BRAHMS'S PIANO POETRY: HIDDEN PROGRAMS IN OPP. 5, 10, AND 117

WITH ACCOMPANYING CD RECORDING

by

ALEXANDER CROSETT

(Under the Direction of Evgeny Rivkin)

ABSTRACT

Johannes Brahms publicly rejected notions of program music espoused by Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, and Richard Wagner. However, there is limited but indisputable evidence that Brahms himself worked with programmatic elements: three of Brahms's most widely played solo piano works (Opp. 5, 10, and 117) include published score inscriptions of poetic text. Given these clear extramusical references as well as Brahms's deep interest in poetry as a composer of lieder, it seems likely that many of his other solo piano pieces were inspired by literary sources. This paper's examination of the context as well as musico-linguistic and formal determinants of Brahms's publicly programmatic piano works makes clear that, while Brahms may not have written every one of his works with a representational intention, he was indeed a lifelong composer of program music.

INDEX WORDS: Johannes Brahms, Program Music, Brahms and Poetry, Brahms Op. 5, Brahms Op. 10, Brahms Op. 117

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Johannes Brahms publicly rejected notions of program music espoused by Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, and Richard Wagner. Liszt, who coined the term, described a musical program as a "preface added to a piece of instrumental music, by means of which the composer intends to guard against a wrong poetical interpretation, and to direct his attention to the poetical idea of the whole or to a particular part of it." [1] Roger Scruton describes program music more generically as "Music of a narrative or descriptive kind; the term is often extended to all music that attempts to represent extra-musical concepts without resorting to sung words."

In contrast, scholars often describe Brahms's works as absolute music, claiming a purity of musical inspiration and abstraction of narrative continuing in the tradition of Beethoven. Twentieth-century music critic Harold C. Schoenberg went so far as to describe Brahms as "…a classicist who dealt with abstract forms and never wrote a note of program music in his life… from the beginning he set himself to write a 'pure' music, an absolute music, a music that would be a corrective to the extravagant ideas of Liszt and Wagner."[2]

However, this absolute music concept conflicts with the personal, subjective essence of German Romanticism, and—as for the absolute nature of Beethoven's music—the Liszt/Wagner camp pointed to the outright programmatic elements in some of Beethoven's works (including his "Les Adieux" Piano Sonata, Op. 81a, Symphony No. 6, and *An die ferne Geliebte* song cycle) as evidence that their approach was a natural extension of Beethoven's programmatic precedent.

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[1] Roger Scruton, "Programme Music," *Grove Music Online*/*Oxford Music Online,* Oxford University Press, accessed 10 February 2019, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22394.
[2] Harold C. Schoenberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 289-91.

There is limited but indisputable evidence that Brahms worked with programmatic elements: three of Brahms's most widely played solo piano works (Opp. 5, 10, and 117) include published score inscriptions of poetic text. Given these clear extramusical references as well as Brahms's deep interest in poetry as a composer of lieder, it seems likely that many of his other solo piano pieces were inspired by literary sources.

Though he often refused to suggest interpretations by giving them descriptive titles—many of his solo piano pieces have thematically neutral titles such as *Cappriccio* or *Intermezzo* at a time when Liszt's elaborate *Après un lecture de Dante: Sonata quasi una fantasia* was popular—the poetic inscriptions of Brahms's Opp. 5, 10, and 117 suggest he wrote solo piano works with definite programmatic meanings in mind.

Beginning in 1853, Brahms copied poems of particular interest into a personal notebook (now held by the Stadt und Landesbibliothek of Vienna). Brahms kept these poems for the rest of his life; many would become the basis for lieder. [3] The first three lines of one of the collected poems, Sternau's *Junge Liebe,* are published in the score to the second movement of one of his early piano pieces—the 1854 Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Op. 5. Though Brahms gives only the first few lines of Sternau's passionate love poem, the remaining stanzas make the program of the movement clear.

Only two other Brahms piano pieces bear poetic score inscriptions: the first of the four *Ballades*, Op. 10, and the first of the three *Intermezzi*, Op. 117. Brahms offers only a few lines of text in the case of Op. 117, No. 1 and a mere subtitle reference in Op. 10, No. 1. Using these poetic inscriptions as a framework, this paper will study the subtle programmatic elements in these selections, raising doubts about the overall absolute nature of Brahms's compositions.

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[3] George S. Bozarth, "Brahms's *Lieder ohne Worte*: The 'Poetic' Andantes of the Piano Sonatas," in *Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives*, edited by George S. Bozarth (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990): 364.

In its analysis, this paper will connect poetic meter and form to the musical rhythm and form of the selected piano pieces, revealing the inner workings of their subtle underlying programs. This paper will not attempt to extend programmatic meanings to the other pieces or movements in the three opuses studied (Opp. 5, 10, 117) that bear no poetic inscriptions. As Brahms was primarily a pianist, his solo piano works should be considered among the purest forms of his musical output; though the scope of this paper will be limited to solo piano works containing outright poetic score inscriptions, the conclusions reached will hopefully prompt further research into programmatic elements in his other works.

CHAPTER TWO

BRAHMS AND PROGRAM MUSIC

In the past few decades, scholars have begun to explore programmatic elements in Brahms's solo piano music, rejecting the mid-twentieth-century view that he composed only program-free absolute music. It seems the scholarly association of absolute music with Brahms originated with Brahms's friend Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904).[1] Hanslick's 1854 pamphlet *Vom musikalischen Schönen* ("On the Beautiful in Music") rejected Immanuel Kant's late eighteenth century assertion that instrumental (as opposed to vocal) music was of low artistic value due to its lack of connection to the written word.[2]

In an attempt to elevate instrumental music as an art form, Hanslick argued that its value was derived from its formal and tonal structures, rather than any representational associations with the written word. He did not reject all ideas of extramusical meaning; he merely relegated them to a subordinate level of importance in an effort to prove the inherent superiority of tonal relationships. Hanslick sought a more objective, logic-based method for understanding musical expression as a counter to his contemporaries' hermeneutic approaches.[3]

This shift in analysis style was also fueled partly by the decline of the ubiquitous eighteenth-century *topoi*—stock musical elements signaling established public meanings—which had been weakened by the new generation of composers including Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner. As a result of their innovations, the public had become open to unconventional thematic presentations. Anthony Newcomb describes the general aesthetic climate of the Romantic period:

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[1] Harold C. Schoenberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers* (W. W. Norton: 1997), 292.
[2] Anthony Newcomb, "Those Images That Yet Fresh Images Beget," *Journal of Musicology* 2, no. 3 (1983): 227-8.
[3] Ibid.

> Sides firmed up rapidly in the ensuing aesthetic debate, especially as important composers such as Wagner and then Brahms took clear positions on opposing sides. Soon the formalists and the "program musicians" were in rigidly separate, opposing camps, and this polarization eventually came to the surface in practical criticism and analysis (or made practical criticism into what we now call analysis and banned expressive criticism to we now deride as program notes). Serious analysis should describe what the piece *is*; by methods that were thought of as scientific, objective, and empirical it should uncover how the piece works—rather than as one might solve a puzzle, explain the laws at work behind some natural phenomenon, or unscramble a coded message.[4]

Brahms's position opposing Wagner cannot be taken at face value, however, as they had more in common than they discussed publicly—they even expressed admiration for each other's work in private.[5] However, the "practical criticism" of "serious analysis" became the prevailing answer to dealing with the difficulty of understanding Romantic music in abstract terms. Much of the ensuing scholarly study reduced Brahms's works to dry, academic content, failing to account for the programmatic influences that helped make them so popular.

Hanslick's formalist emphasis on the pure logic of musical content found a fan in Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935), whose method became the twentieth century standard for analyzing the fundamental structure of tonal music including Brahms's piano works. Schenker's analytical notion that the sole content of a piece of tonal music consists of the long-range relationship between its bass line and melody was developed partly as a reaction to the idea of 'musical hermeneutics' (which explored implied meanings in music).[6]

By graphing or sketching this relationship visually, Schenker sought to reduce the distraction of surface elements and show a clear fundamental line (*urlinie*) in the music. However, while Schenker's technique yields valuable insight into the structural underpinnings of tonal works, it fails to account for their extramusical influences—poetic, textual, or otherwise.

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[4] Newcomb, 231.
[5] Michael Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 99.
[6] Bozarth "Brahms's *Lieder ohne Worte*," 345-8.

Because Brahms's music lends itself so well to "serious analysis" of motivic and structural elements, debate over its programmatic influences was easily suppressed during the twentieth century in an effort to elevate him as the paradigm of an absolute music composer. In her 1905 biography of the composer, Brahms's student, Florence May, offers only peripheral credit to extramusical influences:

> A composer of Absolute music may indeed, and often does, stimulate his imagination by recalling a poem, a legend, a scene of nature or life; and either of these may leave a more or less definite impress on his music: whilst a title or a motto placed above a short pianoforte piece, an orchestral overture, or, in very few cases, a symphony, may sometimes stimulate the hearer's appreciation; but the music is not in such a case to be taken as 'meaning' this or that in detail. The composer aims at making his movement a work of art complete in itself, and relies for his effects upon his musical thoughts and their treatment as such, though he may be willing to let his hearers know that his fancy was encouraged by extraneous aid.[7]

In protest to this established twentieth-century view, George Bozarth writes in 1990:

> …can a composer who conjures up Wertherian images to explain the tragic mood of his Third Piano Quartet, Op. 60 (1855), who writes to Clara Schumann concerning the slow movement of the First Piano Concerto, Op. 15, 'I am painting a gentle portrait of you' (1856)… can such a composer be considered totally inimical to the views of the heteronomist camp?[8]

"Wertherian images" refers to Brahms's letters describing his Op. 60 as a depiction of "a man in blue and yellow"—Goethe's Werther, post-suicide, in his burial clothes. Perhaps the significance of "a man [Werther] who shot himself because he had fallen in love with the wife of a man he admired," as Reynolds describes, was not lost on Brahms, who pined for his mentor's wife (Clara).[9] Contemporary scholar Dillon Parmer asserts that, in light of these elements, "…the very presence of a motto, or other literary adjunct, demands that it be taken into consideration."[10]

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[7] Florence May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), 285.
[8] Bozarth, "Brahms's *Lieder ohne Worte*," 347.
[9] Christopher Reynolds, "A Choral Symphony by Brahms?" *19th-Century Music* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1985): 4.
[10] Dillon Parmer, "Brahms and the Poetic Motto: A Hermeneutic Aid?" *The Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 356.

Origins of Brahms's Public Rejection of Program Music

An exploration of the subtle programmatic elements in Brahms's works merits a frank discussion of his complex personal history as an artist. Though most artists receive outside influence early in their development, Brahms seems to have been particularly impressionable in his young years. This stands in stark contrast to the view of Brahms as a well-disciplined emulation of Beethoven.

