'Pure' Song: 'Du bist wie eine Blume' and the Heine Juggernaut

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Anyone who ventures into the vastness of German song territory encounters a juggernaut almost immediately. Over and over again, the supplier of the words is identified as Heinrich Heine – a very great poet, to be sure, but other great poets did not leave the same mammoth imprint on the history of song as this man. Günter Metzner's catalogue, *Heine in der Musik* (Heine in Music), consumes twelve oversize volumes, and both Peter Shea and I have found settings that are not cited in this Herculean source.[1] Those who peruse Ernst Challier's *Grosser Lieder-Katalog* (Great Song Catalogue) of 1884 discover that nineteenth-century composers frequently chose Heine for their op. 1 entrée onto the scene, as if setting Heine to music was a rite of passage, a guarantee that attention would be paid.[2] Brahms in his later years spoke of having set 'almost all of Heine' to music when he was young (that he destroyed the songs was his prerogative and our regret),[3] and Wolf too turned to Heine in his compositional youth for a *Liederstrauß* (song bouquet) of songs in a Schumannesque style.[4] It is not long before one begins asking why,

1 See Günter Metzner, *Heine in der Musik*, 12 vols (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1989–1994). Peter Shea of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst has created a website in which he lists Heine songs, including those not in Metzner, by composer and by poem-title; see wwwx.oit.umass.edu/~shea/query.html or wwwx.oit.umass.edu/%7Eshea/query.html.

2 Ernst Challier, *Grosser Lieder-Katalog*: *Ein alphabetisch geordnetes Verzeichniss sämmtlicher Einstimmiger Lieder* (Berlin: privately printed by the author, 1885), in which an incomplete listing of settings of 'Du bist wie eine Blume' appears on 178–9. Examples of Heine songs serving as a composer's op. 1 include Robert Hermann, 'Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen', op. 1, no. 1; Emil Kreuz, 'Am fernen Horizonte', op. 1, no. 1; Edmond Snell, 'Die du bist so schön und rein', op. 1, no. 1; Garnet Wolseley Cox, 'Butterfly is in love with the rose', op. 1, no. 3; Franz Mohaupt, 'Aus meinen großen Schmerzen', op. 1, no. 2, and so on and on.

3 See Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms I 1833–1856* (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms Gesellschaft, 1912): 132–3. In a letter to Kalbeck written in 1885, Brahms remarked that it was sad to see youthful composers rush their immature compositions into print. Asked if he had any of his own early works, Brahms replied that he had burned them and poked fun at himself for papering the walls and floors of his first abodes with sonatas, quartets and songs. 'There were quite pretty little songs among them', he said dismissively.

4 Wolf's first three songs to texts by Heine were composed within five days in December 1876: 'Mädchen mit dem roten Mündchen' (Maiden with your rosy lips), 'Du bist wie eine Blume' (Thou art like a flower) and 'Wenn ich in deine Augen seh' (When I look into your eyes), all three influenced heavily by Schumann. In 1878, Wolf planned to assemble a *Liederstrauß* on poems from the *Buch der Lieder* and composed eight songs for it,

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and the usual answers somehow do not suffice. Yes, Heine was a master of pellucid profundity, of simple words arranged to say things that are not at all simple; yes, he could concoct images guaranteed to tempt the composer to his or her writing table; yes, he became famous immediately and therefore one knew his name and read his verse where less notorious figures might go unnoticed; and yes, he was a master-practitioner of contradiction, and hence there is a Heine for many different purposes. But not even all those factors put together are sufficient to explain the sheer size and scope of the phenomenon. To the present day, in works such as Wilhelm Killmayer's *Heine-Liederbuch* (Heine Songbook) of 1998, Heine has composers in thrall.[5] It is as if he were somehow synonymous with song.

Music to Heine's words is not confined only to the German-speaking world: he crops up in surprising places. The gargantuan repertory of Heine settings includes works in Hungarian, English, Finnish, Rumanian, Portugese, Czech, Spanish, Greek, Japanese and Welsh. The French loved him, converting him into pseudo-Parnassian song texts at century's end; one of Debussy's early lost works, 'Tragédie' (Tragedy), was on a poem by Léon Valade after Heine's 'Tragödie'.[6] There was a cottage industry in Russian translations of the *Buch der Lieder* (Book of Songs): Tchaikovsky is a Heine composer, and so are Mussorgsky, Glazunov, Cui, Dargomyzhski, Borodin, Balakirev and a host of lesser lights.[7] Somewhat comically, those who dwelt in the frozen north of Scandinavia and Russia seemed especially fond of the poem 'Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam' (A fir tree stands alone), in which yearning for the exotic-erotic Other is assigned to trees (I always think of 'Ombra mai fù'); a lonely fir tree in northern climes dreams of a similarly lonely Oriental palm.[8] According to nineteenth-century poetry's morals police,

plus a fragment of a ninth; in October of that same year, he wrote four more Heine songs for a second Heft. Only once again did he return to a poet more Schumann's man than his own: on 24 January 1888, he set 'Wo wird einst der Wandermüden' (Where shall the weary traveller) before turning to Mörike's poetry, far more to his own taste.

5 See Wilhelm Killmayer, *Heine-Lieder. Ein Liederbuch nach Gedichten von Heinrich Heine für Tenor und Klavier* (Mainz: Schott, 1998). These 35 songs, composed in 1994 and 1995, have been recorded on CD by CPO (CPO 999 838-2, 2002) with Christoph Prégardien, tenor, and Siegfried Mauser, piano.

6 See Léon Valade, *Nocturnes; poëmes imités de Henri Heine* (Paris: Patay, 1880): 33–6. Debussy's lost 'Tragédie', perhaps for voice and orchestra, was composed around 1881 or 1882; some have speculated that it is identical with the 'Intermezzo' composed in 1882 and arranged for piano four-hands. Given the fact that Valade also translated the *Lyrisches Intermezzo* (Lyrical Intermezzo) into French in a little volume entitled simply *Intermezzo*, it seems more likely that they are two separate compositions.

7 See German Ritz, *150 Jahre russische Heine-Übersetzung* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1981), and Rolf-Dieter Kluge, *Heinrich Heine in Russland* (Tübingen: Slavisches Seminar der Universität Tübingen, 1998). The repertory of Heine songs by Russian composers includes César Cui's op. 37, no. 1, 'Es fällt ein Stern herunter/Le ciel entr'ouvre ses voiles' (A star falls down) and op. 86, nos. 4 and 6, also twelve songs without opus numbers; Mussorgsky's 'Aus meinen Tränen sprießen' (From my tears spring up) and 'Ich wollt', meine Schmerzen ergossen sich' (I want to declare my sorrows to you); Tschaikowsky's 'Warum?' (Why are the roses so pale?) from his *Sechs Romanzen*, op. 6, no. 5, also 'Die blauen Frühlingsaugen' (The blue eyes of spring); and Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Le sapin et le palmier/Fichtenbaum und Palme' (Fir tree and palm) from the *Quatre mélodies*, op. 3, no. 1, as well as five other Heine songs without opus numbers.

8 'Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam' tells the tale of the post-Romantic poet's dilemma, the avatars of Romanticism dreaming lovely but useless dreams of the exotic-erotic Other

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this was one of Heine's few 'pure' poems, unmarred by *Zerrissenheit* (this fashionable Romantic term designates a soul or mind torn between different states of being), sarcasm, irony or sexual reference and hence approved for musical composition, with 114 settings extant.

Furthermore, the shape-shifting musical styles and genres to which Heine was fitted can make one's head spin. There are songs *im Volkston* (in folklike style), concert songs, music-hall ditties, and cycles of many sizes. There are late-nineteenth-century Italian salon songs on words by 'Enrico Heine' of a lushness to inspire laughter, and there is Luigi Dallapiccola's exquisite chamber work *An Mathilde* (To Mathilde [Heine's Teutonized name for his French wife]), based on three poems written near the end of the poet's eight years on the *Matratzengruft* or mattress-grave.[9] Whatever Heine's own complicated feelings about the British, they found their way to his verse early and often. One particularly amusing early specimen is entitled 'This Heart of Mine' by Alexander Reichardt, who translated 'Und wüßten's die Blumen, die kleinen' (And if the little flowers only knew) in best early-Victorian manner: 'The daisies that round me are peeping/Were they of my pain aware,/Would now with me lie weeping/My load of grief to share'. One is not surprised to find the indication *Con molto sentimento* at the start of the song.[10] There was a proliferation of Heine settings by late-nineteenth-century American composers, many of them descendants of the German Forty-Eighters who came to the United States of America in the wake of the mid-century European uprisings. Other Americans, notably Charles Ives, were trained by teachers who believed that setting poetry from the European canon was essential to a composer's formation.[11] These Heine songs from the 'Gay Nineties' and the period before World War One were, with some exceptions, tailored to the middle-class American parlour; in this regressive repertory, you will find nothing as radical as Schubert's 'Die Stadt' (The City) composed some seventy years earlier. As in many European songs composed after 1848, these American works in nostalgic styles often act to uphold those same institutions and ideologies Heine

far, far away in a fantasy-Orient. One of the best settings of this poem is the second of Karl Vilhelm Stenhammar's op. 17 *Drei Lieder von Heinrich Heine*, which ends by returning to the frozen grief of the first two lines. See Reinald Werrenrath, ed., *Modern Scandinavian Songs*, vol. 2: *Lange-Müller to Winge* (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1926): 132–3.

9 See Luigi Dallapiccola, *An Mathilde: Eine Kantate für Frauenstimme und Orchester* (Milan: Suvini Zerboni, 1957), settings of three of Heine's last poems ('Den Strauss, den mir Mathilde band', 'Gedächtnisfeier' and 'An die Engel'). Before Dallapiccola, there were other songs to poems by Heine, including 1) Angelo Bettinelli's lovely 'Io sognai', a setting of *Die Heimkehr* no. 26, 'Mir träumte: traurig schaute der Mond' (Milan: Ricordi, 1911); 2) Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Tre poesie di Heine/Drei Heine-Lieder* (Vienna: Universal, 1929), with settings of 'Zu Halle auf dem Markt', 'Dämmernd liegt der Sommerabend' and the 'impertinent waltz' 'Sie saßen und tranken am Teetisch'; and 3) the *romanze* of Benedetto Junck, such as 'Tu sei bella, o mia dolcezza (Du bist wie eine Blume), 'Flebil traversa l'anima mia' (Leise zieht durch mein Gemüt') and 'Quando ti guardo fiso' (Wenn ich in deine Augen seh) (Milan: Lucca, 1880). Junck and others used the translations by Bernardino Zendrini; see that author's 'Enrico Heine e i suoi interpreti' in Enrico Heine, *Il Canzoniere*, trans. Bernardino Zendrini, vol. 2 (Milan: G. Brigola, 1884), 181–437.

10 Alexander Reichardt, 'This Heart of Mine (Das arme Herz)' (London: Chappell & Co., n.d.). See also Siegbert Salomon Prawer, *Frankenstein's Island: England and the English in the Writings of Heinrich Heine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

11 Ives set 'Die Lotosblume' and 'Ich grolle nicht'. See Charles Ives, *129 Songs*, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2004).

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had most decried during his lifetime. One can imagine Heine's amusement upon hearing settings of his 'malicious-sentimental songs'[12] – note which adjective comes first – turned into middle-class courtship fodder, sounding treacle poured over the sexual, societal and economic realities of American-style love.

Anyone browsing through the available song catalogues is quickly made to muse on repetition-compulsion. What was it that impelled composer after composer to select the same poems? Was it laggard literary enterprise (easier simply to pluck texts from someone else's prior opus) or its Siamese twin, Annie Oakley-style competition (anything you can do, I can do better)? Until the first Panzer divisions took aim in World War One, most composers behaved as if Heine had dropped dead after completing the *Buch der Lieder* and the *Neuer Frühling* (New Springtime) poems later gathered together as part of his 1844 *Neue Gedichte* (New Poems).[13] But Heine recognized even as he penned 'Leise zieht durch mein Gemüt', one of the loveliest encomiums to Romantic Nature ever written, that it was no longer possible for him to escape into crystalline realms of poetic beauty and thereby turn his back on injustice in the world. With his characteristic uncanny prescience, he saw a crisis of language long before it became evident to others and made of the dilemma a lifelong bone to gnaw in his poems and prose. From his self-imposed exile in Paris, he forged new paths, but the vast majority of composers for eighty years thereafter stuck with a short list of early Heine poems and refused to budge from it until the world was a very different place. 'How many settings of "Du bist wie eine Blume" and "The sea hath its pearls" *are* there?', I found myself asking as the examples multiplied exponentially.[14] Was there anyone anywhere in the Western world who did not know these poems? Why them and not others?

