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Mörike's Mozart, Wolf's Schubert: «Denk' es, o Seele!»

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This is an essay born years ago of puzzlement mixed with inchoate love for a favorite composition whose specificity was frustratingly enigmatic. Although I could realize that every detail of the musical architecture of Wolf's «Denk' es, o Seele!», the thirty-ninth song in his volume of *Mörike-Lieder*, was derived from the poetry, I could not say how or why.¹ In particular, I could hear that the piano introduction is all-important, that it lays out not only the musical materials for the body of the song to follow but a conceptual framework whose definition was just beyond my grasp. A search for answers began with Mörike, where one finds the first threads that lead through the maze of meanings to Wolf's astonishingly acute setting. Elsewhere, I have written that Wolf and Mörike had different personalities and different artistic purposes, and that their multiple differences are encoded in the songs composed years later.² While this is still true, not only of Wolf but of most *Lieder*, *this* song also demonstrates a composer's profound insight into his chosen poem. Mindful (I believe) of its origins, he devised music in which both the larger structure and the smaller inflections elucidate the confrontation with ultimate things recorded in these words. «Wölferl's own howl», in particular, his post-Wagnerian tonal language, are present in full measure, but so too is a sophisticated understanding of this poem and an elective affinity born, I would speculate, of personal experience with the dark matter at its core. Professors of Germanistik could not have read «Denk' es, o Seele!» more finely than did Hugo Wolf.

For his fifty-three Mörike songs, Wolf made use of the sixth edition of Mörike's poetic anthology, which was first published in 1838 and revised in three subsequent editions in the poet's lifetime.³ The sixth edition is a

- 1 Wolf composed «Denk' es, o Seele!» in Perchtoldsdorf on 10 March 1888. It was published in his *Gedichte von Eduard Mörike* in 1889 by the firm of Wetzler in Vienna.
- 2 See the author's *Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs*, Cambridge, England, 2002.
- 3 Wolf used the *Gedichte von Eduard Mörike*, Sechste Auflage, Stuttgart 1876. «Denk' es, o Seele!» appears on S. 176. See also Eduard Mörike, *Gedichte. Ausgabe von 1867, Erster Teil: Text*, hrsg. Hans-Henrik Krummacher (= *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe I/1*), Stuttgart 2003, S. 148. S. S. Prawer, in: *Mörike und seine Leser. Versuch einer Wirkungsgeschichte*, Stuttgart 1960, S. 33, states that Wolf was among the first to place Mörike with Kleist and Wagner rather than Goethe and the Greeks. In other words, he treasured the daemonic side of this poet before others caught on.

posthumous re-publication of the so-called «Ausgabe letzter Hand» of 1867, the fourth and final edition of Mörike's poems to be supervised by the poet himself. For this edition, Mörike supplied dates in his table of contents for most of the poems, sometimes two dates where earlier and later versions are at issue, and «Denk' es, o Seele!» is dated 1855. Mörike published the emended final version of the poem in his novella *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*, with the date 1856 – the centenary of Mozart's birth – printed on the title page, despite actual publication in 1855. But the poem had an earlier existence. The autograph manuscript of the initial version, which is entitled «Grabgedanken» and dated September 1851, is now in the collection of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach,⁴ and the poem was first published in the Stuttgart *Frauen-Zeitung für Hauswesen, weibliche Arbeiten und Moden*, no. 14, for 15 July 1852. Mörike was teaching at a girls' school – the Katharinenstift – in Stuttgart, so it is not surprising that he would have sought publication for his work in a periodical directed to a female readership. Indeed, in its historical context, «Denk' es, o Seele!» might well have had a particular meaning for women. At a time when infant mortality rates were very high, a poem about the acceptance of death as part of the immense natural cycle of life-and-death would have special resonance for those who had born life only to have it snatched away too soon by death.

In the novella, the poem has no title, no barrier between prose and poetry. In the anthologies and in Wolf's song-album, the title is carved from the poem's interior and, thus emphasized, hints at Mörike's fascination with German Baroque poetry.⁵ The seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century poetic repertory (especially for those, like Mörike, familiar with Pietist devotional literature) is replete with dialogues between the soul and the body, the Christian believer and the heart, the human being and Christ, but in this

4 See Karl Pörnbacher, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente. Eduard Mörike, Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*, Stuttgart 1976, S. 36, for a photograph of the manuscript. The address to the soul is not yet present in this, mostly likely the earliest, manuscript version of the poem: «Ein Tännchen grünet wo, / Wer weiß, im Walde; / Ein Rosenstrauch, wer sagt, / In welchem Garten? / Von beiden ist gewiß / Ein Reis erlesen, / Auf meinem Grab zu wurzeln / Und zu wachsen. / Zwei schwarze Rößlein weiden / Auf der Wiese; / Sie tummeln sich zur Stadt / In muntern Sprüngen. / Sie werden schrittweis' gehn / Mit meiner Leiche, / Vielleicht, vielleicht noch eh' / An ihren Hufen / Das Eisen los wird, das / Ich blitzen sehe!» See also Bernhard Zeller, Walter Scheffler, Hans-Ulrich Simon (hrsg.), *Eduard Mörike. 1804–1875–1975. Gedenkausstellung zum 100. Todestag im Schiller-Nationalmuseum Marbach am Neckar. Texte und Dokumente*, Marbach am Neckar 1990, S. 373–389.

5 See Manfred Koschlig, «Mörikes barocker Grundton und seine verborgenen Quellen: Studien zur Geschichtlichkeit des Dichters», in: *Zeitschrift für Württembergische Landesgeschichte*, 34–35 (1975–1976), S. 231.

poem, Mörike confronts mortality without religion's consolations. The poet contemplates, not the moment of death, not the manner of its occurrence, but what comes after, and he does so without any allusion to religious geographies of the afterlife. Mörike's involvement with Christianity was conflicted; destined for the Lutheran ministry by his family early in his life, he left the *Brotarbeit* he soon came to detest in 1843, but he maintained an idiosyncratic faith throughout his life.⁶ In his youth, when he was more closely entangled with orthodox religion, he particularly cherished its promise of the resurrection of the body on the Last Day. A passage from a letter written on 19–21 March 1825 to his friend Johannes Mährlen about his surety that he would one day see his beloved brother August (who died, probably a suicide, in August of 1824) in the afterlife ends with the moving exclamation, «O Wiedersehen!».⁷ But «Denk' es, o Seele!» was fashioned many years later, and there is no hint of «Wiedersehen» here. Rather, Mörike tries to find something beautiful in a panoramic survey of the origins and endings of all life in the dust. One thinks of Brahms's «Denn es gehet dem Menschen» from the *Vier ernste Gesänge*, with its assertion from the great and gloomy Ecclesiastes 3: 19–22, «For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?» Mörike too tells of our dissolution into earth, but he wishes to place the thought of such a death – his own death – in a vast, beneficent context. The ambiguities which attend his attempt to do so are part of the profound integrity of this poem.

Before I discuss either the poem itself or Wolf's setting, I want to summarize briefly its place in Mörike's Mozart-novella because I believe that

6 The Mörike archives in Marbach own a Lutheran Bible from 1773 with annotations by the poet (a fascinating document); see the Deutsches Literatur Archiv, «A: Mörike / 82. 419».

7 Eduard Mörike, *Briefe 1811–1828*, hrsg. Bernhard Zeller und Anneliese Hofmann (=Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe 10), Stuttgart 1982, S. 84.

Wolf's knowledge of the prose tale is on display in his song.⁸ It is not easy to write a novel, a play, a short story, a film, about a historical artist; potboilers and melodramas are the rule-of-thumb, but this novella is among the transcendent exceptions. For Mörike, Mozart was one of the tutelary gods of a rococo world marked by grace and wholeness, with an undercurrent of daemonic forces to give the art of the age its power. (Goethe was the other pillar of Mörike's mansion of lost unity.) The nineteenth-century poet's childhood was spent in close proximity to eighteenth-century sensibilities, to rococo villas near Ludwigsburg, to formal gardens, orangeries and hothouses. The atmosphere of the Schinzberg fête is one he would have known from visits in childhood to his wealthy uncle Eberhard Friedrich Georgii. The gaily-embellished coach that brings Mozart into the novella (another «handsome coach», its decoration not cited, carries him out of the story at the end) is a rococo creation, and so too is the four-poster bed with its painted canopy resting on slender green-lacquered columns in which Constanze rests at the inn. A talented, if untrained artist, Mörike at one time made a sketch in red charcoal of an ornate, old-fashioned coach with a woman (? the drawing is indeed sketchy) seated inside, and any reader who loves the Mozart-novella will imagine her as Constanze.⁹ When the poet evokes this remembered world in his later works, it is always with an undercurrent of nostalgia: this is Paradise Lost. One thinks of the «green-lacquered, gold-