As a young composer, Brahms was fascinated by E. T. A. Hoffmann's fictional character Kreisler. He even signed autographs of his early pieces (including the Op. 5 Sonata) "Johannes Kreisler." Siegfried Kross explains this obsession:

> In the Brahms literature we usually read the simple statement that Brahms, in his romantic exuberance, took on the name of the "half-mad" Kapellmeister Kreisler… [however] in the long run the artist is not mad, but only appears mad when reflected in the consciousness of a society which does not perceive the truth of his inner, romantic, artistic reality—which cannot perceive it and therefore denies it… It is therefore not true that Brahms identified with a "halfmad" artist. He identified only with a kind of art whose desire for inner truth in its artistic manifestations was so strong that it could be understood by society only as madness.[11]

This "desire for inner truth" led Brahms to experiment with coded references; for example, signing some movements of his Op. 9 variations with a "B" and others with the letters "Kr." It seems the young Brahms thought of Kreisler as an alter ego—much in the way that Schumann described the two sides of his artistic personality (Florestan and Eusebius).

Brahms's early fixation on the fictional Kreisler was just the beginning of his lifelong struggle to define a role for himself in society as a composer. As he matured, his deep-seated insecurity about the pressure of following in Beethoven's "gigantic footsteps" caused him to err on the side of caution and, as Guido Adler describes, "severe self-criticism."[12]

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[11] Siegfried Kross, "Brahms and E. T. A. Hoffmann," *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 3 (1982): 197-8.
[12] Guido Adler and W. Oliver Strunk, "Johannes Brahms: His Achievement, His Personality, and His Position," *The Musical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1933): 122.

Brahms's friend Joseph Joachim seems to have been the first to deflate his programmatic fantasies. Though only two years Brahms's senior, Joachim was already a renowned concert violinist and held enormous sway over the young composer—he had introduced him to Robert Schumann. Schumann's 1853 article *Neue Bahnen* ("New Paths") in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* exalted Brahms as the future of German art music. In 1854, Brahms sent Joachim a collection of piano pieces titled *Blätter aus dem Tagebuch eines Musikers. Herausgegeben vom jungen Kreisler* ("Leaves from a Musician's Diary, edited by Young Kreisler") and, though he liked the pieces themselves, Joachim criticized Brahms for the programmatic title:

> I must decidedly object to the title. At the time of Hoffmann and Jean Paul, such obfuscations were a novelty, and were the expression of a certain disarming insolence which sought to outwit the Philistines in every possible way. Nowadays meaningless usage has reduced such titles to a mere fashion.[13]

There is an accusation of artistic phoniness in Joachim's judgment, though his underlying objection is to the Hoffman-style pretense of a collection of original artistic work thinly disguised as found content.[14] Brahms, perhaps fearing his reputation would suffer, never published this collection of pieces and made no mention of Kreisler in any of his later published works.

In 1860, the twenty-seven-year-old Brahms joined Joachim and others in a manifesto denouncing the compositional practices of Liszt's New German School. The article was leaked before publication and lampooned in the press, worsening the division between Brahms's camp and the composers of the New German School that had existed since Schumann's 1853 *Neue Bahnen* proclamation.[15]

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[13] Joseph Joachim quoted in Kross, 200.
[14] William Horne, "Brahms's Op. 10 Ballades and His *Blätter aus dem Tagebuch eines Musikers*," *The Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 108.
[15] Heather Platt, *Johannes Brahms: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xv.

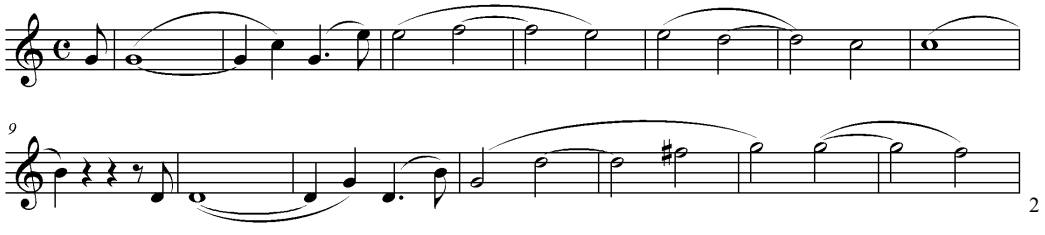
CHAPTER THREE

BRAHMS, BEETHOVEN, AND WAGNER

Practically speaking, the programmatic music of Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner differs from that of Brahms due to the use of overt representational devices to create narrative musical structures. These representational devices—*idée fixe,* thematic transformation, or *leitmotif* techniques—are created using non-linguistic melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic patterns. They give memorable impressions of people, places, or things that listeners can follow throughout the narrative of a piece, but are often generated without any specific source material from the object in question (i.e. source text or existing musical themes).

Most importantly, these representational motives are public, meaning they are shared with listeners via printed synopses, descriptive titles, or, in the case of Wagner, coordination with onstage dramatic action. If an intentionally public programmatic motive is transformed at various points during a work, it is done so minimally to help audiences continue to recognize it as a thematic element.[1] Berlioz's *idée fixe* from his 1830 *Symphonie fantastique* is an early example of this—a representational motive with no text declamation or existing melodic inspiration:

Figure 1: Reduction of *idée fixe* from Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, Op. 14



[1] Christopher Reynolds, "The Representational Impulse in Late Beethoven, I: *An Die Ferne Geliebte*," *Acta Musicologica* 60, no. 1 (January-April 1988): 43.
[2] Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, reduction of *idée fixe* (public domain) by Todeswalzer, 2007 (original composition 1830), accessed Jan 29, 2019, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Idee_fixe.PNG.

Berlioz wrote specific program notes to explain the meaning of this motive:

> The composer imagines that a young musician, troubled by that spiritual sickness which a famous writer has called "le vague des passions," sees for the first time a woman who possesses all the charms of the ideal being he has dreamed of, and he falls desperately in love with her. By some strange trick of fancy, the beloved vision never appears to the artist's mind except in association with a musical idea, in which he perceives the same character—impassioned, yet refined and diffident—that he attributes to the object of his love.
>
> This melodic image and its model pursue him unceasingly like a double *idée fixe.* That is why the tune at the beginning of the first allegro constantly recurs in every movement of the symphony. The transition from a state of dreamy melancholy, interrupted by several fits of aimless joy, to one of delirious passion, with its impulses of rage and jealousy, its returning moments of tenderness, its tears, and its religious solace, is the subject of the first movement.[3]

Berlioz had become obsessed with an Irish actress named Harriet Smithson (whom he had never met) and wrote *Symphonie fantastique* to express his love for her. Berlioz's intense programmatic description of the drama being represented and intentionally fragmented title (*Symphonie fantastique: Épisode de la vie d'un artiste, en cinq parties* ("Fantastical Symphony: An Episode in the Life of an Artist, in Five Parts") recall the passionate romanticism of Brahms's Kreisler-inspired pieces and the title of his "Leaves from a Musician's Diary."

Richard Wagner saw Beethoven's instrumental music as representational in this same way, claiming the great composer as a forebearer of the Berlioz/Liszt/Wagner camp:

> The characteristic of the great compositions of Beethoven is that they are veritable poems, in which it is sought to bring a real subject to representation [*Darstellung*]. The obstacle to their comprehension lies in the difficulty of finding with certainty the subject that is represented…The absolute musician, that is to say, the manipulator of absolute music, could not understand Beethoven, because this absolute musician fastens only on the "how" and not the "what".[4]

Wagner's process-based differentiation raises an important distinction between "absolute" and program musicians' artistic intent.

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[3] Hector Berlioz, translated by Nicholas Temperley in "The *Symphonie fantastique* and Its Program," *The Musical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (October 1971): 597.
[4] Richard Wagner quoted in Reynolds, "The Representational Impulse," 44.

Representational Organicism

Wagner argued that Beethoven's works are representational ("veritable poems"), though the exact objects of their representation may not always be clear. During the Romantic era, both music and poetry were used as representational (rather than abstract) art forms; Beethoven, bridging the Classical and pre-Romantic periods in music, wrote programmatic works featuring overt representational elements such as the Symphony No. 6 ("Pastoral"). Beethoven himself described the program in his Pastoral Symphony as "more the expression of feelings than the illustration of things"—underlining the dichotomy between the organic expression of an object's mood or spirit and mere "illustrat[ive]" depiction.[5]

The concept of organicism in art stems from ancient Greek philosophy. Goethe's theory of evolution helped revive it in the late eighteenth century, and it found its way into the realm of musical analysis by way of E. T. A. Hoffman's music critiques shortly thereafter. In particular, Hoffmann's 1810 article about Beethoven's Fifth Symphony explores the great composer's organic generation of an entire symphony from a single cellular motive.[6]

Beethoven sometimes used linguistic rhythm or inflection to create a motive (i.e. the first syllable emphasis of the "credo" motive in *Missa Solemnis*). Brahms also adopted this linguistically inspired way of generating motives in both his vocal and instrumental music. Beethoven's programmatic Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-Flat Major, Op. 81a ("Les Adieux"), provides an excellent example. Beethoven writes a literal text motto above the opening notes. He follows the phonological emphasis, writing the longest rhythmic value on the longest syllable of the word *Lebewohl* ("farewell") as it is pronounced (Le-be-WOHL). The motive's wistful falling three-note melodic inflection is given a resigned treatment—marked *piano espressivo.*

