

False Dichotomies:
Echoes and Foresight in Works by Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Hugo Wolf

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Preface: Confronting and Exploiting Binaries and Boundaries

Both Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Hugo Wolf achieved prominence during the final two decades of the 1800s by crafting short works in their respective fields. Born in 1830, Ebner-Eschenbach spent her early career laboring over rarely performed historical dramas. In 1880 the Realist author saw her first published novella, *Lotti, die Uhrmacherin*, appear in the *Deutsche Rundschau* and also the release of the first edition of *Aphorismen*, her most successful work. In the subsequent years, expanded editions of *Aphorismen* appeared, and Ebner-Eschenbach completed many widely read collections of novellas. New popular editions of these later works were published throughout the 20th century and continue to be produced in the present millennium. Wolf first tasted success much earlier in his brief life, dying less than a month before his 33rd birthday in 1903. The young composer completed only one, rarely performed opera, *Der Corregidor*, and spent more than a decade on his solitary symphonic poem, *Penthesilea*. With just two large-scale compositions, his list of works falls well-short of capitalizing on the ever-expanding orchestras of late Romanticism, yet he is celebrated today as one of the last great lied composers. After completing songbooks featuring poems by Eichendorff, Mörike, and Goethe in 1888 and 1889, Wolf later devoted himself to lieder collections drawing from Spanish and Italian folk traditions.

Ebner-Eschenbach's and Wolf's success with short forms discloses a latent unease in the Habsburg Empire during the decades prior to the outright political and cultural upheaval of the early 20th century. Rather than pursuing lengthy creative endeavors that bind spontaneous impulse and demand a singular focus, Ebner-Eschenbach's short prose and Wolf's lieder contain

myriad formal gestures and provide a collage of content. They exploit the longer legacy in which they work and improvise open endings, inviting collaboration. Neither revolutionaries nor reactionaries, the author and the composer drew openly from their respective traditions. However, through subtly undermining structural expectations of form and genre, they challenged their audience and granted them creative license to adapt ideas and values for contemporary demands. Their aphorisms, short prose, letters, and songs provided readers and listeners of the late 1800s with diverse models for confronting contradictions intrinsic to life.

In the course of my research, I have found no comparative studies of late Realist literature and late Romantic music.¹ Carl Dahlhaus wrote a slim volume entitled, *Musikalischer Realismus: zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, but, understandably, collaborations of later Modernism dominate research, whether studies of the Vienna Secession or partnerships such as shared by Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss in the early 1900s.² Nevertheless, the contrasts between perceptions of musical success and literary accomplishments during the time just beforehand are not insignificant.³

¹ Capitalized modifiers are those that indicate the most basic understanding of a given genre or era in German Studies. This allows for less confusion when these terms as used in a more general sense, and usage of these terms that deviates from or implies a narrower understanding than common usage the field of German Studies will be explained as such instances arise.

² For a refreshing and recent exception, see David Brodbeck's *Defining Deutschtum: Political Ideology, German Identity, and Music-Critical Discourse in Liberal Vienna*.

³ Many years ago, Carl Dahlhaus described the lack of close and comprehensive study of "minor masters" as the "primary obstacle" to music history: "As yet hardly any attempt has been made to present the history of music in this period in a form other than that of monographs about the leading composers, interspersed with occasional outlines of cultural history which find room for the 'minor master.' The history of music in the nineteenth century, unlike that of the fifteenth or sixteenth, is still seen primarily as the history of its heroes—the 'great master,' the composers of the works which constitute the 'canon'—but simply to condemn this one-sided emphasis as arbitrary does not take us much further." Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, (LA and Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1980), 1-2.

Romantic compositions are considered by many to be the pinnacle of fine art music. Music histories often attribute its beginning to Beethoven's later compositions and its completion in the early 20th century to Mahler; most of the best-known "classical" works emerged during the long 19th century. By contrast, Realist literature, written in German, holds a much more marginal place in literary assessments. German Realist writers are often viewed in light of their French predecessors – Balzac and Flaubert, who generally overshadow their German counterparts. Such dismissal of German Realism only intensifies as the era closes. Other emerging movements such as Naturalism and Expressionism command greater attention in those last decades of the 1800s.⁴

Depending on the source, the epochal duration of musical Romanticism and literary Realism varies; however, both have practitioners firmly planted in the 19th century.⁵ It is also widely accepted that these eras are coming to a close in the final decades of the 1800s and early 1900s. Such timelines denote a liminal space in the 1880s and 1890s. The close of the 1800s

⁴ This may simply rest in the term's vagueness and the style's conceptual position between clearer categories. Hugo Aust writes:

Schon ein flüchtiger Blick auf den üblichen Wortgebrauch macht deutlich, daß 'Realismus' als einfacher Begriff ohne weiteren Zusatz selten das Gemeinte exakt und unmißverständlich bezeichnen kann [...] Es geht darum, ein Prinzip zu beschreiben, das angesichts polar organisierter Ansprüche und Kräfte ausdrücklich vermitteln will: 'Realismus' in jenem eigentlichen Sinn, der durch die attributive Zugabe spezifiziert wird, heißt demnach, zwischen Idee und Wirklichkeit, Idealismus und Materialismus zu vermitteln, Schein und Sein, Oberfläche und Tiefe, Erwartung und Resignation, Einzelnes und Ganzes zum Ausgleich zu bringen.

Literatur des Realismus, 3rd edn., Sammlung Metzler, (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 2000), 23-24.

⁵ Certainly, the terms "realist" and "romantic" were conjured up long before this time. For instance, Aristotle's mimesis postulate is, in an essential sense, the product of a discussion regarding realism and art, and the roots of romance may be traced to medieval France. Nevertheless, both Romantic music and Realist literature are generally accepted terms for a designated (though at times disputed) style of music-making and prose-writing in German-speaking cultures in the 19th century.

precedes the outright rejection of tradition in literature by Modernists and follows the dramatic and musical developments by Wagner. It is a time of before and after, but rarely recognized as significant in and of itself – at best a stop along the way to 1900, at worst the final gasps of imperialism prior to descent into totalitarianism. Yet, if this period precedes an important threshold, what preparations were made and what transgressions committed?

Rather than allowing divergent views regarding the character of literary Realism and musical Romanticism to deter investigation, the following dissertation reveals similarities found across movements in both art forms. Because these commonalities may be found in such dissimilar styles, this analytic choice filters out idiosyncratic characteristics of a given art or personality and discovers which aesthetic and humanistic concerns are greater than a particular creator or disciplinary approach.

To begin, these contemporary styles of literature and music correspond with an essential text of aesthetic theory – Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. The following study of works by Hugo Wolf and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach was inspired by the form and content of Nietzsche's first publication. Just as the Apollonian and Dionysian converge and synthesize, diverge and conflict, dichotomous relationships litter the literary and musical compositions in this dissertation. Similarly, the following texts and scores from Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf tackle the many questions accompanying the complexities of the human condition in a hostile world with an alternative approach from those of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer.

The formal brevity and curated character of the overwhelming majority of Nietzsche's later works resonate further with the success Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach enjoyed by creating relatively short forms in their respective fields. Amidst the fragmentation of society, these thinkers and creators harness the power of concision and condensation, collecting and creating a

pluralistic art. Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach's work foreshadows both the rejection of aesthetic tradition by Modernists as well as alternative methods for problem solving and observation through re-contextualization and productive co-existence of contradictions, free of a contrived dialectical process.

Before further describing the primary texts considered in this dissertation, let us consider aspects of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* that inform the theoretical framework. In addition to the contrary yet complementary nature of the Dionysian and Apollonian that may be attributed to Romantic music and Realist literature, there are other intriguing commonalities within the discourses of contemporary musical and literary movements. Discussion and perception of time, misapplication or impotence of intellectual heritage, and ambitious views of aesthetics all may be found in Nietzsche's now famous manifesto. The centrality of these concerns to the text is confirmed by Nietzsche himself in the new foreword (or "afterword" as the author notes in his opening paragraph), "Versuch einer Selbstkritik," included in the 1886 edition.⁶ Ultimately, in the midst of these dichotomous forces and the disorienting environment of both the apparent and mysterious, the reader finds questions regarding the fragility of the human condition and our very capacity to survive. Finally, the use of ancient civilization, divine beings, and a contemporary individual emphasizes the deeply personal and philosophical nature of these musings.

A brief discussion of the respective forewords from both the initial publication of *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* and the later edition, *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Oder: Griechenthum und Pessimismus*, identifies enduring ideas that inspire consideration of

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 10th ed., vol. 1 of *Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli und Massimo Montinari, (München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2015), 11.

works by Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf. Additionally, a comparison of the two introductions highlights relevant shifts in perspective that are similarly evident in the textual studies here. Both Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf were familiar with Nietzsche's writings, and all three figures battle with the role of the individual in history, as a member of contemporary society, and prospects for future influence.

Entitled "Vorwort an Richard Wagner," the first edition forward addresses a singular, personal acquaintance and projects what the *Gesamtkunstwerk* innovator's initial impressions of the following text might be. Over the course of one long paragraph, Nietzsche narrates a stunning scene. He imagines that Wagner settles into his abode following a winter hike in the snowfall and begins reading. The composer is at once captivated by the image of Prometheus unbound on the first page and, upon reading the author's name, becomes convinced that: "mag in dieser Schrift stehen, was da wolle, der Verfasser etwas Ernstes and Eindringliches zu sagen hat, ebenfalls dass er, bei allem, was er sich erdachte, mit Ihnen wie mit einem Gegenwärtigen verkehrte und nur etwas dieser Gegenwart Entsprechendes niederschreiben durfte."⁷

In retrospect, Nietzsche's assertion regarding the exclusively contemporary nature of his text is gravely mistaken. Most apparently, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* continues to serve as an influential and widely-read text over a century after its initial publication; even its editorial history within his lifetime contradicts the above. As noted above, Nietzsche went on to publish a later edition, and – far from timely – intellectuals first appreciated the far-reaching and transformative aesthetic implications of the text years after the initial disparaging reviews of contemporary scholars, such as Ulrich Wilamovitz-Möllendorff.

⁷ Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie*, 23.

However, rather than speculating on the essay's future in this original preface, the young philologist shifts from emphasizing the timeliness and urgency of his publication to its origins. Still portraying the composer's perspective, Nietzsche asserts Wagner will recall his own Beethoven essay, also published at the time of the Franco-Prussian war: "Sie werden dabei sich erinnern, dass ich zu gleicher Zeit, als Ihre herrliche Festschrift über Beethoven entstand, das heisst in den Schrecken und Erhabenheiten des eben ausgebrochnen Krieges mich zu diesen Gedanken sammelte."⁸ Wagner must have delighted at the parallel Nietzsche draws between Beethoven and himself.

At the same time that the composer reflects on his musical predecessor, the philologist is inspired to look to Wagner as the contemporary mantle-bearer of German culture. Juxtaposed against this celebration of an aesthetic theoretical address is the contrasting violence and destruction of actual war. Nietzsche continues to draw dichotomies in the following:

Doch würden diejenigen irren, welche etwa bei dieser Sammlung an den Gegensatz von patriotischer Erregung und aesthetischer Schwelgerei, von tapferem Ernst und heiterem Spiel denken sollten: denen möchte vielmehr, bei einem wirklichen Lesen dieser Schrift, zu ihrem Erstaunen deutlich werden, mit welchem ernsthaft deutschen Problem wir zu thun haben, das von uns recht eigentlich in die Mitte deutscher Hoffnungen, als Wirbel und Wendepunkt hingestellt wird.⁹

The contradictions are perplexing. Even the serious problem Nietzsche's essay seeks to address is entrenched at the core of German hopes. The very time of unrest is the one in which an

⁸ Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie*, 23.

⁹ Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie*, 24.

enduring German culture may be established. One term in Nietzsche's word choice in the excerpts above implies that these are not mere circumstances. In the section quoted just before he describes "German hope," Nietzsche writes that he "gathered" or "collected" his thoughts for *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, and then the significance of the term is reinforced by "dieser Sammlung" in the following sentence. Such collecting indicates authorial agency, and anticipates the antagonistic anchor of the Dionysian and Apollonian in the main text itself. Nietzsche concludes this foreword by affirming the sobering import of aesthetics and dedicating his work to Wagner. Though this first edition foreword displays the young philologist's respect for Wagner, Nietzsche's thought curation affirms his ultimate authority as author and his role as craftsman of this proposed cultural rebirth.

As is well-known, Nietzsche did not retain such a high regard for the creator of the music drama. By the time of the new edition in 1886, Nietzsche's first monograph bore a fresh name. By changing the subtitle to "Oder. Griechentum und Pessimismus," he discards the work's initial reverence of Wagner's art form and, instead, emphasizes the text's classical and philosophical arguments. However, the former professor does reaffirm much of the original content as well.

Immediately in the first sentence of his new preface, "Versuch einer Selbstkritik," Nietzsche asserts that *Die Geburt der Tragödie* raises an essential yet deeply personal question: "Was auch diesem fragwürdigen Buche zu Grunde liegen mag: es muss eine Frage ersten Ranges and Reizes gewesen sein, noch dazu eine tief persönliche Frage."¹⁰ The retrospective continues by justifying the ideas raised in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* by identifying similar arguments within works that were published in the time between the first and second editions. All contain similar

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie*, 11.

criticisms of the prevalent moralization within both Christianity and philosophy, and the author continues as well to understand “Wissenschaft” to be an empty and unproductive practice. Nietzsche acknowledges that it was folly to try and present his Dionysian theory with “Schopenhauerischen und Kantischen Formeln.”¹¹

Significant structural aspects of the second foreword contrast with that of its predecessor. “Versuch einer Selbstkritik” addresses a collection of readers rather than an individual. In this later effort, Nietzsche does not project what the reader’s reaction may be, but rather explicitly outlines his theories as manifest in the work. The second preface is about ten times longer and maintains a much more typical, scholarly tone. This style is reinforced by the division of the longer introduction into subsections. The relative lack of fantasy may be less enchanting, but it is no surprise in light of the coming charges against Wagner in *Der Fall Wagner*. A sober manner behooves the one labeling the Bayreuth Festival founder a charlatan.

Betrayed by his initial inspiration, Nietzsche crafts a formal address to his collective audience. The absence of a “messiah” for German cultural revival makes the need for a multiplicity of agents all the more apparent. This is an essential difference between Nietzsche’s initial publication of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and the works of Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach as presented here. Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach embrace the reality of and potential in a plurality of flawed, yet dignified persons in the form of listeners and readers as co-creators, as well as exploring and honoring collective knowledge and experience.

Three ideas reminiscent of *Geburt der Tragödie* orient the presentation of the following works by Hugo Wolf and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach. First, this dissertation works upon the premise that the arts are not only an integral and influential aspect of society in a general sense

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie*, 19.

but also transformative for both the creators and their audience, infusing private and public life with socially and politically consequential ideas and experiences. Second, just as Nietzsche struggles to reconcile the duplicitous nature of the arts with an innovative post-Hegelian approach that draws upon the classical tradition, Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach battle with the problems and contradictions of their contemporary life in the disintegrating Habsburg Empire through experimental practice of their respective traditions. Third, this study collects selections from collections themselves, the means by which Nietzsche conceived his seminal aesthetic manifesto.

Eager to honor the exceptional, yet committed to the common good, in her novellas Ebner-Eschenbach condemns the tyranny of the once predominant and still lingering aristocratic structure. Her brief accounts of by-gone provincial life explore the possibilities and challenges of comprehensive change that honors the individual within the context of failed systems, corrupt humans, and fickle fate. Selected for this study, *Er lasst die Hand küssen* features timely commentary and raises essential questions regarding legacy, the future, and the rhetorical means by which one navigates society.

Ebner-Eschenbach's aphorisms contrast one from another in style but are equally thought-provoking. Published in 1880, *Aphorismen* was the first independent collection of axioms to be released with the genre itself serving as title in the German-speaking literary tradition, rather than a compendium within a series of collected works published in retrospect. The book also launched Ebner-Eschenbach's career, and her aphoristic artistry continues to be celebrated and enjoyed with multiple editions appearing before and after her death.¹² Dedicated

¹² Insel Verlag published the most recent edition on the 100th anniversary of Ebner-Eschenbach's death in 2016.

to her circle of friends, *Aphorismen* presents uncompromising and contrary truisms – logically inconsistent yet resonant with life experience. In both of these works, Ebner-Eschenbach displays deft technical skill by crisply and confidently exploiting a given style and form, underpinning the texts with delightful aesthetic irony.

Rather than providing commentary on societal norms and issues, Hugo Wolf's letters present individual aesthetic battles of imagination and realization. Although he recognizes Wagner's work as revolutionary, this breakthrough or fulfillment of Beethovenian promise does not result in compositional revelry. Instead its culmination complicates what progress may be pursued as an artist allied with the New German School. An avid reader, Wolf peppers his correspondence with a plethora of citations and literary references, ripped from their original contexts and molded to equip the young composer in his personal reflective and communicative needs. Wolf transforms impassioned contemplations on the nature remembrance and vibrant readings of his intellectual predecessors into visionary artistic declarations.

Wolf's Lieder feature a wealth of themes and display a wide range of compositional techniques. Most notably, Wolf crafted vocal and piano parts with unprecedented rhythmic and harmonic complexity, and many of his scores subtly realize their lyrical texts with depth and precision. Performances of his Lieder also impacted the reception of literature beyond the confines of the concert hall. For instance, audience exposure to Mörike's poetry through recitals of Wolf's songs revived appreciation of the works by the recently deceased Swabian poet.¹³ The *Goethe Liederbuch*, however, contains poetic selections that many listeners would readily recognize, and most of the songs written over the course of the new year from 1888 to 1889 deal

¹³ Susan Youens, *Hugo Wolf and His Mörike Songs* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

with aspects of the human condition. In contrast to the idiosyncratic character of his letters, these compositions provide stunning portraits of Goethe's words that not only honor their broader thematic context but also push the listener to reconsider the literary framework.

Under the guise of modesty provided by the medium of small forms, both of these artists subvert tradition through provocative craftsmanship. The late 19th century was a comprehensive time of transition. Political, cultural, and economic changes emerged in these decades as stability waned. In their brevity and eclecticism, Ebner-Eschenbach's and Wolf's creative pursuits mirror such loss and fragmentation. However, their work is not simply derivative of their surroundings. The following analyses demonstrate how they exploit the adaptability, multiplicity, and concision of short works to achieve their creative ends and challenge their audiences to direct their own aesthetic experience as active participants in both the fictional setting and the world beyond.

Despite this apparent emphasis on author and audience, these readings endeavor first and foremost to place selected works as the anchor of a given analysis. Already, much scholarship has been produced regarding the lives of Hugo Wolf and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach. The overwhelming majority of research on Ebner-Eschenbach's work is embedded within biographical accounts.¹⁴ Even the flurry of articles published under the guidance of Karl Konrad Polheim and Joseph P. Strelka frame her writing as primarily derivative of her socio-historic circumstances.¹⁵ Similarly, Hugo Wolf's life and relative position to Wagner overwhelm

¹⁴ "*Berühmt sein ist nichts*": *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach* by Daniela Strigl was published in 2016 and serves as the most recent examples of this genre.

¹⁵ Karlheinz Roszbacher's work has a similar approach. This body of scholarship was a much-needed corrective to the saccharine interpretive legacy established by Anton Bettelheim and subsequent *Heimatfilme*. However, as invaluable as it is to acknowledge the relevance of Ebner-Eschenbach's writings to her time, there remain many other lenses through which Ebner-Eschenbach's work can be considered. The 2007 book, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Tragödie*,

scholarship prior to the 1990s. Although scholars such as Amanda Glauert and Susan Youens have published monographs dealing primarily with Wolf's Lieder scores and their literary and music historical contexts, Frank Walker's biography remains the most familiar resource regarding the young Austrian composer and his work,¹⁶ and many resources are plagued by sentimentality and rather wild speculation regarding the influence of Wolf's mental health on his artistic production.¹⁷

The disproportionate regard for Wolf's and Ebner-Eschenbach's personal experiences over and above the broader, more general questions raised by their works begs to be corrected. Fortunately, some recent publications present Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach's works and private writings as scholarly texts. These include studies and codification of Wolf's manuscripts in the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, a five-volume critical edition of his letters, and the *Hugo Wolf Enzyklopädie*. The new critical edition of correspondence between Ebner-Eschenbach and the poet Josephine von Knorr supports further scholarship into the Moravian aristocrat's body of work. Both of these artists were bold architects, stretching formal boundaries and exploiting all

Erzählung, Heimatfilm, by Peter C. Pfeiffer is a delightful example of serious consideration of the timeless aesthetic riches of Ebner-Eschenbach's opus. However, it has proven to be the exception.

¹⁶ The introduction to the *Hugo Wolf Enzyklopädie*, published in 2007, confirms the centrality of Walker's work for German-speaking scholarship as well.

¹⁷ Helga Spannhake, "Hugo Wolf – zwischen Mythos und Realität," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift*, 67 no. 3 (2012): 67-68, accessed March 3, 2014, *ProQuest Music Periodicals Database*, <https://doi.org/10.7767/omz.2012.67.3.67>. A recent conference report notes all the biographical fallacies that could finally be put to rest regarding Wolf's health and genealogy. What is striking is the fact that such misinformation played a central role in scholarship, not because of its inaccuracy, but because of the very nature of such details. This issue betrays the lack of research dealing primarily with the quality and character of the existing musical scores and performance accounts.

the riches of a work's content, whether plot or concept, lyrics or music. This dissertation tests the two intellectuals' perception of their respective careers as callings higher than self.

In the article "Reading European Literature: Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and her Circle," Linda Kraus Worley demonstrates how Ebner-Eschenbach read non-German speaking works with a cosmopolitan perspective, rather than a nationalist prejudice. She writes: "Texts and performances are seen as artistic products whose structural elements are universal and can thus be analyzed and critiqued without reference to national or ethnic particulars."¹⁸ With this in mind, the following readings highlight aspects of Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach's works that surpass their personalities. Here, the artist is an agent, but one that is not beholden to creating works strictly reflective of personal experience. In fact, the inspiration for this study comes directly from the recognition that Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach champion ideas and values greater than self and wrestle with challenges that one cannot conquer single-handedly.

Close readings compose the following four chapters. Far from exhausting the interpretive possibilities, these exercises demonstrate only a handful of possible conclusions to be drawn from examining content, form, and context of these selections. While biographical facts, historical circumstances, and aesthetic movements may be taken into account, at their most elementary level, the following readings are inductive. My hope is to examine the primary texts and re-present them with integrity while entertaining select perspectives and their interpretive potentials.

This study of works by Ebner-Eschenbach and Hugo Wolf seeks to honor their writings and compositions as independently legitimate subjects of inquiry that both reflect and impact

¹⁸ Linda Kraus Worley "Reading European Literature: Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and her circle," *Oxford German Studies*, 42, no. 2 (2013): 198, accessed July 28, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1179/0078719113Z.00000000034>.

their environment. Clearly, the creators are agents whose decisions, worldviews, and circumstances shape their works, but such correlation does not presume that these texts are inherently autobiographical products. By contrast, our approach emphasizes the autonomy of a given text or artwork to determine rules and structures that provide an experimental field to challenge convention and allow for innovation.

The impetus for this approach to these texts comes from principles expressed by Roland Barthes and his theory of the writerly text. The act of reading a writerly text (or more precisely writing the text as the reader) is directly contingent upon the nature of the production of the text in question. Roland Barthes confronts this paradoxical co-dependence: “Our evaluation [of the text] can be linked only to the practice and that practice is that of writing.”¹⁹ He continues, stating that the “goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.”²⁰ In this same section, Barthes bemoans the “pitiless divorce ... between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its costumer, between its author and reader.”²¹

Here, the four chapters of close readings may be understood as reinforcing this regrettable division. Hugo Wolf’s letters and Ebner-Eschenbach’s *Aphorismen* are presented as models of creative praxis, and the readings of *Er lasst die Hand küssen* and Lieder from the *Goethe Songbook* demonstrate possible reading or listening praxis. However, Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach are reading in order to create, and because the third and fourth chapters present plural texts, reception praxis is understood to be writerly. The differentiation between “creative”

¹⁹Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1974), 4.

²⁰ Barthes, *S/Z*, 4.

²¹ Barthes, *S/Z*, 4.

and “receptive” praxis then indicates the relative position of an agent, rather than mutually exclusive functions. Those producing are receiving, and those receiving are producing.

Again, only the broad strokes of Barthes’ literary theory are pursued in this dissertation. Although hermeneutic, semantic, symbolic, active, and referential observations do arise in the following close readings, I do not implement these as rigorous codes in a Barthesian manner. Furthermore, although the notion of “starring the text” does resonate with the possibilities of de- and re-contextualization inherent to collecting, selections for analysis were guided by differences and similarities in content and form, rather than “arbitrary in the extreme.”²² All of Ebner-Eschenbach’s and Wolf’s works here wrestle with a common conundrum of the human condition, questioning individual capacity and corporate responsibilities. Each of the four chapters highlights examples from a different genre. All selections embed contradictory and duplicitous concepts within eclectic aesthetic forms, though the distribution of these features is uneven from text to text.

The first two chapters featuring Wolf’s letters and Ebner-Eschenbach’s aphorisms concentrate on creative praxis. Wolf draws liberally from philosophic, aesthetic, and poetic literature when writing to his friends, crafting arguments and sketching life events by inserting quotes and allusions at his pleasure. Conversely, Ebner-Eschenbach produces a formal publication that celebrates the rich inconsistencies of familiar community, populating her collection of pithy sayings with insightful, yet contrary assertions about life and living.

In his letters, Wolf exercises freely the prerogative personal correspondence allows to place idiosyncratic needs and personal problems above systematic consistencies. He imagines boldly and draws upon concepts and forms of subjectivity modeled in *Sturm und Drang* literature

²² Barthes, *S/Z*, 13.

to articulate conflicting states of emotion and compare them to the creative process. Other letters draw directly from philosophy; in these, Wolf uses concepts and short quotes from Nietzsche and Schopenhauer to support his point of view and disregards the wider context of those references. All of these instances demonstrate the untethered yet productive nature of exploration in personal letters as a genre in comparison to dispassionate empirical studies and systematic philosophical treatises.

Similarly, Ebner-Eschenbach's *Aphorismen* contains contradictory yet holistic perspectives as can be provided by proverbial wisdom. The legitimacy of a given aphorism is not dependent upon logical consistency with its fellow entries. To the contrary, the very richness and quality of the collection first published in 1880 rests upon the provocative co-existence of antagonistic truisms. As a whole, these observations reflect more fully perceived daily reality and its inconsistencies than philosophical categories or psychological explanations of the human condition that insist upon singular diagnoses and burden interactions with an over-arching teleology or underlying trauma. Reflecting the spontaneous character of aphoristic *Einfälle* and the suspense and expectation accompanying *Prägnanz*, Ebner-Eschenbach's axiomatic work teases and tempts. It is a careful curation of destinations emerging from divergent lines of thoughts -- thematically, linguistically, and methodologically.

Consideration of aesthetic production anchor the first two close readings, while the last two studies concentrate on receptive possibilities for Ebner-Eschenbach's novella, *Er lässt die Hand küssen*, and a selection of Wolf's songs set to Goethe's poetry. The embedded plot of *Er lässt die Hand küssen* clearly condemns the feudalism of provincial life in the early 19th century, yet its frame story clouds this clarity with a contemporary legal conundrum. This uncertainty leaves readers to their own devices, questioning both how history informs the present and what

impact one's personal legacy may leave. Similar questions may be raised upon hearing Wolf's Goethe songs, but such inquiries are propelled by a multitude of voices rather than a singular account. From the mythical Prometheus to a notorious con-man to the mysterious Mignon, these selected songs touch upon human origins, daily street smarts, and death. Each song intertwines melody and meaning to reinforce and undermine each other, pushing the listener to further study of sound and text.

Er lasst die Hand küssen is brazenly "unclassical." The embedded story itself, though linear, is disconcertingly incomplete. Scenes that are clearly connected fail to hold together for a comprehensive plot, and characters give incomplete and unpersuasive testimonies. Communicative breakdown cripples most interactions, and the frame narrative further reinforces such discontinuities. As a listener, the noblewoman constantly interrupts to question the veracity and accuracy of the tale. She even directly undermines the authority of the nobleman as storyteller, challenging the source itself. Although such intensity may lead one to think of a writerly account, the noblewoman also seeks to "skim and skip" as described by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*.²³ She scoffs at details the narrator includes and urges him to speed up the story as the suspense grows toward the end of it. She is beholden to the performance of

²³ Barthes writes:

Yet the most classical narrative (a novel by Zola or Balzac or Dickens or Tolstoy) bears within it a sort of diluted tmesis: we do not read everything with the same intensity of reading; a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the *integrity* of the text; our very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or to skip certain passages (anticipated as "boring") in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote (which are always its articulations: whatever furthers the solution of the riddle, the revelation of fate): we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversation; doing so, we resemble a spectator in a nightclub...

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1975), 10-11.

the narrator, and this draws the reader's attention not only to the act of reading but also the limitations and possibilities for the lives that the audience members themselves author.

The fourth and final close reading features selected songs from Hugo Wolf's *Goethe Liederbuch*. In his letters, Wolf expresses disappointment about the audience's reaction to his *Lieder*. This indicates that he composed with a singular reading in mind which is contrary to the nature of a plural text. Musicological scholarship has demonstrated, however, a variety of possible receptive postures for Wolf's *Lieder*. Eric Sams highlights Wagnerian affects in Wolf's *Lieder*, but Lawrence Kramer and Edward Kravitt both approach compositions in light of contemporary Viennese culture. Susan Youens and Deborah J. Stein examine tonal and harmonic innovations Wolf brought to the *Lied* form. In an analysis of the connection between Wolf's rhythmic devices and the corresponding lyrics, I highlight a multiplicity of portraits of humanity from various songs within this one collection and offer yet another perspective on the listening experience. The 19th century house music culture makes possible proposed interpretations that take into account a larger literary context than presented on stage in a given recital. Unlike *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, these songs lack internal warnings that encourage the listener to question the content and thereby revisit the score. However, the cultural practice of purchasing and studying songs at home embodies just the sort of plurality and rereading that Barthes describes in section IX of *S/Z* and contradicts Wolf's self-prescribed limitations upon his own compositions.

All of the selected texts that follow share a common feature when considered in light of the aesthetic trajectory of the long 19th century. They all were published within the last two decades of the 1800s. As mentioned above, we recognize this time as a liminal state following such artistic landmarks such as watershed literary works produced in Jena and Weimar prior to 1848 and the development of music drama later, yet the last two decades precede the more

infamous rejection of literary and musical traditions by Modernist authors and the Second Viennese School of Music. This period is also couched between the Revolutions of 1848 and the Great War as well as swept up in the phenomenal population growth of urban areas and the effects of the Industrial Revolution and new technologies such as the phonograph.

Surrounded by change and witnesses to the ever-increasing fragmentation of swiftly approaching *fin de siècle* Vienna, both Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach create texts and compositions that reflect these circumstances and seek to inspire their audience to impact their unknown futures. All of these works are considered from the view of the “perpetually present” nature of writerly texts. Whether it is Wolf’s impassioned reflections on the implications of Wagner’s legacy in musical culture or Ebner-Eschenbach’s sagacious yet incongruous collection of aphorisms, these ideas resist singular interpretations and beg for continued engagement. The dysfunction portrayed in *Er lasst die Hand küssen* is not closed condemnation, but an invitation to consider and wrestle with perennial and pressing societal issues. Selected songs from Wolf’s *Goethe Songbook* meditate on the ambiguity of personhood, jeer at naiveté, and insist upon a redemptive view of mortality, rather than mere memorial and nihilism.

Although inspired by *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, this dissertation presents an alternative view of history and its future implications than the conclusions Nietzsche would later embrace. While both Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach may be considered in light of the “Epigonen” described in *Von Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, their writings and artworks hold equal if not greater potential as illustrations of preemptive aesthetic endeavors.²⁴ The following collection of texts demonstrates the power aesthetics hold for inspiring cultural transformation. It

²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Von Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, in *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I-IV*, 10th ed., vol. 1 of *Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli und Mazzimo Montinari, (München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2015), 307.

is not a Panglossian perspective that minimizes and dismisses the burdens of reality, but rather a compendium of contradictions and the corresponding processes of negotiation. The decades that follow do not unfold with positive and peaceful societal progress, but that reality does not void the value in the sense of responsibility toward endorsing and promoting edifying art evident throughout these publications and personal writings.

Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach worked and lived in a society undergoing political unrest, rising ethnic tensions, and economic transformation. Throughout the following readings, questions for the present loom. What can we learn today from this author's and composer's insistence on artistic integrity amidst change? How might we resist contempt for the good that has gone before, without succumbing to the siren of nostalgia, or worse, harmful reactionary ideologies? What does it look like to respond to the idiosyncrasies of our time and avoid a myopic view of humanity in history and to come? While universal answers surely elude us, perhaps we may find inspiration and reserves for one next step.

Chapter I.

Voicing Suspensions and a Misleading Resolution

Biographical portraits of Hugo Wolf typically come in two extremes. The negative caricature features a fragile ego, petty remarks from his two years as a music critic, and scenes of him stalking Wagner in his youth. His contemporary Gustav Mahler once summed up Wolf's Lieder as simply "De-kla-ma-tion."²⁵ As amusing as such accounts may be, musicological scholarship of the last two decades tempers the claims that this enthusiast of Lied rigidly accommodated his music to the chosen text and slavishly imitated Wagnerian compositional processes on a smaller scale.²⁶ The second portrayal errs through biographical idolization. In such a depiction, the under-appreciated composer possesses a preternatural sense of the text. Coupled with his musical ingenuity, this literary gift blossoms into a fulfillment of lyrical promise through the transcendent language of music.²⁷ Dismantling the myth of Wolf as both the "poet's composer"²⁸ and as a pedant obsessed with declamation, not only permits less prejudiced readings of his musical works, but also begs for a fuller account of his literary understanding and usage.

²⁵ Ernst Decsey, "Stunden mit Mahler," *Die Musik*, 40 (1911): 114, quoted in Amanda Glauert in *Hugo Wolf and the Wagnerian Inheritance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.

²⁶ See various scholarship by Susan Youens, Amanda Glauert, and Lawrence Kramer.

²⁷ Ernst Newman, Frank Walker, and Mosco Carner fall into this category.

²⁸ Both Hermann Bahr and the title style of Wolf's song collections contribute to this exaggeration. These are described further below.

Close examination of his personal correspondence reveals that Hugo Wolf was far from single-minded, and he recruited from a vast array of literature in his battles to confront paradoxa and to maintain the necessary tension required for a holistic approach to life and art.²⁹ In contrast to the over-simplifications above, his biography itself possesses a dualistic character. Born in 1860, this autodidact died at the age of 42 in the throes of syphilitic insanity. Dismissed from both his gymnasium and later the music conservatory in Vienna, his career was nourished and sustained by the embrace of a large network of loosely affiliated friends. Manic bursts of creativity preceded long periods in which the young composer could find no inspiration. Amid such tumultuous – if not foreboding – circumstances Hugo Wolf sought clarity and direction through creatively engaging the resources of literature.

Hermann Bahr's reflections on Wolf's engagement with literature provide a good starting point for outlining further context for the young composer's reading habits. Once his flat mate in Vienna, Bahr recounts early morning performances of Kleist's *Penthesilea*, with which Wolf would greet his fellow residents upon their return from a night out. The literary critic and author describes these readings as transformative:

Ich habe in meinem Leben niemals mehr so vorlesen hören. Es lässt sich nicht beschreiben. Ich kann nur sagen: wenn er sie aussprach, nahmen die Worte eine ungeheure Wahrheit an, sie bekamen Körper, ja wir hatten das Gefühl, als ob sein eigener Leib auf einmal dann zum Fleisch der Worte geworden wäre, als ob diese

²⁹ Fittingly, letters commence our study of short forms in an age of transition. The German term "Brief" is derived from the Latin "brevis" which, as it also does in English, means "short." The etymology mirrors the thrust of our general interest in brief works. Furthermore, the medium of letter writing straddles private and public spheres, hovering on the threshold of societal divisions, just as Wolf's place in music history follows Wagner and anticipates the Second Viennese School of Music.