What most interests me at the moment are those poems in which Heine simultaneously writes poetry about his own poetic situation *and* turns a jaundiced eye on hypocrisy in the world around him – in particular, the anti-sensual dogmas propounded by Christianity. Poems such as 'Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen' (A boy loves a girl), the *Tragödie* trilogy, 'Sie liebten sich beide' (They loved one another), and 'Du bist wie eine Blume' drew composers like iron filings to a magnet. We know, of course, that the women in Heine's poems are abstractions,

12 The phrase 'my little malicious-sentimental poems' invokes the *Lyrisches Intermezzo* and comes from a letter Heine wrote to Karl Immermann on 24 December 1822. See Heinrich Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 20: *Briefe 1815–1831*, ed. Fritz Eisner (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, and Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1970): 61.

13 The poems in the *Neuer Frühling* section that were most often set to music include 'Gekommen ist der Maie' (May is come), 'Leise zieht durch mein Gemüt' (Softly chimes through my soul), 'Der Schmetterling ist in die Rose verliebt' (The butterfly is in love with the rose), 'Wie des Mondes Abbild zittert' (How the moon's likeness trembles) and 'Es war ein alter König' (There once was an old king). See Stuart Atkins, 'The Evaluation of Heine's *Neue Gedichte*', in *Wächter und Hüter. Festschrift für Hermann J. Weigand*, ed. Curt von Faber du Faur (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957): 99–107 and Jerold Wikoff, *Heinrich Heine: A Study of Neue Gedichte* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1975).

14 'Das Meer hat seine Perlen', the first poem from the small cycle *Nachts in der Cajüte* (Nights in the Cabin) from *Die Nordsee* (The North Sea), was translated into English by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as 'The sea hath its pearls' for his anthology *The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems* of 1846. But one should note that Longfellow disliked Heine and advertised his displeasure in an article on the German poet written for *Graham's Magazine* 20 (1842): 134–7. See H.B. Sachs, *Heine in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1916).

autoscopic mirrors of an agonized psychology, figures both so shadowy and so stylized that they *proclaim* their artificiality, while the men who suffer at their hands are poetic distillations of their creator's ambivalence, alienation and self-reflection.[15] But there is no denying that these poems were most often read for their simulacrum of narrative, their semblance of lived experience. Diagnoses etched in gall and regret, these Jacob-and-the-angel wrestling matches with the Romantic poetic project, these thumbnail sketches of what was rotten in the century's ideologies, were received along a wide-flung gamut of responses. To some, blinded by Heine's recourse to archetypes, these were poignant love poems, while others could recognize the turnings-and-twistings of an agile mind. When composers in the long nineteenth century flocked *en masse* to certain poems, many of them were participating in, responding to, commenting upon Heine's Janus-faced deployment of the sentimental tropes by which institutions were perpetuated. If Man and Woman are Poet and Muse in Heine's metaphorical world, they can also be read as symbols of what was out-of-kilter in the real world of flesh and blood.

'Sie liebten sich beide', for example, might be understood as a poem about the Romantic Muse and the post-Romantic poet, who loved one another passionately but refused to admit it, and hence were condemned, first, to soul-death, then to separation, except – occasionally – in dreams. To make a poem out of this central problem in his existence, Heine concocted a tiny scenario in which a couple who love one another passionately nevertheless deny their love, for unnamed, unknown reasons.

XXXIII.	No. 33
Sie liebten sich beide, doch keiner Wollt' es dem andern gestehn; Sie sahen sich an so feindlich, Und wollten vor Liebe vergehn.	They loved one another, but neither wanted the other to know it; They looked at each other so coldly And wanted to die of love.
Sie trennten sich endlich und sah'n sich Nur noch zuweilen im Traum; Sie waren längst gestorben, Und wußten es selber kaum.[16]	They finally parted and saw each other only occasionally, in dreams; they had died long ago and hardly knew it.

Given the limitations placed on the expression of middle-class female sexuality, it seems hardly coincidental that six of the nineteenth-century's limited roll-call of women composers (most, of course, were denied access to serious compositional training) set this poem to music.[17] Clara Schumann's setting in particular is a

15 See Diana Lynn Justis, *The Feminine in Heine's Life and Oeuvre: Self and Other* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

16 Heinrich Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 1: *Gedichte 1812–1827*, ed. Hans Böhm (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, and Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1979): 108.

17 The women who set 'Sie liebten sich beide' to music in addition to Clara Schumann are Agathe Backer-Gröndahl in her *Sieben Gesänge/7 Sange*, op. 4, no. 3; Rosa Bleiter, op. 34; Mary Grant Carmichael, 'So loved and so loving' in *Three Lyrics from Heine's Book of Songs*, 2nd set (the other two settings are 'Out in the deep woodlands' or 'Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen' and 'From the eyes of heaven above me' or 'Aus den Himmelsaugen droben'); Marie Shedlock from *Ten Songs, with German & English Words*; and Maude Valérie White, in her *Album of German Songs*. In a letter to his friend Rudolf Christiani on 6 December 1825, Heine copied out his new poem and asked, 'Kennst Du in der ganzen deutschen Literatur

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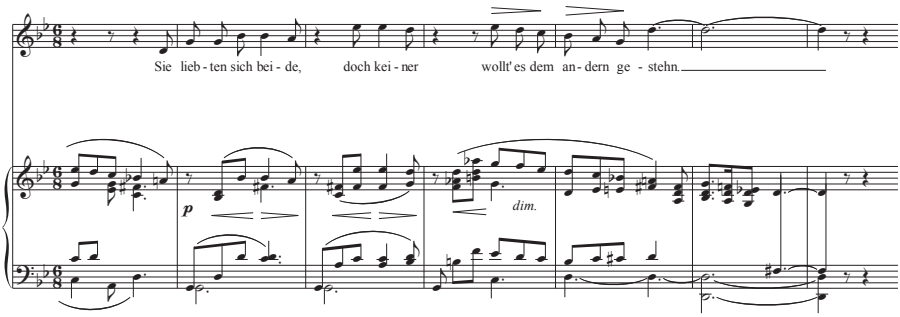
Ex. 1 Clara Schumann, 'Sie liebten sich beide', bars 4–10



wonderful thing. This song and her 'Loreley' – both are settings of Heine in a vein different from her husband's Heine songs – must be numbered among the century's best lieder.[18] Of the myriad evocative details in this work, I will cite only a few, on display in Ex. 1. Clara breaks the initial poetic sentence into smaller figures and brief phrases separated by rests ('Sie liebten sich beide [pause] doch keiner [pause] wollt es dem andern gestehn') after a fashion all the more telling because the first two shorter fragments are followed by a seamless exhalation of words and melody. The second fragment, 'doch keiner', is a despairing, tension-laden, upwards transposition of the previous sighing figure at the words 'sich beide', thus emphasizing the first word of negation in the poem; the accented syllables both of '*bei*-de' and '*kei*-ner', the rhyming diphthongs opening out in helpless desire, are prolonged slightly to underscore paradoxical equivalence and difference. 'Keiner', horribly, takes precedence over 'beide', while 'wollt', the verb of willing something to be or not to be, is the start of an inexorable descent. The way in which Clara hangs the final syllable of the phrase, '[ge]-*stehn*', in mid-air and sustains it, as if thereby to underscore passion's need to make itself understood, while the piano completes the descent to a cadence establishing the tragic dearth of understanding, is so economical, so devoid of the sentimentality that mars other settings of this poem, that one marvels.

Beyond what is bound to the world of the early nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie, these poems also tell of ages-old mechanisms of human nature: the anger of the rejected lover, the taking of an unloved partner on the rebound ('I'll show him/her'), the metamorphosis of unexpressed desire into soul-death, and the effects of economic need or cupidity on sexual transactions of all kinds, licit and illicit. The literary dilemmas of a modern poet who still loved Romanticism became poems he knew would be read both as autobiography and as snapshots of society's mores, including religion's role in dictating the moral codes of the day. One of the artist Paul Thumann's more elaborate engravings to illustrate an 1883 edition of the *Buch der Lieder* is that for *Die Heimkehr* (The Homecoming) no. 28, 'Der bleiche, herbstliche Halbmond' (The pale, autumnal half-moon), with its dysfunctional preacher's family to end them all. In the poem, the pastor's widow reads her Bible, while the youngest daughter laments her boredom (except when

ein besseres Lied?' (Do you know a better song in all of German literature?). See Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 20: *Briefe 1815–1831*: 225.

18 See Clara Schumann, *Sämtliche Lieder für Singstimme und Klavier*, vol. 1, ed. Joachim Draheim and Brigitte Höft (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1990).

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someone dies, there is nothing to do, she sulks), and the eldest daughter yawns, then announces her intention to give herself to a rich count who desires her but is hardly likely to marry someone so far beneath his station.[19] The son too proclaims that he is leaving to join a group of carousing huntsmen who have told him that they know how to make gold and will teach him the mysteries of that art, but his furious mother knows that this is merely a euphemism for highway robbery. At the end, she hurls the family Bible at her son as the dead preacher's ghost lurks outside, still clad in his black preacher's garb and tapping on the window in outrage at the behaviour of his offspring. Thumann must have enjoyed depicting the sullen younger girl slumped against her mother, the older daughter lounging in a brazen pose of sexual display, the thuggish son, the powerful mother with arms like a stevedore, and, barely visible in the window, the spectral father (Fig. 1). Given Heine's stinging send-up of the humble, God-fearing family romanticized elsewhere in the prose and poetry of the day, one is hardly surprised that there were only four musical settings of this poem and that one of them is by Schubert's younger contemporary Johann Vesque von Püttlingen (1803–1883), who wished to rattle the cages of conventional song composition in his mid-century mammoth anthology of all 88 poems in *Die Heimkehr*.[20] One can conjecture that Schubert's 'Die böse Farbe' (The evil colour), with its invocation of the hunter braying and blaring on his hunting horn, the musical pounding laden with sexual overtones, was the model for Vesque's less frenetic hunting music in his setting of this unusual ghost story.

One way of understanding the many musical settings of the *Tragödie* trilogy, 'Du bist wie eine Blume' and 'Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen' is to hear them as players in the working-out of nineteenth-century social and emotional codes. How did men control women by means of sentimental symbols? How did men portray women in literature and in legislation? How did society define sexual expression, both proper and improper? How did religion and society join forces to control sexuality? How were society, religion and human nature at war with one another? Over and over, Heine spins verse from the simultaneous subscription to crippling formulas of desire and ironic subversion of those formulas, and the composers who flocked to these poems were playing with fire: one has to be a consummate master to subvert sentiment at the same time that one evokes it. Some failed to see that Heine's surfaces are untrustworthy, that contradiction lurks beneath the topmost layer, but others *did* see what game was afoot and made the matter resonant by means of all the tonal ambivalence at their considerable chromatic disposal. What follows is a series of case-studies in these possibilities. This repertory, produced by composers ranging from genius to rank amateur, is richly revelatory of shifting cultural contexts as the long nineteenth century wended its way toward the disaster of World War One.

19 See Heinrich's Heine, *Buch der Lieder. (Mit Ausschluß des 'Nordsee-Cyclus')*, (Leipzig: A. Titze, [1883]), illustrated by Paul Thumann: 94.

20 Vesque's setting appears both as 'Des Pfarrers Familie' (The Pastor's Family), op. 22, no. 1 in his *Abendbilder: Gedichte aus Heine's 'Reisebildern'* (Mainz: B. Schotts Söhne, [n. d.]) and in *Die Heimkehr. Achtundachtzig Gedichte aus H. Heine's Reisebildern* (Vienna: Aus der kaiserlich-königlichen Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1851): 86–91. The other settings are by Vladimir Kasperov] (1826–1894); S. Lustgarten (a pseudonym?); and Theodor Scheibel (1828–?), 'Das Predigerhaus', op. 199, no. 2 in the *Drei Lieder von H. Heine* (Lissa, [n.d.]).