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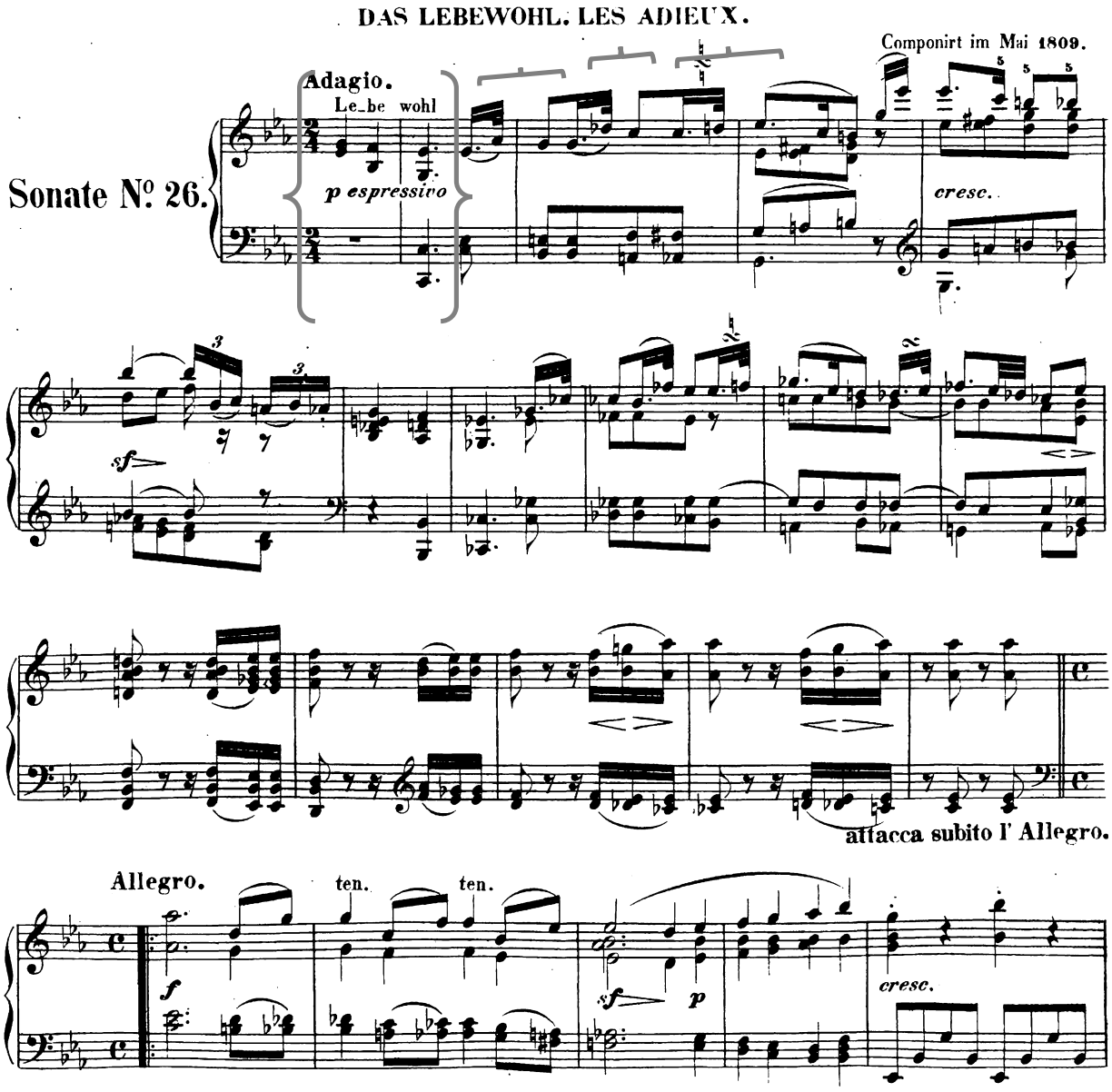
[5] Roger W. H. Savage, *Hermeneutics and Music Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 47.
[6] Nicole Grimes, "The Schoenberg/Brahms Critical Tradition Reconsidered," *Music Analysis* 31, no. 2 (July 2012): 128-9.

Figure 2: Beethoven's Sonata No. 26 in E-Flat Major, Op. 81a ("*Les Adieux*"), mm. 1-21



Beethoven continues his initial motivic statement with three repetitions of this rhythmic pattern, shortened to a dotted figuration while maintaining a longer third note (on strong beats for emphasis). He maintains this pattern as the melody climbs in register to a moment of pathos in measure 5. Beethoven repeats this Anapest (short-short-long) rhythm throughout the introduction before launching into a lively sonata-allegro in measure 17 (also inspired by this initial motive).

Beethoven's aim is clear: to provide "the expression of [the] feeling" of a fond farewell, not a descriptive "illustration" of a scene. His specific development of this motive around the linguistic feel of the word "farewell" (complete with in-score text inscription) proves Wagner's point that his music is indeed representational. Though it may be more organically generated (i.e. from a found linguistic source) and rigorously utilized than Berlioz's illustrative *idée fixe*, Beethoven's motive is just as programmatic.

The subtle distinction between Beethoven's representational technique and that of the New German School composers accounts for the difficulty in reconciling Brahms's programmatic works with his position as a quintessential composer of absolute music. Brahms wrote his programmatic music in a similar manner to that of Beethoven—opting to represent "the expression of [the] feeling" rather than a literal narrative depiction.

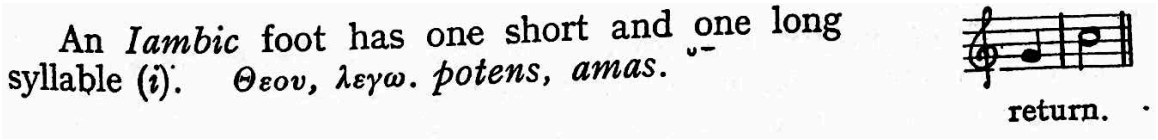
The field of musical hermeneutics has enjoyed a renaissance in recent decades, fueled by the work of scholars such as Robert Hatten, who have uncovered hidden sources of meaning in works by Beethoven and other major composers. However, this paper deals with overtly programmatic works whose sources of meaning are declared openly using textual score inscriptions. Accordingly, the presence of in-score poetic text necessitates an exploration of the poems themselves before examining their influence on the programs of their respective pieces.

CHAPTER FOUR

BRAHMS'S OP. 117 AND POETIC METER

In order to understand the connections between the poetic text Brahms printed in the score to his *Intermezzo* Op. 117, No. 1 (published 1892) and its underlying program, one must have a basic understanding of the way poetic meter connects to music. Charles Burney describes poetic meter in musical terms: "A poetical [*sic*] *Foot* consists of a certain number of syllables, which constitutes a distinct part of a verse, as a *Bar* does of an air in music. An [*sic*] Hexameter verse consists of six of these feet, a Pentameter of five."

Figure 3: Musical transcription of Iambic meter by Charles Burney



[1]

Burney transcribes this common poetic meter with a 1:2 durational proportion—a detail that could be missed using standard poetic scansion notation:

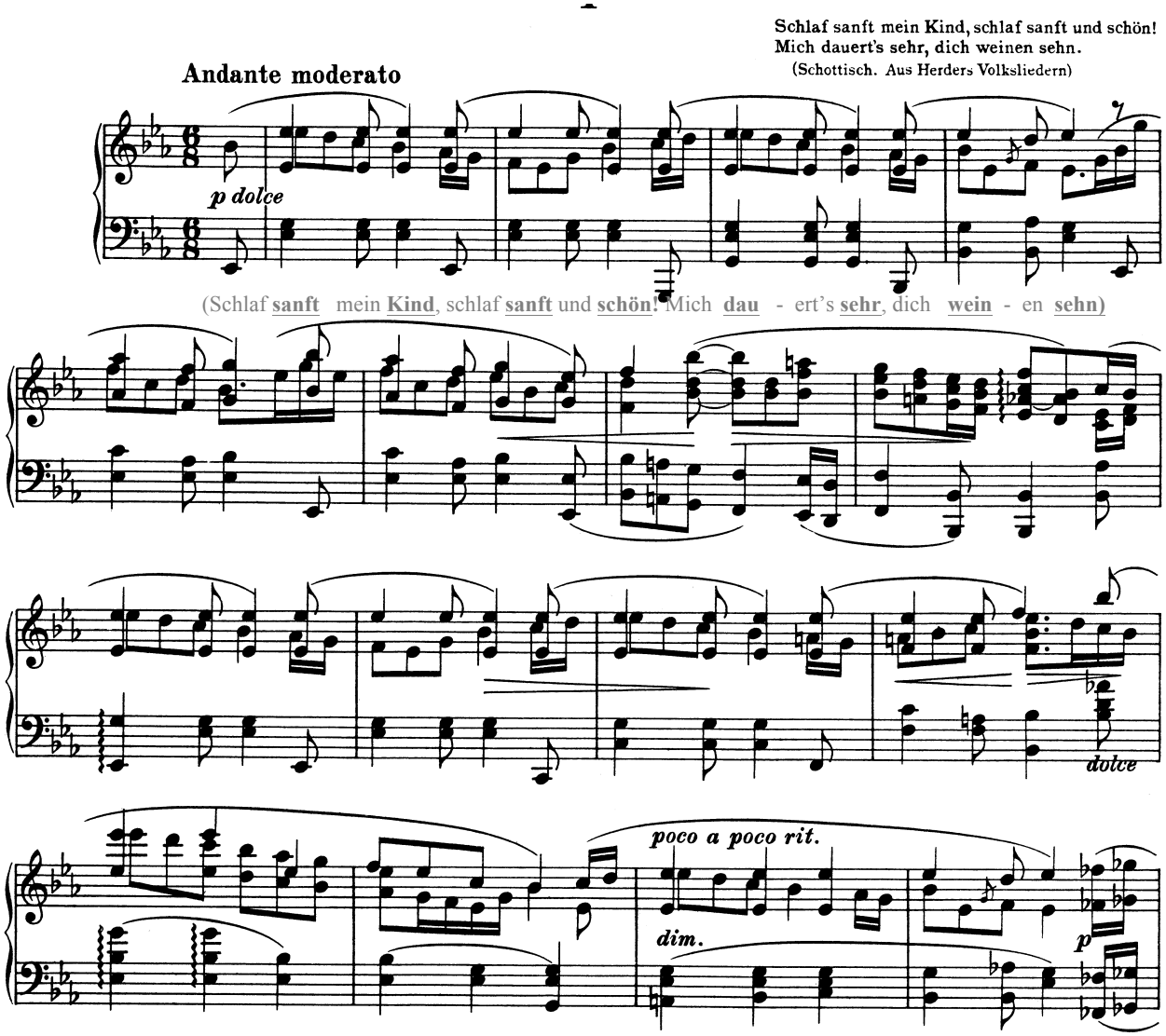
Figure 4: Poetic motto from Brahms *Intermezzo,* Op. 117, No. 1 with scansion notation

˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ –   Schlaf sanft mein Kind, schlaf sanft und schön!   ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ –   Mich dauert's sehr, dich weinen sehn.

The 6/8 musical rhythm Brahms uses to set these lines from "Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament," translated into German in Iambic Tetrameter (four Iambic "feet" per line), fits well with Burney's 2:1 rhythmic transcription. The gently swinging 6/8 meter (marked Andante moderato), soft dynamic, and four-measure phrases create the comforting mood of a lullaby:

[1] Charles Burney, *A General History of Music: From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period (1789)* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 75. Republication from *A General History of Music: from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period (1789)*, edited by Frank Mercer (New York: Hartcourt, Brace, and Co., 1935).

Figure 5: Brahms *Intermezzo*, Op. 117, No. 1, mm. 1-16 with text overlay



Brahms took pride in precisely matching music to poetic declamation, often reciting poems aloud on his walks.[2] Here the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllabi in the text matches exactly—just as Beethoven transcribed the word *Lebwohl* in "Les Adieux." Guido Adler observed that "Brahms's works, following a universal rule, either reflect an experience or originate in a musical germ; occasionally they are the result of a combination of these forces."[3] Op. 117, No. 1 is the latter—deriving its rhythmic "germ" from the experience of the quoted poetry.

[2] Ludwig Finscher, "Brahms's Early Songs" in *Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives,* edited by George S. Bozarth (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 332.
[3] Adler, 124.

