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Wölferl's Own Howl: Musical Characterization in the Rollengedichte of Hugo Wolf

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By the end of the nineteenth century, the era of the German Lied as a significant artistic expression had begun to draw to a close in favor of larger forms. In the late 1880s, Austrian composer Hugo Wolf reclaimed the Lied, and in his hands the genre enjoyed a last great flowering. In contrast to his predecessors and contemporaries, Wolf is known today almost exclusively for his songs. What sets him apart from the others most importantly is his process regarding the setting of text, of transmuting poetry into music. The main purpose of this dissertation is to explore this process in some detail through the study of ten Rollengedichte, or role poems, selected from the Eichendorff and Mörike songbooks. The dissertation investigates Wolf's use of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic devices, as well as his manipulation of form and design; analyzes Wolf's practice of development and transformation of melodic and rhythm motives; and observes the ingenious ways in which Wolf imbued his songs with humor through musical parody — a unique quality among composers of German Lieder. Further, the dissertation considers Wolf's place in the pantheon of German Lied composers, and the place his songs occupy in the realm of vocal music of the nineteenth century generally. Finally, through careful study of textual-musical connections, this dissertation offers insight toward a deep understanding of the ten Rollengedichte chosen as its focus, with the goal that it may lead to a more complete interpretation of the songs, and a more profound appreciation for Wolf's Lieder in general, than would otherwise have been the case.
Wölferl's Own Howl: Musical Characterization in the *Rollengedichte* of Hugo Wolf

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B.A., Westfield State University, 1990
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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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at the
University of Connecticut

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John Carlo Pierce

2013
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Chapter 1: Introduction

For those singers and pianists that possess an interest in German art song, the name of Hugo Wolf may perhaps be well known, though his works may not. An interest in the setting of lyric poetry for solo voice and piano accompaniment began at the end of the eighteenth century, and the idea was developed further through the nineteenth in the hands of some of the greatest German and Austrian composers — Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms, to name a few. Poetry and music, two essential ingredients, combined in an almost infinite number of ways resulted in a repertory of Lieder that numbers in the thousands and is a lasting testament to the art of these composers.

As the end of the nineteenth century approached, Wolf breathed new and vital life into a genre that was on the wane through a re-examination of the exact nature of the fusing together of poetry and music with a decidedly pro-Wagnerian view. Wolf’s processes of musical characterization are clearly evident in his settings of Rollengedichte, or role poems. This particular type of poetry represents a kind of monologue delivered by a particular person that reveals certain traits of character and places the person in a specific social context. Role poems describe brief moments in the lives of these individuals, present miniature textual portraits, and are inherently dramatic. Wolf was preoccupied for many years with the idea of composing a full-length opera, a seed likely planted by Wagner. In a way, these songs represent a testing ground for future work.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to explore the methods — musical and

\[^2\] Thym, “Solo Song Settings,” 254.
otherwise — that Wolf employed to characterize the individuals depicted in the poems. In the words of Wolf biographer Frank Walker,

Although Wolf’s approach to song-writing was primarily a literary one, it is necessary to insist, at the risk of seeming to emphasize the obvious, that his importance ultimately depends on purely musical factors – his rare gifts of melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic invention, his quite exceptional power of design, and his almost Beethovenian command of musical “development.” Beyond these fundamentals lay his incomparable powers of characterization and atmospheric suggestions, and the limitless scope of his imagination.³

Inspired by these words, this dissertation will investigate Wolf’s use of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic devices, as well as his manipulation of form and design; analyze Wolf’s practice of development and transformation of melodic and rhythm motives; and observe the ingenious ways in which Wolf imbued his songs with humor through musical parody — a unique quality among composers of German Lieder. Further, the dissertation will consider Wolf’s place in the pantheon of German Lied composers, and the place his songs occupy in the realm of vocal music of the nineteenth century generally. Ten songs have been chosen for exploration. In order of date of composition, they are as follows:

Eichendorff  
Der Soldat (7 March 1887)
Mörike  
Der Tambour (16 February 1888)  
Der Jäger (23 February 1888)  
Der Gärtner (7 March 1888)  
Auf einer Wanderung (11-25 March 1888)  
Lied eines Verliebten (14 March 1888)
Eichendorff  
Der Glücksritter (16 September 1888)  
Seemanns Abschied (16 September 1888)  
Der Scholar (22 September 1888)  
Der verzweifelte Liebhaber (23 September 1888)

Understanding and interpreting the exquisite richness of Wolf’s songs – his harmony, melody, motivic manipulation, and formal design – may present a formidable task for many vocalists and pianists. We know from Wolf himself that every moment in

his songs grows in some way out of the text. Therefore, through careful study of textual-musical connections, this dissertation offers insight toward a deep understanding of the ten *Rollengedichte* chosen as its focus, with the goal that it may lead to a more complete interpretation of the songs, and a more profound appreciation for Wolf's *Lieder* in general, than would otherwise have been the case.

In the first section, the processes of Wolf’s predecessors will be explored, with the aim of gaining historical perspective on the development of the genre; in the section that follows, Wolf’s biographical details will be examined, which will shed further light on a more thorough investigation of a representative selection of his songs.

**The Development of the Lied to 1880**

Throughout the nineteenth century, *Lied* composers repeatedly faced the issue of the relationship of poetry and music, a relationship that the genre rendered exceptional. It was conceived during a period of unprecedented expansion and prosperity in the German-speaking regions of Central Europe. Several significant factors, both political and musical, influenced the early development of German art song. First, the events triggered by the French Revolution had a profound effect on German letters and led to a flowering of literature, criticism, and philosophy in German-speaking lands. Goethe and Schiller, Klopstock, Kant and Herder all harkened to and were inspired by the Revolutionary watch cry of liberty, equality, and brotherhood. The Napoleonic Wars that followed galvanized the German people and eventually led to unification and the formation of a German *Reich* in 1871.

The question concerning a genuine German identity was on the minds of poets
and philosophers. Johann Gottfried von Herder promoted the development of a German
Volk, a national culture upon a native foundation. Within the Volk, however, the
subjective experiences and emotional extremes of the individual were considered of
utmost importance. The Sturm und Drang movement, as Herder called it, stood in direct
opposition to the Enlightenment ideal of rationalism and had many adherents, including
Goethe and Schiller. Out of this movement grew the German Romantic movement among
philosophers and poets — Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, among others — that challenged
the immutability of Classical form and the stricture of genre. Romanticism, the dominant
artistic movement in the German-speaking world at the turn of the century, witnessed the
rise to prominence of the artist and thinker as arbiter of the new world. The Romantics
looked to the past, to an idealized vision of the Middle Ages, when the arts and sciences
were unified and integrated, when the natural and supernatural world had a profound
impact on day-to-day life. The poetic arts, and lyric poetry in particular, flourished during
this period.

The second significant factor to be considered is the slow but steady decrease of
the dominance of Italian compositional style in vocal music. The Italian school had
monopolized musical life in Vienna and in the courts of the southern German-speaking
world through much of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As part of the rising
nationalism at the end of the eighteenth century, however, German composers challenged
one another to compose works in their own language. Johann Reichardt, Carl Zeller, and
others composed settings of poetry im Volkston with chordal piano accompaniment; their
simple melodies imitated to a certain extent those of German folksongs. The music was

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4 John Warrack, German Opera: From the Beginnings to Wagner (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2001), 266.
meant to act as underscoring for the poem while disturbing it as little as possible. Their settings are generally homophonic in texture and strophic in form, with melodies doubled in the piano part. They used expressive devices sparingly and with restraint. Johann Rudolph Zumsteeg composed ballads in the manner of solo cantatas with movements in different tempos linked by passages of recitative. Although Zumsteeg may claim no great position among German composers, Kenneth Whitton has written that he can serve as a link between the simple strophic eighteenth-century ballad and “the new, magical world of Franz Schubert.”

In his book *German Song and Its Poetry, 1740-1900*, J.W. Smeed has paraphrased Rudolf Louis' essay *Die deutsche Musik der Gegenwart* (“German Music of Today”) of 1909. Louis recognized two prominent lines of development of the *Lied* from Schubert on.

One, which leads naturally to Brahms, regards the text as raw material for the music which is of paramount importance for the composer. The other line, leading via Schumann to Wolf, pays the most fastidious regard to everything which is in and behind the words of the poem and employs all possible means to express the poet's nuances.

This section will trace the development of German *Lied* in the nineteenth century following both lines described by Louis, noting how composers influenced and mentored each other.

The native Viennese Franz Schubert (1797-1828), like his contemporary Beethoven, had one foot in the Classical Period and one foot in the Romantic. Alfred Einstein has remarked that as a song composer, Schubert is simultaneously Classical and...
Schubert is Classical in that the melody, the vocal writing and the declamation in his works are in equilibrium, and in that both vocal part and piano part are subservient to the poem.” However it must observed that, compared to his predecessors, Schubert provided an inordinate amount of music for voice and piano and elevated the importance of the musical element in his songs until it became of equal to or greater than the textual element. In fact, he was not averse to altering the text so that it would better serve his musical purpose. In his setting of Goethe’s “Gretchen am Spinnrade,” for example, the choice to repeat the first two lines of the poem at the end was a necessary ingredient in his own musical conception. Schubert’s move toward autonomy from a slavish representation of the poem in music is one of the factors that make him, and indeed this song, Romantic.

“Gretchen am Spinnrade,” composed on 19 October 1814, is considered by many commentators as the first genuine German Lied. In this song, Schubert synthesized the received form of strict strophic song and its simple chordal accompaniment with the through-composed ballad and its constantly shifting moods. Revolutionary here is the creation of two separate but equal forces in the voice and piano parts. “What is new in ‘Gretchen am Spinnrade,’” as Marie-Agnes Dittrich has written, “is Schubert's exploitation of the song’s means: his polyrhythmic combining of an accompaniment and a quite differently structured vocal line.” The vocal part uncannily reflects the meaning of the text and explores the protagonist’s agitation, while the accompaniment, acting as

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more than simple support, lends depth to the dramatic impulse of the poetry.\textsuperscript{11}

Despite the fact that Robert Schumann (1810-1856) considered the \textit{Lied} as a genre inferior to instrumental music, he is often viewed as Schubert’s spiritual heir; in 1840 he composed well over one hundred songs in what is now known as the “miraculous” \textit{Liederjahr}.\textsuperscript{12} In his choice of texts for musical setting, Schumann turned away from the favored poets of the previous generation — Goethe, Schiller, et al. — toward poets that represent the brightest lights of \textit{Biedermeier} letters: Justinus Kerner, Adelbert von Chamisso, and Friedrich Rückert. He set more than a dozen lyrical verses by Eichendorff, which depict the individual in harmony, or in conflict, with the natural world. Heinrich Heine, “who distanced himself from Romantic imagery and sentiment with irony and urbane wit,” is also well represented in Schumann’s output.\textsuperscript{13} Although, as Whitton has pointed out, the Romantic Movement in literature was waning by 1840, “Schumann's \textit{Lieder} are, in the main, settings of poems of unimpeachable Romantic provenance.... [A]ll the literary \textit{topoi} of the period are to be found there.”\textsuperscript{14}

Schumann continued much in the same vein as Schubert, though in his songs, the balance of voice and piano is tipped in favor of the piano. Schubert, trained at least in part by masters of the Italian school of vocal music, composed periodic melodies based on triadic contours. Schumann, on the other hand, had written most of his best-known piano literature before he composed a single \textit{Lied}. Thus, in Schumann’s songs, then, there is a conspicuous use of lengthy piano postludes, suggesting that the expression of the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{11} Whitton, 35.
\item\textsuperscript{12} Whitton, 51.
\item\textsuperscript{14} Whitton, 53.
\end{itemize}
poetic thought is not yet completed with utterance of the final word of the text, and the
vocal melody seems incomplete without the piano’s harmonic assistance. The result is a
style of song composition in which the voice and the piano are of equal importance. Rey
Longyear has observed the close relationship between the piano and voice as the most
striking characteristic of Schumann’s best songs. “What [he] had previously confided to
the singing tone of the piano was now given to the voice but without relegating the piano
to the background as a mere accompanying instrument.”15 For Einstein, the piano “is
more refined in sonority, more cunning in technique, although it seems to be simple; to it
falls the task of emphasizing ‘the finer traits of the poem.’”16

The Year of Revolutions, 1848, brought a wave of political upheaval that
originated in France and swept across most of Europe. Following along some of the same
lines as the French Revolution at the end of the previous century, the working class
demanded a greater participation in the political process. The devastation and destruction
resulted in very little change, and historians regard the whole affair as a failure. However,
this period did witness a schism that divided the world of music. The two sides can be
described in a number of ways: absolute music versus program music, diatonicism versus
chromaticism, or Brahms versus Liszt and Wagner.

In October 1853, Schumann published an article entitled *Neue Bahnen* regarding
new paths that would be blazed by a brave young pianist and composer, Johannes
Brahms (1833-1897). Just a few weeks before, Brahms had presented himself at the home
of Robert and Clara Schumann and played several of his compositions, including a few
solo songs. Schumann hailed him immediately as the chosen one, although it would be

16 Einstein, 187.
years until he gained notoriety. A native of Hamburg, Brahms shared with his fellow northern Germans the regional trait of reserve and quiet detachment. His friendships, however, were long-lived, and the exact nature of his relationship with Clara has been a subject of considerable speculation.

Unlike Schumann, who experienced an extremely concentrated period of song composition, Brahms's song output represents a more or less interrupted stream. He is often criticized for his faulty declamation, placing unstressed syllables on strong beats, and for subordination of poetry to music. Lorraine Gorrell has observed that Brahms “holds a unique place in the history of the nineteenth-century art song because he presents the listener with so many contradictions. While his inspiration for songwriting began with poetry, the poetry itself became a secondary feature of the composition.” He set relatively few verses by the great poets of the nineteenth century, considering their works to be perfect and not requiring further musical illumination. He preferred the works of minor poets — Georg Friedrich Daumer, Klaus Groth, and Max von Schenkendorf, to name a few. Brahms biographer Peter Latham concluded that Brahms's reasons for choosing second-rate poetry may have stemmed from a belief that he could not harm it in his musical settings. More recent scholarship has suggested that Brahms’s faulty declamation was a deliberate choice, particularly in the light of his instrumental works, in which he often disregarded bar lines, helping to create unnotated shifts of meter and hemiola. This view would certainly align with Gorrell’s admission that, at times, the musical concepts tend to dominate the poetry.

