9 "Actually, I like my songs best": Strauss's lieder

SUSAN YOUENS

If readers should perhaps take Strauss's statement to the great singer Hans Hotter with a barrel of salt,[1] given the composer's primary dedication to opera, it is nevertheless true that, from beginning to end, he wrote songs.[2] He lived around singers his entire life, after all; in his boyhood, he heard his aunt Johanna Pschorr – a gifted amateur mezzo-soprano – sing, and his father Franz Strauss played the horn in orchestral performances with some of the best singers of the day. Later, Richard's wife Pauline de Ahna was an accomplished professional soprano at the time of their marriage. In fact, Strauss began composing songs when he was a mere six-and-a-half years old: the earliest of thirty-two youthful songs without opus numbers, "Weihnachtslied" ("Christmas Song") on a poem by Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart (the poet of Schubert's "Die Forelle"), was composed in 1870. There are gems to be found in this repertory composed before Strauss deemed his songs publishable; we discover, for example, that his love of Ludwig Uhland's poetry began early with such sensitive songs as "Die Drossel" ("The Thrush"), while "Der müde Wanderer" ("The Weary Wanderer") on a poem by August Hoffmann von Fallersleben is another worthwhile creation.[3] Nine other early songs are now lost, including a cluster of five lieder composed in the early 1880s; how one wishes that "Mein Geist ist trüb" ("My Soul is Dark") on a poem by Lord Byron would surface, and we could see what the conjunction of the great British Romantic poet and the twenty-year-old composer produced in this, his only setting of that poet. Thereafter, Strauss would compose 158 songs between 1885 and his death in 1948, songs that range from single-page miniatures ("Die Zeitlose" ["The Meadow Saffron"], Op. 10, No. 7 on a poem by Hermann von Gilm zu Rosenegg) to the operatic expansiveness of "Die Liebe" ("Love"), Op. 71, No. 3 on a text by Friedrich Hölderlin, which unfurls to thirteen pages in length. His "last rose," as he called it, was the song "Malven" ("Mallows"), for soprano and piano on a poem by the Swiss poet Betty Wehrli-Knobel, composed on November 23, 1948, some nine months before his death on September 8, 1949. In other words, songs are the book-ends on either side of his life.[4] If the lied was not his chief *métier*, it was of great importance at crucial periods in his life, and there is considerable variety to be found here.

But only a smattering of early songs from the 1880s and 1890s, along with an even scantier selection of works from Strauss's "middle years" and

the immortal *Vier letzte Lieder* at the end of the composer's life, are standard fare in most singers' repertories. "Die Nacht" ("Night"), Op. 10, No. 3; "Allerseelen" ("All Souls' Day"), Op. 10, No. 8; "Ständchen" ("Serenade"), Op. 17, No. 2; "Breit' über mein Haupt" ("Unbind Your Black Hair over My Head"), "Schön sind, doch kalt die Himmelssterne" ("Beautiful but Cold Are the Stars in the Sky"), and "Wie sollten wir geheim sie halten" ("How Could We Have Kept Secret"), Op. 19, Nos. 2–4; "Du meines Herzens Krönelein" ("You, the Diadem of My Heart"), Op. 21, No. 2; "Morgen!" ("Tomorrow!"), Op. 27, No. 4; "Traum durch die Dämmerung" ("Reverie at Twilight"), Op. 29, No. 1; and "Freundliche Vision" ("A Pleasant Vision"), Op. 48, No. 1: any recital-goer will have heard these songs many times over. They deserve their status as "chestnuts" – who would not love such an exquisite thing as "Traum durch die Dämmerung"?[5] – but their ubiquity, coupled with the composer's occasional descent into post-"Ride of the Valkyries" noise-noise-and-more-noise, have led many to condemn Strauss's songs as inferior to those of Brahms, Wolf, and Mahler.

It cannot be denied, I think, that his notions of the relationship of word and tone in song were differently constituted than theirs. When he was twenty-nine years old, he responded to a questionnaire in which he wrote that apathy about composition could vanish instantly whenever he browsed through volumes of poetry. When a particular poem attracted his notice, usually because it reflected his mood at the moment, music would, so he wrote, spring to mind immediately. But when his chosen poem failed to produce inspiration, he would bend his musical mood to fit the words "as best I can," the song thus being made, not born.[6] Somewhat defensively, he would tell his good friend Max Marschalk years later, "By the way, work is also a matter of talent!" – thus asserting the labor that went into fashioning his beautiful melodies.[7] There is on occasion something of the dutiful Bavarian laborer about Strauss, evident in the determination to compose even when the mysterious creative wheels in the brain were failing to turn with their customary alacrity. That one can tell when he was churning out music regardless and when he was inspired is only to be expected.

But there are gems to discover for those who wander off the beaten path and more grounds for admiration than the doubters might suspect. Consequently, I plan to dwell in this chapter on a few of the less well-known songs in which nothing is routine, songs devoid of the arch sentimentality that mars the likes of "Heimliche Aufforderung" ("Secret Invitation"); the composer, I believe, misread John Henry Mackay's poetic scenario and made of hidden love a splashy, exhibitionistic display. Given inevitable word limits on these occasions, I have also committed sacrilege and omitted the *Vier letzte Lieder* from my slate; they are among the most studied of all Strauss's songs[8] and will assuredly continue to draw notice, given their

place as the crowning glory of Strauss's oeuvre, his *opus ultimum*. I believe that other lieder by this composer deserve that honor too.

Of contemporary poets, early mastery, and an aesthetic of song

At age twenty-one, Strauss began offering his songs in the public marketplace of print. For the ten years from 1885 to 1895, the Biedermeier poets prominent in his youthful songs gave way to two later groups of poets: (1) those belonging to the generation or two before Strauss's own day, such as Hermann von Gilm zu Rosenegg (1812–64), Adolf Friedrich von Schack (1815–94, whose poetry Brahms also liked), and Felix Dahn (1834–1912); and (2) the composer's own contemporaries, including Detlev von Liliencron (1844–1909), Richard Dehmel (1863–1920), Otto Julius Bierbaum (the masterful translator of Albert Giraud's *Pierrot lunaire*, 1865–1910), Emanuel von Bodmann (1874–1946), Carl Busse (1872–1918), and Karl Henckell (1864–1929), the latter a Socialist who waged a war of words on behalf of the proletariat in poems such as "Die kranke Proletarierin" ("The Ill Worker-Woman"), "Der Polizeikommissar" ("The Police Commissioner"), and "Kaiser und Arbeiter" ("Emperor and Worker"), before ceding to sweeter, simpler nature and love poems late in his life. Felix Dahn (whose photograph in old age displays a splendid forked beard, neatly divided into two "V"-shaped bundles) was a virulent anti-Semite whose scholarship would later help shore up Nazi ideology during its brief span, but Strauss was only interested in his lyric poems, which provided the texts for the *Schlichte Weisen* (*Simple Melodies*) of Op. 21 and the *Mädchenblumen* (*Maiden-Flowers*) of Op. 22.[9] None of these writers were of the first rank, and their names might not have endured without the musical settings by the likes of Brahms, Strauss, and Schoenberg. Several of Strauss's contemporaries were properly grateful to the composer for his services on their behalf; Henckell, to whom Strauss sent a dedicatory copy of "Ruhe, meine Seele!" ("Rest, my soul!"), was able to recognize the quality of this "music that shivers so lightly, with hardly a wave breaking … it seems to me that you have transcribed the verse, or absorbed it, or whatever the correct expression is, quite magnificently."[10] It is amusing to see a poet thus admit to being flummoxed about the proper terminology for the transfer of poetry into music. The astute recognition that "something happens" to poetry in the process is present and accounted for.

The first lied in Strauss's first song opus, "Zueignung," Op. 10, No. 1, is a setting of a feeble effusion by Gilm (his poetry was composed in secret and only published posthumously), and it establishes certain patterns