Table 1: German translation and English text of "Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament"

˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – Schlaf sanft, mein Kind, schlaf sanft und schön!	˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – Baloo, my boy, lie still and **sleep**
˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – Mich dauerts sehr, dich weinen sehn.	˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – It grieves me sore to hear thee **weep**.
˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – (Und schläfst du sanft, bin ich so **froh**,	˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – (If thou'lt be silent, I'll be **glad**,
˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – Und wimmerst du—das schmerzt mich **so**!)	˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – Thy moaning makes my heart full **sad**.)[4]

The original author of "Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament" is unknown, but, with the inclusion of the following two lines of the poem in Table 1, the couplet (aabb) rhyme scheme of the English version becomes clear and the poetic meter is confirmed (in both cases) as Iambic Tetrameter. Brahms opted for this German translation by Johann Gottfried Herder, which, for the first two lines printed in the score to Op. 117, does not contain the couplet rhyme scheme of the original. However, the linguistic rhythm that inspired Brahms is present in both languages.

The remainder of "Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament" deals with the mother's complex feelings toward her child, rooted in lingering rage at its father, who has abandoned her. Dillon Parmer suggests that the contrasting middle section (see Figure 6) of Op. 117, No. 1, set in E-flat Minor, represents her resentment towards the father as well as her child (a representation of him), which she reconciles in the E-Flat Major closing section (see Figure 7) by focusing on the joy of her relationship with the child.[5]

Following in the programmatic tradition of Beethoven, whose aim was to provide "more the expression of feelings than the illustration of things," Brahms avoids the banality of "illustrat[ing]" every strophe of this poem—instead, he uses its metrical feel to help create the musical motives and structures the thematic areas to represent major forces in the narrative.

[4] German text quoted in Parmer, "Brahms and the Poetic Motto," 368. English text from Graham Glen, *The Songs of Scotland,* vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Wood, 1848), 30.
[5] Parmer, "Brahms and the Poetic Motto," 375.

Figure 6: Contrasting middle section of Brahms *Intermezzo* Op. 117, No. 1, mm. 21-27

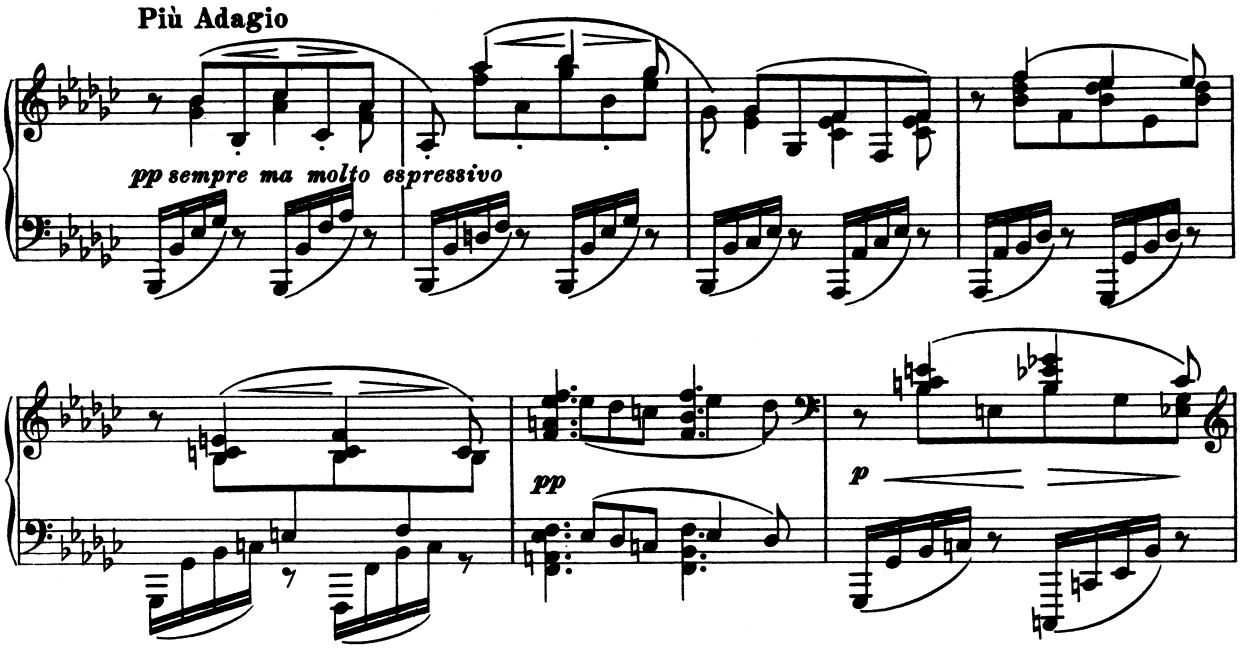
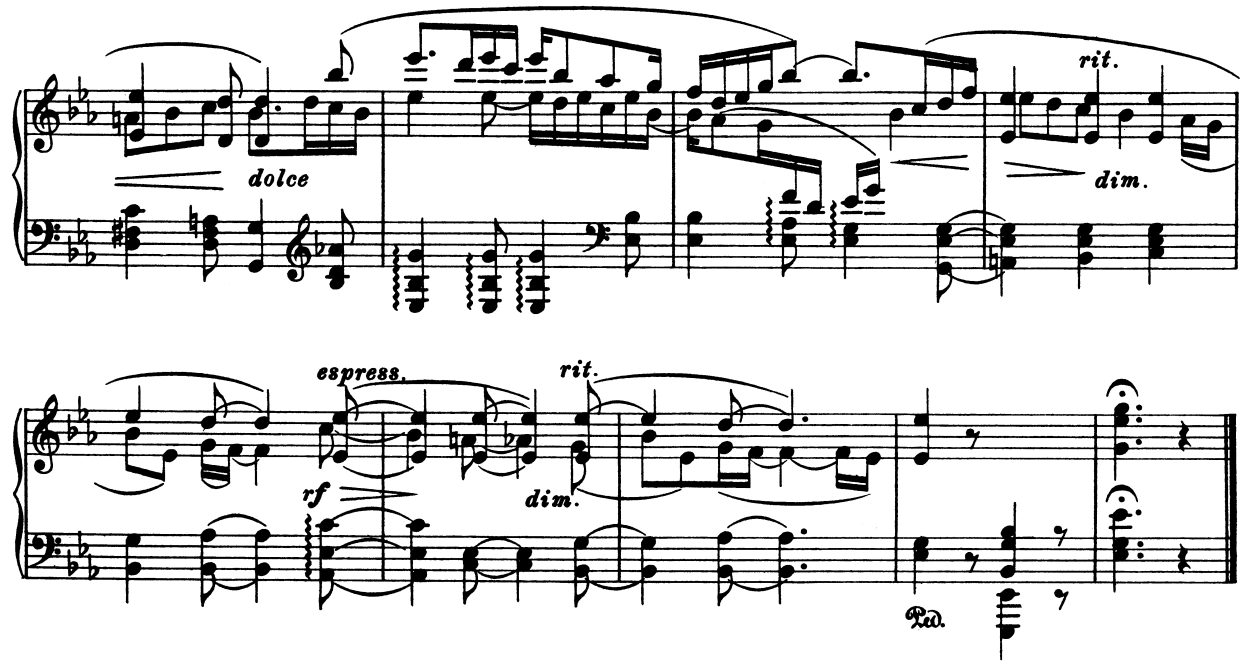


Figure 7: Closing section of Brahms *Intermezzo* Op. 117, No. 1, mm. 49-57



CHAPTER FIVE

SCOTTISH INFLUENCE IN BRAHMS'S OP. 10

A programmatic study of Brahms's first Ballade from Op. 10 (1854) would be incomplete without an account of the pervasive influence of Scottish literature and poetry on the German Romantic movement. At the time, Scotland was an exotic destination few were privileged to visit. Major composers of the nineteenth century wrote a multitude of Scottish themed works, including the popular Scottish operas by Rossini and Donizetti, the *Hebrides* Overture by Mendelssohn, Scottish lieder by Brahms and Schumann, and the two Walter Scott overtures by Berlioz. According to Roger Fiske, "…it is known that Brahms would like to have gone to Scotland. But his enthusiasm was no match for his lifelong horror of sea travel."[1]

Scottish themes also ran rampant during the literary movement of the late eighteenth century as writers sought wildness and freedom in reaction to the balance and stasis of the previous era in art and literature. Goethe, one of Brahms's favorite authors, found some of his greatest inspiration in Scottish poet James Macpherson's *Ossianic Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760). Ossian, the fictional third-century bard whose epic poetry Macpherson "translated" (in reality, the work is a mix of poetry from ancient Scottish sources), was hailed as one of the greatest poets of all time. Ossian was later exposed as a fictional character, but, at the time, Goethe and Brahms believed they were reading the work of an ancient Scottish bard. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), whose German translation of "Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament" Brahms had used in Op. 117, introduced Goethe to the poetry of Ossian in 1770.[2]

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[1] Roger Fiske, "Brahms and Scotland," *The Musical Times* 109, No. 1510 (December 1968): 1111.
[2] Ibid., 1107.

The rugged freedom of Scottish poetry appealed to the naturalistic ideals of Goethe's era; the simplistic genre of Ossianic folk ballad became the preferred model for German Romantic poets. In particular, Ossian's style influenced Goethe's trademark use of simple ballad meter, which made his works vastly preferable to the complex poetry of earlier German writers in the eyes of lieder composers (e.g. Schumann, Schubert, Brahms, and Wolff).[3]

In an attempt to influence poets to incorporate the naturalness of Ossian's style in their work, Herder collected and translated poetry and folk ballads from Britain, Scotland, and other countries (including *Erlkönig*, which originated in Denmark) culminating in his 1778 collection *Stimmen der Völker*. Herder's collection became a popular source of folk ballad texts for lieder composers, including "Edward," the Scots Border Ballad that Brahms mentions in the subtitle to his first *Ballade* of Op. 10.[4]

Poetic Narrative in the *Edwards-Ballade*

Written almost forty years before the Op. 117 *Intermezzi*, Brahms's *Edwards-Ballade,* Op. 10, No. 1 does not feature a poetic motto inscription. However, Brahms did subtitle the piece *Nach dem schottischen Ballade: "Edward" in Herders "Stimmen der Völker"* ("After the Scottish Ballad 'Edward' in Herder's 'Folk Songs'"). Brahms's student Florence May underlines its importance: "…it may be surmised that the book contains the secret key to the composer's thoughts during the writing of… the short pieces for pianoforte designated by the general name of 'Intermezzo' or 'Capriccio.'"[5] The poem "Edward," though anonymous in authorship, is written in Ossianic folk ballad style and describes a bloody revelation of patricide through a conversation between a son and his mother:

[3] Fiske, 1107.
[4] Ibid.
[5] May, 166.