Fig. 1 Paul Thumann, illustration to 'Der bleiche, herbstliche Halbmond', from *Heinrich Heine's Buch der Lieder*. Leipzig: Adolf Titze, 1883

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Bouquets of Worship and Contempt: Heine's 'Du bist wie eine Blume'

'Did you know that I too once set "Du bist wie eine Blume"?', Brahms asked the biographer most at his Beck-and-Kal in his own lifetime.[21] Perhaps more than any other poem by Heine, this one exemplifies the complex tango between social attitudes, literary artefacts and composers who marry poetry to tones. Has any other poem been set to music as often as this one? Not even such canonical works by Goethe as 'Heidenröslein' (Little heath rose), 'Erlkönig' (The Erl King) and 'Wandrers Nachtlied I and II' (Wanderer's night song) are comparable in their attraction for composers. Of the 415 (at last count) settings of 'Du bist wie eine Blume' in numerous languages, I have made my way through 300 or so, and the experience is enough to send one back to the poem in search of answers to the question: why so ubiquitous? Yes, it was possible to construe this poem in wholly/holy sentimental fashion, a semi-sacral worship of the fair sex, but there were sugary poems aplenty that would have served that purpose better. One has to conclude that other forces were at work to make a poem with the sly subtexts one finds here quite so popular with nineteenth-century songsters.

By 1929, D.H. Lawrence, for one, was sick of it, calling for its banishment in an essay entitled 'Pornography and obscenity' born of the controversy surrounding *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

> *Du bist wie eine Blume! Jawohl*! One can see the elderly gentleman laying his hands on the head of the pure maiden and praying God to keep her for ever so pure, so clean, and beautiful. Very nice for him! … he knows perfectly well that if God keeps the maiden so clean and pure and beautiful … for a few more years, then she'll be an unhappy old maid, and not pure nor beautiful at all, only stale and pathetic. Sentimentality is a sure sign of pornography. Why should 'sadness strike through the heart' of the old gentleman, because the maid was pure and beautiful? Anybody but a masturbator would have been glad and would have thought: What a lovely bride for some lucky man! – But no, not the self-enclosed, pornographic masturbator. Sadness has to strike into his beastly heart! – Away with such love-lyrics, we've had too much of their pornographic poison, tickling the dirty little secret and rolling the eyes to heaven.[22]

Of course, this critique tells us more about Lawrence than it does about Heine.[23] Could the twentieth-century British writer possibly have been any more explicit

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21 Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms I 1833–1856*: 132–3 (the same passage cited in note no. 3).

22 D.H. Lawrence, 'Pornography and obscenity', in *'A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover' and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961): 75. Cited in Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20th Century*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1: 10.

23 This passage about 'Du bist wie eine Blume' should be understood in the context of Lawrence's relationships to things German. His wife Frieda von Richthofen was German; he defended German writers and artists; and he admired Wagner enormously. He was even falsely rumoured to have been spying for the Germans in World War One and was expelled from Cornwall by the authorities in 1917. He despised the bourgeoisie (one of his best-known poems is entitled 'How Beastly the Bourgeoisie Is'), including German burghers and their social mores; in this instance, he seems not to have recognized that Heine too was targeting the literary tastes of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (cultivated middle class) who wanted 'pure' poetry.

about Woman as sexual object with a short shelf-life than he is in this passage? According to Lawrence, the tone of intimate contempt in 'Du bist wie eine Blume' has its origins in the sexual inadequacy of its persona, whom he construes as being elderly, impotent and narcissistic: someone who masturbates to fantasies of young girls. That Heine's poetic persona can only be male is apparent at first blush, but all other identifying information is omitted from these words, the result a blank screen upon which readers could and did impose their own shape-shifting portraits of the speaker. According to Lawrence, writing from within *autres temps, autres moeurs*, Heine was a prurient coward who shied away from Lawrence's own sexual frankness and instead just 'tickled the dirty little secret' (such revealing language). Others saw in this poem a worshipful would-be lover addressing a virginal maiden in all sincerity while others construed the persona as a semi-disillusioned, quasi-cynical man (that he is not fully so gives this reading its electric charge) who looks at any and all young women and muses on the inevitable fate of purity. That *Reinheit* (purity) and its unspoken opposite are at issue is signalled by the chiming –ei diphthongs of the repeated word 'rein' in lines 2 and 8 and the words 'schleicht' and 'hinein' in the fourth line – language borrowed blatantly from Goethe. One remembers the Harper's song, 'Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergibt' (Whoever surrenders to loneliness), its lover spying at the beloved's window to the tune of similar diphthongs and the same verb ('Es schleicht ein Liebender lauschend sacht,/ob seine Freundinn allein?' or 'A lover softly spying steals – his beloved, is she alone?), and realizes that the creeping, lurking motion is sexually fraught here as well. However one interprets the age and attitude of the speaker in this poem, no one could mistake his assumption of a more experienced, worldly-wise pose *vis-à-vis* the young woman to whom he speaks.

'Du bist wie eine Blume' is so familiar by now as to be shopworn, its initial sly radicalism difficult to recapture. When one reads the poem closely, however, one realizes the virtuosity with which Heine was able to compact both his own poetic dilemma and so many of society's ills into eight short lines. If the vocabulary of this poem is elementary, what it says is not.

No. 47 in *Die Heimkehr*	No. 47 in *The Homecoming*
Du bist wie eine Blume, So hold und schön und rein; Ich schau' dich an, und Wehmut Schleicht mir ins Herz hinein.	You are like a flower, so sweet and fair and pure; I look at you, and sadness steals into my heart.
Mir ist, als ob ich die Hände Aufs Haupt dir legen sollt', Betend, dass Gott dich erhalte So rein und schön und hold.[24]	I feel as if I should lay my hands upon your head, praying that God keep you so pure and fair and sweet.

In accord with then-fashionable biographical explanations for poetry, various members of Heine's family and his circle of friends insisted that this poem was drawn from life. His niece, Maria Embden-Heine, Princess della Rocca, wrote in her 1881 *Erinnerungen an Heinrich Heine* (Memories of Heine) that the poet had a chance encounter during his student days in Berlin with 'a helpless maiden' named Mirjam, a young Jewish woman from Gnesen in Poland. Heine, so goes

24 Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 1: *Gedichte 1812–1827*: 115.

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Maria's soap-opera text, brought the poverty-stricken Mirjam to his friend Rahel Varnhagen von Ense for aid. The legend would not be complete without a hefty helping of unrequited love, and the princess obligingly supplies it: Heine, she says, fell in love with Mirjam, but the girl did not reciprocate his passion and returned to Poland after a few months.[25] In another version of the story told by the family of Heine's friend Eugen von Breza, also long after the fictional fact, Heine was himself in Gnesen during his trip to Poland in August and September of 1822 and met the rabbi's daughter Mirjam there. Having fallen in love with her, he wrote her this poem as a farewell gift (that 'Gift' means 'poison' in German springs irresistibly to mind).[26] Heine's younger brother Maximilian, however, declared that 'Du bist wie eine Blume' was written when the poet was living in the room next door to him in Lüneburg from the end of May until the beginning of July 1823 and again from the end of September 1823 until mid-January 1824; it was first published in the *Rheinischen Flora* on 13 February 1825, two years before its inclusion in the *Buch der Lieder*.[27] Heine, who, after all, makes an art of seeming to echo conventions while actually undercutting them, could well have taken mischievous delight in spinning variant versions of pseudo-personal history as veils over the actual *raison d'être* of such a famous poem.[28]

For most of Heine's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century readers, this brilliant, duplicitous work was not a record of the poet's quarrel with 'pure' Romantic poetry, but a tender effusion between a man and the maiden he loves. The poet, of course, deliberately leads his readers in that direction, and they were not entirely wrong to construe it that way: Heine's love of the Romantic Muse even as he subjected her proponents to the scalpel of his wit is evident not only in various confessional statements but in the poems themselves. His 'Blume' is multivalent, both symbolism for the properly pure, tender Romantic poem and the ages-old analogy Woman = Flower to symbolize the brevity of the blossoming season, the short span of time when young women are both sexually desirable and virginal. One thinks of Felix Dahn's *Mädchenblumen* (Maiden Flowers) set to music by Richard Strauss at the turn of the century, François Boucher's rose symbolism of female sexual experience (from virginal buds to blowsy blossoms), Alexandre Dumas the Younger's *La Dame aux camélias* (The lady with the camellias), Wagner's flower chorus in act 2 of *Parsifal*, and thousands upon thousands of other examples of flower-women who are alluring, fixed in place, sweet-smelling, fragile and briefly beautiful. Seduction and rape in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry are often evoked in floral guise, as in the sixth stanza of Robert Burns's poem 'To a Mountain Daisy':

25 Maria Embden-Heine, Princess della Rocca, *Erinnerungen an Heinrich Heine* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1881): 25–6.

26 Gustav Karpeles, *Heinrich Heine; aus seinem Leben und aus seiner Zeit* (Leipzig: A. Titze, 1899): 96.

27 Maximilian Heine (1805–1879), *Erinnerungen an Heinrich Heine und seine Familie* (Berlin: F. Dümmler, 1868): 134.

28 Other old-fashioned biographers linked 'Du bist wie eine Blume' to Heine's supposed love for his cousin Therese, 'spiritually of much finer stuff [than her elder sister Amalie]', according to a biographer in the 1920s. 'It was to her, in all probability, that he wrote what is today the most popular lyric in all the literature of the world, that beautiful poem, *Du bist wie eine Blume*.' See Lewis Browne, *That Man Heine* (New York: Macmillan, 1927): 108. His praise for this poem occurs in the context of great dislike for Heine the man.

Such is the fate of artless maid,
Sweet flow'ret of the rural shade!
By love's simplicity betray'd
And guileless trust.
Till she, like thee, all soil'd, is laid
Low i' the dust.[29]

Goethe's 'Das Veilchen' (The violet) and 'Heidenröslein' are the most famous examples, although the poet at least gives the heath rose the power to inflict lingering pain on her destroyer before she dies. It is no wonder that women of spirit rebelled every now and then, as in Luise Hensel's 'Will keine Blumen mehr' (I'll have no more flowers). Fed up with feminine ephemerality, she gives the flower-woman stereotype the boot:

Die Sommerrosen blühen	The summer roses blossom,
Und duften um mich her:	And exude fragrance all around me;
Ich seh' sie all verglühen,	I see them all perish –
Will keine Blumen mehr.[30]	I'll have no more flowers.

The poet's beloved older sister had died in childbirth, so Luise knew the dire consequences of marriage and maternity for many women, and knew too that most women's lot in life was incompatible with a desire for artistic creativity.

Two details to note: Heine does not, I would speculate, designate the 'Blume' as 'blaue' (Novalis's blue flower of Romanticism) because that would have tipped his hand, revealing that 'du' is Romantic poetry – or, rather, a particular notion of what Romantic poetry ought to be. Nor does he compare the beloved to a specific flower that would evoke specific feminine qualities, as most writers did. For example, the camellia was the most prized and expensive flower in nineteenth-century Paris and hence appropriate for Dumas's courtesan whose model was Marie Duplessis, a star of the Parisian *demi-monde*, while the humble daisy of Burns's poem is a simple country girl. Luise Hensel's summer roses bespeak sexuality at its peak, with autumn desiccation and wintry death lurking just around the corner, and Kundry as the Rose of Hell is surely among the most complex examples of Woman as deadly, beautiful blossom. But Heine invokes the universal by means of the non-specific: 'You (all young women) are like a flower (*any* flower)', his persona declares. Typically, the pronouncement is Janus-faced: the fictive recipient of this suspect adoration could feel complimented (*any* flower as *all* flowers) or patronized (that insultingly non-specific flower). No wonder so few women were moved to set this poem to music.[31]

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29 Robert Burns, *The Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London, 1963): 113–14. The full title of the poem is 'To a Mountain Daisy, on turning one down with the plough, in April, 1786'. The poet goes on in the seventh stanza to compare the poet's fate to that of the maid: 'Such is the fate of simple bard,/On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd:/Unskilful he to note the card/Of prudent lore/Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,/And whelm him o'er!'