Hände, die wir im Dunkel schimmern sahen, keinem Menschen mehr, sondern jetzt den Worten, die wir vernahmen, angehören würden! Er hatte sich gleichsam mit seinem ganzen Körper in das Wort des Dichters verwandelt. Dieses stand vor uns, unser Freund war verschwunden.³⁰

Portraying his friend's performance as a transfiguration, Bahr envisions an all-consuming interpretation and reiteration of the text on behalf of Wolf. While his assessment may be exaggerated, such an endorsement by a literary critic and author does provide grounds for further examining Wolf's engagement with literature. Wolf not only read *Penthesilea* with astounding literary perspicuity, but also drew from it compositional inspiration. Kleist's drama is eponymous with the one large, orchestral instrumental work that Wolf completed, and he spent the majority of his career refining and reworking it.³¹ This displays the influence literature had on his music beyond that of resources from which to build his Lieder compositions.

In his book *Alte, unnennbare Tage: Erinnerungen aus siebzig Lehr- und Wanderjahren*, Wolf's patron and friend, Friedrich Eckstein, describes him as having a deep and broad passion for literature and philosophy.³² A major inspiration for his compositions, Goethe's *Faust* also figures prominently in early letters to his parents as a means to describe his life. Time and again, Wolf associates Goethe with contentment and great beauty in his letters throughout 1892 and 1893. Writing to his aunt, the young man illustrates his experience with love by painting a

³⁰ Hermann Bahr, Foreword to *Gesammelte Aufsätze über Hugo Wolf*, ed. Hugo Wolf Verein in Wien, (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1898), x-xi.

³¹ In fact, Wolf worked on it for over a decade, from 1883 until 1897. Jens Rosteck, "Zu Werkgenese und Formkonzeption von Hugo Wolfs Symphonischer Dichtung 'Penthesilea'," *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft*, 40 (1991): 205.

³² Friedrich Eckstein, *Alte, unnennbare Tage: Erinnerungen aus siebzig Lehr- und Wanderjahren*, (Hamburg: Severus, 2013), 159-177.

picture very similar to the final scene of *Torquato Tasso*, rewriting the drama's closing shipwreck with an optimistic final refuge on the "sandy shore of reality," rather than an isolated rock.³³ These instances and their fictional references, allusions, and touchstones could be understood as a series of "Klopstock!" moments, in which Wolf draws on the common literary knowledge of his family and friends to indicate ideas and scenes from various works for articulating his life experiences, where more direct description falls short.

Irrepressible citation

Throughout his life, Wolf read and reread Wagner's complete works. Many are familiar with Wolf's music criticism, and these writings clearly display his devotion to the New German School and vehement rejection of Brahms and Hanslick. However, his reflections on aesthetics draw from a wider field than merely the thoughts of the founder of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. Additionally, Wolf was fascinated by the philosophical works of Schopenhauer, as well as Nietzsche's writings, including those following his rejection of Wagner.³⁴ He encouraged Hugo Faisst, a friend and lawyer in Stuttgart,³⁵ to read Schopenhauer, although Wolf warned him against taking on the full implications of pessimism.³⁶

³³Hugo Wolf to Bertha von Lackhner, July, 22 1881, in vol. 1 of *Hugo Wolf: Briefe*, ed. Leopold Spitzer (Vienna: Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2010), 106.

³⁴ It is interesting that Wolf would have such philosophical tolerance when he so quickly broke personal ties with those he understood to have the wrong aesthetic associations. (For instance, he refused to meet with Martin Lewy during a stay in Berlin because he had heard that he had contact with Joseph Joachim and Brahms.)

³⁵ *Hugo Wolfs Briefe an Hugo Faisst*, ed. Michael Haberlandt (Stuttgart; Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1904), 6.

³⁶ In this particular letter, one sees Wolf's deep interest in philosophy as well as his distance from it. While he revels in attributing various life experiences to familiar concepts, such as Schopenhauer's "Will," he is not a true disciple of any given philosophy. He writes to Faisst: "Hoffentlich wirst Du bei Schopenhauers Philosophie Deinen guten Humor u. die Dir

Later in life, Wolf would draw upon Nietzsche's reflections in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* regarding "Arbeit und Langweile" when he toiled at composing with little joy and once again feared "zu Grunde zu gehen" as he sought to create. Wolf was often buoyed by his belief in the high calling of artistic endeavor while suffering in the depths of such despair. Writing to Emil Kauffman in 1890, Wolf presents what he considers the "highest" principle of art in an exchange regarding his rival Johannes Brahms:

Sie werden mich nun starrköpfig schelten, aber ich bin nun einmal ein Mensch von den radikalsten Grundsätzen u. Anschauungen. Oberstes Prinzip in der Kunst ist mir strenge, herbe, unerbittliche Wahrheit, Wahrheit bis zur Grausamkeit. Kleist z. B. – Wagner immer obenan – ist mein Mann. Seine wunderherrliche Penthesilea ist wohl die wahrste, aber zugleich grausamste Tragödie, die je einem Dichterhirn entsprungen. Und selbst Mörike, dieser Liebling der Grazien! Zu welchen Excessen läßt seine Muse sich hinreissen, wenn sie der dämonischen Seite der Wahrheit ihr Antlitz zukehrt! Das „erste Liebeslied eines Mädchens“ bietet ein treffendes Beispiel hierfür. Und welche krampfhaft Innigkeit, welches wohlüstige Behagen am Peinlichen spricht sich in den unnachahmlichen Versen aus:

„Erinn' rung reicht mit Lächeln die verbittert
Bis zur Betäubung süßen Zauberschalen;
So trink' ich gierig die entzückten Qualen.“

innewohnende Freude am Dasein nicht verlieren. Das Asketenthum stünde Dir auch wahrlich schlecht an. Deine ganze Erscheinung schon, mit Allem was drum u. dran, ist ein lebhafter Protest gegen Schopenhauers Pessimismus. Sieh Dich also vor, ehe Du mit Haut u. Haaren Dich ihm ergibst." Wolf to Hugo Faisst, September 23, 1894. vol. 2 of *Briefe*, 467.

(Besuch aus Urach).

Das ist mit Blut geschrieben u. solche Töne weiß nur anzuschlagen, wer –
leidend – sein innerstes Wesen einer tief wahren Empfindung hinzugeben im
Stande ist. Aber – o wie weit wie weit von dem ist Jemand entfernt, dessen
Namen ich jetzt gar nicht nennen will! Es bleibt doch bei der Melancholie des
Unvermögens. – „Der Rest ist – schweigen.“³⁷

This letter contains a declaration of absolute commitment to truth in art supported by a pantheon of thinkers. Kleist the dramatist, Mörike the poet, and Wagner, *Dichterkomponist*. Yet despite Wolf's insistence that Wagner, who embodies both drama and music, remains his supreme inspiration, he focuses on illustrations from the other two literary figures. After proclaiming *Penthesilea* the truest and cruelest of all tragedies, Wolf continues by recalling an excerpt from Mörike's "Besuch aus Urach," and comments with visceral drama that Mörike's work is "mit Blut geschrieben u. solche Töne weiß nur anzuschlagen, wer – leidend – sein innerstes Wesen einer tief wahren Empfindung hinzugeben im Stande ist." The passion and truth of Mörike's writing requires a comparable sensibility and personal sacrifice on the part of any composer setting those words to music.

In his concluding sentences, Hugo Wolf strongly condemns his contemporary Johannes Brahms, though he refuses to name him directly. Describing Brahms as far from possessing the necessary emotional intelligence (and it is implied lacking the sheer will) for creating true art, the younger composer intensifies his condemnation with a quote from Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner*. By citing Nietzsche's criticism of the traditionalist Brahms's work as the "Melancholie des

³⁷ Wolf to Emil Kaufmann, June, 5 1890, in vol. 1 of *Briefe*, 366-367.

Unvermögens,” Wolf brings to mind Nietzsche’s polemic against Wagner, not only Wolf’s personal role model but also one of the two primary representatives of the New German School.

Closing with Hamlet’s words, Wolf retains a sort of provocative ambiguity. Is he challenging his own earlier assertion regarding the supremacy of *Penthesilea* by including the Bard’s tragic masterpiece as the conclusion? Or, is he highlighting the boldness of his proclamation by referencing Shakespeare and thereby drawing attention to the weight of Kleist’s dramatic accomplishment? This letter may be understood as a pastiche of references because of the contradictory and competing worldviews it awakens – juxtaposing Mörike and Kleist, affirming Wagner’s preeminence at one point and then quoting *Der Fall Wagner* – yet one can also argue that such a mercenary approach to citation reinforces the artistic principle of “truth to the point of cruelty.” The very breadth of these sources (temporally, stylistically, and ideologically) indicates that Wolf sees within them a universal value, best understood as relevance revealed in malleability, a necessity for the inherent volatility of art.

Furthermore, and perhaps more essentially, Wolf describes art as a violent experience of suffering for the artist, and this fractious compendium reflects a similar struggle, taking account of the forces in play and seeking to hold them together in spite of their divergence and disjunction. His writing here brings together fragments and highlights the “cruel,” or ugly, to oppose the emphasis on beauty through balanced order and form as advocated and practiced by representatives of the traditionalist school of musical aesthetics. To clarify, those who opposed the musical aesthetic championed by the theorist, professor, and music critic Eduard Hanslick and as modeled in Brahms’s compositions did not propose absolute free form or scoff at music theoretical knowledge and compositional technique. Quite to the contrary, Hugo Wolf’s ability to sustain harmonic ambiguity and extend harmonic progressions in unexpected ways demonstrates

his compositional mastery. Nevertheless, Wolf had no reverence for tradition in and of itself, and certainly not the sort of placid, static Classicism as held high by Winkelmann. Instead he shapes, combines, and adapts traditional ideas and forms, adapting them to his purposes, just as the colorful array of literary references here demonstrates.

Wolf often refers to philosophical theories and concepts carefully crafted with universal implications in mind, but the young composer recruits and uses these ideas to illuminate his personal state. Tanja Reinlein thoroughly examines the letter as a stage for self-expression and exploration in her book *Der Brief als Medium der Empfindsamkeit: Erschriebene Identitäten und Inszenierungspotentiale*. As the title indicates, her chosen texts stem from the 18th century, an era in which not only personal correspondence abounded, but also its aesthetic parallel, the epistolary novel. Reinlein presents letter exchanges as performances of identity (“performativ Identität”). She carefully demonstrates that the selected correspondence does not merely reflect or indicate possible biographical facts. The writing of these letters themselves contribute to the writers’ understanding of self and provide a setting in which the correspondents can discover and define relational realities. The following letters from Wolf similarly contain sentimental passages and fervent declarations -- clauses tumbling carelessly one after another. However, within each excerpt (whether more discursive or more loosely crafted) the composer employs aspects of German literary, aesthetic, and intellectual traditions (explicitly and implicitly) to test and communicate a personal understanding and experience of his present world.

Additionally, while Hugo Wolf’s writing is the emphasis of this examination, such a subject of study is dependent upon and anticipatory of his audience, the recipient.³⁸ As much as

³⁸ Reinhard M.G. Nickisch delicately outlines this phenomenon:

Jeder Briefschreiber übernimmt also je nach der Sprechhandlung, die er mit dem Brief ausführen will, bewußt oder unbewußt eine entsprechende Rolle. Diese ist

Wolf may be trying to share his personal mental, emotional, or spiritual state, letter writing is an exchange, and his relationship with the addressee (as a medium through which Wolf both responds and initiates) influences topic choice and communicative form.³⁹ Unfortunately, few of his regular correspondents were particularly prominent, and my research has uncovered no responses to the letters featured below. Henriette Lang, Oskar Grohe, and Rosa Mayreder are the respective recipients of the following selections, and Wolf's remarks to them reveal strong personal relationships, in which he freely shares his private and professional concerns.

Having established the felicity and agility with which Wolf recruits from outside sources for his reflections, we now turn to three individual letters spanning the majority of Wolf's adult life: from 1881, during his first years in Vienna; from 1890, immediately following his "miracle" year of composition; and finally, from 1897 when he entered the final stage of life which was spent primarily in mental institutions. Each of these letters commonly deals with history, aesthetics, and self. Although they have fewer explicit references to external sources than the examples above, the ideas shared and arguments formulated continue to indicate a rich literary mindset from which Wolf draws rhetorical devices and devises complex worldviews, whereby he frames alternate emotional, aesthetic, and relational realities.

ihreseite mitbedingt von dem Bild, das er sich von dem Briefempfänger macht bzw. von der Vorstellung der Rolle, die er zugunsten der intendierten Sprechhandlung dem Rezipienten – wiederum bewußt – vorgibt, zuweist oder auch aufnötigt. Sie gibt mithin den Rahmen ab für die vom Emittenten erwartete, erhoffte, gewünschte oder erzwungene Reaktion.

Brief, vol. 260 of *Realien zur Literatur*, Sammlung Metzler, (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), 10-11.

³⁹ Sometimes the medium served as the impetus for the relationship all together. Wolf's initial interaction with both Emil Kaufmann and Oskar Grohe occurred by letter. He knew neither of them until they wrote following concerts in which they heard his music.

The following epistolary selections reveal a continual tension and overlap of contrary realms: private and public spheres, the unseen and the apparent, creative process and artistic product. Hugo Wolf's ability to maintain harmonic ambiguity by straddling two tonal centers in his songs demonstrates his compositional artistry. Similarly, he explores parallel worlds by blurring the lines of the imagined and real. In the first two letters, one sees the aforementioned struggle and tension that exist between such spheres as personal and private lives or in such processes as articulating individual thought in a meaningful way. The last excerpt contrasts starkly with the first two in this regard. Here, the impact on Wolf's mental faculties by the physical consequences of syphilis manifests itself in a disconcerting clarity and lack of conflict. In all letters the consequential bonds between and friction amongst past, present, and future play out differently from one account to the other, reflecting how Wolf's various modes of recollection, experience, and anticipation affect his assessment of situations and decisions regarding his role within those.

Art, lived

An excerpt from Frank Walker's 1951 biography *Hugo Wolf* provides a good introduction to the first letter. Walker acquired and developed much of his material through interviews with Wolf's family and friends soon after World War II. According to this account, the first letter chosen for this study reflects the young composer's state of mind following the termination of his first love affair with a woman named Vally Frank:

Poor Hugo suffered intensely. Although he had not seen Vally for the past six months he was so far from forgetting her that the shock of his dismissal almost drove him out of his mind. Heart-broken, he packed up with tears her letter and a

few pitiful souvenirs – a cape, a ring, some coloured ribbons, and fragments of a torn veil –and posted them back to Vally, receiving in return his own letters to her, which he burnt.

The break seems to have occurred in April, or possibly at the end of March. The earliest evidence of the change in their relationship is the confession and expression of Wolf's tortured feelings in a long and confused letter to Henriette Lang on 26th April, in which involved and remarkably mixed metaphors are carried on through pages. The grievous wound was then obviously almost unbearably painful.⁴⁰

As accurate a description of Wolf's troubled emotional state as this may be, the aspiring composer's letter addresses far more than unrequited love. Written in 1881 to Henriette Lang, 283 words compose the first paragraph and not a single end mark. These tempestuous statements may be characterized as a primarily introspective consideration, but the rejected lover's contemplation encompasses broad-reaching subjects, including creative ecstasy and an artist's suffering, as well as the rich nature of recollection and the vanity of dwelling on transient things. The aspiring composer understands that the act of remembering itself conceives a complex emotional response. Such a transcendent perception of time combined with his recent affair instigate an enriching yet bittersweet joy that he compares to the creative process.

Hoch verehrtes Fräulein!

Wenn es in Ihrer Einsiedelei auch so wunderschön ist, als hier im traulichen

Maierling so beglückwünschen Sie mich – wenn es aber nicht so wunderschön ist,

⁴⁰ Frank Walker, *Hugo Wolf: A Biography*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1951.

dann beneiden Sie mich und gönnen mir das stille Glück die schönsten Stunden meines Lebens mit demjenigen Gefühle wehmütiger Freude wieder in der Erinnerung durchzuleben, das, je anschaulicher die Bilder entschwundener Zeiten sich aufdrängen, durch ruhiges Genießen, durch andauerndes Verweilen den flüchtigen Moment ins Unendliche zu verlängern, dieß contemplative Sinnen, als es die momentanen Eindrücke wenn auch nicht so lebhaft und bestimmt, doch tiefer und umfangreicher vor Augen bringt gewiß freudige Empfindungen zu erwecken im Stande ist – so lange natürlich dieß träumerische Brüten die Seele afficiert – etwa wie der Künstler während des Schaffens von den Schwingen seines Genius’ getragen den letzten Erdenrest abstreifend höchstes Entzücken empfinden mag; – doch wenn die Schwingen der Seele ermatten – man wieder an das Irdische gebunden, von seinen Sinnen, vom Willen (aha! Schopenhauer!) wieder beherrscht in das wirklich Greifbare zurücksinkt und einem doch alles leer, öd und fadenscheinig vorkommt und man glauben möchte dieß sei eigentlich das Reich der Phantasie, wenn uns unsere Sinne nicht allzu sehr vom Gegenteil überzeugen, und wir nie recht erkennen, wann wir Träumen, wann wachen – ach, mir ist der Boden unter den Füßen geschwunden u. wie die Seele eines Verdammten irr ich im Dunstkreis des Elends herum, ungewiß wann sich meiner der Erlösungengel erbarmen wird – – – sehen Sie, verehrtestes Fräulein, solche Gedanken die sich in aller Süße eindrängen sind der Tropfen Wehmut der sich zu der unschuldigsten Freude gesellt – –⁴¹

⁴¹ Wolf to Henriette Lang, April 17, 1881, in vol. 1 of *Briefe*, 81.

The young composer's feverish description opens tamely. Following his musing upon the relative beauty of the respective locations enjoyed by the letter writer and his recipient, Wolf mildly admonishes, insisting that he be allowed to enjoy "stille Glück." This "fortune," however, quickly proves to be far from quiet or calm. Just as the text never stops (not even with a concluding period at the end of the paragraph), the modes which Wolf describes are dynamic, ceaselessly morphing and transforming whatever memories or creative impulses come to mind.

Although recollection initially appears to be a fixed state: "beneiden Sie mich und gönnen mir das stille Glück die schönsten Stunden meines Lebens," the vigor of such reflections and their objects becomes quickly clear: "mit demjenigen Gefühle wehmütiger Freude wieder in der Erinnerung durchzuleben, das, je anschaulicher die Bilder entschwundener Zeiten sich aufdrängen." Wolf first denotes remembrance as an act using the word "durchzuleben," and the richness and complexity of memory intensify as the bygone visions press themselves upon the remembering subject. As these memories assert themselves, their transient nature transmutes into an eternal existence as the recollector transcends time, abiding in the "quiet pleasure" of reminiscence. What the memories may have lost in vibrancy, they have gained in breadth and depth.

Next, the young composer compares the experience of recollection to the artist's creative process. Both processes move the soul, eschewing the remnants of worldly reality and embracing the heights of subjective delight. If this free, metaphysical movement ceases, then one is bound once again to the constraints and dark impulses of earthly reality. Wolf refers directly to Schopenhauer and mourns the lifeless, colorless experience of the "normal" perception of the surrounding environment, thereby tempting

the now earth-bound recollector to perceive the material world as a dream and the “Reich der Phantasie” as the genuine realm. Filled with angst, Wolf writes that he waits as one damned, hoping for his redeeming angel with no idea as to the timing of his salvation. To conclude, he sets aside his myriad metaphors and sums up the ongoing conflict: “sehen Sie, verehrtestes Fräulein, solche Gedanken die sich in aller Süße eindrängen sind der Tropfen Wehmut der sich zu der unschuldigsten Freude gesellt – –”

While Walker may read the letter as a mere impassioned conflation of confused concepts, Wolf’s chaotic opening reflects legitimate historical and contemporary metaphysical and aesthetic discourse. The long line of dependent clauses mirrors the paradoxa with which philosophers, authors, and artists have struggled for centuries.⁴² Furthermore, Wolf fulfills the ancient purpose of poetry as described in Hesiod’s *Theogony* to “trumpet the future and the past.”⁴³ The young man anchors his observations in that tradition by starting with memory and then equating the act of remembrance directly with creativity – what is yet to come. Finally, he wrestles with the implications found in the world of art as a reality equal or superior to the physical and temporal environment commonly acknowledged as actual. He places his personal exuberance and torment firmly in ancient theories of narrative, Romantic notions of transcendentalism, and modern nihilistic tendencies.

Further reflecting German intellectual heritage, Wolf peppers his writing with dichotomies, apparent syntheses, and ambiguities. He endows fleeting memory with

⁴² As seen above, Wolf writes of “wehmütige Freude” and hopes that “durch andauerndes Verweilen den flüchtigen Moment ins Unendliche zu verlängern.” All while he suffers “träumerische Brüten” and exults in “Schwingen der Seele.”

⁴³ Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. and trans. Kimberly Johnson, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 11.

infinite character in the perception of lost time during its moment of reflection. The richness of the term “Sinnen” as sensory-perceptual receptors or semantic determiners bursts with interpretive possibilities as it is paired with the inevitable, yet indeterminable whims of Schopenhauer’s “Wille.” This surplus of contradictory factors results in an assertion of intended disorientation of reality itself, as Wolf blurs the lines between dreaming and wakefulness.

The desire to condemn reality to the illusory is most certainly grounded in the writer’s perceived state of condemnation in the earthly realm. Wolf continues:

Verdammt in einer Welt zu leben, die mir jetzt nur erträglich wird, wenn es mir vergönnt ist in eine andere mich hineinzuzaubern in der ich nur im Schmerze, im Leiden mein Glück zu finden den einzigen Weg sehen muß um in der Wirklichkeit vor Ekel nicht zu Grunde zu gehen – – – bemitleiden Sie mich verehrtes Fräulein, es ist wahrhaftig schwer dieses Elend zu ertragen.⁴⁴

Although Wolf’s tolerance is exclusively accomplished by entering an alternate reality, his experience in this refuge is far from escapism. First, Wolf must mystically transport himself out of the one world and into the other. Second, pain and suffering await him there, even as he discovers his fortune in that realm. Wolf concludes his letter only after a walk outdoors, which further depresses him. Yet, despite the continued battering from his natural surroundings, he resolutely celebrates Christ’s resurrection: “ich will glauben, hoffen, und vertrauen.” In a succinct, yet bold, final sentence to his letter, he declares: “Was andere Menschen sich an Glücksgütern wünschen, sei es ein schönes, braves Weib, Reichtum, Ehre, od. was immerhin – mit Freuden verzicht ich auf

⁴⁴ Wolf to Henriette Lang, April 17, 1881, in vol. 1 of *Briefe*, 81.

dieses ‚Vergängliche‘ – was bleibenden Wert hat, was die Welt als die getreue Wiedergabe ihres Wesens und ihrer Erscheinung in der Kunst erkennt – das ist’s worauf nun mein höchstes Sinnen gerichtet ist.”⁴⁵

As he rejects the “Vergängliche,” what is evanescent, he praises meditation on and reiteration of what can be recalled – or the *Vergangenheit*. Similarly, the specific “Glücksgütern” which Wolf rejects cannot be fully separated from the essence of life and art that he identifies as permanent and worthwhile. Although a good woman, riches, and honor are declared fleeting, all of these desires may be recognized as essential actors in or aspects of whatever the “World” may see as its nature or inner character. If this letter is indeed referring to a terminated love affair, then Wolf’s recollection of the experience, relationship, or season – whatever one may call it – is dependent on its initial existence and thereby the woman, Vally, all the riches of emotional connection and physical satisfaction in the relationship, as well as any honor lost by either party.

The impetus for Wolf’s reflections are less personal in the next letter of this series. Contrasting with the intimacy and urgency of the first letter, mediation stands at the center of this second selection. Wolf considers the accomplishments of Wagner as the key to heaven itself, and the addressee, Oskar Grohe, was a German judge, who served as the intermediary between Wolf and the orchestra director August Bassermann in Mannheim.⁴⁶ Although Wolf enjoyed playing four-hand piano literature with both Grohe and his wife, Jeanne, Grohe held great professional significance in the composer’s life as

⁴⁵ Wolf to Henriette Lang, April 17, 1881, in vol. 1 of *Briefe*, 81.

⁴⁶ Robert Hernried and Frances Heller, “Hugo Wolf’s ‘Four Operas’ with Unpublished Letters by Hugo Wolf, Rosa Mayreder, and Oskar Grohe.” *The Musical Quarterly*, 31, no. 1 (January 1945): 89-100, accessed April 25, 2014, *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/stable/739340>.

a benefactor.⁴⁷ Grohe's most notably assisted in arranging the premiere of *Der Corregidor* in Mannheim.⁴⁸ Writing to his friend and supporter, Wolf seeks to justify his artistic choices, though they are contrary to the expectations of the wider public. It is interesting to consider just what may have been at stake for Wolf in such a defense to a member of the legal profession who also serves as the primary liaison between the composer and those who commissioned compositions and scheduled performances. Rather than ruminating on a broken relationship as in the first letter, here it is in Wolf's interest to maintain and nurture his ongoing friendship with a vital professional contact.

Heavenly inheritance

Like its predecessor, this letter contains thoughts on artistic production but in response to the external expectations of the listening public and music critics. Earlier the internal emotional experience of remembering past pleasures moved the young man to mourn the weight of the material world. Here, Wolf's vision of opera as finally and truly transcendent culminates in a celebration of comic fleshly pleasures in this more explicit consideration of the musical arts. The composer wrote this letter at the height of his career, following the publication of his Mörike, Eichendorff, and Goethe Lieder collections, which he composed and released in rapid succession from 1888 through the following year, 1889. His achievement in 1888 is considered the final of three "miracle

⁴⁷ Ernst Hilmar, "Grohe, Oskar," in *Hugo Wolf Enzyklopädie: 518 Einzelartikel zu Leben und Werk; Umfeld und Rezeption*, (Tutzing, Germany: Hans Schneider Verlag, 2007), 154.

⁴⁸ Hernried and Heller, "Wolf's 'Four Operas'," 89-100.

years” for German art song production, along with Schubert in 1815 and Schumann in 1840.⁴⁹

Responding to professional pressures, Wolf calls upon a history broader than personal experience to address the concerns of the public sphere. Here the reason for reflection concerns the future of musical composition rather than simply remembering events of the past. The former critic draws upon a specific historical account and figure in the myth of Wagner’s transformative genius in order to diagnose the present condition of music. Then, he prescribes comedy as the appropriate aesthetic response:

[...] Noch hat die Welt kaum eine Ahnung von dem philosophischen Tiefsinn, der sich in der ungewöhnlichsten Weise in den letzten Worten des Meisters ausspricht, und schon soll wieder etwas entstehen, das den Leuten neues Kopfweh verursachen soll, -- notabene durch bereits erprobte Kunststücke – wo sich doch allenthalben das Bedürfnis kundgibt nach behaglichem Genießen, nach freundlichen Bildern, wo alles sich sehnt, in dem grämlichen und grübelnden Ausdruck unserer Zeit ein verborgenes Lächeln, einen schalkhaften Zug zu erspähen. Sollen wir denn in unserer Zeit nicht mehr von Herzen lachen können und übermütig sein, müssen wir Asche aufs Haupt streuen, Bußgewänder anziehen, die Stirn in tiefsinnige Falten kleiden und Selbstzerfleischung predigen? Möge die Welt erlösen, wer den Erlöserberuf in sich fühlt; mich schert das wenig. Ich für mich will heiter sein, und wenn hundert Leute mit mir lachen können, bin ich’s zufrieden. Ich strebe auch keine „welterlösende“ Heiterkeit an. Nichts

⁴⁹ Susan Youens. “Tradition and Innovation: The Lieder of Hugo Wolf,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. James Parsons, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 207, accessed Jan 10, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521800273>.

weniger als das. Das überlassen wir billig den großen Genies. Wagner hat in seiner und durch seine Kunst bereits ein so gewaltiges Erlösungswerk vollbracht, daß wir ganz unnützerweise den Himmel stürmen, weil er uns bereits erobert ist, und daß es das gescheiteste ist, in diesem schönen Himmel ein recht freundliches Plätzchen uns zu suchen. Und dieses angenehme Plätzchen möchte ich gern finden, aber bei Leibe nicht in der Wüste bei Wasser und Heuschrecken und wildem Honig, sondern in einer fröhlichen und originellen Gesellschaft, bei Gitarregeklimper, Liebesseufzen, Mondscheinnächten, Champagnergelagen usw., kurz in einer – komischen Oper, und zwar ganz gewöhnlichen komischen Oper, ohne das düstere, welterlösende Gespenst eines Schopenhauerschen Philosophen im Hintergrunde. Dazu und nur dazu benötigte ich einen Dichter, und wahrhaftig! Dazu muß man auch ein Dichter sein und ein ganz verfluchter obenein. Verschaffen Sie mir ihn, und Sie sollen sehen, daß ein Dutzend Buddhas so ein ganz gewöhnliches, aber originelles komisches Operl nicht aufzuwiegen imstande sind.⁵⁰

Wolf touches on three different worlds: that of the sensationalist expectations for novelty among the listening audience and publicists, the true state of the musical aesthetic realm as redeemed because of Wagner's genius, and, finally, the carefree world of comic opera that Wolf hopes to compose. In contrast to the close of Wolf's letter to Henriette Lang, the "World" stands at the center of the first sentence of this excerpt. Equally contradictory, the "World" in the first letter affirmed the legitimacy of the composer's art, whereas here it designates a misguided majority. The "World" are Philistines, unappreciative of the divine heritage left in Wagner's

⁵⁰ Wolf to Oskar Grohe, June 28, 1890, in vol. 1 of *Briefe*, 379-380.

wake. Just as reality chafes Wolf in the first letter, those outside of the true artistic mentality are blind to substantive effects of the genius of *Musikdrama*. They note only its immediate thrill and demand another new, disquieting experience while failing to recognize the on-going consequences of the previous transformative event.

Though unbeknownst to the general audience, Wolf maintains that the very gates of heaven have opened. While many in the listening public are mourning, paradise itself stands open to them – an unclaimed inheritance. He asserts that those who are waiting for salvation and reconciliation wait in vain, because Wagner has already provided this in the musical arts. Wolf wants to feast, rather than fast, and he continues the biblical imagery as he contrasts his pleasure to a pious life in the wilderness, filled with locusts and wild honey.

Somehow the certitude of this new state of affairs remains insufficient, and the composer's vision of this new heaven and his role within it betrays a subtle disharmony. Although Wolf boldly proclaims the definitive nature of Wagner's genius, he still longs for true joy. Despite total access to heaven, he must still seek out his territory within it. He wants no more than a modest audience of 100 with which to enjoy his comic composition. Yet, where is the company to be found if all insist on dourness? According to Wolf, the world longs for sincere, unbridled "laughter from the heart." How can this be realized though, when the listeners themselves fail to recognize the need, let alone the means by which to meet it? Wolf may have denied himself the status of genius or savior in this letter, but the expectations for his comic composition are epic. He may not need to lead anyone out of Hades as Orpheus did, but it remains a colossal task to lead people into heaven.

According to the *Hugo Wolf Enzyklopädie*, Wolf's final remarks regarding "the dozen Buddhas" are in response to a text by Emil Heckel that Oskar Grohe recommended.⁵¹ In 1871, Heckel founded the inaugural Richard Wagner Verein in Mannheim, and he owned a music store providing scores and instruments for the community. Understandably, Wolf was not enthusiastic about what was likely an amateurish libretto. Since Wolf's derogatory comments follow rapturous praise of Wagner's legacy, his disregard for Heckel's text *Buddha* brings to mind more general religious associations as well. On the one hand, the young composer remains quite conservative by refusing to embrace an alternative narrative to the Wagner paradise trajectory, which parallels western Christian teleology. Nevertheless, he does not deny legitimacy to the practice and philosophy of Buddhism directly. He does not reject it because the Eastern religion is false, but rather, countless gods of any faith are deemed superfluous because suffering is dispelled and a paradise available. The horizontal shift of worldview from Christianity to Buddhism is unnecessary because the vertical shift from earth to heaven has opened up through Wagner's genius. Wolf goes to great extremes to justify composing comic opera by affirming the totality of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, once held by Nietzsche to realize the rebirth of true tragic experience. This creates a juxtaposition through which tragedy fulfilled gives birth to comedy.

While Wolf's conception of Wagner crossing the aesthetic threshold into paradise points to the sort of "right angles" of a Christian teleology that M. H. Abrams describes in *Natural Supernaturalism*, the promised peace and rest of Christian teaching eludes the composer. Reflecting an agnostic attitude, his wider correspondence displays fervent declarations of faith and hope as well as a firm denial of the Christian faith. His worldview may be linear rather than cyclical, but there remain further demands for progress. Although early on in this letter Wolf

⁵¹ Hilmar, "Grohe, Oskar," 155.

demurs the overly ambitious call to “welterlösende Heiterkeit,” his operatic search of a “recht freundliche[m] Plätzchen” in heaven demands a “ganz verfluchter” lyricist. The compositional process itself still requires striving on the behalf its creative personalities.

Heaven has opened, yet the composer must still reserve his space within it by his power, rather than the might of another. This responsibility is reinforced by Wolf’s comments regarding the poet. Even if he himself is not the librettist, selecting the proper text or writer demands an exceptional poet as reader. These contradictory conditions create a double bind, making Susan Youens’ account of the Wagnerite’s arduous and continually aborted efforts to find appropriate operatic material a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁵² Wolf adopts an adversarial narrative that requires talent and skill from the artist, rather than reconciliation of man to the divine (or artist to art) through an intermediary as promised by Christian doctrine and implied by Wolf’s initial declaration of Wagner’s accomplishment.

As in his earlier crisis, the composer is compelled to incorporate a vast range of ideas and possibilities in his conceptualization of music and his role within it. This reflects not only the pressures of his personal thought process, but also the trials of the prevailing aesthetic theoretical value system. The residue of an emphasis on tragedy as the highest form of dramatic art clings to Wolf’s compositional intentions. He must justify his choice of comedy, but the means by which he does this further reinforces the supposed supremacy of tragic artworks. By using Wagner’s aesthetic accomplishments as the basis for writing a comic opera, Wolf affirms tradition by lending his predecessor’s mastery of tragedy immense authority.

⁵² Susan Youens, “Hugo Wolf and the Operatic Grail: The Search for a Libretto,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 3 (November 1989): 277-298.

This fulfillment of the tragic mandate serves as a prerequisite for composing a true comic opera. Accordingly, comedy is progressive, because its very existence must be free of the burden laid upon music by Schopenhauer's philosophy. (This is not the only account in which Wolf seeks to temper Schopenhauer. In 1894, he cautions Hugo Faisst that taking *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* all too seriously may lead the vocalist to lose his cheery disposition.⁵³) Rather than accepting the dark destiny and weight of the Will, Wolf envisions originality and sensory pleasures as more powerful: "in einer fröhlichen und originellen Gesellschaft, bei Gitarregeklimper, Liebesseufzen, Mondscheinnächten, Champagnergelagen." Wolf's selective, yet diverse, perspective mirrors the expressions of plurality in modernism by the simultaneous emergence of various "new age" spiritual lifestyles, reactionary movements in the church, and the contest of many political ideologies following the decline of liberal power in fin de siècle Vienna.

Estrangement

The third and final excerpt features correspondence with Wolf's most intimate professional contact, his librettist Rosa Mayreder. The most prominent of the recipients featured here, Mayreder's prolific work as an author and feminist is still available today in essay collections such as *Gender und Kultur* and *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit*. Fortunately, for our purposes here, she also wrote the afterword to the 1921 publication, *Briefe an Rosa Mayreder von Hugo Wolf*, providing a close friend's perspective on the composer and insight into her own personality. Wolf's musings here, however, are the least vulnerable. Written during his first institutionalization, Wolf makes preposterous assertions with uncanny clarity. There are no

⁵³ Wolf to Hugo Faisst, 13 September 1894, in vol. 2 of *Briefe*, 467.

traces of the conflicted considerations found in the earlier letters. This contrast serves to legitimize his earlier struggles as more than mere personal battles:

Liebe, einzige Freundin!

