RECASTING GENDER:
19TH CENTURY GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE LIVES AND WORKS OF
ROBERT AND CLARA SCHUMANN

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CHAPTER I
THE SHAPING OF A FEMINIST VERNACULAR
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Introduction

Powerful and poignant, strains of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony waft through the air.

Oh bliss! Bliss and heaven! Oh, it was gorgeousness and gorgeousity made flesh. It was like a bird of rarest-spun heaven metal or like silvery wine flowing in a spaceship, gravity all nonsense now. As I slooshied, I knew such lovely pictures!

Alex DeLarge exclaimed in response. The main character in Anthony Burgess’ 1962 novel, A Clockwork Orange, Alex deeply associates classical music, and particularly Beethoven, with rape and violence—so closely connecting the two, that as doctors condition him against finding pleasure in brutality, he also loses his enjoyment of music, and ultimately, his own (twisted) humanity. Though concepts of music, emotion and self are rarely so closely entangled, Alex’s case speaks to an interrelationship to which feminist musicology responds. While absolute music argues for objectivity, music is inherently composed, performed and perceived through the tinted lenses of enculturation. Aesthetic, intangible and ephemeral, music both reflects and reinforces the cultural values of given times and places. From composers’ personal agendas and influences, to
performance practices and audience perceptions, socio-cultural implications subtly pervade even the most innocuous of works.

Beginning in the 1980s, the new wave of musicology began veering away from positivistic methodologies in an attempt to address music within its broader social context.¹ Feminist musicology represents one such branch within this "new" approach. Focused on reexamining the often neglected role of women in music, feminist scholarship seeks out forgotten female composers, studies musical manifestations of gender, and investigates the relationship between music, sex and society.² Both Robert and Clara Schumann exemplify the musical, professional and personal issues attended to by recent feminist scholarship. This paper will explore critical discourse relating to the Schumanns' place within the cultural and musical climate of the 19th-century, ultimately focusing on the ways Clara and Robert Schumann reflected, and strayed from, cultural conventions. In order to better understand the context into which recent gender scholarship falls, the first section of this paper will offer a three-tiered background consisting of 1) the evolution of gender studies, 2) relevant aspects of 19th-century society, and 3) specific applications of feminist analytical techniques.


The Evolution of Feminism

We should...understand the relationship of music and gender in terms of musical stylistic development that is charged on one hand by the relative autonomy of inherent musical process, and on the other hand by the aesthetic, cultural and economic changes of the era of the music’s production and reception... Women’s role = a symbiotic relationship between music and society.

—Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education*

As the American feminist movement of the 1960s raised awareness of women’s rights, women’s interests gradually seeped into musicology’s consciousness in an ideological “second wave” of the 1970s. The culmination of these influences led to the debut of feminist scholarship at the 1988 annual meeting of the American Musicological Society. Initially adopting an archeological approach, feminist scholars steered away from controversy for fear of committing “professional suicide.” Numerous neglected composers such as Ruth Crawford Seeger, Lili Boulanger, Germaine Tailleferre, Ethel Smyth, Cecile Chaminade, Amy Beach, Clara Wieck Schumann, Fanny Hensel Mendelssohn, Elizabeth Claude Jacquet de la Guerre, Isabella Leonarda, Barbara Strozzi, Francesca Caccini, the Countess of Dia, and Hildegard von Bingen benefited from this

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archival focus. Feminist musicology's cautious beginnings have since kindled new ideas, criticisms and controversies. Led by Susan McClary, Marcia J. Citron and Ruth Solie, feminist critique looks primarily—but not exclusively—for social constructions of gender within music. Such studies tend to ask one or both of the following questions: 1) How are men and women musically depicted? 2) What do the composer's musical choices tell us about the cultural climate of the period? Unlike traditional musicology, this branch of feminism feigns no pretense of neutrality; feminists acknowledge their own inherent bias. Believing this honesty will yield greater understanding, they marshal cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective in their efforts to recast music history.

Musicologist Lucy Green supports the need for cultural perspectives, stating: "Meanings must be understood as not only arising from, but also contingent upon music's social and historical contexts." Therefore, in the same way that a performer naturally differentiates his/her stylistic treatment of a staccato in the music of Beethoven from that of Berio, feminists offer similar potential for contextual subtlety.

Stretching beyond general reflections of culture, feminist scholarship also strives to highlight the experiential and physiological differences specific to female composers. From the subtleties of Hildegard and the Countess of Dia to Janika Vandervelde's more

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6 McClary IX.

7 Cusick 474.

explicit depiction of childbirth in Genesis II, feminists embrace music about the experiences unique to women. 9 Both the formation of a counter canon stressing women’s works and an increased emphasis on female composers in textbooks reflect this heightened attention. 10 Textbooks of the 1980s and 1990s seldom mentioned women musicians, though the recent popularity of female-focused texts, such as Carl Neuls-Bates' 1982 *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to Present*, Jane Bowers and Judith Tick's 1986 *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, James Briscoe's 1987 *Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, and Karin Pendle's *Women and Music: A History*, offer a greater quantity and quality of information with each subsequent edition and decade. 11

While textual revisions and archival research generated no notable controversy, feminist critique certainly has. Many speculate that early trepidation stemmed from three primary sources: the intangibility of music, Western emphasis on autonomy and the intrinsically institutional nature of the discipline. First, music’s intangibility renders concrete elucidation more troublesome. The concrete nature of art and literature lend themselves to interpretation, but music's unavoidable and unapologetic ambiguity naturally invites subjective interpretation—an invitation that “new” musicology readily accepts. 12 Second, the Western attachment to music as an autonomous entity leaves

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11 McClary 399-403.
musicians less interested in assessing the cultural implications of our discipline. Feminist (and other “new musicology” branches) challenge the ability of music to be absolute at all. If all music intentionally or unintentionally provides social and personal commentary, then it cannot transcend the human experience, but rather, merely represents another cultural artifact. Quick to examine cycles of influence and culture within the indigenous societies studied by ethnomusicology, Western musicology hesitates to look inward and recognize the same symbiotic relationship between art and society in our “civilized” cultures. Reflective of our "widespread feelings of Western superiority," these limitations ultimately shackle us to concepts of musical autonomy and positivistic methodologies. Freeing the exchange between creator and culture, however, invites deeper understanding of the roles and implications of performers, composers, pieces and audiences alike.

Third, the institutional and masculine structure of musicology naturally lends itself to resistance of new ideas and retention of convention. Concepts of universality and structure pervade both the academic and canonic sides of music. From the rigid organization of music schools to the discipline’s more nebulous canon, the formality of performance training and academia within the insular domain of music perpetuates pre-existing concepts of “superiority” and universality, therein indirectly advancing a preference towards historically established and fundamentally masculine characteristics.


13 McClary XI.

14 McClary 366.
and genres. The canon itself represents a prime example of this institutionalism, with its implied hierarchies often guiding unsubstantiated assumptions. The prominence of Mozart within the canon, for example, might lead a less studied listener to assume the superiority of his works to those of all his contemporaries, though that is certainly not always the case. As a product of society, the canon merely mirrors period ideologies and zeitgeists. As Citron reflects:

In a tone of high moral authority it has surrounded art music with the trappings of universality and timelessness. It has painted an elitist vision of music and infused it with an idealism many find inspiring. This helped legitimate music at a time when it lost its aristocratic underpinning and moved into the unknown territory of the public.

The reintroduction of music by women composers challenges this canon, and by questioning content, feminist musicology simultaneously questions the canon’s criteria for evaluation. While evaluative standards aren’t rigid, larger absolute works (often in sonata form) published after 1780 dominate the Western body of works. This canonic preference, however, expresses subtle gender bias itself, as a result of the historical linkage of absolute genres with men and shorter, descriptive works with women.

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15 Cusick 483.

16 Citron 179.
There is no greater joy than composing something oneself and then listening to it. There are some pretty passages in the Trio, and I believe it is also fairly successful as far as form goes. Naturally, it is still only woman's work, which always lacks force and occasionally invention.

—Clara Schumann writing of her Piano Trio in G op. 17

The elevation of absolute music and universality derives from masculine ideologies of power and supremacy, or so Citron, Cusick and others have theorized.\(^\text{17}\) Moreover, the female and male tendencies in regard to form also reflect, to some extent, the more prominent role of men both in culture and music.\(^\text{18}\) Limited to smaller forms and performance venues and denied a critical reception (to be discussed later), women’s music requires the application of broader social and historical understanding in order for its significance to be made clear.\(^\text{19}\) Because the two genders receive incomparable experience and educational tools, judging men and women without reference to this reality would be similar to judging performances on electric keyboards and Steinway pianos by the same standard; the differing vehicles of execution demand differing criteria of evaluation.

With the advent of industrialization and subsequent rise of new wealth and the middle class, 19th-century society saw a drastic alteration of class structure and social

\(^{17}\) Citron 22; Cusick 493.

\(^{18}\) Cusick 19.

dynamics, and consequently struggled to redefine gender roles.\textsuperscript{20} Out of this increasing homogenization and changing cultural values evolved the concept of the housewife.\textsuperscript{21} Women became defined by characteristics of passivity, self sacrifice, sensitivity, irrationality and an inclination towards nurturing functions. Men, on the other hand, adopted coldness, logicality, dominance and reasonability.\textsuperscript{22} Women were essentially men with a minus sign. While writing two centuries earlier, John Milton underscores the subservient role of women in \textit{Paradise Lost}, writing “He for God only. She for God in him.”\textsuperscript{23} Like the patron saint of music herself, St. Cecilia, women's involvement in both music and society was primarily symbolic.\textsuperscript{24}

A reflection of this secondary, inspirational and altruistic role, the popularized romantic ideal of \textit{das Ewig Weibliche} (“The Eternally Feminine”) along with a strategy referred to in modern times as the “gaze,” manifested themselves in a variety of social and artistic forms. Goethe’s \textit{Faust} vividly illustrates \textit{das Ewig Weibliche} through the pure and virtuous Gretchen’s sacrifice for the morally questionable protagonist, thus supporting the related 19th-century belief that man could be saved through the suffering

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\textsuperscript{20} Citron 22.\textsuperscript{21} Melanie Archer and Judith R. Blau. "Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: The Case of the Middle Class." \textit{Annual Review of Sociology} 19 1993: 20.\textsuperscript{22} Green 14.\textsuperscript{23} Qtd. Sophie Hutchinson Drinker. \textit{Music and Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music} (New York: Coward-McCann) 263.\textsuperscript{24} Drinker 264-265.\end{flushright}
and love of a good woman. Further, the contrast between Gretchen's docile immobility and Faust's vigorous volatility reflects the philosophical and literal immobilization of women characteristic to the period and the concept of the “gaze.”

At its pinnacle, this gender hierarchy is reflected in the “gaze,” a term referring to the male observance of a woman's actions, appearance or private activities. Numerous cultural artifacts speak to the pervasiveness of this ideology. Lawrence Kramer discusses the cultural implications of the “gaze” in his 1990 article, “Lizst, Goethe and the Discourse of Gender,” stating that, "Like most cultural icons, the immobilized woman forms a vehicle for numerous and conflicting meanings, among them sexual purity, erotic passivity, self-abnegation, commodification, and—perhaps above all—availability to be gazed at.” Musically articulated by simpler harmonic language, diatonicism, formal fluidity and non-developmental ideas, feminine stillness contrasts more active portrayals of men with complicated harmonic language, including fugues and counterpoint, formal clarity and highly directed and developmental motives.

Gazing reflects power as much as sexuality, with the act itself subjugating the woman as object to the gazer. William Butler Yeats’ "A Drinking Song" illustrates the objectified existence of 19th-century women articulated by the "gaze":

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26 Kramer 107-108.

