

Fanny Hensel's Lied Aesthetic

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The bulk of research on Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel to date has focused primarily on either the historical or editorial; analysis of her music, however, is rare. Turning the lens on Hensel's songs for solo voice is a step toward rectifying this situation. What defines the Henselian Lied? What makes her songs distinctive and unmistakably her own? What, in short, was her Lied aesthetic? An examination of two of her songs from the late 1820s, "Verlust" (1827) and "Die frühen Gräber" (1828), uncovers three hallmarks of her approach to the Lied: an avoidance of tonic harmony, an emphasis on text painting, and the use of the piano accompaniment as commentary. The most striking of these hallmarks—the absence of the tonic—can be traced through several songs from the middle of her output, including her setting of Goethe's "Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh" (1835). All three features are most evident in one of her last songs, "Im Herbst" (1846). These songs reveal a composer with a great sensitivity to textual nuance, a penchant for harmonic experimentation, and a strong interpretive streak. Moreover, they suggest that far from being merely an exemplar of the "Mendelssohnian style," Hensel was an independent artist in her own right, with a creative voice that was adventuresome, deeply expressive, and, in its own way, as pathbreaking as any in the Romantic era.

Once regarded as merely the sister of a famous brother, after more than a century of neglect, Fanny Hensel is finally coming into her own. The past twenty years have seen an explosion of interest in her life and work.¹ Since 1997, the 150th anniversary of her and her brother's deaths, no fewer than

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¹ For consistency, throughout this article I will refer to Fanny by her married name, Hensel, rather than by her maiden name, Mendelssohn, even if the pieces I am discussing were composed before her 1829 marriage to Wilhelm Hensel.

five biographies of Hensel have been published,² as well as five collections of essays,³ four volumes of letters,⁴ an edition of her diaries,⁵ two thematic catalogs,⁶ and even two children's stories and an Italian novel based on her life (aptly titled *Fanny Mendelssohn: Note a margine* [notes in the margins]).⁷ Topping it all off is Larry Todd's remarkable life-and-works study, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn*, published just last year.⁸

The bulk of this research has been either historical or editorial, in part because her life story is so compelling that it has become the focus of attention while her music has been shunted into the wings. Analysis of Hensel's music, however, is rare. I hope to take a step toward rectifying this situation by turning an analytical lens on Hensel's songs for solo voice. Song was her preferred mode of expression; she contributed more works to this genre than to any other, writing 249 songs in total, more than twice as many as her brother and roughly as many as Schumann and Brahms. Yet for all the recent strides in Hensel studies, her approach to songwriting remains ill-defined, and her songs remain underexplored.⁹

² Antje Olivier, *Mendelssohn Schwester Fanny Hensel: Musikerin, Komponistin, Dirigentin* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1997); Sulamith Sparre, *Eine Frau jenseits des Schweigens: die Komponistin Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel (1805–1847)* (Lich: Edition AV, 2006); and Peter Schleuning, *Fanny Hensel geb. Mendelssohn: Musikerin der Romantik* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007).

³ *Fanny Hensel, geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: das Werk*, ed. Martina Helmig (Munich: Edition text + kritik, 1997); *Fanny Hensel, geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Komponieren zwischen Geselligkeitsideal und romantischer Musikästhetik*, ed. Beatrix Borchard and Monika Schwarz-Danuser (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999); *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*, ed. John Michael Cooper and Julie D. Prandi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Fanny Hensel, geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: ein Frauenschicksal im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Veronika Leggewie (Bell: Top Music, 2005); and *Die Musikveranstaltungen bei den Mendelssohns—Ein musikalischer Salon?: Die Referate des Symposions am 2. September 2006 in Leipzig*, ed. Hans-Günter Klein (Leipzig: Mendelssohn-Haus, 2006).

⁴ *Musik will gar nicht rutschen ohne Dich: Briefwechsel 1821 bis 1846 / Fanny und Felix Mendelssohn*, ed. Eva Weissweiler (Berlin: Propyläen, 1997); *Fanny Hensel, Briefe aus Rom an ihre Familie in Berlin 1839/40*, ed. Hans-Günter Klein (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002); *Fanny Hensel, Briefe aus Venedig und Neapel an ihre Familie in Berlin 1839/40*, ed. Hans-Günter Klein (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004); and *Fanny Hensel, Briefe aus Paris an ihre Familie 1835*, ed. Hans-Günter Klein (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2007).

⁵ *Fanny Hensel: Tagebücher*, ed. Hans-Günter Klein and Rudolf Elvers (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2002).

⁶ Renate Hellwig-Unruh, *Fanny Hensel geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: thematisches Verzeichnis der Kompositionen* (Adliswil: Kunzelmann, 2000); and Annette Maurer, *Thematisches Verzeichnis der klavierbegleiteten Sololieder Fanny Hensels* (Kassel: Furore, 1997).

⁷ Roswitha Frölich, *Wer war Fanny Hensel? Auf den Spuren von Fanny Mendelssohn* (Munich: Ellermann, 1997); Gloria Kamen, *Hidden Music: The Life of Fanny Mendelssohn* (New York: Atheneum, 1996); and Adriana Mascoli and Marcella Papeschi, *Fanny Mendelssohn: Note a margine* (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni, 2006).

⁸ R. Larry Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹ Yonatan Malin's chapter on Hensel from his recent book *Songs in Motion: Rhythm and Meter in the German Lied* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 69–94, represents the most thorough analytical treatment of Hensel's Lieder, focusing mainly on her Op. 1 song collection. Diether de la Motte's "Einfall als Bereicherung der Musiksprache in Liedern von Fanny Hensel," in *Das Werk*, 58–67, and Victoria Sirota's *The Life and Works of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel* (Ph.D. diss., Boston University School of Music, 1981), 186–208, offer valuable, if brief, analytical discussions of several Hensel Lieder. For

What are the hallmarks of the Henselian Lied? What makes her songs distinctive and unmistakably her own? What was her approach to text setting and musical expression? What, in short, was Hensel's Lied aesthetic? I use the word *aesthetic* deliberately, referring not just to the stylistic resources of her songs—the stockpile of forms, harmonies, melodies, and rhythms from which she draws, which are largely the same as those of contemporaneous song composers—but also to her deployment of those resources. It is in her characteristic *usage* of form, harmony, melody, and rhythm that her unique compositional voice can be most clearly discerned.

Attending to Hensel's "voice" naturally entails addressing some of the myths that have accreted around her music, perhaps the most common being that it is an exemplar of the "Mendelssohnian style" of her brother.¹⁰ Admittedly, one of my aims here is to suggest that Hensel's songs (particularly her mature songs) are in fact quite different from Mendelssohn's—generally more dramatic, more text-driven, and more harmonically audacious.¹¹ But this is only one aim and hardly the most important one. My main goal is to characterize her Lied aesthetic as a thing

overviews of her song output, see James Deaville, "A Multitude of Voices: The Lied at Mid Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. James Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151–53, and Jürgen Thym, "Crosscurrents in Song: Five Distinctive Voices," in *German Lieder in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rufus Hallmark (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 161–66. See also Marcia J. Citron's seminal essay, "The Lieder of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel," *Musical Quarterly* 69/4 (1983), 570–94. Other valuable analytical studies of Hensel's music (dealing with genres other than song) include Annegret Huber, "Anmerkungen zu 'Schreibart' und 'Lebensprinzip' einiger Sonatenhauptsätze von Fanny Hensel," in *Fanny Hensel, geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Das Werk*, 93–104, and *Das Lied ohne Worte als kunstbegreifendes Experiment: Eine komparatistische Studie zur Intermedialität des Instrumentalliedes 1830–1850* (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 2006); Annette Nubbemeyer, "Die Klaviersonaten Fanny Hensels: Analytische Betrachtungen," in *Komponieren zwischen Geselligkeitsideal und romantischer Musikästhetik*, 90–120; Stefan Wolitz, *Fanny Hensels Chorwerke* (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 2007); and Susan Wollenberg, "Fanny Hensel's Op. 8, No. 1: A Special Case of 'multum in parvo?'," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 4/2 (2007), 101–17. Todd also offers brief analyses of Hensel's works throughout *The Other Mendelssohn*.