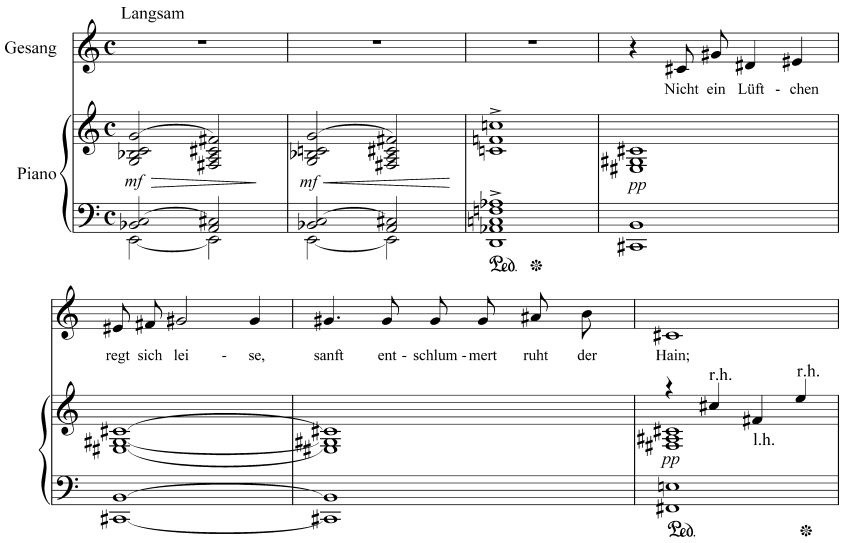
consistent with many of Strauss's works thereafter.[11] On the positive side, the consummate writing for the voice is a hallmark of Straussian song, manifested in sweeping melodic phrases designed for maximum sensuous delight on both the performer's and listener's part. It is no wonder that singers love this repertory. On the negative side, Strauss at times makes use of standard figuration in the piano in a fashion that extends the harmonies but cannot be understood as an outgrowth of the poetry after the manner of Schubert or (differently) Schumann. Where Schubert resorts to conventional figuration, he shapes it to poetic purposes in inventive ways; for example, the repeated chords in the right-hand part throughout "Der Einsame" ("The Solitary Man") are integral to this vivid portrait of a nameless, slightly priggish and self-important but nevertheless dear man immersed in quiet happiness by the hearth. In the ticking chords, we hear time pass in utter contentment, and we are told of the muted vitality that pervades this bliss devoid of drama. The left-hand chords that fill Strauss's "Mein Auge" ("My Eye"), Op. 37, No. 4, on the other hand, seem merely a way to stretch out harmonies by means other than orchestral; they are a somewhat mechanical way of redressing the decaying sound of harmonies even on the biggest, loudest modern pianos. There are, to be sure, cases where routine patterns such as broken-chordal figures are marvelously appropriate, as in the hypnotic, lulling, harp-like waves throughout the "Wiegenlied," Op. 41a, No. 1, on a poem by Dehmel (the song is nevertheless at its best in orchestral guise), but elsewhere, conventional figuration can seem like Strauss soldiering away at his writing desk no matter what.

From a potpourri of comments, letters, and statements, one can piece together at least a partial Straussian aesthetic of song, beginning with Strauss's belief that poetry at its most superlative had no need of music.[12] He was speaking in particular of one of his household gods, Goethe, whose witty definition of vocal music (*Vokalmusik*) as singing in which one only hears the vowels (*Vokale*) Strauss quotes in a letter of March 4, 1943 to Karl Böhm; the conductor is enjoined to copy out the pun in large letters and hang it in the director's room as a *mene tekel* for those singers who fail to pay proper attention to consonants.[13] The encomiums to Goethe are sprinkled throughout the Straussian record: accused of this, that, and the other influence on the libretto of *Guntram*, Strauss replied that "for the last four months I've studied only Wagner, Goethe, and Schopenhauer," and, while sightseeing in Egypt, he wrote of "luxuriating" in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* – "dear God, there's so much in that book," he said. He read Goethe on the boat to South America in 1920; in 1928, he quoted Goethe's advice that everybody should write memoirs; and in the terrible year of 1944, he reread the entire Propyläen edition, minus the *Farbenlehre*.[14] But if immersion in Goethe is a constant in his life, Goethe songs are not, with occasional exceptions.[15] For lieder, he was more wont to gravitate to the

likes of Henckell, whose verse may not be stellar but who provided the impetus for some stellar songs from Strauss's pen.

The first of Strauss's ten Henckell songs, "Ruhe, meine Seele!," Op. 27, No. 1, is an exceptional work by anyone's reckoning. I wonder whether Strauss remembered the beginning of Schubert's great Heine song "Am Meer" when he set this poem invoking rest and peace for the soul in Nature's quiet midst, whatever history's storms raging outside? It is the repetition of slurred half-note harmonies in the piano at the start that brings the earlier work to mind. Despite very different subject matter, both poets, one a genius, one not, establish a contrast between zones of joy and beauty on the one hand, of horror on the other; it is an inspired reminiscence, whether or not Strauss was aware of it. Certainly he engineers the contrasting regions differently. His introductory chords are different varieties of seventh chords in inversion, one after another, with tonal certitude as clouded as the possibility of peace in the soul. Common-tone linkage and chromatic sideslipping from the previous chord tones glue the harmonies together in a progression but fail to give firm tonal ground; the key signature is C major, but in the harmonic murk of the song's first half, we wonder at first whether we might be headed for B major – but no. It is a very Straussian maneuver to begin a song in or around a key other than the principal tonality, sometimes treated as ultimate goal rather than point of origin. "Ruhe, meine Seele!" does not achieve quiescence on an unclouded C major chord until the final two bars of the song, although the intimation of C is there from the beginning.[16] Up to that point, we are slowly, solemnly awash in seventh chords that cannot resolve as long as there is any remaining consciousness of the storms raging in the poet's soul (Example 9.1). Only once before the end do we hear a triadic point of arrival for "Diese Zeiten" ("these times"), their F minor horror a certainty, but because this is far from peace, the F minor promptly engenders another succession of seventh chords … until the directive "und vergiß, und vergiß, was dich bedroht!" ("and forget, and forget, what threatens you!"). The oracular sound of this injunction stems from the novelty of pure root-position triads in succession, including the typically Straussian elements of third relationships and the cross-relation between A♮ and A♭ pitches in chords of D-minor-going-to-F-minor. In a last wonderful detail, the singer "ends" with the 5–1 scale pitches of perfect authentic cadence but because his or her last word is "bedroht" ("threatens"), a C major chord of arrival would hardly be appropriate. Instead, we have a revoicing, this time over C in the bass, of the menacing chords from the start of it all before the piano can finally clear away all of the chromatic storminess and allow C major to have the last word. From the mere fact of chromatic complication right up to the final harmony, we apprehend how fragile this peace is, how threatened by the resumption of history's storms lurking beyond the last measure line.

Example 9.1 "Ruhe, meine Seele!," mm. 1–7



Desire, mystical rapture, and death: three turn-of-century masterpieces

In the late 1890s, as the turn of the century neared, Strauss continued to gravitate mostly to the poetry of his contemporaries, with one detour in Op. 36 for poems of a bygone age (Friedrich Klopstock, poems from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, and the Orientalist poet Friedrich Rückert). One of the most exquisite songs of this period is "Leises Lied" ("Gentle Song"), Op. 39, No. 1 of 1898, on a poem by Richard Dehmel, whose works were set to music by a glittering panoply of composers.[17] Dehmel was notorious for the eroticism of his verse; the poem "Venus consolatrix" was eliminated from the second edition of his anthology *Weib und Welt* by order of the censors. Here, he creates his own variation on medieval *hortus conclusus* imagery. "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed," we read in the Song of Solomon 4:12, and from its passionate imagery derives a long tradition both of Marian iconography and secular erotic poetry.

Leises Lied

In einem stillen Garten
An eines Brunnens Schacht,
Wie wollt' ich gerne warten
Die lange graue Nacht!

Viel helle Lilien blühen
Um des Brunnens Schlund; –
Drin schwimmen golden die Sterne,
Drin badet sich der Mond.

Und wie in den Brunnen schimmern
Die lieben Sterne hinein,
Glänzt mir im Herzen immer
Deiner lieben Augen Schein.

Die Sterne doch am Himmel,
Die stehen all' [stehen uns all] so fern;
In deinem stillen Garten
Stünd' ich jetzt so gern.[18]

Gentle Song

In a silent garden
by a well shaft,
how I would love to wait there
through the whole long gray night!

Many bright lilies bloom
around the well's abyss;
the golden stars are floating there,
the moon bathes there.

And as the dear stars gleam
In the well,
so your dear eyes' light
ever glows in my heart.

But the stars in the sky
are all so far away;
I would linger now
in your silent garden.

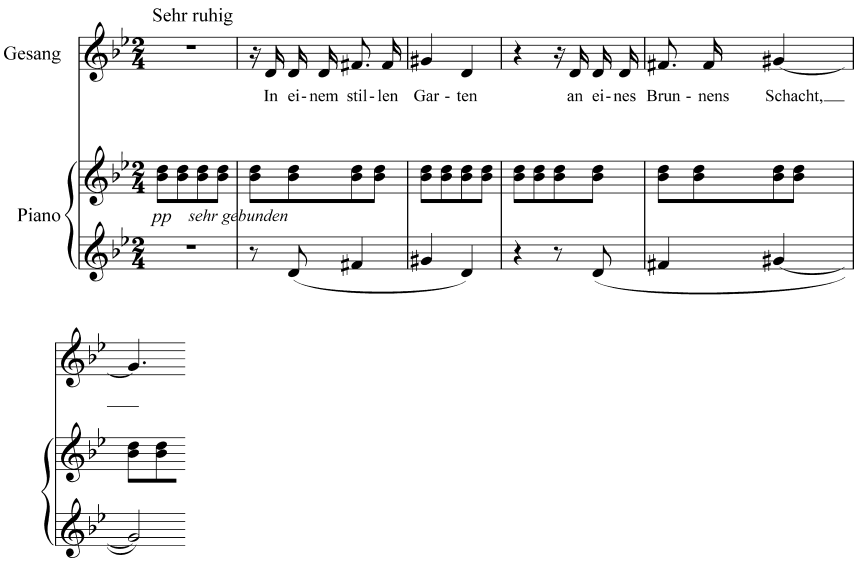
Brahms's setting of Franz Kugler's "Ständchen" gives us the "clean" version of the same script, with its Germanic folkloric scenario of a lover waiting patiently in a garden for his beloved to appear, but only the very innocent could fail to recognize the erotic symbolism on display in Dehmel's poem. The quiet garden and the well that sinks deep into the earth are not difficult to decode as composite symbols for female sexual organs; when the persona announces that he would gladly spend the night there, any reader post-Freud will get the point. Because Dehmel sought to extol erotic experience as a way to break free of middle-class convention,

he converts the lilies of the second stanza from medieval emblems of virginal purity (they surround the Virgin Mary in Sandro Botticelli's *Madonna of the Lilies*) into blossoms that flourish all around the cavity of the well. Sexuality is quasi-mystical rapture, he declares. This second verse gives us a poetic convention as old as the hills – stars reflected in the water are as the beloved's eyes reflected in a lover's heart – while the third verse sweeps away the celestial analogies to proclaim the persona's preference for physical experience. Throughout, Dehmel calls on poetic tradition to buttress a tender, rapt celebration of sex.