19 Virginia Hancock, “Johannes Brahms: Volkslied/Kunstlied,” in *German Lieder in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rufus Hallmark (NY: Routledge, 2010), 144. See also Gorrell, 265.
These musical concepts grew in part from Brahms’s thorough study of works by composers of earlier eras — Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, and others. He participated in awakening interest in the music of Baroque composers and integrated the use of Baroque contrapuntal techniques into his music. This, in conjunction with triadic, folksong-like melodic lines, distinguished him from other composers of the day. Whitton has labeled him a “conscious classicist ...one who composes more with form in mind than with emotion” (emphasis Whitton’s). Longyear agrees: “Although Brahms used many of the harmonies of the ‘new German school,’ particularly the half-diminished seventh chord as dominant preparations in cadences, to him harmony was strictly functional, neither coloristic nor rhetorical.”

The New German School (Neudeutsche Schule), a loose collection of like-minded composers formed in the second half of the nineteenth century, is most closely associated with the names of Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. Although better known for his works for piano and for orchestra, Liszt (1811-1886) composed many songs throughout his life and returned again and again to the intimate form. He first encountered the Romantic Lied as a young composer and concert artist; to bolster his concert repertoire, he embarked on a project that resulted in a number of transcriptions for piano of songs by Beethoven and Schubert. While on tour in the 1840s, he was introduced to the songs of Schumann and considered composing his own songs in that style.

In his Lieder, Liszt relied a great deal on the piano to express the poetry and gave significant prominence to the accompaniment. For several commentators, his Lieder suffer by comparison with those of Schubert or Schumann. As Monika Hennemann has

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20 Whitton, 62.
21 Longyear, 197.
written, “Schumann's concentration on the emotional import of the words is in stark contrast to Liszt's bravura emphasis on the pictorial background.” Einstein holds that, in the hands of Liszt, song loses its form. “Everything resolves itself into details — often very clear details — and is held together only by a single melodic idea.” For Thym, this reduction results in an “austere, even barren appearance.” Mueller views Liszt's *Lieder* as a kind of nursery, “a compositional testing ground, not unlike the way in which Beethoven treated his piano sonatas as harmonic and formal experiments for other genres.”

The same can be said about Richard Wagner (1813-1883), arguably the most controversial composer of the nineteenth century. Wagner spent most of his formative years in the theater, working at a number of jobs in various opera houses. He was obsessed with the symphonies of Beethoven, particularly the last, with its combined vocal and instrumental forces. He considered Beethoven’s symphonies to be the final word spoken in support of absolute music and viewed the next logical step to be a unification of the power of the symphony and the power of drama. Thus Wagner contributed little to the art-song canon; however, both Wagner and Liszt explored and exploited a rich harmonic vocabulary in their songs, and Wagner's theories about setting text had the greatest effect on the future development of *Lied* composition.

The development of *Lied* compositional styles in the second half of the nineteenth

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23 Einstein, 195.
26 Gorrell, 256.
century can be roughly divided into two periods: before and after the death of Wagner. Prior to 1880, *Lied* composers were for the most part influenced by Schumann. With the Wagner revolution in musical theater came great changes in art song. Hermann Kretzschmar, in his essay of 1898 entitled “Das deutsche Lied seit dem Tode Richard Wagners” (“The German Lied since the death of Richard Wagner”) recognized that his effect on music manifested itself in three ways: “attempts to expand the *Lied* beyond its traditional limits, thereby renouncing the folk-song influence so important in the history of earlier nineteenth-century German song; the predominant pathos of the new lieder; and the heightened focus on the instrumental part.”

**Hugo Wolf and the Lied**

Wolf's struggle to find his own unique voice as a composer, his own “howl” as he described it, would last for several decades. Born in Windischgrätz, a small town then under the control of the Austrian Empire (in modern-day Slovenia), his music education began at home at the age of four. From his father, he learned to play violin and piano. In primary school, he studied music theory with a local music teacher, Sebastian Weixler. As a secondary school student, he cared little for subjects other than music, and was dismissed from two schools. With his father's reluctant permission, he left home in 1875 to matriculate at the Vienna Conservatory, where he attempted to conform to the rigors of the program. However, he was thrown out after two years for general insubordination and breach of discipline.

Without the benefit of further formal education, Wolf turned for instruction to the music with which he had the closest affinity. He made a careful study of the songs of his predecessors, in particular those of Robert Schumann. He emulated the master's technique of text setting by composing his own songs to some of the same verses used by Schumann. The “slavish echoes” and “uncannily exact assimilation” in these early songs are instantly recognizable. The result, as Susan Youens has remarked, “was either credible imitation-Schumann or mediocre Wolf each time, and eventually, Wolf abandoned the sporadic attempts.”

While in Vienna, Wolf attended the opera regularly and became a devoted fan, hearing performances of dramatic works by Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, and others. It was at the opera where he first heard some of the works of Richard Wagner, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin. Wolf instantaneously adopted Wagner as his musical hero, and in the ensuing years studied Wagner's opera scores fervently in order to absorb his revolutionary and controversial chromatic language. Undoubtedly, the most essential lesson Wolf learned from Wagner, and the one that would most influence his Lied composition style, is the synthesis, the “love-bond” of music and poetry into a Gesamtkunstwerk. Speaking of late nineteenth-century critics, Amanda Glauert has commented “while acknowledging that it was hard to trace the logic of Wolf's harmonies, or identify a consistent stylistic character in his music, they could agree that such difficulties were serving poetry and bringing individual poems to life.”

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30 Youens, Vocal Music, 4.

Wolf's personal breakthrough still lay several years away. Continuously plagued by frustration and false starts, he accepted a post as music critic for the *Wiener Salonblatt* in 1884. For more than three years, he wrote uncompromising critiques that served to alienate him from the musical life of the city. He composed very little during these years and even then only in fits and starts. The pieces he did complete were rejected by the very establishment he had alienated as a critic.

The tide turned in 1887, and Wolf was inspired to begin composing again. The death of his father in May of that year, however, brought this promising period to an abrupt end. The fervor returned in November with an offer to publish some of his songs and, at the start of the next year, he removed to the Viennese suburbs to try once more in earnest to compose. At last the dam that had bottled up his creative energies broke, and the waters rushed nearly out of control. In 1888, he composed nearly one hundred songs in rapid succession; in the span of three years, he would compose over 200 songs, sometimes several in one day.32

Once Wolf had absorbed a poem completely, he wrote quickly. The text suggested every aspect of the compositional process – melody, harmony, and rhythm, musical word painting, as well as overall form. He employed the contrapuntal devices of the Baroque period, and developed motivic material in the style of Beethoven and Wagner. There are songs in strophic and modified-strophic forms that parody the simple *Volkslied*, through-composed songs in elaborate symphonic structure, and many variations of the two. “But whatever form he used,” Frederic Austin wrote less than a decade after Wolf’s death, “there was none that he did not enrich, or clarify and concentrate, and in the work of no other man in a similar field do we find such varied

examples of flawless and beautiful technical handling.”

Unique to Wolf's process as a composer was his focus in large part on a limited number of poets, a practice contrary to that of his predecessors and contemporaries, who ranged much more widely for inspiration. In the poetry of his own age, he found little that would serve his musical purposes. He preferred the works of poets from earlier generations, particularly those of the early Romantic era: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857), and Eduard Mörike (1804-1875). Further, he was drawn to the un-Romantic in Romantic poetry: in Eichendorff and Goethe, he sought out untapped veins — verses that had gone undiscovered by other composers. In the case of Mörike, the majority of whose verses were unset at the time by any composer, Wolf recognized the greatest opportunity for his own innovations in song composition.

Another unique aspect of Wolf's process is his use of the term *Gedicht* (poem) instead of *Lied* (song) as label for his compositions. At the time of publication, the Mörike songbook bore the title *Gedichte von Eduard Mörike* (as opposed to *Lieder von Hugo Wolf*) and included a portrait of the poet on the flyleaf, a practice he continued with the Eichendorff and Goethe songbooks. This act demonstrated the debt he felt he owed to the poet for the songs' very existence. Wolf viewed it as his duty to enhance the essential nature of the verse, not simply to impose music on words. As Jürgen Thym has expressed, “Wolf did not use poems merely as a vehicle for music; he wanted to represent and interpret poetry in all its details and nuances through music. The poem is not only the point of departure for the musical setting but is also the core and center of the music.”

34 Jürgen Thym, “The Solo Song Settings of Eichendorff’s Poems by Schumann and Wolf” (PhD diss.,
This quality of Wolf's song composition, which has its origins in the study of his predecessors' work and further heightened through his own processes, is what makes his work unique among late nineteenth-century Lied composers.

**Conclusion**

The repertories of the nineteenth-century Lied represent one of the greatest artistic treasures of vocal music. We have Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, and others to thank for works of deep emotional impact and lasting beauty. Among those composers, there are names that are connected with works in all instrumental genres as well. When it comes to Hugo Wolf, however, a significant difference must be considered. Unlike his fellow composers, Wolf required poetry as a necessary ingredient in his creative process, and the Lied became the outlet for his truly personal musical expression. His output establishes him as a leading figure among Lied composers, and for this reason, his songs deserve closer inspection.

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Case Western University, 1974), 238.
Chapter Two: Representative *Rollengedichte* of Joseph von Eichendorff

**Wolf’s Settings of Eichendorff’s Poetry**

Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857) was born to an aristocratic family in Upper Silesia, part of modern-day Poland. Following an idyllic childhood, he spent two years at Halle University studying law before transferring to the University of Heidelberg. It was in Heidelberg that Eichendorff was introduced to Romantic thought by a young lecturer, Joseph Görres, a magnetic personality to whom he was uncontrollably drawn. Following the completion of his university study, he traveled with his brother through Europe and met many of the bright lights of German Romantic letters — Clemens Brentano, Achim von Arnim, and Hermann von Kleist, among others. During this period, he began work on what would become his first novel, *Ahnung und Gegenwart*. In Vienna, Eichendorff came in contact with Friedrich Schlegel, one of the leaders of the Romantic Movement, who encouraged him in his literary pursuits. Considered by many to be the finest Romantic poet, his verse has been set to music time and again.  

The conception of the Eichendorff songbook came to Wolf following a hiatus from composition in the summer of 1888, before he returned to the Mörike songbook in October of that year. He had first entertained the idea of setting Eichendorff’s verse in the early 1880s. By then he had learned to avoid the specific poems Schumann had chosen to set, thereby avoiding any possible imitation, but he was not satisfied with the result and chose not to publish the majority of these songs. In late summer of 1888, he returned to those songs from that time — seven in all — that he deemed worthy of re-

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examination, and composed another thirteen. The group of twenty songs was published as a volume in 1889.

As his personal compositional technique developed and coalesced through the first volumes of the Mörike songs, Wolf came to recognize the kind of poetry with which he had the closest affinity, as Susan Youens has noted. When re-examining the Eichendorff poems with this fresh vision, it was the Rollengedichte that immediately attracted him, with their “clarity of outline and vivid human depictions,” as Youens has put it.36 Throughout the volume, rough and earthy figures, deeply rooted in public consciousness, pass by in colorful alternation. The folksy quality of the protagonists suggested strophic forms and periodic melodies reminiscent of the Volkslied.37 These were the qualities Wolf had already discovered in 1887 when he chose to set “Der Soldat I.”

**Der Soldat I (7 March 1887)**

Ist auch schmuck nicht mein Rösslein, although my horse may not be handsome, so ist’s doch recht klug, he is actually quite clever, trägt im Finstern zu ‘nem Schlösslein and will carry me through the dark mich rasch noch genug. quickly enough to a certain little castle.

Ist das Schloss auch nicht prächtig, Although the castle is not very splendid, zum Garten aus der Tür out of her door and into her garden tritt ein Mädchen doch allnächtig steps a maiden who, all night, dort freundlich herfür will be friendly to me.

Und ist auch die Kleine And although this small girl nicht die schönst’ auf der Welt, is not the fairest in the world, so gibt’s doch just keine there is still no other die mir besser gefällt. that I like better.

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This short, humorous musical sketch was composed in early 1887, several months before Wolf’s most prolific period began. As noted earlier, humor in song was one of his greatest gifts to Lied composition. Youens has observed three general comedic principles across Wolf’s output:

He was always attracted to exaggeration, Rabelaisian excess and comic melodrama, to the laughter that is generated when gestures are more extravagant than the occasion warrants. Second, he sought to compress multiple comic details, musical nuances inspired by the text, into both the piano part and the vocal line, but especially in the piano.... And finally, whatever the verbal device, the joke becomes primarily a musical jest.\(^{38}\)

Before the soldier has spoken a single word, Wolf paints the scene in the song’s introduction. The horse’s easy gait is depicted in the triple-meter rhythm, which serves as the rhythmic underpinning for the entire song (see Ex. 2.1). The characterization of the horse’s gait continues at m. 9 in the form of grace notes limping up from below the main pitch. It will be observed in the course of this study that grace notes and other embellishments of this kind often signal the humorous element in Wolf’s songs. In this case, the soldier is enjoying a laugh at his own expense and, by the end of the song, the listener will be in on the joke.

\(^{38}\) Youens, \textit{Wolf: The Vocal Music}, 76.
Ex. 2.1 “Der Soldat I,” mm. 1-14

The language of the soldier is rough and unrefined. The sentence structure is informal and full of contractions and apocopeation, for example, the shortened ‘nem’ and the s’ist in the first stanza. He may have picked up this manner of speech in the military camp; he may have the benefit of very little education, if any at all; he may in fact be slightly inebriated and no longer concerned with correct syntax. There is a smugness, a certain self-satisfaction, in his tale. In the first three quatrains, he recounts the negative aspects of his subjects. His horse may not be anything special, neither the castle the most splendid, nor the young lady the most beautiful; however, he is willing to overlook their faults.

As each stanza begins with similar wording, and each enumerates a specific thing with which the soldier finds fault, a modified strophic form is suggested for the setting. At the start of the first three stanzas, the vocal melody follows a similar contour, and Wolf repeats the same opening interval of a perfect fourth each time. This melody is presented in a rising sequential pattern – in C major, D minor, E minor. Instead of continuing the pattern to the F tonal level for the fourth strophe, as one might expect,
Wolf returns abruptly to C major with no harmonic preparation. This sudden change of direction may have been prompted by a clever bit of wordplay in Eichendorff’s poem. The verb *freien* (to court, to woo) and the noun *Freien* (the outdoors), though spelled the same way, have very different meanings. Wolf translates Eichendorff’s joke into musical terms – the initial letter F suggests both the key and the pitch. In the poem, the young lady brings up the subject of marriage (*Und spricht sie vom freien*...), and the soldier beats a quick retreat away from the castle. Wolf foreshadows this action by the avoiding the F tonality at the beginning of the final strophe and returns to the home key instead.