¹⁰ Consider, for example, that in his 1984 textbook on Romantic music Leon Plantinga wrote that Hensel's songs and piano pieces were "similar in style to her brother's early music," save "certain individual traits in texture and figuration" (*Romantic Music: A History of Nineteenth-Century Style in Western Europe* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1984, 255]), and that in the 1995 paperback edition of the *New Grove* Karl-Heinz Köhler claimed that Hensel "composed in the same style as [Mendelssohn] did" (*New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* [London: Macmillan, 1980], vol. 12, 134). As recently as 2005, Richard Taruskin wrote that Hensel's music "bears entirely *favorable* comparison with" her brother's and, as proof, offered a song by each sibling—"Ferne" (Distance) and "Verlust" (Loss), which appear side by side in Mendelssohn's *Zwölf Lieder*, Op. 9 (1830)—with the composers' names omitted: "One of them is by Fanny (but which?)" (*Music in the Nineteenth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 185). I will explore Hensel's "Verlust" further on.

¹¹ For discussions of Mendelssohn's song aesthetic, see John Michael Cooper, "Of Red Roofs and Hunting Horns: Mendelssohn's Song Aesthetic, With an Unpublished Cycle (1830)," *Journal of Musicological Research* 21/4 (2002), 277–317; Douglass Seaton, "The Problem of the Lyric Persona in Mendelssohn's Songs," in *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Kongreß-Bericht Berlin 1994*, ed. Christian Martin Schmidt (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1997), 167–86; and Susan Youens, "Mendelssohn's Songs," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Peter Mercer-Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 189–205.

in itself, to turn an eye and an ear to the subtleties and wonders of her unique expressive language. Therefore, I will not undertake an exhaustive comparison of her songs with her brother's—although I do hope that my article may inspire others to head in that direction. If anything, Hensel will become more credible as an independent artist if we start with her rather than with her brother, and if we take her music on its own terms.

To that end, what I offer is an analytical exploration of representative songs from throughout Hensel's lifetime, using them to tease out three hallmarks of her Lied aesthetic: an avoidance of tonic harmony, an emphasis on text painting, and the use of the piano accompaniment as commentary. The chronological organization will allow readers to get a feel for the development of Hensel's aesthetic over time. My intent is not to show that *all* of her songs exhibit these features; neither is it to offer a survey of her entire Lied output. Rather, I want to suggest that these features are so prevalent as to become musical fingerprints, instantly recognizable markers of her approach to the genre. However much Hensel's songs may resemble those of her brother, Schubert, Schumann, and even her north German forebears, her fingerprints are her own.

THREE SIGNS OF HENSEL'S VOICE

The roots of Hensel's Lied aesthetic lie in the north German school, the primary advocates of which included two of her and her brother's early teachers: Carl Friedrich Zelter, the doyen of the north German school, who taught the siblings composition; and Ludwig Berger, who taught them piano. The north German aesthetic differs markedly from the more familiar Romantic aesthetic associated first and foremost with the songs of Schubert and Schumann, which is characterized by extensive text painting, the interaction of voice and accompaniment, and the composer's subjective reading of the text. Adherents to the north German school believed that the music of a song should generally reflect the basic tone of the poem rather than offer pronounced interpretations of poetic ideas; music was regarded as ancillary to poetry, a vehicle for the expression of the poem's underlying sentiment. North German Lieder thus tended to avoid through-composed forms, demanding vocal lines, and obtrusive accompaniments—anything that projected the “composer's voice” too forcefully (to borrow Edward T. Cone's famous formulation).¹²

¹² This is not to suggest that the north German school was either monolithic or simplistic. For all that composers such as Reichardt and Zelter shared the idea that music should be ancillary to poetic expression, their songs are in many ways as varied and different from one another as those of Schubert and Schumann. Reichardt wrote not only simple, folk-like songs but also dramatic, through-composed “declamations” such as the “Monlog des Tasso”; Zelter prized straightforward strophic forms, but also sometimes used freer designs, as with the through-composed form of “Ratlose Liebe.”

Hensel's setting of Wilhelm Müller's "Die liebe Farbe" (1823), one of three poems she set from his collection *Die schöne Müllerin*, is but one example among many early songs that adhere to the north German aesthetic. In the poem, which Schubert would immortalize in his famous cycle written only one month after Hensel's Müller songs, the miller laments that the mill-maid has deserted him for a hunter. Hensel's song, explicitly modeled on a song by Berger,¹³ is simple to the point of being quaint: Its accompaniment does little more than lightly support the melody, the tune itself is easy and folk-like, and the song shows no sign of the Romantic subjectivity of Schubert's setting, with its ominous death-knell accompaniment and expressive mode shifts. Hensel's song tells the miller's story from afar—objectively, even casually—whereas Schubert's delves within, probing the depths of the miller's psyche.¹⁴

By the end of the 1820s Hensel begins to move beyond the principles of Zelter and Berger, using her compositional resources in new and inventive ways that reveal glimmers of what will come to define her fully developed Lied aesthetic: a keen sensitivity to poetic nuance, a penchant for experimentation, and a strong interpretive streak.¹⁵ "Verlust" (1827), her setting of Heine's "Und wüssten's die Blumen" from his *Buch der Lieder*, shows these traits in abundance. The song was published in Mendelssohn's song collection *Zwölf Lieder*, Op. 9, along with two other songs by Hensel.¹⁶ Most nineteenth-century listeners, therefore, would have had no idea that she wrote "Verlust."¹⁷ Even though modern editions of Op. 9 identify Hensel

¹³ The Berger song in question is "Rose, die Müllerin," which parallels "Die liebe Farbe" in subject matter even though the poem was written not by Müller but by Hedwig von Stägemann. Hedwig was the daughter of Elisabeth von Stägemann, the organizer of the salon where the original *Die schöne Müllerin Liederspiel* was created. Hensel plainly acknowledged Berger's influence, writing on her finished manuscript of "Die liebe Farbe," "Herr Berger understood this better" ("Das hat Herr Berger besser verstanden") (see Hellwig-Unruh, *Thematisches Verzeichnis*, 117).

¹⁴ For a discussion of horn call topics in Hensel's, Berger's, and Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* settings, see Angela Mace, "Hunting in the Nineteenth-Century Salon: Ludwig Berger, Fanny Mendelssohn, Franz Schubert, and 'Die schöne Müllerin,'" paper presented at the spring 2008 meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the American Musicological Society, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

¹⁵ It is telling that Hensel's father cut off Felix's instruction with Zelter in this very year, and therefore presumably also Fanny's, believing that more study "would only fetter him" (see Eduard Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and His Letters to Me*, trans. Natalia Macfarren [London, 1869, repr. New York: Vienna House, 1972], 32). As Todd suggests, Fanny might have felt freer to assert her own voice once she was no longer under Zelter's tutelage (*The Other Mendelssohn*, 104).

¹⁶ The other two Hensel songs in Op. 9 are "Sehnsucht" (no. 9) and "Die Nonne" (no. 12). Hensel's three songs in Mendelssohn's Op. 8 (1826) are "Das Heimweh" (no. 2), "Italien" (no. 3), and "Suleika und Hatem" (no. 12).

¹⁷ Felix famously had to confess to Queen Victoria that "Italien," from Op. 8, was Fanny's song and not his when the queen asked to sing the song while he was visiting Buckingham Palace in 1842. Fanny's family and friends would of course have known that Felix included her songs in his two song collections. Larry Todd notes that when the theorist and composer A. B. Marx—a close friend of the family—reviewed Op. 8 he described certain of Fanny's songs as "feminine," perhaps leaving subtle clues about their true origins (see *The Other Mendelssohn*, 105, and *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 4/23 [June 6, 1827], 178–80).

as the composer of these three songs, we do not need her name to know that “Verlust” is her song—*pace* Richard Taruskin, who has argued just the opposite: “Verlust” is so similar to Mendelssohn’s “Ferne,” which follows it in Op. 9, that without their names it is virtually impossible to guess who composed which piece.¹⁸ Clues are in the score, signs of her compositional hand; three signs stand out in particular.