Strauss understood what Dehmel was doing and compounds several different musical symbols for the ecstasy of love into a beautifully economical lied. The loveliest and also the slyest is his recourse throughout the song to whole-tone figures within the span of a tritone. Tritones, of course, were *diabolus in musica* according to medieval music theory, and to churchmen and society's arbiters, sex could be the very devil as well. But whole-tone progressions are also open, mystical, either rootless or at least calling rootedness into question; Liszt's "liberation" of the augmented triad, his innovative uses of it in the *Dante* Symphony – mysticism and rapture of a different sort – are predicated on a similar openness. What had once been dissonant is no longer treated as such. The vagueness of tonal location and the banishment of hierarchical distinctions in scale formation are ways to suggest the effect of love-making on consciousness of the world's borders and strictures. Strauss begins the song with an initial measure of pulsation in the treble on the interval of a third, harmonically indeterminate. Are we in B♭ major? G minor? Some other tonal realm? Impossible to say as yet. The pulsation continues while the left hand doubles the vocal line exactly (if a female singer) or at the octave (if a male singer). The D and F♯ pitches hint at a G minor orientation, but what is G♯ doing here in that instance? The pitch certainly changes the way we hear F♯, such that the first half of m. 5 sounds much stranger than the second half of m. 2. This way of suggesting both the dark and the light sides of relative major and minor modes while throwing both of them open is wonderfully fitted to Dehmel's poetic scenario (Example 9.2). And the translucency of the texture, the delicacy of the voicing, is almost Debussyan; it is rare indeed that one can make analogies between Strauss and Debussy, but they are apropos here.

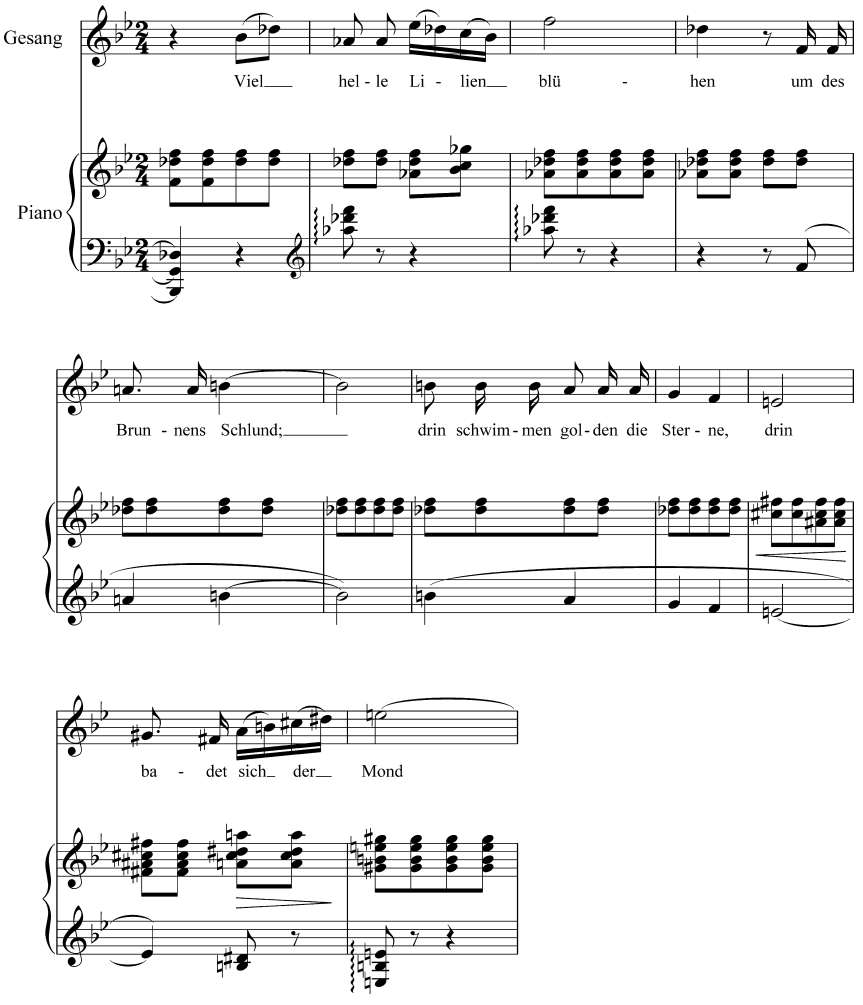
One of the most beautiful aspects of Strauss's late-Romantic tonal language is the ease with which he shifts between distant tonal planes and his propensity to alternate passages of complication/dissonance/tonal uncertainty with purest diatonicism in unusual relationships. At the beginning, we "wait" – like the lover – in suspended rapture for a tonality to be revealed, and when an authentic cadence finally happens in mm. 9–10, it is not what

Example 9.2 "Leises Lied," mm. 1–6



we might think from the opening bars. A root-position G minor harmony, followed by its leading tone, sounds at the start of m. 7 (the start of the second phrase), but not as a "tonic" harmony; rather, it is a passing tone/chord (on the downbeat!) as part of a desire-laden slide downwards by semitones in the doubled vocal line and left-hand part. The "long gray night" is not the enemy of love (one wonders whether "graue" was picked for its dark diphthong leading to the "ah" sound of "Nacht"), but its rich, profound climate, the first certainty of the poem: B♭ minor. The ultimate goal of the song is B♭ major, but how we arrive there is quite distinctive. Rather like physical rapture itself, we move in and out of focus, with passages that hover in whole-tone mid-air and then touch down to earth, if never for long. For example, following the momentary arrival on B♭ minor, Strauss quietly drops the root tone of that harmony and repeats the major-third interval (D♭–F) that is left after the fashion of m. 1 before reinterpreting those pitches as constituents of a D♭ major harmony. Here, the "many bright lilies" are accompanied by seraphic harp-chords in the high treble, the left hand no longer doubling the singer but wafting into the empyrean and hovering on D♭ for a moment. Returning to whole-tone openness for the "Brunnens Schlund" (this hardly seems coincidental or unrelated to the words), we hear tritones both in simultaneity and outlined horizontally before touching down again, this time on E major: a tritone away from the first such cadence (Example 9.3). In like manner, we rise another minor third/augmented second for the returning figure from m. 2 – D at first, then F, then G♯ – to repeat the cycle, leading this time to a cadence on D major.

Example 9.3 "Leises Lied," mm. 11–21



The third stanza is the goal of the poem: the statement that the physical is infinitely preferable to the metaphysical. In a tenderly witty maneuver, Strauss retraces his footsteps in the final stanza, returning to the "garden" in B♭, now radiant on major mode, by the end. At the hinge-word "doch" ("Die Sterne doch am Himmel"), the whole-tone figure heads downwards, not upwards, and we are en route back to the plane of the beginning. When Strauss reiterates the sensuous chromatic semitone slide downwards from mm. 7–8 in rhythmic augmentation at the crucial words "stünd' ich, stünd' ich" ("I would linger, I would linger") near the end, he conveys his exquisite understanding of Dehmel's purposes. The whole-tone aggregate (A–C♯–E♭–F) preceding the resolution to the first B♭ major chord at the end of the texted body of the song, at the word "gern" (gladly), is the gently dissonant aggregate of desire's tension before melting into release and calm.

This entire song is a study in economy: every note, every texture, every rhythmic pattern derived in logical fashion from the compound of gestures at the beginning and from the alteration between tonal hovering and tonal landing.

