University of Cincinnati

Date: 3/16/2016

I, Ellen C Chew, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Germanic Languages & Literature.

It is entitled:
Goethe’s "Gretchentragödie" in Song:
A Multidimensional Woman, not Victim

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Goethe’s *Gretchentragödie* in Song:
A Multidimensional Woman, not Victim

A thesis submitted to the
Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In the Department of German Studies
of the McMicken College of Arts and Sciences
by

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March 2016
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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of several musical settings of the Gretchen character’s most poignant songs and scenes in Goethe’s Faust. The purpose of this paper is to argue that nineteenth-century composers from Germany, (Carl Friederich Zelter, Richard Wagner, and Hugo Wolf,) Austria, (Franz Schubert) and France (Charles Gounod) chose Gretchen as the subject of their Lieder (or in Gounod’s case, enhanced her role from supporting to lead in his opera) because they recognized she was more complex than most women of her time.

Throughout Faust, Gretchen exercises an unparalleled agency that is usually denied by scholars. My purpose is to reinstate Gretchen’s agency and to show how composers added depth and subtext through their musical settings to make Gretchen stronger and an even more poignant character. In this paper, each scene is presented in chronological order; the purpose of which is twofold: First, I examine each scene based on Goethe’s “Naturformen der Dichtung” and how the three poetic forms outlined may have influenced the composers. Second, I discuss carefully selected chosen vocal music settings of these texts to show how composers portrayed Gretchen’s coming of age: her psychological and physical transformations that lead to her maturity, and the coming into her agency to reconcile herself as a sexual woman with her religious faith.

Gretchen’s faith in God is very strong, but the faith she has in herself, is even stronger. Gretchen is as relevant a character today as she was in the nineteenth century. I wish to show that the interdisciplinary exchange between German Studies and Music makes for a relevant twenty-first century interpretation of this timeless character and timeless work.
Acknowledgments

Two years ago if I had been told that I would write a Master’s Thesis almost seventy pages long; I am not sure that I would have believed it. I want to thank each member of the German Studies faculty at the University of Cincinnati for making this feat possible. Each one of you has supported my interdisciplinary research interests and has encouraged me to find my own “voice” (pun-intended) in German Studies; thank you.

First, I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Kelley, my Graduate Teaching Coordinator, who I have known since I was an undergraduate. Jennifer, it was a privilege to be your student and a greater privilege still to serve as one of your Graduate Teaching Assistants. The teaching experience has been one of the highlights of my M.A., and I could not have asked for a better supervisor; thank you.

Second, I would like to thank the professors with whom I took graduate seminars, Dr. Evan Torner, Dr. Tanja Nusser, and Dr. Sunnie Rucker-Chang, and of course, my co-chair Dr. Richard Schade, for improving my writing skills. Your classes made me a better writer and without that preparation, I would not have known where to begin my Master’s Thesis; thank you. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Todd Herzog. Since there wasn’t a seminar offered with you during my time as an M.A., I am so glad that I had the privilege to get to know you on our Transatlantic Seminar Conference last May in Essen, Germany. The time spent with you and Dr. Tanja Nusser on that trip is another memory that will always be special to me.

Third, A special thank you to each of member of my committee:

Professor Mary Stucky, thank you for your support and belief in me long after my graduation from CCM. Conservatories need more teachers like you. You are truly the definition
of the “diamond in the rough.” Thank you for being my voice teacher and agreeing to serve on my committee.

I am so lucky to have been advised by not one, but two outstanding faculty members of the German Studies Department: my co-chairs, Dr. Valerie Weinstein and Dr. Richard Schade.

Valerie, I am so glad that I had the opportunity to take classes with you. Your class on Expressionism where we read Die Dreigroschenoper in German was one of the highlights of my undergraduate career. It was your passion in the classroom that convinced me that I could teach German. You have always been so supportive of my singing and after some difficult news in 2014, you helped me apply to the M.A. program. Thank you for your encouragement and mentorship in everything I do.

Last but most certainly not least, I would like to thank you, Richard. Words cannot begin to express how lucky I have been to work with you as both an undergraduate and a graduate student. Your support of my singing and love of music knows no boundaries. You have always been there for me and there has been no greater joy than the journey I have taken from a CCM student taking your undergraduate Faust class to an M.A. student in German Studies writing my Thesis on Gretchen. I will miss you very much.

Finally, although we have never met, I would like to thank the professors whose research made my “voice” for this paper possible, including Lorraine Byrne, Kenneth S. Whitton and Martin and Erika Swales. I was extremely pleased to learn from your research not only your findings but that interdisciplinary studies between German Studies and Music is thriving in Ireland and the United Kingdom! Thank you for your contributions to the field.

May Gretchen sing on!
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Introduction

Gretchen among Germanists, musicologists and performers has often been considered to be a “victim,” a poor young innocent girl who has been lured into Faust’s trap (Atkins 424.) She is seen and frequently described as a “simple” (Whitton 159), “naïve” and “fixed character” (Grim 23), however this could not be farther from the truth. Gretchen is not a victim; she is constantly evolving as a character. She starts the Faust drama as a young girl and transforms, psychologically and spiritually, into a mature and multidimensional woman. As she grows in maturity, so does her agency. The moments where Gretchen experiences significant growth as a character, testing her agency, can be narrowed down to the scenes, “Abend,” “Gretchens Stube,” and “Zwinger.” In these scenes, she has either a song (“Es war ein König in Thule in “Abend”) or a monologue that gives us insight into her development as a young woman (“Gretchen am Spinnrade” in “Gretchens Stube; “Ach neige” in “Zwinger). This “soliloquize[ing]” is paramount to her maturity:

Under the emotional pressure of her love for Faust, she finds herself desperately impelled to think, to reflect, to interrogate her experience. […]When Gretchen soliloquizes, she is not simply sitting and thinking. She is doing something. The hands are busy: she is trying on jewelry; she is brushing her hair and undressing for bed; she is at the spinning wheel; she is putting flowers in a vase. And frequently, when she thinks, she has recourse to old, established forms of utterance. She, as it were, borrows the discourse of inwardness: from folk song (“Es war ein König in Thule” [There Once Was a King in Thule],) work song, (“Meine Ruh ist hin” [My Peace Has Gone], prayer “Ach neige, / Du Schmerzenreiche” [Ah Incline, You Who Are Full of Sorrows]) (Martin and Erika Swales 139).
Composers recognized this agency in Gretchen’s character and over the course of the nineteenth century, all three of these texts were set to music. This paper is divided into three chapters in chronological order of these three monologues and their musical settings: “Song as Sexual Awakening: “Es war ein König in Thule in “Abend,” Song as a Cycle of Sexual Frustration: “Gretchen am Spinnrade” in “Gretchens Stube,” and Song as Sexual Closure and Spiritual Redemption: “Ach neige” in “Zwinger.” The musical settings of these texts included in these chapters are by the most famous composers of the nineteenth century including composers who specialized in the Lied such as Carl Friederich Zelter, Franz Schubert, and Hugo Wolf, as well as composers who specialized in opera, Richard Wagner and Charles Gounod.¹ Each chapter has the same structure throughout: I start each chapter with a dramatic analysis based on the three poetic genres Goethe outlined in his essay, “Naturformen der Dichtung;” the Epos, the Drama and the Lyrik (and I follow with two or three carefully selected musical settings that I find enhance these poetic genres as well as contribute new subtext to the existing song or monologues in the drama.

My aim is simple; but Gretchen is not. Instead of conceiving of Gretchen as a simple, naïve and fixed character, I search for new adjectives based on the subtext contributed by the musical ideas and interpretations of the composers. I prefer the adjectives: “strong,” “decisive” “sexual,” and above all “multidimensional.” Goethe’s Faust is a canon in traditional German Studies, but Gretchen is far from a traditional character. She is a very real character and her agency is brought to life through these musical settings. She is not a victim.

¹ Charles Gounod (1818-1983) was born in Paris and died in Saint-Cloud France; he also happened to write the most famous operatic adaptation of Faust in 1859. It is because of the importance and popularity of this work that, albeit in French translation, it is included in the first chapter of this paper.
Chapter 1: *Song as Sexual Awakening*

“Es war ein König in Thule”

*from*

“Abend”

GRETCHEN […] *Sie fängt an zu singen, indem sie sich auszieht.*

Es war ein König in Thule,
Gar treu bis an das Grab,
Dem sterbend seine Buhle
Einen goldnen Becher gab.

Es ging ihm nichts darüber,
Er leert’ ihn jeden Schmaus;
Die Augen gingen ihm über,
Sooft er trank daraus.

Und als er kam zu sterben,
Zählt’ er seine Städt im Reich,
Gönnt’ alles seinem Erben,
Den Becher nicht zugleich.

Er saß beim Königsmahle,
Die Ritter um ihn her,
Auf hohem Väter saale,
Dort auf dem Schloß am Meer.

Dort stand der alte Zecher,
Trank letzte Lebensglut
Und warf den heiligen Becher
Hinunter in die Flut.

Er sah ihn stürzen, trinken
Und sinken tief ins Meer,
Die Augen täten ihm sinken,
Trank nie einen Tropfen mehr.²

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Gretchen reveals herself through song over the course of the drama, beginning with her song “Es war ein König in Thule” in the scene “Abend.” This song inspired many nineteenth-century composers to set the text to music such as the German composer, Carl Friederich Zelter, the Austrian composer, Franz Schubert and the French composer Charles Gounod because of its understated dramatic complexity. Originally written as a song in the Faust drama, “Es war ein König in Thule” masquerades as a simple bedtime story, but in reality it is the start of Gretchen’s feelings for Faust and moreover, her sexual awakening. This song is the first example of Gretchen exercising her agency as a character. In order to explore Gretchen’s agency in its beginning stages in the drama, I start by examining the literary structure of “Es war ein König in Thule” as a Volksballad and how this structure is instrumental in awakening something new in Gretchen. I turn then to the musical settings of Zelter, Schubert and Gounod to explore how “Es war ein König in Thule,” a Volksballad (a song in literature not necessarily set to music) has been realized and enhanced as a Kunstballad (a song with music) through the mediums of Lieder and opera. Therefore, this song is of pivotal importance as it marks the beginning of the Gretchentragödie: dramatically, “Es war ein König in Thule” can be interpreted as a metaphor for Gretchen’s decision to pursue and to give herself to Faust; however it is the musical settings which bring the subtext to the forefront of the song. The subtext of “Es war ein König in Thule” shows that Gretchen not only craves this sexual awakening; but that she is very excited about her decision to embrace it.

