Brahms Rhapsodizing: The Alto Rhapsody and Its Expressive Double

CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS

For Donald C. Johns

Biographers have always recognized the Alto Rhapsody to be one of Brahms's most personal works; indeed, both the composer and Clara Schumann left several unusually specific comments that suggest that this poignant setting of Goethe's text about a lonely, embittered man had a particular significance for Brahms. Clara wrote in her diary that after her daughter Julie Schumann announced her engagement to an Italian count on 11 July 1869, Brahms suddenly began behaving differently: "Johannes is quite transformed; he seldom comes to the house and is monosyllabic."[1] Soon after the marriage on

[1] Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: Ein Künstlerleben nach Tagebüchern und Briefen*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1910), 3:230: "Den 16. Juli. Johannes ist wie umgewandelt jetzt, kommt selten und ist einsilbig; auch gegen Julie, gegen die er vorher so sehr liebenswürdig immer war." There are many who have covered the biographical background for this work. See especially the introductory commentary in Walter Frisch, introduction to *Johannes Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, Opus 53: A Facsimile Edition of the Composer's Autograph Manuscript in the Music Division of the New York Public Library* (New York: New York Public Library, 1983); and Aubrey Garlington, "'Harzreise als Herzreise': Brahms's Alto Rhapsody," *Musical Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (1983): 527–42.

22 September 1869, he brought Clara a copy of the Alto Rhapsody, and she noted that he had called it "sein Brautgesang" (that is, *his* bridal song) and that she understood the piece to be "the expression of his own heart's anguish."[2] On another occasion he described the work to his friend Hermann Deiters as "somewhat intimate music" and said that he might decide not to allow it to be published; in a letter to his publisher he called it an epilogue to his *Liebeslieder* waltzes, and on yet another occasion he again used the term "Brautlied," specifying this time that it was not for him but "für die Schumannsche Gräfin" (for the Schumann countess).[3] The dates in this telling suggest an uncharacteristic compositional speed, indicating that Brahms composed the work in July, August, and September 1869 fueled by his anger, pain, and passion.

Brahms's choice of text and title led some to compare his work to Johann Friedrich Reichardt's "Rhapsodie (Aus der Harzreise)" from 1792, a crucial precedent not only for the title but also for several musical details. He evidently got to know the Reichardt setting in 1868, for as he later recalled in a letter to Hermann Deiters: "I remember in my stay with you that I saw a book of songs by Reichardt (possibly Zelter), in which there was a passage from Goethe's *Harzreise* ('aber abseits wer ist's'). Can you lend me this volume for a short time? I hardly need to tell you that I have already composed my piece, and that I only want to see that work of my predecessor."[4] He and Reichardt used the same verses from the poem "Harzreise im Winter" that Goethe had written in December 1777. Of Goethe's eighty-eight verses, Reichardt set sixteen and Brahms twenty-two, as shown in table 1. Max Kalbeck long ago identified several musical correspondences to Reichardt's song in his biography of Brahms (his comparison of the two works appears in ex. 1). He marked three spots at which Brahms set the same words to the same pitches: first at "Gift ward" on G (with Brahms adding an appoggiatura), then a measure later at "Der sich Menschenhaß" on G and D♭, and again at "Fülle der Liebe" as the singer descends from F by step for several notes.[5]

---

[2] Quoted in Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life Based on Material Found in Diaries and Letters*, trans. and ed. by Grace Hadow, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1913), 2:267–68.

[3] Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms Gesellschaft, 1913–22), 2:299–306. See also Margit McCorkle and Donald McCorkle, *Johannes Brahms: Thematisch-bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis* (Munich: G. Henle, 1984), 221–22. Brahms described the Alto Rhapsody as an epilogue or postlude to his *Liebeslieder*, op. 52, in a letter of 5 October 1869 to his publisher Fritz Simrock; see *Johannes Brahms, Life and Letters*, ed. and trans. Styra Avins and Josef Eisinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 396.

[4] "Ich erinnere mich bei Ihnen ein Heft Lieder von Reichardt (möglicherweise Zelter) gesehen zu haben, in dem ein Absatz aus Goethes Harzreise (aber abseits wer ist's) stand. Könnten Sie mir das Heft auf kurze Zeit leihen? Ich brauche kaum dazu zu schreiben, das ich es eben komponiert, und gern die Arbeit meines Vorgängers sehen möchte." Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2:301. My translation.

[5] See ibid., 2:299–301, for a discussion of Brahms's letter to Deiters; and 2:302–4 for the Reichardt model. At "Ach, wer heilet die Schmerzen," as Walter Salmen recognized,

EXAMPLE 1a. Reichardt, "Rhapsodie (Aus der Harzreise)," mm. 1–8, as presented in Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2:303; boxes have been added to indicate aspects also present in Brahms's Alto Rhapsody

We can extend the similarities yet a little further, as I have indicated with the boxes I have added to Reichardt's example. Both singers begin on the third of the C-minor triad and reach the note D at "Des," a pronoun that both composers accentuate rhythmically and elevate above the surrounding pitches. Both also dramatically emphasize the arrival at "Menschenhaß" by the same diminished seventh chord (and when Brahms repeats this verse, he too sets each syllable of "Menschenhaß" to D♭). And both Brahms and Reichardt precede the climactic F of "Fülle" with one measure in which the singer sustains a D♭.

It is striking that both composers begin in C minor and shift to major (although Reichardt moves to E♭ major), and both shift from duple meter to $\frac{6}{4}$ time. Less obvious are the similarities in the cadential phrases that lead into this change of meter. Brahms disguises the resemblance by the dramatic shift in octaves, but his cadence is nevertheless related to the standard recitative formula that Reichardt too had altered. Examples 2a and 2b present this phrase as it appears in the scores, whereas in examples 2c and

---

"einige Takte der Singstimme so ähnlich verlaufen, daß auf eine vertiefende Nachgestaltung des Musters nach offenbar gründlicher Beschäftigung damit geschlossen werden darf." See Salmen, *Geschichte der Rhapsodie* (Zurich and Freiburg: Atlantis, 1966), 49.

EXAMPLE 1b. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 48–59, as presented in Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2:303–4; boxes have been added to indicate aspects also present in Reichardt's "Rhapsodie (Aus der Harzreise)"

2d I have removed Brahms's leap of a ninth, indicated the melodic steps and some elements of the harmony, and added the chord Brahms implies by his low F♯, to show what a more conventional accompaniment would have been and indicate how close that implied chord is to Reichardt's augmented sixth. Brahms's debt to Reichardt is better characterized as a formal modeling than as an allusion. But although these similarities convey a sense of his reverence for musical traditions and his respect for a composer who was close to Goethe, I think that Brahms's reason for borrowing ideas from Reichardt had more to do with the work's designation as a rhapsody.
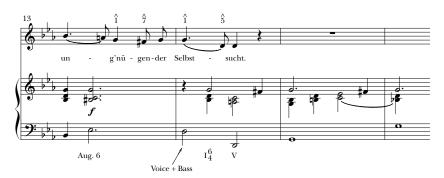
EXAMPLE 2a. Reichardt, "Rhapsodie (Aus der Harzreise)," mm. 13–15; the cadence preceding the shift to E♭ major
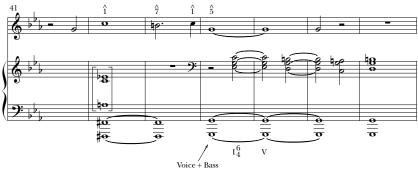
EXAMPLE 2b. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 41–47; the cadence preceding the shift to C major

EXAMPLE 2c. Reichardt's "Rhapsodie (Aus der Harzreise)," mm. 13–15

EXAMPLE 2d. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 41–47; the cadence preceding the shift to C major, with Brahms's octave leaps replaced by step motion

In nineteenth-century German-speaking lands, the word rhapsody could carry any one of several meanings: among these were an improvised and spontaneous outpouring,[6] a fragmentary poem or excerpt from a longer work, "a miscellaneous collection of writings,"[7] and a work cobbled together from verses of other poems—usually called *cento* in English, French, and Italian and *Stoppelgedicht* in German. It is in the sense of fragment and excerpt that Reichardt chose the title "Rhapsody" for his setting of an excerpt from Goethe's poem. That this was also Brahms's conscious intent in adopting Reichardt's title is made explicit in his subtitle, *Fragment aus Goethes Harzreise im Winter*. In following Reichardt, Brahms was fully conscious of his debt to the older composer, as he acknowledged in a letter to Deiters: "I call my piece 'Rhapsody,' but believe that I already have my distinguished predecessor to thank for this title."[8] Brahms's use of the word "Vorredner" (previous speaker or orator) instead of "composer" or even "colleague" implies that he thought of himself and his predecessor as rhapsodists. The element of passion associated with the work, as documented in the accounts left by both Brahms and Clara, suggests composition as a "spontaneous outpouring" fully in line with the genre's expectations. Also relevant as evidence that he understood the Homeric heritage of the form are the declamatory recitative- and arioso-like writing for the alto soloist in the first two sections of the work and the

---

[6] "For a rhapsody is not 'composed'; it is improvised, seemingly regardless of any rules of form, a free outpouring guided only by the instinct of the creative musician and the mood seeking expression." Louis Kentner, "Solo Piano Music (1827–61)," in *Franz Liszt: The Man and His Music*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1970), 131.

[7] John Rink, s.v. "Rhapsody," *Grove Music Online*, (accessed 15 December 2011).

[8] "Ich nenne mein Stück 'Rhapsodie', glaube aber, daß ich diesen Titel auch schon meinem verehrten Vorredner zu danken habe." Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2:301.

harp-like writing for strings that enters with the male chorus at the conclusion. A study of German poetic forms published in a sixth edition in 1868 defined rhapsodies as poems that "either had more the character of an ode or more that of a hymn," a description that suits the stylistic contrast between the opening and closing sections of the Alto Rhapsody precisely (for the full quotation, see the appendix, no. 8).

Yet Brahms doubtless also knew of the patchwork associations of rhapsody. His concern to adhere to literary and generic conventions has been well documented. John Daverio, for instance, has concluded that Brahms exhibited "a true sensitivity to the literary qualities of Tieck's musical *Märchen*" in his *Magelone Romanzen*, in which he realized the complex musical implications of Tieck's generically mixed poetry.[9] Since Brahms consciously adopted several other traits of rhapsody—spontaneous outpouring, fragment, the styles of ode and hymn—it is worth considering whether or not he also accommodated one of the most important nineteenth-century attributes of the genre: its use in wedding celebrations in the form of a cento consisting of numerous fragmentary quotations from other works.

We need therefore to examine the musical and textual links of the Alto Rhapsody to other compositions that provided Brahms with material. I will also identify the many ties between the Rhapsody and the *Schicksalslied*, op. 54, another work for chorus and orchestra. Brahms seems to have conceived these two works as companion pieces, as "expressive doubles" of each other, to invoke a concept proposed by Lawrence Kramer.[10] The results of my investigation suggest that Brahms likely conceived the Alto Rhapsody at least a year earlier than previously thought.

