

# Anton Webern's Jone Poems

## Lauriejean Reinhardt

On the evening of November 29, 1944, at the Archbishop's Palace in Vienna, there occurred a poetry reading devoted to the works of Hildegard Jone. The evening was sponsored by Dr. Otto Mauer, a priest, professor, and patron of modern art who was also a personal friend of Jone's. The poetry reading was one of many such events that Mauer organized during the latter days of World War II, for the cultural and spiritual edification of his parishioners.<sup>1</sup> The same poetry reading occasioned the elegant manuscript at hand, a manuscript prepared by Anton Webern that contains all of the Jone texts he set to music.<sup>2</sup>

The evening's program was planned from the very outset around the poems Webern had set to music. Jone envisioned Webern as reciter, and she also specifically requested a copy of the texts in Webern's hand. On April 25, 1944, she wrote to Webern:

Please, dear Anton, write out the texts for me *sometime in the future*, in your own hand, in the correct sequence: I would like so very much to have them, perhaps as well with the indication that they are your texts.

Webern acknowledged Jone's request shortly thereafter and completed the manuscript by June 2, 1944.<sup>3</sup>

The question of who would serve as the evening's reciter proved considerably more problematic. In her attempt to persuade Webern to assume the role, Jone argued:

Regarding the recitation by you, that would frankly be the only satisfactory solution. Professional actors are, in a very large sense, dilettantes. Somehow, a word spoken by you truly is already entirely the music that you perceive in it: really your music.

I.

Wie bin ich froh!  
noch einmal wird mir alles grün  
und leuchtet so!  
noch überblühen

die Blumen mir die Welt!  
noch einmal bin ich ganz ins Werden  
hingestellt  
und bin auf Erden.

II.

Des Herzens Purpurnvogel fliegt durch Nacht.  
Der Augen Falter, die im Hellen gankeln,  
sind ihm voraus, wenn sie im Tage schaukeln.  
Und doch ist er's, der sie ans Ziel gebracht.  
Sie ruhen oft, die bald sich neu erheben  
zu neuem Flug. Doch rastet endlich er  
am Ort des Todes, müd und Flügel schwer,  
dann müssen sie zum letzten Blick vorbeugen.

III.

Sterne, Ihr silbernen Bienen der Nacht  
um die Blume der Liebe!  
Wahrlich der Honig aus ihr hängt schimmernd an Euch.  
Lasset ihn tropfen ins Herz, in die goldene Wabe,  
Füllet sie an bis zum Rand. Ach schon tropfet sie über,  
selig und bis ans Ende mit ewiger Süße durchtränkt.

Drei Gesänge, op. 23

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Aus „Viae in viae“

I.

Das dunkle Herz, das in sich lauscht, erschaut den Frühling  
nicht nur am Hauch und Duft, der in das Leuchten blüht.  
es fühlt ihn an dem dunklen Wurzelreich, das an die Toten rührt:  
Was wird, legt sich mit zarten Wurzeln an das Wartende im  
trinkt Kraft und Stille aus der Nacht, eh' sich's dem Tage  
Dunkel,  
schenkt,  
eh' es als Liebeskelch zum Himmel duftet  
und eh' aus ihm zu ihm ein goldnes Flattern Leben trägt:

Ich bin nicht mein.

Die Quellen meiner Seele,  
sie sprudeln in die Wiesen dessen, der mich liebt,  
und machen seine Blumen blühen und sind sein.

Du bist nicht dein.

Die Flüsse deiner Seele,  
du Mensch, von mir geliebt,  
sie strömen in das Meine, dass es nicht verdorre.

Wir sind nicht unser,  
ich und du und alle.

II.

Es stürzt aus Höhen Frische, die uns leben macht:  
das Herzblut ist die Feuchte uns geliebt,  
die Träne ist die Kühle uns gegeben:  
sie fließt zum Strom der Gnade wunderbar zurück.