“Es war ein König in Thule” was one of Goethe’s first Volksballaden that he wrote inspired by folk poetry. It was “Goethe’s introduction to Herder³ in 1770” (Byrne 207) as a

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³ Johann Gottfried Herder (1744 – 1803) was a prominent German poet, philosopher and theologian. “[His] essay ‘Über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker’ published in the collection Von deutscher Art und Kunst in 1773 is the first important manifestation of German scholarly interest in folk song. It was in this essay that Herder coined the word Volkslied.” (Byrne 164). Herder continued to publish anthologies of Volkslieder until his death. Stimmen der
student at the University of Strasbourg in Alsace, France, that moved Goethe to collect folk songs as source material for his poetry. According to Canisius, “[t]his crude and vigorous folk poetry could be found anywhere, in the countryside, in villages, and in the market places of the cities” (21). Naturally, Goethe started by collecting Alsatian folk songs and later throughout the “Upper Rhine Area” (Canisius 19). “Der König in Thule,” the original title for “Es war ein König in Thule” comes from Rhineland poetry and was first published before the publication of the Faust drama, in 1774 (Markz 3). Other prominent German writers, such as Christoph Martin Wieland, Achim von Arnim, and Clemens Brentano soon joined the movement. In fact, Goethe and Wieland together published the Taschenbuch auf das Jahr 1804, a collection of literary ballads. Many were set to music, but many had “no musical counterparts” (Byrne 207). Goethe published certain Volksballaden without music, because he communicated the musicality through his writing alone; thereby transforming the Volksballad into a viable literary genre (Byrne 207).

However, in order to understand the placement of “Es war ein König in Thule” in Goethe’s Faust,” it is necessary to first examine the literary structure as a Volksballad, starting by distinguishing a “folk song” from a “ballad.” For Goethe and his contemporaries, “these folksongs and ballads had a “pure” and “natural” quality art songs and poetry were lacking” at the time (Markz 3). According to Francien Markz:

[F]olk poetry in general was perceived as “genuine” and “authentic,” the ballad, moreover, distinguished itself by a narration of tragic or gruesome events, often using dialogue, with little background information or development of character.

Völker in Liedern, a diverse collection of Volkslieder from across Western and Eastern Europe, was published posthumously in 1807. (Kindler). These Volkslieder were rich in musicality and functioned as Lieder independent of music. Herder is known amongst scholars as the “Initiator der deutschen Volksliedforschung,” (Hönig 234).
Formulaic language, rhetorical devices such as recurring questions, refrains, or other techniques of repetition were also characteristic (3).

A *Volksballad* can then be summarized as the “pure,” “natural,” “genuine” and authentic elements of folk poetry conveyed through the tragic narrative of the ballad. However for Goethe, the structure of the “folk ballad” presented a new opportunity for literary expression. In his “Naturformen der Dichtung” he expressed that the *Volksballad* unite[s] all three distinct poetic form[s]: “*Epos, Lyrik und Drama*” (3).

Diese drey Dichtweisen können zusammen oder abgesondert wirken. In dem kleinsten Gedicht findet man sie oft beysammen, und sie bringen eben durch diese Vereinigung im engsten Raume das herrlichste Gebild hervor, wie wir an den schätzenswerthesten Balladen aller Völker deutlich gewahr werden.

(Goethe 194)

It is the poetic form of the *Epic* that particularly makes Goethe’s “Es war ein König in Thule” a profound *Volksballad*. “Es war ein König in Thule” can be seen as an “old-fashioned epic” or “epyllion” because of its “romantic theme” and in that it “[draws] its subjects from […] Greek myth and legend” (Jackson 40), such as the island of Thule. Gretchen’s sexual awakening is framed by this mythology and her fate is foreshadowed by the fate of the characters, and in this way the ballad acts as a turning point in the drama.

Lorraine Byrne asserts that “the location of Goethe’s legend leads us to the central theme of his tale.” She elaborates by explaining that “[in] classical antiquity, Thule was an island that marked the northern limits of the known world, and the epithet *ultima*, was always applied to it.” (336). For Germanists and musicians unfamiliar with the “*ultima*”, “[the] epithet [*ultima*]is a Latin phrase, first used by the ancient Greek historian Polybius to designate the farthermost
regions of the habitable world; used figuratively, it refers to the extreme limits of travel and discovery” (Deas 36)). The “central theme” Byrne refers to is the start of Gretchen’s sexual awakening, the “northern limits” of the island of Thule represents the comforts of her daily life, and the ultima is, Gretchen exploring these outer limits and pushing the boundaries of these “northern limits.”

This means that the mythical realm of “Es war ein König in Thule” gives Gretchen a safe place to awaken, discover and push the boundaries of her sexuality. The framework of the Volksballad gives Gretchen a place to also explore her agency. The Swales assert that “when [Gretchen] thinks, she has recourse to old, established forms of utterance. She, as it were, borrows the discourse of inwardness: from folk song” (Martin and Erika Swales 139). Singing is an intimate act for Gretchen and it gives her the strength to process what is happening to her. The Swales remark further that Gretchen processes her emotions through action. “The hands are busy: she is trying on jewelry; she is brushing her hair and undressing for bed; she is at the spinning wheel” (139). In “Es war ein König in Thule”, it is the act of undressing.

The stage direction prefacing the first line of the song reads, “Sie fängt an zu singen, indem sie sich auszieht” (Goethe 227). In this moment, she is literally, as well as figuratively revealing herself to Faust. One could dismiss this as getting ready for bed, were it not for the first stanza of the poem, “Es war ein König in Thule, gar treu bis an das Grab, Dem sterben seine Buhle, Einen goldnen Becher gab” (Goethe 227.) Byrne explains how this opening line indicates to the audience before Gretchen finishes her song that she will indeed give herself to Faust:

To exchange cups is a traditional symbol of faithfulness, yet in Goethe’s fable the gift is only given from the girl and this alteration of tradition anticipates the nature of Gretchen’s relationship with Faust [...] The consecrated character of Goethe’s cup is
reminiscent of medieval legends of holy grail, where the chalice is associated with
virginity and in ‘Der König in Thule’ it emerges as a symbol of erotic love. As in ‘Der
Becher’, the gift of a goblet can be read as a poetic avowal of the woman’s sexual
surrender (337).

Gretchen has used this song to mask her feelings of desire, placing particular symbolism on the
word “Becher;” the gift of her virginity. Goethe has, as Byrne, points out, subtly “altered”
traditional archetypes so that it is clear that Gretchen not only desires, but wants to give herself
to Faust. This image of Gretchen, offering her own “Becher” as she undresses is not only
intimate, it is explicit.

However, “Es war ein König in Thule” ends tragically, as per the conventions of the
Volksballaden. The penultimate stanza of the poem reads: “Dort stand der alte Zecher, Trank
letzte Lebensglut, Und warf den heiligen Becher Hinunter in die Flut (Goethe 228).” Scholars
argue that this stanza is the most beautiful of the poem, as it represents the King’s faithfulness
and constancy to his Beloved to the end.

The King is portrayed as ‘der alte Zecher,’ (the old toper), who lives life to the
full, enjoys his cup every day, yet is true to her who gave it. […] In stanza five, he
imbibes life’s last glow’ and throws the golden goblet into the sea. As it plunges
into the sea, the king’s eyelids sink, and the sinking goblet symbolizes the end of
an age (Byrne 336).

Indeed, the King is the archetype of constancy. Yet, in this piece of what Jeffrey Langford calls
“dramatic irony” “such fidelity of course, is not what [Gretchen] is going to experience with
Faust (203).” The King’s act of throwing the cup into the sea, is normally read as a profound act
of love (no one else would drink from this cup after he was gone), but Goethe, true to form in
playing with archetypes, has Faust act in a different manner entirely. After Faust has taken
Gretchen’s ‘Becher,’ her virginity, he abandons her. Once he has taken Gretchen’s virginity, and
‘drained her cup,’ Faust ‘throws Gretchen back into the sea,’ leaving her alone and pregnant with
his child. Yet Gretchen, who knows the story of “Der König in Thule,” is willing to act on her
feelings of lust and desire, for the sake of being loved by a ‘King.’ She might have misplaced her
faith in Faust, but she is far from being a “naïve” and “fixed character” that she has made out to
be by scholars (Grim 23). She is cognizant of the impact of her decisions.

Langford writes that “[i]n the context of his play, Goethe actually intended this text to be sung, but to what kind of music we do not know.” Goethe’s wish, then is in keeping with the
development of the Volksballad. These Volksballaden eventually developed into Kunstballaden
in which “words and music are not inseparable as they are in the folk ballad” (Byrne 207).

However Langford’s research does not specify a particular composer or that Goethe
would have had in mind for “Es war ein König in Thule.” There exist more than a dozen musical
settings of Goethe’s “Es war ein König in Thule,” but I have chosen the three musical settings by
the following major composers Zelter, Schubert and Gounod intentionally. It is a fact that Goethe
loved Zelter’s music, Germanists and musicologists have written many books on Schubert’s
settings of Goethe and albeit in French, Gounod’s Faust is arguably the best-known operatic
adaptation of Goethe’s Faust. In this section, I explore how the composers chose to convey the
“dramatic irony” that is “Es war ein König in Thule,” how Gretchen’s sexual awakening is
present in their music, and how the music enhances the dramatic interpretation of Gretchen’s
sexual awakening and her fully cognizant decision to pursue and give herself to Faust.

Goethe wrote to the composer Zelter, “‘Deine Kompositionen fühle ich sogleich mit
meinen Liedern identisch’” (Whitton 54). He heard Zelter’s music for the first time, between
fragments of *Faust* and at the height of his collecting of “folk songs” and “ballads,” in 1795 (Whitton 66). The two struck up a close friendship, and kept up a correspondence between Goethe’s home in Weimar and Zelter’s home in Berlin. The two shared ideas on everything from music and literature to gardening to condolences in difficult family matters. According to Kenneth Whitton, “Zelter was one of the very few whom Goethe addressed with the intimate “du” form” (Whitton 68).

