

Musical Mignon:

A discussion of the character Mignon as portrayed in the musical settings of
Schubert, Schumann and Wolf

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“What is thy name,” he asked.

“They call me Mignon.”

“How old art thou?”

“No one has counted.”¹

Goethe’s character, Mignon, beautifully embodied the virtues of Romanticism. From her endearing simplicity, to her unbreakable loyalty and strength of emotion, Mignon has fascinated authors and composers for the last two hundred years. Her dichotomy of youthful innocence and mature longing, her gender fluidity, her helplessness as an abused child, and her ambiguous relationship with her protector, have caused her immortal character to live out countless incarnations throughout literature, from Balzac’s *Modeste Mignon*² to present day *Anne of Green Gables*.³ Despite her obvious well of pride and her eagerness to please, Mignon pulled on the heartstrings of readers with her vulnerability, giving a voice to those in society who were otherwise ignored or forgotten. It was this plaintive, beseeching voice that inspired the composers, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Hugo Wolf to set her songs to music, each composer exposing different aspects of her complex character.

Talents are nurtured best in solitude, but character on life’s tempestuous sea.⁴

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in Frankfort in 1749, a time period in which “freedom of thought was translating itself into liberty of action.”⁵ Goethe spent his childhood in an upper middle class home, surrounded by paintings of Italian architecture, and educated in the

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, trans. Thomas Carlyle (New York: Heritage Press, 1959), 91.

² Terence Cave, *Mignon’s Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 101.

³ Katharine Slater. ““The Other Was Whole”: *Anne of Green Gables*, Trauma and Mirroring.” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 34, no. 2 (2010), 167-187. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed March 15, 2017).

⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Dramatic Works of Goethe*, trans. Anna Swanwick (London: George Bell and Sons, 1875), 227.

⁵ George Henry Lewes, *The Life of Goethe*. (London: Smith, Elder and CO, 1864) 11-13 <https://archive.org/details/lifegoethe00lewegoog> (accessed March 15, 2017), 11.

sciences, languages, and arts. Though Goethe's initial study of law in Leipzig was interrupted by illness, he later completed his studies in Strasbourg, where he had the freedom to explore a variety of subjects. There, he was introduced to the works and philosophy of Shakespeare.

Goethe was an incessant learner. He studied minerals and human anatomy, Persian and Chinese poetry, the Old Testament and modern physics, he was interested in architecture and knowledgeable about theater.⁶

A twenty-two years old Goethe returned home to Frankfurt to practice law. Though he was close with his sister, Cornelia, the children's relationship with their father was cold and strained. Goethe's mother served as mediator between the children and their father with little success.⁷ In 1773, Cornelia married and left Frankfurt. Goethe fell in love with Charlotte Buff, despite being a friend of her betrothed. However, Goethe's focus quickly shifted when he received news that his friend, Jerusalem, had committed suicide due to similar unrequited feelings for a married woman. Goethe set himself to work on the semi-biographical story, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.⁸ Shortly thereafter, Goethe moved to Weimar, which would be his home for the remainder of his life. He married and had children, though not in that order, and became a literary leader of German thought.

Know'st thou the land where citron-apples bloom,⁹

Due to the influence of his father and to his own travels, Italy was very much a theme in the life of Goethe, playing heavily into his writing. Goethe wrote *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* in two parts, beginning in 1777, and picking it up again after his many travels in

⁶ Robert Spaethling, *Music and Mozart in the Life of Goethe* (Camden House; Columbia, 1987) 22.

⁷ George Henry Lewes, *The Life of Goethe*. (London: Smith, Elder and CO, 1864) 11-13 <https://archive.org/details/lifegoethe00lewegoog> (accessed March 15, 2017), 63.

⁸ Lewes, 134.

⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, trans. Thomas Carlyle (New York: Heritage Press, 1959), 137.

1793.¹⁰ The plot follows the adventures of a young Wilhelm as he seeks answers about the world around him and his individual purpose in it. Though not a traditional main character, Mignon instantly draws the readers attention, much the same as she draws Wilhelm's fascination. She enters the novel as a young acrobat forced to perform in a traveling circus. Upon witnessing her being brutally beaten, Wilhelm buys her from her captor. Throughout the novel, clues are given as to Mignon's true identity and Goethe devotes special attention to describing her features and mannerisms. Having been kidnapped as a young child in Italy, Mignon is forced into a life of slavery, but despite a cruel upbringing, she maintains a sweet disposition and desire to please. Mignon's fluid emotions for Wilhelm move between the love for a savior, the love of a child for her father and the romantic love of a woman for a man. The later combined with her childhood neglect and unhealthy origin, lead to Mignon's weak heart and eventual premature death. After her death, it is learned that her mother and father were, unbeknownst to them, brother and sister, adding yet another layer to the mystique and tragedy of Mignon.

