

Notes Toward Three Recitals

by

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DEDICATION

For my grandmother, Marie Trenchel, who taught me how to listen. And how not to.

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ABSTRACT

Three art song recitals were performed in lieu of a written dissertation. The following program notes indicate some of the creativity and scholarship that shaped those performances. The first recital, “Mostly About Love,” was curated loosely around love songs, including the work of a composer in each of the German, French, English, and American song traditions. For this performance, notes were provided to inform and enhance the audience’s experience with the music. The second program, “In Defense of Gossip,” celebrated the recital as an explicitly literary forum, incorporating musical settings of poetry by only two authors: W.H. Auden and Frank O’Hara. Here the accompanying notes are more instructive—an attempt to attune the audience to the innerworkings of the respective poets and their poems, especially as they can be read (and, by extension, heard) to be in dialogue with one another. In the final recital, “The Good Songs,” I concede to the song as a primarily musical experience, while recontextualizing the performance as a kind of a case study within a broader commentary on the concept of the performer’s “voice.” The notes use musical commentary and analysis in support of an argument that intersects with issues of performance practice and performance theory.

Recital I
Mostly About Love

Daniel McGrew, tenor
John Etsell, piano

Tuesday March 10, 2020, 6:30PM
Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor

Viola, D.786

Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)

Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire

Le balcon
Harmonie du soir
Le jet d'eau

Claude Debussy
(1862–1918)

Intermission

Canticle I, "My Beloved is Mine"

Benjamin Britten
(1913–1976)

Mostly About Love

Love Song
Down at the Docks
Let's Take a Walk
A Prayer to St. Catherine

Virgil Thomson
(1896–1989)

I. On the Tendency for Songs to be About Love

What's left to sing after the songs about love? Love songs are, after all, most songs. As Richard Leppert suggests, "Songs elide themselves with love, surely song's most common trope. Love's successes and failures (the latter more common than the former) belong to song."¹ Indeed, song is among the most powerful technologies with which we confront and express our vulnerable selves. It variously enables and ennoble the risks taken in the process of probing, pondering, and processing love. Acknowledging this, Lawrence Kramer, who has written significantly on art song, observes that, "Both the Lied and the popular song . . . serve a common end, which is to uphold the power and authority of the wounded self,"—which is to say the wound-able self, or the self who seeks to love and be loved.²

Preparing this particular program of love songs, I've been affected not only by the beautiful, even surprising resonances among the songs themselves, but also by those among the narratives behind and between the songs. These aren't merely songs about love; they are songs *brought about by* love.

II. Flowers of Innocence and of Evil

Franz Schubert's friendship with Franz von Schober must be counted among the most fruitful and enduring of his too-short life. It was Schober whose family welcomed the young composer into their home from autumn 1816 to late summer 1817, affording him the financial freedom to focus on composing, and Schober who introduced Schubert to the baritone who would become one of the foremost interpreters of his songs, Johann Michael Vogl.³ Their closeness is also

¹ Richard Leppert, foreword to *Song Acts: Writing on Words and Music*, ed. Walter Bernhart (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2017), VII.

² Lawrence Kramer, *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 118.

³ Graham Johnson, *Franz Schubert: The Complete Songs*, Volume II, *J-Schulze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 790-791.

reflected in Schubert’s fourteen Schober settings, the tenth of which, “**Viola**,” D.786, was composed in March of 1823.

“Viola” quietly prefigures a compositional inclination toward long-form narratives that would later the same year result in the first of Schubert’s monumental Müller cycles, *Die Schöne Müllerin*, as well as a three-act opera, *Fierrabras*, D.796. In “Viola,” Schubert and Schober craft an extended ballad, chronicling the fate of a personified violet—she blooms too early and ultimately succumbs to the intensity of her solitude and longing for love.

A lilting piano introduction evokes the ringing of bells and anticipates a refrain: “*Schneeglöcklein, o Schneeglöcklein. . .*” Graham Johnson describes this initial music as, “demure to the point of temerity.”⁴ But while at the beginning of the song the *Schneeglöcklein* (little snow bell) is invoked to ring in the approaching spring, as the narrative progresses, its ringing is put to more macabre tasks. The atmosphere of innocence and purity in which Viola blooms is modulated throughout her story, until finally the *Schneeglöcklein* is poignantly revealed to ring her death knell.

At the time of this song’s composition, Schober was preparing to depart Vienna for Breslau; Schubert, already very ill, faced the loss of one of his dearest companions.⁵ Perhaps the themes of abandonment and longing in *Viola* were particularly relevant to Schubert at this time.

Franz von Schober⁶
(1796–1882)

Viola

Schneeglöcklein, O Schneeglöcklein,
In den Auen läutest du,
Läutest in dem stillen Hain,

Violet

Snowdrop, O Snowdrop,
You ring in the meadows,
You ring in the quiet valley,

⁴ Graham Johnson, *Franz Schubert: The Complete Songs*, Volume III, *Schwanengesang–Z* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 513.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Translated into English by Daniel McGrew.

Läute immer, läute zu, läute immer zu!

Denn du kündest frohe Zeit,
Frühling naht, der Bräutigam,
Kommt mit Sieg vom Winterstreit,
Dem er seine Eiswehr nahm.

Darum schwingt der goldne Stift,
Dass dein Silberhelm erschallt,
Und dein liebliches Gedüft
Leis' wie Schmeichelruf entwallt:
Dass die Blumen in der Erd,
Steigen aus dem düstern Nest,
Und des Bräutigams sich wert
Schmücken zu dem Hochzeitsfest.

Schneeglöcklein, O Schneeglöcklein,
In den Auen läutest du,
Läutest in dem stillen Hain,
Läut' die Blumen aus der Ruh'!

Du Viola, zartes Kind,
Hörst zuerst den Wonnelaut,
Und sie stehet auf geschwind,
Schmücket sorglich sich als Braut,

Hüllet sich in's grüne Kleid,
Nimmt den Mantel sammetblau,
Nimmt das güldene Geschmeid,
Und den Brilliantentau.

Eilt dann fort mit mächt'gem Schritt,
Nur den Freund im treuen Sinn,
Ganz von Liebesglück durchglüht,
Sieht nicht her und sieht nicht hin.

Doch ein ängstliches Gefühl
Ihre kleine Brust durchwallt,
Denn es ist noch rings so still,
Und die Lüfte weh'n so kalt.

Und sie hemmt den schnellen Lauf,
Schon bestrahlt von Sonnenschein,
Doch mit Schrecken blickt sie auf,
Denn sie stehet ganz allein.

Schwestern nicht, nicht Bräutigam
Zugedrungen! und verschmäht!
Da durchschauert sie die Scham,
Fliehet wie vom Sturm geweht,

Ring on, ring on forever!

For you herald a happy time:
Spring, the bridegroom, approaches
With victory from his battle with winter,
From whom he seized his icy weapon.

So your golden rod swings
That your silver bell shall resound,
And your sweet fragrance wafts gently,
Like an inviting call:
So that the flowers in the earth
Rise from their dark nest,
and, to prove worthy of the bridegroom,
adorn themselves for the wedding feast.

Snowdrop, O Snowdrop,
You ring in the meadows,
You ring in the quiet valley,
Ring the flowers from their rest!

You, Violet, tender child,
First hear the blissful sound;
And she rises swiftly
To carefully adorn herself as a bride.

She wraps herself in a green dress
Takes a velvety blue coat,
her golden trinkets,
And her dewy diamonds.

Then she hurries forth with a powerful step,
Thinking only of her beloved,
Glowing with the happiness of love,
Looking neither this way nor that.

But a feeling of anxiety
Pierces her tiny heart,
For it is still so quiet all around,
And the winds blow so cold.

And she stops her rapid course
Already illuminated by the sun,
But with horror she looks up,
Because she is totally alone.

No sisters, no bridegroom
She is too early! She has been spurned!
Then she shudders with shame,
She flees as if swept away by a storm.

Fliehet an den fernsten Ort,
Wo sie Gras und Schatten deckt,
Späht und lauschet immerfort,
Ob was rauschet und sich regt.

Und gekränket und getäuscht
Sitzet sie und schluchzt und weint,
Von der tiefsten Angst zerfleischt,
Ob kein Nahender erscheint.

Schneeglöcklein, O Schneeglöcklein,
In den Auen läutest du,
Läutest in dem stillen Hain,
Läut die Schwestern ihr herzu!

Rose nahet, Lilie schwankt,
Tulp' und Hyazinthe schwellt,
Windling kommt daher gerankt,
Und Narciss' hat sich gesellt.

Da der Frühling nun erscheint,
Und das frohe Fest beginnt,
Sieht er alle, die vereint,
Und vermisst sein liebstes Kind.

Alle schickt er suchend fort,
Um die eine, die ihm wert,
Und sie kommen an den Ort,
Wo sie einsam sich verzehrt.

Doch es sitzt das liebe Kind
Stumm und bleich, das Haupt gebückt,
Ach! der Lieb' und Sehnsucht Schmerz
Hat die Zärtliche erdrückt.

Schneeglöcklein, O Schneeglöcklein,
In den Auen läutest du,
Läutest in dem stillen Hain,
Läut Viola sanfte Ruh'!

She flees to the farthest place,
Where grass and shade conceal her,
She waits and listens the whole time
For something to rustle or stir.

Hurt and deceived,
She sits and sobs and weeps,
Torn up by a profound fear
That no one will appear.

Snowdrop, O Snowdrop,
You ring in the meadows,
You ring in the quiet valley,
Ring her sisters to her!

Rose approaches, Lily sways,
Tulip and Hyacinth swell,
Bindweed climbs along,
And Narcissus has joined them.

Now Spring appears
And the happy festival begins.
He sees them all united,
And misses his dearest child.

He sends them all out to search
For the one that he cherishes,
And they come to the place
Where she withers alone.

But there sits the dear child
Silent and pale, her head bowed,
Ah! The pain of love and longing
Have crushed the tender one.

Snowdrop, O Snowdrop,
You ring in the meadows,
You ring in the quiet valley,
Ring Viola gently to her rest!

Charles Baudelaire's infamous collection, *Les fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil), suggests a striking inversion of Viola's tragic innocence. The collection, from which Debussy assembled his *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, was first published in 1857. In Baudelaire's poems the candid, emotional utterances of high Romanticism give way to a Modernist's inclination

toward the obscure, evocative, and symbolic. The book incited significant outrage, even to the extent that the poet's sanity was questioned. Eventually six poems from *Les fleurs du mal* were banned on the grounds of "offense to public morality."⁷ The stigma surrounding the collection, even thirty years later, renders it a somewhat contumacious choice on Debussy's part.

The first of the songs, *Le balcon*, was written in 1888, the very year Debussy, on his friend Étienne Dupin's dime, traveled to Bayreuth to experience Wagner's, *Tristan und Isolde*.⁸ "Le balcon"—its sheer length (the longest in Debussy's song catalogue), unrelenting chromaticism, and overwrought motivic development—is unmistakably indebted to Wagner's music, and furthermore saturated in Tristan's particular world of insatiable amorous desire. "Harmonie du soir" and "Le jet d'eau" (the second and third songs) were both written a year later in 1889. These songs are in several ways anomalous in the context of Debussy's catalogue; they represent both experimentation and transformation. Still, among the hallmarks of Debussy's musical voice—what Mark DeVoto calls, the "Debussy sound"—are distinctive patterns of repetition that find a direct parallel in Baudelaire's intricate formal processes.⁹ Repetition functions uniquely within each of the first three songs: in "Le balcon," the first line of each stanza is repeated as the fifth and final line, "Harmonie du soir" features a pattern of interlocking repetitions (ABCD BEDF EGFH, etc.), and finally *Le jet d'eau* (like "Viola") features a repeating refrain. Debussy, aligning his penchant for musical patterns with Baudelaire's formal repetitions, saturates his songs with a dizzying cyclicity.

Mirroring the reception of Baudelaire's poems, Debussy's songs were not enthusiastically received upon their premiere in 1903. This is in part due to the explicit

⁷ Francis Scarg, introduction to *Baudelaire: The Complete Verse*, by Charles Baudelaire (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2012), 30.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mark De Voto, *The Debussy Sound: Colour, Texture, Gesture*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 79–196.

Wagnerian influence they display, especially within a musical culture overtly concerned with the cultivation and revival of an independently French music. While Debussy's music would persist in its reckoning with Wagner, it would never again express the Wagnerian aesthetic with such lucidity.

Charles Baudelaire¹⁰
(1821–1867)

Le Balcon

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,
Ô toi, tous mes plaisirs! ô toi, tous mes devoirs!

Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses!

Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon,
Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses.

Que ton sein m'était doux! que ton coeur m'était
bon!

Nous avons dit souvent d'impérissables choses
Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon.

Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!
Que l'espace est profond! que le coeur est puissant!
En me penchant vers toi, reine des adorées,
Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang.
Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!

La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison,
Et mes yeux dans le noir devinaient tes prunelles,
Et je buvais ton souffle, ô douceur! ô poison!

Et tes pieds s'endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles.

La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison.

Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses,
Et revis mon passé blotti dans tes genoux.
Car à quoi bon chercher tes beautés langoureuses
Ailleurs qu'en ton cher corps et qu'en ton coeur si

The Balcony

Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses,
O you, my every pleasure! O you, my every
duty!

