STEPHEN RODGERS

SONG AND THE MUSIC OF POETRY

In 1997 Robert Pinsky, then Poet Laureate of the United States, established the Favorite Poem Project, an initiative to create an audio and visual archive of Americans reading poetry. In that year alone 18,000 people responded to the open call for submissions. Since then Pinsky and his team have produced 50 short video documentaries, three anthologies and a website with resources for teachers.¹ Notably, the videos contain no expert analysis, no voice-over by Pinsky, no images of the poets in question, just footage of people sharing their experiences with poetry and reciting poems they love. This is very much by design. Central to Pinsky’s conception of the project is that poetry is above all a vocal art, an art that speaks to us in large part because we take such delight in speaking it. Commenting on his own craft, Pinsky has said, “Write” is almost the wrong verb for what I do. I think “compose” is more accurate, because you’re trying to make the sounds in your mind and in your voice. […] If anything I do is any good, it’s carried by that kind of cadence, or melody’ (2013a).

More than any other living poet, Pinsky has become an eloquent spokesperson for the pleasures of reading poems, a ‘composer’ of verse who prizes sound as much as sense. Yet he is hardly alone: in 2012 M. H. Abrams published a book of essays whose title, The Fourth Dimension of a Poem and Other Essays, refers to the physical sensation of uttering the sounds of poetry. Pinsky and Abrams are only the most recent in a long line of writers who have placed a premium on the materiality of poetic language, including (to name only a few) Paul Verlaine, Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, Paul Valéry and John Hollander. From the perspective of music theory and analysis, what is most striking is not so much the number of works that have been written on the sonic aspect of poetry as the number of times those works have referenced music. Music, for Pinsky and others, is the metaphor par excellence for the intricate and diverse patterns of sound that give a poem its intonational shape, for the material aspect of poetic language, which is at once intimately related to and distinct from semantic meaning.²

One would think that analysts of art song would be especially attuned to what I am calling the music of poetry. There is plenty of evidence, after all, that composers of art song were so attuned. Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Wolf were all known to have read poems aloud before setting them; Schumann even said he conceived of himself as poet and composer in one person (Eismann 1956, vol. 2, p. 18). Furthermore, music theorists and musicologists deal routinely in
sound patterns – it’s just that those patterns involve chord transformations and linear progressions rather than rhyme schemes and consonant shifts. In general, however, scholars writing about music and text have tended to disregard the sonic elements of poetry – the vowels and consonants, or phonemes, that make up a poem, and the various ways in which those phonemes are arranged into expressive patterns.³

The reasons for this are many and varied, but it is the consequences that interest me even more and, conversely, the possibilities that are opened up if we pay careful attention to how a poem sings in its own right and how its music interacts with the music of song. Below I explore some of these possibilities, outlining an analytical approach designed to ensure that the music of poetry is given its due and then applying this method to the analysis of two Schumann songs, each of which reveals his remarkable sensitivity to the speech-sounds of language: his famous Heine setting ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’’ (1840) from Dichterliebe, and the lesser-known late song ‘Melancholie’ (1849) from the Spanisches Liederspiel.

Three Approaches to Music and Poetry (that Neglect the Music of Poetry)

Comments on the sonic dimension of poetry are certainly present in the literature on song analysis.⁴ Yet with relatively few exceptions, examinations of song and poetic sound have tended to be passing observations that address only one small part of a poem’s vast sonic universe.⁵ In part, this is a matter of practicality: we do what we do best, and as music scholars, what we do best is write about music; no wonder, then, that our interpretations of our ‘native’ art form would be more sophisticated than those of a ‘foreign’ one. More fundamentally, though, the indifference to poetic sound among some song analysts is a matter of methodology, even of ontology. At issue is not just how music analysts happen to approach the analysis of a song, but also how they more explicitly choose to do so, and how that choice reflects firmly held ideas about what song is and is not.

In an oft-cited article on the theory and practice of analysing nineteenth-century Lieder, Kofi Agawu (1992) outlines several competing models of song. These models can serve as a helpful starting point for our discussion, since some of them are more attentive to poetic details than others, yet none of them does full justice to the phonetic patterns of verse.

Assimilation: Music Swallowing Words

The model that is most indifferent to the inherent music of poetry is one that Agawu calls ‘assimilation’. Analysts who adhere to this view argue that a poem ceases to be a poem when it is set to music; ‘purely’ poetic elements, such as line length, metre, enjambment, assonance, alliteration and caesuras,
are so thoroughly absorbed by the music that they cease to be very relevant to an understanding of the song. In her seminal essay ‘The Principle of Assimilation’, the philosopher Suzanne Langer proposes that in the conjoining of words and music in song, ‘music swallows words; not only mere words and literal sentences, but even literary word-structures, poetry’ (1953, p. 152; emphasis added). Composers, Langer suggests, don’t disregard ‘poetic laws’, but neither do they obey them; rather, they ‘transform the entire verbal material – sound, meaning, and all – into musical elements’ (p. 150). Thus it is of little use to explore this ‘verbal material’ in and of itself, since it is so fully ‘assimilated’ that we might not even recognise its residue in the final product.

Edward T. Cone offers a similar view, or at least ends up adopting one after revisiting some of his influential ideas about the ‘voices’ of art song. In The Composer’s Voice (1974) he famously delineated three personas operative in art song: a poetic-vocal persona, an instrumental persona and a complete musical persona that contains the first two. Eighteen years later, however, Cone revised his theory and reduced the role of the poetic persona, to some extent pushing purely poetic elements farther toward the periphery. Now the poetic persona is no longer just a proxy for the actual poet; it is also a proxy for the composer: ‘The composer not only writes his own music but desires, as it were, to write his own words. Sometimes, indeed, he can do just that; but often he finds another poet that has already written them for him’ (1992, p. 184). Composers, by this account, don’t so much enter into a dialogue with the poet as take the poet’s words as their own. The setting of a poem becomes more an act of possession than of interaction, and with that act the original poet and the original poem effectively disappear.

The assimilation model has come under fire from those who claim, quite rightly, that it unnecessarily downplays the importance of poetry in the amalgam of words and music. In a critique of Cone’s revised model, Berthold Hoeckner claims that it fails to place poetry on a par with music: ‘Even when a poem has been molded into a through-composed song; even when its words have lost the rhythm of their original metre; and even when its text has been altered by the composer: the poetic text still remains an independent component of a song’ (2001, [para. 2.6]). Agawu lodges a similar complaint, taking aim not at Cone but at Langer. His main criticism of Langer is similar to Hoeckner’s criticism of Cone: she doesn’t allow for the possibility that the poetry can have its own voice in the word-and-music blend, and doesn’t allow that an analyst can separate out the words as they exist in the context of the song from the words as they exist in their original verbal context. ‘What happens’, he asks, ‘to the inherent musicality of certain poems during the process of assimilation? Is it perhaps the case that the listener hears, simultaneously, the music of the poem, the non-music of the poem and the transformed music of what used to be a poem? These are not questions that Langer addresses’ (1992, p. 6).
Three Overlapping Circles: Words + Music = Song

Agawu’s language – ‘inherent musicality of certain poems’, ‘the music of the poem’ – would seem to open the door to a full consideration of how exactly the music of poetry interacts with the music of music. Yet in his own analyses he doesn’t pursue this path. His preferred model of song analysis is a tripartite one in which words, music and song are three overlapping circles in a Venn diagram. The strength of this model, he says, is that it allows the analyst to ponder words and music separately, without needing to show that one always influences the other.

The problem is that in practice Agawu spends more time pondering music than words. In his ‘informal method’ of song analysis, he recommends that the analyst first explore the music, setting aside the text, and then, with this musical foundation in place, ‘read the text as it appears in the composer’s reading’ (1992, p. 12; emphasis added). By this he means that one should examine the text through the filter of the music, approaching it less as an independent entity than as an entity already interpreted by the composer. In making this argument, however, he ends up doing the thing for which he criticises Langer: he places the poem on a lower level than the music, denying it a measure of autonomy. As a result, though the musical commentary in his analysis of Schumann’s ‘Seit ich ihn gesehen’ is wonderfully detailed, the poetic commentary is more limited: Agawu writes eloquently about the images and ideas in Chamisso’s poem, but he says little about its form and nothing about its sound.

Text-to-Music: Words Swallowing Music

The main reason for this contradiction – that Agawu views music and text as equal but doesn’t quite treat them that way – is that in proposing his Venn-diagram model he aims to offer a corrective not only to the assimilation model, but also to a model that could be viewed as its opposite: the text-to-music approach, in which an analyst starts with the text and then looks for direct musical correspondences with it. This would seem to be the model most sympathetic to the material dimension of poetry, since the idea is to begin with the poem and then ‘read’ the music in light of it. Surprisingly, though, proponents of the text-to-music method have been just as reluctant as other analysts to explore the sonic properties of poetry in detail. One of the most prominent books to adopt a text-to-music methodology is Of Poetry and Song: Approaches to the Nineteenth-Century Lied (2010), a collection of essays by a quartet of scholars, two of them musicologists (Jürgen Thym and Rufus Hallmark) and two of them scholars of German literature (Harry E. Selig and Ann C. Fehn). As exhaustively as these four scholars examine the rhythm, metre, syntax and rhetoric of verse, they barely touch on its phonemes.