Zelter is best known as a prominent composer of the Second Berlin School, a time in the history of music that rose out of “[t]he fall of the Bastille prison in Paris on 14 July 1789 [and] allowed writers [of literature and music] in other European countries to use their own music (Whitton 34). This political climate, as well as growing up in the 1770s and 1780s, at the same time Goethe and his contemporary German writers were collecting folk songs, explains why Zelter as a composer would also be attracted to “folk ballad” poetry. Although Zelter’s setting uses the Goethe’s pre-Faust 1774 title: “Der König [von] Thule,” it is dated from 1812, written after Goethe had published his final version of Faust in 1808. The song has the musical characteristics of the Second Berlin School in that it is “strophic.” The musical term “strophic” is easily understood in the context of a hymn, as it is defined in *A History of Western Music: “Hymns are strophic, consisting of several stanzas that are all sung to the same melody.”* (Burkholder, Grout, and Paliscam 57.) The context of a hymn is also in keeping with Zelter as he was famous as a church musician, which has led to historically mixed reviews among critics measuring Zelter as a composer of the *Lied*. “Few nowadays would place him in the first flight of Lieder composers; his love of church music is too clearly seen in his stiff, choralelike melodies and in his work with secular choirs” (Whitton 39.) As Zelter’s setting of “Der König in Thule,” is very short, I have included three stanzas, in this chapter with the melody in its entirety.
It is necessary then to examine how “Der König von Thule” as a musical, strophic setting of “Es war ein König in Thule” fits within the literary genre of the *Volksballad*. The strophic setting, in the key of A minor, does seem to capture the melancholy mood of the ballad. It also makes use of the “rhetorical devices” that Markz describes: Strophic *Lieder* are the musical answer to the “recurring questions, refrains, or other techniques of repetition” that Markz claims “were also characteristic” of the ballad (3). Yet, how, especially in the context of a

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4 The marking “Die übrigen Textstrophen siehe unter Nr. 20” indicates that Zelter did set the other verses of Gretchen’s song, but they do not appear reproduced here.
hymn, does it articulate Gretchen’s decision to follow her feelings towards Faust, and thus her sexual awakening?

Gretchen’s decision is expressed musically in the penultimate and final chord of Zelter’s setting. The song, which began in the key of A minor, ends surprisingly in A Major, with the third of the chord, C being raised to a C sharp. This phenomenon, a minor key ending with a final major chord, is known as a Picardy third. This C sharp first appears in the penultimate measure on the word “gab,” and results in a Picardy third in measure ten. This placement on “gab” follows the musical concept of “text painting” by illustrating how Gretchen has decided to “give” herself to Faust. Traditionally, the Picardy third was used to end songs in the Baroque era in the sixteenth century to “give the piece a sense of finality” (dictionary.onmusic). Just as Gretchen uses the mythological past as an analogy for her present, Zelter uses the sixteenth century styles as an analogy to complement his setting. However, Whitton in his essay, “Goethe, Music, and Musicians,” wrote that Hermann Abert, “claimed that Zelter was anything but “conservative.” [N]ot only did he underline the connection to the genuine Volkslied more strongly than any of his contemporaries...(he) was particularly important for the development of the free forms of the Lied” (Whitton 67). In this regard, I believe Whitton and Abert mean Zelter’s influence on Franz Schubert, who is considered to have developed the Lied to the fullest and in that right, is arguably, the greatest composer of the Lied.

It would be impossible to write this chapter, this paper even, without mention of Franz Schubert. In fact, “[t]he birthday of the Lied is said to be October 14, 1814, the day Schubert composed “Gretchen am Spinnrade,” his setting of Gretchen’s “Meine Ruh’ ist hin” (which will be featured in my chapter on “Spinning Songs,”) (Kimball 39). This song solidified the reputation of Schubert’s settings of Goethe (and indeed, for this reason he is the only composer
to appear in all three of my chapters) but he never replaced Zelter as Goethe’s favorite composer. For all the correspondence between Zelter and Goethe, Goethe had no inclination to have such a relationship, or one at all, with Schubert. On June 16, 1825, Goethe wrote that he had received a letter from Schubert, “Sendung von Schubart [sic.] aus Wien von meinen Liedern-Kompositionen.” However he received a note from Felix Mendelssohn at roughly the same time, whom he deemed more important. “Felix received an answer on 18 June – Schubert received nothing” (Whitton 57-58). It is an interesting subject, made even more so by the fact, that Schubert so admired Goethe’s favorite, Zelter! Schubert looked to the Second Berlin School, his predecessors, as a model for his own compositions. He was born in 1797, during the height of the “folk ballad” and he had been inspired by these composers to write his own Goethe and Schiller Lieder. (Whitton 54).

Indeed, there is not one expert on Goethe and Schubert who would deny the influence of Zelter’s setting of “Der König von Thule” on Schubert’s own setting. Written in 1816, just four years after Zelter’s setting, Schubert is said to have “emulate[d]” Zelter in his choice to set “Der König von Thule” as a strophic Lied (Whitton 208). (Schubert could have easily chosen to set the song as one of his “through-composed” Lieder: “new music for every line of poetry” (Burkholder, Grout and Palisca, 245)). There are many musical parallels to be found between Zelter’s and Schubert’s settings. Schubert like Zelter, chose to set the song in a minor key, (the key of D minor) with “block-chords” in the piano effectively creating the same feeling of foreshadowing of the consequences of her decision that Zelter achieved in his interpretation of the Volksballad (Byrne 338). However, instead of two sections of music for six stanzas, he “amalgamat[es] the six stanzas into three groups of two (Whitton 208),” writes in musical directions for the singer and the pianist, and ends the piece on an entirely different
cadence, which in turn offer more dramatic possibilities for interpreting Gretchen’s vocal line.

The song is not quite as brief as Zelter’s but as it is only one page long, I have included it in its entirety as well:

Schubert indicates that his “Der König in Thule” should be sung *etwas langsam* and includes dynamic markings of pianissimo (pp) with a few well-placed crescendos (cresc.). Byrne, in her analysis of Schubert’s setting sees these markings as indicative of Gretchen’s thought process, the musical interpretation of Gretchen’s “soliloquizing” described by the Swales. It is also indicative of the “dramatic irony” that Langford found within the poem.

As Zelter’s masterful setting is performed *sanft* and *frei*, Schubert’s [*Lied*] is sung *etwas langsam* and *pianissimo* to reflect how Gretchen sings the ballad song quietly to herself, as she muses upon her encounter with Faust. The dirge-like quality of the melody recognizes the dramatic irony and the tragic implications of Gretchen’s song. (Byrne 338-339)

The dynamic markings add interest to the music and richer symbolism to the text. The change from *pianissimo*, (a very soft opening) to a *crescendo*, (an increase in volume) to an even greater *crescendo* still (the biggest outburst) is a musical climax mirroring a sexual climax that Gretchen reaches through masturbation. Goethe has intended for Gretchen to arouse herself in “Abend,” through her own mythological fantasy. This is implied in the text preceding her song: “Es ist so schwül, so dumpf hie, *Sie macht das Fenster auf.* / Und ist doch eben so warm nicht drauß. / Es wird mir so, ich weiß nicht wie – […] Mir läuft ein Schauer übern ganzen Leib – ” which transitions into her stage direction, “*Sie fängt an zu singen, indem sie sich auszieht*” (Goethe 227). The humid night air moves Gretchen to undress and to fantasize through song. The dynamics Schubert places here are his musical response to Goethe’s scenario. The crescendo on “Er sah ihn (den Becher) stürzen, trinken,” can be interpreted as Gretchen, however little clothed, giving into her fantasy as well as the the hot and humid “Abend.”
However, unlike Zelter, Schubert does not end the piece with a raised Picardy third, but rather, his piece ends most decidedly still in the minor key. Zelter’s final chord of the Picardy third, implies that an awakening will occur in the near future. Schubert, through his dynamic markings, insinuates that it has already happened. Schubert’s final cadence instead functions to illustrate the outcome of her decision by foreshadowing the challenges she will face having awoken this sexuality.

The last setting of “Es war ein König in Thule” is “Il était un Roi de Thulé,” by the French composer Charles Gounod. Gounod’s setting is equally as worthy of discussion, as either Zelter’s or Schubert’s setting of the original German text, because of the legacy of his operatic adaptation. His opera, Faust, “outnumbered [performances] of almost every other opera” from the end of the nineteenth- to the mid-twentieth century (Langford 193) and continues to be popular today.

Gounod’s “Il était un roi de Thulé” shares the characteristics of the Volksballad with Zelter’s and Schubert’s settings, in that it is also in a minor key (A minor) and it is in modified strophic form – a “variant of strophic form in which the music for the first stanza is varied for later stanzas” (Burkholder, Grout and Palisca A11). Gounod chooses to vary the rhythm between verses. The first and third verses are below shown as examples:

Example 1.3: First Verse

Example 1.4: Third Verse

However, opera is a much different medium than the Lied. Perhaps the most interesting aspect about Il était un roi de Thulé (other than being in French) is that it is a song, (not an aria) in the opera. According to Langford, “these “embedded songs” are of pivotal importance to an opera’s plot” (203). However, opera, generally speaking, is a more sexually charged art form and arias tend to be more explosive both in content and orchestration, whereas the Lied as a genre is of a more reserved nature, so the songs are more introspective and the piano is more of an intimate nature. Gounod maintains the intimacy of the Lied in his orchestration, in simple block chords, however his librettists Michel Carré and Jules Barbier present Gretchen’s sexual awakening in a much more obvious manner in the form of dramatic asides between stanzas. There are two asides each labeled with the stage direction “(breaking off).” The first aside added is: “Il avait bonne grâce, à ce qu’il m’a semblé / He was kindly and gracious, or so it seemed to me” (Gounod 120-121). Clearly these dramatic asides were added as a result of the librettists’ lack of faith in the audience to pick up on the metaphors of the “Buhle” (Gretchen), giving the “König” (Faust), her “Becher” (virginity). These asides are compensating for the audience not having time to interpret the literature. This is where opera is at a disadvantage to the Lied. In opera, there are many different details competing for one’s attention (such as costumes, lighting, and scenery), and the nuances of the poetry can be overwhelmed by these aspects of the theatre. Whereas the Lied (for solo voice and piano; or sometimes orchestra) is focused exclusively on the poetry (no costumes, no scenery) set to music. Therefore, the introspective nature of the concert Lied does not require the amount of help that Gounod’s librettists found necessary in the form of dramatic asides to communicate the metaphors embedded within the mythology of “Es war ein König in Thule.”