And there is another Dehmel setting from this same period of great productivity in song that deserves to be better known than it is (the great pianist Roger Vignoles is championing its cause these days): "Am Ufer" ("At the Shore"), Op. 41, No. 3. The poem comes from Dehmel's best-known anthology, *Weib und Welt* (*Woman and World*) of 1896:

Am Ufer

Die Welt verstummt, dein Blut erklingt;
in seinen hellen Abgrund sinkt
der ferne Tag,

er schaudert nicht, die Glut umschlingt
das höchste Land, im Meere ringt
die ferne Nacht,

sie zaudert nicht; der Flut entspringt
ein Sternchen, deine Seele trinkt
das ewige Licht.[19]

At the Shore

The world falls silent, your blood sings;
in its bright abyss sinks
the distant day,

it does not shiver, the glow embraces
the highest land, the distant night
grapples with the sea,

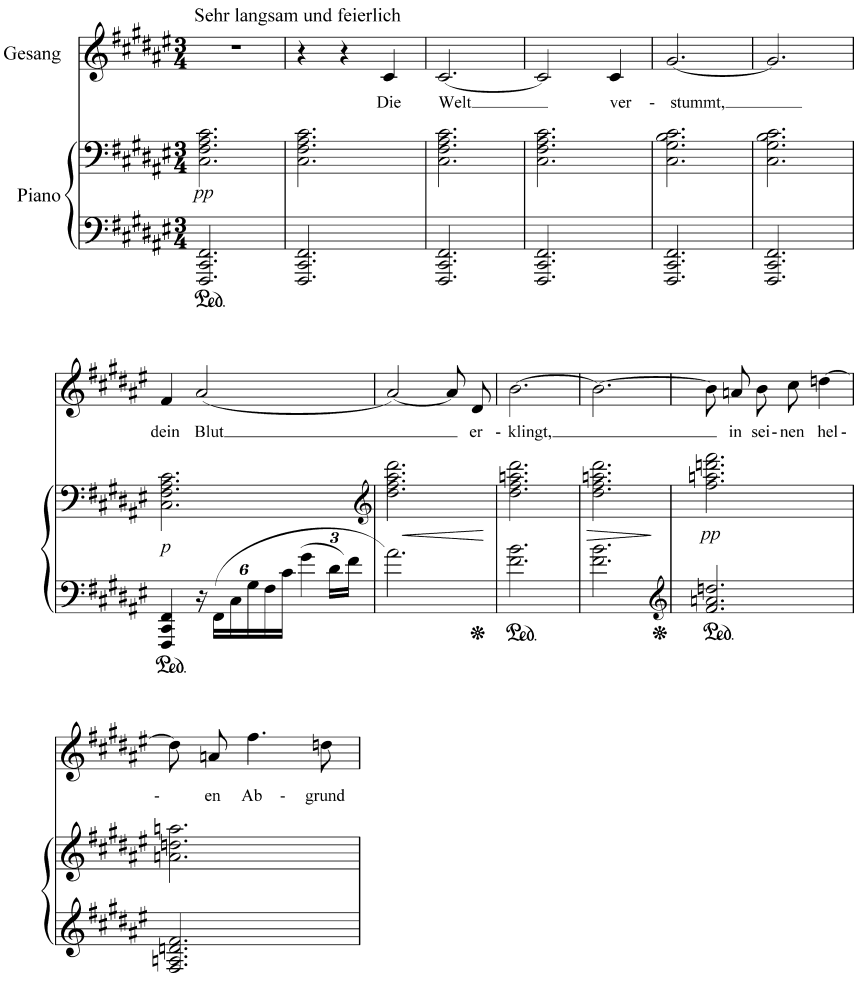
it does not hesitate; from the waters arises
a little star, your soul drinks
the eternal light.

Reading this poem, one can understand both why Stefan George hated Dehmel's poetry and why Strauss would have been attracted to it at this particular time in his life. The woolly mysticism; the ultra-late-Romantic acclamation of night; the unnamed beloved or perhaps the poet himself (to whom "dein Blut" or "your blood" belongs is not clarified, but the poem seems sunk so far inward that self-reference is at least likely); the persona's location on the threshold between the world and the otherworldly, his very being bent on things eternal: only the turn of the century could have produced such a work. The poem is a clever formal construction, with

its repeated -gt and -kt word endings (erklingt/sinkt, umschlingt/ringt, entspringt/trinkt), its insistent parallelisms (der ferne Tag/die ferne Nacht, er schaudert nicht/sie zaudert nicht, dein Blut erklingt/die Glut umschlingt/der Flut entspringt), and its multiple enjambments winding their way to the end, but Strauss sweeps all of that aside. Not only does he turn Dehmel's words into prose but he elongates them in such exaggerated fashion as to induce the desired state of mystical rapture in his listeners by that means alone. In fact, every category of compositional choice – harmony, tonality, melody, form, texture, meter, tempo, chord-voicing, register, and more – is bent to that end. This song is an utmost distillation of Straussian thumbprints, of the most profound hallmarks of his musical language stripped of any glitter. (His virtuosity *can* be both necessary for his vision of a particular text and thoroughly enjoyable, I hasten to add.) No one else could have composed "Am Ufer."

Strauss marks this song *Sehr langsam und feierlich* (*Very slow and ceremonially*) and sets it in an F♯ major tonality with a long history in Romantic song; this is Schubert's key for "Die Mondnacht" ("The Moonlit Night"), D. 238 to a text by Ludwig Kosegarten, whose persona expresses moonlit, rapturous harmony with the beloved. "Die Schwestergruss" ("Sister's Greeting"), D. 762 and "Totengräberweise" ("Gravedigger's Melody"), D. 869 are other Schubert songs in F♯ minor/major, in which he evokes spirit worlds and the afterlife.[20] Solemn chords, one per measure of very slow 3/4 meter, prevail, but three times Strauss bids the pianist waft upwards via a sextuplet sixteenth-note figure comprising open-fifth intervals spanning a ninth – a dry description of Strauss's inspired means of transport from the depths into the empyrean, but those conjoined perfect intervals are essential to the cosmic aura of this music. This seamless passage extending from mm. 1–16 – although Strauss knew that his singer would need to draw breath at least three times in this span, there is not a single rest indicated either in the vocal line or in the piano until the "gap" in the singer's part at mm. 16–17 – is the first instance of one of Strauss's principal means throughout this song to tell of the attempted sacralization of the phenomenal world: the metamorphosis of harmony, as if it were the soul, one tone at a time in order to touch lightly on distant redemptive places.[21] If F♯ major is the "tonic," it is so by fact of repetition at the beginning, middle, and ending sections of the body of the song and in the postlude, not because Strauss establishes it in more conventional fashion. The same is true of the harmonic places we visit in the song; we do not dwell there or even linger long. The first section is the tamest (but still amazing) specimen of the procedure: we go from an initial state of profound contemplation sunk deep within the tonic chord at the start of it all to its beautifully blurry-dissonant combination with the dominant seventh in mm. 5–6 (this reduction

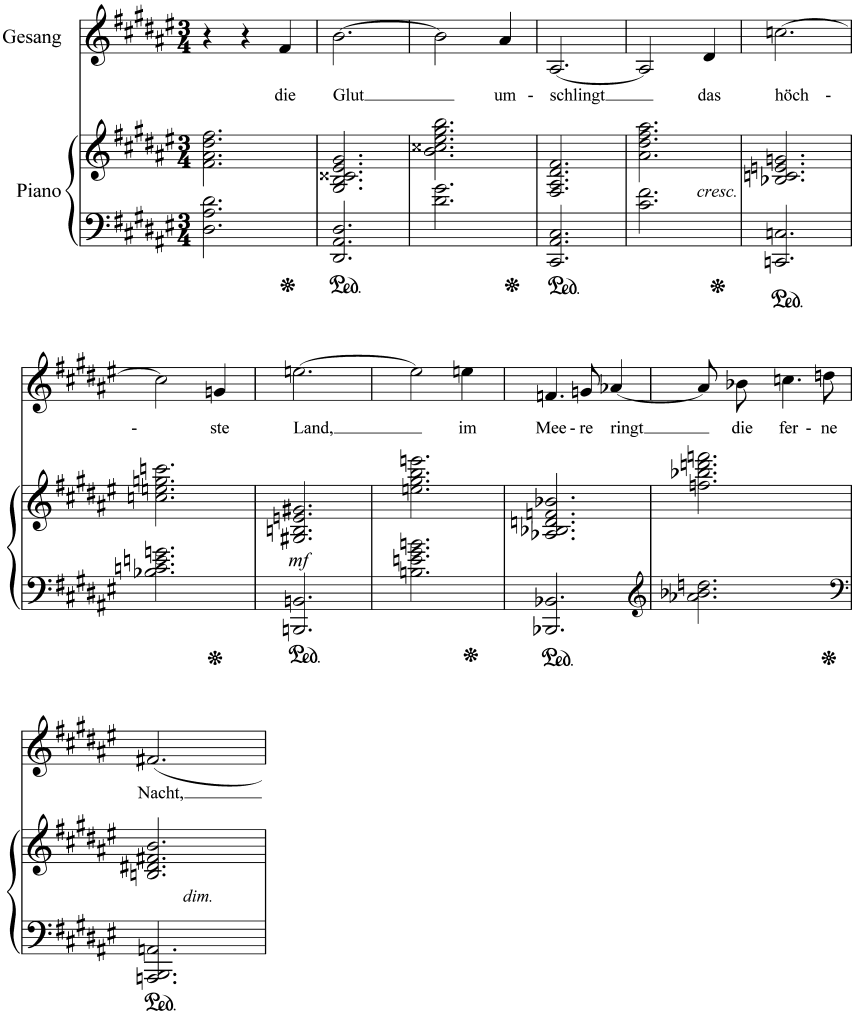
Example 9.4 "Am Ufer," mm. 1–12



to bare essentials is what passes for "establishment" of a key in this song) to another pure triad (the submediant): a progression elongated in time. The submediant chord is then slowly transformed by chromatic alteration one or two pitches at a time (here, we are reminded of Strauss's Wagnerian obsessions), bringing us to its flatted version, or the "bright abyss" of D major chords – our effortless agent of transport downwards, back to the instrument's deepest depths (Example 9.4). From the half-cadence on A, it is mere sleight-of-hand to use C♯ as a common tone and return to F♯ major at mid-song. For such a weighty lied, every shift is handled with similar lightness, as if a god of harmony merely flicked a finger and rearranged the cosmos.

