

ALBERT, ANNE E., D.M.A. *Fragments: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Character Mignon on Her Journey Through Nineteenth Century Lieder.* (2009)
Directed by Dr. Robert Wells. 58pp.

The songs of Mignon from Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*) have been set hundreds of times by dozens of composers from the late 18th century onward. Though most frequently set by composers from the German School, Mignon's songs have also been popular with many non-Germans including works by French, Russian, and Italian composers. Mignon's mysterious persona has long fascinated song composers and many have been compelled to set her songs multiple times.

The purpose of this study is to explore the character of Mignon from Goethe's novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* through the lens of a psychoanalytic literary critic. I will examine six different composer's settings of Mignon's first song in the novel, "Kennst du das Land?" in order to understand how each composer portrays her character differently as seen through their unique compositional styles, their own psychology, and the style periods in which they wrote. The method of literary criticism applied to the song settings becomes psychoanalytic reader-response criticism as we move from merely analyzing Goethe's depiction of Mignon to each composer's depiction and reception of Goethe's character in addition to our own reception of that persona. One of the goals of this research is to show how Mignon's character is transformed as she makes her way through history in the development of Lieder.

FRAGMENTS: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF THE
CHARACTER MIGNON ON HER JOURNEY THROUGH
NINETEENTH CENTURY LIEDER

by

Anne E. Albert

A Dissertation Submitted to
The Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Greensboro
2009

Approved by

Robert Wells

Committee Chair

To my husband,
with gratitude for his love, his support,
his brilliant intuition and ideas,
and his continual sacrifice.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the time, work, and support of my mentor and
Committee Chair, Dr. Robert Wells.

I would also like to convey my gratitude to my Committee Members,
Dr. James Douglass, Professor David Holley,
Dr. Nancy Walker, and Dr. Welborn Young.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The songs of Mignon from Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*) have been set hundreds of times by dozens of composers from the late 18th century onward. Though most frequently set by composers from the German School, Mignon's mysterious persona has long fascinated many non-Germans, including works by French, Russian, and Italian composers. Several composers were compelled to set her songs multiple times.

The purpose of this study is to explore the character of Mignon from Goethe's novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* through the lens of a psychoanalytic literary critic. I will examine six different composers' settings of Mignon's first song in the novel, "Kennst du das Land?" in order to understand how each composer portrays her character differently as seen through their unique compositional styles, their own psychology, and the style periods in which they wrote. The method of literary criticism applied to the song settings becomes psychoanalytic reader-response criticism as we move from merely analyzing Goethe's depiction of Mignon to each composer's depiction and reception of Goethe's character in addition to our own reception of that persona.

Some of the psychoanalytic approaches that I utilize in this paper are fragmentation or splitting, repression, displacement, and projection. Theories of psychoanalysis in this literary tradition are drawn from Sigmund Freud and his followers,

including Jacques Lacan and Karl Jung. These theories are then applied to the desired elements of a work in order to understand the motivation and behavior of the author, character, audience or text. Certain characters and symbols are by nature more susceptible to psychoanalysis: Mignon is one such character.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the fragmentation of Mignon and the way that these six composers depict different aspects of Mignon's psyche. I have chosen to include these six settings partially because they are representative samplings from the German school, particularly Schubert, Schumann and Wolf. I have included Reichardt's setting because it was one of the first settings, and because it was published in the 1795 version of Goethe's novel. I have included Spohr's settings because I think it captures an interesting quality of Mignon and because Spohr was an extremely respected and prolific composer in his day. Beethoven's setting was included to show how he bridges the gap between Classicism and Romanticism.

CHAPTER II
SYNOPSIS OF *WILHELM MEISTERS LEHRJAHRE*

Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship is comprised of eight books, most of which have several chapters. Books 1-5 tell the beginnings of Wilhelm Meister's journey into the wide world, his love of the theatre and acting, and his encounters with many enigmatic characters, including Mignon, the Harper and Natalie. There are many mysteries without resolve at the end of the fifth book. Book six is a diversion from the story entitled *Confessions of a Beautiful Soul*. The main character of this Book ties into the lives of new characters from Books 7 and 8. Books 7 and 8 provide answers for many of the open-ended mysteries of the first section of the novel, including the fate of Marianne as well as Mignon's history and connection with the Harper.

The novel opens with a budding relationship between our hero Wilhelm, and the young Marianne, an actress. Wilhelm has long been attracted to the delights of the theatre, and his new love has only enhanced his passion. Wilhelm's hopes are soon dashed when he believes that Marianne has been unfaithful. His father sends him on a business trip where he meets up with a group of assorted actors whom he befriends. They seek not only wisdom from Wilhelm but also funding for their aspiring theatre troupe. In this town, Wilhelm first meets the waif Mignon and the wandering Harper.

After rescuing Mignon, he buys her from the acrobats that have taken her from her homeland, Italy, so long ago. The Harper also joins the strange company and they are soon invited to the Baron's castle where they stay awhile and perform for the prince. It is here that Wilhelm begins devouring the works of Shakespeare. Wilhelm falls in love with the lovely Countess, but before anything comes of his affection, the company is journeying again.

Along the road they are attacked by a band of robbers. Wilhelm fights fiercely, but is sorely outnumbered and badly beaten as a result. Almost everything that they own is stolen and while Wilhelm is laying unconscious, the entire company disperses except Mignon, the Harper, and the flirty young actress, Philine. A carriage appears and out steps a beautiful woman who becomes known to Wilhelm as the Amazon. She instructs her surgeon to heal Wilhelm and has him safely brought to a nearby town. To Wilhelm's dismay, she disappears without a trace.

In this new village, Wilhelm finds many of his theatre friends as well as a few new theatre friends Serlo, his sister Aurelie, and her young son Felix. In this new company Wilhelm plays Hamlet, a character that he has strongly identified himself with since reading the play. Shortly after the play, Aurelie falls sick and dies. Wilhelm sincerely grieves her death and vows to deliver a letter to the man who he believes has fathered Felix and abandoned Aurelie.

At this point in the novel, Book 6 appears and narrates the story of a brave and strong woman of a mystical and indestructible faith. This is the story that is given to Wilhelm to read to Aurelie as she is on her deathbed.

Book 7 begins with Wilhelm's journey to the home of Aurelie's former lover, Lothario. He soon discovers that Felix does not belong to Lothario, and that Lothario, Jarno and the Abbe that he meets are part of a secret society that has been tracking his life and "apprenticeship." In this region he meets Therese, a new kind of woman in this novel who provides order, strength and peace to Wilhelm. He decides to bring Mignon and Felix to be raised under her care and the care of her friend Natalie.

It is during the last two books of the novel that the mysteries of the first five books begin to unravel. Wilhelm learns that Felix is his son by Marianne who was never unfaithful to him, but died shortly after childbirth. His friends of the society offer him a certificate of apprenticeship and many mysteries are revealed to him. Mignon becomes ill and after a very rough period, she dies of a broken heart. He mourns her death greatly and learns of her kidnapping, and eventually of the Harper's incestuous relationship with his sister that resulted in the child Mignon. Wilhelm realizes that the gift he believed he had for acting is not really so apparent as he thought, and he accepts this fact. Natalie turns out to be the Amazon who rescued him in the forest after he had been beaten. They finally declare their love for each other and are united at the end of the novel.

CHAPTER III
MIGNON: A CHARACTER ANALYSIS

When Wilhelm first spots Mignon she stops him in his tracks and he is initially unsure if she is a boy or a girl. She is described as follows in their first encounter.