Marguerite’s second dramatic aside (the French use the “Margaret” form of Gretchen’s name) featured in “Example 1.5,” reveals Gretchen’s sexual awakening in a very obvious
manner and thus her agency in choosing a path that will lead her to an intimate relationship with Faust.

Example 1.5: Ibid., 122.

Marguerite begins the next verse, the French translation of “Und warf den heiligen Becher hinunter in die Flut,” and the song ends on a perfect authentic cadence in A minor. It is marked *pianissimo* as though Gounod intended for the music to fade away like the “Becher” into the sea.

This is a poignant quote from Goethe to consider as this chapter comes to a close, and before considering next two chapters which focus on the monologues in “Gretchens Stube” and “Zwinger:”

[A]ls wenn der Musiker sich darin versenkt, um ihr erst das eigentliche Leben einzuhauen und sie durch seine Persönlichkeit eigens zu individualisieren. Es entsteht dadurch ein neues Poem, welches den Dichter selbst überraschen muß” (Goethe 176).

There is no “one way” to set a poem, but in spite of each composer’s individual voice, it is interesting to see how their musical conceptions overlap and shared and in this chapter, this overlapping concerns the musical interpretation of the literary *Volksballad*. Each composer in this chapter, Carl Friedrich Zelter, Franz Schubert, and Charles Gounod, all chose minor keys (Zelter and Gounod both coincidentally chose A minor) to represent foreshadowing of the
*Gretchentragödie* and tunefull\(^5\) folk-like melodies to reflect Gretchen’s psychological process of “soliloquizing” as she mulls over her decision. As a result, they have more musically in common than not. Where the settings differ however, is how each composer uses music to suit the drama, which affects the interpretation of “Es war ein König in Thule” as Gretchen’s sexual awakening. Zelter’s musical setting is the shortest, but he clearly set the standard with his choice to realize the *Volksballad* as a strophic *Lied*, and the strophic setting clearly demonstrates the narrative properties of the Epic genre of folk poetry. Zelter’s setting of the song in a minor key ending on a major chord (the Picardy Third) not merely her sexual awakening but that he understood the larger scope of the drama. Following her sexual awakening, Gretchen will go through a period of darkness, but it always her agency, represented in the Picardy Third, which lights her way. Schubert further developed Zelter’s ideas and used musical markings as a progression to create a musical climax, implying Gretchen’s agency in awakening herself and achieving her first orgasm through masturbation. Whereas Gounod and his librettists saw the poem as an opportunity to advance the plot and added asides in their French translation so that the audience would not be lost in live performance. However, blatant their technique, it effectively communicates Gretchen’s growing interest in physical intimacy, and thus Gounod’s setting is an effective interpretation of her sexual awakening.

These interpretations of foreshadowing, sexual climaxing, and created dramatic asides are all subtext already present in the text. However, it is through their musical settings that they become apparent. These musical settings defy all existing stereotypes that Gretchen is a

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\(^5\) Tuneful in music often refers to a “singable” range of only a few intervals, so that a non-classical singer could sing them easily as well. The repetition of the same few notes, musically creates the illusion of one mulling one’s thoughts over.
“simple girl” (Whitton 208) and that she is indeed coming into her sexuality and maturing into a young woman.
Chapter 2: Song as a Cycle of Sexual Frustration
(“Gretchen am Spinnrade”)

“Gretchens Stube”

GRETCHEN am Spinnrade; allein:

Meine Ruh ist hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer;
Ich finde sie nimmer
Und nimmermehr.

Wo ich ihn nicht hab,
Ist mir das Grab,
Die ganze Welt
Ist mir vergällt.

Mein armer Kopf
Ist mir verrückt,
Mein armer Sinn
Ist mir zerstückt.

Meine Ruh ist hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer;
Ich finde sie nimmer
Und nimmermehr.

Nach ihm nur
schau ich
Zum Fenster hinaus,
Nach ihm nur geh ich
Aus dem Haus.

Sein hoher Gang,
Sein edle Gestalt,
Seines Mundes Lächeln,
Seiner Augen Gewalt

Und seiner Rede
Zauberfluß,
Sein Händedruck
Und ach, sein Kuß!

Meine Ruh ist hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer;
Ich finde sie nimmer
Und nimmermehr.

Mein Busen drängt
Sich nach ihm hin:
Ach dürft ich fassen
Und halten ihn

Und küssen ihn,
So wie ich wollt.
An seinen Küssen
Vergehen sollt!6

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The scene “Gretchens Stube,” in which Gretchen delivers her dramatic monologue, “Gretchen am Spinnrade,” (Gretchen at the spinning wheel), is commonly interpreted as a “bewildered, bodily surrender,” (Gray 104). However, I am making the case in this chapter that Gretchen is not bewildered or confused by this “surrender,” but rather, she is cognizant of her “surrender” and of her desires as a sexually frustrated woman, following her sexual awakening in “Es war ein König in Thule.” However, unlike the Volksballad, “Es war ein König in Thule,” “Gretchen am Spinnrade,” was not written as a song in the drama, but rather as a soliloquy. After a detailed dramatic and Jungian analysis of “Gretchen am Spinnrade” as a soliloquy, I uncover how the inherent musicality of this monologue, its language and its rhythm, captivated two major composers of the nineteenth century, Austrian composer Franz Schubert and German composer Richard Wagner. Ultimately, I aim to prove how although this soliloquy was not written as a song, music cannot be divorced from the drama of “Gretchen am Spinnrade” in the scene “Gretchens Stube.” Gretchen’s soliloquy at the spinning wheel is a reflection of her mature sexuality.

According to Goethe, the three elements, essential to writing poetry, were the “Epos, Lyrik und Drama” (Markz 3). In the first chapter, I made the case that the Volksballad, “Es war ein König in Thule” was heavily influenced by the “Epos” found in folk ballad poetry and for that reason it can be seen as an “epyllion.” In this chapter, I assert that the genre of poetry that most drives the monologue “Gretchen am Spinnrade” in “Gretchens Stube” is that of the “Drama,” because of “its primary emphasis is on character” (Miller and Greenberg, 167), whereas in “Es war ein König in Thule,” the primary emphasis was on storytelling. This scene is focused exclusively on Gretchen, or the “persona.” The essential feature in all dramatic poems is the PERSONA [sic.], a character created by the poet and placed in a situation that involves
some conflict or action (even though the poem may consist of no more than an internal debate)” (Miller and Greenberg, 167.) Goethe makes it clear from the first stanza of the monologue, “Meine Ruh ist hin, Mein Herz ist schwer; Ich finde sie nimmer [U]nd nimmermehr!” (Goethe 248), that Gretchen is indeed experiencing an “internal debate”. According to Byrne, this “internal debate” for Gretchen in “Gretchens Stube,” is “an antithesis between her physical desire for Faust and her Christian morality” (340), which fuels her sexual frustration. Therefore, it is not guilt that Gretchen is experiencing at this moment, but rather, “a metaphor of growth and rebirth, where the spirit is set free” (Byrne 340). This sexual freedom is new to her and therefore, unregulated. Furthermore, this “growth” Byrne mentions, as well as Goethe’s stage direction, “GRETCHEN am Spinnrade; allein (248),” indicates that “Gretchen am Spinnrade” is no ordinary monologue, but a soliloquy. In a soliloquy, “one person speaks aloud and does so with no one else present to hear the words. When this occurs, it is usually a means of providing information so that the plot can move forward or the hidden self can be revealed” (Miller and Greenberg 167)[.] “Therefore, in writing “Gretchen am Spinnrade” as a soliloquy, Goethe shows Gretchen to be a profoundly psychological character, “neither stupid nor naive” (Martin and Erika Swales 139). The soliloquy is the dramatic device that allows Gretchen the most freedom to express her frustration and to reveal her “hidden self.”

Under the emotional pressure of her love for Faust, she finds herself desperately impelled to think, to reflect, to interrogate her experience. But how can she do it? She needs a framework of self-exploration but does not know where to look for it; […] Girls of her class and upbringing are not meant, as it were, to soliloquize in any sustained or complex ways. But she has to[!]” (Martin and Erika Swales, 138)
Gretchen is not a passive character. “When a woman is in love, we […] say that she loves, that is, she is active” (Harding 177). Gretchen is actively determining her role in her relationship with Faust as she soliloquizes and while using the spinning wheel as a “framework” for her “self-exploration. “When Gretchen soliloquizes, she is doing something, she is not simply sitting and thinking. The hands are busy: […] [S]he is at the spinning wheel” (Swales 139).” Goethe gives Gretchen a powerful tool in the spinning wheel, overlooked by many scholars, for Gretchen to establish herself as “a woman of power” (Byrne 341).

The spinning wheel is the dominating symbol in “Gretchens Stube.” The rotating of the wheel drives the rhythm of “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (both as a soliloquy and later as a Lied), while serving as a metaphor for a cycle of endless sexual frustration for Gretchen. According to Byrne, “[a]s a traditional symbol of fertility [the spinning wheel] symbolizes the dawn of desire and sexual initiation and presages the outcome of their affair” (341). This shows that Gretchen is cognizant of the possible consequences of a sexual relationship with Faust and moreover, willing to accept those consequences. Furthermore, “[i]n folk mythology, spinners perpetually open and close the cycles that affect individuals” (341). This is the end of the safe Gretchen who always abides by the rules and society’s expectations. This is the new cycle of a woman, who is consciously giving in to her desires and establishing herself as an individual.