Strauss initiates the song's astonishing mid-section by recalling and condensing the move from tonic to the submediant harmony with which

Example 9.5 "Am Ufer," mm. 22–33



the first section began. But where the first stanza clings to the pitch F♯ until day sinks to its rest in m. 15, the second stanza is built upon a descending chromatic line spanning a fifth, from D♯ through the C𝄪 in the inner voice at "Glut," and on to C♯, C♮, B♮, B♭, an inverted order of A♭ first, then A♮ sinking to G♯ (V^7 of C♯ major), and landing finally on the C♯ major triad. Only D♯ major, a $\frac{6}{4}$ chord of E major, and C♯ major are triads here, Strauss perhaps impelled by the verb "ringen" ("ringt / die ferne Nacht") to create this slow-moving barrage of seventh chords. Their dissonances are the emblems of the battle between mystic lightness and darkness within the soul in a progression whose Straussian enharmonic transformations (A♯ to B♭, G♯ to A♭), common-tone shifts, and semitone side-slipping motion are rich and strange indeed (Example 9.5). (Here one remembers the very

young Strauss in December, 1877 telling Ludwig Thuille that "… it is quite irrelevant how you mark the key into which you are moving, for between C♭ major and B minor is no difference at all, for here you have only an *enharmonic exchange*."[22] He would always be addicted to enharmony and all its possibilities.) It is here too that one notes the economy of this song, its middle section filled with gestures inherited from the initial section and wonderfully warped to fit the not-exactly-new organizing principle unifying mm. 21–36 (after all, the chromatic bass is an extension of the semitone shifts from before). The octave leap at "umschlingt" recalls the "Abgrund," the leaps of a sixth that fill the vocal line in the mid-section are already familiar, and the scalewise ascent near the end of the section is a chromatic variant of m. 11 ("in seinen hellen [Abgrund]"). The stringency and sophistication with which Strauss derives everything that comes after from the tightly compacted compositional choices at the beginning are cause for marvel.

Another feature of this song's unique power has to do with the nature of the vocal writing. One does not hear this song often because its virtuosity is not the flashy sort but depends instead on mammoth lung capacity and breath control, as well as the ability to traverse phrases filled with an extraordinary number of large intervallic leaps, all while singing very softly (always more difficult than bellowing). The brief scalar bits in mm. 11 and 31–2 are a rarity in this climate, where an enlarged soul expresses itself by means of an enlarged melodic wing-span. If the total range of the singer's part is not at all outré, extending from A♯ below middle C to the F♯ a thirteenth above, the athleticism of what transpires within those limits is far from ordinary. That these leaps are not filled in with melismas, that they conform to syllabic text-setting, only heightens their effect. Language and music are literally enlarged. In the song's final section, as Strauss rings the last changes on the *Stoff* of a musical cosmos paradoxically both small and immense, the vocal part becomes breathtaking in its wide embrace; the little star ascends from the waters to span the entire tessitura of the singer's part in a single four-measure phrase, richly entangled with the sextuplet figures that precede the passage and waft the singer up to the heights. "The eternal light," refulgent at the close, reworks the singer's very first elemental pitches (C♯, G♯, F♯) in a new order and in octave displacement: now we realize that the rapture was there all along. If it strikes deeper and rises higher at the end, that is but the completion of a process already enjoined in m. 1.[23] Dehmel told his first wife in a letter that he liked "Lied an meinen Sohn" and "Notturno" best of all Strauss's settings of his poetry, but "Am Ufer," so he told Strauss, "is one of my favorites."[24] I will second the motion.

An even greater work followed shortly after. At the turn of the century, Strauss turned to the late poetry of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (1825–98),

a Swiss writer best known for his novellas and ballads, and drew from his oeuvre a single superb song. "Im Spätboot" ("On the Late Ferry"), Op. 56, No. 3, is for bass voice and was composed between 1903 and 1906; one can only wonder at the proximity to *Salome*, completed in 1905.

Im Spätboot

Aus der Schiffsbank mach' ich meinen Pfühl.
Endlich wird die heiße Stirne kühl!
O wie süß erkaltet mir das Herz!
O wie weich verstummen Lust und Schmerz!
Über mir des Rohres schwarzer Rauch
wiegt und biegt sich in des Windes Hauch.
Hüben hier und drüben wieder dort
hält das Boot an manchem kleinen Port:
Bei der Schiffslaterne kargem Schein
steigt ein Schatten aus und niemand ein.
Nur der Steurer noch, der wacht und steht!
Nur der Wind, der mir im Haare weht!
Schmerz und Lust erleiden sanften Tod.
Einen Schlummrer trägt das dunkle Boot.[25]

On the Late Ferry

From the boat's bench I make my pillow.
Finally my fevered brow will be cool!
O how sweetly my heart grows chill!
O how softly joy and pain are hushed!
Above me the funnel's black smoke
goes to and fro in the wind's breath.
Over here and again over there,
the boat calls at many little ports.
In the scant light of the ship's lantern,
a shadow disembarks, and none takes its place.
Only the helmsman's awake and stands watch!
Only the wind that blows in my hair!
Pain and joy are gently put to death.
The dark boat bears one who slumbers.

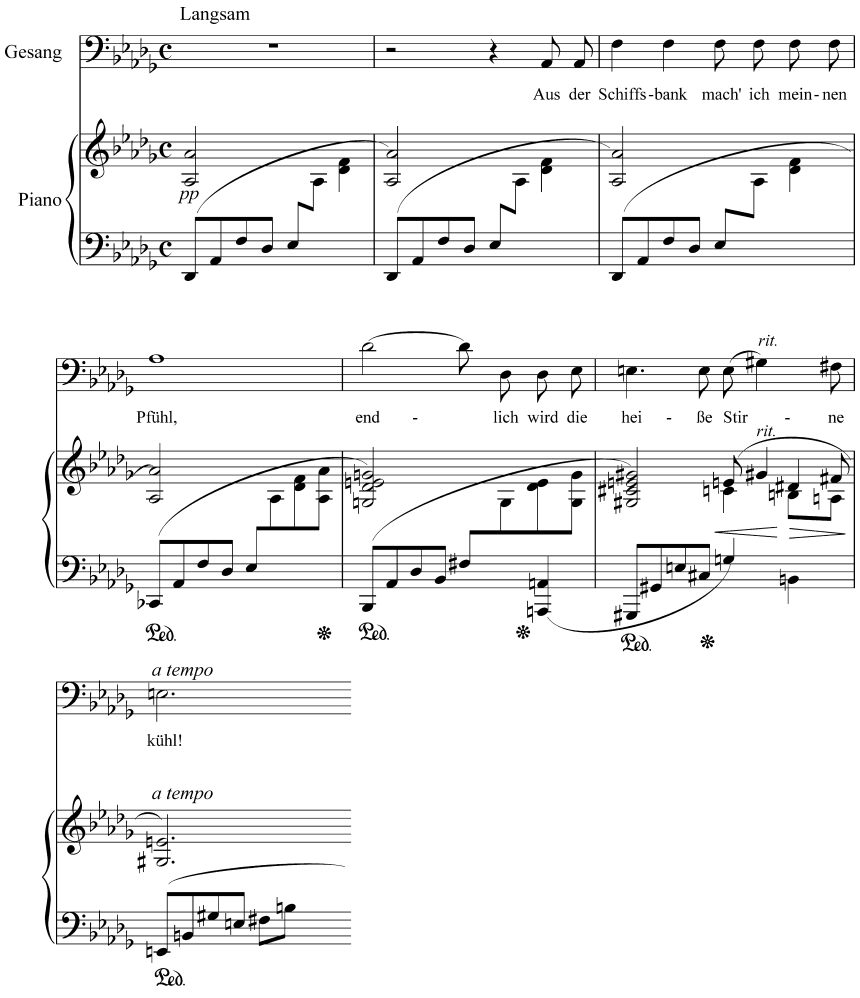
This fourteen-line poem in rhyming couplets and trochaic pentameters is a "sonnet" or "sonnetto" in the same sense as Shakespeare's twelve-line Sonnet 126, also in rhyming couplets. Here, Meyer intermingles symbol and physical imagery until they all but fuse. The poet does not name Charon as the helmsman or the River Styx as the waters on which this ferry travels; such overt reference would displace this intimate presentiment of death onto the antique classical world and take away our necessary awareness of the present moment, of death here and now. The persona who speaks so

ecstatically here narrates his own voyage into death from the moment he lays his head down for the last time until his final transmutation into "one who slumbers." This is an envisioning of death as anyone would wish it to be, given the iron law of mortality, and hence the same voice tells both of consciousness and, in the final couplet, of the last unconsciousness. There, the one who was dying and is now dead sees "the sleeper" as if from outside, a final farewell from the Self to its shell. En route, the boat stops at this, that, and the other small port; at each, a shadow disembarks, "and none takes its place." The solipsism of death, the fact that we each die alone, that no one's soul re-enters the ferry for the dying once death is completed, is suggested in the singularity of each shadow. Finally, only the persona is left. His last conscious awareness is of the wind blowing in his hair, the breath of life and of elemental Nature.