Reflecting on this pleasant episode, he was going upstairs to his room when a young creature jumped out at him and immediately attracted his attention. The child was neatly dressed in a short silk bodice with slashed Spanish sleeves and puffed-out long, slim trousers. Its long black hair was curled and wound in locks and braids on its head. He looked at the figure with amazement, uncertain whether it was a boy or a girl. But he finally decided in favor of the latter and stopped her as she was rushing past, wished her good day, and asked to whom she belonged, although he could easily see that she must be a member of the group of acrobats and dancers. With a dark and penetrating sidelong glance she broke loose and rushed into the kitchen without saying a word.¹

Wilhelm is instantly intrigued and enchanted by this child. When he sees her with the troupe of dancers and acrobats later that day he is dismayed to see her contorting her body with the other children in strange positions that “aroused both horror and amazement.” She is described as somber and dark and Wilhelm is filled with pity for the child. He is so drawn to her that one of his companions, Philine, beckons the child and brings her into the inn where they have been watching the performance. This time Mignon does not run away, but places her right hand on her chest and her left hand on her temple and lowers into a curious, deep bow. Wilhelm immediately assures her not to be afraid calling her “little one” and asks the uncertain girl a series of questions about who

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 50.

she is. We learn that her name is Mignon, that no one has counted how old she is, and when asked who her father is, she responds, “The big devil is dead.” At this point she has completely captured Wilhelm’s interest and he is unable to release his gaze from the girl.

Wilhelm could not take his eyes off her; her whole appearance and the mystery that surrounded her completely absorbed his mind and feelings. He thought she was probably twelve or thirteen years old. She was well-built, but her limbs suggested further development was to come, which possibly had been arrested. Her features were not regular, but striking: her forehead seemed to veil some secret, her nose was unusually beautiful, her mouth, though too tight-lipped for her age and inclined to twitch at times on one side, had a certain winsome charm about it. The grease paint almost obscured her dark complexion. Wilhelm was so absorbed in contemplating her that he lapsed into silence and became completely oblivious to the others. But Philine roused him out of his daze by offering the child some of the candy she had left over, and then gave the girl a sign that she should leave, which she did, with her usual bow, and in a flash ran out of the room.²

Wilhelm’s keen observation of the girl makes her an object of significant interest to the reader, particularly because Mignon is the first character that Goethe takes this much care to describe. He does not even give Marianne, Wilhelm’s first love from the first book, this much characterization from the start. Though she is a secondary character in the novel, Goethe’s provocative and intriguing characterization of Mignon gives her a unique status in the novel. The power of intrigue that Mignon holds over Wilhelm is the same power that she held for more than a century over composers who set her songs, in many cases, multiple times. Goethe’s acute and complete description of Mignon in addition to the songs he has provided for her are a key reason so many composers are

² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 54.

eager to set her songs. Goethe describes Mignon very directly through Wilhelm's eyes, and gives the reader insight into her background as well. The fact that no one has counted how old she is and that she describes her father as a big devil tell us that she has not been cared for very well. The speculation that her growth may have been arrested signals further abuse. Her motions are both formal, as displayed in her entrance and exit bow, and skittish as she dashed out of the room and in the twitching of her mouth. From these first two encounters with the young girl we see both timidity in her uncertainty and dashing out of sight, and boldness in her direct dialogue and penetrating glance. She is guarded and mysterious to be sure, but in some manner she welcomes Wilhelm's interest.

The very next evening Wilhelm comes upon a violent scene outside of the inn that he pushes through the crowd to see. There he sees the manager of the troupe dragging Mignon by her hair and beating her with the handle of a whip. Though there is a large crowd, no one has shown enough bravery to step forward and stop the man, until Wilhelm comes boldly forth and grabs the man by the chest threatening to fight him if he will not stop. Wilhelm's force overwhelms the man and he is unable to keep his grip on Mignon. Wilhelm had already perceived that the manager has stolen Mignon and he refuses to allow the man near Mignon until he gives an account for her origins. The manager releases his hold on her, calling her "utterly useless" and offers her to Wilhelm if he will pay for her clothes. The deal is sealed later that evening: for a mere thirty thalers, Wilhelm purchases Mignon. He is unable to decipher anything about her origins from the manager however, except that he acquired her when his brother, who was known as the big devil, died.

Meanwhile, Mignon has run off and assumedly knows nothing about Wilhelm's purchase. She turns up just after the troupe has left and Wilhelm inquires as to her whereabouts and wellbeing. He then explains to her that he is now her caretaker and she adopts the role of his servant.

From that moment on, she watched carefully to see what service the waiter had performed for the two friends, and would not let him enter the room anymore. She wanted to do everything herself and performed her various services, though slowly and sometimes awkwardly, but correctly and very attentively.³

Mignon's careful study of her master illustrates not only her attentiveness and keen powers of observation, but also indicates one source from which her powers of intuition are drawn. As the novel continues, Mignon is able to both identify, empathize with, and to take on the mood of Wilhelm. In many of the songs that she sings throughout the novel she mirrors his emotions while simultaneously expressing her own state. Ronald Gray's observations about Mignon in his book, *Poems of Goethe*, point out her intuitive nature and function in the novel. "She has great intuitive powers, and may represent in some way, without Goethe's ever having tried to formulate this to himself, the pristine, undivided unity at the very root of him."⁴ Before Wilhelm was even aware of this trait he was more and more drawn to the girl.

But the person and character of Mignon attracted him more and more. There was something strange about everything she did. She never walked up or down stairs, she always ran. She

³Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 59.

⁴Ronald Gray, *Poems of Goethe*, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 113.

climbed up on to banisters, and before one knew it, there she was on top of a closet, sitting quite still. Wilhelm also noticed that she had a different greeting for everybody. For some time now she had been greeting him with arms folded on her breast. Some days she would be completely silent; on others she would answer certain questions, but always strangely so that it was difficult to decide whether it was a joke or her German mixed with French and Italian was intentional or the result of an imperfect knowledge of German. She was tireless in Wilhelm's service, getting up at sunrise but retiring early to rest on the bare floor of one of the rooms. Nothing could persuade her to sleep in a bed or on a straw mattress. He often found her washing herself. Her clothes were clean though heavily patched. Wilhelm was also told that early every morning she went to mass, and once he followed her and saw her kneeling in the corner of the church, piously saying her rosary. She did not see him, and he went home full of thoughts about this strange creature and unable to make up his mind about her.⁵

At this point in the novel all of the descriptions of Mignon come from instances of Wilhelm staring at the child and trying to solve the puzzle of who she is and from where she has come. Yet it is not until Wilhelm hears heart-wrenching news of his beloved Marianne that we see Mignon's intuitive qualities fully emerge. When Wilhelm returns home from learning of his past lover, he is dejected and quite overwhelmed. Mignon is waiting up for him with a candle to guide him up the stairs. She asks if she may perform her famous egg dance for him, the one that she had refused to perform before the manager began beating her. He politely accepts, so as not to offend the child, but is delighted to find himself mesmerized and transported by this act.

...forgetting all his cares, he followed every step of the beloved creature, amazed to see how completely her character was manifested in the dance. Severe, sharp, dry and violent- all this she certainly was; and in her quieter movements there was solemnity rather than grace. He suddenly realized what he had been feeling about her all this time. He wanted to take this abandoned

⁵Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 61.

creature to his bosom as his own child, caress her and by a father's love awaken to her all the joys of life.⁶

After this display, Wilhelm strokes Mignon's cheeks and tells her that he is sorry she has been abused and he will buy her a new suit of clothes. The next morning when Mignon insists upon having a jacket and sailor pants made, like those she has seen on boys in the town, she demonstrates another quality that adds to her mystery: gender ambiguity. Not only does her boldness coupled with her timidity represent a certain amount of ambiguity, but perhaps the cause of this trait is the ambiguity surrounding her gender. As mentioned earlier, Wilhelm was not initially sure of her sex. In fact, in an earlier version of the novel, Goethe refers to Mignon with both the masculine and feminine pronouns. Even her name is from the masculine form of the French word, which means "darling."⁷

Ambiguity surrounding gender in Mignon's case may also be a result of her incestuous beginnings. We do not learn this until the end of the novel, but in hindsight, the truth of Mignon's past is a dark and controversial one. Mignon was the child of the Harper and Sperata, brother and sister who married and conceived before they knew of their relationship. Once their union was discovered, the couple was separated, Sperata eventually went mad and died, and the Harper was left to wander the world alone and in great despair. Mignon was kidnapped at a young age by a circus troupe, exploited and more than likely abused. Goethe gives the reader bits and pieces of Mignon's story

⁶Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 65.