So darf ich Sie wohl nennen, denn seit dem 24. d. M., an welchem „kritischen“ Tage – natürlich in der Nacht vom 24. auf den 25., denn alle großen Umwandlungen vollziehen sich in schlaflosen Nächten – hat sich eine Wiedergeburt in mir vollzogen. Ich weiß nun, daß ich einzig nur an Ihnen u. unserm lieben Lino [Karl Mayreder] wahre u. aufrichtige Freunde besitze. Alle Andern, Frau Köchert Edmund etc. etc. mitinbegriffen haben mich schändlich verrathen. Sie sind auf immer ausgelöscht aus meinem Gedächtniße. – Doch nun zur Sache. Ich habe in letzter Zeit oftmals Ihrer gedacht. Heute Nacht träumte mir auch von Ihnen. Ich nannte Sie mein liebes Roserl, trotzdem wir uns wacker über unterschiedliche Thematas herumstritten. Das soll uns aber nichts anhaben, vielmehr denke ich, daß Sie von nun ab mehr denn je mein liebes Roserl sein werden, trotzdem wir künftighin nur aus der Ferne mehr verkehren sollen. Ich beabsichtige nach meiner Entlassung aus der Anstalt in die Schweiz zu flüchten u. habe Luzern zu meinem Domizil erkoren. – Nun aber hege ich den sehnlichen Wunsch, Sie, liebste Freundin u. Lino wiederzusehn, und mich einmal Menschen gegenüber, die mich verstehn, auszusprechen. Besuche von Seiten anderer sogenannter Freunde u. Freundinnen habe ich mir ausdrücklich verboten. Wie Vieles werde ich Ihnen zu erzählen haben! Denken Sie nur, daß ich zwei volle Monate unter den ärgsten Narren verbringen mußte. Ist es da zu verwundern,

wenn ich in solcher Umgebung auch auf närrische Gedanken kam? Daß ich kein completer Narr geworden bin, dafür war ich denn doch zu vernünftig. So war ich freilich ein Narr unter Narren in dem Sinne wie Goethe es im Coptischen Lied meint. Schließlich bin ich doch der geblieben der ich war, nur größer, weiser, reifer, ja ich möchte sagen lustiger u. vor allem witziger bin ich geworden, u. wissen Sie, was noch? In meiner grossen Noth wurde ich auch – Poet, u. z. ein ganz verteufelter Poet. Endlich, -- was ich so lange sehnlichst erstrebt. Meine künftigen Operntexte werde ich mir selber machen. Denken Sie nur. Ich habe nicht weniger, als 4 Tetralogien im Kopfe. Drei komischen Inhaltes u. eine von einer Tragik, die jeder bisherigen Tragödie spottet. Doch darüber mündlich ein Mehres.⁵⁴

Written on November 27, 1897, this letter follows days after Hugo Wolf wrote to his doctor, requesting release from the asylum within the month, yet his stay would extend well into the year 1898. This initial residency was the first of repeated institutionalizations that Wolf underwent until his death in 1903. Mania was nothing new for Wolf. However, his previous productivity with Lieder collections at such times was focused on small portions of a given project. His letters from the late 1880s and early 1890s reflect completion of individual or, at most, small clusters of songs, one after another. Such simultaneity as he describes here is unusual even for his creative patterns.

In Mayreder's comments in the afterword accompanying *Hugo Wolf: Briefe an Rosa Mayreder*, the 1921 publication of her letters from Wolf, the librettist describes the burden the

⁵⁴ Wolf to Rosa Mayreder, November 29, 1897, in vol. 3 of *Briefe*, 505.

composer bore. She portrays this affliction as characteristic for a man of principle with artistic sensibilities:

Und das äußere Leben war ihm feindlich, wie es allen feindlich ist, die sich ihm nicht beugen, [...] die nur dem Gesetz ihres eigenen Innern gehorchen. Er war kein Herr des Lebens, kein 'überlegener' Mensch. Das erbärmlich Alltägliche mit seinen kleinen Schikanen konnte ihn gänzlich umwerfen und überwältigen; zufällige Umstände erlangten stets Gewalt über ihn und zerstörten ihm die schönsten, versprechendsten Momente des Lebens.⁵⁵

The letters preceding the final selected text reflect such struggle. The first citation depicts an intimate relationship between lived experience and creative pursuit. The young Wolf suffers as he recalls the intense pleasure of his recently terminated love affair – the painful joy of reliving what is forever lost. Shifting from a private retrospective to professional expectations in the second letter, he expresses his obligation to provide the carefree pleasure of a comic opera. Even as the composer rejects the unreasonable pressure to crank out another aesthetic revolution, he takes on creating a comedy as his *duty*. Such dichotomies may be identified throughout Wolf's career. As an informal student of aesthetics, he came to embrace both Wagner's complete works and Nietzsche's later writings. His productivity pattern consisted of miraculously prodigious months separated by years of creative drought. The final letter quoted above sketches a surreal situation in which all is eerily self-evident and integrated. One does not sense the inner tumult and tension found in his earlier correspondence. Rather than wrestling with the demands and unique expectations of composing in the wake of Wagner, Wolf boldly claims the mantle of

⁵⁵ Rosa Mayreder, Afterword to *Briefe an Rosa Mayreder von Hugo Wolf*, ed. Heinrich Werner, (Vienna: Nikola Verlag, 1921), 108.

Dichterkomponist. To his librettist (of all people), he declares not only that he has acquired the skill and talent of a lyricist but also that this new-found gift may be exercised on no fewer than four operatic projects simultaneously. In his madness, he exchanges the challenges of timely innovation for a shallow imitation of his predecessor.

He also pronounces his social sphere to be no longer complex nor in the least bit messy. This he accomplishes by crying “betrayal” and cutting ties with all other friends, including his closest companion and lover of the past decade, Melanie Köchert. To Wolf, Mayreder may be professionally superfluous as his librettist, but she and her husband are now anointed his sole social contacts. This is also an uncanny reenactment of Wagnerian relational practice. Ute Frevert describes Wagner’s relationship with Cosmina in her book *Vertrauensfragen: Eine Obsession der Moderne*. Cosmina must bear sole responsibility for maintaining Wagner’s unyielding expectation of unquestioning, blind trust. Finally, Wolf’s inner voice is less diverse in this example. He has no need to resort to referencing others’ works or thoughts, because he is self-sufficient as a writer, composer, and thinker. We learn little about his many operatic projects in this text because he is anxious to discuss it orally with Mayreder. Unlike the other letters, which display a vigorous and transparent debate about the essence of artistic praxis and production, Wolf withholds information about the substance of his activity.

The historical accounts following Wolf’s bold assertions in the letter contradict his hopes and confirm his unwell state of mind. After 1897 he would complete no more compositions. *Der Corregidor* would remain his only published operatic score. His wide circle of friends remained intact and faithfully served and supported him in every bout of insanity until his death in 1903. I have included this letter not because of its factual discord with reality, but because of its formal deviance from earlier correspondence. In this text Wolf’s many voices are silenced. The uncanny

lack of dissonance in his account is chilling. It is uncharacteristic in its certitude, in its simple line of thought, in the compartmentalization of subject matter, and in the single perspective presented.

Heinrich Werner, the editor of *Hugo Wolf: Briefe an Rosa Mayreder* chose not to include Wolf's correspondence written during his asylum stay. He understood such a practice to be salacious and a misrepresentation of Wolf's person. This not only reveals the intimate rapport Wolf possessed with those who shared professional interests, but also highlights the ascension of the young Austrian composer to a serious subject in contemporary research. Our present-day access to these documents points to the composer's import for academic inquiry. Rather than damaging his reputation, the published letter testifies to Wolf's historical significance, which demands an uncensored view.

In his fantasy, Hugo Wolf has arrived. He is no longer underway – wrestling, creating, suffering, or conceptualizing. He has severed ties with the duplicitous. He refuses to tolerate, let alone nurture, unreliable relationships. His creative genius has crystallized into the centralized source of his sole imagination. In reality, Wolf's artistic isolation reduces his once vibrant and contentious aesthetic to a poor imitation of his predecessor, the *Dichterkomponist*. Fortunately, Hugo Wolf's supporters refused to abandon him. Although he denounces these friendships, his friends did not desert him in his need. The last years of his life the Hugo Wolf Verein and many unaffiliated individuals provided the financial means necessary for Wolf to live his last years in safe domiciles, whether in private homes or within institutions as required by his mental state.

Virtually all of Hugo Wolf's companions were professionally involved in his career through financial support and creative impetus. Those he may have considered strictly professional supporters continued to care for him in his last years when it was clear his career

had ended. The publications of the Hugo Wolf Verein give perhaps the most complete testimony of this phenomenon. They are responsible for the many collections of Hugo Wolf's letters compiled and published in the years after his death, and although each volume presents only the composer's correspondence, the books feature letters sent exclusively to one recipient. The respective volumes were not curated chronologically or thematically. The organization's primary goal may have been to secure Hugo Wolf's legacy, but their editorial decisions also preserve the memory of the chorus of voices with whom the composer collaborated.

The preceding discussion highlights the multiplicity of ideas, artworks, and personalities present in Hugo Wolf's considerations and pursuit of artistic endeavors. Although many of these voices may be inaudible, the lacunas reveal much about those that are center-stage. Throughout his letters, Wolf brings together concepts and imagery from his voracious reading often and liberally by embedding them within his conceptualizations and synthesizing sources in less than credible combinations. He engages in a sort of capricious proof-texting, limiting philosophical ideas to accommodate his arguments and elevating singular phrases to the heights of transcendent value. This is the beauty of personal correspondence. The writer is not bound to high rhetorical standards, but rather, it is expected that one recruits and edits ideas for the sake of articulating the idiosyncratic in dynamic community. Wolf's correspondence reveals not only the intricacies of passionate, yet comprehensible, self-expression, but also the distillation of musical and poetic heritage into an aesthetic wrought by contemporary experience.

Chapter II.

Proclaiming Paradox: Staking out Ground in *Aphorismen*

“Ein Aphorismus ist der letzte Ring einer langen Gedankenkette.”⁵⁶ This metaphor opens all editions of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach’s maxims with provocative self-reflexivity. As well as attributing a character of culmination to the aphorism, this description emphasizes an unseen connectivity and continuity. The reader is moved to consider not only the prerequisite ponderings of the opening motto, but also the preceding aphoristic tradition. While not a contradiction to the etymological roots of the Greek term *aphorizein*, this assertion provides an interesting contrast to the lexical definition: to “mark off” or “divide.” Continuity, of course, does not preclude selectivity, but this unseen chain of thought brings a progressive extension to mind that differs from the sort of compartmentalization and demarcation more immediately associated with limits and borders.

The motto above places thought at the center of the aphoristic art, and the following discussion continues to explore the writer’s further assertions in light of her opening salvo. Two other aphorisms deal explicitly with mental activity. Both are significantly longer than the other hundreds of entries in Ebner-Eschenbach’s *Gesammelte Schriften* from 1893. Their aberrant length is immediately apparent. It is intriguing that their form would so contradict the message of the motto, although the subject matter of thinking is shared. Below each aphorism is quoted in full and examined.

⁵⁶ Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen in Aphorismen; Aus einem zeitlosen Tagebuch; Altweibersommer; Parabeln und Märchen*, vol. 9 of *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Edgar Groß (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1960, 1961), 7.

Einen Gedanken verfolgen – wie bezeichnend dies Wort! Wir eilen ihm nach, erhaschen ihn, er entwindet sich uns, und die Jagd beginnt von neuem. Der Sieg bleibt zuletzt dem Stärkeren. Ist es der Gedanke, dann läßt er uns nicht ruhen, immer wieder taucht er auf – neckend, quälend, unserer Ohnmacht, ihn zu fassen, spottend. Gelingt es aber der Kraft unseres Geistes, ihn zu bewältigen, dann folgt dem heißen Ringkampf ein beseligendes, unwiderstehliches Bündnis auf Leben und Tod, und die Kinder, die ihm entspringen, erobern die Welt.⁵⁷

Unlike the opening motto of the collection, in this musing the reader is privileged to a chain of thought prerequisite to the last link. Ebner-Eschenbach's characterization of thinking in this second saying embodies both the Greek root meaning of aphorism and her earlier designation. If the thinker overcomes the idea, then it has been caught. In other words, it is contained; it lies within boundaries. However, to chase a thought is an arduous, messy task. By presenting the process of thinking, the reader can appreciate the alternate description more fully as well.

This short paragraph serves as an explication of the expression: "einen Gedanken verfolgen." By materializing the unseen chain of thought preceding the last link that composes the aphorism, Ebner-Eschenbach justifies her earlier characterization. Her first adage emphasizes the history of origin within a concise statement, thereby deepening the reader's understanding of the essence of this small form.

In this second entry on thought, Ebner-Eschenbach presents the unseen history asserted in the first. This both contradicts and demonstrates the prioritization of the seen or final product, as embodied in the Greek term *aphorizein*. She complicates the reader's reception of the aphorism

⁵⁷ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 22.

by highlighting the unseen process. This illustration extends the form of the genre and points to the author as crafting and grafting the final product. While marking off and dividing are prerequisite processes, these actions emphasize the brevity of the printed definition and attribute a state of finality to it. The aphorism is free to be considered alone; other associations and contradictions have been pruned back. This second consideration of thought explores both practice as product and product as practice.

In fact, the various dynamics within this illustration of thinking add yet another type of process. The chase initially has a progressive, linear character like the chain, as the thinker comes from behind. However, the final clause of the second sentence highlights a cyclical nature as well. After the first attempt comes to a close, the second begins anew. A cycle is expansive in its potential as temporally infinite, yet its repetitive character makes it a closed system.

The agents in the drama of thinking further confound our understanding of aphorisms. Here we have not simply one subject seeking to seize its object, but rather a stand-off between the thought and the thinker. While the idea is the object of the thinker's pursuit, the notion itself nags and disturbs its pursuer. If the thought ultimately prevails, it does not dissipate out of the thinker's reach. Instead it persists in its existence, interrupting and corrupting the person's other mental activities. However, if the thinker is stronger than her pesky opponent, the mind's victory triggers a transformative event.

The fantastic way in which the final sentence presents this intellectual wrestling is reminiscent of Romanticism, while the asserted outcome encompasses the goal of Realist literature. If the mind wins in this battle of the unseen, then the idea transfigures into a force of change in the wider world beyond its opponent's cognition, born out of the paradoxical and cyclical alliance of life and death. Although the initial containment of the thought mimics the

root definition, the consequent capture or conquering of the world implies a shattering of existing demarcations and rules in reality. The drama of the abstracting alone is not satisfactory; the thought culminates in concrete change beyond the mind itself.

While apprehending a thought in the world of ideas results in material change beyond the sphere of cognition, the last of these three thought aphorisms introduces another internal element, whose essence is characterized primarily through its authority or vertical orientation. This second long entry provides possible insight into the nature of the intersection of life and death suddenly announced in the previous aphorism. Continuing to expound upon the thinking process in more detail, this final contribution describes the refinement following a thought's apprehension:

Es steht etwas über unseren schaffensfreudigen Gedanken, das feiner und schärfer ist als sie. Es sieht ihrem Entstehen zu, es überwacht, ordnet und zügelt sie, es mildert ihnen oft die Farben, wenn sie Bilder weben, und hält sie am knappsten, wenn sie Schlüsse ziehen. Seine Ausbildung hängt von der unserer edelsten Fähigkeiten ab. Es ist nicht selbst schöpferisch, aber wo es fehlt, kann nichts Dauerndes entstehen; es ist eine moralische Kraft, ohne die unsere Geistige nur Schemen hervorbringt; es ist das Talent zum Talent, sein Halt, sein Auge, sein Richter, es ist – das künstlerische Gewissen.⁵⁸

Teasing her reader, Ebner-Eschenbach waits to name the “creative conscience” until the very end. This power remains a neutral and ambiguous “es” until the last words of her sketch.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 69.

⁵⁹ On September 30, 1893, Ebner-Eschenbach reflected on the ambiguous and accommodating nature of “es” in her journal: “‘Es’ droht schon wieder zu regnen. Dieses ‘es’ ist wirklich merkwürdig. Allmählig heiterte ‘es’ sich aber auf.” Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher IV*,

By delaying her identification of the subject, emphasis remains on its activity and effects, spurring the reader on to seek to understand essence, rather than simply note the author's categorization.

That said, Ebner-Eschenbach does not hesitate to delineate a definite hierarchy between the creative conscience and the respective thought. This artistic ethic exercises authority through supervising, molding, and reigning in its charges. Although this mediation may steal some of the vibrancy of "Schaffensfreude," Ebner-Eschenbach claims that nothing enduring may come of thoughts left to their own devices.⁶⁰ Absent of this "moral power," cognition alone produces empty schemes – shells bearing no life. Yet, the thought must yield to its superior for vitality beyond the mind, allowing the creative conscience to prune it in preparation for fruitful endurance.

In this rendition of (or perhaps addendum to) the creative act of thinking, inspiration and ecstasy may not be denied, but the practice of self-discipline certainly is recognized as equally essential to meaningful innovation. Even when describing the "Bilder" of "schaffensfreudigen Gedanken," they were "woven," or crafted. These qualifications highlight the artistic components of skill, rather than presenting art as a strictly ecstatic experience. Furthermore, though genius is not excluded in this account, the process of refining the unruly, arresting aspects of fantasy gives substance to an otherwise empty, transient structure of a work without creative conscience.

1890-1897, *Kritische Texte und Deutungen: Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*, eds. Konrad Polheim and Norbert Gabriel. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995), 234.

⁶⁰ The arduous nature of creativity is highlighted here as well: "Wer von Schaffensfreude spricht, hat höchstens Mücken geboren." Ebner-Eschebach, *Aphorismen*, 61.

The earlier metaphor of chasing and capturing a thought is extended in this third account. While describing the creative conscience, Ebner-Eschenbach emphasizes the inner hierarchy with the words “edelsten Fähigkeiten,” and she acknowledges external power dynamics as she comments on durability. Following the capture of a thought, the creative conscience molds the idea, narrowing it further through tempering its color and character. These adjustments prepare it for life beyond the mind – the pending conquest proclaimed in the previous aphorism.

In writing about the legacy of a given thought, the author asserts that the longevity of an idea is dependent upon its survival in the outer world. Contrary to early Romantic values, in this account, the greatest ideas are not autonomous or disinterested. This is portrayed in both their ability to impact the material world and the ways in which manipulation and reception of a given thought is necessary for its continued existence. Internally, the idea must succumb to the adjustments imposed by the creative conscience. This may be understood as an “alliance in life and death,” as introduced in the earlier portrait. A thought must sacrifice certain elements in order to maintain life and integrity in the outer world.

When one compares the character of these two long aphorisms, the former presents a dramatic, transcendent process, whereas the latter is more subdued and conservative in its assertion. Yet, the entry calling for restraint is more daring insofar as it introduces an original term, the “creative conscience.” Although the chase of the former maxim has a more adventurous tone, one could argue that it is exceedingly unoriginal in its substance as an explication of an existing saying. In this way, form contradicts content. However, the two aphorisms’ co-existence allows Ebner-Eschenbach’s intellectual world to enjoy pluralism and maintain the characteristic tension of process and product introduced by the opening motto. This is entirely appropriate, if not necessary, for depictions of thinking and the impact of ideas on the concrete world beyond

the mind. The absurdly reflexive nature of reflections on reflecting quickly confound subject and object, as well as medium and message.

Succinct success

This brief study of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's aphorisms uses volume nine of the 1961 critical edition of her *Gesammelte Werke* published in Munich. It draws from both the *Gesammelte Schriften* of 1893 and the *Sämtliche Werke* from the 1920s, noting which aphorisms were omitted and replaced between the two publications. Although more recent critical editions of selected texts by Ebner-Eschenbach exist, the Nymphenberger publication is the last to include the *Aphorismen*.

Counted among the finest aphoristic writers of German literature, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach published her first collection of pithy sayings in 1880 at the beginning of a period in which her short prose enjoyed a success that had eluded her earlier dramatic works. She dedicated this first edition of aphorisms to her friends,⁶¹ a gesture that embodies both the intimate and communal character of a genre that features highly subjective takes on the truisms of a community. Ebner-Eschenbach's reflections resonated so strongly with the reading public that two more expanded editions were published in subsequent years. In 1884, a second edition with 400 entries was released, and then an additional 100 were added to the 1890 collection, for a total of 500.

⁶¹ Dee L. Ashliman, "Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach und der deutsche Aphorismus," *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur mit Geographie* 18 (1974): 155. Although my research has not yet yielded further information on the original dedication, it may hold significance as an allusion to Rahel Levin Varnhagen's *Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde*. The influential Jewish salon intellectual peppered this work with many aphorisms. In addition to the first publication, the 1895 and 1906 editions of Ebner-Eschenbach's *Aphorismen*, the dedication reads: "Meinen Freunden widme ich dieses kleine Buch."

Distributed by the Gebrüder Paetel publishing house of Berlin in 1893, the title page of the first volume of Ebner-Eschenbach's *Gesammelte Schriften* reads: *Aphorismen. [/] Parabeln, Märchen und Gedichte*. Her aphorisms open her collected works, and they are set apart from the other genres included in the first book. One could argue that poetry is the exceptional element in this group of four, rather than one among the three prose categories. However, the title pages clearly indicate the singular nature of the aphoristic collection, and the collection of parables, fairy tales, and poetry as a separate work. It is a fourth edition of the *Aphorismen* and a third edition of *Parabeln, Märchen und Gedichte*.⁶²

The formatting of *Aphorismen* in the 1893 edition extends this sort of care to each individual aphorism as well. The motto enjoys its own page, carefully centered so: "Ein Aphorismus [/] ist der letzte Ring einer langen Gedankenkette."⁶³ The line break clearly denotes the centrality of the genre of choice, and a fine line drawn beneath the opening words unquestioningly distinguishes between this contemplation and the aphorisms composing the body of the work.

This distinction is further solidified in the thorough numbering and explicit divisions of the following 500 entries. Page three begins with the subheading "Erstes Hundert." in larger font than the motto and body. A small "x" beneath this introduction is struck through by another fine line, further separating the subheading from its components below.⁶⁴ Each entry following is introduced by its corresponding numeral designation (1., 2., 3., ...) centered above the maxim, which is left-justified with an indent. Beneath each aphorism repeats the same fine line as found

⁶² Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen in Aphorismen; Parabeln, Märchen und Gedichte*, vol. 1 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, 1893).

⁶³ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen, Gesammelte Schriften*, 2.

⁶⁴ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen, Gesammelte Schriften*, 3.

beneath the motto, without the decorative “x” of the subheading’s divider. The last saying in a grouping of one hundred also has this detail, closing out the century graphically as well as numerically.

Each section of one hundred aphorisms begins on a fresh page, following the formatting precedents – of font size and dividers – established by the first. Numbering begins anew as well. Such organization gives the collection the feel of a reference book. It reinforces the literary quality of these sayings rather than what one would expect from an oral tradition of proverbs. The formatting emphasizes each aphorism as an independent entity by enclosing each respective offering within its number and graphic line break. The systematic subdivisions of each grouping of one hundred and the explicit denotation of sequence through individual numbering enables close study and conversation with easy referencing.

This edition’s organizational tools aid the reception of the text, while also reinforcing the underlying self-referential nature of aphoristic writing by presenting these axioms as a reference work would.⁶⁵ Over a century following the first edition of Ebner-Eschenbach’s *Aphorismen*, many publishers in both Austria and Germany continue to reprint and repackage the Moravian aristocrat’s reflections.⁶⁶ In his book *Kleine Geschichte des österreichischen Aphorismus*, Stefan Kaszyński identifies Ebner-Eschenbach as the first Austrian author to publish aphorisms as an aesthetically self-aware collection.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ It is striking how much these formatting choices affect the reader’s experience. Rather than indicating a superficial sequence or artifice of systematic organization, the numbering and illustrated line breaks emphasize the plurality of the aphoristic collection. Later editions and reprints that do not include numbering and that include more entries per page than earlier editions present the collection as a homogeneous mass of entries.

⁶⁶ A quick search of WorldCat online shows publications that include her aphorisms from every decade since 1880 excepting the 1940s and 2000s.

⁶⁷ “Von einem ästhetisch gattungsbewußten Schreiben von Aphorismen darf man aber in Österreich erst seit der Veröffentlichung des ersten selbständigen Aphorismusbandes (1879) von

The French-speaking German author from Moravia is, of course, continuing the chain of a long line of aphoristic writing and thinking throughout Europe, inspired by Classical literature and biblical books of wisdom. This heritage provides a solid foundation for Ebner-Eschenbach's agenda to further secure universal humanist values, challenge uncritical application of biblical commands, and navigate the problems that arise from a robust view of individualism. Just as Erasmus is credited with founding "einen populären Humanismus" in his critical collection of Roman maxims, entitled *Adagia*,⁶⁸ Ebner-Eschenbach exploits the communal character of the aphorism.

We see this most explicitly in this aphorism: "Respekt vor dem Gemeinplatz! Er ist seit Jahrhunderten aufgespeicherte Weisheit."⁶⁹ Wolfgang Mieder points out that Ebner-Eschenbach's use of exclamation points is rare, and the punctuation here indicates irony.⁷⁰ Certainly, other entries in her collection reveal a progressive mindset and warn against traditionalism, and she explicitly supersedes existing proverbs in other pithy assertions: "Ausnahmen sind nicht immer Bestätigung der alten Regel; sie können auch die Vorboten einer neuen Regel sein."⁷¹ Yet, as this example shows, she mines the very products of common sense

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach ernsthaft auch in theoretischen Kategorien sprechen." Stefan H. Kaszyński, *Kleine Geschichte des österreichischen Aphorismus*, (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 1999), 9.

⁶⁸ Erasmus von Rotterdam, *Des. Erasmi Roterodami Adagiorum Chiliades iuxta locos communes digestae 1599 (?)*, quoted in Wilhelm Grenzmann, "Probleme des Aphorismus" in *Der Aphorismus: zur Geschichte zu den Formen und Möglichkeiten einer literarischer Gattung*, ed. Gerhard Neumann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), 182.

⁶⁹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 32.

⁷⁰ Wolfgang Mieder. *Sprichwörtliche Aphorismen: von Georg Christoph Lichtenberg bis Elazar Benyoëtz*. (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 1999), 33. It should be noted that Mieder's quote has an exclamation point following both sentences. This is not, however, the case in the 1893 edition.

⁷¹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 29.

and its truisms to produce her own contributions to the mists of aphoristic musing. She is not a legalist and highlights the spectrum within which ethical decisions are made: “Wenn du durchaus nur die Wahl hast zwischen einer Unwahrheit und einer Grobheit, dann wähle die Grobheit; wenn jedoch die Wahl getroffen werden muß zwischen einer Unwahrheit und einer Grausamkeit, dann wähle die Unwahrheit.”⁷²

These contributions reflect the spirit Francis Bacon expresses in the following: “Lastly, aphorisms, representing only portions and as it were fragments of knowledge, invite others to contribute and add something in their turn; whereas methodical delivery, carrying the show of a total, makes men careless, as if they were already at the end.”⁷³ The years in which Ebner-Eschenbach’s aphorisms succeeded so greatly were a time of transition. Although there were great strides taken and many changes made in the Ringstrasse period, by 1880 the hope of liberalism was waning. The future was uncertain, yet the overt and pervasive fatalism of the fin de siècle had not yet taken root in intellectual circles. One sees in Ebner-Eschenbach’s aphorisms an intriguing combination of persistent conservatism and insistent liberalism. They tease, challenge, and encourage her audience to engage in the co-authorship of interpretation.

Ebner-Eschenbach creates many boundaries in her aphorisms – and oversteps them. In this broad selection of her aphoristic publications, one finds a treasure trove of the possibilities and challenges presented by the Austrian aristocrat’s conceptions of humanity and creativity. These sayings often feature the intersection of two independent entities and the resultant state of

⁷² Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 27.

⁷³ Francis Bacon, Vol. 4 of *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. Spedding-Ellis-Heath, (London: 1860), 451, quoted in Grenzmann, “Probleme des Aphorismus,” 182.

this collision. For instance, “Wenn ein Mensch uns zugleich Mitleid und Ehrfurcht einflößt, dann ist seine Macht über uns grenzenlos.”⁷⁴

Naturally, one of the beauties of the aphorism is its use of absolute terms to state a generality, and its compact nature serves as a prime platform for examining the seemingly contradictory. One such example is: “Wenn man nur die Alten liest, ist man sicher, immer neu zu bleiben.”⁷⁵ Contradictions within a collection are not problematic, but rather, emblematic, and complex processes and delicate states may be summed up with reckless precision. For example, “Anmut ist ein Ausströmen der inneren Harmonie.”⁷⁶ These observations seek to highlight both thematic and structural aspects of selected entries from the collection of aphorisms in Paetel’s 1893 edition of Ebner-Eschenbach’s collected works.

Austrian authors have continued to turn to the aphorism in the decades following Ebner-Eschenbach’s first publication of the genre as a distinct, stand-alone literary variety. Secondary literature provides evidence of her mastery of the form also, as her work is regularly used to model optimal execution of various techniques displayed in the eclectic tradition of these miniatures.⁷⁷ Looking at her journal from the year of the publication of *Gesammelte Schriften* provides a fascinating sketch of the author’s literary production and her engagement with the wider community.

⁷⁴ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 12.

⁷⁵ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 12.

⁷⁶ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 8.

⁷⁷ Grenzmann’s essay “Probleme des Aphorismus,” cited above, is one such source. He turns to Ebner-Eschenbach for a disproportionate number of exemplars.

In her reflections on literary inspiration, one sees the aristocrat's passion for presenting a given person's life and corresponding story. Ebner-Eschenbach wrote the following about her work on *Glaubenlos?* in her journal on July 22, 1893:

Was will ich mit dieser Arbeit? Was ich mit jeder meiner Arbeiten will:
Möglichst einfach und treu die Lebensgeschichte od.: ein Stück Lebensgeschichte
eines Menschen erzählen, dessen Charakter od. [/] u dessen Schicksal [/]
Geschick mir eine besonders lebhaftes Interesse eingeblöbt haben. Ich habe die
'Anregung' ein Buch zu schreiben nie durch ein Buch sondern immer nur durch
einen Menschen empfangen.⁷⁸

Throughout her works, she champions humanism, even if figures representing this worldview often fail to effect lasting change in her stories. Both her narratives and aphorisms simultaneously embody a benevolent attitude toward and searing criticism of the imperfections of the human condition.

The following excerpt displays how with this commitment to the humanistic tradition comes a deep sense of responsibility to pursue justice in all spheres of life. The appendix of her journal from 1893 contains notes for an unpublished aphorism comparing racism in America with segregation of women's work in literary anthologies. Here, one can find a biting commentary and insights as to its writer's process.

An die Eisenbahnzüge in Amerika werden zuletzt ein paar Waggons angehängt
für die Neger. In den Büchern über Litteratur
[*Textabbruch*]

Auf den Eisenbahnen in Amerika giebt es einen Waggon für die Neger.

⁷⁸ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher IV*, 232.

In den Büchern über Litteraturgeschichte giebt es ein eigenes Kapitel für die Frauen.⁷⁹

By juxtaposing discriminatory publishing practices against racial segregation in the United States, Ebner-Eschenbach emphasizes both the importance of the “Frauenfrage” as well as that of the literary field. One might argue that the organization of literary histories is merely an aesthetic choice or a purely academic abstraction. Yet, how cultural products are presented and therefore institutionalized reflects and reinforces attitudes in wider society. Such anthologies as cited above were widely read in the late 19th century. This aphorism equates European contemporary attitudes towards women with the plainly discriminatory treatment of people a world away.⁸⁰

By first presenting the foreign situation, Ebner-Eschenbach invites the reader to be outraged and horrified by the barbaric behavior of the other, only to be confronted with personal prejudice a sentence later. The situation in the United States is an ocean away geographically, and the European reader might even claim that recent U.S. slavery is antediluvian to a European in light of the early condemnation of slavery in the *Sachenspiegel* of the Holy Roman Empire.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher IV*, 272.

⁸⁰ While one could argue that this aphorism is merely arguing that women writers should not be treated as blacks in America, the syntax of the aphorism and semantic weight would be grossly compromised by failing to recognize both situations as unjust. Furthermore, Ebner-Eschenbach’s grief at the assassination of Lincoln stated in an entry from April 27, 1865, her later membership in the Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus, and many criticisms of Georg von Schönerer und Karl Lüger provide biographical evidence that she herself actively opposed many forms of discrimination.

⁸¹ Of course, the practice of *Leibeigenschaft* continued practically (if not in the full legal sense) in the Habsburg Empire well into the 19th century, and this is not to suggest that Ebner-Eschenbach’s contemporaries were not implicitly racist themselves. However, such contemporary practices of racial segregation and the recent America form of slavery were presumably relatively alien to Ebner-Eschenbach’s audience due to the historical, legal, and demographic differences of the U.S. and Europe in the late 19th century.

The power of the imagined distance between the societal reality of America and that of Europe is emphasized by the line break before the second sentence. This pause is a false respite, though. The break serves as a fatal pivot to the very present injustice of discriminatory practices in contemporary Western Europe toward women.

The adjustments made after the break between the two drafts provide a glimpse of the aphorist's skill in presenting commonalities. In both versions the subjects are parallel, but the revised version strengthens the asserted universal. By omitting the temporal reference "zuletzt," the author highlights the general injustice of discrimination, eliminating a detail that distracts from the similarities. Furthermore, her choice of literary *history* anthologies disrupts any false sense of superiority based on judging American practices as regressive or less enlightened. The parallels between the two statements not only elevate the "Frauenfrage" in literature, but also move the reader to reflect on racial discrimination in Europe itself. The human zoos found throughout Europe in the late 19th century and into the 20th century betray the very attitudes that undergirded the far more commonplace forms of racial discrimination in America. In her aphorism, Ebner-Eschenbach adeptly synthesizes distance and intimacy, first playing to the reader's sympathy and moral outrage and then swiftly upsetting any assumption of self-righteousness.

Despite its excellent construction and provocative subject, this particular reflection was never published. Kaszyński notes that Ebner-Eschenbach's aphorisms are not nearly as vicious or aggressive as those of later Modernist writers, such as Karl Kraus.⁸² Interestingly, it was in the very year of 1893 that the Moravian noblewoman first received work from "einem Herrn Karl

⁸² Stefan H. Kaszyński, *Kleine Geschichte*, 112.

Kraus.”⁸³ It is not clear whether he personally sent this collection of satirical short works or if they were forwarded by another author or publisher. However, he would later become yet another standard bearer of the aphoristic tradition, producing three volumes of aphorisms in 1909, 1912, and 1919; each of which continued to raise the “Frauenfrage” through agitated axioms with rancorous irony.

Ebner-Eschenbach’s more moderate declarations and formulations of social and political problems laid the foundation for later writers. By refraining from publishing her more fractious writings, she maintained greater accessibility for her bourgeois readership. When she received her honorary doctorate from the University of Vienna in 1900, only two of her works were cited: *Das Gemeindkind* and her aphoristic publications. One could argue that this aesthetic conservatism primed the general public for the innovations and incitements in later generations. Certainly, her faithful support of more radical intellectuals and writers provided them with a stable platform from which they could innovate more aggressively with both content and form.

Ability, action, and belief

“Für das Können gibt es nur einen Beweis: das Tun.”⁸⁴

“Zwischen Können und Tun liegt ein Meer und auf seinem Grunde gar oft die gescheiterte Willenskraft.”⁸⁵

Though many of the Moravian noblewoman’s aphorisms have a hopeful tone or describe positive transformative events, those most explicitly dealing with realization are rather

⁸³ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher IV*, 219.

⁸⁴ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 17.

⁸⁵ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 34.

unforgiving, as seen above. Potential itself is virtually valueless if its only assurance is fulfillment. Although she celebrates human agency elsewhere, here ability is disregarded in light of an incredibly skeptical view of the willpower of the majority. These reflections are not nihilistic, but they do present consequent action as exceptional. In so doing, Ebner-Eschenbach both questions the feasibility of sweeping societal change and intensifies the importance of individual agency.

As suggested above, the question of belief closely accompanies the essential interdependence of ability and action. The following three aphorisms speak to this directly:

“An das Gute glauben nur die wenigen, die es üben.”⁸⁶

“Man kann nicht allen helfen! sagt der Engherzige und – hilft keinem.”⁸⁷

“Die Taten reden, aber den Ungläubigen überzeugen sie doch nicht.”⁸⁸

The first of this trio is the most concrete. Echoing earlier assertions about proven potential, belief in goodness is only possessed by those who personally participate. By contrast, the next maxim underlines the power of unbelief. Here, an arguably realistic view of limited social change becomes far more than an observation. Instead, this generalization about the present and the enduring insufficiency of humanitarian efforts serves as a justification for future passivity when expressed by the mean-spirited individual. Despair threatens most in the last aphorism. Building upon any number of maxims that compare words and actions,⁸⁹ Ebner-

⁸⁶ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 17.