Strauss resists any temptation to turn Meyer's multiple exclamation points into rhapsodic ecstasies. Instead, the song floats gently on broken-chordal figuration that we hear, not as routine extensions of the harmonic progressions, but as gestures with poetic purpose from the beginning, where Strauss beautifully "blurs" the D♭ major tonic chord with the addition of the second scale degree.[26] The Straussian hallmark of first enriching harmonies either by added tones or passing tones, or as dissonant seventh, ninth, and eleventh chords, and then shortly thereafter clearing out all the accumulated dissonance with the flick of a compositional wand in order to arrive at a purely triadic resting point is here put to symbolic use. The rich, warm dissonances are followed by "small ports" of triadic repose, one diatonic harbor at a time, until all is at rest. Even Strauss's life-long love affair with enharmony is put to symbolic service here; in the singer's first two phrases, we rise an octave-and-a-half, from the depths to the word "endlich" ("at last"). At the invocation of the "fevered brow," the D♭s and A♭s are transformed into sharps, and the music cools into cadence on E major (Example 9.6). The motion to the enharmonic flatted mediant in major mode makes the relief of falling temperatures audible.

The points of arrival at the ends of phrases carry us from that cadence on E major to other ports-of-call at E minor and then to a bigger articulation of the dominant, A♭ major. If this seems an unusually customary arrival-point, the means of getting there is a hallmark of this composer's unique repertory of harmonic devices. As "joy and pain" both grow mute ("O wie weich verstummen Lust und Schmerz"), Strauss sends a brief jolt of electricity through the passage in a last reminiscence of joy and pain; via common-tone and neighbor-note motion, Strauss shifts suddenly from an A minor chord to a diminished-seventh chord on A♯, with a rare leap upwards in the vocal line to "Lust." One of the options to which that harmony can, and does, turn is B minor, but Strauss, in a typical wave-of-the-wand,

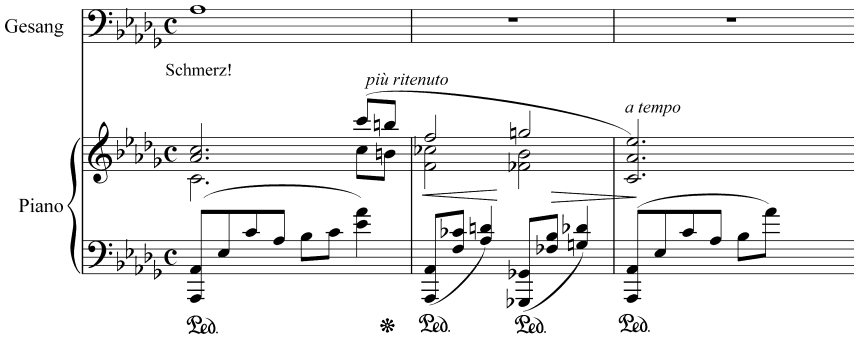
Example 9.6 "Im Spätboot," mm. 1–7



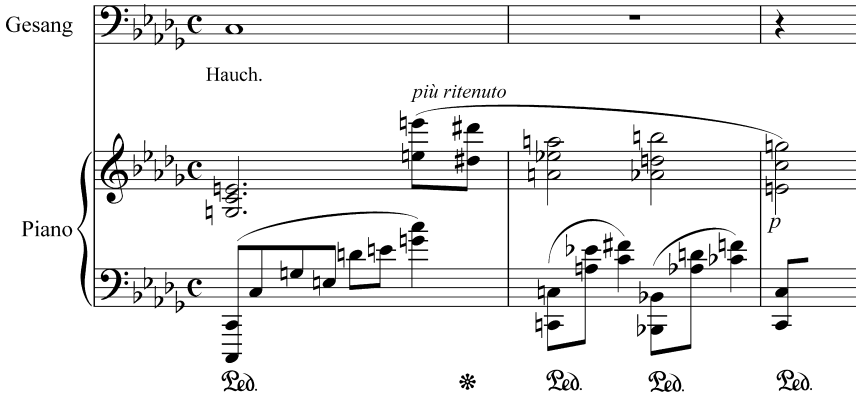
bids that harmony slip downwards to the dominant seventh of A♭ and from there to arrival at the A♭ chord of resolution. This is not where we expect to go when we disembark from E minor, any more than we expected the E major that follows so soon after setting off in D♭ major. Late-Romantic death floats on a mediant-imbued Lethe.

From A♭, the next port-of-call is a Phrygian-inflected cadence to C major, a Picardy third as well, this after an unusually repetitive and prolonged "black smoke" of non-resolving seventh and ninth chords that begin each time with a permutation of the eloquent gesture we first hear at the words "O wie süß" and "O wie weich." This gesture is defined by the anacrusis on a descending semitone interval and the subsequent drift downwards on the downbeat to a pitch a fourth, a tritone, a fifth, and finally a sixth lower; as we near the end, the interval widens. When Strauss transposes this motif

Example 9.7a "Im Spätboot," mm. 15–17



Example 9.7b "Im Spätboot," mm. 24–6



in two piano interludes, he ensures that we apprehend the sweetness and gentleness enveloping this passage into death's realm (Example 9.7). That there is a faint prick of life's lingering pain in the wonderful voice-leading by which the topmost voice sounds the leading tone (G♮ or B♮) against the flatted seventh in the bass demonstrates yet another way in which Strauss could bend dissonance–consonance pattern-making to symbolic purposes in this song.

The close linkage of music to words within a beautiful abstract overall design is particularly marked as we head towards song's end. Strauss, of all composers, could hardly be expected to resist the image of a "Steurer" who stands guard like a watchman, nor does he. Just before, he plunges briefly into the depths of G♭ major to tell of each solitary shadow disembarking. The singer's leap of a ninth downwards to the cadence at "niemand ein" is inexpressibly moving; in that one gesture, we *hear* that no one on the other shore can return to the ferry and that they would not wish to do so. For the watchman, the composer sounds a proclamatory fanfare, but in the treble, and what he announces is the final "Hauch" of life, set as the sort of sinking

chromatic line that has a long, death-haunted tradition in western music. Each step along the descent is a small wavelet – the whole-tone anacrusis figure we have already heard so many times before – that rises before it falls. Nor does Strauss, prompted by the poet, shy away from the invocation of a last stab of pain at the close, rendered as a *sforzando* jangle of dissonance in the piano (a rhythmically augmented variant of the anacrusis motive) even as the singer wends his "very peaceful" (*sehr ruhig*) way to death. The exquisite deceptive motion to the submediant, or B♭ minor, for "sanften Tod" means that we return to D♭ only at the transmutation into "one who slumbers" at the end; even there, the chromatically altered tones remind us of rich melancholy before the song comes to rest on a wide-spanning last chord. Almost forty years before the *Vier letzte Lieder*, we have this premonition of its brooding, autumnal, darkly ecstatic welcome to Death.

"Her melodious lay": Ophelia's mad-songs

Strauss made a practice of organizing opuses by poet or poetic collection: not song cycles per se, but a coherent grouping, as in the *Acht Gedichte aus "Letzte Blätter"* on poems by Gilm, Op. 10; the *Sechs Lieder aus "Lotosblätter"* on poems by Schack, Op. 19; or the *Mädchenblumen* of Dahn, Op. 21. These sets are usually mined for individual numbers, although it is worth pointing out that familiar songs reveal themselves in new ways when one performs the entire opus (for example, the "Ständchen" in Op. 17 when one follows it with "Das Geheimnis" and the other Schack songs). The same is not true of the first half of Strauss's *Sechs Lieder*, Op. 67: the *Drei Lieder der Ophelia*, always performed as a mini-cycle. Confronted with these plangent works, one remembers Strauss's formative experiences with his mentally ill mother Josephine Schorr, who attempted, so we are told by his sister Johanna, to intervene as peace-maker when Strauss and his autocratic father Franz quarreled. She first went into a nursing home when she was forty-seven and her son not quite twenty-one; thereafter, Strauss defended his mother, who "never uttered a cross word" and "always had to be so careful of her nerves," and spoke of her in idealizing ways.[27] But his experience of mental illness at close quarters left its mark. One treads on dangerous ground with life-into-art guesswork, and yet the humanity one hears in these songs, the avoidance of any taint of kitsch, is an invitation to do just that. Whether he could allow himself to think of his mother in terms of sexualized madness I will not speculate, but his Salome and Elektra are women whose psychoses have much to do with sexuality warped beyond bearing, and Ophelia too is infected with Hamlet's sexual disgust, his displacement of fury at his mother onto his betrothed. Female psychosis was a subject Strauss would

address over and over again, and thus it was perhaps inevitable that he would join forces with the many painters, poets, and musicians at the turn of the century who were also fascinated by Ophelia.

Strauss found his Ophelia in the Shakespeare translations of Karl Joseph Simrock (1802–76) and Ludwig Seeger (1810–64), with Seeger listed as the translator of *Hamlet*.[28] It is in Act 4, Scene v that the mad Ophelia appears, a scene that begins with Queen Gertrude, Horatio, and a gentleman in conversation with one another about the young woman's sad state. The unnamed court gentleman muses about the ways in which sane people attempt to understand the language of insanity:

> … her speech is nothing,
> Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
> The hearers to collection; they aim at it
> And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts;
> Which, as her winks, and nods, and gestures yield them,
> Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
> Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.
>
> (*Hamlet* IV.v.7–13)

Something similar is at work in the musical syntax of these songs, which, like all mad music, must radiate lunacy and yet connect, however tenuously, to the laws and logic of music in its own day. Shakespeare's character uses language – she has no other recourse – to say what she would never have said before, and the listener tries to force sense onto whatever coherence presents itself. And coherence is in fact to be found here: Strauss tells us both that madness has its own inner logic and that it slips in and out of contact with more conventional discourse.