Many text-to-music analyses fall short on another count: aside from the types of poetic observations they make, those poetic observations tend to dictate their
musical observations. Agawu makes just this point in his essay on the analysis of nineteenth-century Lieder: ‘While analysts who focus on the music and ignore the text could be accused of overlooking an indispensible part of the work of art, those who adopt a [text-to-music] framework from the beginning frequently miss – or ignore – many aspects of the musical structure for which analogies with poetic processes cannot readily be found’ (1992, p. 21). Several years later, in a review-essay about two books on Schubert’s songs, Agawu reiterates the critique, arguing that the problem with text-driven analyses of song ‘is not that their findings are falsifiable but rather that in the rush to “read” music in the light of images constructed from the verbal text they ride roughshod over many pertinent musical details’ (1997, p. 114). Reading from text to music, he suggests, creates a kind of analytical blind spot: it presents us with only a partial view of the music, by turns too fragmented and fuzzy. Better, then, to start with the music, to dwell on its structure and details and only then turn to the text.⁹

As I have argued, however, if reading from text to music often means discussing the music only in so far as it relates directly to the poetry, reading from music to text often results in the opposite problem: denying the poem autonomy as a meaningful utterance in its own right.¹⁰ How do we avoid being drawn toward one of these two centres of gravity – music swallowing words and words swallowing music?

An Alternative: Incorporation (with a Twist)

The work of Lawrence Kramer provides a viable middle path. Agawu in fact places Kramer in a category separate from the assimilation and text-to-music models. For Agawu, Kramer’s work is representative of an approach that sees song as an ‘irreducible combination’ of words and music, instead of as a subsumption of one by the other (1992, p. 7). In a chapter from Music and Poetry: the Nineteenth Century and After, Kramer plainly distances himself from the assimilationists, especially Langer and Cone. ‘A poem’, he writes, ‘is never really assimilated into a composition; it is incorporated, and it retains its own life, its own “body”, within the body of the music’ (1984, p. 127; emphasis in original). For Kramer, the problem with assimilation is that it fails to acknowledge the struggle that takes place when words and music come together in song. The meeting of text and music, he argues, is not nearly as ‘smooth and unambivalent’ as Langer and Cone suggest; instead, it is a ‘contest’, albeit a productive contest that ‘drives and shapes the song’ (ibid.).¹¹

The strength of Kramer’s approach is that it places poetry and music on the same level, giving the poem (and, by extension, the poet) an equal voice in the contest that creates the song.¹² Indeed, Kramer’s model seems ideally suited to an examination of the various ways in which the physical, material aspect of poetry is integrated into a composition. His language is as suggestive as Agawu’s: a poem, as he says above, ‘retains […] its own “body”’ in the music. In a more recent essay on ‘songfulness’ – a phenomenon in which the sheer sound of the
singing voice overwhelms the meaning of the words being sung – he writes that in
certain instances it is not so much the meaning of the text that strikes the listener
as the ‘material presence’ of its signifiers (2002, p. 52). Vowels and consonants,
phonetic patterns, the tactile elements of a poem that must be felt as well as heard
to be fully experienced, the ‘fourth dimension of a poem’, to use M. H. Abrams’s
term: these would seem to constitute the ‘body’ and ‘material presence’ of poetry
as much as anything.

Surprisingly, though, like Agawu, Kramer ends up saying almost nothing
about the sonorousness of poetry. Here the reason may be more practical than
philosophical. It’s not that Kramer believes, as Agawu does, that the poem
is no longer really the poet’s once it is set to music; it’s that he is more
interested in contest than in accord. In encouraging analysts to look beyond
easy correspondences and ‘smooth’ transformations of words into song, he ends
up emphasising the dissolution that he believes language undergoes when it
comes into contact with music – the ‘dis-articulation’ of poetry, as he puts it
(1984, p. 130). Granted, for Kramer this is only a partial dissolution, not a
wholesale assimilation, as Langer would have it. But it is a dissolution all the
same, and poetic form and sound, he seems to suggest, are most susceptible to
dis-articulation. ‘By replacing the phonetic/syntactic integrity of the text with the
gestural continuity of a melodic line’, he writes, ‘song reconnects the impulse to
speak with its basis in physical sensation’ (p. 131; emphasis added). ‘Phonetic
and syntactic articulation’ turns into ‘vocalization’ (p. 130).

Why, though, must music have a monopoly on ‘physical sensation’ and
‘vocalization’? As we have seen, poetry is fundamentally a physical and vocal
art, no less than music. It is true that in some instances music may subdue
that physicality and vocality, just as in other instances it may heighten it. But,
plainly put, a poem does not need music to be physical or vocal. Kramer is right
that poetry retains its own ‘body’ when it is ‘incorporated’ into song, but that
body is already physical – and already musical – before music even enters the
picture. Thus, if we want to attend to the music of poetry and the many ways in
which it interacts with the music of a composer’s setting of the poetry, we will
be best served if we follow Kramer in recognising that ‘purely’ poetic features
maintain their presence in the music-and-text blend, but at the same time push
against him in insisting that poetic sound is one of the most important of these
residual elements. As song analysts we should challenge ourselves to listen to
this verbal ‘music’, both in its original context and in the context of the song –
to engage in a kind of verse listening that is just as attentive as our music
listening.

In the two analyses below I aim to do just that. My method might be seen as
an inversion of Agawu’s. I start with the poetry rather than with the music, in an
attempt to return our attention to the particulars of the poetic material, guarding
against the tendency (modifying Agawu) to ride roughshod over many pertinent
poetic details – in particular, phonetic details. I then consider how the poem’s
sonic patterns relate to the music’s sonic patterns, paying special attention to the
ways in which these two sound worlds seem to remain indifferent to each other, to reinforce each other and to exist in conflict with each other. (Here I take a page directly from Agawu, who argues that analysts of song should consider all three categories, lest they give the false impression that every detail of the music relates meaningfully to the poetry [1992, p. 12].) My analytical method – both poetic and musical – is best seen as eclectic in the strongest sense of the word: I proceed with various parameters and questions in mind, but I let the poetry and the music guide my choice of analytical tools. It is also fine-grained: I attend as closely as possible to the nuances of both sound worlds in an effort to slow down the listening process and savour the physicality of the material.

‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’: Dissonant Poetry, Dissonant Music

This song makes a good initial test case for two reasons. First, it uses a more fluid style of declamation than many of the songs from Schumann’s *Liederjahr*: the vocal melody moves freely, in keeping with the natural rhythms of Heine’s language, suggesting that in setting the poem to music Schumann paid careful attention to how it felt to speak the words aloud. Secondly, as much as the song has been analysed, it has mostly been examined with an eye toward how (and how successfully) Schumann responded to the poem’s meaning, leaving unexplored many questions about how Schumann responded just as carefully to its materiality.

Analysing Heine’s Poetic Music

Formally, ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’ is straightforward – two quatrains of iambic tetrametre (four weak-strong poetic feet per line), with accented line endings and rhyming couplets throughout. (See Ex. 1 for the annotated German text and an English translation.) The poem is a prime example of what the late, great Heine scholar (and Lied aficionado) S. S. Prawer described as Heine’s ‘folk-song directness’ (1961, p. 33) and what the nineteenth-century British poet Matthew Arnold called his ‘masterly, finished simplicity and rhythmic grace’ (1863, p. 62). This ‘finished simplicity’ is also reflected in the syntactic construction of the stanzas. As Yonatan Malin has noted, each line contains a single grammatical clause, each couplet a conditional and a resultant clause separated by a comma and each quatrain two complete sentences joined by a semicolon (2010, p. 127). Furthermore, the conditional and resultant clauses usually begin with the same words – ‘Wenn’ or ‘Doch wenn’ for the former and ‘So’ for the latter. When viewed from the perspective of stanza divisions, metre, syntax, punctuation and even the placement and frequency of word repetitions, nothing is particularly disruptive or out of the ordinary; in its broadest formal outlines, the poem is thoroughly, almost determinedly, well-behaved.