Each stanza of “Gretchen am Spinnrade” exhibits a unique facet of Gretchen’s “internal debate.” Starting with her initial outburst in the first stanza, “Meine Ruh ist hin” (Goethe 248). Gretchen builds to a “poetic climax” that is realized in the seventh stanza (Byrne 340). The second stanza “Wo ich ihn nicht hab / Ist mir das Grab/ Die ganze Welt / Ist mir vergällt” (Goethe 248), is defined by the imagery of Gretchen imprisoned in a “tomb” (Byrne 340). The following stanza, “Mein armer Kopf / Ist mir verrückt / Mein armer Sinn / Ist mir zerstückt” is
frequently interpreted literally as if Gretchen had gone crazy and lost her mind, however it is
simply the sexual frustration that Gretchen feels from wanting more of Faust while feeling
imprisoned in the “tomb.” In fact, Mephistopheles used the folk song “Wenn ich ein Vöglein
wär?” (Goethe 346), in the previous scene, “Wald und Höhle,” to taunt Faust with the imagery of
Gretchen being a little bird trapped by her feelings for him. According to Harding, “To be ‘in
love’ with a man is more than to ‘love’ him. The state of being in love carries with it a certain
element of compulsion, and one who is in love, however enraptured [she or] he may be, is
certainly not free” (176). This shows that Gretchen is perfectly justified in feeling imprisoned.
However, she is imprisoned not by Faust, but by her own sexual frustrations. Gretchen has
“projected” “her masculine soul, her animus,” onto Faust (Harding 176.) Harding is referencing
the Jungian concept of the “animus” the masculine, or active, part of the female psyche in which
“glamour and attraction are effects produced by forces in her unconscious which have been
stirred to activity through her contact with her man” (176). This is why Gretchen feels frustrated
at the idea of a world without Faust. In the fourth stanza, Gretchen repeats the text of the “Meine
Ruh ist hin” stanza for dramatic emphasis of her “internal debate” and the fifth stanza features
the next most important symbol after the spinning wheel: the window. “Nach ihm nur schau ich’
/ Zum Fenster hinaus / Nach ihm nur geh’ ich / Aus dem Haus” Windows as a symbol, have
traditionally been associated with “longing” in literature, fairy tales and folklore. Byrne asserts

7 “Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär” is a traditional folk song in Germany about a bird wanting to fly away, if only it had
wings. Gretchen wants to fly to Faust, but feels trapped by the confines of society and religion. However it is
commonly associated as a children’s song, which is why Gretchen spins at the spinning wheel, to exercise her agency.
8 Carl Gustav (C.G.) Jung (1875-1961), was a Swiss psychologist who studied with Sigmund Freud and is the father
of analytical psychology. His theory on the “Anima and Animus” explains the anima as a “man’s feminine soul” and
an animus as a “woman’s masculine soul.” Men and women project their anima or animus onto one another when
they fall in love (Harding 176).
that in the fifth stanza “the window [is] an image that is symbolic of her receptivity to Faust” (Byrne 340). Gretchen feels that the cure to her sexual frustration is more of Faust.

There is a perceptible change in mood from the fifth stanza to the sixth stanza. Gretchen has channeled her frustration into the spinning wheel and thus the mood of the text has lightened considerably: “Sein hoher Gang / Sein edle Gestalt / Seines Mundes Lächeln / Seiner Augen Gewalt” (Goethe 249). In this stanza, Gretchen is fantasizing about Faust’s physical characteristics. This stanza, like the second stanza, can also be understood in terms of the Jungian “animus.” According to Harding:

> If a woman whose animus values are constellated in a projection on to a man is analysed, a moment comes when the projection is broken. The psychological energy, or libido, formerly occupied with the projection is released and sinks down into the unconscious where it begins to activate the primordial images that lie hidden there. At this moment it sometimes happens that she begins to produce spontaneous fantasies and visions, which represent the transformations which the libido is undergoing in the unconscious. [...] [I]nstead of merely being obsessed by the mood of unhappiness into which such disappointment is only too apt to throw her. (182)

By channeling these “visions” and “fantasies” from her memories of intimate moments with Faust, Gretchen has shown that she is able to overcome her “mood of unhappiness” and momentarily, rise above her sexual frustration. As she continues to spin, the “poetic climax” Byrne mentions (340), finally occurs in the seventh stanza: “Und seiner Rede / Zauberfluß / Sein Händedruck, Und ach, sein Kuß!” It is the euphoric “Und ach, sein Kuß!” “that recalls [Gretchen] to reality and inspires the repetition of her refrain [in the eighth stanza.]” (Byrne
340). The ninth stanza, “Mein Busen drängt / Sich nach ihm ihn / Ach dürft ich ihn fassen / Und halten ihn” expresses her “distraught ecstasy,” and in the tenth stanza, “[a]s she longs to kiss Faust, her obsessive fervor builds to the second summit of the poem where she exclaims how she would die in his kiss” (Byrne 341): “Und küsse ihn, / So wie ich wollt / An seinen Küssen vergehen sollt!” Goethe uses the verb “vergehen” as a double entendre. On one hand, Goethe uses the “imagery of death” in the tenth stanza as foreshadowing for Gretchen’s own death at the end of the drama (Byrne 341); however, on the other hand, given the context of the scene and the intensity of Gretchen’s feelings, the verb “vergehen” is also simultaneously acting as the French la petite mort (“little death”) or orgasm. According to Taylor, “‘[W]anting to die’ [(as Gretchen does)] evokes la petite mort – the so-called ‘little death’ of orgasm – where Freud likens the ‘condition that follows complete sexual satisfaction to dying’ (in Bristow, 1997: 122)” (9-10).

This interpretation of “vergehen” as la petite mort shows Gretchen’s willingness to completely surrender herself to Faust, which paradoxically, foreshadows her willingness to surrender herself to God at the end of the drama. Thus, the double entendre of the word “vergehen” is ultimately a precursor to Gretchen exercising her agency to ultimately resolve her “internal debate,” this “antithesis between [Gretchen’s] physical desire for Faust and her Christian morality” (340), and thus her sexual frustration.

Perhaps Whitton puts its best, “Certainly there is no doubt that this monologue [....] is, indeed, a frank and physical declaration of passion” (156), and it is Gretchen’s passion, specifically her sexual frustration, that inspired composers to set this soliloquy to music and resulted in the birth of the “High Romantic Lied.”9 This development is a testament to Franz

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9 The origins of the “High Romantic Lied” come from the Volkslieder discussed in the previous chapter. According to Kimball, “The [Lieder] were self-contained strophic songs with simple accompaniments and tuneful melodies that could easily be remembered by audiences. The Volkstümlicheslieder served as a model for early song composers [in the eighteenth century.]” (39)
Schubert’s setting of “Gretchen am Spinnrade,” and according to Kimball, “[t]he “birthday” of the Lied is said to be October 14, 1814 - the day Schubert composed “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (39), and is considered to be his “first great masterpiece” (53). This Lied has earned the title of a “masterpiece” because “[h]ere for the first time in the history of the German [Lied], text and music share the honors; the music does not just illustrate the poem, it is indeed self-contained and “reproduces the poetic intentions” (Whitton 159)[. Schubert accomplishes this feat by musically “reproducing” Gretchen at the spinning wheel in the hands of the pianist while the singer gives voice to Gretchen’s sexual frustration. As a result, Gretchen’s soliloquy is enhanced through music as a Lied.

Schubert’s Lied is a dramatic realization of “Gretchens Stube” from beginning to end. It is clear from his setting, that Schubert also saw the spinning wheel as a metaphor for a cycle of endless sexual frustration for Gretchen. He conveys this cycle by beginning and ending the piece with only the spinning wheel. In the beginning, the piano’s entrance without the voice in the opening measures reproduces Gretchen’s agitated mood in the first five stanzas of her soliloquy and furthermore, demonstrates Schubert’s knowledge of the spinning wheel. In order to effectively reproduce the mechanics of spinning, Schubert gives left and right hands of the pianist separate roles to play as the spinning wheel: “The sempre legato spinning motif is underscored by sempre staccato rhythmic fifths to suggest the treadle and the long held notes in the bass give rhythmic emphasis through the song” (Byrne 342). The function of the treadle (the foot pedal) is to literally apply pressure to the part of the spinning wheel known as the drive wheel. The right hand of the piano imitates the “rotation of the wheel […] capable of mirroring orchestral sonority, a big dipper following the ups and downs of the human heart” (Johnson 795).
Schubert achieves the image of the wheel spinning without ceasing and that is what drives Gretchen to voice her frustration.


Furthermore, Schubert gives each stanza its own motif, showing his deep understanding not only of the spinning wheel but of Gretchen as woman. “Example 2.1” features the motif for each repetition of “Meine Ruh ist hin” where the music returns in the same shape and key to underscore this stanza. Schubert has the piano spin out new melodies and harmonies as the spinning wheel for the second stanza, “Wo ich ihn nicht hab / Ist mir das Grab” (Example 2.2) and the fifth stanza’s, “Nach ihm nur schau’ ich / Zum Fenster hinaus” shared motif (Example 2.3). For Byrne, these two stanzas share the same motif in order to “portray the prison imagery” in this scene (Byrne 343).
In Schubert’s setting the change from the fifth to the sixth stanzas is quite audible even to the untrained ear. This is because this is the first time the piece has shifted from a minor to a major key. The shift from the fifth stanza, “Nach ihm nur Schau ich” to the sixth stanza, “Sein hoher Gang,” reflected in a key change from D minor to F Major, corroborates Jung’s theory on “mood.” According to Whitton:

Schubert’s instinctive awareness of the emotional colour [sic.] of individual keys is an essential part of his genius for finding the best musical form for an
individual text.” Goethe realized this intuitively as well, and the magical move from the major and minor in Schubert’s music would have been understood by Goethe as a move into a different emotional state. (Whitton 84).

Moreover, with this shift in mood, “the pedal motif is also dropped in the bass” (Byrne 342).

As Gretchen begins her description of Faust, the pedalling motif is replaced by pianissimo chords and the treble chords widen out. The transformation this inspires is marked with a long awaited relative major and the intensification of this imagery is realized in the tonal ascent from F Major to G minor to A flat major to B flat major (Byrne 343).

Example 2.4 shows clearly shows the change in the left hand from the end of the fifth to the beginning of the sixth stanza:

![Example 2.4: Ibid.](image-url)

Schubert reaches B flat major in the “ach,” of “Und ach, sein Kuß!” in the seventh stanza. In his setting of the word “Kuß,” Schubert shows his understanding of the “poetic climax,” Byrne describes (340), by placing a fermata¹⁰ on the word and by setting it on a G above the staff, the second highest note in the piece, and this is significant in that it is the first time that she cries out.

As she cries out, the spinning wheel in the piano stops. It resumes again marked pianissimo, A “fermata” in music is an indication that the singer should break free from tempo and hold the note as long as they feel dramatically serves the music and the text.
gradually building up in speed and momentum to return to the “Meine Ruh ist hin” refrain in stanza eight.

Example 2.5: Ibid.