27 Kramer 107.

Wine comes in at the mouth,  
And loves comes in at the eye;  
That's all we shall know for truth  
Before we grow old and die.  
I lift the glass to my mouth,  
I look at you and I sigh.29

Thus, this poem illustrates women’s physical, more than intellectual and emotional, presence in relationships (“love comes in at the eye”), with the act of gazing reinforcing reigning concepts of supremacy (“Before we grow old and die…I look at you and I sigh”).

To some extent, the sexual supremacy intertwined with the "gaze" also reflects the dark side of the Madonna/Whore dichotomy.30 Equally prevalent in the period, the Madonna/Whore split illustrates men's simultaneous and conflicted craving for a good woman (the "virgin ideal") and the dark, erotic and excessive opposite. Characterized by repression, contradiction and abandon, 19th-century sexuality both reflected and maintained social order yet was approached with apprehension and ambivalence.31

While traditional values emphasized the importance of control and sanctity, the prevalence of venereal disease attested to the rift between ideal and actuality.32 Men were frequently sent to the whore houses, admonished that, "A woman admires in man


30 Kramer 122.


32 Rosenberg 140.

33 Rosenberg 143.
true manliness, and is repelled by weakness and effeminacy. A womanish man awakens either the pity or the contempt of the fair sex.”

Further, because overt sexuality held lowbrow implications, the middle class suppressed desire as they aspired to climb the social ladder.

The parlor tradition, on the other hand, grew out of the Madonna side of femininity. With gender guiding both social and musical roles, men and women were separated into public and private spaces. Men inhabited the public sphere, which largely occupied all things outside the domestic realm, while women were confined to private contexts. Even when a woman ventured into the public arena, she still maintained characteristics of the private sphere. As a result, women’s opportunities were primarily limited to service, teaching and caring-inspired jobs. While women occasionally performed in public, like employment, these performances still held domestic associations; they often involved—or referred to—births and marriages and funerals. Even as women broke into the public sphere later in the century, cultural milieus and male dominated audiences harbored animosity towards female performers. Consequently, the private performance practice of salon music developed out of necessity, as women rarely strayed far from the home.

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34 Qtd. Rosenberg 141.

35 Green 13.


37 Post 43-45.
The more intimate nature of parlor music reflects the private setting of these performances. Predominantly female and typically limited to close friends and family, the salon tradition saw performances of popular music, Lied and chamber music. Women’s music favored vocal compositions both because of the more feminine implications of singing and the common use of the voice in accompanying domestic activities. The more complex/mechanical nature of instruments distanced performers from the bodily (and thus sexual) associations of vocal performance, which helps to explain why men were more likely to play instruments than sing.\textsuperscript{38} Prevailing Renaissance conceptions of feminine instruments as those "requiring no alteration in facial expression or physical demeanor" ultimately pointed to the keyboard instruments, harp and guitar as acceptable choices.\textsuperscript{39} Generally, the larger, louder and more complex the instrument, the more it conflicted with feminine ideals.\textsuperscript{40} Historically well-established, prominent Renaissance author, diplomat and Italian courtier Baldasare Castiglione underscored these feminine values as he invited readers to:

Imagine yourself what an unsightly matter it were to see a woman play upon a tabour or drum, or blow in a flute or trumpet, or any like instrument; and this is because the boisterousness of them doth both cover and take away that sweet mildness which setteth so forth every deed that a woman doeth.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} Green 52-53.

\textsuperscript{39} Carol Neuls-Bates and D. Moynihan. Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996). XII.

\textsuperscript{40} Green 58.

\textsuperscript{41} Qtd. Dahl 39.
The more feminine instruments typically complemented the womanly activities of music education, church performance and intimate musical entertainment. Keyboard instruments of the 19th-century became symbolic of bourgeois culture, domestic bliss and private female performance.\footnote{Leppert 111-115.} Further, musical proficiency showcased feminine qualities of elegance, poise and domesticity, characteristics attractive to potential male suitors.\footnote{Green 59.}

Upper-middle class families generally considered conservatory training for girls “nice,” but viewed professional occupation less favorably.\footnote{Reich 134.} Though a few women, such as Clara Schumann and Fanny Hensel Mendelssohn, defied conventions by developing active performance careers, their experiences were not typical and weighty emotional/cultural baggage undoubtedly accompanied their travels.\footnote{Reich 138-140.}

Even more subject to critical scrutiny than female instrumentalists, women composers battled the rebuke of critics, contemporaries and culture. Virtually invisible within music history, female composers have received renewed attention as feminist scholarship of the 20th and 21st centuries offer numerous theories to explain the dearth of women in music-history textbooks. Stated in summary and addressed subsequently, current scholarship cites the five most commonly recognized hindrances to the perpetuation of women’s music: (1) the socially imposed limitation to smaller “minor” genres and the resultant lack of originality, (2) limited performance opportunities (given
the containment to the private sphere discussed previously), (3) exclusion from formal
training, (4) inability to publish (5) failure to achieve professional status. In light of the
afore-mentioned associations of men with logic and women with emotional instability,
culture deemed music's creative and mental demands too complex for the female mind.
But as with instruments, some types of composition strayed further from feminine ideals
than others; thus female composers tended to write with brevity, sparse instrumentation,
and a more delicate character than their male counterparts. A few women managed to
compose symphonies, operas and other distinctively “masculine” works, but these remain
largely unrecognized.

Churches and universities continued to exclude women well into the 20th-century,
and even with the advent of women's colleges in the 19th-century, females were
discouraged from conducting and composing. Lili Boulanger's 1918 disqualification
from the Prix de Rome competition further exemplifies the residual reservations toward
female composers. After winning the Prix de Rome anonymously at the age of 18, the
competition modified the rules to limit participation to unmarried men under the age of
30. Although blatant discrimination of this sort waned in the later part of the century,
the prevailing distrust of female intelligence was expressed even as late as 1884, with one

46 Paula Higgins. "Women in Music, Feminist Criticism, and Guerrilla Musicology:

47 Green 82-115; Neuls-Bates XIV; Drinker 267-272.

48 Drinker 265-275.

49 Drinker 276.
German scientist's Breslau Conference presentation highlighting woman’s intellectual similarity to animals.\textsuperscript{50}

Finally, inability to publish and confinement to amateur status also set women at a disadvantage. While a vast array of published works does not guarantee a place within the canon, both publication and professional performance encourage notoriety and critical opinion—both necessary in securing a coveted spot within the canonic body. Female composers were defined first by their gender, and this less-than-subtle bias dominated critical reception.\textsuperscript{51} Inconsistency and contradiction peppered reactions to women’s works, which were often simultaneously accused of being “derivative” of masculine compositions, yet too tonally or formally free (considered traditionally feminine).\textsuperscript{52}

Ironically, while women and men alike condemned femininity in composition, music itself was generally thought of as feminine due to its often sensitive, emotional nature. The inherent effeminacy of music threatens the masculinity of male composers and performers, thus redoubling the masculine emphasis on rationality and transcendence

\textsuperscript{50} Drinker 272.


Stephen Miles ruminates upon the consequences of gender bias, stating that “The fact that [women] tend to be identified first by their sex ‘women composers’) shows how fundamental gender is to the reception of their work.”

\textsuperscript{52} Higgins 183.

In Paula Higgins’ Women in Music, Feminist Criticism, and Guerrilla Musicology: Reflections on Recent Polemics, she discusses the double standard by which women were evaluated, linking it to the 19th-century equation of femininity to madness. She discusses the precarious inhabitation of the Romantic genius on the precipice between male reason and “feminine (but not female) imagination.” Reviewers reflect this insecurity as they attempt to “control the symptoms of female dementia.”
and further marginalizing women throughout music history.\textsuperscript{53} To elaborate: the
Romantic genius is arguably androgynous. These heroic men inhabit the gray space
between assertive, logical masculinity and the expressive and adventurous formlessness
characteristic to “women composers.”\textsuperscript{54} Even the epitome of masculinity, Beethoven,
reflects these dueling characteristics in his late works as he ruptures the traditional sonata
form and defies harmonic expectation.\textsuperscript{55}

Modern society tends to resist the “invasion” or effeminizing of male dominated
arenas, and music is certainly not a historical exception.\textsuperscript{56} Writings from the late 19th
and early 20th centuries attest to an increase in hostility toward “woman composers” in
response to the rising skill and stature of female authors and composers; literary
luminaries such as Hemingway, Joyce and Hawthorne wrote harsh commentaries on the

\textsuperscript{53} Leppert 122.

\textsuperscript{54} Higgins 183-185.

\textsuperscript{55} Higgins 185.
Higgins asserts that the prevalent feminine attributes of Beethoven’s late style were
ultimately the same characteristics that provoked criticism and a lack of acceptance on
behalf of 19th-century audiences.

\textsuperscript{56} Higgins 189.
Higgins notes that sociological studies continue to reflect the aversion to women entering
male dominated domains and the subsequent devaluing of these areas in a “perceived
effeminization and loss of stature.” She cites the more recent inclusion of women in
sports via Title IX of the Civil Rights Act as one such example.
Reflected in music, Lennox Amott’s address to male composers in “Manliness in Music” underscores this insecurity; he writes that “effeminacy and affection in men are contemptible” and prescribes sports or similarly manly activities as the cure for artistic impulses such as composition and poetry. Outspoken composer Charles Ives further illustrates a more contemporary condemnation of feminine characteristics. Accusing other prominent composers of musical “emasculating,” he considers the music of Beethoven, Bach and Brahms “…too much of the sugar-plum for the soft-ears,” calling “Richy Wagner” a “soft-bodied sensualist=pussy?” and Sibelius “anemasculated cherry…[with] yellow sap flowing from a stomach that had never had an idea.” Lucy Green additionally asserts that both music and women are similarly describable as "fleecingly beautiful, ephemeral, desirable yet unattainable in their ineffability, contrived yet at the same time natural. Both possess a mysterious otherness, very unlike the stable, rational self-certainty of man in his opposition to nature."

Therefore, Green suggests that the innate similarities that women share with music provokes male composers to react defensively to the infiltration of women. As a result, masculine insecurity, coupled

57 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. “Tradition and the Female Talent” Poetics of Gender New York: Columbia University Press, 1986: 184-207. Offering insight into the underrepresented role of women in 19th and 20th-century art and literature, Gilbert and Gubar offer misogynist reactions (in the form of letters) to female talent. Perhaps the most famous of these responses to commercial achievement of women is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s assessment of female authors as “damned mob of scribbling women.”


59 Qtd. Treitler 37.

60 Green 86-87.
with this perceived link between music and femininity, fused to erect a misogynistic wall between women and music.

Soundings of Sex

The notion of gender in language…is a mark unique of its kind, the unique lexical symbol that refers to an oppressed group. No other has left its trace within language to such a degree that to eradicate it would not only modify language at the lexical level but would upset the structure itself and its functioning.

