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"Do you know the land?" Unfolding the secrets of the lyric in performance

Amanda Glauert
Royal College of Music, UK

ABSTRACT: The question of the distinctiveness of lyric song performance – as against epic or dramatic modes of communication– can be addressed through the ideals set out by Johann Gottfried Herder, ideals which are shown to inform Goethe's song aesthetics too. This paper seeks to demonstrate the ways in which such ideals can be turned into a practical agenda for performers now, through investigating the figure of Goethe's Mignon from both poetic and musical perspectives. The contradiction between personal expression and communal appeal in Mignon's "Kennst du das Land" is shown to have inspired particular strategies from musicians which call upon the performance of silence as a means of drawing the listener in. The musical settings of Reichardt, Beethoven and Wolf are analysed for the models they give of the performer – listener relationship. It is argued that in Beethoven and Wolf's settings of "Kennst du das Land" in particular, the performer is given the creative role of reconfiguring the coordinates of time and space, so substantiating in practical terms Mignon's claim to share the lyric as a 'land' with her listeners.

KEY WORDS: lyric performance, song, Mignon, Goethe, Beethoven, Wolf

When the theorist Emil Staiger sought to define the distinctiveness of the lyricist, he wrote "he is alone, knows of no public, and writes for himself" (Staiger, 1946/1991, p. 70). Whilst he calls on music – in Schumann's words he picks up the lyre (Schumann, 1827/1983) – to enhance his utterance, for Staiger the lyricist works from fragments and fleeting words (Staiger, 1946/1991, p. 67). Even the repetitions and refrains which characterise a lyric are focussed on the smallest units of attention as "the poet listens again to the chord he has struck" (Staiger, 1946/1991, p. 61). Staiger thus identifies the lyric as belonging to an essentially private sphere, one to which another may listen in but as though behind a door. Two of the most famous lyrics in the German language, "Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass" (Who

never with hot tears ate his bread) and "Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergibt" (He who turns to solitude) from Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, are described as issuing from just such a process of self-communion:

> Wilhelm crept up to the door. The old man was rhapsodizing, repeating stanzas, half singing, half reciting, and then, after a short while, Wilhelm heard something like this:
>
> > Who never with hot tears ate his bread,
> >
> > Who never through the nighttime hours
> >
> > Sat weeping in sorrow on his bed,
> >
> > He does not know you, Heavenly Powers.
> >
> > You lead us into this life, ordain
> >
> > That wretches pile up guilt from birth,
> >
> > And then you yield them up to pain;
> >
> > For all guilt is atoned on earth.
>
> This mournful heartfelt lament affected the listener deeply. It seemed to him as if the old man was at times prevented by tears from continuing to sing, and the strings of the harp resounded until the voice came in again, softly and with broken sounds (Goethe, 1795-6/1989; trans. E.A. Blackall, pp. 77-8).

The Harper's second lyric emerges as Wilhelm pushes open the door and enters the room, but only after he has asked the Harper to ignore his presence:

> Sing whatever you have a mind to, whatever you're in a mood for – and just pretend I'm not here. I think you are very fortunate to be able to occupy yourself so pleasantly in solitude, and, since you are a stranger everywhere, to find your dearest friend in your own heart *(ibid*., p. 78).

The links between how Goethe describes the Harper and how Staiger defines the lyricist are so strong that one might be encouraged to set the Harper up as a model of lyrical performance. Goethe describes the Harper's fingers as "gliding softly" over his harp (Goethe, 1795-6/1989, p. 78), and Staiger says that in the lyric the sound "glides… since all elements are already joined in it by mood" (Staiger, 1946/1991, p. 68); the movement of a lyric is a "constant gliding" (*ibid.*, p. 93). According to Staiger, there is no goal that a lyricist aims for; once the poet reflects on the mood he has created, or gives it a name, the song is over. Thus, there can be no test of strength in a lyricist's performance, perhaps not even a means of measuring success or of fulfilling expectations. Staiger believes that the lyric's power – which unites those who hear it more intimately than any other type of poetic creation – resides in its freedom from rationally demonstrable truth and from concept-driven words. It is not even subject to the coordinates of time and space. If, as Staiger asserts, the lyric draws on the sound of syllables rather than the meaning of words, then at its most distinctive it dissolves into the condition of music. In the Harper's model of lyrical performance, the fingers on the harp speak more than his broken voice; the words are uttered to be glided over and absorbed as musical experience.

Many would attest to the power of this kind of lyrical experience. Schoenberg famously admitted to hearing Schubert's songs without registering their words beyond the opening

line of the poem (Schoenberg, 1912/1975). However, Goethe himself raises other contrasting expectations of the lyric through the figure of Mignon, whose role in *Wilhelm Meister* seems to be to act as a counterpoint to the Harper in almost every respect. In the scene in which she delivers her performance of "Kennst du das Land" (Know you the land), Mignon enters Wilhelm's room to make her performance and, at his request, repeats and explains what she is singing so that he can write it down and translate it. She also shows her intention to provoke a direct response from her listener:

> When she had finished the song a second time she paused, looked straight at Wilhelm, and asked: "Do you know the land?" "It must be Italy", Wilhelm replied (Goethe, 1795-6/1989, trans. E. A.Blackall, p. 84).