Schubert portrays Gretchen’s sexual frustration in the ninth stanza by placing a crescendo poco a poco marking in the music. This means as Gretchen sings “Mein Busen drängt / Sich nach ihm hin” the music is gradually getting faster and faster. With this increase in tempo comes a building of intensity leading to the highest note in the Lied, the A above the staff, aptly placed on “vergehen.”

Example 2.6 Ibid

This placement on “vergehen” as the loudest cry on the highest pitch in the Lied lends itself to the interpretation of “vergehen” as la petite mort (“little death” or orgasm) as well as the interpretation of Gretchen perhaps having some foresight on what is to transpire between herself
and Faust. However, even with the knowledge of the possible consequences of defying society’s expectations, Gretchen is still willing to act on her sexual desires to relieve her frustration.

After this climax on the A above the staff, Schubert adds one more declaration of the first two lines of the “Meine Ruh ist hin” stanza. Byrne argues that it would have been too musically “abrupt” for Schubert to have ended the poem with “An seine Küsse vergehen sollt” (344). The repetition of “Meine Ruh ist hin / Mein Herz ist schwer” has a profound, unintended dramatic effect as well. Through this musical choice, Schubert is making the dramatic statement, that indeed, spinning serves as a metaphor for a cycle of endless sexual frustration for Gretchen.

Franz Schubert is known and remembered for being a composer of the Lied, whereas Richard Wagner is primarily known as a composer of opera. However, as “[i]t was Wagner’s mission to reform the libretto and elevate it into a dramatic poem” (Finck 479), it is not wholly unsurprising that Faust as a play, and the Gretchentragödie in particular, would have appealed to him. Wagner’s choice to set “Gretchens Stube” as “Meine Ruh ist hin” speaks to his commitment to Drama as an art form.

Wagner, as a German, was naturally acquainted with the Lied and it is clear from his setting of the scene, “Meine Ruh ist hin” that he was familiar with Schubert’s “Gretchen am Spinnrade.” He published his setting as part of his Sieben Kompositionen zu Goethes Faust in 1831. Although the spinning wheel is present, Wagner’s interpretation tends to focus more exclusively on the persona, showing his commitment to the dramatic form of the soliloquy and Gretchen’s “psychological process” (Kovács, trans. Mészáros 6), her sexual frustration, and womanly desires.
Wagner, like Schubert, begins his setting with piano only; the pianist playing the role of the spinning wheel. However, “the onomatopoeic representation of the whirring spinning wheel occurs only in the brief interludes” (Wersin, trans. Johnston), rather than a steady spinning throughout. However Wagner’s setting differs from Schubert’s in that he has the hands of the pianist enter separately. Wagner has the left hand (as the treadle) enter on a piano trill, rapidly alternating between the pitches of D and E flat for six beats. The right hand does not enter until the last beat (beat six.) This oscillation between the notes of D and E flat for five beats effectively creates a mood of agitation and is a musical portrayal of Gretchen’s frustration. Furthermore, the intermittent role of the spinning wheel indicates that Gretchen is so consumed with desire that she cannot concentrate on her task of spinning.


The spinning wheel motif is one rhythmic motif Wagner uses in this piece. He also uses it in the vocal line to portray Gretchen’s soliloquizing. In particular, the third stanza, “Mein armer Kopf / Ist mir verrückt / Mein armer Sinn / Ist mir zerstückt” is punctuated by rests, creating a sense that Gretchen is so frustrated and overwhelmed with desire that she is struggling to get out the words.
Wagner like Schubert, signals the dramatic shift in mood that arrives at the sixth stanza with a key change. Wagner’s “Meine Ruh ist hin” moves through different keys to create a sense of frustration, though it begins and ends in G minor. The modulation at the beginning of the sixth stanza to the parallel major, G Major, is significant because maintains the same tonal center of G, while raising two significant pitches, the third (B flat to B natural) and the seventh (F natural to F sharp). The elevating of pitches is a literal representation of the elevation in mood and Jungian psychology. According to Ridley:

Jungian psychology was much more sympathetic to Wagner, both generally as an artist and in particular. [...] For [Jung] the interest of the psychologist in art lay in the identification of archetypes, and he often discussed Wagner positively for his insights into the nature of archetypes[.] (179)

The archetype in this scene would be Gretchen, or, a woman in love, and in this moment at the transition to the sixth stanza, would be the “projection” of her animus onto Faust. Wagner chooses to portray this animus musically by having Gretchen sing above the staff for the first time in this section. She is already singing above the staff for “Und seiner Rede Zaubefluß” and Wagner depicts Gretchen’s cry of “Und ach sein Kuß” as a chromatic scale starting at the “Hände” of “Händedruck” on the pitch E natural, climbing by half steps to F natural, F sharp and finally Wagner has Gretchen reach “Kuß” on the G above the staff. Wagner is clearly
emulating Schubert here, for not only is the word, “Küß” on the same pitch, but Wagner, like Schubert also includes a fermata. There is a slight difference in that the music in the piano stops so that the singer is holding “Küß” longer than the piano underneath her which does not happen in Schubert’s version. When the piano does resume, it is in one of its “brief interludes” as the spinning wheel; a reference to Schubert’s setting.

Example 2.9, Ibid.

Wagner ends his setting with the line “An seine Küssen vergehen sollt,” but he sets the word “vergehen” an interval of a sixth lower than Schubert. However he changes the tempo from an
“etwas schneller” to “langsamer” directly above “vergehen.” It may not be the orgasmic cry of Schubert’s Gretchen, but it is a dramatic resolution of Gretchen’s sexual frustration. She has made a decision and that is to act on her desires as a woman and to follow her feelings for Faust. Once she has made her decision, she can resume spinning and the piano ends the piece.

Example 2.10, Ibid.

According to Finck, “Wagner insisted that an operatic artist should be an actor before he presumes to sing. As an actor, [the singer] can produce as great an “effect” as he ever can hope to with his “free and independent” arias; and if he is a good singer too, his power is doubled” (480)[.]. This doubling of power is precisely why Gretchen’s soliloquy at the spinning wheel is so effective when set by Schubert, Wagner, or other composers, to music. The spinning wheel, an inanimate object, mentioned only in the stage direction for the scene “Gretchens Stube,” suddenly comes to life through the piano. This musical realization of the spinning wheel contributes to a greater dramatic realization of Gretchen. The keys carefully chosen by the
composers to signal changes in mood reveal new clues to Gretchen’s psychological state: her desires, sexual frustration and her *animus*, as per Jungian analysis. Gretchen is a mature young woman who longs and desires for a loving sexual relationship with Faust, yet he is withholding himself from her and as a result, she is both sexually and spiritually frustrated. In the scene, “Marthens Garden,” immediately following “Gretchens Stube,” Gretchen asks the question that has become famously known as her question: the *Gretchenfrage*, “Nun sag wie hast du’s mit der Religion?” (Goethe 249). Faust replies, “Ich ehre sie,” to which she replies back, “Doch ohne Verlangen” (Goethe 250). Gretchen is no fool. She knows that Faust does not desire Christianity, yet her “Christian morality” (Byrne 340) is still very important to her. In spite of this, knowing full well where he stands on religion, she chooses to act on her desires and to be with him. Therefore, this soliloquy and *Lied* is not a “bewildered, bodily” surrender (Gray 104); it is a cognizant surrender.
Chapter 3: Song as Sexual Closure and Spiritual Redemption
(“Ach neige”)

“Zwinger”

In der Mauerhöhle ein Andachtsbild der Mater dolorosa, 
Blumenkrüge davor.

GRETCHEN steckt frische Blumen in die Krüge:

Ach neige, 
Du Schmerzenreiche, 
Dein Antlitz gnädig meiner Not!

Das Schwert im Herzen, 
Mit tausend Schmerzen 
Blickst auf zu deines Sohnes Tod.

Zum Vater blickst du, 
Und Seufzer schickst du 
Hinauf um sein’ und deine Not.

Wer fühlet, 
Wie wühlet 
Der Schmerz mir im Gebein? 
Was mein armes Herz hier banget, 
Was es zittert, was verlanget, 
Weiβt nur du, nur du allein!

Wohin ich immer gehe, 
Wie weh, wie weh, wie wehe 
Wird mir im Busen hier! 
Ich bin, ach! kaum alleine, 
Ich wein, ich wein, ich weine, 
Das Herz zerbricht in mir.

Die Scherben vor meinem Fenster 
Betäub ich mit Tränen, ach! 
Als ich am frühen Morgen 
Dir diese Blumen brach.

Schien hell in meine Kammer, 
Die Sonne früh herauf, 
Saß ich in allem Jammer 
In meinem Bett schon auf.

Hilf! rette mich von Schmach und Tod! 
Ach neige, 
Du Schmerzenreiche, 
Dein Antlitz gnädig meiner Not!11

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Gretchen knew inherently that if she followed her desires there would be consequences. The “internal debate” of religious expectations, societal pressures and her own sexual frustration, as the spinning wheel in the scene “Gretchens Stube” demonstrated, was not a cycle that would be easily broken. However as a mature young woman with sexual needs, however cognizant of possible outcomes, she was willing to risk it all for her belief in love and her desire for an intimate relationship with Faust. This chapter focuses on the less than desirable consequences of Gretchen’s cognizant surrender to Faust, but moreover, in this chapter I aim to prove that Gretchen is to be commended for her strength, not condemned for her “sin,” or if that word is in fact, appropriate. Gretchen’s sexuality makes her a whole and complete person; her “Ach neige” is an unapologetic lyric poem. The musical settings of the “Zwinger” scene, by the German composer Hugo Wolf and Austrian composer Franz Schubert, highlight the strength she finds and needs to be unapologetic about her sexuality which adds new dimensions to Gretchen’s delivery of this poem. However, the lyricism of Goethe’s text and Gretchen’s “Ach neige,” translates not only to music but to the twenty-first century. Therefore, the “Zwinger” scene is not only the story of Gretchen; it is the story of every woman.

Gretchen’s sexual awakening in the scene “Abend” was framed by the poetic genre of the Epos (Epic), her choice to ultimately follow her heart and her desires in “Gretchens Stube,” (rising above her “internal debate” ((Miller and Greenberg, 167.) “[the] antithesis between her physical desire for Faust and her Christian morality” (Byrne 340)), was framed by the poetic genre of the Drama, and her inner strength to ultimately reconcile herself is reflected through the Lyrik.