⁷ Ronald Gray, *Poems of Goethe*, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 113.

throughout the novel, revealing the details like pieces of a puzzle that Mignon and the other characters must string together to make sense of this strange creature.

Those ambiguities most clearly portrayed in the character of Mignon are present in Wilhelm throughout the novel. He is unsure about his chosen path in life and spends much time and energy debating whether he wants to be the businessman or the actor. He falls in love several times during the novel. Even his feelings about Mignon, though mostly under the surface, fall between father, protector and an ambiguous, passive type of lover. In these ways, Mignon's ambiguity is a mirror of her master's. The novel as a whole is in fact the journey of Wilhelm to the path of self-discovery, passing through ambiguity and uncertainty along the way.

It is at the end of the second book that Wilhelm and Mignon's relationship is more concretely defined. Wilhelm is desperate to leave the town when Mignon throws herself at his knees and asks him what will become of her if he leaves. He takes her hands and says, "Dear creature, you too are part of my sorrow. I must leave this place." When he feels her silent weeping he lifts her to his arms and kisses her. She begins convulsing and then weeping as Wilhelm questions her about what is wrong. It is then that the defining moment between the two characters takes place:

She wept with such tears as no tongue can describe. Her long hair hung loosely around her as she wept, and her whole body seemed to be dissolving into a steady flood of tears. Her rigid limbs unfroze, her whole inner self poured itself out, and in the confusion of the moment Wilhelm feared that she might melt away in his arms so that nothing of her would remain. He grasped her more and more firmly to himself. "My child!" he cried, "My child! You are mine. Let that console you. You are mine! I will keep you. I will never leave you!" Her tears continued. Finally she raised her head, and a gentle serenity lit up her face. -"My father!" she cried. "You will never leave me! You will be my father! - and I am your child!" From outside the door came the soft sounds of the harp. The old man was singing his most heartfelt songs, as an evening offering to

his friend who, holding his child ever close in his arms, experienced a feeling of the most perfect, indescribable bliss.⁸

A new trust evolves between Mignon and her master and she is then much freer to express herself through her songs. In this moment Mignon exhibits the displacement technique as she transfers her feelings of love for a father figure to Wilhelm. She does not know her father and has not experienced a father figure in the way of love, affection, and protection from the world until Wilhelm came along. The very next day she sings her first of four solo songs to Wilhelm about the land from which she has been stolen.

⁸Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 82.

CHAPTER IV

PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY CRITICISM

Psychoanalytic literary criticism began with the work of Sigmund Freud in the early days of the twentieth century at which time he was a neurologist practicing in Vienna. Though Freud's theories changed throughout his lifetime, his work *The Interpretation of Dreams (Die Traumdeutung)* written in 1900 has been a source of inspiration for many critics who share the goal of psychoanalyzing the elements of a literary work. Psychological criticism has many faces, depending on the vein of psychoanalysis that is used in deconstructing a piece of writing. Freudian criticism, Jungian criticism and reader-response criticism all portray different aspects of Psychological criticism.

There are several different ways that a work may be psychoanalyzed. One of the more typical methods involves the psychoanalysis of the author based on the work he has written, though also taking into account biographical information. This can be a difficult task, particularly when the author has been deceased for a century or more and when there is little written about the author. Another type involves the psychoanalysis of an interesting character within a literary work. This has proven to be a very popular method of psychological criticism, however, it also has its dangers in that all the reader knows about the character is what is on the page. The critics may have to fill in the blanks when it comes to many aspects of the character, as the characters are not real people. A third

way that psychoanalysis is applied to literature is by gauging the response of the audience to the work and applying techniques of psychoanalysis to the reader. This is also known as a type of reader-response criticism.

While I have chosen to analyze the character of Mignon, I would also like to point out that Mignon's feelings and attitudes are often a reflection of Wilhelm's feelings and attitudes in the novel. Her intuitive nature in many ways reflects the desires and emotions of her protector, Wilhelm. Mignon is so deeply connected to Wilhelm that she may even be seen as a part of Wilhelm's brain, functioning as the subconscious layer that is just beyond his conscious control. In this way Mignon becomes a projection of Wilhelm and a vehicle for catharsis for the haunted places in his psyche. Additionally, there are many similarities between Wilhelm and his creator, Goethe, particularly each man's early life. Wilhelm's love of the theatre, his connection to the character of Hamlet and his love of Shakespeare, and his conflict between a career in his father's chosen profession and his desire to be an artist are all traits taken directly from Goethe's life, making the novel somewhat autobiographical. Through Mignon's reflection of Wilhelm and Wilhelm's reflection of Goethe, we have an interesting link to Goethe through Mignon. Ultimately, Mignon functions as an object of projection for Wilhelm, through Goethe, as well as for the six Lieder composers who are discussed in this study. The enigmatic Mignon becomes a vehicle for catharsis through these individual's projection of her in their compositional styles.

The primary focus of this paper is to demonstrate how Mignon may be considered a victim of splitting. Splitting occurs most often as a result of childhood trauma,

particularly in children who are survivors of incest or abuse. Child victims, such as the waif Mignon, are unable to accept the reality of what has happened in their past and they develop polar personality traits in order to compartmentalize and deal with the ordeal that they have suffered. For example, a child may have a very innocent component to her personality as well as a very experienced part. Children often see these two fragments in black and white, reflecting good and evil, or some other opposing traits. Often this type of splitting can lead to schizophrenia.

Mignon's fragmented psyche is captured in the novel as she is described as direct and mysterious, spontaneous and somber, girl and boy, and ambiguous in many senses. Not only do the following six composers project themselves through Mignon, but they also project various fragmentations of Mignon's psyche in their individual settings. For this reason, all of the settings that follow represent and depict Mignon accurately; they each depict a unique fragment of her shattered personality.

Some of the other important aspects of psychoanalysis that are applicable to Mignon are Freud's concept of repression of emotions, desires, and memories and techniques of displacement. Repression is the suppressing of ideas, desires, impulses, or memories deep in the subconscious. A psychoanalytic approach claims that these memories or desires are buried because of a traumatic event that occurred, a deep, dark secret that is being hidden, or a desire that is too painful or too shameful to acknowledge in the conscious mind. For Mignon, the catalyst for her repression is layered. On the surface we have her history of abandonment and abuse in the circus, but as the novel progresses her Oedipal origins as a product of incest are revealed. Mignon particularly

represses the incestuous nature of her origin, as well as her desires for her surrogate father figure Wilhelm. Therefore, she not only projects desires upon him, but also acts as a receptacle for projection by Wilhelm. She perceives and embodies traits such as Wilhelm's need for approval. Mignon takes empathy to a new level as she is able to express Wilhelm's longing for him in her song, "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt." While he defines himself through other's perceptions of him, Mignon defines herself through Wilhelm's perception of her.

Mignon may also function as the subconscious layer of Wilhelm's mind. Her inability to remember her early years is a mystery that slowly unfolds over the course of the novel as the process of self-discovery occurs in Wilhelm's life simultaneously. By the end of the novel Wilhelm is able to reconcile the desires of his subconscious with his conscious, and steps into a new arena of self-realization. Mignon may not ever know her whole story, but she is aware of it on a subconscious level. The revelation of her past to the other characters in the novel functions as a type of epiphany or unveiling of mystery of the subconscious, which affects them all on different levels. Most profoundly impacted is the character of Wilhelm; it is as if he comes into his own self-actualization at the same time that Mignon's tragic beginning is understood.

Displacement is another unconscious defense mechanism in which desires or emotions are transferred from the actual object to a more accessible or willing substitute. Displacement often occurs when the victim has been deeply wounded or abandoned by the object. This also includes audience projection as denoted in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle claimed that tragedy acts as a catharsis of such emotions as pity and fear. The

tragic history of Mignon and the catharsis that readers experience when reading such tragic tales is another key reason that countless composers have been compelled to immortalize her songs.

Symbols are an important component in some forms of psychoanalysis, seen particularly in the work of French analyst, Jacques Lacan. Mignon's first song, "Kennst du das Land" includes several interesting symbols such as the grand and mysterious house that Mignon recalls in the second stanza. A house is often a representation of the mind or subconscious mind of the main character in psychoanalysis. The mule in the third stanza signifies barrenness and ambiguity of gender. Fog and Torrents are other symbols exhibited in the third stanza. The use of these symbols help to shed light on Mignon's inner emotional landscape.