Mignon encourages Wilhelm to respond by implanting the familiar images of citrus groves, myrtle and laurel into her lyric's first verse:

> Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn,
>
> Im dunkleln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn,
>
> Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
>
> Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht,
>
> Kennst du es wohl?
>
> Dahin! Dahin
>
> Möcht ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter ziehn.
>
> [Know you the land where the lemon blossoms blow,
>
> And through dark leaves the golden oranges glow,
>
> A gentle breeze wafts from an azure sky,
>
> The myrtle's still, the laurel tree grows high –
>
> You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there
>
> With you, O my beloved, would I fare.] (*ibid.*, p. 83).

Richard Sternfeld has pointed out that the first verse of "Kennst du das Land" is in the technical literary sense a 'parody' of George Thomson's "Summer":

> Bear me, Pomona! to thy citron groves;
>
> To where the lemon and the piercing lime,
>
> With the deep orange, glowing through the green,
>
> Their lighter glories blend. Lay me, reclin'd,
>
> Beneath the spreading tamarind, that shakes,
>
> Fann'd by the breeze, its fever-cooling fruit (Sternfeld, 1954, p. 34).

Mignon's question at the point of refrain – "Kennst du es wohl?" – thus seems designed to elicit a positive response ('yes, I know that land'). The subsequent break in the metrical scheme for "Dahin! Dahin" might even be taken as indicating a pause for the listener to join in ('yes, let's go there'). The prominence of the refrain throughout the three verses provides a steady frame of reference, even while the images of Italy change from familiar tourist-

guide territory to increasingly individualised scenes of loss and trauma:

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

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

[Know you the house? Roof pillars over it,
The chambers shining and the hall bright-lit,
The marble figures gaze at me in rue:
"You poor poor child, what have they done to you?"
You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there
With you, O my protector, would I fare.

Know you the mountain and its cloudy trails?
The mule picks out its path through misty veils,
The dragon's ancient brood haunts caverns here,
The cliff drops straight, the stream above falls sheer.
You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there
Our path goes on! There, Father, let us fare!] (Goethe, 1795-6/1989, trans. E. A. Blackall, p. 83).

Mignon takes her listener on a journey from the familiar to the unknown. The poetic image of a "path through misty veils" can be taken as a metaphor for how a lyric performer must lead listeners by the ear if she is to create a common ground of experience. Wilhelm's description of Mignon's performance certainly underlines this notion of deliberate shaping. Certain modes of address remain constant for the same line of each verse, certain lines are subject to variation:

> She intoned each verse with a certain solemn grandeur, as if she were drawing attention to something unusual and imparting something of importance. When she reached the third line, the melody became more somber; the words “You know it, yes?” were given weightiness and mystery, the “Oh there, oh there!” were suffused with longing, and she modified the phrase ”Let us fare!” each time it was repeated, so that one time it was entreating and urging, the next time pressing and full of promise (*ibid.*, p. 84).

Wilhelm precedes this detailed description with an admission that much is lost from his attempting to capture what Mignon does:

> He found…that he could not even approximate the originality of the phrases, and the childlike innocence of the style was lost when the broken language was smoothed over and the disconnectedness removed. The charm of the melody was also quite unique (*ibid.*, p. 83).

These references to broken language take one back to Wilhelm’s description of the Harper’s singing; however, the communicative context is quite different. It is clear that Mignon aims to be understood, even when speaking of the mysteries of individual experience, and even if it means turning herself inside out and seeking to present her internal memories as a landscape. In the third verse of “Kennst du das Land” the Italianate literalness of Palladian columns and Alpine passes gives way to dragons as a picture of her fears. The stillness of trees and an “azure sky” is animated by dialogue in the second verse: “You poor child, what have they done to you?” Mignon creates a theatre of the imagination, in which elements of epic storytelling and of dramatic enactment are mixed in to serve her lyric purpose. She externalises her inner state and emotions to give maximum opportunity for her listener to share the nature of her experience, even if only through tracing its shape and trajectory. Such concern with externals might seem to compromise the lyric’s distinctiveness, but the refrain’s urgent question to the listener – “You know it, yes?” – makes clear that these externals are only a means to an end, an extra step is needed. This step has to be taken in performance, in direct dialogue with the expectations and response of the listener. The dragons and abyss make no sense unless the pass through the mountains becomes understood as an inner journey to connect with memory and to make that memory communal. The external props of scene and event point to a process of inward illumination that demands to be recognised as the primary reality, and indeed as the main object of the song. The fact that ‘this happened’ in the past is to be confirmed by the fact that ‘this happens’ now – in performance. Johann Gottfried Herder, Goethe’s teacher, called the lyric “the land of the soul” (Herder, 1796/1992a, p. 168). In the terms of Mignon’s song, the lyricist aspires to turn the external land of Italy into a place of mutual recognition – not just of self-recognition, but of communion with her listener.