Table 2: Gaelic text of "Edward" with modernized transliteration

"Why dois your brand sae drap wi' bluid, Edward, Edward, Why dois your brand sae drap wi' bluid, And why sae sad gang yee O?" "O I hae killed my hauke sae guid, Mither, mither, O I hae killed my hauke sae guid, And I had nae mair bot hee O."	"Why does your sword so drip with blood, Edward, Edward, Why does your sword so drip with blood, And why so sad go ye O?" "O I have killed my hawk so good, Mother, mother, O I have killed my hawk so good, And I had no more but he O."
"Your haukis bluid was nevir sae red, Edward, Edward, Your haukis bluid was nevir sae red, My dier son I tell thee O." "O I hae killed my reid-roan steid, Mither, mither, O I hae killed my reid-roan steid, That earst was sae fair and frie O."	"Your hawk's blood was never so red, Edward, Edward, Your hawk's blood was never so red, My dear son I tell thee O." "O I have killed my red-roan steed, Mother, mother, O I have killed my red-roan steed, That before was so fair and free O."
"Your steid was auld, and ye hae gat mair, Edward, Edward, Your steid was auld, and ye hae gat mair, Sum other dule ye drie O." "O I hae killed my fadir deir, Mither, mither, O I hae killed my fadir deir, Alas, and wae is mee O!"	"Your steed was old, and ye have got more, Edward, Edward, Your steed was old, and ye have got more, Some other grief ye bear O." "O I have killed my father dear, Mother, mother, O I have killed my father dear, Alas, and woe is me O!"
"And whatten penance wul ye drie, for that, Edward, Edward, And whatten penance wul ye drie, for that, My deir son, now tell me O." "Ile set my feit in yonder boat, Mither, mither, Ile set my feit in yonder boat, And Ile fare ovir the sea O."	"And what penance will ye bear, for that, Edward, Edward, And what penance will ye bear, for that, My dear son, now tell me O." "I'll set my feet in yonder boat, Mother, mother, I'll set my feet in yonder boat, And I'll fare over the sea O."
"And what wul ye doe wi your towirs and your ha, Edward, Edward, And what wul ye doe wi your towirs and your ha, That were sae fair to see O?" "Ile let thame stand tul they doun fa, Mither, mither, Ile let thame stand tul they doun fa, For here nevir mair maun I bee O."	"And what will ye do with your towers and your house, Edward, Edward, And what will ye do with your towers and your house, That were so fair to see O?" "I'll let them stand 'til they down fall, Mother, mother, I'll let them stand 'til they down fall, For here never more must I be O."
"And what wul ye leive to your bairns and your wife, Edward, Edward, And what wul ye leive to your bairns and your wife, Whan ye gang ovir the sea O?" "The warld is room, late them beg thrae life, Mither, mither, The warldis room, late them beg thrae life, For thame nevir mair wul I see O."	"And what will ye leave to your children and your wife, Edward, Edward, And what will ye leave to your children and your wife, When you go out over the sea O?" "The world is wide, let them beg through life, Mother, mother, The world is wide, let them beg through life, For them never more will I see O."

"And what wul ye leive to your ain mither deir, Edward, Edward, And what wul ye leive to your ain mither deir? My deir son, now tell me O." "The curse of hell frae me sail ye beir, Mither, mither, The curse of hell frae me sail ye beir, Sic counseils ye gave to me O."[6]	"And what will ye leave to your own mother dear, Edward, Edward, And what will ye leave to your own mother dear, My dear son, now tell me O." "The curse of hell from me shall you bear, Mother, mother, The curse of hell from me shall you bear, Such counsels ye gave to me O."

The conversational pretense in which the truth is revealed through the discourse of the mother's questions and son's replies is typical of Ossianic style; most of Ossian's poems are set as a dialogue between the author and St. Patrick. This narrative abstraction creates a dramatic form of storytelling when the poem is performed (Goethe was known to recite Herder's translation of this particular ballad frequently at parties starting in 1772).[7]

The mother detects Edward's lies, dragging the truth out of him ("Some other grief ye bear O") and raises questions about the "penance" Edward must seek for killing his father (in this case, he proposes exile) as well as the consequences for his family and property, revealing the complexity of the underlying social situation without ever acknowledging it in plain terms. This is especially Ossianic, according to Paul Moulton: "A central theme in the Ossian text and Ossianic music is death and the repercussions for those who have lost their lovers."[8]

The roughness of the interaction, violence of the imagery, unsettling ending, and refrain of the names ("Edward, Edward"… "Mother, Mother") create a raw, haunting feeling. In her book, *Brahms and His Poets*, Natasha Loges writes, "…Brahms was attracted by the broad emotional content of a poem (its *Stimmung*), ideally content which mirrored his private emotions at the time."[9] The music of Brahms's *Edwards-Ballade* certainly reflects the brooding *Stimmung* (mood) of this poem.

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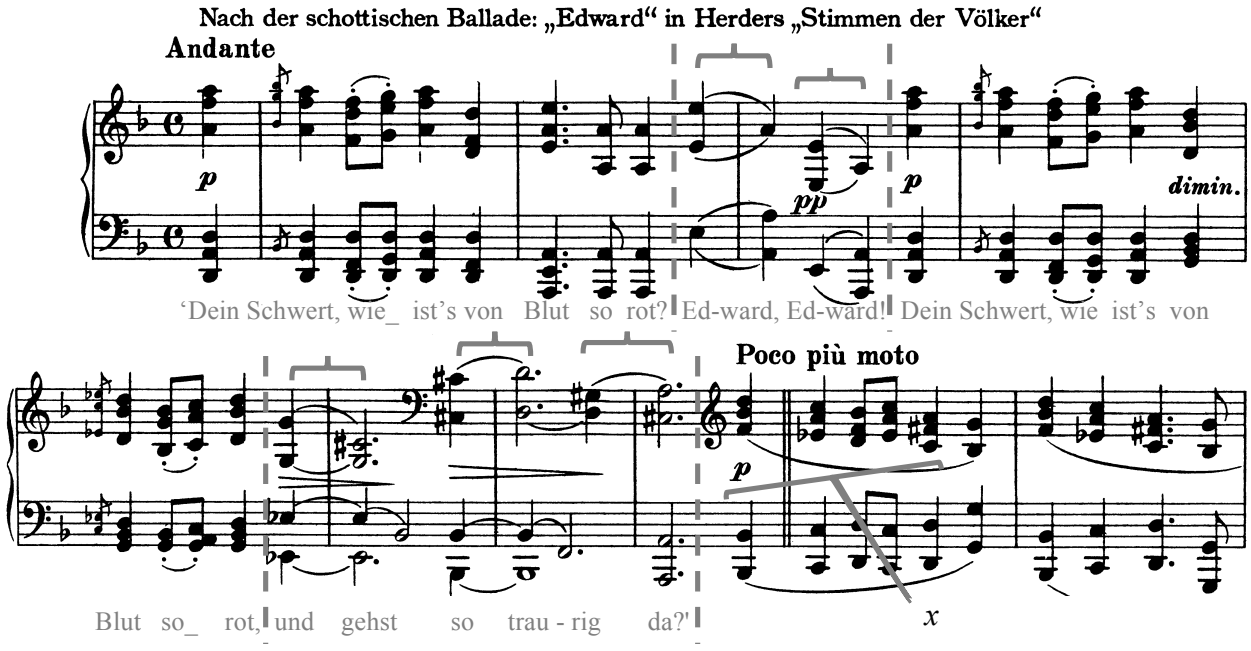
[6] Original text from Francis James Child, Helen Child Sargent, and George Lyman Kittredge, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1904), 26. Transliteration is my own.
[7] Fiske, 1107.
[8] Paul Moulton, "Of Bards and Harps: The Influence of *Ossian* on Musical Style" (PhD diss., Florida State University: 2005), 75.
[9] Natasha Loges, *Brahms and His Poets: A Handbook* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 1.

Ossianic Style in the *Edwards-Ballade*

There have been multiple scholarly articles published on performance interpretations of Brahms's *Edwards-Ballade*—some presenting inferred meanings in the thematic imagery—but none deal fully with the poetic narrative or its obvious Ossianic influences.[10] Again in the tradition of Beethoven, whose programmatic music aimed to present "more the expression of feelings than the illustration of things," Brahms's *Edwards-Ballade* does not attempt to represent the entire poetic text word for word. But, like the first piece of his Op. 117, it opens with a linguistically accurate transcription of the poem's meter and phrase structure:

Figure 8: Brahms *Edwards-Ballade*, Op. 10, No. 1, mm. 1-10 with text overlay[11]



Brahms changes the phrasing pattern three times in this opening section alone, effectively moving the bar lines to paint the text. He shifts the pattern of strong and weak beats at the end of measure 2, using slurs to indicate a strong accent on beat 4 (emphasizing "Ed-ward, Ed-ward!").

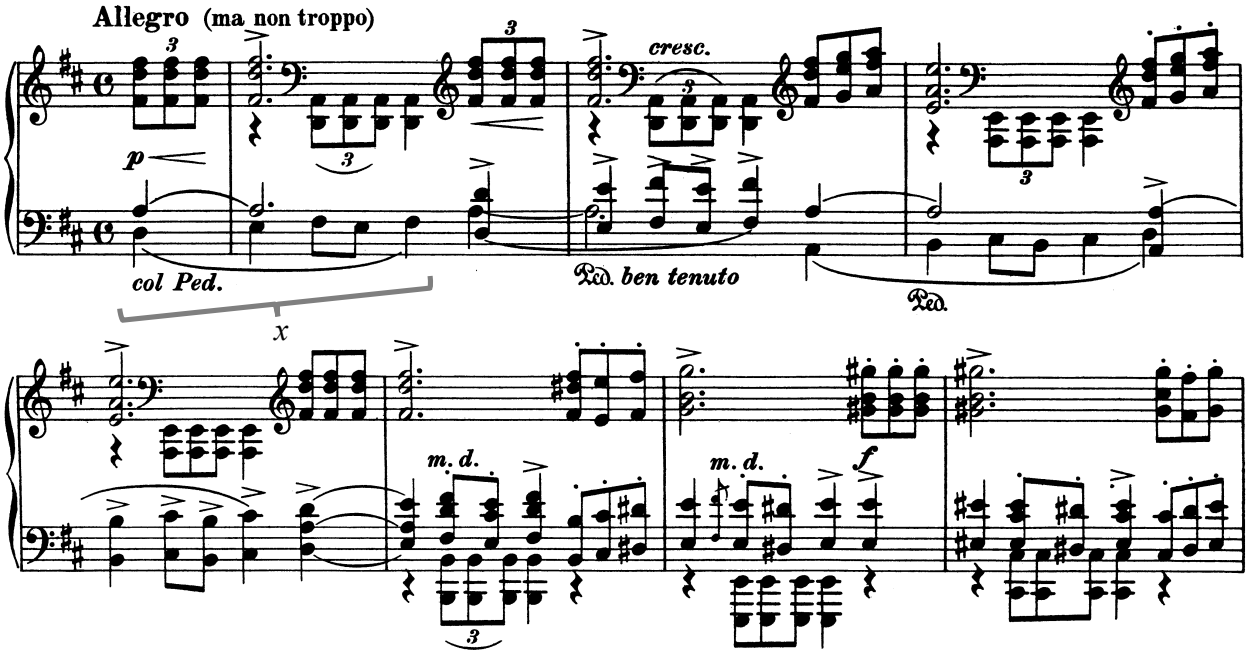
[10] See Claire Hastings, "From Poem to Performance: Brahms's "Edward" Ballade, Op. 10, no. 1," *College Music Symposium* 48 (2008): 83-97; or Ellen Rennie Flint, "Thematic and Tonal Imagery in Brahms's Ballade in D Minor, Op. 10, No.1 ("Edward")" *American Music Teacher* 54, no. 3 (2004): 18-25.
[11] Herder's text quoted in Michael Musgrave, *The Music of Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.