Mignon's timelessness as a symbol of androgyny, mystery, and repressed femininity is not unlike Ophelia's role in Hamlet. Ophelia has become a symbol of femininity and repression that leads to madness, a symbol that is central to the world of western literature and art song. Interestingly, Wilhelm becomes obsessed with the character of Hamlet in the novel, and Mignon may be considered an Ophelia prototype in the novel. Both Ophelia and Mignon exhibit an ethereal beauty and tragic element in their respective works, characteristics that have made them very accessible to writers of *Lieder*. Ophelia is at the mercy of Hamlet's affection and violent whims, becoming a projection of his own repressed sexual desire and ambiguity, which leads to madness. Similarly, Mignon functions as an object of projection for Wilhelm, absorbing and

reflecting his ambiguity, longing and desire for the approval of others, particularly a father figure.

Not only is Mignon art song's Ophelia, but Wilhelm bears similarity to Hamlet as well. Both Wilhelm and Hamlet are blown about by chance and ambiguity of their own emotions, desperately wishing to control their own circumstances. Hamlet devises a play to manipulate the emotions of his mother and step-father; Wilhelm sets up a theatre of traveling actors which he can direct and in some way assert control over his circumstances. For Wilhelm, this is a type of reversion back to his childhood days and the marionette theatre in which he poured hours of his boyhood days. The difference now is that he can use real people and real resources to produce a drama.

In both works, the female character, the weaker and most vulnerable creature in the play and novel, bears the brunt of her male counterpart's struggle and becomes a pawn in his struggle. It is as if Mignon becomes a puppet of his childhood years, a player who serves to act out the emotions and inner workings of Wilhelm's subconscious. She is tied to him and he to her in a profound way that binds the two until her death.

Mignon plays several roles in Wilhelm's life. First, she is property purchased by Wilhelm, then an attentive servant, and finally, an adopted daughter. To Mignon, Wilhelm is savior, master, father, and in the Freudian sense, a would-be lover. She craves his approval, his attention, and the opportunity to serve him throughout the novel. The stroke that actually kills her is the knowledge of his engagement to another woman. Wilhelm is fascinated by Mignon from the moment he spots her on the street, and Goethe demonstrates his keen interest by going into more depth describing her physical

appearance than any other character in the novel. She captivates Wilhelm in perhaps the same way she has captivated composers throughout the nineteenth century.

Mignon becomes a symbol of the innocent, the repressed, the neglected, and the voiceless. Her ability to absorb the emotions and moods of others make her a blank slate for composers who desire to capture the essence of Mignon, and through her project their own moods, feeling and circumstances. Not only this, but her tragic tale and state of vulnerability acts as a catharsis of emotions for composer and audience alike.

One of the foremost intrigues of psychoanalytic literary criticism is the way it connects the levels of layers that exist between author, character, and audience. Goethe as creator is a source for analysis. At the core is the object of analysis, Mignon. Mignon also serves as a projection of Wilhelm's emotional state. Wilhelm is a somewhat autobiographical character and in turn reflects Goethe's attitudes, beliefs and feelings. The audience, or composers, who read Goethe's tale and use Mignon as an object of projection, become the next level of analysis, and we could continue with the listeners and performers of these compositions who fulfill the role as the next level of audience, and so on.

Another set of layers revolving around the psychoanalysis of Mignon includes the several fragments of Mignon's mind that are depicted by each composer's setting. Many of these composers focus exclusively on one central element of her character, portraying a single fragment of her psyche. Underneath this layer of Mignon lies the projection of the composer and perhaps the reason he was drawn to her character in the first place.

CHAPTER V
KENNST DU DAS LAND

<p>Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn, Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn, Ein sanfter Wind von 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.</p>	<p>Know you the land where 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.</p>
<p>Kennst du dem Haus? Auf Säulen ruht sein Dach. Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach, Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an: Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?</p>	<p>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?"</p>
<p>Kennst du es wohl? Dahin! Dahin Möcht ich mit dir, o mein Beschützer, ziehn.</p>	<p>You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there, With you, O my protector, would I fare.</p>
<p>Kennst du den Berg und seinen Wolkensteg? Das Maultier sucht im Nebel seinen Weg; Im Höhlen wohnt der Drachen alte Brut; Es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Flut!</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Kennst du es wohl? Dahin! Dahin Geht unser Weg! O Vater, lass uns ziehn!</p>	<p>You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there Our path goes on! There, Father, let us fare!⁹</p>

Mignon's first song opens Book Three of the novel, with no introduction whatsoever.

After the defining moment of the previous night, Wilhelm wakes and finds that Mignon

⁹Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 83-84.

has gone out early with Melina to find costumes and props. It is not until several hours later that he hears Mignon outside his door accompanying herself on the zither.

He opened the door for Mignon who came in and sang the song we have just communicated. The melody and expression pleased Wilhelm greatly, though he could not make out all the words. So he asked her to repeat it, and explain it; then he wrote it down and translated it into German. He found, however, 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. She intoned each verse with a certain 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 more weightiness and mystery, the "Oh there, oh there!" was 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. 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. "Where did you get that song?" "Italy!" said Mignon in a meaningful tone; "if you go to Italy, take me with you. I'm freezing here." "Have you ever been there?" asked Wilhelm; but the child kept silent and not one more word could be elicited from her.¹⁰

In this song Mignon presents herself rather directly for the first time in the novel, specifically to Wilhelm. It is as if the new trust that has been forged makes it possible for her to bare a little bit of her soul and begin to unravel the mystery that surrounds her. The fact that Mignon sings the song in Italian indicates a strong familiarity with the language and the land. As she sings expressively and "imparts something of importance" to her audience, a deeper glimpse of her roots, as well as their importance to her, is demonstrated.

The poem itself is written in strophic form, with a sequence of three six-line strophes. The first four lines of each strophe are two sets of heroic couplets in an *aabb*

¹⁰Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 83-84.

rhyme scheme.¹¹ The refrain of each section is in the narrative form and in each instance refers to Wilhelm by a different title or role in Mignon's life, including "Geliebter" (beloved), "Beschützer" (protector), and finally, "Vater" (father). In the refrain, Mignon's longing for her homeland is displayed without hiding her desperation by the end of the poem. In each stanza she appeals to Wilhelm to take her to this place, for she equivocates it with safety and beauty.

The text of each strophe indicates a different memory, or even a different side of Mignon's personality from her hidden past. The first strophe paints a picture of tropical and thriving vegetation, bright colors, and gentle breezes. Mignon captivates the listener with her beautiful imagery of this land. Therefore, when she sings in the refrain "with you, O my beloved, would I fare," the world that she describes seems vibrant and peaceful, full of pleasant memories, perhaps at a time when Mignon was living in complete security

The second stanza describes the shining chambers and bright halls of the house that Mignon remembers from her childhood. The marble figures do project mystery as they call her a poor child, asking what they have done to her. This may refer to the incestuous nature of her origin, or it may refer to another hidden mystery in Mignon's life. This second stanza is one of mixed images, both brightness and some degree of shame. It is not unusual that Mignon cites Wilhelm as her protector in this second strophe. A common symbol used in psychoanalytic criticism is the image of the house.

¹¹Seonmi Koh, *Kennst du das Land: Performance Guide to six musical settings of Goethe's poem*. (DMA Thesis, Ohio State University, 1991), 14.

The house most often represents the character; in this case Mignon describes a house of grandeur and mystery, reflecting her inner self. It may be argued that this abode contains many rooms, housing the various pieces of Mignon's fragmented mind. Though Mignon does not consciously know or understand the depth of her secret, she is aware of a mystery in her past that is central to who she is.