Goethe took particular care in setting text to Mignon's songs, specifically describing the way in which these songs would be sung.

She began each verse in a stately and solemn manner, as if she wished to draw attention towards something wonderful, as if she had something weighty to communicate. In the third line, her tones became deeper and gloomier; the words Dost thou know? were uttered with a show of mystery and eager circumspectness; in "Tis there! 'tis there!" lay an irresistible longing; and her "Let us go!" she modified at each repetition, so that now it appeared to entreat and implore. now to impel and persuade.¹¹

Beethoven idolized Goethe, twenty one years his senior, but even so, he did not escape the sharpness of Goethe's tongue in regards to his and Spohr's settings of "Kennst Du das Land."

¹⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, trans. Thomas Carlyle (New York: Heritage Press, 1959), XXII.

¹¹ Goethe, 138.

“I cannot understand,” Wenzel Tomaschel, the Czech composer, quotes him as saying in 1822 “how Beethoven and Spohr so thoroughly misunderstood the poem as to through-compose it. I should have thought that the divisions occurring in each stanza at the same spot would be sufficient to show the composer that I expected a simple song from him. Mignon is a person who can sing a song, not an aria.”¹²

Based on Goethe’s text and his biting criticisms, one can wonder whether Schubert, Schumann, or Wolf were able to set Mignon’s character and words to Goethe’s satisfaction.

Man bears misfortune without complaint, but feels it the more keenly. Wherefore did God give us compassion?¹³

Though Franz Schubert (1797-1828) lived a tragically short life, the Vienna born composer was exceedingly prolific, writing over six hundred songs, 144 of which, he wrote within the period of one year, 1815.¹⁴ Schubert, a quiet introvert, is credited with creating German lied, despite the lack of recognition during his lifetime. Schubert died at thirty-one, due to complications of mercury poisoning, a common nineteenth-century treatment for syphilis.

Throughout his adulthood, Schubert had a close-knit group of devoted friends and was known for lacking in jealousy. Many times, he chose the texts that he would set to music from amongst the poetry of his friends, preferring simple poetry for his lied. He was, however, drawn to Goethe, setting many of Goethe’s poems multiple times. At the innocent age of 18 years, Schubert set Mignon’s text, “Kennst du das Land.” Though he later set Mignon’s other three songs multiple times, his most enduring settings of “Heiss mich nicht reden,” “Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt,” and “So lasst mich scheinen” were written in 1826. Schubert tried to send a packet of songs to Goethe in 1825, a packet which was returned unopened, likely due to the relative youth and obscurity of Schubert.

¹² Jack Stein, *Poem and Music in the German Lied* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 54.

¹³ Julian Horton, *Schubert*. (London: Routledge, 2016), 44.

¹⁴ Michael Kennedy, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, Third Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 573.

Look deeply into life, and study it as diligently as the other arts and sciences.¹⁵

Robert Schumann (1810-1856), the composer who elevated the piano to an equal partnership with the singer in German lied, led a life fraught with battles. He battled to become a concert pianist, though unsuccessful after a permanent hand injury. He battled to marry the woman he loved despite the vehement objections of her father, who was also his teacher. He battled to gain and hold respect as a musician and conductor, oftentimes without success. And finally, he fought a devastating battle with his own sanity. Schumann studied law at Leipzig, much as Goethe had approximately seventy years earlier. Schumann met his future wife, the concert pianist, Clara Wieck, in 1829, and after a court case granted permission, the two married in 1840. Their devotion and longing, leading into and at the start of the marriage, led to a prolific time of song composition for Schumann.¹⁶ The pair eventually had eight children and Clara performed concert tours while Robert composed at home. In 1844, the family moved to Dresden in an effort to find calm for Schumann who had been suffering bouts of depression and in 1850, they moved to Düsseldorf for Schumann to find work as a conductor. In 1854 Schumann attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine and was then institutionalized until the end of his life two years later. His daughter, Eugenie, illustrates the sad tragedy in her memoirs.

In March 1854 when he was taken to Endenich, I was only two years and three months old. How often I have tried to penetrate the first years of infancy, always imagining that the form of him who must often have bent over my cradle would return to my consciousness! But in vain!¹⁷

¹⁵ Robert Schumann, *Advice to Young Musicians*, Trans. Henry Hugo Pierson. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28219/28219-h/28219-h.htm> (accessed March 15, 2017)..