The association of the young lady with the key of F is hinted at for the first time in the third strophe (see Ex. 2.2). At m. 51, when the soldier refers to her specifically, Wolf heads harmonically toward the flat keys (B flat/E flat), but skirts a convincing arrival by raising one semitone in the bass from B flat to B natural. This passage is given further emphasis by way of a *ritardando* and expressive direction *sehr zart* (very tender). The soldier dwells for a moment on the image of the young lady before returning to the quick tempo (*frisch*). The laughing grace notes in the vocal line indicate the soldier’s bemusement at his own state of affairs. She may not be the loveliest, but there is no one who pleases him more.
An even clearer example of the repulsive aspect of F occurs at m. 79 (see Ex. 2.3). The flat-key harmony returns momentarily as the soldier sings repeatedly on F of his decision to stay outdoors, away from the castle and free from the bonds of marriage. Marked *gedehnt* (stretched), the vocal part begins quietly, as if whispering, then drops an octave and grows louder over the duration of the note before it heads up one semitone to F sharp. In light of the associations of the key of F with the young lady, this is a clever musical depiction of a narrow escape. Grace notes trail after horse and rider as they trot away to safety.

In his setting of this charming verse, Wolf responds to several aspects of the poem. First, the parallel structure of the stanzas suggested to him a varied strophic song form. Second, the poetic image of the horse is illustrated with a rhythmic pattern that resembles an easy canter, and that serves as a basis for the entire song. Finally, Wolf underscores the humorous element through a deliberate harmonic plan.
In contrast to the soldier of the previous song, whose level of intoxication is not made explicit in the poem, the *Glücksritter* — this soldier of fortune — has clearly had several drinks even before the poem begins. He is not a gallant knight, as the title might suggest, but a reprobate, a heavy drinker, and a gambler to boot. His mount is no trusty steed; he rides astride a barstool. He has likely lost every penny at cards. Dame Fortuna, or Lady Luck, as we might call her today, has abandoned him. When he luck runs out, as has surely happened in the past, he seeks solace in drink. No Sir Galahad, our protagonist is cast more in the mold of Shakespeare’s scurvy knight, Sir John Falstaff.

*Wenn Fortuna spröde tut,*  
*lass’ ich sie in Ruh’,*  
*singe recht und trinke gut,*  
*und Fortuna kriegt auch Mut,*  
*setzt sich mit dazu.*

*But I make no effort:*  
*“Hey, another one here!”*  
*I turn my back to her,*  
*I toast this one and that —*  
*this annoys her very much.*

*Und bald rückt sie sacht zu mir:*  
*And soon she moves softly up to me:*
“Hast du deren mehr?”
“Have you any more of that?”
“Wie Sie seh’n, drei Kannen schier,
“As you see, almost three tankards
und das lauter Klebebier!
and foaming thick beer!
’s wird mir gar nicht schwer.”
It won’t be too much for me.”

Then she smiles at me kindly:
“Bist ein ganzer Kerl!”
“You are quite a man!”
ruft den Kellner, schreit nach Wein,
She calls the barkeep, orders wine,
trinkt mir zu und schenkt mir ein,
drinks my health and pours me
echte Blum’ und Perl’.
genuine bouquet and bubbles.

Sie bezahlet Wein und Bier,
She pays for the wine and beer,
und ich, wieder gut,
and I, feeling good again,
führe sie am Arm mit mir
lead her on my arm
aus dem Haus wie’n Kavalier,
from the house like a cavalier,
alleszieht den Hut.
and everyone doffs his hat to us.

In his tale, the knight recounts his own tried-and-true method of winning back
Lady Luck’s favor: he ignores her. Like the soldier, the knight dispenses with proper
sentence structure, shortens and contracts many words, and uses colloquial expressions.
Eichendorff grants human form to Lady Luck, and what ensues is no less than a drinking
contest between Fortuna and her knight. The poetry resembles a narrative ballad, a form
of traditional verse that generally describes tragic events and adventures. Here, however,
the form is twisted into a humorous scene of five quintains, or five-line stanzas.

If we accept that the vocal line is the knight’s voice, we may then take the piano
part to represent Fortuna herself. The two-measure motive presented at the song’s
opening, which can be labeled the Fortuna Motive, appears in various guises at the
beginning of each strophe. Wolf transforms and develops the motive as Lady Luck adopts
new attitudes towards her knight. The knight, however, never sings the motive in this
form again in the song; he has indeed left Fortuna in peace.
At the song’s opening, the knight and the lady speak in unison in pure C major, but not for long (see Ex. 2.4). Wolf paints the word *spröde* (brash, brittle) appropriately by tossing an unexpected, somewhat harsh G sharp into the melody. After the opening phrase, which concludes with a fanfare figure in E major, the next phrase is bombastic and mock-heroic, redolent with undertones of march music (see Ex. 2.4, mm. 5-12). This eight-measure phrase begins squarely in F major, one semitone higher than the conclusion of the fanfare of the previous measure. The use of the close juxtaposition of two notes a semitone apart dominates the melodic profile and the harmonic plan of the song. In a way, it is analogous to the battle of wits between the knight and Dame Fortune.
For example, as Lady Luck works up the courage to sit beside her knight, the bass moves from B flat to A in m. 8 and back again before climbing by semitone to C. The first strophe closes with a two-measure rising scalar figure over a triadic descending bass; this musical gesture is repeated at the end of each strophe. Its function is twofold: first, it places an exclamation point at the end of each strophe before the song moves on to the next stage of the narrative; second, it serves to square up the somewhat uneven five-line verse form, contributing an implied sixth line of poetry.

The piano in the second strophe begins exactly like the first (see Ex. 2.4, m. 13). What is different here is the knight’s response. In an act of reconciliation, Fortuna offers her motive, but the knight pays no attention. In fact, he begins his line a semitone away from hers and heads in the opposite direction. The knight then assumes control and changes the pattern established in the first strophe by forcing the harmonic direction away from the expected F-major tonality and heading toward a cadence in A major in m. 24 (see Ex. 2.5). Here Wolf makes the significance of the semitone struggle patently clear with a clashing discord between the voice and the piano (voice on A, piano on G sharp) in m. 22, further emphasized with an accent mark in both parts. This is also a prime example of Wolfian word painting. Just as Fortuna is annoyed (verdriesst) by the knight’s flattery of the other women in the room, so does the dissonance annoy the ear.
In the third strophe, Fortuna’s own voice is heard for the first time. Her motive resounds delicately in G minor at m. 25, a key quite remote from the A-major cadence of the previous measure (see Ex. 2.5, m. 25). At her “vocal entrance,” she directs the tonality down one semitone, from G minor to F sharp major. Wolf spins out her line into a tender (zart) melody in the piano that wafts over the scene like a soft breeze (see Ex. 2.6). This melody insistently reiterates the F sharp several times and conceals within itself yet another semitone juxtaposition, this time between C sharp and D. The knight recaptures harmonic supremacy immediately and wrenches the harmony back to G major. As yet, she has had no effect on the knight.
In the construction of the song, Wolf ties the strophes together by employing the same or similar music for each. For instance, the passage in G major (see Ex. 2.6, mm. 31-38) parallels the passage in F major at mm. 5-12 (see Ex. 2.4); it is an exact repetition in the new key. Dramatically, the higher pitch level equates with the knight raising his voice as the level of his intoxication rises. This use of parallel construction continues in the fourth strophe, which repeats much the same music as the second (compare Ex. 2.5 and 2.7). In this case, the use of similar music for these two strophes draws a dramatic as well as a musical parallel between them. In the second stanza, the knight aggravates Fortuna by flattering the other ladies in the tavern. In the fourth, it is Fortuna’s turn to flatter the knight and smile at him. But there is something ominous about the smile. The Fortuna Motive in the piano is transformed and altered from its original contour (see Ex. 2.6, m. 39 and fig. 2.7, m. 40). Instead of descending to G sharp as before, it lingers on A while the voice sings D sharp — creating the harmonic interval of a tritone — and the tempo slows approaching this moment. Fortuna is still working to regain the upper hand.
The vocal line at the beginning of the final strophe is marked _etwas breiter_ (see Ex. 2.8). This is Wolf indulging in a bit of word play of his own, _breit_ suggesting here an idiomatic expression for drunkenness as well as a broader tempo. The song has returned to the home key of C major and remains solidly in that key for the duration. Harmonically speaking, Fortuna, linked from the opening to the key of C major, has assumed complete control of the scene. The expected turn to F major, as in the first strophe, is evaded. The knight is even persuaded to sing a version of the Fortuna motive in mm. 57-58. In the measures that follow, the second part of the motive — the C to G sharp descent — is heard three times in the piano part, harmonized by a chromatic rising bass line and growing in dynamic strength. The final line of the poem, set in a rather low vocal range, can hardly be heard over Fortuna’s rejoicing at having won the day. The song closes with a lengthy postlude, an apotheosis in mock-heroic military style.
There are several similarities between this song and “Der Soldat I.” First, the ballad-like quality of the poetry suggests to Wolf a modified strophic form for both. The modifications, particularly with regard to the harmonic plan, are such that they illuminate the story and heighten its dramatic potential. The cyclical harmonic plan for “Der Glücksritter” follows the knight’s moving away from Dame Fortune and returning to her side. Second, just as the opening rhythmic motive of “Der Soldat I” represents the horse, the soldier’s constant companion, the opening melodic motive represents Dame Fortune. Here, Wolf subjects the motive to Wagnerian treatment, developing and transforming it as the drama demands. Unique to this song is Wolf’s representation of the struggle between the knight and the lady through the use of a semitone as a significant structural
The protagonist of this poem, a young man and a student, is despairing; nothing is going right for him. He cannot concentrate on his books, his zither will not stay in tune, and his student’s robe is falling apart at the seams. Finally he reveals that the source of his despair is his sweetheart, who has fallen out with him. The young man retreats into his fantasies — the stuff of schoolboy preoccupations: knights, dragons, and damsels in distress — and dreams of ridding the world of all Philister. Originating from the Bible, the term philistine — used to describe an uneducated, uncultured, or materialistic person — was adopted by German students in the seventeenth century.³⁹ In the last lines of the poem, with a heavy dose of mock-tragedy, the student imagines his own glorious death and afterlife, during which he will only think about his own contentment.

im Himmel still und weit
und frag’t nach all’ dem Plunder
nichts vor Zufriedenheit.

in the still, broad sky
and did not need to think about
anything but contentment.

The existence of the despairing lover’s irritation is made clear right from the start of the song (see Ex. 2.9). Set to an accompaniment of clashing discords, Wolf directs the singer to deliver the text of the first stanza quickly and as if annoyed (rasch und unmutig). The text is set on repeated notes in a simple and direct declamatory style. After the initial outburst, however, the lover’s head of steam dissipates rather rapidly as each phrase begins on a lower pitch. Marked sehr zurückhaltend (very held back), he manages only barely to utter the reason for his irritation: he has lost his beloved. Thus Wolf illuminates the dramatic quality of the text through harmonic and melodic choices. He has also reflected its rhetorical quality — the enumeration of the lover’s woes — with a falling sequence that encompasses the entire first stanza. This opening passage, eight measures in length, is then significantly contracted into two measures (see Ex. 2.9, mm. 9-10). As Eric Sams has noted, “the parallel phrases of the poem are translated into musical sequences, which are then summarized for further emphasis in one concentrated bar of piano interlude.”

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40 Sams, 168.
In the second stanza, as the lover is carried away in daydreaming, Wolf illustrates each image by varying the rhythmic and melodic contour of the accompaniment patterns of the piano part (see Ex. 2.10). The Classical image of a beautiful woman walking on the green warrants a rolling, arpeggiated figure, reminiscent of Schubert (mm. 11-12). The dragon’s roar is reflected in the chromatic bass line played in octaves, while in the right hand, the rising chords describe the dragon flying off into the sky (mm. 15-16). The gallop of the armored knight’s mount is reflected in the dotted rhythms (mm. 19-20).

In the final strophe, marked *bedeutend langsamer* (significantly slower), the despairing lover imagines himself in heaven, free from care. The slow, sighing figure that
accompanies this phrase (the dyad G/E flat descending by semitone to F sharp/D) echoes a similar figure from the opening measures of the song (compare Ex. 2.9, mm. 1-2 and Ex. 2.11, mm. 27-28) and hints at a lingering irritation. The lapse is only momentary, however, as the final phrase returns to the quick tempo. In the piano part, little remains of the dissonance from the song’s opening; this lover is bound and determined to despair no longer. To emphasize this point further, Wolf throws the word nichts (nothing) into relief by setting it on the highest note in the phrase and tying it over the barline.

Ex. 2.11 “Der verzweifelte Liebhaber,” mm. 27-34

Der Scholar (22 September 1888)

The title of this song is Wolf’s invention; in Eichendorff, he is variously titled “the student” (Der Student) in some editions, and “the wandering student” (Der
wandernde Student) in others. The protagonist of this poem and that of the previous poem share two qualities: they are both students, and they both indulge in reverse snobbery. This protagonist imagines himself as a medieval wandering scholar, or Goliard. The Goliards of the twelfth century were monks or students who left the safety of the monastery or university for a life on the streets. They earned what little money they could by singing songs on various subjects to suit the situation — drinking songs, love songs, or satirical songs. The life was not easy and, as Judith Lynn Sebesta has noted, “the songs of the Goliards speak of disillusionment with the world.” such that “many Goliards were drop-outs of medieval society.” Eichendorff must have encountered many such young men as a student at Heidelberg University. As mentioned above, many of the brightest lights of the Romantic movement attended the university — Brentano, von Arnim, and Tieck, among others — who were partly responsible for the revival of interest in the German Middle Ages in speech, poetry, and art.

Bei dem angenehmsten Wetter
singen alle Vögelein,
klascht der Regen auf die Blätter,
sing ich so für mich allein.

Denn mein Aug’ kann nichts entdecken,
wen der Blitz auch grausam glüht,
was im Wandern könnt’ erschrecken
ein zufriedenes Gemüt.