–Monique Wittig, *The Poetics of Gender*

Codified by Mozart and cultivated by Beethoven, the perception of sonata form as the superior genre—and the exclusion of women from its composition—carries with it implications for gender. Often discussed as “a metaphor for the gendered struggle," the sonata form tell us “a great deal about the representation of women and men in society, how ideologies affected how music itself was conceptualized and described, and how music had close ties with ideals and processes in society,” or so feminist musicology contends.\(^6^1\) The sonata form exudes masculinity from its early focus on form to an emphasis on distinct timbral character and tonal contrast. Describable as dominant, competitive and dynamic, the genre’s characteristics could be used interchangeably to describe 19th-century male ideals. Moreover, the Romantic infatuation with struggle and

\(^{61}\) Citron 134, 137, 141.
triumph, as exemplified by the early (“heroic”) Beethoven, has a distinctively male accent to it. As Citron reminds, "Beethoven the hero wasn't feminine."\textsuperscript{62}

While the fervor of continued contention surrounding gender and genre may imply otherwise, the defining of gender codes within sonata form is neither new nor originally the work of feminists. In fact, the recent contributions made by Citron and McClary pay homage to the theoretical groundwork of scholars A.B. Marx, Hugo Riemann, and Vincent D’Indy. Marx’s 1845 \textit{Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition}, pioneered the application of gendered meaning to sonata form by labeling the first and second themes masculine and feminine. The more assertive first theme ("masculine") is countered by a more lyrical ("feminine") second theme in a different key, with the latter eventually subordinated by the former. Riemann and D’Indy expounded these ideas in their respective 1888 and 1909 publications: \textit{Katechismus der Musik (Allgemeine Musiklehre)} and \textit{Cours de composition musicale}, both of which discuss gender as a fundamental basis of sonata form.\textsuperscript{63} D’Indy, particularly, develops the concept of gendered opposition and suppression as more than thematic in function:

\begin{quote}
Force and energy, concision and clarity: such are almost (in)variably the essential \textit{masculine} characteristics belonging to the first idea. . .The \textit{second idea}, in contrast, entirely gentle and of \textit{melodic} grace, is…eminently alluringly \textit{feminine}. . .(A)fter the active battle of the development, the being of gentleness and weakness has to submit, whether by violence or by persuasion, to the conquest of the being of force and power.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{62} Citron 134.

\textsuperscript{63} Liane Curtis. "Rebecca Clarke and Sonata Form: Questions of Gender and Genre." The \textit{Musical Quarterly} 81.3 (1997) 393-429.

\textsuperscript{64} Curtis 398.
Citron further cultivates D’Indy’s premise of gendered struggle, contesting that the formal structure itself holds sexual implications. With the tonic typically deemed masculine, Citron contends that divergence from the home key (and ensuing instability) illustrates the feminine “Other” and the subsequent struggle and triumph of the masculine “home” key provides poignant social commentary. 65 As addressed previously, Kramer similarly employs A.B. Marx’s notion of masculine vs. feminine themes as an analytical foundation for Liszt’s *Faust Symphony*, interpreting accents as reflective of Faust’s masculinity and fluidity, and the lack of formal structure and tonal direction as representative of the feminine character of Gretchen.66 Similarly, McClary’s discussion of the second theme of Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No.4* and Clement's *Opera or the Undoing of Women* both observe chromaticism as a vehicle for portraying not just gender but explicit female sexuality.67

McClary also adopts D’Indy’s concept of struggle as a starting point, but infuses her analyses with the larger influences of “narrative” and social and personal history. In particular, she reads significance into the degree to which a composer observes or departs from the conventions associated with a given genre. For example, in her discussion of Brahms *Third Symphony* in “Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute’ Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms’s Third Symphony,” she reflects on its function as a cultural

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65 Citron 21.

66 Kramer 103-106.

67 McClary XIII.

Modern interpretations differentiate between the types of female portrayed: diatonicism conveys innocent feminine character, chromaticism, female eroticism.
artifact, whose challenges to tonality, sonata form and narrative characteristics speak to “the increasing self-alienation of the late-nineteenth individual and his feelings of impotence in a totalizing world that always defeats in advance his challenges to its absolute authority.”68 Espousing that the symphony both reflects social values and realities of the time and those of the later decades of audiences and musicians with whom the work also finds resonance, she ultimately perceives Brahms as a partial narrator to 19th-century anxiety. Thus, more simply put, she perceives his digression from musical tradition as indicative of the estrangement of individuals, him self included, who feel helpless and voiceless within an ever evolving society. Moreover, the popularity of the work in later decades indicates through association the prevalence of similar ideals, issues and anxieties in modern audiences as they similarly connect with Brahms Third.

McClary takes discussions of masculinity further through her sexuality-oriented work in teleology, which likens musical fulfillment of expectations to sexual gratification.69 Perhaps the most controversial of her analyses, her reading of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony sparked hostility from both sides of the musicological divide. Like Alex DeLargo’s linkage between Beethoven and violence in A Clockwork Orange (see the opening of this thesis), McClary likens the recapitulation in the first movement to rape and brutality:


As if the thrusting impulse characteristic of tonality and the aggression characteristic of first themes were not enough, Beethoven’s symphonies add two other dimensions to the history of style: assaultive pelvic pound (for instance in the last movement of the Fifth Symphony and in all but the ‘passive’ third movement of the Ninth) and sexual violence. The point of recapitulation in the first movement of the Ninth is one of the most horrifying moments in music, as the carefully prepared cadence is frustrated, damming up energy which finally explodes in the throttling, murderous rage of a rapist incapable of attaining release.70

Cited often and frequently out of context, McClary later rewrote this particular passage in response to negative backlash, though for the purpose of this discussion, I chose to cite this more contentious early version. Hermann Kretzschmar’s less controversial interpretation of the same recapitulation, articulates that “The development unrolls the Faustian portrait still further: seeking and not attaining rosy fantasies of future and past….the fulfilled reality of a pain that now suddenly makes itself felt.”71 While these analyses provide vivid contrast, Kretzschmar illustrates that musicologists embraced narratives and metaphors as a means of understanding unsettling aspects of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony long before McClary entered the field. We see here a critical double standard that divides “feminist” and “traditional” musicology, with musicology essentially granting interpretative liberty only insomuch as that leeway doesn’t upset the traditional values of the discipline. By no means a feminist, Lawrence Kramer observes the Western tendency to hover over and protect the great canonic works:


71 Qtd. Treitler 38.
Music is all too easy to treat as an Abstract Entity, something in but not of culture and history. Perhaps the impulse to idealize music in these terms betrays a need to establish a preserve, a protected area where the compromises and brutalities of the world cannot encroach. Freud once compared our conscious fantasies—daydreams—to preserves like Yellowstone Park; perhaps the compositions we idealize are the national parks of high culture.72

So Kramer underscores our need to cling to masterworks because they represent stability, comfort and cultural stasis as much as they do our traditions and historical icons, with the double standard of musical criticism stemming from this reality.

McClary and her feminist colleagues oppose this submissive acceptance of tradition, with gendered readings such as McClary’s continuing to generate discord within contemporary musicology. Even among feminist scholars, controversy rightfully surrounds attempts to universalize encodings of gender and sexuality within music. Leo Treitler contends that feminist musicology opens a virtual “Pandora’s Box” of issues that he feels need not be addressed.73 Meanwhile, others view 20th-century feminist criticism as a reaction to 19th-century misogyny, ultimately questioning whether these subjective interpretations create a feminist double standard within musicology parallel in function to the masculine double standard they strive to eradicate.74 Moreover, the ambiguity that gender studies provokes numerous criticisms, with some scholars (in this case Green) pointing out that feminist musicology does not yet "reveal how gendered meanings


73 Treitler 38.

74 Green 127-29.
surface in that which is absolute about absolute music...they are allowing musical
delineations to influence the way they hear inherent meaning.”75 In addressing absolute
music, however, Green fails to address the function of universals as a socially
conditioned way of hearing. Similarly, in his 1997 article, “Critical Musicology and the
Problem of Mediation,” Stephen Miles criticizes current musicology’s tendency to ignore
the problem of mediation, defined as “the concrete link between music and society on the
levels of production and reception.”76 Quick to offer philosophical ponderings and vague
metaphors, but less forthcoming with supportive discussions and substantive evidence, he
identifies feminist musicology, and specifically Susan McClary’s application of
semiotics, as one of many culprits.

Feminist musicology may counter, however, that the “new” breed of critical
scholarship is philosophical in both roots and essence. Subjectivism in musicology may
be traced back to Theodor W. Adorno, who left a legacy of socially and philosophically
insightful—though only marginally “verifiable”—work, which laid the foundation for
current feminist scholarship.77 So while current critical musicology offers more support
than he himself sought to supply, demands for tangible evidence and objectivity conflict
with the goals of new critique, as a result of the masculine nature of “objectivity” and
“universality.” So while feminist musicologists are more objective than Adorno, they’re

75 Green 127.

76 Miles 723.

York: Continuum, 1988).
not objective enough for some other musicologists, and these opposing musicologists exhibit masculine traits in their emphasis on formal rigidity.

19th-century music portrays masculinity as clear, direct and assertive. Similarly, traditional positivistic scholarship is direct, clear and objective. Meanwhile, feminine themes are typically more expressive, meandering and personal and feminist musicology shares similarly expressive and subjective characteristics. Thus traditional musicology demands substantiated evidence, a request that cannot be fulfilled, as its masculine priorities would undermine the feminist approach itself. Aiming at objectivity would merely perpetuate a new-age breed of positivism while sweeping the newly emerging feminine voice under the philosophical rug. In *An Icon for Our Times*, Richard Taruskin points out that the way we interpret music often says more about us than the music itself—and to some extent, this notion may also find resonance within our interpretive choices, both individually and as a discipline. In an era that simultaneously embraces the stark clarity of advanced science and technology and heralds a social and global interconnectivity, we each bridge the varying levels of this contradictory divide.

While the rise of political correctness may have seen the fall of blatant appearances of gender in music, it by no means eliminates masculine and feminine

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78 Taruskin.
If some scholars criticize feminist musicology’s inability to articulate what is “absolute” about encodings of gender within “absolute music,” I would argue that the creation of such black and white standards would undermine the very premise of feminist critique. A reaction to the austerity of positivism, such formal rigidity nourishes the confirming ideologies against which feminist musicology grapples. Striving to approach each work as its own entity within a sphere of varied and shifting influences, feminist critique does not speak in absolutes. Having thus understood the cultural climate of the 19th-century, as well as the role of feminist musicology as a refreshingly subjective offshoot of traditional scholarship that strives to lend insight not only into individual works, but also into the lives of composers and the societies they inhabit, we may now discuss Robert and Clara Schumann. In recognizing the social and musical limits placed on women, we will observe the ways that Clara’s fame as a piano virtuoso defied tradition, while her later prioritization of family and reflections on her work succumbed to conservative 19th-century feminine ideals. Robert, as a Romantic composer of delicate melodies and piano works typical to (feminine) parlor performance, challenged the “masculine” style of writing on his own accord, but at the same time underscored the male imposition of constricting feminine ideals through his writing of the highly controversial Frauenliebe und Leben. Following a general exploration of Robert and Clara Schumann within the context of 19th-century cultural, the ideologies and

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Higgins discusses the highly gendered nature of musicology as a discourse. She cites numerous examples of gender anxiety throughout the discipline’s history: A.B. Marx’s labeling of “feminine” and “masculine” themes, Georg Andreas Sorge’s association of major and minor triads as male and female, respectively, Schoenberg’s search for “asexual” music, and Schenker’s sexually and metaphorically charged writings on music and his own graphic system of music analysis.
vocabulary of contemporary feminist critique will subsequently serve as the basis for a final investigation into the Schumanns’ music, with particular emphasis on meaning in Robert’s *Frauenliebe und Leben*. 
Born into the musical household of Marianne and Friedrich Wieck in Leipzig on September 13, 1819, Clara Wieck made her solo debut at the age of 9. An internationally known performing virtuoso by 11, she later went on to premiere works by Schumann, Chopin, Brahms and Beethoven, and to solicit the admiration of Goethe, Paganini, Louis Spohr, Chopin, Liszt, and Mendelssohn, among others. Clara’s father, pianist, pedagogue and businessman Friedrich Wieck, supplied her with the academic, business and musical training for a career as a concert pianist. Though her parents divorced in 1824, her mother, a celebrated singer and pianist herself, continued to support Clara and act as role model. From the age of 5, Wieck not only supervised her study of piano, languages and religion, but also saw that she received instruction in theory, violin, orchestration, counterpoint and composition from the best teachers in Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin. A dictatorial teacher, Wieck championed a teaching philosophy of combining “moderate work” with “physical exercise in the same proportion, attendance of good operas and personal maturity that far surpassed her years, Wieck made certain that Clara developed good musical taste by attending all of Leipzig’s significant performances.
Further, he asked that Clara copy his business correspondences in her diary, therein teaching Clara the logistical side of managing a performance career and ensuring that her knowledge and talent would not go to waste.\(^1\) Wieck continued to oversee Clara’s personal and professional life until she turned 19. He was infamous for his heavy-handed approach to rearing Clara, and she reflected on this reputation, writing:

\begin{quote}
My Father had to put up with being called a tyrant; however, I still thank him for it every day; I have him to thank for the freshness that has remained in me in my old age (at least in my art). It was also a blessing for me that he was exceedingly strict, that he reprimanded me when I deserved it and in so doing, prevented me from becoming arrogant from the praise the world showered on me. At times the rebuke was bitter, but it was still good for me!\(^2\)
\end{quote}

Initially introduced to Robert when Clara was only 9 years old, Clara’s later interest in Schumann marked the first significant, and most devastating, conflict between father and daughter. Refusing to condone their marriage on account that Schumann was licentious, psychologically unstable, musically inept and careless with money, Wieck demanded that Robert prove his ability to earn 2000 thalers per annum. Unable to do so, the couple was eventually forced to seek permission from the courts in an epic legal battle with Wieck beginning in 1837. Robert finally emerged victorious in the fight for Clara’s hand in 1840.