30 Luise Hensel, *Lieder von Luise Hensel*, ed. Hermann Cardauns (Regensburg, 1923): 239.

31 Gertrude Grossmann's 'O maiden sweet and holy' (Baltimore, 1908), a setting by Marie König, Marie Hinrichs's op. 1 (discussed in this essay), Caroline Ungher-Sabatier's 'Charmante belle et pure', and a setting by Elise von Waldeck are among the few instances of female composers to set this poem.

But the true addressees of 'Du bist wie eine Blume' were the literati. Here, Heine takes aim at those poetic qualities held sacrosanct by critics and other writers, standards he was frequently accused of transgressing. When he concocted phrases such as 'geistreiche Hüften' (witty thighs), when his persona tells the girl that the two of them should go to her bedroom, not the literary linden tree where fictive German lovers have had their rendezvous since Walther von der Vogelweide, he was cocking a snook at those who touted purity as poetry's prime principle. When his publisher Julius Campe wrote him on 24 June 1828 to say that the *Buch der Lieder* was doing quite well in Vienna (compared to Germany), the success might have been due to the Viennese censors holding back the first *Reisebilder* (Images of Travel) volume for a time and forbidding the second volume outright, hence ensuring that the curious would seek it out in copies smuggled into the country by Campe.[32] Infamy is Fame's surly twin brother, and both are good for sales, as Heine – aware of Fame's paradoxes as few have been – knew; his calculated offences to middle-class morality garnered him critical notice and new readers, even if some of the attention was negative. It was poems such as the tiny 'Himmlisch war's, wenn ich bezwang' (It is heavenly when I overcome) from the 1826 *Reisebilder*, Part 1 that prompted critics such as Willibald Alexis to their loudest cries of outrage. The young Heine, Alexis fumed, had dedicated himself entirely to *Venus cloacina* (the Aphrodite of excrement).[33]

Himmlisch war's, wenn ich bezwang	It is heavenly when I overcome
Meine sündige Begier,	my carnal lust,
Aber wenn's mir nicht gelang,	but if I don't succeed,
Hatt' ich doch ein groß Plaisir.[34]	I still have great pleasure.

The dyspeptic critic to the contrary, Heine's witty details are delicious: the literary word 'Begier' (rather than 'Begierde') for lust, the Frenchified designation of pleasure (obviously sexual), and the suppression of carnality as something heavenly, Heine thus needling religion's renunciations. 'One doesn't write about these things', his angry fellow-poet declared. Heine struck back with the weapon of his matchless wit, with a mocking prescription for 'Willibald Alexis salad' to purify his body (of verse) – rabbit food for those too timid to partake of flesh.[35]

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32 For Julius Campe's letters to Heine of 20 July 1827 and 24 June 1828, see Heinrich Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 24: *Briefe an Heine 1823–1836*, ed. Renate Francke (Berlin, 1974): 33 and 42. See also Heinrich Houben, *Verbotene Literatur von der klassischen Zeit bis zur Gegenwart; ein kritisch-historisches Lexikon über verbotene Bücher, Zeitschriften und Theaterstücke, Schriftsteller und Verleger*, vol. 1 (Berlin: E. Rowohlt, 1924): 385–6.

33 Willibald Alexis's comment applies to the entire *Heimkehr* cycle of poems. See his review of Heine's *Reisebilder* in the *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung* 10 (11 January 1827), reproduced in *Heinrich Heines Werk im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen* 1: *Rezensionen und Notizen zu Heines Werken von 1821 bis 1831*, ed. Eberhard Galley and Alfred Estermann (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1981): 238–42. In an earlier review of the *Tragödien, nebst einem lyrischen Intermezzo* in Vienna's *Jahrbücher der Literatur* 31 (July–September 1825), 179, this same reviewer observed, 'As far as we can tell, Mr. Heine does not belong to the Christian faith'. See Galley and Estermann, *Heinrich Heines Werk im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen* 1, 177–202.

34 Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 1: *Gedichte 1812–1827*: 219.

35 'Der Schweinskopf wirkt auf mich wie auf das übrige deutsche Publicum – ich muß einen Willibald Alexis-Salat darauf essen, der reinigt', Heine wrote in *Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand*; see Heinrich Heine, *Säkularausgabe*. 5: *Reisebilder I 1824–1828*, ed. Karl Wolfgang Becker (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, and Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1970): 127. But whatever

Certainly Alexis was not alone in his condemnation of certain poems as obscene. According to a reviewer in the June 1823 *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in Halle, Heine repeatedly crosses the bounds of propriety; he should, the nameless critic scolded, 'purify his speech and ennoble his poetic art'.[36] The Catholic tragedian and critic Adolph Müllner attempted, so he assures his readers, to exercise tolerance in reaction to Heine's 'Du sollst mich liebend umschließen' (You should lovingly embrace me) from the *Tragödien, nebst einem lyrischen Intermezzo* of 1823,[37] but the feeble defence of artistic licence is rapidly overthrown by prudery.

> I understand quite well that art must also have the freedom to depict 'the beast with two backs' ['la bête à deux dos', the writer heightening the sexual reference by switching into the language deemed most suitable for smuttiness], but the end should ennoble the means, as in *Othello*. Such a painting should have a green silk curtain in front of it, not hang naked in the gallery.[38]

These are debauched poems, he declares, while a likeminded critic – a woman – pointed out the cutting, mocking irony that does not allow any feeling to exist in a pure state.[39] Adolf Peters in the Berlin periodical *Der Gesellschafter* insisted that 'One only finds a few *pure* lyrical poems by this poet', the fighting word 'rein' italicized and placed at the beginning of the sentence, lest anyone fail to perceive its centrality.[40] Like Christianity, true poetry should, so said a critic identified only as 'Sch' – Schleiermacher? – reconcile, unify and harmonize,[41] but this poet from

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his subsequent wit on the subject, Heine was deeply offended. In a letter to Moses Moser on 19 December 1825, he said of the long essay in the *Jahrbücher* that 'there is more about me than there is about my tragedies'. When people attacked his poetry, he continued, it did not affect him, but when they attacked his private life in underhanded ways, he was hurt by it. See Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 20: *Briefe 1815–1831*: 229. He was still brooding about the matter one year later; in a letter to Friedrich Merckel of 16 November 1826, he states his supposition that the reviewer was Friedrich Schlegel; see ibid., 275.

36 See the anonymous review of Heine's 1821/22 *Gedichte* in the Halle *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 2/139 (June 1823), 246, reproduced in Galley and Estermann, *Heinrich Heines Werk im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen* 1: 100–104. See also Erich Mayser, *H. Heines 'Buch der Lieder' im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag H.-D. Heinz, 1978): 121–3.

37 Heinrich Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 1: *Gedichte 1812–1827*: 217. In the poem, Heine bids the beloved embrace him with her arms, legs, and entire body; she will become the most beautiful of snakes to his Laocoon.

38 Adolph Müllner, 'Notiz zu Liedern in: *Westdeutscher Musenalmanach auf das Jahr 1823*' in the *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* 270 (11 November 1823), 360, reproduced in Galley and Esterman, *Heinrich Heines Werk im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen* 1: 150–51.

39 Anonymous, 'Briefe einer Dame über die Almanachsliteratur des Jahres 1825. 3. Brief' in the Leipzig *Literarisches Conversations-Blatt* 280 (6 December 1824), 1, 118–19, reproduced in Galley and Esterman, *Heinrich Heines Werk im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen* 1: 172.

40 Adolf Peters, 'Rezension zu *Gedichte* und *Tragödien, nebst einem lyrischen Intermezzo*' in *Der Gesellschafter* 11 (19 January 1825), 53–4, reproduced in Galley and Esterman, *Heinrich Heines Werk im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen* 1: 173.

41 See 'Sch' review of Heine's *Gedichte* in the *Kunst- und Wissenschaftsblatt. Eine Beilage zum Rheinisch-Westfälischen Anzeiger* 24 (7 June 1822), 369–76, reproduced in Galley and Esterman, *Heinrich Heines Werk im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen* 1: 37–43. Heine once remarked that 'Blätterlob' (periodical praise) seldom incited more than passing amusement on his part and certainly did not encourage or revitalize him, and yet it was of utmost importance. No wonder: it made him known. See Heine's letter to Moses Moser on 18 June 1823 in Heine, *Säkularausgabe* 20: *Briefe 1815–1831*: 98.

the beginning engaged in the *destruction* of unity, in a calculated campaign to make no feeling, no tone, 'pure'.

'Du bist wie eine Blume' might seem at first glance the polar opposite of such poems as 'Himmlisch war's', and yet it too attacks both critics' notions of proper poetry and bourgeois notions of female modesty, albeit more subversively than its infamous cousins. Partly for aesthetic reasons, partly in order not to offend too much of his readership, Heine eliminated the poems that had angered Müllner and Alexis from his 1827 *Buch der Lieder*, but he retains works such as 'Du bist wie eine Blume' in which he wages a subtler war on behalf of newer conceptions of poetry. Here, the persona has been overcome by quite Clemens-Brentano-like melancholy at the thought that the flowerlike Romantic poem might not endure as a 'beautiful, pure, and gentle' entity and ironically invokes the God of the romanticized Middle Ages to keep her that way. Those such as Novalis who looked back with nostalgia to those 'beautiful, glittering times when Europe was a Christian realm, where *One* Christianity dwelt in all the kingdoms of men'[42] were hardly likely to garner Heine's approval, whatever his own early attraction to High Romantic chivalric re-creations in verse, and his 'prayer' to the mystic Catholic God of Novalis, Tieck and the Schlegels to keep the Muse unbesmirched by the likes of him is so tongue-in-cheek as to make a cat laugh. In the world of this poem, merely looking at a beautiful young woman is sufficient to elicit religion's strictures in the minds of men, to make them don the imaginary garb of a bishop or cardinal piously praying for what they know to be impossible. Indeed, the sly, lubricious hope is for impossibility: 'May *I* be the one to put an end to such purity', the persona hints. One notices the verb *sollt'*, 'should', with its hint of obligation – praying over young women while thinking sexual thoughts is what men are *supposed* to do, says Heine, tongue-in-cheek – and realizes yet again how rapier-precise this poet's language is. Blasphemy posing as piety, misogyny fused with worship: what a deft turn of the poetic screw. As we shall see, Schumann got the point and varies the earlier half-cadence in bar 5 by means of a grace-noted kick in the bass line on the verb sollt'. That Heine's cloak of Romantic religiosity was mistaken for sincerity by more than a few readers and composers piles irony upon irony. When they encountered this poem, many people evidently thought that they were encountering the poet on a good day and on his best behaviour, a Heine one could enjoy without guilt. They were wrong.

Even if one reads 'Du bist wie eine Blume' as a love-poem, complexities surface immediately, as neither men nor women are spared a poisonous dilemma in this poem. The unpleasantly superior male with his pseudo-sanctimonious gestures nevertheless locates the greatest physical and spiritual beauty in the woman to whom he speaks, while the mute recipient of his gaze is poised on the threshold of consummated desire – which is the beginning of the end of her desirability. Two opposing currents run simultaneously throughout this poem: the male persona's worship of and contempt for women on the one hand and a different world-view critical of that gelignite compound on the other. We take note of the condescension, the invocation of God as the only force sufficiently powerful – perhaps – to keep women unstained by sexual congress, and some of us will dislike such nasty superiority. And yet we also note the matchless skill by which misogyny is made lover-like. Heine's seamless melding of contradiction in this

[42] This is the beginning of Novalis's 1799 prose-fragment 'Die Christenheit oder Europa'; see Friedrich von Hardenberg, *Novalis: Werke in einem Band*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995): 526.

artefact of ambivalence entails multiple decisions on the composer's part. If one is aware of critique, does one incorporate it into the song, and if so, how? Should the composer characterize the persona as ardent lover or older, Don Alfonso-like cynic? Should the invocation of things sacred be treated straightforwardly or ironically, bent in some way to hint at purposes far from pious? To go from song to song, assessing who bought the religiosity wholesale and who saw the sting in the tail, is a fascinating exercise. No wonder so many music-making men were drawn to this poem: it could be turned into a weapon in the nineteenth-century's debates about gender roles, a melodious way to keep women in their place, and it was also a sort of pandemic itch to be scratched in tone and rhythm. Dilemmas with no answer prompt revisiting over and over again.