Frei von Mammon will ich streiten
auf dem Feld der Wissenschaft,
sinne ernst und nehm’ zu Zeiten
einen Mund voll Rebensaft.

Bin ich müde vom Studieren,

In the most pleasant weather
all the birds sing,
but when the rain slaps the leaves,
I sing alone and for myself.

For my eyes can see nothing,
when the lightning flashes dreadfully,
that could frighten in its wandering
a contented mind.

Free from Mammon, I will walk
on the fields of scholarship
in serious thought and, from time to time,
take a mouthful of grape juice.

When I tire of studying,

41 Sams, 168.
wann der Mond tritt sanft herfür,  as the moon steps out softly,
pfleg’ ich dann zu musizieren   I will go to make music
vor der Allerschönsten Tür.   in front of my beloved’s door.

In Eichendorff’s poem, the scholar revels in the foul weather. In fact, the rain
cheers him. He avers that he has nothing to fear from nature, from lightning and thunder.
His mind is only truly content when he is wandering far from the world of men. If the
protagonist were indeed a student at Heidelberg, he would surely be familiar with the
*Philosophenweg*, or philosopher’s walk, which climbs steeply from the level of the
Neckar River into the woods on the bank opposite the old part of the city. From the path,
one can still see the university, but the sense of isolation it affords transports those who
travel it to another, more secluded world. The fact that Wolf never traveled the
*Philosophenweg* did not preclude him from comprehending the feeling of lofty distance
presented in this poem. He likely followed similar paths in the suburbs of Vienna.

The cynical, ironic point of view, perhaps typical of the highly educated, persists
right through the poem. Wolf reflects the scholar’s detachment in the staccato walking-
bass figure of the piano part (see Ex. 2.12). Steady and unflagging, it is a near-constant
feature of his setting. It also serves him as an expressive device. At several points in the
song the bass is specifically marked *nicht staccato*. The alternation between staccato and
legato occurs as the poem dictates; staccato for detachment and irony, legato for
emotional involvement, as Sams has noted.\(^\text{44}\)

\(^{44}\) Sams, 167-8.
In the third strophe, Wolf responds with the most vivid use of the expressive device (see Ex. 2.13). The text describes both sides of the scholar’s nature and therefore “says something that vividly encapsulates his personality,” one of the hallmarks of narrative poetry. The scholar returns from his walk and from his musings, and trades the outdoors, the woods and fields, for the field of knowledge and for his studies. He states with fervor (kräftig) that he prefers scientific pursuits to those associated with Mammon, the demon of gluttony, richness, and injustice. The Biblical allusion serves a dual purpose: the allusion itself subtly indicates the scholar’s breadth of knowledge, and his claim of freedom from excess as represented by Mammon testifies to his snobbish disdain for the material world. The large intervallic leaps in the vocal line, each further emphasized with accent marks, “underscores the youthful pomposity of the words.” The bass line is to be played legato, indicating his genuine emotional connection to the statement. In the second half of the stanza, the scholar regains his composure; the detached staccato markings return, while the vocal line regains its melodic smoothness.

45 Youens, Wolf: The Vocal Music, 97.
46 Ibid.
“Der Scholar” and “Der verzweifelte Liebhaber” were composed a day apart in September 1888 and together make a kind of miniature song cycle. Despite the fact that the verses come from different parts of Eichendorff’s own collection (“Der Scholar” from *Wanderlieder*, “Der verzweifelte Liebhaber” from *Frühling und Liebe*), Wolf recognized their common features: both protagonists are students, and both admit to some frustrations regarding their amorous pursuits. The despairing lover has fallen out with his beloved, while the scholar is left to wait outside her door. In subtle ways, Wolf hints through musical terms that they may be one and the same person. For example, the opening falling-fifth motive in the piano part of “Der Scholar” (see Ex. 2.12) is recalled

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in the falling fifths of the opening vocal line in “Der verzweifelte Liebhaber” (see Ex. 2.9). Further, the closing measures of the two songs share common aspects. In the postlude of “Der Scholar,” the lower and middle voices of a three-voice texture repeat a pendulous semitone motion several times over, while a third voice moves by semitone in the opposite direction (see Ex. 2.14, mm. 47-8). A similar pendulous motion arises in “Liebhaber,” in which two voices descend by semitone while a third ascends by whole tone (see Ex. 2.11, mm. 27-30). Finally, both songs conclude with a series of detached chords in the piano part.

Ex. 2.14 “Der Scholar,” mm. 45-51

Although Wolf ordered “Der Scholar” before “Der verzweifelte Liebhaber” in the Eichendorff Songbook, the performer may choose to ignore Wolf’s ordering when presenting these two songs. The alternative orders present two narrative possibilities: on one hand, the despairing lover’s hot-headed and annoyed mood may require a walk in the rain to cool the flame; on the other, the sight of the beloved’s door shut to him might result in a desperate fit of temper. There is a case to be made for either option depending on the desired dramatic effect. Whichever is chosen, the two songs make a suitable and
dramatically convincing pairing.

**Seemanns Abschied** (21 September 1888)

Like all of the men discussed thus far, the hero of this poem is engaged in a struggle with the object of his affection. But the seafarer is a far earthier, more pragmatic, sort: he is not as well educated as the scholar, nor does he not possess the innate cleverness of the knight or the soldier. He wastes no time pining helplessly over a lost love, or trying to lure her back to his side; he simply walks out on her and, in parting, makes it clear that she will one day regret her disdain. For his part, he will return to the milieu he understands best: the sea.

Ade, mein Schatz, du mocht’st mich nicht, ich war dir zu geringe.  
Einst wandelst du bei Mondenlicht und hörst ein süßes Klingen:  
Ein Meerweib singt, die Nacht ist lau, die stillen Wolken wandern,  
da denk’ an mich, ’s ist meine Frau, nun such’ dir einen Andern!

Ade, ihr Landsknecht’, Musketier’!  
wir zieh’n auf wildem Roße, das bäumt und überschlägt sich schier vor manchem Felsenschloße.  
Der Wassermann bei Blitzvorschwein taucht auf in dunklen Nächten, der Haifisch schnappt, die Möwen schrei’n, das ist ein lustig Fechten!

Streckt nur auf eurer Bärenhaut daheim die faulen Glieder, Gott Vater aus dem Fenster schaut, schickt seine Sündflut wieder!  
Feldwebel, Reiter, Musketier, sie müssen all’ ersaufen,

Adieu, my love, you did not like me, I was too lowly for you.  
One day you will wander in the moonlight and hear a sweet sound: a mermaid sings, the night is mild, the quiet clouds drift by; you will think of me, she is my wife, now go find yourself someone else!

Adieu, soldiers and musketeers!  
We mount a wild horse that rears up and almost flips over before many a rocky castle.  
The merman, in the lightning flash, comes to the surface in dark nights; the shark snaps, the seagulls cry. This is a merry struggle!

Stretch out on your bearskin your lazy legs at home,  
God the Father looks out of his window and sends his flood again!  
Field marshals, cavalrmen, musketeers, you must all drown,
This poem, full of rollicking machismo and vivid imagery, is an ideal vehicle for Wolf’s particular brand of musical descriptive techniques. For example, in the song’s prelude, he draws a graphic, dramatic seascape: the whistling wind and the cries of seagulls are heard in the right hand; the powerful, rolling surge of the ocean waves, in the rising octaves of the bass (see Ex. 2.16). The prelude recalls the opening measures of another drama set on the untamed sea, that of Wagner’s opera, Der fliegende Holländer. Distinctly Wolfian, however, is the unusual use of whole-tone harmony of the first two measures. Another particularly fine example of Wolf’s simultaneous use of multiple illustrative devices occurs in the second half of the second strophe (see Ex. 2.15).

Fig. 2.15 “Seemans Abschied,” mm. 39-42

This violent scene of flashing lightning, snapping sharks and taunting seagulls is brought to life in the acciaccaturas and rapid passagework of the piano part. The execution of this passage demands a significant amount of violent energy from the pianist.

At the outset of the song, Wolf introduces a distinctive rhythmic profile (long-
short-short) in the left hand of the piano that he employs in several variations as accompaniment figure throughout the song. This particular figure, reminiscent of the galloping horse, may have been suggested by a specific poetic image in the text: in the second stanza, the seafarer compares the ship, nearly capsizing on rough seas, to a wild horse that rears up and nearly flips over. Wolf’s harmonic vocabulary for this song is also in the spirit of the poem. As the sailor boasts about the excitement of a life at sea, so does Wolf about his facility with harmony. For example, the dominant D flat chord that first appears in m. 5, and subsequently in mm. 6, 9, and 10, is resolved each time in a different manner (see Ex. 2.16). The boisterous harmonic shifting reflects not only the sailor’s own boisterous state, but also the constant rolling of the surf.
The first variation of the pattern (short-long-short) appears immediately as the voice enters and persists through the first and second strophes (see Ex. 2.16, mm. 5-11).

In the third strophe, as the tempo slows slightly (*ein wenig breiter*), the galloping quality of the rhythmic profile gives way to a smoother variation (see Ex. 2.17). Suddenly its carefree boisterousness is replaced by propriety and constraint. Cast in a homophonic texture, the sea shanty becomes a parody of a foursquare hymn. Wolf seems to be responding to a number of textual prompts and images from the poem: hearth and home, idleness and ease, and a reference to the Biblical story of the flood. At the mention of the flood (*Sündflut*), the surging sea returns in the left hand in the guise of rising and falling octaves (see Ex. 2.18).
As the sailor’s bravado reaches fever pitch in the final line of the poem, the rhythmic profile from the first strophe returns. Those land bound army men will surely drown in the flood, while he and his mates are propelled into paradise ahead of a good strong wind. The vocal line is operatic in range and dynamic, and the postlude takes up this cue, carrying it to humorous heights (see fig. 2.17). The three-note motive that begins in m. 63 (D-F-C#) is repeated obsessively until, a few measures later, Wolf constricts the motive rhythmically, lending it an impression of galloping. Thus then, the metaphor of ship as horse is recalled one last time.

Ex. 2.19 “Seemanns Abschied,” mm. 62-69
Like the parallel construction of the stanzas of “Der Soldat I,” which suggested to Wolf a song in modified strophic form, the first two stanzas of “Seemanns Abschied,” which both begin with “Ade,” result in a similar outcome. On the other hand, these two songs, when compared, also demonstrate the remarkable development in the space of eighteen months in Wolf’s confidence with regard to the setting of poetry. He has acquired great skill with the use of harmony as a dramatic agent. In the introduction, for instance, he creates a sense of instability and ambiguity that attests to his own personal interpretation of the verse. Harmonic ambiguity reigns until quite late in the song, when at m. 54 the key of F-major is clearly established for the first time, as the seafarer condemns all non-believers to eternity (see Ex. 2.18, m. 54). The use of illustrative device is ebullient and unrestrained, and the symphonic scale of the piano part attests to an operatic influence.

**Conclusion**

With his *Gedichte von Joseph von Eichendorff*, Wolf demonstrated without a doubt that the last word had not yet been spoken by Schumann and his contemporaries concerning the verses of the man considered the finest Romantic poet. He revealed not only an undiscovered vein of musical opportunity, but also the latent dramatic quality hidden in the unassuming lines of the *Rollengedichte*. He responded to the homely qualities of the protagonists — at turns primitive, boastful, wily, and snobbish — with musical aspects reminiscent of the Volkslied: largely periodic, symmetrical phrases and metrical declamation. Under this seemingly unsophisticated exterior, however, is Wolf’s
Kunst, his art and genius as a composer. In “Der Glückritter,” for example, he represents the changeable figure of Dame Fortune through motivic development. In “Der Scholar,” he depicts the academic nature of the protagonist through deliberately awkward text declamation. He illustrates the seafarer’s rollicking life on the sea through suppression of a firm tonal base in “Seemanns Abschied.” It is the responsibility of the modern interpreter to penetrate the superficial details of pitches and rhythms, and reveal Wolf’s method, process, and manipulation of musical structures used toward the characterization of these verses, so that he may arrive at a richer, more complete interpretation of the poems.
Chapter Three: Representative Rollengedichte of Eduard Mörike

Wolf’s Settings of Mörike’s Poetry

Eduard Mörike (1804-1875) was born the son of a physician in the southern-German town of Ludwigsburg. A bustling town during the residency of Duke Charles Eugen in the 1760s, it was much reduced in grandeur by 1800. Following the death of his father in 1817, when Mörike was thirteen, he was sent to preparatory school in Urach, and eventually to Tübingen to study Lutheran theology in preparation for a career as a pastor. Although he was never a particularly good student, he passed his final examinations in 1826 and spent the next eight years moving from parish to parish in Kingdom of Württemberg. At twenty-nine years of age, he became the vicar of the rural town of Cleversulzbach. Plagued by various health complaints of an indefinite nature through his school years, Mörike continued to suffer during his tenure in Cleversulzbach. These issues, coupled with a disinterest in his pastoral duties, led to his forced retirement from the position in 1843.48

The years spent in relative ease among the farmers and villagers did leave time for Mörike to answer the call of his literary muse. Despite his seemingly quiet, passive nature, his poetic imagery often concealed a dark demonic aspect lying underneath, as Sams has recognized: “Mörike’s own intuitive awareness of the occult and erotic worlds of ancient pagan worship and ritual, witchcraft and legend, had been further enhanced by daily experience of rural life in remote communities.”49

Wolf set forty-three of Mörike’s poems between 16 February and 18 May 1888,

49 Sams, 60.
nine more between 4 and 11 October, and a final song on 26 November. In these fifty-
three songs, he reveals the depth of the poetry and its hidden demonic powers, and he
allows the listener to share in the experiences of joy and bitterness, of awe and humor.⁵⁰
These verses finally allowed Wolf to break through the block that had plagued him for
many years, as if Mörike’s own benevolent spirit had taken hold of him. But what was
the source of this unprecedented output? In her book, Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs,
Susan Youens has offered three sources. First, both men shared common experiences
regarding the unreliable nature of his Muse. Neither could identify a method to encourage
her arrival, nor prevent her departure. Second, Wolf was attracted to the sheer number of
different genres of poetry he found in Mörike’s œuvre, verses of every known type, and
others that defied categorization. Similarly, Wolf prided himself on his facility to re-
invent himself to best meet the demands of setting a particular poem. Third, and perhaps
most importantly, Wolf could lay claim to the discovery of Mörike’s poetry as source
material for song — as Schumann had done for Heine — thus placing him firmly in the
pantheon of the greatest composers of Lieder, a status he desperately desired.⁵¹

In the Rollengedichte especially, Wolf saw the opportunity to develop his use of
word painting. The narrative, descriptive qualities of the verse allowed for the most
creative uses of this technique. Unlike his predecessors, who strove to compose with
simplicity, Wolf was interested in vivid presentation of the details of the text, thereby
transforming the Romantic ballad from “one in which events are retold into one in which
they are actually beheld.”⁵² The first song under consideration, “Der Jäger,” is a prime
example of this practice.