Heine, however, is never as simple as he seems. Look beneath the poem’s surface of predictability, peer under its skin, and scars emerge. Some of those
disruptions are rhythmic. The word ‘Doch’ – what linguists would call a grammatical ‘particle’ that intensifies the expression associated with it – adds extra weight to the beginning of lines 3 and 7. In speaking these lines aloud, one would probably place as much stress on ‘Doch’ as on ‘wenn’, the word that ‘ought’ to be stressed according to the iambic metre; one might even be inclined to stress ‘Doch’ more than the following word, resulting in a full-fledged substitution of a trochee (a strong-weak foot) for the expected iamb (weak-strong). Line 7 contains not just a substitution but also a caesura, the one and only mid-line pause in the entire poem: the colon before ‘ich liebe dich’. What is more, it ends with an exclamation point, a punctuation mark that is admittedly more rhetorical than grammatical, but no less disruptive to the poem’s steady flow.\(^\text{16}\)

The poem’s irregularities, however, are also, and equally, phonetic. Each stanza begins with a series of euphonious lines whose words roll naturally off the tongue but ends with lines that are much harsher and more phonetically
hard-edged. Take the first stanza. Lines 1 and 2 use a symmetrical closed-open-closed vowel pattern – [i], [a], [a], [e] – a graceful widening and narrowing, with the assonant [a] vowels framed by more closed [i] and [e] vowels on either side. (In keeping with standard texts on lyric diction, I refer to vowel and consonant sounds with International Phonetic Alphabet symbols and place these symbols in square brackets; I also treat the first vowel in any diphthong as the vowel which would be emphasised when singing the word.\textsuperscript{17} The symbols in Ex. 1 indicate the stressed vowels in each line.) These two lines are also full of consonants that allow for a continuation of airflow: fricatives (the [v] sounds in ‘Wenn’, ‘schwindet’ and ‘Weh’, the [c] in ‘ich’, the [z] in ‘seh’ and ‘So’ and the [ʃ] at the start of ‘schwindet’), nasals (the many [n] sounds in words like ‘Wenn’, ‘in’, ‘deine’, ‘Augen’, ‘schwindet’, ‘mein’ and ‘und’, as well as the [m] at the start of ‘mein’) and liquids (the [l] sounds in ‘all’ and ‘Leid’). But the last two lines in the stanza, boxed in Ex. 1, are not nearly as easy to enunciate. Line 3 alternates more rapidly between open and closed vowel sounds, with no assonance to speak of – [e], [y], [a], [ʊ] – requiring one to open and close one’s mouth several times over, rather than only once. Its consonants are also more percussive: note the three plosive consonants at the start of the words ‘Doch’, ‘küsse’ and ‘deinen’, compared with only one plosive consonant in lines 1 and 2 combined. Line 4 is also densely plosive, with the sharper attacks in the alliterative phrase ‘ganz und gar gesund’.\textsuperscript{18} In sum, from a purely physical perspective, the first stanza progresses from relative ease to effort; its last two lines demand more physical work of the reader.

The same is true of the last four lines, except that the penultimate line alone is the effortful one. Lines 5 and 6 roughly maintain the symmetrical vowel pattern of lines 1 and 2 – [i], [e], [a], [ʊ] in line 5, with an open [a] vowel midway through; and [y], [i], [i], [ʊ] in line 6, with identical [i] vowels in the centre and related [y]/[ʊ] vowels at the extremes. And the consonants in these lines are as fluid as any in the poem, with the [n], [c] and [l] continuants of ‘Wenn ich mich lehn’ an’ and the sibilant [s] sounds of ‘Himmelslust’, a word that sounds like the very thing it describes. Even line 8, for all its \textit{Stimmungsbruch} (break in mood), features a fairly symmetrical closed-open-closed vowel pattern ([ʊ], [a], [i], [i]), an uninterrupted rhythmic flow and a profusion of fricative and nasal consonants (until the slight plosive punch at the front of the final word). Line 7, however, dispenses with symmetry and euphony altogether. Heine strings together three nearly identical vowels: the [i] of ‘sprichst’, the [i] of ‘liebe’ and the [i] of ‘dich’ (four, if we count the unstressed [i] of ‘ich’).\textsuperscript{19} Nowhere else in the poem do more than two stressed vowels of the same type appear in a row. This may seem like a small point, but the vowel change is surely no less significant than, say, a break in a melodic or harmonic sequence, and it shapes our hearing of the poem no less than this kind of disruption to a musical pattern would shape our hearing of the piece. With its internal caesura, its exclamation point, its vowel asymmetry, its accumulation of similar vowel sounds and its many plosive consonants (the heavy [d] sounds in ‘Doch’, ‘du’ and ‘dich’, and the [p] in ‘sprichst’, a word that
begins with a dense cluster of consonants), this line demands more work than any other line. Earlier I spoke of scars that lie beneath the unperturbed outer skin of the poem. Line 7 is the deepest scar of them all, for it is quite simply the most difficult line to speak.

**Relating Heine’s Music and Schumann’s Music**

Clearly, Schumann’s technical devices differ from Heine’s. It is the mingling of these different, autonomous art forms, the complex interaction of these two sounding bodies, that gives life to the song, rather than some sort of neat equation of the two – which is why I organise the following discussion around the ways that music and text are indifferent to each other, in support of each other and in conflict with each other. As we shall see, however, support does in fact outweigh indifference and conflict. Indeed, one of the points I want to stress is that Schumann doesn’t contradict Heine as much as some writers have suggested; in many cases music and text only *seem* to be in conflict – only, that is, if we read the poem not just for what it says, but also for how it says it.²⁰

**Indifference.** Not surprisingly, some of the most striking sonic features of the poem appear to have been of little interest to Schumann. In the song, for instance, ‘Doch’ – the percussive word at the beginning of lines 3 and 7 – passes by almost unnoticed. (Refer to the score in Ex. 2 throughout the following analysis.) Schumann could have emphasised the word by placing it on a downbeat, or even a strong beat, but in both instances (bars 4 and 12) ‘Doch’ is a mere quaver offbeat. Schumann also makes little of the fact that line 3 includes harsher consonants and more rapidly changing vowels than any other line in the first stanza. True, the vocal melody climbs into a higher register in bars 5–6 and begins to pull away from G major – both signs of increased effort – but the rhythm and articulation of this gesture and the previous one are virtually identical.

**Support.** Still, as much as some poetic elements seem either to have escaped Schumann’s attention or simply not piqued his interest, many more are singled out for special treatment. Most strikingly, Schumann adopts the same basic formal strategy as Heine. Both the poem and the song are, in their broadest outlines, balanced and conventional: the outward equipoise of the text is matched by that of the music. Malin has shown that the song is organised into two-, four-, eight- and sixteen-bar units (2010, p. 128). He further notes that many of the song’s two-bar melodic gestures follow a particular ‘declamatory schema’, in which the four feet of each poetic line are distributed evenly across four beats (pp. 128–9). In his analysis of the song, Don Michael Randel makes a similar point when he writes that the most straightforward way to set Heine’s lines would be in 3/4 time, with the first accented syllable in a line falling on one downbeat and the last accented syllable falling on the next (2014, p. 40). The melodic gestures in bars 3–4 and 5–6 conform to this normative model: each gesture is four beats long (discounting the quaver upbeat) and extends from the downbeat
Ex. 2 ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’: score

Wenn ich in deine Augen seh', so schwindet all' mein Leid und Weh; doch

Wenn ich kis-se dei- nen Mund, so werd' ich ganz und gar ge- sund. Wenn ich mich lehre an dei- ne

Brust, kommits ü- ber mich wie Him- mels-lust; doch wenn du sprichst: ich lie-be dich! so mus ich

weisen bit- ter- lich.
of one bar to the downbeat of the next. Similar gestures, disposed in a similar fashion so that they span one downbeat to the next, can be found in bars 9–10 and 11–12, the only difference being that the upbeats have been lengthened to a crotchet.

Indeed, all of the song’s melodic units can be seen as variations on this basic four-crotchet model; this is partly what gives the song its special blend of irregularity and regularity. Ex. 3 shows how the song’s most flexible units can be related to simpler models. In the left-hand column, each of the song’s melodic gestures is shown as a unit that lasts four crotchets (hence the ‘1 2 3 4’ above each gesture). This is the fundamental melodic shape of the song, the source from which everything springs. (A couple of caveats: first, I show a quaver at the beginning of each gesture because more often than not the gestures appear with this kind of anacrusis; where crotchet anacruses appear, as in bars 8 and 10, they are best viewed as variations on the basic model presented at the beginning of the song. Secondly, I haven’t included bar lines because in some cases the exact placement of a downbeat within each gesture is difficult to discern, and also because, unlike Randel, I am more interested in how the gestures are expanded temporally than in how they are shifted metrically.) The right-hand column of Ex. 3 reveals how this basic shape is expanded. Three times in the song – in the fourth, seventh and eighth melodic gestures, which are of course associated with the same poetic lines – Schumann widens the melodic units from within, stretching particular notes and syllables beyond their expected length. And, remarkably, the moments of musical disruption coincide with the moments of poetic distortion mentioned above.