One of Song's Sweetest Flowers: Schumann's 'Du bist wie eine Blume'

'Even our most beloved composers seem hardly to have read their chosen poems all the way through, so at odds is their music with the poetry' Schumann once observed, a rather ironic statement in light of what I would conjecture is his quarrel with Heine in his own music.[43] Of the many nineteenth-century renditions of this poem, the twenty-fourth song in *Myrthen* (Myrtles), op. 25, is by far the loveliest, a frequent choice for performance at weddings [!] to this day. According to most who have written about it,[44] an ardent young husband-to-be fashioned a miniature epithalamium for inclusion in a cycle conceived as a lieder-alphabet of love in many moods and manifestations. Pure desire becomes pure song. But when one looks at Schumann's design for these 20 bars more deeply, it becomes evident that the composer understood the poem's complexities very well indeed. Understanding them, he engaged in a musical quarrel with one of his favourite poets, a rich refutation of Heine's wormier strains. As someone who believed that the composer should become the poet, Schumann considered it quite within his rights to supplant the poet's purposes with his own, and the way in which he does so here is fascinating. Heine's persona gazes at the beloved and says things that seem worshipful on the surface but become decidedly less so the more one ponders them, until at last they are virtually the opposite of their seeming. Schumann enables us to *look* at the score and *see* evidence of worminess, but he does not allow us to *hear* it. I know of no other instance in which the ear contradicts the eye after the manner we find in this song (although I am sure it exists), and I am convinced it was with deliberation aforethought on Schumann's part. He understood that, at some level, the passion limned here was real: Heine did in fact love the Romantic Muse, whatever his quarrels with her, and contempt goes hand-in-hand with desire on far too many occasions. But the composer inverts the proportional weight given the Janus faces of love by the poet, muting mightily

43 Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker* 2, ed. Martin Kreisig (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1914): 246.

44 In his marvellous mini-book to go along with *The Songs of Robert Schumann* 7 (Hyperion CDJ33107), Graham Johnson declares that 'Du bist wie eine Blume' arrives just in time to prevent *Myrthen* from deteriorating 'into a succession of folkish fragments of diminishing musical import', that it is 'the equivalent of heavy artillery in lieder terms' (91) – how right he is. But it is Schumann's music, I would speculate, that inspired this great pianist's assessment of the *poetry* as 'shy and epigrammatic' (92); that is its public face, not its inner core.

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the element of black bile and enlarging what is rich and expansive until it fills the entire frame of the work. One can go through this music and point out those places on the page indicative of Heine's irony, and yet their tonal surroundings are such that contempt, alienation and otherness are not audible. If performers decided to make evident the bitterness of those passages where bifurcated meanings can be glimpsed, they would be going against the larger grain of the song; I have never heard anyone, live or on recordings, who has tried to do so. And yet, the worm at the heart of the apple is there, and I believe that Schumann wanted us to see it, if only in glimpses.

Schumann sets the song in the A♭ major tonality Schubert had earlier associated with reciprocated love in such songs as 'Das Rosenband', 'Frühlingsglaube', 'Geheimes', 'Lachen und Weinen', 'Das Zügenglöcklein' and 'Auf dem Wasser zu singen' (The rosy ribbon, Faith in spring, Secret, Laughing and weeping, The passing bell, To be sung on the water). It has the same associations in *Myrthen*, which begins ('Widmung', or 'Dedication') and ends ('Zum Schluß', or 'At the close') in this key, and one notes its rarity, the fact that it is reserved for architecturally significant moments along the way; it is tempting to see a particular relationship between the three songs in A♭ major as all having to do with avowals both public and private. 'Widmung', with its contrast between the A♭ major declaration of dedication and the E major inner heart of the song, establishes the sharp side/flat side polarities in this cycle, with the greater number of songs by far on the sharp side. The twenty-fourth song, 'Du bist wie eine Blume', brings the definitive return to the opening key (and its dominant E♭) for the final three songs of the cycle – bigger by two songs than Schubert's *Winterreise* (Winter journey), one notes with a certain amusement. Schumann makes the reference, albeit across great distances, to the first song all the more compelling by sounding yet again the non-legato, rich repeated chords (a stylized heartbeat tactus) in the right hand familiar both from 'Widmung' and the Heine song 'Die Lotosblume' (The lotus flower), the seventh song in the cycle. And just as in the encomium to a lotus (another Flower = Woman song), the piano introduction is minimal and configured in the same way: repeated tonic chords in the piano alone for almost a full bar before the singer enters on the anacrusis to bar 2 (in 'Du bist wie eine Blume', the C in the topmost voice of the repeated chords, also the singer's first pitch, is the common tone with the dominant of the two previous Burns songs in F major).

But in the dilemma cloaked in velvet that is this song, insidious darkness begins to infiltrate almost immediately. Listening to tonal music, we search for the tonic–dominant relationship at the beginning in order to know where we are, and Schumann duly provides it but with a twist. The initial bar of pulsations on the tonic is indeed followed by a dominant-seventh harmony – but in third inversion and en route to a briefly tonicized supertonic chord on the word 'Blume'. In A♭ major, that harmony is a B♭ minor chord, truly dark, a black flower dyed in melancholy. The leading tone to the supertonic is, of course, the raised tonic pitch, and it is the first altered tone in the song, the first hint that the tonality of reciprocated love will be less secure than we might wish. Even the disposition of the beautiful first vocal phrase, with its written-out trill on the second and third scale degrees (that is, oscillating just above the tonic pitch) and its closing lift to the desire-laden appoggiatura in bar 3, has a sly subtext on paper, if not in sound. The emphasis in bar 2 provided by the downbeat placement and by prolongation is on the verb 'bist', that is, on the present moment. 'You ARE like a flower', the persona sings, attempting to prolong the moment of blossoming beauty and therefore emphasizing the impossibility of doing so, especially as the voice-leading

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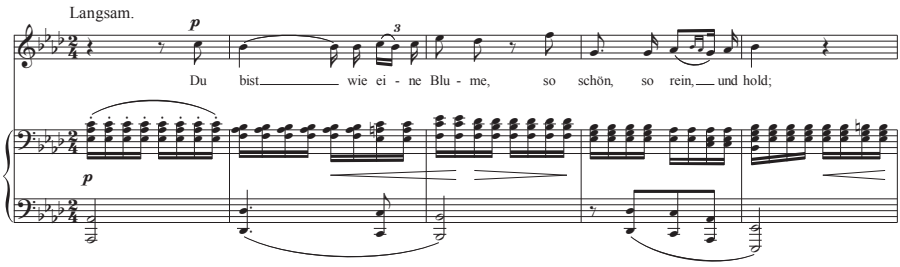
Ex. 2 Robert Schumann, 'Du bist wie eine Blume' from *Myrthen*, op. 25, bars 1–5



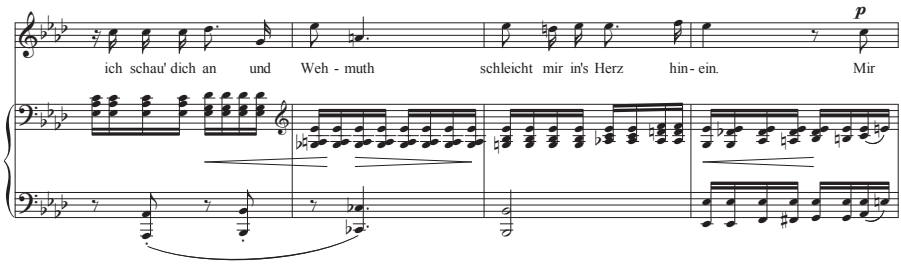
and harmonic progression insist that we move beyond the now of 'bist' (Ex. 2). The emphasis has a Janus face in mixed sarcasm and warning: 'You are like a flower now, but all too soon you will no longer be the object of my already somewhat suspect compliments because they will no longer apply.' One can, of course, argue that Heine's iambs and purely musical imperatives converged to produce this design, but it is also possible to construe the heaviness of this verb as deliberate: Schumann did not have to prolong 'bist' through five semiquaver beats of *langsam* tempo unless he wanted to do so. Other mid-nineteenth-century composers, as we shall see, would try other solutions for rendering Heine's initial iamb into melody.

The inflection of flattery is one way to gauge its sincerity or lack thereof, since any compliment can be performed to hint at contempt rather than approbation. What Schumann does with Heine's roll-call of desirable qualities – 'rein, schön, hold' – is a brilliant demonstration of the way in which he half-reveals, half-buries Heine's hints of sugar-coated contempt. The ultra-expressive leap downwards of a seventh in the vocal line from the sixth scale degree to the leading tone at the words 'so schön' is a masterstroke of double-speak: the adjective 'so' is the higher pitch by far but it is rhythmically an anacrusis, while 'schön' is situated on the downbeat but lacks the deep octave bass underpinning in the left hand established in bars 1–3. The emphasis on 'so' trembles on the brink of insincerity; the exaggeration of the gesture bespeaks both awe at the magnitude of the beloved's beauty and a soupçon of sarcasm. Furthermore, the upbeat–downbeat leap on 'so schön' measures the compass of the entire vocal line from top to bottom, a tessitura both curiously restricted and curiously placed, neither dipping into the lower reaches nor ascending to the heights. The Italianate mordent that acts to emphasize the word 'rein' is another Janus-faced detail. Schumann, as many have noticed, changed the order of the poet's trio of adjectives: Heine ends the line with the word 'rein', Schumann with 'hold'. One can propose various reasons why the composer did so, from copying the poem incorrectly (lines 4 and 8 are the same in the musical text) to wanting dark vowel sounds to begin and end the phrase. 'Schön' and 'hold' thus enclose the brighter diphthong of 'rein', which impels appropriately pure harmonic triads in the piano. Whatever prompted the emendation, the effect is to make ornamented purity the mechanism for the drive to half-cadence. And yet, whatever the whisper of exaggeration-cum-critique, is there a person on earth who could fail to be moved by the culmination of the cadence in bar 5, with the piano sinking to the depths of the instrument? This adoration strikes deep, Schumann's persona tells us.

When melancholy is announced in the third phrase, Schumann momentarily staggers the vocal line and left-hand part. In place of the downbeat emphases

in the vocal line for the first pair of phrases – implying calm, assured reverence – the singer begins the phrase after the downbeat. Chanting the first three syllables of the gaze ('ich schau dich [an]'), he is briefly transfixed in mid-bar (staring intently) before leaping in alarm to 'Wehmuth'. Schumann invests this crucial word with as much tension as he could compress into such a small space: the augmented sixth chord throughout bar 7, the singer's tritone leap downwards from the fifth scale degree to the raised tonic pitch at 'Wehmuth', the prolongation of the second, weaker syllable, are all indices of muted angst with undertones of threat, of danger. But if the persona seems to be thrown ever so slightly off-balance by melancholy made menacing, the steady heartbeat pulsations continue undeterred. Like everything else in this song, one can hear the unaltered right-hand rhythmic pattern as a two-faced phenomenon. On the beneficent side of the equation, the reverential heart cannot be stopped by the fusion of sadness and alarm, but we also sense thereby the controlling hand of the puppet master, the man in charge, who does not allow melancholy to overturn his dominance. Schumann, one notes, places the title/initial acclamation of the poem in quotation marks, alerting all who see it to the fact that the poetic persona is speaking to someone. This song, he hints, is a *performance*, a duet with a mute Other.

Ex. 3 Robert Schumann, 'Du bist wie eine Blume' from *Myrthen*, op. 25, bars 6–9



The augmented sixth harmony, needing resolution, drives the third phrase forward into the fourth, with which it is paired. The result is a cadence to make one ponder. Yes, classical compositional principles require a cadential articulation for the fourth phrase, but I doubt that many people reading the words '[Wehmuth] / schleicht mir in's Herz hinein' would expect the serene restoration of diatonic order after the chromatic disturbance of melancholy (Ex. 3). Heine seems to deviate from the iambic meters established in lines 1–3 for his fourth line; scanned by itself, it consists of a dactyl and two trochees, the second trochee incomplete because the line is end-stopped. But Heine actually does something wonderfully sneaky with the word-rhythms, enjambing lines 3 and 4 such that one line slithers into the next. 'Schleicht' is both the accented syllable of the iamb '[Weh] -muth / schleicht' and the initial syllable of a dactyl; composers therefore must choose how to inflect it metrically. Furthermore, the Goethean verb is prominently placed at the beginning of the line; if one treats it as the accented beginning of a dactyl and puts it on the downbeat, it acquires a faintly proclamatory stress at odds with anything 'schleichendes'. That he recognized the enjambment is evident in his fusion of the two poetic lines as a single harmonic progression, but it matters that he restores diatonicism on the downbeat of bar 8, makes 'schleicht mir in's [Herz]' a musical dactyl, and rounds off the phrase with an untroubled authentic

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cadence.[45] How better could Schumann tell us that the melancholy is staged, that his persona assumes control after merely feigning dismay?