When speaking in his essay “Ballade: Betrachtung und Auslesung” of how performers should sing ballads, Goethe said they should mix the ingredients of epic, lyric and dramatic, to create a flight from the “Ur-Ei” (foundational egg) prepared by the poet (Goethe, 1887-1912, I, 41, p. 223). The urgency in Mignon’s “Kennst du das Land” is that the lyrical must emerge paramount if the poem is to fulfil its aim; for all its story-telling elements this song is a lyric not a ballad, as the refrain confirms. Yet the question remains what view of the lyric Mignon espouses. Whilst the model of the lyric emanating from the Harper focuses on self-expression, Mignon’s model emphasises the need for response and communality – for a “land”. In comparison with the Harper’s lyrics that one senses could be sung inwardly,

Mignon's "Kennst du das Land" demands a performance.

Staiger would seem to privilege the Harper's notion of lyric performance, yet there is evidence that Goethe himself believed Mignon was the truer lyricist. In *Wilhelm Meister* the Harper disappears without trace; by contrast, Mignon is embalmed and her achievement celebrated with these words:

> The treasure now is well preserved, the beauteous image of the past. Unconsumed in marble it rests; in your hearts it lives and works (Goethe, 1795-6/1989, p. 354).

But perhaps Goethe intended these different views of lyric performance in his novel to be complementary. Mignon and the Harper sing "Wer nur die Sehnsucht kennt" (Only they know my pain) together as a "free duet" (Goethe, 1795-6/1989, p. 142), even though the lyric is often ascribed to Mignon when set to music. Whilst the lines "Hot is my spinning brain,/My insides burning" suggest the Harper's uncompromising inwardness, the presence of a refrain – "Only they know my pain/Who know my yearning!" – recalls Mignon's appeal for a listener to join in. Any performer of this lyric is given contrasting messages to work with which must somehow be held in balance, even if theoretically or dialectically they seem opposed.

The theoretical implications of the Harper-Mignon contrast might best be demonstrated with reference to the competing views of the essential nature and purpose of song offered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder. In 1772, a couple of decades before the completion of *Wilhelm Meister*, each philosopher entered a competition to write an essay on the origins of language; they shared the prize. Rousseau's essay, which is much better known, represents song as a version of the primal scream, uttered instinctually by the singer from an overwhelming need for self-expression – like a baby emerging from the womb (Rousseau, 1772/1986). Herder, by contrast, invokes a picture of an Adam-like figure in the Garden of Eden, singing back to a sheep. Adam's lyrical impulse arises from response to another's sound, a response which initially works through instinct as Adam is overwhelmed with fear at hearing something outside himself. But then in the silence that follows, Adam reflects on how to control his fear through making a mimesis of the sound that has invaded him, eventually managing to summon his forces to sing back "you are that which bleats":

> Even if the occasion were never to arise for him that he should want or be able to transmit this idea to another being, and thus to bleat out with his lips this distinguishing mark or reflection for another, his soul – as it were – bleated within when it selected this sound as a sign of recollection, and it bleated again as it recognized the sound by its sign (Herder, 1772/1986, pp. 117-8).

To Herder song emerges in dialogue, in response to another's sound and in preparation for communication with others – even if that dialogue remains internal: "The first characteristic mark which I conceive is a characteristic word for me and a word of communication for others!" (Herder, 1772/1986, p. 128). An immediate response to sound is channelled through the conceiving of a "characteristic mark", which comes after a silence for reflection and with the added layer of the singer's awareness of making a mimesis. In the case of Mignon's "Kennst du das Land", the foregrounding of the refrain gives it some of that urgency of a "characteristic mark", coupled with the poem's repeated references to "land" which suggests a desire for substantiality in the connection between sound and object – "bleating"

and “sheep”, refrain and land. Herder, indeed, believed that a true singer, as summed up for him in the figure of Ossian, could evoke a people and a land so strongly as “to defy the power of time and the changes of the centuries” (Herder, 1773/1992b, p. 135):

> All the songs of these savage peoples move around objects, actions, events, around a living world! How rich and various are the details, incidents and immediate features! And the eye has seen it all, the mind has imagined it all. This implies leaps and gaps and sudden transitions. There is the same connection between the sections of these songs as there is between the trees and bushes of the forest; the same between the cliffs and grottoes of the wilderness as there is between the scenes of the event itself (Herder, 1773/1992b, p. 140).