Wieck’s less public concern for his daughter’s marriage stemmed from her piano performance. As both instructor and organizer of Clara’s artistic endeavors, he worried


that marriage might hinder her active career—a concern that proved well founded.
Domestic duties and the birth of her eight children between 1841 and 1854 somewhat curtailed her professional endeavors, though Clara continued to perform, compose and teach in moderation following their union. After the birth of her eighth child and death of Robert in July of 1856, Clara, only 36, promptly resumed her active performance career, eventually taking a position as professor of piano at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt in 1878.³ Though the financial and physical care of her children necessitated her increased activity, her career ambitions no doubt stemmed more from her deeper recognition of her own artistic value than from maternal motivation.⁴ Brahms provided invaluable friendship throughout this challenging period of Clara’s life as she struggled to cope with the grief of her husband’s death while raising his (then) seven children.⁵

³ Reich 2.

⁴ Neuls-Bates 99-100.

⁵ Hinson 2.
Clara as a Pianist & Composer

Despite gender prejudices, audiences heralded Clara Schumann, “Europe’s ‘Queen of the Piano,’” as one of the foremost pianists of her time. Appointed as the venerable Imperial Chamber-Virtuoso to the Austrian Court at the age of 19—a rare privilege for such a young woman and a foreigner—she received praise for her technical precision, polished tone and “poetic spirit.” In the same year, an article in the *Neue Zeitschrift fur Musik* likened her pianistic skill to that of male celebrities Liszt, Thalberg and Adolf von Henselt. Credited with raising the status of the 19th-century solo piano recital above its previous existence as a vehicle for showy personal flair, Clara devoted herself to presenting the best of “serious” piano repertoire with the highest level of musical attention. Student, Franklin Taylor, wrote of her thoughtful performances thus:

As an artist, Mme. Schumann’s place was indubitably in the very first rank; indeed she may perhaps be considered to stand higher than any of her contemporaries, if not as regards the possession of natural or acquired gifts, but in the use she made of them. Her playing was characterized by an entire absence of personal display, a keen perception of the composer’s meaning, and an unfailing power of setting it forth in perfectly intelligible form.

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6 Reich 3.

7 Reich 3.

8 Hinson 3. This April 27, 1838 article offered an indepth survey and comparison of the various characteristics of each pianist. Hinson surmises the article: “Liszt embodied impassioned performance; Thalberg, refined sensualism in expression; Clara, irrepressible enthusiasm; Henselt, Germanic Lyricism. Liszt’s playing was diabolical; Thalberg’s fascinating; Clara’s ennobling; Henselt’s exciting.”

9 Hinson 3.
Typical to the showy style, the standard piano recital previously showcased flashy virtuoso 19th-century works, often written by the performer him- or her self. Along with Liszt, Clara was one of only a few pianists to perform from memory and pioneered the now standard tradition of performing a solo piano recital without the aid of assisting artists. Her innovation of the typical piano program also includes her introduction of the balanced piano recital—a shorter program that presents prominent Baroque, Classical and Romantic works and pays due respect to each composer.

Because tradition had previously deemed the performance of self-composed virtuoso works the norm, Clara composed numerous show pieces in her early performance career but eventually ceased composing. While Clara’s works received great audience acclaim, her November 1839 diary entry reflects both her self-conception as a performer, not composer, as well as the cultural stigma that accompanied female composition:

I once thought that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose—not one has been able to do it, and why should I expect to? It would be arrogance, though indeed, my father led me into it in earlier days.  

For such an uninspired conception of female composition to come from a talented woman composer herself provides a pointed commentary on the depths of 19th-century gender influences, which saw (and quickly discarded) the success of only a few female musicians. While a reference to “Schumann” today immediately evokes the style of Robert Schumann, the 19th-century may have just as quickly been reminded of Clara. With early audiences as mesmerized by the young Clara Wieck’s compositional talents as

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10 Neuls-Bates 154.
by her virtuosity, the majority of her early recitals featured at least one of her own works, nearly all of which received publication (a rare accomplishment for a female composer), beginning with her Polonaises op.1 in 1831.\textsuperscript{11} Employing creative modulation, strong harmonies and rhythmic expressiveness, her compositional style is comparable to that of such noted Romantic composers as Robert Schumann, Mendelssohn and Chopin.\textsuperscript{12}

Preferring virtuosic show pieces and lyrical character works in her early years, she later matured to song composition following her marriage to Robert. Clara stopped composing after Robert’s death and subsequently became known more as a pianist and pedagogue, with her earlier compositions remaining ignored until the advent of commercial recordings in the 1970s. Recent attention sparked nearly 100 recordings and other broadcasts of her works, as well as the excavation of numerous published and unpublished compositions.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{center}
\textbf{The Life of Robert Schumann}
\end{center}

\begin{quote}
Music is the ability to express emotion audibly; it is the spiritual language of emotion.

—Robert Schumann
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11} With the composer-performer as an accepted, if not expected, feature of 19th-century piano performance, the majority of recitals featured at least one improvisation or variation composed by the performer him or her self. Nearly all of Clara’s concerts prior to 1840 featured at least one such work.

\textsuperscript{12} Reich 4.

\textsuperscript{13} Reich 4.
While the 60-page *New Grove Music Online* entry on Robert Schumann (compared to a meager four pages devoted to Clara) could easily lead modern audiences to falsely assume Robert’s 19th-century celebrity status, he only later received acclaim for his contributions to Romantic music. Born in Zwickau, Saxony on June 8, 1810, Schumann was recognized predominately as a writer, and later, as the husband of the more famous pianist, composer and teacher, Clara Wieck Schumann.¹⁴ Best remembered for his piano music, lieder and select chamber and orchestral works, Schumann drew inspiration from poetry and literature while influencing generations of new composers through his innovation of form, tonal development, creation of melodic material and contrapuntal expansion.¹⁵

Schumann struggled with mental illness throughout his life, with a serious breakdown in 1854 landing him in an asylum at Endenich for two years and ultimately leading to his death in 1856. Among Schumann’s diary entries was one reference to his contraction of syphilis in 1832. Though he wrote that arsenic cured him, his 24 year battle with psychological issues likely stemmed from this infection, with the hallucinations and

¹⁴ Hinson 11.

“Europe’s foremost spokesman for romantic music,” Robert Schumann founded the *Neue Zeitschrift fur Musik* as a result of the declining musical taste he observed throughout Germany. This two times weekly publication offered articles on various musical subjects and reviews of concerts, printed music and books. He contributed approximately 1,000 pages to the journal over his 10 year reign as editor-in-chief.

auditory symptoms beginning in February of 1854 likely representing the final stages of the disease.\textsuperscript{16}

Robert the Writer/Critic

Son of publisher, bookseller and writer, August and Johanna Christiana Schumann, Robert’s upbringing was as infused with literature as Clara’s was with music. Particularly influenced by the works of Jean Paul, Schumann’s infatuation with the author first took hold prior to his brief enrollment as a law student at the University of Leipzig. Though his legal studies proved unfruitful, his time in Leipzig opened personal and professional avenues through his commencement of studies with Wieck, and resultant introduction to Clara. Equally drawn to literature and music, he chose to pursue music only in July of 1830, reflecting that he was “excellent in music and poetry—but not a musical genius: (my) talents as musician and poet are at the same level.”\textsuperscript{17} Having formerly studied with Wieck, his mother consented to her son’s newfound ambition given the approval of his previous teacher. With support from Wieck, Schumann recommenced daily study as a boarder in the Wieck home. While Schumann devoted himself to preparation for a career as a composer-pianist, hand problems (likely brought on by his

\textsuperscript{16} Daverio and Sams, “Endenich, 1854-6” 1.

\textsuperscript{17} Daverio and Sams.
use of a chiroplast), coupled with Wieck’s less than subtle focus on promoting his young daughter’s career, eventually led to his self-conception as composer-critic.18

Schumann’s passion for literature fed his writings on music, forging a new style of criticism that extended beyond the tonal/formal elements of the compositions and offered broader historical and intellectual perspectives. The 1833 creation of the Neue Leipziger Zeitschrift für Music, published twice-weekly, marked the integration of Schumann’s duel interests as well as his primary vehicle for voicing his musical commentary.

Initiated by a group of similarly minded musicians and artists concerned by the superficiality of much 19th-century concert music, this inaugural group included pianist Julius Knorr, painter and composer J.P. Lyser, music critic E.A. Ortlepp and philosopher J.A. Wendt. The publication’s premiere editorial board in March 1834 consisted of Knorr (editor-in-chief), Schumann, Schunke and Wieck, but as a result of conflict among the board members, Schumann eventually took leadership, functioning as editor-in-chief from January 2, 1835 until 1844. Though Schumann later reflected on the uselessness of his journalistic endeavors, his experiences as editor of the Neue Leipziger Zeitschrift ultimately exposed him to a wider variety of new compositions and marked the quintessential union of his poetic and musical interests. His musical approach to poetry

18 Daverio and Sams, “Discoveries and Disappointments,” 2.

The chiroplast (or “cigar mechanism” as Schumann often referred to it) was a 19th-century tool for strengthening the fingers what Schumann began using around 1829 while he resided in Heidelberg. By January of 1830 Schumann reportedly complained of “numbness” in the middle finger of his right hand. These complaints worsened through November 1832 when he wrote to his mother: “for my part, I’m completely resigned (to my lame finger), and deem it incurable.” This resignation took place after a series of failed treatments, including animal baths (inserting hand into the entrails of an animal carcass), “electrical” tehrary and homeopathic treatment (diet and herbal remedies).
and poetic approach to composition inevitably shaped all of Schumann’s creative endeavors.  

Relationship

Posterity shall regard us completely as one heart and one soul. 