You will remember the beauty of caresses,
The sweetness of the fireside, and the charm of
the evenings,

Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses!

The evenings lit by the glowing coals,
And the evenings on the balcony, veiled in rosy
vapors.

How soft I found your breast! How kind your
heart was to me!

We have often said imperishable things
On evenings lit by the glowing coals.

How beautiful are the suns on warm evenings!
How the space is deep! How the heart is strong!
Leaning toward you, queen of my adoration,
I seem to breathe the fragrance of your blood.
How beautiful are the suns on warm evenings!

The night thickened around us like a wall,
And my eyes found your pupils in the darkness,
And I drank in your breath, O sweetness! O poi-
son!

And your feet fell asleep in my fraternal hands.

The night thickened around us like a wall.

I know the art of evoking happy moments
And relive my past nestled in your lap.
For what good is it to seek your languid beauties
Save for in your dear body and so-sweet heart?

¹⁰ Translated into English by Daniel McGrew.

doux?
Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses!

Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis,
Renaîtront-ils d'un gouffre interdit à nos sondes,
Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajeunis
Après s'être lavés au fond des mers profondes?
— Ô serments! ô parfums! ô baisers infinis!

Harmonie du Soir

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!

Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor!

Le jet d'eau

Tes beaux yeux sont las, pauvre amante!
Reste longtemps, sans les rouvrir,
Dans cette pose nonchalante
Où t'a surprise le plaisir.
Dans la cour le jet d'eau qui jase
Et ne se tait ni nuit ni jour,
Entretient doucement l'extase
Où ce soir m'a plongé l'amour.

La gerbe d'eau qui berce

I know the art of evoking happy moments!

Those vows, those perfumes, those infinite
kisses,
Will they rise from an unfathomable abyss,
As the reborn suns ascend to the sky
After washing themselves in the depths of the
sea?
— O vows! O perfumes! O infinite kisses!

Evening Harmony

Now the time is coming when, quivering on its
stem,
Each flower sheds its perfume like a censer;
The sounds and the scents swirl in the air;
Melancholy waltz and reeling languor!

Each flower sheds its perfume like a censer;
The violin trembles like a wounded heart;
Melancholy waltz and reeling languor!
The sky is sad and beautiful like a great altar.

The violin trembles like a wounded heart,
A tender heart that hates the vast, black void.
The sky is sad and beautiful like a great altar;
The sun has drowned in its congealing blood.

A tender heart that hates the vast, black void,
Is gathering to itself all traces of its luminous
past!

The sun has drowned in its congealing blood. . .
Your memory shines within me like a mon-
strance!¹¹

The Fountain

Your beautiful eyes are tired, poor lover!
Rest awhile, without opening them,
In that listless pose
In which pleasure surprised you.
The babbling fountain in the courtyard
Never silent, night or day,
Sweetly prolongs the ecstasy
Into which love plunged me this evening.

The sheaf of water rocking

¹¹ (in the Roman Catholic Church) an open or transparent receptacle in which the consecrated Host is exposed for veneration.

Ses mille fleurs,
Que la lune traverse
De ses pâleurs,
Tombe comme une averse
De larges pleurs.

It's thousand flowers
Through which the moon shines
It's paid light,
Falls like a shower
Of large tears.

Ainsi ton âme qu'incendie
L'éclair brûlant des voluptés
S'élançe, rapide et hardie,
Vers les vastes cieux enchantés.
Puis, elle s'épanche, mourante,
En un flot de triste langueur,
Qui par une invisible pente
Descend jusqu'au fond de mon cœur.

Thus, your soul lit
With the searing flash of sensuousness
Springs swift and bold
Toward the vast, enchanted skies.
And then spills over, dying
In a wave of sad languor,
Which falls down an invisible slope
Into the depths of my heart.

La gerbe d'eau qui berce . . .

The sheaf of water rocking. . .

O toi, que la nuit rend si belle,
Qu'il m'est doux, penché vers tes seins,
D'écouter la plainte éternelle
Qui sanglote dans les bassins!
Lune, eau sonore, nuit bénie,
Arbres qui frissonnez autour,—
Votre pure mélancolie
Est le miroir de mon amour.

O you whom the night renders so beautiful,
How sweet it is, as I lean over your breasts
To listen to the eternal lament
Sobbing in the fountain's basin!
Moon, sonorous waters, blessed night,
Trees that tremble all around—
Your pure melancholy
Is the mirror of my love.

La gerbe d'eau qui berce . . .

The sheaf of water rocking. . .

III. Praise and Prayer

Benjamin Britten composed five canticles between 1947 and 1974, each to a sacred text and for a varied ensemble of voices and instruments. The first of these, *Canticle I, 'My Beloved is Mine,'* for solo tenor and piano, was written for a memorial concert performed in honor of Dick Sheppard, a clergyman, activist, and prominent figure of the Peace Pledge Union, to which Britten also belonged. The piece, like virtually all of Britten's music for solo tenor, was premiered by his partner, Peter Pears. The poem by Francis Quarrels, a minor poet and devout Anglican (born twenty years after John Donne, and certainly inspired by that master's sacred

verse), is a paraphrase of *Song of Solomon*: “My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.”¹²

For Britten, this seventeenth century text evoked the musical world of Henry Purcell. In terms of both content and form, the canticle recalls Purcell’s longer songs, which tend to be cantata-like: comprised of distinct musical sections, alternatively declamatory and tuneful.¹³ Britten’s elaborate, melismatic writing on words like “joined,” “entire,” and “fire” are also notably Purcellian touches. Throughout the piece, Britten devises various musical depictions of the text’s central theme: union, two joined as one. Initial bitonality and polyrhythms establish a musical landscape in which the composer develops various processes of unification and integration.

It should be acknowledged that the canticle’s text features unmistakably homoerotic resonances. In setting these words to be sung by his male lover, Britten is characteristically subversive. This song of love from man to man—“So I my best-beloved’s am; so he is mine”—was acceptable within a dangerously homophobic society because of the familiar conventions of devotional poetry. As Graham Johnson notes, in the context of the canticle’s premiere, any suspicion of a homoerotic subtext “would simply have been taken as a sign of ignorance of religious literature.”¹⁴

Francis Quarles (1592–1644)

A Divine Rapture¹⁵

Ev’n like two little bank-divided brooks,

¹² Song of Solomon 2:16, KJV.

¹³ Jennifer Doctor, Judith Le Grove, Paul Banks, Heather Wiebe, and Philip Brett, “Britten, (Edward) Benjamin.” *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 24 Feb. 2020.

¹⁴ Graham Johnson, *Britten, Voice & Piano: Lectures on the Vocal Music of Benjamin Britten* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 117.

¹⁵ The poet’s title is not preserved by Britten.

That wash the pebbles with their wanton streams,
And having rang'd and search'd a thousand nooks,
Meet both at length at silver-breasted Thames,
Where in a greater current they conjoin:
So I my best-beloved's am; so he is mine.

Ev'n so we met; and after long pursuit,
Ev'n so we joyn'd; we both became entire;
No need for either to renew a suit,
For I was flax and he was flames of fire:
Our firm-united souls did more than twine;
So I my best-beloved's am; so he is mine.

If all those glitt'ring Monarchs that command
The servile quarters of this earthly ball,
Should tender, in exchange, their shares of land,
I would not change my fortunes for them all:
Their wealth is but a counter to my coin:
The world's but theirs; but my beloved's mine.

Nor Time, nor Place, nor Chance, nor Death can bow
My least desires unto the least remove;
He's firmly mine by oath; I his by vow;
He's mine by faith; and I am his by love;
He's mine by water; I am his by wine,
Thus I my best-beloved's am; thus he is mine.

He is my Altar; I, his Holy Place;
I am his guest; and he, my living food;
I'm his by penitence; he mine by grace;
I'm his by purchase; he is mine, by blood;
He's my supporting elm; and I his vine;
Thus I my best beloved's am; thus he is mine.

He gives me wealth; I give him all my vows:
I give him songs; he gives me length of days;
With wreaths of grace he crowns my longing brows,
And I his temples with a crown of Praise,
Which he accepts: an everlasting sign,
That I my best-beloved's am; that he is mine.

Just over ten years later, in 1959, Virgil Thomson would set a group of four, then-unpublished poems by the contemporary poet, Kenneth Koch. Upon the songs' publication, Thomson called them, *Mostly About Love*—a title at once open-ended enough to accommodate Koch's freewheeling poetic imagination and precise enough to locate each piece within a given

discourse (a profession of love, a comment on love, an invitation to the beloved, and a prayer for love). The songs were commissioned by the arts patron and soprano, Alice Etsy, who premiered them at Carnegie Hall on 3 April, 1960.

Koch was an established member of the New York School of poets; he and Thomson had several mutual friends in figures such as Frank O'Hara and Ned Rorem. Their working relationship was established in 1958, when they decided to collaborate on an opera, which never came to fruition. Thomson was inspired by Koch's lyrical imagination, just as he was by the language poetry of Gertrude Stein, with whom he frequently collaborated. Describing Koch to friends, he is reported to have said: "He writes just like Gertrude, except it makes sense."¹⁶ It is perhaps not surprising that Thomson, whose music is concerned with a radical simplicity, and whose process is shaped by what he called the "discipline of spontaneity," would be drawn to lines like, "I love you as a sheriff searches for a walnut," or "The maple tree's not made of wood / It is wood / Wood comes from it."

In setting Koch's poems, however, the composer did take liberties, omitting segments of individual lines and even entire stanzas. At Koch's objection, the composer insisted: "It's more beautiful this way, sweetie. Don't say the same thing three times."¹⁷ Koch, the younger and less established artist, acquiesced. These songs boast a combination of silliness, sweetness, and sincerity unique even in Thomson's whimsical output.

Kenneth Koch
(1925–2002)

Love Song

I love you as a sheriff searches for a walnut
That will solve a murder case unsolved for years

¹⁶ Anthony Tommasini, *Virgil Thomson: Composer on the Aisle* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 454.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Because the murderer left it in the snow beside a window
Through which he saw her head, connecting with
Her shoulders by a neck, and laid a red
Roof in her heart. For this we live a thousand years;
For this we love, and we live because we love, we are not
Inside a bottle, thank goodness! I love you as a
Kid searches for a goat; I am crazier than shirttails
In the wind, when you're near, a wind that blows from
The big blue sea, so shiny so deep and so unlike us;
I think I am bicycling across an Africa of green and white fields
Always, to be near you, even in my heart
When I'm awake, and also I believe that you
Are trustworthy as the sidewalk which leads me to
The place where I again think of you.
I love you as the sunlight leads the prow
Of a ship which sails
From Hartford to Miami, and I love you
Best at dawn, when even before I am awake the sun
Receives me.

Down At the Docks

Down at the docks
Where everything is sweet and inclines
At night
To the sound of canoes
I planted a maple tree
And every night
Beneath it I studied the cosmos
Down at the docks.
Sweet ladies, listen to me.
The dock is made of wood
The maple tree's not made of wood
It is wood
Wood comes from it
As music comes from me
And from this mandolin I've made
Out of the maple tree.

Jealous gentlemen, study how
Wood comes from the maple
Then devise your love
So that it seems
To come from where
All is it yet something more
White spring flowers and leafy bough
Jealous gentlemen.

Arrogant little waves
Knocking at the dock
It's for you I've made this chanson
For you and that big dark blue.

Let's Take a Walk

Let's take a walk
In the city
Till our shoes get wet
and when
We see the traffic
Lights and the moon
Let's take a smile
Off the ashcan, let's walk
Into town
Let's take a walk
Into the river
(I can even do that
Tonight) where
If I kiss you please
Remember with your shoes off
You're so beautiful like
A lifted umbrella orange
And white we may never
Discover the blue over-
Coat maybe never never O blind
With this (love) let's walk
Into the first
Rivers of morning as you are seen
To be bathed in a light white light
Come on

A Prayer to St. Catherine

If I am to be preserved from heartache and shyness
By Saint Catherine of Sienna,
I am praying to her that she will hear my prayer
And treat me in every way with kindness.
I went to Sienna to Saint Catherine's own church
(It is impossible to deny this)
To pray to her to cure me of my heartache and shyness.
Which she can do, because she is a great saint.
Other saints would regard my prayer as foolish.
Saint Nicolas, for example, he would chuckle,
"God helps those who help themselves,
Rouse yourself! Get out there and do something about it!"
Or Saint Joanna. She would say, "It is not shyness,
That bothers you. It is sin. Pray to Catherine of Sienna."

But that is what I have done. And that is why I have come here
to cure my heartache.
Saint Catherine of Sienna, if this song pleases you,
then be good enough to answer the prayer it contains.
Make the person that sings this song less shy than that person is,
And give that person some joy in that person's heart.