The cliffs and grottoes in Mignon’s poem of Italy seem designed to recall these passages from Herder’s famous essay on Ossian’s songs. The breaking energy of the refrain in “Kennst du das Land” also evokes the “leaps and gaps and sudden transitions” that Herder believed should characterise all living songs – songs meant to be performed and heard, not read:

> But those peoples in all their vitality who did not read it from the page but heard it, heard it from childhood on and joined in singing it and adapted their ear to it – do not imagine that they had any difficulty with the rhythm! Nothing becomes habituated more strongly and enduringly, more rapidly and delicately than the ear. Once it has grasped a thing, how durably it retains it! (Herder, 1773/1992b, p. 135).

Both Herder and Goethe saw the country of Italy as offering the closest link between a people and nature, though not quite the wild nature of the Caledonian hills. Mignon, for all her mystery, is not quite Ossianic in her utterance. But she does share the Ossianic aspiration to recreate what has been lost through song – not just for herself, but for others who might hear her. Goethe’s intention that the songs of *Wilhelm Meister* should never be thought of as for the page only, but should be sung and sung back, is confirmed by the musical settings he included in the original edition of his novel. And these settings, by Johann Friedrich Reichardt, are not in simple folk-like style such as might be hummed through while holding the book in the hand. They suggest a considered performed response on behalf of the composer, that requires the reader to reach for the keyboard or guitar to play through and listen to how the musical phrasing works (see Figure 1). This version of the song comes from Reichardt’s 1809 collection of Goethe songs, 14 years after the original publication of the novel.

Mit Affekt

[1]

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zi - tro - nen_ blühn, im dun - keln Laub die

f

[E♭ major]

7

[2]

Gold-o-ran gen_ glühn, ein sanf - ter Wind vom blau - en Him-mel weht, die

[V]

13

[3] [4]

Myr - te still und hoch der Lor - beer steht? Kennst du es wohl? Da -

f

[C minor] [B♭ major]

Figure 1. Reichardt, "Kennst du das Land" (from *Goethes Lieder, Oden, Balladen und Romanzen mit Musik*).

It shows his desire to present his musical response to Mignon as an autonomous creative entity, with a separated vocal line and keyboard part such as might suggest formal performance, unlike in the original version where voice and accompaniment are incorporated on two staves. This performance can be taken as sanctioned by Goethe, and in many senses it is possible to perceive a close relationship between the rhythmic ebb and flow of Reichardt's melody and the description of Mignon's performance in *Wilhelm Meister*. In the novel Wilhelm outlines five stages in Mignon's performance: Stages [1] and [2] move from "solemn grandeur" to becoming "more somber" at the third line. Stages [3] and [4] develop "weightiness and mystery" for the words "You know it, yes?" and "longing" for "Oh there, oh there!" Stage [5] involves "entreating and urging" or "pressing and urging" for the words "Let us fare!" These stages can be mapped onto Reichardt's song quite precisely, following the annotations shown in Figure 1:

> Stage [1] "Solemn grandeur": bars 1 to 8 (spacious rise and fall of matching two and four-bar phrases within a broad eight-bar arch)
>
> Stage [2] "More somber": bars 8 to 16 (darker colouring with the passage through C minor to a cadence on Bb)
>
> Stage [3] "Weightiness and mystery": bars 17 to 18 (slowing to a chorale-like phrase)
>
> Stage [4] "Suffused with longing": bars 18 to 21 (breaking into more urgent one-bar phrases)
>
> Stage [5] "Entreating and urging" or "pressing and full of promise": bars 21 to 23 (cadential flourish which sweeps the previous one-bar phrases into a bigger arch).

The closing cadential flourish suggests an improvisatory gesture, such as might encourage the fluctuation in delivery from verse to verse that Wilhelm describes for the final line. Reichardt has also skilfully controlled his rhythmic ebb and flow to happen within the rise and fall of matching four-bar phrases (see the markings of the example) to suggest the 'charm' of the melody, as praised by Wilhelm. The rests in bars 2 and 14 suggest the potential for the singer to inject a hint of declamatory urgency, noting Reichardt's instruction *Mit Affekt*. From bar 17, at the point of refrain, the phrasing is broken up into smaller two and one-bar gestures. But melodic charm and decorum is reinstated with the

Lebhaft

Sah' ein Knab' ein Rös-lein stehn, Rös-lein auf der Hei-den, war so jung und mor gen-schön,

7

lief er schnell es nah zu sehn, sah's mit vie - len Freu - den.

11 [REFRAIN]

Rös - lein, Rös - lein, Rös - lein rot, Rös - lein auf der Hei - den.

balancing sweep of the final cadence.

Figure 2. Reichardt, “Heidenröslein” (from *Goethes Lieder, Oden, Balladen und Romanzen mit Musik*).

