightarrow T$ where both $T$s are identical; these are represented by N in this diagram.) The free formation of fantasy is carried through the force of metaphorical chordal substitution that coordinates the metonymic circuit of desire. The Dwarf initially sits waiting with hesitant expectancy (“My will slips away like a swallow in storm, I feel myself waiting by your side, but I know not what for”). A firm basis on D establishes the home key of this introductory passage, continuing the preceding section’s twenty-one measure D ($T$) pedal. During an initial stage of trepidation, when the Dwarf swims in aimless libidinal flux, Zemlinksy rotates tonal function twice through substitution ($T \rightarrow S \rightarrow D \rightarrow T \rightarrow S \rightarrow D$), leading to the true dominant chord of A. The Infanta seizes upon this chord and sharpens its tension by chromatically sliding in the bass region back towards the tonic of D to provide a stable platform upon which the Dwarf can extemporize his fantasies.

Ironically, notwithstanding the Dwarf’s intense level of delusion, he does not as yet know how to construct fantasy (“I dreamt of a great abundance of songs, and they disappeared. Vanished by something more than a dream.”). His ability to assemble new fantasies, evidently so powerful during his years of sexual solitude aboard a Spanish galleon, has been rendered impotent by his encounter with the princess. The point of this scene is that the Infanta not only leads the Dwarf to desire her, but also teaches him how to desire her. As Žižek tells us:

> The fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed – and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject’s desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: *through fantasy we learn how to desire.*

The Dwarf’s initial sterility forces him to cling relatively tightly to a $T$ axis of D, F, Ab and B, although within this framework he makes tentative forays into the D region, each small step resolving back into the T. This hesitant harmonic motion accompanies the Dwarf’s words, “I know only three things. An old house in which my mother died, and ten years at sea, and you—yet let me compose.” Once this invention takes hold (“A rock-cut tomb, and you captured by a lindworm, then I with a fiery steed, from slaughter and hunt to the king’s court”) the rotation of function begins and the Dwarf enters a desire-producing
circuit. The cycle is interrupted only by the “religious” pseudo-plagal cadence (a substitutional gesture from E to Ab) upon the words “fortified with God and my spear.” As the Dwarf celebrates his newly fully supported imago—a dazzling hero—he returns to a celebration of the T axis with a full-blooded B chord.

In contrast to the Dwarf’s loose, fantasmatic, metaphorically substituted rotation of the cycle of fifths, the Infanta takes relatively vast strides through tonal functions, rotating literally, i.e. without substitution, and with each chord lasting two or four full measures. Just as our desires come to us from outside in Lacan, so is she articulating the Dwarf’s desire; she does not buy in to his fantasy and cruelly “leads him on.” In the same way that Lacanian desire is ultimately the desire to be the object of desire for the Other, she teases the Dwarf by pretending to want him completely. Despite her young age she is perfectly adroit at sadistic manipulation. Harmonically too, she moves seamlessly from the Dwarf’s apotheosis on B to E, to A, to D, to G, to C. Substitution here reintroduces the tonic proper—D (an F would have continued the literal progression). At this point, Zemlinsky passes through a B♭7 (S) to once again announce another blazing E♭ chord; this chord recurs through the section, and always accompanies images of splendor (“king,” “glistens,” “beautiful”).

The Dwarf’s subsequent scenario continues his characteristic rotation of function but this becomes temporarily dismantled as he reengages with reality. Accustomed to being mocked by all he meets, he is so deluded as to interpret their laughing at him as laughing with him. And the Dwarf brings this “reality” (as he sees it, though fundamentally a delusion) with him into his fantasy: “I wish not be your consort, only lie on the steps of your dominion, that the people who see me become cheerful and not upset you with their gloom. Yes, I must be full of joy, so that all who see me laugh!” It seems that the Dwarf desires nothing other than he already possesses. To accompany this ‘true’ desire, Zemlinsky jumps straight to the true dominant (a chord which structures much of the passage) but resolves however to a substituted tonic—F, before presenting the entire T axis in the subsequent dialogue. Here the Dwarf has regained his seated posture; he has worked through his fantasy and returned to his mundane everyday reality.