¹⁶ Michael Kennedy, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, Third Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 577.

¹⁷ Eugenie Schumann, *The Schumanns and Johannes Brahms: The Memoirs of Eugenie Schumann* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 2

In his own words, Robert Schumann composed Mignon's lied in the summer of 1849, "amidst a veritable children's uproar." and though surrounded by his family, he also composed amidst the uproar and danger of the Dresden uprising. The Schumanns fled home to the relative safety and idyllic peace of the countryside, and like Mignon, Schumann longed for home.¹⁸

Wolf's name on a program strikes simultaneous chords of joy and terror in any accompanist. Joy, because of Wolf's ability to synthesize music and text in a way that allows both to emerge, not merely uncorrupted, but enhanced. Terror, because, if one is thorough, the technical execution of even his simplest measures is a formidable task... and then there are the difficult ones!¹⁹

By many accounts, Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) was cantankerous, meticulous in his appearance, impatient, and self-centered. Much like Schumann, Wolf was destined to love deeply and also, destined to lose himself before he would have chosen to put his pen down. Wolf was born in Slovenia, which, at the time was a part of the Austrian Empire. Wolf felt responsible to pick up where Wagner had left off, taking German Lied to a point at which the piano and the voice not just shared equally in the music, but also could exist independently.

Wolf's personal story is tinged with sadness as the woman with whom he shared a great love, Melanie Köchert, happened to be married to Wolf's friend and patron. Melanie served as support and a form of guidance throughout the years as Wolf fought against the hazards of mental illness and musical genius. Melanie stayed close to Wolf in the last torturous days of his life, taking her own life just few years after his death. Despite the life-long tragedy and longing, existing letters exchanged between Köchert and Wolf over the course of thirteen years, show moments of humor, accepted chastisement, respect, and a deep devotion.

¹⁸ John Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 424.

¹⁹ Hugo Wolf. *Letters to Melanie Köchert*, Trans. Louise McClelland Urban (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), x.

Wolf composed his *Goethe-Lieder*, fifty songs set to text by Goethe, over the course of four months, from October 1888 to February 1889, ending an extremely productive three year period. Shortly after, on October 22, 1890 Wolf wrote to Melanie Köchert,

It is 9:00 in the evening and I'm sitting in front of the lighted stove in my small but very cosy, comfortable little room and I want to chat with you now and tell you what you like to hear.²⁰

“Kennst Du das Land”

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn,
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht?
Kennst du es wohl?

Dahin! dahin

Möcht ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter, ziehn.

Kennst du das Haus? Auf Säulen ruht sein Dach.
Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach,
Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an:
Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?
Kennst du es wohl?

Dahin! dahin

Möcht ich mit dir, o mein Beschützer, ziehn.

Kennst du den Berg und seinen Wolkensteg?
Das Maultier sucht im Nebel seinen Weg;
In Höhlen wohnt der Drachen alte Brut;
Es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Flut!
Kennst du ihn wohl?

Dahin! dahin

Geht unser Weg! O Vater, laß uns ziehn!²¹

Know'st thou the land

Know'st thou the land where citron-apples bloom,
And oranges like gold in leafy gloom;
A gentle wind from deep blue heaven blows,
The myrtle thick and high the laurel grows?
Know'st thou it, then?

'Tis there, 'tis there

Oh my belov'd one, thou with me must go!

Know'st thou the house, Its porch with pillars tall?
The rooms do glitter, glitters bright the hall,
And marble statues stand, and look each one:
'What's this, Poor child, to thee they've done?'
Know'st thou it, then?

'Tis there, 'tis there

Oh my protector, thou with me must go!

Know'st thou the hill, the bridge that hangs on cloud?
The mules in mist grope o'er the torrent loud.
In caves lie coil'd the dragon's ancient brood,
The crag leaps down and over it the flood.
Know'st thou it, then?

'Tis there, 'tis there

Our way runs; O my father, wilt thou go?

Wilhelm, a classic example of Romanticism's wanderer, feels compelled to continue on

²⁰ Hugo Wolf. *Letters to Melanie Köchert*, Trans. Louise McClelland Urban (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 30.

²¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, trans. Thomas Carlyle (New York: Heritage Press, 1959), 137.

his journeys. However, his ties to Mignon give him pause. “Kennst du das Land” is set the morning after Wilhelm and Mignon proclaim their deep love and devotion to each other as father and child. Mignon tentatively approaches Wilhelm’s bedroom door and sings this song through the closed door. Wilhelm invites her in and asks her to sing her song again, hoping to find clues about her origin.²²

Schubert composed his “Kennst du das Land” as a stand alone song in 1815, though it is often grouped with his settings of the additional Mignon’s songs written in 1826. Schubert very nearly follows the setting that Goethe’s text implied by writing a three verse strophic form in A major, the key of youthful cheeriness, with the third verse beginning in a weighty A minor, the key of womanliness and tenderness. Schubert does deviate slightly from Goethe’s text by adding nine additional *dahins* to create a melodically beautiful b-section for each verse. Mignon’s range sits high between A4 and A5 through much of the song, implying the vocal lightness of a young girl, though the melody dips down in the third verse as Mignon sings of her kidnapping. The melody begins legato and simply without an introduction, as one imagines a child would begin singing. The tempo is marked *Mässig* or Moderately, which creates a sense of calm as Mignon recounts to Wilhelm her hazy memories of her childhood home. The b-section is marked *Etwas geschwinder*, or somewhat quicker, when Mignon begins to sing the word *Dahin*, creating a sense of urgency and imploring Wilhelm to take Mignon back to her native home. The time signature is an even 2/4 time for the duration of the song and one fermata adds tension when Mignon asks the question, *Kennst du es wohl?* (Do you know it?)

²² Goethe, 135-138.

The piano serves as an accompaniment to the voice without an introduction or a postlude and with very short interludes. The accompaniment begins by doubling the voice before running off into a youthful pattern of sixteenth-note triplets. In the final verse, the piano quadruples the voice by playing three octaves to emphasize the danger in Mignon's words, *Es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Flut!* (the cliff rocks plunge under the flood.) The voice and piano then leap into the final optimism of the b-section. The overall mood of Schubert's setting is one of innocence and joy. Though he set the music simply as Goethe may have preferred, and though there were moments of text-painted fear, Schubert portrayed a child who perhaps, had not yet seen the depths of pain that Goethe's Mignon had already experienced. Schubert may have missed setting the depth of Mignon's *sehnsucht*, (Longing.)

As the first of Schumann's set of nine Wilhelm Meister Songs, "Kennst du das Land" immediately introduces the piano as a much more equal partner with the voice than was evident in the Schubert setting. Schumann begins in G minor, triple meter with a four-bar prelude that leads directly into the vocal line. The G minor key implies discontent and unease and G major signifies the true friendship and faithful love that Wilhelm and Mignon share. Schumann's fluid key signatures mirror the uncertainty over whether Mignon's recollections are actual memories or simply wistful dreaming. There are three twenty-four bar verses with three four-measure phrases at the start of each verse. The entrance of the word, *Kennst*, interrupts the final measure of the third four-bar phrase in each verse, mirroring Mignon's anxiety and desire to immediately discover if Wilhelm knows the land of her recollections. The tempo is marked *Langsam, die beiden letzten Verse mit gesteigertem Ausdruck* or slowly, the two last verses with increased expression.

The accompaniment acts on its own, rarely doubling the vocal line and Schumann introduces driving sixteenth-note triplet chords into the piano part at the sixth measure of each phrase, portraying Mignon's urgency in attempting to convince Wilhelm to help her find home. Mignon sings a *Dahin* refrain at the end of each verse in G major, and with perfect-fourth leaps, Schumann emphasizes her joy and hope that Wilhelm can help her. However, when each refrain repeats, Schumann returns to G minor as Mignon sinks back into her melancholy. The constant chromaticism of this setting and the richer harmonies portray Schumann's Mignon as being far more conflicted and moody than the Mignon of Schubert's setting.

Hugo Wolf's approach to "Kennst du das Land" reveals a much more complex setting than an innocent troubled child would be likely to sing. He opens in the intimidating key of G-flat major and despite using accidentals to visually remain in G-flat major, he shifts seamlessly to A-flat major in measure thirteen. Wolf begins with a four bar introduction marked *Langsam und sehr ausdrucksvoll*, slow and very expressive. The right hand of the piano introduction creates a melody for the vocal line to grow out of while the left hand sets an off-beat recurring pattern. The accompaniment continues throughout the song, not just as an accompaniment, but as what could be mistaken for a stand alone piano solo with the vocal line complimenting. Wolf's setting is modified strophic, allowing him to break from form in order to emotionally distinguish between verses. His first two verses remain similar while his final verse creates a much darker mood as Mignon relives fragmented memories of her abduction. This setting begins in 3/4 time, but shifts to the triplet feel of 9/8 with a ritardando leading into Mignon's questioning, "Kennst du es wohl?" Wolf, who very rarely altered original texts, repeats "Kennst du es wohl," in order to emphasize Mignon's desire to be clearly understood.