This is skilful composing on Reichardt’s part and there is much for a listener to admire, whether by referring to the closeness of the song to Wilhelm’s description or by following the musical details of its balanced melodic flight. Yet, crucially, Reichardt does not offer a

refrain for the listener to remember as the song's "characteristic mark". Whilst in Mignon's poem the words of the fifth line of each verse refer back to her first line, bar 17 of Reichardt's song does not refer to the opening of his musical strophe. Reichardt makes the music "glide" over this poetic repetition, rather than pausing to mark it and invite the listener to join in. Reichardt creates a song for drifting on the breeze rather than for confronting the listener with a demand for recognition.

Reichardt's decision not to create a refrain is particularly interesting since he was so passionate in embracing folk-like directness in other Goethe settings. His "Heidenröslein" can be taken as a model of how to exploit a refrain's function in performance to maximum effect. The four last bars of each verse serve both as the high point to which the rest is tending – with the motto-like repetition in bar 11 of the melodic thirds in bar 3 – and as the lead into the next verse. The final two bars would actually work well if appended as an instrumental prelude to the whole. Just as the song reaches its culmination on the high G of bar 12, a twist to the subdominant in bar 13 prepares for the verse to begin again. There is a deftness in this turning between looking back and looking forwards, that allows the performer to play with an awareness of time passing. For just at the point when the performer encourages the listener, metaphorically or literally, to join in with the voice, the melody can be made to seem to hover before gathering momentum for the next repetition (see Figure 2).

In this setting of Goethe's "Heidenröslein" the refrain makes the song, so much so that singer, and listener, poet and composer, can seem to blur into one communal identity – despite the trauma of betrayal that is depicted through the verses of the poem. From a story of loss, emerges an enactment of togetherness. By downplaying the sense of refrain in Mignon's "Kennst du das Land", Reichardt seems to be implying that such togetherness cannot be expected in this case. By contrast, Mignon must remain as an individual voice, calling for a response from her listener that may not be forthcoming. In working with singers on both Reichardt songs, I have found that they need to begin from different ends of the spectrum. The definite object-nature of the "Heidenröslein" setting, musically speaking, allows singers to play with exaggerated *rubato* at the turning point in the refrain, indeed almost requires them to do so in order to assert their presence as performers in any meaningful sense. Reichardt's "Kennst du das Land" setting, by contrast, demands a precision of melody-making from the performers so that the shape of the song can be transferred whole to the listener. In both songs a live process of 'making' is required, as is an exchange between inhabiting the lyric as object and the lyric as subject, between hearing the lyric as personal and hearing the lyric as a communal voice.

It is this process of exchange between subject and object, personal and communal, that Mignon's "Kennst du das Land" encapsulates most clearly, once the song is understood in the context of live performance. Herder decried the efforts of Lessing and others to define the lyric in the abstract, saying the lyric was a matter of lived "force" or "energy" (Herder, 1769/1992c, p. 119). As Lawrence Kramer would put it, Mignon's model of the lyric proclaims "the potential knowledge-value of interpretive acts" (Kramer, 2011, p. 31). If one follows the affirmation of Tobias Janz that works should be approached as "performative phenomena", so that any "distinction between the work concept and the concept of performativity may be overcome and replaced by an integrative approach" (Janz, 2011, p. 2), then Goethe's description of Mignon as self-realising performer should be a tool and

catalyst for performers' own self-realisation.

Ziemlich langsam

[Motif]

Kennst du das Land? wo die Zi-tro-nen blühn, im dun-keln Laub die Gold-o-ran-gen glühn, ein

f *p* *p*

[A major] [V] [V]

8

sanf - ter Wind vom blau - en Him - mel wcht, die Myr - te

cresc.

[A minor] [V]

11

[Motif]

still und hoch der Lor - beer steht. Kennst du es wohl?

[Motif]

ff *p*

[V] [V]

Geschwinder

Da- hin! da- hin! möcht' ich mit dir, o mein Ge - lieb - ter,

cresc.

p

[A major] [I]

23

ziehn. Da - hin! da - hin möcht' ich mit dir, o mein Ge - lieb - ter,

cresc.

p

[I]

28

Tempo I

ziehn. Da - hin! da - hin!

dim.

cresc.

[I]

Figure 3. Beethoven, 'Kennst du das Land'. bars 1-39 (from *Beethovens Werke,* 1990).

At times Goethe himself seemed to balk at embracing such freedom. When he saw Beethoven's mode of setting "Kennst du das Land" he exploded to the Czech composer Tomasek with the words "Mignon would never have sung a song like that" (Smaczny, 2004, p. 170). But then, Goethe was looking at Beethoven's setting as a finished response – as a text – not as a script for other performers to work with. Goethe criticised Beethoven for making Mignon sing an aria rather than a song; he clearly saw the dramatic contrasts between the two halves of each verse as encouraging listeners to stand back and observe the fluctuations in Mignon's mood as they might a character on a stage rather than to sing along with her. Yet it is possible to approach Beethoven's contrasts as a mixture of song ingredients – hymn-like phrases followed by a shift to *Tanzlied* from bar 19 – which demand to be woven into a single strophe in the performers and listeners' minds. If the first half of each verse is set as a question, with an emphasis upon imperfect cadences, then the second half answers with repeated statements of the tonic. Yet the radical change in metre, tempo and style between the question and the answer places the connection between them in doubt. The pause at the point of change in bar 17 is the performers' cue to play with the relation of question to answer in the moment of performance, not as a pre-determined directed manipulation of contrasts as in staged opera but as a response to the quality of the listeners' attention in the intimacy of song performance.