⁸⁷ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 19.

⁸⁸ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 40.

⁸⁹ For example, “Täten zählen mehr als Worte,” “Lass deinen Worten Taten folgen,” and “Taten sprechen lauter als Worte.”

Eschenbach constructs a new saying, condemning the skeptic. Even substantive change fails to persuade those in denial according to this final axiom.

As a set, these considerations reveal the complex relationships between intention and action, belief and behavior. The inescapable mutual reinforcement of these elements creates a conundrum. One can only achieve credibility through realization, yet incredulity seems an immutable state that prevents both producing and recognizing positive, consequent change. Belief hinges on transformation, and transformation is dependent upon outlook. Ebner-Eschenbach presents and preserves this paradox.

Crafting an aesthetic

“Künstler, was du nicht schaffen mußt, das darfst du nicht schaffen wollen.”⁹⁰ In this admonition to the artist, Ebner-Eschenbach brings necessity and desire together. When considered from the perspective of the patron and that of the artist, it offers two opposing options for interpretation.

The first perspective may be a criticism of the economic demands dictating artistic production. Though the patronage system for the arts in the 19th century was much less rigid than that of earlier centuries, there remained pressures to be published and produce a work with economic solvency. The forces of commercialism entered in where patronage receded. Even aristocratic artists such as Ebner-Eschenbach faced challenges in finding a public for their work. Naturally, those who were dependent on income experienced such external pressures more acutely. In this light, the artist is beholden to the whims and tastes of public consumption as anticipated by publishers, curators, and producers.

⁹⁰ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 9.

In contrast, one could argue that the demands of creative passion appear to take center stage in this aphorism. This second perspective highlights the tyranny an artist's inner life might maintain. It is reminiscent of the passionate drive of genius portrayed in Storm and Stress era writings.⁹¹ The unique and insistent authority of the artist's creative impulses distinguishes her from the skilled but measured work of an artisan, one necessarily considerate of product function and consumer demand.

The above readings address the two most apparent aesthetic factors in this entry. Additionally, in light of Realist principles, there is a third possible reading. Necessity is not merely restricted to the artistic process in its conceptualization, publication, or reception. External political and social reality drive the Realist artistic ethic. According to these guidelines, the artist must respond to the context of reality. (This context serves as more than simply a frame, too. It demands and provides substance as well.)

The aesthetic realm may not be exclusive in the ways understood by proponents of autonomous art. The call to properly represent reality also extends beyond those circumstances which impact personal interest, such as those discussed above regarding individual income or the profit margins of commercialism. Instead, Realist aesthetics demand a precarious tension of personal disinterest for the sake of communal interest – ardently promoting the common good by illustrating dispassionately the insufficiency of present-day society.

“Wenn der Kunst kein Tempel mehr offensteht, dann flüchtet sie in die Werkstatt.”⁹²

Unlike the authoritarian structure of the previous aphorism, this statement portrays a horizontal

⁹¹ Two other aphorisms give insight as to Ebner-Eschenbach's understanding of the autonomous and directive nature of genius. She highlights this by drawing distinctions between genius and talent: “Der Genius weist den Weg, das Talent geht ihn” and “Beim Genie heißt es: Laß dich gehen! Beim Talent: Nimm dich zusammen!” Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 41; 57.

⁹² Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 13.

shift from the religious sphere to that of the working world. There remains a catalyst of sorts though, and this lends intrigue to the flight of art.

Unlike the narrative of the rise of secularization, in which humanist momentum frees artistic production from sole patronage and necessary endorsement by the Church, it appears here that exclusion from the sacred drove the arts to the workshop. It is not a given, however, that the temple of this statement is that of the Church. Perhaps it is the temple of the mind. Art, a product of imagination, possesses an agency in this maxim. Because of this, it must not necessarily be contained within the conceptual world alone. It moves from the realm of the *Geist* (which contains both the potential intellectual and spiritual nature of the temple) to the economic, from the abstract to the material. Once again, the tension of the Realist aesthetic is on display.

Despite the paradoxical potentialities of art in the preceding aphorisms, Ebner-Eschenbach also affirms the well-established notion of art as exceptionally cohesive and complete: “Der alte Satz: Aller Anfang ist schwer, gilt nur für Fertigkeiten. In der Kunst ist nichts schwerer als beenden und bedeutet zugleich Vollenden.”⁹³ Unlike the previous musings, in this critique of a well-known German saying, the nature of the artwork and artistic process are resoundingly Romantic. Schlegel’s poetic universalism comes immediately to mind. In addition to her bold content, Ebner-Eschenbach intensifies the sweeping exhaustiveness of art by her sentence structure. In her distinction, she itemizes the result of non-artistic production in writing about “Fertigkeiten,” while her description of art concentrates exclusively on the process. She never reduces creativity to tangible, discrete artworks, and with this, the world of art is characterized by its atmosphere and aura, maintaining a mystical integrity as an exceptional sphere.

⁹³ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 24.

In these three aphorisms on art, Ebner-Eschenbach presents a plurality of perspectives. She alludes to a multiplicity of theoretical conceptions and practical considerations, which, like the sayings themselves, reinforce and contradict one another. Peppered throughout her publication, these selected maxims and others remind the reader of the intersection of praxis and theory. Just as form and substance inform and challenge one another in the artistic process, the art of aphoristic writing displays the virtuosity of integration while featuring the obstacles of seamless synthesis.

Fate and human hands

Within the first ten aphorisms of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, the classic collision of chance and destiny appears: “Der Zufall ist die in Schleier gehüllte Notwendigkeit.”⁹⁴ This maxim anchors the unexplained and unexpected in a conviction of underlying meaning. It is a robust, unabashed teleological claim.

While Ebner-Eschenbach’s hope and admonitions regarding social engagement reflect a liberal mindset, her writings do not reveal a sweeping progressive philosophy or faith in a grand systematic “solution” to social and political ills. On the one hand, the staid aristocrat maintains a traditional Western worldview by acknowledging that actions have natural consequences and encouraging her reader to choose whatever may serve the common good. On the other hand, her aphorisms regarding fate paint a rich portrait of inevitable outcomes dictated by futuristic forces and mediated by human response.

However, a later entry tempers this view of fortune with the interference and influence of concrete factors: “Wir werden vom Schicksal hart oder weich geklopft; es kommt auf das

⁹⁴ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 8.

Material an.”⁹⁵ The introduction of “Material” not only seems to diminish the power of destiny by its mediating interference, but also compromises fortune’s existential force by suggesting that destiny itself is a construct. If fate is constructed, then this may imply a constructor, or authority higher than the outcome itself.

While the above aphorism may be understood to indicate a supernatural agent crafting and molding destiny, fate is further humbled in the hands of its victims: “Nicht, was wir erleben, sondern wie wir empfinden, was wir erleben, macht unser Schicksal aus.”⁹⁶ This last adage elevates humankind to the ultimate arbitrator. While people may not have control over the substance of their experience, individuals’ perception and response to circumstances determines the true nature of their destiny.

Trust and loyalty

One of the first aphorisms in Ebner-Eschenbach’s collected works reads: “Vertrauen ist Mut, und Treue ist Kraft.”⁹⁷ This statement defines the traits of trust and loyalty as forms or manifestations of the inner qualities of courage and strength. Ebner-Eschenbach chooses to laud qualities far from those cherished by the aesthetic of genius of the Storm and Stress epoch or the rebellious spirit of Modernism. Rather than touting innovation or radical individualism, this aphorism presents a highly charitable view of traits that one could just as easily portray as immature and unprincipled. Trust and loyalty are not necessarily contrary to independent thinking and inspiration. In fact, self-trust and commitment to aesthetic ideals demand these very

⁹⁵ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 57.

⁹⁶ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 38.

⁹⁷ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 7.

virtues. However, revolutions – aesthetic or political – are founded on turning from the old way and blazing a new trail. Nevertheless, Ebner-Eschenbach’s endorsement of trust and loyalty is not strictly reactionary or simply naïve.

Just as trust and loyalty are related to one another, courage and strength are often associated one to another. Trust and courage often fuel their partners, loyalty and strength. As we gain trust in someone, we are more likely to be loyal to them, and courage similarly reinforces persistence in the face of challenges, nourishing and strengthening resolve. Taking risks that pay off can lend confidence to someone. Even if an individual steps out and fails, she may build character, as the adage states. However, this does not mean that trust and courage are absolute prerequisites for loyalty and strength.

The parallel structure of the assertion regarding trust and loyalty also begs the reader to note distinctions between these common companions. In reading this aphorism, one may conclude that courage is the necessary source of enduring trust. While trust may be based upon knowledge, it is only relevant and truly exercised in situations of uncertainty or in light of seeming contradiction. Similarly, loyalty’s value lies in its persistence despite trying circumstances, whether external or inter-relational. However, trust may be understood as either the impetus for loyalty or a judgment based upon the faithfulness of an individual. A further distinction is that trust may lie in not only subjects, but also objects. For instance, drivers lack confidence in the safety of automobiles without seatbelts. Loyalty, however, is attributed exclusively to subjects – a person or animal. Objects may be trusted because of their reliability or consistency, but the term “loyalty” is not ascribed to such things.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ People are sometimes loyal to a particular brand, but this too represents an institution, one comprising people. The quality of products is ensured by workers.

Although trust is a form of courage and in this sense praiseworthy, it may be misapplied. A later aphorism reveals why wisdom is a necessary component to the trio that comprises the good: “Der am unrechten Orte vertraute, wird dafür am unrechten Orte misstrauen.” The consequences of misplaced trust are not only directly related to the situation in which one unwisely trusted, but also present in scenarios of misplaced distrust. This serves as a warning against both naivety and cynicism. Trust should be exercised selectively. However, indiscriminate mistrust is not laudable. This reveals that while trust is courageous, some prerequisite trigger or motivation must be tested or fulfilled for trust to be right and fruitful.

One earns trust. Can one earn loyalty? Is one deserving of it? The uncertainty of loyalty is highlighted here. While we may say that one is undeserving of trust or loyalty, no one can ever truly earn it. Human inconsistency will likely compromise any efforts to earn loyalty, and even if one manages to be steadfast, the inherent right to autonomy precludes total loyalty as a legitimate obligation of another.

Relational vulnerability and honor

“Die Frau verliert in der Liebe zu einem ausgezeichneten Manne das Bewußtsein ihres eigenen Wertes; der Mann kommt erst recht zum Bewußtsein des seinen durch die Liebe einer edlen Frau.”⁹⁹ In this description, the degradation of the woman and exaltation of the man are not merely givens. It is not simply that one respective sex is stationed above the other. Rather, the self-perceived worth of a woman decreases as that of the man increases.

This first example of male/female interaction portrays not merely absence and presence, but dynamic loss and gain resultant from a love relationship. This is reinforced by the adjectives

⁹⁹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 29.

for each subject. The modifier for the male is a participial adjective (“ausgezeichnet”) which implies action, but the woman’s description (“edlen”) holds no such meaning. The verb “auszeichnen” can carry with it distinction due to a personal accomplishment or, in the least, results from setting oneself apart even if others do not. Conversely, “edel” comes from the Old German “Adel” or nobility, a status gained by biological circumstance. Womanhood is defined by absence and loss, rather than illustrated by the presence or ascertaining of particular qualities.

It is not clear wherein agency lies. It is possible that responsibility rests with each individual. Though the consequences are clearly less advantageous for the woman, the process is not obviously one in which the man is actively oppressing his partner. Love may be the catalyst. It is the common denominator for both parties, and the state in which this transformation occurs. This uncertainty makes the aphorism all the more thought-provoking. The sense of inevitability won by this ambiguity holds an insidious quality. The internal workings of relationships are mysterious. In this case, love’s potion is positively infectious for the male partner, but poison for his female counterpart.

Loss is not limited to closer personal relationships in these aphorisms, though. Negation is a common aspect of Ebner-Eschenbach’s reflections on gender dynamics more generally as well. The Moravian noblewoman presents this reality in bold relief against expectations and characterizations of men in another entry. Even without the influence of love and in the light of public affairs, women are measured by what they are not. Alternately, men are credited for *possessing* the very same quality: “Die Unschuld des Mannes heißt Ehre; die Ehre der Frau heißt Unschuld.”¹⁰⁰ A man’s innocence is honor, one among many attributes which may compose his societal standing. An honorable reputation may even secure for him the presumption of

¹⁰⁰ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 49.

innocence in questionable situations. For women, however, innocence is the sole source of honor. The woman's honor is constricted by this renaming, equivocated with innocence and excluding further features. Not only is this an unforgiving standard, it is one that is not within the control of the woman herself. Dishonorable behavior by others can tarnish her, leading to shame and loss because of no misdeed on her part. Although not the first to emphasize this reality, Ebner-Eschenbach's subtle yet scrupulous aphorism strikes a different tone than other longer illustrations in narrative or theoretical treatises, and its chiasmatic form brings both gender similarities and differences to the fore.¹⁰¹

A possible root of such expectations for women can be found in one final aphorism of interest: "Wenn mein Herz nicht spricht, dann schweigt auch mein Verstand, sagt die Frau. [/] Schweige, Herz, damit der Verstand zu Worte kommt, sagt der Mann."¹⁰² Because emotions interfere with masculine mental processing, men are threatened by thinking women, whose intellectual contributions necessarily include elements beyond the bare-bones of sheer rationality. Out of self-protection, patriarchal society insists upon unreasonable and vague standards for women to establish and retain their reputations. Such a culture leads to radical consequences for both public life and individual existence.

These differing methods or necessities for the act of reasoning indicate why mutually beneficial symbiosis eludes men and women. Because the man cannot think simultaneously with emotional output and the woman demands both heart and mind to be at the same time active, they cannot co-exist. Only in her absence and silence can men be fruitful thinkers, and because a

¹⁰¹ Christiane Zschirnt deftly traces how fainting was the only possible reaction a woman could resort to in order to maintain honorable purity in 18th century literature in the following article. Christiane Zschirnt. "Fainting and Latency in the Eighteenth Century's Romantic Novel of Courtship," *Germanic Review* 74, no. 1 (1999): 48–66.

¹⁰² Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 38.

woman requires both aspects, a man cannot articulate his thoughts according to her intellectual demands. Descartes coined the fundamental ontological statement of Western modernity: “Cogito ergo sum.” According to Ebner-Eschenbach, *being* itself eludes male and female when in one another’s company.

Humanism and the supernatural

In the following selection, the power of belief in self promises supernatural results: “Wenn es einen Glauben gibt, der Bergen versetzen kann, so ist es der Glaube an die eigene Kraft.”¹⁰³ Readers would have readily recognized this aphorism as a revision of Jesus’s statements regarding faith found in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. The Gospel of Mark documents his words as: “Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him” (Mark 11:22-23). While this assertion does depend in part upon the health of human belief, the final phrase, “it will be done for him” makes clear that the believing person remains dependent on God for the outcome. According to the New Testament, belief in God’s power and action, rather than strictly robust belief, makes possible the impossible.

Ebner-Eschenbach’s adjustments are particularly confrontational because she not only omits God from this equation but also replaces him with the individual, rather than another external source of power. This may not be a revolutionary gesture, but it would incite a stronger reaction from Christian readers than works that explore this possibility within the context of Classical traditions such as Goethe’s well-known poem “Prometheus.” Despite the direct

¹⁰³ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 10.

challenge to the divine posed in the preceding maxim, a later musing regarding self-trust reintroduces the necessity of exterior intervention and the supernatural: “Ein Nichts vermag das Vertrauen in die eigene Kraft zu erschüttern, aber nur ein Wunder vermag es wieder zu befestigen.”¹⁰⁴ Here, one sees how fragile self-confidence is, even though it may fuel the fantastic in the previous example. Furthermore, after self-doubt takes over, restoration requires a miracle. Only an extraordinary occurrence or exceptional circumstances beyond the control of the individual can revive her belief in herself.

Similarly, the grand potential of love is proportionally inverted by its fragility: “Die Liebe überwindet den Tod, aber es kommt vor, daß eine kleine üble Gewohnheit die Liebe überwindet.”¹⁰⁵ This one statement embodies what the prior two assert in concert with one another. This single characterization of love’s delicate power presents the paradox succinctly. Though love may triumph over death, the mundane may defeat love easily.

Human agency, institutions, and emotion

“Ehen werden im Himmel geschlossen, aber daß sie gut geraten, darauf wird dort nicht gesehen.”¹⁰⁶

“Wer an die Freiheit des menschlichen Willens glaubt, hat nie geliebt und nie gehaßt.”¹⁰⁷

“Die meisten Menschen brauchen mehr Liebe, als sie verdienen.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 37.

¹⁰⁵ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 48.

¹⁰⁶ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 11.

The three preceding aphorisms follow directly one after another as written above in both the 1893 edition of Ebner-Eschenbach's collected works and the later undated expanded edition, *Sämtliche Werke*, published in Berlin. This sequence is intriguing precisely because the axioms do not have an apparent thematic or aesthetic order in any given collection. In this tiny grouping, one finds marriage, love, hate, and the human will.

In the reflection on marriage, we see once again that the essential power or decisive action lies with man rather than God. While heaven and the supernatural is explicitly acknowledged, it is inconsequential. The weight of success in a marriage falls exclusively to the human parties entering into this covenant. One should not expect any divine grace to cover miscalculation or poor judgment in choosing a partner. Stripped of consequential divine authority, marriage is simply a legislative formality, a strictly human institution.

Yet, immediately following this declaration, she restricts the autonomy of the human will: "Wer an die Freiheit des menschlichen Willens glaubt, hat nie geliebt und nie gehaßt."¹⁰⁹ All of these humanistic aphorisms preclude any authority over humans in the form of a personal deity, yet they point out the limitations and fragility of the human condition. Here, the subject is not at the mercy of a deity, another individual, or a given situation, but rather oneself. While the deeds and words of the object of one's affection or abhorrence may exasperate or intensify the attitude toward him or her, the lover or hater stands at the center of this assertion. The possessor of the emotion is primarily commanded by his or her emotional state.

This is further emphasized in the final of the three sayings. Human inadequacy is on display in the form of emotional debt. And this debt arises out of need. It is one thing to go into debt because of poor judgment or excessive tastes. It is quite another to be compelled by need to

¹⁰⁹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 11.

maintain a constant state of indebtedness. The economy of love presented here echoes the emphasis on earthly reality asserted in the first of the three maxims. The middle aphorism may temper the myth of autonomy by pleading to the transcendent power of emotion, but its predecessor and successor ground such abstractions in worldly terms.

Time

“Niemand ist so beflissen, immer neue Eindrücke zu sammeln, als derjenige, der die alten nicht zu verarbeiten versteht.”¹¹⁰ In this aphorism Ebner-Eschenbach displays her respect for existing knowledge and reflection. Yet, the assertion is tempered by the following criticism of lending authority to tradition based solely on its existence: “Was geschehen ist, solange die Welt steht, braucht deshalb nicht zu geschehen, so lange sie noch stehen wird.”¹¹¹ In her aphorisms dealing with time, Ebner-Eschenbach displays a great respect for tradition and a deep disdain for traditionalism.

She insists on valuing substance over existence, and this critical view pertains as well to the future: “Was für die Gegenwart zu gut ist, ist gut genug für die Zukunft.”¹¹² Here, the aristocratic liberal dispels any dreams of new traditions. She spurs her reader on to prepare for the unknown and resist trusting in the conventional. Her forward thinking is once again cautionary though: “Nichts ist weniger verheißend als Frühreife; die junge Distel sieht einem zukünftigen Baume viel ähnlicher als die junge Eiche.”¹¹³ Just as she warns against continuing

¹¹⁰ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 50.

¹¹¹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 63.

¹¹² Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 15.

¹¹³ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 16.

traditions for superficial reasons, change in and of itself or the alluring promise of youth may be misleading.

Her reflections on the present are similarly equitable. She promises great reward in embracing the moment and points out the challenges in seizing the day. As much as her other aphorisms consider the past and future, this maxim clearly affirms the priceless present: “Die Herrschaft über den Augenblick ist die Herrschaft über das Leben.”¹¹⁴ Such command is far from easy to maintain, though: “Nichts wird so oft unwiederbringlich versäumt wie eine Gelegenheit, die sich täglich bietet.”¹¹⁵

Taken as a group, this assemblage of sayings is far from cohesive. This should not surprise, given that time is such a misleading, yet universal construct. In fact, its very disjunction and uncertainty indicates that this smattering of reflections may be approaching the treasure of a framework for wisdom, partially visible and definitely buried: “Die Summe unsere Erkenntnisse besteht aus dem, was wir gelernt, and aus dem, was wir vergessen haben.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 33.

¹¹⁵ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 9.

¹¹⁶ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorismen*, 65.

Chapter III.

Lost Heroes in *Er lasst die Hand küssen*: Failures in Moderation

Published in 1886, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's novella, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, challenges contemporary Austro-Hungarian society as a political state and an aesthetic community through a family narrative from a forgotten era in the out-skirts of the empire. Though this story is small and seemingly straightforward, it wrestles with the uncertainty of the late 19th century and critiques Habsburg feudal heritage. Like many of Ebner-Eschenbach's tales set in her homeland of Moravia, the prose's provincial landscape belies its broader commentary on class, politics, and culture. Similarly, this work's literary aesthetic exploits narrative possibilities, layering and merging discourse and narrative time, intra- and extra-diegetic voices, as well as focalization in the frame dialog and embedded content; all of which reinforces and complicates the novella's social critique.¹¹⁷ Expanding on previous scholarship, which concentrated on the socio-historical context of Ebner-Eschenbach's career, this study examines the aesthetic construction and content of *Er lasst die Hand küssen* as a diagnostic tool that challenges readers to consider the future, moving the audience from critical examination of a fictive world toward self-reflection.

Er lasst die Hand küssen opens with a dialog between two aristocrats, a man and a woman. Over the course of their conversation, the reader learns that the noblewoman is in the

¹¹⁷ Mentioned in the introduction, Peter C. Pfeiffer's 2007 book, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Tragödie, Erzählung, Heimatfilm*, provides a convincing introduction to the aesthetic worth of Ebner-Eschenbach's writing. In it he analyzes a wide range of her work, examining multiple genres produced throughout her long career.

midst of a legal process, in which farmers in the community have filed suit against her. Both she and the baron are confident that the plaintiffs will lose, but the baroness has been unable to persuade the farmers to withdraw their complaint. After discussing the upcoming trial, the baron, inspired by a recent encounter with a petty thief on his land, narrates the story of his matriarchal grandmother and Mischka, a worker on her manor. The baron opens his narration by noting that Mischka was the great-grandfather of the pilfering tenant whom the baron now indulges on his land. Mischka IV's forbearer was doomed the moment the materfamilias took an interest in him. The remainder of the nobleman's story depicts the dire consequences of his ancestor's interference in Mischka's life. In his final "transgression," the young man flees the manor to assist his exiled family, but he is forcibly returned to the estate and flogged to death. As these life-changing events unfold for the peasant, his master is oblivious to the true nature of her charge's situation. Instead, she devotes the majority of her energy and emotional reserves to preparing for entertaining guests with a play production she herself has scripted.

Mischka first catches his master's attention when he boldly makes eye contact while she places a wreath on him in an estate festival for the harvest. After this event, the grandmother inquires further about the young man, learning that he is quite compliant and hard-working. His fellow workers note that he so rarely speaks that as a child many feared him to be mute, and as an adult he is generally considered to be of very low intelligence. The grandmother promotes the young man from field hand to gardener, a position he only accepts because of his father's coercion. The estate owner's messenger and chamber servant, Fritz, omits this central detail about the young man's acquiescence, however, and the grandmother never learns of it.

Following this undesired promotion, each command the matriarch makes regarding the young man impacts him and his loved ones in ways she does not anticipate and does not learn

about until the end of the tale. Her reasoning or motivations are consistently misguided – because of both her own faulty assumptions as well as a lack of information due to the prevailing communicative practices on the manor. Such instances include the baroness sending Mischka’s lover and his son to another estate and thereby stripping his lover’s disabled mother of her sole financial support and home care as had previously been provided by her daughter. On another occasion, the narrator’s grandmother punishes Mischka for failing to honor his parents, when in fact, his disobedience was an effort to defend his mother from the father’s abuse.

Although Mischka and his master, two persons at completely opposite ends of the social spectrum, are the most central figures of the tale, the most intriguing scenes occur when those of the class between them try to influence the aristocrat’s knowledge of and decisions regarding the peasant. As mentioned above, the grandmother’s servant, Fritz, impacts her understanding of events and the consequences of her commands through his reports to her. Additionally, engagements with the wider community lead to conversations about the manor and Mischka between the matriarch and local leaders, including a prominent politician known as the “director,” the head forester, and the resident doctor. These bourgeois interlocutors seek to illuminate and influence the grandmother, but their efforts ultimately fail to imake the desired impressions, impacting the situation in neither a direct nor positive manner.

A similar tension reigns in the frame story dialog. Throughout the narration, the modern-day baroness interrupts with questions and comments, drawing attention to her own receptive posture and to the narrative choices of her companion. Both the embedded story and its frame end abruptly. Just after the baron shares that Mischka died due to the matriarch’s harsh punishment, his listener remarks how gruesome she found the tale to be. The storyteller responds

that the very horror justifies his permissive attitude toward Mischka's progeny, leaving the modern baroness to ponder rights and responsibilities in her upcoming court date.

Aborted literary forms

Various theories about the genre and form of *Er lasst die Hand küssen* may be found in secondary literature. Eda Sagarra explains her interpretation by reconstructing and identifying features that have significance primarily in the classical tradition of idyllic drama.¹¹⁸ Eugen Thurner sums up the work's nature as a tragedy transposed into prose,¹¹⁹ and Gotthart Wunberg understands the essence of the novella as a face-off between Romanticism and Realism.¹²⁰ I agree that all of these influences or manifestations of genre and style may be alluded to in Ebner-Eschenbach's "Schlossgeschichte." However, the significance of these references and such symbolism lies not in fulfillment, but in failure. Suspense and curiosity for the reader are maintained by approaching multiple templates for prose and drama, but the ultimate impact and message lie in literary miscarriage. Each level of narrative – from the frame story, to the embedded account, to the play production within the baron's tale – criticizes or confounds its apparent form or style.

¹¹⁸ Eda Sagarra, "Herr-Diener-Konstellationen in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Erzählung *Er lasst die Hand küssen*," in *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Ein Bonner Symposium zu ihrem 75. Todesjahr*, ed. Karl Konrad Polheim (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 229-237.

¹¹⁹ Eugen Thurner, "Die Poesie des Ungesagten: zu Stil und Weltanschauung der Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach," in *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Ein Bonner Symposium zu ihrem 75. Todesjahr*, ed. Karl Konrad Polheim (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 144-145.

¹²⁰ Gotthart Wunberg, "'Das Gedächtnis ist meine Muse': zu Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Erzählung *Er lasst die Hand küssen*," in *Sinn und Symbol: Festschrift für Joseph P. Strelka zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Karl Konrad Polheim (Bern: Peter Lang, 1987), 201-211.

From the start, the baroness proclaims the fragility of any communicative act. The very first sentence of the novella is: “‘So reden Sie denn in Gottes Namen!’, sprach die Gräfin, ‘ich werde Ihnen zuhören; glauben aber – nicht ein Wort.’”¹²¹ The prerequisite oath to God and the act of listening are meaningless if the audience will not believe the content under any conditions. The baron responds: “‘ich erfinde gar nicht, ich erinnere mich. Das Gedächtnis ist meine Muse.’” This assertion brings to mind both the subjectivity of history as well as the problematic nature of Realist fiction. More substantial details of the narrative source cast further doubt on the story to come as the baron must admit that he was not an eye-witness to the events of his family tale. He must rely on the recollection of his grandmother’s chamber servant.

As the narrator and his listener continue to converse throughout the visitor’s tale-spinning, these exchanges provide little relief from the cynical and skeptical start of the novella. The narrator’s integrity and authority are questioned at every turn of phrase.¹²² The fact that the conversational partners are also former lovers adds a layer of mistrust that further undercuts their dialog, despite the rich content touching on legal, religious, economic, and social themes. Yet, the dubious roots of the story are not the only factors to complicate what lessons one can learn from the baron’s anecdote.

Superficially, the embedded story maintains the simplicity of a moral tale.¹²³ Spatial boundaries are clearly staged. Within the manor, corruption reigns and convention rules, whereas

¹²¹ Ebner-Eschenbach, Marie. *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, in *Erzählungen*, vol. 1 of *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Edgar Groß (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlag, 1961), 153.

¹²² We will return to examine the baroness’s interruptions when considering the moral implications toward the end of this study.

¹²³ Sagarra, “Herr-Diener-Konstellationen,” 229. Sagarra describes the novella’s embedded story as “ironically” indebted to the tradition of the 18th century moral tale. She also succinctly describes the symbolism of various spaces within the story that I refer to directly following this

nature promises true freedom and simple joy. The primary players: Mischka, the grandmother, and her messenger Fritz, react and assert themselves with dogged consistency, revealing unfaltering inclinations in the central actors. The grandmother's tyrannical rule, reinforced by her messenger Fritz's pandering, results in Mischka's tragic death. Yet, despite the stark contrast, archetypal character, and causal severity of these literary components, this brief account is disturbingly convoluted. Far from providing a clear didactic conclusion, Mischka's devotion to family – the “good” – is his demise, and the perpetrators suffer no consequences for their “evil” deeds.¹²⁴

Many scholars extrapolate a prohibitive moral from the apparent parallels between the matriarch of the embedded story and the modern baroness of the frame story. For Sagarra and others, the tale serves as a warning against clinging to antiquated notions of justice and morality as embodied by the baron's grandmother, and her grandson has learned to magnanimously tolerate the misdeeds of Mischka's offspring.¹²⁵ This interpretation then asserts that the gentleman's aristocratic friend should follow suit. It remains, however, unclear how the noblewoman could proceed in such a manner, if the workers in her situation insist upon pursuing the legal course they have undertaken.

note. She does not, however, address any elements of the baron's tale that deviate from this genre.

¹²⁴ A popular genre in the 18th century, the moral tale's mechanisms were driven by *Handeln* (which may be translated as both “to act” and “to negotiate”). The disconnect between gardener and matriarch precludes such a categorization, just as the agitated but fruitless attempts from the manor's informal council result in inaction or ineffectual compromise.

¹²⁵ Sagarra, “Herr-Diener-Konstellationen,” 230.

The baron's circumstances differ from that of the baroness', and she cannot simply mimic his conduct.¹²⁶ Unlike his position as head of the estate, her position as a defendant in a legal matter does not provide her with the same unilateral agency. There is no singular universally superior principle or method of aristocratic conduct in these dissimilar settings. Just as the frame story dialog broadly and explicitly displays the fragility of successful communication, the embedded story presents a dark world that fails to illuminate the baroness' predicament.¹²⁷

We will look more closely at this dissonance when we revisit the frame story later. Delving deeper into the narrative levels, within the baron's problematic tale lies a still more explicit critique of aesthetic application. The grandmother's theater production is the height of artifice. Rife with platitudes, it is both the most affected literary example in the novella and the least moving. This play, formulated as the central event of her birthday celebration, constitutes the innermost narrative of the novella and thereby the furthest from the reader.

The grandmother's work, *Les adieux de Chloë*, is a pastoral play, written in the French neo-classical style as modeled by Racine. Inspired by Aristotle's *Poetics*, this form is highly schematic with strict rhythm and meter as well as definite rules for the number of acts, characterizations of the cast, and affective goals. The German literary theorist Johann Christoph Gottsched, born in 1700 (the year following Racine's death), continued to emphasize formal

¹²⁶ In fact, we should not assume his methods for running the estate to be faultless, let alone exemplary. One can argue he pursues a form of soft patriarchy in his attitude toward Mischka IV, and we will explore the possible ill effects of this approach later.

¹²⁷ Marie Luise Wandruszka, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Erzählerin aus politischer Leidenschaft*, Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2008, 56-59. Marie Luise Wandruszka understands the message of the story to be a warning against faulty alienating political praxis. This insight is essential to interpreting the text. However, individual agency and responsibility within such systems demands attention as well. We will look more closely at both the similarities and differences between the two narrative levels in the final section, which more closely considers frame story elements.

features such as the “Ständeklausel,” which restricted tragic characters to members of the nobility. Such a play rises in tension steadily from act one, with a peak in the central act three, followed by a decline or “retard” through the final act five. The situation of an aristocrat in nineteenth-century Moravia staging an enlightened French interpretation of classical Greek drama intensifies the already estranging formality of the artwork with preposterous temporal and cultural distance – not to mention the countless iterations and adaptations lying between the grandmother and the poets of antiquity.

Form overrides content, as the modern-day narrator emphasizes the set’s reproduction of a natural setting, describing the protagonist’s moss bed and other imitative features of her idyllic, natural surroundings. His grandmother’s work features alexandrine verse, and his most substantive description of the play is a summary of Chloë’s pronouncement that “...dies seien die Blumen der Erinnerung, gepflückt auf dem Felde der Treue und bestimmt, dargebracht zu werden auf dem Altar der Freundschaft.”¹²⁸ The audience’s fawning response to the play demonstrates the correspondingly superficial social ties possessed by the playwright and producer of this drama about friendship. Even more exasperatingly, this loyalty “sacrifice” takes place on stage simultaneously with the actual execution of Mischka.

The matriarch is not even aware of the lethal sentence to which she condemned her tenant due to her preoccupation with her imaginary show and celebration of self. Just as the birthday play is the most deeply embedded narrative element, it is also the least applicable to the outside world, whether that of its fictive creator or that of the contemporary reader. This idyllic concoction represents a petty, inward orientation, rendering its content irrelevant and its form

¹²⁸ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 173.

uninspiring for any other than her whose imagination wrought it. It is a vain public display of the narrow and esoteric interior of a shallow, narcissistic psyche.

The above survey shows that effective and consequential narrative depends upon both the technical and imaginative craft of the narrator as well as the receptive posture of the listener. The seeds of doubt planted by the baroness' opening remarks and nurtured throughout her former lover's storytelling encourage the reader to reflect critically upon the material at hand, including the reliability of the baroness herself and the relevance of the frame story for the novella's audience. This brief overview demonstrates some of the ways Ebner-Eschenbach deconstructs tradition through proceeding with and then abandoning imitation. In the following section, we look more closely at the content of the embedded story and its relevance as a commentary on the past in preparation for examining the tale's implications for the frame-story listener's present predicament and for the readers' lives beyond the novella's fictive scope.

Tragic expectations

Here, we will continue to consider literary form with a closer examination of the embedded story's content, and the theory of tragedy presented in Aristotle's *Poetics* will inspire much of the following discussion. Ebner-Eschenbach's late 19th century reader may have been less insistent on formal prescriptions for a drama or story than Racine or Gottsched, but this educated bourgeois audience did continue to draw upon literary principles such as those presented in Aristotle's *Poetics*, whether knowingly or not.¹²⁹ At this time Western writing and

¹²⁹ I would argue that most contemporary readers possess similar literary expectations. While writerly narratives may be more commonplace today, they remain the exception, especially for non-specialist readers. Most audience members of any work identify open texts as deviant or counter to readers' expectations. Even today, Aristotle's concerns continue to serve as a standard by which to evaluate and analyze drama and prose.

reading are inescapably influenced by the ancient philosopher's evaluations and recommendations. It is therefore not a bold assertion that a typical reader of Ebner-Eschenbach's works possesses expectations that orient around the nature of the protagonist and transformative change in the plot, such as the "discovery" or "peripeteia."

The rigidity of the class system at the manor stands at the center of the baron's recollections, and this stalwart differentiation presents a compelling opportunity to consider consequences of compartmentalization and integration, distinctions between agency and circumstance, and finally, rhetorical choices and information transfer. Unlike the earlier examination of the levels of narrative, which considered the different modes of narrative and their reception successively, moving from the frame story inward, let us first compare the extremes of the class system as embodied by Mischka and the grandmother and end with commentary regarding the "middle" class of the manor as represented by Fritz and leaders in the larger community.

Although the grandmother and Mischka first appear to be the primary characters, they do not fulfill the standards for a protagonist because of their extreme positions. Furthermore, neither of them experiences a watershed moment that reflects the sort of intellectual realization or moral transformation anticipated and awaited by readers. After examining these "shortcomings," we'll turn to the middle class or "in-between" characters like Fritz and the manor's community advisers. Although less prominent, their more moderate natures may fill this lacuna.