One further deviation from the rotation model is the subsequent disjunction between the B♭ of the Infanta’s gay laughter (S) and the following F/C♭ (T) of her dialogue as she too disintegrates the Dwarf’s consciously produced fantasy and enters his more ‘realistic’ unconscious fantasy in a final ruthless twist: the suggestion that fantasy and reality can be sutured: “How lovely! You wish to become my hero!
Always at my side, like my green parrot, or my wind chime, for this you must know, that I love you!’” And to accompany this false declaration of love she employs a substituted form of dominant tension: E♭ (D). After the Dwarf has pushed his fantasy to its limits, it disintegrates back into the introverted world of the T axis, with only one final move through a substituted “open-ended” rotation (B→E→F♯) to accompany the hesitant “I know not what love is . . . but if it is fear, Princess, then I love you!” Just as he sees fear as a metaphorical replacement for love, so he ends on the metaphorical intersection of F♯, poised for a move to B minor rather than D minor.

The success of this whole scene is that the Infanta understands the fundamental question of desire that Lacan poses—Che vuoi? She is deeply sadistic. For Lacan, the formula for perversion (of which Sadism is a particular species) is an inversion of the formula for fantasy; rather than the normalised “neurotic” whose basic question is Che vuoi? (“What does the Other want from me?”), the sadist knows exactly what the Other wants. The Infanta is assured in this knowledge and thus strides through tonal function with perfect conviction and a clear illusion of control; her path is monodirectional. The Dwarf, by contrast, is a toy that she draws into her circuit of desire. As she provides fantasmatic support to him, his pathway is constantly rerouted and obfuscated by metaphorical tonal substitution.

III

Perhaps the most potent symbol in the opera is that of the mirror. Naturally, this invites some philosophically apposite Lacanian connections. In A Florentine Tragedy Sherry Lee finds an intimate Lacanian drama in which the female character in the love triangle connects the two men, reflecting their own imagos back onto them. Based on Lacan’s La femme n’existe pas as prefigured by Weininger, Lee thus casts the “woman as mirror.” Whilst this also pertains to Der Zwerg in some ways, the Lacanian innovation of the Mirror Stage, now so ubiquitous in art criticism, is a more appropriate point of reference for this opera. By contrast, the Dwarf, who has failed to recognize his image (he imagined his reflection was an evil demon who follows him—so powerful is his Primary Narcissism), has not successfully negotiated this rite of passage, amplifying the effect of his deferred contact with his true likeness.

However, the theme of the mirror also holds a broader metaphorical function to the opera’s plot and, so too, its music. Carolyn Abbate’s
exploration of Eric’s Dream from *The Flying Dutchman* reveals a *mise en abîme* at the opera’s centre-point. Although the concept of the *mise en abîme* (the infinitely reflected mirror within a mirror) is doubtless well-worn as Abbate complains, Der Zwerg’s focus on the mirror nonetheless provides a tempting invitation. Of course, whereas the *mise en abîme* in *The Flying Dutchman* was literal (Eric’s dream was a prophecy that came true on its own terms), the Dwarf’s song that Georg Klaren added to Wilde’s tale is a purely metaphorical construction. Unlike the Dwarf’s famously comical songs, he can only find a “sad song” when the Infanta begs him to sing (“a song like those the sun sings when it sinks into the sea”). The song he sings, again structured around the Dwarf’s home key of D minor, is a microcosm of the opera’s narrative, and metaphor (in the form of allegory) is palpable in its various dimensions.

Maiden, take this blood-red orange, that ripened in my garden, take it! I am poor, my garden has but a single tree, and it bore this blood-red orange, take it! The maiden burst in a lofty, acerbic laughter, took the silver pin out of her soft hair, and laughing, stabbed the orange and threw it in the dust. Maiden, ah! Your laughter and the pin punctured not a blood-red orange, the sharp pin and your harsh laughter hurt me, see, I die, because the blood-red orange was my heart.