The most striking musical disruption occurs in Schumann’s setting of line 7 (‘Doch wenn du sprichst: ich liebe dich!’), the line that contains more scars than any other. Schumann may not do anything special with the word ‘Doch’, but he deepens the other scars, reinforcing the poem’s dissonant music with his own. The gesture that accompanies this line expands the basic model from four crotchets to six – or six and then some, considering the ritardando in bar 13. What creates the expansion is the elongation of the G on the downbeat of bar 13, a note that ‘ought’ to have been a semiquaver but is instead a minim, the longest note value in the entire vocal melody. This moment is arresting for many reasons, not least of which the diminished seventh chord, the languidly unfolding arpeggio in the piano and the striking dissonance on ‘liebe’ in bar 14. But the lengthening of the word ‘sprichst’ is also important. In so doing Schumann musicalises Heine’s poetic caesura, so to speak, lengthening the word before the pause rather than the pause itself. In the process, he also dramatises the arrival of the most important verb in the poem – ‘sprichst’, marking the beloved’s decisive action – and stresses its crucial [i] vowel, which triggers a string of additional [i] and [i] vowels, almost like an echo, or an aftershock: ‘liebe’, ‘dich’ and ‘bitterlich’.

The vocal gestures associated with lines 4 and 8 are also expanded, if not as dramatically – each gesture is five crotchets long instead of four (as in the
Ex. 3 ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’: four-bar models and expansions

When I see your eyes,

So vanishes all my love and sigh;

But when I kiss your lips,

So I become whole and gar gar

When I lean against your breast,

Comes over me like heaven's delight;

But when you speak: I love you! But when you speak:

So I must weep bitterly. So I must weep

Music Analysis, 00/0 (2017) © 2017 The Author. Music Analysis © 2017 John Wiley & Sons Ltd
basic model), and the expanded notes are the E on ‘gar’ in bar 7 and the B on ‘bit-’ in bar 15. Here, too, the augmentations of the declamatory rhythm have an expressive purpose, related to both the sense and the sound of the text. Take the last of these gestures, the setting of ‘So muss ich weinen bitterlich.’ The elongated B on the first syllable of ‘bitterlich’ underscores the depth of the poetic persona’s pain, but it also emphasises the profusion of [ɪ] and [i] vowels in the last two lines. In Schumann’s hands the assonance of the closing lines becomes a powerfully expressive element, a purely phonetic element that carries as much weight as the musical sounds that conjoin with it.

The expansion of ‘So werd’ ich ganz und gar gesund’ is even more expressive, likewise for reasons that are as much sonic as semantic. Dwelling on the E to which ‘gar’ is set allows Schumann to place additional stress on the plosive [g] consonants in this line (‘ganz und gar gesund’, the first two [g] words especially), with ‘ganz’ receiving a registral accent, thanks to the ossia G in bar 7, and ‘gar’ receiving an agogic accent. At the same time, by stressing ‘gar’ Schumann calls attention to the assonant [a] vowels that link these two words. To some listeners, especially to those who have heard the song dozens of times or more, Schumann’s handling of this line may seem altogether natural; stressing ‘ganz’ and ‘gar’ might seem like the only real option, the default way of setting these words. Yet the word in line 4 that would most likely receive the strongest stress in a normative reading is neither ‘ganz’ nor ‘gar’ (both adverbs), but ‘gesund’ (the adjective they modify). Without the added weight placed on these adverbs, without the underlining of their hard [g] sounds and open [a] vowels, Schumann’s melody wouldn’t sound nearly as effortful. Had he read the line differently, we would lose the sense of overexertion, the strange feeling that the poetic persona’s emotions of fullness and joy are suspect, precisely because he expresses them more exuberantly than he ought to. The overexertion is especially noticeable when we compare Schumann’s setting of line 4 with his setting of line 8. The second of these gestures is of course a varied repetition (and transposition) of the first. Yet the initial statement packs much more punch than its repetition. For one thing, it appears in a higher register, and with the dramatic leap up to 5. For another, the 3–2–1 descent in C major is doubled in the piano’s highest voice, and sounded at a forte dynamic, rather than buried in the piano’s alto voice, as with the descent in G major.

The exaggerated declamation in Schumann’s setting of lines 4, 7 and 8 helps to highlight the key vowels in each half of the poem, as well as the overall vowel progression from [a] to [ɪ]/[i]. It is easy enough to imagine a reading of Heine’s lines that minimises this large-scale ‘modulation’ from one vowel sound to another, treating it as an abstract pattern that has little or no impact on how we experience the poem. But Schumann’s reading emphasises these vowels not just at the end of each stanza, but also at the beginning. The [a] vowels of ‘Augen’ and ‘Leid’ are the focal points of bars 1–4: they fall on the highest notes of each melodic gesture, notes that are approached by upward leaps (after static repetition, no less). The gentle arc of these two gestures accords

© 2017 The Author.
Music Analysis © 2017 John Wiley & Sons Ltd
Song and the Music of Poetry

beautifully with the delicate opening and closing of the vowels in these two poetic lines. Schumann’s melody is as graceful and euphonious as the speech-sounds themselves, and by cresting on these notes it plants the [a] vowel in our ears and prepares us for the more dramatic presentation of this vowel in the upcoming C major cadence. Even the emphasis on [i]/[i] in bars 12–18 is in some sense prepared by Schumann’s handling of the previous lines. In line 5 (‘Wenn ich mich lehn’ an deine Brust’), ‘ich’ gets more musical stress than ‘Brust’. Both words fall on downbeats; but the B of ‘ich’ is reinforced by the piano’s B dominant, whereas the G of ‘Brust’, which occurs above the same B chord sustained across the bar, gets no such support. In Schumann’s reading of the poem, [a] and [i]/[i] are akin to contrasting key areas – call them contrasting vowel areas – that are loosely established at the start of each section and firmly secured by the end.

Interestingly, this kind of phonetic modulation from open to closed vowels appears not only in song 4, and not only in those songs that use a more speechlike, declamatory style. The next song in the cycle, ‘Ich will meine Seele tauchen’, does something similar, if less dramatic: its first strophe strongly emphasises the [a] vowels in the final words of lines 1–3 (‘tau-chen’, ‘hin-ein’ and ‘hau-chen’), each of which falls at the apex of a two-bar melodic gesture; and its second strophe stresses the comparatively closed vowels at the end of lines 5–7 (‘be-ben’, ‘Mund’ and ‘ge-ben’). The gestures from the song’s first strophe – two rising thirds, B–C–D and D–E–F♯, that lead to high points on [a] vowels – are themselves reminiscent of the ascending gestures in bars 20–23 of song 1, ‘Im wunderschönen Monat Mai’, which feature not simply the same pitches but also the same emphasis on [a] (‘Da hab’ ich ihr ge-stand-den / Mein Sehnen und Ver-lan-gen’); the songs’ melodic similarities, in other words, are strengthened by their phonetic similarities. The same could be said of the rising thirds that begin ‘Lehn’ deine Wang’, one of the two songs that falls between ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’’ and ‘Ich will meine Seele tauchen’ in the original twenty-song cycle. The gesture G–A–B♭ in the song’s opening phrase emphasises the [a] vowel of ‘Wang’ (‘Lehn’ deine Wang’) and is followed by a gesture that culminates on an even more registrally accented [a] vowel (‘zu-sam-men’) in bar 7. Something similar happens in the next phrase: the rising B–C–D♭ of bars 9–10 stresses the open [ɛ] of ‘Herz’ and leads to an even more emphatic climax on the [a] of ‘Flam-men’. It would require another article to do a thorough study of Schumann’s responses to Heine’s poetic music throughout the cycle, but these examples alone suggest that the relationships among the songs are as much phonetic as they are musical and semantic.

Conflict. This brings us finally to moments of disagreement. ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’’ is certainly not without its contradictions – Schumann’s setting of ‘Himmelslust’, for instance, goes against a normative reading of this word, since it stresses its last syllable rather than its first; also, as we’ve seen, he sets ‘ganz und gar gesund’ overemphatically, giving the impression that the lyric speaker is rather too confident about the healing powers of love. I would argue, however, that his setting of line 8 (‘So muss ich weinen bitterlich’) is not a

Music Analysis, 00/0 (2017) © 2017 The Author.
Music Analysis © 2017 John Wiley & Sons Ltd
contradiction. Throughout I have maintained that the greatest poetic disruption, the most troubling spot in the poem, is not line 8 but line 7. The greatest musical disruption occurs in the same place: not in the final vocal cadence – the gesture that Schumann took the teeth out of in his revision of the song by means of the conventional, almost nonchalant, close in G major\(^{28}\) – but in the previous bars, where the harshest dissonances in the song cast a shadow over a line about an affirmation of love and the most expanded melodic gesture emphasises the poetic caesura, the exclamation point and the proliferation of [i]/[ɪ] vowels. In this sense, Schumann’s song isn’t so much a misreading as a close reading of Heine. Schumann not only attends to the numerous facets of the poetry but also disavows a literal reading of the final line. Instead of expressing the sorrow of Heine’s words, he captures the understatement of his diction, the paradoxical matter-of-factness of his delivery.\(^{29}\)

Both Rufus Hallmark and Beate Perrey have argued that Schumann’s ‘sting in the tail’ in fact precedes Heine’s, and that this is not a flaw but a sign of Schumann’s strong interpretative vision. The music, according to Hallmark, ‘surprises us before it should; it anticipates the poem’s reversal rather than underlining it’ (1977, p. 48). For Perrey, the point of reversal is ‘shifted forward’ in Schumann’s song. ‘Heine’s gesture’, she writes, ‘does not coincide with Schumann’s; instead, in ascribing significance to what takes place before the Stimmungsbruch, the whole working of Heine’s poem is transformed: “meaning” is inscribed before the literal fact, and “Ich liebe dich” assumes the central place in Schumann’s song’ (2002, p. 184).