These accented falling fifths motives in measures 2-3 (Figure 8) create an impression of Edward's mother urgently repeating his name. The change in these slurs to a falling tri-tone in measures 5-6 and rising minor seconds in measures 6-8 paint the change in subtext from an innocent question in measures 2-3 to a suspicious interrogation in measures 5-8 ("And why so sad go ye O?").

Just like in his Op. 117, No. 1 *Intermezzo*, Brahms uses the Iambic Tetrameter of Herder's German translation to determine the rhythm of measures 1-2 and measures 4-5 (interrupted by the "Edward, Edward!" fifths). He maintains the Iambic rhythm, stretching it out into three equal slurred gestures in measures 5-8 to paint the translated poem's fourth line (*und gehst so traurig da?*—one syllable shorter than the Gaelic/English version).

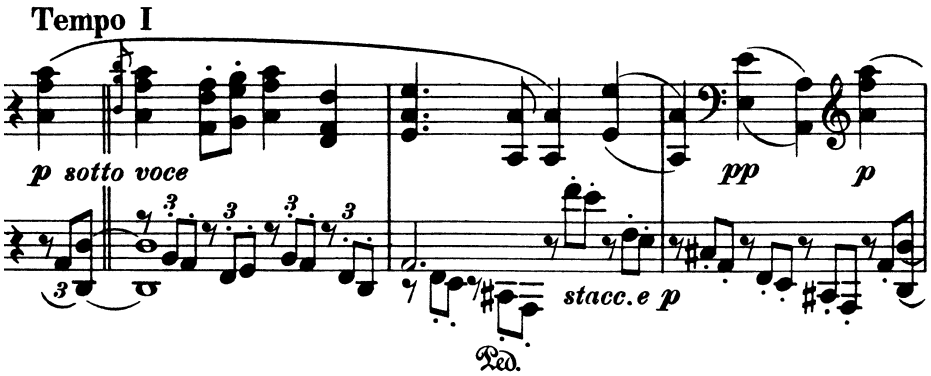
The rest of the piece maintains the upbeat anacrusic pattern established in measure 1, and the contrasting D Major middle section (Figure 9) features fanfare-like triplet figures and an inverted fragment (*x*) of the theme from measures 9-13 (Figure 8):

Figure 9: Brahms *Edwards-Ballade* Op. 10, No. 1, mm. 27-33



Besides the theme of "death and the repercussions for those who have lost their lovers," Paul Moulton describes several musical Ossianic characteristics (gathered from study of both poetry and other such musical compositions) that apply here: Scotch snaps (the upper neighbor grace notes in measures creating a dotted rhythm[12] in measures 1, 4, and 5 of Figure 8); folk sounds including open fifths and melodies with narrow ranges (the "Edward, Edward" fifths as well as the melodic motive spanning the interval of a third marked *x* in Figures 8 and 9); disjunctive musical sections with little or no transitional material creating the impression of spontaneous "subplots that in the aggregate form a general plot" (for example, abruptness of transition from measures 8 to 9 in Figure 8); warlike imagery (martial brass and timpani fanfares beginning with the upbeat to measure 27 of Figure 9); "framed" form, consisting of a "slow and melodically nebulous" introduction (measures 1-8) that returns at the end; and the personification of the bard (storyteller) through the impression of harp sounds:[13]

Figure 10: Brahms *Edwards-Ballade* Op. 10, No. 1 mm. 59-62



The staccato left-hand triplet figurations in this section have been described variously as "blood drops"[14] or "footsteps," however, in keeping with an Ossianic interpretation of the piece, the soft sound of a plucked harp fits best with the image of a bard accompanying the story's conclusion.

[12] David Johnson, "Scotch snap," *Grove Music Online*/*Oxford Music Online,* Oxford University Press, accessed 16 Feb, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25244.
[13] Moulton, 77-9.
[14] Flint, 25.

CHAPTER SIX

BRAHMS'S OP. 5 AND POETIC FORM

All three of Brahms's early piano sonatas (published 1853-4) bear textual references. The Andante of the Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 1, is a theme and variations on the folk song *Verstohlen geht der Mond auf*; Brahms writes the song lyrics below the opening theme in its published score. The Andante of the Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 2, is subtitled *nach einem altdeutschen Minneliede* ("after an Old-German Minnelied"). And the Andante of his monumental five-movement Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 5, is inscribed with the first three lines of C. O. Sternau's poem *Junge Liebe* in motto form above the score (as in Op. 117).

In his previously mentioned 1853 article *Neue Bahnen*, Robert Schumann exalted Brahms as the future of absolute music, describing his newly premiered piano sonatas as "veiled symphonies" (*mehr verschleierte Sinfonien*)—and indicating, as John Rink describes, "…the variegated timbral palate, dense textures and instrumental characterisations."[1] In an 1862 issue of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (founded by Schumann), music critic Adolf Schubring described the Andante second movement of Brahms's Op. 5 sonata in florid terms, declaring this seminal work by a proclaimed absolute musician as definitively programmatic:

> This is program music, one of the most beautiful moonlight poems ever created. Words cannot describe the blissful caresses of the two lovers in the still night, the sweet scent which wafts over the entire scene. One must hear the poem, hear it and experience it, as it is sung [*sic*] by Clara Schumann, who often plays it in her concerts…Brahms has his lovers embrace to their hearts' content, repeat their most tender farewells, and even call out the last goodbye from a distance.[2]

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[1] John Rink, "Opposition and Integration in the Piano Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms,* edited by Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81.
[2] Adolf Schubring, "Five Early Works by Brahms," translated by Walter Frisch, in *Brahms and His World*, edited by Walter Frisch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 114.

Brahms, Song and Public Versus Private Meaning

In order to fully appreciate the program of the Op. 5 Andante*,* one must connect Brahms the lieder composer with Brahms the instrumentalist. In his 1990 essay "Brahms's *Lieder ohne Worte*: the 'Poetic' Andantes of the Piano Sonatas," George Bozarth writes, "One must view the young Brahms not as a composer of instrumental music who occasionally wrote songs, but rather as a tone-poet whose lyric muse found expression principally through song, both with and without words."[3] Brahms's use of songs "both with and without words" in his instrumental music is apparent from the very beginning of his *oeuvre*—the Op. 1 piano sonata contains not only the aforementioned German folk song theme in its second movement, but also a quotation of the Scottish song "My Heart's in the Highlands" in its exuberant finale.[4]

Bozarth's description of the young Brahms as a "tone-poet" who found his inspiration in song raises an important dimension of the composer that is crucial to the understanding of his reasons for using poems and folk songs to in his instrumental music. Ludwig Finscher writes, "…the young Brahms was concerned with the poems not so much as poems, but rather as emanations of a poetical world in which he was still trying to live."[5] In fact, Brahms felt the inspiration so strongly about them that he shared transcriptions of the poems that inspired Op. 2 and Op. 5 with Clara Schumann (who often performed them) in an 1855 letter to ensure that she fully understood the programmatic meanings behind them. Parmer asserts this as evidence that Brahms intended for his works to have private programmatic meaning, shared only with his innermost circle of colleagues and friends.[6] It seems more likely that Joachim's early influence and the 1860 Manifesto made him uncomfortable with the thought of detailed public programs.

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[3] Bozarth, "Brahms's *Lieder ohne Worte*," 377.
[4] Fiske, 1109.
[5] Finscher, 344.
[6] Dillon Parmer, "Musical Meaning for the Few: Instances of Private Reception in the Music of Brahms," *Current Musicology* 83 (Spring 2007): 123.

Andante and *Rückblick*: Poetry as Formal Determinant

In 1853, before Brahms signed the Manifesto and became overly concerned with the public reception of program music, he sent his publisher, Bartolf Senff, a letter asking to add a poetic motto to the score, writing, "I have already sealed the 'Sonata' and do not wish to think about it any longer; so, I ask that you place the following little verse above the first Andante in small parentheses. It is perhaps necessary for the 'understanding and enjoyment' of the Andante."[7] Though the Andantes of the Op. 1 and 2 piano sonatas both provide glimpses of the young Brahms melding song and instrumental writing, the Op. 5 Andante carries an additional point of interest: its companion piece, the *Rückblick* ("Reminiscence") fourth movement.