Treatment of Tonic Harmony

The first sign is the song’s harmonic audacity. While it may not be shot through with chromaticism, it is novel in its avoidance of tonic harmony. It begins on the dominant, as if in the middle of a phrase, just as the poem begins with the word “und,” as if in the middle of a thought (see Example 1).¹⁹ More remarkably, it also *ends* on the dominant (Example 2 shows the end of the second strophe).²⁰ Heine’s poem describes an abandoned lover, trapped in a world of private grief—neither the flowers, nor the nightingales, nor the stars know the depth of her pain, and nothing can offer her consolation.²¹ The song’s ending is a poignant metaphor for the pain that can never be resolved, the broken heart that can never be mended; it is as affecting as the unresolved dominant-seventh at the end of Schumann’s “Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,” which foreshadows a broken heart to come.²² Even between these dominant bookends, the tonic is barely present. In the nineteen-measure first strophe, the first true minor tonic appears in m. 17—ninety percent of the way through.²³ The expected i^6 on the downbeat of m. 4 is transformed into a Bb -major triad in second inversion, when the melody moves unexpectedly to Bb . The tonic at the end of m. 4 is major, not minor, functioning as the dominant of G minor. And the fleeting D-minor triad in m. 12 sounds less like a tonic than a submediant in the local key of F major.

¹⁸ Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, 185.

¹⁹ La Motte makes this same point in his commentary of this song (“Einfall als Bereicherung,” 61).

²⁰ Dominant endings are rare in Hensel’s songs, as they are in nineteenth-century music in general. Other examples from her Lieder include “Stimme der Glocken,” which begins in Ab major and ends in Eb major, and the second song of her *Liederkreis an Felix*, which begins in E major (although on the dominant) and ends with a half cadence, preparing the following song in E minor. “Fichtenbaum und Palme” nominally ends where it began, on an Eb -major tonic, but it sounds as though it ends off-tonic: The last page of the song so strongly tonicizes Ab minor that the final chord sounds like the dominant of iv. For another song that begins on the dominant, see “Es rauscht das Rote Lamb.” Todd compares the ambiguous tonality of this song to that of Schumann’s “Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,” since both songs hover between $F\sharp$ minor and A major (*The Other Mendelssohn*, 328).

²¹ Throughout this article I will treat the personae in Hensel’s songs as female, even if the poems were written by men. In “Verlust” Hensel changes Heine’s pronouns so that the text is presented from a woman’s perspective.

²² “Im wunderschönen Monat Mai” also, of course, begins off-tonic like “Verlust.”

²³ Sirota notes this as well in her remarks about “Verlust” (*The Life and Works of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel*, 195).

Allegro con fuoco

Und wüs-sten's die Blu-men, die klei-nen, wie tief ver-wun-det mein Herz, sie wür-den mit mir wei-nen, zu heil-len mei-nen Schmerz. Und wüs-sten's die Nach-tigal-len, wie ich so trau-rig und krank, sie lie-ßen fröh-lich er-schal-len er qui-cken-den Ge-sang.

EXAMPLE 1 Hensel, "Verlust," first strophe (mm. 1–19).

In "Verlust" the tonic represents not a point of stability but a void, a loss as profound as the loss of the poetic persona's beloved.

Text Painting

Hensel's music responds in detail to particular words and to the nuances of the poem. The unexpected B \flat on "tief" (deep) in m. 4 is elongated, emphasizing the depth of the poetic persona's pain. The modulation to F major in

zer - ris - - - sen - - - mir das Herz.

EXAMPLE 2 Hensel, “Verlust,” end of second strophe (mm. 37–41).

mm. 8–10 parallels the text “zu heilen meinen Schmerz” (to heal my pain); as the poetic persona’s mood shifts, so does the music, with a “healing” move to a major key that offers a reprieve from the pain of the opening bars. The chromatic upper neighbors and diminished-seventh chords in m. 13—and also the weary “flatness” of the vocal melody and bass line, which move but effectively go nowhere for a full measure—lend added meaning to the line “wie ich so traurig und krank” (how sad and sick I am).²⁴ And the vocal melisma leading to the tonic cadence in m. 19—an instantly recognizable “Henselism”²⁵—depicts the nightingale’s “erquickender Gesang” (refreshing song), and later, at the end of the second strophe, the very outpouring of grief caused by the poet’s “zerrissen” (broken) heart.

Accompaniment as Commentary

Finally, the piano accompaniment does not just support the text, as is common in north German Lieder, it also comments on it, intensifying the pain of the poetry. The final, fractured measures reverberate with anguish, quite literally echoing the poetic persona’s anguished words from the opening bar (note the A–F–E melodic motive), as if to say that her grief will never end but only continually cycle back on itself (refer to Example 2). The piano, in short, tells us more than the melody and words do alone. It is an equal participant in the song, and it adds another layer of meaning to the poem.

These three compositional techniques are not particular only to “Verlust.” They appear throughout Hensel’s songs and become ever more pronounced as her career progresses. To what end, though? What is their expressive purpose? The main purpose for Hensel, the guiding force behind

²⁴ When this passage returns in the second strophe, the melody has changed: “nur” enters on the upbeat to m. 34, and “meinen Schmerz” is transposed up a sixth. These details also respond to the text: “einer”—that is, the “one” who alone knows her pain—is accented on the downbeat, and “meinen Schmerz” is emphasized with the expressive upward leap. The music changes precisely when the poem reveals the source of her agony.

²⁵ For two prototypical examples of vocal melismas before cadences see “Schwanenlied,” Op. 1, no. 1 (ca. 1835–1838), and “Die Mainacht,” Op. 9, no. 6 (1838).

her experiments with harmony, text setting, and accompaniment, seems to have been to *interpret* poetry through music. Far more than her north German contemporaries, and also more than her brother, Hensel tended to regard a song as a “reading” of a poem—as a “poem on the poem,” to quote Joseph von Spaun’s description of Schubert’s Lieder.²⁶ She did not just reinforce the basic idea of the text; she complicated it, even contradicted it, teasing deeper meaning from the words she set.

“DIE FRÜHEN GRÄBER” (1828): A PROPHETIC EARLY SONG

Hensel’s setting of Klopstock’s “Die frühen Gräber” (The Early Graves), composed only a year after “Verlust,” provides a remarkable (and remarkably early) example of that will toward interpretation. Although her strophic song has a spareness and a simplicity that aligns it with many of her early, Berlin-style settings, in all other ways the song looks forward, betraying an intensity of feeling, an attention to poetic detail, and a novel treatment of voice and accompaniment that reach well beyond the conventions of the north German school.

Klopstock’s poem describes a quiet evening, with the moon hovering high in the night sky, providing solace to a solitary wanderer.

Willkommen, o silberner Mond, Schöner, stiller Gefährt’ der Nacht! Du entfliehst? Eile nicht, bleib, Gedankenfreund! Sehet, er bleibt, das Gewölk wallte nur hin.	Welcome, o silver moon, Beautiful, quiet companion of the night! You flee? Don’t hurry away, stay, friend of thought! See, it stays; only the clouds were flowing away.
Des Maies Erwachen ist nur Schöner noch, wie die Sommernacht, Wenn ihm Tau, hell wie Licht, aus der Locke träuft, Und zu dem Hügel herauf rötlich er kömmt.	The awakening of May is even Lovelier than the summer night, When dew, bright as light, drips from its locks, And rises red behind the hill.
Ihr Edleren, ach, es bewächst Eure Male schon ernstes Moos! O, wie glücklich war ich, als ich einst* mit euch Sähe sich röten den Tag, schimmern die Nacht!	You nobler beings, alas, your monuments Are already overgrown with gloomy moss! O how happy I was, when I could once, with you, See the day redden and the night glimmer.