This was apparently not the first time Jone had mentioned her desire for Webern to recite the poems. In an earlier letter, the composer had remarked that he was "pleased" (*glücklich*) and "fascinated!" (*fasziniert!*) with the idea of reciting the poems, but in such matters he was "unfortunately a dilettante" (hence Jone's later remark that professional actors were true dilettantes), adding "between the two of us, I regret this!"<sup>4</sup> Webern, in turn, tried his best to convince Jone that she should recite the poems.

*but the reading, the reading, dear Hilde, only you yourself should do it! What an impressive rendering you recently gave of your own poems and one of Goethe's. Recall how my wife reacted to it! Believe me, you must decide to do it! Consider the idea! What an experience it could be for an audience, attendant upon you in the highest anticipation!!! Think of that!*

In the end, neither artist proved successful in convincing the other, and the task of reciting the poems ultimately fell to Werner Riemerschmid, a former neighbor of Webern's and a poet in his own right.<sup>5</sup>

As the date for the poetry reading approached, Webern became increasingly involved in the event's organization. In addition to Jone's poems, the evening was scheduled to include performances of the composer's *Drei Gesänge aus "Viae inviae" von Hildegard Jone*, op. 23, and the *Drei Lieder*; op. 25. The songs were eventually sacrificed when the original singer left Vienna for her native Sweden, and the "exceptional" singer Webern secured as a replacement demanded an honorarium.<sup>6</sup> Had the songs been performed, it would have marked the first and only time the composer heard a live public performance of any of his Jone settings.

When a performance of the songs became impossible, Webern proposed as alternative musical selections his *Variationen für Klavier*, op. 27 and Berg's *Sonata für Klavier*, op. 1. At the last minute, however, and for reasons largely of programming, Webern substituted for his own work one of Mozart's lesser-known *Fantasien*.<sup>7</sup> The change came about when Mauer asked for a musical selection to open the program. Since the audience was to consist of musical laymen (primarily church officials and parishioners), Webern decided that the evening should begin with a classical composition. Although Jone strenuously

objected to the change, Webern argued that his own work might prove "problematic" and lead to "an occasion for head shaking and so on." The musical selections for the evening were ultimately limited to Berg's *Sonata* and the Mozart *Fantasia*, both performed by Olga Novacovic.<sup>8</sup>

Webern took an equally strong interest in the literary portion of the program. Using the manuscript he had prepared, the composer coached Riemerschmid to ensure that the latter's spoken renditions might approach his own musical interpretations. He further advised Riemerschmid to allow for "decided pauses" (*ausdrückliche Trennungen*) between individual works. In addition, Webern was apparently responsible for revising the sequence of poems for the evening's program. Although he had copied the poems according to his own opus numbers, beginning with the texts for the *Drei Gesänge*, op. 23, Webern reordered the manuscript to begin with the poems for the *Drei Lieder*, op. 25. This change is revealed by the repagination on the pages shown herein. The original page numbers, written in red pencil, had positioned the texts for the *Drei Gesänge* as pages 1-2, followed by the texts for the *Drei Lieder* as page 3. The original page numbers have been written over in lead pencil, so that the lieder texts now precede those for the *Gesänge*.

Webern's motivation for the revision may have been one of pacing. He may have felt that the short, lyric nature poems he had set as op. 25 would be more appropriate to commence the poetry portion of the program, as opposed to the texts for op. 23, which are longer, elegiac, and more deeply spiritual in nature. Then too, the texts for the *Gesänge*, op. 23 and *Das Augenlicht*, op. 26 are all taken from Jone's cycle "Viae inviae"; the revised manuscript ordering thus places the "Viae inviae" texts together.