8 There is a rich scholarly repertory on Mörike's Mozart-novella and this poem, including Ilse Graham, «Orpheus Looks Back: Movement and Meaning in Three Poems by Eduard Mörike», in: *The German Quarterly* 52 (1979), S. 218–226; Erich Hofacker, «Mörikes Mozartnovellen in ihrem künstlerischen Aufbau», in: *German Quarterly* 66 (1933), S. 106–113; Hanne W. Holesovsky, «Der Bereich des Schlosses in Mörikes Mozartnovelle», in: *The German Quarterly* 46 (1973), S. 185–201; Raymond Immerwahr, «Apocalyptic Trumpets. The Inception of «Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag»», in: *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 70 (1955), S. 390–407; Raymond Immerwahr, «Narrative and «Musical» Structure in *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*», in: *Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures*, St. Louis 1963, S. 103–120; Jürgen von Kempfski, «Zu Mörikes «Denk es, o Seele»», in: *Merkur* (1947), S. 475–477; Franz Mautner, *Mörikes Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*, Krefeld 1957; Joseph Müller-Blattau, «Das Mozartbild Mörikes und seines Freundeskreises», in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 117 (1956), S. 325–329; Karl Konrad Polheim, «Der künstlerische Aufbau von Mörikes Mozartnovelle», in: *Euphorion* 48 (1954), S. 41–70; S. S. Prawer, «The Threatened Idyll. Mörikes «Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag»», in: *Modern Languages* 44 (1963), S. 101–107; Volkmar Sander, «Zur Rolle des Erzählers in Mörikes Mozart-Novelle», in: *The German Quarterly* 36 (1963), S. 36–47; Benno von Wiese, «Eduard Mörike, «Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag»», in: *Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka*, Düsseldorf 1959, S. 213–237; and Jean M. Woods, «Memory and Inspiration in Mörikes «Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag»», in: *Revue des langues vivantes* 41 (1975), S. 6–14.

9 Reproduced in K. Pörnbacher, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente*, S. 5.

flowered dulcimer» in the poem «Ach, nur einmal noch im Leben!», purportedly a reminiscence of a bygone pastor and his wife who lived in a little house with a kitchen garden. The garden gate, magically endowed with artistic talent, sings the first phrase only of Sesto's death-haunted plea to the Emperor Titus for forgiveness in the aria «Ah, per questo istante solo» from the last act of *La clemenza di Tito*, Mozart's last opera.¹⁰ In Mörike's world, art is elegy for what is irretrievably lost.

At the beginning of the novella, Mozart and his wife Constanze set out for Prague in the fall of 1787 (the autumnal season of imminent death is symbolic) to supervise the first performance of *Don Giovanni*. They stop along the way to admire the Bohemian woods, and it is here that Mörike's fictive Mozart utters the poignant words, «Die Erde ist wahrhaftig schön und keinem zu verdenken, wenn er so lang wie möglich darauf bleiben will».¹¹ All of idyll – its habitat in Nature, the artists who cherish it, its omnipresent knowledge of death – is contained in these few words. When the wayfaring composer strays into a garden and plucks an orange from a tree, the echoes of Adam and the Garden of Eden made explicit by Mozart himself, he discovers that the estate belongs to a Count and Countess von Schinzberg, whose musically gifted niece Eugenie (shortly to be married to a wealthy, young baron) is staying with them, also their son Max and Eugenie's pretty, lively friend Franziska.¹² Lovers of Mozart's music, they delightedly welcome the composer and his wife into their home for an evening which exemplifies the counterplay between creative isolation and the social worlds intrinsic

10 In the *Gedichte von Eduard Mörike*, 6th ed., «Ach, nur einmal noch im Leben!» appears on S. 299–301 and is preceded by a musical incipit with Mozart's vocal phrase.

11 Eduard Mörike, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, Gerhart Baumann, hrsg. (Stuttgart 1954), S. 856.

12 According to Hugo Rokyta in «Das Schloß in Mörikes Novelle «Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag», in: *Jahrbuch des Wiener Goethe-Vereins* 71 (1967), S. 127–153, the model for the Schinzberg villa was the «Neue Schloß» in Gratz, a villa built between 1801 and 1810, and the poet's Graf Max von Schinzberg was in real life, Georg Franz August Buquoy von Longueval, Freiherr von Vaux (1781–1851). Johann Graf Buquoy (1741–1803) was a contemporary of Mozart's, someone whose Vienna salon Mozart frequented. The Bohemian composer Wenzel Johann Tomaschek (1774–1850), in service to the Buquoy family from a young age, wrote in his autobiography, which Mörike read in the Prague periodical *Libussa* for 1844–1847, of the Buquoy family's services on Mozart's behalf. In «Wenzel Johann Tomaschek, Tondichter bei Georg Grafen von Buquoy», in: *Libussa. Jahrbuch für 1845*, vol. 4, Paul Aloys Klar, hrsg., S. 395–396, Tomaschek says that the Graf was his piano student and was so impressed by Tomaschek's setting of Gottfried August Bürger's «Lenore» that he wanted him to become his court composer. On S. 366, he writes, «Mozart, der doch alle Orchester Deutschlands genau kannte, pflegte immer zu sagen: «Mein Orchester ist in Prag»».

to eighteenth-century art. In Mörike's fanciful scenario, Mozart composes «Giovinette, che fate all' amore» alone in the beautiful Bohemian garden while remembering an incident from his youth.¹³ As a thirteen-year-old lad, a Cherubino on the brink of sexual maturation, he watched a staged battle of love on the Bay of Naples, with Vesuvius in the background and agile youths and girls tossing oranges back and forth between two ships;¹⁴ it is this memory which leads to his unconscious twisting of the Bohemian orange, detaching it from its stem, in the Count's garden. (The angry gardener who appears in the wake of such dereliction will make every Mozart-lover recall the gardener Antonio in the second-act finale of *Le nozze di Figaro*.) Masetto's and Zerlina's bridal duet-and-chorus is subsequently performed at the little Bohemian court of love into which the fictive Mozart has inadvertently stumbled. Mörike is at pains over and over again to tell us that Mozart is the spirit of Love – there is, for example, an anecdote without any historical basis in which Mozart and his friends aid a Viennese shopkeeper's assistant and her young man to obtain the financial means to marry¹⁵ – and that Death, Art, and Love are his incessant preoccupations.

But death has the last word, and it snuffs out genius sooner than ordinary humanity (one wonders whether it would have been possible for Mörike to write this tale until he was safely beyond the age at which his favorite composer died). It seems only appropriate that one of the sources Mörike consulted for his novella was Alexander Oulibicheff's [Aleksandr Ulybyshev] *Mozart's Leben, nebst einer Übersicht der allgemeinen Geschichte der Musik und einer Analyse der Hauptwerke Mozart's*, published in Stuttgart in 1847, as Oulibicheff was much preoccupied with controversies about Mozart's requiem and death. Mörike's friend Wilhelm Hartlaub, a pastor by profession and talented pianist, someone with whom Mörike could share his love of music, damned Oulibicheff's enterprise with faint praise as «decently written ... better than I expected», but biography had, so he felt, nothing to do with explaining artistic genius. Mörike would do it better, he assured his friend; he was right, but the insight is more into Mörike's genius than Mozart's.¹⁶ When the first installment of the novella (two others followed)

13 Mörike, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, S. 880–881.

14 Ibid., S. 876–879.

15 Ibid., S. 894–900.

16 Otto Jahn, in the fourth volume of *W. A. Mozart*, Leipzig 1859, S. 296, wrote, «Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag» ist von Eduard Möricke in einer Novelle (Stuttgart 1856) dargestellt worden, welche die Anmuth und Feinheit ihres Verfassers nicht verläugnet. Indessen mag man doch bedauern, daß grade von dieser Hand in der Charakteristik des großen Meisters die Seite des leichten Lebemanns so hervorgekehrt ist; und daß ein Dichter Mozart eine Art des Componirens zuschreiben konnte, die wenigstens seiner künstlerischen Natur so fern wie möglich lag, ist kaum begreiflich».

was printed in Cotta's *Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser* for 22 July 1855,¹⁷ it was preceded by a slightly-emended citation from Oulibicheff:

«Wenn Mozart, statt stets für seine Freunde offene Tafel und Börse zu haben, sich eine wohl verschlossene Sparbüchse gehalten hätte, wenn er mit seinen Vertrauten im Tone eines Predigers auf der Kanzel gesprochen, wenn er nur Wasser getrunken und keiner Frau außer der seinigen den Hof gemacht hätte, so würde er sich besser befunden haben und die Seinigen ebenfalls. Wer zweifelt daran? Allein von diesem Philister hätte man wohl keinen Don Juan erwarten dürfen, ein so vortrefflicher Familienvater er auch gewesen wäre.»¹⁸

In Mörike's letters to Hartlaub, we read that the poet had obtained a copy of Georg Nikolaus von Nissen's biography of Mozart – «ein faustdickes Buch», Mörike dubs it – but waited to read it until June of 1855, *after completing Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*. He did so, he tells his friend, «half out of indolence, half out of instinctual care not to disturb my inner conception».¹⁹ One element of Mörike's attraction to everything Mozartian was his dread that he too might be consumed in the fires of creativity, a fear born in some measure of the fact that his father's death was attributed to over-work. One learns from the documents that the poet proposed to Cotta another Mozart-novella, this one about the Requiem and the end of Mozart's life, but could not bring himself to do it.²⁰ Given his preference

17 Mörike, «Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag», in: *Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser* 49/30, 22 July 1855, S. 697–703; 49/31, 29 July 1855, S. 721–727; and 49/32, 5 August 1855, S. 745–751.