⁵⁰ Slessarev, 89.
Der Jäger (23 February 1888)

Drei Tage Regen fort und fort,  
Kein Sonnenschein zur Stunde;  
Drei Tage lang kein gutes Wort  
Aus meiner Liebsten Munde!

Three days of non-stop rain,  
no sunshine as yet;  
three days without a kind word  
from my beloved’s mouth

Sie trutz mit mir und ich mit ihr,  
So hat sie’s haben wollen;  
Mir aber nagt’s am Herzen hier,  
Das Schmollen und das Grollen.

She goaded me and I her,  
just as she would have had it;  
it is gnawing at my heart,  
all this sulking and grumbling.

Willkommen denn, des Jägers Lust,  
Gewittersturm und Regen!  
Fest zugeknöpft die heiße Brust,  
Und jauchzend euch entgegen!

Welcome then to the joy of the hunt,  
to thunderstorms and rain!  
My hot breast is bundled up well,  
and exults in taking you on!

Nun sitzt sie wohl daheim und lacht  
Und scherzt mit den Geschwistern;  
Ich höre in des Waldes Nacht  
Die alten Blätter flüstern.

She will be sitting at home laughing  
and joking with her siblings;  
I hear in the woods at night  
the whispers of the dead leaves.

Kein Hirsch und Rehlein überall!  
Ein Schuß zum Zeit vertreibe!  
Gesunder Knall und Wiederhall  
Erfrischt das Mark im Leibe. --

There is no stag or fawn anywhere!  
A shot to pass the time!  
A healthy crack and an echo  
refreshes me deep down in the bones.

Doch wie der Donner nun verhallt  
In Tälern, durch die Runde,  
Ein plötzlich Weh mich überwallt,  
Mir sinkt das Herz zu Grunde.

But as the thunder dies away now  
in the valleys, all around,  
a sudden pain overwhels me,  
My heart sinks down to the depths.

Sie trutz mit mir und ich mit ihr,  
So hat sie’s haben wollen,  
Mir aber friß’t’s am Herzen hier,  
Das Schmollen und das Grollen.

She goaded me and I her,  
just as she would have had it,  
it is eating into my heart,  
all this sulking and grumbling.

Und auf! und nach der Liebsten Haus!  
Und sie gefaßt um’s Mieder!  
“Drück’ mir die naßen Locken aus,  
Und küß’ und hab’ mich wieder!”

Get up! Off to my beloved’s house  
and put my arms around her waist,  
“Wring out my wet locks,  
kiss me and take me back.”
The events described in the poem are presented in a series of scenes and images as the hunter recounts his tale. He has been quarrelling with his beloved for three days without pause and decides to seek solace in hunting, his favorite pastime. But he finds that even this offers no satisfaction; he is distracted and unable to concentrate, and everything around him seems to recall his beloved in some way. Restlessness eventually gets the better of him, so he takes a shot to distract himself. Unfortunately the wasted energy and the wasted bullet only serve to make him feel more downhearted. He finally decides to put all pride aside, return to her, and beg her forgiveness.

To set such a verse faithfully, each scene and poetic image would require its own idiosyncratic musical depiction. In the hands of a lesser master, this procedure might result in a series of disconnected musical moments. In his setting, however, Wolf employs a rhythmic motive in the accompaniment that can be altered in any number of ways to illustrate the various scenes, resulting in a cohesive and united whole. The motive as presented in the opening measures, with its nagging, ascending semitone in the bass emphasized by the syncopated chords in the right hand, portrays the hunter’s restless state (see Ex. 3.1). The relatively slow harmonic tempo depicts the feeling of frustration caused by the unceasing arguing between the hunter and his beloved.

![Ex. 3.1 “Der Jäger,” mm. 1-4](image)

As suggested by the shift of location in the third stanza, there is a shift of mood in
the music from frustration to jubilation as the hunter escapes into the woods, and a complimentary shift of mode from minor to major. Marked *energisch* (energetic), the drizzly rain of the first stanza takes on potency and danger with the addition of lightning and thunder. The accompaniment figure now bears only a passing resemblance to the original model; it seems almost split apart and fractured. The intervals of fourth and fifths in the piano part recall the sound of hunting horns, while the vocal line in this passage is strongly accented and takes on a muscular quality. The piano and voice sing together in unison as the hunter plunges out euphorically to meet the weather (see Ex. 3.2, m. 28). Here is the quintessential Romantic hero interacting and, in this case in complete harmony with, his natural surroundings.

Ex. 3.2 “Der Jäger,” mm. 25-28

The transformation of the rhythmic motive continues in the fourth and fifth strophes as the hunter becomes distracted by thoughts of his beloved, imagining what she might be doing at home. In the fourth stanza, the hunter contrasts the sound of lively chatter among the beloved’s family with the whispering, rustling sound of leaves in the wind. A new accompaniment figure, complicated by a fourth distinct pitch in the pattern of the bass, accompanies the entire strophe (see Ex. 3.3). The pattern returns briefly to its original profile at the end of the strophe, suggesting a return of the hunter’s restlessness.
The fifth stanza presents two more contrasting scenes — the beloved in her own room, weeping and wailing, and the hunter sleeping snugly in the dark forest — and Wolf responds with two contrasting, but related, accompaniment patterns (see Ex. 3.4). For the first scene, Wolf conjures up images of hearth and home, and of family music-making, with a piano part that clearly resembles a string quartet texture. This passage, to be played somewhat slower and further marked *zart und ausdrucksvoll* (tender and expressive), is likely meant as an ironic, tongue-in-cheek statement on polite society. The weeping, simpering upper voice of the piano part harmonizes with the vocal line for a moment before joining it in unison. In sharp contrast, the second scene is accompanied by a more concise, stripped-down version of the original rhythmic motive that may describe the hunter’s simple lodgings in the forest.
In the sixth and seventh stanzas, the poem takes a turn away from the self-reflective mood of the hunter toward something much more presentational, as if he has stepped onto the operatic stage and is speaking directly to the listener. Having found himself thinking quite unconsciously about his beloved, he begins to cast around for distractions. He returns to the task at hand, but sighting no target, his enthusiasm sags and despondency overtakes him. Story and song threaten to come to a complete halt, until the idea to shoot the gun suddenly strikes him, further reinforced with a resounding sforzando chord (see Ex. 3.5, mm. 49-52). The piano part in the next passage surges in incessant dotted rhythm, falls back and surges again, the upper voice climbing chromatically, struggling to attain the high G. At the moment of the gunshot, the G enters four octaves below, as if the desired effect of the gunshot — a satisfying climax — has missed its target.
As the rolling echoes of the gunshot die away in a low *tremolo*, the operatic conventions continue (see Ex. 3.6). The next lines of text are to be delivered in free recitation (*mit freiem Vortrag*) and rather slackly (*ziemlich nachlassend*). This brief passage resembles the *recitativo accompagnato*, during which the strings of the orchestra play sustained harmonies, allowing the singer more freedom to declaim the text in close imitation of the rhythms of natural speech. Up to this point, Wolf has set the text in a fairly strict metrical fashion, four syllables to a measure, placing the first syllable of the each line on the upbeat. In this section, mm. 50-68, he considerably loosens the strictness of the metrical declamation. For example, he observes the enjambment in lines 25-26 by connecting the prepositional phrase *in Tälern* to the previous line. Then, to preserve some sense of metrical symmetry, he is required to lengthen the note on *durch*, pushing it perhaps past the bounds of good taste, and further emphasize this rather unimportant word with syncopation and brief melismatic embellishment. For the last two lines of the strophe, he contracts the syllables together, allowing the text to be recited more naturally.
while simultaneously drawing out the silences between the lines. Despite Sams’s commentary that this passage represents “a bad patch, in which operatic conventions supervene,” Wolf clearly does have a specific dramatic effect he wishes to achieve. In this case, the responsibility for interpretation falls to the performers.\(^{53}\)

![Musical notation](image)

Ex. 3.6 “Der Jäger,” mm. 61-67

In the song, as in the poem, the eighth strophe is an exact repetition of the second. For the protagonist, there must be a sense of having come full circle and arriving exactly where he left; the story could, indeed, end at this point. This fact heightens the sense of surprise in the final stanza: the hunter decides to return to his beloved’s house, grab her around the waist, and overwhelm her with kisses until she relents and forgives him. The passage sets out from F major with an upward trajectory in both the vocal and piano parts, seemingly striving for the high G again as earlier in the song (see Ex. 3.7). This time, the pitch is attained with a clear statement of intent: “wring out my wet curls, and kiss and have me again!”

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\(^{53}\) Sams, 125.
In the postlude, very little is left to the imagination of the listener as to how the story ends. Marked sehr schnell und leidenschaftlich (very fast and passionately), the upward trajectory of the three upper voices, anchored to a G pedal point, rises to full climax, as if riding waves of uncontrollable passion (see Ex. 3.7, mm. 91-92). The rising semitone motive from the opening measures in the bass, which once depicted the hunter’s restlessness and frustration, is now transformed into a falling semitone in the inner voices, illustrative of the two lovers in the throes of passion. The long trill on F sharp seems to launch itself to the A, then to the B in the final measure. The song closes with a
plagal cadence, adding the final Amen to the spirited scene.

Wolf reflects the impulsive quality of this scene by rapidly moving from one musical idea to another. “The result,” as Sams has remarked, “is disturbing in the poem, and jarring in the song.”

On the contrary, like an opera libretto, this scene represents one in a series of vignettes that comprises the whole, and, as Wolf has constructed it, the music responds flexibly to each shift of emotion.

**Der Gärtner (7 March 1888)**

Unlike the hunter, indeed unlike all of the other protagonists in this survey, the gardener does not speak of himself, nor does he play any great part in the action. He occupies no place in the world of the princess; he is of a much lower class and therefore may never speak directly to her. The princess, riding her favorite snow-white pony, is carried farther away from him, farther out of his range. The gardener speaks only to the princess’s hat and begs it to be honored with a single feather, the smallest token. In exchange, the hat may have every flower in the garden he has so carefully tended. The transfer should be covert, however, and go unnoticed by the princess. For all his great regard for her, he knows he must remain unknown to her. Youens has pointed out that “there is no story, no moral, no ending, only this single tableau.”

Yet, as the poem reveals the gardener’s unrequited love for the princess, it reveals a glimpse into the human condition.

*Auf ihrem Leibrößlein*

*So weiß wie der Schnee,*

*Upon her favorite pony*

*as white as snow,*

54 Sams, 125.

Die schönste Prinzessin
Reit’t durch die Allee.

Der Weg, den das Rößlein
Hintanzet so hold,
Der Sand, den ich streute,
Er blinket wie Gold!

Du rosenfarb’s Hütlein
Wohl auf und wohl ab,
O wirf eine Feder,
Verstohlen herab!

Und willst du dagegen
Eine Blüte von mir,
Nimm tausend für eine,
Nimm alle dafür!

From the outset of the song, the pony is presented as the leading character of Wolf’s setting. His light and graceful canter is evident in the piano part and never ceases throughout (see Ex. 3.8). Unlike the soldier’s gimpy mount (see Ex. 2.1), this is a well-trained, well-behaved creature with an even gait. The four-measure introduction contains two brief pauses, as if horse and rider momentarily disappear from view as they travel down the Allee. When the voice enters, the line is lilting and melodic, and resembles an operetta waltz tune. In 1880s Vienna, the waltz was ubiquitous and inescapable, and Wolf was quite familiar with the popular operetta repertoire. He held the post of second Kapellmeister in Salzburg, during which he was responsible for preparing the singers for operettas by Johann Strauss, Albert Lortzing, and Carl Millöcker. However, his tenure lasted only a few months, as he possessed neither the taste for the style, nor the skill to conduct it.56 It is certainly possible that Wolf purposely chose a melodic style reminiscent of the operetta Lied — a style he reviled — as an ironic commentary on the gardener’s

56 Grove, “Wolf.”
simplistic fantasy of perfection.

This song diverges from the expected attributes of Wolf’s compositional style in a number of ways. First, Wolf is known for having taken particular pains regarding proper declamation. In this song, his choice of 6/8 meter is at odds with his choice of a rather strict metrical setting of the text, resulting in problematic declamation. Often, weak syllables and less important words fall on strong beats; further, the vocal line repeatedly rises to these unaccented syllables, compounding the issue. For example, the setting of the word *Leibrösslein* in m. 6 incorrectly emphasizes the final, unaccented syllable. In this case, however, the lilting rise and fall of the melody takes precedence over proper declamation. Wolf is more concerned with finding the gardener’s “voice,” which has a rather limited range, encompassing only a seventh. In the setting of the final two stanzas

Ex. 3.8 “Der Gärtner,” mm. 1-14
as the gardener becomes progressively more ecstatic, the range becomes even more limited. The vocal part of the final eight measures is essentially restricted to a fourth (see Ex. 3.9). This is the second unusual aspect of this song, since many others require the singer to cover a much larger ambit.

Third, there is very little evidence of the often wildly chromatic idiom seen in many of his other Mörike songs. Instead, Wolf responds to the simplicity and naïveté of the poem with a rather conservative harmonic vocabulary. Regardless, he creates an air of uncertainty and hesitation within the limited vocabulary. The opening chord (F sharp–A) has no root, making its function difficult to perceive without context. Indeed, the song seems to begin on a dominant, a question that requires resolution. This unsettled feeling is further emphasized in the vocal line in the first and second strophes, which both end with half cadences (see Ex. 3.8, mm. 11-12).