* * *

In addition to the musical debts to Reichardt, there are several passages in the Alto Rhapsody that draw on a broad range of works that reinforce the meaning of Goethe's text. Two of Brahms's sources are unsurprising and involve citations that are close enough musically to be considered quotations: his own *Ein deutsches Requiem* and Schumann's oratorio *Das Paradies und die Peri*. In his setting of "erquicke sein Herz" (restore his heart) in the closing C-major section of the Alto Rhapsody, he uses the same pitches and harmonization as those in the C-major mezzo-soprano solo "Verlassener Jüngling" (Abandoned youth) from *Das Paradies und die Peri* (exs. 3a and 3b). This section of Schumann's oratorio provides

---

[9] John Daverio, "Brahms's *Magelone Romanzen* and the 'Romantic Imperative,'" *Journal of Musicology* 7, no. 3 (1989): 350. As Daverio identified the generic mix, "Tieck's *Märchen* hovers between folk tale and *Roman*, narrative and lyric reflection, poetry and music."
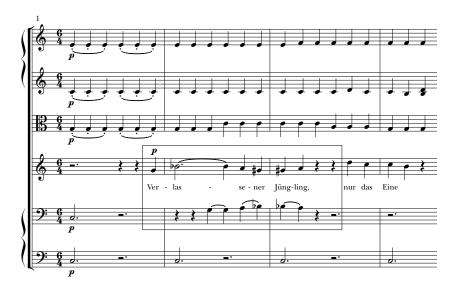
[10] Lawrence Kramer, "Beethoven's Two-Movement Piano Sonatas and the Utopia of Romantic Esthetics," in his *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 21–71.

wedding imagery, since it deals with the unwavering love of a man and his *treue Braut* (faithful bride). There are multiple elements of the text that complement either Goethe's text or Brahms's life, including, for example, the first verses: "Abandoned youth, only one thing remains that still gives him comfort" (Verlassener Jüngling, nur das Eine bleibt, was ihm Trost noch giebt), namely, a woman "whom he had loved faithfully for many years" (die er seit Jahren treugeliebt) who is safe in her father's house. The existence of just one source of comfort (nur das Eine bleibt) occurs also in Goethe's text, when the alto asks the "Father of love" if there is "one tone that can reach his ear" (ein Ton seinem Ohre vernehmlich, so erquicke sein Herz). And, finally, Goethe's plea to open the springs for those parched in the desert is matched in Schumann's description "just one drop from the sea to cool his feverishly burning brow" (einen Tropfen nur aus der See, zu kühlen das fiebrisch brennende Weh).

Among Brahms's own works the third movement of *Ein deutsches Requiem* shares a series of general musical ideas and textual images with the Alto Rhapsody. Like the Alto Rhapsody, this movement also progresses from verses for soloist that proclaim the unworthiness of man to verses for choir that offer a vision of comfort, with questions midway through about where to seek healing (consider the correspondence of "Nun Herr, wes soll ich mich trösten?" in the Requiem with the Rhapsody's "Ach, wer heilet die Schmerzen?"). The passage in the Rhapsody at "Menschenhaß" (hatred of people) corresponds closely to the setting of the Requiem's "Ach, wie gar nichts sind alle Menschen, die doch so sicher leben" (Ah, how worthless are the people, who nevertheless live so securely). In this passage Brahms had composed a sequential line that appears first in the oboe and then in the cellos, basses, and bassoons. He quotes this line in the Rhapsody under the repeated word "Menschenhaß"; examples 4a and 4b show the second statement of this phrase in the Requiem and the first statement in the Rhapsody. The other occurrences of this line—beginning on F♯ and G♯ in the Requiem, and E♯ and G♯ in the Rhapsody— also correspond. Examples 4a and 4b also show an ascending motive in both works (in the sopranos in the Requiem and violins in the Rhapsody) that is intervallically similar. The resemblance is stronger at the second occurrence of this sequential motive in the Rhapsody, because oboes and flutes play the upper motive in quarter notes. Brahms turned to these motives in both works in setting texts that express scorn for mankind.[11]

[11] A third source is Schumann's overture to his opera *Genoveva*, which involves a motive that never appears in the opera with a text. Brahms quotes mm. 36–39 almost literally at Goethe's text "in ung'nügender Selbstsucht" (in insatiable self-pity). The arpeggiated diminished seventh chord repeats imitatively an octave lower and breaks off in the middle of the third statement. Brahms and Schumann both approach this phrase with a rising F-minor arpeggiation. I am grateful to Paul Berry, who noticed this resemblance independently, for communicating his impressions.

EXAMPLE 3a. Schumann, *Das Paradies und die Peri*, no. 15, mm. 1–4; strings and soloist

EXAMPLE 3b. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 159–61; choral parts and soloist

EXAMPLE 4a. Brahms, Requiem, mvt. 3, mm. 132–35; choral parts

EXAMPLE 4b. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 60–62; piano reduction

In addition to Reichardt and Schumann, the most important musical sources for Brahms were a trio of unexpected models, Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust*, Liszt's *Eine Faust-Symphonie*, and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Brahms seems particularly indebted to several compositions based on Goethe's *Faust*, which is surprising since, unlike most other successful nineteenth-century composers, Brahms never publicly admitted to having composed a major work on the Faust theme.[12] Not counting the many lieder on Faust texts such as "Gretchen am Spinnrade," I have

---

[12] Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 3:258. Kalbeck's opinion, expressed in 1883, that Brahms had thought of the Third Symphony in connection with a performance of *Faust* at the Burgtheater in Vienna, is recounted in A. Peter Brown, "Brahms's Third Symphony and the New German School," *Journal of Musicology* 2, no. 4 (1983): 451.

identified at least sixty compositions on Faust written between Ignaz Walter's singspiel *Doktor Faust* at the end of the eighteenth century and Mahler's Eighth Symphony at the beginning of the twentieth.[13] These works include tragic operas, comic operas, symphonies, symphonic poems, overtures, incidental music, cantatas, and sets of lieder and were written by composers in Germany and Austria, of course, but also France, Italy, Poland, Russia, and England. Among the most significant settings are several composed in the 1840s and 1850s, notably by Berlioz, Wagner, Schumann, Liszt, and Gounod. The extent to which there are musical traditions within this vast body of music is as yet largely unexplored.[14]

For Brahms and the Alto Rhapsody the most relevant Faust association, both for textual parallels with the *Harzreise* verses and for musical connections to earlier works by other composers, is the scene in Goethe's *Faust*—"Faust allein in seinem Studierzimmer"—in which a solitary Faust broods in his study, tormented and despairing. Two *Faust* compositions have related treatments of this text, Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* from 1846 and Gounod's *Faust* from 1859. The parallels between the text set by Brahms and the adaptation of Goethe set by Berlioz extend through the first two stanzas of text (compare tables 1 and 2). Moreover, Berlioz proceeds from a minor-mode solo to a four-voice male chorus singing an Easter hymn in major, a sequence from despair to comfort that adumbrates Brahms's soloist singing verses of self-pity who is answered by a male chorus singing a C-major hymn. Berlioz's setting of the text portrays Faust with a learned, contrapuntal texture and a motive that returns at the fifth and octave above and then several times over a pulsing C♯ pedal (ex. 5a). A decade later Gounod chose this motive, this scene, and this texture to begin act 1 of his opera (ex. 5b). He too presents Faust in his study with low strings, entries at the fourth above, and, in the last statements of the motive as the curtain rises, the same chromatic descent from the upper note as present in Berlioz's *Faust* (mm. 15–16). The steady pulse of a pedal underlies the entire section. Vocal scores of Gounod's opera began to appear in 1859 and a full score was published in 1860.

---

[13] See the longer list of works on Faust assembled by Janet I. Wasserman and posted online at http://www.schubertsocietyusa.org/guest_pages/faust.html. She also lists songs and numerous twentieth-century compositions. See also Lorna Fitzsimmons, *The Faust Theme in Literature and Music: A Reader* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2008).

[14] With at least one exception: Dorothea Redepenning and I have suggested, independently, that the motive with which Liszt begins his *Faust-Symphonie* alludes to Schubert's "Szene aus Goethes Faust"; Dorothea Redepenning, *Franz Liszt: Faust-Symphonie* (Munich: W. Fink 1988), 11–12; and Christopher Reynolds, *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57–58.

TABLE 1

Texts from Goethe's "Harzreise im Winter" set by J. F. Reichardt and Johannes Brahms; Brahms set all of the text, Reichardt only that in boldface.

Aber abseits, wer ist's?	But there apart, who is it?
Ins Gebüsch verliert sich sein Pfad,	He has lost his path in the brush.
Hinter ihm schlagen	Behind him the bushes
Die Sträuche zusammen,	Close together.
Das Gras steht wieder auf,	The grass again rises
Die Öde verschlingt ihn.	The wilderness hides him.
Ach, wer heilet die Schmerzen,	Ah, who heals the pains
Des, dem Balsam zu Gift ward?	Of one whose balsam has become poison?
Der sich Menschenhaß	Who has drunk the hatred of Mankind
Aus der Fülle der Liebe trank?	From the fullness of love?
Erst verachtet, nun ein Verächter,	First scorned, now a scorner,
Zehrt er Heimlich auf	He secretly consumes
Seinen eigenen Wert	His own worth
In ung'nügender Selbstsucht.	In insatiable self pity.
Ist auf deinem Psalter,	Is there on Thy psaltery,
Vater der Liebe, ein Ton	Father of love, one tone
Seinem Ohre vernehmlich,	That can reach his ear,
So erquicke sein Herz!	So restore his heart!
Öffne den umwölkten Blick	Open the clouded gaze
Über die tausend Quellen	To the thousand springs
Neben dem Dürstenden	Next to the parched
In der Wüste.	In the desert.

The "Faust in his study" motives of Berlioz and Gounod relate to the opening motive of the Alto Rhapsody, shown in example 6. As in Berlioz, Brahms's motive is played by low strings; as in Gounod, the first three pitches span a diminished fourth (the opening measures of all three works are given in exs. 7a–7c). Liszt too composed several transformations of this motive in his *Faust-Symphonie* of 1857, first a version of the motive near the beginning that employs two octave displacements (indicated in ex. 7d), and later several transformations in the third movement, "Mephistopheles," without octave displacements. Example 7d also shows one of these, with the oboe playing against a more common disjunct version in the violins. The form that Liszt used in the *Requiem for Male Voices* at the text "Quid sum miser tunc dicturus"

TABLE 2

The texts of Berlioz, *La Damnation de Faust*, and Gounod, *Faust*, at "Faust allein in seinem Studierzimmer"

Berlioz:

Sans regrets j'ai quitté les riantes campagnes	Without regret I left the smiling country-side;
Où m'a suivi l'ennui.	There too my ennui pursued me.
Sans plaisir je revois nos altières montagnes;	Without pleasure I see again our proud mountains;
Dans ma vieille cité je reviens avec lui.	I return to my ancient city with my burden still.
Oh! Je souffre, je souffre! Et la nuit sans étoiles	Oh! I suffer, I suffer! and the starless night
Qui vient d'étendre au loin son silence et ses voiles,	Which has just spread its veil of silence over the world
Ajoute encore à mes sombres douleurs.	Intensifies my brooding melancholy.
O terre! Pour moi seul tu n'as donc pas de fleurs!	O Earth! for me alone do you bear no flowers!
Par le monde, où trouver ce qui manque à ma vie?	Where in all the world can I find what my life lacks?
Je chercherais en vain, tout fuit mon âpre envie!	Vainly would I search: everything flies my yearning grasp!

Followed by male chorus singing Easter hymn

Gounod: *Faust*, "Faust allein. Fausts Studierzimmer."

Rien!! En vain j'interroge,	Nothing! In vain I question
en mon ardente veille,	in my ardent vigil
La nature et le Créateur;	Nature and the creator;
Pas une voix ne glisse à mon oreille	Not a voice slips to my ear
Un mot consolateur!	A word of consolation!
J'ai langui, triste et solitaire	I languished, sad and solitary
Sans pouvoir briser le lien	Without being able to break the tie
Qui m'attache encore à la terre	Which attaches me still to the earth!
Je ne vois rien! Je ne sais rien! Rien!	I see nothing! I know nothing! Nothing!

(What should I, miserable one, say) is particularly close to that in the Alto Rhapsody (ex. 7e).[15] To this group of related motives, I add another version as it appears in the *Hamlet* Overture of Brahms's friend Joseph Joachim, which premiered in 1853 (ex. 7f). With his second statement of the Faust motive Brahms approaches a direct quote of a transposition of

[15] This work was published in 1869 and is therefore too late to have been known by Brahms as he composed the Alto Rhapsody.