18 See Alexander Oulibicheff, *Mozart's Leben nebst einer Uebersicht der allgemeinen Geschichte der Musik und einer Analyse der Hauptwerke Mozart's*, trans. A. Schraibson, (Stuttgart 1847), vol. 2, S. 6–7.

19 See K. Pörnbacher, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente*, S. 69 f. See also Georg Nikolaus von Nissen, *Biographie W. A. Mozart's. Nach Originalbriefen, Sammlungen alles über ihn geschrieben, mit vielen neuen Beylagen, Steindrücken, Musik-Blättern, und einem Fac-simile*, Leipzig 1828. Nissen, of course, was Constanze Mozart's second husband, and it was she who edited the volume after Nissen's death in 1826.

20 On 6 May 1855, Mörike sent most of the manuscript to Baron Georg von Cotta, saying in the accompanying letter, «Vielleicht daß ich später in einem Pendant auch die andern, hier nur angedeuteten Elemente seines Wesens und seine letzten Lebenstage darzustellen versuche.» See Pörnbacher, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente*, S. 63. Cotta loved the tale (the first of many to do so), writing Mörike two days later to say, «Ich nahm Ihr Manuscript mit [to Cotta's Hipfelhof estate], und las es dort, ward auch durch diese Lectüre so entzückt, daß ich die mich umgebenden Blüten und das frische, so lang ersehnte Grün, nach dem sich mein Auge, des langen Winters müde, sehnte, ganz darüber vergaß. Ich wünsche Ihnen Glück zu dieser Arbeit. Sie kommt mir wie ein altes, wohlgefaßtes Juwel vor, aus der besten Zeit und für alle Zeit reizend und fein.» See *ibid.*, S. 65. When Cotta wanted to bring out the two novellas together, however, Mörike had to say on 11 May that he now felt differently about the matter and wanted to distance himself from this subject in order to take up another.

for keeping what is dark in existence at bay beneath idyllic surfaces, it is hardly surprising both that he contemplated such a project and that he rejected it almost immediately.

Of the three women in the household (the classicist Mörike thereby invokes the Three Graces), it is Eugenie, the bride-to-be, her spirit made receptive by music and by love, who divines that Mozart will not live long, that he will be consumed by the daemonic powers of his creativity. When we first meet her, Mörike garbs her in crimson silk—the color of love, royalty, passion, roses—with a pure-white, pearl-studded fillet around her brow, emblematic of her purity of understanding and of future grief (pearls as tears). That evening, Mozart performs for the company passages from the Don's doom, composed, so he tells them, some three weeks earlier in Vienna. When the fictive composer extinguishes the candles and sings the Comendatore's fateful line, «Di rider finirai pria dell' aurora!», Mörike writes another of the unforgettable sentences in this tale: «Wie von entlegenen Sternenkreisen fallen die Töne aus silbernen Posaunen, eiskalt, Mark und Seele durchschneidend, herunter durch die blaue Nacht».²¹ At the end, after the delighted Mozart has left for Prague in the carriage given to him by his genial host, Eugenie closes the piano keyboard and locks it. For a while, no one else shall play it in Mozart's wake, she decides, but her action signifies as well the impending end of Mozart's life, the end of his music-making. When she puts several volumes of songs back in their place, a page falls out containing, so Mörike tells us, an old Bohemian folk song: «Denk' es, o Seele!». Eugenie reads it silently and, understanding it as a prophecy, weeps. She does not sing it: the time for music is over. The poem/unsung song is the end of the novella, the last word.

Ein Tännlein grünet wo,
Wer weiß, im Walde;
Ein Rosenstrauch, wer sagt,
In welchem Garten?
Sie sind erlesen schon,
Denk es, o Seele,
Auf deinem Grab zu wurzeln
Und zu wachsen.

- 21 Mörike, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, Gerhart Baumann, hrsg. (Stuttgart 1954), S. 905. That Mörike was justly proud of this line we can infer from a letter written to his wife Margarethe in the summer of 1852, when Mörike was on a journey with his best friend Wilhelm Hartlaub and the Hartlaub family: «Im Angesicht von Rutesheim geriet ich auf der Spur meiner Novelle stark in Mozartsche Phantasien hinein, wovon ich Klärchen einiges mitteilte, das Ihr künftig an den «silbernen Posaunen» erkenn und mit jenem Platz zusammendenken sollt.» How very characteristic of Mörike that he would imagine his newly-completed work as a future madeleine of remembrance for his sister.

Zwei schwarze Rößlein weiden
 Auf der Wiese,
 Sie kehren heim zur Stadt
 In muntern Sprüngen.
 Sie werden schrittweis gehn
 Mit deiner Leiche;
 Vielleicht, vielleicht noch eh'
 An ihren Hufen
 Das Eisen los wird,
 Das ich blitzen sehe!²²

Mörike used to be categorized as Biedermeier-cosy-idyllic-limited, but if ever a poet understood the human condition as one of perpetual threat, it was this man. We are, he says over and over, besieged by anxieties, isolation, ills, uncertainties, and thoughts of death. That he can fashion the memory of things lost into pure poetry, can veil the tragedy of absence in loveliness of language, can clothe the vanished fragment of Time in playfulness, bespeaks not limitation but poetic art of the highest sort. In the first stanza of a poem entitled «Rückblick», written on the occasion of a girl's confirmation (Mörike gave this poem, written on or before 15 September 1853, to numerous recipients, including his own daughter Fanny), the poet declares that we are always susceptible to ambush by thoughts of the irretrievable past. Stopped in our tracks by the sudden eruption of memory, we lament, and of that lamentation is this poem, and others much greater, made. The self-revelation in this «glance back» is, one guesses, the reason for the poet's decision not to publish it; he preferred greater distances between the reading public and himself. But from it we learn more of Mörike and are grateful for the knowledge.

Rückblick (Zu einer Konfirmation) (lines 1–9 of 19).

Bei jeder Wendung deiner Lebensbahn,
 Auch wenn sie glückverheißend sich erweitert
 Und du verlierst, um Größres zu gewinnen:
 – Betroffen stehst du plötzlich still, den Blick
 Gedankenvoll auf das Vergangne heftend;
 Die Wehmut lehnt an deine Schulter sich
 Und wiederholt in deiner Seele dir,
 Wie lieblich alles war, und daß es nun
 Damit vorbei auf immer sei, auf immer!

22 Ibid., S. 911.

But in the second stanza, he looks not backward but into the future (lines 10–16 of 19).

Ja, liebes Kind, und dir sei unverhohlen:
Was vor dir liegt von künft'gem Jugendglück,
Die Spanne mißt es einer Mädchenhand.
Doch also ward des Lebens Ordnung uns
Gesetzt von Gott; den schreckt sie nimmermehr,
Der einmal recht in seinem Geist gefaßt,
Was unser Dasein soll.²³

Both the contemplation of our future end and the repudiation of fear (or the attempt to do so) are themes we encounter again in «Denk' es, o Seele!», but the greater poem strikes deeper. In «Rückblick», Mörike promises his young friend the abolition of terror at the prospect of death (which he delicately refrains from invoking by name) as long as one truly grasps the nature of human existence (one notes the enjambement that acts to emphasize the alliterative «Gesetzt von Gott»), but in the great *memento mori* poems, the confrontation with death is weightier still. In «Erinna an Sappho», Mörike imagines the death of someone young, loved, and full of promise, and in «Denk' es, o Seele!», he gives us nothing less than the panorama of life and death as intertwined cyclical forces.

If the poetic address to the soul is obviously a *memento mori* creation, it lacks the usual accoutrements of horror, the skull with its empty eye-sockets the *vanitas* emblems, Holbein's skeletal emissary to terrified human beings of all degrees and ages in the *Totentanz*. Rather, a parade of beautiful living things is brought to the soul's attention, whether the persona's soul or someone else's hardly matters; it is the solicitude directed outward to an «Other», even if that Other is his own soul, that is the catalyst by which the persona is able to experience his own mortality. Studying this poem, one soon realizes that it can be read, *has* been read, in at least two different ways, depending upon whether one stresses Life-in-Death or Death-in-Life. Both stances can be successfully supported by the poem, and it is my contention that Wolf recognized them both and made of this recognition the basis for his structural design. Seen from one perspective, Mörike's persona accepts that death serves the larger cycle by which life in all its beauty goes on without end, although each plant, animal, and person must die. Instructing a soul less knowing, he asserts that death nurtures new life;

23 Ibid., S. 368.

when the soul is no more, life will still be there.²⁴ Reading the poem from another perspective, the persona accepts that life is merely «Schein», and Death is «Dasein», whatever the cherished loveliness of life.²⁵ But no matter which reading one prefers, the persona achieves, if only temporarily, a mature, hard-won acceptance of death, not the deaths of others in the abstract or even the particular but his own mortality. That such acceptance is susceptible to being overthrown by terror at any moment tells us that this confrontation must be waged by consciousness over and over again.