Mischka's eventual death and the dramatic combination of choice and circumstance point toward tragedy as an appropriate genre classification for this text. The series of events leading to Mischka's death is a devilish string of ever-escalating incidents. Aristotle notes that the sequence of events comprising the plot of a tragedy are not merely one following another, but rather

consequent, causally bound to each other. Certainly, the matriarch's reaction to her unexpected encounters with Mischka and to the reports of his conduct dictate whether he works in the fields or the garden, if his beloved can continue working at the manor, and, finally, whether his penalty for fleeing the estate is lethal or not. There is, however, a gross disconnect between the grandmother's understanding of her rule as righteous and the consequences that ensue. As we see in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the tragic nature of an event lies not in the action itself, but in *relational* tension.¹³⁰

The norm of the manor, which is legally reinforced by *jus gladii*, is fatal for Mischka, because of his allegiance to family over state (that of the manor). This echoes the crisis in *Antigone*. However, because the grandmother does not recognize Mischka and his family as privy to any rights, Mischka's and his master's interests do not clash within the narrative world of the embedded story. Neither party senses an ethical dilemma, even if they are striving in oppositional directions. Just as Mischka does not hesitate to help his family in ways contrary to his orders as a servant, the head of the manor has no appreciation for Mischka's devotion to family when it contradicts her commands as baroness, which are guided by her fervent but arbitrary moral compass. These two characters, though linked by residing and working on manor property, are living in two separate worlds, which precludes any true struggle between them.

¹³⁰ "Let us therefore ask what kinds of event strike us as terrible or pitiable. The interactions in question must necessarily occur either between friends and relations, or between enemies, or strangers. If an enemy takes on an enemy, there is nothing in his acting or planning to arouse pity, only the actual suffering of the victim. So too when the characters are strangers. What should be looked for are cases where the sufferings occur within relationships, as between brother and brother, son and father, mother and son, son and mother – where one kills, or is on the point of killing, the other, or is doing something else horrible." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Anthony Kenny, Oxford World's Classics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1435a15-25; 33.

Although their choices are causally linked, the peasant and his master are basing their decisions and actions on information or motivations independent of the other party, creating two parallel though primarily contrary story lines, rather than one integrated struggle. Although Mischka's death may be considered tragic in the general sense, the baron's narrative fails to meet Aristotle's criteria for a pitiable event found in the *Poetics*. This distance between the two main characters also divides the affective pair of pity and fear. One fears the grandmother but has no pity for her, while Mischka's existence is in another sense pitiable to the exclusion of fear – his demise is so certain that the audience merely accepts and endures it, rather than fearing for him. According to Lessing, pity and fear must be embodied in one person, and separation of pity and fear characterize a primary shortcoming in the French classical school of drama. He criticizes Pierre Corneille's understanding the *Poetics*:

Aristoteles sagt: die Tragödie soll Mitleid und Furcht erregen; beides, versteht sich, durch eine und eben dieselbe Person. – Corneille sagt: wenn es sich so trifft, recht gut. Aber absolut notwendig ist es eben nicht; un man kann sich gar wohl auch verschiedener Personen bedienen, diese zwei Empfindung hervorzubringen [...] – Das hat Corneille getan: und die Franzosen tun es ihm nach.^{131, 132}

The young man anticipates neither more nor less than the severe punishments he must endure – expectations resultant not only from his class, but also from the life-long abuse at the hands of his alcoholic father. Even Mischka's suffering within the intimate relations of his family presents itself as more of a condition than a pitiable interaction. Similarly, the grandmother's conduct may be horrible, but her relationship to Mischka does not meet

¹³¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, vol. 6 of *Gesammelte Werke*, (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1985), 588.

¹³² This final sentence attributes the same shortcomings to Racine.

Aristotle's standards for a protagonist. As noted earlier, her worldview and ethical principles drive her decisions more so than Mischka's behavior or person.

In the most intimate terms, the matriarch and gardener may be represented as enemies, but their relational dynamics reflect more closely that of strangers. Yes, the manor's matriarch is absolutely responsible for many of Mischka's misfortunes, but her conscience is inoculated from the true nature of the situation by both her misguided conception of morality and the worker's character. Mischka perceives the baroness as simply one among many adversaries he faces in life – a force to tolerate as needed and evade whenever possible. The baroness' sense of self-righteousness and myopic moral compass contrast greatly from Mischka's resignation to suffering and reflexive commitment to his child's mother and grandmother. Class, personality, and perception – all of these factors contribute to an insurmountable alienation between the master and the servant.

As noted above, Marie Luise Wandruszka also identifies distance as the primary problem in the embedded story.¹³³ Certainly, the hierarchical compartmentalization obscures issues at hand and isolates the individual participants in a given negotiation or interaction. However, one could also argue that the legal rights of the matriarch lead to much interference in Mischka's personal life – a symptom that the modern baroness's legal system seeks to address. Ultimately, the human actors within a given institutional system must also bear responsibility. This observation does not preclude the idea that some systems are superior to others. However, structural adjustments alone do not ensure justice, because of human factors.

Mischka's unfailing naiveté and the unremitting anguish imposed upon him by the baroness and her minions, his co-workers, and his father are further intensified by his total lack

¹³³ Wandruszka, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Erzählerin*, 59.

of voice. This is best summed up by the title “Er lasst die Hand küssen.” Fritz the chamber servant uses this phrase to indicate the young man’s submission to the matriarch’s commands in any given instance. There are occasions in which the narrator quotes Mischka or indicates verbalization on his behalf, but these moments are rare and mostly indirect accounts.

On the other hand, the baron’s grandmother has a very vocal presence in the story. She freely shares her opinions and readily commands others to displace, punish, and reclaim Mischka as she sees fit. Through this, one quickly recognizes not only her narcissistic nature, but also her great conviction in (if shallow understanding of) the biblical basis of bourgeois values. She is simply absurd in these regards, and this disqualifies her as a potential protagonist in classical tragic form. Her character contains no complexity, and although she pardons Mischka eventually, there is no true “discovery” on her part or “turn” in the sequence of events. Her sense of self-righteousness is completely unflappable, and her reversal is one in word alone as well as the only inconsequential instance of her executive power.

The baron’s grandmother is immovable, unchangeable in her blindness to her own inhumanity, and Mischka is equally entrenched in his absolute innocence. In addition to their relational distance, these figures’ respective characters are too extreme to qualify them as protagonists. Just as Aristotle writes: “We are left, then, with the person in between: a man not outstanding in virtue or justice, brought down through vice or depravity, who falls into adversity not through vice or depravity but because he errs in some way.”¹³⁴ While one may consider the two characters and merely draw a moral from this matriarchal anti-hero or from the plight of the newly-minted gardener, the search for a tragic “in-between” pushes the reader to consider the various figures in positions between the aristocratic grandmother and her peasant victim.

¹³⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a10-11; 33.

As the link between the workers and their master, the estate's chamber servant and other advisers have access to knowledge that neither the head of the manor nor her workers possess. Fritz and those of the "Spitzen der gräflichen Behörde" are not just more fully informed.¹³⁵ With their knowledge of the court and the world beyond, they may be more suited to be the tragic protagonists as described in section 13 of the *Poetics*. Those of this class may be more moderate in their worldviews and in their character, but their potential power to enact change within the community is greater than that of either the peasants or the aristocracy.¹³⁶

The episodes involving Fritz and the matriarch's counselors can be viewed in light of spectacle or staging. Aristotle maintained particular standards for balancing pathos with that of spoken content in both the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*. While spectacle and connecting emotionally with the audience are essential, Aristotle decries manipulation and warns against empty showmanship.¹³⁷ Pathos plays a role in both political and artistic spheres, and we should examine the balance between spectacle – or more subtle oral presentation – and informational content that the "in between" characters maintain when addressing their employer.

¹³⁵ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 161.

¹³⁶ Mischka's fellow workers reinforce the grandmother's reign of terror by mobbing the young man and forcing schnapps down his throat. The following morning, Mischka awakes, asking for "noch ein Schluck." In his assimilation, he is granted one of only three direct quotes in the story.

¹³⁷ Dana LaCourse Munteanu summarizes Aristotle's evaluation of spectacle well:

Aristotelian theory discourages those specific visual effects, which do not fit poetic discourse or exaggerate it, whereas it constantly underlines the fact that the artist, whether orator or tragic poet, should be able to create a vision. [...] Aristotle does not dismiss tragic performances. He only wishes that the content of a play could be so exquisite that it may convey the impression of a performance by itself, and that actual performances would not spoil a good tragedy, or, perhaps, transform a bad one into a success.

Dana LaCourse Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos: Pity and Fear in Greek Philosophy and Tragedy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89.

Fritz's report, "er lasst die Hand küssen," represents legal closure from the court's view of any command given by the grandmother. Though her bullying and intimidation clearly influence the behavior of all who serve on and around the estate, Fritz himself carries great responsibility in communicating on behalf of both Mischka and the head of the manor. This is apparent from his very first message, when he deliberately omits Mischka's initial objection to his new assignment as gardener and the subsequent physical abuse from Mischka's father which follows. Fritz, in fact, does not even mention the young man's name when responding to the matriarch's inquiry: "“Und der Mischka?’ ‘Oh, der’ lautete die devote Antwort [...] ‘oh, der – der lasst die Hand küssen.’ Dass es einer Tracht väterlicher Prügel bedurft hatte, um den Burschen zu diesem Handkuss in Gedanken zu bewegen, verschwieg Fritz.”¹³⁸

Though he omits such details from his accounts, Fritz's reports abound with theatrical flourishes. The baron portrays him as a man who holds great pride in his office and a deep devotion to the manor's matriarch:

Fritz öffnete das Tor, [...] schwebte dann, ein Papagei im Taubenfluge, ins Haus, über die Treppe, in den Saal hinein [...] Der Kammerdiener, von dem Glücksgefühl getragen, das Bedientenseelen beim Überbringen einer neuesten Nachricht zu empfinden pflegen, rundete ausdrucksvoll seine Arme und sprach, vor Wonne fast platzend: ‘Der Mischka lasst die Hand küssen. Er ist wieder da.’¹³⁹

While a "Papagei im Taubenfluge" may point to Fritz's inflated sense of self-importance, it also alludes to a systemic problem. Throughout the novella the grandmother's conversational

¹³⁸ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 157.

¹³⁹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 170.

partners seek to soften the informational content of their statements, whether through outright omissions, speaking behind napkins, or euphemisms. The manor is over run with “Taubenfluge,” and too many pigeons create an environment rife with *Taubenplage*. Fritz’s theatrical manner reflects the poverty of spectacle stripped of substantive content.¹⁴⁰

Fritz serves as the most impervious of all the protective layers between the baron’s grandmother and substantive knowledge of the reality beyond her. However, many others contribute significantly to her perceptual cocoon. These enablers include the director, the head forester, and the doctor, all of whom could inform or even object to the grandmother but fail to do so in a manner that is an impetus for just action.

The three other representatives of the class between that of the baroness and the peasants are less corrupt and fawning than Fritz. However, each demonstrates the need for pathos in persuasive speech. Though Aristotle asserts that the speaker should not manipulate the audience in Book I of *Rhetoric*, he does maintain in Book II that speaking to the emotions of the listener is essential. The director, the head forester, and the doctor all try to influence the grandmother’s actions but with varying degrees of success. Each speaks to her regarding different aspects of Mischka’s state. The director’s observation is readily accepted and leads to immediate action by the baroness. The forester is less well-received, but his comments appear to temper the mistress. The doctor is initially rejected altogether by the noblewoman, but once he succeeds in gaining her attention, his exceedingly pertinent report has no impact on the events to which it pertains.

The director corrects the matriarch when she mistakens Mischka’s lover and the young couple’s son for his siblings. His manner in relaying this information is soaked in social convention. He qualifies his response to the grandmother’s report of seeing Mischka with his

¹⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450b15-20; 25-26.

sibling by using the phrase “meines Wissens,” and he holds a napkin before his mouth as he clarifies the nature of Mischka’s relationship to woman and child: “es wird wohl – ich bitte um Verzeihung des obzönen Ausdrucks—die Geliebte Mischka und, mit Respekt zu sagen, ihr Kind gewesen sein.”¹⁴¹ By using “werden,” he carefully cloaks his grammar in probability, rather than absolute certitude. Additionally, he verbalizes deference explicitly with the words “Verzeihung” and “Respekt.” His cautious assertions are received readily by the baroness, as reflected in her outrage following the revelation.¹⁴²

The next occasion upon which the baroness converses with someone other than Fritz occurs just before she sentences Mischka to the deadly flogging. Before pronouncing this final sentence, however, she threatens to hang him. Objecting, the head forester claims such an act would be out of character for the matriarch. Unlike the director, he is more assertive in his observation, saying, “Hochgräfliche Gnaden werden es aber nicht tun.”¹⁴³ His demeanor is described by the narrator as apologetic, but nonetheless the grandmother responds indignantly, reminding all that she would be within her rights to execute the worker. As a protector of nature, the head forester appeals to the grandmother’s humanity and seeks to preserve Mischka’s life. He serves here as an advocate for natural rights.

In this scene, the cowardice of the majority takes center stage. All others are silent. The power of silence is portrayed vividly through the narrator’s anthropomorphic description of it: “Wieder verneigten sich alle Beamten, wieder trat Schweigen ein [...]”¹⁴⁴ This silence is broken by the inspector as he returns to the conventional bureaucratic process. In the course of the

¹⁴¹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 161.

¹⁴² Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 161

¹⁴³ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 171.

¹⁴⁴ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 171.

conferral that follows, all other matters are discussed first, with Mischka's case tabled until the end. At the close of the meeting, the matriarch declares a sentence of 50 lashes. Though she does not call for hanging as threatened, her decision does condemn the young peasant to a brutal death.

A final encounter between the baroness and a member of the larger community closes the tale. The doctor fights for her attention in the midst of her birthday party, in order to speak on behalf of Mischka's mother and thereby for Mischka himself. The narrator attributes the grandmother's dismissive attitude toward the doctor to the physician's pedantry and his lack of eloquence. Such communicative clumsiness combined with the grandmother's preoccupation with the ongoing festivities, affords the doctor the least success as yet in gaining an audience with her.

Following the completion of the noblewoman's play, the doctor finally has the chance to speak to her and explain Mischka's motives and the circumstances informing his actions. As he shares, it becomes clear that not only is he the least rhetorically refined of the three interlocutors "in between," but also his delivery is distractingly affected, riddled with hesitations. Conversely, his information is the most substantive of any that the matriarch has received.

In his account of Mischka, the doctor delivers a diagnosis of what the community of the estate largely regards as "dummlich."¹⁴⁵ Mischka is driven not by the demands of the baroness or estate expectations, but rather by his duty to family. After listening to the doctor, the matriarch grants Mischka's mother's request that his punishment be delayed, so he may recover from the beating he endured from the footmen who were sent to bring him back to the manor. However,

¹⁴⁵ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 156.

her pardon is too late. By the time Fritz relays the grandmother's directive, Mischka has already died from the fifty lashes.

In summary, these instances of attempted intervention may be understood to reflect the balance needed for ethical persuasive speech. One on end of the spectrum, the director communicated quite effectively, but his lack of discretion regarding what he shared was damaging. The head forester had noble intentions in objecting to a rash lethal penalty for Mischka, but his blunt delivery compromised his mission. Finally, the doctor brought the most content-rich and visionary message in regards to informational content, but his stilted and hesitant delivery (both historically and in the moment) led to delay that cost Mischka his life.

Having analyzed the characters of the embedded story in more detail, let us consider one more literary technique before returning to the frame story. Throughout this analysis, I have highlighted missing or incomplete elements of tragic form. Both complementing and contradicting our commentary regarding missing formal features, Aristotle notes that good literature does not rely on *deus ex machina*, or supernatural intervention, for transformation within the narrative world. This brings us to one final faltering candidate for tragic hero.

God is notably silent in a narrative in which verbalization appears to be the primary mode of agency in the story. The fourth and sixth commandments are explicitly denoted earlier in the tale, as the narrator explains the grandmother's intolerance of Mischka's behavior. She accuses him of dishonoring his parents and committing adultery. Interestingly, "you shall not kill" lies directly between these two commandments.¹⁴⁶ Right between Mischka's two supposed sins

¹⁴⁶ Sagarra notes that, while the grandmother is outraged by Mischka's disregard for the fourth and sixth commandments, the young gardener upholds the spirit of these laws faithfully, if not the letter. Similarly, one could point to his financial support of his lover's mother and commitment to be with his child's mother on her deathbed as fulfilling the marital command in

stands the grandmother's violation: "You shall not kill." However, the fifth commandment goes unnoted by either the storyteller or any of the characters within his narration.

Similarly, references to God betray the inconsequential role the divine Person plays in a society founded upon Christian tradition. From the first lines of the opening dialogue, the modern baroness proclaims God's name powerless: "'So reden Sie denn in Gottes Namen!'", sprach die Gräfin, 'ich werde Ihnen zuhören; glauben aber – nicht ein Wort.'"¹⁴⁷ The biblical prohibition behind not taking the Lord's name in vain is directly tied to God's role as judge. Deuteronomy 5:11 reads: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain." Additionally, the grandmother's arbitrary view of the ten commandments and her self-obsession both subvert the power of a divine author.

A seemingly more passionate and personal reference to God is associated with Mischka. The baron reports that when the young man learned that his lover and child would be forced to move elsewhere, he was almost speechless: "'Mehr als: 'Herrgott! Herrgott! o du lieber Herrgott!'" sprach Mischka nicht."¹⁴⁸ In saying that the gardener said "no more than" the Lord's name, the baron does not actually affirm that God was beseeched at all. Instead this qualifier only indicates what was not said – namely, anything beyond what stands in the quotation marks.

Reviewing the scenes discussed thus far, silence plays a pivotal role in crucial moments. Two times these may be understood as essentially tied to the characters of the embedded story. First, Fritz omits details about the brutal means Mischka's father uses to bring about his son's

Genesis 2 that a man "leave" his parents and "cleave" to his wife. Sagarra, "Herr-Diener-Konstellationen," 230.

¹⁴⁷ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 153.

¹⁴⁸ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 165.

acceptance of his new position as gardener. Second, as “Schweigen tritt ein,” Mischka’s plight is tabled while the counsel occupies itself with business as usual. However, there are numerous instances in which information is withheld that may be attributed to the narrator himself. And, while the embedded story may not have an instance of *deus ex machina* when considered independently of the frame story, the reader cannot escape the reality that the baron narrator is a god relative to his tale.

Finally, the embedded story can be understood, not only as a miscarriage of the basic elements expressed in the *Poetics*, but also as a pointed inversion of Hegel’s interpretation of *Antigone* found in his lectures on aesthetics. Hegel interprets the conflict of interest between family and state as two opposing moral goods. In and of themselves they are not problematic, but when pursued to the exclusion of the other, death follows. Silence and word in Mischka’s tale are presented as evil forces. The grandmother’s tyranny is fueled by her commands, and Mischka’s lack of voice condemns him to death. Efforts to synthesize word and silence through selective and nuanced communication by the bourgeois community members also fail, further contradicting the efficacy of Hegel’s more general philosophy and method of the dialectic. Just as the grandmother perverts the ten commandments and the classical model for narrative is only partially mimicked, the height of enlightened aesthetic theory fails to satisfy.

Disjointed empathy

The final scene of the story is the one instance since the opening ceremony honoring Mischka in which all three classes are present in one space, yet this symbolic unity only serves to reinforce the exasperating reality of a fractured community. Throughout his narration, the baron teases his listener by glossing over or omitting significant aspects, while concentrating on the

non-essential. The baron contributes to the young worker's lack of voice by representing him primarily by indirect means: through his grandmother's impressions, through Fritz's reports, and by placing weight on Mischka's reputation with others.

The baron notably circumvents a direct representation of Mischka's execution. Were this a drama, the death scene would not exist. As with so many of the pivotal events in Mischka's brief but turbulent life, the reader learns of his demise through Fritz, as he reports, "er lasst die Hand küssen, er ist schon tot."¹⁴⁹ Although this communicates that the act of killing has been completed, the substantive deed remains a distant scene far from the primary political stage of the estate.

In stark contrast to the baron's detached presentation of events and the loose associations between the characters in the embedded story, the aristocratic conversational partners engage in repartee unmediated by other characters. A deeper feeling of intimacy on the reader's behalf is also achieved as finer gestures are detailed.¹⁵⁰ This dramatic quality is highlighted as essential to awakening pity in both Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*.¹⁵¹

Eugen Thurnher affirms this theatrical orientation and its effects on the reader in "Die Poesie des Ungesagten: zu Stil und Weltanschauung der Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach":

¹⁴⁹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 178.

¹⁵⁰ For instance, the aristocrats' respective demeanors are depicted in detail in their opening exchange. The baron's good humor can be seen in his expression and simple gestures: "Er vernahm es ohne Zucken, strich behaglich seinen weißen Bart und sah die Gräfin beinahe dankbar aus seinen klugen Augen an." And his conversational partner displays a reluctant but resilient self-control in the following: "Sie verschluckte ihre Ungeduld, zwang sich zu lächeln und suchte ihrer Stimme einen möglichst gleichgültigen Ton zu geben..." Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 153-154.

¹⁵¹ Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos: Pity and Fear*, 79.

Bei Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach ist nicht nur der Erzähler wichtig, der die Geschichte berichtet, sondern auch der Zuhörer, der das Erzählte erfährt. Nicht selten wird er zur handelnden Person. Diese Person wird in die Handlung einbezogen und erblickt im Geschehen öfters ihr eigenes Schicksal ... Aber ist das nicht ein Vorgang, der eigentlich auf die Bühne gehört? Oder umgekehrt gesagt: Wird dabei nicht eine Bühnenhandlung in die Erzählung übersetzt?¹⁵²

More importantly, the characterizations in the frame story resonate with bourgeois expectations of theater as established by Lessing's *bürgerliche Trauerspiele* and expressed in the *Hambürgische Dramaturgie*, an interpretation of the *Poetics* that emphasizes empathy over formal aspects, contrasting with the predominate theory and practice of dramatic production for the neo-classicists mentioned early – Racine and Gottsched. By transposing drama into prose, Ebner-Eschenbach draws the reader closer to action. She allows one to visualize the dialog between the aristocrats and maintain a more acute eye for the embedded story as well. This leads to a more critical audience in regards to not only the artwork, but also their own behavior and choices.

Lessing affirms how essential it is that the audience experience just this sort of identification:

Alles das, sagt er, ist uns fürchterlich, was, wenn es einem begegnen sollte, unser Mitleid erwecken würde: und alles das finden wir mitleidswürdig, was wir fürchten würden, wenn es uns selbst bevorstünde. Nicht genug also, daß der Unglückliche, mit dem wir Mitleiden haben sollen, sein Unglück nicht verdiene, ob er es sich schon durch irgend eine Schwachheit zugezogen: seine gequälte

¹⁵² Eugen Thurnher, "Die Poesie des Ungesagten," 144-145.

Unschuld, oder vielmehr seine zu hart heimgesuchte Schuld sei für uns verloren, sei nicht vermögend, unser Mitleid zu erregen, wenn wir keine Möglichkeit sähen, daß uns sein Leiden auch treffen könne.¹⁵³

As noted in the baroness's opening comment, the nobleman's words are discounted before they are spoken, and the text is rife with indications of their fallacy or exaggeration. Thanks to the noblewoman's inquiry, the reader knows early on in the account that the baron was not an eye-witness,¹⁵⁴ and she also draws the reader's attention to his presumptive declarations of extreme empathy with his protagonist.¹⁵⁵ Displaying a droll distance to his material, the baron manages to mildly and charmingly tell his gruesome story. However, his ironic narration and playful banter betray an inability to empathize, to have true pity for the suffering in his story (let alone transfer it to his listener).

As noted in the first section, the flatter and less intimate characters of the embedded story are excluded from experiencing let alone emoting pity and fear. The nobleman's command as narrator and his ironic posture may be endearing, but it also precludes him from making the necessary connection with his tale's characters or the novella's readers as a figure in the frame story. The noblewoman, however, displays much emotion as she describes her personal problems and as she engages with the fictive world her friend presents. This furthers the immersion of the reading audience into the story that Thurner and Lessing describe.

¹⁵³ Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, 558.

¹⁵⁴ In fact, he is relying on the dubious account of "noble" Fritz: "Waren Sie dabei?", fiel die Gräfin ihrem Gaste ins Wort. 'Bei dieser Referenz gerade nicht, aber bei späteren des edlen Fritz.'" Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 157.

¹⁵⁵ "Es ist doch stark, dass Sie jetzt gar in der Haut Mischkas stecken wollen!', fuhr die Gräfin höhnisch auf. 'Bis über die Ohren!', entgegnete der Graf.'" Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 162.

The exchange between the baron and the baroness that follows her provocative prejudice shows a personal relationship that is loving and peaceable. However, even the most intimate relationships can contain deceit –even if seemingly and intentionally “harmless.” The baroness then directly confronts these very implications by saying, “Vermutlich erfinden Sie nicht überzeugend genug.” What does it mean that the noblewoman homes in on the mode of invention, rather than the character of the speaker? Most likely, the baroness has no hope of knowing the true character of her friend.

In his response, the nobleman denies that he invents anything. He remembers. Memory is his muse. As noted in the summary above, this is also a central theme in his grandmother’s play: “...dies seien die Blumen der Erinnerung, gepflückt auf dem Felde der Treue und bestimmt, dargebracht zu werden auf dem Altar der Freundschaft.”¹⁵⁶ He refers to the origins of history, the first purpose of stories, and the difference between history and fiction – a devilish distinction already wrestled with by historians such as Ranke.

In addition to questioning the accuracy of the baron’s characterizations, the younger noblewoman also urges him to accelerate his story-telling by omitting the unessential from his account. Munteanu points out that pity and fear are temporally informed. Pity is caused by observing others’ suffering, as one either recalls or anticipates their own suffering.¹⁵⁷ Though the above shows many tragic elements that fail to come to full fruition, the frame story of *Er lasst die Hand küssen* capitalizes on these aspects of pity. The baroness is concerned about the future. This is clear in the first pages as she discusses her upcoming trial with the farming community. She also has an interest in the pacing of the narrative. Leading up to the final scenes, the

¹⁵⁶ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 173.

¹⁵⁷ Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos: Pity and Fear*, 76-77.

baroness finds the narrator's details regarding Saturday as the traditional day of execution to be superfluous. This indicates that, unlike the grandmother, she regards such a framework as less substantive.¹⁵⁸ This, of course, adds to the anticipation of the reader as well.

Following her admonition, the baron then shifts his attention away from the more immediate context of Mischka's fate toward his grandmother's birthday drama production. It is an odd choice. One would expect him to shift from the peripheral details of Mischka's defining moment to the scene of the crime. However, the baron mirrors the matriarch's priorities and proceeds to give a lengthy account of her party. This builds suspense, extending the listener's and reader's hope. Until it is reported, the possibility remains that Mischka may survive and that the grandmother may actually listen and *recognize* the actual state of both the gardener's life and her role in it. This suspense creates a more precipitous crash, as the belated pardon merely results in a speedier notification of Mischka's death.

While the execution outruns the mechanisms informing executive power in the embedded story, the figures in the frame story fail to ever reach the potential turning point. Aristotle writes: "complication is everything from the beginning up to the point that immediately precedes the change to good or bad fortune; everything from the beginning of the change to the end I call explication."¹⁵⁹ The modern aristocrats remain in the complication of both the embedded story and their own. The baroness' legal battle leads to a fascinating exchange between the two aristocrats that reveals the limitations of the legal system, grieves the vicious cycle that results from misplaced trust, and cautions the reader of long-lasting consequences due to abuse of

¹⁵⁸ In a clever inversion, the frame-story serves as a more substantive representation of humanity than that which it frames.

¹⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1455b25-30, 40.

power. Just after the baron tells her that, despite her warnings, the farmers will not accept that the baroness will win the upcoming trial, she responds:

“Verbluten sich lieber, tragen lieber den letzten Gulden zum Advokaten. Und zu welchem Advokaten, guter Gott! ... ein ruchloser Rabulist. Dem glauben sie, mir nicht, und wie mir scheint, Ihnen auch nicht, trotz all Ihrer Popularitätshascherei.” Die Gräfin richtete die hohe Gestalt empor und holte tief Atem. “Gestehen Sie, dass es für diese Leute, die so töricht vertrauen und misstrauen, besser wäre, wenn ihnen die Wahl ihrer Ratgeber nicht freistände.”

“Besser wär’s natürlich! Ein bestellter Ratgeber, und auch bestellt – der Glaube an ihn.”

“Torheit!”, zürnte die Gräfin.¹⁶⁰

The modern-day baroness is not as naïve in her understanding of power as the baron’s grandmother was.¹⁶¹ Although many commentators characterize the aristocrats as arrogant in their assumptions regarding the lower classes, the noblewoman does not take for granted that her legal justification and impending legal victory means that justice is served. While her evaluation of the farmers’ attitudes and choices may be patronizing (of which in this instance the baron is equally, if not more, guilty), her concern and identification of trust as a persistent and complex problem is far more sophisticated than the grandmother’s assumptions about the workers on her manor and her consequent interference.

¹⁶⁰ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 155.

¹⁶¹ Wunberg, “Das Gedächtnis ist meine Muse’,” 208. Wunberg stresses the “besser Wissener” attitude that the aristocrats maintain relative to the working class. However, I think it more important that these observations display the legacy of mistrust and continued struggles that occur not due to mere compartmentalization, but rather, true fracture among the classes. This is a dire situation for which the aristocracy is most certainly responsible, yet it cannot be solved by the upper-most class exclusively.

By questioning the veracity of the baron's narrative and then challenging his argumentation regarding belief, the aristocratic female in the frame story shows not only skepticism toward communicative forms, but also a desire to access the essential. That she does not presume knowledge of or the ability to access truth reflects a humility that is completely foreign to the baron's grandmother. In her objection to the baron's ironic musings that trust can be commanded, she also attributes a common humanity to the farmers as expressed in the form of autonomy. Later, her total and curt dismissal of *jus gladii* further supports the characterization of the noblewoman as more compassionate than the grandmother.¹⁶²

Certainly, the baron's friend expresses opinions and makes assertions that affirm that she is convinced of the farmers' mistrust toward her and regrets their obstinacy. In this, the baroness displays an attitude of superiority in regards to her perspective on the legal and societal situation, similar to that of the grandmother. However, the baron's contemporary is critical of the legal system and sophistry of lawyers, even if she asserts that she has "Recht."¹⁶³

Both Eda Sagarra and Gotthart Wunberg point to the baron's playful banter in the dialog and ironic narrative style as consistent with his character as a wiser, more judicial aristocrat in comparison to the baroness.¹⁶⁴ After admitting that one cannot simply place an order for belief or produce it through demanding it, the baron does insightfully and regretfully assert: "Nein, der Glaube lässt sich nicht bestelle, aber leider der Gehorsam ohne Glauben."¹⁶⁵ While the baron

¹⁶² Sagarra's assertion oversimplifies: "Mögen sich auch in der Zwischenzeit der zwei bis drei Generationen welche Erzählung und Rahmen trennen, die rechtlichen Verhältnisse auf dem Land geändert haben, die Mentalität der Herrschaft – und gerade der Frau als Herrscherrin – ist die gleiche geblieben." Sagarra, "Herr-Diener-Konstellationen," 230.

¹⁶³ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 155.

¹⁶⁴ Wunberg, "Das Gedächtnis ist meine Muse," 204.

¹⁶⁵ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 155.

may rightly temper his influence as property owner and supervisor, one can also understand his attitude toward Mischka IV as a prime example of soft patriarchy. Just as the noblewoman is not simply a heartless and obtuse tyrant, her conversational partner is not merely a flawlessly merciful supervisor on his property. His narrative choices reflect a continuance of just the sort of “Sittlichkeit” that drove his grandmother’s moral motivations and misguided rule.

Under the entry “Sittlichkeit” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* one sees both the universal implications of the term, as well as its inherent complexity and potential for contradiction. This first excerpt highlights the expectation that rational principles of interaction may be universally recognized and carried out:

Unter “Sittlichkeit” oder “Moralität” versteht man in Deutschen seit Kant die Übereinstimmung einer Handlung mit universal verbindlichen, weil rational begründbaren Normen, die frei anerkannt und nicht durch Anwendung von Zwang durchgesetzt werden sollen.¹⁶⁶

It is notable that such interactions are voluntarily entered into and may not be coerced. This brings to mind the grandmother’s efforts to enforce a moral code for all members of the estate. In contrast, her grandson is closer to fulfilling this vision of “Sittlichkeit” because he does not strong-arm Mischka IV. However, the instructions he gives to his friend through his narrative fail to recognize the complexity of her dilemma. This next description of “Sitten” shows the limits of universality as embodied by “Sittlichkeit” as a legal and moral term:

¹⁶⁶ Karl-Heinz Ilting, “Sitte” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historische Lexikon zur politischen-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 863.

Unter Sitten versteht man sowohl Verhaltensweisen, die in einer Gemeinschaft oder in einer Gesellschaft unbefragt als verbindlich angesehen werden oder üblich sind, wie auch Verhaltensnormen, auf deren Einhaltung man sich in einer Gesellschaft mit Recht glaubt verlassen zu dürfen. [...] Lediglich die juristisch relevanten “guten Sitten” können nicht verletzt werden, ohne daß zugleich auch moralische Normen verletzt werden; ihre Verletzung ist immer auch unsittlich.¹⁶⁷

By allowing the young man to continue in his petty crimes without any confrontation, the nobleman’s condoning creates an environment in which Mischka’s descendant is still at the mercy of the manor’s hierarchical system.¹⁶⁸ Mischka IV is completely dependent on the baron’s tolerance and benevolence. Even if it is well-meaning, the baron’s permissive attitude toward Mischa IV very well could lead to the forest being taken away as the noblewoman warns in the opening scene of their conversation.¹⁶⁹ If the baron does not adjust in light of the shifting economic landscape, then he may lose the estate all together. Were this to occur, the greatest losers by far would be the workers. The baron prides himself on his refusal to interfere, but this may very well be just as detrimental as his grandmother’s denial about meddling in the private

¹⁶⁷ Ilting, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 864.

¹⁶⁸ Just as “silence” on the part of the grandmother’s counsel endangers Mischka I, the baron’s withdrawn management style leaves Mischka IV unprotected.

¹⁶⁹ Karlheinz Rossbacher emphasizes the transitory nature of societal circumstances in the historic and political landscape during Ebner-Eschenbach’s writing: “Jenes Landproletariat besteht also aus einer vom Schloß nicht mehr erfaßten und in die Dorfgemeinde noch nicht integrierten Schicht . . . Der Erziehungsgewalt und der Gerichtsbarkeit der Grundherrn sind diese Menschen nicht mehr unterworfen, also entfällt auch die Verpflichtung, sich ihnen gegenüber patrimonial zu verhalten. Aus den Bindungen der älteren Sozialform entlassen, haben sie noch keinen Ort in der veränderten gefunden.” Rossbacher, “Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Sozialgeschichte am Beispiel von Krambambuli.” *Osterreich in Geschichte und Literatur (mit Geographie)* 24, (1980): 98-99, accessed June 8, 2010, *MLA International Bibliography*, EBSCOhost.

lives of those on the estate. Genuine “Sittlichkeit” and “Sitten” are founded on relationship, as indicated by the prominence of the terms “Handlung” and “Verhaltensweisen” in the descriptions above.

We do not know why Mischka IV steals. We are only aware of the baron’s reaction to this act, not its motivation. And, isn’t that the heart of the problem in the embedded story as well? The baron’s grandmother punishes Mischka indiscriminately with no interest in his personhood, his motivations, and consequently the challenges he faces. While the grandson rejects brutality toward the descendants of his grandmother’s victim, he does not truly overcome the distance that lies between the classes.

It is very possible that a systemic problem on the manor is at the root of Mischka IV’s theft. Perhaps his extended family is facing similar financial pressures as his ancestor’s mother-in-law did. The baron does have the advantage of treating each individual instance as he sees fit in his small domain, but even if he does know of Mischka IV’s situation (which is unclear), this hardly indicates that he maintains a complete and thorough understanding of the respective circumstances that each individual worker navigates or even a view to the more general attitude of the working class. He must know Mischka IV personally to recognize wider-reaching problems and fulfill his responsibilities as the estate manager most effectively.