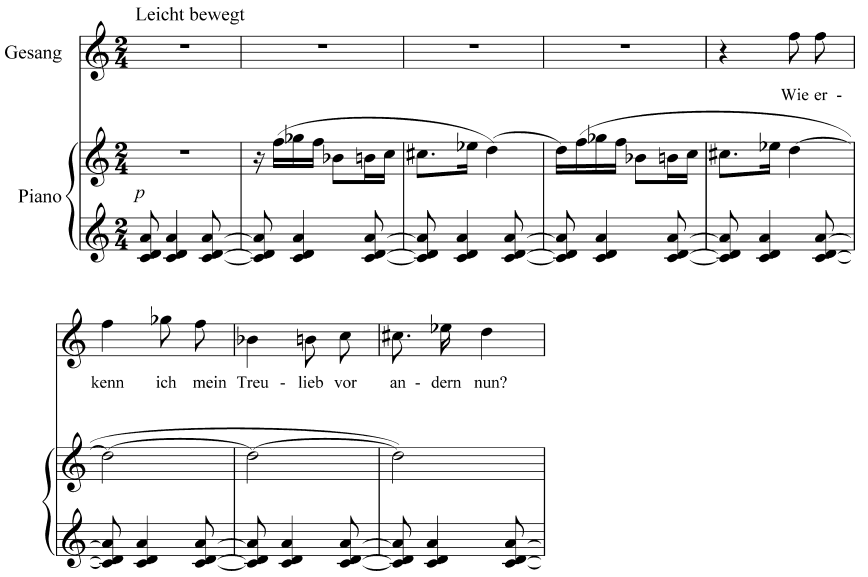
Shakespeare is, of course, famously difficult to translate because his incessant word-play resists transfer onto other linguistic maps. Simrock and Seeger clearly tried to be as literal as possible, except when stumped by such expressions as the white shroud "larded with sweet flowers" (this becomes "Viel liebe Blumen trauern": "Many sweet flowers mourn") or the sexualized language of the Saint Valentine's song. "By Cock they are to blame" becomes the much tamer "Führwahr, das ist nicht recht" ("Forsooth, that is not right"), but the translator cleverly manages to substitute a German sexual inference for an English one at the song's end, when "An thou hadst not come to my bed" becomes "Wärst du nicht kommen herein." "To come inside" has two meanings here, as obvious in their lewdness as the words that so shock Claudius in the play. Of course, what any extraction of the songs from the play sacrifices is the context – the surrounding interjections by the king, Gertrude, and Laertes – who break the madwoman's songs into fragments and seek to deny Ophelia's increasingly

uninhibited perception of her own sexuality and of corruption at the court. "Pretty Ophelia," the king cries, while the grief-stricken Laertes declares that "Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself, / She turns to favour and to prettiness." But the disruptive power of Ophelia's torment cannot be wished away in such fashion, and too much beauty in poem, painting, or song runs the risk of negating the hell of lascivious fantasy that drives her to suicide. Does Strauss avoid that particular danger without depriving her of the pathos intrinsic to her attraction?

Everything about the beginning of the first song, "Wie erkenn' ich mein Treulieb?" ("How Should I Your True Love Know?"), tells of an inner world gone awry. If one takes the stance described by Shakespeare's gentleman and seeks to make sense of the song's beginning, to place it in an ordered harmonic world, one might describe mm. 1–8 as an obsessively repeated ninth chord of B♭ in fourth inversion … except that the harmony formed by the aggregate pitches B♭–D–F–A–C never resolves. Rather, we hear two strands at dissonant odds with one another and with conflicts of other kinds built into each strand. In the left hand, we hear a meter-defying chain of syncopations across the measure line – we hover in mid-air – and a pitch cluster that no one could hear as firm tonal ground. A harmonic whole-step at the base joins forces with a perfect fifth in the left hand to produce both dissonance and hollowness simultaneously, while the right-hand melodic gesture also harps on an open fifth. The terminal pitch D is surrounded by its chromatic neighbors on either side, C♯ and E♭, and the result is softly bone-crushing dissonance against the left hand. Where are we …? We have no idea (Example 9.8). There are remnants of tonal discourse, memories of a tonal world, but they are not used to affirm any location we can recognize or in which we can remain, and the recourse to repetition without progression to recognizable places heightens our sense of having strayed into an alien landscape. In m. 9, the interval of the perfect fifth is warped into another recurring pattern that bespeaks disorientation, that of bell-like, falling tritone intervals that strike above, through, and below a semitone-displaced variant of the initial left-hand simultaneity. It is as if the tritone-/whole-tone-scale sexual rapture of "Leises Lied" had become, by hideous metamorphosis, that which now expresses sexually fraught descent into madness.

Thereafter, Strauss moves these figures around as if on a chessboard, with tonal surety always out of reach. When he shifts the original figures to sit above E minor and C major $^{6}_{3}$ triads starting in m. 11, we are allowed the briefest instant of C major clarity for the pilgrim's sandals worn by the phantom lover (his asceticism is in tragic-ironic counterbalance to her sense of sinfulness), but this brief evocation of clarity and purity is surrounded by edgy dissonance. Here, parallel fifths are part and parcel of an

Example 9.8 "Wie erkenn' ich mein Treulieb?," mm. 1–8



alternate universe, where transgressions compositional and sexual flood the air. Only for the outburst at the singer's last word, "Liebesschauern," does the bell-chiming figure ascend from the depths into the treble rather than drop into a pit via a ladder of tritones; only here does a pure triad, with no dissonant accretions, hold sway for an entire two-and-a-half measures. But even this climax, both radiant and desperate, is preceded by the harmony a tritone away (B♭ to E), and it is followed by a long postlude that returns us by degrees and by repetition to the song's beginning. The soft strains die away in the middle of the last bar, leaving us in the same indeterminacy in which we began. There is method to this madness, rigorous method in fact: every note is derived from the figures at the beginning, but its logic is not that of a sane world, centered on tonic–dominant polarities or any other fulcrum of functional tonality.

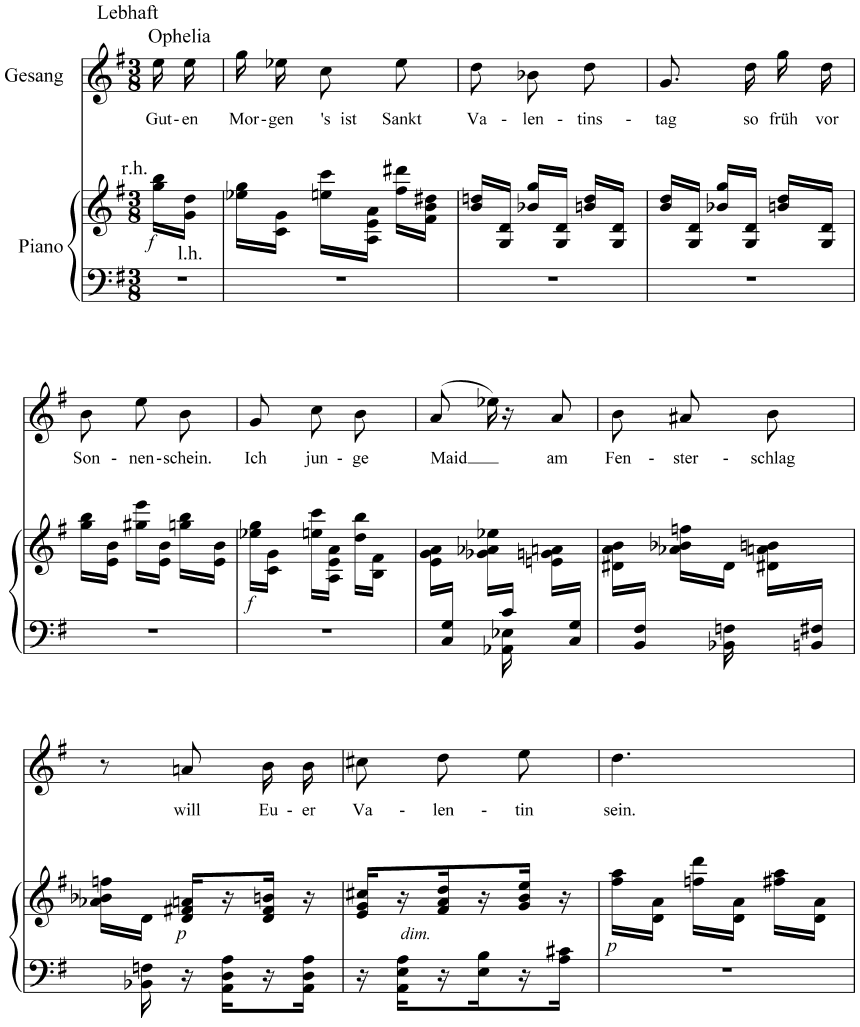
With the second song, "Guten Morgen, 's ist Sankt Valentinstag" ("Good morning, 'tis Saint Valentine's Day"), we turn abruptly from the depressive to the manic side of Ophelia's madness, to misandry made exhibitionistic. Here again, known elements appear in insane configurations, in patterns that have their own logic but not of the sort one finds either in composition textbooks or etiquette manuals for proper princesses. Once again, we ask, "Where are we?" and are vouchsafed no comfortable answer. The key signature would seem to indicate either G major or E minor for a song that begins and ends with E minor chords, but nothing that follows that beginning or precedes that ending resembles conventional late-Romantic syntax. If the entire song stops on the same chord as the anacrusis to m. 1,

the relationship seems more the result of obsessive returns throughout the song to its starting point than anything resembling a usual ending. Closure is a quantity severely compromised in madness because there is no escape from the twisted processes of a mind diseased, and Ophelia's cadences must therefore be different from the mini-closures that the sane enact every day, with their completion of thoughts and actions in rounded, comprehensible fashion. The closest thing to an authentic cadence in Ophelia's second song is in mm. 8–10 ("will Euer Valentin sein"), the mad girl's declaration that she will reverse the standard roles in seductions-by-night: *she* will come to *his* window and sue for admittance, if only in fantasy. But this is far from your usual authentic cadence, in part because the resolution on D major does not continue the voice-leading just prior to it but is rather an elision with the start of another jigging passage on contrasting major–minor chord colors, back in the treble register where the song began and in which it lives most of the time. And the diminuendo throughout the cadence bespeaks a draining away of vital energies (Example 9.9).