Wolf's *Dahin* refrains return to the original quicker tempo with a crescendo and a change in the texture of the accompaniment as it surrenders passionately (*liedenschaftlich hingebend*) to a racing, asymmetrical pattern of ascending, block-chord, eighth notes. The accompaniment and Mignon's notes stretch plaintively higher, illustrating the emotional urgency of her desire to go with Wilhelm to the distant land of her memories. Each verse decrescendos into a sparse accompaniment to give quiet emphasis to the final and most important text of each stanza.

Due to the wide leaps and heavy use of a lower register in the vocal line, due to the complicated key signatures and the use of slightly more complex harmonies than Schubert and Schuman, due to the difficult rhythms and depth of the accompaniment, Wolf's setting of "Kennst du das Land" is not the simple song of a young girl, but rather, the aria of a mature woman. Though an incredible piece of music, one could imagine that Goethe's ethereal Mignon would become lost in the fullness of the texture, that perhaps Wolf wrote for the promise of the woman that Mignon never had the chance to become.

"Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt"

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
 Weiß, was ich leide!
 Allein und abgetrennt
 Von aller Freude,
 Seh ich ans Firmament
 Nach jener Seite.

Ah! der mich liebt und kennt,
 Ist in der Weite.
 Es schwindelt mir, es brennt
 Mein Eingeweide.
 Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
 Weiß, was ich leide!²³

'Tis but who longing knows,

'Tis but who longing knows,
 My grief can measure.
 Alone, reft of repose,
 All joy, all pleasure,
 I thither look to those
 Soft lines of azure.

Ah! far is he who knows me
 And doth treasure.
 I faint, my bosom glows
 'Neath pain's sore pressure.
 'Tis but who longing knows,
 My grief can measure.

²³ Goethe, 229.

Injured during a robbery, Mignon's guardian, Wilhelm, is recovering and having thoughts of longing for the mysterious beautiful woman who had saved him. Picking up on his mercurial mood, Mignon and the harper begin to softly sing.

Schubert's "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" begins *langsam* in a slow, rocking 6/8 time with the right hand playing the melody and the left hand introducing eighth-note arpeggios, an allusion to a harper. Again, Schubert chooses the key of A minor, the key of womanliness and tenderness. The voice enters after a six-measure prelude, with a legato line over the continued arpeggiated eighth notes of the accompaniment. The shape of the two-bar phrase arches up to the word, *Sehnsucht*, before falling back down, much as someone would sigh.

This setting is strophic with four sections. The second section begins with the words *allein und abgetrennt* (alone and cut off) causing the eighth-note accompaniment pattern to shift to quarter notes while the right hand plays block chords on the off-beat, mimicking a sense of disconnect. The third section becomes pianissimo with a pedal tone in the left hand as Mignon quietly and painfully states that the one who knows and loves her is far. The third section holds the greatest contrast with a change in tempo, change in texture in the right hand of the piano and a plethora of diminished seventh chords. The third section paints the picture of an uncontrollable fire and longing as is matched by the text, *es brennt Mein Eingeweide*. Since the book, *Wilhelm Meisters's Apprenticeship*, makes no mention of an outburst by Mignon at this point in the story line, one wonders if perhaps Goethe would have preferred that Schubert had set Mignon's burning entrails to music slightly quieter. The fourth section is a modified version of the first section and finds Mignon slightly more contained as she sings quietly to her Wilhelm.

Similar to Schubert, Schumann also creates a rocking eighth-note texture that mimics the

harper, though Schumann settled on 3/4 time instead of 6/8 time. Schumann's "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" picks up where his "Kennst du das Land" ended, beginning solidly in G minor for the space of a measure before introducing borrowed seventh chords and their subsequent resolution. Despite Goethe's written indications otherwise, Schumann sets this piece as a solo. However, Schumann does follow Goethe's instructions by omitting a piano prelude.

He (Wilhelm) fell into a dreamy longing; and well accordant with his feelings was the song which at that instant Mignon and the harper began to sing, with a touching expression, in the form of an irregular duet.²⁴

Schumann's vocal line mixes into the texture on the third eighth note of the first measure. The accompaniment maintains the eighth-note texture throughout despite a pulling and pushing of the tempo. This setting could be considered modified strophic as Schumann repeats nearly all of the text a second time. The vocal line applies leaps to emphasize Mignon's longing, an example being the very first phrase, also applying dissonance on the first syllable of the word *Sehnsucht*. An additional example of word painting is the splitting of the word *abgetrennt* (separated) between two registers in the female voice, illustrating the meaning of the word.