The extent of the breakdown in societal ties is best shown in representation of family in both the embedded story and the frame story.¹⁷⁰ While it clearly centers around familial heritage

¹⁷⁰ In “Spätherbst einer Gesellschaft: soziale Erzählkunst in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Novellen,” Helmut Koopmann describes the specific sort of decline portrayed in Ebner-Eschenbach’s work: “ihr Verfallsszenarium ist eindeutiger [als eine allgemeine Kulturverfall], bei aller Eindeutigkeit allerdings nicht weniger vielgestaltig als das, was die zeitgenössische Kulturphilosophie zu sagen hatte. Verfall ist, mit einem Wort, bei ihr im wesentlichen und vor allem sozialer Verfall, und dieser soziale Verfall äußert sich in dem, was zur engsten sozialen Umgebung des Menschen gehörte: im Verfall der Familie.” In *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*:

on the one hand, depictions of family are severely compromised in other ways. As shown above, the baron's paternalism is a dangerous response to his grandmother's heartless interference in Mischka's family affairs. Moreover, the characters of the frame story are oddly isolated, reiterating the alienation first addressed in the embedded story analysis.

We know very little about the nature of their relationship one to another. Since they exist, obviously they themselves are descendants of others, but the reader has no idea whether the nobleman or noblewoman are married or have children of their own. The baron mentions his father in reference to a misplaced portrait of Mischka that he treasured, but other than his father's regret in the absolution of *jus gladii*, we know nothing of him. In the embedded story, the grandmother is equally isolated. There is no mention of her parents, husband or children in the course of the story – only “impoverished relatives” are noted when describing the dinner table.¹⁷¹ Mischka's family is dysfunctional in basically every regard. His father is abusive, and his mother is helpless to protect her son (both from his father and his employer). Mischka's lover and child receive lots of support from him, but none of this is ultimately effective. Though his lineage continues through the son he carries back to the grandmother's estate, his sacrifices are otherwise in vain. And, his great-grandson's life of petty crime hardly indicates that the continuance of Mischka's line maintains any higher quality of life than that of its founder.¹⁷²

Ein Bonner Symposion zu ihrem 75. Todesjahr. ed. Karl Konrad Polheim (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 165.

¹⁷¹ Ebner-Eschenbach, *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, 160.

¹⁷² In the interest of length and focus of my argument, I chose not to address the on-going and apparent theme of fertility and eroticism. Ebner-Eschenbach was praised at various times in her career for her tasteful allusions to sexual encounters and considerations in her publications. For more on this particular novella's erotic and sexual references, Sagarra provides insights regarding symbolism and significance of this topic.

Literary limits and receptive potential

Where does this leave the noblewoman as listener, the nobleman as speaker, and the reader as observer of the conversation itself? It appears that viable information is not to be found. Western legal safeguards dependent on belief in a consequent God are useless, and the classical foundations of history and poetry as birthed by Mnemosyne are equally inadequate. Because of prejudicial mistrust, the aristocrats' conversation stalls before any direct and substantive exchange of ideas or information can take place. Similarly, the bourgeois values of authenticity and moral integrity are fruitless in this story. The more recent tradition of the Enlightenment and its claims to objectivity and universality fall victim to communicative means.¹⁷³ Just as the individual's essential feelings or idiosyncrasies cannot be successfully communicated, the essence of religious form and ritual is lost, leaving behind only the tyrannical shell of legalism.

Eda Sagarra notes that the novella portrays “das Wechselspiel von ‘Damals’ und ‘Heute’, und ebenfalls jene Ungleichzeitigkeit des Gleichzeitigen, von gesetzlicher Reform und schleppendem Mentalitätswandel im Österreich des 19. Jahrhunderts.” Laws are passed as corrective measures and seek to influence ultimately not only behavior, but attitudes as well. There is a lag between the two. However, the separation of form and substance occurs inversely as well. A case in point is the development of the petit bourgeois. The moral codes of the middle-class were inspired by the philosophy of the Enlightenment and practice of pietism. Yet, over time, practitioners of such codes lost their undergirding principles of authenticity and uncompromising individualism, stripping moral expectations of substantive values and divorcing

¹⁷³ Here again, an affinity to Lessing comes to mind. Incommunicability plays a prominent role in *bürgerliche Trauerspiele*. The shifting function of the father in the family and the fight to retain the moral purity of the daughter is exasperated time again in failed efforts to communicate, whether in gesture, letter, spoken word, or deed in both *Emilia Galotti* and *Miss Sara Sampson*. As noted, the aristocratic fathers are virtually completely absent from this novella.

compassion from integrity. Once again, the obvious poles of the generation highlighted in the opening dialog and the feudal attitudes of their ancestors indicate an era in-between.

Interestingly, the end of the 18th century is also reasonable time-frame for the baron's grandmother's days as matriarch. Her rule may bring to mind practices combatted by the progressive intellectuals of the late 18th century, but she likely co-existed temporally with such revolutionaries.

All of these absences – the impersonal relationships, the missing peripeteia and discovery, the baron's highly ironic story-telling, and the noblewoman's lack of trust – unsettle the reading audience and push them to question and seek elsewhere: first within the narrative levels and among the novella's characters, and then beyond the boundaries of Ebner-Eschenbach's work and into the wide world of their personal stories. The merciless authority of the grandmother and the unquestioning adherence of her servants to her commands power the runaway train that is presumably Mischka's destiny. In this respect, the anecdote is remarkably impersonal, yet the reader cannot help but long to appeal to the conscience of the grandmother and her enablers.

Of course, no one can directly influence the conscience of another, let alone a mere witness. This is confirmed in the noblewoman's dilemma and her companion's continued distant and tolerant administrative posture. The injustice of the tale and the impossibility of interference on the part of the reader lead to self-reflection that brings about criticism of contemporary circumstances and whatever agency the reader does possess within the framework of reality. Such a reflective process for the reader is a remarkable literary achievement, particularly in light of the goals of Realist writing.

The basis of my argument rests on providing evidence of faltering literary devices and unfulfilled reader expectations. On the one hand, one might conclude from such an interpretation that Ebner-Eschenbach's deconstruction of aesthetic norms anticipates and affirms the explicit rejection of literary tradition in the decades following publication of *Er lasst die Hand küssen*. By deviating from common forms and content, modernists shocked their audience into recognizing the presumptive and superficial views of art and reality they held. On the other hand, these same classical Western literary standards encourage readers to expect transformation and meaningful relationships within a narrative. When these longings are projected outward, readers may recognize an exceedingly difficult but noble call in their reality beyond the fictive forms of a story.

Although *Er lasst die Hand küssen* does not provide a feasible solution to the noblewoman's plight nor thereby to that of her fellow "listeners" (the readers), the work moves its audience to consider the narratives of their own lives and how they themselves may be listening, speaking, and acting. Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach both subverts Enlightenment tradition and harnesses its legacy to direct readers toward a self-reflection and consideration of their reality that fulfills the spirit of exploration, individualism, pluralism, and responsibility that once served as hallmarks of this earlier age. She brings to the fore formal echoes of the by-gone era as embodied by unproductive and repressive remnants of legalism and moralism, and then, in displaying their poverty as inhumane systems, she awakens the substantive humanism that give birth to such expressions. Having been reminded of their agency and the humanity of their fellow citizens, readers reclaim independent, critical thinking grounded by concern for the common good.

Chapter IV.

Resounding Portraits: Performing the *Goethe Liederbuch*

Hugo Wolf composed the *Goethe Liederbuch*¹⁷⁴ in the same year as his Mörike collection. Wolf's whirlwind of productivity in 1888 counts as one of three miraculous years of Lieder composition during the 19th century, along with earlier feats by Schumann and Schubert. As mentioned in the introduction, performances of Wolf's Mörike Lieder led to a renaissance of reading the Swabian poet's works, and thus many musicologists credit Wolf with establishing Mörike among the German-speaking literary canon. In this chapter, the analytic approach to the Goethe songs similarly assumes that Wolf's audience likely revisited the literature in its original, informing the impression of the song as a whole. The three close readings undertaken in this chapter feature four select songs from Wolf's *Goethe Liederbuch*, all composed within less than four weeks, spanning from December 17, 1888 to January 9, 1889. This constellation of songs serves to illuminate both the interpretive potential resting within the songs' literary context and the contours Wolf's musical settings lend to the texts at hand. If the Mörike songs heightened German-speakers' awareness of the richness of those texts, how might they have responded anew to Goethe's lyric writings?

The following close readings seek to answer this through highlighting two songs from recognizable sets, "Mignon"¹⁷⁵ of the *Wilhelm Meister* songs and "Grenzen der Menschheit"

¹⁷⁴ The formal title of this collection is *Gedichte von J.W. v. Goethe für eine Singstimme und Klavier*, but it is truncated to *Goethe Liederbuch* here.

¹⁷⁵ This work is more commonly known as "Kennst du das Land." In Wolf's collection, the other Mignon songs are entitled "Mignon I," "Mignon II," and "Mignon III." These choices by Wolf will be addressed later. When referring to the source text and the song generally or in other

from a trio of Goethe's *Gedankenlyrik*; these are coupled with songs that lack such a discernible context other than the collection itself, "Coptisches Lied I" and "Coptisches Lied II."

Accompanying this foray into the external literary context, comments on intrinsic rhythmic and metric characteristics of the selected compositions round out our method for examining *Lieder*. Combining the immediate experience of perceived pulsations in the music with study of Goethe's texts and their surroundings provides opportunities to consider both sensory-perceptual and intellectual aspects of Wolf's art. Just as the *Lied* straddled public and private stages in the late 19th century, this study moves between the listeners' instantaneous response to rhythm in performance and their potential reflections upon further consideration of textual sources.

Impulsive perusing

Rather than the closed nature of a song cycle, Wolf's collections beg further investigation on the part of the listener into the literary sources themselves.¹⁷⁶ Although a conclusive and comprehensive definition of the song cycle eludes the broader musicological community, "ideal" modern performance practice clearly calls for the artist to present the series of songs in its prescribed sequence and totality. A song cycle is fixed and program-ready, so to speak. Such strictness also informs the music's relationship to text. Because the unity and artistic expression of the cycle are of foremost concern, the literary source must accommodate the greater good of the cycle. For instance, Schubert used different titles for the songs in *Winterreise* than those of

iterations, the title "Kennst du das Land" will be used, but Wolf's designation "Mignon" is retained to identify the primary song in question.

¹⁷⁶ The cycle form may also influence text selection further. The most remembered and revered cycles often use poetry from lesser-known authors such as Alois Jeitteles in Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*, Wilhelm Müller in Schubert's *Winterreise*, or Friedrich Rückert in Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*.

the original poems. All of these traits of the song cycle deter the listener or performer from seeking further context or experimenting with the songs presented.

By contrast, a song collection such as Wolf's *Goethe Liederbuch* possesses programmatic flexibility, encouraging the performer to survey material on their own terms. Its sheer volume excludes the assumption that it should be performed as a whole, and its construction also belies the notion of a prescribed performative sequence.¹⁷⁷ Elmar Budde notes that critics of Wolf's Lieder point to the lack of a comprehensive structure: "die Lieder sind nicht Lieder im Sinne der Gattungstradition 'Lied': Sie sind nicht als ein Ganzes komponiert, sondern sie setzen sich wie ein Puzzle aus vielen Details zu einem – im traditionell musikalischen Sinne – amorphen Gebilde zusammen."¹⁷⁸ Such puzzle pieces within the collection are both recognizable sets of songs and songs lacking framework.

Wolf retains the integrity of individual poems and even incorporates complete series from larger works such as the selections from *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (though the sequence does not follow the order of appearance in the novel). For the most part, sections within the collection directly reference a common literary source, such as *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, but the most extensive portion falls under the generic heading *Balladen* and features an array of songs without a common origin. Such a variety of organizational attributes spurs the curiosity of those reviewing scores within the collection, prompting them to identify and even construct further

¹⁷⁷ Such pliability was far more suitable for the performance practice of the time. Recital programs of the late 19th century rarely featured only one soloist, and the idea of including songs from only one composer (let alone songs based on one poet's works by one composer) would have been far-fetched. A song collection was much more conducive to public performances because of the variety and adaptability of individual songs, pairs, or brief sets.

¹⁷⁸ Elmar Budde, "Musik und Jugendstil: Versuch einer Annäherung an die Liedkompositionen Hugo Wolfs," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 65, no. 1 (2010): 9.

categorical possibilities.¹⁷⁹ The analyses below take into account each text's literary genre and source (or lack thereof) as well as the context provided by Wolf's ordering within his collection.

To balance this exploration of literary implications found beyond the score, readily identifiable rhythmic and metric characteristics provide the primary orientation for our discussion of the musical scores. There are three reasons for emphasizing rhythm and meter.¹⁸⁰ First, harmonic and melodic analyses often overshadow this element of music.¹⁸¹ Concentrating more exclusively on the organization of beats yields new observations, providing a different sketch of the relationship between lyrics and their musical setting.¹⁸² Second, although many enthusiasts note Wolf's strict adherence to poetic meter and consequent declamation in his songs, the pulse and rhythmic overlay of a given song is greater than this one relationship. A broad overview possesses further semantic implications than a granular account of scansion and demonstrates that Wolf's compositions achieve more than mere replication of corresponding

¹⁷⁹ For instance, Harry Seelig proposes that the *West-östliche Divan* songs are a song-cycle embedded within the larger collection in his article "Hugo Wolf's Seventeen *Divan*-settings: An undiscovered Goethe song-cycle?." Walter Bernhart and David Mosley, eds., *Word and Music Studies: Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field; Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Word and Music Studies at Ann Arbor, MI, 1999*, Word and Music Studies (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001.)

¹⁸⁰ The subject entry for "meter" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* provides a definition which succinctly sums up our interest in both rhythm and meter: "In measured music the grouping of beats [...] into a recurring pattern (the bar) defined by accentuation. An entire piece or section of a piece is constructed of a succession of bars, and the recurring accentual pattern, whether explicitly stated or present only by implication, is the framework within which rhythm is established and perceived." (accessed Oct. 20, 2017)

¹⁸¹ Many have made detailed analyses of the tonal ambiguity and harmonic innovations present in Wolf's music, thereby justifying their research interests and his aesthetic contributions to fine art music. For instance, Deborah J. Stein's entire book, *Hugo Wolf's Lieder and extensions of tonality*, devotes itself to a Schenkerian study of Wolf's songs as harmonically progressive.

¹⁸² For a study of these musical components across the Lied genre, see Yonatan Malin's recent study. Yonatan Malin, *Songs in Motion: Rhythm and Meter in the German Lied*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

textual meter. Finally, the sensation that meter and rhythm produces is generally more apparent than other musical components.¹⁸³

The immediacy of the sensory-perceptual rhythmic and metric experience serves as a counterweight to the interpretive assertions inspired by the wider literary context. Although Wolf may have been dismayed by the finer points his contemporary audience overlooked, rhythmic aspects of his works are easily experienced if not appreciated.¹⁸⁴ Wolf masterfully manipulates rhythmic and metric tensions to feign ambiguity, reinforce the obstinate, and portend the unspoken within a given text. This examination of the more accessible musical aspects of rhythm and meter in each song complements discussions of less apparent aspects contained within Goethe's earlier publications.

Mysterious roots, comic relief, and elevating ends

Each of the following songs present a different perspective of humanity, and Wolf's musical settings both rightfully reinforce and adroitly extend a given text's meaning. Our first reading focuses on "Mignon," the last of the *Wilhelm Meister* set which opens the songbook.

¹⁸³ Certainly harmony, tonality, and melody are also perceived and influence the character of a given piece. It would be preposterous to assert otherwise. However, I am suggesting that rhythm and meter can be felt, recalled, and articulated in a more direct manner. For instance, the impact of the effects of meter inform genre; the waltz, march, and gigue are all distinguished one from another by their respective time signatures. This is readily recognizable without extensive aural and abstract study, such as that which is needed to understand counterpoint, chord progressions, or even various modal scales.

¹⁸⁴ This is not to suggest that rhythm is a straight-forward or simple element of music. Rather, it is commonly viewed as essential to music making. However, the following observations are relatively simplistic in light of theories of rhythm. A far cry from the complexities of Peter Petersen and Ernest Bernhard-Kabisch's "component theory," the following remarks seek to point to more apparent effects of rhythmic patterns and the less apparent implications of these aspects in the literary setting. Peter Petersen and Ernest Bernhard-Kabisch, *Musik und Rhythmus: Grundlagen, Geschichte, Analyse* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2011).

Following this mysterious and somewhat tragic song, the two “Cophtische Lieder” provide comic relief, and our survey concludes with “Grenzen der Menschheit,” the final song of the complete collection. This sequence of songs represents various lyrical sources, each of which depicts the human condition in a different manner. Respectively, these three studies represent distinct relationships between text and music. In “Mignon,” Wolf enriches a familiar text with asymmetrical musical gestures that reinforce the mysterious origins of Mignon, a well-known figure from Goethe’s famous formation novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Conversely, the less notorious text of “Grenzen der Menschheit” is seemingly straightforward, but Wolf drives the listener to investigate its meaning further by concluding the song with an enigmatic musical postlude. Between these two songs are the pair of “Cophtische Lieder,” which have no completed literary context. Originally written by Goethe for an abandoned opera project, they find a home in Wolf’s collection as a pair of carousing marches that mock the manipulations of a singing charlatan.

In the first song, the poem’s message of a known yet elusive homeland is clear, and the detailed portrayal of a persistent, yet perplexing, memory is reinforced by Wolf’s stilted strophic form and oscillation between duple and triple meter. The song and its story are further displaced by its formal separation from the initial *Wilhelm Meister* song section as the first of the *Goethe Liederbuch* ballads. Lastly, its title “Mignon” further distinguishes it from the preceding songs by Mignon, which are followed respectively by the roman numerals I, II, and III. Whereas “Mignon” is a song directed at one named listener, Wilhelm, the “Cophtische Lieder” pair addresses an unidentified audience. The singer in these songs seeks to manipulate, and the music dutifully follows with a veneer of authoritative martial beats. Just as the fraudulent claims of the charlatan lack substance and abound with frivolity, the abrupt beginning and relentless duple

time of the accompaniment pushes the listener forward with little rhythmic complexity or innovation. Wolf exploits familiar musical metric expectations in order to unmask the singer's duplicity and turns the tables on the fictive character for the enjoyment of his listeners. After two selections which both feature characters who exhibit flawed or unfamiliar origins, the final analysis turns to "Grenzen der Menschheit," a meditation on the undeniable destination of every human life. This comparison of gods and humans appears straightforward in its fatalistic rumination. However, unlike the previous songs, Wolf's compositional choices obscure the apparent witness of the text. Much of the song pairs respective rhythmic values with humanity, the gods, and nature. His extended pianistic postlude, however, pushes the listener to question a straight-forward reading with a rhythmic riddle, contrary to the song's earlier established musico-textual norm, embedded in the expansive final chords.

Aesthetic tradition and musical legacy

These songs do not encompass the full range of the *Goethe Liederbuch*, but they do reflect the Austrian composer's assertions regarding music as primordial and progressive, a familiar tension found throughout the history of musical aesthetic discourse.¹⁸⁵ Although Kant

¹⁸⁵ The composer's letter regarding aesthetics and genius from the previous chapter demonstrates the fundamental value Wolf places on visceral insight from the artist: "Das ist mit Blut geschrieben u. solche Töne weiß nur anzuschlagen, wer – leidend – sein innerstes Wesen einer tief wahren Empfindung hinzugeben im Stande ist." Hugo Wolf to Emil Kaufmann, June 5, 1890, in vol. 1 of *Hugo Wolf: Briefe*, ed. Leopold Spitzer (Vienna: Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2010,) 366-367. And, Wolf understands music as progressive here: "Was Sie mir über Prometheus u. Ganymed schreiben hat mich auf das innigste erfreut. Auch ich bin der Ansicht, daß Schubert die Composition dieser beiden Gedichten nicht gelungen ist u. daß es einer nach-Wagner'schen Zeit erst vorbehalten war, diese großartigen Gedichte im Goethe'schen Geiste zu vertonen." Wolf to Emil Kaufmann, December 22, 1890, vol. 1 of *Briefe*, 477.

dismissed music as an inferior art form,¹⁸⁶ the Romantics regarded music as superior to other arts because it is the least representational of all.¹⁸⁷ What Kant regards as mere manipulation of feeling and sensations, intellectuals such as Ludwig Tieck and Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder understand to be a transcendent language of the heart in *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst*. Author, composer, and performer E. T. A. Hoffmann solidifies the perceived seriousness of seeming formal confusion in Beethoven's orchestral works in his famous review of the master's *Fifth Symphony*, where the music critic asserts that the confounding aspects of structure are deeply rooted genius.¹⁸⁸ Of course, Schopenhauer's work not only validates but also valorizes music as the lone gateway past the Mayan veil – the very cipher to the soul.

The following examination of Wolf's Goethe Lieder contributes to this tradition by highlighting a relatively microcosmic manifestation of such theories put into practice. While the Austrian composer may not have explicitly sought to realize the theoretical premises above, such

¹⁸⁶ “Wenn man dagegen den Wert der schönen Künste nach der Kultur schätzt, die sie dem Gemüt verschaffen, und die Erweiterung der Vermögen, welche in der Urteilskraft zum Erkenntnis zusammen kommen müssen, zum Maßstabe nimmt: so hat Musik unter den schönen Künsten sofern den untersten (so wie unter denen, die zugleich nach ihrer Annehmlichkeit geschätzt werden, vielleicht den obersten) Platz, weil sie bloß mit Empfindungen spielt.” Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, vol. 10 of *Werkausgabe*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1974), 269.

¹⁸⁷ “[Die Instrumentalmusik] ist die romantischste aller Künste, beinahe möchte man sagen, allein echt romantisch, denn nur das Unendliche ist ihr Vorwurf. – Orpheus' Lyra öffnete die Tore des Orkus. Die Musik schließt dem Menschen ein unbekanntes Reich auf, eine Welt, die nichts gemein hat mit der äußern Sinnenwelt, die ihn umgibt und in der er alle *bestimmten* Gefühle zurückläßt, um sich einer unaussprechlichen Sehnsucht hinzugeben.” “Beethoven: 5. Sinfonie,” in *Frühe Prosa, Briefe, Tagebücher, Libretti, Juristische Schrift: Werke 1794–1813*, vol. 1 of *E.T.A. Hoffmann: Sämtliche Werke*: eds. Gerhard Allroggen, Friedhelm Auhuber, Hartmut Mangold, Jörg Petzel, and Hartmut Steinecke. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2003), 532.

¹⁸⁸ Holly Watkins' book, *Metaphors of Depth in German Musical Thought: From E. T. A. Hoffmann to Arnold Schoenberg*, follows the trope of depth throughout modern German music history.

ideas influenced and informed the musical atmosphere of the German-speaking world at every level of aesthetic production, praxis, and reception. This intellectual heritage loaned the musical arts enormous cultural currency.¹⁸⁹

The author of the original literary texts contributes still greater importance to Wolf's vision. Goethe is well-known as the German epitome of classicism and as a figure that shaped musical aesthetics and praxis. His correspondence with Carl Friedrich Zelter is often quoted by musicologists seeking to paint a portrait of the emergence of music as a legitimate profession beyond the walls of the court and as a respected art form worthy of intellectual engagement. Goethe's prominence in both the history of the Lied genre and literature complements and complicates interests in recognizing Wolf's place within tradition.

Some commentators find Wolf's settings in the *Goethe Liederbuch* to be tentative at times. For them, the anxiety of properly responding to the compositional precedents set by composers such as Schubert and Schumann is further aggravated by the fact that Goethe's works as the textual source are equally, if not more so, intimidating. Mosco Carner, for instance, writes in response to Wolf's *Goethe Liederbuch*: "we sense a very conscious effort of the will, a flexing of all his intellectual muscles to write music worthy of the great poet." *The New Oxford History of Music* asserts that "[t]he fifty-one Goethe poems look like a conscious challenge to [Wolf] himself."¹⁹⁰ The following readings do not dwell on the composer's mindset. Instead, this analysis emphasizes how Wolf's rhythmic and metric creativity combines with the audience's

¹⁸⁹ The ongoing canonization of music is evidence of its legitimation as a serious art. The rivalry between traditionalists and the New German School reflect striving for such status as well. In Germany, Josef Joachim contributed immeasurably to fine art music's reputation through his work as director of the Musikhochschule in Berlin and through more than one public chamber concert series in the Singakademie.

¹⁹⁰ Leslie Orrey, "Solo Song: (a) Germany," in *Romanticism: 1830 - 1890*, ed. Gerald Abraham, reprinted, vol. 9 of *New Oxford History of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 682.

knowledge of established musical discourse, reviving the interpretive potential of Goethe's texts for the modern listener. Observations here affirm Amanda Glauert's viewpoint regarding Wolf's work in her book, *Hugo Wolf and the Wagnerian Inheritance*: "His poetic interpretations bear the signs of processes of negotiation and reflection that allow little to be taken for granted [...]."191

Though later composers such as Wolf felt the weight of unreasonable expectations due to the reputation of predecessors such as Wagner and Schubert, the young Austrian confronts this challenge aggressively.¹⁹² Both the opening group of *Wilhelm Meister* songs and the closing *Gedankenlyrik* selections had previously been set to music. According to the *Index to Poetry and Music*, in addition to Schubert, no fewer than ten prominent composers (including Zelter, Beethoven, Schumann, and Gounod) had endeavored earlier compositions for the text "Kennst du das Land," and Schubert also wrote musical settings for all three of the final *Gedankenlyrik* songs, "Prometheus," "Ganymed," and "Grenzen der Menschheit." Many scholars note that by both starting and ending his Goethe collection with texts formerly tackled by such prominent composers, Wolf confronts this heritage and claims his own artistic authority within the Lied tradition.

¹⁹¹ Amanda Glauert, *Hugo Wolf and the Wagnerian Inheritance*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.

¹⁹² Two of the four selected songs in this study were previously set to music by Schubert. According to Gustav Schur in his book *Erinnerungen an Hugo Wolf*, Wolf once stated: "Man bedroht mich ja förmlich mit Schubert, ich kann mir doch nicht das Maul verbinden, weil ein Genie vor mir gelebt und herrliche Lieder geschrieben hat." Leopold Spitzer, Introduction to *Gedichte von J.W. v. Goethe: für eine Singstimme und Klavier; Komponiert 1888-1889*, 2nd edn., (Vienna: Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1996), III.

The difficult task of establishing a legacy is by no means limited to Wolf's personal perception of his works or those of his contemporaries. Glauert addresses residual prejudice due to these historic circumstances:

“It is as though we [present-day scholars] fear that, unlike Wagner's, his [Wolf's] music might not survive the collapse of a monolithic view of history or of a certain aesthetic vision. In particular, we underestimate the potential of the Lied as a vehicle for aesthetic complexity, thinking that the genre must remain one-dimensional as an intimate and lyrical reflection of composers themselves and their immediate expressive intentions.”¹⁹³

As one can see, Wolf's status as a composer is not only dependent on chronology – as a post-Wagnerian musician or one to follow the highly regarded Lied composer Schubert – but also due to his genre of choice, the Lied. Such prejudice is misguided. Although rarely admired like large orchestral works or virtuosic instrumental pieces, the Lied has a rich history, and its performance status as a publicly presented art form was on the rise during Wolf's most successful publications. At the same time, the genre remained a central figure in the music lover's home where it was traditionally studied and performed.¹⁹⁴

Today, many concert-goers consider the German art song to be overly complex for ready enjoyment. Yet, despite the classical music listening public's present associations with the form as esoteric, the Lied was first recognized as “fine art” in the early 19th century. Prior to Schubert's “Gretchen am Spinnrad,” composed in 1814, solo songs with keyboard

¹⁹³ Glauert, *Hugo Wolf*, 3.

¹⁹⁴ Celia Applegate notes that the great success of music publishing houses indicates the continuance of *Hausmusik* even as public performances became more common and accessible in the latter half of the 19th century. *The Necessity of Music: Variations on a German Theme*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 58-59.

accompaniment were understood as popular amusement for the privacy of one's home. Even after Schubert's breakthrough and Schumann's further development of the genre, public performances of Lieder remained rare until the last two decades of the 19th century. It is just at the time Wolf was composing the *Goethe Liederbuch* that chamber music performances were expanding from the domestic sphere and smaller venues to larger concert halls, which had previously been reserved exclusively for works of greater scale, such as operatic and orchestral performances.¹⁹⁵

In such public settings, Wolf held high expectations for his audience. More than once in his letters, Wolf expresses disappointment in what he perceived as the listeners' lack of understanding during a given recital.¹⁹⁶ However, the Lied tradition remained strong within the domestic sphere even as public performances became more common, and the young composer's dismay discounts the reality that close study likely followed at home by some attendees in a respective audience. Just as Mörike's poetry gained a following due to exposure through performances and reviews of Wolf's Lieder, it is doubtless that some listeners reread Wolf's scores beyond the concert stage and considered the intricacies of text and musical form more closely after a given performance. In this spirit of musical practice and literary exploration, the

¹⁹⁵ In his article "The Lied in 19th-Century Concert Life," Edward F. Kravitt pinpoints a less than ten year period in which the Lied made this transition in Vienna: "The Lied was raised from a relatively neglected concert genre to a great favorite in Vienna with the passage of only a few years – from 1876 to 1885." Edward F. Kravitt, "The Lied in 19th-Century Concert Life," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1965): 211, accessed June, 3, 2016, *Proquest Music Periodicals Database*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/830684>.

¹⁹⁶ As was the case following a recital featuring some of Wolf's Goethe songs. He writes to Melanie Köchert about this and complains, calling the audience "spießig." Hugo Wolf to Melanie Köchert, October 12, 1890, vol. 1 of *Briefe*, 420.

following comments seek to broaden the discussion of Wolf's compositional creativity relative to Wolf's textual source, Goethe's poetry.¹⁹⁷

A preternatural wandering

The third chapter of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* opens with a well-known song, often referred to as "Kennst du das Land":

Kennst du das Land? Wo die Zitronen blühn,
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht.
Kennst du es wohl?
Dahin! Dahin!
Mögt ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter, ziehn.

Kennst du das Haus: auf Säulen ruht sein Dach,
Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach,
Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an:
Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?
Kennst du es wohl?
Dahin! Dahin!
Mögt ich mit dir, o mein Beschützer, ziehn.

Kennst du den Berg und seinen Wolkensteg?
Das Maultier sucht im Nebel seinen Weg,
In Höhlen wohnt der Drachen alte Brut,
Es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Flut.
Kennst du ihn wohl?
Dahin! Dahin!
Geht unser Weg! o Vater, laß uns ziehn!¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ As Glauert writes, "...it seems critics have been surprisingly reluctant to give up their fictions of Wolf as a single-minded fanatic, continuing to see him as following the authority of Wagner and 'the poet' without question." Glauert, *Hugo Wolf*, 2. Susan Youens is an obvious exception, and her articles and books on Wolf's opus provide studies that combine musical, literary, and biographical substance and context.

¹⁹⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, in *Romane II: Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung; Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre; Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, vol. 9 of *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Voßkamp and Herbert Jaumann (Fankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987), 503.

Goethe chose to categorize the above song as a ballad in his collected works published by Cotta in 1815 under the title “Mignon.”¹⁹⁹ Similarly, Wolf also uses the title “Mignon.” The earlier songs from Mignon in the *Wilhelm Meister* set are all followed by a roman numeral (successively I, II, and III), which implies that this song of Mignon is the epitome or standard, needing no qualification, unlike the previous selections. Wolf further distinguishes “Mignon” by placing the song as the first in the *Balladen* subsection of his collection, distinct from the preceding Wilhelm Meister series. The poetry does meet the typical strophic formal expectations of this genre, but its episodic content is not plot-oriented in a straightforward manner. Instead, the listener travels through a series of speculative metaphors and portraits of this mysterious place, “das Land.”²⁰⁰ The following discussion seeks to highlight how the very ambiguity and consequent variety of possibilities within this genre provide a worthwhile direction for exploring Hugo Wolf’s musical setting.²⁰¹

In her contribution to the *Nineteenth-Century Literature* journal edition on ballads, “What is a Ballad? Reading for Genre, Form, and Medium,” Meredith L. McGill writes about the ubiquity of this form and the consequent difficulties of codification within genre theory. The ballad is not only ever-present in all literary periods, but also defies the boundaries between high

¹⁹⁹ Gonthier-Louis Fink, “*Kennst du das Land? wo die Zitronen blühn* in der Sicht von gestern und heute,” in *Goethe-Gedichte: Zweiunddreißig Interpretationen*, ed. Gerhard Sauder, 110.

²⁰⁰ Fink notes that earlier scholars such as H. Meyer and W. Kayser misapplied overly rigid understandings of the ballad genre in their readings of the “Mignon” song. Fink, “*Kennst du das Land?*,” 110.

²⁰¹ Lawrence Kramer, “Hugo Wolf: Subjectivity in the Fin-de-Siecle Lied,” in *German Lieder in the 19th Century*, ed. Rufus E. Hallmark, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 186-217. This may be viewed as an alternative to Lawrence Kramer’s analysis of Hugo Wolf’s vocal compositions, which uses an “oedipal script.” Much of what he identifies as feminine or masculine, id or super ego, are similarly recognized as binary characteristics here. However, for our argument these dichotomous elements serve to obscure, rather than clarify.

and low culture. Such deviance, however, cannot be ignored, because as a literary form, the genre's "achronicity" helped establish the very theorization of literary eras.²⁰² Song and performance play no small part in reinforcing the timeless qualities recognized by McGill.

We see this essential yet enigmatic character of the ballad in the case of "Mignon" between the performer and listener. Mignon is a child bought out of servitude by her listener, Wilhelm, a young man with the privilege of traveling freely while pursuing self-determined interests. Furthermore, the presentation of "Mignon" within the novel as a text and performance mimics the way the ballad morphs in medium, existing as both an oral and a written tradition. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* duplicates this reality by presenting the verse first and then accounting for its performance in prose two paragraphs later. Finally, the provocative androgyny of the character Mignon mirrors this form. Even transgressions such as James MacPherson's fabrication of "Ossian" led to progress in the literary community's standards for authentication, again demonstrating the contradictory yet comprehensive nature of the ballad. These ambiguous, ambivalent aspects of the ballad genre make it a perfect fit for a character such as Mignon, who straddles various thresholds. Defying a definitive age, gender, and ethnicity for much of the novel, Wilhelm's endearing and adoring companion unsettles his (and the reader's) bourgeois prejudices. Further context from the novel and details as to Mignon's mysterious personhood equip us to read Wolf's compositional choices as a masterwork in musical agility and delightful disorientation.

Immediately following the verses of "Kennst du das Land," the reader learns that Wilhelm sought Mignon that morning while she was with the theater director, Melina, acquiring

²⁰² Meredith L. McGill, "What is a Ballad? Reading for Genre, Form and Medium," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 71 no. 2 (September 2016): 156, accessed April 9, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2016.71.2.156>.

the performance troupe's props and taking inventory. Hours later, Wilhelm hears music at his door. He initially believes it to be the harper, but he gradually realizes that it is in fact Mignon, singing and playing the zither. Upon entering, Mignon serenades the protagonist with the above song. Wilhelm's impressions of the selection follow:

Melodie und Ausdruck gefielen unserm Freunde besonders, ob er gleich die Worte nicht alle verstehen konnte. Er ließ sich die Strophen wiederholen und erklären, schrieb sie auf und übersetzte sie ins Deutsche. Aber die Originalität der Wendungen konnte er nur von ferne nachahmen. Die kindliche Unschuld des Ausdrucks verschwand, indem die gebrochene Sprache übereinstimmend, und das Unzusammenhängende verbunden ward. Auch konnte der Reiz der Melodie mit nichts verglichen werden.²⁰³

This account of the performance and Wilhelm's consequent translation of the text touches on essential questions of aesthetics, both musical and literary. The beauty and naiveté of the artwork are lost when semantic precision is sought through translating.²⁰⁴ The enchantment of the mysterious is not only affirmed in the explicit prose, but also reinforced through the original language of the novel itself. Despite numerous musical settings by various composers, all efforts will only approach the fictional reality. Disorientation itself is essential to a rich aesthetic

²⁰³ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 504.