Schumann rejected any impulse to 'schleichendes' motion as the verb itself is invoked, but he slithers chromatically upwards from E♭ back to the tonic immediately afterwards, in the brief piano transition (bar 9) to the second verse. The chromatic motion, doubled down low at the tenth, recalls the Mozartian operatic connotations of such figures with sexual excitement – Donna Elvira fantasizes about Don Giovanni in similar fashion – and with horror in the face of death, to which 'la petite morte' is related (one thinks of Schiller's terrified horde of spirits driven relentlessly towards eternity in Schubert's 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus', or 'Group in Hades', to multiple invocations of rising linear chromaticism). Here, the figure in the piano prevents any possibility of lingering on the dominant cadence; Eros does not permit quietus. The prospect of pseudo-sacral bodily contact in the second verse is what gives rise, literally, to this transition, and that same excitement impels the gentle *Schwung* built into the piano part for bars 10–11, the first phrase in the setting of the second verse. Schumann does something wonderfully perceptive with Heine's second stanza by bringing back the music of the first stanza but varying it in suggestive ways. The vocal line for bars 10–13 is almost exactly the same as that for bars 1–4, the sole difference being the lack of the quaver rest between 'Blume' and 'so schön'; instead, the singer is enjoined to take a very deep breath and sing the entire four-bar phrase without break. What Schumann underscores by means of this varied return is parallelism, 'Du bist … mir ist', the same downbeat and durational stresses on the verb of being, the same written-out trill leading to the desire-laden appoggiatura, now placed on the hands that wish to pluck the flower ('Blume … Hände'). Beneath the returning melody, we hear a brief snatch of dance music: a bass tone on the downbeat, joined on the next semiquaver beat by the repeated chords which now sound in both hands; the pulsation is now richer, more overtly erotic than before, throbbing heartbeats becoming sexual excitation. The chords in bars 10–11 are all supertonic harmonies, one notices, heightened by its dominant. The 'Blume' harmony of dark-hued passion drenches the first two bars of this benediction-with-a-difference.

The music for the second half of stanza 2 requires variation, as the staged melancholy-menace of bars 6–9 will not do for the piety and patriarchy on parade in bars 14–17. The beating of the desirous heart in the piano becomes solemn, columnar underpinning for a metrical singularity – two successive dactyls – in Heine's poem: 'Betend, dass Gott dich er – [halte]'. The German prosodists who observed wryly that it is difficult to be serious in dactylic metre have a point; Goethe used dactyls to hilarious effect in his 'Cophtisches Lied' (Coptic song), a send-up *par excellence* of squabbling academics, and Heine, one feels sure, knew the association of dactyls with the comedic in verse. There is a whiff of the ridiculous in this scenario of blessing, the dactylic metres hint, or would be if the tempo were not so solemnly slow. One notes as well that the words 'Gott dich

[45] This is not the only such instance in Schumann's song oeuvre. The most notorious example of Schumann failing to turn an enjambment into musical prose is when he separates the two parts of a reflexive verb in 'Die Lotosblume', the seventh song in *Myrthen*. 'Die Lotosblume ängstigt', the singer declares, followed by three crotchet-note beats of rest before supplying the remainder of the verb as the downbeat of the next phrase, '*sich* vor der Sonne Pracht'. That the vocal line sinks downward to a lower tessitura for the second phrase only exacerbates the split between the components of the verb.

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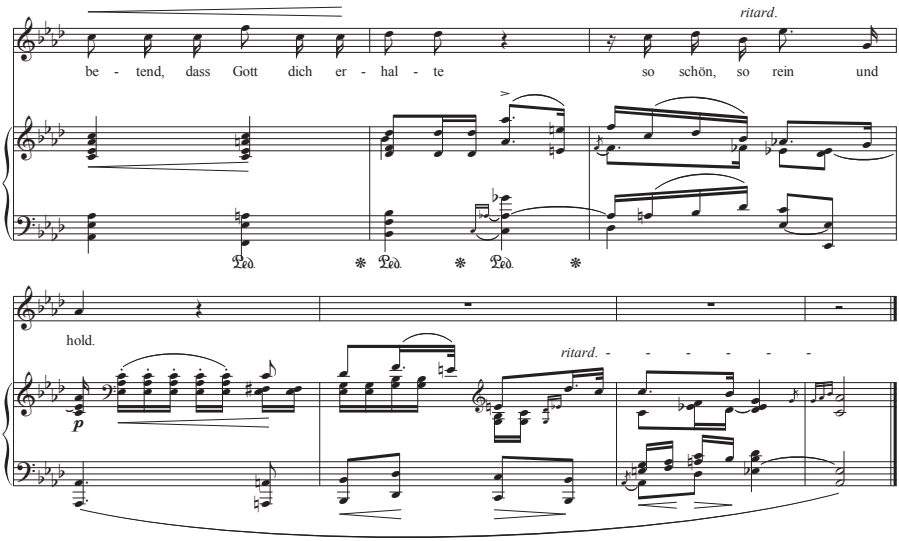
Ex. 4 Robert Schumann, 'Du bist wie eine Blume', from *Myrthen*, op. 25, bars 14–20



erhalte' are given the same progression as the preceding words 'als ob ich die Hände'; God and his earthly stand-in have the same harmonic identity. Where other composers made the prayer a unified utterance, 'praying that God keep you so beautiful, so pure and gentle', Schumann breaks the seventh and eighth lines apart. In between, the piano wordlessly repeats 'betend, dass Gott dich erhalte' in elision with the first invocation and transposed a semitone higher. The fervour of the doubled invocation is unmistakable, especially given the harmonic inflection to the 'Amen' subdominant. There is a certain touch of melodrama in thus separating the act of prayer from that for which one prays, the composer milking the fake suspense of the moment (Ex. 4). 'Praying that God keep you, that God keep you … so beautiful, so pure and gentle'. The right hand remains a melodic voice when the words resume and doubles the singer's list of desirable qualities while the lower contrapuntal voices in the piano rise and fall. Somehow it is not surprising that the inner voices in bar 16 (beginning in bar 15 on A♭ for the tenor) are in contrary motion, the tenor part rising and the alto part sinking down, via erotic-chromatic passing tones. The singer diverges from the right-hand part only at the crucial word 'rein', which is tinged with melancholy in advance by means of the flatted sixth degree in the alto voice at the adjective 'so'. That Woman/the Romantic Muse should be pure is crucial, the leap upward in the singer's line tells us; that such purity is unlikely to last is hinted from within the layered lines in the piano. The touch of darkness so often apropos of passion is there for another reason as well.

And yet, it is all so beautiful, from beginning to end. It is a revelatory aspect of this song that a scholarly accounting of those ways in which Schumann acknowledges the dark side of Heine's poem is tantamount to distortion. The hints of irony built into the music assume more prominence in prose than they do when one listens to this almost impossibly lovely song. Schumann, one infers, understood Heine's point about the shopworn language of Romantic love, complete with anonymous flower-women and post-coital *tristesse* on sight; such language told of codes of poetic desire in need of revision. The composer even, I

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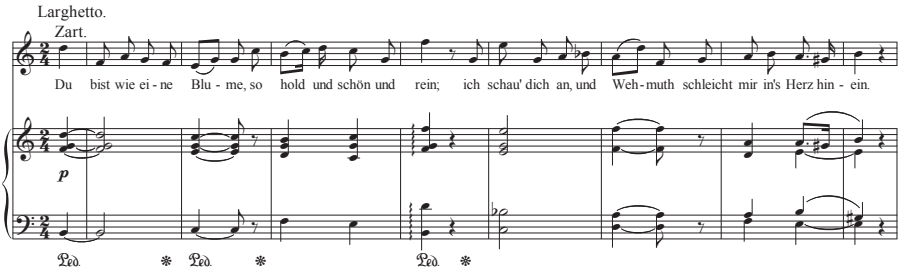
believe, saw that the beloved is Romantic poetry herself, with medieval-chivalric Christianity enlisted as her guardian. Heine hints that such linguistic triteness is a threefold register 1) of outworn Romantic expectations of poetry's purposes, 2) of the absurd over-valuation of virginity in a hypocritical society, and 3) a Christian patriarchy's contempt for women unless they were 'pure', but Schumann insists that genuine ardour is the single most important element in this sonorous compound of desire's complexities. The Romantic Muse *is* beautiful, and God Himself *should* make it His business to keep her so, he asserts. In the postlude, the song is unleashed from language. The chromatic inflections of the tonic and dominant pitches, the multiple appoggiaturas, the seventh chords that 'resolve' to other seventh chords, the grace-noted flourish around the final tonic pitch (echoing in reverse motion the ornamentation of the words 'so rein und [hold]' in bar 4), are ingredients made familiar earlier in the song, but here they are set free from Heine's hints of wormwood and gall. The appoggiatura sighs of desire, intensified by dotted rhythms and anticipation tones, are enough to seduce anyone with ears to hear. Who could resist such strains? – certainly not the listener, so beautifully wooed by Schumann in this setting. Composer trumps Poet, *becomes* Poet at the end, and does so for purposes of revision. If Schumann recognized the dual critiques of Romanticism and patriarchy in this poem, he was less bothered by them than was the poet, and no wonder, in this the year of his marriage. The diminished seventh chord that sets the postlude-progression into motion at the end of bar 17 hints at dark disturbance, at tension and shaky tonal ground, but longing sweeps it away, elevating the right-hand part by stages and saturating the inner voices by the penultimate bar. Even the tonic chord in the final bar has to be enveloped in a mordent, telling us that all is made grace by desire. Schumann's relationship to Romanticism was, after all, less exacerbated than Heine's, his belief in the enduring 'Schönheit' and 'Reinheit' of his own creations a surer thing, something he celebrates in this song even as he covertly acknowledges Heine's dilemmas.

As a postscript to this section on Schumann, I wanted to take a brief look at what I would speculate is a complex response to his song as well as to Heine's poetry, an example all the more interesting to me because it comes from a woman's pen: the *Neun Gesänge* (Nine Songs), op. 1 by Marie Hinrichs (1828–1891), published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1846. There was, regrettably, no op. 2; 1846 was also the year of her engagement to marry Robert Franz, which she did in 1848, thereafter abjuring composition. Six of the nine songs are settings of Heine, including 'Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen' (I stood in dark dreams), 'Ich weiß eine alte Kunde' (I know an old legend) and 'Du bist wie eine Blume'. Here, we find someone who was aware of the *Myrthen* song and who plays with the Lied *im Volkston* in suggestive ways. Recognizing that the poet's metre gives short shrift to the person ostensibly being addressed, that 'du' is the weaker initial syllable of an iambic foot, she sets out to correct the matter in her music. As in Schumann, she sets 'du' as an anacrusis, but only those looking at the score can realize this at first because there is no piano introduction to establish tonal and metrical context. The verb 'bist' sounds on the downbeat of the first bar, but she, unlike Schumann, makes it difficult to hear as such when she drops downward from 'du' to 'bist', does not strike a new chord in the piano but sustains the dominant-seventh harmony beneath the initial word 'du', and sets 'bist wie eine' as quavers, the speaking tactus of the vocal line. 'Du' is thus emphasized more than 'bist' by metrical trickery, a longer note value, a bit of harmonic duplicity, and a higher pitch. Schumann's very noticeable plunge of a seventh downwards at the start of

Ex. 5 Marie Hinrichs, 'Du bist wie eine Blume' from *Neun Gesänge*, op. 1, bars 1–18. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1846



the trio of qualities becomes Hinrichs's leap upwards of a seventh (same pitches, different tonal context) at the end of that same roll-call. The word 'rein' is thus made to stick out in startling manner. Of the three precious attributes, this is the one she singles out for special attention, with a harp-like flourish in the piano to emphasize it still more (Ex. 5). I particularly like the way she stitches the first and second vocal phrases together by means of related leaps, the second one laying stress on the verb 'schauen', 'to look'. Gazing is everywhere in Heine: just think of Schubert's 'Ihr Bild'. One notes as well that she chose to elide Heine's third and fourth lines, thus gliding through the typographical-accentual stress on 'schleicht'. Hinrichs's harmonic language is kept basic for this folklike song, the musical means obviously very economical, but she is doing something more complex here than first acquaintance with the song might suggest. And she is among the first in a long line of post-1840 composers who took note of Schumann's song when they too appropriated the text he had transmuted into music so unforgettably during his year of lied composition. Quite a few subsequent settings should have the subtitle 'Son or Daughter of Schumann', given their obvious indebtedness to the *Myrthen* song, but Hinrichs manipulates or reverses what she borrowed from her illustrious contemporary in ways that make us regret the silencing of those songs that might have followed this debut.