The third strophe describes the mountains, most probably the Alps, that Mignon was carried over by her kidnappers, away from her dear homeland and family. The cliffs are described as jagged and straight, the waterfalls as sheer, the misty veils and cloudy trails have a haunting and foreboding sense to them. Mignon even mentions a dragon that lives in the caverns and conveys a much darker and more dismal association to the last strophe. This was the path that she was dragged away on, and it is the path that she so desperately wishes to transverse once more in the company of her new father figure. This last stanza shows the deepest and most heart-felt yearning of Mignon, as this memory is no doubt the most recent and most painful. Seonmi Koh has deciphered three of the symbols in the last strophe in her dissertation, *Kennst du das Land: Performance Guide to Six Musical Settings of Goethe's Poem*. The mule is an animal that cannot reproduce, pointing once again to Mignon's incestuous past, sexual ambiguity and barrenness. The waterfall is a symbol for self-destruction as well as one for revealing knowledge. Fog is unformed water and a symbol of obscurity, indicating Mignon's confusion about her past.¹²

¹²Koh, Seonmi. *Kennst du das Land: Performance Guide to six musical settings of Goethe's poem*. (DMA Thesis, Ohio State University, 1991), 16.

In this first song the reader is given a glimpse into the hidden and somewhat repressed memories of Mignon. Mignon elaborates on the fact that she guards a deep secret later in the novel when she sings “Heiss mich nicht reden”, but the reader is given hints about the story in this song as well. The line is the second stanza when the statues speak to Mignon betraying a traumatic event that has taken place in Mignon life. They say, “You poor, poor child, what have they done to you?” Mignon knows that she carries a deep and grave mystery about herself and her origin, but she is unable to speak of it or even to admit it fully to herself. She functions very much like a victim of childhood trauma in this way. Additionally, though Mignon is young, she demonstrates maturity well beyond her years due to the pain and injustice she has suffered in her early childhood. Her intense and abnormal repression of memories results in a great deal of anxiety that she also must carry. The reader is left wondering what else Mignon may be repressing and what other secrets lie buried, deep in her soul.

Mignon’s vulnerability in conveying this information to Wilhelm is significant in that she has thus far been solemn and guarded. Wilhelm describes her singing “entreating,” “urging” and “suffused with longing.” As she trusts Wilhelm she begins to bare her soul and reveal bits and pieces of her mysterious life.

Paul Arthur Treanor, in his Ph.D. thesis *Goethe’s Mignon Poems: Their Interpretation and the Musical Illustration of their Poetic Devices*, points out that in the context of the poem as a whole each strophe has equal weight, stating that, “The composer who stresses one or the other strophe through excessive repetition may then be

considered to have violated the original form of the poem.”¹³ This is of course open to interpretation, but from Goethe’s standpoint this would most surely be the case. Treanor also observes the lack of uniformity in the metric pattern of the last two lines, which gives the rhythm of the poem a parlando effect.¹⁴ This is clearly demonstrated by some composers more than others in their musical portrayal of the poem. The third significant observation that Treanor makes with regard to structure of the poem is that “the accentuation is constant throughout the strophe with the exception of the first and fifth lines, which vary in part due to the interrogations found there.”¹⁵ This would perhaps give a composer license to shape the phrasing with particular regard to the question/answer that Goethe has established in these strophes.

The integral things that this poem shows us about Mignon are the longing inside her for Italy and for security in some form, a glimpse into her past and the long road that she has already traveled, and her newfound vulnerability and trust with Wilhelm. Treanor suggests that Mignon’s interest in Italy, which ties in with her interest in maps and in southern destinations throughout the novel, may also be an indication of Goethe’s interest in Italy at the time of writing this novel. “It might be seen to portray the

¹³Paul Arthur Treanor, *Goethe’s Mignon Poems: Their Interpretation and the Musical Illustration of their Poetic Devices*. (Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 1963), 96.

¹⁴ Paul Arthur Treanor, *Goethe’s Mignon Poems: Their Interpretation and the Musical Illustration of their Poetic Devices*. (Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 1963), 96.

¹⁵ Paul Arthur Treanor, *Goethe’s Mignon Poems: Their Interpretation and the Musical Illustration of their Poetic Devices* (Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 1963), 96.

transgression of his own spirit over the Alps to the object of his yearning.”¹⁶ The autobiographical nature of the work would then also indicate Wilhelm’s desire for Italy as well, or at least his own personal longing and yearning. In this way, Mignon’s intuitive character mirrors or even foreshadows what Wilhelm is feeling. This is an example of how Mignon may be seen as symbol for Wilhelm’s subconscious, as a vehicle for reconciliation between his conscious action and his subconscious desires.

¹⁶ Paul Arthur Treanor, *Goethe’s Mignon Poems: Their Interpretation and the Musical Illustration of their Poetic Devices* (Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 1963), 91,94.

CHAPTER VI

THE MUSIC

The following six settings each represent a fragment of Mignon's psyche. This fragmentation, or splitting, is a common psychological coping method coined by Pierre Janet, and furthered by Sigmund Freud, and more so, by his daughter, Anna Freud. Splitting occurs in victims of trauma and those who suffer a childhood as unstable as Mignon's story indicates. This fragmented and multi-faceted psyche is what makes her such an interesting subject for Lieder composers and such a likely candidate for projection on the part of the composers.

Reichardt's "Mignon I"

Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752-1814) was a member of the Second Berlin School of the 1760's and 1770's.

Although he cannot be ranked among the greatest song writers, Reichardt was a key figure in the development of the form. He was experimental, expanding the scope of the song form considerably. He was also more sensitive to literary values than any song composer before him....He was the first prominent musician to devote himself extensively to Goethe poems.¹⁷

¹⁷Jack Stein, *Poem and Music in the German Lied* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 32.

Reichardt set 116 of Goethe's songs to music including all of the songs from *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Reichardt, as a personal friend of the author, knew that Goethe conceived of these poems as songs and felt they should be expressed simply and in the mood of the character singing. Author Jack Stein remarks, "Author and composer were in complete agreement that the melodies provided were to be suited to the characters and situations."¹⁸

Reichardt's compositions demonstrate a "simplicity of line and a sparseness of accompaniment"¹⁹ that allowed his music to be performed by amateurs in the privacy of their own homes. His compositional output was considered inconsistent in that some of the pieces were more developed melodically and harmonically moving toward the realm of Schubert and his contemporaries. He was highly sensitive to the lyrics and believed that the performers must be intimately familiar with the text in order to be able to perform it with meaning and proper expression.

"Kennst du das Land" is a simple strophic setting in 3/4. The instructions read *mit affekt*, pertaining to his preferred treatment of the text. The vocal line is simple, balanced and mostly conjunct in contour. The text is followed exactly with out repetition or extraction. The piano accompaniment is sparse and for the most part doubles the vocal line in the right hand. The melody is charming and simple, embracing two of the

¹⁸Jack Stein, *Poem and Music in the German Lied* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 35.

¹⁹Jack Stein, *Poem and Music in the German Lied* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 32.

characteristics often found in Mignon. He depicts a sweet character with a straightforward and natural delivery of text. Reichardt's settings were published as inserts in the 1795 version of the novel. An example of the last line of the poem shows an emotional outpouring of Mignon as she sings of her beloved/protector/father Wilhelm.

Reichardt holds a unique place in the composition of song, particularly as he relates to Goethe; perhaps he was eager to provide Goethe a setting that would please the author, and in this way he identifies with Mignon's need for approval. Given his sensitivity to the text, Reichardt's setting of Mignon may be a projection of his own need to set the proper structure and mood of a song, according to the wishes of the author.

Reichardt's setting reveals the innocent and repressed component of Mignon's psyche. While his setting fails to reveal more about Mignon than the surface meaning of her words, he captures the simple and charming element of her character and the part of her mind that was unaware of the mystery and tragedy below the surface. Reichardt's Mignon is balanced and safe; like Mignon, he casts a repressed version of this song.