Reversals pervade this song. In the alternation between the left and right hands throughout the piano's near-incessant figuration, the left-hand part nearly always falls on the weak half of the beat, the opposite of what one would expect for this pattern whereby a harmony is divided between the hands. Only twice in the entire song do the two hands join forces for emphatic accents on the downbeat ("ver-*spracht*" and "beim *Son*-nenlicht"), the result paradoxically a wrong-footing of the reversed pattern surrounding these two short-lived instances. The incessant motion of mania, the piano part bobbing up and down, continues unchecked until the postlude, where we hear the energy swiftly dissipate; broken by measures of silence, it finally stutters to a halt on the second half of the third and weakest beat of the measure.

The jigging motion is not all that is "off" about the piano figuration. If parallel fifths were one element of the first song, they are far more prevalent here, filling the air from start to finish; Strauss's Ophelia has become even more brazen in the ways she flouts proscriptions. Root-position triads follow one after another in many passages of this song but in progressions that are far from usual, to put it mildly. A song that starts with E minor, C minor, A minor, B major, G major, and G minor triads in mm. 1–3 is not in the realm of tonal normalcy. But the virtuosity with which Strauss typically manipulates common-tone and side-slipping neighbor-note chord progressions is on display here; once again, there is logic at work, albeit logic with an elliptical relationship to the sane world. At times, the succession of root-position triads gives way to equally unorthodox seventh chords or to parallel first-inversion chords in the right hand, but always we come back to the root-position chords and parallel fifths en masse.

Example 9.9 "Guten Morgen, 's ist Sankt Valentinstag," mm. 1–10



In particular, the alternation between major and minor forms of the same chord is the most prevalent recurring feature of this song, a mirror of insanity's extreme instability. This is not, as in Mozart or Schubert, either the momentary darkening or lightening of the one mode by the other or the contrast of a plateau in major with a plateau in minor or vice versa (for example, G♭ major becoming F♯ minor in the exposition of the first movement of Schubert's 1828 opus posthumous, the B♭ Piano Sonata, D. 960). Rather, the two color possibilities alternate within the measure, and neither modal color continues onwards to define a key; since each bar has three beats, Strauss has the minor chord predominate in some bars, the major in others. The fact that there is usually a leap of a perfect fourth in the topmost voice such that the highest pitch is in the middle of the bar

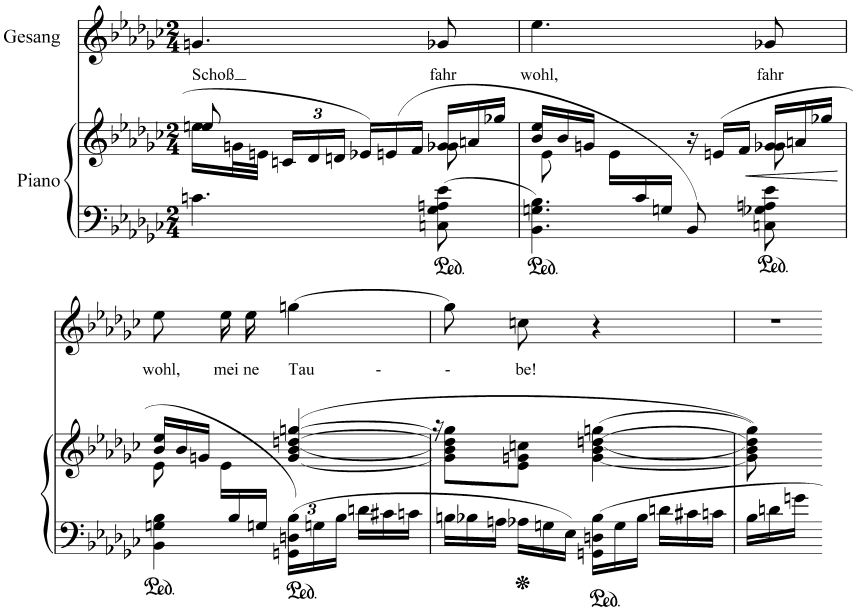
only adds to our sense of a mind in disarray. In those rare cases where the composer both returns to the alternating chord colors and *descends* at mid-measure rather than leaping up, he puts an accent on the second beat in the piano, lest we find even momentary surcease from the conflict between meter and melodic profile regnant throughout the song (for example, in m. 35 at the word "Geschlecht!" and repeated in mm. 36, 38, and 39).

But again, there is method in this madness because we keep coming back to the same illogical harmonies we have already heard. At the beginning, in mm. 2–5, we hear jigging back and forth on G major–minor and E minor–major, followed by the same device in mm. 10–11 on D minor–major and in mm. 14–15 on C major–minor. Thereafter, we return in mm. 27–9 to mm. 1–3, again in mm. 37–9, and finally in mm. 62–3, the stitching between the singer's "cadence" and the piano postlude. Not surprisingly, the "ending" of this song is as inconclusive as the "ending" of the first song. We sense that the manic mechanisms producing the jittery contrasts are running out of energy when the triads darken to become all minor towards the close of the piano postlude (the first three chords of the song are also all minor). These F minor and D minor triads surround E minor in a manner that once again denies us any means of hearing "closure" or any sense of secure tonal location. The song saddens and then simply stutters to a stop.

Because the rules of normal connection in a sane world are not the law here, Strauss just slips from the E minor harmony at the end of the second song to the bassless E♭ minor harmony at the start of the third song, "Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß" ("They bore him naked on the bier"). Anticipating the flowing water in which Ophelia will shortly die, Strauss hangs the "tonic" harmony between octave columns of the chord's fifth degree and warps it suggestively; again, we ask where we are, on what ultimate path to suicide. Slipping back up to the E minor strand of the second song in m. 4, Strauss resorts once again to the parallel descending motion endemic to the Ophelia songs, reiterated before one of the most heart-stopping moments of the cycle in mm. 11–15. "Fahr wohl, fahr wohl, meine Taube!" ("Farewell, farewell, my dove!"), she sings to typically Straussian third-related triads (E♭ major and G major), and we are reminded of the "Liebesschauern" climax in the first song. In these poignant-radiant moments of refulgence, we hear a recollection of her beauty of spirit in happier times (Example 9.10).

Because she is mad, such moments cannot last, and hectic gaiety overthrows the sad tenderness. What eroticized waltzes at the turn of the century mean for the likes of Ravel and Strauss, in their very different ways, is a fascinating subject, and here, the sprightly sensuality of a *Rosenkavalier* world invades her mind. That the bright A major – an intrusion, as we do not change key signature – is pervaded by octave plunges downwards is

Example 9.10 "Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß," mm. 11–15



enough to induce vertigo. The giddiness skids to a halt at the realization that "he will never come again" ("Er kommt dir nimmermehr"), set to yet another succession of root-position triads linked by *echt* Straussian side-slipping chromatic motion (G major, B♭ minor, E major, G minor) and culminating in seventh chords. "Er ist tot, o weh!" ("He is dead, oh woe!"), she sings, and then begins all over again: the warped water-music, the nausea-inducing waltz, the *wieder langsam* chords that signal realization all return, varied and transposed until, at last, she sings her farewell blessing, "Gott sei mit euch!" ("God be with you!"). The final harmonic gesture, echoed an octave lower, is the apotheosis of Straussian neighbor-note and common-tone motion leading to an unforgettable last point of repose: a diminished-seventh harmony on A♮–C–E♭–G♭ slides softly sideways to the final E♭ major chords. The traditional Picardy-third close for Baroque compositions in minor mode here has tragic meaning. Surcease is finally at hand, she now knows, but only at the cost of self-extinction.

Here at the close, indignant readers will, I know, carp about the omission of this, that, or the other special Strauss song, and I can only plead exigencies of length and my desire to draw attention to my own favorites. Who, once exposed to "Im Spätboot," could ever forget it? Other writers will surely follow suit to "talk up" other gems, just as singers and pianists are now beginning to perform songs other than the standard few. May both missions continue.