EXAMPLE 5a. Berlioz, *La Damnation de Faust*, part 2, scene 1, no. 4; Northern Germany, Faust alone in his study, mm. 1–10

EXAMPLE 5b. Gounod, *Faust*, act 1, scene 1, Faust alone in his study; mm. 1–9 and 14–18

Joachim's principal theme, with C♭, B♭♭, and the leap up to a dissonant F♭ that resolves down a half step. Like Brahms, Joachim too had scored this passage for muted strings.[16]

Brahms incorporated several elements of Liszt's *Faust-Symphonie*. The first notes of the Alto Rhapsody share with Liszt's work a pattern of dynamics (loud, then immediately soft) and an orchestration with muted strings (compare ex. 8 and ex. 6). Both composers launch into a state of tonal aimlessness from the same conspicuous augmented triad, B-E♭-G—Liszt melodically, Brahms harmonically; and both composed opening gestures that they then sequence one step lower. In using the augmented triad, both chose a chord that the theoretical champion of the augmented triad, Carl Friedrich Weitzmann, had colorfully

---

[16] Joachim completed this overture early in 1853, very much under the influence of Liszt, with whom he had been working closely in Weimar. When Joachim sent Liszt the *Hamlet* Overture, he wrote, "[D]as Werk möge Ihnen auch sagen, woran Sie hoffentlich nicht gezweifelt haben, dass Sie, mein Meister, mir beständig gegenwärtig waren." Letter of 21 March 1853, as published in Andreas Moser, *Joseph Joachim: Ein Lebensbild*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Brahms-Gesellschaft, 1908), 1:146.

EXAMPLE 6.   Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 1–14; boxed notes in this example
will be discussed in comparison to later examples

EXAMPLE 7a. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 1–5

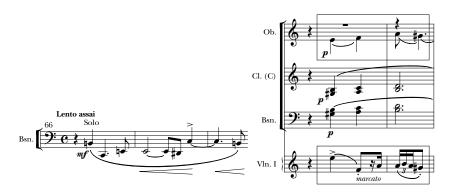EXAMPLE 7b. Berlioz, *La Damnation de Faust*, no. 4, mm. 1–2

EXAMPLE 7c. Gounod, *Faust*, act 1, scene 1, mm. 1–3

207

EXAMPLE 7d. Liszt, *Eine Faust-Symphonie*, mvt. 1, mm. 66–68 and mvt. 3 at V+5

EXAMPLE 7e. Liszt, Requiem, Dies irae, mm. 110–17

EXAMPLE 7f. Joseph Joachim, *Hamlet* Overture, 6–10 mm. after rehearsal C; violins 1 and 2

characterized with the traits Goethe had used to describe the study scene in *Faust*. Weitzmann, who was close to Liszt, began his 1853 treatise on this chord in the following anthropomorphic terms:

> The augmented triad has until now been considered by all theoretical and practicing musicians to be an "unwelcome guest" (unheimlicher Gast), who one believed needed to be gotten rid of as quickly as possible. His dubious lineage has awoken mistrust against him; his gruff appearance as well as his apparent incivility was not designed to win him friends. The testimonies of our best old and new theorists, which either denied him all territorial rights (Heimatrecht) or at best suffered him fleeting passage, were not designed to stimulate interest in him.[17]

These are not merely anthropomorphic terms. Weitzmann's depiction serves well to represent Faust, as Goethe portrays him, alone and despondent, in his study, or in "Harzreise im Winter", "the one who stands apart", the one who "has lost his path," who is scorned by those who encounter him. Brahms, like Liszt, thus begins by invoking a sonority that expressed in three notes the intrinsic character of the central figure. But Brahms could also have seen something of himself in this description. In Michael Musgrave's wording, "Brahms was characteristically an outsider."[18]

---

[17] "Der übermässige Dreiklang ist bisher von allen theoretischen und praktischen Musikern als ein unheimlicher Gast betrachtet worden, dessen man sich stets so bald wie möglich entledigen zu müssen glaubte. Seine zweifelhafte Abkunft hatte Misstrauen gegen ihn erweckt; sein schroffes Auftreten sowohl wie seine scheinbare Unbehülflichkeit waren nicht geeignet, ihm Freunde zu erwerben. Die Zeugnisse unserer besten älteren und neueren Theoretiker, welche ihm entweder alles Heimathrecht absprachen, oder höchstens seinen flüchtigen Durchgang duldeten, waren nicht geeignet, Interesse für ihn zu erregen, und auch die praktischen Meister, welche ihn zuweilen, doch stets gebunden einführten, erlaubten ihm nur zwei bis drei, ein für alle Mal vorgeschriebene Schritte zu thun." Karl Friedrich Weitzmann, *Der übermässige Dreiklang* (Berlin: Trautwein, 1853), 1. In my translation, I render *er, sein,* and *ihn* as masculine pronouns rather than as *it*. For an important discussion of Weitzmann's significance, see R. Larry Todd, "The 'Unwelcome Guest' Regaled: Franz Liszt and the Augmented Triad," *19th-Century Music* 12, no. 2 (1988): 93–115.

[18] Michael Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 44.

EXAMPLE 8. Liszt, *Eine Faust-Symphonie*, mm. 1–3

Brahms also took inspiration from the choral conclusion that Liszt appended to the *Faust-Symphonie*, which influenced the orchestration, form, harmony, and meter of the choral C-major section of the Alto Rhapsody. Liszt ended his symphonic poem with a tenor solo accompanied by male chorus, an orchestra that includes a harp, and rhythmic movement that relies heavily on triplet eighth notes. Table 3 compares this section with the choral ending of the Alto Rhapsody, showing the distribution of the text, and the thematic, temporal, and tonal structures. In both sections the eight verses of text are sung mostly in the first fifteen measures, then the motives that set the verses 7 and 8 are repeated in three different keys, before text and music begin a varied repeat. Brahms preferred E♭ to A♭ for his second theme, but he and Liszt both move to B major for the first repetition of the second theme, and they remain in these secondary tonal areas only fleetingly.[19] Brahms's choice of keys for the second thematic group, E♭, B, and G, emphasizes the notes of the augmented triad that begins both works.[20] And as he leads to his final plagal cadence, Brahms also emulated Liszt's plagal closure, progressing from V^7 of IV to IV, to ♭VI (here Liszt used an augmented sixth containing both A♭ and E♭), and back to I.

Liszt provided a model for this choral section, but Brahms, as was his habit, deviated from it. Gender roles, for example, were flipped. His male chorus with alto solo, which sings of a loving, redemptive father, contrasts blatantly with Liszt's male chorus with tenor solo singing of the "eternal feminine." Yet although these two passages offer very different musical representations of salvation, Brahms's evocation of Liszt is not

_209_

---

[19] In the Liszt *Faust-Symphonie*, the section that I have marked as being in G in parentheses is essentially in C major but with an emphasis on the dominant, so that it also functions as the G-major phrase does in Brahms: it prepares the return of the first group.

[20] The theme begins successively on the notes G, D♯, and B. On Liszt's pioneering use of the augmented sixth chord in various contexts, see Todd, "The 'Unwelcome Guest' Regaled," 93–115.

TABLE 3

Similarities between the choral endings of Brahms, Alto
Rhapsody, and Liszt, *Eine Faust-Symphonie*

Liszt –

verses:	1–6	7–8	7–8	7–8	1–6	7–8	7–8	7–8	7–8	
motives:	I	II	II	II'	I	II	II''	II'''	III	
measures:	15	8	8	16	13	9	8	16	8 + 8	= 47 + 46 + 16
keys:	C,	A♭,	B,	(G),	C,	A♭,	B,	(G);	C	

Followed by male chorus singing Easter hymn

Brahms –

verses:	1–4	5–8	7–8		1–4	4		4	4	
motive:	Iab	II	II'	II''	Iab	II	Ib'	II	Ib'	Ib''
measures:	12	7	6	5	12	2	2	2	4	4 + 4 = 30 + 30
keys	C,	E♭,	B,	G,	C,	E♭,	C	A♭,	C	

merely a corrective. By alluding to Liszt's setting of "Das Ewig-weibliche" as he composed Goethe's prayer to the "Father of Love," Brahms gave common nineteenth-century views of male and female roles and capabilities a resounding endorsement. About the time that Liszt composed his *Faust-Symphonie* he (or perhaps actually Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein) wrote a review of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* in which he described Wagner's representation of gender differences:

> [T]he woman becomes . . . the revelatory agent of [man's] perfect harmony, the indispensable mediator of the victory, of his salvation. Her desire for devotion . . . and her atonement-worthy ability to love supplements and fulfills the gaps in man's ability to love. The sacrifice of the female heart, existing in highest love, resolves all dissonances in the fate of the man.[21]

[21] "Das Weib wird so das dritte ausgleichende Glied in der Natur des Mannes, das lösende Agens seiner vollkommenen Harmonie, die unentbehrliche Vermittlerin des Sieges, seiner Erlösung. Ihr Begehren nach Hingebung, welches nur durch das Begehren des Mannes nach Besitz zu befriedigen ist, und ihre sühnungsmächtige Liebesfähigkeit ergänzen und erfüllen die Lücken in der Liebesfähigkeit des Mannes. Das Opfer des weiblichen Herzens, in höchster Liebe bestehend, löst alle Dissonanzen im Geschick des Mannes; es infundiert ihm das versöhnliche Element, auf daß er des Glückes teilhaftig werde, durch das zarte geheime Band mit welchem das Gefühl Gedanken und Handlung verknüpft." Franz Liszt, "Der fliegende Holländer von Richard Wagner 1854," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Julius Kapp, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1910), 2:205. On this passage, see the discussion of Frank Hentschel, "Das 'Ewig-weibliche'–Liszt, Mahler und das bürgerliche Frauenbild," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 51 (1994): 275–76. According to Liszt's assistant Joseph Joachim Raff, Liszt's article was either written or cowritten by Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein; see James Deaville, "A 'Daily Diary of the Weimar Dream': Joachim Raff's Unpublished Letters to Doris Genast, 1852-1856," in *Liszt and his World: Proceedings of the International Liszt Conference held at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 20 - 23 May 1993*, ed. Michael Saffle (Stuyvestant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1998), Analecta Lisztiana, 1:188–89.

Liszt depicted men as having a flawed "ability to love," living lives of "dissonance," having "limited" and "darkened" thoughts, and being "misdirected." All of these are traits expressed either musically or textually in the opening C-minor segment of the Alto Rhapsody. Women alone are capable of mediating between the flawed state of men and an "unlimited, absolute feeling that blossoms with thoughts." That Brahms allowed an alto the preeminent role in the concluding C-major section—Wallace Berry called it a section of "diatonic purity"—is therefore fitting.[22] It is a woman who mediates, who reveals to man the path to salvation. As Lawrence Kramer observed in his stimulating analysis of the *Faust-Symphonie*, Faust's themes are all chromatic, whereas Gretchen's are diatonic, a pattern that Brahms mostly replicates.[23] Consequently, even though he substitutes an alto for Liszt's tenor, Brahms tacitly endorsed the conventional notions about women's powers. In the context of Brahms's describing the Alto Rhapsody as his "bridal song," Faust probably symbolized his recognition that he was doomed to strive for the unattainable.

James Webster has discussed the many ways in which Brahms adopted a Wagnerian voice at the start of the Alto Rhapsody. Webster cites in particular the influence of *Tristan und Isolde*, where "the Isolde action in act 1 likewise manifests a psychological progression from C minor . . . to C major."[24] Among the passages he finds Wagnerian is the cadential figure we considered at the outset because of the falling ninth, what he calls the "wide-leap motive," as well as other details. He compares what we have already seen in example 2b to what is visible in example 9a:

> This complex recalls the striking climax near the beginning of *Tristan*, when Isolde utters the fateful words '*Todgeweihtes Haupt! Todgeweihtes Herz!*' Although this passage has full harmony and is moderately loud, its second phrase . . . is similar, in the same key and register: a pre-dominant chord involving F♯ leads to a half cadence, while Isolde's wide-leap motive is almost identical.[25]

---

[22] Wallace Berry, "Text and Music in the Alto Rhapsody," *Journal of Music Theory* 27, no. 2 (1983): 239–53, esp. 245.

[23] Lawrence Kramer, "Liszt, Goethe, and the Discourse of Gender," in his *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 102–34, esp. 106. Among other insights, he noted the significance of Liszt's chorus and soloist being male, calling it the "most obvious element of male-centeredness" (130).

[24] James Webster, "The *Alto Rhapsody*: Psychology, Intertextuality, and Brahms's Artistic Development," in *Brahms Studies* 3, ed. David Brodbeck (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 19–46, esp. 23. An earlier version of this article appeared as "Der stilistische Ort der *Alt-Rhapsodie* und ihre Bedeutung für Brahms' künstlerische Entwicklung," in *Johannes Brahms: Quellen—Text—Rezeption—Interpretation: Internationaler Brahms-Kongress, Hamburg 1997*, ed. Friedhelm Krummacher, Michael Struck, et al. (Munich: G. Henle, 1999), 323–42, esp. 328.