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Recital II
In Defense of Gossip

Daniel McGrew, tenor
John Etsell, piano
Evan Hines, piano

*Recorded June 2020
Green Wood, Ann Arbor*

To lie flat on the back
Night covers up the rigid land
Fish in the unruffled lakes
Underneath the abject willow

Benjamin Britten
(1913–1976)

Five Poems, op. 53

Lauds
O Lurcher-Loving Collier
What's in Your Mind
Eyes Look into the Well
Carry Her Over the Water

Lennox Berkeley
(1903–1989)

Evan Hines, piano

Three Auden Songs

In Memoriam L.K.A. 1950–1952
Rimbaud
Lay Your Sleeping Head My Love

Hanz Werner Henze
(1926–2012)

From Song on Poems of Frank O'Hara

Autobiographia Literaria
Song (1951)
St. Paul and All That
Prelude
Song (July 29, 1960)
Song ("is it dirty")
Steps
Having a Coke with You
A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island

Christopher Berg
(b. 1949)

John Etsell, piano



Figure 1: Event poster by Fances Vandervoort¹⁸

¹⁸ Designed after Joe Brainard's illustration for the cover of Ned Rorem's *Four Dialogues*, texts by Frank O'Hara.

...Gossip is creative. All art is based on gossip—that is to say, on observing and telling. The artist proper is someone with a special skill in handling his medium, a skill which few possess. But all of us to a greater or less degree can talk; we can all observe, and we all have friends to talk to. Gossip is the art-form of the man and woman in the street, and the proper subject for gossip, as for all art, is the behavior of mankind.

—“In Defense of Gossip,” W. H. Auden

I. Auden and the New York School

In his 1937 essay “In Defense of Gossip,” W. H. Auden, determined against many of the hallmark hostilities toward poetry (it’s high-brow, obtuse, inaccessible!), identifies the art form as merely a specialized iteration of a common, every-day discipline: gossip. Rather than some reclusive genius wielding impenetrable lyrics, Auden’s poet is discovered among any “man [or] woman in the street,” whose poetry, however incantatory, is fundamentally a mode of speech—one notices things, things happen, one tells about it. He prizes a poetic imagination born of presence, a creativity only as vivid and varied as are one’s experiences.¹⁹ Unmistakably, these qualities point toward a poet that could well be, or rather would become Frank O’Hara.

Following the emergence of his vocation as a poet in the early 1920’s, Auden quickly established himself the literary figure by whom an entire community of British writers is recognized: The Auden Generation.²⁰ His poetry reflects a series of dichotomies and contradictions, a fluidity of creed, intent, and approach that eventually established him a 20th century poet of distinct range, transformation, and influence. The poetry is political and private, public and intimate—“Yes, we are out of sight and earshot here.”²¹—thus scholars have long rehearsed the poet’s waxing and waning politics, religious convictions, and personal

¹⁹ W.H. Auden, “In Defense of Gossip: From the Listener Weekly Organ of the British Broadcasting Station” *The Living Age* (1897–1941), American Periodicals (1938).

²⁰ Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930’s* (London: Pimlico, 1976).

²¹ “To Lie Flat on the Back,” 1934.

relationships in an effort to decode a fickle poetics. But David Yezzi emphasizes that these mercurial qualities are secondary to the poems themselves. He reads Auden's changeability within the context of craft, the primacy of the poet's skill with language:

In the end, the signature of Auden's poems is his mastery of the phrase . . . But the kind of virtuosity that Auden displayed was frequently lost behind the veils of thought that he picked up then shed like a manic Salome. For Auden, the aesthetic exigencies of the poem came first; the intellectual systems that he poached on for his poems were true only in so far as they helped him to realize the verse.²²

After all, it was Auden himself who suggested that, "In poetry all facts and all beliefs cease to be true or false and become interesting possibilities."²³

Born in 1907 in York, England, Auden moved to New York City in 1939. He became a naturalized American citizen in 1946, the same year he first met O'Hara, while performing a reading at Harvard where the younger poet was a student.²⁴ O'Hara, along with John Ashbery, Barbara Guest, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler, form the core of the so-called New York School—a somewhat misleading designation (and one they officially resisted).²⁵ None of these poets was born or educated in New York City, neither can the range of their collective work be considered within a singular, aesthetic "school."²⁶ Instead, their association was characterized by friendship and collaboration, both with each other and with the New York School of Abstract Expressionists (Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Lee Krasner, et al.), from

²² David Yezzi, "What Auden Believed," *The New Criterion*, March 2006, <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2006/3/what-auden-believed>.

²³ W. H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand, and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

²⁴ David Lehman, *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Lehman, 19.

whom they inherited their name.²⁷ They convened in New York in the 1950's, an auspicious cultural moment in which, as David Lehman has it, the city was, "displacing Paris as the world capital of modern art."²⁸

Auden and the New York School poets moved in overlapping social circles; Auden was aware of the younger poets' work. In a letter from 3 June, 1955, he offers O'Hara artistic feedback: "I think you (and John [Ashbery] for that matter) must watch what is always the great danger with any surrealistic style . . . namely of confusing authentic non-logical relations which arouse wonder with accidental ones which arouse mere surprise and in the end fatigue."²⁹ A year later, Auden granted John Ashbery's first collection *Some Trees* the Yale Younger Poets Prize, thereby rejecting O'Hara's submission. Even following this loss, in a letter to Kenneth Koch, O'Hara is unflinching: "I don't care what Wystan says, I'd rather be dead than not have France around me like a rhinestone dog-collar."³⁰

In fact, O'Hara's poetic inheritance is as much from Auden as from that "rhinestone dog-collar," French surrealism. O'Hara himself indicates this dual influence in his poem, "Memorial Day 1950":

And those of us who thought poetry
was crap were throttled by Auden or Rimbaud³¹
when, sent by some compulsive Juno, we tried
to play with collages or sprechstimme in their bed

However, O'Hara's letter to Koch does reflect a significant shift both in Auden's poetics and the New York School's corresponding interest in his work.

²⁷ Lehman, 20.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Brad Gooch, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 261.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gwendolyn M. Bays, "Rimbaud-Father of Surrealism?" *Yale French Studies*, no. 31 (1964): 45-51. Rimbaud is often considered "the father of Surrealism."

As Auden’s aesthetic diverged from the personal, colloquial mode of his earliest work—what Ashbery in his 1946 senior thesis on Auden, describes as a poetry brought closer to “the everyday world”³²—it likewise diverged with the interests of the poets of the New York School.³³ Writing to Kenneth Koch in the mid-1950’s, James Schuyler laments the poet’s revision of a poem from his 1932 collection *The Orators*—in which a list of first names, “Wystan, Stephen, Christopher,” is altered, universalized: “Subjects, Objects, all of you.”³⁴ Auden’s original catalogue of first names has obvious echoes throughout O’Hara’s poetry. Lytle Shaw, reflecting on the full scope of the poet’s influence on O’Hara, writes, “Auden’s collaboration, his cultivation of camp, his interest in popular culture and light verse, and his thematization of homosexual bonds all appealed to O’Hara.”³⁵ Indeed even as over time his cachet with the poets of the New York School faded, Auden’s poetry signals O’Hara’s work in important ways.

Frank O’Hara was born in 1926 in Baltimore, Maryland. In his youth, he was a serious student of music. He briefly studied piano at Boston Conservatory prior to his military service during World War II. Then, with the funding made available to veterans, he became a student of literature, first at Harvard University, and then at the University of Michigan.³⁶ Reading Auden’s masterful “In Praise of Limestone,” David Lehman envisions, of all people, O’Hara:

...the nude young male who lounges
Against a rock displaying his dildo, never doubting
That for all his faults he is loved; whose works are but
Extensions of his power to charm?³⁷

³²Terence Diggory, *Encyclopedia of the New York School Poets* (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2009), 35.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ James Schuyler, *Just the Thing: Selected Letters of James Schuyler 1951–1991*, ed. William Corbett (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2004), 73–75.

³⁵ Lytle Shaw, *Frank O’Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 59.

³⁶ Gooch, 54–188.

³⁷ This is true to the poem as originally published in 1948 and 1951. A revised version was published in 1958, which reads: “...the flirtatious male who lounges / Against a rock in the sunlight, never doubting / That for all his faults he is loved; whose works are but / Extensions of his power to charm?”

While this poem predates the Auden-O’Hara association, it does present an uncanny likeness, not least for that the young man is naked. O’Hara’s social circle was heavily populated by painters; he frequented artist’s studios, helped them stretch canvases, and eventually posed for them, often in the nude.³⁸ O’Hara took a job at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) on 3 December, 1951, where he worked first at the front desk and eventually as a curator.³⁹

O’Hara wrote constantly and quickly: entire poems in single sittings, on his lunch break (his 1964 *Lunch Poems* collects these), even on his way to poetry readings.⁴⁰ His approach was not “serious.” He stashed poems freely around his apartment and distributed original copies to his friends.⁴¹ This nonchalance also appears within the work itself, which was never revised or edited, and therefore baffled many readers, especially beyond his immediate circle; by critics and writers alike he was considered no more than a “whimsical, charming, gadfly.”⁴² Ashbery writes of his poetry: “It is part of a modern tradition which is anti-literary and anti-artistic, and which goes back to Apollinaire and the Dadaists.”⁴³ Echoing this, Marjorie Perloff considers O’Hara’s poetry a persuasive argument against any espousal that the avant-garde is dead: “the avant-garde is precisely what it always was—art that is so far ahead of its time that it takes years—sometimes decades—for the audience to catch up.”⁴⁴ Perloff also reads in O’Hara’s poetry an “aesthetics of attention.” His work is frequently noted for its vibrant sense of place (namely New York City, but also Ann Arbor, Fire Island, etc.) and for its naming and listing: “I do this, I do that.” In this

³⁸ Gooch, 206.

³⁹ Gooch, 207.

⁴⁰ Marjorie Perloff, “Frank O’Hara and the Aesthetics of Attention,” *Boundary 2*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1976), 781.

⁴¹ Lehman, 180.

⁴² Pearl K. Bell, *The New Leader*, 55 (10 January 1972), 15-16, quoted in Perloff, 781.

⁴³ John Ashbery, introduction to *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara*, ed. Donald A. Press, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), vii

⁴⁴ Perloff, 782.

way, O'Hara's poetry exalts and refines the "art of gossip" that Auden espoused—noticing things, telling about them.

Thus early Auden forecasts O'Hara's particular poetic imagination; the two men's poetics exist in conversation. Auden at once invites O'Hara's voice and critiques it. O'Hara at once takes up Auden's charge and scoffs at him. James Schuyler (who of the members of the New York School, developed the closest personal relationship with Auden) captures these paradoxes well, elegizing him with both skepticism and fondness:

On Ischia he claimed to take
St. Restituta seriously, and
sat at Maria's café in the cobbled
square saying, "Poets should
dress like businessmen." while
he wore an incredible peach-
colored nylon shirt.⁴⁵

II. The Songs and Poems

Auden and Britten met through their mutual work for the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit, which brought together young creatives to develop documentary films, and thus became the cite of their initial collaboration.⁴⁶ Despite being posthumously published together under the title, "Fish in the Unruffled Lakes," Britten's earliest Auden settings do not belong to a formal cycle or collection. They were written throughout the latter half of the 1930's, as Auden flirtatiously teased the reticent composer, harboring what Graham Johnson refers to as an "emotional obsession" with him.⁴⁷ Many of these poems can be found written in Auden's hand into various

⁴⁵ James Schuyler, "Wysten Auden," in *Selected Poems*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), 169.

⁴⁶ Neil Powel, *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2013), 91–98.

⁴⁷ Graham Johnson, *Britten, Voice & Piano: Lectures on the Vocal Music of Benjamin Britten*. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 159.

scores and papers belonging to Britten;⁴⁸ several were dedicated to the composer when first published in Auden's 1936 collection *Look, Stranger!*.

These songs are the fruit of a relationship mutually formative for both artists, and they document the collaborative spirit with which Auden excited the poets of the New York School. Britten's treatments of these pointed poems are by turns earnest and subversive. The playfulness in songs like "To lie flat on the back" and "Underneath the Abject Willow" simultaneously deflects Auden's intrusive sentiments and illuminates his overtly casual voice. The sobering "Night covers up the rigid land," sounds like a token of compassion from the rejector to the rejected. However, if in that poem the poet is forced to "lie alone," in "Fish in the Unruffled Lakes" he receives the sublime gift of "voluntary love," a gift Britten never offered Auden. Their association ended tensely in 1947, after which they were irreparably estranged.⁴⁹

W. H. Auden
(1907–1973)

To lie flat on the back

To lie flat on the back with the knees flexed
and sunshine on the soft receptive belly,
or face down, the insolent spine relaxed,
no more compelled to cower or to bully, is good;
and good to see them passing by
below on the white sidewalk in the heat,
the dog, the lady with parcels, and the boy:
there is the casual life outside the heart.

Yes, we are out of sight and earshot here.
Are you aware what weapon you are loading,
to what that teasing talk is quietly leading?
Our pulses count but do not judge the hour.
Who are you with, from whom you turn away,
At whom you dare not look? Do you know why?

⁴⁸ Peter Dickinson, *The Music of Lennox Berkeley* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, Limited, 1988), 37.

⁴⁹ Philip Hensher, "Love's Little Boy," *The Guardian*, November 2009,
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/nov/07/britten-auden-philip-hensher>.

Night covers up the rigid land

Night covers up the rigid land
and ocean's quaking moor,
and shadows with a tolerant hand
the ugly and the poor.