* Hensel substitutes the word “einst” (once) for Klopstock’s “noch” (still).

²⁶ Otto Erich Deutsch, *The Schubert Reader*, trans. Eric Blom (New York: Norton, 1947), 875.

What is most remarkable about Hensel's setting of the text is that she places the vocal line and the piano not in parallel but in dialogue (see Example 3). The piano is not just an affective backdrop to the vocal line, as is common in north German Lieder, but also a complement to it, another voice that communicates with it. A rising line in the piano reaches up to $D\flat$ in m. 3, mirroring the moon's gradual ascent, and then falls to $E\flat$. The beginning of the vocal melody mimics this falling motive, then modifies and extends it, stretching down to C as if to suggest that the first line of the poem ("Willkommen, o silberner Mond") is not so much an address to the moon as a *response*. The poetic persona, we imagine, interprets the moon's appearance as a greeting and offers her own greeting in return. Later, the singer again echoes the moon's motive, this time exactly: The pitches in m. 16 ($D\flat$ – $B\flat$ – $A\flat$ –G, on "Sehet, er bleibt") match the accompanimental melody in m. 4 note for note. Having lost the moon behind the clouds, she rediscovers it, and sings out to it once more. Here we see how even the slightest detail can hint at something not explicit in the text itself. In Hensel's reading of the poem, a soliloquy becomes a conversation, and an inanimate object becomes an actor, rather like the "holde Kunst" of Schubert's "An die Musik," which "speaks" in the bass register of the piano, although it is silent in the poem.

Hensel incorporates other, more obvious examples of text painting. In mm. 11–15, the rate of harmonic and melodic rhythm changes with the poetic persona's fluctuating emotions: The harmonies move more quickly (and, incidentally, are more chromatic), and the melody is broken into shorter, "breathless" segments in mm. 11–12, when she imagines the moon leaving her; harmony and melody literally "eilen" (hurry away) as fast as her lunar companion. Throughout the course of mm. 13–15, as she begs the moon to stay ("bleib, Gedankenfreund!") and the clouds dissipate, the harmonic rhythm returns to one chord per bar and the melody slows—significantly, the tonic also returns, first in the vocal arpeggiation in mm. 13–14 and then in the resolution to $A\flat$ major in m. 15. There is also another Henselian melisma, which is just as descriptive as the one at the end of "Verlust," at least in the first and third strophes: In the first strophe it falls on the word "wallte" (flowed) and depicts the movement of the clouds; in the third it falls on "schimmern" (glimmer) and depicts the moon's glimmering light.²⁷

Finally, the accompaniment's tone color—extremely low in register, murky, somber, mournful—reveals a depth of emotion not found in Lieder of the north German school. This, too, is part and parcel of Hensel's interest in pictorialism; the harmonies are obscured by nonchord tones, just as the

²⁷ In the second strophe, the melisma falls on the word "rötlich" (reddish), perhaps evoking the reddish glow of the sun as it rises on a May morning—although it seems likely that the first strophe was the real impetus behind Hensel's decision to end the song with a melisma.

Lento e largo *p*

1. Will - kom - men, o sil - ber - ner Mond,
 2. Des Mai - es Er - wa - chen ist nur
 3. Ihr Ed - le - ren, ach! es be - kränzt

7 *cresc.*

schö - ner stil - ler Ge - fährt der Nacht, du ent - fliehst, ei - le
 schö - ner noch, wie die Som - mer - nacht, wenn ihm Tau, hell wie
 eu - re Ma - le schon ern - stes Moos. O wie glück - lich war

12 *cresc.* *p* *tranquillo*

nicht, bleib, Ge - dan - ken - freund! Se - het, er bleibt, das Ge -
 Licht, aus der Lo - cke träufelt und zu dem Hü - gel her -
 ich, als ich einst mit euch sä - he sich rö - ten den

17 *cresc.* 1. 2. 3.

wölk wall - - - - te nur hin.
 auf röt - - - - lich er kommt.
 Tag, schim - - - - mern die Nacht.

17 1. 2. 3.

EXAMPLE 3 Hensel, "Die frühen Gräber."

poetic persona's vision is obscured by the night and the moon is obscured by the clouds.²⁸

But the solemnity of the accompaniment also has an interpretive function. In the first two stanzas the poetic persona may be contemplative, but it is only in the third stanza that contemplation gives way to sadness—she now addresses the “Edleren” (nobler beings) who lie in overgrown graves, and remembers a time when she saw the glimmering moon and the reddening sun with them. Her feelings of loneliness and loss are intimated only in the final lines of Klopstock's poem, yet Hensel heightens them and allows them to pervade the entire song; her reading of Klopstock, with its dirge-like tempo, darkly hued accompaniment, expressive dissonances—and, notably, strophic rather than through-composed form—is suffused with sorrow from start to finish. It is as though the dead, mentioned only in the final strophe, are already there from the beginning; in this sense, the accompaniment, grounded in the lowest register of the piano, evokes not just the darkness of night but also the graveyard itself, and the interaction between voice and piano suggests not just a lunar conversation but also a spiritual one, a dialogue with those that have gone beyond. In Hensel's hands, the poem is more than a paean to the moon and a reflection on past joys—it is an elegy for the departed and a meditation on present pain.

ABSENT TONICS: EMBLEMS OF LOSS AND DESIRE

Arguably, the surest sign of Hensel's Lied aesthetic is her tendency to undermine the stability of the tonic, to continually and unexpectedly steer clear of it so that its return at the end of a song or a larger formal section aligns with the end of a thought, or the revelation of an idea—so that, in short, musical and poetic resolutions coincide. This, even more than the two other techniques mentioned previously, is what gives her Lieder their particular sound, their “feel.” Call it a sense of tonal fluidity, where the tonic is lost no sooner than it has been established and only found again at the last possible moment.

Todd notes this tendency in other works by Hensel, primarily in her instrumental works. Her Adagio in E♭ major (1829), he writes, features harmonic digressions that “delay and significantly postpone the attainment of the true tonic key”²⁹; the first movement of her String Quartet in E♭ major (1834) does not so much define the tonic key as “encircle it with related harmonies,” such that the first and only full cadence in the tonic

²⁸ Unlike “Verlust,” “Die frühen Gräber” is more about blurring the tonic than avoiding it.

²⁹ Todd, *The Other Mendelssohn*, 138.

occurs in the closing bars³⁰; and the second movement of the quartet “skirt[s] around the [G-minor] tonic” and *never* attains a cadence in the home key.³¹

But absent tonics are just as evident in her vocal works, more than Todd suggests,³² where they carry specific text-expressive meanings, symbolizing a lack of emotional stability, an experience of profound loss, and a struggle to find peace of mind. In her 1836 setting of Marianne von Willemer’s “Suleika I,” for example, every phrase unit ends on something *other* than a global tonic or dominant, giving the song a momentum that propels it onward, similar to the wind that carries messages to Suleika’s distant lover³³; as in “Verlust,” the music searches for closure as the poetic persona searches for comfort. In “Warum sind denn die Rosen so blaß,” Op. 1, no. 3 (1837), each phrase similarly leads to a cadence in a key other than the tonic; tonal instability becomes a metaphor for the poetic persona’s emotional instability, and absent tonics become stand-ins for her unanswered questions. “Der du von dem Himmel bist” (after 1840), her setting of Goethe’s “Wandlers Nachtlied I,” begins in A♭ major, sounding the tonic for only a bar and a half, but does not return to a root-position tonic until almost forty bars later.³⁴ The song touches on more than *ten* different keys, including G♭ (twice), before finding its way home—it is pulled in every direction, similar to the poetic persona who says she is “tired of being driven” by pain and joy, and it finds the tonic only when she finds peace. “Vorwurf,” Op. 10, no. 2 (1846), although nominally in G♯ minor, spends more time in other keys (C♯ minor, E major, D♯ minor, and, above all, C♯ major); it is as anxious and “wandelhaft” as the poet who laments for no apparent reason, and it cadences at last in the final line of the poem, only to relinquish the minor tonic for major at the very end. “Nacht ist wie ein stilles Meer” (1846) begins in B♭ major but quickly leads to half cadences in G minor and D minor, and later modulates to D♭ major—the song’s tonalities are as “verworren” (tangled up) as the

³⁰ Todd, *The Other Mendelssohn*, 181.