[25] Ibid, 29–30.

EXAMPLE 9a. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, act 1, scene 2, mm. 320–26

EXAMPLE 9b. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, act 1, scene 3, mm. 1090–96

Webster identifies two other moments in the Alto Rhapsody that have convincing precedents in Wagner. He hears the Fate (or Death) motive from *Tristan* in measures 9–10 (compare ex. 6 and ex. 9b): "[T]he chromatic bass motive A♭–A–C, underneath ominous upward-sliding chromatics, almost quotes the so-called Fate motive in *Tristan*."[26] The example he provides for comparison is from act 1, where Isolde intends to drink Brangäne's death potion instead of the balsam of love. And, lastly, Webster calls attention to a dissonant dominant ninth chord that occurs in a contextually similar moment in act 1 of *Die Walküre*, where Siegmund describes his sad life (a dominant ninth chord occurs several times in Schumann's overture to his opera *Genoveva*; indeed, it begins with one).

The idea that the Alto Rhapsody was in some sense Wagnerian dates at least to Richard Specht's 1928 biography of Brahms.[27] Although both Webster and Specht identify a stylistic affinity with Wagner, neither of them wished to suggest that Brahms intended to allude to Wagner. However close Webster comes, he takes pains to distance himself from a hermeneutical interpretation of these similarities. He calls the "wide-leap motive" an "intertextual echo" rather than an allusion, a distinction that allows him to avoid the issue of whether or not Brahms intended these similarities, and thus also whether or not Brahms meant these resemblances to convey a textual meaning.

Yet in the context of discussing not one but several possible musical sources—not just Wagner but also Reichardt, Berlioz, Joachim, Liszt, and Gounod, as well as Schumann and Brahms himself—the combined influences suggest a different interpretation, one that the Alto Rhapsody fulfilled, a generic expectation of rhapsody that, however unfamiliar it is today, was common in the nineteenth century: a composition that stitched together fragments of other works. In the allusions and influences that I have discussed, two features stand out; the surprisingly large number of allusions in a relatively brief work, and the relative literalness of the allusions. A list of the moments I and others have identified indicates how many of the allusions employ the same pitches as their sources (see table 4).

* * *

The primary "formal" implication of rhapsody, whether with regard to music or to poetry, was that of a free-form work assembled from borrowed fragments. The notion that rhapsodies, like centos, are works made up of passages taken from other works was common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as in antiquity. Indeed, German

---

[26] Ibid, 29.
[27] Richard Specht, *Johannes Brahms: Leben und Werk eines deutschen Meisters* (Hellerau: Avalun-Verlag, 1928).

TABLE 4

List of allusions and musical references in Brahms,
Alto Rhapsody

Measure Number	Brahms text	Allusion or reference	Degree of similarity
Adagio			
1-5		Faust motive, Berlioz; Liszt; Gounod	varied
3-5		Joachim, *Hamlet* Overture	same pitches
9-10		Wagner, *Tristan*, Death/Fate motive	same pitches
12-17		Liszt, *Faust-Symphonie*, mm. 8-11	varied
Varied REPEAT:			
18-24	Aber abseits …	Faust motive, Berlioz; Liszt; Gounod	varied
22-24	verliert sich …	Joachim, *Hamlet* Overture	same pitches
28-29	hinter ihm	Wagner, *Tristan*, Death/Fate motive	same motive
34-39	das Gras …	*Brahms*, Requiem, mvt. 1 (Webster)	varied
40-47	die Oede …	Reichardt, "Rhapsodie"	varied
		Wagner, Tristan, "Todgeweihtes Herz"	varied cadence
Poco Andante			
48-58	Ach, wer heilet …	Reichardt, "Rhapsodie"	model, same pitches
60-61	Menschenhaß	*Brahms*, Requiem, mvt. 3 (at "Menschen")	same pitches
82-85	in ung'nügender Selbstsucht	Schumann, overture to *Genoveva*	same pitches
88-89		Wagner, *Die Walküre*, act 1, Siegmund also first chord of *Genoveva*	same chord
Varied REPEAT of mm. 48–72 with same text			
Adagio			
116-end		Liszt, *Faust-Symphonie*, finale	formal plan solo + male choir harp, triplet eighths
122-25	so erquicke	Schumann, *Das Paradies und die Peri* (at "Verlassener Jüngling")	same pitches
152-55	so erquicke	Schumann, *Das Paradies und die Peri*	same pitches
160-61 end	so erquicke	Schumann, *Das Paradies und die Peri* Liszt, *Faust-Symphonie*, finale	same pitches cadential pattern

dictionaries throughout the nineteenth century offer roughly the same definitions for rhapsody and cento, routinely using the terms *Stoppelgedicht* and *Stoppelwerk* (that is, a poem or work patched together from verses of other poems) as well as *Flickwerk* (a patched or cobbled work). The appendix presents definitions of these related words from 1748 to 1869, demonstrating that the conception of a work that is patched together takes precedence in more popular usages of the word over the definitions that are more familiar to us.

A brief survey of the range of sources, popular as well as specialized, will be useful. A German dictionary from 1811 of words borrowed from other languages (appendix, no. 1) defines rhapsody variously as a Stoppelgedicht, as a collection of writings that are not closely related, and as a work that has been patched together. In more detail, a grammatical dictionary from 1830 (appendix, no. 2) provides two definitions for Stoppelgedicht: a poem patched together from other works, that is, a cento; and a poem put together from "torn out pieces," that is, a rhapsody. That dictionary further describes a Stoppelwerk as a "learned work" patched together from several other works. Similarly, a German-English dictionary from 1843 (appendix, no. 5) considers rhapsody to be either a fragment or something patched together, like a Stoppelwerk or Flickwerk. This is a definition a German-English dictionary from 1868 retains, calling a Stoppelgedicht a "compiled or patched poem, rhapsody, cento" (appendix, no. 7). Other kinds of specialized works endorsed these definitions. In 1869, the year of the Alto Rhapsody, Lessing's book on the Laocoön was reissued in an edited version (appendix, no. 9) that explained cento for its readers as something "put together from any old rags, then especially a 'Stoppelgedicht,' which is assembled from the verses and words of the most different poets." Musical references include Carl Gollnick's *Handlexikon der Tonkunst* of 1857 (appendix, no. 6), which defines rhapsody both as a poem recited by a rhapsodist, especially individual snippets of Homeric poems, a torn-out piece, a fragment of a larger poem; and as a gathered Stoppelwerk with various components. A few years later the biographer of Schumann and Mendelssohn, August Reissmann, in his *Lehrbuch der musikalischen Komposition* from 1866 (appendix, no. 10) considers rhapsodies, like fables, to be of "no actual musical form" and describes them as being "often assembled with changing rhythms from a variety of related poems."

Coming closer to Brahms's sphere, and to the use of rhapsodies to celebrate weddings, is the music historian August Wilhelm Ambros, who in his 1864 *Geschichte der Musik* (appendix, no. 13) cited, like others in the nineteenth century, "Cento nuptialis" as an example of cento. This was a notorious wedding poem by Ausonius of Bordeaux, a fourth-century Roman poet. Ausonius created his poem almost entirely from

verses by Virgil, taken out of context and put together in a witty, obscene celebration of Emperor Gratian's wedding to the daughter of Constantius II.[28] Later poets used this as a model, but with serious rather than satirical intent. Wedding poems of this kind were generally called centos, although a popular *Reales Schul-Lexicon* from 1748 (appendix, no. 11) distinguished rhapsodies from centos partly based on the length of the citations. This source also suggests rhapsodies as a composition appropriate for a wedding: "To be sure, rhapsodies are all and every Carmina, or songs, that are cobbled together from something larger than centos, in order to make something out of them that may be suitable to sing at an auspicious occasion, like a wedding, birth, victory and the like."[29]

Was Brahms attempting a modern-day wedding cento? The variety and relative fidelity of his musical references and his assertion that the work was a "bridal song," whether his or that of the "Schumann countess," would seem to indicate that this is a reasonable conclusion. But the hesitation I have of asserting this more strongly grows out of the uncertainty about how quickly Brahms composed the work. If he indeed began composing the Alto Rhapsody in July 1869, as his account indicates, then I think this intent was there all along. Although such compositional speed is certainly possible, it strikes me as being out of character for Brahms, particularly in a work in which his style tilts so blatantly toward Liszt and Wagner—a work, moreover, that represents his first substantial setting of Goethe's poetry. The density and subtlety of the motivic interconnections, traits that have generated much analytical commentary, suggest an earlier beginning.[30]

* * *

A plausible alternative is to place the beginnings of the composition to June 1868, when Brahms visited Deiters and, by his own admission, encountered Reichardt's setting in a volume in Deiters's library. This would place the origins of the work in the same period as the *Schicksalslied*, op. 54, a choral-orchestral work that is known to owe its origin to a chance reading of a late eighteenth-century poem while visiting his friend Albert Dietrich. As Dietrich later recounted, Brahms discovered the poem when he arose early in the morning, and then that afternoon he had sat apart on the beach at Wilhelmshaven and sketched musical ideas.[31]

---

[28] See Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis, ed., *The Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 189.

[29] See appendix, no. 11. Hederich first published this lexicon in 1717. Salmen, *Geschichte der Rhapsodie*, 31, cites an edition from 1731.

[30] See Berry, "Text and Music in the Alto Rhapsody"; and Allen Forte, "Motive and Rhythmic Contour in the Alto Rhapsody," *Journal of Music Theory* 27, no. 2 (1983): 255-71.

[31] Albert Dietrich, *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms in Briefen besonders aus seiner Jugendzeit* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1898), 65. On the *Schicksalslied*, see esp. John Daverio, "The *Wechsel der Töne* in Brahms's *Schicksalslied*," in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46, no. 1 (1993): 84–113.

Again, as in the biographical accounts relating to the Rhapsody, Brahms connects life and text: as Daverio noted, Hyperion sang the verses of his *Schicksalslied* while gazing out at the sea, thinking of his beloved.[32]

The Alto Rhapsody and the *Schicksalslied* interact on several levels. Brahms chose three strophes from Hölderlin's two-volume poeticized novel *Hyperion*, which reverse the dramatic sequence of the Alto Rhapsody, proceeding from a vision of blissful life in the heavens to a contrasting description of mortal sorrows, of humans who "have no resting place," who vanish, fall, and suffer, like "water thrown from cliff to cliff." In the two compositions the three strophes divide in opposite ways. The *Schicksalslied* has two divine strophes set serenely leading to one anguished mortal strophe, while in the Alto Rhapsody Brahms reversed the proportions: two agonized strophes precede one comforting prayer to God. By combining the first two strophes in the *Schicksalslied* into one musical texture and then adding an instrumental postlude, Brahms created a three-part musical structure like that in the Rhapsody; and as in the Rhapsody, he composed a second section in C minor, and a third section in C major, an unusual closing key for the *Schicksalslied*, which begins in E♭ major.
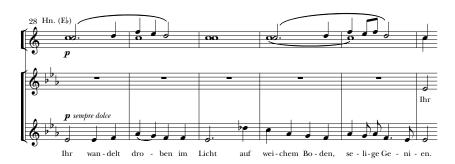
To judge from the way he set textual images to music, Brahms clearly appreciated the connections between Hölderlin's and Goethe's poems. The presence in both poems of a stringed instrument (Goethe mentions a psaltery, Hölderlin a female artist with fingers on "holy strings") suggested to Brahms in both of his works an accompaniment of pizzicato strings. Other shared images—both poems contain references to seeing, nature, and wandering—create contrasting meanings. Thus, for example, whereas Goethe prays that the mortal's "clouded glance" (umwölkten Blick) be opened, Hölderlin's heavenly spirits have "holy eyes" that gaze "in eternal clarity" (die seligen Augen Blicken in stiller Ewiger Klarheit). Despite this opposition of meaning, Brahms devised comparable textures with simultaneous duple and triple eighth notes playing against each other.[33]

Most significant, two of the principal motives and their variants correspond in the two works. As shown in example 10a, the first choral motive in the *Schicksalslied* relates to the cellos' first motive in the Alto Rhapsody (ex. 10b), although the two contrast strongly, even maximally, in

217

<hr/>

[32] Ibid., 93.