I hear a less radical transformation. I don’t hear a composer intervening in a poem and taking it over as his own (swallowing it, as it were); I hear a composer paying careful attention to the nuances of a poem, joining its music with his own. I do not agree that ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’ is (quoting Perrey’s discussion of Schumann’s Lied aesthetic in general) ‘no longer the poem of the poet, who did nothing more than provide the composer with material for thought and reflection’ (2002, p. 54). To say as much is to minimise the importance of the poem as a poem – how it moves, how it feels, how it sounds, how it ‘sings’ – and also the depth and subtlety of Schumann’s interaction with it.

‘Melancholie’: Signs and Sounds, Words and Wounds

I close with an analysis of a song from the Spanisches Liederspiel of 1849, one of two song cycles from that year based on Emanuel Geibel’s translations of Spanish poetry. The songs from Schumann’s late period are of course noted for their flexible melodic construction, their idiosyncratic approach to text setting and their general avoidance of four-square regularity.\(^{30}\) This makes ‘Melancholie’ a good testing ground for questions about the relationship between poetic and musical sound, since Schumann’s decision to free himself from the ‘tyranny’ of the four-bar phrase and the norms of text declamation seems to stem directly
from his heightened sensitivity to the physical, gestural dimension of the poem’s language.

The song is through-composed, and it unfolds freely, at times even erratically: the piano accompaniment changes texture frequently, and the vocal melody has wide leaps, dramatic accents and phrase structures that seldom conform to any normative theme type or phrase length. Little in the song feels settled, steady or regular. However, as with ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’, Schumann counters this unpredictability with a measure of constancy. The difference, though, is that the constancy comes not from without but from within – not from the outer regularity provided by four-, eight- and sixteen-bar units whose contents may be shifted and expanded, but from an unrelenting inner repetitiveness of pitch and phoneme.

**Analysing Geibel’s Poetic Music**

Geibel’s poem is a German translation of a poem by the sixteenth-century Spanish poet Francisco de Sà de Miranda. The text describes the poetic persona’s desire to be released from the torments of life. Having experienced only sorrow, wounds and agony, he longs for the arrival of that morning hour when he will no longer be able to see. The poem is thus structured around a paradox – that the coming of morning (and, by implication, the coming of a world beyond this one) will free him from having to witness the pain that surrounds him, yet the light will not open his eyes but close them. (An annotated version of Geibel’s poem appears in Ex. 4, followed by my translation of Geibel. I include breaks between each quatrain only for ease of reading; both Miranda’s and Geibel’s poems are written as one continuous sixteen-line stanza.)

Geibel’s poem adheres to one predominant metre: trochaic trimetre. However, it defies any attempts to be explained in terms of a single governing rhyme scheme. (The letters to the right of each line in his poem indicate where end rhymes appear, and the arrows connect rhyming pairs.) Notice that each quatrain contains two rhyming lines, but that the position of those rhyming lines varies. In the first quatrain the rhyme ‘wann denn’/‘Banden’ appears in lines 2 and 4; in the second quatrain the half rhyme ‘Leide’/‘Freude’ appears in lines 1 and 4, and another half-rhyme, ‘trübe’/‘Liebe’, appears in lines 2 and 3; the third quatrain repeats the rhyming pattern of the second, only now with full rhymes (‘Wunde’/‘Stunde’ in lines 1 and 4, ‘geben’/‘Leben’ in lines 2 and 3); and in the last quatrain the rhyme ‘geschähe’/‘sähe’ appears again in lines 2 and 4, replicating the pattern from the first quatrain. The net effect is a free repetition and variation of similar sounds within a set pattern.

The poem is in fact dominated by repetitive sounds, even aside from its rhyming words. Not only at the ends of lines but everywhere in the poem Geibel repeats words, phrases, vowels and consonants to excess. The most noticeable of these repeated sounds are the vowels [a] and [ɛ]. One could be statistical and
Ex. 4 ‘Melancholie’: annotated text and translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[a]</th>
<th>[a]</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>When will the morning come,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wann erscheint der Morgen,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>When, when, when,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wann denn, wann denn, wann denn!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der mein Leben löset</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>That will release my life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>From these bonds!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus diesen Banden!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>You eyes, by sorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ihr Augen, vom Leide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So trübe, so trübe!</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>So clouded, so clouded!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>Saw only torment instead of love,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saht nur Qual für Liebe,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>Saw no joy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saht nicht eine Freude;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Saw only wounds upon wounds,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saht nur Wund auf Wunde,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>Agony upon agony inflicted upon me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schmerz auf Schmerz mir geben,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>And in my long life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Und im langen Leben</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Not one cheerful hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keine frohe Stunde.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>If it would only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenn es endlich doch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>Finally happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endlich doch geschähe,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[a]</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>That the hour would arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daß ich säh’ die Stunde,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>When I could no longer see!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

note that 25 of the 46 stressed syllables in the poem feature [a] or [ɛ] vowels, with more [a] vowels than [ɛ] vowels in general, and more [a] vowels in the first half of the poem and more [ɛ] vowels in the second half. (I have marked these stressed [a] and [ɛ] vowels in Ex. 4.) Yet the best way to get a feeling for the preponderance of these open vowels is to read the poem aloud, paying careful attention to how often one’s mouth forms these sounds. When I do this I feel a palpable shift from [a] to [ɛ] around the second line of the third quatrain (‘Schmerz auf Schmerz mir geben’), rather like the ‘modulation’ from [a] to [i]/[ɪ] in ‘Wenn ich in deine
Augen seh”, only this time it is a modulation to a more closely related vowel. And I come to understand Geibel’s poem as one whose irregular form is held together by the common sounds within it, these two sounds above all.

Relating Geibel’s Music and Schumann’s Music

As with ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh”, the points of connection between Schumann’s music and Geibel’s poetry exceed the points of disconnection and disagreement. Here, however, indifference and conflict make up larger pieces of the pie, for Schumann’s approach to the poem is extremely free: he doesn’t just highlight its material elements but sometimes disregards them, exaggerates them, even subverts them.

Indifference. The main poetic element to which Schumann seems indifferent is Geibel’s metre. (Refer to the annotated score in Ex. 5.) Seldom is there a straightforward correspondence between the poetic metre of a given line and the declamation of the melodic gesture associated with it. Irregularity, not neatness, is the guiding principle, as even a quick glance at his setting of the opening quatrain will show. The first three lines are of course metrically identical, with three strong-weak poetic feet, but the musical realisations of these lines could hardly be more different. In part, this is because Schumann alters the number of feet in each line by adding or deleting words (for example, line 1, ‘Wann erscheint der Morgen’, becomes ‘Wann, wann erscheint der Morgen’; and line 2, ‘Wann denn, wann denn, wann denn’, becomes just ‘Wann denn, wann denn’); the poem may be loosely patterned, but the music at times seems devoid of patterning altogether, as if born of free improvisation. Adding to this improvisatory effect is the fact that the placement of the poetic feet in Schumann’s vocal melody varies greatly, no matter how many feet there are in each line. The four stressed syllables in line 1, for example, ‘Wann, wann er-scheint der Mor-gen’, are apportioned into four bars, roughly one bar per stressed syllable – regular enough, so far as it goes. Except that only the last stressed syllable (‘Mor-gen’) lands on a downbeat: the first three stressed syllables (‘Wann, wann, er-scheint’) are shifted one crotchet to the right (as is the piano’s left hand), making the notated bar line seem even more obscure. Schumann’s setting of line 2 also moves at the rate of one stressed syllable per bar and places those two syllables (‘Wann denn, wann denn!’) on downbeats. In his setting of lines 3–4 (bars 8–11), yet another scheme appears: of the five stressed syllables in these lines (‘Der mein Le-ben löst / Aus die-sen Ban-den”), three are downbeat-accented – ‘Le-ben’, ‘löst’ and ‘Ban-den’ – and the other two are treated as upbeats (‘der’ and ‘die-sen’); ‘Leben’, furthermore, lasts a full bar, whereas the phonetically related ‘Banden’ stretches across the bar.