²⁰⁴ Although it is commonly asserted that Wilhelm translates from Italian to German, there is no point in the text that explicitly states the original language of the song – only that Wilhelm translated it with Mignon's assistance.

experience, whereas order detracts because it compromises the exceptional nature of the melody.²⁰⁵

After this account, Mignon's dramatic and musical interpretation is described further. Here affective details of the performance can inform the Wolfian listener's understanding of his musical setting:

Sie fing jeden Vers feierlich und prächtig an, als ob sie auf etwas sonderbares aufmerksam machen, als ob sie etwas wichtiges vortragen wollte. Bei der dritten Zeile ward der Gesang dumpfer und düsterer, das: *kennst du es wohl?* Drückte sie geheimnisvoll und bedächtig aus, in dem: *dahin! dahin!* Lag eine unwiderstehliche Sehnsucht, und ihr: *Laß uns ziehn!* wußte sie, bei jeder Wiederholung, dergestalt zu modifizieren, daß es bald bittend und dringend, bald treibend und vielversprechend war.²⁰⁶

In a brief reflection on the ballad form, Goethe places incredible weight on the performance of such a piece: "Die Ballade hat etwas mysterioses ohne mystisch zu seyn; diese letzte Eigenschaft eines Gedichts liegt im Stoff, jene in der Behandlung. Das Geheimnißvolle der Ballade entspringt aus der Vortragsweise."²⁰⁷ The mystery of the ballad of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is embodied in not only Mignon's performance but also the soloist's personal history. Furthermore, Mignon's recital is not mere imitation of the mysterious, because she herself does not comprehend how she came to know the very song she sings, let alone the land portrayed in it.

²⁰⁵ Interestingly, the first edition of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* included an accompanying score in its appendix. This was omitted from future editions.

²⁰⁶ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 504.

²⁰⁷ Goethe, "Ballade: Betrachtung und Auslegung," 39.

In his aesthetic musing, Goethe continues: “Der Sänger nämlich hat seinen prägnanten Gegenstand, seine Figuren, deren Thaten und Bewegung, so tief im Sinne daß er nicht weiß wie er ihn ans Tageslicht fordern will.”²⁰⁸

As this scene continues, Mignon’s mysterious origins and personhood are further convoluted. No one knew that Mignon could play the zither until she displays a preternatural talent upon acquiring the instrument that very day. It is also not until the close of the novel that Mignon’s origins – she is Italian by birth due to an incestuous encounter between the harper and his sister, Sperata – are revealed. Ultimately, the riddle of Mignon is solved by a doctor who serves the family of Lothario, a leader in the secret society central to the last chapters of the book. The physician uses hints from her songs found throughout the novel. Though initially confounding and, as isolated artworks, fragmentary, Mignon’s songs serve ultimately as a collective cipher.

This lush literary context and its ambivalence are reflected in Hugo Wolf’s musical setting. His inspiration for composing the Lied rested in part on what he judged to be the one-dimensional quality of earlier efforts by Schubert.²⁰⁹ Mosco Carner praises the emotional range and variety in Wolf’s version of “Kennst du das Land.” He writes that Wolf, more than any other composer before him, manages to portray “*all* Mignon’s swiftly changing moods and yet preserve musical unity” amidst “almost hysterical excitement.”²¹⁰ Certainly, Carner rightly

²⁰⁸ Goethe, “Ballade: Betrachtung und Auslegung,” 39.

²⁰⁹ Later in the letter to Kaufmann cited in footnote 182, Wolf writes about how his works are even neglected due to Schubert’s earlier mediocrity: “Mich wundert wahrlich, daß man meine Harfner u. Mignon-Lieder noch so passiren läßt u. dieß Alles nur, weil ein großes Genie (Schubert) sich einmal auch schwach gezeigt hat.” Wolf to Emil Kaufmann, December 22, 1890, vol. 1 of *Briefe*, 477.

²¹⁰ Mosco Carner, *Hugo Wolf Songs*, BBC Music Guides (London: British Broadcasting Corporation), 39.

praises the expressive spectrum achieved by Wolf's composition. However, amidst the striking extremes mentioned above, this particular song also features a nuanced ambiguity as well.

In contrast, Eric Sams' song analysis comes across as tepid, though he incorporates more aspects of the novel's plot to inform his interpretation. He characterizes the music in the first verse as "quiet and beautiful," which, according to Sams, "match[es] the words." The harmonic change at the third line darkens the mood, and the piano and voice unite for the exclamation "dahin!" He writes that the second verse is "heightened by adding rhythmic interest," and the final verse is "treated dramatically to conform with what Wolf knew was the fate of Mignon."²¹¹ All of these observations display how Wolf's musical setting fulfills the performative description in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Finally, Sams justifies Wolf's repetitions as an appropriately contemporary realization: "[t]he second 'Kennst du es wohl?' in each verse and 'lass uns ziehn' at the end, are Wolf's repetitions, not Goethe's. But [...] Goethe expected his composers to repeat words in the contemporary style [...]."²¹²

Both Carner and Sams emphasize Wolf's accomplishment in carrying out a musical setting that appropriately reflects and reinforces Goethe's text. Carner emphasizes emotional perspicuity, while Sams renders the song as having rather clinical accuracy relative to the novel and Goethe's intentions. In contrast, the comments below highlight ways in which Wolf creates and sustains mystery, much like the character, Mignon, embodies in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.²¹³ Through rhythmic patterns and metric manipulation, Wolf achieves a continual tension and sense of anticipation, capturing both Mignon's fervency and uncertainty.

²¹¹ Eric Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 192.

²¹² Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf*, 193.

²¹³ Gonthier-Louis Fink notes that the character Mignon is inseparable from the song itself. Although the song may have become a popular song in and of itself and have been taken out of the context of the novel by its inclusion in the poetry volume of Goethe's 1815 collected works,

Unlike the majority of his Lieder, Wolf chooses a strophic structure rather than through-composed design for “Mignon.” However, the strophes are not identical. The minor melodic and harmonic variations shape the overall repetition, mimicking both the familiarity with and alienation from the unknown land that Mignon expresses over the course of her solo. In the poem, each stanza concentrates on the one location but different features – idyllic nature, man-made structures, and hidden threats – and Wolf composes complementary musical material.

In the first twenty measures, the bass rhythm is a persistent palindrome: eighth – quarter – quarter – eighth. The syncopated symmetry of this pattern mimics not only the pull from Germany toward a southern land, but also the androgyny of Mignon. Though a girl, she is introduced in the novel dressed in knickers, and the affection Wilhelm holds for the girl is also sexually ambiguous, as highlighted in the chapter of the novel that precedes the one containing “Kennst du das Land.” Although Wilhelm is a father figure on the one hand, there is undoubtedly a sexual penchant between the two in scenes. As a person, Mignon straddles male and female genders as well as childhood and maturity (Wilhelm guesses her to be twelve or thirteen years old). Goethe initially assigns the pronoun *das* to Mignon rather than *sie* and describes her as “ein junges Geschöpf.”²¹⁴ Of course, the diminutive for a young girl – *Mädchen* – also demands the neuter article *das* and corresponding pronoun *es*. Later, the child is introduced as “das Rätsel.”²¹⁵ And, finally her name “Mignon” carries similarly conflicting, multi-faceted associations.²¹⁶

Goethe’s choice of title, “Mignon,” shows that the ballad “nur in Zusammenhang mit dieser Gestalt zu verstehen sei.”

²¹⁴ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 443.

²¹⁵ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 451.

²¹⁶ For more on androgyny in the novel see Catronia MacLeod’s article, “Pedagogy and Androgyny in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.” *MLN* 108, no. 3, (April 1993): 389-426

Similarly, the time signatures of the song maintain a sort of duplicity. First, the song oscillates between 3/4 time and 9/8, simple and compound meters respectively. Not only does this shift the pulse throughout the work, but even within 3/4 time, Wolf also exploits the duple/triple ambiguity intrinsic to six eighth beats per measure, which may be grouped into two sets of three or three sets of two. By measure 32, the musical directives for tempo reinforce this obscurity: dotted quarter note = quarter note. The 3/4 triplets are temporally identical to the eighth notes in the 9/8 sections, possessing the exact duration because of tempo compression and beat preservation directed by the score note: “Im Hauptzeitmaß.”²¹⁷ When the first triplets appear in the second 3/4 section at measure 37, they serve as a precise rhythmic echo of the recent 9/8 time signature, explicitly stated again at the tempo shift at measure 35 with the note in parentheses: quarter “wie vorher” dotted quarter.²¹⁸ (See Figure 1 on next page)

The duration of the tone corresponding with the word “Kennst” straddles the main beats of 3/4 and 9/8 meters. In the introductory measures which have the 3/4 time signature, “Kennst” lasts three eighth notes, tying the first quarter note to an eighth in the second beat. Within the refrain, which is in 9/8, “Kennst” again breaks beyond the initial beat in its duration; this time totaling 4 eighths (a dotted quarter tied to an eighth note). These durations are consistent for all but one instance; in measure 78, “Kennst” holds a quarter note value, which begins on the upbeat of 1, ending within the weak second beat of the 3/4 measure.

²¹⁷ Hugo Wolf, *Gedichte von J.W. Goethe. Für eine Singstimme und Klavier. [/] Komponiert 1888-1889*. 2nd edn. vol. 3 of *Hugo Wolf: Sämtliche Werke*, eds. Hans Jancik and Leopold Spitzer. Vienna: Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1996), 28.

²¹⁸ Hugo Wolf, *Gedichte von J. W. v. Goethe*, 28.

Figure 1 "Mignon" mm. 30–38²¹⁹

28

Mignon

Im Hauptzeitmaß (♩. = ♩).
(leidenschaftlich hingehend.)

Da - hin! —

pp *dim.* — — — — — *p* *f*

da - hin — — — — — möcht' — — — — — ich — — — — — mit

p *fp molto cresc.* *f*

(♩ wie vorher ♩.)

dir, o mein Ge-lieb - - - - - ter, ziehn.

f *pp* *p* 3 3

Red. *

²¹⁹ Hugo Wolf, *Gedichte von J. W. v. Goethe*, 28.

The piano accompaniment intensifies the word further at the beginning of the second stanza, where repeating triplet chords in the inner voices lend the word urgency, even though the vocal line is identical to the beginning of the previous stanza. The palindromic bass line returns with slight variation here as well. Just as the initial accompaniment pushes the listener over the bar line, the new pattern (triplet – two eighths – eighth rest – eighth note) retains a “pulling back” in the middle of the mensural time and a “pushing forward” at the start of each bar. The triplet in these sections also foreshadows the return of the 9/8 time signature at the close of the second stanza. However, the 3/4 time signature reasserts itself just before the last words of stanzas 1, 2, and 3, retaining its place for the majority of the piece.

In addition to these rhythmic aspects, melodic movement and the relationship between the accompaniment and vocal line reinforce and enrich the text. The rhyming words “blühn” and “glühn” in the first stanza have melodic lines that move apart rather than parallel. By contrast, the most unified passage between the vocal line and piano is found in the one stanza where a question is posed in the fourth line: “Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?” The pain of Mignon’s past may be asserted in an interrogatory sentence, but the certainty of Mignon’s suffering is affirmed by the voice’s and piano’s unison melodies. Finally, Wolf provides subtle yet striking contrasts in each instance of the last line of a given stanza. He shapes a different melodic contour and harmonic underpinning every time, which emphasizes the differing characterizations of Wilhelm as lover, protector, and father.

It is clear that the singer is truly the consequential subject of this song. Mignon’s desperate pleas for clarity lead the listener to be far more interested in her story than the location of “das Land.” In the midst of her seemingly singular obsession with this location, the singer’s conflicted identity is on display in myriad ways. The final lines of each stanza address the

audience differently each time, which shows not only Mignon's desperation, but also the child's confusion. This mystery will linger until Mignon's death, and even then, revelation merely affirms the inadequacy of isolated self-knowledge as a salve to a soul's need for love.

Delightful deception in the “Cophtische Lieder”

First published in 1795 with accompanying compositions by Reichard, the “Cophtische Lieder”²²⁰ are remnants of a never-completed operatic libretto by Goethe, entitled *Die Mystifizierten*. This project was to use material from his earlier play, *Der Gross-Cophta*, for which Goethe drew inspiration from the “Diamond Necklace Affair.” This scandal took place in the last years of the Bourbon dynasty, and some historians speculate that the event contributed to the public's disillusionment with the monarchy that fueled the subsequent French Revolution. The soloist in these songs is the swindler, the Gross-Cophta.²²¹ The singer pontificates freely, touching lightly upon a vast array of scenarios, cultures, and moralisms. Although the larger musical production was never realized, the “Cophtische Lieder” succeeded in appearing in future collections of Goethe's writings. In 1815, the two were among those selections found in the “Geselligen Lieder.”²²² Below are the complete texts of each song:

Cophtisches Lied I

Lasset Gelehrte sich zanken und streiten,
Streng und bedächtig die Lehrer auch sein!
Alle die Weisesten aller der Zeiten

²²⁰ I have chosen to use the spelling “cophtisch” rather than “kophtisch” (as appears in Goethe's *Sämtliche Werke*), because this is the spelling used in the score and most common in musicological scholarship.

²²¹ For a musical analysis of “Cophtisches Lied I” that emphasizes this literary background see Susan Youen's article “Charlatans, Pedants, and Fools: Hugo Wolf's ‘Cophtisches Lied I’” *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario* 8 (1983): 77–92.

²²² Karl Eibl, “Kommentar” in *Sämtliche Werke: Gedichte 1756–1799*, 1216.

Lächlen und winken und stimmen mit ein:
Töricht auf Beßrung der Toren zu harren!
Kinder der Klugheit, o! habet die Narren
Eben zum Narren auch, wie sich's gehört.

Merlin der Alte, im leuchtenden Grabe,
Wo ich als Jüngling gesprochen ihn habe,
Hat mich mit ähnlicher Antwort belehrt:
Töricht auf Beßrung der Toren zu harren!
Kinder der Klugheit, o! habet die Narren
Eben zum Narren auch, wie sich's gehört.

Und auf den Höhen der Indischen Lüfte,
Und in den Tiefen ägyptischer Grüfte
Hab' ich das heilige Wort nur gehört:
Töricht auf Beßrung der Toren zu harren!
Kinder der Klugheit, o! habet die Narren
Eben zum Narren auch, wie sich's gehört

Cophtisches Lied II

Geh! gehorche meinen Winken,
Nutze deine jungen Tage,
Lerne zeitig klüger sein.
Auf des Glückes großer Waage
Steht die Zunge selten ein.
Du mußt steigen oder sinken,
Du mußt herrschen und gewinnen,
Oder dienen und verlieren,
Leiden oder triumphieren,
Amboß oder Hammer sein.²²³

Just as cunning as the manipulative protagonist in Goethe's fictional world, Wolf's musical settings are directive and seemingly straightforward. The first of these two songs has a 4/4 time signature and features a basic rhythmic pattern of quarter – two eighths – quarter – two eighths throughout the piece. The piano part reinforces the rhythmic pattern of the vocal lines by primarily playing the same note values. Piano interludes are essentially a retrograde double time,

²²³ Goethe, *Gedichte*, 650-651.

dominated by a two sixteenth – eighth pattern. The song has a definite martial quality. This is established by the time signature and further reinforced by grace notes in the piano. There are no tempo changes throughout, and accent marks in the accompaniment are never syncopated but always on the beat.

Already in the first strophe, the text is authoritative and definitive, declaring that the utmost elite endorse the singer's view: "Alle die Weisesten aller der Zeiten." Furthermore, there is a static quality to the semantics throughout. By the second stanza, the contemporary stubbornness of fools is confirmed unequivocally by Merlin – who is dead. With such an inaccessible prophetic source, no contradiction is possible. The last strophe demonstrates the universal value of the wisdom found in leaving fools alone to be foolish. Here, the sources of this recommendation hail from the heights of India all the way to the depths of Egyptian graves. Together as a geographic constellation, Merlin represents the West, and India the East. Temporally, Egypt is the first of the great world civilizations from the prevailing historical and cultural viewpoint of the time.²²⁴

The tautological nature of the singer's assertion is fortified by the reflexive grammar of the proposed reality: "o habet die Narren eben zum Narren auch, wie sich's gehört!" The station of fools is fully fixed. Similarly, the vocal line rarely deviates from the quarter – two eighths rhythm, and then only in the form of a dotted eighth – sixteenth combination. There are no off-beats whatsoever in the soloist's melody. Pianistic flurries of two sixteenths – eighth combinations are as lively as it gets, and the only instance of an off-beat in the accompaniment is

²²⁴ Interestingly, the Greco-Roman influence is not present in this directive, and one wonders what semantic significance the Classical world's silence holds. Such an omission conveniently protects against any objections from his audience, who would have been much more likely to be familiar with Greco-Roman antiquity than the cultures and figures explicitly invoked.

a mere measure which commences and concludes with an eighth rest. All of these musical elements further support the authority and stability of a prescriptive text grounded in a premise of immovability.

The second “Coptisches Lied” has many similar characteristics to its predecessor, but it is slightly less insistent, featuring more variation in both its musical and textual components. Its time signature is also 4/4, but there is more rhythmic variety within this meter. Measures contain more off-beats as well as further combinations of eighths and quarter notes. The bass of the piano part contains a triplet, and the articulation includes staccatos in the left hand at one point. Similar to its predecessor, the character of the text is also prescriptive here, but it is more dynamic.

Within the first line, the addressee is instructed: “Geh!” This imperative is informed by the reality of the various possible outcomes. In contrast to the position in the previous song about the futility of engaging fools, here the counselor advocates with urgency and is insistent that the addressee act decisively. However, the details of such steps are never revealed, only an ominous forecast of dualistic potential results, oscillating between pairs of extremes: rise and fall or triumph and loss. Eschewing any responsibility, yet burdening his audience with radical scenarios, the charlatan primes them for rash decisions and impetuous actions.

Upward intervallic leaps in the melody further secure the intensity of the text, and the bass contributes through its rhythm and articulation. For the first half of the text, half notes dominate, but quarter notes command the second half of the song. These are punctuated by either staccato markings or accents for the remainder of the song. Only four of the last nineteen measures do not have these articulations. Finality is further feigned by the ever-descending left

hand, as well as the last three chords, which are all played on the strongest beats, with the second and fourth beats occupied by quarter rests.

In these settings, Wolf's musical choices reflect the rhetoric of the texts. Simple, straightforward rhythmic patterns and consistent melodic and harmonic unity between the vocal and instrumental contributions solidify and further the prescriptive and simplistic viewpoints of the poetic self. The musical setting retains the "one-note" atmosphere of the impostor's assertions by abstaining from the harmonic shifts and tonal ambiguities characteristic of many other songs by Wolf. The composer's restraint produces a wry humor, tying the two songs together through musically stylistic affinity and deepening the aesthetic experience with aural reinforcement of existing poetic meter and literary irony.

Of course, contrary to Goethe's intention, these texts never found a home in any larger published work. The context mentioned above is by association and determined by scholars through examining personal letters and notes, as well as unpublished writings. Untethered from this framework, the songs can float and spread their message unhindered by a definitive setting, free to bully and manipulate in their obscurity. Such are the tools of empty rhetoric. Sealed off by their tautological formulas and untested by any background, their effects rest in the unassuming audience, whose alarm drives them to respond as directed. The first song convinces the listener to turn inward and rest in the cosseted self-protection provided by inactivity, and the second admonition recruits under the guise of otherwise inevitable defeat, pushing its audience toward blind, frenetic action.

Unlike the assumed naiveté of the charlatan's victims, Wolf infuses his song with humor by drawing upon musical tradition. Wielding unrelenting marches and ostentatious grace notes, the composer enables his listener to see through the counterfeit's call. Goethe's text was

charming even in its solitary state, but Wolf heightens this delight with unabashed pretention achieved by contextualizing the song in the well-known martial musical tradition. Maddeningly redundant quarter- and eighth-note combinations litter the relentless melody in both songs. The piano accompaniment intensifies the mood with leaping two-note phrases, staccatos, and abundant accents in the interludes.

The first song cleverly defines the nature of the fool as stagnant and counsels against futile interference, thereby guaranteeing a continuance of the present condition and inevitable self-justification. In the second song, false dichotomies follow a vague call to action. No substantive strategy is presented, yet the command gains legitimacy through a series of blatantly simplistic outcomes. While the first song rests upon the straw man of a tautologically justified premise to induce indifference, the second selection exploits the fear and enthusiasm inherent to rude dualistic views of possible outcomes in order to push the audience toward reckless action. The two “Cophtische Lieder” exploit rhetorical devices linguistically and musically in an exercise of self-referential criticism. Wolf adorns such claims in the march, the musical bully of the state, thereby unmasking the lawless intentions of the fraudulent speaker.

Human, nature in “Grenzen der Menschheit”

The title of our final song is the most explicit of all the selections of our study. A descriptive phrase, “Grenzen der Menschheit,” appears to be much less ambiguous than the question posed by “Mignon” or the genre and numbers of the “Cophtische Lieder.” A meditation on mortality, the difference between the gods and humanity, “Grenzen der Menschheit” is the final song of a trio of poems which close the *Goethe Liederbuch*. And yet, both Wolf’s pianistic postlude and the larger literary context complicate such apparent finality. The following analysis

first demonstrates how Hugo Wolf compositionally opens the door to what lies beyond the “Grenzen der Menschheit,” and the second half explores the poems that follow in Goethe’s collected works. Wolf’s ephemeral ending serves as an impetus for the audience to explore further, and Goethe’s subsequent poetry provides a heartening redemption of mortality.

Before beginning with commentary, the complete text of “Grenzen der Menschheit” is provided below:

Wenn der uralte,
Heilige Vater
Mit gelassener Hand
Aus rollenden Wolken
Segnende Blitze
Über die Erde sä’t,
Küss’ ich den letzten
Saum seines Kleides,
Kindliche Schauer
Treu in der Brust

Denn mit Göttern
Soll sich nicht messen
Irgend ein Mensch.
Hebt er sich aufwärts,
Und berührt
Mit dem Scheitel die Sterne,
Nirgends haften dann
Die unsichern Sohlen,
Und mit ihm spielen
Wolken und Winde

Steht er mit festen,
Markigen Knochen
Auf der wohlgegründeten,
Dauernden Erde;
Reicht er nicht auf,
Nur mit der Eiche
Oder der Rebe
Sich zu vergleichen.

Was unterscheidet
Götter von Menschen?
Daß viele Wellen

Vor jenen wandeln,
Ein ewiger Storm:
Uns hebt die Welle,
Verschlingt die Welle,
Und wir versinken.

Ein kleiner Ring
Begrenzt unser Leben,
Und viele Geschlechter
Reihen sich dauernd
An ihres Daseins
Unendliche Kette.²²⁵

The majority of musicological analyses of Wolf's setting of "Grenzen der Menschheit" emphasize the power and majesty the gods have over that of their human counterparts. Mosco Carner's interpretation of the song allows for little intrigue and virtually no human self-respect. He writes that Wolf's version of "Grenzen der Menschheit" possesses a sense of "awe and submission" and "conveys man's sense of humility and insignificance before the omnipotence of divine power." He continues:

It follows a pictorial path in such suggestive word-paintings as the strong, sturdy march tune at 'Steht er mit festen markigen Knochen' ('if he stand strong and firm...') and the billowing figures at "Dass viele Wellen wandeln..." ('That many waves roll on ...'). In addition, Wolf employs a constructive rhythm as characterising symbol, such as even minims for the majesty of the gods and even crochets for the insignificance of man.²²⁶

Though less insistent on a concrete lyrical reality, Eric Sams also allows the awe of the immortal to drive his observations. Providing a rubric of rhythmic values that correlate with

²²⁵ Goethe, *Gedichte*, 332-333.

²²⁶ Carner, *Hugo Wolf Songs*, 40.

respective subjects, he notes that the whole note is a ring, which corresponds with the “Ring” symbolic of mortality in the text. However, Sams does not interpret the postlude composed of this note value as a continuance or reintroduction of man. Rather, he associates the closing with a nondescript future: “In the postlude the music dissolves into an eerie and somber vision of an eternity beyond our imagining.”²²⁷

Susan Youens’ commentary on “Grenzen der Menschheit” in the Cambridge Companion publication on German Lieder diverges from such a god-centered interpretation. However, she does so only after writing that the persona of the poem “contemplates unknowable divinity and the insignificance of individual human life, except as a link in the chain of being.”²²⁸ She then continues to praise Wolf’s use of augmented triads and his allusion to Liszt’s *Faust Symphony* as “a bold symbol of Faust’s striving for the omniscience denied human beings but sought anyway.”²²⁹ When focusing on the piano postlude as indicative of Wolf’s rejection of such an imbalance of power between the gods and humans, she asserts that such a reading runs contrary to Goethe’s intentions.²³⁰ (Figure 2 on the next page shows the postlude score.)

²²⁷ Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf*, 246.

²²⁸ Susan Youens, “Tradition and Innovation: the Lieder of Hugo Wolf” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214.

²²⁹ Youens, “Tradition and Innovation,” 214.

²³⁰ Youens, “Tradition and Innovation,” 214.

Figure 2 “Grenzen der Menschheit” mm. 104–126²³¹

dau - ernd an ih - res Da - seins un - end - li - che Ket - te.

In contradistinction to the aforementioned interpretations, the literary analysis below proposes that Wolf’s final measures not only challenge stunted views of humanity, but also reinforce the broader literary context. Looking at both the first and last of the *Gedankenlyrik* poems (“Prometheus” and “Das Göttliche”) supports the implications indicated above in Wolf’s

²³¹ Wolf, *Gedichte von J. W. v. Goethe*, 224.

use of whole notes as triumphant rather than foreboding signs of humanity. The literary scholar Peter von Matt resists the urge to consider “Grenzen der Menschheit” in isolation and considers it relative to the first poem “Prometheus”:

“Prometheus steht zum Ich dieser Strophen nicht wie die Hubris zur Bußfertigkeit, sondern – um ein lebenslanges Ordnungsbild Goethes zu gebrauchen – wie das Einatmen zum Ausatmen. Eine Polarität bildet sich hier ab und nicht ein Reifungsprozeß. In der mythischen Demut, die sich unter Gottes Donnern neigt, steckt jener mythische Trotz als ihre Bedingung.”²³²

Extending Matt’s interpretive logic, the following consideration of Wolf’s musical setting of “Grenzen der Menschheit” takes into account two further poems that immediately follow. From this extended context emerges a more magnanimous view. In contrast to the implications of the title “Grenzen der Menschheit,” Goethe’s next and final poem of the *Gedankenlyrik*, “Das Göttliche,” asserts that the exceptionally noble nature of humanity is superior to all other beings.²³³ Immediately after that selection follows a series of epigrams, the first of which, “Herzog Leopold von Braunschweig,” provides a concrete account of such human dignity. Ultimately, because of its majestic and open postlude, Wolf’s setting of “Grenzen der Menschheit” celebrates human worth, anticipating the counterexamples found immediately following.

²³² Peter von Matt, “Selbstbewusste Demut,” in *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Verweile doch. 111 Gedichte mit Interpretationen*, ed. Marcel Reich-Ranicki (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 120–121.

²³³ Although a literary scholar may find it surprising that the poem immediately following “Grenzen der Menschheit” is not addressed in musicological literature, the only prominent composer to set “Das Göttliche” to music is Beethoven. His work for male chorus is written for eight voices (identical to the number of strophes).

Goethe was quite particular about publishing the end of “Das Göttliche” on the opposite page from “Herzog Leopold von Braunschweig” within the second collection of his *Vermischte Gedichte*. He wrote his publisher Göschen on 24 October, 1788 with concerns about the layout of these two poems in relation to the following epigram “Herzog Leopold von Braunschweig”:

Bei zwei einzigen Gedichten, welche auf einander folgen, möchte eine Schwierigkeit entstehn, welche aber auch zu heben ist. Die Gedichte *Grenzen der Menschheit* p. 116 und *das Göttliche* p. 118 nehmen *fünf* Seiten ein. Sollten sie, wie ich vermute, im Druck nicht auf 5 Seiten gehn, so müssen sie beide um eine Seite ausgedehnt werden, damit sie *sieben* Seiten füllen und das Epigramm *Herzog Leopold* gegen das Ende des vorhergehenden Gedichts über zu stehen komme, auch alle Epigramme so gegeneinander über stehen, wie sie im Manuskript geschrieben sind. Hieran ist mir *sehr viel* gelegen, und ich bitte also *genau* darauf Acht zu haben und, wenn sich ein Hindernis zeigte, mir es zu schreiben.²³⁴

A brief look at the content of these two poems clarifies Goethe’s insistence on the juxtaposition of the abstract message of “Das Göttliche” against the concrete memorial of the epigram “Herzog Leopold.” Leopold’s death realizes the nobility attributed to humankind in the preceding selection.

Looking back from “Das Göttliche” infuses hope into the seemingly hopeless affair in “Grenzen der Menschheit.” Conversely, when one recognizes an inherent insistence on (if not hope in) human dignity in the pianistic postlude to “Grenzen der Menschheit,” the listener can

²³⁴ Goethe to Georg Joachim Göschen, October 24, 1788, in *Italien – Im Schatten der Revolution*, vol. 3 of *Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Karl Eibl (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991), 441.

also see a foreshadowing of the message in “Das Göttliche.” In this poem, humans are declared exceptional because of their ethical goodness. Below are the first and last stanzas:

Edel sei der Mensch,
Hülfreich und gut!
Denn das allein
Unterscheidet ihn von allen Wesen,
Die wir kennen.²³⁵

[...]

Der edle Mensch
Sei hülfreich und gut!
Uermüdet schaff' er
Das Nützliche, Rechte,
Sei uns ein Vorbild
Jener geahndeten Wesen!²³⁶

These attributes stand in stark contrast to the lack of compassion characterizing the gods in “Prometheus.” Scalding rhetoric serves as a rebuke in stanza five:

Ich dich ehren? Wofür?
Hast du die Schmerzen gelindert
Je des Beladenen?
Hast du die Tränen gestillet
Je des Geängsteten?
Hat nicht mich zum Manne geschmiedet
Die allmächtige Zeit
Und das ewige Schicksal,
Meine Herr und deine?²³⁷

“Das Göttliche” further condemns the disinterest of the gods by lifting high humanity’s pursuit of justice. And the first epigram, “Herzog Leopold von Braunschweig,” provides tribute

²³⁵ Goethe, *Gedichte*, 333.

²³⁶ Goethe, *Gedichte*, 335.

²³⁷ Goethe, *Gedichte*, 330.

to an individual who sacrificed his very life. Goethe recounts and honors a man who drowned in a flood in Frankfurt an der Oder while seeking to save others²³⁸:

Dich ergriff mit Gewalt der alte Herrscher des Flusses,
Hält dich und teilet mit dir ewig sein strömendes Reich.
Ruhig schlummerst du nun beim stilleren Rauschen der Urne,

Bis dich stürmende Flut wieder zu Taten erweckt.
Sei dann hilfreich dem Volke, wie du es Sterblicher wolltest,
Und vollend' als ein Gott, was dir als Menschen mißlang.²³⁹

The first of the epigrams that follow “Grenzen der Menschheit” and “Das Göttliche” recalls two elements of its preceding poems. The waves that overwhelm man and demonstrate his mortality in “Grenzen der Menschheit” literally take the life of Herzog Leopold as he fulfills the noble task that opens and closes “Das Göttliche,” namely to be “hilfreich und gut.” All of these components are an unabashed celebration of humanity and a redemption of mortality. In death, Herzog Leopold exemplifies the exclusively noble character of humankind, foregoing a beastly instinct for self-preservation and embracing a sacrifice no god could give. Though its physical victim, he did not bow to the brutality of nature featured in all three of the above texts.

Wolf’s song serves as a foreshadowing of Leopold’s sacrifice. At the root of this reading rest three values of the rhythmic code mentioned by both Carner and Sams: the quarter note for humans, the half note for the gods, and the whole note as a symbol of mortality. All three of these rhythmic values are found in the final chord of “Grenzen der Menschheit.” Keeping in mind the conclusions drawn above about human nobility and god-like caprice when considering “Prometheus” and “Das Göttliche,” the final measures, in which a choral of half notes stretches

²³⁸ Reiner Wild, *Goethes klassische Lyrik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 7.

²³⁹ Goethe, *Gedichte*, 335.

into whole notes with a quarter note as the final note, sets all notions of human feebleness in question.

The standard term for “quarter note” in British musicology is “crotchet.” Alternate definitions of “crotchet” awaken observations that lend further significance to the rhythmic rubric that both Sams and Carner construct. The first definition of “crotchet” found in the American Heritage dictionary is “an odd, whimsical, or stubborn notion.” With Prometheus as the lyrical subject among the final trio of songs, exceptionally stubborn opposition to the gods comes immediately to mind, rather than unabashed servitude and praise. The third definition is “a small hook or hook like structure.” Here, “crotchets” anticipate the image later found in the song of individual human lives linking into an unending chain.

Instead of emphasizing the mystery of eternity resting upon the immutability of the gods, one can credit the enigmatic to the dynamism and unpredictability as created by human fertility. The triplet “waves” of the accompaniment are transformed into the rings of human life strung out from one generation to the next in the form of whole notes. Although humans may sink in waves that do not affect the gods, the natural rebirth as manifest in the continuation of generations undermines the supposed superiority of immortality and immutability. The hard boundaries of mortality make possible the linking of forefathers and their descendants, and this lineage appropriates the overwhelming power of nature as manifest in the wave as characteristic of procreation. The dynamism of generational endurance supersedes the monolithic state possessed by the gods. Wolf’s use of whole notes in the postlude elevates the human capacity to endure, and the ethereal, mysterious character of the last chords pushes the listener to read on, discovering the redemptive themes and example found in “Das Göttliche” and “Herzog Leopold von Braunschweig.”

In considering the greater literary context of “Grenzen der Menschheit,” the significance of Hugo Wolf’s postlude flourishes in harmony with Goethe’s series of poems. The composer completes his Goethe collection with an open end. Far from feeble and fragile, the limitations of human life encompass the potential for transcendence. Without boundaries and vulnerabilities, there is nothing to sacrifice or save. Justice has no place in a world where all are impervious to death and have no needs to satisfy. The enclosed ring of the whole note does not celebrate the self-sufficiency of gods. Instead, its borders provide the material needed for strong bonds between humans, a community whose inhabitants are helpful and good. Although “Grenzen der Menschheit” may initially imply limitations, Wolf closes his song celebrating these boundaries as delineations that connect and extend humanity, linking the chain of inheritance from one life to the next. The opening of the poem ruminates on the inviolable majesty of the gods, but Wolf’s pianistic postlude portrays the underlying pushback of humanity’s persistent existential will.

Binding musical performance

Leopold Spitzer writes that Wolf populated the *Goethe Liederbuch* with a multiplicity of characters – those in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, the lovers from the *West-östliche Divan*, and myriad other personalities that comprise the ballads, from the rat-catcher to the wise men.²⁴⁰ Wolf supports and highlights this diversity by drawing upon the established significance of music as primordial and progressive. The above analyses of “Mignon,” the two “Coptische Lieder,” and “Grenzen der Menschheit” demonstrate how music deepens the mystery of

²⁴⁰ Leopold Spitzer, *Hugo Wolf: Sein Werk, Sein Leben*, vol. 9 of *Musikportraits* (Wien: Holzhausen, 2003), 133.

personhood, reinforces linguistic self-reflexivity with its own formal tradition, and insists on a reexamination of simplistic readings by means of provocative chord progressions.

“Mignon” is fraught with passionate disorientation amidst powerful memories of a perplexing person with a tragic future. Mignon’s intense longing for an unknown land mirrors the mysterious attributes of melody, harmony, and rhythm as experienced by those listening to music. Referring to a musical score separate from the performance itself captures little of the holistic sonic experience, and seeking to articulate the effects of music is equally frustrating. This, however, does not diminish the value of the art itself.

The humor of the two “Coptische Lieder” is a felicitous exploitation of form. Using common and simple compositional tools, Wolf ingeniously reinforces the truisms of the charlatan. The uncomplicated duple time and diatonic harmonic sequences all lull the fictive audience in the same way that the soothing words of a con man deceive. Unlike the unsettling uncertainty of Mignon’s state, the real audience can confidently delight in the naked intentions of one who seeks to capitalize on others’ unassuming attitudes. Although the motives are clearly sinister, the familiar scenario inspires glee in the spectators, who are free of any real threat. Familiarity with Western musical rhetoric underpins the very mystery of music’s power and expectations for its progress.