Schumann modulates to B-flat major when Mignon's attention turns from her own longing to that of the joy in the world. More word painting occurs as Mignon leaps up a sixth to the word *brennt*, as though she has been burned. The unsteady harmonies illustrate the turmoil of Mignon's emotions. The repetition of the verse returns to G minor, and slows into the final repetition of *nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, weiss was ich leide*, emphasizing and stretching, yet again, the strength of Mignon's longing.

True to Goethe's form, Wolf sets the text of "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" without

²⁴ Goethe, 228.

reorganizing or repeating any individual words or lines, holding to the integrity of the original poetry. However, Wolf writes the piano accompaniment as a second character to the voice, representing an active manifestation of the churning emotions hidden beneath Mignon's song to Wilhelm. Wolf's setting begins *Etwas bewegt* in 6/8 time with both hands of the accompaniment remaining in treble clef for the duration. The right hand plays octaves on the downbeat of each measure while the left hand enters with syncopated eighth-note chords. This, in combination with the treble quality of both the accompaniment and the voice, as well as the vague tonal center, creates the feel of a slightly far off waltz, which is likely how Wilhelm must have registered Mignon's song as he lost himself within his own thoughts.

Wolf splits "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" into four distinct sections, giving Mignon's troubled thoughts moments to speak in the piano part between each entrance of the vocal line. Wolf marks the section of Mignon's burning insides as *sehr belebt*, or very lively, and crescendos into an interlude in which the right hand octaves are raised an octave higher, mimicking the shrill pain and burning of Mignon's longing. Wolf marks the return of the initial words *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt* with descending chromatic octaves in the right hand and the left hand descending for the first time, into the bass clef. The final line vocal line diminishes into the continuing fall of the piano line, resolving unconvincingly on a pianissimo D major chord.

"Heiss mich nicht reden"

O, ask me not to speak

Heiß mich nicht reden, heiß mich schweigen,
Denn mein Geheimnis ist mir Pflicht,
Ich möchte dir mein ganzes Innre zeigen,
Allein das Schicksal will es nicht.

O, ask me not to speak, I pray thee!
It must not be reveal'd but hid;
How gladly would my tongue obey thee,
Did not the voice of Fate forbid!

Zur rechten Zeit vertreibt der Sonne Lauf
Die finstre Nacht, und sie muß sich erhellen,
Der harte Fels schließt seinen Busen auf,

At his appointed time revolving,
The sun these shades of night dispels;
The rock, its rugged breast dissolving,

Mißgönnt der Erde nicht die tiefverborgnen Quellen. Gives up to Earth its hidden wells.

Ein jeder sucht im Arm des Freundes Ruh,
Dort kann die Brust in Klagen sich ergießen,
Allein ein Schwur drückt mir die Lippen zu,
Und nur ein Gott vermag sie aufzuschließen.²⁵

In Friendship's arms each heart reposes;
There soul to soul pours out its woe:
My lips an oath forever closes,
My sorrows God alone can know.

Mignon learned of her incestuous beginning from a vision of the Virgin Mary during her kidnapping. In exchange for Mary's promise to take care of her, Mignon swears an oath to never tell the story of her own birth. However, Mignon's songs and poetry often hinted at her mysterious past. In "Heiss mich nicht reden," Wilhelm has promised a dying friend that he would deliver a letter and is departing on his journey, leaving Mignon behind.

And so we leave our friend, entering on his journey, amid a thousand different thoughts and feelings; and here subjoin, by way of close, a little poem, which Mignon had recited once or twice with great expressiveness, and which the hurry of so many singular occurrences prevented us from inserting sooner.²⁶

Schubert's "Heiss mich nicht reden" begins in E minor with a four-bar piano introduction, which introduces the melody, echoed thereafter by the voice. The chordal accompaniment and doubling of the melody in the right hand gives a hymn-like quality to the weight of Mignon's words. This setting has three sections, the first alternating between E minor and G major, while in the second section, Mignon takes us to the optimistic key of C major as she sings of how one day the sun will illuminate the darkness. The third section brings back the melody of the first section, but with the underlying key shifting to E major instead of the original E minor, echoing Mignon's desire for the comfort of confiding in a friend. As Mignon's longing increases, Schubert adds more chromaticism, creating the difficult tension with which the keeping of a secret entails. The chromaticism abruptly releases into half-note chords in the

²⁵ Goethe, 340.

²⁶ Goethe, 339.

accompaniment, allowing Mignon's angst to dissipate into the solemnness of the vow that she has made. Though the key of E minor returns, emphasizing Mignon's resignation, the song unexpectedly ends with a picardy third, offering one final ray of hope.