³¹ Todd, *The Other Mendelssohn*, 182.

³² Todd does mention how Hensel undermines the tonic in her songs, although he focuses more on her use of mixture and mediant key relationships than on her delayed tonic resolutions per se (see, e.g., his comments about her late songs on pp. 326–33 of *The Other Mendelssohn*). Delayed tonics, however, are just as central to her Lied aesthetic as obscured tonics or destabilized tonics. In other words, it is not just that she clouds her tonics with chromaticism or veers away from them, but that she waits so long to reestablish them.

³³ The triple hypermeter of Hensel’s song also gives it a forward momentum, because each new phrase begins one bar earlier than expected, pushing the music onward. For an analysis of the text-expressive effect of triple hypermeter in this song and in other Hensel songs, see Stephen Rodgers, “Thinking (and Singing) in Threes: Triple Hypermeter and the Songs of Fanny Hensel,” *Music Theory Online* 17/1 (March 2011), <http://www.mtosmt.org>.

³⁴ Todd writes briefly about this song in *The Other Mendelssohn* (269), where he notes that the resolution to a cadential 6/4 in m. 29 releases the tension from the previous tonal excursions. The ultimate tension release, however, does not happen until m. 38, the first appearance of a *root-position* tonic since m. 2.

emotions that swirl gently in the sea's waves and the poet's heart. And "Ich kann wohl manchmal singen" (1846), a song about feigned joy, quickly modulates from its G-major home, touching on several minor keys as the poet persona's mask of contentment wears thin, and returns to the major tonic only at the end of the strophe when she realizes that tears can free her heart from pain.

These absent tonics are emblems of loss and desire, signs of needs unfulfilled, hopes dashed, emotions unsettled; in Hensel's musical language, the abandonment of the tonic has as much "extra-musical" as musical significance. Likewise, the restoration of the tonic is not just a structural event, a means of providing formal balance and closure, but also an *emotional* one, triggered by the arrival of a pivotal word or by a realization, whether comforting or distressing. One has the impression that the tonic arrives (now—*at last, now*) not because formal constraints or conventional models demand that it do so but because the *words* do. One senses Hensel "tracking" the poem with her music, calibrating her harmonies to the poem's vicissitudes of passion.³⁵

"ÜBER ALLEN GIPFELN IST RUH" (1835): EMOTIONAL AND TONAL UNREST

Hensel's 1835 setting of Goethe's "Wandrer's Nachtlid II" provides a particularly poignant example of this sort of calibration of harmony and text (see Example 4). Todd has commented on the "compositional restraint" of Hensel's songs, which "could engender musical and poetic intensification."³⁶ "Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh" is a model of restraint, a song of such condensed feeling that every note seems freighted with meaning and every unexpected harmonic turn profoundly colors our understanding of Goethe's text.

The poem itself is a world in eight lines:

³⁵ Hensel was obviously not alone in this pursuit. Other Lied composers likewise explored the relationship between tonality and psychology—Schubert perhaps most of all. His modulations often coincide with moments of psychic shock (as in "Auf dem Flusse," from *Winterreise*, where the tonality is wrenched from E minor to G \sharp minor when the protagonist realizes that his heart is as encrusted as the icy lake into which he carves the name of his lost beloved), thoughts of alternate emotional worlds (as in the tonally exploratory "Fülle der Liebe," which hovers in a key a half step above the tonic when the poetic personae imagines being reunited with his beloved in paradise), or introductions of new characters with their own distinct psyches (as in ballads such as "Der Zwerg" and "Erkönig"), and they are often chromatic and unexpected. Hensel's tonal shifts, on the other hand, are generally smooth, triggered by a single chromatic inflection that sneaks in at the very end of a phrase unit, and they frequently lead to a half cadence in the new key rather than to an authentic cadence, gesturing toward the new tonic rather than asserting it boldly.

³⁶ Todd, *The Other Mendelssohn*, 108.

The image shows a musical score for a song in G major and 2/4 time. It consists of four systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a consistent triplet accompaniment pattern. The lyrics are in German and English. The score includes measure numbers 9, 19, and 29.

Ü - ber al - len Gip - feln ist Ruh, in al-len Wip - feln spü - rest_ du kaum
 ei - nen Hauch; die Vög-lein schwei - gen im Wal - de, War-te nur, bal - de, —
 bal - de, bal - de ru - - - - - hest du
 auch, bal - de ru - hest du auch, —

EXAMPLE 4 Hensel, "Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh."

Über allen Gipfeln	Over all summits
Ist Ruh,	Is peace,
In allen Wipfeln	In all treetops
Spürest du	You feel
Kaum einen Hauch;	Hardly a breath;
Die Vögelein schweigen	The birds are silent in
im Walde.	the woods.

Warte nur, balde
Ruhest du auch.

Only wait, soon
You too shall rest.³⁷

Goethe begins with an image of nature at peace, first eyeing the distant mountain peaks and then closing in slowly, as if with a camera's zoom, on the treetops and the silent birds. With this progression from the distant to the proximate, and from the inanimate to the animate, the true subject of the poem gradually emerges—not just the stillness of nature but the poetic persona's longing for the same stillness, her desire for an inner peace that matches the peace of the outside world. At the heart of the poem is a tension between nature's rest and her unrest and a promise that "balde" she will find the serenity she seeks.

Hensel captures that tension with a restless harmonic scheme and a piano accompaniment that continually avoids closure in the tonic, providing no root-position E-major chord until the final bars and not a single authentic cadence. The music yearns for tonal rest, just as the wanderer yearns for emotional and spiritual rest. The tonal instability is evident already in the first phrase, which begins on a first-inversion tonic triad and, after only three bars, tilts unexpectedly toward the submediant, C \sharp minor. The melody in mm. 1–4 might well have been harmonized so as to lead to an imperfect authentic cadence in E major; the backbone of the melody is a B–A–G \sharp stepwise descent, which cries out for a harmonic underpinning that expands the tonic in some way (see Example 5 for a hypothetical reharmonization). But Hensel has other things in mind. She introduces a touch of disturbance, an expressive B \sharp in the bass in m. 4, precisely when the singer lands on the word "Ruh," giving the impression that not everything is as peaceful as it seems. Nature (represented, one might imagine, by the easy, diatonic melody) may be untroubled, but the poetic persona (represented by the chromatic piano accompaniment) is not. As with "Verlust" and "Die frühen

Ü - ber al - len Gip - feln ist Ruh,

EXAMPLE 5 Hensel, "Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh," hypothetical reharmonization of mm. 1–4.

³⁷ The translation is adapted from Harry Seelig, "The Literary Context: Goethe as Source and Catalyst," in Hallmark, *German Lieder in the Nineteenth Century*, 10.

Gräber,” we see here how Hensel’s accompaniments add new layers of meaning: The poetic persona, the “du” of “spürest du kaum einen Hauch,” is not mentioned until m. 8, but one somehow senses her presence, and her inner disquiet, in the piano accompaniment.³⁸

The next two phrases (mm. 13–20) are even more tonally restless than the first two. Although the rhythm of the accompaniment becomes simpler, in keeping with mention of the birds that “schweigen im Walde” (are silent in the woods), the rhythm of the vocal line quickens and, even more telling, the mode changes to minor—more signs of disturbance. Then follows a modulation to G major, the upward tonal shift and the repetition of the word “balde” conveying the poetic persona’s intensified longing. Attempting to escape the minor tonic of mm. 13–18, the music finds a “false” major tonic, a point of local (but not global) stability that makes the absence of E major all the more apparent.