The wounded pride for which I weep
you cannot staunch, nor I
control the moments of your sleep,
nor hear the name you cry,

Whose life is lucky in your eyes,
and precious is the bed
as to his utter fancy lies
the dark caressive head.

For each love to its aim is true,
and all kinds seek their own;
you love your life and I love you,
so I must lie alone.

O hurry to the feted spot
Of your deliberate fall
For now my dream of you cannot
refer to you at all.

Fish in the unruffled lakes

Fish in the unruffled lakes
Their swarming colours wear,
Swans in the winter air
A white perfection have,
And the great lion walks
Through his innocent grove;
Lion, fish and swan
Act, and are gone
Upon Time's toppling wave.

We, till shadowed days are done,
We must weep and sing
Duty's conscious wrong,
The Devil in the clock,
The goodness carefully worn
For atonement or for luck;
We must lose our loves,
On each beast and bird that moves
Turn an envious look.

Sighs for folly said and done

Twist our narrow days,
But I must bless, I must praise
That you, my swan, who have
All gifts that to the swan
Impulsive Nature gave,
The majesty and pride,
Last night should add
Your voluntary love.

Underneath the abject willow

Underneath the abject willow,
Lover, sulk no more:
Act from thought should quickly follow.
What is thinking for?
Your unique and moping station
Proves you cold;
Stand up and fold
Your map of desolation.

Bells that toll across the meadows
From the somber spire
Toll for these unloving shadows
Love does not require.
All that lives may love; why longer
Bow to loss
With arms across?
Strike and you shall conquer.

Geese in flocks above you flying.
Their direction know,
Brooks beneath the thin ice flowing,
To their oceans go.
Coldest love will warm to action:
Walk then, come,
Walk then, come,
Into your satisfaction.

Auden and Lennox Berkeley (1903–1989) were contemporaries at Oxford, where Berkeley studied French. Then, on Ravel’s recommendation, he moved to Paris to study

composition with Nadia Boulanger.⁵⁰ Berkeley and Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) met first in 1936. Berkeley writes:

When I came back to England after my student days in Paris . . . I was still far from having found how to use what I had acquired to real advantage. I realized quickly that here was someone of greater musical ability than I, and from whom I could learn . . . I was rather tied up in knots: he was able to undo them for me and encourage me to be myself, to write, in fact, the kind of music I wanted to write . . . I have done so ever since⁵¹

Berkeley's initial settings of Auden are contemporary with the early Britten settings (discussed above); he even sets several of the same poems. Having already shadowed Britten with his own setting of "Night Covers Up the Rigid Land," Berkeley, writing in praise of the younger composer's 1938 Auden song cycle *On This Island*, admits, "Incidentally I have got bitten with Wystan's poems and am doing another one. I promise not to do any more! Not that it matters—they are not as good as yours."⁵² He makes good on this promise until some twenty years later, when he returns to Auden for his *Five Songs, op. 53* (1958). Britten's early claim on the poet had by this time faded.

Berkeley chooses short, lyrical poems, each of which the poet himself has designated "song": "What's in your mind" is the first in a poetic cycle of *Five Songs*, "O lurcher loving collier" the third in a poetic cycle of *Twelve Songs*, etc. The opus was commissioned by the American soprano, Alice Esty, and premiered by her at Carnegie Hall in 1964. The music captures the full scope of Berkeley's mature compositional voice, demonstrating technical skill

⁵⁰ Joan Redding and Peter Dickinson, "Berkeley, Sir Lennox," *Grove Music Online*, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000044828>.

⁵¹ Lenox Berkeley, "A Composer Speaks," *Composer* 43 (1972), 17–19.

⁵² *Ibid.*

and a flair for the tonally ambiguous or elusive, the latter quality most prominently distinguishing his music from Britten's.⁵³

W. H. Auden
(1907–1973)

Lauds

Among the leaves the small birds sing;
The crow of the cock commands awaking:
In solitude, for company.

Bright shines the sun on creatures mortal;
Men of their neighbours become sensible:
In solitude, for company.

The crow of the cock commands awaking;
Already the mass-bell goes dong-ding:
In solitude, for company.

Men of their neighbours become sensible;
God bless the Realm, God bless the People:
In solitude, for company.

Already the mass-bell goes dong-ding;
The dripping mill-wheel is again turning:
In solitude, for company.

God bless the Realm, God bless the People;
God bless this green world temporal:
In solitude, for company.

The dripping mill-wheel is again turning;
Among the leaves the small birds sing:
In solitude, for company.

O lurcher-loving collier

O lurcher-loving collier, black as night,
Follow your love across the smokeless hill;
Your lamp is out, and all the cages still;
Course for heart and do not miss,
For Sunday soon is past and, Kate, go not so fast,
For Monday comes when none may kiss:
Be marble to his soot, and to his black be white.

⁵³ Peter Dickinson, foreword to *Lennox Berkeley and Friends*, ed. Peter Dickinson, (Suffolk, Boydell & Brewer: 2012), 4.

What's in your mind

What's in your mind, my dove, my coney;
Do thoughts grow like feathers, the dead end of life;
Is it making of love or counting of money,
Or raid on the jewels, the plans of a thief?

Open your eyes, my dearest dallier;
Let hunt with your hands for escaping me;
Go through the motions of exploring the familiar;
Stand on the brink of the warm white day.

Rise with the wind, my great big serpent;
Silence the birds and darken the air;
Change me with terror, alive In a moment;
Strike for the heart and have me there.

Eyes look into the well

Eyes look into the well,
Tears run down from the eye;
The tower cracked and fell
From the quiet winter sky.

Under the midnight stone
Love was buried by thieves;
The robbed heart begs for a bone,
The damned rustle like leaves.

Face down in the flooded brook
With nothing more to say.
Lies One the soldiers took,
And spoiled and threw away.

Carry her over the water

Carry her over the water,
And set her down under the tree,
Where the culvers white all day and all night,
And the winds from every quarter,
Sing agreeably, agreeably, agreeably of love.

Put a gold ring on her finger,
And press her close to your heart,
While the fish in the lake snapshots take,
And the frog, that sanguine singer,
Sings agreeably, agreeably, agreeably of love.

The streets shall flock to your marriage,
The houses turn round to look,
The tables and chairs say suitable prayers,
And the horses drawing your carriage
Sing agreeably, agreeably, agreeably of love.

Henze's initial collaboration with Auden (and Chester Kallman, with whom the poet wrote numerous opera libretti) resulted in *The Bassarids* (1965), a one act opera based on Euripides's *The Bacchae*. His three Auden songs were composed later, in 1983.

In the post-war musical landscape of 1950's and 60's Germany, Henze's music was criticized for its expressivity and melodicism—as Theodor Adorno told the composer: “Your music is not chaotic enough.”⁵⁴ Henze accounts for this in post-modernist terms: “My music is nourished by just this state of tension: the abandonment of traditional tonality and the return to it. Rather like tensing a bow, it is here a kind of ‘tensing the ear.’”⁵⁵ This is an especially apt description of the music in his three Auden songs, which successively increase in gravity and scope: the first a brief elegy for a beloved pet, the second a dense portrait of Rimbaud, and finally an intricate lullabye. Here the tensions in Henze's music—between the tonally-oriented and freely atonal—poignantly mirror the characteristic dualities couched in Auden's poems—the heartfelt and droll, verbose and pithy, cynical and sincere.

W. H. Auden
(1907–1973)

In Memoriam, L.K.A; 1950-1952

At peace under this mandarin, sleep, Lucina
Blue-eyed queen of white cats
For you the Ischian wave

⁵⁴ Tom Service, “A Guide to Hans Werner Henze's Music” *The Guardian*, October 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2012/oct/29/contemporary-music-guide-hans-werner-henze>.

⁵⁵ Virginia Palmer-Füchsel, “Henze, Hans Werner,” *Grove Music Online*. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000012820>.

Shall weep
When we who now miss you
Are American dust
And steep Epomeo in peace and war
Augustly a grave-watch keep.

Rimbaud

The nights, the railway-arches, the bad sky,
His horrible companions did not know it;
But in that child the rhetorician's lie
Burst like a pipe: the cold had made a poet.

Drinks bought him by his weak and lyric friend
His senses systematically deranged,
To all accustomed nonsense put an end;
Till he from lyre and weakness was estranged.

Verse was a special illness of the ear;
Integrity was not enough; that seemed
The hell of childhood: he must try again.

Now, galloping through Africa, he dreamed
Of a new self, a son, an engineer,
His truth acceptable to lying men.

Lay your sleeping head, my love

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,
Mortal, guilty, but to me
The entirely beautiful.

Soul and body have no bounds:
To lovers as they lie upon
Her tolerant enchanted slope
In their ordinary swoon,
Grave the vision Venus sends
Of supernatural sympathy,
Universal love and hope;
While an abstract insight wakes

Among the glaciers and the rocks
The hermit's sensual ecstasy.

Certainty, fidelity
On the stroke of midnight pass
Like vibrations of a bell,
And fashionable madmen raise
Their pedantic boring cry:
Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.

Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
Let the winds of dawn that blow
Softly round your dreaming head
Such a day of sweetness show
Eye and knocking heart may bless,
Find the mortal world enough;
Noons of dryness see you fed
By the involuntary powers,
Nights of insult let you pass
Watched by every human love.

O'Hara's poems—sprawling and conversational—have not appealed widely to song composers. Still, reviewing Christopher Berg's twelve O'Hara settings, the American Record Guide wrote, "On the evidence of these songs, Berg may be an American Hugo Wolf." Steve Blier, cofounder of the New York Festival of Song, echoes this sentiment, comparing the Berg-O'Hara relationship to that of Poulenc and Éluard: "Just as Poulenc illuminated the poetry of Éluard . . . Chris Berg clarifies O'Hara. He musicalizes O'Hara's words with an expert sense of timing, a perfect balance of recitative and tunefulness and a dry sense of humor."⁵⁶

Berg's O'Hara songs were written between 1985 and 1988. In his own notes, the composer locates their genesis in the 1970's, when he encountered a copy of O'Hara's *Selected Poems* and was drawn to the poetry's "casual relations" to his own life: "O'Hara had attended

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the University of Michigan, and I was living in Ann Arbor at the time; O’Hara was a passionate lover of music... But more [I was drawn to] his open embrace of the world and, especially, his love of men.”⁵⁷

These elaborate songs draw freely on the various musics of O’Hara’s moment—“art music” of the avant-garde, pop, musical theatre, and jazz. But Berg warns: “While these songs may often “sound” pop, please be advised that the intention is High Art—these are not, as some seem to think, cabaret songs.”⁵⁸ This statement aligns Berg’s music with the central aesthetic “problem” posed by O’Hara’s poetry: a need to distinguish between high and low art, and furthermore an impulse to dismiss the colloquial or “every-day” as the later (one thinks again of Auden’s poet “in the streets”).

This selection of eight of Berg’s songs is bookended by poems that illustrate O’Hara’s poetic arrival and departure: “Autobiographia Literaria” and “A True Account of Talking to the Sun on Fire Island.” The songs each begin with the same musical material—a circular motive that first depicts the quiet monotony of an outsider’s childhood and later the personified sun’s attempt to wake the sleeping poet, in order to praise his art. Fire Island is a particularly poignant setting for O’Hara’s contemplative dialogue with the sun, as it was eight years later the cite of his premature death

In his poems, O’Hara found ways to “elevate the prose of everyday life”⁵⁹—Berg’s songs mirror that project in music, extending it into the concert hall.

Frank O’Hara
(1926–1966)

Autobiographia Literaria

⁵⁷ Christopher Berg, *Songs on Poems of Frank O’Hara*, (Fayetteville: Classical Vocal Reprints).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Lehman, 169.

When I was a child
I played by myself in a
corner of the schoolyard
all alone.
I hated dolls and I
hated games, animals were
not friendly and birds
flew away.
If anyone was looking
for me I hid behind a
tree and cried out "I am
an orphan."
And here I am, the
center of all beauty!
writing these poems!
Imagine!

Song

I'm going to New York!
(what a lark! what a song!)
where the tough Rocky's eaves
hit the sea. Where th'Acro-
polis is functional, the trains
that run and shout! the books
that have trousers and sleeves!
I'm going to New York!
(quel voyage! jamais plus!)
far from Ypsilanti and Flint!
where Goodman rules the Empire
and the sunlight's eschatology-
logy upon the wizard's bridges
and the galleries of print!
I'm going to New York!
(to my friends! mes semblables!)
I suppose I'll walk back West.
But for now I'm gone forever!
the city's hung with flashlights!
the Ferry's unbuttoning its vest!