A Whitman's Sampler of 'Blume' Songs: Heine in Other Hands

Hinrichs had company: there were settings galore of this poem, until World War One changed every European landscape, including song. If I have used chocolate-box terminology, it is because a considerable percentage of these settings are sickly-sweet, a fusion of parlour song with the sort of devotional music, replete with secondary dominants, one might have heard in Victorian-era churches. And yet, these specimens of *Trivialmusik* have much to tell us. In these ditties, we see how a great poet's works were received by a multitude of composers at levels below the likes of Schubert and Schumann, and we hear what would have been heard in parlours all over Europe and America. For seventy years and more, Schumann had competition – quite a lot of it.

What one discovers in the course of sifting through a multitude of these songs is that the structure of Heine's poem is eerily apt for nineteenth-century song composition. One begins in a 'pure and gentle' tonic in major mode for the first two lines of stanza 1, adds a dollop of darkness and chromatic intensity for the third line ('Ich schau' dich ein, und Wehmuth') at just the right spot for moving

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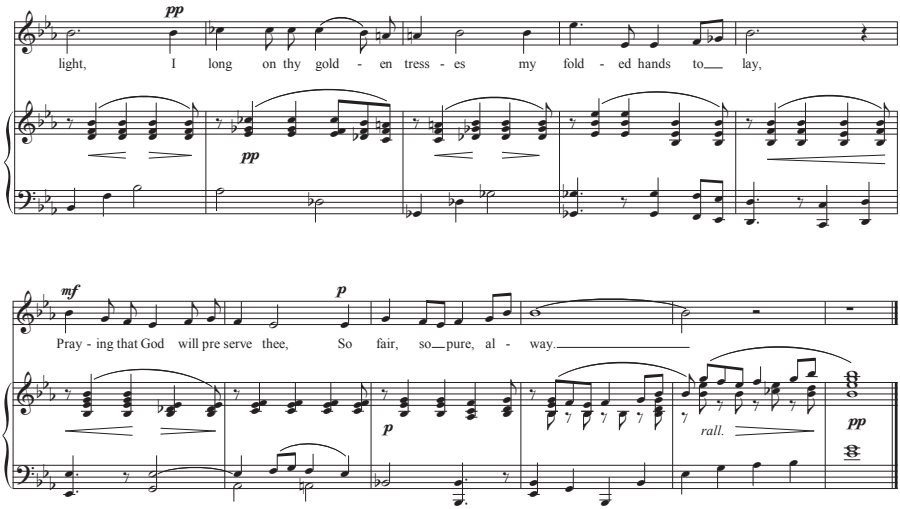
Ex. 6 Frances McCollin, 'Thou Art Like Unto a Flower', bars 10–20. Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1911

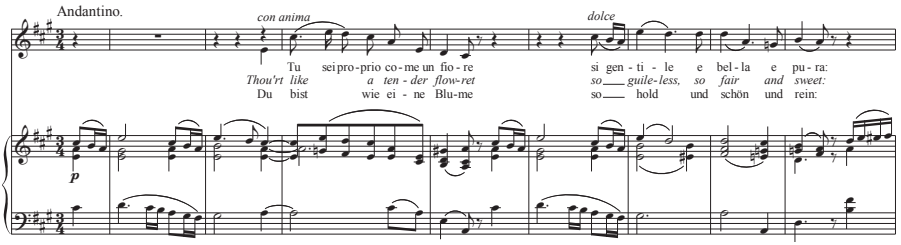


away from the home key, and then either concludes the first stanza in the tonic or modulates elsewhere, to the relative minor or the dominant. With the start of the second stanza, we are transported with very little modulatory ado into sacred space, often a third away from the tonic, while the repetition of line 2 as the final line of the poem virtually dictates the return to the tonic. The invocation of God and prayer in line 7 usually puts the climax of the song in a most appropriate spot near the end, just before the 'beautiful, pure, and gentle' refrain in the tonic. One encounters this pattern over and over again in the huge repertory of 'Du bist wie eine Blume' settings, as in the 1911 song, 'Thou Art Like Unto a Flower', dedicated to 'Miss Marian Anderson from her friend Frances McCollin'.[46] Here, the original German text is replaced by a translation into English revelatory of the commonplace interpretation of this poem as an ardent love-song, its eroticism semi-sanitized by religious reference: 'Thou art like unto a flower/so fair, so pure, so bright,/I look on thee and sadness/fills all my soul's delight.//I long on thy golden tresses/my folded hands to lay,/praying that God will preserve thee,/so fair, so pure alway'. Even in such a sentimental context as this, queasy subterranean reference is audible in certain details, for example, the diminished seventh harmony at the words '[I look on] *thee*' and the desire-laden vocal phrase, 'I long on thy golden tresses', its upward-pressing appoggiatura and modulation to a third-related key emblems of desire. I quite like the vocal ascent to '*folded* [hands]', as if to assure all who hear this song that the hands will only be engaged in blessing, whatever the obvious longing to go farther (Ex. 6). One notes as well the piano's twofold ascent in the postlude, where it wordlessly repeats the words 'so fair, so pure alway', rising into the empyrean while the singer sustains the dominant pitch. The refusal of tonic closure is the concomitant of 'alway', stretching out into an impossible infinity of pure beauty.

46 Frances McCollin, 'Thou Art Like Unto a Flower' (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1911).

Composers, of course, tweaked the pattern in various ways. One common manoeuvre was the repetition of the first verse as a final section in order to make a three-part song form out of Heine's epigrammatic poem, as in Giovanni Sgambati's 'Tu sei proprio come un fiore' (You are exactly like a flower) in his *Canti per una voce con accompagnamento di Piano-Forte*. Sgambati (1841–1914) came from his native Rome to Germany at Liszt's invitation in 1869 and was perhaps inspired by his teacher to enter the 'Du bist wie eine Blume' sweepstakes, winnings guaranteed by a buying public that seemed as if it could not get enough of this poem. The Italian composer, his Requiem Mass popular for a long time, was, I would guess, inspired by his teacher's setting, as both men establish a graceful, charming, wistful phrase in their piano introductions and then keep returning to that phrase as if it were the beloved who is being addressed in this poem. In this instance, the two-bar phrase we first hear in bars 3–4 for the poem's first line languishes its way from the (restrained) heights to the depths, swooning the length of a tenth in five beats, with an appropriate turn to the subdominant harmony at the final adjective 'pura'. For the arrival of unease in the gazing persona's heart ('ti contemplo e in cuor mi sento un acuta trafittura', 'I look at you and in my heart I feel a sharp pang'), we hear a muted drum-beat on the dominant pitch in the left hand, while chromaticism is more in evidence in the 'blessing' verse, set in the plagal key of D major; Liszt likewise modulates from the same principal key of A major to the prayerful subdominant key for the start of stanza 2, although he then converts the previous F♯ minor key of creeping melancholy into parallel major mode for 'betend'. This is the quiet climax – here, we recall Liszt's spiritual inclinations – of a setting that grows softer, more inward, throughout the second half. One notes with a chuckle his Roman pupil's rising chromatic bass line beneath the acclamation, 'o verginella' (Oh, sweet little maiden) – music's announcement of desire for this adorably diminutive virgin – and in the postlude, after he ends the texted body of the song by dwelling on heartfelt disturbance, darkened by the flatted sixth degree. This is another commonplace of the 'Du bist wie eine Blume' repertory, an economical way to tell of melancholy's lingering effect even after tonic has been reinstated (Ex. 7).

Ex. 7 Giovanni Sgambati, 'Tu sei proprio come un fiore', from *Canti per una voce con accompagnamento di Piano-Forte*, bars 28–43. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne



Another student of Liszt's, the organist-composer Alexander Winterberger (1834–1914), devises yet another variation on the pattern we encounter so often in this repertory. His Lisztian credentials are evident in the number of augmented triads sprinkled throughout his setting, especially the first stanza, which is saturated with complex chords and non-harmonic tones. He then shifts to pure triads (for the most part) in chromatic progressions – the sort of progression Wolf associates with the mythical goddess Weyla's blessing of her realm in the Mörike

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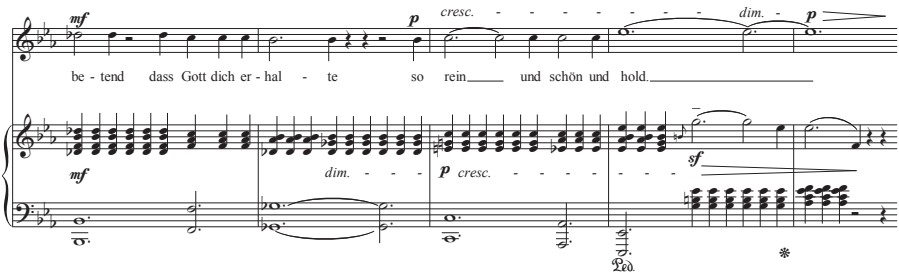
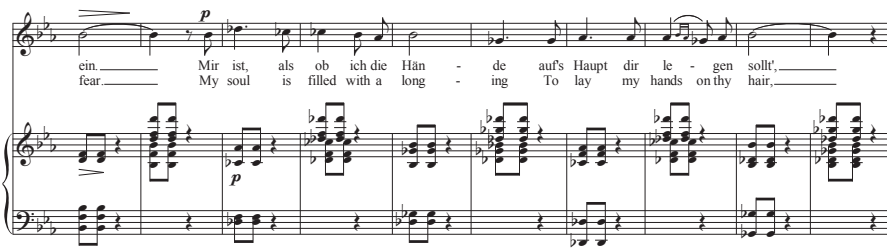
Ex. 8 Alexander Winterberger, 'Du bist wie eine Blume', from *12 Gesänge*, op. 12, bars 10–20. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne



Ex. 9 Anton Rubinstein, 'Lied', op. 32, no. 5 from *Rubinstein-Album. 24 Lieder*, op. 32, 33, 34, bars 19–28. Leipzig: Friedrich Kistner



song 'Gesang Weylas' (Weyla's Song) – when the mood turns religious in the second stanza. The church organist speaks here. The unintentionally comic masterstroke of this setting is when Winterberger melts from G♭ major harmonies to soft C major chords for the adjective 'rein': pure indeed (Ex. 8). In fact, observing how composers reach the second stanza and how they treat its pseudo-religiosity are among the subversive pleasures of immersion in this repertory. Anton Rubinstein, for example, begins his op. 32, no. 5 setting with chiming on the dominant pitch, then spends the rest of the song wafting both hands back and forth between lower and higher registers, as if to tell of hymn-like male devotion in the bass and sweet, ethereal femininity in the treble or as if looking from earth to heaven. But at the beginning of the second stanza, he shifts suddenly from a cadence on the dominant harmony B♭ into G♭ major. You are entering sacred space, he announces (Ex. 9).

In fact, more than one composer places God at the peak of his version of these all-too-famous words and does so far less subtly than Liszt. The American composer Vernon Spencer's 'Thou art so like a flower' of 1913 builds to a fortissimo climax at the name of God, this after a *con tenerezza* beginning with much chromaticism of the ultra-sentimental variety (Ex. 10).[47] George Castello's 'Ah, sweet as any flower' of 1901 and James Rogers' 'Thou art like unto a flower' of 1898 both make praying the point of greatest emphasis, and how they do it is

47 Vernon Spencer, 'Thou Art So Like a Flower' (Cincinnati: John Church, 1913). Translations are always revelatory of interpretation, and Spencer's own rendering is no exception: 'Thou art so like a flower/So chaste and pure and fair,/That looking at thee,/Sadness steals o'er me unaware./I long and pray God to keep thee/A flower sweet and rare;/Pray Him to keep thee forever/So chaste, so pure and fair.'