[33] And, given the melodic and contrapuntal aspects they share, it seems as though Brahms read Hölderlin's eternally blooming spirit ("Blühet ewig, Ihnen der Geist") as being comparable, oppositionally, to Goethe's recluse who forever "consumed his sense of self-worth in insatiable selfishness" (conclusion of stanza 2). Thus in both works, over bass lines that descend a minor seventh and then rise a fourth, the sopranos descend a diminished triad from A♭ (then F–D–C) to a phrase-ending, melodic 4–3 suspension. It may be appropriate that the line for the spirit world is an octave higher.

EXAMPLE 10a. Brahms, *Schicksalslied*, mm. 28–33, first choral entrance; French horn and choral altos

Ihr wan - delt dro - ben im Licht auf wei - chem Bo - den, se - li - ge Ge - ni - en.

EXAMPLE 10b. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 1–5

EXAMPLE 10c. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 48–49

Ach, wer hei - let

EXAMPLE 10d. Brahms, *Schicksalslied*, mm. 126–35

lei - den - den, lei - den-den Men - schen blind -

lings, blind - lings

character. While the motives share the same contours, in the *Schicksalslied* the hymn-like rhythmic squareness of the motive, its diatonicism, and the repetition at pitch in the French horns create a stability completely unlike the chromatic sinking that obscures a tonal center in the comparable passage of the Alto Rhapsody. Brahms further contrasts these ideas in their phrasing: the first choral phrase in the *Schicksalslied* comes immediately to rest, breathes, and then returns a second time to the tonic, whereas in

the Rhapsody the motive is clipped and elided with the next statement, demonstrating movement that is literally without rest or arrival. The opening texts support this opposition between stability and uncertainty: both speak of wanderers, but Hölderlin writes of the blessed celestial spirits who wander together in the light (Ihr wandelt droben im Licht / Auf weichem Boden, selige Genien), Goethe describes the solitary wanderer who loses his way in the brush (Aber Abseits, wer ist's? / Ins Gebüsch, verliert er sein Weg). Reflecting the difference between happy group and anguished individual, the first phrase of the *Schicksalslied* is sung by the altos of the choir, that of the Rhapsody by the alto soloist.
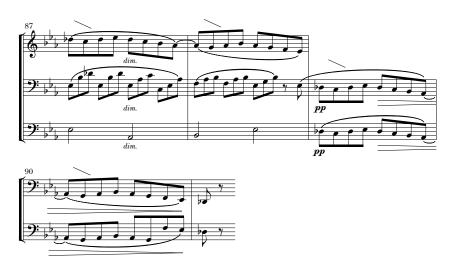
In both works these motives return with variations that bring them closer to the version that is primary in the other work. In the Rhapsody, as Max Kalbeck was the first to realize, the alto sings the verse "Ah, who can heal the pain" (Ach, wer heilet die Schmerzen) to a more diatonic version of the cello's motive.[34] This version appears with the pitches of the *Schicksalslied* (ex. 10c), as Daverio has observed.[35] The exact reverse of this transposition may occur in Brahms's setting of Hölderlin's third strophe, as the tone shifts with the change from heavenly to earthly terrain. Brahms perhaps portrays the suffering of mortals (emphasized textually in his melodramatic insertions of repetitions at "leidenden, leidenden Menschen, blindlings, blindlings, blindlings") by transposing a transformed version of the opening motive downward to begin on B♮, now on the seventh scale degree of C minor rather than on the tonic of E♭ major. After leaping up a minor seventh, the line begins its descent but gets lost on its way back to the tonic, illustrating the "blindness" lamented at this moment in the text and at the same time contrasting those doomed to walk in darkness with the depiction of those who wander in light (compare ex. 10a and ex. 10d).

One of the motivic links between the works lacks an accompanying text. Instead, it serves the same structural function in both, closing off the second of the three parts, just before leading in to C major. Shown in examples 11a and 11b, this descending figure begins in the violins and concludes two octaves lower played by the cellos and double basses. In the *Schicksalslied* the pattern repeats with beginnings on D♭ and A♭; in the Alto Rhapsody it begins on various pitches (also on A♭ and D♭ when it concludes the first A section of this part on mm. 69–72). Both in its half-step emphases and its function as a closing gesture, it is anticipated in skeletal form at the end of the opening period of the Alto Rhapsody (mm. 12–16, ex. 11c). In this shape, position, and function, the idea is one of those that Brahms appropriated from Liszt's *Faust-Symphonie* (ex. 11d). Liszt

[34] Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2:307–8.
[35] Daverio recognized this connection in "The *Wechsel der Töne* in Brahms's *Schicksalslied*," 111–12.

EXAMPLE 11a. Brahms, *Schicksalslied*, mm. 87–91; closing gesture of second stanza, beginning with violins and ending with cellos and basses

EXAMPLE 11b. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 108–12; closing gesture of second stanza, beginning with violas and ending with cellos and basses

EXAMPLE 11c. Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, mm. 12–16; closing gesture of opening period, violins

EXAMPLE 11d. Liszt, *Eine Faust-Symphonie*, mm. 8–11; closing gesture of opening period

groups his descending minor seconds around the notes of an augmented triad, thus in his work there are three pairs per octave rather than two.

The twin nature of the Alto Rhapsody and the *Schicksalslied* also encompasses the sources of the texts (both are composed on three stanzas excerpted from late eighteenth-century poems), their embrace of conventions and characters from antiquity, and numerous elements of the musical setting. The almost identical circumstances in which Brahms found these texts (summer 1868, in books owned by friends he happened to be visiting) also links them. It is worthwhile briefly to consider two other aspects of their composition: the unusual key scheme of the *Schicksalslied* and Brahms's long indecision about whether or not to include voices in that work's closing C-major section. These issues are possibly related. As Daverio has noted, the *Schicksalslied* is "the only one of his large-scale compositions to end in a key different from that in which it began."[36] Yet if the plan was all along to set two similar poems and link them musically, then perhaps the overall key scheme of the works in tandem should be considered. Together the six sections of the two works are not at all unusual tonally: C minor, C minor, C major, E♭ major, C minor and C major. And the internal emphasis on E♭ major in the last part of the Alto Rhapsody—which contains the verses about the "clouded glance"—could be construed as preparatory for the beginning of the *Schicksalslied.*

Internally, the key scheme and text of the *Schicksalslied* replicate those that Brahms originally intended for what would have been the fourth and fifth movements of his Requiem before he added the soprano solo (Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit). The fourth movement, in E♭ major like the beginning of the *Schicksalslied,* has a text that talks about heavenly dwellings and the happiness of those who live in them, as in the beginning of Hölderlin's poem. This was to have been followed by the C-minor setting of similar verses that tell of the contrasting situation here on earth. The verse from the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews—"Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt" (For here we have no continuing city)—is so close to the first verse of Hölderlin's passage—"Doch uns ist gegeben,

221

[36] Ibid., 84.

Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn" (But to us is given, at no abode to rest), that Brahms could hardly have missed the similarity with the composition that he had triumphantly premiered just a few months earlier, in April 1868. Hölderlin's verses and the passage in Hebrews differ crucially in the continuation of the first verse, with Hölderlin's leading only to despair and the biblical verse leading to an expression of hope: "[B]ut we seek one [a home] in the future." Brahms, in composing the Requiem, was able to cobble together biblical passages that allowed him to move logically from C minor to a life-affirming finish in C major. This patchwork approach to texts was for him a model of how he might conclude the *Schicksalslied*; indeed, he first thought to tack on a reprise of the optimistic opening verses.

Nevertheless, another aspect of the relationship between the Alto Rhapsody and the *Schicksalslied* looms as at least a partial explanation of why Brahms chose to begin the latter work in one key and end in another: both poems are excerpts. For the Alto Rhapsody, the fragmentary nature of its three strophes is proclaimed once in the subtitle, and again by beginning with a conjunction, "But" (Aber), that conjoins no preceding text to the poetry that follows. The possibility that Brahms composed the music for the Goethe fragment in such a way as to give the impression that it too had been excerpted from a larger work has, to my knowledge, never been suggested. Yet the extraordinarily chromatic and tonic-obscuring opening may well convey to listeners the sense that they have been dropped into the midst of a work that is already well under way. It is as if we enter the work in, say, the middle of a development section, in time to hear previously presented ideas being subjected to extreme transformations. In this regard the work is similar to the cadenza that begins Beethoven's Choral Fantasy, a free-form composition that grows out of the works that preceded it in its first performance. Just as Goethe's text exists independently of its beginning, so too—fictively—does the music.

For the *Schicksalslied*, also a setting of a fragment from a lengthy work, the decision to start in E♭ major rather than C major perhaps offered Brahms a comparable means of feigning a fragmentary identity for the music. The precedent of Reichardt's setting of the Rhapsody verses beginning in C minor and ending in E♭ major may also have influenced Brahms. The naively happy text precluded beginning in a minor mode or with tonal ambiguity; indeed, the first measures could not be more tonally secure. But if the initial phrases of the Alto Rhapsody have a developmental character, then the beginning of the *Schicksalslied* sounds like a culmination, like a well-prepared conclusion—which is what it becomes when it returns in the final measures, especially with the rolling timpani and the concluding plagal cadence. More pointedly, the

conclusion of the *Schicksalslied* specifically emulates the conclusion of the Alto Rhapsody in its modal mixing of ♭6 and ♮6 (the C♭ in m. 2 is cancelled in m. 4) and in the triplet pulse of the timpani on the tonic, which recalls the triplet pulse on the tonic that the French horns have in the last phrase of the Rhapsody.

The abandoned choral parts in the final section of the *Schicksalslied* would have communicated an even stronger echo of the Alto Rhapsody. The autograph full score of May 1871 shows that Brahms had considered having the choir sing a very simple chorale-like setting of the first two verses about the blessed spirits who wander "up there in the light" (Ihr wandelt droben im Licht / Auf weichem Boden, selige Genien). The vocal parts are very much like those that begin the Alto Rhapsody prayer: rhythmically square, homophonic writing that uses the same pitches in the upper voice but one (c''–g'–f'–e'–a''–g' in the Alto Rhapsody; c''–g'–f–a''–g'–f'–e' in the *Schicksalslied*).[37] Additionally, the last eight measures would have replicated the same sequence of forces and musical events: over a low tonic C pedal, a male chorus would have sung alone for two measures with one part descending from A to A♭ to G (after which the basses quickly supplied a low A♮), and then, as they continued for three more measures to the end, the women's voices entered, as does the alto soloist in the Rhapsody, with the plagal A to A♭ to G repeating once more. In both works, the descent through the A♭ to G sounds against a chromatic inflection in the uppermost voice that suggests an augmented sixth chord: in the Alto Rhapsody, D♯ resolves to E, in the *Schicksalslied*, C♯ resolves to D.

Brahms ultimately rejected the notion that the choir should repeat the earlier verses at the end, explaining that Hölderlin's poem "is not the kind of text to which one can cobble something on [*anflicken*]."[38] His qualms did not, however, prevent him from patching on a seemingly unmotivated reprise of the opening instrumental music, which even without words bewildered listeners struggling to understand what Brahms's conciliatory ending contributed to Hölderlin's despairing text.[39] Another possibility, though, is that Brahms omitted the choral ending to lessen the resemblance between *Schicksalslied* and the Alto Rhapsody. The repetition of the opening line may have also too readily called to mind the choral coda that Liszt tagged on to his *Faust-Symphonie*, where the *chorus mysticus* repeats Goethe's verse about the eternal feminine drawing

223

[37] Daverio provides a transcription of these parts in "The *Wechsel der Töne* in Brahms's *Schicksalslied*," 88–89.

[38] Ibid., 90, quoting a letter of 25 December 1871. I substitute *cobble* for *tack* in the translation, because *flicken*, like *stoppeln*, is a verb that one encounters in discussions of rhapsody.