The protagonist of the song offers a blood orange to his beloved who, in turn, laughs and pierces the fruit with a needle, casting it to the ground. Klaren does not allow the metaphor to pass us unnoticed, ending the passage with the words, “See, I die, for the blood-red orange was my heart.” The vital ingredient of the song’s dramatic irony is the Dwarf’s unconscious grasp of his situation, though he naturally fails to make this crucial connection conscious. This *mise en abîme* therefore holds the precise structure of the infinitely reflected mirror; it reflects, in ever diminished metaphorical (though potentially synecdochal) form, the imaginary gaze of the spectator—the Dwarf. This, more than the looking glass that the Dwarf stumbles upon, is the true mirror of the opera; he looks into it and disavows the knowledge he finds there.

Attributes of the mirror also pertain to the musical substance of the song, bearing out the element of *mise en abîme* in some very basic ways through correspondences between its macro- and micro-structures. For one thing, various cadential melodic descents in the opening bars of the song hang throughout the opera like sighs of anguish. Adorno
comments further that “Zemlinsky’s outstanding quality is his melodic cadence, cadence in the literal sense—that is to say, an expressive falling of the voice, a melancholic falling away at the outset. The line mimics the composer’s temperament.” But the structure of *mise en abîme* is apparent in a tonal parameter also. The piece opens and closes in D minor—the global motion in the opera itself. Indeed, most of the Dwarf’s significant utterances occur in a D minor setting. The key signatures that Zemlinsky uses to structure large sections are tabulated below. Notably, C major/A minor recurs throughout the piece and seems to perpetually intersect the D frame (See Example 13).

The common axial link between C and A key signatures means that this D element provides regular contrasts with the T of D. Furthermore the whole-tone contrast between D and C and their functional alternation at the structural level of the work echoes the chord-level contrast of A and G, which is elaborated in the song under consideration. Indeed this D/C dichotomy is drawn forcefully into the song itself; the D minor setting is framed within a C major key signature (marked in bold). This also has bearing upon the largest formal level of the piece. When the Dwarf expires in the final scene, his dying strains occur in C minor against the “polytonal” dance music in D minor. At this close we realize precisely the level at which the Dwarf has deluded himself. Even his musical voice—the key of D minor—was a fantasmatic component of his misconstituted Ideal-ego. In fact the key of C minor, unvoiced in the opera, was perhaps his true voice, repressed throughout. But if we remove ourselves a metaphorical level further away from the song, the key of D minor begins to represent Zemlinsky himself, in the same way as it represents his disfigured creation. We also learn from Beaumont that Zemlinsky was powerfully drawn to D minor. Indeed his famous harmonic fingerprint D-F-A-G♯ is structured around a D minor triad with an additional augmented fourth.

Unlike *Lieder die schwere Menge träumt ich*, Zemlinsky is not concerned with encapsulating an all-pervasive atmosphere of desire in this song, tinged as it is with painful melancholy, and does not choose to adhere to a strictly tonal rotational (metonymically organized) paradigm. However, there are certainly key moments when axial

\[
\begin{align*}
D|F|C|E|A|C|F|C|A|C|E\flat|C|A|C|F|C|A|C|E\flat|C|A|C|E\flat|C|A|C|E\flat|C|A|C|E\flat|C|A|C|E\flat|C|A|C|\end{align*}
\]