Although not written as a song in the context of Goethe’s Faust, as a lyric poem, the “Zwinger” scene or “Ach neige,” is perhaps the most logical choice of the three scenes to be set
to music. According to Miller and Greenberg, “The derivation of the term *lyric* from “lyre,” a musical instrument, relates the genre to song, suggesting brevity, a strongly musical component [and] a significant presence of emotion” (175)[.] As a monologue that takes place in front of a devotional picture of the *Mater dolorosa*, it has these components and takes the “strict” form of the thirteenth century “*Stabat Mater*” (Byrne 345-346). Indeed, I have read the English translation of the *Stabat Mater* by Edward Caswall in the *Lyra Catholica* from 1849, and several stanzas of Gretchen’s monologue match up almost exactly with the same stanzas of his translation. The second stanza of Caswall’s translation of the *Stabat Mater* is just one example that clearly shows how Goethe used it as a model for Gretchen’s “Ach neige:”

> Through her heart,  
> his sorrow sharing,  
> Now at length the sword had passed (Caswall 139).

> Das Schwert im Herzen,  
> Mit tausend Schmerzen  
> Blickst auf zu deines Sohnes Tod. (Goethe 255).

Goethe has retained the sentiments and some of the imagery (Das Schwert im Herzen; The sword through her heart) of the second stanza of the *Stabat Mater*, integrating the character of Gretchen and using the form to deepen her pain (Mit tausend Schmerzen; Gretchen’s sorrow is Mary’s sorrow a thousandfold.) His choice of form is important because it speaks to the “internal debate” that has been raging inside of the character since “Gretchens Stube.” However, in spite of the importance of religion to Gretchen, there is more at stake here than religion: to Gretchen this is not just a prayer; this is a matter of personal salvation. According to Byrne, “Gretchen’s prayer to a mother, who is both virginal and maternal, mirrors Gretchen’s position. […] Gretchen identifies with the *Mater Dolorosa* and her words echo the *Stabat Mater* because she will share the supreme sorrow of a mother who sees her child die (346).
Gretchen used to identify with her friend Lieschen, before she experienced physical intimacy. In the previous scene, “Am Brunnen,” she and Lieschen bring their jugs to the well and Gretchen is forced to listen to Lieschen condemn the unmarried Bärbelchen for her pregnancy. After Lieschen leaves, Gretchen delivers this short soliloquy directly preceding her “Ach neige” to Mary:

Wenn tät ein armes Mägdlein fehlen!
Wie konnt ich über andrer Sünden
Nicht Worte gnug der Zunge finden!
Wie schien mir’s Schwarz, und schwärzt’s noch gar,
Mir’s immer doch nicht Schwarz gnug war,
Und segnet mich und tat so groß,
Und bin nun selbst der Sünde bloß!
Doch – alles was dazu mich trieb,
Gott! war so gut! ach, war so lieb! (Goethe 255)

In this short soliloquy, Gretchen admits that as a virgin, she used to relish condemning other girls just as Lieschen does. However, by undergoing a physical transformation (finding herself pregnant) she has undergone a psychological transformation as well. She realizes that condemning someone else’s “sin” does not bring her closer to God, if indeed an act of love is such a “sin.” Here, Gretchen for the first time sees “sexual intercourse [as] part of a rational exchange between a man and a woman, not the result of women’s more suggestible minds and greater weakness” (Fronius 103)[.] Ironically, Gretchen’s acknowledgment of sexuality gives her a newfound empathy for Mary; as a woman with child. She turns to Mary in “Zwinger” because she realizes she is the only woman to whom she can relate, as she admits in her lyric monologue.
“Ach neige.” Gretchen’s fourth stanza which ends with the line, “Weißt nur du, nur du allein!” (Goethe 255), expresses her desire to connect her experience to Mary’s and to find strength from this bond. Gretchen is drawn to Mary in the midst of her transformation because Mary is “an embodiment of the Eternal Feminine” (Byrne 347) and according to Hamlin, “the Eternal-Feminine is defined by a form of erotic love, however idealized and purified by mythological and spiritual transformations” (143)[.] Furthermore, Mary as the “Eternal Feminine” “personifies courage and idealism, and is an incarnation of eternal forgiving love” (Byrne 347). Then in keeping with this definition of the “Eternal Feminine,” Gretchen’s “Ach neige” can be rationalized as her prayer to Mary to aid her in finding the strength to undergo a “spiritual transformation” from an experience of “erotic love” fraught with pain to a path of “spiritual” healing and redemption.

The path of spiritual redemption for Gretchen is a path to take back her power and her agency. This is not fully realized until the last scene of Goethe’s Faust, (“Kecker,”)) but the “Zwinger” scene shows the first steps towards this redemption. This is why Gretchen brings flowers to the Andachtsbild and why the flowers (Blumen) serve as such a supremely important symbol in this poem. Her offering of flowers is a peace offering; she is praying to be “spared” by a male dominated society that has “demanded” that she is sinful and deserves “‘shame and death’” for her actions (Byrne 346). According to Byrne, “the flowers are a symbol of her love, they are also an image of the cycle of life and signify a loss of innocence” (346). However, in losing this innocence, Gretchen has gained knowledge. She has learned that sexuality is natural, that physical intimacy can be a loving act, and poignantly, that she is not ready to be a mother.

12 Helen Fronius, in her research, asks the question, “What do the discrepancies between reality and depiction reveal about the authors’ motivation in writing about infanticide? Some writers were at least partly motivated by their desire to promote a particular model of womanhood.” She mentions that the majority of these writers, including Goethe, Schiller, and Heinrich Leopold Wagner were male (104).
Her controversial act of agency is to commit infanticide. According to Fronius, in her research on infanticide in Germany, “real-life cases show[ed] women trying to regain control of their lives by disposing of the baby that caused them their problems,” however “[Real-life] was not the stuff of poetry.” As a result in poetry (usually from the perspective of males, including Goethe\textsuperscript{13}), “[w]omen’s agency is removed and their victimhood underlined throughout” (105). However, I maintain that Gretchen is no victim; she is actively seeking not to restore her virginity, but to restore her agency. In asking to be saved first in this moment of the “Zwinger” scene, Gretchen is preparing herself for her ultimate act of agency: her prayer for redemption at the end of Goethe’s *Faust*.

Needless to say, the “significant presence of emotion” that Miller and Greenberg attribute to lyric poetry, the “Ach neige” of the “Zwinger” scene, naturally lends itself to be set to music. There are not as many musical settings of this scene as other Faust scenes, because of the difficulty of the subject matter, but the scene particularly moved the Slovenian born Austrian composer Hugo Wolf. As a composer, Wolf was very selective in his choice of lyric poetry. He chose only “first-rate literary texts” and lyric poetry that “deal[t] in timeless human truths, transcendent of history and society, which the universal language of music can reproduce or enhance” (Kramer 240). Goethe’s *Faust* as a text, and Gretchen’s “Ach neige” as a lyric poem, certainly fit this criteria as “expressive ideal[s]” for music (240).

According to Kimball, “[Wolf] referred to his songs as “poems for voice and piano” (111). Wolf’s setting, titled, *Gretchen vor dem Andachtsbild der Mater Dolorosa*, was one of his earliest Goethe *Lieder*. Wolf’s setting shows a deep understanding of Gretchen’s psychology.

\textsuperscript{13} Goethe’s *Gretchentragödie* was influenced by the story of Susanna Margaretha Brandt, who was tried for infanticide in eighteenth-century Frankfurt am Main. For further reading on the historical background and details of the trial, please see: Siegfried Birkner, *Goethes Gretchen: Das Leben und Sterben der Kindsmörderin Susanna Margaretha Brandt*. (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1973.)
Gretchen’s opening cry of “Ach neige” is not written neither in the voice nor the piano as a broad “melody,” but rather as the first in a series of “fractured gasps of recitative” (Johnson 89). In opening the Lied in this “fractured” manner, Wolf shows how emotionally raw Gretchen is feeling at this moment. This musically captures her desperation to feel an empathetic connection with the Mater Dolorosa:

*Aus Goethes „Faust“*


Wolf maintains this “fractured” compositional style throughout. This has both the musical effect as well the dramatic effect of portraying Gretchen’s search for the words to express her desire to ask Mary, the “Eternal Feminine,” for help to burgeon her inner strength and aid in her spiritual transformation. According to Johnson, “[O]ne feels that the young composer is living for the immediate effect made by each phrase, and he allows himself to be wafted hither and thither by Gretchen’s emotions. […] [W]e feel the teenage Wolf’s complete empathy with his subject and his intense reaction to the words” (89). One such example of this “hither and thither” Johnson describes occurs at the beginning lines of the fourth stanza, “Wer fühlet / Wie wühlet.” Wolf has the piano transition from the “piety” of the third stanza (89), reflected by block chords in the
piano to the fourth stanza marked *poco più agitato* (*etwas erregter*). In other words, Gretchen is able to steady her voice and sing longer lines when addressing Mary’s relationship to God, but when she returns to the subject of her prayer, her own request for spiritual redemption, she is afraid that such a request will not be granted. Musically, this results in an agitated tempo and with it, a return of the “fractured gasps.”

Example 3.2, Ibid.

The other outstanding instance of Wolf’s empathy is at “Das Herz zerbricht in mir.” Wolf starts the fifth stanza, “Wohin ich immer gehe,” squarely in the middle of the voice, escalating higher in pitch and intensity with each line. Wolf marks Gretchen’s “Wie weh, Wie weh, Wie wehe” poignantly with accents over the first and third iterations of “weh” to express how deeply her physical transformation (the loss of her virginity) and psychological transformation (her loss of faith in society) have affected her.
This builds to a climax on the word “Herz” at the end of this stanza. “Herz” is set on the highest note of the song, an A above the staff. This note is even higher than her final plea of “Hilf! Rette mich von Schmach und Tod!” at the end (Hilf! is on a pitch lower, a G above the staff.), which at first seems an odd choice on the part of Wolf, however, this emphasis on “Herz” is of course, a symbol for the emphasis of love. In this way, “Gretchen’s invocation to the Divine Mother marks the beginning of her regeneration where passion is sublimated in an image of eternal love” (Byrne 347), and for the psychologically transformed Gretchen, love of all kinds is sacred. However, she knows that by acting upon her sexual desires in having premarital sex she has also defied society. She has realized that her growing agency and newfound strength in her sexuality has overwhelmed the strength she found in religion to guide her moral compass (for instance, she drugged and killed her mother in pursuit of her desires) and her heart is breaking as a result. In setting the word “Herz,” on such a high pitch, Wolf transforms a line of despair into a musical instance of agency; Gretchen’s invocation to Mary for her heart be accepted by God and to help her find the strength to accept herself in spite of her terrible crimes.
Wolf closes his setting, just as Goethe closes Gretchen’s lyric poem, with a restatement of “Ach neige,” leaving Gretchen’s fate to be determined until the final “Kecker” scene of the Drama. The piano has the last word and the postlude ends with these “fractured gasps” in F minor.