Another program change concerns the addition of Jone's "Lumen" cycle to conclude the program. Webern had recently turned to the opening lines of the cycle ("Das Sonnenlicht spricht") in sketching a project left incomplete upon his death.<sup>9</sup> While he and Jone had earlier entertained the idea of including the "Lumen" poems on the program, the decision to add them was not made until mid-November, just days before the event and largely at Riemerschmid's urging.<sup>10</sup> Since they were added at the last minute, the "Lumen" poems were read from a separate Jone autograph. It is also possible that selections from Jone's *Selige Augen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1938) were read, as Webern lent a copy of the volume to Riemerschmid before their final coaching session, when the evening's program was to be determined.<sup>11</sup>

One curious feature of Webern's poetry manuscript concerns the presence of Jone's handwriting on the back of one leaf. In preparing the manuscript, Webern wrote almost exclusively on the recto sides of pages; however, the verso of page 7 contains the poem "Schöpfen aus Brunnen," written in Jone's hand. Webern set this poem as the third movement of his *Kantate*, op. 31. He used the reverse side of Jone's page to copy out "Schweigt auch die Welt," the text for op. 31, movement I, which he indicated as page 7. He then pasted a separate sheet over Jone's poem and copied the text for "Sehr tiefverhalten innerst Leben singt," the poem he set as op. 31, movement II; this page is indicated as page 8. "Schöpfen aus Brunnen" was then recopied on a fresh page, which now follows as facing page 9. It is unclear why Webern broke his pattern of writing on recto sides only when he came to these texts, why he intentionally obscured Jone's original poem, or why he incorporated Jone's autograph leaf into the manuscript at all.

<sup>1</sup> On Mauer's career and his patronage of modern art, see Inge Podbrecky, ed., *Sammlung Otto Mauer: Zum zehnten Todestag* (Vienna: Österreichische Bundesverlag, 1983). The Jone poetry reading is discussed briefly in Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), pp. 596-97.

<sup>2</sup> Webern's manuscript contains only the texts for completed compositions (i.e., opp. 23, 25, 26, 29, and 31), not those for abandoned or incomplete projects.

<sup>3</sup> See his letters to Jone dated April 30, 1944, and June 2, 1944, in Josef Polnauer, ed., *Anton Webern: Briefe an Hildegard Jone und Josef Humplik* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1959), pp. 56 and 58, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Webern to Jone, April 22, 1944 (*ÖNB/HIS, Webern Briefe*, 431/1-284).

<sup>5</sup> Riemerschmid would play a far more significant role in the days immediately following World War II; i.e., that of safeguarding the Webern family home in Maria Enzersdorf.

<sup>6</sup> Problems with the singer and the requested honorarium were discussed in a flurry of letters between Webern and Jone early in October 1944. Neither of the proposed singers is identified in the letters.

<sup>7</sup> Although he did not specify the Mozart fantasia he had in mind, Webern referred to the work as "eine selten gespielte 'Fantasie'." (See his letter to Jone on November 25, 1944, in Polnauer, *Briefe*, p. 61). Since the C-Minor Fantasia, K. 475, was by this point a concert favorite, the work he had in mind must be either the Fantasia in D Minor, K. 397, or the earlier C-Minor Fantasia, K. 396.

<sup>8</sup> Webern's decision to withdraw the *Variationen* is explained in letters to Jone dated November 25, 1944, and December 8, 1944 (see Polnauer, *Briefe*, pp. 61 and 62, respectively) and a letter to Riemerschmid dated November 25, 1944. Jone's disappointment about the sacrifice of Webern's work is expressed in letters to the composer dated November 22, 1944, and December 11, 1944.

<sup>9</sup> The "Lumen" sketches, initially conceived as part of an instrumental concerto, are reproduced in Hans Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern Sketches (1926-1945): Facsimile Reproductions from the Composer's Autograph Sketchbooks in the Moldenhauer Archives* (New York: Carl Fischer, Inc., 1968), pl. 41-47.

<sup>10</sup> Webern informed Jone of Riemerschmid's request on November 18, 1944.

<sup>11</sup> Webern reports this development to Jone in a letter dated November 6, 1944 (*ÖNB/HIS Webern Briefe*, 431/1-301).