**EXAMPLE 13: PROGRESSION OF KEY SIGNATURES IN DER ZWERG**
substitution reinforces the psychological processes of fantasy production explored in the text. After the initially blurred key (D minor or A minor?) (see Example 14) Zemlinksy offers an E7 chord (with bass A pedal) as a sign-post to orientate us towards the key of A. The melody at first supports the harmony flawlessly, but in m. 5 an E7 (D) is melodically outlined against the harmonic “support” of a G chord. This G chord is naturally heard in conjunction with the melody as a substituted D. That this metaphorical substitution occurs as the libretto slips into poetic metaphor (“Maiden, take this . . .” is accurate to the situation; “blood-red orange” is metaphor) supports the correlation, by intention or coincidence, between harmonic and poetic metaphor, despite the different levels of effect these devices doubtless negotiate in the cognitive apparatus of the listener. In the same stanza, when the Dwarf sings about the only tree in his garden, a C#7 chord in m. 14 (“Garten”) should naturally discharge onto a T F# chord. However, Zemlinsky brings in yet another metaphorical switch to an Eb chord (“reife”—one of F#’s T axial partners. Zemlinsky follows this Eb chord (m. 15) with an Eb7 and a pedal tone of A before merging flawlessly into an A7 chord. This produces a polychord that bridges the two individual units that frame it. This streak of polytonal composition was recognized by Adorno: “Together [Zemlinsky and Schoenberg] were the first to incorporate polytonal chords into movements while still taking the concept of key extremely seriously.” But in fact the smooth transition between these chords betrays their origins in a shared tonal function for which they both synecdochally stand. A surrogate relationship becomes apparent between A and F# chords in m. 35, again supporting the symbol of the orange. Here, in contrast to the cadence onto A that accompanied a similar melody in the first stanza, an F# chord stands as an overt substitute. Just as Klaren’s poetic synecdochal connection is drawn between the blood orange/tree and the heart/body, Zemlinsky makes palpably clear the axial metaphorical links between these substituted chords and the function they represent.

These operations come to a head in the final moments of the scene when the Dwarf unveils the allegorical meaning of the fantastical situation he has invented in song (“see, I die, because the blood-red orange was my heart.”). A loosely triadic chromatic rise over a typical Zemlinskian pedal point on F (m. 37) leads up to a diminished seventh chord (m. 49, comprising the pitches A, Eb, C, Gb) over the same pedal point. These notes, apart from being the prototypical carriers of suspense, synecdochally represent each of the four chords of the axis that is so prevalent. Sure enough, a reprise of material from m. 15
EXAMPLE 14: MÄDCHEN, NIMM DIE BLUTENDE ORANGE

Der Zwerg, vocal score, 1921, Universal Edition No. 6630.
perspectives of New Music presents the earlier transition between A and Eb chords but now frames it with pure Gb triads, thus refracting the diminished chord into three of its individual chord substitutes. A pianissimo Gb chord also behaves as a substituted V chord in the final cadence to D minor on which the ballad rests. And this all occurs at the moment when the Dwarf allows the various strands of meaning in the ballad to coalesce. Musically then, the relationship between the substituted chords comes to light in its most striking form and thus follows closely the trajectory of the text.

Crucial to the Dwarf's metaphorical engagement with the princess is the substitutive structure of fetish, this orange being one of the less subtle moments (it is used literally, as a voodoo doll). Indeed, it is when the Dwarf is at his most fetishistic that he catches sight of his reflection. Whilst the Dwarf is waiting for the Infanta to finish dancing, his fantasies focus on items that bear her trace: “So I will kiss
the cushion which bore her when I saw how lovely she was. Her body was caressed by your silk, your wonderful wood and I kiss the trace of her neck.” This section of fetishistic curiosity follows a more direct fantasy: “I shall sing songs at her feet, songs that will shine along with countless stars. I will kiss her mouth, and perhaps release the agate on her belt.” The Dwarf draws himself towards her cushion, bringing himself paradoxically both nearer to, and further away from, the princess. Naturally, Zemlinsky differentiates these two different fantasies in terms of key. Whilst the first passage is set in a firm D minor key, the second moves to its axial relative of B major. A brief section in between, in which the Dwarf watches the princess dancing, alternates chords A, F♯ and C from the D axis; this mediates two keys (D minor and B) through their related dominants (A and F♯), which interchange fluently at the point of intersection of the two worlds. The second phrase stands as a “fantastical” axial reinterpretation of the first for a variety of musical reasons. Firstly, both moments move towards a subdominant chord of B♭ in their third measure (the fifth chord) through rising chords from the axially related keys of D and B (See Example 15). Secondly, both approach this from a directly proceeding S chord—the first through a G7 chord, the second from a C♯ chord. Thirdly, both sections harbor the same alternation between T and S, finally discharging through loosely articulated D→T. After the second stanza, as the Dwarf performs his most pathetic action (kisses the trace of her neck) Zemlinsky moves to yet another “fantastical” axial partner of Ab.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) Normal Fantasy</th>
<th>Dm</th>
<th>Em</th>
<th>Fm</th>
<th>G7</th>
<th>Bm</th>
<th>Dm</th>
<th>F♯</th>
<th>Bm</th>
<th>*</th>
<th>Bm</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oscillation between A, F♯, C: D axis</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Fetish Fantasy</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C♯m</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C♯m</td>
<td>B♭</td>
<td>D/B</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F/D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D/Ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal Function</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>(D)</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The first stanza harbors a 5-measure long chromatic descending chord cluster to render the seductive line: “and perhaps release the agate on her belt.” The equivalent in the second stanza uses a sustained T chord to render the less lurid, “when I saw how lovely she was.”