Unlike the hymn quality of Schubert's setting, Schumann begins with a dramatic, almost recitative-like exclamation in C minor, changing to A-flat major in the fourth bar and changing yet again to C major in the seventeenth measure, illustrating the power of the sun dispelling the night. Schumann's tempo markings change often, illustrating the swift changes of mood in Mignon's singing while clarifying the different sections of this song. Though Goethe set the poem to a very specific stress pattern, Schumann ignore the suggestion completely with a repetition of phrases, even setting words without considering their natural stress, such as is evident with the musical setting accenting the *schwa* of the word *reden*. While Schubert set a melody line, Schumann wrote as though for a pianist.

After the initial recitative-like section, the piano texture thickens to eighth-note chords with occasional pedal tones in the left hand. The texture slows back to the initial recitative-like accompaniment in C minor in the final adagio section as Mignon sings quietly and reverently to God. Schumann's accompaniment finishes in a major key much as in Schubert's setting. However, Schumann's C major was approached in a more harmonically complex way, implying that despite Mignon's resignation, there is still an internal rebellion which she must actively suppress.

Wolf separately sets the three stanzas of "Heiss mich nicht reden" to individualized textures in the voice and accompaniment. He begins the first section marked *Sehr getragen*, or very worn, in 4/4 time with the accompaniment playing block chords on downbeat quarter notes with the same chord repeating for two eighth notes, creating a hymn-like quality despite the ambiguity of key. In the second section, in which Mignon sings of the sunlight dispelling the

dark night, the piano texture changes to eighth-note chromatic ascending octaves, mimicking the rising of the sun and Mignon's excitement. The third section returns to the blocked chords of the first section as Mignon ceases to imagine a future daybreak, instead returning to present, resigned in her promise to Mary to keep the secret of her past. In the final phrase, the word *Gott* is emphasized not just as the highest note of the phrase, but also with a fortissimo in the accompaniment.

While the key signature implies F major, there is not an F major chord until after the prelude when the voice enters. The key of F major is then lost again within just a few measures. The ambiguous key throughout this setting could represent Mignon's secret, seeming just within reach, waiting to be told, but even at the end tucked away, beyond the resolution of the key.

“So lasst mich scheinen”

Such let me seem

So laßt mich scheinen, bis ich werde,
Zieht mir das weiße Kleid nicht aus!
Ich eile von der schönen Erde
Hinab in jenes feste Haus.

Such let me seem, till such I be:
Take not my snow-white dress away!
Soon from this dusk of earth I flee
Up to the glittering lands of day.

Dort ruh' ich eine kleine Stille,
Dann öffnet sich der frische Blick;
Ich laße dann die reine Hülle,
Den Gürtel und den Kranz zurück.

There first a little space I rest,
Then wake so glad, to scenes so kind:
In earthly robes no longer drest,
This band, this girdle, left behind.

Und jene himmlischen Gestalten
Sie fragen nicht nach Mann und Weib,
Und keine Kleider, keine Falten
Umgeben den verklärten Leib.

And those calm, shining suns of morn,
They ask not who is maid or boy:
No robes, no garments, there are worn;
Our body pure from sin's alloy.

Zwar lebt' ich ohne Sorg' und Mühe,
Doch fühlt' ich tiefen Schmerz genug.
Vor Kummer altert' ich zu frühe;
Macht mich auf ewig wieder jung!²⁷

Through little life not much I toiled,
Yet anguish long this heart has rung;
Untimely woe my blossom spoiled:
Make me again forever young!

²⁷ Goethe, 483.

Mignon, who up until this point in the novel had worn the clothing of a boy, has been convinced to dress as an angel to deliver presents for a birthday party.

The little party having satisfied their curiosity, and the impression of the show beginning to abate, we were for proceeding to undress the little angel. This, however, she resisted: she took her cithern; she seated herself here, on this high writing table, and sang a little song with touched grace: ²⁸

Schubert's setting of "So lasst mich scheinen" is an ABAB strophic, generally diatonic piece in B major, set to 3/4 time. Schubert returns to the hymn-like texture of his setting of "Heiss mich nicht reden" through his use of block harmonies while doubling and occasionally tripling the vocal line in the right hand of the accompaniment. The legato sweetness of the first stanza mirrors the image of a delicate Mignon dressed as an angel. The second stanza begins with a calm pianissimo illustrating peace, but moves up in stepwise motion, building into a D major crescendo on the words *frische blick* or fresh view, showing the strength of emotion that Mignon feels in anticipation of opening her eyes in heaven.