–Clara Schumann

Despite Clara’s controlling father, their age difference, other love interests and conflicting musical ambitions, the union of Clara and Robert came to pass against all odds. Attracted to each other many years before their courtship began, these many prevailing issues, as well as their contrasting personalities, threatened any prospect of a relationship surpassing that of close friendship. While Robert was characterized by a kind gentleness and Clara by musical talent and an outgoing personality, the personal qualities each found attractive in the other further distanced both from socially conceived gender characteristics from the start. Further underscoring his divergence from traditional patriarchal principles, Robert vehemently opposed the harsh treatment and training of Clara’s father. Though tensions inevitably arose, the couple’s “Ehetagebuch” (marriage diary) further attests to the depth of their relationship. This journal, written in weekly for the first four years of their marriage, was Robert’s 21st birthday gift to

19 Daverio and Sams.

Clara. While diary writing was a common practice among the middle and artistic classes up until the late 19th and early 20th-century, shared journals were far more rare. Couples often began as co-authors but quickly discarded the notion after only a few weeks. Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and his wife Cécile illustrate one such example—while they began a journal on their honeymoon, writing ceased upon their return to normal life. Maintaining the diary for such a prolonged time, Robert and Clara marked the exception as co-authors, partners and musicians. This section will explore Robert and Clara’s relationship and the various ways it reinforced, and departed from, social norms.

Robert and Clara’s relationship simultaneously embraced some 19th-century marital conventions while defying others. While far more aspects of their marriage were unconventional, the tension surrounding Clara’s performance career, as well as their marital roles reflected prevailing social expectations. Though Robert rather unconventionally encouraged his wife’s composition and practicing, even contacting publishers on her behalf, his own composition and study clearly took precedence over hers; thus her practicing was limited to times when he wouldn’t be bothered and her domestic duties were complete. Clara’s longing to tour and perform caused further marital strife. One example of this ongoing tension appears in Clara’s October and November 1940 trip to Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark, when she requested

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22 Gerd Nauhaus, ed. X-XXV.
Schumann’s company in her travels. Robert wrote of this conflict in the couple’s diary, confessing:

The separation has once more made me very conscious of my peculiar and difficulty position. Am I to neglect my own talent in order to serve you as a companion on your journeys? Have you allowed your talent to lie useless, or ought you to do so, because I am chained to the paper and to the piano? Now, when you are young and in full possession of your powers? We found the solution. You took a companion with you, and I came back to the child and to my work. But what will the world say? Thus I torture myself in thinking. Yes, it is most necessary that we should find some means by which we can both utilize and develop our talents side by side.

The journal entry illustrates the artistic, domestic and social dilemma facing Robert and Clara. Robert’s hope, however, that they could find a way to “utilize and develop our talents side by side” reflects his progressive views on gender equality. While conflict arose in response to Clara’s performance, she ultimately enjoyed a great deal of independence.

The inspiration Robert drew from Clara, the couple’s compositional collaboration, Robert’s reviews of his wife-to-be, as well as their high regard for each other’s musical opinion, all reflect the pair’s mutual musical and personal esteem. In the early years of their courtship Robert wrote numerous Clara-inspired works, beginning with *Impromptus sur une Romance de Clara Wieck*. This work, which paid homage to a motive from Clara’s *Romance*, also integrated a series of falling 5ths as a reminder of the many

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23 Daverio and Sams.

afternoons the two spent sight-reading Bach fugues in May of 1832. While the notion of a 19th-century woman as muse represents no novelty, the quotation of a female composer provides a rarer and more meaningful compliment. Robert’s desire to collaborate with her on a composition further speaks to his exceptional respect for his wife’s abilities. Impressed by Clara’s 1840 Christmas gift of musical settings of poems by Burns (Am Strande) and Heine (Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen and Es fiel ein Reif), Robert suggested they co-compose a volume of lieder together. The product, Zwölf Gedichte aus F.Rückerts Liebesfrühling, was published as Schumann’s op.37 and Clara’s op.12 the following year.

Unrestrained in his admiration for his wife’s musicianship, Robert wrote of her Soirées for Piano, Opus 6:

There should also be a female head to adorn our museum…The Soirées betray, on the one hand, and plain for anyone to see, a life effulgent and tender, apparently responsive to the slightest stirring; on the other hand, a wealth of unconventional resources, an ability to entangle the secret, more deeply twisting threads and then to unravel them, something one is accustomed to expect only from experienced artists—and males!

This review simultaneously illustrates conventional and unconventional symptoms of gender in the relationship of this 19th-century duo: on the one hand, Robert applauds Clara’s work, but on the other, he interprets her refined and polished attributes as fundamentally masculine. No doubt, Schumann constitutes an overtly biased reviewer


27 Pleasants, 122-123.
due to his personal connection to Clara, but this type of review is highly similar to other critiques of the young Wieck virtuoso, who appeared to largely escape the critical wrath often directed at female composers and performers (more on this later).

Similarly divergent from social convention, Robert and Clara solicited and offered musical advice to one another, with Robert frequently making revisions and taking on new genres at Clara’s suggestion. Even before their marriage Robert sought her opinion:

Please write and tell me how you liked the *Phantasiestücke* and *Davidsbündlertänze*—sincerely, please; not as though you were speaking to your fiancé, but as though speaking to your husband, will you? *Träumeswirren*, I believe, could occasionally be played by you in public together with *Des Abends*. *In der Nacht*, however, is too long, perhaps…In the *Davidstänze* the clock strikes twelve at the very end as I have discovered.\(^{28}\)

This excerpt from Robert’s February 12, 1838 letter attests to both his high regard for her unadulterated opinion (particularly in asking her to react as she would to a husband rather than a fiancé, thus implying that he wants her to surpass niceties and politeness in favor of honesty) and Clara’s important role in promoting Schumann’s works. Premiering nearly all of Robert’s compositions from the onset of their relationship, Clara’s performance and promotion of her husband’s compositions is often cited as one of her greatest achievements.

Clara represented, to some degree, the force of financial and emotional stability within the household, leading many to deem her the more dominant one in the

relationship. While Robert was not so progressive as to blithely accepted Clara’s wish to “use her hands to support” her husband, he certainly recognized the uniqueness of their relationship as two independent artists equally dedicated to their art and to each other.²⁹

Clara Schumann’s *Concerto for Piano in A minor*

Clara began composing her first large-scale work, the *Concerto in A minor, Op. 7*, in January of 1833 at the age of 13. Initially intended as a Konzertsatz, or one movement orchestral work featuring the piano, her initial ideas evolved to demand a more expansive vehicle of expression: the concerto. Aided in part by her future husband, this concerto marked the first of their many aforementioned collaborations. Both her diary and their letters attest to his involvement, particularly in Robert’s orchestration of the third movement.³⁰ An astounding accomplishment for a teenager, the work markedly contrasted her previous compositions in musical and structural maturity and derived inspiration from the stylistic characteristics of Kalkbrenner and Herz and structure of Mendelssohn’s recently premiered G Minor Concerto. After numerous revisions and several smaller performances, the full work was performed at the Gewandhaus under Mendelssohn’s direction on November 9, 1835.³¹

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²⁹ Nauhaus XXII-XXIII.

³⁰ Reich 227.

³¹ Reich 227.
Constructed in 3 movements intended to be performed without break, the concerto departs from traditional classical form in its connection of the movements, divergence from tonal conventions, and in Clara’s decision to forego cadenzas and traditional relationships between soloist and orchestra. The first movement relegates the orchestra’s function primarily to a supportive role. A surprising choice of A-flat major for what was simultaneously a development section and the second movement provoked disapproval from critics but by no means signals a lackadaisical structuring of the work.\(^{32}\) This lyrical *Romanza* second movement highlights the solo cello, which accompanies the piano while the orchestra remains dormant. The contrasting and more expansive third movement, however, relies more heavily on the orchestra to create a dialog between the soloist and accompaniment.

Claudia Macdonald’s “Critical Perception and the Woman Composer: The Early Reception of Piano Concertos by Clara Wieck Schumann and Amy Beach” candidly addresses the differing standards of judgment applied to male and female composers. Recognizing that women were more accepted as performers than composers, and as a result, that their compositions solicited audience approval as a starting point, Macdonald defends the use of “performance-oriented gestures,” which are defined as musical gestures or characteristics intended to appeal to audiences. She argues that since “these gestures may well have been born of an instinctive sense gained through experience of what is effective before an audience,” the freedom of expression they created represented “essential parts of the design.”\(^{33}\) The evaluations of masculine-minded critics

\(^{32}\) Reich 227-228.
condemned this flagrant pandering to the public when exploited by women but validated its use in male composers, typically attributing successful female compositions to innate ability rather than intellectual ability or musical training.\textsuperscript{34} Macdonald cites even modern examples of this, as shown in the entry on Clara Schumann in the \textit{New Grove Dictionary}, when Pamela Susskind states that the concerto is “remarkably effective for a 15-year old girl.”\textsuperscript{35}

Undoubtedly conceiving of herself as a performer first, Clara employed such gestures, as well as harmonic freedom and beautiful melodies, in order to create a sense of improvisation on behalf of the performer. Robert’s first reaction to the work admires Clara’s artistry:

\begin{quote}
The first strains that we heard flew before us like a young phoenix fluttering upwards. Passionate white roses and pearl lily cups leaned down, orange blossoms and myrtle nodded above, and between them, alders and weeping willows threw their melancholy shadows. In their midst, however, a girl’s radiant face bobbed and searched for flowers to make a wreath.”\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

Later, however, his preference for the masculine emphasis on formal clarity manifests itself, as Robert writes that:

\begin{quote}
\begin{flushright}
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{\footnotesize 34 Macdonald 25.}
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{\footnotesize 35 Macdonald 25.}
\end{flushright}
\begin{flushright}
{\footnotesize 36 Qtd. MacDonald 27.}
\end{flushright}
\end{quote}

Robert’s response to her first performance of the composition appeared in one of his Schwärmbriefe (“Musing Letters”) in the \textit{Neue Zeitschrift für Musik}. 

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If heaven has conferred upon you a lively imagination…
Beware…lest you give yourself over too often to a talent
that will tempt you to waste time and energy, as it were, on
poetic fancies. You will gain mastery of form, force of
clear formulation only through the permanent testimony of
writing.37

This emphasis on form and control is illustrated in his review of other works, and, given
the progressive nature of Clara’s writing for the time, guarantees Schumann’s ideological
disagreement (even if such dissatisfaction remains only subtly expressed). Critics, like
Schumann, maintained similarly strong beliefs that movements should remain
autonomous and that the work as a whole should adhere to conventional harmonic and
formal framework. While Schumann tactfully protests her departure from tradition
(writing that although “the concertino is somewhat lacking in unity, yet it is fashioned
with imagination and spirit”), other critics were less diplomatic.38 One critic for the
Viennese Allgemeiner Musikalische Anzeiger, commented on the unexpected key of the
second movement but comes to terms with this irregularity, concluding “Women are
moody.”39 Other reviews, such as Ferdinand Becker’s, were positive but shallow and
tended to emphasize gender over all else.40 He, like other critics, could only see the score
through the male shrouded spectacles of 19th-century society, thus overlooking the
charming attributes that enthralled audiences. MacDonald explores Wieck’s construction
and unification of the work, illustrating that while she didn’t adhere to male conventions

37 MacDonald 27.
38 MacDonald 36.
39 MacDonald 31.
40 MacDonald 30.
of form, her concerto is neither haphazardly written, nor is it devoid of unification. In fact, strong thematic and harmonic interconnections, bridges and thematic reiterations serve to fuse individual melodies and the movements themselves into a highly integrated whole.\textsuperscript{41}

Two years after the premiere, on November 29, 1837, Schumann questioned Wieck’s choice of repeatedly programming the work, writing “Do you always play your Concerto of your own initiative? There are stellar ideas in the first movement—yet it did not make a complete impression on me.”\textsuperscript{42} While this question may have stemmed from Schumann’s suspicion that her father was forcing her to program the work as a freak-show style “curiosity piece,” given the unconventionality of a young woman performing her own composition, she was nevertheless offended. Clara haughtily responded that she continued to play her work for her audiences who enthusiastically received it time and time again.