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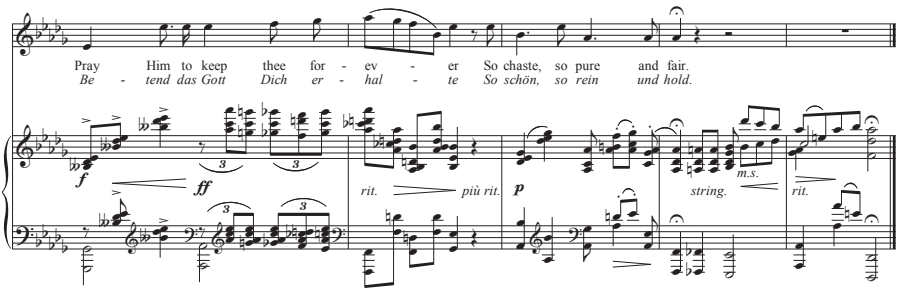
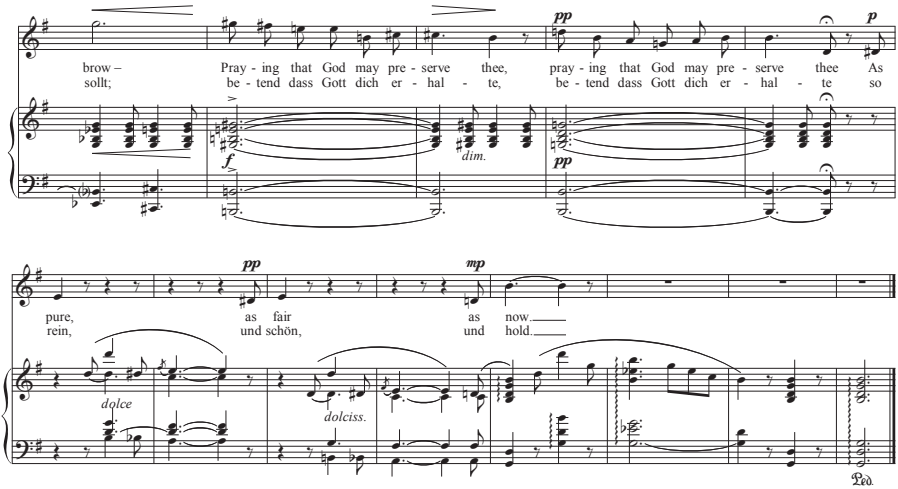
Ex. 10 Vernon Spencer, 'Thou art so like a flower', bars 18–22. Cincinnati: John Church, 1913



Ex. 11 James H. Rogers, 'Thou art like unto a flower', bars 15–30. Boston: The Boston Music Co., 1898



a window onto the genuine tonal ingenuity of many *fin de siècle* devisers of sugary parlour songs; these people knew their business. Rogers enharmonically converts the D♯ chromatic inflections in his G major first section to E♭ for a very short-lived tonicization of that harmony at the build-up to the climax, then with a single diminished chord turns to E major for the dramatic announcement of prayer before sinking equally rapidly down to pianissimo dynamics and G major (Ex. 11). The song ends with still more occurrences of the D♯/E♭ inflections to tell of purity and beauty and to darken the final cadence with the appropriate hint of melancholy ardour.[48] Edwin Aler in 1894 ascends to high G♭ territory at the verb 'erhalte' while heavenly, harp-like chords resound, followed by a brief pause both for dramatic effect and oxygen intake before the 'schön, rein und hold' trio of desired qualities (Ex. 12). One notes the G♭ major key – a signal of rich, rare profundity? – and the

48 James H. Rogers, 'Thou Art Like Unto a Flower', words after Heinrich Heine (Boston: The Boston Music Company, 1896). This 'Blume' is specific: the title page is adorned with a large rose.

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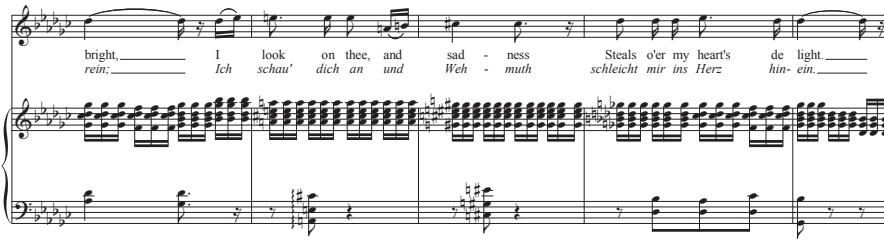
Ex. 12 Edwin Aler, 'Thou art like unto a flower', from *Five Songs*, bars 14–22. Washington, D.C.: John F. Ellis, 1894



higher-note emphases on '*so* schön, *so* rein'. To our ears, such songs hover on the brink of self-parody. It is enough to make one wonder to what extent these composers were simply adding their two cents to the prevailing lushness of parlour song composition or whether they were joining their voices to Heine's ironic meanings. The fact that it is so difficult to distinguish between the two possibilities is one measure of Heine's success, of the brilliance with which he cloaked subversive purposes behind masks of many kinds.

Aftermaths

By the turn of the century, 'Du bist wie eine Blume' had become more than a poem, more than a song. Chameleon-like, it was converted into symbols for this, that and the other – a mutable signifier for the concerns of those who appropriated it. It is, for example, fascinating to watch anti-Semitic German critics in the later nineteenth century grapple with this famous poem. Some made it out to be a rare exception to Heine's sins against poetry, and some went into offended frenzies, the pretext usually religious or racial or both. Adolf Bartels, so upset by Heine's massive presence on the literary scene that he wrote three books trashing the poet, devised snappy, one-line dismissals of every poem in the *Lyrisches Intermezzo* and *Die Heimkehr* in his *Heinrich Heine: Auch ein Denkmal* (Heinrich Heine: Also a Monument), in which he weighs in at length on the vexed question of a monument to Heine in his homeland. While Bartels saw condemnable Jewish sentimentality ('orientalisch-sentimental') in the persona's desire that the purity of a young woman's beauty not be besmirched, he grudgingly summed up the poem as 'simple and beautiful' nevertheless.[49] Another late-nineteenth-century literary critic, Viktor Hehn, was in no mood to be conciliatory about this or any other poem by Heine and subjected it to special abuse in his *Gedanken über Goethe* (Thoughts on Goethe) of 1886. (The frequent pairing of Goethe's and Heine's names was a thorn in the side for many.) 'Heine blessing! Heine praying! Never have more impure [that word again] hands blessed, never has a more unprincipled heart uttered a more blasphemous prayer! How he must have laughed up his sleeve when true-hearted, stupid Germans let themselves be moved by such a thing', Hehn fumes.[50] That Heine was being a double agent, aping things Christian in

49 Adolf Bartels, *Heinrich Heine. Auch ein Denkmal* (Dresden: C.A. Koch, 1906): 135–6. Bartels would later write *Der Nationalsozialismus Deutschlands Rettung* (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1924).

50 Victor Hehn, *Gedanken über Goethe* (Berlin, 1887): 157; my translation.

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order to decry them, was something the critic could dimly discern but without a shred of understanding of the poet's aesthetic purposes. In Hehn's hate-filled eyes, a Jew had no right to invoke anything Christian. That the charade should have been taken to heart by the German bourgeoisie for decades, sung and declaimed and anthologized over and over, maddened him.

In one of Thomas Mann's early stories, 'Der Wille zum Glück' (The will to happiness) of 1896, 'Du bist wie eine Blume' becomes the register of the true artist's predilection to great passion, in excess of the rest of humanity's punier capacities. Here, we find Mann experimenting with what would become a frequent theme in later works: the coupling of frailty/disease/mental illness and artistic genius. The central figure of the story is a young man named Paolo Hofmann, his half-Italian, half-German parentage responsible in some measure for his refined sensibilities. In his school years, when he falls in love for the first time, his devotion to the chosen girl exceeds that of his cruder classmates for their sweethearts, and his artistic talent is first evident in a charcoal drawing of her face with the caption, 'Du bist wie eine Blume!', the added exclamation point a beautifully economical register of adolescent excess. As with all those op. 1 settings, there is a certain passage into artistic self-awareness implied in the frequency with which one encounters this poem in contexts such as Mann's. Near the beginning of the story, the narrator speaks about 'the pathos of distance' felt by all those 'who at fifteen read Heine in secret and pass judgement on the world and mankind'.[51] Later, Paolo falls in love with a young Jewish woman whose wealthy parents' home is described with a touch of snobbery on Mann's part, although sympathy predominates. Young love, creativity, Jewish outsider status, great passion, Heine's critiques of humanity and society are all evoked simply by dropping the poet's name and the title-line of this extraordinarily famous poem.

Inevitably, reaction to all those overripe parlour songs set in, and twentieth-century composers began to rebel. Either they passed over the poem altogether as no longer congruent with modernism's many aims – for example, Hanns Eisler's only setting of Heine for solo voice is the tiny, lovely 'Verfehlte Liebe' (Misspent love)[52] – or spoofed it in one way or another. The eccentric baron Gerald Tyrwhitt-Wilson, Lord Berners, 'explained' in the small preface to his setting of 'Du bist wie eine Blume', the first of his *Three Songs in the German Manner* composed between 1913 and 1918, that the poem was inspired by 'a white pig that the poet had encountered in the course of a country walk and whose melancholy fate inspired the note of foreboding that runs throughout the work'. 'This fact', culled from an unnamed biography of the poet, 'does not seem to have been sufficiently appreciated by those who have hitherto set the poem and the present version is an attempt to restore to the words their rightful significance, while at the same time preserving the sentimental character of the German Lied', Lord Berners declared, tongue thoroughly in cheek. I have subsequently encountered those who took his unspecified reference to a biographical source at face value and held the poem to have indeed been thus inspired. Marked *secco (schnauzend)*, the piano snuffles and grunts and paws the ground in porcine dissonance, modern

51 Thomas Mann, *Frühe Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1981): 43. The story was first published in the Munich periodical *Simplicissimus* in 1896 and then in Thomas Mann, *Der kleine Herr Friedemann. Novellen* (Berlin: Fischer, 1898).

52 Hanns Eisler, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Stephanie Eisler and Manfred Grabs, 1/16: *Lieder für eine Singstimme und Klavier*, ed. Manfred Grabs (Leipzig: Deutsche Verlag für Musik, 1988): 161.

to a degree. I particularly like the descending parallel fifths in the bass at 'Ich schau' dich an', the musical persona presumably too melancholy to obey such elementary compositional strictures as avoidance of parallel fifths. One also has to laugh at the conjunction of the Schumannian directive *innig* with loudness and accents on virtually every syllable of text in the vocal line, hardly in accord with previous notions of *Innigkeit*, and at the setting of the final phrase 'so rein und schön und hold' in such a manner as to emphasize grotesquely the connective 'und': 'so pure … AND beautiful … AND gentle'.[53]

And finally, Wilhelm Killmayer devised the musical commentary to end all musical commentaries on this poem for the third section, entitled *Die alte Geschichte* (The old story), of his 1998 Heine songbook. 'The old story' is as multivalent as anything in Heine, signifying not only those poems beloved of Romantic composers (there is a wild, woolly and wonderful setting of 'Ich grolle nicht', or 'I do not complain'), but earlier song traditions and love itself. When Killmayer sets 'Du bist wie eine Blume' to two root-position triads (A major and F♯ minor) for the right hand only and in the treble, with nothing underneath, when he bids the singer quasi-recite the words to a declamatory vocal line in which hints of past lyricism are shredded into fragments, we hear the death-knell of a famous poem for music.[54] Marked *hold und rein* [!], this song proclaims satiric boredom with an overused text. The pattern of so many prior songs to these words is distilled to the bare bones of major sweetness, minor melancholy, one chord each, while soaring up to the word 'rein' in ecstasy now becomes the musical equivalent of a yawn. 'Been there, done that, what a bore', we hear. Heine, I feel sure, would have laughed.

53 See Gerald Tyrwhitt-Wilson, *The Collected Vocal Music*, ed. Peter Dickinson (London: Chester Music, 1980): 2–3. One notes the date of composition – during World War One.

54 Wilhelm Killmayer, *Heine-Lieder*: 54.

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