Mystery is made manifest in the convoluted syntax of the beginning. For the poem «Denk' es, o Seele!», Mörike breaks nine lines of blank verse in traditional iambic pentameters into fragments (lines in trimeters and dimeters), surrounded by evocative emptiness. In the first four lines, two linked declarative statements («A fir tree grows in the forest; a rose bush grows in the garden») are interwoven with four questions («Where in the forest? Who knows? In what garden? Who can say?»). The musicality is extraordinary: voiced-*w* consonants chime throughout the first octave-stanza, underscoring crucial words by means of the same sound («wo, wer weiß, Walde, wer, welchem, wurzeln, wachsen»), while the second stanza is stitched to the first by the return of the same alliterative element, «weiden/Auf der Wiese». Mörike is justly famous for poems that retrace motions of mind («Im Frühling», «An eine Äolsharfe», and «Auf einer Wanderung» are others, all set to music by Wolf), and the embedded questions are the embodiment in poetic form of a mind considering its own death. Turning every which way in his attempt to grasp immensity, he interrupts himself with queries that go beyond the merely interrogative. «Who knows?», the persona asks, knowing that no one really knows. It is difficult to describe the tone of this question, fusing as it does both didactic urgency (the soul must hear and heed the persona's words) and a certain disinterestedness; he himself has gone beyond the desire to seek out such knowledge. When Mörike gave this poem its new title for the final two editions of his poetic anthology, erasing the uninspired «Grabgedanken» and replacing it with words lifted from within the poem, he tells the reader something important: that this is «Denken» and requires utmost effort. Wolf, taking note of the syntactic twisting-and-turning, the intertwining of question and declaration, breaks apart the embedded fragments so that we may register the different elements of a complex utterance in the «prose» of music.

24 This is the view promulgated, and very beautifully, in Terence K. Thayer, «Knowing and Being: Mörike's «Denk' es, o Seele!», in: *The German Quarterly* 45/3 (1972), S. 484–501.

25 See Wolfgang Taraba, «Eduard Mörike: Denk es, o Seele!», in: Benno von Wiese, hrsg., *Die deutsche Lyrik: Form und Geschichte*, Düsseldorf 1957, S. 91 f.

The emblems of life at the start of this poem are multivalent. The fir tree is a familiar symbol of Eternal Life (the evergreen), the rose an equally familiar symbol of Love; there is a long tradition of real roses and actual evergreen wreaths placed on graves to signify the immortality of the soul and love everlasting.²⁶ The fir tree can be interpreted additionally as a phallic male symbol, the rose as a female symbol; one thinks (*pace* both Heine and Mörike, who disliked one another's poetry²⁷) of Heine's «Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam», with its lonely fir-tree in northern climes pining (pun intended) for the tropical lotus flower, an exotic sign for Woman in several of Heine's most famous poems. All living things, Mörike asserts, flourish atop the graves of the once-living, whose numbers they will one day surely join. Throughout this poem, the poet fashions a progression of living things destined for death, beginning with those most unlike our own existence and culminating in the persona's own body. From forest wildness to a garden cultivated by human hands to horses tamed by men to the poet himself (plants – animals – humanity – the persona), the progression moves with shocking speed. Furthermore, the tree and the rose bush, the horses frolicking in the meadow, have the same teleology as human beings; they will, like us, be young and small for a time, will grow to maturity, will die. The diminutives «Tännlein» and «Rößlein» tell us that life is dear, but they hint as well at an unequal distribution of power by which life's adorable vitality is weaker than death. But the beauty of life matters. By a strenuous act of will, the poet attempts to see his own death in the larger context of Nature's life cycle, in which individual deaths make possible the continuation of life. From the dissolution of his body will come the means to make roses and evergreens flourish in beauty.

In the Janus-faced reading of these same symbolic images, the «greening» of the distant fir tree and the rosebush is mere seeming; their destiny is to be emblems of death. Whichever reading one adopts, the small but mammoth word «es» in the title of the poem remains the same. The usual translations of that line into English are «Think of this, my soul!» or «Think of it, oh soul» or «Oh soul, remember», but I like the un-idiomatic and literal «Think it, oh soul», as a way to convey the intensity of the act of mind Mörike traces here. It is not easy to confront the intertwining of life and death on

26 Renate Heydebrand, in: *Eduard Mörikes Gedichtwerk. Beschreibung und Deutung der Formenvielfalt und ihrer Entwicklung*, Stuttgart 1972, S. 177, points to Mörike's combination of a folk song-like «Zeichensprache» characteristic of this poet's early verse with the *memento mori* themes belonging to his later verse.

27 The Deutsches Literatur Archiv in Marbach includes in its Mörike collection a printed copy of Heine's «Almansor» with a handwritten dedication by Eduard to his sister Klara.

personal terms, to accept that our lives will end in death; to do so, one must «think it» in a concentrated act of consciousness. The same «es» resounds multiply at the end of Rilke's eighth Duino Elegy:

Duino Elegies, no. 8 (lines 66–75 of 75).

Und wir: Zuschauer, immer, überall,
dem allen zugewandt und nie hinaus!
Uns überfüllts. Wir ordnens. Es zerfällt.
Wir ordnens wieder und zerfallen selbst.

Wer hat uns also umgedreht, daß wir,
was wir auch tun, in jener Haltung sind
von einem welcher fortgeht? Wie er auf
dem letzten Hügel, der ihm ganz sein Tal
Noch einmal zeigt, sich wendet, anhält, weilt – ,
so leben wir und nehmen immer Abschied.²⁸

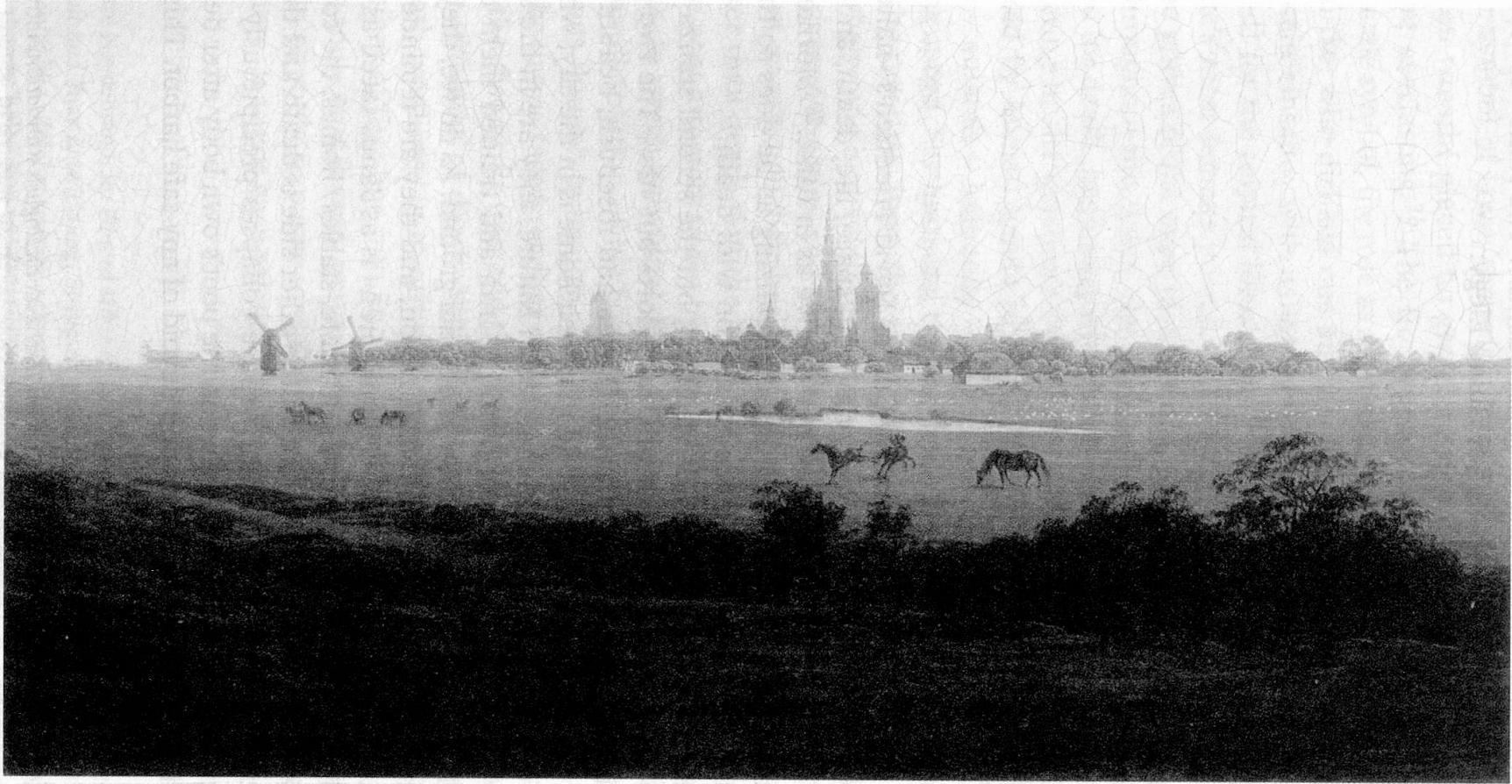
As Joseph Leo Koerner has observed, Caspar David Friedrich's «halted travelers» with their backs to us survey time and space, life, death, and history, from much the same mysterious perspective as in Rilke.²⁹ Mörike's persona too looks at things seen and unseen, realizing as he does so that the relationship of humanity to Nature is an agon with death.