Since Clara conceived of herself as a performer first, her public’s satisfaction was her foremost concern. The programming of her early concerts, in particular, blatantly illustrates her awareness of public taste both in the length and the superficial yet stunning nature of her selected works.\textsuperscript{43} Unbiased by formal conventions and structural rules, audiences repeatedly warmly received her concerto. MacDonald argues that compositional differences between male and female composers, such as Amy Beach and

\textsuperscript{41} MacDonald 31-36.

\textsuperscript{42} MacDonald 35.

Wieck, mirror differing social ideals: because women were more accepted as performers than as composers of music, they wrote as performers; therefore their writing reflected the considerations of the soloist who would perform the work. MacDonald discusses of the canonic disadvantages of catering to the public, relating that “great music by male composers, the music about which history is primarily written, bends little toward the tastes of the general public.” In the case that male composers did employ the same overtly crowd pleasing style, critics emphasized other aspects of the performance, such as his stage presence or the deeper musical aspirations of the work. Liszt marks one such example of this phenomenon. If male composers were recognized for their similar exploitation of audience appreciation, the innately public oriented nature of 19th-century female works, such as Schumann’s *Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 7*, could no longer be discredited.

Thus, while Clara Schumann’s achievement as a piano virtuoso, coupled with her independence and the unique partnership she shared with Robert, raise her above socially repressive norms, even she could not entirely escape the censure of her gender. Her piano concerto adheres to common preconceptions of female composers, with its less formally rigid characteristics soliciting the gendered criticism of reviewers, these

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44 Susskind Pettler 70-76. She reflects that Clara’s repertoire choices artistically matured with age, as did her compositional style, as she transitioned to writing Lied, and eventually ceased composing altogether. Works by Beethoven, Chopin and Schumann became more dominant in her programs, ultimately leading to the artistically and historically sensitive performances with which she eventually became associated. A standard program included at least one bigger work, as well as several smaller pieces, which starkly contrasted her earlier programming choices in both breadth and style. This trend reverberates strongly in the subsequent history of piano recitals.

45 Macdonald 54.
performance oriented attributes reflected her self-conception as a performer. Robert Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und Leben* similarly illustrates gender norms while subtly defying those very conventions it articulates. The next section will explore the controversy that surrounds the varied and contrasting gender-focused interpretations of Schumann’s *Frauenliebe* song cycle.

*Frauenliebe und Leben: A Woman’s Love and Life?*

A song cycle comprised of eight songs based on the *Frauenliebe* poems of Adelbert von Chamisso, Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und Leben* (aptly translated to mean “A Woman’s Love and Life”) often provokes discord among contemporary audiences and scholars. Meant to describe the life of a woman, with love as the central focus, the first of the eight songs depicts her initial encounter with him (see Appendix for full lyrics). He “blinds” her through his presence. In the second song she speaks worshipfully of him, wishing only to serve him. The third song tells of their engagement and her subsequent joy and disbelief. Song four sees her serenade the engagement ring, expressing her undying devotion to him. The next tells of her sisters readying her for the wedding and her departure. Songs six and seven bring the news, and the birth, of their child. The final song mourns the husband’s death. While some view the work as a cultural artifact, others accuse the song cycle of propaganda—an example not of “the way things were” but, rather, the way men believed women should think and act. The unique nature of the Schumann’s own relationship, as well as the work’s composition in July of 1840 (the near eve of their wedding) further blur the cultural and personal messages
encoded within the cycle. The next section will focus on three pieces of contemporary scholarship that each offer new and contrasting perspectives on the meanings—articulated and implied—of Schumann’s *Frauenliebe* songs.

Whose life? The Gendered Self in Schumann’s *Frauenliebe Songs*

—Ruth Solie

Though actually conveying the sentiments of men, they are of course to be performed by a woman, in a small and intimate room in someone’s home, before people who are known to her and some of whom might well be potential suitors; she is unlikely to be a professional singer but, rather, someone’s daughter or niece or cousin—and ordinary woman, significantly enough—and she sings, in the native tongue and contemporary idiom of herself and her hearers, texts which seem already to have been popular favorites, no doubt to an audience of approvingly nodding heads. We are irresistibly reminded of the familiar cultural trope in which woman is positioned, docile and immobile, under the male gaze; and we are reminded, moreover, that it is a crucial part of the effectiveness of this fantasy that she appear to present herself so, to speak for herself.

In “Whose life? The Gendered Self in Schumann’s *Frauenliebe Songs,*” Ruth Solie explores Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und Leben* as doing “cultural work.” Structuring her argument in two parts, she first points out that the songs illustrate male “fantasy” and antiquated ideologies that had only recently seeped into late 18th and early 19th-century German culture. Whereas previous gender delineations limited themselves to household

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47 Solie 226-7.
and social roles, new gender definitions implied that characteristics were “nature based” and stemmed from a governmental attempt to suppress socially problematic behaviors, as well as the development of capitalism.48 Advances in the sciences, such as medicine, anthropology and psychology, bolstered this cause, (as well as the causes/justifications of other socially dominant groups) by offering tangible evidence to support social hierarchies. Solie further points out that conceptions of the sexes and patriarchal values did not necessarily permeate the masses: a burgeoning women’s movement in Germany, the establishment of the first generation of women writers and increased contention surrounding marriage attest to this fact.

Section two asserts that the male fabrication of a “woman’s voice” in the cycle carries a “social message.” Citing specific examples within the songs, Solie emphasizes the tendency for all of the songs in the first half (up until the point that her bridesmaids are preparing her for the wedding) to fixate on him. “His image, his character, his choice of her, his ring,” she concludes that the woman’s voice may only be heard once she’s safely snared within the confines of patriarchal rules, at which point she’s allowed to participate in and discuss the events undeniably granted women: pregnancy and motherhood.49 The cycle’s early treatment of the female character as “background to his foreground” is exemplified by statements such as “wherever I look, I see only him” (song 1) and reinforced by the pervasive presence of his masculine theme, vividly illustrated in

48 Solie 224.
49 Solie 233.
In Song 5, even the wedding march holds masculine implications: the rhythmic motive associated with the husband infiltrates the sisters’ chatter as they prepare the bride. Therefore, the application of masculine motives throughout the song cycle implies that from courtship and marriage to the domestic realm that lies beyond, patriarchal influence is woven into the fabric of women’s lives. Further, the cyclical nature of both poetry and song suggest the generic and repeatable nature of women’s experience throughout time.

Citing Virginia Woolf, Solie likens the role of the woman to that of a mirror; similar to the mirror, “she is not present: a mirror must show only what looks into it, not itself.” Moreover, the poetry suggests that only love and motherhood are events unique and integral to a woman’s life. Even in the latter, she still maintains a subordinate position. Despite 23 slow bars of text in Song 6, she never outright states her news of the pregnancy. Her delayed and passive implication of the coming child supports social expectations of the idealized woman: dependent, proper and naïve. Further, Schumann’s removal of her conversation with her mother included in Chamisso’s original poetry more tightly confines her to his sphere of influence. Solie also highlights the significance of Schumann’s setting of the subservient text of the Ring’s fourth stanza,

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50 Solie 229.

51 Solie 235.

52 Qtd. Solie 235.

53 Solie 233. Solie explains that 19th-century gender ideologies impart that, as a result of both her impracticality and reticence, “the virtuous wife” should be unable to deliver such information. Thus, significant news is left to the logical powers of the husband.
in which she expresses her desire to “belong” to him, at a musical high point, therein emphasizing the significance of the declaration. Tonality also heightens the impression of patriarchal control over the wife through the introduction of his initial triadic melody and the subsequent regimented circle of fifths as a means of taming her “crazy tonality.”\textsuperscript{54} The important tonal relationships, however, are overwhelmingly diatonic, with the introduction of profound change (the child) marking the only significant exception.\textsuperscript{55}

With the women’s movement of the 20th-century long past, audiences of the 21st-century provide excuses in order to look beyond the song cycle and its accompanying implications. Solie offers four common methods of avoidance, citing the tendency to emphasize the autonomous nature of music as the primary means of justification. While many criticize our tendency to judge works with ears and eyes biased by contemporary culture rather than from the historical context of their creation, Solie contends that the more intimate venue which likely saw the early performances of the song cycle would further reinforce its meanings. The migration of song cycles to the concert hall allows modern audiences to more easily overlook the social/gender messages imbedded within the work. Finally, Solie points out that contemporary listeners justify lyrics with the misconception that the perspectives expressed within the song coincided with women’s widely held conceptions of themselves and their place within society. As we have seen,

\textsuperscript{54} Solie 238. Tonal instability for the female character reflects cultural associations of mental (and musical) instability and formlessness with women. The reintroduction of male “rational” motives and devices is similarly reflective of 19th-century ideologies.

\textsuperscript{55} Solie 233.
this does not originate as a self-definition by women, but a prescription by men of how women should think and act.

Frauenliebe und Leben Now and Then

–Kristina Muxfeldt

Although it is tempting to dismiss Chamisso’s poems as the wishful thinking of nineteenth-century “male culture,” this would be an ungenerously exclusionary reply to the past, an effort to block, rather than to contend with, their continued effectiveness in the present through the power of Schumann’s songs…Aside from the purely musical attractions that Schumann’s work offers us, a performance stands as a valuable living document of a past ideology and its former sway. It serves as one of our most immediate modes of access to this past—in all of its complexity.56

Kristina Muxfeldt offers a more sympathetic reading of the poetry in her article, “Frauenliebe und Leben Now and Then.” She contends that we often take an “unapologetically modern reaction to the poems [that] makes no effort to recover what might once have appealed in them.”57 In allowing our 21st-century values to alienate us from the text and music of Schumann’s Frauenliebe songs we likely overlook the unique attributes that charmed 19th-century audiences and secured the song cycle as a mainstay of the contemporary canon. She urges modern listeners and scholars to begin by observing the songs within the cultural framework of the time period, recognizing that the continued study and performance of such works does not champion a return to the antiquated social values from which the compositions took root. In fact, the “Schillerian


57 Muxfeldt 29.
ideal of womanhood” illustrated by Frauenliebe was outdated even in its own time, therefore the attraction itself could lie in this obvious exaggeration.\(^{58}\)

In undertaking the challenge of creating a woman’s voice both Chamisso and Schumann attempted to fill a void within the vocal repertoire. By the late 18th-century female writers and composers were slowly becoming more prominent—not by expressing their own voice, but rather, by adopting masculine voices and characteristics.\(^{59}\) While Solie and others view Frauenliebe as an impersonation of women as a means of expressing male values, the song cycle marked the first instance that female singers were not asked to adopt male characters. Men rarely, if ever, wrote from the woman’s perspective. So for the two to take on this task, and moreover, to go so far as to incorporate passionate language, including an “invocation of erotic bliss,” and an idolization of her husband to-be that parallels the elevated reverence that men directed towards women, represented a distinct attempt to equalize the poetic treatment of the genders.\(^{60}\) By expressing the inner thoughts and entrancement of the woman the song cycle provides a refreshing take on love and marriage that might have appealed equally to love struck men and women. The implication that matrimony was not a patriarchal

\(^{58}\) Muxfeldt 34.

\(^{59}\) Muxfeldt 31.