The “real” tonic does return, but more as a promise than a reality. In mm. 21–23 the vocal line falls again from B to G♯, mimicking the melodic motion across mm. 1–4 and settling unexpectedly onto an E-major triad in second inversion, just when the all-important word “ruhest” reappears (the G♯ on “ruh” is all the more startling because of the chromaticized voice exchange between melody and bass across mm. 21–23). Yet the cadential 6/4 fails to lead to an authentic cadence; the music swerves instead toward the submediant, as it did in the very first phrase—only this time, to the *major* submediant (m. 25). Similar to the G-major chord in m. 21, C♯ major also acts as a “false” major tonic of sorts, a chromatic mediant equidistant from E major but in the opposite direction, a chord that likewise offers only the illusion of rest. Even in m. 29, when the singer descends to E and reaches the last line of the poem, “ruhest du auch,” and when the expectation of a tonic cadence is even greater than it was in m. 4, Hensel leaves the listener wanting; rather than a perfect authentic cadence in E major, she leads instead to an evaded cadence in C♯ minor. To get a sense for how the melody “should” have been harmonized in mm. 21–29, compare the actual version of these measures with my recomposition in Example 6, which ends with an E-major perfect authentic cadence and also substitutes a diatonic C♯ minor for C♯ major in m. 25. The literary critic L. P. Johnson has written that Goethe’s poem shows man “perpetually at odds with the rhythm of time, out of season.”³⁹ Again, it is not hard to conceive of the diatonic melody, with its normative, even generic, stepwise descent to the tonic, as a symbol of the natural order and the out-of-sync, “out-of-season” harmonic underpinning as a symbol of the

³⁸ In this light, consider also Hensel’s “Nachtwanderer,” Op. 7, no. 1 (1843). The vocal melody starts with a rising line (not present in the piano), but when this melody returns in m. 17 it is *only* heard in the piano—the reprise begins with the piano alone. The singer responds in the next phrase, “O wunderbarer Nachtgesang,” and we realize only then that she has been singing the *Nachtgesang* all along, echoing nature’s sounds with her own “wild singing” (*wirres Singen*).

³⁹ L. P. Johnson, “‘Wandrer’s Nachtlied,’” *German Life and Letters* 36/1–2 (1982–1983), 46.

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The lyrics are "bal - de ru - hest du auch,". The piano accompaniment is in the same key and time signature. The bass line has a long descending line, and the treble line features several triplet patterns.

EXAMPLE 6 Hensel, “Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh,” hypothetical reharmonization of mm. 21–29.

poetic persona, discordant with nature, seeking but not finding the rest that comes so easily to the world around her.

By refusing to align melody and accompaniment at this moment, Hensel manages to write a “poem on the poem” that is in fact more unresolved than the poem itself. Johnson goes on to explain how Goethe maintains the tension of the poetry by switching the order of the rhymes in the last two lines: Readers expect the rhyme scheme of the first six lines—ababcb—to be answered with cd, or, in Johnson’s hypothetical rewrite, something like “Gleich ruhest du auch, / Warte nur balde,” with “balde” answering “Walde” from two lines earlier.⁴⁰ Even in Goethe’s actual version, however, the tension is resolved when the word “auch” arrives, because “auch” answers “Hauch,” however belatedly. As Johnson puts it, once we hear the last word, “we can slump back in our seats relaxed, like the audience of a nineteenth-century symphony when at the end, after what seems an eternity of struggle and search, the composer finally finds the tonic note, relaxes the tension, and lets us go home.”⁴¹

Not so with Hensel’s song—she may find the tonic note on “auch” in m. 29, but she does not find the tonic *chord*; the “struggle and search” continue, even after the vocal line cadences. It is this feeling of tonal incompleteness, of work left to be done and expectations left to be fulfilled, that necessitates the repetition of “balde ruhest du auch” and the long descending bass line that leads finally to a root-position E-major chord in m. 35, the first and only one in the entire song. Even here, though, the resolution is also equivocal, and not just because the vocal line ends on scale degree 3: More to the point, the chord preceding the tonic lacks a leading tone, thus weakening the pull toward I. The tonic, we might say, is not really confirmed; it just appears, and then is gone. As in “Verlust,” true closure—both emotional and tonal—seems to lie beyond the bar line, outside of the song and, by extension, outside of the time frame of the poem.

⁴⁰ Johnson, “‘Wandrer’s Nachtlied,’ ” 42–43.

⁴¹ Johnson, “‘Wandrer’s Nachtlied,’ ” 43.

Hensel's expressive means are entirely different from those of Schubert, who composed his immortal "Wandrer's Nachtlied II" roughly twelve years earlier (it is not known whether Hensel knew Schubert's song). A brief comparison of the two songs underlines how important harmony and tonality are to Hensel's expressive vision. Schubert's setting is far less tonally ambulatory than Hensel's—it establishes its B \flat tonic clearly from the outset and never strays from it.⁴² Schubert conveys the poetic persona's inner tension and longing less with harmony and tonality than with rhythm and meter. Yonatan Malin has shown how the song's rhythmic motion—particularly the syncopation in its piano accompaniment—represents the poetic persona's "internal unrest": Schubert, he writes, "stages longing as internal animation" with the syncopations beginning in m. 5, "followed by reaching outwards toward the infinite," in the repetition of "warte nur" in m. 9 and the ascent to F in m. 10, as well as in the wholesale repetition of the last phrase.⁴³

Hensel "stages longing" as avoidance of tonic, as deferral of closure. In its tonal irresolution, her setting of Goethe's poem reaches even further outward toward the infinite than Schubert's—and not just outward but *downward*. One of the most striking musical gestures in "Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh" is the bass-line octave descent in mm. 29–35, mentioned previously. Coupled with the mode mixture and the bell-like repeated E in the voice and the piano, the descent casts a pall over the closing measures and suggests that the "rest" the poetic persona seeks is not so much sleep as death. Literary scholars have long debated the various connotations of "Ruh" in Goethe's poem.⁴⁴ One might argue that it is hard to read Goethe's poem and *not* think of eternal rest, but it is certainly possible to do so—nothing in the text *explicitly* points to death as the true subject matter, unlike, for example, Eichendorff's "In der Fremde," where the comparable line "da ruhe ich auch" is more unambiguously death-laden because the poet has just mentioned the passing of his mother and father.⁴⁵ With Hensel's musical

⁴² Not surprisingly, Zelter's 1814 setting of Goethe's poem, "Ruhe," is also far less tonally adventurous than Hensel's. Although written in the same key, E major, and with similar gentle arpeggiations in the piano accompaniment, it only briefly leaves the tonic key, with a modulation to B major in mm. 7–8; after this large-scale half cadence, E major returns, as expected. Zelter's song is hardly bland—James Parsons shows how its irregular phrases belie its outward simplicity ("The Eighteenth-Century Lied," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, 54–60), but it does not approach the tonal fluidity or the mysteriousness of Hensel's setting.

⁴³ Malin, *Songs in Motion*, 250. Thrasybulos Georgiades also writes eloquently of the song's "animated gestures of intensified expression" in "Lyric as Musical Structure: Schubert's *Wandrer's Nachtlied* ('Über allen Gipfeln,' D. 768)," trans. Marie Louise Göllner, in *Schubert: Critical and Analytical Approaches*, ed. Walter Frisch (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 90.

⁴⁴ See Johnson, "'Wandrer's Nachtlied,'" 45, and Wulf Segebrecht, *Johann Wolfgang Goethes Gedicht 'Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh' und seine Folgen. Zum Gebrauchswert klassischer Lyrik: Text, Materialien, Kommentar* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978), 66–72.