[39] Ibid., 87-90. Daverio surveys the work's reception, which remains divided about what exactly Brahms attempted to convey by following Hölderlin's bleak views of the real world with the orchestral recall of the ideal world.

us upward: "Das Ewig-weibliche zieht uns hinan!" When Brahms had a chance to conduct the *Schicksalslied* in Karlsruhe in October 1871, he provided a Faustian setting for his new work by interpolating it between portions of Schumann's *Scenen aus Goethe's Faust*.[40] The scene in the garden, in which Faust woos Margaret, opened the concert, and the final choral movement closed it, repeating over and over, "Das Ewig-weibliche zieht uns hinan!"[41]

Motivically the reprise of the opening music was arguably more important for completing a musical journey that began in the Alto Rhapsody than it was for mitigating Hölderlin's pessimism. That is because of another occurrence of the Faust motive tucked into the conclusion of the *Schicksalslied*'s introduction, nine and ten measures before the altos enter with the clear diatonic statement of the Faust motive. Examples 12a and 12b show this introductory statement along with the choral entrance, which was accompanied by E♭ horns. The first horn maintains the rhythm that the motive had at the outset of the Alto Rhapsody. But only by bringing this introduction back in C major in the finale, does the motive appear at a pitch level (beginning on C) that resolves the motive (beginning on B) in the Alto Rhapsody (ex. 12c). Moreover, in these final measures, for whatever poetic purposes he may have had in mind, Brahms links this diatonic version of the Faust motive to Tristan's descending sixth fate (or death) motive, G♯–A–C, which had also been heard in the introduction of the Alto Rhapsody (mm. 9 and 10), but there immediately *following* the Faust motives.

Had Julie Schumann not pulled the domestic rug out from under Brahms by announcing her wedding when she did, perhaps what he initially intended was a double rhapsody (as he soon enough did in his piano rhapsodies op. 79, nos. 1 and 2), composing musically related settings for two complementary poetic excerpts. Since in the summer of 1869 he
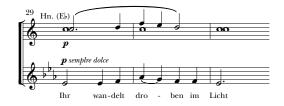
[40] Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2:371–72. The *Schicksalslied* came between Schumann's Scene in the garden and two songs by Schubert that Brahms had orchestrated ("Greisengesang" on a text by Rückert and "Geheimes" by Goethe). The concert then ended with Schumann's concluding scene from his *Faust Szenen*.

[41] Schumann's revised chorus (1847) influenced Liszt's choral ending in a way that Brahms references at the end of the *Schicksalslied*: all three have the same G-major dominant ninth chord as they set the final word of text (Liszt and Schumann continue with repetitions of the text set to different music). All have the same voice leading: violins and sopranos move downward by step in parallel thirds beginning on the notes a″ and f′, with *divisi* violas and middle voices moving upward in contrary motion also in parallel thirds. Liszt has this as the tenor reaches "hinan" two measures before rehearsal letter "E"; Schumann as the sopranos reach "hinan" eleven measures before the "Nach und nach schneller" conclusion; and Brahms, at what would have been the last word, "Genien," in m. 394. Liszt had conducted Schumann's *Faust-Scenen* in Weimar in 1849; see "From the Biographer's Workshop: Lina Ramann's Questionnaire's to Liszt," with introduction and annotations by Rena Charnin Mueller, trans. Susan Hohl, in *Franz Liszt and His World*, ed. Christopher Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 421n1.

EXAMPLE 12a. Brahms, *Schicksalslied*, mm. 19-22; violins 1, diatonic version of the Faust motive

EXAMPLE 12b. Brahms, *Schicksalslied*, mm. 29–31; violins 1

EXAMPLE 12c. Brahms, *Schicksalslied*, mm. 396–99; violins 1

225

had not yet developed his sketches for the *Schicksalslied*, he wrapped up what he could and presented the fragment that he had completed as his wedding "gift." When he ultimately finished the *Schicksalslied* (after the *Triumphlied*), he did what he had already done six times in his career: he published these two kindred works with successive opus numbers, opp. 53 and 54. Throughout his career he occasionally piggybacked works of similar instrumentation and genre. In this practice he—and at this point in the nineteenth century, he far more than anyone else—followed Beethoven, as demonstrated in table 5. Schumann was not a model in this regard, and if Mendelssohn followed the practice early in his career, he abandoned it after publishing the Hebrides Overture and *Meerestille und glückliche Fahrt* as opp. 26 and 27.[42] Not counting the opus numbers of lieder publications, Beethoven had fourteen pairings or groupings of opus numbers to Brahms's thirteen. If Brahms shared the opinion advanced by Raymond Knapp that for Beethoven these pairings and

---

[42] These two overtures were published in 1832, which means that Mendelssohn withheld op. 27 for four years until the Hebrides Overture was ready to be published. Prior to that, Mendelssohn had published three piano quartets as opp. 1–3, two string quartets as opp. 12–13, two piano fantasies as opp. 15–16, and two orchestral overtures as opp. 26–27. This list should also include op. 19a (six songs) and op. 19b (six songs without words).

groupings were motivated on occasion by shared musical ideas, then the kind of intertextual connections I suggest for Brahms's two choral works may reflect his emulation of Beethoven.[43] The likelihood that Brahms conceived the *Schicksalslied* as a companion choral rhapsody— and, as such, a work assembled from fragments of other works—would explain the segmented character with its juxtaposition of differing motivic and melodic phrases. This trait puzzled Daverio. As he wrote about the introduction of the work, "[T]he precise nature of the features governing its coherence are difficult to grasp. . . . Conceived as an apparently loose network of four lyric phrases . . . the passage demonstrates an at best elusive logic."[44]

Brahms's two choral-orchestral works represent a broader Romantic artistic phenomenon, exemplifying what Kramer has termed "expressive doubling." By this he refers to instances in which paintings, books, poems, or, as in this instance, musical works present varied or alternate versions of a pattern in which "one term represents a freer, happier, or more enlightened condition than the other. Or, to be more exact, one term represents the transposition of the other to a higher or deeper plane, a more brilliant or profound register."[45] He cites as an example E. T. A. Hoffman's *The Golden Pot* (1813), a novella "based on the conjunction and opposition of two ideal worlds. One is a bourgeois paradise identified with Biedermeier Dresden; the other is an ideal realm of poetry and erotic bliss that Hoffmann calls Atlantis." An example from art is J. M. W. Turner's pairing of two paintings from 1843, *Shade and Darkness* and *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory)*, the former emphasizing dark colors and subtitled *The Evening of the Deluge*, the other in bright reddish tones and subtitled *The Morning after the Deluge—Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*. Brahms's opposition of mortal suffering and divine happiness fits this pattern easily.

Among other traits of expressive doublings, two are relevant for the succession of music and texts that Brahms composed in opp. 53 and 54. First, "the initial term of an expressive doubling is always presented as a totality." It is complete by itself, as is for that matter the supplementary term. Together, "the effect is compelling, hermeneutically provocative; each term energizes the other."[46] Second, the succession of poetic worlds typically proceeds "from low to high in the sphere of value."[47] Although,

---

[43] Brahms had not anticipated composing the *Triumphlied*, but he undertook the work to celebrate the founding of the first German Reich. On the possibility that Beethoven's pairings had musical significance, see Raymond Knapp, "A Tale of Two Symphonies: Converging Narratives of Divine Reconciliation in Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 2 (2000): 291–343.

[44] Daverio, "The *Wechsel der Töne* in Brahms's *Schicksalslied*," 104.

[45] Kramer, "Beethoven's Two-Movement Piano Sonatas and the Utopia of Romantic Esthetics," 30.

[46] Ibid., 24.

[47] Ibid., 37.

TABLE 5

Successive opus numbers for works composed by Beethoven and Brahms in the same genre and for the same musical forces. Works in boldface are those for which Brahms chose an opus number that Beethoven had previously used for a pair or group of works. This list omits lieder for singer and piano accompaniment

Opus no.	Beethoven's opus pairs and groups	Brahms's opus pairs and groups
1-2		Piano Sonatas
6-7	Piano Sonatas	
8-9	String Trios	
12-13		Sacred works for choir and instruments
13-14	Piano Sonatas	
23-24	**Violin Sonatas**	**Piano Variations**
25-26		Piano Quartets
26-28	Piano Sonatas	
29-30		Sacred choral works
34-35	Piano Variations	
41-42		Works for unaccompanied chorus
53-54	**Piano Sonatas**	
53-55		**Alto Rhapsody,** *Schicksalslied*, *Triumphlied*
64-65		Vocal quartets
67-68	Symphonies 5 and 6	
78-79	Piano Sonatas	
80-81		Overtures (Academic Festival, Tragic)
85-86	Oratorio and Mass	
92-93	Symphonies 7 and 8	
99-100		Cello Sonata, Violin Sonata
109-10		**Works for unaccompanied chorus**
109-11	**Piano Sonatas**	
114-15		Clarinet Trio, Clarinet Quintet
116-19		Sets of Piano Pieces
121-22	*Opferlied* and *Bundeslied*	
130-35	String Quartets	

internally, the succession of Hölderlin's verses in the *Schicksalslied* reverses this normative pattern (following divine with mortal), Brahms effectively reclaims the priority of the divine world in his major-mode final section. And although Brahms found sufficient aesthetic justification for this within the internal dynamic of the *Schicksalslied*, his ability to compose Hölderlin's verses as an expressive double of the Alto Rhapsody

virtually required the C-major reprise of the divine music, with or with-out the choral ending. The optimistic conclusion allows the entirety of the *Schicksalslied* to provide an answer to the prayer that concludes the Alto Rhapsody.

Three other works that Brahms composed about this same time—the two sets of *Liebeslieder* waltzes and the Hungarian Dances (1869)—show connections to the Alto Rhapsody, elements of rhapsody, or both. Moreover, the *Liebeslieder*, op. 52 (1868–69), and the *Neue Liebeslieder*, op. 65 (1869–74), also interact as expressive doubles of one another, the first setting poems about playful and light-hearted love, the second fo-cusing on darker, wearier, even cynical poems about love gone wrong. The connection of the op. 52 set of eighteen waltzes to the Alto Rhap-sody is biographical. When Brahms offered his publisher Simrock the Alto Rhapsody, he ironically called it a "Postlude to the Composer's Love Songs, op. 52."[48] Whereas the op. 52 settings of poems published by Georg Friedrich Daumer share no musical links with op. 53, the *Neue Liebeslieder* do; they conclude with an overt quotation that was disclosed already by Kalbeck. After setting thirty-two poems from Daumer's *Poly-dora* in opp. 52 and 65, Brahms chose to end the second group with a text of Goethe's, "Nun, ihr Musen, genug!" (Now, you Muses, enough!). Brahms entitled this song simply "Zum Schluss," which may best be trans-lated as the speaker's rhetorical marker "in conclusion." The bass of the piano plays an ostinato made up of the pitches that the soloist in the Alto Rhapsody used to begin her C-major prayer to the Father of Love, "Ist auf deinem Psalter." Because the only other composer to have set these verses was Johann Friedrich Reichardt, Brahms's choice of this text con-stitutes yet another, more subtle, link to the Alto Rhapsody. Once again Reichardt had set a fragmentary text by Goethe, entitling the song "Aus Alexis und Dora" (1809) to identify his source. Reichardt had excerpted the last four verses of a 158-verse elegy about a Greek youth who fell deeply in love just as he was boarding a ship to sail away forever.[49]

The rhapsodic element of the two sets of Brahms's *Liebeslieder* derives in part from the nature of Daumer's texts. Daumer published his col-lection *Polydora, ein weltpoetisches Liederbuch* in 1855, having gathered to-gether poems from many different countries and rewritten them in free translations, relying heavily on earlier translations. From this two-volume collection, Brahms selected poems from Poland, Russia, and Hungary

---

[48] "Postludium zu des Verfassers Liebesliedern, op. 52." See Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2:298–99; and *Johannes Brahms, Life and Letters*, 396.