St. Paul and All That

Totally abashed and smiling
I walk in
sit down and
face the frigidaire

it's April
no May
it's May

such little things have to be established in the morning
after the big things of night
do you want me to come? when
I think of all the things I've been thinking of
I feel insane
simply "life in Birmingham is hell"
simply "you will miss me
but that's good"
when the tears of a whole generation are assembled
they will only fill a coffee cup
just because they evaporate
doesn't mean life has heat
"this various dream of living"
I am alive with you
full of anxious pleasures and pleasurable anxiety
hardness and softness
listening while you talk and talking while you read
I read what you read
you do not read what I read
which is right, I am the one with the curiosity
you read for some mysterious reason
I read simply because I am a writer
the sun doesn't necessarily set, sometimes is just
disappears
when you're not here someone walks in
and says "hey,
there's no dancer in that bed"
O the Polish summers! those drafts!
those black and white teeth!
you never come when you say you'll come but on the
other hand you do come

Song (July 29, 1960)

Did you see me walking by the Buick Repairs?
I was thinking of you
having a Coke in the heat it was your face
I saw on the movie magazine, no it was Fabian's
I was thinking of you
and down at the railroad tracks where the station
has mysteriously disappeared
I was thinking of you
as the bus pulled away in the twilight
I was thinking of you
and right now

Song (“is it dirty”)

Is it dirty
does it look dirty
that's what you think of in the city

does it just seem dirty
that's what you think of in the city
you don't refuse to breathe do you

someone comes along with a very bad character
he seems attractive. is he really. yes. very
he's attractive as his character is bad. is it. yes

that's what you think of in the city
run your finger along your no-moss mind
that's not a thought that's soot

and you take a lot of dirt off someone
is the character less bad. no. it improves constantly
you don't refuse to breathe do you

Steps

How funny you are today New York
like Ginger Rogers in Swingtime
and St. Bridget's steeple leaning a little to the left

here I have just jumped out of a bed full of V-days
(I got tired of D-days) and blue you there still
accepts me foolish and free
all I want is a room up there
and you in it
and even the traffic halt so thick is a way
for people to rub up against each other
and when their surgical appliances lock
they stay together
for the rest of the day (what a day)
I go by to check a slide and I say
that painting's not so blue

where's Lana Turner
she's out eating
and Garbo's backstage at the Met
everyone's taking their coat off
so they can show a rib-cage to the rib-watchers
and the park's full of dancers with their tights and shoes
in little bags
who are often mistaken for worker-outers at the West Side Y

why not
the Pittsburgh Pirates shout because they won
and in a sense we're all winning
we're alive

the apartment was vacated by a gay couple
who moved to the country for fun
they moved a day too soon
even the stabbings are helping the population explosion
though in the wrong country
and all those liars have left the UN
the Seagram Building's no longer rivalled in interest
not that we need liquor (we just like it)

and the little box is out on the sidewalk
next to the delicatessen
so the old man can sit on it and drink beer
and get knocked off it by his wife later in the day
while the sun is still shining

oh god it's wonderful
to get out of bed
and drink too much coffee
and smoke too many cigarettes
and love you so much

Having a Coke with You

is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz, Bayonne or being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gracia in Barcelona
partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St. Sebastian partly because of my love for you, partly because of your love for yogurt
partly because of the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches
partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and statuary it is hard to believe when I'm with you that there can be anything as still
as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it
in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we are drifting back and forth
between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles
and the portrait show seems to have no faces in it at all, just paint you suddenly wonder why in the world anyone ever did them
I look
at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the world
except possibly for the *Polish Rider* occasionally and anyway it's in the Frick which thank heavens you haven't gone to yet so we can go together the first time and the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of Futurism
just as at home I never think of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* or
at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used to wow me and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them
when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the sun sank

or for that matter Marino Marini when he didn't pick the rider as carefully
as the horse
it seems they were all cheated of some marvelous experience
which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I am telling you about it

A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island

The Sun woke me this morning loud
and clear, saying "Hey! I've been
trying to wake you up for fifteen
minutes. Don't be so rude, you are
only the second poet I've ever chosen
to speak to personally

so why
aren't you more attentive? If I could
burn you through the window I would
to wake you up. I can't hang around
here all day."

"Sorry, Sun, I stayed
up late last night talking to Hal."

"When I woke up Mayakovsky he was
a lot more prompt" the Sun said
petulantly. "Most people are up
already waiting to see if I'm going
to put in an appearance."

I tried
to apologize "I missed you yesterday."
"That's better" he said. "I didn't
know you'd come out." "You may be
wondering why I've come so close?"
"Yes" I said beginning to feel hot
wondering if maybe he wasn't burning me
anyway.

"Frankly I wanted to tell you
I like your poetry. I see a lot
on my rounds and you're okay. You may
not be the greatest thing on earth, but
you're different. Now, I've heard some
say you're crazy, they being excessively
calm themselves to my mind, and other
crazy poets think that you're a boring
reactionary. Not me.

Just keep on
like I do and pay no attention. You'll
find that people always will complain
about the atmosphere, either too hot
or too cold too bright or too dark, days
too short or too long.

If you don't appear

at all one day they think you're lazy
or dead. Just keep right on, I like it.

And don't worry about your lineage
poetic or natural. The Sun shines on
the jungle, you know, on the tundra
the sea, the ghetto. Wherever you were
I knew it and saw you moving. I was waiting
for you to get to work.

And now that you
are making your own days, so to speak,
even if no one reads you but me
you won't be depressed. Not
everyone can look up, even at me. It
hurts their eyes."

"Oh Sun, I'm so grateful to you!"

"Thanks and remember I'm watching. It's
easier for me to speak to you out
here. I don't have to slide down
between buildings to get your ear.
I know you love Manhattan, but
you ought to look up more often.

And
always embrace things, people earth
sky stars, as I do, freely and with
the appropriate sense of space. That
is your inclination, known in the heavens
and you should follow it to hell, if
necessary, which I doubt.

Maybe we'll
speak again in Africa, of which I too
am specially fond. Go back to sleep now
Frank, and I may leave a tiny poem
in that brain of yours as my farewell."

"Sun, don't go!" I was awake
at last. "No, go I must, they're calling
me."

"Who are they"

Rising he said "Some
day you'll know. They're calling to you
too." Darkly he rose, and then I slept.

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Recital III
The Good Songs

Daniel McGrew, tenor
Eric Sedgwick, piano
Martin Katz, piano

*Recorded July 2020
161 W 54th Street, NYC &
Northside Community Church, Ann Arbor*

La Bonne chanson, op 61

Une sainte en son auréole
Puisse que l'aube grandit
La lune blanche
J'allais par des chemins perfidies
J'ai Presque peur, en vérité
Avant que tu ne t'en ailles
Donc, ce sera par us clair jour d'été
N'est-ce pas?
L'hiver a cessé

Gabriel Fauré
(1845–1924)

Eric Sedgwick, piano

Selected Mörike Lieder

Der Gärtner
Heimweh
Jägerlied
Auf eine Christblume I
Auf eine Christblume II
Nimmersatte Liebe
An eine Äolsharfe
Selbstgeständnis
Gebet
Peregrina I
Peregrina II
Auftrag
An die Geliebte

Hugo Wolf
(1860–1903)

Martin Katz, piano

*Est-ce une voix future,
Une voix du passé?*

–Charles van Lerbergher⁶⁰

(Is it a future voice, / A voice from the past?)

I. Issues of Voice

The wages of song is voice. Before any concept of language or music, there was voice and therefore song, whether or not it would be recognized as such today.⁶¹ If since that prehistoric “singing” our concept of song has been refined, inversely our concept of voice has broadened. Voice as we know it, is acoustics and body, word and idea; we acknowledge the vocal mechanism and the sound it produces as voice, but also the voice of the people, the voice in one’s head, and the author’s unspoken voice. In this way, the art song already only on the page contains a confluence of voices: composer and poet, music and language. These voices are literally voiced by further voices: those of the performers. But the performer’s voice is, again, both sound and idea. By unnumbered processes of engagement and interpretation, performers navigate music and language according to their own aesthetic assumptions, imaginative thoughts, and expressive goals—procedures which result in what we might consider their unique point of view, or their voice. There can be no doubt that if the wages of song is voice, the art song delivers amply. In this way, performance begets a complex discourse,⁶² engaging a dizzying anatomy of voices.

⁶⁰ “Crépuscule,” Charles van Lerbergher.

⁶¹ “Men sang out their feelings long before they were able to speak their thoughts. But of course we must not imagine that ‘singing’ means exactly the same thing here as in a modern concert hall. . . . These utterances were, at first, like the singing of birds and the roaring of many animals and the crooning of babies, exclamative, not communicative.” Otto Jespersen, *Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), 436.

⁶² Here I use “discourse” following Joel Sherer’s anthropological study of linguistics and other communicative practices and Tyler Bickford’s investigation into singing as “a layer of discourse built on top of language.” Joel Sherer, “A Discourse-Centered Approach to Language and Culture,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 89, no. 2 (1987): 295-309. And Tyler Bickford, “Music of Poetry and Poetry of Song: Expressivity and Grammar in Vocal Performance,” *Ethnomusicology* 51, no. 3 (2007): 439-76.

Those of us engaged in the performance and study of song perhaps unsurprisingly surrender these voices to our most Hobesian instincts: “the war of all against all.”⁶³ Many of our questions and conversation, our critiques, and our delusions about performance revolve around this proverbial “war”: an imagined contest. We strain for a decisive hierarchy. Which voice wins? Which is ultimately heard? And how do we quell the other voices accordingly? These questions and our common answers to them intersect with several concepts too complex and tangential to bear thorough explication here (e.g. the romantic trope of “genius”), but even a cursory consideration of one aspect of the mythology in which musicians frequently participate can bring us closer to an honest account of voice.

Consider this phenomenon, which I have observed particularly among connoisseurs of art music, and most often musicians themselves: when a performance is vivid, when something particularly lucid or revelatory occurs and one is compelled to the highest praise, one lauds not the performer’s voice, but, paradoxically, its absence. The most common phantom voice experienced in the performer’s stead is that of the composer: “When you played, it was as though I was listening to J.S. Bach himself!” In the foreword to his collected poems, Stanley Kunitz, known for dense, intellectual poetry, memorably writes: “I dream of an art so transparent that you can look through and see the world.”⁶⁴ Despite the vocal density at play in performance, we, too, dream of transparency. It is a noble aspiration. So we study, collect whatever is knowable, commune at length with the vivid continuities that emerge from any meaningful survey of a composer or poet’s life and output. Still, even the most learned and skillful artists are unlikely to disappear mid-performance; Mozart isn’t going to take the podium, even at the behest of the

⁶³ Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651). See Gregory S. Kavka "Hobbes's War of All Against All." *Ethics* 93, no. 2 (1983): 291-310.

⁶⁴ Stanley Kunitz, Foreword to *The Collected Poems*, (New York: Norton, 2002).

most dedicated and perceptive performers of his music. Alas, the performer's art cannot traverse the divide which separates it from the composer's art. What we *really* mean, of course, when we claim to have experienced the composer's voice in performance, is rather that we have experienced something more than merely the performer's voice.⁶⁵ But if we cannot dispel our own voices, how can we use them to this end? Which is to ask: how do we sing songs? I believe the good songs, the best songs can teach us how.

II. The Good Songs

Performance momentarily aside: let us consider the song itself and the vocal riddle it already contains. At the initial meeting of my first collegiate course on art song, the class hushed as our professor wrote very slowly, very clearly on the blackboard:

bad poem + good music = good song

good poem + bad music = bad song

A good song requires good music and is therefore its composer's achievement: a musical success. Even connoisseurs of poetry in song, those of us who come to the repertoire in search of more than purely musical satisfaction, must concede that no matter the power of a composer's literary sensibility, their songs will be successful only insofar as they can express that power in musical terms and construct a musical discourse which will coherently unfold alongside a given poem. The greatest songs, however, achieve considerably more than this. They are marked by an indelible quality, ultimately containing expressive powers greater than their constituent voices.

Walter Pater, an influential nineteenth century thinker, addresses this phenomenon in his groundbreaking aesthetic critique of Renaissance art:

⁶⁵ The exception to this of course being those rare instances in which one does literally experience the composer's voice in performance, because the composer is also the performer.

The sensuous material of each art brings with it a special phase or quality of beauty, untranslatable into the forms of any other. . . each art, therefore, having its own peculiar and untranslatable sensuous charm, has its own special mode of reaching the imagination, its own special response to its materials. . . yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what German critics term an *Anders-streben*—a partial alienation from its own limitations, through which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces.⁶⁶

Music and poetry belong to separate schools within the academy, they are practiced by musicians and poets respectively, they appeal to distinct audiences, and each can certainly be said to have “[its] own peculiar and untranslatable sensuous charm.” But they are also historically predisposed to this *Anders-streben*. Rewind their distinct evolutions far enough, and histories become history—the story of how meaning was made of that first, prehistoric singing. Don’t we often reference the language of music and the music of language? Making music and making language are both processes by which meaning mediates sound; the ancient Greeks spoke of poetry and music at once: *mousikē*.⁶⁷ One possible reading of song composition, therefore, is as a retrospective attempt to realize the coequal condition of music and poetry. Of course, in art song, language and music cannot be objectively coequal because of that treacherous omnipresence: voice. In most cases, the voice of the poetry has in a sense, already “sounded.” It is fixed. And so the song composer’s challenge in setting a text foreshadows the performer’s predicament outlined above—how does one add one’s voice in such a way that it does not obscure, but rather contributes “new forces?”

Gabriel Fauré and Hugo Wolf are among the uniquely gifted composers whose works suggest answers to this question. Fauré’s settings of Paul Verlaine and Hugo Wolf’s Eduard Mörike songs are perspicuous evidence of the art song’s potential. Any adequate account of why

⁶⁶ Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 122, 124.