“Grenzen der Menschheit” confronts and transforms the one universal and inevitable threat to any person. Though it is the one song which does not address the listener directly, its topic confronts any listener with their mortality. All will die, and each will have the choice of how they cross the ultimate threshold. The example of Herzog Leopold is daunting and at the same time inspiring, not because others can be confident to sacrifice similarly, but because his heroism is indicative of inherent human worth and hope. Humans are not alone. “Grenzen der

Menschheit” emphasizes those who have gone before and will follow, but such a vision also brings to mind those who are with us presently.

The cryptic power of the primordial and the promise of aesthetic progress both rely on the established and recognizable forms and sequences of musical tradition. Without grounded rhythmic and metric expectations, the audience could not appreciate the ambiguity of metric deviations or playful shifts between simple and compound emphases in “Mignon.” Similarly, “Grenzen der Menschheit” teases listeners, not because a song should naturally conclude in a different manner, but because Wolf’s pianistic postlude contradicts the implicit ear-training of other musical experiences. The “Coptische Lieder” stand between these two manifestations of lofty aesthetic theory with more modest texts in duration and meaning. However, they embody the musical rhetoric that anchors the primordial and progressive possibilities in music. The “Coptische Lieder” lack a familiar literary context, yet Wolf composes a musical setting that more than suffices for providing them a home. The listeners need no further directions than the commonplace march to jeer and joke with both the poem’s author and the song’s composer themselves, becoming co-creators within their own imaginations.

Finally, these vignettes are bound by an element shared by all personalities and circumstances presented in the score. Performance and action flow throughout the preceding discussion. Most generally, the subject of our study, the Lied, is a performing art. Though the textual approach falls far short of encompassing music in its fullness, the readings above demonstrate how each selected work hinges upon agency.

Mignon appears most helpless in her predicament; however, she exercises impactful agency through the intensity and beauty of the act of singing. Although Mignon’s identity is ultimately revealed through compiling and interpreting the texts of her various songs, the true

value of her musical art rests not in knowledge but in performance. This is affirmed by Wilhelm's attempt to translate "Kennst du das Land" and the consequential loss. Reiteration of the mystery itself releases the song's power, and this catharsis occurs only in real time, through singing and listening moment to moment.

Agency is most apparent in the middle two "Cophtische Lieder," in which the listener is both encouraged to withdraw in the first selection and then, conversely, prompted to act. These songs bind the first and last selections of our study because they most clearly demonstrate the nuance of established musical rhetoric for the audience, whether in the concert hall or sitting at the piano at home. Knowledge of the march form and its tradition enables recognition of the irony that reveals the poverty of the charlatan's call. On this level, intellectual activity combats both negligent passivity and foolhardy action due to manipulation.

Lastly, in pitting human against nature, "Grenzen der Menschheit" stimulates questions about human nature. Here, the proposed quintessence of humanity as physically fragile is countered with the ethical potential for performing out of sacrifice rather than self-preservation. Wolf spurs on the listener and performer to look beyond the confines of the score, and in so doing, they discover a call to consider community beyond themselves. This is not an endorsement of self-glorifying martyrdom, but rather an act motivated by confidence in the resilience of the human race.

As a set, these three selections span birth to death and demonstrate positive human agency in preternatural performance, self-controlled critical thinking, and self-sacrifice. Mignon's song captures the mystery and beauty of origin and inherent individual worth. The irony of march music lends hope for communities facing the threat of exploitation in the "Cophtische Lieder," and music redeems the final threshold all will cross as depicted in

“Grenzen der Menschheit.” Both intangible and understandable, yet neither fully transparent nor completely inexplicable, music calls upon human agency in its totality, whether through baring the cryptic soul, discovering true intent, or giving freely of self.

Conclusion: Performing Orality in Literate Context

Mimicking the structure of Wolf's compositions and Ebner-Eschenbach's publications as collections, this dissertation gathers together select songs, aphorisms, narratives, and letters by them. Unlike a cycle or series, collections promote a plurality of perspectives. They themselves often contain material that is re-contextualized, re-visited, and re-ordered. As such, these compendia encourage renewed representation by the viewer, reader, listener and performer. Collections are not as prescriptive or singularly teleological as other categorical designations which imply exclusive or co-dependent relationships between components, and they are far more flexible than epic forms in literature or symphonic and operatic compositions.

The array of close readings in this study examine textual evidence as reflective of creative process and indicative of receptive potential. Rather than imposing a particular cultural theory upon texts or restricting observations to an exclusive methodology, this series of interpretations encompass a diversity of genres presented through concise selections with each chapter driven primarily by its subject of inquiry. While this strategy is implemented in order to prevent a false impression as to the superiority of a given disciplinary field or analytic theory, it does not guarantee that every perspective is represented either.²⁴¹ Such ambitions would overburden both author and audience.

²⁴¹ Nicholas Jardine warns about the pitfalls of analytic methods in cultural studies: "Auch wenn die Anwendung bestimmter Erklärungsmodelle Anachronismen vermeiden kann, so wirft der Gebrauch ambitionierterer historischer Erklärungsmuster beträchtliche narrative Probleme für den Kulturhistoriker auf. Eine große Anziehungskraft der neuen Kulturgeschichte der Wissenschaften liegt in ihrer Kapazität, die gelebte Erfahrung derer, die an der vergangenen Wissenschaft beteiligt waren, zu übermitteln. Während diese Aufgabe eher durch die einfachen Erklärungsmuster (Handlungen werden durch Motive erklärt, Artefakte in den Begriffen des Design, die Auswirkungen von Büchern durch ihre Rezeption) befördert wird, tendiert man dazu, sie durch die Jagd auf theoretische ambitioniertere, ökonomische, soziologische und

Of course, some collections do endeavor to encompass huge swaths of knowledge or culture. *Wunderkammer* are the first examples of collecting in the Modern era, and these exhibits featured microcosmic artefacts which were intended to represent the macrocosm of heaven and earth. Collections are not inherently unbiased. As a practice, however, assembling a collage of items need not be endowed with prescribed significance. The act of collecting and its consequent assemblage may inform the curator's understanding of the very work of collecting.²⁴² Those who peruse a collection retain a certain independence as well. Although reception is certainly influenced by presentation, a singular conclusion cannot be imposed upon the audience as it may be in more linear forms of representation. The concurrent interconnection and impartiality of art production and reception informs the analytic method of the preceding close readings, which concentrated on creative praxis in the initial two chapters and more intentionally explored receptive possibilities in the last two.

I have argued that both Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf confronted and explored binaries with pluralistic methods, and this creative strategy, in turn, stimulates active aesthetic reception that extends beyond the boundaries of a given work into the audience's reality. This approach to dichotomies functions as an alternative to a dialectical process, retaining the integrity of contradiction while still allowing for freedom from gridlock. Published in the 1870s, Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie* provided a starting point for analyzing the intellectual and artistic pursuits by the Realist author and Romantic composer. Nietzsche's changing perspective on his proposal

anthropologische Erklärungsmuster zu behindern." Nicholas Jardine, "Sammlung, Wissenschaft, Kulturgeschichte," in *Sammeln als Wissen: Das Sammeln und seine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Bedeutung*, eds. Anke te Heesen und E.C. Spary (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001), 199-200.

²⁴² Anke te Heesen and E.C. Spary sum up this character well: "[...] eine Sammlung [ist] zugleich gezieltes und kontingentes Resultat einer wissenschaftlichen und kulturellen Praxis [...]." Introduction to *Sammeln als Wissen: Das Sammeln und seine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Bedeutung*, eds. Anke te Heesen and E.C. Spary, (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001), 8.

for cultural renewal helped identify the common problems that Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach faced in the decades immediately following.

Just as Nietzsche draws upon the mystery of myth and the authoritative residue of Classical Studies to propose a cultural rebirth, the literary and musical examples of this dissertation revive elements of a known, yet untraceable, heritage. When audience members interpret Ebner-Eschenbach's writings and perform Wolf's songs for current circumstances and idiosyncratic purposes, this constitutes receptive rebirth, and these occurrences are reminiscent of communicative and aesthetic praxis in primary oral cultures. Complementing our theoretical framework of the "writerly text," the following remarks rely on characteristics of primary oral cultures identified by Walter J. Ong to illuminate the thesis that Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach provocatively extend and challenge traditions through short works in a manner particularly suited to the taciturn, yet ubiquitous, tensions of the declining Habsburg Empire.²⁴³

Reverberating orality

In his book, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Ong first introduces oral tradition by identifying traces of it in ancient literature. Ecclesiastes 12:9-10 explicitly states that its wisdom comprises existing oral sayings. The author "searched out and arranged many proverbs [...] and sought to find delightful words."²⁴⁴ Other sources hold less obvious evidence. Milman and Adam Parry's scholarship highlights repetitions and formulaic patterns in Homeric

²⁴³ Ong's theory has been rightfully criticized for both the limitations of his binary schemata and his exclusive focus on education available historically only to males. Using his paradigm is not full-throated endorsement of all his work – especially in a dissertation entitled "False Dichotomies."

²⁴⁴ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 16.

poetry that reflect “the economy enforced on it by oral methods of composition.”²⁴⁵ These positive examples are contrasted with sources that confirm a shift in values as literature develops its unique idiom. Ong draws upon Eric A. Havelock’s work to demonstrate an emerging appreciation for innovation and distaste for oral reprise: “Plato excluded poets from his ideal republic essentially [...] because he found himself in a new chirographically styled noetic world in which formula or cliché, beloved of all traditional poets was outmoded and counterproductive.”²⁴⁶

After establishing these broad distinctions, Ong notes the impact of writing’s absence in relation to both “modes of expression and thought processes.”²⁴⁷ Without a written record, a partner is needed for thinking through complex problems; retaining and recalling knowledge requires structures such as formulaic expressions, epithets, rhythmic patterns, and common thematic schema. A culture of conservatism and reverence for tradition accompany embodied retention, which is dependent on apprenticeship and preservation for the continuance of knowledge.²⁴⁸ However, many aspects of oral thought and practice would be considered progressive today, challenging literate society’s established methods and structures, such as hierarchical reasoning and authoritative interpretation. Ong classifies differences between orality and literacy to help portray the unfamiliar world of thought process, semantics, and communicative practices in primary oral cultures.²⁴⁹ These include such pairs as the following

²⁴⁵ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 17.

²⁴⁶ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 24.

²⁴⁷ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 33.

²⁴⁸ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34.

²⁴⁹ When referring to “orality” and “literacy” in this chapter, I am referring to communicative practice within primary oral cultures and literate cultures respectively.

(the oral aspect is listed before its literate counterpart): 1. additive—subordinative 2. aggregative—analytic 3. empathetic and participatory—objectively distanced 4. situational—abstract.²⁵⁰

For people from literate cultures, it is difficult to imagine the profound impact writing has on problem solving, the means by which learning occurs, and the ways written records affect perceptions of language and reality. In a comparison of hunter-gatherer/agricultural thought with industrial thought, J. Peter Denny identifies de-contextualization as the chief difference between primary oral and literate societies.²⁵¹ The short forms in this dissertation present that very principle of literacy in action in two ways. First, it does so in the forms themselves. The aphorism's very independence and isolation lends it to de-contextualization, and the Lied's displacement of verse into a new musical setting not only removes the poem from an initial literary context but also often places the text to music quite foreign the author's ears. Second, de-contextualization occurs within the works themselves. Wolf's capricious use of literary allusions foists select philosophic statements into unintended frameworks. Ebner-Eschenbach peppers her novella with gestures from other genres but never truly fulfills them, declining, thereby, to properly embed them. However, in these cases de-contextualization serves to re-enact oral priorities and customs, and a hybrid practice emerges that both exploits literate awareness of formal expectations and repurposes literature for oral modes of thought and action. Below, our earlier close readings are summarized in light of oral tradition. Through this lens, we see that

²⁵⁰ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 37-57.

²⁵¹ J. Peter Denny, "Rational thought in oral culture and literate decontextualization," in *Literacy and Orality*, eds. David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance, (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 66–67.

Wolf's and Ebner-Eschenbach's cooperative creative methods and manipulation of convention inspire works that are epithetic in nature, allowing for situational reception.

Dynamic creative partnership and collective action permeate the aesthetic production, praxis, and reception of the works from this study. Although not as essential to problem-solving as in primary oral cultures, both Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf take advantage of multiple interlocutors when crafting their works. Neither fit the mold of an isolated genius. They both rely upon and benefit from collaborative engagement. For Wolf, letters are not only opportunities for him to process and test his aesthetic theoretical ideas, but also a stage in which he co-opts other intellectuals' labor to support and express his personal thoughts in dialog. The *Goethe Liederbuch* brings together multiple perspectives and personalities in a musical practice central to amateur study, lessening the singular celebrity associated with forms conceived primarily for the stage. Ebner-Eschenbach dedicated multiple editions of *Aphorismen* to her friends, thereby crediting her social circle with undefined yet definite contribution to the publication. Serving as a negative example of the necessity for collective action, the tragedy of Mischa's death in *Er lasst die Hand küssen* occurs due to failed cooperation and destructive de-contextualization caused by the strict compartmentalization of community in the feudal state's hierarchical mechanisms.

Each of these thinkers exhibit a certain conservatism as well through continuing tradition by utilizing existing techniques and forms. For instance, the aphoristic genre itself is indebted to proverbial wisdom, a practice central to primary oral cultures and diverse in rhetorical forms and semantic assertions. Ebner-Eschenbach recalls the judicial roots of the novella with legal considerations in the frame story of *Er lasst die Hand küssen*. Musical study depends largely on apprenticeship models, whether in private lessons or through championing particular schools of pedagogy. Such educational models rely on preservation of a prescribed method, a faithful

passing on from one generation to the next. Both Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf respond through their craft to a pantheon of earlier luminaries, whether Wagner or Schiller, Beethoven or Goethe. Nevertheless, their definition of art demands originality, and their sense of art's role in society begs for timely creative contributions that are suited to their contemporary situation.

Far from rigid preservationists, Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach exploit conventional tropes and established techniques to reveal insufficiency in their respective artistic legacies. They leverage the familiarity of literary and musical discourse to open up new avenues for their audience to explore individually. Such receptive license emerges from the additive attitudes of the creators themselves. In addition to the chorus of quotes in his letters, Wolf's songbooks consist of a multiplicity of voices: religious and secular, demanding and vulnerable, quaint and ethereal.²⁵² Each voice added enriches the whole. This is apparent in the content and form of Ebner-Eschenbach's *Aphorismen* as well, and her novella's portrait of dysfunctional life on a manor soundly rejects both a top-down order and simplistic revolution that leads to new forms of oppression. Protocol debilitates public and private life in *Er lasst die Hand küssen*, and these institutional failures serve as an appeal to reflection and responsibility from each individual reader – an additive approach to addressing societal ills.

Much like the epithets of primary oral practice, all of these works rely on elements which are transferable. Wolf demonstrates this when he co-opts eclectic sources for his singular purposes in correspondence. The young composer transforms observations once made in service of a philosophic system designed for universal application into epithets with a morphing

²⁵² *The New Oxford History of Music* asserts that no other of the famous Lieder composer set “a greater variety of poems” than Wolf. Leslie Orrey, “Solo Song: (a) Germany,” in *Romanticism: 1830 - 1890*, ed. Gerald Abraham, reprinted, vol. 9 of *New Oxford History of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 681.

character for exceptional situations. Conversely, Wolf's many Lieder are reiterations and a re-contextualization of Goethe's poetry. The collection, then, provides thousands of performance variations for both the stage and the home, transforming one author's work into countless recurrences. The proverbial wisdom at the core of aphoristic writing lends mobility to the entries of Ebner-Eschenbach's first widely successful publication, not only for each individual reader, but even across languages and cultures.²⁵³ Finally, *Er lasst die Hand küssen* contains multiple genres, distilling the Romantic vision of the novel into a small form packed with confession, dialog, idyll, and tragedy.

All of these epithetic elements stimulate situational interpretation and application by the audience. Ebner-Eschenbach's short and at times contradictory maxims are transferrable, relevant to many circumstances and accommodating human inconsistencies. *Er lasst die Hand küssen* awakens situational application because of the devastating consequences due to severe division of labor across the manor. The novella presents readers with an insufficient case-study and abdicates the task of ethical authorship to them. As impassioned and ardent as Wolf may have declared his personal aesthetic, his re-contextualization of philosophical and literary materials undermines the authority of those very assertions. His model of argumentation opens the door for responses from his correspondents filled with new, potentially adversarial, constellations. Finally, our selected songs from the *Goethe Liederbuch* make a universal plea to exercise human agency through multiple actors in various situations. Ranging from the mysteries of birth to the certainty of death, these situations inspire listeners and performers to consider action in their unique circumstances.

²⁵³ By 1893 this work was already translated and distributed in France, Italy, and the U.S.A.

Though the composer and author realized their creative efforts in short works, the questions raised by these two thinkers are far from modest. The preceding survey reveals that Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf struggled with extending artistic legacy by innovative means, celebrated individual potential while confronting systemic injustice, fought to retain human dignity despite our species' fundamental frailty, and stirred the public to consequential reflection. These issues take different forms today, but we continue to grapple with the same fundamental problems. Our introductory chapter closed with an acknowledgement that the years directly following Ebner-Eschenbach's and Wolf's presumed "successes" were marked by upheaval, fragmentation, and, ultimately, the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire. None of the works featured here inspired immediate cultural renewal or even superficially durable artistic trends. However, the promise of pluralism and of oral practice in written form resurfaces in a time beyond that of our subjects' immediate Modernist successors. Half a century later, striking similarities emerge in reflections by a political theorist steeped in poetics.

Questioning the future and quoting the past: a coda

Throughout her works, Hannah Arendt champions plurality and deftly combines earlier poetic and philosophic materials for modern political life, an era in which the continuity and authority of tradition has ceased.²⁵⁴ Unlike Nietzsche, who shifted from the field of philology to the philosophical realm, Arendt identified herself as a political theorist and declined to claim the title of philosopher, despite university study with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. Similar to

²⁵⁴ For a concise and compelling account of the philosophical and poetic in Arendt's thinking, see Sigrid Weigel's article "Poetics as a presupposition of philosophy: Hannah Arendt's *Denktagebuch*." *Telos* 119 (April 2009): 97-110.

Nietzsche, Arendt is drawn to pairs and binaries.²⁵⁵ This dissertation began with an analysis of the philologist's earliest publication, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, and our discussion concludes by considering Arendt's private contemplations in her *Denktagebuch*, published posthumously in 2002.

Written from 1950 to 1973, the entries of the *Denktagebuch* create yet another collection in this study, and they display Arendt's penchant for binary and plural conceptualizations. These notes are brief and eclectic. At times, one recognizes groupings of meditations that focus on certain concepts or topics, but the overall variety of considerations create a rich tapestry. Much like the foregoing portrayals of fruitful explorations among dichotomies, Arendt conceives models in which both political life and solitary thinking depend upon twosomes which in turn multiply. She ruminates on earlier political and philosophical theories in order to develop new visions for life in the individual mind and the public square. Composed primarily in German but with many entries in English, these reflections are vibrant experiments, true creative labors. The following excerpts served as inspiration for future publications and as platforms for continued engagement with concepts already presented in earlier lectures, essays, and books.²⁵⁶

Arendt consistently brings philosophical assertions to bear on political considerations, although she declares the respective academic disciplines incompatible. Just as Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf tirelessly confront contradiction, Arendt is indefatigable in her efforts. While she heartily rejects the singular "philosophical man," she repeatedly grapples with ideas

²⁵⁵ Barbara Hahn begins her book, *Hannah Arendt – Leidenschaften, Menschen und Bücher*, by quoting one of Nietzsche's aphorisms, from which the study's title is also derived. Hahn, *Hannah Arendt – Leidenschaften, Menschen und Bücher*, (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2005), 1.

²⁵⁶ Weigel, "Poetics as a presupposition," 97.

from those who rely upon the very premise.²⁵⁷ Plato, Aristotle, and Kant routinely trespass the pages of her private writings.

Diversifying the field beyond the antagonism between philosophy and politics, theological, sociological, and historical perspectives often mediate between the two, reorienting the dialog to accommodate Arendt's vision for a more comprehensive theory of social order. Early on, she asserts that plurality is essential to politics and this fact precludes productive contributions from fields that depend upon the presupposition of the "ideal man," including philosophy, theology, as well as natural and social sciences.²⁵⁸ She cannot, however, escape engaging with these very disciplines. In a discussion about the implications of Augustine's reflections on animal and human creation in *City of God*, Arendt concludes that the binding *relationship* between Adam and Eve distinguishes them from animals, rather than shared *nature*.²⁵⁹

Within a few years, Arendt expresses hope in the second creation myth of Genesis as a sound foundation for pluralistic political theory:

Experimental Notebook of a Political Scientist: To establish a science of politics one needs first to reconsider all philosophical statements on Man under the assumption that men, and not Man, inhabit the earth. The establishment of political science demands a philosophy for which men exist only in the plural. Its

²⁵⁷ When considering the prevalence of pairs in Arendt's work, Hahn characterizes the two histories in *On Revolution* as uncanny in their parallel existence, never intersecting or informing one another: "zwei Varianten ohne 'Original'" Hahn, *Hannah Arendt – Leidenschaften*, 33. This insight helps us understand Arendt's theory of plural origins and their impact on political life as well as the inevitable co-existence of seemingly competing interests such as discussed here.

²⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch: 1950 bis 1973*, vol. 1, eds. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, (München: Piper, 2002, 15).

²⁵⁹ Arendt, vol. 1 of *Denktagebuch*, 66.

field is human plurality. Its religious source is the second creation-myth – not Adam and rib, but: Male and female created he them.²⁶⁰

This form of political science is founded on a religious source, a notion quite alien to the tenants of Descartes, let alone the statistics and quantitative measures central to current political science practices. The founding of this political science also involves philosophy, albeit, a critical review of its tenants. It appears that a political theory of plurality requires an equally diverse method as that of its constituents' ontology.

The same principle holds true for Arendt's conceptualization of individual reflection. She insists that even in isolation, true thought takes place through an inner dialog: "Denken in der Einsamkeit ist immer ein Gespräch mit sich selbst."²⁶¹ The *Denktagebuch* itself is, of course, a glimpse into just such internal conversations, and across these notes, we discover that Arendt's thinking is populated by far more voices than the Socratic solitary thinker.²⁶² In the seventh entry from November 1969, Arendt describes quotes as companions: "Das Interpretieren, das Zitieren – doch nur, um Zeugen zu haben, auch Freunde."²⁶³ Rather than citing other sources to serve an arsenal of authority, Arendt references earlier texts for witnesses and friends.²⁶⁴ Witnesses may testify to a time past or an idea present; they may also be interrogated. Friends both affirm and contradict, drawing upon intimate knowledge of the thinker's individual assumptions or biases, and the inquisitive mind reciprocates, as she also tempers and challenges them.²⁶⁵ Arendt's

²⁶⁰ Arendt, vol. 1 of *Denktagebuch*, 295.

²⁶¹ Arendt, vol. 1 of *Denktagebuch*, 73.

²⁶² Weigel, "Poetics as a presupposition," 97-98.

²⁶³ Arendt, vol. 2 of *Denktagebuch*, 756.

²⁶⁴ Both Weigel and Hahn understand this entry to be central to understanding Arendt's idiom.

²⁶⁵ In the introduction to *Artifacts of Thinking*, Ian Storey notes that the lack of an authorial *I*: "adds to the peculiar intimacy of reading the *Denktagebuch*, precisely because the text bears

acquaintances are many, ranging from ancients such as Homer, Cicero, and Augustine to moderns like Luther, Tocqueville, and Benjamin.

This affection materializes in a certain lack of editorial formality. In many of her publications, Arendt eschews proper citation or reference to her sources. Instead, she embeds them seamlessly within her argumentation and ideation. Such integration is not mere de-contextualization either. She rewrites oft quoted passages, as though using conceptual epithets, rather than replicating statements or phrases. The rhetorical traditions that grew out of a desire to master oration reemerge with a literate twist. Barbara Hahn identifies a plethora of such instances in *Vita activa: oder Vom tätigen Leben*, and her interpretation of these allusions and transmutations display the depth and meaning that a reader's literary, musical, and cultural knowledge brings to bear on the text.²⁶⁶ Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf inspire participatory interpretation through unsettling expectations, and Arendt refines this technique still subtler representations of discourse and greater license in adjusting them to her purposes.

One final entry from the *Denktagebuch* reiterates the centrality of citation and leads back to the world beyond Arendt's mind: "Tradition – past no longer *tradierbar*, nur *zitierbar* (Benjamin)."²⁶⁷ After years of publishing works for American and German audiences, Arendt adapted her essay on Walter Benjamin (included in *Men in Dark Times*) for the introduction to a collection of writings by Benjamin in English translation. In it, Arendt elaborates on this notion of tradition and quoting: "[Benjamin] discovered that the transmissibility of the past had been

none of the signs and disturbances of having any potential audience other than herself in mind." *Artifacts of Thinking: Reading Hannah Arendt's Denktagebuch*, eds. Roger Berkowitz and Ian Storey, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.

²⁶⁶ Hahn, *Hannah Arendt – Leidenschaften*, 105-123.

²⁶⁷ Arendt, vol. 2 of *Denktagebuch*, 702.

replaced by its citability and that in place of its authority there had arisen a strange power to settle down, piecemeal, in the present and to deprive it of ‘peace of mind,’ the mindless peace of complacency.”²⁶⁸ Entitled *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* the anthology begins with the essay, “Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting,” and closes with “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” Although tradition does not survive in the present age, knowledge of the quoted sources and theories about our understanding of the past remain vital.²⁶⁹

Arendt read texts from the foregone tradition in depth and detail. Only intimate comprehension of these writings makes possible a pluralistic review of philosophy, let alone the kind of re-tooling for the postmortem time in which Arendt resides. Her introduction to this collection of Benjamin’s essays includes the quote above, and Benjamin himself locates the end of tradition within the writings of Karl Kraus, whose ruthless examination of language and iterations stripped any remaining value from this heritage.²⁷⁰ Born in 1874, Kraus came of age in the last decades of the 19th century. A new era begins with the generation that arises as the once influential voices of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Hugo Wolf diminish.

²⁶⁸ Hannah Arendt, Introduction to *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Walter Benjamin, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 38.

²⁶⁹ Arendt’s theory about the cessation of “Western tradition,” though the subject of many lectures and indicated in other texts, remained an unfinished, labyrinthine full-length written work. Drafted under three different potential titles: *Totalitarian Elements of Marxism*, *The Modern Challenge to Tradition*, and *Amor Mundi*, it will be the first volume, *The Modern Challenge to Tradition: Fragment eines Buchs*, of a new print and digital critical edition of Arendt’s opus. *The Modern Challenge to Tradition: Fragment eines Buchs*, eds. Barbara Hahn, Ingo Kieslich, James McFarland, and Ingeborg Nordmann, vol. 1 of *Hannah Arendt: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, forthcoming).

²⁷⁰ Arendt, Introduction to *Illuminations*, 39.

Past posterity

Although the radical de-contextualization of Modernist literati rends an irreparable tear in the fabric of tradition, Arendt establishes that intellectuals after this destruction can still continue to recall quotes from their predecessors, causing those words to echo down unfamiliar corridors. Wolf and Ebner-Eschenbach used this very strategy prior to this final rupture. Their compositions and writings exploit existing techniques and common forms by pressing familiar literary and musical elements into serving purposes contrary to their convention. Positive examples of this, such as Wolf's philosophic caprice in correspondence, endow existing material with new meaning. In other instances, the poverty of aesthetic means for contemporary circumstances comes to the fore; Ebner-Eschenbach's *Er lasst die Hand küssen* exemplifies such a process. These works reveal that a singular authoritative tradition is ultimately untenable, yet this reality provides opportunity. As an aggregate, the texts featured in previous chapters recall orality in writing while reinforcing the text through performance.

As he processes personal life experiences in relation to artistic aspirations, Wolf pursues an aesthetic theory that is not merely imitative. Though he seeks to utilize and further develop Wagnerian compositional innovations, his attitude toward the necessary bond between truth and art demands a unique voice. In his pursuit of an inventive continuation, the young composer delves into a plethora of other inspirational sources and exchanges ideas with a diverse group of intellectuals and friends. The final letter presented displays the consequences of creation in isolation. In his madness, Wolf rejected his social network, and the artistic autonomy he claimed to have won was nothing more than a frenetic shadow of the *Dichterkomponist*.

Likewise, Ebner-Eschenbach's book, *Aphorismen*, responds to earlier written methods for reiterating spoken materials, gaining from this legacy and molding it to fit her distinctive

aesthetic. Unlike previous folklorists that systematized and regulated existing oral traditions through literary practices, Ebner-Eschenbach's *Aphorismen* revives the oral traditions of collective proverbial wisdom through the artifice of aphoristic composition. The Brothers Grimm relied on tales by bourgeois women as their source and then, adjusted tone, length, and content to conform to literate standards. Ebner-Eschenbach, an aristocratic female writer, invades the male-dominated field of publishing by elevating the aphoristic genre to book form while retaining features distinct to oral practice through entries' additive and contradictory character.

The prose in *Er lasst die Hand küssen* possesses a theatrical depth due to Ebner-Eschenbach's background as a dramatist, arousing the readers' empathy. The relational sensitivity displayed by the nobles' gestures and oral parlance in the frame story give the audience a sense of intimacy and intrigue, pulling them into the scene. As the story progresses, the modern-day noblewoman's off-hand comments and perturbed interjections sustain the readers' sense of companionship, as a fellow listener to the embedded tale rather than as a dispassionate observer of all levels of narrative. Allured by the initial scene, modern readers soon find themselves confronted by symptoms of decrepit institutions and crippled community without an evident cure. Over the course of the tale, a multitude of literary gestures never come to fruition, and these failures to fulfill aesthetic promise compound the tragic plot of the novella. This lack of resolution produces malleable narrative significance, begging for active interpretation and contemporary application. The buffer provided by the feudal provincial setting of the embedded story allows modern urban bourgeois readers to safely contemplate injustice from a distance, yet their identification with the modern interlocutors of the frame story move Ebner-Eschenbach's fellow citizens to exercise their agency in the present.

Wolf's *Goethe Liederbuch* compositions both reinforce the implication of their corresponding texts and encompass their larger literary context, providing a listening experience that encapsulates multiple views of humanity in its limitations and resilience. Wolf further develops the Lied form in individual songs by taking the role of the piano beyond mere accompaniment and experimenting with less melodic, yet more expressive, vocal lines. By producing songbook collections, Wolf complements the existing eclectic programming practice in public recitals and provides home study with rich and varied repertoire from which to select and combine, satisfying amateurs' desires and needs. Unlike the assessment that Wolf is the "poet's composer," a crafter of an authoritative and singular musical interpretation of the text, the forgoing analysis demonstrates how the young Austrian's music encourages individual study of musical and literary sources, and these observations confirm the legitimacy and centrality of musical performance itself in all its variations.

Throughout this dissertation, discussion traverses from one extreme to the other, considering most closely the expanse in between. Concentrating on works by Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Hugo Wolf brought relatively obscure selections of Austrian literary and musical history to the fore. This pairing demanded engagement with late Romantic music, a movement that only grew in stature as it continued, and late Realist literature, an era typically overshadowed by emerging Naturalism. Nevertheless, this merger proved that the creative output of a young bourgeois Austrian composer from modern-day Slovenia bears striking similarities with that of a mature aristocratic Moravian author. Shared time and place during their adulthood provides ample common ground, yet their artistic affinities are far from conventional.

Throughout their works, both Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf hold together the dichotomous while

entrusting artistic abundance to the disparate interests of readers and listeners, commending aesthetic culmination to audience members.

In response, the structure of this dissertation's modest sampling sought to capture a wide-range of content in style and substance, and the subsequent analytic acts yield a compelling constellation. The opening chapter featured correspondence. The form's very name in German, "Brief," means "short" in Latin, and these personal dispatches straddle private and public spheres as a medium and in their content. The second reading consisted of the pithiest of these select forms, the aphorism. Ebner-Eschenbach's *Aphorismen* most directly demonstrated potential as a portable and pluralistic genre, crafted as collective wisdom for individual use. Alternately, the penultimate analysis of *Er lasst die Hand küssen* highlighted how one small story can leverage allusions to misguided genres for stunning impact beyond the text. The final chapter's scope expanded to several selections from one songbook, and this interpretive approach simulated the act of de- and re-contextualization while recalling the first chapter's blurring of public and private realms through performance practice on the stage and at home.

Situated on either side of this collection, methodological and theoretical pairs frame the conversation in terms of art and reality, the oral and written. We began with considering forewords to Nietzsche's enigmatic first publication, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, and closed with observations on Arendt's private contemplations in the *Denktagebuch*, a series of journals published posthumously. The model of Apollonian and Dionysian forces inspired a closer examination of binaries within the writings and compositions of Nietzsche's contemporaries, and the consequent discovery of pluralistic elements brought to mind the work of Arendt, a figure in the future living an ocean away. After drawing upon Barthes' literary theory of the writerly text to characterize this study's analytic model, all close readings were revisited in light of Ong's

reconstruction of primary oral practice and its impact on methods and functions of communicative and artistic production and reception. The framing structure supporting the core of this study takes on the same dichotomous yet pluralistic character as its subjects hold within themselves. As a whole, this dissertation pursues the same purpose it ascribes to its subjects. It provides a representation of an apparent binary relationship in the hopes of multiplication, drawing from the plurality of existing scholarship and hoping for a proliferation of future readings and applications. These might affirm or contradict ideas presented here, extend or restrict them.

Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf curated with an eye to both the past and present, and this approach endows their publications with resilience in posterity. Because they refused to blindly lend contemporary authority to historical genius, their works themselves assert no such expectations for future reception. Both Austrians' creative instincts and consequent publications not only reflect the fragmentation of the Habsburg Empire in decline, but also provide a model for responding to a world no longer anchored by tradition. Resisting both the temptation to pursue empty novelty as well as the security of continuing another's established legacy, Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf crafted stories and songs of enduring relevance. They utilized the knowledge and resources of the past to create new cultural contributions to their era, confronting contemporary problems by reshaping and questioning long accepted forms. The presence of mind that they exercised pervades their publications, and this disposition continues to invite new readings and fresh interpretations in our time.

The week following the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Hannah Arendt's 1951 work, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, sold out at the online retailer, amazon.com, and her book hit

bestsellers lists.²⁷¹ The revival of Arendt's diagnosis in this early work begs that her subsequent thoughts on a new political theory be revisited as well. As shown above, writings and compositions by Ebner-Eschenbach and Wolf share a methodological kinship with Arendt's considerations. Anticipating the plurality Arendt attributes to humanity, the texts of this dissertation provide a theoretical space in which to consider individual and collective agency in light of history and the present in myriad arrangements. These exceptional spaces open readily into the ordinary reality beyond their borders, encouraging thinkers to take concrete action based on a diversity of perspectives in many different scenarios. Some may scoff at short works from late 19th century Austria as mere products of a cautious and cramped aesthetic, a remnant of the Biedermeier era, but these modest minutiae carry immense collective weight and counter censorious impulse. Far from merely elitist, nostalgic, and conservative, this Austrian author and her composer compatriot created works in a manner that is instructive for many individuals and organizations during a time of emerging populism, breathless technological developments, and widespread disillusion.

The imaginative and resourceful musical and literary contributions by these Austrian aesthetes reveal how small forms open a vast sphere of possibility due to their concision, flexibility, and interpretive prospects. The monolithic, centralized forces of government and commerce require a multiplicity of independent, focused external cultural and social movements to both invigorate and temper larger institutions. Reductionist views of technology idolize the useful, yet limited, analytic potential of binary code, and only rigorous, truly cooperative community can optimize the benefits of multi-cultural societies while lessening the impact of

²⁷¹ Karen J. Greenberg, "Beyond the Origins of Totalitarianism," *The New Republic*, 14 April 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/142050/beyond-origins-totalitarianism>.

alienation within monstrous social and professional networks. Finally, the internet age opens up far-flung and wondrous worlds of information and art, but collecting these treasures demands discerning and inventive curation. Looming on a scale unimaginable to those of the late 19th century, contemporary challenges and opportunities are worlds away from the late Habsburg Empire, yet such magnitude and volatility demand the very depth, ingenuity, compassion, and concentration exemplified by Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Hugo Wolf.

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