[49] Brahms's title "Zum Schluss" cues another allusion: after the brief introduction, the first motive of the soprano, with the text "Vergebens strebt ihr zu schildern," is essentially a quotation from another ending song, Robert Schumann's ironic Shakespearean love song "Schlusslied des Narren" with which Schumann began his year of lieder composition. See Reynolds, *Motives for Allusion*, 72–75.

for the first set, and from Poland, Russia, Latvia, Serbia, Sicily, Spain, Malaya, Persia, and Turkey for the second, composing them for various combinations of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. This sort of miscellaneous collection brought together by type is the aspect of rhapsody better translated into German as Stoppelwerk rather than Stoppelgedicht (appendix, no. 2), or the kind of rhapsody defined by Carl Gollnick in his *Handlexikon der Tonkunst*, as a *Sammel-Stoppelwerk* (appendix, no. 6), or simply as "rhapsody" when defined as "a collection of stories, poems, representations, etc., that are enlivened by one spirit, though not necessarily in connection with each other."[50] Here again, Liszt provided a precedent. This is exactly the loose but focused collection he intended in his Hungarian Rhapsodies. Ultimately he wrote nineteen in all, though by the time Brahms composed the *Liebeslieder* and the Hungarian Dances, Liszt had published fifteen, mostly in 1853. Liszt described his intentions for this genre in his book *Die Zigeuner und ihre Musik in Ungarn* (1861), in his chapter on Hungarian rhapsodies:

> [T]he conviction grew in us that these splintered, scattered melodies could be the errant, fluttering, rambling parts of a large compendium [eines grossen Ganzen], that they would meet fully the conditions for the creation of a harmonious collection [Gesammtheit]. . . . From this new point of view onward, we needed to observe that the almost innumerable individual pieces of gypsy music—such as odes, dithyrambs, elegies, ballades, idylls, ghazals, distichs, war hymns, funeral songs, love songs and drinking rhymes—can be reassembled into a homogeneous body, into a complete work, divided by kind so that each song would be at the same time total and partial, capable of being separated and enjoyed apart and independent of the rest, yet all still linked to the rest by the identity of style, the uniformity of inspiration, the unity of form.[51]

229

---

[50] As quoted in Walter Salmen, *Geschichte der Rhapsodie*, 7 (see appendix, no. 4, for the full citation). Regarding Daumer's translations of Sándor Petöfi's Hungarian poetry as used in Brahms's *Liebeslieder*, see R. Boros, "Petöfi in der Vertonung von Brahms," *Studia musicological academiae scientiarum hungaricae* 8 (1966): 391–400.

[51] "Und mitten in diesen Bestrebungen erwuchs die Überzeugung in uns, dass diese zerstückten, zerstreuten Melodien die irrenden, flatternden, schweifenden Theile eines grossen Ganzen seien, dass sie den Bedingungen zur Herstellung einer harmonischen Gesammtheit völlig entsprächen. . . . Von diesem Gesichtspunkt aus mussten wir bald wahrnehmen, dass die fast unzähligen einzelnen Stücke der Zigeunermusik sich wie Oden, Dithyramben, Elegien, Balladen, Idyllen, Ghaselen, Distichen, Kriegshymnen, Grabgesänge, Liebeslieder und Trinkreime zu einem homogenen Körper, zu einem vollständigen Werke vereinigen liessen, welches derartig eingetheilt wäre, dass jeder Gesang zugleich ein Ganzes und ein Theil bildete, den man lostrennen und an und für sich, ohne Rücksicht auf das Ganze betrachten und geniessen könnte, der aber dennoch durch die enge Verwandschaft des Stoffes, die Gleichheit seines inner Wesens, die Einheit der Gestaltung zum Ganzen gehören würde." Franz Liszt, *Die Zigeuner und ihre Musik in Ungarn*, trans. [from the French] Peter Cornelius (Pesth: Gustav Heckenast, 1861), 255.

Brahms certainly knew Liszt's Rhapsodies, and he emulated them by composing his own Hungarian Dances (1869), a set of ten dances for piano four hands published in two books without opus number. None of the dances was original; like Liszt's, they were gathered and artfully arranged.

There are doubtless many reasons why Daumer was Brahms's favorite poet for song texts. But one of them may well be that Daumer shared with Brahms a conviction that older works are as important for creativity as contemporary sources, and that creativity is inherently and unavoidably collaborative. In the foreword to *Polydora*, he explained his views of working with texts from other authors, in this case both the original texts in other languages and the translations from which he derived his versions of the texts:

> The genius of poesy is the same everywhere; it is a collective human possession, according to which concepts of "mine" and "yours" are not at all sharply circumscribed, as it might seem to superficial observation. One individual can continue and complete something that was already begun by another and brought to a certain level of development, and both are then perceived as one and the same poetic subject. It can apply in this way communally to one poetic work, not only for different individuals but also for different generations and periods of folk and human history.[52]

The distinction of "mine" and "yours" obviously mattered to Brahms, as we can gather from the fact that certain works of his, like the Hungarian Dances, appeared without opus numbers, while most others, like the *Liebeslieder*, were numbered. But to the extent that rhapsodizing involved working with ideas that had already been published, Brahms certainly appreciated the irrelevance of whether the fragments that he incorporated came from a composer who was from his generation or an earlier one. Although this is true of allusion and quotation in general, the density of the allusive material in the Alto Rhapsody is greater than any I

---

[52] "Der Genius der Poesie ist überall derselbe; er is ein gemeinsam menschliches Eigenthum, wobei das Mein und Dein überhaubt nicht so scharf abzugrenzen ist, als es oberflächlicher Betrachtung erscheinen mag; derselbe kann in einem Individuum fortsetzen und vollenden, was er in einem anderen bereits begonnen und bis zu einem gewissen Punkte der Ausführung gebracht, und die Beiden sind dann nur als ein und dasselbe dichterische Subjekt zu betrachten; es können sich auf diese Weise nicht nur verschiedene Individuen, sondern auch verschiedene Generationen und Perioden der Volks- und Menschengeschichte gemeinschaftlich an einem poetischen Werke bethätigen." Georg Friedrich Daumer, *Polydora, ein weltpoetisches Liederbuch*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt-am-Main: Literarische Anstalt, 1855), 1:xviii. See also Sebastian Donat, "Weltliteratur zwischen geistigem Handelsverkehr und Markenpiraterie: Georg Friedrich Daumers Hafis-Dichtung und ihre russische Rezeption," in *Geistiger Handelsverkehr: Komparatistische Aspekte der Goethezeit*, ed. Anne Bohnenkamp and Matias Martinez (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2008), 149–72, esp. 158.

have encountered elsewhere. There, and also in the thematic collections of the *Liebeslieder* and Hungarian Dances, Brahms is the rhapsodist, the "Zusammenstoppler," the maker of a musical Stoppelgedicht or Stoppel-werk. He is the "com-poser," a word the roots of which are clearer in the German synonym *zusammen-stellen*, or "put together." Wagner expounded pejoratively on this etymology in *On Poetry and Composition* (1879), in one of his most petulant, sarcastic swipes at Brahms: "Compose, compose, even if nothing occurs to you! Why is it called 'composing'—putting together—if a bit of invention should also be necessary?"[53]

Is this degree of incorporating external sources also evident in Brahms's three rhapsodies for piano op. 79, nos. 1 and 2, and op. 119, no. 4? The answer to that question will have to wait for another study, although, as regards the two op. 79 pieces, I think the answer is "no." Brahms's prolonged uncertainty about what to call them suggests a different inception. Kalbeck noted that Brahms originally titled them "Capriccio" in the manuscript but came to think that, after Liszt, piano rhapsodies and Hungarian character, music with "Magyarizing inflections" (Magyarisierende Wendungen) belong together.[54] Despite Kalbeck's impression that the themes and phrases in the op. 79 rhapsodies were subjected to fragmentary elaborations, these two pieces seem to be rhapsodies more by virtue of national type than by poetic pedigree.

* * *

The pervasive musical and poetic connections of the Alto Rhapsody and the *Schicksalslied*, together with Dietrich's account of the inspired composer immediately sketching initial ideas for his setting of the Hölderlin text, have implications for the question of when Brahms's first musical thoughts about the Alto Rhapsody occurred. Rather than suggesting a scenario in which he impetuously seized on Goethe's poem and Reichardt's prototype in shocked reaction to Julie Schumann's engagement, the musical and textual interactions of the Rhapsody and the *Schicksalslied* suggest that Brahms had decided to set the Goethe text some time before Julie Schumann's announcement and had, perhaps in a process similar to that following his encounter with the Hölderlin poem, already begun sketching initial ideas for the Rhapsody. A gestation period of a year and a few months seems more credible for the Alto Rhapsody than one of two to three months. It allows time for the gathering of musical-textual sources to

[53] "Komponiert, komponiert, wenn euch eben auch gar nichts einfällt! Wozu heißt es 'komponieren'—zusammenstellen—wenn auch noch Erfindung dazu nötig sein sollte?" Wagner, "Über das Dichten und Komponieren" (1879), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10:148.

[54] In the aftermath of Liszt Rhapsodies, there are those who believe that "eine Klavier-Rhapsodie müsse immer etwas Ungarisches haben"; see Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 3:202–3 and 203, n1.

provide appropriate allusive material for setting Goethe's text and also the means to fulfill the generic requirements of a rhapsody. Having already started to compose a Faustian rhapsody that would express the longings of a solitary bachelor in his mid-thirties for someone who might provide order and comfort in his life—and from all indications this person was Julie Schumann—Brahms had to react quickly to the unexpected wedding; the event would have provided a new and enriching context for his work and doubtless also an intensified impetus to finish. The altered circumstances might also explain why in one instance he called this work "his" wedding song, and in another, Julie's.

Brahms's diverse influences and musical sources in the 1860s range from Bach to Wagner and from Hungarian dances to elevated sacred styles such as those evident in the German Requiem; the sources that influenced the Alto Rhapsody include such antithetical composers as Reichardt and Wagner, Schumann and Liszt. The Alto Rhapsody, despite its immediate success and unbroken popularity, can be heard as a prime example of what Nietzsche, echoing Wagner's criticism, saw as one of Brahms's main weaknesses: his ability to adopt the musical styles of other composers. In *The Case of Wagner* (1888), Nietzsche lampooned Brahms in the harshest terms:

> His is the melancholy of impotence; he does *not* create out of an abundance, he *languishes* for abundance. If we discount what he imitates, what he borrows from great old or exotic-modern styles—he is a master of imitation—what remains as specifically his is *yearning*.[55]

But this imitative facility was not a superficial inclination to dabble, or mimic; it was rather an ability to compose in a style open to a broad spectrum of currently fashionable musical voices, both historical and modern. As Schumann recognized at their earliest meeting, this ability was there from the start. In his essay "Neue Bahnen," Schumann praised young Brahms for the number of works he had already written in various genres and for the variety of styles that these represented. He named sonatas, lieder, piano pieces, violin sonatas, and string quartets, "each so diverse from the others, that each seemed to spring forth from a different source."[56] Brahms was evidently open to diverse musical sources even before he came to the Schumanns in 1853. Whereas Nietzsche derided him as a "master of imitation," Schumann marveled at the richness of his stylistic vocabulary.

[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 187–88. See also David Thatcher, "Nietzsche and Brahms: A Forgotten Relationship," *Music & Letters* 54, no. 3 (1973): 276.

[56] "und jedes so abweichend vom andern, daß sie jedes verschiedenen Quellen zu entströmen schienen"; Robert Schumann, "Neue Bahnen," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 39, no. 18 (28 October 1853).

Early influences on Brahms included Marschner and Liszt, as well as Beethoven. Walter Frisch has demonstrated the ways in which Brahms's Piano Sonata in F minor, op. 5, derives its use of thematic transformation from Liszt's B-minor Piano Sonata.[57] Under the spell of both Schumanns, Brahms spent much of the next decade turning to a more focused group of compositional models: Beethoven, Schumann, and Mendelssohn, as well as Schubert and Bach. The years between his arrival at the Schumanns in 1853 and his arrival in Vienna in 1862 might therefore be understood as years in which he had restricted what was otherwise his natural inclination. Once settled in Vienna, another compositional link to Liszt soon emerged, evidently spurred by his having become a friend of Liszt's protégé Carl Taussig. His title "Studien für Pianoforte: Variationen über ein Thema von Paganini," op. 35, from 1862–63, proclaims its descent from similar sets by Schumann and Liszt. Brahms's title for these "studies," which he published as two books, foregrounded the links to Liszt's setting of the same theme, the *Grande Étude de Paganini*, no. 6, in A minor, and to Schumann's *Studien für das Pianoforte nach Capricen von Paganini*, op. 3. Some years later, Liszt commented on the resemblance of Brahms's music to his own: "I am glad that my variations were of service to Brahms when he composed his; it gives me great pleasure."[58] These are also the years when musical references to Wagner begin. Kalbeck had already noted the possible influence of *Tristan,* which the Vienna Opera had rehearsed in March 1863, on *Rinaldo* (1863), and Brahms's song *Die Mainacht* (1866) has been called "Tristanesque" in the middle section at the text "Aber ich wende mich, suche dunklere Schatten" (But I turn away, seek darker shadows).[59] The influence of Liszt on the Alto Rhapsody, while unexpected, has precedents both in Brahms's recent and in his more distant past.