⁶⁷ See James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

these songs are among the most prized in the repertoire necessarily surpasses mere descriptions of music and poetry. In these songs, voice meets voice and “new forces” speak. And, at the same time, each voice remains plainly extant within the expressive material. These songs, therefore, demonstrate masterful handlings of voice; they suggest an approach that may be useful to the performer.

III. ‘Des airs ingénus’

Gabriel Fauré was an established and successful song composer by 1887, when Paul Verlaine’s poetry famously entered his musical output with “Clair de lune.” That song is joined the next year by “Spleen,” and, in 1891, by the *Cinq mélodies ‘de Venise,’* a cycle featuring songs which are integrated by common musical material. This compositional technique, indicative of the composer’s middle period, is explored even more elaborately in the ecstatic *La Bonne chanson*, op. 61—a cycle composed between 1892 and 1894, comprising nine songs to texts from Verlaine’s 1870 collection of the same name.⁶⁸ Fauré and Verlaine themselves were not simpatico. If the composer had initially romanticized the great, old poet, he was properly disillusioned by having to chase after Verlaine for a handsomely commissioned opera libretto that never materialized.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Fauré’s voice joins Verlaine’s at a point of distinct, aesthetic compatibility.

Fauré’s *La Bonne chanson* balances some of his most adventuresome harmonic writing with no fewer than five motives or themes. These themes are woven throughout the songs, ultimately coalescing in the last song, “L’hiver a cessé.” They comprise an affecting element of cohesion, even in a scandalously unstable harmonic landscape. Indeed, it was the work’s

⁶⁸ Jean-Michel Nectoux, "Fauré, Gabriel," *Grove Music Online*, 2001.

⁶⁹ Graham Johnson, *Gabriel Fauré: The Songs and their Poets*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 204–205.

harmonic obscurity that affronted the majority of its first audience, including Claude Debussy and Fauré's former teacher, Camille Saint-Saëns.⁷⁰ What others condemned as needless complexity, though, Fauré might have considered in terms of color or nuance. Interviewed in 1903 by Louis Aguetant, the composer explains: "One frequently attributes to composers intentions they never dreamed of. I seek above all to extricate the general feeling of a poem, rather than to concentrate on its details."⁷¹ This investment in poetic atmosphere before the minutia of ideas or images is uniquely suited to Verlaine's poetics; the harmonic flexibility in *La Bonne chanson* is adjacent to the poet's lyricism. As Graham Johnson has it, "[Verlaine's] texts fitted [Fauré] like a glove: they were more naturally musical than anything he had set in the past. As the most sheerly musical of song composers, Fauré was able to be completely himself, almost *more* than himself in setting these poems."⁷²

Paving the way for the Symbolists, Verlaine famously wrote: "De la musique avant toute chose."⁷³ The music of which he speaks is carefully cultivated, but one fashioned to evoke folk poetry, to reflect the language of the common people (as opposed to the aristocracy)—a kind of studied simplicity⁷⁴ In "Puisque l'aube grandit," for example, one smiles at, "Je chanterai des airs ingénus" (I will sing some simple songs)—it contains an endearing flicker of disingenuousness. Neither the poet's nor, later, the composer's song is simple, really. Fauré himself displayed a twin impulse when, again in Aguetant's interview, he only reluctantly admitted that his cycle contained any thematic scheme at all, as though this design occurred in

⁷⁰ Johnson, 226.

⁷¹ Gabriel Fauré, interviewed by Louise Aguetant. Quoted in Robert Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré*, (London: Eulenburg, 1979), 82.

⁷² Johnson, 219.

⁷³ "Let's have music before all things." Verlaine, "Art Poétique," printed and translated in Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Epoch*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 127–128.

⁷⁴ Bergeron, 126–127.

spite of him—an illustration as charming as any of the uncanny symmetries between *La Bonne chanson*'s poet and its composer.⁷⁵

It is also instructive to consider, however, that despite these compatibilities, *La Bonne chanson* suggests very different meanings in the dual contexts of its authors' artistic lives. While spending the summer with his in-laws in north-eastern France, Fauré composed the majority of his cycle in a fit of amorous feeling for Emma Bardac, a skilled soprano (later married to Debussy), to whom he dedicated the piece.⁷⁶ At that same time, Verlaine was facing the bitter end of his tumultuous life, but twenty two years earlier, when *his* collection was written, it poured forth from a similar experience of passion. The poems were dedicated to his then fiancée, Mathilde Mauté, to whom he was briefly and unhappily married. Their conjugality was infamously interrupted by the poet's affair with Arthur Rimbaud.⁷⁷ In light of this, it is easy to read a marked desperation in these ardent poems, to observe in Verlaine's *La Bonne chanson* a doomed attempt to invent a savior in Mauté's image—"Je veux, guidé par vous . . . Marché droit."⁷⁸ While it is the case that Fauré would have been aware of these narratives, capable of reading Verlaine in context, in selecting, reordering, and composing his nine of Verlaine's original twenty-one poems, Fauré eschews virtually all of the peril, uncertainty, and suffering that haunted the poet. Is it therefore the case that Fauré misreads or misuses Verlaine?

A composer is no more able to assume the condition of the poet than the performer is able to assume the condition of the composer. No matter the range and breadth of that which resonates between words and music, the composer's voice is an additional discourse. This discourse may be animated by the word, but it cannot be the word itself. It is not Faure's task to

⁷⁵ Orledge, 81–82.

⁷⁶ Jean-Michel Nectoux, "Fauré, Gabriel," *Grove Music Online*, 2001.

⁷⁷ Johnson, 197.

⁷⁸ "I want, guided by you . . . To walk straight ahead." Robert Orledge advances this reading, arguing that the poems in *La bonne chanson* contain more passion than Verlaine ever felt for Mauté. See Orledge, 81.

disappear. In finding an honest aspect of his own voice within Verlaine's voice, both voices speak clearly, are "almost *more* themselves." Thus, "new forces" emerge—a world of expressive potential contained within nine songs.

Paul Verlaine⁷⁹
(1844–1896)

Une sainte en son aureole

Une Sainte en son auréole,
Une Châtelaine en sa tour,
Tout ce que contient la parole
Humaine de grâce et d'amour;

La note d'or que fait entendre
Un cor dans le lointain des bois,
Mariée à la fierté tendre
Des nobles Dames d'autrefois;

Avec cela le charme insigne
D'un frais sourire triomphant
Éclos dans des candeurs de cygne
Et des rougeurs de femme-enfant;

Des aspects nacrés, blancs et roses,
Un doux accord patricien:
Je vois, j'entends toutes ces choses
Dans son nom Carlovingien.

Puisque l'aube grandit

Puisque l'aube grandit, puisque voici l'aurore,
Puisque, après m'avoir fui longtemps, l'espoir
veut bien
Revoler devers moi qui l'appelle et l'implore,
Puisque tout ce bonheur veut bien être le mien,

Je veux, guidé par vous, beaux yeux aux flames
douces,

A Saint in her halo

A Saint in her halo,
A Chatelaine in her tower,
Everything human speech
Means by grace and love—

The golden note that a horn
Sounds far off in the forest,
Wedded to the delicate pride
Of noble Ladies of old—

Along with the memorable charm
Of a bright, winning smile
Breaking through a field of swan white
And the blush of a wife-like child—

Ivory tones, both white and rose,
In a gentle, patrician accord:
I see and I hear all such things
In her Carolingian name.

Now that dawn's breaking

Now that dawn's breaking, now that daylight is
here
Now that, after long being gone, hope is inclined
To fly back toward me as I plead and implore,
Now that such joy is inclined to be mine,

I want, guided by you, eyes softly blazing,

⁷⁹ English translations by Samuel N. Rosenberg, published in Paul Verlaine, *Paul Verlaine: A Bilingual Selection of His Verse*, ed. Nocolas Valazza, trans. Samuel N. Rosenberg, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

Par toi conduit, ô main où tremblera ma main,
Marcher droit, que ce soit par des sentiers de
mousses
Ou que rocs et cailloux encombrant le chemin;

Et comme, pour bercer les lenteurs de la route,
Je chanterai des airs ingénus, je me dis
Qu'elle m'écouterait sans déplaisir sans doute;
Et vraiment je ne veux pas d'autre Paradis.

La lune blanche

La lune blanche
Luit dans les bois;
De chaque branche
Part une voix
Sous la ramée . . .

Ô bien aimée.

L'étang reflète,
Profond miroir,
La silhouette
Du saule noir
Où le vent pleure . . .

Rêvons, c'est l'heure.

Un vaste et tendre
Apaisement
Semble descendre
Du firmament
Que l'astre irise...

C'est l'heure exquise.

J'allais par les chemins perfides

J'allais par les chemins perfides,
Douloureusement incertain.
Vos chères mains furent mes guides.

Si pâle à l'horizon lointain
Luisait un faible espoir d'aurore;
Votre regard fut le matin.

Nul bruit, sinon son pas sonore,
N'encourageait le voyageur.
Votre voix me dit: "Marche encore!"

Led by your hand holding my trembling hand,
To walk straight ahead, whether on grass

Or stumbling along on stone-covered paths;

Then, to lull the slow laps of the journey,
I shall sing little innocent airs, telling myself
That she'll listen with no disapproval or doubt;
And truly I want no heaven but this.

The moon at night

The moon at night
Shines through the woods;
From every limb
A murmured sigh,
A clear white voice . . .

O love, my joy.

The pool reflects,
In soundless depth,
The silhouette
Of shadowed willows
Bewept by wind . . .

Let's dream: begin.

A vast and tender
Silent calm
Glowing iridescent
In its descent
From heaven's stars . . .

Begin, still charm.

I was going along perfidious paths

I was going along perfidious paths,
Unsure of my goal and in pain;
Your hands came along to show me the way.

So pale on the distant horizon
There glimmered a faint hope of dawn;
Your glance is what brought me the morning.

No sound beyond my sonorous steps
Could I hear to hearten my spirit;
Your voice called out: "Keep on ahead!"

Mon coeur craintif, mon sombre coeur
Pleurait, seul, sur la triste voie;
L'amour, délicieux vainqueur,

Nous a réunis dans la joie.

J'ai presque peur, en vérité

J'ai presque peur, en vérité
Tant je sens ma vie enlacée
A la radieuse pensée
Qui m'a pris l'âme l'autre été,

Tant votre image, à jamais chère,
Habite en ce coeur tout à vous,
Ce coeur uniquement jaloux
De vous aimer et de vous plaire;

Et je tremble, pardonnez-moi
D'aussi franchement vous le dire,
À penser qu'un mot, qu'un sourire
De vous est désormais ma loi,

Et qu'il vous suffirait d'un geste,
D'une parole ou d'un clin d'oeil,
Pour mettre tout mon être en deuil
De son illusion céleste.

Mais plutôt je ne veux vous voir,
L'avenir dût-il m'être sombre
Et fécond en peines sans nombre,
Qu'à travers un immense espoir,

Plongé dans ce bonheur suprême
De me dire encore et toujours,
En dépit des mornes retours,
Que je vous aime, que je t'aime!

Avant que tu ne t'en ailles

Avant que tu ne t'en ailles,
Pâle étoile du matin
—Mille caillies
Chantent, chantent dans le thym.—

Tourne devers le poète
Dont les yeux sont pleins d'amour;
—L'alouette

My timid heart, my somber heart,
Was in tears and alone on its dismal road;
Love, that ravishing master,

Brought us together in joy!

I am almost fearful, truth to tell

I am almost fearful, truth to tell,
So tightly bound is now my life
To the vibrant image
That seized my heart this summer last.

So fully does your visage live
Henceforth within my faithful heart,
This heart uniquely bent
On loving and on pleasing you;

I tremble—will you please forgive
This frank and forthright statement now?—
To see your smile, your word
Is nothing less than my command,

And understand your merest move
Or whispered frown might well suffice
To throw a shroud
Around a heaven-sent illusion.

My wish rather, though, to see you,
However dark the future may be
And filled with fears,
Through an endless, vast expanse of hope,

Immersed in this, the highest bliss—
The knowledge now and evermore,
Despite whatever trials,
That you are my love, *et je t'aime!*

Before you fade from view

Before you fade from view,
Pale morning star,
—A thousand quail
Sing forth in field and glade.—

Look first toward the poet,
His eyes athirst for love,
—The meadow-lark

Monte au ciel avec le jour.—

Tourne ton regard que noie
L'aurore dans son azur;
—Quelle joie
Parmi les champs de blé mûr!—

Puis fais luire ma pensée
Là-bas - bien loin, oh, bien loin !
—La rosée
Gaîment brille sur le foin.—

Dans le doux rêve où s'agite
Ma mie endormie encor...
—Vite, vite,
Car voici le soleil d'or.—

Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été

Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été
Le grand soleil, complice de ma joie,
Fera, parmi le satin et la soie,
Plus belle encor votre chère beauté;

Le ciel tout bleu, comme une haute tente,
Frissonnera somptueux à longs plis
Sur nos deux fronts qu'auront pâlis
L'émotion du bonheur et l'attente;

Et quand le soir viendra, l'air sera doux
Qui se jouera, caressant, dans vos voiles,
Et les regards paisibles des étoiles
Bienveillamment souriront aux époux.