Beethoven can be said to prepare for this intimacy of attention between listener and performer by the dialogue he creates between the pianist and singer in his "Kennst du das Land" setting. In bar 14 the pianist interjects with a memory of the singer's opening phrase (see Figure 3).

This melodic and harmonic reminder of where the song began, harmonically reintroducing the imperfect cadence in A after the diversion to C major, is presented as a motivic landmark as though the pianist were asserting 'this is what I heard'. With this moment of motivic definition the pianist presumes to act as Wilhelm to the singer's Mignon. The singer then responds in her turn by repeating the motif and adding words to the musical exchange of memory – "Kennst du es wohl?" Though the subsequent *Tanzlied* with its implied imagery of musical togetherness, is largely driven by the pianist's pounding quavers, it is still the singer who manoeuvres the pause that leads into it and thus manages the impression given by the faster contrast. If the singer makes a crescendo through the pause of bar 17 and minimises the breath before "Dahin!", or even waits to take one till afterwards, then she can seem to direct the listener to a triumphant answering of Mignon's question – 'I know it well'. If, by contrast, she allows the sound to die away over the pause, and even to echo into absolute silence, then the *Tanzlied*'s image of togetherness can seem like a mirage, to be dispersed by the solemn return to Tempo 1 in bar 32.

I have found in workshops with performers and listeners that the insertion of an absolute silence before the second half of the verse in Beethoven's setting can have a profound impact in communicating Mignon's inner journey, even though the instinct to keep the music moving forward is strong too.[1] In the end the image of togetherness, presented by the *Geschwinder* section, is perhaps less powerful in drawing the listener in to the song than the poignant exchange of memory offered by the piano motif and the singer's subsequent response in bar 16. If, in any of the three verses, the singer follows her repetition of the piano's motif by complete silence, then the motif becomes clearly etched as a "characteristic mark", a mark that continues to resonate in the listener's memory after the song is over. At the end of the third verse Beethoven adds rests and a pause to the last bar to suggest a final silence, a silence in which the listener can imagine the song starting again with the motif of Mignon's question – now an unanswerable question except in the sense that the listener will not forget it (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Beethoven, "Kennst du das Land" bars 92-8 (from *Beethovens Werke,* 1990).

It is tempting to relate the treatment of motif in Beethoven's "Kennst du das Land" with

[1] When I joined Ian Partridge in coaching singers in a workshop on Beethoven's "Kennst du das Land" he encouraged them always to sing through the pause in bar 17.

notions of a Wagnerian leitmotif and to think of it as an extractable summary or pre-prepared memory of the song's content. Yet Beethoven's treatment is far more fluid, the motif being both within the fabric of the strophe and apart from it, the difference relying on the performers' spontaneous reaction to the moment by moment communication with listeners. It is notable that recordings of Beethoven's "Kennst du das Land" do not elongate the pauses between the two halves of each verse, and indeed it would sound contrived to have such silences as a fixed repeatable event. They work when listeners and performers are genuinely taken up in the uncertain outcome of the moment, as they juggle with ingredients that are not settled in relationship until the song is actually sung.

Figure 5. Schubert, "Kennst du das Land"bars 1-8.

Figure 6. Schubert, "Kennst du das Land" bars 17-18.

Goethe may have thought Beethoven unworthy to capture the secrets of Mignon's lyricism, but the creative impact of his "Kennst du das Land" setting is clearly traceable through the approaches to Mignon of subsequent composers. Paul Reid, among others, has noted how much Schubert's setting draws upon Beethoven's example (Reid, 2007, pp. 191-2). In his "Kennst du das land" Schubert also imposes a dramatic contrast mid-way between each verse, the mid-way point at bar 17 again being marked by a motif that draws upon the intervallic profile of the song's opening (see Figures 5 and 6). Schubert's melodic opening is less hymn-like than Beethoven's and more immediately motivic as focussing on the expressive nature of a falling fourth – a perfect fourth which intensifies into a tritone as a summary of Mignon's emotional unease. Schubert's treatment suggests that a motif should be presented to the listener as an object of memory from the start, and object from which the song then derives. Such a treatment is made even clearer by Liszt's setting of 1842 (1921), which seems closely derived from Schubert's (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Liszt, "Kennst du das Land" bars 1-3.

Rather than waiting for the refrain and the words "Kennst du es wohl?" before adding a pause to his melodic motif, Liszt adds it in the third bar so encouraging the performers to linger on this summary as an event in itself. And indeed, even before the rest of the strophe is presented, the sense of reference to Schubert and Beethoven can make Liszt's motif seem weighted with content and memory, sufficient for it to be offering a recognisable 'land' to the listener.