As the gardener raises the stakes in the third and fourth stanzas, Wolf responds by expanding the narrow tonal vocabulary he has used to this point and accelerating the harmonic rhythm considerably (see Ex. 3.9). The leap to the pitch F sharp on the word *eine* reflects the gardener’s desperate insistence and mimics the physical action of throwing the feather. A half-diminished seventh chord makes a sudden appearance in m. 37 indicating some looming tension, perhaps the nagging uncertainty, even as the gardener’s voice gains in strength. The top G in m. 41 feels like an arrival, like a goal has been attained, the feeling of climax further emphasized with the first *forte* dynamic in the song. Surely the gardener has overcome his shyness, and his uncertainty is wiped away for good. With the offer of every flower in the garden for a single feather, his repressed emotions have been let loose. Wolf permits him to repeat the offer — a rare departure
from the original poetic material — but he quickly loses forward momentum and volume by the end, and his last tentative note hangs for a long moment unsupported by the piano (see Ex. 3.9, m. 44). With his feet back on the ground, he finds the princess and the pony farther off than he thought.

Ex. 3.9 “Der Gärtner,” mm. 24-44

*Der Gärtner* was one of Mörike’s most popular poems among nineteenth-century *Lied* composers. The verse was set by many of the lesser lights of the era, most of these
names forgotten by history.\textsuperscript{57} For the most part, Wolf avoided choosing poems he felt had already been well treated by his predecessors and contemporaries. When he did make such a choice, as Elaine Brody has commented, it was simply because he believed he could do better.\textsuperscript{58} On the surface of his setting, Wolf depicts the innocence of the protagonist through largely diatonic harmonic vocabulary and an enchanting, lilting vocal melody; the gardener’s desire for the princess seems harmless, a secret infatuation. Beneath the surface, however, Wolf seems to be making his own cynical commentary on the gardener’s plight by imitating the operetta waltz, a musical style he considered trite.\textsuperscript{59}

\section*{Der Tambour (16 February 1888)}

For Wolf, it was this unassuming verse that proved to be the key to unlocking the gates, and that brought freedom from a prison of his own making. The composition of this song marked the beginning of an unprecedented stream of creative activity that flowed uninterrupted for a year and resulted in the composition of fifty-three Mörike songs, twelve Eichendorff songs, and all but the last of the fifty-one Goethe songs. After a short lapse in productivity lasting only a few months, the forty-four Spanish songs and the first twenty-two of the Italian songs followed in quick succession, totaling 190 songs completed in three years of nearly continual song composition. Youens has suggested

\begin{flushright}
57 One significant exception is Robert Schumann’s setting (op. 107, 3) published in 1852.
59 For another possible view, see Susan Youens, \textit{Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs}, 138: “For Schumann, Mörike’s gardener and princess seem an odd mixture of “Once upon a time” fictions and actual flesh-and-blood creatures, one of whom – the man – suffers, and therefore the song Schumann gives his gardener to sing is likewise a queasy mixture of fairy-tale delicacy and all-too-human pain. Wolf restores Schumann’s Mörike to innocence when he sets “Der Gärtner,” and in so doing joins forces (if only for a moment) with the emerging \textit{fin-de-siècle} image of Mörike as a purveyor of wistful idylls and enchanted tales.”
\end{flushright}
that it was the humor in the lines that unleashed the floodgates, and that Wolf recognized himself in the young man who fantasizes about transformation and metamorphosis.\textsuperscript{60}

Indeed, the infusion of humor into the \textit{Lied} genre is one of the most significant contributions Wolf made to the form.

Wenn meine Mutter hexen könnt’,
Da müßt sie mit dem Regiment,
Nach Frankreich, überall mit hin,
Und wär’ die Marketenderin.
Im Lager, wohl um Mitternacht,
Wenn Niemand auf ist als die Wacht,
Und Alles schnarchet, Roß und Mann,
Vor meiner Trommel sätt ich dann:
Die Trommel müßt’ eine Schüssel sein,
Ein warmes Sauerkraut darein,
Die Schlegel Messer und Gabel,
Eine lange Wurst mein Sabel,
Mein Tschako wär’ ein Humpen gut,
Den füll’ ich mit Burgunderblut.
Und weil es mir an Lichte fehlt,
Da scheint der Mond in mein Gezelt;
Scheint er auch auf Franzö’sch herein,
Mir fällt doch meine Liebste ein:
Ach weh! Jetzt hat der Spaß ein End!
— Wenn nur meine Mutter hexen könnt’!

If my mother could perform magic,
then she could go with the regiment
to France, travel everywhere with them
and provide refreshment for the soldiers.
In the camp at midnight,
when no one is awake but the watchman,
and everyone is snoring, horse and man,
I would sit before my drum:
the drum would be a bowl
full of warm sauerkraut,
the drumsticks, knife and fork;
my saber, a long sausage;
my shako would be a large mug
I would fill with Burgundy’s blood.
And because there would be no light,
the moon would shine into my tent.
Though it would be shining in French,
I would still be reminded of my beloved.
Alas! That has brought the fun to an end.
If only my mother could perform magic!

The protagonist, a drummer boy, is a young man who has been conscripted into the army and sent to France to fight in the Napoleonic Wars. Far from home and with no friend save his drum, he sets the scene. It is night and the entire camp is asleep. He, however, is too weary and hungry to get any rest. Homesick for his mother’s cooking, he imagines she is a benevolent witch with the power to change his drum into a bowl of sauerkraut, his drumsticks into cutlery, and his saber into sausage. Inevitably, his thoughts turn to his dearest love, painful thoughts that eventually bring his fantasies to an end. Exhaustion finally gets the better of him, and in the final measures of the song, he

\textsuperscript{60} Youens, \textit{Mörike Songs}, 3.
drifts off to sleep.

Wolf’s gifts for word painting, parody, and rhythmic and melodic motivic transformation are evident in every measure of this song. Sams has commented that “in four pages there are enough march tunes and rhythms, enough musical allusions and comments, for half a dozen songs. Also notable are the deftness and wit that can compress all this fertility of invention into a unified narrative and embellish it on every page with apt and colorful illustrations of the text.”61 For example, in the introduction the roll of the bass drum in the left hand, and of the snare in the right, invoke the sounds of a military band (see Ex. 3.10). The direction *im Marschtempo* indicates not only a metrical pace, but also an emotion connotation. The dotted rhythm and the melodic shape bring to mind the opening of the *Marcia Funebre*, the second movement of Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony, an allusion to a work with its own Napoleonic associations.

![Musical notation](Im Marschtempo.png)

Ex. 3.10 “Der Tambour,” mm. 1-3

Because of the narrative, ballad-like nature of the *Rollengedicht*, Wolf often sets the text of these poems following the metrical model of a folksong. In “Der Tambour,” however, there are indications of what would become a hallmark of his lyric songs; that is, a more flexible response to the demands of declamation. When the voice enters, it adopts the dotted rhythm of the prelude and dispatches the first four lines of text rather

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61 Sams, 71.
quickly, save for two distinct exceptions (see Ex. 3.11). The first, the word *Frankreich* (France), is thrown into relief in two ways: its two syllables are set on relatively long notes, and the entire propositional phrase is separated from the rest of the line by a pause. Second, the rather unusual, obscure word, *Marketenderin*, requires a bit more time to fall on the ear of the listener and is therefore elongated in the setting. A term with specific wartime connotations, the *Marketenderinnen* were women who traveled with military bands and provided liquid refreshment for the players. The drummer boy fantasizes that his mother were one of these women, traveling with him all over France, so that at a moment’s notice she may conjure up his favorite meal. The idea thrills him as the volume swells to *fortissimo*, and the piano jubilates with a fanfare figure in the relative minor of the home key.

![Ex. 3.11 “Der Tambour,” mm. 4-9](image)

As the drummer boy imagines in vivid detail the meal his mother would prepare, the use of illustrative devices continues. The rich poetic images come thick and fast, and Wolf rises to every occasion, painting each with a deft brush (see Ex. 3.12). Here the piano carries the brunt of the responsibility. It is transformed into a brass band in m. 19-
20, and then dances with delight, laughing and joking as it ornaments the vocal line. The military music returns in m. 23-26, in the company of upward thrusts like dagger slashes, as the drummer boy prepares to do battle with the sausage. The rising figure in particular may very well be analogous to a similar figure from the fight scene between Don Giovanni and the Commendatore in Mozart’s opera (compare Ex. 3.12, mm. 23-26 and Ex. 3.13).  

Ex. 3.12 “Der Tambour,” mm. 18-26

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62 Mörike regarded the music of the First Viennese School above the music of his own time. Youens has remarked that he considered Mozart’s late operas, and Don Giovanni especially, the *ne plus ultra* of music. Wolf heard the work as a Wagner-obsessed sixteen-year-old and “liked it very much.” Youens, *Mörike Songs*, 8.
Pursuing this idea further, there may be more than a passing reference to *Don Giovanni* in this song. It is certainly plausible that the image of the drummer slashing hungrily at the sausage brought to mind the opening scene of Mozart’s opera, one that Wolf knew Mörike regarded highly. He may have then gone to the score to remind himself of the passage, been struck by the sequential pattern and chromatic voice leading, and taken them as inspiration for the section of “Der Tambour” that follows. In the Mozart excerpt, the uppermost voice descends chromatically from D to A over a sequential pattern; in Wolf’s song, the topmost voice of the piano part descends chromatically from G to D (see Ex. 3.14), and there is a clear harmonic sequencing of the vocal and piano material from mm. 27-28 to mm. 29-30. Surely these similarities are more than coincidence.
Another hallmark of Wolf’s compositional style, the use of motivic development, is evident in the passage beginning at m. 31. As the poem veers toward sentimentality, the piano part shifts to a distinctly four-part texture. The alto voice takes up a descending figure (A–G–F sharp–E) that threads its way through the next several measures (see Ex. 3.14), tossed from the alto to the soprano voice. The motive undergoes a series of slight alterations until, at the end of this passage, the intervallic pattern of the motive is at its narrowest: four pitches each a semitone away from the previous pitch. The drummer boy, obsessed with thoughts of his beloved, sings a version of the motive (see Ex. 3.15, m. 38) that may allude to the prelude of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, which also falls by semitone after an initial leap of a minor sixth. The piano carries on this version of the motive, until the voice and piano together find themselves caught in a loop of circular argument that threatens to spin out of control (see Ex. 3.15). These maudlin thoughts are evidently difficult to shake from his head. Eventually, he finds a way free, but not before singing the motive one last time in m. 42 (*Jetzt hat der Spass ein End’!)**
Without further elucidation, Sams referred to the musical allusions and comments in this song. There is strong evidence of allusions to three compositions: Beethoven’s *Eroica Symphony*, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, and Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. It is not immediately evident why Wolf chose to weave these particular musical quotations into his own work. There is little in Mörike’s poem that suggests the plot of *Don Giovanni*; however, Wolf knew of Mörike’s deep affection for the opera. He may have wished to pay homage to the man whose work offered inspiration. There is indeed some connection between the drummer boy and Tristan: the drummer boy, in France and far from home, is occupied by thoughts of his beloved and pines for her, just as the wounded Tristan, taken to Brittany, desires Isolde’s return. Perhaps Wolf is making a subtle connection between Mörike’s idol and his own, Richard Wagner.

The Beethovenian allusion returns in the coda of the song, first cast in the minor mode (see Ex. 3.15), then in the major (see Ex. 3.16). These are connected by a wandering chromatic line, which acts like an extension, a spinning-out, of the falling semitone motive. Wolf has uses this kind of chromaticism to depict drunkenness in “Der
Glücksritter,” and weariness in “Der Scholar.” In this case, sleep overtakes the drummer boy in the closing measures; the repetition of the final line of text is marked wie im Traume (as in a dream). Under the last note from the voice, drawn out and drifting, a plagal cadence is heard repeatedly like a chanted amen. The final sforzando chord adds the exclamation point, and Wolf’s final joke, to the song.

Ex. 3.16 “Der Tambour,” mm. 47-58

Lied eines Verliebten (14 March 1888)

The title, the song of one in love, is misleading: the protagonist is anything but delighted with the situation in which he finds himself. Rather, he is unsettled, his sleep is disturbed, and he is sick at heart. The phantom of a girl – the object of his desire – awakens him in the middle of the night. His Auge, his ability to see the truth of the
situation, is clearer in the dark of night than it ever could be in the brightness of day. He can see that she cares nothing for him, and he wonders whether she thinks of him at all.

In an attempt to dispel these thoughts, the Verliebter imagines for himself other fates and other occupations. If he were a fisherman or a miller’s apprentice, the physical exertion of those jobs might at least distract him from his troubles. But there is no escape from his fate; there is nothing for him to do but grieve over the unruly, untamed girl who monopolizes his thoughts.

In aller Früh, ach, lang vor Tag,  
Weckt mich mein Herz, an dich zu denken,  
Da doch gesunde Jugend schlafen mag.  

Very early, long before day,  
my heart wakes me to think of you,  
just when healthy youth should be sleeping.

Hell ist mein Aug’ um Mitternacht,  
Heller als frühe Morgenglocken:  
Wann hätt’st du je am Tage mein gedacht?  

My eye is clear at midnight,  
clearer than the bells at early morning:  
have you even thought of me today?

Wär’ ich ein Fischer, stünd’ ich auf,  
Trüge mein Netz hinab zum Fluße,  
Trüg’ herzlich froh die Fische zum Verkauf  

If I were a fisherman, I would get up,  
carry my net out to the river,  
heartily bring the fish to the market.

In der Mühle, bei Licht, der Mühlerknecht  
Tummelt sich, alle Gänge klappern;  
So rüstig Treiben wär’ mir eben recht!  

At daylight in the mill, the miller’s boy  
cavorts about, all the gears clatter;  
such lusty activity would be good for me!

Weh, aber ich! o armer Tropf!  
Muß auf dem Lager mich müßig grämen,  
Ein ungeberdig Mutterkind im Kopf.  

Alas! But I, poor ninny,  
must lie in bed and grieve idly  
over the unruly child in my head.

In September 1888, six months after he composed this song, Wolf would confront Eichendorff’s “Der verzweifelte Liebhaber,” a poem with similar themes of love and despair. In that verse, he finds humor in the Liebhaber’s fantastical musings; here Wolf presents the darker side of the frustrations of love. The setting is full of restlessness, as indicated by the marking stark bewegt, which can be translated as strongly moving or highly emotional, and drängend (pressing or rushing). The piano part does most of the
duty to create the restless atmosphere: the right hand plays a syncopated accompaniment to the principal melodic material presented in the left hand (see Ex. 3.17).