There are two biographical implications of Brahms's having conceived the Alto Rhapsody and the *Schicksalslied* together. One, which I am reluctant to pursue, involves his choice of texts and the significance of the message that they create together on his evolving personal fantasy of a life with Julie Schumann. The other deals with his aspirations as a composer and his attempt to carve a path that would be distinct from

[57] Walter Frisch, *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 47–49. See also Jürgen Schläder, "Zur Funktion der Variantentechnik in den Klaviersonaten f-moll von Johannes Brahms und h-moll von Franz Liszt," *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* 7 (1984): 171–97. Brahms has long been understood to quote Marschner's overture to *Hans Heiling* in his E♭-minor Scherzo, op. 4. See for instance Michael Musgrave, *The Music of Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 16–17.

[58] Quoted in Alan Walker, *Reflections on Liszt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 65n16.

[59] See Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2:68–69; and Hugh Wood, "A Photograph of Brahms," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 271.

those of his closest models. Like Wagner, he had thus far avoided composing symphonies; and, like Wagner, he had devoted himself to setting texts. About the time Brahms finished composing the Alto Rhapsody, Wagner began writing the essay "On Conducting," a vitriolic screed in which he ridiculed Brahms as the guardian of musical chastity and one for whom opera "beckons in the distance like a forlorn bride."[60] But by 1869, when this essay was published, and in the years to follow, Brahms was enjoying sustained success as a composer of nonoperatic vocal music. With the Alto Rhapsody (his bridal song), the *Schicksalslied*, the two collections of *Liebeslieder*, and the two volumes of Hungarian Dances for piano, Brahms was exploring the various musical manifestations of rhapsody; in so doing he appears to have laid claim to a new mantel, that of rhapsodist. This was an identity that encompassed his love of poetry, his reverence for the past, his deft ability to allude and emulate, his bent for "Magyarizing," and even his image as a wanderer fated to stand apart. As a reader of texts, Brahms seems to have been acutely sensitive to which texts would work together. His ability to draw out the common elements of his chosen poems by Goethe and Daumer (whether to emphasize likeness or contrast) is not constrained by the limits of an opus. Whatever his initial ideas were for "com-posing" these texts, the two poems sparked works that are remarkable in part for the ways in which they complete each other.

My discussion has of necessity had two distinct but related parts: an interpretation of the Alto Rhapsody in light of nineteenth-century conceptions of rhapsody that suggests that Brahms breached compositional boundaries to quote from and allude to works by other composers; and a proposal, based on musical analysis and biographical accounts, that he composed the Alto Rhapsody and the *Schicksalslied* as "expressive doubles" of each other. The latter argument has focused on the transformation of motivic, harmonic, and shared musical-textual details rather than on allusion and quotation, to posit that Brahms wove the threads of one work through the fabric of the other. But as Daumer observed, since "concepts of 'mine' and 'yours' are not at all sharply circumscribed," there is little to distinguish allusions to compositions by other composers from the sharing of ideas between two works by the same composer. The allure of rhapsodizing was the license to appropriate worthy ideas, poetic and musical, from wherever they could be found.

University of California, Davis

---

[60] Richard Wagner, *On Conducting (Über das Dirigieren): A Treatise on Style in the Execution of Classical Music*, trans. Edward Dannreuther, 2nd ed. (London: W. Reeves, 1897), 87.

ABSTRACT

This article presents two new hypotheses about Brahms's Alto Rhapsody, op. 53 (1869), a work Brahms referred to as his "bridal song." Consulting a range of nineteenth-century sources, I explore the implications of rhapsody as a genre for this composition and argue that they include the classical convention of rhapsody as a poetic *cento*, or *Stoppelgedicht*. Centos, poems made up of quotations from earlier works, were often written for important events such as weddings; examples include the *Cento nuptialis*, which was discussed, among others, by August Wilhelm Ambros in his *Geschichte der Musik* (1864). Brahms's musical sources include Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and several works based on Goethe's *Faust*, including, especially, Liszt's *Faust–Symphonie*.

My second hypothesis is that Brahms likely composed his *Schicksalslied*, op. 54, as a companion piece to the Alto Rhapsody. The two pieces respond to each other through several shared musical and textual correspondences. They deal in paired ways with the division between mortal suffering and otherworldly grace, and they embrace conventions and characters from antiquity. Invoking a concept proposed by Lawrence Kramer, I interpret these works as "expressive doubles" of each other. My investigation suggests that Brahms probably began work on the Rhapsody at least a year earlier than previously thought.

Keywords: Alto Rhapsody, Johannes Brahms, Faust, Franz Liszt, rhapsody, Schicksalslied

Appendix

Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Definitions of Rhapsody, *Stoppelwerk*, *Flickwerk*, and *Cento*. The terms being defined are presented in boldface, wherever they appear in the quoted excerpt.

1. Johann Conrad Schweizer, ed., *Wörterbuch zur Erklärung fremder, aus andern Sprachen in die Deutsche aufgenommener Wörter und Redensarten* (Zurich: Orell, Füßli und Co., 1811), 736.

   Rhapsodie (griech.)—**Stoppelgedicht**; eine Sammlung von schriftlichen Aufsätzen, welch unter sich in keiner nähern Verbindung stehen; ein zusammengestoppeltes Werk.

2. *Grammatisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, ed. Eucharius Ferdinand Christian Oertel, 2 vols. (Munich: E. A. Fleischmann, 1830), 2:69.

   Stoppelgedicht, 1) eine aus andern Werken zusammengestoppeltes Gedicht, **Cento**, 2) ein aus abgerissenen Stücken zusammengesetztes Gedicht, **Rhapsodie**.

   Stoppelwerk, ein aus mehreren anderen Werken zusammengestoppeltes gelehrtes Werk.

3. H. E. Lloyd and G. H. Nöhden, *Neues Handwörterbuch der Englischen und Deutschen Sprache in zwei Theilen* (Hamburg: August Campe, 1836), 62.

   Cento—das **Flickwerk**, **Stoppelwerk**, ein Gedicht.

4. *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyklopädie für die gebildeten Stände*, 8th ed., 12 vols. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1833–37), 9:258.

   [**Rhapsodie**] . . . eine Sammlung Erzählungen, Dichtungen, Darstellungen usw., die zwar durch Einen Geist belebt, aber nicht nothwendig unter sich in Verbindung stehen.

5. *Flügel's Complete Dictionary of the German and English Languages*, ed. C. A. Feiling and A. Heimann, 2nd ed. (London: Whittaker and Co., 1843), 509.

   Rhapsody—1. die Rhapsodie, das Bruchstück (ein Stück aus dem Homer, ein Gesang); etwas Zusammengestoppeltes, das **Stoppelwerk**, **Flickwerk**.

6. Carl Gollnick, *Handlexikon der Tonkunst*, 2 vols. (Offenbach am Main: Joh. André, 1857), 2:80.

Rhapsodie, 1) das von einem Rhapsoden vorgetragene Gedicht, besonders die einzelnen Abschnitte der Homerischen Gedichte, daher ein abgerissenes Stück, Bruchstück eines grösseren Gedichts;

2) Sammel-**Stoppelwerk** verschiedenen Inhalts; rhapsodisch, abgerissen, unzusammenhängend; Rhapsodist, Zusammenstoppler.

7. Newton Ivory Lucas, *Englisch-Deutsches und Deutsch-Englisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols. (Bremen: C. Schünemann, 1868), 2:1896:

   Stoppelgedicht – compiled or **patched poem, rhapsody**, **cento.**

8. Ernst Kleinpaul, *Poetik: Die Lehre von den Formen und Gattungen der deutschen Dichtkunst*, 6th rev. ed., 2 vols. (Barmen: W. Langewiesche, 1868), 2:49–50.

   Die Lyrische **Rhapsodie**. Die Aufstellung dieser Rubrik in deutscher Poetik war ursprünglich wohl nur ein Nothbehelf der Theorie, um manche und zum Theil sehr werthvolle odenartige Gedichte, die weder ganz den Character der eigentlichen Ode, noch ganz den der Hymne trugen und bei allen ihren Vorzügen ihrem Inhalte nach eine gewisse Unvollständigkeit zeigen, besser unterbringen zu können. Die Rhapsodie hat, in Rücksicht ihres Gegentands, entweder mehr den Charakter der Ode oder mehr den der Hymne. Ihre *unterscheidende Eigenthümlichkeit liegt darin, dass sie ihrem Inhalt nach nur also ein Bruchstück erscheint, indem sie vorzugsweise eine Seite ihres Gegenstandes behandelt;* auch sie tritt ihrer Form nach mit völliger Freiheit auf, nimmt bald diesen, bald jenen Rhythmus an. [Italics in original.]

9. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoön: Für den weiteren Kreis der Gebildeten*, ed. Wilhelm Cosack (Berlin: Haude und Spinner, 1869), 181n1.

   Cento (lateinisch)—eigentlich was aus allerhand Lappen zusammengesetzt ist, dann besonders ein **Stoppelgedicht**, welches aus Versen und Worten der verschiedensten Dichter zusammengestellt ist.

10. August Reissmann, *Lehrbuch der musikalischen Komposition*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Guttentag, 1866), 2:113.

   Die Mähre oder **Rhapsodie** ist keine eigentlich musikalische Form. Sie erfordert den klaren und ruhigen Fluss der epischen Darstellung, und ist selbst nicht einmal an eine strenge und einheitliche Umrahmung gebunden. Sie ist *häufig aus verschiedenen zusammenhängenden Dichtungen* mit wechselnden Rhythmus zusammengesetzt. [My italics.]

Associations of centos and weddings:

11. Benjamin Hederich, *Reales Schul-Lexicon worinne nicht allein von den Ländern, Städten . . .,* 3rd rev. ed. (Leipzig, 1748), col. 2392.

    Rhapsodiae sind zwar an sich alle und jede Carmina oder Gesänge, welche aus einem andern größern als **Centones** zusammen geraspert sind, um etwas daraus zu machen, so sich auf eine vorseyende Gelegenheit, als *Hochzeit,* Gebuhrt, Victorie u. d. g. [und desjenigen Gleich] abzusingen schicket.

12. Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Wörterbuch zur Erklärung und Verdeutschung der unserer Sprache auf gedrungenen fremden Ausdrücke,* 2 vols. (Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandl, 1801), 1:218.

    Cento, überhaupt Flickwerk; insbesondere ein **Stoppelgedicht**, das ist ein Gedicht, welches aus Versen zusammengesetzt ist, die man aus andern Gedichten entlehnt hat, vergleichen zum Beispiel *Ausonius* unter dem Titel *Cento nuptialis* aus einzelnen Versen und halbversen des Virgils zusammenflickte.

13. August Wilhelm Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik*, 2 vols. (Breslau: F. E. C. Leuckart, 1864), 2:44n.

    Endlich hiess **cento** ein aus allerlei Gedichten zusammengesetztes, zusammengestoppeltes Poem, wie der *Cento nuptialis* des Ausonius.

14. Ernst Kleinpaul, *Poetik: Die Lehre von den Formen und Gattungen der deutschen Dichtkunst,* 6th rev. ed., 2 vols. (Barmen: W. Langewiesche, 1868), 2:50.

    Der Name **Rhapsodie** ist dem Griechischen entlehnt. In Griechenland pflegten nämlich die bei Festen oder sonst öffentlich auftretenden wandernden Sänger, wenn sie Gedichte vortrugen.