Support. How, then, does Schumann reinforce the poem’s music with his own? Most strikingly, he reserves some of his longest and highest notes for the poem’s prominent [a] and [ɛ] vowels. In Ex. 5, I have circled the [a] and [ɛ]
Ex. 5 ‘Melancholie’: annotated score

Mit Affect, aber nicht schnell.

Wann, wann erscheint der Morgen, wann

denn, wann denn! der mein Leben löst aus diesen Bann

den. Ihr Augen vom Leide so trübe, so trübe sahst nur Qual für

Liebe, sah nicht eine Freude; sah nur Wunde auf Wunde, Schmerz auf
Ex. 5 Continued.

Schmerz mir ge - ben, und im lan - gen Le - ben kei - ne fro - he Stan - de. Wenn es

end - lich doch, end - lich doch ge - schä - he, dass ich säh' die Stan - de, wo ich nimm - mer

sä - he! wo ich nimm - mer säh - he! Wann er - sehneit der Mor - gen, der mein

Le - ben löst aus die - sen Ban - den!
vowels that are stressed either agogically or registrally or both and also written
the appropriate International Phonetic Alphabet symbol above each note. (I
have chosen pitches that are either in the d⁰–g⁰ upper register of this mezzo-
ranged song, or at least a dotted crotchet in length, or both; in addition, I have
taken into account where high notes are approached and/or left by leap – which
is to say that I have not selected every [a] and [ɛ] vowel in this upper range,
but only those that receive some kind of emphasis.) It could well be argued
that the circled syllables would have to be musically stressed, since they are
already poetically stressed – they are already ‘there’ in the poem, and a composer
would have to determinedly avoid the natural patterns of text accentuation to do
anything otherwise. Nonetheless, a composer still has to consider which stressed
syllable to stress more than others, and how much more. The real surprise about
Schumann’s setting of ‘Melancholie’, and the real key to his reading of the poem,
is that he places so much emphasis on certain stressed syllables, attacking them
vigorously, even violently. This battering-ram approach, whereby key words and
syllables are struck forcefully and repeatedly, can be awkward – for the listener,
and certainly for the singer – but it is by no means crude and careless; instead, it
results in a kind of overpowering resonance of musical and poetic sound, where
pitches and phonemes ring out in deafening reverberation.

The easiest way to appreciate the effect of this peculiar conjoining of music
and poetry is to focus on the most reverberant passage in the song: bars 24–35.
As Ex. 5 shows, the [a] and [ɛ] words ‘langen’, ‘wenn’, ‘endlich’, ‘geschähe’ and
’sähe’ are boldly underlined, not just because they appear in such a high vocal
register – they are set to five Fs and a climactic G in the space of about ten
bars – but also because of the context in which those high points appear. The F
on ‘lan-gen’ in bar 24 is approached by an unexpectedly rapid and long upward
arpeggio. F is the longest note in a foreshortened three-bar phrase and the apex
of a gesture that rockets up a tenth in only one beat and then falls the same
distance more slowly, over three bars. The arrival on F also coincides with the
arrival on the structural dominant, a chord that is prolonged over virtually this
entire passage, leading to the decisive tonic cadence in bar 35. The tenths (up
and down) in these bars spawn other tenths, and also other Fs: the F of ‘Wenn’,
on the upbeat to bar 27, is struck with even greater force than the F on ‘lan-gen’,
rising the same distance (a tenth from one beat to the next) but without the
arpeggio to help smooth over the gap; the Fs on ‘end-lich’ in bars 27 and 28
are equally emphatic, and they lead to the most dramatic [ɛ] vowel in the entire
song, the high G on ‘ge-schä-he’.

Conflict. The greatest conflicts between text and music have to do with
subverting the natural declamation of the text. Throughout the song, those
syllables that are metrically or agogically accented tend to be syllables that would
be stressed in a reading of the poem: ‘Leben’ (bar 8), ‘löst’ (bar 11) and ‘Banden’
(bar 12) are prime examples. In certain instances, however, registral accent
overpowers metric and agogic accent, because Schumann places undue stress on
syllables that would not be stressed in speech. Almost all of these subverted text
stresses involve leaps to and away from the note in a relatively high tessitura, and almost all are further emphasised because they correspond with harmonies that are held across the bar line: the F on the upbeat to bar 12 (‘Ihr Augen’), the D on the upbeat to bar 13 (‘vom Leide’) and the D on the upbeat to bar 21 (‘auf Wunde’).

These ‘battered’ weak syllables are one of the most peculiar aspects of the song – part of what gives it the quality of overwrought speech rather than flowing, expressive melody. But they do more than just heighten the declamatory character of the song; they also help to exaggerate the open [a] and high F that recur throughout the song. It is true that no poetically unstressed [a] vowel falls on a high F, but the first and second of these subverted syllables – ‘Ihr Augen’ and ‘vom Leide’ – directly precede metrically and agogically accented [a] vowels, and the first of course is sung on f2. Furthermore, the last subverted syllable – ‘auf Wunde’ – does indeed fall on an [a] vowel. This might not seem significant were it not that this note is surrounded by other registrally emphasised [a] sounds, such as the C on the upbeat to bar 16 (‘saht nur Qual’), the D on the upbeat to bar 18 (‘saht nicht eine’) and the F on the upbeat to bar 20 (‘saht nur Wunde’).

Together these strongly accented high notes amplify something that is present in the poem but blatant in the song: the predominance of a vowel that resembles an exclamation, a cry of pain.  

For Ulrich Mahlert, this kind of exaggerated, highly declamatory melodic writing is part of the song’s raison d’être: Schumann’s musical declamation, he says, is not ‘natural’ but ‘gestural’, and this is not a failing but a strength, and a key to understanding Schumann’s artistic response to the poem’s heightened rhetoric (1983, p. 104). Mahlert’s word choice is fitting, for it implies that the song’s exaggerated melodic gestures involve actual physical gestures as well (though his analysis does not pursue this idea) – specifically, the gestures involved in the production of vowels like [a] and [ɛ], which in this context seem almost stripped of meaning. Schumann, in this most extreme of songs, transforms signs into sounds – or, rather, unleashes sounds that were already there to begin with.

In 1826, at the age of sixteen, Schumann wrote a poem that included these lines: ‘And yet ’tis fairer still when the string’s sound / Doth raise and glorify the poet’s song’ (‘Doch schöner ist’s, wenn das Geläut der Saite / Verherrlichend des Dichters Lied erhebt’) (Schumann 1914, vol. 2, p. 175). That he penned these words when he was only a teenager suggests that even as a young composer he was already beginning to think about the myriad aspects of language to which a composer could attend in setting a poem to music. As his craft developed, his attention to these aspects only deepened. Poetic sound, I have stressed throughout, was one such aspect – and not just any aspect but a crucial component of his encounter with poetic language and his efforts to meld it with music. In this remarkable sensitivity to the sonorousness of words we find clear evidence of his commitment to ‘raising and glorifying’ the music of poetry. But not only raising and glorifying: as we have seen, he sometimes remained
true to the poet’s song, echoing it with his own, but just as often he managed to uncover hidden strains of poetic music, revealing beautiful phonetic patterns that might not be heard without the aid of the composer’s art.

My intention has been to explore the means by which we go about analysing song, and to offer some suggestions for how we might incorporate a careful consideration of poetic sound into that endeavour, using Schumann as a test case. More than offering answers to the question of how the music of poetry functions in song, I hope above all to have opened up a space where new questions might be asked and new repertoire explored. For no matter the poetry and the particular musical realisation of it, our experience with text and music will be immeasurably enriched if we think of them both as worlds of sound, and listen closely for what happens when these worlds converge.

NOTES

1. See favoritepoem.org for more information about these projects. The three anthologies are Pinsky and Dietz (1999), (2002) and (2006). See also Pinsky (1998) and (2013b).

2. Music, however, may not be the ideal metaphor. As the scholar and poet Craig Dworkin has pointed out, when scholars write about the ‘music’ of poetry, they are often referring merely to euphonious language: “‘music’ of course encompasses a range of works far more expansive than the classical and romantic imagination of the pleasant, mellifluous, or affecting” (Perloff and Dworkin 2009, p. 15). As I hope to demonstrate, ‘music’ can still be a potentially useful term for describing those aspects of poetry that at once conjoin with and are separate from content.