The first stanza of «Denk es» is visionary, but the second stanza begins in the present moment, with creatures not «dort» but «da». The two ponies cavorting in the meadow are, like the fir tree and rosebush, beautiful and vital ... but funereal black. We are told that their home is in the city; whatever their playful energies when untrammelled in Nature, they are in the service of men, who have shod them in gleaming iron and trained them to step sedately when they convey a coffin to the burial ground. As do we, they move between the worlds of Nature and civilization, and they are reminders that we too have an animal existence. «Heimkehren» is as Janus-faced as everything else in this great poem: on one side is life, stables/homes, the company of other creatures of our kind, while on the other side is death and the final solitary homecoming to the earth. If space collapses precipitously in this poem, unknown distances converging on the poet's own body after death, so too does Time, in constant motion and devoid of any safe harbor. This poem

28 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies. The German Text, with an English translation*, introduction and commentary J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender, New York 1939, S. 70 f.

29 Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, New Haven and London 1990, S. 179.

Illustration 1



Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), *Meadows near Greifswald* (1820), Hamburg Kunsthalle.

oscillates back and forth between the future and the present before ending in the present moment, and it invokes a past in which predetermination occurred about a future event. If «Denk' es, o Seele!» begins with the orderly continuity of plant life in sequential stages of growth through Time, from rooting to growing, such continuity disappears as the poem moves faster and faster, Time fragmented until we reach the «flash» at the end. After death, our bodies will no longer require the man-made trappings of civilization; we too will cast off the garb of life as the horses will someday shed their iron shoes. Death is an iron law, and Wolf took note: it is at the word, «Eisen», that he – like Schubert in his settings of Mignon's «Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt» – bids the harmonies in the piano dissolve in tremolos and *fortissimo* horror.

Reading Mörike's stanza 2, I always think of Friedrich's 1820–1822 painting, *Meadows near Greifswald* (see Illus. 1), in which two (dark brown, not black) horses gambol and frisk about while their more sedate companions graze.³⁰ We see the town in the background, its two church spires and two windmills (houses of worship to sustain spiritual life, places where grain is ground for the bread which sustains corporeal life) the only identifiable structures. The uniform blue-gray-mauve and the surreal, sharp contours of the distant town make it seem rock-like, as if the edifice of civilization had been carved uniformly from the same shale-like substance, but the coloration is also cloud-like, insubstantial, distinct from the fresh, green meadow. A slashing, almost black line of hedges forms the boundary between the darker, mossy-muddy foreground – almost empty – and the middle-ground of the meadow. Friedrich's unguessable distances and radical elisions ask questions of lost Nature, with no answer forthcoming and death always at issue. The emptiness in the foreground is the hue of decaying things, the repository of bygone horses, towns, men and all their works. There is even a tentative relationship, in kind but not in degree, between painter and poet in the unfulfilled desire for union with the numinous. That Friedrich never makes the claim that such union is a certainty – his landscape paintings are created as if for altars, but with the gods missing³¹ – is one of the foundation-stones of his artistic integrity.

30 Friedrich's *Meadows near Greifswald* is in the collection of the Hamburg Kunsthalle.

31 Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, S. 20.

When Wolf set «Denk' es, o Seele!» to music on 10 March 1888, three days before his twenty-eighth birthday, he understood the poet's confrontation with intimations of death from within his own body. Diagnosed with syphilis a decade before the 1888 outpouring of song, he was aware of the clock of mortality ticking away inside an incurably diseased brain, and this deadly knowledge surely shaped his musical rendering of Mörike's poem. In the piano introduction, Wolf fashions two figures situated on two different planes, one in the bass, one in the treble: austere statement (mm. 1–2) followed by a response (mm. 3–5), austere statement repeated literally (mm. 6–7), followed by the same response but transposed higher (mm. 8–10). The fact that the statements are separated into different registers has always seemed to me, admittedly somewhat fancifully, as sounding symbols of different places within the mind. The song begins at a lower level but not the lowest, as if the tocsin had risen above the depths of the unconscious in order to make itself known to consciousness, and then moves to a higher level, as if the fully engaged mind were grappling with what it has just perceived. It is here one remembers that Wolf was a resident of Freud's Vienna, gave Josef Breuer's children music lessons, and once referred to adulterous passion as «the mysteries of these kinds of psychological occurrences» in a letter to Melanie Köchert.³² In other words, this composer was well aware that he lived in what Carl Schorske dubbed «the age of psychological Man» in his now-classic study of fin-de-siècle Vienna.³³ From the evidence of his music, Wolf understood that this poem traces complex operations within the mind, and he found complex musical operations by which to trace them again in tones (see ex. 1).

There is a possibility, I believe, that this song is (in part) a reply to an earlier work by Schubert, whose song-oeuvre haunted Wolf's own. «They fairly threaten me with Schubert», he once exclaimed, «but must I keep silent because a great man lived before me and wrote wonderful songs?»³⁴ The mixture of reverence with anger (notice the undefined «they») and Oedipal frustration is palpable. But influence is not always a matter of anxiety. Whatever the acrimonious differences between Brahms and Wolf, exacerbated by their residence in the same city, they shared a similar capacity to make of prior greatness a source of novelty. The resulting music issues, I would speculate, not from helpless capitulation to stronger bygone voices

32 The letter was written from Brixlegg on 6 October 1894. See Franz Grasberger, hrsg., *Hugo Wolf. Briefe an Melanie Köchert*, Tutzing 1974, S. 117–118.

33 Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, New York 1980, S. 22.

34 This anecdote is recounted in Frank Walker, *Hugo Wolf: A Biography*, Princeton, New Jersey 1992, repr. of London 1968, S. 250.

Example 1: Hugo Wolf, «Denk' es, o Seele!», mm. 1–10.

but as a deliberate exercise compounding reverence with delight, the latter at times downright cheeky. For example, the youthful Brahms's setting of Eichendorff's «In der Fremde» («Aus der Heimat hinter den Blitzenrot») makes flagrant use of every aspect of Schumann's setting for his Eichendorff *Liederkreis*, op. 39, and yet it is unmistakably Brahms. Wolf, I have speculated elsewhere, composed his own version of Mörike's poem «Der Gärtner» both to pay homage to Schumann and to propose a different understanding of the poem, less neurotic, more Märchen-like than his predecessor's. What Wolf does with his inheritance from the past in «Denk' es, o Seele!» is less obvious because he does not set the same poem as his predecessor,³⁵ but the skeletal declarations in mm. 1–2 and mm. 6–7 have a history unmistakable to any musician. No one in 1888 could begin a song with two bars of octave B-flats without thereby invoking the beginning of Schubert's «Ihr Bild», and Wolf made sure that no one would miss the citation by placing his octaves in exactly the same register as Schubert's (see ex. 2).

35 In later years, Brahms preferred his *hommages à Schubert* to sound from within settings of a different text entirely, for example, his citation of the end of «Der Doppelgänger» in his setting of Baron Friedrich von Schack's «Herbstgefühl» or the oblique reference to Schubert's «Der Winterabend» in his setting of Goethe's «Dämmerung senkte sich von oben».

Example 2: Franz Schubert, «Ihr Bild», poem by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), D. 957, mm. 1–4.