Beethoven's "Mignon"

The next fragment of Mignon's psyche is ambiguity, as represented in Beethoven's setting. Beethoven's setting of "Kennst du das Land" was revered by many composers after him for its strong individuality, his treatment of the text and the piano, and the transitional nature of the composition. Goethe, however, did not approve of his setting:

“I cannot understand,” Wenzel Tomaschel, the Czech composer, quotes him as saying in 1822 “how Beethoven and Spöhr so thoroughly misunderstood the poem as to through-compose it. I should have thought that the divisions occurring in each stanza at the same spot would be sufficient to show the composer that I expected a simple song from him. Mignon is a person who can sing a song, not an aria.”²⁰

Schumann, on the other hand, praised the setting as the only one that enhanced the text, before his own of course.²¹

Beethoven’s setting may more accurately be referred to as modified strophic. This 1810 composition still adheres to some of the Lied composition techniques of the previous century through the use of the right hand doubling the melody, the strophic melodic line, and the balanced phrases of the melody. The quality that sets this song apart from settings prior to Beethoven’s is his treatment of the piano, particularly in the interludes, which do not exist in Reichardt’s version and in most versions before Beethoven’s.

The piece is in A major and marked *ziemlich langsam*. The meter is 2/4 in the first half of each stanza, changing to 6/8 after “Kennst du es wohl?” At this point Beethoven changes the tempo indication to *geschwinder*. This pattern continues for all three stanzas. The melody itself is fairly simple and reminiscent of the simplicity and childlike nature of Mignon as portrayed in the novel. Goethe’s comparison of this piece to an aria seems more aimed at the passionate, thick chords of the piano that do not really

²⁰ Jack Stein, *Poem and Music in the German Lied* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 54.

²¹ Stein, Jack. *Poem and Music in the German Lied*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971. (53)

indicate a young girl. The role of the piano in Beethoven's setting is to depict the grand, opulent, and horrific forces around Mignon, as she relates the majesty of her homeland and the terrifying Alpine journey that she made to Germany as a small child.

The treatment of the accompaniment is unique in that it is not merely a harmonic background for the melody, but it aids in telling the tale of the unfortunate Mignon. Beethoven included two measure piano interludes before the line, "Kennst du es wohl?" The triplet pattern that is employed throughout the first half of each stanza in the left hand is unique and innovative for the time.

The richness of the harmony and unexpected shifts in dynamic levels add to the mystery of Mignon's situation. Through the thick texture of the accompaniment, symbolizing Mignon's inner complexity and torment combined with the simple melody, indicating her youth and innocence, Beethoven captures the ambiguity of Mignon's personality. She is at once full of childlike innocence and simultaneously full of depth and mystery; Mignon is both youthful and wise beyond her years. This setting portrays the part of Mignon's psyche that represents ambiguity and mystery. Beethoven exhibited this quality of ambiguity as he effectively and strategically bridged the gap between the Classical and Romantic periods in music. Beethoven chooses to repeat the last line of each strophe to draw emphasis to the line, repeating the very last line three times.

Spohr's "Mignons Lied"

Louis Spohr (1784-1859) composed his own setting of this popular text in 1815. Spohr believed that the text was secondary to the music, which is perhaps one reason that

Goethe criticized his setting of “Kennst du das Land.” He was primarily interested in the vocal line and pushed the functional aspects of harmony in the accompaniment.

Spohr’s setting of “Kennst du das Land” is in a modified strophic form in the key of F major throughout. The tempo marking is *feierlich*. Lyrical and sweet, the melody is mostly conjunct, with an occasional leap of a third or fourth at an emotional moment in the poetry. Spohr makes use of chromaticism in both the vocal line and accompaniment, making the contour of the phrase somewhat unpredictable.

Another interesting element about this setting is Spohr’s use of mixed meter throughout the piece. The composition begins in 3/2 and two measures later, continues in 3/4 for five measures before moving to 2/4 for two measures then 3/4 again for one measure, then common time. He makes use of these frequent meter changes throughout the piece, bringing a conversational nature to the text as the meter changes in adherence to the prosody of the line. Spohr’s usage of mixed meter adds a declamatory feeling to the flow of the vocal line and creates a recitative type effect in several of the phrases. These declamatory phrases in conjunction with the more broad and lyrical phrases add a tremendous deal of musical interest to the overall vocal line. Spohr was an opera composer from a very early age in his life; the declamatory setting of Mignon’s first song is testimony to this fact. The blending of these two elements, recitative and lyrical line, creates a spontaneous and unpredictable Mignon, adding to the mystery of her situation.

Spohr’s setting identifies with the unpredictable and spontaneous component of Mignon’s personality as his setting describes. Perhaps Spohr’s love of opera and the theatre are what drew him to the exotic and mysterious Mignon. Wilhelm, and his

creator Goethe were also theatre enthusiasts. Spohr projects a Mignon who is theatrical, spontaneous, and mysterious. This somewhat simple device of using mixed meter gives Mignon a very accessible quality. She appears to chatter on about her homeland in a declamatory manner, delivering her lines with naturalness and ease.

Spohr subtly varies the rhythm in the second stanza, particularly drawing attention to a very important line in the text, when the statues say to Mignon, “*Was hat man dir du armes kind getan?*” (*What have they done to you, you poor child?*) Following this revealing question, Spohr leaves two beats of vocal silence before asking, “*Kennst du es wohl?*” compared to the other two stanzas when he only leaves one beat. This mysterious question deserves the extra amount of silence, giving the learner a chance to digest and ponder the new information. The musical line that highlights this text is also quite chromatic, further emphasizing the uneasiness of the sentiment.

The simple changes in the melodic line from strophe to strophe highlight the text, for example, drawing attention to the dangerous nature of her journey over the mountains in the last stanza by changing to a dotted rhythm on the line, “in caves dwell an ancient dragon’s brood, and the torrent sweeps over a plunging rock.” The added chromaticism throughout this stanza brings to mind a winding and jagged path, as is portrayed by the poetry.

The top note of the right hand in the piano accompaniment mostly doubles the melody line demonstrating style consistent with other 18th century art song. The harmonic language, mixed meter, and rich texture in the accompaniment bring this song closer to the Lieder of the 19th century. Spohr paints a character much like the waif-

child Mignon in the natural speech flow of the line, the sweet, yet altered innocence of the melody, and the haunting harmony in the accompaniment. Spohr brilliantly captures the spontaneous and unpredictable fragment of Mignon.

Schubert's Mignon's Gesang

Franz Schubert became enamored with Goethe's poetry after reading the story of Gretchen. He set 88 of Goethe's poems, many of them multiple times. Of the Mignon texts, Schubert set all of them at least twice, except *Kennst du das Land. Heiss mich nicht reden* was composed three different times; *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt*, five times; and *So lasst mich scheinen* a total of four times. One of the settings of *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt* was composed as a duet for Mignon and the Harper as it is performed in the novel. Many believe that it is doubtful that Schubert even read the novel, as his characterizations do not always ring true with the character of Mignon.

The first poem of the four that he set was *Kennst du das Land* in 1815 after finding it under the heading "*Mignon, drei*" under the "*Ballads*" section.²² Schubert's setting represents the servant or pleaser aspect of Mignon's psyche. The key is F major for the first two stanzas and changes to f minor as the last stanza unfolds. In the first two lines of verse one the melody is slow and stately and is doubled in the accompaniment as Mignon asks, "*Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühn, Im dunkeln Laub die GoldOrangen glühn.*" The musical line has an uncertain or tentative character, which is in line with Mignon's nature. In the next two lines the accompaniment changes to triplet

²² Kenneth S. Whitton, *Goethe and Schubert, The Unseen Bond* (Portland, OR: The Amadeus Press, 1999), 202.

sixteenths and melody line speeds up. The note values are much shorter when Mignon recites, “*Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht, die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht.*” The piano continues for three measures and the text is sung in the same triplet patterns, corresponding to both the breeze in the poetry or the youth of Mignon. A rolled chord follows before the singer goes on, unaccompanied on “Do you know it?” In this phrase we hear the charm of Mignon’s youth and perhaps a hint of her shyness towards Wilhelm. After this phrase *a piacere*, the tempo marking reads *etwas geschwinder* and we are back in the triplet pattern for the remainder of the verse, “It’s there, there that I want to go with you, my love!”