Figure 11: Brahms Sonata No. 3, Op. 5: II. Andante, mm. 1-10

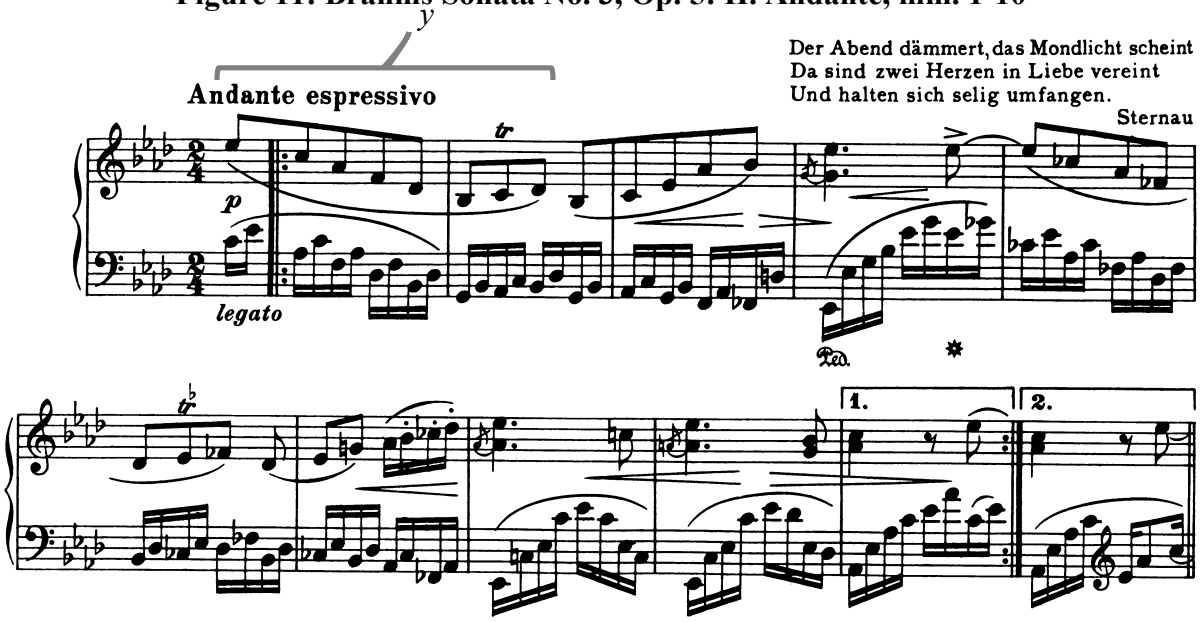
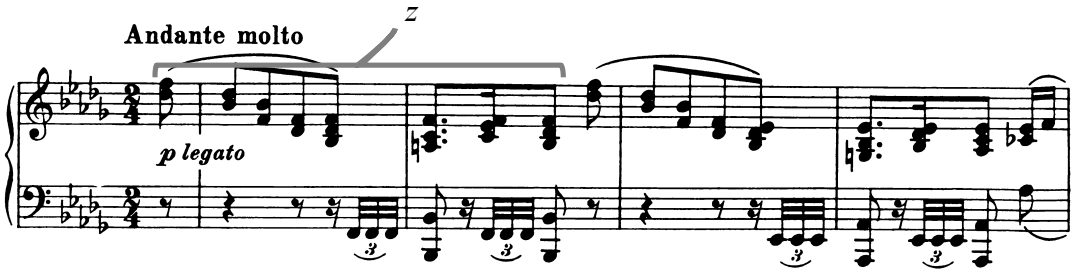


Figure 12: Brahms Sonata No. 3, Op. 5: IV. *Rückblick*, mm. 1-4



[7] Brahms quoted in translation by Parmer, "Musical Meaning for the Few," 115.

Though the falling arpeggiated thirds of the *Rückblick* theme (*z*) in Figure 12 seem to be a minor-key transposed version of the *Andante* theme (*y*) in Figure 12, Max Kalbeck, Brahms's close friend and first biographer, indicated that its urgent, repetitive rhythm matches the declamation of another Sternau poem, *Bitte* ("Request")—which followed *Junge Liebe* (*Der Abend dämmert*) directly in Brahms's 1853 personal poetry collection. Bozarth asserts, "Furthermore, the words of Sternau's poem can actually be sung to Brahms's Andante, and virtually all details of musical punctuation, form, texture, harmony, and melody can be attributed to the influence of the poem."[8]

It seems Brahms followed Beethoven's model of organicism (as in "Les Adieux") with this Andante movement, developing "virtually all details" with the "influence of the poem." Bozarth provides the full German text and an English translation of *Junge Liebe*:

Table 3: German text of *Junge Liebe* by C. O. Sternau with English translation

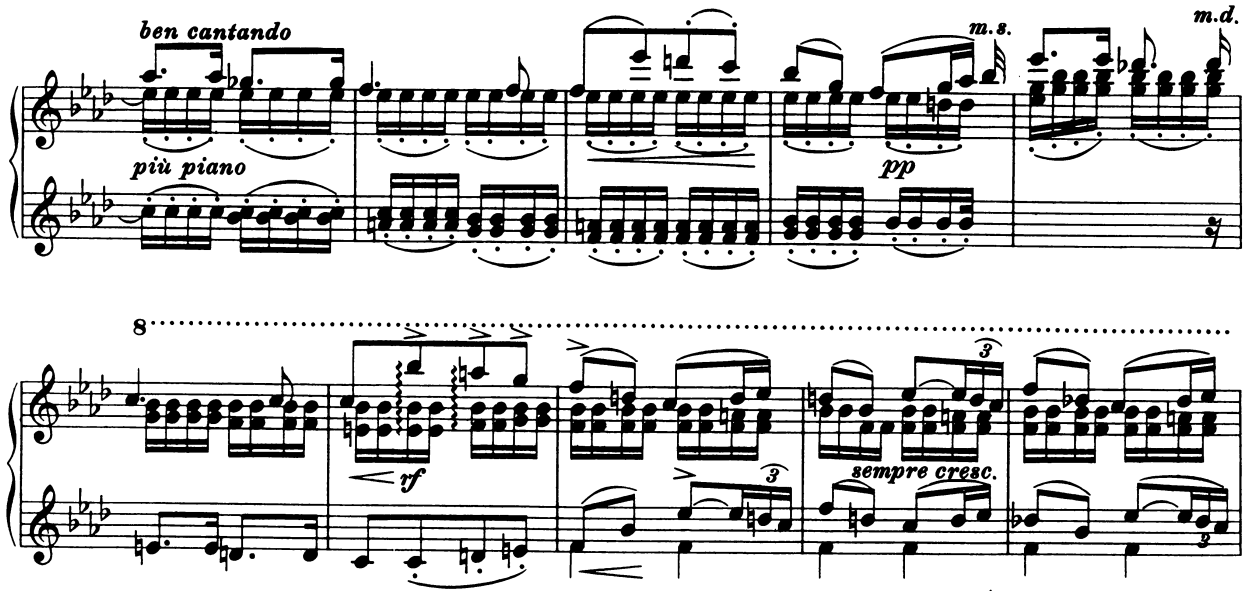
Der Abend dämmert, das Mondlicht scheint *Da sind zwei Herzen in Liebe vereint* *Und halten sich selig umfangen.* **Es weht und rauschet durch die Luft,** **Als brächten die Rosen all ihren Duft,** **Als kämen die Englein gegangen.**	Twilight is falling, moonlight shines, *there two hearts are united in love* *and keep themselves enclosed in bliss.* **It wafts and rustles through the air,** **As if the roses were yielding all their fragrance,** **As if the little angels came on foot.**
Ich küsse Dich zum ersten Mal, Ich küsse Dich viel tausend Mal. Ich küsse Dich immer wieder; Auf Deine Wangen lange Zeit Rollt manche Träne der Seligkeit Wie eine Perle nieder.	I kiss you for the first time, I kiss you many thousand times. I kiss you again and again; Down your cheeks, for a long time, roll many tears of blissfulness like pearls.
Die Stunde verrauscht, der Morgen scheint, *Wir sind noch immer in Liebe vereint* *Und halten uns selig umfangen.* **Es weht und rauschet durch die Luft,** **Als brächten die Rosen all ihren Duft,** **Als kämen die Englein gegangen.**	The hours pass away, the morning appears, *we are still united in love* *and keep ourselves enclosed in bliss.* **It wafts and rustles through the air,** **As if the roses were yielding all their fragrance,** **As if the little angels came on foot.**[9]

[8] Bozarth, "Brahms's *Lieder Ohne Worte*," 364.
[9] Ibid., 361.

Sternau's poem follows an ABA structure, with the last three lines of the first stanza recurring exactly in the last stanza (boldface text in Table 3). Interestingly, the second and third lines of these stanzas feature a transformation from the third person plural to the first person plural in the first stanza to the third (italicized text with modifications underlined in Table 3). Perhaps the impersonal nature of the poem's first three lines appealed to Brahms, as they give a general impression of the story—avoiding the emotional immediacy of the rest of the poem.

However, his letter to Clara Schumann including the poem's full text proves the programmatic importance of the entire poem to the Andante. Following the opening section in Figure 11, both hands rise ever higher in register (Figure 13, measures 11-20), perhaps representing the recurring last three lines of the stanza: 'it wafts and rustles through the air, as if the roses were yielding all their fragrance, as if the little angels came on foot.' The melody here, marked *ben cantando*, accompanied by gently pulsating chords (perhaps the "little angels… on foot"), is joined in measure 16 by a tenor voice in increasingly passionate contrapuntal polyrhythm (measures 18-20) as the crescendo begins toward the passionate B section.

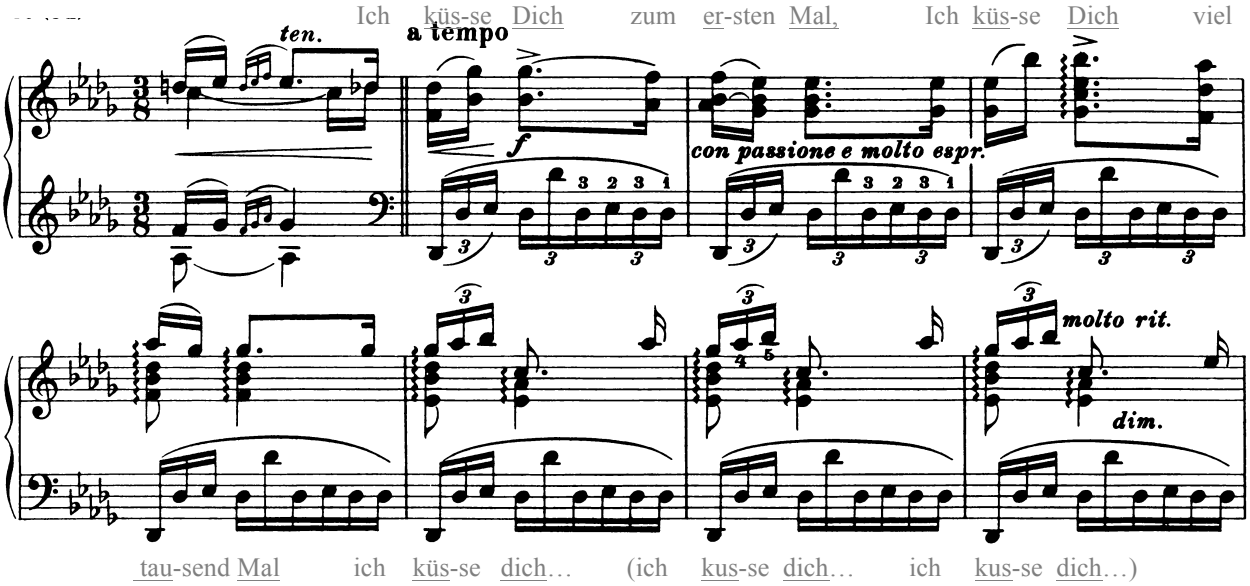
Figure 13: Brahms Sonata No. 3, Op. 5: II. Andante, mm. 11-20



This thematic area (Figure 13) recurs at the end of the last A section of Brahms's Andante before its coda, just as the text that inspired it returns at the end of Sternau's final stanza.