⁴⁵ Schumann, like Hensel, also expresses the poetic persona's yearning for future rest with text repetition and deferral of tonal closure. The tonic, F \sharp minor, is a far stronger presence in his song than in Hensel's, especially in the outer sections, but in the middle of the song, when the poetic persona

interpretation of Goethe's poem, however, a more literal reading of "ruhest du auch" is much harder to sustain. The subdued harmonic colors of the closing bars, the ominous chiming bells, and the octaves that creep inexorably to the lowest depths of the piano, like a coffin being lowered into a grave—all of this pushes death to the foreground. It impels us to read the text in a particular way, and makes explicit what Goethe leaves to the reader's imagination.

"IM HERBSTE," OP. 10, NO. 4 (1846): PAINFUL THOUGHTS
AND GRADUAL REALIZATIONS

As a final example, I turn to one of Hensel's last songs, "Im Herbst," which shows her at the height of her creative powers, using all three devices (absent tonics, text painting, and accompanimental commentary) to present a complex musical interpretation of a poetic text. Hensel finished "Im Herbst" on January 23, 1846, just more than a year before she would suffer a fatal stroke while rehearsing for one of her Sunday musicales. Todd notes that she devoted 1846 to small genres (solo songs, piano miniatures, and choral songs), "as if she sensed the urgency to make up quickly for lost time."⁴⁶ Although she could not have known that the end was so near, it is hard not to sense in her late songs a desire to use her talents to their fullest, an effort to make the most of every opportunity to express herself creatively.

In structure and subject matter, Emanuel Geibel's poem resembles Heine's "Verlust." The poetic persona is plagued by "ein Gedanke" (a thought) that clings to her consciousness, similar to a solitary vine that clings to a garden wall, yet we do not learn what that thought is until the very last line of the poem: "daß du mir verloren bist" (that you are lost to me). The revelation is all the more dramatic because the last four lines of the poem upset the rhyme scheme established by the previous three. Beginning with line 5, "Kaum vermag ich ihn zu fassen," the rhyme scheme is aab (fassen—lassen—Frist), but the next lines break the pattern: aab becomes aaab (trage—Tage—Klage—bist). We expect the final sentence to conclude one line earlier, but Geibel thwarts those expectations, making us wait even longer for the answer to the question that drives the poem and gives it its inner tension: *What is the thought? Why is the poetic persona suffering?*⁴⁷ Structurally

first speaks of the "stille Zeit" that he hopes will come "bald," Schumann moves to the relative major (although evading a perfect authentic cadence in that key in m. 13) and then repeats the opening phrase in the "false" tonic, B minor.

⁴⁶ Todd, *The Other Mendelssohn*, 317.

⁴⁷ There is, to be sure, a sense of balance to the poem, which rests on the structure of the last four lines. Based on the rhyme scheme, readers may be inclined to break the poem into three symmetrically disposed sections (4 lines plus 3 lines plus 4 lines). And the series of three successive rhyming words (trage—Tage—Klage) might be interpreted as a logical extension of what comes before them: There are no

and semantically, everything in the poem points toward this final line. As we shall see, everything in the song does as well.

Auf des Gartens Mauerzinne, Bebt noch eine einz'ge Ranke,	On the top of the garden wall There trembles still one single vine,
Also bebt in meinem Sinne,	Just as in my mind there trembles still
Schmerzlich nur noch ein Gedanke.	Painfully one thought.
Kaum vermag ich ihn zu fassen,	I can hardly grasp it,
Aber dennoch von mir lassen, Will er, ach, zu keiner Frist.	But it refuses to leave me, Alas, for one second.
Und so denk' ich ihn und trage	And so I contemplate it and carry with me
Alle Nächte, alle Tage, Mit mir fort die dumpfe Klage, Daß du mir verloren bist.	Every night and day The hollow lament, That you are lost to me.

The easiest way to understand how Hensel recreates the poem in music is to examine the song as it unfolds through time, because each part of the piece builds on what precedes it. The A section (mm. 1–12), which sets the first four lines of Geibel's poem, establishes two of the main expressive devices that Hensel will use throughout the song: (1) the diminished-seventh chord as a signifier of pain and (2) movement away from the tonic as a metaphor for the protagonist's effort to escape the thought that haunts her. These two devices are, of course, related to two of the three hallmarks described previously—text painting and the treatment of tonic harmony. (I will turn to the third hallmark—the accompaniment as commentary—when I discuss the final section of the song.)

Example 7 shows the opening section and marks two important diminished-seventh chords (these are not the only diminished-seventh chords in the A section—a $\text{vii}^{\circ}7/\text{V}$ precedes the cadential $6/4$ on the downbeat of m. 9—but they are the most expressive and the most tied to the text). Beginning halfway through m. 5, a diminished-seventh chord sounds for the equivalent of two full measures, beneath the text “also bebt in meinem Sinne” (literally, therefore trembles in my mind), trembling just like the

successive rhyming words in lines 1–4, there is a pair of successive rhyming words in lines 5–6 (fassen–lassen), and there is a trio of such words in lines 8–10. But I think readers will more likely expect two parallel rhyming structures at the end of the poem (aab, aab) in response to the two parallel rhyming structures of the opening (ab, ab).

Adagio

Auf des Gar - tens Mau - er - zin - ne bebt noch ei - ne einz' - ge

Ran - ke, al - so bebt in mei - nem Sin - ne schmerz - lich nur noch ein, noch

ein Ge - dan - ke.

B \flat : PAC

EXAMPLE 7 Hensel, “Im Herbst,” A section (mm. 1–12).

painful thought. Immediately after this, at the end of m. 7, comes another diminished-seventh chord, now associated not just with the *idea* of pain but with the *word* itself—“schmerzlich” (painfully). This chord triggers a modulation to B \flat major, but the tonic was already abandoned long before this moment. In typical Henselian fashion, the opening phrase veers quickly from its tonal “home,” drifting toward the dominant of D minor—note, again, an initial phrase that leads to a dominant in a non-tonic key. The first slip-page occurs in m. 3, when the opening G-minor triad leads to an A-major chord, and is righted briefly before the music slips off course again only two bars later, again tonicizing the dominant. Another root-position tonic will not appear until more than thirty measures later, when the last word of the poem arrives and the source of the poetic persona’s pain is revealed.

The tonal shifts in the B section (mm. 13–24) are even more expressively meaningful, and even more distant (see Example 8). The poetic persona’s

Kaum ver - mag ich ihn zu fas - sen, a - ber den - noch von mir
 lass - sen will er, ach! zu kei - ner Frist. Kaum ver - mag ich ihn zu
 fas - sen, a - ber den - noch von mir las - sen will er, ach! zu kei - ner Frist.

dim. 7th e_b : IAC dim. 7th C_b : V $\begin{matrix} 8 & 7 \\ 6 & 5 \\ 4 & 3 \end{matrix}$
 D_b : V $\begin{matrix} 7 \\ 4 & 3 \end{matrix}$ dim. 7th e_b : HC dim. 7th
 dim. 7th g : HC

EXAMPLE 8 Hensel, "Im Herbste," B section (mm. 13–24).

struggle to escape the thought that plagues her—the thought that “refuses to leave me, alas, for one second” (aber dennoch von mir lassen will er, ach, zu keiner Frist)—is reflected in music that struggles to escape the clutches of the tonic. The B section modulates first to E_b minor in m. 14 (typifying Hensel’s fascination with chromatic mediant) and then heads into even more remote realms, tonicizing C_b major in m. 15 and D_b major a bar later, before returning to E_b minor and eventually leading to a half cadence in G minor. *How* Hensel modulates is just as important as *where* she modulates. As in the A section, the key changes are initiated by diminished-seventh chords, the result being a profusion of dissonance, a jolt of pain in practically every measure. Yet for all the strain, the efforts are for naught. In m. 18 the music returns to E_b minor—and, more important, to a B_b -major triad, the very triad with which the A section ended (substitute m. 10 for m. 18 and one has the impression that the music has gone nowhere). Then comes

another attempt at escape: The last half of the B section repeats the text from the first half and retraces the same harmonic path, but this renewed effort is doomed to even greater failure—the second arc collapses on the dominant of G minor.