Schubert repeats the poetry here several times as the music grows more and more exciting. The word *dahin* is repeated no less than eleven times in each stanza in Schubert’s setting. The choice to emphasize a seemingly unimportant word is most likely to add to the lovely melody that Schubert has written. While it does add a childlike quality to the verse and capture the age of Mignon, it does not truly reflect the direct and mysterious character Mignon. Mignon did not tend to linger over her words, or her actions. She spends much time dashing in and out of places and whenever questioned about her past, she gave the most succinct and unrevealing answer required.

Verse two, still in major, follows the exact pattern of verse one. Mignon now sings of the house that she vaguely remembers from her early childhood. The third and fourth lines are about the marble statues that stand looking at Mignon asking, “What have they done to you, my poor child?” In this case the triplet sixteenths of the accompaniment do not paint the wind, in fact they do not seem to mirror the seriousness

of the text this time. When the singer arrives at “*Kennst du es wohl?*” in this instance, more time may be allowed to highlight the mystery of the situation and of all that has happened to Mignon.

The final verse of the poem changes now to minor as Mignon recalls the horror of being taken over the mountains from her native land. The melody is the same as the first line, except in the parallel minor key. Mignon sings “*Kennst du den Berg*” and as she continues the notes of melody change slightly to a darker more mysterious tone while the rhythm remains the same. There is break from the triplet pattern in the accompaniment to every note doubling the melody with staccato markings below as she sings, “*es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Flut.*” This adds strength to the text, painting the plunging rocks and torrents very well. Soon, the triplets resume and we are back in F major. The final lines finish just as the other two verses did, as though Mignon has forgotten the fear and terror of the third stanza. Whenever she sings, “There, oh there my Beloved/Protector/Father, there we will go!” she is off and running, carefree and excited.

The Mignon of Schubert’s setting is youthful, wistful and engaging. She seems a bright soul in this song who longs to go on a journey with her newly found father. The simple setting of the text and melodic flow is evidence of a young girl as the singer. The haunting, mysterious, direct nature of the child is not seen in this particular setting of Goethe’s poem. Rather this characterization paints a pleasing and dutiful Mignon. Schubert might relate to this characteristic as he had struggled with wanting to please his father early in his life. He desired to be a composer, though his father insisted on him

becoming a teacher.²³ This characteristic is also perceived in both Wilhelm's and Goethe's backgrounds. Goethe wanted to be a writer and his father desired him to be a lawyer. Wilhelm is constantly torn between being the businessman that his father and family believe that he is, and the pursuit of a life in the theatre. Mignon reflects the pleasing part of all three of these men in her constant desire to please Wilhelm and to gain his approval. A great deal of Mignon's energies in the novel were spent eagerly serving Wilhelm, reflecting the fractured psyche that identified with pleasing others in order to gain approval, affection, and more than likely a fear that her basic needs would not be met should she fail to please her caretakers.

Schumann's "Kennst du das Land?"

Robert Schumann first set "Kennst du das Land" in his *Album für der Jugend*, and the rest of the *Wilhelm Meister* songs made up Opus 98a after Schumann read the novel three times²⁴. The reception of these songs has varied greatly among critics. Donald Ivey, in his book *Song: Antomy, Imagery, and Style*, has described all of the songs as "extremely restless harmonically as well as somewhat halting melodically. The poetic continuity is often disrupted by accompaniment interludes, the purpose of which is obviously to provide a musical reflection or commentary on the immediately preceding

²³ Winter, Robert, et al. "Schubert, Franz." In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25109> (accessed March 14, 2009).

²⁴Deborah Phillips Wilkie, *Composer's Delineation of Character in Franz Schubert's, Robert Schumann's and Hugo Wolf's Settings of Goethe's Mignon Lieder: A Performance Guide* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 1996), 64.

poetic statement.”²⁵ Gerald Abraham, on the other hand, does not appear to be overly impressed with these songs of Schumann as he notes in his comments from *Schumann, A Symposium*.

The *Wilhelm Meister* songs ...are among Schumann’s most conspicuous failures as a songwriter. Painfully oppressed by the philosophic significance of Mignon and the old harp-player, he rambles on in a portentous, pseudo-symphonic style, with frequent modulations and unnatural vocal phrases, losing the thread of the poem and of his own musical design....²⁶

Many others have disagreed with this interpretation and see the value in the Schumann *Wilhelm Meister* settings. Jack Stein believed that there was “no relation whatsoever between Schumann’s songs and Goethe’s novel. The atmosphere in the music is closer to Schumann’s own romantic temperament than to that of the harpist or Mignon.”²⁷ However, he also concedes that, “The songs are richer in texture, the harmony is more complex, the musical declamation more subordinate to the poetic line, and the songs in general more dramatically conceived.”²⁸ This seems an accurate depiction of Schumann’s compositional process, particularly in regard to this novel, though he had read it three times before setting the poetry. Schumann displays a bit of a disconnect between the

²⁵Donald Ivey, *Song: Anatomy, Imagery and Style* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), 199-200.

²⁶Gerald Abraham, editor, *Schumann: A Symposium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 110.

²⁷Jack Stein, *Poem and Music in the German Lied* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 122.

²⁸Jack Stein, *Poem and Music in the German Lied* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 122.

simple setting of this piece in the novel and romantic style of the song, perhaps not unlike his own personal disconnect between his literary abilities and his emotional desires. In this respect Mignon becomes a projection of Schumann's own disconnected psyche.

Kennst du das Land is the only strophic song among Schumann's *Wilhelm Meister* settings. The original key shifts between G major and g minor throughout the piece. The song opens with a piano prelude of four bars followed by a lyrical melody that blends into the accompaniment. The 3/8 time signature is markedly different than Schubert's opening in 4/4. The melody floats back and forth seamlessly between the piano and voice in typical Schumann fashion. After each verse the piano is given four bars of commentary in order to reflect and recapitulate the words the singer has spoken. The ending postlude is rather brief, but provides adequate closure to the piece.

The accompaniment begins with a chromatic melody in sixteenth notes at a tempo marking of *langsam*. When the voice comes in the piano takes a backseat role for two measures with rolled eighth note chords, but is soon back to a counter melody. On the lines "*Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht, die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht.*" Schumann places sixteenth triplets in the accompaniment that build in intensity and harmonic energy, particularly set against the duple rhythm in the voice.

A crescendo placed over "*vom blauen himmel weht.*" and again over "*Kennst du es wohl?*" propels the line forward towards the *dahin* moment in the song. Schumann chooses to repeat this word four times in each verse, each time with an upward leap of a fourth to show the importance of this statement. A *forte* is marked over the first *dahin* and continues until the last *dahin*, which is marked *piano*.

Because the setting is strophic, it is easier to identify the overall tone of the piece rather than to observe specific instances of word painting. One of Schumann's greatest strengths in this genre is creating a mood. It is clear that he took a more melancholy approach to this piece than Schubert. The sorrowful melody and minor key in the first half of each stanza indicate a sense of her loss and despair. The winding melody evokes the lonely path that Mignon has traveled from her beloved homeland and family. The loveliness of the melody in conjunction with the text of these two stanzas portrays the beauty of the land she left in addition to her nostalgia for her lost childhood. This setting reflects the wounded part of Mignon's brain that is haunted with mysterious melancholy.

As the singer approaches the text "*Kennst du es wohl?*" the song moves into a major quality for the first two *dahin* sections, as if the character is expressing a newfound hope, and then as the final *dahin* appears it is as if she doubts her joy and is thus returning to her sorrow. In the final stanza, this pattern does not reflect the text as accurately. The prosody of the language does much to display the terror of the third verse. Ultimately, the credit belongs to Goethe and his brilliant choice of language.

Schumann's setting draws out the haunted fragment of Mignon, exploring the melancholic personality of Mignon. The complexities of the harmonies draw out a more pensive and solemn Mignon. The line is appropriately haunting, though the strophic nature of the piece in some way denies a musical contrast in the third verse. Fortunately, the text speaks volumes in this case.