N'est-ce pas?

N'est-ce pas? nous irons gais et lents, dans la voie
Modeste que nous montre en souriant l'Espoir,
Peu soucieux qu'on nous ignore ou qu'on nous
voie.

Isolés dans l'amour ainsi qu'en un bois noir,
Nos deux coeurs, exhalant leur tendresse paisible,
Seront deux rossignols qui chantent dans le soir.

Sans nous préoccuper de ce que nous destine

Flies up as daylight breaks.—

Look far from morning light
And azure-drowning dawn,
—What great delight
In fields of ripening grain!—

Then let my thoughts shine bright
Far from here—oh, far!
—Dew-drops sparkle
Gaily through the hay.—

Sweet dream wherein my love
Is tossed while sleeping still . . .
—Quickly now!
Look here—the golden sun!

So, it will be on a bright summer day⁸⁰

So, it will be on a bright summer day—
The great sun, my joy's accomplice,
Will make, amid the satin and the silk,
Your dear beauty only more beautiful;

Completely blue, the sky, like a high tent,
Lavishly throbs in long folds
Above our brows, which pale
With emotion: happiness and eagerness.

And when evening comes, the air will be soft
As it playfully caresses your veils,
And the serene stars will look down
And smile tenderly on the newlyweds.

Isn't it true?

Isn't it true? despite all the fools and the spiteful
Who won't fail to envy our joy,
We'll be sometimes reserved and always indulgent.

Alone in our love as if deep in a forest,
Our hearts breathe the soft calm that they feel—
Two nightingales they, singing airs in the dark.

Undisturbed by whatever Fate has in store,

⁸⁰ This is the singular poem in Fauré's cycle that is not included in Rosenberg's selected translations; a translation by Daniel McGrew is provided instead.

Le Sort, nous marcherons pourtant du même pas,
Et la main dans la main, avec l'âme enfantine.

We'll move forward together step by step
Hand in hand, with the innocent soul

De ceux qui s'aiment sans mélange, n'est-ce pas?

Of young lovers without any doubts, isn't it true?

L'hiver a cessé

L'hiver a cessé: la lumière est tiède
Et danse, du sol au firmament clair.
Il faut que le coeur le plus triste cède
À l'immense joie éparse dans l'air.

J'ai depuis un an le printemps dans l'âme
Et le vert retour du doux floral,
Ainsi qu'une flamme entoure une flamme,
Met de l'idéal sur mon idéal.

Le ciel bleu prolonge, exhausse et couronne
L'immuable azur où rit mon amour
La saison est belle et ma part est bonne
Et tous mes espoirs ont enfin leur tour.

Que vienne l'été! que viennent encore
L'automne et l'hiver! Et chaque saison
Me sera charmante, ô Toi que décore
Cette fantaisie et cette raison!

Winter has passed

Winter has passed; sunshine is warm
And dances from ground to bright sky.
Even the saddest of hearts has to yield
To the fullness of joy everywhere.

For a year now I have felt in my soul
The bright green return and softness of spring;
Just as a flame becomes one with another,
Two ideals grow from one I have known.

Blue sky now lengthens and raises and crowns
The immutable azure wherein my love smiles;
The season is good and my part in it true,
And all my hopes can now be allowed.

Let summer now come! Let autumn return,
Like winter and all other seasons! Every one
Will enchant me, O You who gave birth
To my dreams and these wonder-filled words!

IV. 'Meiner Seele plötzliche Regung'

If Fauré and Verlaine represent an uncommon aesthetic compatibility—artistic points of view that intersect in multiple, significant ways—Hugo Wolf's songs to poems by Eduard Mörike suggest a rather different mode of invention, or, rather, reinvention. Wolf was fifteen years old at the time of Mörike's death, as yet thirteen years away from the *Wunderjahr*⁸¹ of 1888. Between February and May of that year, Wolf produced a staggering forty-three of his immortal Mörike

⁸¹ "Miracle year"

songs. By November he had composed ten more—fifty-three songs in total.⁸² Wolf’s music both exalts and possesses his poet. Historically, it is largely because of Wolf’s songs that we read Mörike; while this is a testament to Wolf’s own voice, it also indicates the depth of his involvement with the word. Many of the poet’s particular gifts are indeed resonant with Wolf’s unique abilities; Wolf’s status as the composer of poets is confirmed on every page of the songbook. Still, the songs comprise an aesthetic world in which Mörike could never have imagined his poetry, and probably one to which he would have vehemently objected.⁸³

Wolf’s devotion to Mörike is unmistakable. He famously demanded that the poet’s name appear before his own on the title page of the published songs: “Gedichte von Eduard Mörike . . . componirt von Hugo Wolf.”⁸⁴ But he was also keenly aware of his own voice, especially what Susan Youens refers to as “those harmonic predilections, voice-leading procedures, textures, and so forth that . . . [are] manifest in every song.” He even had a name for these phenomena: “Wölferl’s own howl”—a more assertive acknowledgement of his own expressive agency is hard to imagine.⁸⁵ Various musical commentaries scattered throughout Mörike’s poetry and prose can reveal just how remote the composer’s “howl” was from the poet’s musical preferences. While Wolf, a disciple of Wagner, railed against Brahms’s classicism, Mörike treasured Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven. He expressed embarrassment at the overt emotionalism of Romantic music and was vehemently anti-Wagner. Surely Mörike references Wagner, among others, when at the end of his novella, *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*, his imagined Mozart warns that “in the next sixty or seventy years, after I am long gone, many a false prophet will arise.”⁸⁶ Would Mörike have numbered Wolf among these impostors? It is possible. And yet it is the richness, the

⁸² Eric Sams and Susan Youens. “Wolf, Hugo.” *Grove Music Online*. 2001.

⁸³ Susan Youens, *Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7–15.

⁸⁴ “Poems by Eduard Mörike . . . composed by Hugo Wolf,” See Youens, Preface to *Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs*, x.

⁸⁵ Youens, *Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs*, 4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

decadence (to use a Wagnerian word) of Wolf's voice that enables him musical access to Mörike's multifaceted poetry.

The enigmatic Peregrina diptych is particularly illustrative of this musico-poetic precision. Wolf sets only the first and fourth poems in a cycle of five from Mörike's 1832 novel, *Maler Nolten*. In the complete poetic cycle, the threatening seduction in "Peregrina I" and hallucinatory elopement in "Peregrina II" are bridged by material depicting the quick heat and bitter decay of love. Through relentless, obsessive repetitions of a brief, chromatic motive both within and across the two songs, Wolf fills a narrative gap while simultaneously dramatizing the psychological disintegration of his narrator. Scholars guessed at why Wolf would set two, nonsequential poems such as these.⁸⁷ Whatever the reason, the aplomb with which he meets the challenge—setting, in a sense, both poem and poem's absence—is the mark of both his investment in Mörike and his special ability to integrate layers of nuance.

What Wolf and Mörike decisively share is a tremendous artistic range. Mörike defies categorization. He devised lyrics in virtually every tradition, from devotional poetry and love sonnets to humor poems, folk ballads, and fairytales.⁸⁸ Likewise, the full scope of Wolf's songs is an expressive cosmos, almost a theatre of voices (indeed as successful a theatricality as the composer ever achieved in music, unsuccessful as he was at adequately expanding his voice for the much broader canvas of opera⁸⁹). Empowered by a common expressive voracity, Wolf did not falter in sounding his voice through Mörike's words, even if occasionally at the expense of the chasteness, the restraint that characterizes the poetics—"Doch in der Mitten!," is, after all, the

⁸⁷ Susan Youens, "The Undoing of Desire: Hugo Wolf's Paired Songs in the "Mörike-Lieder"." *Il Saggiatore Musicale* 6, no. 1/2 (1999).

⁸⁸ Youens, *Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs*, 4.

⁸⁹ Eric Sams and Susan Youens. "Wolf, Hugo." *Grove Music Online*. 2001.

petition.⁹⁰ The composer, amid the throes of inspiration, writes to his friend: “What I write now . . . I write for posterity, too.”⁹¹ It’s hard to imagine Mörike making such a claim, even at his most inspired and self-satisfied; his art was a quieter thing. Thus, there are ways in which Wolf’s songs suggest a Mörike that Mörike himself would scarcely recognize. Does this asynchrony preclude the “happy marriage” of poetry and music to which art song aspires?

Wolf’s music appeals to unmistakable truths in Mörike’s words, even if those truths aren’t ones of which Mörike was aware, or by which he was convicted in his process of composing the poems. The songs, therefore, are testament to the integrity of the various expressive worlds a poem can contain, and to the legitimacy of what intensely “new forces” can be achieved by a vivid creativity. Wolf’s voice comes to life in Mörike’s words; Mörike’s words are afforded further life by Wolf’s music.

Eduard Mörike⁹²
(1804–1875)

Der Gärtner

Auf ihrem Leibrösslein,
So weiss wie der Schnee,
Die schönste Prinzessin
Reit’t durch die Allee.

Der Weg, den das Rösslein
Hintanzet so hold,
Der Sand, den ich streute,
Er blinket wie Gold.

Du rosenfarbs Hütlein,
Wohl auf und wohl ab,
O wirf eine Feder
Verstohlen herab!

The Gardener

On her favourite mount,
As white as snow,
The loveliest princess
Rides down the avenue.

On the path her horse
Prances so sweetly along,
The sand I scattered
Glitters like gold.

You rose-coloured bonnet,
Bobbing up and down,
O throw me a feather
Discreetly down!

⁹⁰ For a helpful discussion of this quality, one in which Mörike is vividly referred to as “a Swabian cassock on Mount Parnassus,” see T.M. Campbell, “Eduard Mörike: A Neglected German Classic.” *The Sewanee Review* 25, no. 2 (1917): 171-86.

⁹¹ Eduard Mörike, quoted in Youens, *Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs*, 3.

⁹² Translation © Richard Stokes, *The Book of Lieder*, (Faber, 2005), provided courtesy of Oxford Lieder (www.oxfordlieder.co.uk)

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

Heimweh

Anders wird die Welt mit jedem Schritt,
Den ich weiter von der Liebsten mache;
Mein Herz, das will nicht weiter mit.
Hier scheint die Sonne kalt ins Land,
Hier deucht mir alles unbekannt,
Sogar die Blumen am Bache!
Hat jede Sache
So fremd eine Miene, so falsch ein Gesicht.
Das Bächlein murmelt wohl und spricht:
„Armer Knabe, komm bei mir vorüber,
Siehst auch hier Vergissmeinnicht!“
– Ja, die sind schön an jedem Ort,
Aber nicht wie dort.
Fort, nur fort!
Die Augen gehn mir über!

Jägerlied

Zierlich ist des Vogels Tritt im Schnee,
Wenn er wandelt auf des Berges Höh:
Zierlicher schreibt Liebchens liebe Hand,
Schreibt ein Brieflein mir in ferne Land’.

In die Lüfte hoch ein Reiher steigt,
Dahin weder Pfeil noch Kugel fliegt:
Tausendmal so hoch und so geschwind
Die Gedanken treuer Liebe sind.

Auf eine Christblume I

Tochter des Walds, du Lilienverwandte,
So lang von mir gesuchte, unbekannte,
Im fremden Kirchhof, öd und winterlich,
Zum erstmal, o schöne, find ich dich!

Von welcher Hand gepflegt du hier erblühtest,
Ich weiss es nicht, noch wessen Grab du hüttest;
Ist es ein Jüngling, so geschah ihm Heil,
Ist eine Jungfrau, lieblich fiel ihr Teil.

Im nächtgen Hain, von Schneelicht überbreitet,

And if you in exchange
Want a flower from me,
Take a thousand for one,
Take all in return!

Longing for home

The world changes with every step
That takes me further from my love;
My heart’s reluctant to follow me.
Here the sun shines coldly on the land,
Here all seems unfamiliar,
Even the flowers by the brook!
Each thing
Has so foreign a look, so false a face.
The stream, it’s true, murmurs and says:
“Poor boy, come to me,
You’ll see forget-me-nots here too!”
– Yes, they are lovely everywhere,
But not so lovely as those I left.
Onwards, onwards!
My eyes fill with tears!

Huntsman’s Song

A bird steps daintily in the snow
On the mountain heights:
Daintier still is my sweetheart’s hand,
When she writes to me in far-off lands.

A heron soars high into the air,
Beyond the reach of shot or shaft:
The thoughts of faithful love
Are a thousand times as swift and high.

On A Christmas Rose I

Daughter of the forest, close kin to the lily,
You whom I sought so long and never knew,
Now in a strange churchyard, desolate and wintry,
For the first time, O lovely one, I find you!

Whose hand helped you to blossom here,
I do not know, nor whose grave you guard;
If a young man lies here, he has found salvation,
If a maiden, a fair lot befell her.

In the dark grove, overspread with snowy light,

Wo fromm das Reh an dir vorüberweidet,
Bei der Kapelle, am kristallinen Teich,
Dort sucht ich deiner Heimat Zauberreich.

Where the gentle deer moves past you grazing,
By the chapel, beside the crystal pond,
There I sought your enchanted realm.

Schön bist du, Kind des Mondes, nicht der Sonne;

How fair you are, child of the moon, not of the
sun;

Dir wäre tödlich anderer Blumen Wonne,
Dich nährt, den keuschen Leib voll Reif und Duft,
Himmlischer Kälte balsamsüße Luft.