The third stanza returns with the pianissimo sweetness of the first stanza as Mignon reflects on the simplicity of a heaven in which one is not judged a girl or a boy. The fourth and final stanza also begins pianissimo but quickly crescendos to a fortissimo in D minor on the word *schmerz* or pain, mirroring the weight of the pain Mignon has endured. Mignon returns to a soft dynamic as she laments her fate of aging too soon. She crescendos once more as she pleads to be made forever young again, resolving back in the original key of B major and ending with a pianissimo two-bar postlude.

"So lasst mich scheinen" is the last of Schumann's settings, yet the first which begins in a major key, signifying that upon putting on the garb of an Angel, Mignon has finally found a sense of joy and anticipation of death. Having dealt with extreme depression, perhaps Schumann

²⁸ Goethe, 483.

was giving hints to his own inner turmoil. Schumann's setting begins with a *Langsam* marking in 3/4 time with a two-bar pianissimo prelude before the voice enters above the piano line, stepping up on the words *So lasst mich* or, *so let me seem*. The vocal line then falls down to within the piano texture for the second half of the phrase, *bis ich werde*, or, as I once was, illustrating Mignon's momentary hope for release before she is pulled back to her earthly reality.

Schumann's "So lasst mich scheinen" is through-composed as there is not discernible break between Goethe's set stanzas, with the exception of a four bar piano interlude between the third and fourth stanzas. Schumann uses word painting liberally throughout, one example being the pianissimo and tied eighth-note accompaniment under Mignon's *Dort ruh' ich eine kleine Stille*, there I will repose in peace. Schumann creates a moment of calm and stillness to match her words before employing a forte for when Mignon opens her eyes to her new heavenly form. In the last two measures of the piano interlude before the final stanza, Schumann creates a texture of youth and optimism with his eighth-note major arpeggios, signifying Mignon coming closer to her hearts desire to be free of her earthly bonds. Mignon's final plea to be made young again is met by a postlude with more beautiful open eighth-note arpeggios, bringing to mind the energy and playfulness of youth, which has not been much evident in any of Schumann's settings of Mignon's songs. Schumann's postlude resolves sweetly and peacefully, much as Mignon does when she lets go of her earthly self.

While Schubert set "So lasst mich scheinen" as a child's hymn, sweet and pure, and Schumann set it infused with anticipated relief and final resolution, Wolf set Mignon's final words in A minor with the delicacy and mystery that the concept of holy transfiguration inspires. Marked at the start with *Sehr langsam und zart* and a pianissimo, Wolf's setting begins with

wide, open blocked chords in both hands of the accompaniment, leaving much range and space between the hands for the mystery of the afterlife to rest within. Though set in 4/4 time, Mignon's voice never enters on a strong beat, but rather weaves throughout the piano part unexpectedly, alluding to the otherworldly quality that a delicate Mignon dressed as an angel would portray.

Wolf maintains a quiet dynamic throughout, though the final section, which begins with Mignon singing *Zwar lebt' ich*, begins to build towards an uncharacteristic forte as Mignon, having sung of the pain she has endured, pleads to be made young again. Her *jung* floats off into the final piano texture. Wolf's postlude continues with the same otherworldly chordal accompaniment present in the beginning of the song, but fades quietly away as Mignon fades from this world.

Franz Schubert wrote the settings of Mignon's songs as individual, simple songs. Robert Schumann set Mignon's songs, as well as the Harper's songs, almost in their entirety, into a complete cycle. Hugo Wolf set all ten *Meister* songs at the start of his collection *Gedichte von J. W. v. Goethe*. Each of these composers, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann and Hugo Wolf, approached setting Mignon's words from wildly different perspectives. Schubert wrote music for a young girl, troubled by life but still infused with joy, innocence and reverence. Schubert's youth at setting Mignon's "Kennst du das Land" and his acquiring of years before setting her other three poems corresponds to the order in which Mignon sang them in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Schubert's physical frailties likely enabled him to connect with and write for a young Mignon. Schumann set Mignon's songs to music after having lived most of his life through great struggles, infusing Mignon's character with the depth and age of his trials. Despite

his aching chromaticism, Schumann does, in the end, resolve dear Mignon's final song, releasing her peacefully and full of hope into her next life. Wolf's Mignon, churns with pain. Wolf set Mignon as though she were a woman grown and full of turmoil. For Wolf, Mignon is capable of great depth of feeling and even greater uncounted mysteries. Schubert set the child, Schumann set the struggles and eventual resolution and Wolf set the enigma of the woman.

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