Example 3.5, Ibid.

Wolf’s setting is powerful in that it imagines how Gretchen might have delivered these words, particularly in the sense of the “fractured gasps.” He gives the impression through music that she is struggling to maintain a sense of composure, even breaking into sobs, but it is through the desire to reinstate her agency that she does not break down. She takes action to preserve her own self-worth in appearing before the Mater Dolorosa, she honors her psychological transformation, all of this, so that she might find spiritual redemption and save herself.
Schubert pays particular attention to Gretchen’s psychological transformation, so much in fact, that he has been criticized for his setting in that “[a]lmost all psychological interest in the song is concentrated on the vocal line” and the “piano, for all the richness of the accompaniment’s texture, is reduced to a supporting role” (Johnson 801). The piano’s role is invaluable in the musical realizations discussed thus far, having added so much color and richness to Gretchen’s experiences in every monologue, but in having the piano pull back when Gretchen enters at “Ach neige,” Schubert insists that one has to “concentrate on Gretchen’s predicament” (Byrne 348). These are the opening measures of Schubert’s setting, aptly named, “Gretchens Bitte:”


Unlike Wolf’s setting, Schubert’s vocal writing is predominantly *legato*, although his piano takes on a “fractured” quality in the second stanza. “Das Schwert im Herzen / Mit tausend Schmerzen / Blickst du auf deines Sohnes Tod” is decidedly not smooth in the piano writing. Schubert marked his sixteenth notes marked *staccato* in the piano, a musical marking for a sharp separation, which mirrors the sharp stabbing of the heart.
Schubert has the ability in this setting to draw out some of Gretchen’s deepest emotions on one-syllable words. In the “Weißt nur du, nur du allein!” Schubert stretches out the word “du” so that it is clear that it is the Mater Dolorosa (not Lieschen) who can feel her pain, and she alone. Likewise when Gretchen utters the “Ich wein!” of the fifth stanza, “Ich wein, Ich wein, Ich weine,” Schubert stretches out “wein” so as to clearly illustrate the emotional toll of her physical and psychological transformation.
Alas, Schubert did not set the full text to music, stopping after “Das Herz zerbricht in mir.” The reason for this is unknown, but it is speculated that it is either because he wished to “write an opera” (perhaps Faust) and come back to the project at a later date, or because he was uncomfortable with the “Christianity” of the piece (Whitton 227). Nevertheless, the text he did set, shows a sensitivity that results in a very mature rendering of Gretchen, a Gretchen who handles her situation with grace.

However, Wolf is to be commended for setting the full text to music, because representing agency in an unmarried woman, who is guilty of “sin” in the nineteenth century,
would not have been an easy task. In fact, it is not an easy task in the twenty-first century. Contemporary society is hardly kinder in regard to the reproductive rights of women. The discussion in the modern era has shifted from infanticide to abortion, but the result is the same: it victimizes women and denies them agency. In early 2016, the Center for Reproductive Rights released a video series called “Draw the Line” about women, who like Gretchen, because of the physical transformation of their bodies, were forced to undergo a psychological transformation as well. The videos featured actresses portraying real women, who found themselves with pregnancies either unplanned or dangerous (physically or psychologically) to them, and how they had to find the strength within themselves to overcome society and accept themselves, like Gretchen. This is Kayleigh’s story:

I am a woman who trusts her own opinions. I was not about to let anyone bully me. I was surprised to find that the process actually made me feel braver. It was an active choice. My choice, that I made. I knew I was strong, but many women are made to feel shame and spend much of their lives pretending it didn’t happen. I’m proud I had the guts to make the right choice for myself.

(“Dascha Polanco Tells Kayleigh’s Story: I Wouldn’t Let Anyone Bully Me,” Youtube: Center for Reproductive Rights)

This video is a testament to Goethe’s prowess as a writer insofar as that he could write a fictional woman who faced real issues. Gretchen’s story is placed in the nineteenth century but her story is timeless. Gretchen is every woman. In the face of shame, she stands up for her choices. She is any woman who considers herself to be sexual, any woman who has been taught by society that her sexual impulses and desires are evil, any woman, married or unmarried, who has found herself pregnant in a situation when she could not be, any woman seeking spiritual redemption
and to be loved, not shamed, for her agency. The musical realizations by Wolf and Schubert of 
Gretchen’s lyric poem, “Ach neige” offer very real insight into her psychological condition as 
she prays to the Andachtsbild der Mater Dolorosa in their musical depictions of her crying, her 
angst, her agitation, and her love and empathy for Mary; which enhances the primary literature 
as a result.

Gretchen is to be commended for her strength, not condemned for her sexuality. Her act 
of infanticide and murdering her mother are indeed tragedies, but she finds the inner strength 
through her prayer “Ach neige,” to overcome these tragedies and in doing so, “[t]he contrite 
Gretchen is, quite simply, beyond comparison to all other women at the well” (Schade 106). In 
this regard, her story can be seen as a beacon of hope to all women who have, like Gretchen, 
“broken their jugs;” they have lost their virginity, they may have lost a child, but they gained 
their agency in the process and in doing so experienced a physical, psychological and spiritual 
transformation. Gretchen’s story is parallel to a twenty-first century woman like Kayleigh’s, 
where the “process make[s] her feel braver.” In praying to Mary at the “Zwinger,” this process 
made Gretchen feel braver, inspiring her ultimate act of agency, to implore God to take her to 
heaven, “Dein bin ich Vater, rette mich!” in the final scene, “Kecker” (Goethe 288). Kayleigh is 
a reminder that the Gretchentragödie is timeless; and moreover, not exclusive to Gretchen.

Ultimately, it is because Gretchen refuses to be a victim that she is able to overcome her 
tragedy; it is through her agency that she saves herself and finds spiritual redemption in 
“Kecker.” The “Zwinger” scene is invaluable to the Faust drama in that it shows Gretchen to be 
the most real character in the play because of the physical and psychological transformations that 
her situation forces her to experience. The Lied is an ideal medium for communicating 
Gretchen’s authenticity as a character because with the music follows a series of musical
imagery such as, the sharp stabbing sword in her heart, her gasps for air, and finding the strength to continue to sing in a smooth connected legato line that portray the strength of a real woman.

Gretchen is committed to finding the strength to move forward. Gretchen proves that the sexuality which accompanies romantic love can coexist with God’s love.
Conclusion

Gretchen is a multidimensional character; not a victim. As she matures over the course of the drama, her monologues help to assert her agency as a young woman and her agency is undeniable when set to music. These monologues when set to music enhance the poetic forms Goethe attributed to folk poetry (the *Epos* of “Es war ein König in Thule,” in the scene “Abend,” the *Drama* of “Gretchen am Spinnrade” in the scene, “Gretchens Stube” and the *Lyrik* of “Ach neige” in the scene “Zwinger,”) which results in inspiring Gretchen to action. The *Strophic Lieder* envisioned by Zelter, Schubert and Gounod for “Es war ein König in Thule,” embody the storytelling narrative of the *Epic* genre while capturing Gretchen’s desire to experience such an epic love for herself, offer her “Becher” to Faust and give in to her sexual awakening. The drama waiting for this consummation with Faust is embodied by the spinning wheel in “Gretchens Stube” which the composers Schubert and Wagner interpret as a vehicle for Gretchen’s sexual frustration. In Gretchen exercising her agency by spinning out her frustrations at the wheel, the music adds a dimension not previously present in the poetic genre of *Drama*, the soliloquy. The musical settings by Wolf and Schubert offer different interpretations of the *Lyrik* in Gretchen’s “Ach neige,” that uniquely see beyond the text and through to the conflicting emotions of Gretchen’s psyche at this moment behind the words. In each of these three scenes, Gretchen makes an active choice in the pursuit of her own happiness, dispelling any stereotype that she is naïve, weak, or innocent. She is a strong young woman with faith in herself.

In order to arrive at these conclusions, it is imperative that there is an interdisciplinary exchange: the singer must read the primary literature of *Faust* in its entirety with a particularly close reading of Gretchen and her soliloquies, while the Germanist / in must engage with and be familiar with at least one vocal music (*Lied* or opera) adaptation of Gretchen that speaks to their
dramatic interpretation of Gretchen. The value of interdisciplinary studies between German and Music has been a topic of interest for years:

[There are] many concrete instances where music and German literature needs no apology[.] […] I am interested in contemplating rather sweeping questions such as: What is the role of poetic and music theory, if any, in bringing about the reciprocal interaction that results in musico-literary practice? To what extent is the symbiotic relationship between music and literature something typically German? […] What is it then that makes our topic a matter of course, a topic that needs no apology, nor elaborate explanation? Could it be the plain fact that music as an art form has been taken more seriously in German-speaking lands than in other countries – especially by poets, writers, and critics, but also by the art-consuming public at large? (Scher 354).

Scher concludes that it is because many great German philosophers were “melomaniacs” (357); wild about music and melody. Certainly this was true of Goethe, who reportedly wrote: “Were language not indisputably the highest (art) that we have, then I should place music still higher than language and right at the top” (Whitton 41). This explains why Goethe referred to his *Volksballaden* and other poems as *Lieder* even if they had not been set to music and realized as *Kunstballaden*. He recognized the importance of music in communication.

There are many disciplines which are relevant to German Studies. In the twenty-first century, where Media Studies is growing in popularity as a discipline, nineteenth-century music, the music of Goethe’s era, should not be discounted as media. The interdisciplinary exchange between German Studies and Music or “musico-literary” studies offers a unique opportunity for collaboration between two fields as well as a fresh and dynamic interpretation of a young
woman, who by embracing her sexuality and in seeking spiritual redemption, finds strength and faith in herself through music in the form of song: a decidedly untraditional reading of a figure from traditional German literature.
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