3. When I say ‘the sonic elements of poetry’, ‘poetic sound’ and so on, I am referring mainly to a poem’s phonetic patterns. A poem’s rhythm and metre also of course dictate how it sounds in the most general sense, but I have found it useful to distinguish the actual sounds of a poem from the relative stress placed on those sounds and the pace at which those sounds are uttered. For this reason, although I by no means ignore the rhythmic and metric aspects of the poems I analyse, I pay special attention to the vowels and consonants the poems contain. I take my lead in part from Kennedy and Gioia, who make a similar distinction: ‘A rhythm may be produced by the recurrence of a sound (the throb of a drum, a telephone’s busy signal), but rhythm and sound are not identical. A totally deaf person at a parade can sense rhythm from the motions of the marchers’ arms and feet, from the shaking of the pavement as they tramp. Rhythms inhere in the motions of the moon and stars, even though when they move, we hear no sound. In poetry, several kinds of recurrent sound are possible, including [. . . ] rime, alliteration, and assonance. But most often when we speak of the rhythm
of a poem, we mean the recurrence of stresses and pauses in it’ (2013, p. 163). Where I do discuss the relation between musical and poetic rhythm and metre, I draw mainly upon the excellent work on this topic by Krebs (especially 2005, 2009 and 2011) and Malin (especially 2010). For a very recent study that extends (and critiques) Krebs’s work and offers a detailed exploration of the prosody of German Lieder – focusing, however, more on the placement of stress than on the sound of language – see Snarrenberg (2014).

4. To mention some notable examples from the past decade: Malin (2006), p. 255, has written about Schubert’s handling of the consonants in Goethe’s ‘Wandrers Nachtlied I’; Lewin (2006), p. 255, has explored the relation between ‘vowel pitch’ and musical pitch in a song from Schoenberg’s Buch der hängenden Gärten; Cherlin (2007), p. 373, has commented on the sonic properties of Schoenberg’s text to Moses und Aron; and Guralnick (2009) has discussed some of the sonic elements in poems by Yeats, Tennyson and Dickinson, and the musical responses to these poems by Thomas Dunhill, Dilyl Elwyn-Edwards, Aaron Copland and Roger Quilter.

5. In an earlier article (Rodgers 2015) I applied Abrams’s ideas about the physical sensation of reading poetry to the analysis of songs by Schubert and Britten; Randel (2014) has explored the interaction of music with poetic sound, rhythm and syntax in four songs from Schumann’s Dichterliebe; and Voigt (2013) has written about Schoenberg’s and Webern’s treatment of poetic rhythm, rhyme, assonance and alliteration in their freely atonal songs.

6. The vocal persona, he explains, is related to the poetic persona – the ‘speaker’ of the poem itself – but not identical to it: a vocal persona, for example, doesn’t encompass the whole song (as a poetic persona would encompass an entire poem) but instead is present only when the singer is singing.

7. In an article surveying approaches to text-music analysis, Lodato makes a similar point. ‘Agawu’, she claims, ‘has no problem with dispensing with a wide range of textual readings by choosing to examine only the composer’s reading of the text. If Agawu intends to situate his analytical approach within the tri-partite model, such a treatment of the text would result in an imbalance between the importance accorded to musical and textual integrity that is implied in this model. The text would then become assimilated by the music and the song, rather than intersecting with them’ (1999, p. 100).

8. Howe notes as much in a review of the book and offers a possible explanation: ‘One important feature of poetry and song that receives only passing treatment in this volume is the use of phonemes – the
sounds of words – for expressive purposes: the urgency conveyed by exaggerating labiodental fricatives, for example, or the lift offered by a double consonant’s percussive comma. Talk of this sort necessarily enters touchy-feely territory. But given how naturally seasoned reciters of poetry and singers of lieder exploit the expressive power of phonemes in performance, this is a topic that warrants study by future scholars of song’ (2011, p. 657).

9. Another critic of the text-to-music approach is Cook, who urges song analysts (and, really, anyone analysing a work that combines different media, not just music and poetry) to employ a technique that he calls ‘inversion’ (1998, p. 136). Conventional readings of song, he says, start with the text and then ask how the music relates to it, but in doing so they fail to see the music as anything but an expression of the words. Inverting this relationship and reading from music to words helps us to avoid these kinds of oversights; it prevents us from being guided by the unconscious assumptions we bring to the task of analysis when instead we should be guided by the nature of the material itself. The power of inversion, for Cook, is that it ‘brings to light features that are submerged or overwhelmed in a naturalistic, with-the-grain reading’ (1998, p. 140).

10. In his recent book on Schubert’s Winterreise, Suurpää recognises this danger as well, though he does not fault Agawu for succumbing to it. In his own analyses Suurpää modifies Agawu, recommending (as Agawu does) that one begin with the music, but then, when it comes time to turn to the text, urging analysts not to let their poetic analysis be coloured by their musical analysis: ‘[T]he results of the musical analysis might have influenced the analysis of the text had the poem been read solely from the standpoint of the musico-poetic aspects. At this second analytical stage, however, the poems are to be read and analyzed only as text. If the poems are interpreted in this way, without recourse to the music, then the actual manner in which the music shapes their reading can be explained more clearly’ (2014, p. 52). Suurpää, in other words, does treat the poem as a meaningful utterance in its own right; however, he focuses more on the thematic content of Müller’s poems than on their sonic structures.

11. For another example of an analytical approach that sees song as arising from the conflict of two mutually independent elements (poetry and music), see Kurth (1997).

12. Zbikowski’s ‘conceptual blending’ model of song bears some relation to Kramer’s ‘incorporation’ model in that it likewise strives to treat the music and poetry of a song as two separate but related ‘discourse structures’, as Zbikowski calls them (2002, p. 245). At the same time, it resembles Agawu’s model in that the two spaces of music and text combine in a third,
blended space: song. Zbikowski implicitly acknowledges as much when he writes that Agawu stops short of fully endorsing his own model because it provides ‘no account of a concrete identity for song’ (ibid.) – a task that Zbikowski himself undertakes in his book. As with both Kramer and Agawu, however, Zbikowski focuses mainly on poetic content: imagery, narrative progression, point of view, emotional states and so on.

13. Malin (2010), p. 128, notes this as well. Miller also comments on the striking declamatory freedom of ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’: ‘Lyric declamation is built on speech inflection. No better example of the effectiveness of Schumann’s mastery of this idiom, which is of his own creation (there are tentative indications of it in late Schubert), can be found than in this brief song’ (1999, p. 105).

14. Randel (2014) is something of an exception: he makes many lovely observations about Schumann’s musical response to the prosody, syntax and sound of Heine’s poem. Yet he focuses much less on the last of these – on Heine’s treatment of vowels and consonants, and on Schumann’s expressive rendering of them. Listening to the song with this in mind shows us that the most dissonant music is reserved not for the ‘ironic’ final line but for the previous one, which, in spite of its comforting message, is the most sonically discordant line in the poem.


16. Curiously, Randel does not discuss any of these rhythmic irregularities, not even the striking colon in the penultimate line. Heine’s text, he writes, ‘does not vary the syllabic rhythm, but Schumann’s setting has varied it quite strikingly at moments and in ways that can be thought about in relation to other features of the text’ (2014, p. 40). Varied poetic rhythm, I would argue, is precisely one of the ‘features of the text’ to which Schumann seems most attentive.

17. Readers interested in learning more about German lyric diction may wish to consult Odom (1981).

18. Randel (2014), p. 41, also points out the alliterative [g] consonants in line 4. The vowels of line 4 are more balanced than its consonants are, using a variation of the pattern presented in lines 1 and 2: though the line begins with a more open [ɛ] vowel, it likewise progresses through two [a] vowels (the assonant pair ‘ganz’/’gar’) and then ends with a more closed vowel (the [ʊ] of ‘gesund’).

19. The [ɪ] and [i] vowels are not identical – the first is short and open, the second long and closed – but they are similar enough to be considered
assonances. Randel (ibid.) also comments on this moment of assonance, though he does not mention the assonance of ‘ganz’ and ‘gar’ in line 4.

20. Sams is the strongest proponent of the view that Schumann didn’t grasp the full meaning of Heine’s poem. ‘Schumann’, he writes, ‘is innocent of innuendo. His music’s meaning is not even discontent, let alone distress’ (1969, p. 111).

21. Malin also comments on the song’s balance of regularity and irregularity, writing of its ‘fluidity within a flexible mold’ (2010, p. 129).

22. Randel (2014), p. 41, describes how Schumann freely shifts these melodic gestures around within the bar, such that any of the four accents in a poetic line might fall on a downbeat. Often, he suggests, this allows Schumann to place important nouns on the first beat of a bar.

23. Randel (2014), p. 42, also remarks on the lengthening of this note and writes that the syllabic rhythm in the middle of line 7 is slower than anywhere else in the song. Malin (2010), p. 129, likewise notes that ‘sprichst’ receives the longest duration of any syllable in the song – and that the ‘declamatory schema’ associated with this line appears nowhere else in the piece.


25. Most singers perform the ossia notes in this bar – but not all. See, for example, Hampson and Parsons’s recording of the song (1994), in which Hampson sings the lower notes in bar 7.