The earlier composer's twofold dotted half-note octaves – eyes which stare at us like the poetic persona's eyes staring, Narcissus-like, at the image of the lost beloved³⁶ – become Wolf's tocsin in 6/8. Here, one remembers that the poem in the novella is «an old Bohemian folk song» and guesses that Wolf knew the story, that he advertises his knowledge of the prose context by setting his song in the D minor of Mozart's Requiem and by employing the compound meter one finds in so many German folk songs. He could not have known that Mörike was contemplating a pendant-novella specifically about the Requiem, but that work, its incompleteness a powerful symbol of a life cut short, is something any music-lover will recall in conjunction with the «folk song» at the end of «Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag.»³⁷ One infers that the B-flat octaves should be monotone, even, without rubato, not only as a matter of retrospective knowledge gleaned from the larger context but in contrast to the directive «ausdrucksvoll» for the responses in the treble register. What precedes those responses should be devoid of emotion because it is the inexorability of a law we hear in mm. 1–2, the law of inevitable death – the persona's own. The seemingly simple compositional decision by which Wolf begins and ends these proclamations on

36 See Susan Youens, «Echoes of the Wounded Self: Schubert's «Ihr Bild»», in: Lorraine Byrne and Dan Farrelly, hrsg., *Goethe and Schubert: Across the Divide*, Dublin 2003, S. 1–18.

37 Near the end of the novella, Mozart plays the graveyard scene and the finale (*sans* epilogue) for the company. When he has finished, the Countess asks him what he thought when he put down his pen after composing such music as this. The composer tells a half-merry, half-premonitory anecdote about the night of its creation when he was tired and had thought of resting, but had then reflected, «Suppose you were to sicken and die this very night, suppose you had to abandon your score at this point – would you rest at peace in your grave?»

downbeats conveys something ineluctably iron-willed, not to be gainsaid. One imagines an anacrusis to this figure and realizes how wrong that would be.

How is the conscious mind to receive these intimations of death? Wolf's persona, I believe, understands immediately what the tocsin means. The fact that the two responses «end» just before the point of resolution does not, I believe, indicate questions as to the identity of the tolling figure but rather the persona's tentative experiments with two ways of assimilating his knowledge of what the sounds mean: the fact of his own mortality. There are, this introduction suggests, different tonal contexts in which the conscious mind can situate the death-knell, and uncertainty – «Is *this* the right key? Should I understand the skeletal figure in this way or in that way?» – is made evident in every aspect of voice-leading and stratification. (Here, one remembers that Schubert too trafficked in contrasting levels or registers in «Ihr Bild»: the middle register for the announcement at the beginning of the song, a higher register – but not as high as Wolf's responding phrase – for the response by the singer and piano in unison, and the low register for sounds denoting death.) The right hand in mm. 3 and 8 reiterates the rhythmic pattern of the bass tocsin but with repeated pinpricks of dissonance, with harmonic major second intervals. Meanwhile, the left hand inches chromatically upward from G-sharp (which will become the A-flats of «Sie sind erlesen schon») to B-flat and then falls back a semitone to suggest the dominant of D minor and hence the key of D minor as one possible location from whence issues the tocsin. This beautifully precise chromatic voice-leading shrouds the tentative proposition of D as tonic in musical question marks, elongating the responsorial phrase beyond the customary two-bars to an asymmetrical three bars. The rising chromatic fragment in the left hand is mirrored by the topmost voice in descending motion, which is then elided with another transposition of the three-note figure in the inner voice. The three statements are each given a different rhythmic configuration, but that does not obscure the listener's awareness of the close relationship between them, of every voice echoing the same query. One notices as well that of the twelve pitches of the complete chromatic scale, only F and F-sharp are missing from the phrase in mm. 3–5; Wolf holds them in reserve until the texted body of the song begins in 11 f, where they have a special purpose, a special meaning. Nine years later, in March of 1897, Wolf would fill the second of his Michelangelo songs, «Alles endet, was entstehet», with similar mirrored, echoing, elided chromatic figures in which semitones are everywhere.³⁸ This, one of Wolf's greatest creations, is also a *memento mori*.

38 See Susan Youens, ««Alles endet, was entstehet» – The Second of Hugo Wolf's *Michelangelo-Lieder*», in: *Studies in Music* 14 (December 1980), S. 87 f.

The responsorial phrase «ends» with an entire bar (m. 5) poised as if waiting for confirmation. Instead, the bass tocsin sounds again in a deceptive relationship to a «dominant function» which is not yet attached to anything definitive and hence is only provisionally discernible as such. In this song, where Death is limned as a deceiver, a trickster who might arrive at any moment, the deceptive relationship between mm. 5 and 6 has a chilling symbolic significance. Hearing the tocsin again, the persona proposes another way of understanding the sound by means of transposition, the same questioning, incomplete response hinting at F major as the origin of the B-flat pitches; the key signature, of course, could indicate either key. «What is Death? – horror in D minor or a necessary part of pastorage in F major?», the persona asks wordlessly before the song even begins. The tocsin could belong to either one as the upper neighbor to the dominant of D or the subdominant of F. The tentative proposition of D minor comes first, one notices, with F major following in its wake, and the order of events is important. Not only does Wolf already suggest which one has primacy; he places the higher transposition at a greater registral distance from the left-hand tolling. Of the two possibilities, the latter requires more effort of will and is, we already suspect, farther away from the truth of the matter. And yet, the piano prelude «ends» with B-flat sustained in the topmost voice of the right hand. Throughout the course of the introduction, the fact of one's own impending death makes a journey from lower depths of consciousness to its upper reaches.

It was Wolf's brilliant perception that the black horses are present on the scene throughout the entire poem, before the persona invokes them in words at the start of the second stanza. Sight becomes sound: once he has heard the tolling death-knell and has put two tentative tonal faces on it, we *hear* him observe the black horses in mm. 11–18, significantly, in the treble register indicative of the conscious mind mulling over what it sees. The stylized evocation of their «muntern Sprünge» happens both in the vocal line and in the piano part, and these emblems of Nature's vitality are fused with recurring statements of the death-tocsin in different locations. Life is inescapably, inextricably entwined with Death, and Wolf tells us so as soon as the text of the song begins. The singer, watching the horses as he sings of fir tree and rose bush, initiates the series of «Sprünge» intervals with the small leap A D and back to A in m. 12, a gesture which is then elided with the piano's slightly larger leap starting from the same vantage point. One black horse outdoes the other in friskiness; one notes the staccato buoyancy of the piano part, occasionally enlivened by brief slurred figures (a form of muted emphasis in this light, airy context). Wolf thus ensures that we hear them as a pair, already merrily leaping about as they wend their way home, and that we perceive the fusing of death- and life-figures as

belonging both to the pianist and the singer. All of this music is an emanation from the persona, a sounding representation of what he sees and knows and thinks. Hence, both the vocal and instrumental parts are harnessed in tandem as they go through innermost paths of mind. Throughout the queries in mm. 11–18, the vocal line rises by degrees, from the starting point on A up to D, tracing an ascent through B-natural, C, and C-sharp to D. Rising anxiety is here made economically evident.

But even as he repeats death's tocsin and crawls upward in muted tension, Wolf's persona enacts a quietly heroic struggle to find beneficence in death's designs. In his setting of lines 1–4 of the first stanza, Wolf fleshes-out the tentative tonalities proposed in mm. 3–5, 8–10 in the same order in which we found them in the introduction, beginning with the D minor tonal realm of Mozart's Requiem. The persona's determination to seek beauty in death's stern law is made evident in two significant details of mm. 11–13. Not only is the pitch B-flat from mm. 1 and 6 banned from this phrase, but the mirrored chromatic fragments from the response-phrases in the introduction become an inner voice in the right-hand part, transforming a D minor chord to a D *major* chord twice in succession by tracing the pitches F, F-sharp, G. The archetypal Schubertian contrast of parallel minor and major (which Schubert, of course, inherited from Mozart) is here compressed into the smallest of spaces and bent to poetic use. At first, the raised third degree is a matter of passing motion, a mere flash of eighth-note brightness, over before we can take in its meaning (m. 11). At the end of m. 11, the incomplete dominant seventh harmony (minus E or the E-flat of the introduction) in first inversion leads us back to D minor at the start of m. 12, suggesting a tape-loop in which this tiny struggle could be repeated ad infinitum, returning us to D minor death-haunted darkness each time. But the repetition also tells of persistence, of insistent attempts to establish major mode in a more lasting way by force of will. Finally in m. 13, the persona is briefly victorious, and we hear the D *major* harmony throughout the first half of the measure. From his very first words, the persona tries to turn darkness into light. That he does so with such a gossamer touch, in such a playful manner, is entirely in keeping with Mörike's idyllic mode. If the Arcadia of life is always menaced by death, it is still Arcadia, and one should invoke it with delight (see ex. 3).

Example 3: Wolf, «Denk' es, o Seele!», mm. 7–18.