Schumann wrote this setting in 1849, at a time when he and his family had fled their home in Dresden due to revolutionary forces invading the city. Schumann could

very easily tap into the darker moods of the Wilhelm Meister songs at this time in his life, particularly “Kennst du das Land,” as he, like Mignon was away from his home not by choice, but by necessity. He may not have been kidnapped and carried away over the mountains, but he escaped the city to avoid being drafted. Schumann was more than likely haunted by the sights and smells of his home as Mignon was, and in this way Mignon is a projection of his own longing for home and the way that he was haunted by the events taking place in Dresden. The melancholic state and haunting harmonies raise the question over whether or not Schumann diverted from the novel he knew so well as a means of projecting his own feelings of melancholy and haunting. Only five years after setting the Wilhelm Meister settings Schumann had become severely psychotic and was moved to an asylum.

Wolf’s “Mignon”

Hugo Wolf’s (1860-1903) song writing erupted in storms of creativity. Most of his songs were written in a period of a few years, the majority written between 1888-1891²⁹. Wolf worked with one poet at a time, setting all of the poems that he wished to set before moving to his next poet. One of his principles was that he did not set a poem that had already been set unless he believed that he could improve upon the setting. Clearly, this was the case with the *Wilhelm Meister* songs, and many people believe that Wolf’s Mignon Lieder are the finest among these settings.

²⁹ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature*. 1st Edition (Redmond, WA: PST...INC, 1996), 117.

Wolf's "Kennst du das Land" titled "Mignon" was written on December 17th, 1888. His setting is modified strophic, with slightly varied vocal lines and accompaniment patterns in each verse. The overall effect of the song is drama and a Mignon who is exotic and tortured by her memories of home. Stein has remarked that,

It is a big song, which portrays the longing and exotic quality of the verse with great force, but tears apart the tight structure of the poem in an attempt to squeeze the emotional juice out of each phrase. The music leaves far behind the timid girl, to say nothing of the fascinating context in which the song is introduced in the novel.³⁰

Yet Kimball praises the work as one of Wolf's masterpieces:

Wolf's powerful setting, highly dramatic and tinged with the exotic, is unlike any previous treatment of this text by other composers. Its piano writing is reminiscent of Liszt, and its expansive lyrical lines are quasi-operatic in style. Its complex texture is orchestral in concept, and indeed, Wolf did compose an orchestral setting for this song. "Kennst du das Land" is among Wolf's masterpieces.³¹

Wolf's setting opens in a melancholic mood, the right hand introducing the melody and setting the stage for the piano counter melody while the left hand plays eighth notes on the off beat, true to Wolf's style. The tempo is *Langsam und sehr ausdrucksvoll*.

³⁰ Jack Stein, *Poem and Music in the German Lied* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 180.

³¹ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature*. 1st Edition (Redmond, WA: PST...INC, 1996), 122.

The original key begins in Gb Major changing to three flats at measure 13, though remaining in the key of Gb through the use of accidentals.³² The beginning of the refrain begins in f minor and moves back to Gb Major for the next verse. The shift in keys depicts an uncertain and changing Mignon, who is yearning and sorrowful, but also spontaneous in the manner of delivery. The slower tempo indicates a much older character than the Mignon of Schubert and also the Mignon of Schumann. She communicates passion and experience in the ways of the world in the unusual intervals and the sliding half steps.

The meter starts in 3/4 and changes to 9/8 for the second half of each stanza. This rhythmic change gives the feeling of yearning and desperation to the refrain, until the very last line of each stanza where Wolf returns to 3/4 and a certain amount of peace is found in the resolution of the harmonies and slowing rhythmic pattern.

The melodic line begins in the middle of the female voice, soon descending into the chest region creating an intimate and sensual expression of the line. The unusual intervals and disjunctive construction of the vocal line imply a character that is somewhat older and significantly more experienced than the young girl of Goethe's novel. The line rises and falls in a rather wide-ranging manner, also indicating a more mature Mignon than the one who prattles on in the high-pitched tone of a child. When the text changes to "*Kennst du es wohl?*" Wolf chooses to repeat this phrase after a two and half measure piano interlude. This is unusual for Wolf as he typically did not repeat text that the poet

³² Deborah Phillips Wilkie, *Composer's Delineation of Character in Franz Schubert's, Robert Schumann's and Hugo Wolf's Settings of Goethe's Mignon Lieder: A Performance Guide* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 1996), 83.

had not already restated.³³ He stretches out the vocal line with ties and by moving into a meter that has a greater sense of motion. The longing in this section is also described as *ruhiger*. The fusion of piano and voice at this point works to create longing in the sustained descending notes of the vocal line and the urgent crescendo in the notes of the left hand. In the *dahin* section, which is not repeated as in the Schubert and Schumann versions, *dahin* communicates a surge of yearning which continues until Mignon names Wilhelm as her beloved, her protector, and her father at the end of the stanza.

Though the setting is considered modified strophic, the pattern in the accompaniment and the contour of the vocal line change a great deal in the verses of each stanza. In the first stanza, the accompaniment sounds hesitant and held back, increasing in energy and forward motion through the refrain. The second verse begins with a triplet note pattern alternating with eighth notes in the left hand. This depicts the majesty of the great house of Mignon's past. In the third verse, the accompaniment plays tremolos in the left hand indicating the horror of Mignon's kidnapping and passage out of Italy. The right hand joins in the tremolo at many points in the third verse as well. Often the right hand provides a counter-melody to the vocal line, remaining consistent with Wolf's style.

The melodic line rises and falls in an attempt to mirror the text and to depict the word painting more clearly, instead of following a strophic pattern. For example, in the first verse of the song when the text speaks of the tall laurel, the upward leap to "tall" is

³³ Deborah Phillips Wilkie, *Composer's Delineation of Character in Franz Schubert's, Robert Schumann's and Hugo Wolf's Settings of Goethe's Mignon Lieder: A Performance Guide* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 1996), 83.

in the interval of a M6. Wolf allows the text to dictate the rhythm and the rise and fall of the line, rather than what is seen in a standard strophic version of the piece.

The overall structure of the setting allows for a great increase of tension building through each verse and which is then released at the return to Gb major with its relaxed tempo. Mignon appears to have a deep yearning to communicate and to be understood in Wolf's version. This seems very consistent with the character of Goethe's novel, who first sings this song when she begins to trust Wilhelm and wants him to know more about her. Wilhelm describes Mignon as singing this piece with a solemn grandeur and drawing attention to something unusual and important. Goethe sees his character as giving weightiness and mystery to the line and communicating a deep sense of longing.³⁴

Wolf's Mignon may not exhibit the childlike qualities and innocence of Goethe's Mignon, but the music clearly portrays the mystery, the heaviness and the longing that this girl suffers. Wolf has set an exotic and passionate woman who is wrestling with her identity, rather than a young waif who is haunted by the mystery of her unknown past. He manages to capture the alluring exotic Italian, but he missed the sweet naturalness of her delivery of this text. This setting represents the experienced, exotic and passionate psyche of Mignon, whose knowledge is repressed in the novel.

Mignon's exotic nature and melancholic past were more than likely natural connecting points for Wolf, whose life was riddled with depression and periods of mental instability. Wolf was drawn to exotic characters and texts; capturing the essence of a

³⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Edited and Translated by Eric A. Blackall, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 84.

character even to the point of caricature was one of his strong points. Mignon is described as exotic in the novel and Wolf's setting illuminates this trait more than any of the other settings discussed. Wolf also capitalizes on the melancholic characteristic of Mignon in this setting, which functions as a projection of his own bouts with depression throughout his life span. The instability in the rhythmic motives of this piece relate to both the hesitancy and uncertainty of Mignon's past, as well as the mental instability that threatened Wolf.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Goethe's character Mignon holds a tremendous power over artists and audiences alike. We are captivated by her mystery and become entangled in her sorrow, which works as a catharsis of our emotions, allowing us to connect with her character as a projection of our own longing, mystery, and pain. The six fragments represented in this paper are but a few of the many aspects that exist, embedded in the deep layers of Mignon's complex and mysterious character. These composers of the Lied approached Mignon from very different angles by inserting pieces of themselves and thus allowing her character to develop from the innocent and alluring child of Reichardt to the exotic and melancholic woman of Wolf. As each composer taps into an aspect of Mignon's fragmented self, he also projects a part of his own psyche, thus portraying a significant aspect of himself.

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