26. Both Agawu and Cook acknowledge that the C major cadence is overemphatic. For Agawu, the early high point (the G in bar 7) might well ‘weaken the overall dramatic structure’ if Schumann didn’t compensate for it by following it with two other high points that involve dimensions other than register: the return of 3 over static harmony in bar 9 is, according to Agawu, a ‘melodic-textural’ high point, and the diminished seventh chord in bar 13 is a ‘harmonic’ high point (1984, p. 175). For Cook, the forcefulness of bars 7–8 creates an unresolvable ‘problem’: the music in these bars ‘works hard – too hard – to establish a definitive cadence in the subdominant’, a cadence, at any rate, that ‘virtually disappears’ in a Schenkerian sketch of the song; ‘the massive rhetorical emphasis of the cadence [in C major] has no structural support’ (1998, p. 140). (He embellishes this claim in The Schenker Project when he writes that ‘the ever so emphatic cadence is a façade, no more real than the song’s profession of love’ [2007, p. 289].) Yet this problem – that the C major cadence has strong rhetorical emphasis
but weak structural support – is matched by another: the vocal cadence in G major has weak rhetorical emphasis but strong structural support (since it coincides with the descent of the Urlinie). Cook (1998), p. 140, argues that the re-emergence of the tonic key in bar 14 happens too suddenly, without preparation; the structural dominant, he writes, is ‘blurted out without warning’, resulting in a ‘structural aporia’, a disjunction. I hear the disjunction, but I don’t hear a cadential progression that is ‘blurted out’: it is true that bar 14 seems not to follow bar 13 – not, however, because it is too bold, but because it isn’t bold enough. After the static diminished seventh chord, bar 14 seems almost to shrink away from the dissonance, decreasing the tension at the ‘drive’ to the cadence, pulling back from the brink when we least expect it.

27. The registral and agogic emphasis on these [a] vowels – the D of ‘Augen’ and the C of ‘Leid’ – could be reason to interpret the song as a 5 line rather than a 3 line, and thus to go against Schenker’s famous analysis of the song ([1935] 1979, vol. 2, fig. 152,1). In a well-known article that re-evaluates Schenker’s Formenlehre, Smith (1996), p. 208, argues in favour of 5-line reading, though for very different reasons. For a critique of Smith’s analysis and its methodological implications, see Cook (2007), pp. 287–9.

28. As Hallmark has shown (1977, pp. 116–17), in the original sketch of the song bars 15–16 don’t echo bars 7–8, and in fact don’t lead to a tonic cadence at all; instead, the melody passes through B on its way to A, and then falls farther to F as the word ‘bitterlich’ is repeated. This ending may be structurally weaker than the ending in the final published version, but it is rhetorically stronger. In the original version of the song, the endings of the two halves stand out because they are so unconventional: first, a cadence in a subordinate key is hammered out too forcefully, and later a cadence in the tonic key is avoided altogether. In the published version, only the first cadence truly stands out; the final cadence is so conventional that it passes by almost without event. The novelty of Schumann’s solution is most apparent when juxtaposed with a setting like Hugo Wolf’s, from 1876. Wolf also sets off line 7, with increased chromaticism, a crescendo and even an appoggiatura on ‘liebe dich’ which alludes to Schumann. But he makes even more of the next line, suddenly turning to the minor mode on ‘So muss ich weinen bitterlich’; and staying there for the remainder of the song. Where Schumann eases up and pulls back from the brink when we least expect it, Wolf plunges deeper into darkness.

29. Miller makes a similar observation: ‘The poet’s purposeful understatement of the climactic moment is wonderfully caught by Schumann. His handling somewhat tempers critical comment that composer Schumann fails to take
into account poet Heine’s tendency to find a worm in the center of every Romantic apple’ (1999, p. 105).


31. I derive my English translation from Emily Ezust (see the LiederNet Archive – www.lieder.net – where one can also find a copy of Miranda’s poem). A comparison of Miranda and Geibel reveals that Geibel’s German translation retains a number of the structural features found in the Spanish original: it consists of sixteen lines (though now broken into two stanzas, 4 + 12) and generally has six syllables per line (the only exceptions being lines 4 and 13, which contain five syllables rather than six). The main difference is that Geibel’s poem is metric (or accentual-syllabic), while Miranda’s is not. Unlike German poetry, Spanish poetry is only syllabic – the number of syllables in a line matters far more than the number of stresses in a line, because the differentiation between strong and weak stresses is not as pronounced in Spanish as it is in German.

32. Still, he introduces some unexpected irregularities – like the first two lines of the second quatrain (‘Ihr Augen vom Leide / So trübe, so trübe!’), which use amphibrachic dimetre (each line has two poetic feet, and each poetic foot has a weak-strong-weak syllabic pattern). The fourth line could also be interpreted as a deviation from the prevailing trochaic tetrametre, since its first word (‘Aus’) would be only weakly stressed, if indeed it were stressed at all. I have nonetheless chosen to regard this line as at least in part trochaic – essentially a varied repetition of the metric pattern presented in lines 1–3.

33. As Mahlert (1983), p. 99, notes in his analysis of the song, two quatrains with abba rhyme schemes (quatrains 2 and 3) are framed by two quatrains with an abcb rhyme scheme (quatrains 1 and 4). What is in between, we might say, is organised tightly, while what lies on the extremes is organised more loosely, except that the ‘loosest’ rhymes appear in one of the most tightly patterned quatrains.

34. Johnson sees the song’s improvisatory character as essential to its evocation of Spain: ‘For Schumann, Spanish music seems to have meant a certain Baroque grandiosity combined with improvisatory freedom as if he envisaged the Escorial of Philip II somehow combined with the Moorish extravagances of the Alhambra’ (2002). Sams, on the other hand, faults the song for its lack of melodic consistency: ‘The new techniques [of the 1849 songs] have no place for fresh melodic invention; indeed, they might have been devised to compensate for its absence. The music [of this period] lacks rhythmic unity; in “Melancholie”, for example, no two bars are alike’ (1972, p. 136).
35. This free musical distribution of poetic feet is part and parcel of what Mahlert (1983, p. 104) describes as Geibel’s distinct lack of interest in ‘symmetrical correspondences’ (symmetrische Korrespondenzen) – which, he says, also involves the decidedly different treatments of the words that fall at the end of lines 1 and 2 (‘Morgen’ and ‘Banden’).

36. I treat the long ‘ä’ in ‘geschähe’ (bar 29), ‘säh’ (bar 30) and ‘sähe’ (bars 33 and 35) as equivalent to an [ɛ] vowel. Some diction guides and dictionaries differ about whether this vowel is closer to an open [ɛ] vowel or a closed [e] vowel, but most of the ones I have consulted indicate the former (and this has been confirmed by conversations with various vocal pedagogues). See, for example, Odom (1981), p. 90, which recommends, ‘In singing, the letter ä is usually pronounced [ɛ], whether long or short’, and Langenscheidt (2010), which says that the ‘äh’ letter combination in words like ‘Krähé’, ‘krählen’ and ‘nählen’ should be pronounced with a long [ɛ] vowel – [ɛː] in IPA the International Phonetic Alphabet. Regardless, in a high register – which is where the ‘ä’ vowels usually fall in Schumann’s song – it would be much easier for a singer to negotiate an open [ɛ] vowel than a closed [e] vowel.


38. Hallmark uses this very word – ‘exclamation’ – to describe the opening of the song. The song’s opening, he writes, ‘unfolds less as a melody than as a series of exclamations, in metrically displaced and strongly accented tones, more operatic than lied-like’ (2010, p. 121).


REFERENCES


Music Analysis, 00/0 (2017)


**NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR**

Stephen Rodgers is Associate Professor of Music Theory and Musicianship at the University of Oregon. He is the author of *Form, Program, and Metaphor in the Music of Berlioz* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). His other research, on relationships between text and music, nineteenth-century song and musical form, has appeared in *Music Theory Spectrum, Music Theory Online, Current Musicology, Nineteenth-Century Music Review, Journal of Musicological Research, Indiana Theory Review* and *Theoria*. He is currently the associate editor of *Music Theory Online*.

**ABSTRACT**

As much as the Lied has been a mainstay in studies of the relationship between text and music, one important aspect of that relationship has been largely ignored: the ways in which composers respond to the sounds, or phonemes, of words themselves. Analysts of German Lieder (and art song in general) have emphasised the diverse ways in which music expresses the meaning of poetry, but they have remained largely indifferent to how music captures, and often enhances, poetry’s materiality – its patterns of consonants and vowels, its intonational shapes, its ‘music’. Drawing in part upon literary scholarship on the sonic aspects of poetry (by Robert Pinsky, M. H. Abrams and others), this article explores how the sound worlds of poetry and music interact. I begin by evaluating three common approaches to the analysis of art song, each of which...
neglects poetic sound to some degree. I then propose an alternative approach, one designed to ensure that the music of poetry is given its due. Finally, I apply this method to a detailed analysis of ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’, from Dichterliebe, and to another setting by Schumann, ‘Melancholie’, from the Spanisches Liederpiel.