(sehr leise)

Ein Tännlein grü - net wo,

p *pp*

wer weiss, im Wal - de, ein Ro - senstrauch, wer sagt, in wel - chem

pp

Gar - ten? (lange)

To ask questions is to change places in the mind, or seek to do so. Wolf makes the verb «weiß» in the first embedded question the turning point, the hinge by which to move from the D minor/major guise of death to the second possible face of Death. The bottommost voice beneath the invocation of the fir tree is as minimal as can be, no more than the tonic and leading tone pitches (the semitone atom of grief that is so important in the world of this song); Wolf simply respells the C-sharp leading tone as D-flat resolving downward to C-natural, the dominant of the relative major key (F major). For the naming of the rose, we shift to a famously pastoral place, albeit no more than a brief tonicization which is never established as firm tonal ground. (Beethoven's pastorale is also menaced by storms and the shadow of death.) Wolf alters Mörike's iambs when he places an accent in the vocal

line on the anacrusis «*ein* [Rosenstrauch]» in order to emphasize the singular even before we realize that these objects in Nature have to do with imminent death in the singular. This glimpse of pastorella is fraught in other ways as well. The inner voice in the piano in mm. 15–16 brings back the G-sharp A B-flat pitches of the bottommost voice in mm. 3–5, linking the tentative D minor and F major options. In this way, Wolf both foreshadows the enharmonic transformation to follow shortly thereafter, that of G-sharp into A-flat for the pronouncement of eschatology («*Sie sind erlesen schon*»), and, as the different voices converge in vertical harmonies, converts the dominant of F major into an augmented triad. The dissonance, twice-stated, is brief, but Wolf would have known the Lisztian associations of augmented triads both with the Faustian desire for omniscience and mystical open-endedness. Ten months later, on 9 January 1889, he would compose a monumental setting of Goethe's «*Grenzen der Menschheit*» in which waves of augmented chords submerge the numberless generations of humanity in immense indifference.³⁹

The mind that contemplates these things is a mind in motion; this is a remarkably restless tonal world. As the questioning continues, the music moves towards an implied tonicization of G major/minor, but once again, the only «resolution» is deceptive and deferred. «In what garden?», the persona asks, moving in another direction to another tonal place but pausing just short of resolution. There in mid-air, Wolf directs the musicians to linger on multiple fermatas prolonging both sound (in the piano) and silence (in the voice) before the song moves onward without a break. (One thinks again of Caspar David Friedrich and the frequency with which he places the viewer of his scenes in an indeterminate spot hovering somewhere in mid-air.) The disappearance of the staccato articulations in the piano at mm. 17–18 and the lack of any rests between m. 18 and m. 19 are significant, as is so often the case in Wolf; these songs remind one of the best Swiss watches, in which each one of many small, finely crafted moving parts are crucial to the mechanism. When the persona contemplates the forest and garden, not of this earth but in Fate's domain, the leaping intervals, staccato frisking about, and airy texture vanish (the last half of m. 13 and m. 14, mm. 17–18). In these places, the contemplation of life's adorable vitality is weighed down by «Grabgedanken», and lightness is no longer possible; that the persona not only wins his way to tonicized F major in m. 15 but compels the *légèreté* of Life to return is testament to a considerable feat of will. Wolf's «resolution» of the multiple questions in Mörike's lines

39 R. Larry Todd, «The «Unwelcome Guest» Regaled: Franz Liszt and the Augmented Triad», in: *19th-Century Music* 12/2 (1988), S. 93–115.

1–4 is elided with the beginning of an «answer» that is at the same time no answer at all: yes, these things have been chosen, but we cannot know when they will be required. Deceptive relationships in this song tell of death's deceptions. We expect some sort of chord on G in m. 19, but the octave E-flats sound as if they issue from another world: this is one of the eeriest moments in all of Wolf. Another composer might have made m. 19 equivalent to m. 1, might have sounded the recurring tocsin in the piano alone for a bar before the voice re-enters, but not Wolf. In the fermata-sustained pause, the persona has already heard the transposed death-knell and joins forces with it to sing the words, «Sie sind erlesen schon».

For the final four lines of Mörike's first stanza in mm. 19–26, Wolf engages in a remarkable instance of sustained tonal symbolism of a sort he would have known from such Schubert songs as «Totengräber-Weise», with its enharmonic symbolism of life-death-the afterlife. (Wolf's song is the pessimistic obverse of Schubert's triumphal-optimistic enharmony.) For much of the way, the statement of «Dasein» in Wolf's song is situated in near-total flattened darkness before turning to chromatic notation in sharps. The emblems of life = death sink into the persona's grave and take root there in descending, flattened harmonies and then begin to grow upward in sharps, or so we surmise in the absence of any actual ascent. «Wachsen» can only happen, Wolf tells us, after the roots have sunk into the depths, but this persona is too haunted by the thought of his own death to develop the concept of Nature's bounty arising from his grave beyond the conversion to sharps. Instead, the darkness of death becomes a *simulacrum* of life's brightness. That the latter is «Schein» is evident when we realize that it is only visual, that we hear no difference between the realm of flats and that of sharps. At the beginning of this passage, while the bass remains pinned for four bars to the E-flat tocsin in the bass (a Neapolitan relationship to D minor/major), the right hand rises in solemn terror, the level of dissonance and therefore intensity increasing throughout the duration of the pedal point. And no wonder: in these four bars, the persona approaches – reluctantly, as if forced – a B-flat harmony midway through the passage in mm. 19–26. These B-flats descended from m. 1 will soon be revealed to us as emblematic of future death, but here, their meaning is not yet fully apparent; we hear a B-flat minor harmony only in first inversion and en route elsewhere. When the persona sings the title line of the poem, «Denk' es, o Seele», one notes the placement of the tiny but immense word «es» on the pitch B-flat in m. 21, with the preceding injunction to «think» located a semitone above, pressing down on «it», leading inevitably to «it». And one notices as well the everywhere-and-nowhere character of this passage, shifting, unstable, its verities veiled. Looking at the bass line, one can see that it ends (another open ending) a tritone away from its beginning (E-

flat to A-natural), and yet, the passage concludes with E-flat/ now D-sharp sounding in its original register. Wolf traces an oblique circle in these paired phrases, such that «Ma fin est mon commencement». Harmonically, we begin on A-flat minor and end as if going to C-sharp minor (an enharmonic circle-of-fifths relationship), but nothing is clearly defined or stable. Like the prelude to act 3 of *Parsifal*, this enacts the outer limits of functional tonality, saturated with chromaticism. There is no tonal place where we feel ourselves secure, where we may linger.

Example 4: Wolf, «Denk' es, o Seele!», mm. 18–27.

18 Gar - ten? (lange) 20 Ste sind er - le - sen schon, denk es, o See - le,

23 auf dei - nem Grab zu wur - zeln 25 und zu wach - sen.

pp dim.

The expressive musings from the piano introduction return in the interlude between stanzas 1 and 2, but their harmonic locations are varied. Here, the persona edges upward from an uncompleted hint of C-sharp minor in the first half of the interlude back to a repetition of mm. 3–5, the tentative approach to D minor as the meaning of death. When the music of lines 1–4 returns for the first half of the second stanza, the horses who have been in sight and sound since m. 11 are at last invoked by name. They no longer share the stage with visions of future rose bushes and fir trees but are the sole focus of sight and sound, and therefore their gamboling is livelier than before. And yet, this dotted rhythmic vitality is made threatening by the economical means of a crescendo and a shift of register that tells again of

Wolf's profound insight into this poem. What we heard before entirely in the treble register of the piano, the voicing thin and transparent (mm. 11–18), now shifts an octave lower in the left hand, into the bass clef and Wolf's favorite four-voice string quartet or chorale texture. This is no longer a vision located in the insubstantial world of the mind, but something in the real world, hence with grounding in the bass *terra firma*. A song that has been largely *pianissimo* until this point becomes thunderous, the hooves pounding as the persona imagines the horses coming ever closer to claim his body. In the corridor for the piano alone between the «muntern Sprünge» and the vision of the funeral cortège (mm. 41–42), Wolf abruptly bids the left hand jump upwards in mid-measure, back into the treble clef, back into the realm of things envisioned in the future. The brief leap back into the treble is infinitely poignant in its implications of attempted denial. «May my own death still be in the far-off future of treble forests and rose gardens», Wolf's persona pleads, even as the hoofbeats continue to pound ever more loudly and without cessation. It is therefore all the more terrifying when the music turns «schrittweis» in duple meter from m. 43 onward – no longer folk song in the meadow but funeral march – and the left hand returns to the bass register, again abruptly, again without a break. There could be no more chilling way to tell the listener that futurity («werden») has become Now in the persona's imagination.

Example 5: Wolf, «Denk' es, o Seele!», mm. 34–42.

34 *bewegter.*

schwar-ze Röss-lein wei-den auf der Wie-se, sie keh-ren heim zur

39 Stadt in mun-tern Sprün-gen. Sie

cresc. *f*

At the beginning of the cortège, complex chords vanish, and all becomes dreadfully clear, as harmonies previously deferred, veiled, or only hinted are now stated as elemental triads: B-flat major and E-flat minor (the skeletal octaves from before take on full garb), G minor, D minor. The «muntern Sprünge», the leaps up and back down again of a sixth, the indices of life, are still present, but now they are subsumed into the heavy, quiet tread of creatures who bear a coffin to the cemetery. It is an especially chilling detail that Wolf prolongs the verb «gehn» in the vocal line so that we might clearly mark the heavy, dactylic hoofbeats in the piano throughout m. 44.