Fatal to you would be the bliss of other flowers,
Your pure body, all rime and scent, feeds
On heavenly cold and balsam-scented air.

In deines Busens goldner Fülle gründet

There dwells within the golden fullness of your
heart

Ein Wohlgeruch, der sich nur kaum verkündet;
So duftete, berührt von Engelshand,
Der benedeiten Mutter Brautgewand.

A perfume so faint it can scarcely be perceived;
Such was the scent, touched by angelic hands,
Of the Blessed Mother's bridal robe.

Dich würden, mahnend an das heilige Leiden,

Five crimson drops, a reminder of the sacred
Passion,

Fünf Purpurtropfen schön und einzig kleiden:
Doch kindlich zierst du, um die Weihnachtszeit,
Lichtgrün mit einem Hauch dein weisses Kleid.

Would suffice as your sole and lovely ornament:
Yet child-like at Christmas-time you adorn
Your white dress with a hint of palest green.

Der Elfe, der in mitternächtger Stunde
Zum Tanze geht im lichterhellen Grunde,
Vor deiner mystischen Glorie steht er scheu
Neugierig still von fern und huscht vorbei.

The elf, who at the midnight hour
Goes to dance in the glistening glade,
Stands awestruck from afar by your mystic halo,
Looks on in inquiring silence and scurries by.

Auf eine Christblume II

On a Christmas Rose II

Im Winterboden schläft, ein Blumenkeim,

There sleeps within the wintry ground, itself a
flower-seed,

Der Schmetterling, der einst um Busch und Hügel
In Frühlingsnächten wiegt den samtnen Flügel;
Nie soll er kosten deinen Honigseim.

The butterfly that one day over hill and dale
Will flutter its velvet wings in spring nights.
Never shall it taste your liquid honey.

Wer aber weiss, ob nicht sein zarter Geist,
Wenn jede Zier des Sommers hingesunken,
Dereinst, von deinem leisen Dufte trunken,
Mir unsichtbar, dich blühende umkreist?

But who knows if perhaps its gentle ghost,
When summer's loveliness has faded,
Might some day, dizzy with your faint fragrance,
Unseen by me, circle you as you flower?

Nimmersatte Liebe

Insatiable Love

So ist die Lieb! So ist die Lieb!
Mit Küssen nicht zu stillen:
Wer ist der Tor und will ein Sieb
Mit eitel Wasser füllen?
Und schöpfst du an die tausend Jahr,

Such is love! Such is love!
Not to be quieted with kisses:
What fool would wish to fill a sieve
With nothing else but water?
And were you to draw water for some thousand
years,

Und küssest ewig, ewig gar,

And were you to kiss for ever and ever,

Du tust ihr nie zu Willen.

Die Lieb, die Lieb hat alle Stund
Neu wunderlich Gelüsten;
Wir bissen uns die Lippen wund,
Da wir uns heute küssten.
Das Mädchen hielt in guter Ruh,
Wie's Lämmlein unterm Messer;
Ihr Auge bat: „Nur immer zu!
Je weher, desto besser!“

So ist die Lieb! und war auch so,
Wie lang es Liebe gibt,
Und anders war Herr Salomo,
Der Weise, nicht verliebt.

An eine Äolsharfe

Angelehnt an die Efeuwand
Dieser alten Terrasse,
Du, einer luftgebornen Muse
Geheimnisvolles Saitenspiel,
Fang an,
Fange wieder an
Deine melodische Klage!

Ihr kommet, Winde, fern herüber,
Ach! von des Knaben,
Der mir so lieb war,
Frisch grünendem Hügel.
Und Frühlingsblüten unterwegs streifend,
Übersättigt mit Wohlgerüchen,
Wie süß bedrängt ihr dies Herz!
Und säuselt her in die Saiten,
Angezogen von wohl lautender Wehmut,
Wachsend im Zug meiner Sehnsucht,
Und hinsterbend wieder.

Aber auf einmal,
Wie der Wind heftiger herstösst,
Ein holder Schrei der Harfe
Wiederholt, mir zu süßem Erschrecken
Meiner Seele plötzliche Regung,
Und hier – die volle Rose streut, geschüttelt,
All ihre Blätter vor meine Füße!

Selbstgeständnis

Ich bin meiner Mutter einzig Kind,
Und weil die andern ausblieben sind

You'd never satisfy love.

Love, love, has every hour
New and strange desires;
We bit until our lips were sore,
When we kissed today.
The girl kept nicely quiet and still,
Like a lamb beneath the knife;
Her eyes pleaded: "Go on, go on!
The more it hurts the better!"

Such is love! and has been so
As long as love's existed,
And wise old Solomon himself
Was no differently in love.

To an Aeolian Harp

Leaning against the ivy-clad wall
Of this old terrace,
O mysterious lyre
Of a zephyr-born Muse,
Begin,
Begin again
Your melodious lament!

Winds, you come from far away,
Ah! From the fresh green mound
Of the boy
Who was so dear to me,
And brushing spring flowers along the way,
Saturated with fragrance,
How sweetly you afflict this heart!
And you murmur into these strings,
Drawn by their sweet-sounding sorrow,
Waxing with my heart's desire,
Then dying away once more.

But all at once,
As the wind gusts more strongly,
The harp's gentle cry
Echoes, to my sweet alarm,
The sudden commotion of my soul;
And here – the full-blown rose, shaken,
Strews all its petals at my feet!

Self-confession

I am my mother's only child,
And since the others failed to appear

– Was weiß ich wieviel, die sechs oder sieben, –
Ist eben alles an mir hängen geblieben;
Ich hab müssen die Liebe, die Treue, die Güte
Für ein ganz halb Dutzend allein aufessen,

Ich wills mein Lebtag nicht vergessen.
Es hätte mir aber noch wohl mögen frommen,
Hätt ich nur auch Schläg für Sechse bekommen.

Gebet

Herr! schicke, was du wilt,
Ein Liebes oder Leides;
Ich bin vergnügt, dass beides
Aus deinen Händen quillt.

Wollest mit Freuden
Und wollest mit Leiden
Mich nicht überschütten!
Doch in der Mitten
Liegt holdes Bescheiden.

Peregrina I

Der Spiegel dieser treuen, braunen Augen
Ist wie von innerm Gold ein Widerschein;
Tief aus dem Busen scheint ers anzusaugen,
Dort mag solch Gold in heiligem Gram gedeihn.
In diese Nacht des Blickes mich zu tauchen,
Unwissend Kind, du selber lädst mich ein –
Willst, ich soll kecklich mich und dich entzünden,
Reichst lächelnd mir den Tod im Kelch der
Sünden!

Peregrina II

Warum, Geliebte, denk ich dein
Auf einmal nun mit tausend Tränen,
Und kann gar nicht zufrieden sein,
Und will die Brust in alle Weite dehnen?
Ach, gestern in den hellen Kindersaal,
Beim Flimmer zierlich aufgesteckter Kerzen,
Wo ich mein selbst vergass in Lärm und
Scherzen,
Tratst du, o Bildnis mitleid-schöner Qual;
Es war dein Geist, er setzte sich ans Mahl,
Fremd sassen wir mit stumm verhaltenen
Schmerzen;

– Who knows how many, six or seven, –
Everything had to centre on me;
I've had to devour all myself
The love, loyalty and kindness for a full half-
dozen,
I'll never forget it, as long as I live.
I dare say it would have done me no harm,
If I'd been whipped for six as well!

Prayer

Lord! send what Thou wilt,
Pleasure or pain;
I am content that both
Flow from Thy hands.

Do not, I beseech Thee,
Overwhelm me
With joy or suffering!
But midway between
Lies blessed moderation.

Peregrina I

The surface of these faithful brown eyes
Seems to mirror the gleam of inner gold;
Seems to draw it from deep within your breast –
There, in hallowed grief such gold may thrive.
To plunge into this dark night of your gaze,
Innocent child, you yourself invite me –
Wish me boldly to consume us both in fire,
Smile as you offer me death in the chalice of sin!

Peregrina II

Why, beloved, do I now think of you
Suddenly and with a thousand tears,
And cannot be satisfied at all,
And long to extend my heart into infinity?
Ah, you came yesterday to the bright nursery,
In the gleam of decorative candles,
As I forgot myself in noise and mirth,

You came, agony's image, lovely in compassion;
It was your ghost, it joined us at the feast,
Strangers we sat, our sorrows mutely hidden;

Zuletzt brach ich in lautes Schluchzen aus,
Und Hand in Hand verliessen wir das Haus.

At last I broke out into loud sobs,
And hand in hand we left the house.

Auftrag

In poetischer Epistel
Ruft ein desperater Wicht:
Lieber Vetter! Vetter Christel!
Warum schreibt Er aber nicht?

Weiss Er doch, es lassen Herzen,
Die die Liebe angeweht,
Ganz und gar nicht mit sich scherzen,
Und nun vollends ein Poet!

Denn ich bin von dem Gelichter,
Dem der Kopf beständig voll;
Bin ich auch nur halb ein Dichter,
Bin ich doch zur Hälfte toll.

Amor hat Ihn mir verpflichtet,
Seinen Lohn weiss Er voraus,
Und der Mund, der Ihm berichtet,
Geht dabei auch leer nicht aus.

Pass Er denn zur guten Stunde,
Wenn Sein Schatz durchs Lädchen schaut,
Lock ihr jedes Wort vom Munde,
Das mein Schätzchen ihr vertraut.

Schreib Er mir dann von dem Mädchen
Ein halb Dutzend Bogen voll,
Und daneben ein Traktätchen,
Wie ich mich verhalten soll!

An die Geliebte

Wenn ich, von deinem Anschaun tief gestillt,
Mich stumm an deinem heiligen Wert vergnüge,
Dann hör ich recht die leisen Atemzüge
Des Engels, welcher sich in dir verhüllt.

Und ein erstaunt, ein fragend Lächeln quillt
Auf meinem Mund, ob mich kein Traum betrüge,
Dass nun in dir, zu ewiger Genüge,
Mein kühnster Wunsch, mein ein'zger, sich
erfüllt?

Von Tiefe dann zu Tiefen stürzt mein Sinn,

A Comission

A desperate fellow cries for help
In this poetic letter:
My dear cousin, cousin Christel!
Why do you not write?

You know that people
Smitten with love
Cannot be trifled with,
Especially a poet!

For I am one of those creatures
Whose head is always full;
And though I'm only half a poet,
I am half-demented.

Cupid has pledged you to me,
You know what your reward will be.
And the mouth that tells you all
Shall not go away empty.

So wait for the right moment
When your love looks from her window,
Go and find out every word
My sweetheart's said to her.

Write me a letter six pages long
All about the girl,
And enclose a treatise of advice
On how I should respond!

To the Beloved

When I, deeply calmed at beholding you,
Take silent delight in your sacred worth,
Then I truly hear the gentle breathing
Of that angel concealed within you.

And an amazed, a questioning smile
Rises to my lips: does not a dream deceive me,
Now that in you, to my eternal joy,
My boldest, my only wish is being fulfilled?

My soul then plunges from depth to depth,

Ich höre aus der Gottheit nächtger Ferne
Die Quellen des Geschicks melodisch rauschen.

From the dark distances of Godhead I hear
The springs of fate ripple in melody.

Betäubt kehr ich den Blick nach oben hin,
Zum Himmel auf – da lächeln alle Sterne;
Ich kniee, ihrem Lichtgesang zu lauschen

Dazed I raise my eyes
To heaven – where all the stars are smiling;
I kneel to listen to their song of light.

V. New Forces

As performers, we build our artistic lives between abstract concepts of music and embodied musical experiences, constantly transfiguring what is understood, observed, and imagined, into what is executed, felt, and, ultimately, heard. This is a discipline, a perpetual practice. It is furthermore a process that necessarily renders the pretty realm of aesthetic ideals vulnerable to the rude reality of the variously feeble and triumphant human body and mind. The breath runs short, the digits falter, the memory fails. At our best, we work happily and with determination, even alongside scarcity. We aspire to the ineffable in music, even as we can be assured that the full scope of its potential will evade us in our most carefully practiced maneuver and our luckiest moment of inspiration alike. But these truths teeter on a semantic and ideological ledge that can easily become another gospel altogether—one that fancifully preaches the erasure of the performer’s voice. If there is false prophesy lurking, this is it: that our delicate and fallible voices, our peculiar imaginations, our distinct expressive convictions may discredit or undermine the other voices at play in our music—“the composer’s intent,” “the poet’s subtext,” etc. As we have seen, the creation of the songs themselves suggests an alternative process. A song composer finds in a poem an expressive invitation—words that invoke the composer’s voice; why shouldn’t the song invoke the singer’s voice?

Recently, I discussed Mozart with a famous Mozartian, Mitsuko Uchida, and a few colleagues and friends. Someone evoked “the Mozart sound”—and we all quietly awaited her response. She laughed nervously and said, “I always played Mozart, and it was terrible. I simply could not play it. But I always played it. And then one day I heard Mozart on a radio broadcast, and I thought, ‘That is me!’ When I recognized myself playing Mozart, yes—that was the beginning of something!”

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