\(^{60}\) Muxfelt 30.
obligation but a consequence of mutual adoration, likely appealed to couples like Robert and Clara as they fought for their right to marry despite harsh parental dissent.\textsuperscript{61}

Muxfeldt additionally points out that Schumann prepared to wed a piano virtuoso who, in many ways, defied the conservative gender constructions that an initial listening of the songs might suggest. Therefore, the mutual passion expressed by the poetry likely appealed to Schumann, not the antiquated gender ideologies. Clara apparently interpreted the song cycle similarly because she often accompanied singers in performances of the lied. In fact, the song cycle was not limited to women; renowned baritone Julius Stockhausen regularly included \textit{Frauenliebe und Leben} in his repertoire.\textsuperscript{62}

While the idea that amateur female performances of lied often took place in the home no doubt heightens the impact of socially submissive poetry, Muxfeldt emphasizes that by the mid-19th-century lied increasingly enjoyed professional performance on both public and private stages. Thus, many early performances of \textit{Frauenliebe und Leben} might not have drastically differed from those that take place today. As others had emphasized before, the gender implications of the song cycle receive heightened meaning

\textsuperscript{61} Muxfeldt 34-35. Typically functioning merely as idols to men, women rarely expressed inner thoughts and emotions. Chamisso’s choice to include her effusive display of personal feelings and desires raised her above the traditional statuesque position to one of equality. In her enthusiastic admiration of her husband she essentially turns the “gaze” on him, philosophically immobilizing him and raising herself to status of the “gazer.”

\textsuperscript{62} Muxfeldt 38. While male singers of today resist performance of female song cycles, 19th-century performers were not so gender restrictive. Stockhausens’s 1862 diary entries even reflect his attempts to embrace the female persona in performance, including musings such as “If I were a woman…” Though Stockhausen marks an extreme example in his gender-indiscriminate teaching and theatrical performance of female roles, our century’s distance from the cycle loses perspective of the impact it had at the time of its origination.
when restricted to the domestic realm, so the realization that performances may have
taken place on concert stages even in the 19th-century drastically alters the strength of its
submissive implications. Muxfeldt further argues that the very act of a woman singing
this cycle elevates her role beyond that of a puppet, as she adopts an active, rather than
passive, role in controlling the direction and outcome of the performance. She further
suggests that the appeal of the songs likely lies in characteristics shared with surviving
male lieder of the period. Given changing social tides and contemporary emphases on
political correctness, the very survival of the Frauenliebe cycle is a testament to
Schumann’s ability to engage his female character, and ultimately, the artistic value of
the song cycle as a whole.

“Ah Clara, I am not worthy of your love”:
Rereading ‘Frauenliebe und Leben,’ the Poetry and the Music”
–Elissa S. Guralnick

The cycle may take as a given the conventional image of
woman as a pure and patient wife. But it subjects this
convention to withering scrutiny. The wife in the cycle
plays her part to perfection and, in return for her efforts, is
wounded. The husband, who had seemed to be a paragon
of virtue, proves somehow undeserving of devotion and
disappears from sight, as if death were all she merited.
Frauenliebe thus presents a radiant dream, subtly infected
by a nightmare.63

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63 Elissa S. Guralnick. "'Ah Clara, I Am Not Worthy of Your Love': Rereading
Frauenliebe und Leben, the Poetry and the Music." Music and Letters 87.4
Elissa S. Guralnick reads *Frauenliebe und Leben* as autobiography, arguing that the song cycle expresses Schumann’s marital anxieties as he prepared to wed the great Clara Wieck. Dividing her article into two distinct parts, she deals first with the poetry of Adelbert von Chamisso before examining Schumann’s setting. She states that, while the work might superficially appear to support suppressive social ideals, under closer scrutiny the “heroine” reveals that, like Clara, submissive speech cloaks her inner strength of character. Ultimately, Guralnick argues for a more perceptive reading of the song cycle that notes the consistent appearance of a subtext contradicting the literal poetic text. Referencing the earlier work of Edward Cone and Beate Julia Perrey as a starting point for her exploration, Guralnick views the conversational, disturbing and independent voice of the piano as representative of the husband and the songs themselves as two simultaneous conversations in which the *Frauenliebe* heroine and her husband double for Robert and Clara. The songs convey a message to women that naïve devotion to a lover is “less of a virtue than a danger,” a notion that Schumann both expressed through his own life and heightens through his setting of Chamisso’s poetry.64

Why the undercurrent of dissatisfaction given the couple’s impending wedding? Though Clara was by no means a feminist, she didn’t lead a conventional story-book life. From an unusual upbringing by her father (her mother, a performer herself, had divorced Clara’s father for another man) to Clara’s own performance career and defiance of her father in marrying Robert, her actions display an “independent spirit” often contradicted

64 Guralnick 3.
by her words. Only a teen when she accepted Robert’s advances, Clara sacrificed tremendously—professionally and personally—in choosing him, ultimately estranging herself from her father and manager. With Robert’s knowledge of how much Clara gave up, coupled with persisting insecurities and bouts of depression, perhaps he questioned whether he could live up to her high musical and marital expectation.

The Poetry

The poetry of Frauenliebe displays the Romanticism embraced by the 19th-century, also vividly illustrated in the passionate and effusive correspondences of the Schumann’s themselves. Guralnick contends that the heroine begins worshipfully but ends by patronizing her husband, with motherhood releasing her from “exclusive control” and death liberating her from both his judgment and physical presence. Even following their wedding, this transition towards independence takes motion. Her child-like treatment of her husband implicates her increasing dominance, which her imploring of her husband to: “Come and hide your face here on my heart” demonstrates. The child replaces the husband as the heroine’s source of joy, exulting in poem 7 that she had “thought herself overjoyed” before, but in fact she “is overjoyed only now,” even going so far as to say that she “pities him for his inability to feel a mother’s happiness.”

65 Guralnick 2.
66 Guralnick 5.
67 Guralnick 4.
husband’s death in Poem 8 raises the question of whether his death is literal or one of philosophical disappointment. While she admonishes him as a “cruel, pitiless man,” she bemoans that he “sleeps the sleep of death.” In the unset final poem the wife objectifies love as independent from the man who created it. She further implies that men are doomed to hurt the women who love them. Therefore, the cycle actually undermines patriarchal values in that it “embodies the unease and foreboding about a social order that causes women like the Frauenliebe’s heroine, trustful and young, to subordinate themselves to men like Chamisso—or, at any rate, to men like his self-professed double.”

Musical Setting

Characteristically moody, (both personally and musically) Schumann’s setting voices his insecurity. Is he worthy of Clara’s love? Can he fulfill her expectations? The vicious personal attacks of Clara’s father against Robert no doubt carried weight and

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68 Guralnick 4.

69 Guralnick 5-7.

Guralnick reflects that Chamisso takes the stereotypical image of the wife as “pure and patient” but “subjects this convention to withering scrutiny. The wife in the cycle plays her part to perfection and, in return for her efforts, is wounded. The husband, who had seemed to be a paragon of virtue, proves somehow undeserving of devotion and disappears from sight, as if death were all she merited. Frauenliebe thus presents a radiant dream, subtly infected by a nightmare. The dream is a man’s impossible wish to be illimitably loved by a woman of capacious emotions. The nightmare is the dreadful supposition that, even if the dream could be entered, the man would fall out of it, damaging his wife by his fall and disclosing, in the process, the fundamental folly of his claim on her affections.”
likely served to exacerbate Robert’s pre-existing anxieties. Often confessing his uncertainties to Clara, on June 3, 1839 he wrote:

> In the years to come I’ll sometimes cause you grief; I lack a few things which would make me a complete man; I’m too restless, often too childish, too soft; I also indulge myself quite a bit in whatever I’m enjoying and don’t think of others; in short, I have my bad days when nothing can be done with me—however, the patience and love which you have so often shown will help me develop more and more.70

The German composer, conductor and baritone, Carl Lowe (1796-1869), set the Frauenliebe poems in 1835 but took a drastically more conservative interpretation of the subtext. Schumann’s song cycle, on the other hand, is riddled with an undercurrent of anxiety and self-doubt. Robert’s critical writings attest to his high esteem for subtext, or depth, in poetry and literature, relating that he “defines a mediocre poem as one without depth, since what mirrors reflect are surfaces alone,” and “we compare them to precious stones whose luster is concealed under a homely crust of earth; industry and care are necessary to bring out their full value to the light.” Schumann likely similarly cherished musical depth and subtlety.71 In Frauenliebe, Guralnick contends that two secrets lurk behind the façade of subservience: the strong spirit of the heroine (Clara) and the unspoken yet fundamental concern of her husband (Robert) that he may ultimately injure her and lose her love.72 Manifesting themselves in Schumann’s use of word painting (and occasional lack thereof), examples appear as early as song 2. Schumann sets the

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70 Guralnick 8-9.

71 Guralnick 11.

72 Guralnick 11.
“hear not my silent prayer” strophically, thereby allowing the heroic Heldenleben theme to associate itself with the heroine’s modesty, thus implying that strength belies the heroine’s demure surface. Similarly, treatment of “demuth” (humility) in song 2 attests to the piano’s independent intelligence through the placement of a subito piano in the piano part but not the vocal part. Therefore, the piano, which Guralnick imagines as the husband, shows the wife how to act. The cycle’s postlude also argues for the individual and equal function of the piano, with the instrument delivering a near exact repetition of the song 1 accompaniment. Traditionally the soloist enters to create closure, so the vocal line’s failure to recur creates an impression of loneliness; the husband (piano) continues despite her absence, longing for her reappearance. Guralnick suggests that this nostalgic and solitary treatment of the previously joyful material implies that the husband died figuratively rather than literally and now wistfully reminisces of earlier times.

Revealing word painting exemplified by “demuth” fosters similarities between Clara and the heroine. While Clara’s letters reflect similarly subservient and flowery language, her outward devotion and docility conceal her vivacious character. The ongoing tension surrounding Clara’s performance career vividly articulates this underlying spirit:

Robert writes: “The wife is more important than the musician, and my fondest wish will have been fulfilled if I can get you to have nothing more to do with the public”

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73 Guralnick 9.

The earlier poems, in particular, demonstrate distinct similarities to Clara’s letters to Robert. Excerpts of her letters include quotes such as: “I live for one person alone…and if the world will but do him justice—that will be my highest happiness;” “You are my everything;” “I want to live for you alone and make you happy!” “I can truly say I only live through you.”
Clara responds: “I will go wherever you wish, my beloved Robert, and I quite agree with you; the greatest thing is being loved as a wife!”

Despite Clara’s affirmative response, her actions failed to mirror her words—similar to the rift existing between the heroine’s language (submissive) and her conflicting musical setting. Ultimately, Guralnick draws a parallel between Schumann’s last known statement to Clara on the morning of his suicide attempt and the confession permeating the Frauenliebe song cycle: “Ah, Clara, I am not worthy of your love.”

Reflection

The strikingly different interpretations of Schumann’s Frauenliebe song cycle candidly demonstrate the plethora of perspectives falling under the umbrella of feminist musicology. Taken together, Ruth Solie, Kristina Muxfeldt, and Elissa Guralnick support the dual notions that feminist critique need not subscribe to one particular viewpoint, and certainly need not perpetuate fanatical feminist stereotypes. While Solie questions the submissive poetry and oppressive social values expressed in the song cycle, Muxfeldt interprets the very same characteristics as indicative of social progress on behalf of the composer and poet. Meanwhile, Guralnick sides with Muxfeldt in perceiving the work as less dictatorial of feminine subservience than Solie believes, urging modern readers to view the songs within the context of composition. She, however, takes her argument

74 Qtd. in Guralnick 16.
Though Robert was largely supportive of Clara’s performing career, social decorum inevitability provoked issue despite their fundamentally encouraging relationship.

75 Guralnick 21.
further to focus on the Schumann’s personal life and possible manifestations of their personal experiences, insecurities and characteristics within the subtext (word painting and setting) of the song cycle. Fundamentally, Muxfeldt and Guralnick take equally indefensible reactions to the poetry, though Muxfeldt focuses more on the function and significance of the work within the cultural context of the period. Of the three, Guralnick and Solie are most apt to spark contention as a result of their more extreme interpretations, with the former formulating an intensely subjective reading and the latter attacking the cycle from the alienated and offended perspective of the modern feminist.