Example 15: The Dwarf Moves from Fantasy to Fetish
IV

It is surely no coincidence that the Dwarf’s fantasy, at its highest point of tension, is crudely interrupted by a curious musical event which signifies an influx of the Lacanian Real. This event leads to the final stage of the Dwarf’s psychological-tonal development. This paper has situated both the Lacanian Imaginary (be it metaphor or fantasy as the locus of desire) and the Symbolic dimensions in Zemlinsky’s dramatic harmonic technique, and it would be remiss to omit mention of the Lacanian Real that may lie beneath. The Real, repressed by the human subject, lurks beneath our consciousness and always resists symbolization but, like the Kantian sublime, it breaks through the Symbolic surface under certain conditions, although it is never approached directly, understood, nor represented adequately (it is always perceived symbolically). For Kristeva, the principal moment of breakthrough of this repressed Real occurs through the shock force of abject horror, typically invoked when viewing a corpse:

The corpse . . . does not signify death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.35

The remarkable function of the Lacanian Real in Der Zwerg is that it becomes synonymous with his disgusting surface appearance: the Dwarf has repressed the ugliness that is visible to everyone except him. And this is communicated to him through a particular leitmotif. In contrast to the much quoted “Dwarf theme,”36 a much more subtle motive lurks beneath the whole drama which we might term “the Dwarf’s Appearance.” The two themes are heard in succession as the Dwarf first takes to the stage37 (see Example 16). Whenever Zemlinsky wants to lay bare the Dwarf’s grotesque form, he gives the orchestral voice banal quartal sonorities. This forms our first impression of the Dwarf when, from the outset, we see him as the other characters see him, a “luxury” denied to him (see Lacan’s famous maxim “You never look at me from the place at which I see you . . .”).38 This is most obvious when the Dwarf describes “my wicked foe who mimics me”; this entire passage, during which the Dwarf tells of how a monster follows him and hides in shiny metal, smooth marble and clouded glass, is saturated by such quartal harmonies (See Example 17). This leads to the parody of the Narcissus myth in which the Dwarf relates
EXAMPLE 16: THE TRADITIONAL DWARF MOTIVE AND MOTIVE OF THE DWARF’S APPEARANCE

Der Zwerg, vocal score, 1921, Universal Edition No. 6630.

EXAMPLE 17: THE DWARF DESCRIBES HIS “WICKED FOE”

Der Zwerg, vocal score, 1921, Universal Edition No. 6630.
how the creature hides underwater in streams. Note how the fourths are now hidden amid rippling arpeggios. The irony is all the greater that the Dwarf’s doppelganger is thought to be “a creature from my dreams.” In these moments the Dwarf has successfully Othered himself even as Narcissus did, but unlike Narcissus the Dwarf loathes the image he sees. The secret of the Dwarf’s ugliness is always kept by the orchestra, who seem to adopt the Infanta’s conspiracy against him until the final moments of the opera. It is the orchestra that belies the Dwarf’s utterances, telling us that he perceives himself but does not recognize.