With Liszt's setting a compositional self-referentiality has emerged to parallel Mignon's poetic parody of Thomson's "Summer". Or else, one could conceive of composers joining in a chain-reaction of attentive listening and remembering as Mignon demanded of Wilhelm within the original scene from *Wilhelm Meister*. As one turns to Wolf's setting of "Kennst du das Land" the sense of compositional momentum becomes almost overwhelming. Wolf saturates his song with motivic references to the melodic semitonal inflection, B flat-C flat-B flat, with which the piano starts, as a way of controlling the melodic, harmonic and tonal fabric of his setting. The stress on a single interval as emotional summary, as observable in Schubert and Liszt's settings, has now taken on *Tristan*-like proportions. As a projection of

the piano's initial melodic rise and fall the vocal line traces a descent from the singer's first B flat in bar 5 to the low B flat of "glühn", whilst the piano traces a semitonal ascent between the same pitches in reverse from bar 7 to bar 13.

Langsam und sehr ausdrucksvoll

['THEN']

p

Kennst du das

hervortretend

p

pp

[G♭ major]

6

Land, wo die Zi - tro - nen blühn, im dunk-len

pp zart

p

sehr ausdrucksvoll

poco a poco cresc.

pp

10

Laub die Gold - - o - rang - en glühn,

mf

p

[B♭7]

13

ein sanft-er Wind vom blau-en Him-mel weht,

p

[E♭ major]

[G♭ major]

17

die Myr - te still und hoch der Lor - beer steht,

cresc.

f

p

3

[E♭ major]

[C7]

21 [REFRAIN PART 1]

Belebt

Ruhiger

Kennst du es

f

leidenschaftlich

poco rit.

p

[F minor, IV]

24

wohl?__

molto cresc.

più f

poco rit.

[C7]

27

Ruhiger

Kennst__ du__ es wohl?__

p

[C7]

[REFRAIN PART 2]

Im Hauptzeitmass (♩. = ♩)

leidenschaftlich hingebend

30

Da - hin!__

pp

dim.

p

f

[D♭7]

[G♭ major]

33

(♩ wie vorher ♩.)

da - hin! möcht' ich mit dir, o mein Ge- lieb -

p fp *molto cresc* f f

Ped. ❊

[G♭ major]

36

['THEN']

- ter, ziehn.

pp p

[G♭ major]

41

Kennst du das Haus? auf Säu - len ruht sein Dach,

ausdrucksvoll

p pp *poco a poco cres* - - - - - - - -

45

— es glänzt der Saal, — es schim - mert das Ge - mach,

cen - - - - - - - - - - - do

mf

3 3

[B♭7]

49

und Mar - mor - bil - der

p

[E♭ major]

51

stehn und sehn mich an: —

mf

Figure 8. Wolf, “Kennst du das Land” bars 1-53.

In the first part of each verse there are many examples of such musical self-mirroring as piano and voice expand upon the first moments of melodic intensity in a remarkable display of expressive introspection. In order to convey the intensity of the poetic refrain, "Kennst du es wohl?" Wolf breaks the fabric of this textural unanimity with even more abandon than Beethoven or Schubert. Whilst Beethoven's stylistic contrast halfway through the verse seems to introduce a different song, a *Tanzlied*, Wolf's contrast at bar 21 could be said to take the listener out of song entirely and directly into Wagnerian music drama. It is quite literally as though a different voice, or chorus of voices were demanding to be heard; from bar 21 the piano becomes an orchestra,[2] the lyrical singer a dramatic diva (see Figure 8).

Whilst one can link Wolf's musical setting to the compositional choices of Beethoven, and to Liszt and Schubert, it might be hard to hear the distinctive traits of Mignon's lyricism in such greatly expanded textures. Goethe insisted Mignon sings a song not an aria, and thus the unity of the repeated strophe, even with its internal contrasts, and the clarity of the joining-in points for the listener should remain paramount. If Wolf had followed the silence in bar 31, as the quasi-orchestral influx subsides, with an immediate return to the song's opening melody then he would have remained nearer to Goethe's immediate strictures. The D flat7 harmonies of bars 29 to 31 prepare for a return to the tonic G flat major and thus the resolution of the tonal circle of descending thirds from G flat to E flat (bar 13), to C (bar 20), via semitonal sidesteps to D flat7 (bars 28 to 30) which can be linked aurally to the song's primary motivic material. Yet the pause in bar 31 is not immediately answered by the return of the opening melody. It is followed by a new desperate anacrucial figure in bar 32, which suggests an extra effort is needed to assert musical direction and the return of the song's first tune in bar 37. Wolf presents his silence of bar 31 as a silence of true uncertainty, where Mignon's question, "Kennst du es wohl?" might receive the answer she does not want.