While history will likely never reveal with complete certainty Schumann’s intended message in the song cycle, contemporary scholarship attests to both their unconventionally respectful and balanced relationship, as well as their concern for the continued mutual musical development and fulfillment of both partners. Though autobiographical analyses certainly have their limitations, an understanding of the personal and historical context from which a work is born can offer insight. A purely literal reading of the poetry and setting fall victim to the same interpretive issues, manifested in a differing guise. Poetry may articulate cultural ideologies of the times, but neither its creation in the 19th-century, nor its perpetuation on the concert stages of today, advocates the application of such ideologies to the individual lives of those involved.

Does Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* glorify war by focusing on it (Britten’s pacifism notwithstanding)? Most would say that it does not. So perhaps Schumann’s *Frauenliebe* cycle deserves similar discretion. Cultural conventions and contexts inherently inform all compositions, but this does not automatically mean that those compositions reinforce such things.
In traditional musicology positivistic facts offer quantifiable—verifiable—results. In new musicology, however, there is less of a sense that one view is wrong while another is right; facts are facts, of course, but the emphasis is on interpretations, which fundamentally depend on the interpreter’s perspective. An analogy will help make sense of this distinction: if the “old” method parallels classical interpretation, this “new” approach bears more of a resemblance to jazz in its notion that (within reason) “there’s really no wrong, it’s more about approach and attitude.” This generally applies as feminist scholars attempt to read personal and sometimes unverifiable meanings into music of the past. Similar to jazz musicians who view notated melodies not as the means to the end, but rather as points of departure, feminist musicologists interpret within a given framework. As the jazzers of musicology, feminists such as Solie, Muxfeldt and Guralnick represent soloists who interpret the materials at hand in contrasting yet valid ways.

Robert and Clara were innovators, both as musicians and as spouses. But innovation can only stretch, not surpass, the boundaries if its environment. New musicology, and feminist critique in particular, have played a pivotal role in reinvestigating the lives of composers and the societies they inhabited as a means of shedding new light on the composition and content of the Western canon. By reveling in the theoretical discord feminist rhetoric provides, musicology moves toward a stronger, sassier and more diversified discourse.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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APPENDIX

FRAUENLIEBE UND LEBEN (A WOMAN’S LOVE AND LIFE)

I. seit ich ihn gesehen

Seit ich ihn gesehen, glaub ich blind zu sein;
Wo ich hin nur blicke, seh‘ ich ihn allein;
Wie im wachen Traume schwebt sein Bild mir vor,
Taucht aus tiefstem Drunkel heller, heller nur empor.
Sonst ist licht und farblos alles um mich her,
Nach der Schwestern Spiele nicht bekhr‘ ich mehr,
Möchte liber weinen, still im Kämmerlein;

II. er, der herrlichste von allen

Er, der herrlichste von allen,
Wie so milde, wie so gut!
Holde Lippen, klares Auge,
Heller Sinn und fester Mut.
So wie dort in blauer Tiefe,
Hell und herrlich jener Stern,
Also Er an meinem Himmel,
Hell und herrlich, hehr un fern.
Wandle, wandle deine Bahnen,
Nur betrachten deinen Schein,
Nur in Demut ihn betrachten,
Selig un nur traurig sein!
Höre nicht mein stilles Beten,
Deinem Glü nur geweiht;
Darfst mich, nied’re Magd, nicht kennen,
Hoher Stern der Herrlichkeit!
Nur die Würdigste von allen
Darf beglücken deine Wahl,
Und ich will die Hohe segnen
Viele tausend Mal.
Will mich freuen dann und weinen,
Selig, selig bin ich dann,
Sollte mir das Herz auch brechen,
Brich, o Herz was liegt daran?

II. He, The Most Glorious of All

He, the most glorious of all,
How kind he is, how good!
Gentle mouth, clear eyes,
Clear mind and firm courage,
Even as in young blue depth,
Shines bright and glorious that star,
So is he in my heaven,
Bright and glorious, sublime and far.
Wander, wander along your course,
Only to look at your light,
Only to look at it humbly,
Only to be blissful and sad!
Do not hear my silent prayer,
Offered for your happiness;
You must not know me, humble maiden,
Noble star of glory!
Only the worthiest of all
May your choice make happy,
And I will bless the noble one,
Many thousand times.
I shall rejoice and I shall weep then,
Blissful, blissful I am then,
Even though my heart should break,
Break, a heart, what does it mean?

III. Ich Kann’s Nicht Fassen, Nicht Glauben

Ich kann’s nicht fassen, nicht glauben,
Es hat ein Traum mich berückt;
Wie hätt’ er doc hunter allen
Mich Arme erhöht und beglückt?
Mir war’s, er habe gesprochen:
“Ich bin auf ewig dein.”
Mir war’s, ich trauma noch immer,
Es kann ja nimmer so sein.
O lass im Traume mich sterben,
Gewieget an seiner Brust,
Den seligen Tod mich schlüfen
In Tränen unendlicher Lust.

III. I Cannot Grasp, Nor Believe It

I cannot grasp, nor believe it,
A dream must have me bewitched,
How could he from among all others
Have exalted and blessed poor me?
It seemed to me that he had spoken:
“I am forever yours,“
It seemed to me that I am still dreaming,
For it can never be thus.
Oh let me die in my dream,
Cradled on his breast,
Let me drink blissful death
In tears of infinite joy.
IV. Du Ring An Meinem Finger

Du Ring an meinem Finger,
Mein goldenes Ringelein,
Ich drücke dich fromm an die Lippen,
An das Herze mein.
Ich hatt’ ihn ausgetäumet,
Der Kindheit friedlich schönen Traum,
Ich fand allein mich, verloren
Im öden unendlichen Raum.
Du Ring an meinem Finger,
Da hast du mich erst belehrt,
Hast meinem Blick erschlossen
Des Lebens unendlichen, tiefen Wert.
Ich will ihm dienen, ihm leben,
Ihm angehören ganz,
Hin selber mich geben und fiden
Verklärt mich, in seinem Glanz.

IV. You Ring On My Finger

You ring on my finger,
My little golden ring,
I press you devoutly to my lips,
Devoutly to my heart.
My dream had come to an end,
Childhood’s peaceful, lovely dream,
I found myself lonely and lost
In empty, infinite space.
You ring on my finger,
You taught me only then,
You opened to my eyes,
Life’s infinite, deep value.
I want to serve him, live for him,
Wholly belong to him,
Give myself and find myself
Transfigured in his splendor.
Helft mir, ihr Schwestern, freundlich mich schmucken,
Dient der Glücklichen heute, mir.
Winder geschäftig mir um die Stirne
Noch der blühenden Myrt Zier,
Als ich befriedigt, freudigen Herzens,
Sonst dem Geliebten im Arme lag,
Immer noch rief er, Schnsucht im Herzen,
Ungeduldig den heutigen Tag.
Helft mir, ihr Schwestern, helft mir
Verscheuchen eine törichte Bangigkeir;
Dass ich mit klarem Aug’ihn empfange,
Ihn, die Quelle der Freudigkeit.
Bist, mein Geliebster, du mir erschienen,
Gibst dur mir, Sonne, deinen Schein?
Lass mich in Andacht, lass mich in Demut,
Lass mich verneign dem Herren mein.
Streuet ihm, Schwestern, street ihm Blumen,
Bringet ihm knospende Rosen dar.
Aber euch, Schwestern grüss’ich mit Wehmut,
Freudig scheidend aus eurer Schar.

V. Help Me, My Sisters

Help me, my sisters, kindly adorn me,
Serve me, the happy one, today.
Wind zealously around my forehead
The lovely wreath of myrtle in bloom.
When I, contented, with a joyful heart,
Formerly lay in my beloved’s arms,
He always invoked, his heart filled with yearning,
Impatient by this very day.
Help me, my sisters, help me
Cast out a foolish anxiety,
That I with bright eyes may receive him,
Him, the source of all happiness
Have you, my beloved, come to me,
Do you, sun, give me your light?
Let me devoutly, let me humbly,
Let me bow to my master and lord.
Strew, sisters, strew flowers before him,
Budding roses offer to him.
But you, sisters, I greet with sadness,
Joyfully parting from your midst.

VI. Susser Freund

Susser Freund, du blackest mich verwundert an,
Kannst es nicht begreifen, wie ich weinen kann;
Lass der feuchten Perlen ungewohnte Zier
Freudig hell erzittern in dem Aug emir.
Wie so band mein Busen, wie so wonnevoll!
Wusst’ ich nut mit Worten, wie ich’s sagen soll;
Kommt und bigt dein Antlitz hier an meiner Brust,
Will ins Ohr dir flüstern alle meine Lust.
Weisst du nun die Tränen, die ich weinen kann,
Sollst du nicht sie sehen, du geliebter, geliebter Mann?
Bleib’ an meinem Herzen, fühl deßen Schlag,
Dass ich fset und fester nur dich drücken mag.
Hier an meinem Better hat die Wiege Raum,
Wo sie still verberge meinen holden Traum;
Kommen wird der Morgen, wo der Traum erwacht,
Und daraus dein Bildnis mir entgegen lacht,
   Dein Bildnis!

VI. Sweet Friend

Sweet friend, you look amazed at me,
You cannot understand how I can weep;
Let the moist pearl’s adornment
With playful clarity tremble in my eyes.
How frightened is my heart, how with rapture filled,
If I only knew the words to tell it to you;
Come and hide your face here on my breast,
Let me whisper in your ear all my delight.
Now you know the tears that I must shed,
Should you then not see them, you beloved, beloved man?
Stay near my heart, feel its throbbing,
So that I may clasp you only firmer and firmer.
Here by my bed the cradle will have its place,
Where it may in silence hide my lovely dream;
There will come a morning when the dream awakens,
And from the cradle your image will smile up at me,
Your image!

VII. An Meinem Herzen, An Meiner Brust

An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust,
Du meine Wonne, du meine Lust!
Das Glück ist die Liebe, die Lieb’ ist das Glück,
Ich hab’s gesagt und nehm’s nicht zurück.
Hab’ überschwenglich mich geschätzt,
Bin überglücklich aber jetzt.
Nur die da säugt, nut die da libt
Das Kind, dem sie die Nahrung gibt;
Nut eine Mutter weiss allein,
Was lieben heist und glücklich sein.
O wie bedaur’ ich doch den Mann,
Der Mutterglück nicht fühlen kann!
Du lieber, liber Engel, du,
Du schauest mich an und lächelst dazu!

VII. On My Heart, On My Breast

On my heart, on my breast,
You my delight, you my jay!
Happiness is love and love is happiness,
I have said it and won’t take it back,
I deemed myself so fortunate,
But I am more than happy now.
Only she who suckles, only she who loves
The child to whom she gives nourishment;
Only a mother can know,
What it means to love and to be happy,
Oh how sorry I am for the man,
Who cannot feel a mother’s bliss.
You dear, dear angel you,
You look at me and you smile at me!
VIII. Nun Hast Du Mir Den Ersten Schmerz Getan

Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan,
   Der aber traf.
Du schläfst, du harter, unbarmerz’ger Mann,
   Der Todeseschlaf.
Es blicket die Verlass’ne vot sich hin,
   Die Welt ist leer, ist leer.
Geliebet hab’ich und gelebt,
   Ich bin nicht lebend mehr.
Ich zich’ mich in mein Inn’res still zuruck,
   Der Schleier fällt,
Da hab’ ich dieh und mein verlor’nes Glück,
   Du meine Welt!

VIII. Now You Have Caused Me The First Pain

Now you have cause me the first pain,
   That really hurt.
You sleep, you hard and cruel man,
   The sleep of death.
The now forsaken woman stares into a void,
   The world is empty, empty.
I have loved and I have lived,
   I do not live any more.
I silently withdraw into myself,
   The veil is falling,
Then I have you and my lost happiness,
   You, my world!