One would expect the Real to breakthrough when the Dwarf engages with the looking glass and realizes that the terrifying image is his own reflection in a confrontation that will hold a lethal dimension, as we have been warned early in the opera. Indeed, in some ways we can describe the Dwarf’s abject horror as a form of musical death—the end of diatonic communication. As the Dwarf sees his reflection, Zemlinsky replaces triadic chords with sequential, quartal, desire-negating sonorities (see Example 18). But so complete is his denial that the Dwarf constantly begs the Infanta to “say it isn’t true.” Realizing the truth fairly early on, he disavows it—see Žižek’s formulae of the fetishist’s disavowal: “I know very well, but just same . . .” As Zeller states, “The fatal blow for Klaren’s Dwarf is not the moment of revelation in the mirror; it is dealt by the Infanta herself when she admits that she can never love the Dwarf.” And this is when the true trauma breaks through. Upon hearing the words “I can only love a man, and you are an animal,” the Dwarf is thrown into utter despair. His cry of “Ah!!” is now unpitched above a total chromatic aggregate of fourths (See Example 19).

If we view triadic harmony as a Symbolic construction, called upon to channel human Imaginary desire in the opera, then quartal harmony serves as its antithesis—a tonally defiant configuration of tones: something approaching the Lacanian Real. This is not always true in Zemlinsky’s wider harmonic language in which Adorno finds that “The quartal chords never clash with the circumscribed tonality, but blend in an unceasing series of resolutions with the harmonic flow which they interrupt.” And furthermore: “. . . in his work such moments [harmonic intrusions] are never conceived as effects, but are developed functionally from the harmonic progression.” Adorno’s more general qualification that quartal chords still seem to be perceived as intrusive would support the Lacanian dimension to the close of this opera, where they behave as a violent influx of the Real, however deeply this may be embedded in the Symbolic universe. Given the structural impossibility of musically representing the Lacanian Real,
EXAMPLE 18: THE DWARF SEES HIS REFLECTION

Der Zwerg, vocal score, 1921, Universal Edition No. 6630.

EXAMPLE 19: “YOU ARE AN ANIMAL”

Der Zwerg, vocal score, 1921, Universal Edition No. 6630.
and the further impossibility of the Dwarf to fully comprehend it, we find here a clear attempt to dramatically reconstruct some of its effects. The tragedy of *Der Zwerg* is that the function of the mirror has been inverted; rather than construct an imago, it breaks it down; rather than produce a Narcissistic fantasy, it dismantles it; rather than reflect tonal progression it destroys it.

As indicated, metaphor works on many levels and saturates our entire experience of the opera. At its most intrinsic level, the singing Dwarf’s ugliness is a grotesque metaphorical (allegorical) substitution for Zemlinsky as composer spurned by Alma. At a more universal level, the metaphorical message of the opera is summarized by the servant Ghita: “Dwarf, Oh Dwarf, God has created all of us blind about ourselves.” The Dwarf, in the full materiality of his disgustingness, stands for each of us and our Imaginary/Symbolic existence. In short, we live in a solipsistic, self-made fantasy world. And of course, as Lacan took great pains to show, it is in fantasy that our desires take root. Yet for all the psychologically penetrating aspects of *Der Zwerg*, the piece is still a bitterly misogynistic drama. Whereas Wilde’s Infanta was a naive young girl, innocently playing with her new toy, Klaren’s Infanta is a full adult, acutely aware of her cruelty. In Wilde’s story the girl acts out her own perverse fantasies with the Dwarf-as-plaything, giving him a white rose in docile innocence by “aping” the gestures of adults; she summarizes finally, “For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts.”45 But Klaren reduces-out this sympathetic element—the Infanta is wholly sadistic. His addition of the compassionate character of Ghita, who recognizes the Dwarf’s inner-beauty, barely ameliorates the defamatory stance of the opera. Yet the message certainly runs deeper than a nineteenth-century misperception of feminine cruelty; its message is surely that we would rather be the Dwarf than the Infanta. As Zeller eloquently puts it:

The Infanta and the rest of the Court do not perceive the deformity of their own hearts, which cannot accept the Dwarf as a man rather than an animal or a plaything . . . He may have the smallest body, but he has the largest soul, and that, Zemlinsky and Klaren suggest, is what counts.46

The Infanta herself is certainly left in a state of delusion, and Weininger characteristically suggests that this is always to be the case: “There is no woman that does not see herself as beautiful and desirable when looking in a mirror; unlike a man, her own ugliness is never a painful reality, rather, she seeks to delude herself and others, to the
The D minor (the key of the Dwarf’s imago) is ultimately consigned to the Infanta’s asinine dance music with its “brittle” and “unemotional style” whilst the Dwarf dies in a rich, newly discovered key of C minor—the minor-relative axial substitute of the Eb key of splendor that erupts throughout the opera at moments of climax. Like Gretchen, the Infanta is confined to her D minor spinning wheel, and runs a purely cyclical, literal harmonic progression; the Dwarf, by contrast, is given the literary-harmonic support of metaphor and fantasy; he is a musician-poet after all. The obvious question that the opera asks—both in its themes and its harmonic language—is the age-old one: would we rather face the truth whatever the cost or live in blissfully ignorant fantasies? Whilst the Dwarf’s answer is clearly the latter—the option of oblivion (based on the logic of the fetishist’s disavowal)—one wonders if Zemlinsky, with his post-Wagnerian hyperactive death-drive, (see Žižek) would pose a different answer.
Notes


10. I adopt the Riemannian functional labels of T, S, and D, but indicate these using italics (T, S, and D) to avoid confusion with the key/pitch of D.


18. Certain notes that I regard as “non-chordal” and fulfill an elaborative function are set in parentheses in the graph for the sake of clarity.


21. Translation by Orit Hilewicz.


25. Lee’s more recent 2010 article offers a detailed reading of the theme of the “mirror” in *Der Zwerg*. Although not explicitly Lacanian—rather, Lee follows a thread from Paul Ricoeur’s work—she examines issues of the “other” found in the mirror, as well as applying theories of the gaze and the Lacanian notion of “misrecognition.”


27. Translation by Orit Hilewicz.


29. This progression focuses only on Zemlinsky’s notated key signature changes, which often do not represent the “actual” key (which I tabulate in the major mode) of the passage in question—so fluid is Zemlinsky’s modulatory character. For example, the section under discussion is notated in C major/A minor. Nonetheless, key signature seems to be an important element of Zemlinsky’s tectonic design.


32. Lee finds “fetish” in the needle, and demonstrates that the Dwarf is forced into a “passive, feminine sexual position, that of an orange being penetrated by a hairpin.” (Lee, “The Other in the Mirror, or, Recognizing the Self: Wilde’s and Zemlinsky’s Dwarf,” 206.)

33. Despite the omission of the pitch G, and the concentration of D in the bass, this chord can still be heard as G7 in the same way that chord vii often substitutes V7.

34. In the general outline of this first progression, similarities can be found with the “Dwarf” motive, quoted in due course. Perhaps the fantasy is then an unconscious expression of the Dwarf’s own fantasy image.


37. Lee also observes this “representation of the Dwarf as he is seen through the eyes of others” (Lee, “The Other in the Mirror, or, Recognizing the Self: Wilde’s and Zemlinsky’s Dwarf,” 215), and draws out the mimetic quality of this motive. Expertly cataloguing its various salient incarnations throughout the opera, she brings these into a dialogue that registers the effect of “self recognition.”


41. This animalistic quality of the Dwarf’s may also be derived from Klaren’s reading of Weininger, who claims that animals do not understand mirrors and perceive their images as Doppelgangers. Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (London: Heinemann, 1906), 267.


43. Ibid.


46. Ibid., 128–129.


49. In addition to those listed earlier in this paper, such moments are found notably at fig. 160 (“beauty is sacred, and I love it”) and fig. 47 (“Dance on the lawn in the sunlight”).