In one sense Wolf has thus shown Mignon to be isolated from her listeners in a way that departs from Goethe's ideals; they are encouraged to watch Mignon's struggle to hold lyrical continuity as in a dramatic scena. Wolf seems to have replaced the choices in the interpretation of silence that Beethoven offered in his setting by a composed silence that always moves in one direction – towards separation and even fragmentation. In the second verse the opening melody does return intact in bar 37, even though the lead-up to this point has been so tumultuous. Yet in the third verse the expressive surface of the opening melody begins to fracture as the tonality shifts to the minor mode in bar 78 (see Figure 9).

[2] Wolf did create two orchestral versions of his original "Kennst du das Land" setting for voice and piano of 1888, one in 1890 and one in 1893. The second version is composed for slightly smaller orchestral forces (with one rather than two trumpets, for example). However, the second version uses more instruments for the emergence of the refrain in bar 21, including four horns and expansive harp flourishes.

74 ['THEN']

p

[G♭ major]

pp

[F♯ minor]

79

Kennst du den Berg und sei - nen Wol-ken-steg? Das Maul-tier sucht im Ne-

ausdrucksvoll

84

- bel sei-nen Weg; in Höh-len wohnt der Dra - chen al-te

cresc. *mf* *pp* *p*

[D♯ minor] [F♯ minor]

89

Brut; es stürzt der Fels und ü - ber ihn die Flut.

molto cresc. *f* più *f* *ff*

[G♯7] [C♯ minor]

95

[REFRAIN PART 1]
Belebt

ff *f* *p* *ff* leidenschaftlich poco rit.

[F minor] [IV]

101 Ruhiger

Belebt

Kennst du ihn wohl?

8va

p molto cresc. *ff*

[C7]

104

Ruhiger

Kennst du ihn wohl?

poco rit.

dim.

p

[C7]

107

pp

dim.

[D♭7]

[REFRAIN PART 2]

Im Hauptzeitmass (♩. = ♩)

leidenschaftlich hingebend

110

Da - hin! da - hin

p **f** **p**

112

(♩ wie vorher ♩.)

['THEN']

geht uns - er Weg! O Va - ter, lass uns ziehn!

fp molto cresc. f f pp

Ped. *

116

pp

lass uns

p

119

ziehn!

pp ppp

Figure 9. Wolf, "Kennst du das Land" bars 74-122.

The declamatory climax in bar 93 threatens to pre-empt the quasi-orchestral influx of the refrain, and so dissolve the previous distinctions between lyrical melody and declamatory outburst. Yet it is at this point that Wolf reinstates the song's previous boundaries; from bar 95 he inserts four bars that allow the energy of the first melodic climax to subside before the refrain bursts out afresh in bar 99, as it did in the previous two verses. Clearly the timing of that precise moment of textural breaking is vital to Wolf's interpretation of Mignon, his interpretation of the moment where she seems to step out of her performance to ask Wilhelm if he knows what she is singing about. Wolf gives this moment the vividness of a 'now' to compare with the more veiled and even nostalgic character of the song's opening. As this opening melody returns it could be heard as continuing to evoke a 'then' from the past, except that the second part of the refrain, the urgent anacruses that first erupt from bar 32, seem to urge the song forwards. The second part of the refrain seems to want the next 'then' to be a part of the future not the past.

The silences of bar 31 and of the subsequent points in the middle of each refrain, thus offer their own kind of ambiguity and power to performers. Within these silences the natural circularity of the strophic form, as demonstrated through the simple example of Reichardt's setting of "Heidenröslein", can become animated as a pivot between looking back and looking forwards. A personal past can become reconstrued as a communal future, as a place to which the lyricist can lead her listener. Whilst the voice's final falling descent by a third to the tonic in bar 119 suggests a 'dying fall', the piano insinuates a further echo of the semitonal motif B flat-C flat-B flat in bars 120-121, which seems to offer an invitation for the listener to hear the song sounding into the future. A memory of the past is offered to the listener as an extension into the future, as a 'land' – to use Mignon's overriding metaphor. But, according to Wolf's interpretation of Mignon, this projection from past to future cannot be taken for granted; it has to be created across the song's recurrent silences. The silences in Wolf's refrain are full of potential for change, for a shift in the perception of time and space, but this potential can only be realised in the moment. Like Mignon, Wolf suggests a lyric can be tested and achieved, however mysterious and evanescent its effect, provided performers succeed in using its ingredients to draw the listener into the uncertainties of live performance.

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AMANDA GLAUERT has held lectureships at Trinity College Dublin, Colchester Institute, and the Royal Academy of Music. After a spell as research professor at Kingston University, she is now Director of Programmes and Research at the Royal College of Music. Her work on the songs of Hugo Wolf and Beethoven has brought her to consider definitions of the lyric in theory and practice. She is co-founder, with Dr Kathryn Whitney, of SONGART, a research group of the Institute of Musical Research.