Example 6: Wolf, «Denk' es, o Seele!», mm. 43–46.

etwas zurückhaltend

wer - den schrittweis gehn mit dei - ner Lei - che;

(schwer)

Did Wolf borrow this allusive rhythmic pattern from Schubert? Certainly his predecessor associated dactylic rhythmic patterns with cosmic matters or things fated in such songs as «Die Sterne» to words by Carl Gottfried Ritter von Leitner and «Die Liebe hat gelogen» on a poem by August von Platen-Hallermünde. And there is another Schubertian reminiscence as well. One of the most affecting details in the entire poem is the anxious stammer, «Vielleicht, vielleicht», echoing «Leiche» from within another word. The difficulty of this confrontation is made manifest in the deliberate verbal stumble by which the persona repeats this word, as if to delay the words that follow. For this sudden welling-up of panic, Wolf begins a passage of doubled rising linear chromaticism throughout mm. 47–51, reminding the listener of Schubert's «Gruppe aus dem Tartarus», in which a throng of anonymous dead are compelled towards Eternity in utmost terror. Somehow one is not surprised that Wolf's ascent culminates in two bars of augmented sixth horror on B-flat.

Wolf was largely an autodidact in the art of composition, and he taught himself in part by mimicking Schumann. Schumann's song-aesthetic entailed the composer becoming a poet, going beyond the poet's words, subjecting the poet to the Tondichter's will. It is a mannerism of Wolf's that the singer's

part «ends» incompletely, that the piano must finish the composition. At the end of the texted body (and never was that term more appropriate than here) of the song, he breaks off the vocal line on the leading tone: we hear the nearness of death, almost but not quite at the point of resolution. The piano must finish the *memento mori* in the postlude. Among the details in the postlude (prime real-estate for his predecessor's musical poeticizing) that tell of Wolf's imaginative extensions of the poem are the pedal indications (the only ones in the entire song) in mm. 55 and 57, with their rhythmically altered repetitions of m. 1. These directives are somewhat mysterious because the performer must decide whether to sustain the pedal throughout one measure (the B-flat tocsin – yet another deceptive resolution, this time following the singer's final C-sharp leading tone) or two (mm. 55–56, 57–58). If the pianist chooses the latter, he or she thereby fuses together the death-knell and the persona's first response to the sound in mm. 3–5, now abbreviated. Here at the end, the first half of the introduction is compressed into a two-bar design, and the original eighth-note rest between the different levels of consciousness is gone. The postlude is a seamless fabric, no longer shot through with slight but significant moments of emptiness to tell of ambivalence and mystery. One cannot read Mörike's entire anthology as this composer did and fail to recognize the poet's mortal fear, the bone-deep nostalgia because we must leave life on some unknown day. The slight pedal blurriness Wolf calls for in the postlude seems the musical concomitant to a last touch of vertiginous fear (see ex. 7).

When Wolf repeats mm. 55–56 as mm. 57–58, he sinks the «consciousness» figure an octave lower, in closer proximity to a death-knell we now know is the sixth degree of D minor, not the subdominant of F major. This time, the shifting dominant finally resolves, and it does so in death's bass realm on the downbeat of m. 59, the right hand «consciousness»-plane dropping out for much of the bar, the better to hear D exposed. The right hand's task here at the end is to provide the third scale degree that bespeaks minor mode, and the way in which it does so is almost unbearably poignant. The resolution of the augmented sixth on the final sixteenth-note beat of mm. 59 and 60 is to the pitches A and F, the remaining tones of the D minor triad ... but with the dominant pitch A in the bass: dominant function down below, the last tenacious intimation of pastoral possibility up above (one which we see rather than hear).

But the final gesture of the song is the most haunting. The only place in the postlude where the right hand sounds the full D minor chord of «Leiche» is at the very end. The tonic triad (stark, with no tones doubled) is sustained after the octave Ds in the left hand, sounding only for an eighth note in duration, have vanished. The persona's death has not yet happened, hence the falling away of the low bass fundament of «Leiche», but the knowledge

Example 7: Wolf, «Denk' es, o Seele!», mm. 48–62.

48 viel-leicht noch eh' an ih-ren Hu-fen das Ei-sen los wird, das ich

50 zurückhaltend

53 blit-zen se - he!

55

58

60

that it is coming for him is now fully present in the conscious mind. Whether the means of life's end are unknown, as with the forty-eight year-old Mörike in 1852, or known, as with the twenty-seven year-old Wolf in 1888, it is difficult to stare at one's own death and sustain the gaze. But that is what Wolf does when he bids the pianist hold the final chord of «Denk' es, o Seele!» for an unspecified length of time. This ending is all the more powerful because a *néant* lies beneath the last triad once the left hand drops away. How long can one bear to hold that fermata-prolonged triad at song's end?

Analytical prose, I will concede, is tedious; songs make their points more concisely and far more effectively. But despite the tedium, I have wanted somehow to recount a few of the mechanisms that move this song in hopes of elucidating various aspects of its power. First and foremost, I believe that Wolf's knowledge before he was even twenty years old of the cause of his own death gave him profound access to this poem by a death-haunted man in his last creative phase (Mörike wrote very little in the final years of his life). In his enthusiasm for Mörike, «this darling of the Graces»,⁴⁰ Wolf would surely have read the poet's Mozart-novelle, and he found ways to tell the cognoscenti of his knowledge. And by 1888, this composer had discovered how best to incorporate his debts to the past, to Schubert, to Schumann, to Wagner, in his music, all the more so because he could make of such previous marvels as «Ihr Bild» something new. Mörike's Mozart becomes Wolf's Schubert.

After one has contemplated Mörike's poem and Wolf's song, it is sad to recall that neither creator was granted a peaceful end. In her letter to Wilhelm Hartlaub of 4 June 1875, telling him of her brother's death, Klara Mörike wrote, «This morning at around eight o'clock, our beloved Eduard departed gently, almost unnoticeably, but after horrific pain lasting the entire night.»⁴¹ Mörike had long been interested in occult phenomena; when on the evening of his seventieth birthday, he heard soft, harp-like strains whose source he could not locate, he said, «That is for me: this is my last birthday». In an address delivered by the Stuttgart pastor Friedrich Walther, son of the famous silhouette artist Luise Walther, on 7 June 1925 for the dedication of a memorial plaque placed on the house where the poet died (Moserstrasse 22 in Stuttgart), Walther recounted Mörike's statement to his parents that he would try to give them a sign on the occasion of his death. Before noon on 4 June 1875, Luise Walther smelled the scent of the roses Mörike had loved so much and said to herself, «That is the sign: Mörike has died».⁴² The tale seems like something born of Mörike's elegiac «An eine Äolsharfe», with its wind-engendered harp strains and its

40 Hugo Wolf, *Hugo Wolf's Briefe an Emil Kauffmann*, Edmund Hellmer, hrsg., Leipzig 1911, S. 13.

41 See Gotthilf Renz, hrsg., «Freundeslieb' und Treu». 250 Briefe Eduard Mörikes an Wilhelm Hartlaub, Leipzig 1938, S. 426.

full-blown rose suddenly scattered in death, but Mörike and the Walthers, so we are told, believed in it. Twenty-eight years after the poet's demise, Wolf endured the worst of bad deaths, the sort of fate everyone rightly dreads: years of insanity and paralysis before the final release. Not *croyant*, he seems to have had a brutally realistic view of what would happen after creativity's desertion in the course of incurable disease. «When I can no longer compose», he once said, «They may throw me on the dungheap».⁴³ And yet, «Death, be not proud»: «Denk' es, o Seele!», both the poem and the song, endure. If this is scant consolation to mortal flesh (Flaubert reportedly once howled with fury at the thought that *Madame Bovary* would outlive him), it is still true.

42 See Friedrich Walther, «Vor Mörikes Sterbehaus», in: the Stuttgart *Neues Tagblatt* for 10 June 1925. See also Walter Hagen, «Legenden um Mörike», in: *Ludwigsburger Geschichtsblätter* 25 (1973), S. 111–124, and by the same author, «Von Eduard Mörikes Leiden, Sterben, Tod und Begräbnis», in: *Ludwigsburger Geschichtsblätter* 27 (1975), S. 117–123. Furthermore, the Deutsches Literatur Archiv in Marbach has the manuscript of Clara Mörike's «E. Aufzeichnungen über Eduard Mörikes letzte Tage». Hagen's essay on legends about this poet begins with a wry motto from Mörike himself to the effect that «a published lie always has something more unconquerable about it than any other» (ibid., S. 111).

43 Walker, *Hugo Wolf: A Biography*, S. 467.