It is only fitting that the tonic should return precisely when the poetic persona realizes that she can escape the thought no longer: “Und so denk’ ich ihn” (and so I contemplate it), she sings in mm. 25–26, and we are back in G minor for good, save a brief tonicization of C minor in mm. 26–28 (see Example 9).⁴⁸ Yet again, tonal shifts and mood shifts reinforce one another; Hensel’s harmonies respond to the variable moods of the poem like an emotional barometer, registering the line-by-line fluctuations in the poetic persona’s mental state. More jolts of pain follow (see the boxed diminished-seventh chords in mm. 24–26 in Example 9), and her grief, now uncontrollable, finally pours forth in mm. 28–29, a passage of wrenching chromaticism and vivid text painting, with its slide from high G on “Tage” (days) and its tangle of dissonances. Here, more than in any other song discussed in this article, we see the drama at the heart of Hensel’s Lied aesthetic, the desire to use drastic musical means to capture the torrents of Romantic subjectivity, the willingness to cast aside convention to explore the depths of human feeling.

G-minor tonality may return at the beginning of section C, but a root-position G-minor tonic does not appear until the downbeat of m. 33, on the final word of the poem, “bist.” The entire song leads to this cadence, the first in G minor, just as the entire poem leads to this line. Not only is the tonic triad held at bay, but so is the tonic *pitch*; only twice before m. 32 does the vocalist sing scale degree 1 in the obligatory register (G4), and then only fleetingly (see the eighth-note Gs in mm. 25 and 26). In mm. 32 and 33, however, we hear two G4s, first on “mir”—with, notably, no harmonic support, as solitary as the protagonist herself—and then on “bist,” supported on the downbeat only by bare G octaves. The musical resolution is as hollow as the poetic revelation that accompanies it, a symbol of the emptiness she feels. The song’s formal design, incidentally, works hand in hand with its tonal structure. Hensel ensures that the structural and emotional weight of the song will be thrown onto this pivotal cadence by *not* reprising the material from the A section. Another composer might have set the song as a ternary form, but Hensel opts for a more unconventional through-composed form, with a successive, rather than a recursive, logic that suits the forward thrust of the poem.

⁴⁸ Deaville likewise notes that the “harmonic and tonal instability throughout the song underscores the pain expressed in the text” (“A Multitude of Voices,” 152). However, he writes that the song moves through G minor, B \flat major, C \flat minor, C minor, and A \flat major. C \flat *minor* is a mistake, as is his omission of D minor and D \flat major. C minor and A \flat major are briefly tonicized in mm. 26–28 and 30–31, respectively.

und so denk' ich ihn und tra - ge al - le Näch - te, al - le Ta

ge, mit mir fort die dump - fe Kla - ge, daß du mir ver - lo - ren bist, daß du

mir ver - lo - ren bist, daß du mir ver - lo - ren bist.

g: PAC!!

EXAMPLE 9 Hensel, "Im Herbst," C section (mm. 25–38).

Finally, a few words about the piano accompaniment, which, more than any other single element, shows Hensel engaging in a deeper level of reading. The snaking melodic line in the right hand is clearly meant to represent the trembling vine of the poem, but this is hardly the most meaningful connection between the accompaniment and the text. Even more significant is that in m. 24, when G minor returns, the relationship between voice and piano changes. Malin has shown how in Schumann's songs the piano's unexpected departures from the vocal melody, however slight, are moments that demand interpretation.⁴⁹ The same is true in Hensel's songs. Up to this point in "Im Herbst," the piano has faithfully doubled the singer's melody,

⁴⁹ Malin, *Songs in Motion*, 131. See especially his comments about the transposition of the original melody in mm. 9–10 of "Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen" so that it lies above the vocal melody: "Why would the two melodic lines depart at just this moment? The piano melody is that which the poet hears, and now he continues to hear it but also comments on his response, on his heart that would burst from the pain of memory and loss."

but now it suddenly plays its own repeated figure not present in the vocal part: A–C–B \flat –A, and then two bars later D–F–E \flat –D, an upward leap of a third and a stepwise descent. Why make a change now? Why introduce this new “voice”? What is it intended to say?

A clue comes in mm. 33 ff., after the structural perfect authentic cadence, when the same motive returns in the piano *and* in the voice part, setting the crucial line “daß du mir verloren bist” and outlining a chromatic descent that echoes the chromatic descent on “Tage” in mm. 28–29. Here, it seems, are the words that the piano was only suggesting ten bars before, the secret text to its *Lied ohne Worte*. On successive hearings, in other words, a listener might actually imagine that the fateful words “daß du mir verloren bist” (or perhaps “daß *er* dir verloren *ist*”) are being “sung” by the piano in mm. 33–36, uttered by the accompanimental persona before they are uttered by the vocal persona. Whether one chooses to interpret the accompanimental persona as another character distinct from the poetic persona, akin to the moon in “Die frühen Gräber,” or as another part of her character, some aspect of her subconscious perhaps, the important point is that the piano seems to know more than she does—it whispers the truth that she has not yet realized, or not yet admitted to herself.

A closer look shows that a version of the piano’s motive was present from the very first measure of the song, hidden in the snaking accompanimental melody: The last half of m. 1 reads B \flat –D–C–B \flat , with thirds beneath. In Geibel’s poem, the painful realization (both the reader’s and the poetic persona’s) seems to occur in an instant—nothing before the final line gives any hint as to why exactly she is suffering; the answer to the question *what is the thought?* appears only at the end. In Hensel’s reading of the poem, however, the revelation happens more gradually. In her “poem on the poem,” the answer is there all along.

OTHER SIGNS, OTHER QUESTIONS

Looking only at the works discussed in this article, one would be forgiven for thinking that all of Hensel’s Lieder deal with pain—or, more specifically, with *abandonment*, whether by a lover (as in “Verlust” and “Im Herbste”) or by loved ones who have died (as in “Die frühen Gräber”). This of course is not the case. Hensel was perfectly capable of writing contented songs—the song that follows “Im Herbste” in Op. 10, for example, “Bergeslust,” written on May 13, 1847, the day before she died, is a celebration of nature with a buoyant accompaniment and a cheerful, pastoral melody. And yet texts dealing with themes of pain and abandonment, more than any other, seem to have inspired her to delve deeply into inner worlds of feeling and also to experiment with harmony and tonality. In this respect, it is telling that

for all its subtlety and sophistication, “Bergeslust” is not especially harmonically adventuresome; it barely leaves the tonic, only mixing modes briefly in its middle section. If absent tonics in Hensel's Lieder are symbols of abandonment, present tonics may be symbols of contentment.

These were not her only experiments, of course. I have focused here on Hensel's innovative approach to harmony, text painting, and accompaniment—and I do believe that her idiosyncratic treatment of these elements is what truly defines her Lied aesthetic. But these are only three signs of her creative voice. Further research into her Lieder might explore her formal innovations: her supple strophic variations and her later penchant for through-composed forms that respond to the flux of poetic meaning, sound, and structure in remarkable ways (“Im Herbst” is only one example among many); the freedom and fluidity of her melodic lines, which often sound as though they are being invented on the spot; or her penchant for mixing modes, which rivals Schubert's and almost always stems from a strong text-expressive impulse. Her handling of certain poets would also make a fascinating study: particularly Goethe, whose poems she set more than any other and throughout her career, and who himself was an adherent of Zelter's song aesthetic; Heine, whose poems Hensel turned to in the middle of her career, between 1836 and 1838, and whose famous sense of irony presented various musical challenges; and Eichendorff, whom she turned to in her final years, and who provided the inspiration for some of her most forward-looking and affecting songs. How did she adapt her musical materials to *their* creative voices? Which kinds of poems did she favor, and why? What poetic themes most inspired her to seek new ways of mingling word and sound? Previously I mentioned abandonment, but there are surely others. These and other questions await further study. Now that Hensel is finally emerging from behind the shadow of her brother and being recognized for her singular contribution to nineteenth-century music, we are in a position to give her songs the full attention they deserve.

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