This song-like melody, rising steadily and reaching ever higher, is at first enigmatic as to what it represents or to whom it belongs. Its form, on the other hand, is regular and symmetrical. The eight-measure phrase divides evenly into four shorter phrases of two measures each, the third phrase further divided in half. At the opening of the song, the melody is heard in its entirety as a prelude to the poem itself, starting out in B minor and concluding with an authentic cadence in F-sharp major. This major-key cadential gesture figures prominently throughout the song and acts as a kind of punctuation to each strophe. The symmetrical phrase arrangement of the melody is juxtaposed against the uneven meter of the poetry – stanzas of three lines, each line containing a progressively larger number of syllables. Wolf plays the asymmetry of the poetic meter and the symmetry of his melodic material against each other; they act in opposition and do not line up. From strophe to strophe, the setting of the text is varied slightly in imitation of the natural rhythms of speech, pausing at times for dramatic effect. As the vocal part enters, the melody begins again like a nagging thought, an idee fixe, floating through the troubled mind of the lover. The voice enters soon after with the same four notes, as if pursuing this elusive thought (see Ex. 3.17, m. 9).
The focus of the poem turns away from the beloved in the third and fourth stanzas toward the protagonist himself. As it does so, the *idée fixe* undergoes a series of melodic distortions while retaining its original rhythmic profile. In the third strophe, the piano and voice are almost in accord, as if the lover begins to control the *idée fixe*. Twice briefly the melody sings in unison with the voice; melodically and harmonically, voice and piano come into alignment. The F-sharp major cadence, ubiquitous up to this point, is displaced in favor of one in E major, as if the beloved has been displaced. Further distortion continues in the fourth strophe as the character of the melody is altered by way of staccato markings, suggested in the poetry by the clattering gears and the robust activity in the mill (see Ex. 3.18). Also, the range of the melody is displaced; this is the first strophe in which the melody lies mostly below the vocal line. The strophe closes with the cadence in E major, as if the *Verliebter* has successfully broken free from the hold of F sharp associated with the object of his desire.
The freedom, however, is short-lived. The song returns to its own beginning, illuminating the cyclical nature of the lover’s obsession. To achieve the return to the B minor/F sharp harmonic axis, Wolf composes a somewhat contrived single measure of 9/8 as a pivotal point (see Ex. 3.19, m. 38). Unquestionably, he could have done without the measure altogether; sudden shifts of harmony are not rare in his songs. Rather, this short delay immediately before the return of the *idée fixe* serves to illustrate the reluctance on lover’s part to accept his fate. He seems surprised and startled when he hears the melody start up again, as illustrated by the syncopated setting of the interjection in m. 42. To complete the cycle, Wolf might have chosen to repeat the prelude as postlude. Instead, he recalls the transformed version of the melody from the second

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63 Sams, 129.
strophe (see Ex. 3.19). In the mind’s ear the question echoes: when have you ever thought of me? The unsatisfactory answer comes in the last measures as the F sharp major half cadence, now inextricably associated with the beloved and unrequited love, is reiterated numerous times. It matters not how the beloved thinks of her, so long as she possesses his thoughts.

Ex. 3.19 “Lied eines Verliebten,” mm. 49-57

**Auf einer Wanderung** (11-25 March 1888)

In each of the four poems considered thus far in this chapter, the protagonist has found himself obsessed by thoughts of his beloved. Wolf has responded in a number of ways to Mörike’s verse through his manipulation of musical means — harmonic plan, motivic development, vocal range, cyclical forms, etc. Indeed, the theme of obsessive
love might have been part of the appeal of the poems. As mentioned previously, during his most fruitful period of song writing, Wolf was known to have composed multiple songs in a single day. This final *Rollengedicht*, unlike any of the others discussed here, inspired Wolf to compose what must be considered a masterpiece of the late-Romantic *Lied*.

In ein freundliches Städtchen tret’ ich ein,  
Into a friendly little town I enter,  
Into a friendly little town I enter,
In den Straßen liegt roter Abendschein.  
in the street lies the red glow of sunset.  
in the street lies the red glow of sunset,  
In den Straßen liegt roter Abendschein.
Aus einem offnen Fenster eben  
From an open window,  
From an open window,  
Aus einem offnen Fenster eben.
Über den reichsten Blumenflor  
one can hear golden chimes float by,  
one can hear golden chimes float by,  
Über den reichsten Blumenflor.
Hinweg hört man Goldglockentöne schweben,  
and a single voice  
and a single voice  
Hinweg hört man Goldglockentöne schweben,
Und eine Stimme  
seems like a chorus of nightingales,  
seems like a chorus of nightingales,  
Und eine Stimme.
scheint ein Nachtigallenchor,  
that make the blossoms tremble,  
that make the blossoms tremble,  
scheint ein Nachtigallenchor,
Daß die Blüten bebem,  
and the breezes come to life,  
and the breezes come to life,  
Daß die Blüten bebem,
Daß die Lüfte leben,  
and the roses glow a brighter red.  
and the roses glow a brighter red,  
Daß die Lüfte leben,
Daß in höherem Rot die Rosen leuchten vor.

Lang’ hielt ich staunend, lustbekommen.  
I paused long, amazed and disquieted by joy.  
I paused long, amazed and disquieted by joy.
Wie ich hinaus vor’s Tor gekommen,  
How I found myself before the town gate  
How I found myself before the town gate.
Ich weiß es wahrlich selber nicht.  
I truly do not know myself.  
I truly do not know myself.
Ach hier, wie liegt die Welt so licht!  
Here, where the world lies in such light,  
Here, where the world lies in such light.
Der Himmel wogt in purpurnem Gewühle,  
the heavens swayed in a purple crush;  
the heavens swayed in a purple crush;  
Der Himmel wogt in purpurnem Gewühle,
Rückwärts die Stadt in goldinem Rauch;  
behind me, the town is in a golden haze;  
behind me, the town is in a golden haze;  
Rückwärts die Stadt in goldinem Rauch;
Wie rauscht der Erlenbach,  
how the alder brook rushes,  
how the alder brook rushes,  
wie rauscht der Erlenbach,
wie rauscht der Erlenbach,  
how the mill make the ground rumble,  
how the mill make the ground rumble,  
wie rauscht im Grund die Mühle,  
how the mill make the ground rumble,  
how the mill make the ground rumble,  
wie rauscht im Grund die Mühle,
Ich bin wie trunken, irrgeführt:  
it is as if I were drunk, disorientated:  
it is as if I were drunk, disorientated:
O Muse, du hast mein Herz berührt  
oh Muse, you have touched my heart  
oh Muse, you have touched my heart
Mit einem Liebeshauch!  
with a breath of love!

The scene is set in the first couplet of the poem: the protagonist enters a friendly little town at the moment of sunset when the streets seem paved with red light. Suddenly he hears from an open window a sound like the tinkling of golden bells carried on the breeze. It is the voice of an unseen singer, a voice that sounds to the listener akin to an entire chorus of nightingales. The voice has a profound effect on him and on his perception of his surroundings, transforming ordinary objects into the extraordinary. The flowers in the window box glow redder and the breezes seem almost alive. For a long
moment he stands transfixed. This disembodied voice has acted on his system like a drug that has tuned all his senses to a higher frequency and allowed him to experience sights, sounds, and smells more acutely. When he rouses himself again, he is the other side of the town gates with no idea how he arrived there.

The poem concludes with an evocation of a Muse, an indefinable, unreliable force, which provides poetic stimulation in the form of a breath of love — quite literally an inspiration. Both Mörike and Wolf suffered terribly from the erratic nature of their muses and dreaded her extended absences. Youens has written that “neither poet nor composer could court his Muse by any inducement; disciplined work-habits and the greatest of desires to create were of no avail in this fealty where she, not they, held the reins.”

When she finally returned, Wolf, like the protagonist in the poem, felt drunk and disorientated to the point of madness.

“Auf einer Wanderung” required two weeks of gestation, two weeks of intermittent work, during which time he turned to other poems, but as a result of the effort Wolf experienced personal growth. Indeed, the poem’s irregular meter and rhyme scheme released him from the constraints of strophic form and periodic phrases. As Frank Walker has written, it is a type of song peculiarly associated with Wolf’s name and used by him with increasing frequency and unsurpassable mastery in his later volumes. It enabled him to declaim the poem with all the freedom and subtlety that his fine literary sense demanded, while at the same time it gave abundant opportunities for the employment of his outstanding musical gifts — the invention and development of short, pregnant ideas and the shaping of the resultant ‘symphonic’ material into forms that satisfy both musical requirements and the poetic, or programmatic, requirements of the text. This type of Wolf song is, in fact, nothing less than a miniature symphonic poem for voice and piano.

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64 Youens, Mörike Songs, 3.
65 Walker, 231-2.
The prelude begins with a jaunty rhythm that suggests the speaker is on horseback (see Ex. 3.20). The dotted rhythm in 6/8 imitates a horse’s gait as it does in “Der Gärtner,” composed a few days earlier, and in “Der Soldat I,” composed the previous year. The verb *eintreten* connotes only entrance, not necessarily on foot; however, there is nothing in the text that confirms or denies the presence of a horse. The speaker joins the accompaniment already in progress, as if giving voice to thoughts. In the first strophe of the song, Wolf juxtaposes the regularity of the harmonic tempo, which shifts roughly every four measures, with irregular phrases in the voice, allowing it to respond to the declamatory demands of the poem, lingering on certain syllable, hurrying through other lines. The result is a sense of separation or independence of the two “protagonists,” voice and piano. Each image the speaker sees — the red sunset, the flowers, the golden bell tones, and the chorus of nightingales — is depicted in its own tonal shift, suggesting also the shifting focus of the speaker.

Ex 3.20 “Auf einer Wanderung,” mm. 1-9

66 Sams has also entertained the idea of a rider on horseback. “The music grows out of the lilting four-bar prelude, which brings the singer jauntily into town to the rhythm of springing steps whether of notional heels or hooves, on foot or on horseback,” Sams, 88.

67 Glauert, 128.
Thus far, Wolf has built the piano part from the motive presented in the first measure. When the listener takes notice of the voice from the window, the motive begins to disintegrate until the head of the motive fractures off from the rest (see Ex. 3.21, m. 21). As the power of the voice from the window begins to assert itself on the listener’s system, Wolf overturns the musical world he has created. The piano part asserts itself, surging ever higher then retreating to swell again, increasing in intensity until it crashes, threatening to overwhelm the voice and drown it entirely. For Wolf, the clarity of the text is not as important at this moment as his symphonic depiction of heightened sensory awareness.

Ex. 3.21 “Auf einer Wanderung,” mm. 20-34

The speaker has lost all sense of time; he has experienced a *furor poeticus*, a
possession by the Muse, a poetic madness that has transported him out of his body. He is *lustbeklommen*, struck dumb by the existence of some indefinable desire (see Ex. 3.22). During the extended piano interlude that links the two strophes, the madness subsides. At m. 54 the opening motive from the prelude tries insistently to nudge its way back into the speaker’s consciousness until, unaware, he is carried by some force to the town gate. If he were indeed astride, the re-entrance of the original motive may be interpreted as the horse, weary of waiting, taking control of the situation. In any case, the speaker seems almost embarrassed to admit the fact; Wolf marks the line *flüsternd* (in a whisper).

Ex. 3.22 “Auf einer Wanderung,” mm. 45-56

Ex. 3.23 “Auf einer Wanderung,” mm. 63-68

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On the way out of town, the speaker experiences his surroundings on a higher plane. A stream of semi-consciousness pours out of him in which new images, sights and sounds are taken up and quickly abandoned. The transformative effects of the poetic madness take on the musical form of a truly transformed version of the original motive that floats and drifts ethereally through the next section (see Ex. 3.23). The ethereal quality is further elevated by Wolf’s markings of *bedeutend langsamer* (considerably slower) and *ausdrucksvoll* (expressive). This sense of peace is short-lived, however, and the song commences an unconstrained forward momentum, gaining in tempo (*beschleunigend*) and in volume. As before, the new motive fractures and disintegrates until, at m. 80, it is only the initial upward leap that remains. The events have left speaker feeling not only intoxicated, but also confused and bewildered. Wolf’s setting of the word *irrgführt* on a weak beat in the midst of an acceleration of tempo is itself confusing and bewildering and requires the singer to relinquish his own sense of metrical control.
When, beginning in m. 82, the piano part offers an eight-measure long melody, there is an overwhelming sensation of arrival, as if the song had been driving to this point from the start (see Ex. 3.24). Through Wolf’s manipulation of structure and motive, as Glauert has noted, this central moment of lyric release is well prepared and carefully bound into the structure of the whole. The melody ends unresolved, and the traveling motive appears once more, diminishing in volume as the speaker moves on away from the listener with one last lingering look back (see Ex. 3.25).

Ex. 3.25 “Auf einer Wanderung,” mm. 102-107

**Conclusion**

For Hugo Wolf, the poetry of Eduard Mörike struck the right chord at precisely the right time, and he wrote down the songs one by one in rapid succession as if dictated

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69 Glauert, 125.
to him by a higher power. He suspected from the start that these songs would represent perhaps his greatest achievement: “What I now write, dear friend, I write for posterity too. They are masterpieces.” He recognized immediately the possibility of attaining greatness, and it frightened him; he had nearly given up composition entirely.

The Mörike poetic anthology offered Wolf a myriad of types and topics ripe for musical exploration and exploitation. In particular, his choice to set many of the Rollengedichte attests to his operatic ambitions, born of his early affection for the form, and his later meeting with Wagner. Because of this fact, the Mörike songbook remains a treasury for the singer-actor. The representative Rollengedichte discussed above demand from the interpreter an attention to literary and musical detail in order to bring to bear the humor and pathos in the musical analogies and metaphors.

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70 From a letter to his brother-in-law, Joseph Strasser. Quoted in Grove, “Wolf, Hugo.”
71 Youens, Mörike Songs, 15.
Chapter Four: The *Lied* at the *Fin-de-siècle*

**Wolf and His Contemporaries and Critics**

In the hands of Schubert and Schumann, the verse of poets like Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Eichendorff, and Rückert were no longer their exclusive property. Through manipulation of musical structures — melody, harmony, rhythm, and form — these composers created a new work of art, an illuminated version of the original. This was the prevailing model for *Lied* composition emulated by countless imitators, including Hugo Wolf in his earliest efforts. Following the 1848 Revolution, Germany underwent an intense period of change with far-reaching effects. In musical spheres, the phrase “New German” came to represent modernism and innovation, and, following the example of Wagner, composers of vocal music were expected to concentrate on declamation, vivid characterization, and the use of leitmotiv techniques. There were those who did not subscribe to Wagner’s theories: Brahms and his chief supporter, the critic Eduard Hanslick, argued that music as an art form required no extramusical influences — an autonomous view. Wagner, on the other hand, theorized in his essays that the balance of music and poetry, of all arts in fact, must be re-examined, and that musical elements must be dictated by and subject to extramusical factors — a heteronomous view. He envisioned a total work of art based on ancient Greek models, a harmonization of the elements of music, poetry, and dance. These theories, too grand perhaps to be applied to

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the Lied, nevertheless influenced Wolf’s mature compositional process. Wagner’s inescapable influence resulted in some of the most challenging music for voice and piano ever written.