Though Bozarth's assertion that "the words of Sternau's poem can actually be sung to Brahms's Andante" does not seem to work in the opening section's phrasing (Figure 11), the poetic meter (Iambic Tetrameter, as in Op. 10 and Op. 117) does seem to have influenced the musical rhythm—the same initial Iambic anacrusic upbeat he used to set "Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament" and "Edward." The passionate B section of the Andante, however, works well as a musical transcription of the poem's text, breaking into repetition in measure 48 to symbolize "again and again" (*immer weider*) rather than spell out that portion of the text literally:

Figure 14: Brahms Sonata No. 3, Op. 5: II. Andante, mm. 43-50 with text overlay



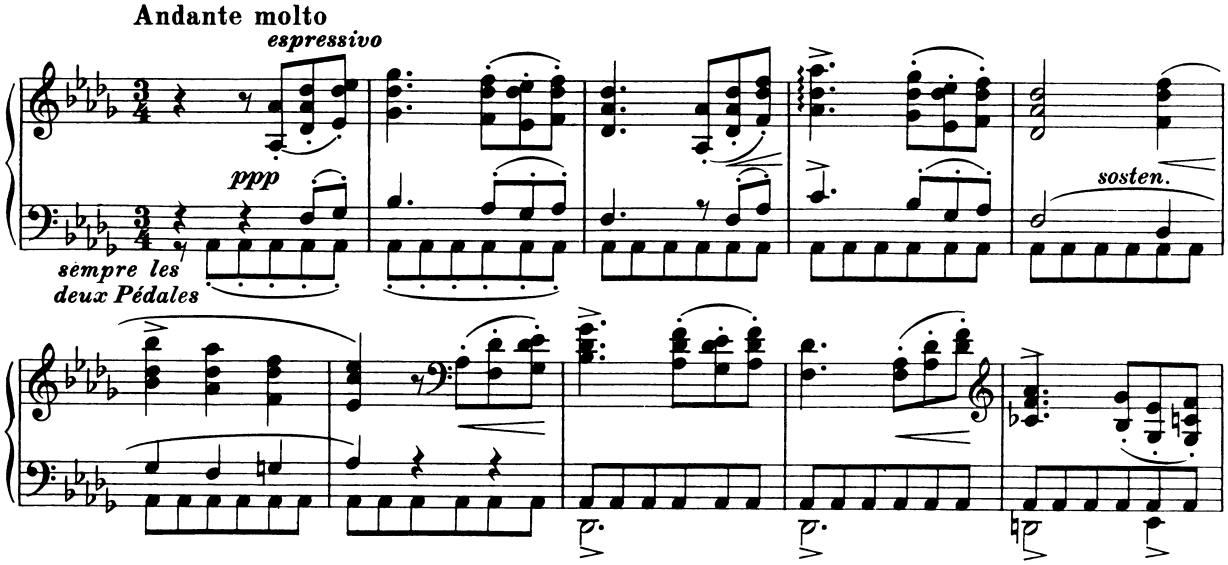
It seems obvious that Brahms, to paraphrase Natasha Loges, "was attracted by the broad emotional content of [this] poem (its *Stimmung*)… which mirrored his private emotions at the time."[10] And his repetition of the "*ich küsse dich*" line shows that, while he delivered the meaning of the line "again and again," he refused to limit himself to transcribing the it verbatim.

[10] Loges, 1.

Coda: The Poet Speaks

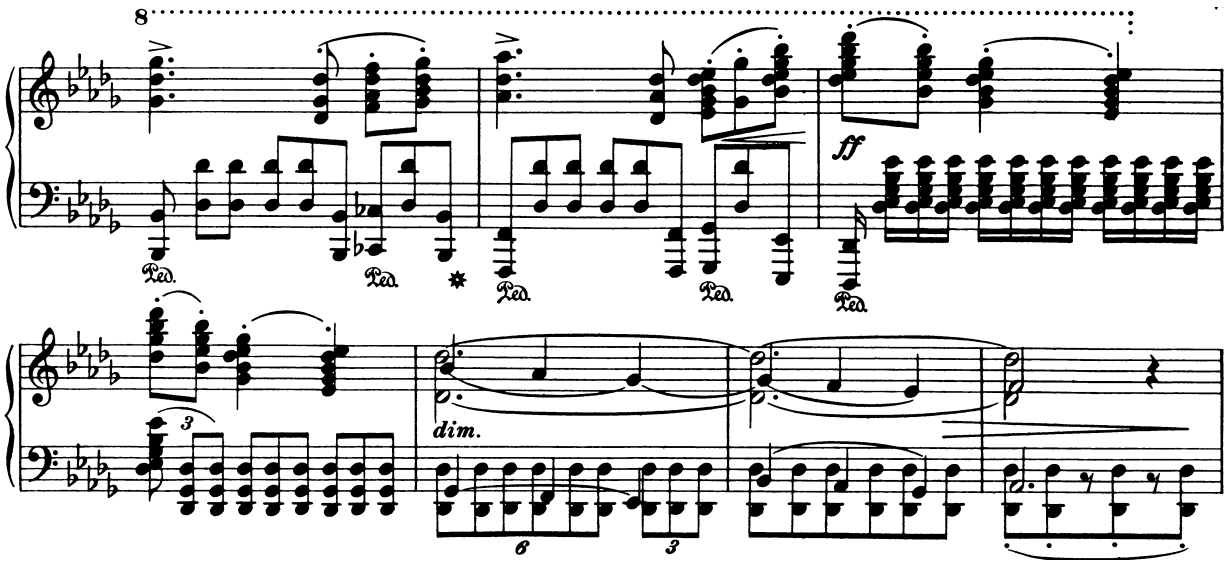
A moment of silence divides the ABA form and the coda, which gently creeps in over a repeated A-flat pedal tone (Figure 15). While most of the Andante stays in the realm of A-flat Major, the Coda is set in D-Flat Major (foreshadowing the B-flat Minor *Rückblick*):

Figure 15: Brahms Sonata No. 3, Op. 5: II. Andante, mm. 121-130



The three-part opening phrase, marked *espressivo* and pianississimo, contains brand new melodic material that builds over the course of the movement's final two pages:

Figure 16: Brahms Sonata No. 3, Op. 5: II. Andante, mm. 149-155



As the persistent pulsation in the bass quickens to a vibration, the crescendo grows from silence to a thunderous climax in measure 151 that spreads across the keyboard before disappearing in measure 154-155 (as the pulsation slows back down). It seems clear that this coda represents an unrestrained outburst of passion following the love scene described in the preceding ABA section.

With no text inscriptions, the purpose of this final section has been the subject of scholarly research and debate for decades. Adolf Schubring (in the same 1862 article where he declared the piece "program music") suggested that the melody resembles the German folk song *Steh' ich in finst'rer Mitternacht*, which describes a soldier remembering a night of love. George Bozarth agrees, even providing a musical incipit of the folk song, which seems to only roughly match the first phrase of the coda.[11] Scholars continue to disagree about whether the tune came from a pre-existing source or whether the coda was meant as an instrumental postlude. John Rink argues for the latter interpretation:

> There is good reason to suppose that such a function may have been intended by Brahms, given the similarity of two influential models. The first, Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* (a cycle of six songs about another 'distant beloved'), introduces an exciting piano postlude to round off the sixth song's reprise of the opening music and to suggest a rapturous union of the two lovers, just as the piano postlude in the final number of Schumann's *Dichterliebe* extends a repeated piano passage from the end of Song 12 to express the sense of reconciliation that the protagonist himself has been unable to articulate verbally. In both cases, the narrative conclusion or commentary is instrumental, not verbal, in nature, just as the piano-as-poet 'speaks' in the last work, 'Der Dichter spricht,' in Schumann's *Kinderszenen* (and, like the final postlude in *Dichterliebe*, employs a recitative style to do so).[12]

Both interpretations seem plausible, but with silence from Brahms himself on the matter, this debate is reduced to mere speculation. One thing remains clear, however: Brahms was clearly working with a program in mind.

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[11] Bozarth, "Brahms's *Lieder ohne Worte*," 363.
[12] Rink, 82.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

As Charles Rosen wrote, "there is a precedent for practically everything in Brahms."[1] Philosophically, artistically, and personally, Brahms valued the continuity of his legacy—even if it came at the expense of his own freedom. His habit of destroying manuscripts he considered inferior and reluctance to share autographs of his published works showed a self-corrective reflex rooted in longitudinal thinking. However, during the years between Schumann's 1853 *Neue Bahnen* pronouncement and the 1860 Manifesto he signed with Joachim, Brahms enjoyed a brief era of openness, bravely sharing public clues to the programmatic inspirations behind his piano music in a way that he would not again until late in life. In this early period, Brahms seemed eager to align himself with his mentor Schumann, naming pieces descriptively and leaving coded messages in his scores. Looking beyond his youthful aspiration, this behavior reveals the beginning of his lifelong love for poetry and literature—a love that was displaced to his lieder during the middle period of his career.

After he signed the Manifesto denouncing program music, Brahms likely sought to avoid the hypocrisy of continuing to share public programs to his instrumental pieces, instead offering them privately to his inner circle of colleagues and friends. His extraordinary song output and eventual return to public poetic programs (as in Op. 117) shows that even while Brahms may have been a bit ashamed to declare his programs publicly, he always maintained his desire to live in "poetical worlds."

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[1] Charles Rosen, "Brahms the Subversive" in *Brahms Studies*, edited by George S. Bozarth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 108.

Furthermore, the organic development and musico-linguistic sensitivity to poetic declamation in Brahms's programmatic solo piano music reveals an aspiration to the tradition of his true idol: Beethoven, whose programmatic piano music ("Les Adieux") was as organically connected to spoken language as his lieder (*An die ferne Geliebte*). Brahms's sensitivity to the poetic aspects of his text selections in Opuses 5, 10, and 117 also proves the depth of their importance to Brahms's programmatic narratives—these are not mere "extraneous aid[s]" to the composer's inspiration, as Florence May contends.

This paper does not intend to insinuate the presence of programs in movements or works where Brahms did not name them. However, much scholarly work has been done to connect Brahms's correspondence with members of his private circle to literary meanings behind many of the famous late piano pieces, including Op. 116, 118, and 119. His long-standing reluctance to declare programs publicly has led scholars such as Christopher Reynolds and Dillon Parmer to surmise that Brahms was "between absolute and program music."[2] However, from this paper's examination of the context as well as musico-linguistic and formal determinants of Brahms's publicly programmatic piano works, it seems clear that, while Brahms may not have written every one of his works with a representational intention, he was indeed a lifelong composer of program music.

[2] See Reynolds, "The Representational Impulse," 1; and Parmer, "Musical Meaning for the Few," 109.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY OF EXISTING DISCOGRAPHY

Brahms, Johannes. Ballades, Op. 10. Performed by Emil Gilels on *Johannes Brahms: 4 Balladen Op. 10; 7 Fantasien Op. 116.* Deutsche Grammophon, 2016. CD.

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