Vienna in the 1880s and 90s was a sharply divided city in terms of its musical life, and Wolf possessed the power of the pen as critic for the Salonblatt. He saved some of his harshest attacks for Brahms, whom he viewed as having willfully ignored the revolutionary movement in music led by Chopin, Berlioz, Liszt, and the “dazzling genius of Wagner.” For his part, Brahms remained exceptionally forgiving when it came to musical judgments of his contemporaries, as biographer Jan Swafford has pointed out. For example, “when Wolf’s songs began appearing in print and causing a stir, Brahms looked them over as a matter of course, observing mildly to [memoirist] Richard Heuberger, ‘Ja, if you’re not concerned about the music, the declamation of a poem is pretty easy.’” In the public press, however, he eschewed response.

Both Wolf and Johannes Brahms read poetry voraciously; unlike Wolf, however, Brahms often set texts by minor poets of dubious talent and ignored the rules of proper declamation in favor of melodic periodicity and symmetry. He held folk music in particularly high esteem and was influenced by its declamation, rhythmic patterns, and form. One collection of folk tunes and poetry he returned to time and again, Zuccamaglio’s Deutsche Volkslieder, contained material written by the collector himself and not at all genuine, a fact Brahms learned much later but that did not concern him.

Mahler, born the same year as Wolf, was highly influenced by Des Knaben Wunderhorn,

77 Gorrell, 260.
a folksong collection assembled eighty years earlier by Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim and freely modified by the authors. 78 One may intimate from this that Brahms and Mahler gave little thought to the quality of the poems they chose to set, so long as they were somehow inspired to compose. Here, then, is the crux of the difference between their process and Wolf’s: whereas Brahms and Mahler desired to create music suggested by a text or a tune, Wolf aspired to turn a poem into music, to musicalize text.

Following the death of Wagner in 1883, three men represented the musical avant-garde: Wolf, Mahler, and Richard Strauss, a group Hanslick labeled in 1900 as the “Musical Secession.” 79 With this label, the critic was drawing a parallel to the Vienna Secession of painters, sculptors, and architects whose motto “Der Zeit ihre Kunst. Der Kunst ihre Freiheit” (“To the age its art; to art its freedom”) stood for the exploration of art outside the limitations of an academic tradition. With respect to the Lied, Mahler employed the solo song as a launching point toward new genres. A master of instrumentation, he incorporated songs into many of his early symphonies before 1908-9, when he created Das Lied von der Erde, a work conceived from the start for solo voice and orchestra that integrated the song cycle and symphonic forms. Heavily influenced by folksong, Mahler wrote tuneful melodies that follow stepwise motion and triadic outlines.

Mahler and Wolf met as conservatory students in Vienna. They shared rooms together for a time and faced some of the same struggles with the rigor of academic life; Mahler, too, was reprimanded for his insubordinate manner. Despite possessing similar temperaments, Mahler was the polar opposite of Wolf as a composer. On the subject of

78 Charlie Louth has called the 1808 publication of Des Knaben Wunderhorn “probably the single most important event in the development of the Romantic lyric.” Charlie Louth, “The Romantic Lyric,” in The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 76.
79 Glauert, 4.
song composition, as Austrian musicologist Alfred Mathis-Rosenzweig has written, Mahler rejected Wolf’s efforts, regardless of the songs’ magnificent qualities, because their basic formal principles did not coincide with his own.\textsuperscript{80} When interviewed in 1900 by Ernst Decsey, Wolf’s first major biographer, Mahler “claimed not to be able to find in [the songs] any of the basic rules of composition, namely, the statement of a theme and its working out. A song, he insisted, should be characterized by singing and by music, not by word-setting, which is of course paramount to Wolf.”\textsuperscript{81} However, as early Mahler commentator Richard Specht has written, in private conversation, Mahler was often given to quick-tempered paradoxes (\textit{hitzigen Paradoxe}) in his judgment of his contemporaries. He warned that Mahler’s criticism of Wolf’s songs, that in two of them at the most were “real melody and organic unity to be discerned, while all the others remain glued to the rhythm of the text and are therefore determined by the poet, not the musician,” should be taken with a grain of salt.\textsuperscript{82}

The third member of Hanslick’s “Musical Secession,” Richard Strauss, was drawn to contemporary poetry and took his cues from the burgeoning Symbolist movement. Lyrical and yet not melodic, the hallmarks of his vocal writing style include a significant extension of the range, large leaps, and melismatic passages. His use of daring, decadent harmonies was labeled by Ernest Newman as sheer melodic and harmony nonsense: one finds “sins not only against beauty but against sanity.”\textsuperscript{83} Writing in 1917, Henry Finck

\textsuperscript{82} “Da gab es dann unter sämtlichen Wolfschen Liedern höchstens zwei, in denen eine wirkliche Melodie und ein geschlossener Organismus zu entdecken sei, während alle anderen am Rhythmus des Gedichts kleben geblieben seien und durch den Dichter, nicht vom Musiker determiniert.” Richard Specht, \textit{Gustav Mahler} (Berlin, Shuster & Loeffler, 1913), 31. See also Rosenzweig, 105.
\textsuperscript{83} Ernest Newman, \textit{Richard Strauss} (London: John Lane, 1908), 97.
recognized a parallel between Wolf and those songs of Strauss composed after 1900, in that both composers placed the music secondary to the poem. He claimed that this was Wolf’s favored method because he “almost entirely lacked the faculty of creating unique melodies; from the melodic — the highest — point of view, his songs are appallingly arid and uninteresting. That Strauss followed his example was doubtless due largely to his own increasing difficulty in creating melodies.”

To this assessment must be added another commonality between the songs of Wolf and Strauss: the at times extreme technical difficulty they pose for both singer and pianist.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the Lied, no longer relegated to private performance by amateur musicians, became an increasingly large part of the public musical consumption. Around the mid-century, Lieder appeared on concert programs as part of an eclectic mix of genres, including orchestral and piano pieces, and spoken declamation. By the 1870s, specialists were regularly offering song recital programs (Liederabende) in large concert halls. The trend caught on quickly and, by the late 1880s, had grown into an epidemic, as Wolf himself wrote in the Salonblatt; at its height, the public appetite for Liederabende was such that as many as twenty such evenings were presented weekly in Berlin alone.

Surely this move from the parlor to the platform was one of the factors that prompted the “orchestral” piano style used by Wolf and his contemporaries, which often threatens to submerge the voice in its sound. Taking his cue from Wagner, Wolf’s keyboard writing relates to the piano reductions of Wagner’s opera scores by Liszt and his student, Karl Klindworth, as pianist Graham Johnson has noted.

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85 Kravitt, 20.
Despite his apparent disdain for the song recital craze, Wolf owed a great deal to the efforts of Lied interpreters, especially to those activities of the Hugo Wolf-Verein in Vienna, which did much to raise his profile and that of his songs through several such evenings.

As mention above, this new type of Lied required trained professional singers to do justice to the demands of the songs. Julius Stockhausen, a pupil of vocal pedagogy pioneer Manuel Garcia, and himself a much-respected teacher, was instrumental in stimulating interest in the songs of Schubert and Schumann in the 1860s. An accomplished opera and oratorio singer, he is considered an important champion of the Lied in the nineteenth century. In 1856, Stockhausen gave the first public performance of Schubert’s Die schöne Müllerin in its entirety and was highly influential to Brahms’s song composition; the Magelone Lieder, op. 33, were composed for him. Despite his Brahmsian bent, he expressed interest in Wolf’s songs as well.\(^\text{87}\)

One of Wolf’s earliest interpreters, the composer himself, was a frequent guest performer at the Thursday evening meetings of the Wagner-Verein in Vienna. He routinely prefaced the performance of each song with a recitation of the poem. “With his poor, almost toneless voice,” wrote biographer Frank Walker, “[Wolf] was able to hold his hearers spellbound. None that heard him ever forgot the experience, or ever heard any performance comparable in intensity from any trained singer.”\(^\text{88}\) Regardless, Wolf recognized the advantages of relying on the talents of professional singers for the dissemination of his songs, which was hampered on the one hand by his having made so

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\(^{88}\) Walker, 208.
many enemies as a critic, and on the other by the sheer technical difficulty of the songs themselves. Temperamental by nature, he could be quite tyrannical when it came the interpretation of his songs, and spoke sharply to one unsuspecting singer in the middle of a concert, berating her for taking too many liberties.\textsuperscript{89}

Two of Wolf’s most important early interpreters came from very different walks of life: one, a professional Wagnerian tenor, the other, a wealthy lawyer who nevertheless was a passionate amateur and devoted adherent. As Wolf’s reputation spread as a result of his performances for the Wagner-Verein, a public concert was given in December 1888 at which Ferdinand Jäger sang nine of Wolf’s songs with the composer at the piano. Jäger, who had sung Siegfried in the Vienna premieres of both \textit{Siegfried} and \textit{Götterdämmerung}, was apparently encouraged enough by the success of the concert that he willingly took up Wolf’s cause and continued the practice, despite the harsh anti-Wolf sentiment in the press.\textsuperscript{90} Hugo Faisst, however, needed no encouragement from the public, for his enthusiasm and admiration for Wolf’s songs was genuine and ardent. He contributed ten songs to an all-Wolf program in the southern German city of Tübingen given on 31 October 1893. When he and Wolf finally met in 1894, a friendship was initiated that continued to the end of Wolf’s life.\textsuperscript{91} Faisst offered moral and financial support to Wolf, and moreover, he possessed an uncanny understanding of Wolf’s compositional voice. “Although his [own] voice was not a particularly good one by professional standards, he possessed much of Wolf’s own power of bringing a song to

\textsuperscript{89} Walker, 308.

\textsuperscript{90} In a review of a \textit{Liederabend} given 5 March 1889, music critic Max Kalbeck wrote that Wolf’s songs were “dry, puerile stuff, extravagantly banal melodies and ridiculous harmonic convulsions, that would fain pass themselves off as emotions of the soul!” Newman, 68-72.

\textsuperscript{91} Wolf’s side of the letter exchange was collected and published soon after his death. \textit{Briefe an Hugo Faisst}, ed. Michael Haberlandt (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1923).
life by the intensity and warmth of expression.”\textsuperscript{92}

The search for Wagner’s successor was much on the minds of music critics in Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century. As Glauert has commented, while they acknowledged the difficulty in parsing the logic of Wolf’s harmonies or identifying a consistent style, they could at least agree that in Wolf’s songs there was clear evidence of Wagner’s theories regarding the bound of poetry and music, that Wolf’s music and the poetry were destined to be united, and that “any notion of artistic calculation must not be allowed to disturb any ‘love-bound.’”\textsuperscript{93} Lawrence Kramer has pointed out that this “Wolf legend” was the one told almost universally at the turn of the century. Indeed, there are any number of examples of this view in the two volumes of \textit{Gesammelte Aufsätze über Hugo Wolf} published by the Hugo Wolf-Verien in Vienna in 1898 and 1899 respectively. More recent studies, however, have taken “a more nuanced view of Wolf’s aesthetic, with emphasis on the sometimes conflictual interplay of music and poetry,” as Kramer has written.\textsuperscript{94} Many of these studies — by Youens, Glauert, and others — have been helpful in the preparation of this dissertation.

\section*{Conclusion}

One of Wolf’s gifts as a composer, perhaps his finest, was his ability to grasp the poet’s intentions, absorb them, and respond in his own very personal musical terms. Once he had finally identified and refined his own personal compositional voice, he was able to adapt it to any given poetical parameter. The result is arguably as complete an

\textsuperscript{92} Walker, 338.
\textsuperscript{93} Glauert, 48.
\textsuperscript{94} Kramer, 239.
amalgamation of poetry and music as can be found in the repertoire of nineteenth-century
*Lieder.* His manipulation of melody, harmony, and form, his use of illustrative devices, and his introduction of humor into the genre, brands him as a re-inventor of the *Lied* in the *fin-de-siècle* period.

Wolf was for many years obsessed with the desire to compose opera. The narrative and dramatic nature of the *Rollengedichte* would have naturally appealed to him. In them, one can detect clear echoes of the modified strophic form Schubert employed in his seminal work, *Gretchen am Spinnrade,* and many others. In Schumann’s songs, one discovers the roots of the ever-expanding role Wolf gives to the piano, which suggests the weight and strength of the symphonic orchestra. Finally, Wolf’s compositional voice owes much to Wagner’s theories of the unity of music and poetry, his techniques pertaining to text declamation, and the dramatic use of motivic development.

Because of their unique qualities, Wolf’s *Lieder* run the risk of being labeled children of their age. In our times, the financial viability of a song recital requires the presentation of a known entity, an opera star, whose primary goal is to display himself in another light away from the trappings of the stage. Generally, the opera star will choose art-song material that caters to his particular strengths and with full recognition of the audience’s familiarity with his performance persona. Admittedly, the repertoire of Wolf’s songs does not cater to the taste of every audience, nor does it suit the talents and skills of every performer. One may quibble with the notion that Wolf’s songs, which require not only an intimate relationship with the German language, but also a deep understanding of Wolf’s compositional style from both performer and listener, is not appropriate literature
for this kind of event.

At the university level, the song recital is the measure by which young singers are judged on musicianship, language proficiency, vocal technique, musicality, and interpretative skills. Yet Wolf’s songs, which test all of these, are sorely missing from recital programs. While it would be a formidable challenge for a young singer in his early twenties to tackle a large set of Wolf songs, there are several included in this discussion, and many more that are not, that would encourage musical and dramatic exploration and are within the capabilities of a skilled young singer.

The successful interpreters of Wolf’s Rollengedichte, both singers and actors, must employ all their skills as investigators. They must dig beneath superficial details of pitch and rhythm, pronunciation and translation, and approach their study of the poem as Wolf did, by consuming and digesting it. Then, with an eye toward poetical and musical metaphors and analogies, will the interpreters succeed in displaying each Lied in its unique light.
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Hugo Wolf

Books


**Articles**


**Dissertations**


