

Chapter 1

“Göttlicher Mörike!”: an introduction to Eduard Mörike and Hugo Wolf

In the summer of 1890, when Hugo Wolf was attempting to explain his philosophy of art to his new friend, the Stuttgart composer Emil Kauffmann (1836–1909), he cited works by Eduard Mörike as a perfect example of the kind of artistic truth he too sought to create:¹

And Mörike himself, this darling of the Graces! to what excesses his Muse gave herself up, when she turned her countenance to the daemonic side of truth! The “Erstes Liebeslied eines Mädchens” presents a striking example of this. And what convulsive intimacy, what voluptuous pleasure in pain [welche krampfhaftige Innigkeit, welches wollüstige Behagen am Peinlichen] speaks from those inimitable lines: “Erinn’rung reicht mit Lächeln die verbittert / Bis zur Betäubung süßen Zauberschalen; / So trink’ ich gierig die entzückten Qualen” [Memory, smiling, offers me the bitter-anodyne, sweet, enchanted chalice; so I drink avidly of enraptured torments²]. That is written with blood, and such tones can only strike one who, suffering, surrenders his innermost being to deeply truthful knowledge.³

The context for this impassioned passage is distressing – Wolf was trying to prove that Wagner was superior to Brahms (Wolf dubbed his detestation of his older contemporary “my anti-Brahmimentum”) – but the letter is still crucial for what it tells of Wolf’s attraction to this poetic repertoire. Wolf even mimics Mörike’s Baroque-influenced trafficking in oxymoron, among the devices this poet used to evoke the intensity, complexity, ambiguity, and suffering of life. “That is written with blood,” Wolf declared, but this aesthetic ideal-in-a-nutshell was far from Naturalism or Realism, literary tendencies Wolf detested. Rather, passion and knowledge of pain are channeled into creations by artists who abjured the confessional gushing Wolf found so objectionable in certain poets of his own day. That the composer claimed Mörike as a kindred spirit, an alter ego, is evident in the letter to Kauffmann, but more than mere admiration is at work. Wolf *used* the poet for his own purposes, and he necessarily filtered everything in Mörike through the warping mirror of his (Wolf’s) psychology, musical concerns, and culture, different from those of the poet he venerated. The discrepancies between poet and composer are far more interesting than the hoary legend of Wolf and his poets marching in lock-step, a myth which crumbles upon examination to reveal more intricate processes at work.

Wolf was preaching to the converted when he wrote of Mörike as the “darling of the Graces” to this particular correspondent. Emil Kauffmann was the son of Ernst Friedrich Kauffmann (1803–74), a lifelong friend of Mörike’s⁴ and one of the first composers ever to set the words of this “son of Horace and of a cultivated Swabian lady” – Gottfried Keller’s

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famous capsule characterization of Mörike – to music.⁵ The friendship between Wolf and Kauffmann began with Kauffmann’s enthusiastic response to Wolf’s 1889 *Gedichte von Eduard Mörike*; along with a letter expressing his admiration, Emil sent a princely token of appreciation: the autograph manuscript of Mörike’s “An Longus” (To Longus) of 1841. Perhaps Kauffmann knew from Wolf’s settings of Mörike’s comic songs that the Viennese composer would relish the verbal demolition of pushy, presumptuous types, or *Sehrmänner* (“very-men”) in this poem. The gift arrived on Wolf’s thirtieth birthday, and the composer was delighted:

You have unknowingly given me a birthday present, and a more splendid one I could not have wished for. With inner joy, I beheld the poet’s handwriting and, for the first time, discovered that its symmetrical strokes harmonize splendidly with the balanced essence of the poet. The poem, which, to be sure, manifests nothing of the “arch-fantasy” for which Mörike is renowned, is numbered among those I love most. Composable it isn’t, however.⁶

The passage is revealing. Wolf’s knowledge of Mörike’s poetry is obvious, and he writes almost as if he were a literary critic, pointing out the poet’s idiosyncratic vein of fantasy and his cultivation of balance, but this connoisseur’s thumbnail sketch of the poet culminates with the omnipresent thought of a poem’s suitability or not for conversion into music. The search for song texts was his entire reason for reading poetry; whatever his appreciation of literary merit, he placed poems that were not composable into a different category than those that were amenable to music – *his* music.

It is a mysterious phenomenon, neither comprehensible nor calculable, when the rediscovery of a poetic repertoire at a certain point in a composer’s life unlocks the door to musical maturity. In February of 1888, after a long, troubled apprenticeship in the art of composition, Wolf returned to the poet whose “Mausfallen-Sprüchelein” (Magic Charm for Mousers) he had set so charmingly six years earlier in 1882. For some reason, the renewed encounter was the catalyst for an explosion of creativity (the same was true of Schubert’s return to Goethe’s poetry in late 1814–15 and of Debussy’s musical rendezvous with Verlaine in 1884). On 24 January 1888, just three weeks before the Mörike outpouring began, Wolf had composed a listless setting of a listless poem by Heine, “Wo wird einst” (which, however, he later published in the 1897 *Vier Gedichte nach Heine, Shakespeare und Lord Byron*); this would be his last attempt to tune his lyre to that of Schumann’s favorite poet. It seems only appropriate to this tale of transformation that Mörike and Heine heartily disliked one another, representing as they do different approaches to poetry.⁷

That same day, however, Wolf also set to music Robert Reinick’s “Gesellenlied” (The Apprentice’s Song) about an apprentice whose master continually tells him “Kein Meister fällt vom Himmel” (Masters don’t fall from the sky) and who longs to find a bride and be a master himself. Wolf, who linked the cheeky, attractive apprentice David from Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* with the apprentice in Reinick’s poem, might have seen himself in both of these figures as well and perhaps glimpsed that his own mastery was just around the corner. He was exuberant over his friend Friedrich Eckstein’s services in arranging for the publication in 1887 of the *Sechs Lieder für eine Frauenstimme* and the *Sechs Gedichte von Scheffel, Mörike, Goethe und Kerner* – the first appearance in print of Wolf’s songs – and had moved in mid-January 1888 to the Werner family’s home in Perchtoldsdorf in search of the peace and quiet he needed for composition. It was laugh-

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ter that unleashed the floodgates, and laughter by a greater master than Reinick: Mörike's "Der Tambour" (The Drummer-boy), composed on 16 February 1888, about a lad on the threshold of adulthood who fantasizes transformations and metamorphoses. How appropriate! – Wolf too was transformed in a way no one yet understands. What happened in those three weeks between "Wo wird einst" and "Der Tambour"? What conjunction between the trajectory of Wolf's life and this poet's words brought "Wölferl's own howl" into being at that moment in February? How does a poet act as midwife for a composer's attainment of mastery?

Wolf himself could not explain it, indeed, could hardly believe it. The letters he wrote to his friends Edmund and Marie Lang, Eckstein, and his brother-in-law Josef Strasser are hyperbolic, dazed, exuberant reports of what he had just composed and how he felt about each specimen of "Mörikeana," as he dubbed the growing pile of songs.⁸ A letter to Lang on 22 January, one week after the start of it all, ricochets from joyful boasting ("A divine song, I tell you! Quite divinely marvelous!") to an exacerbated state he could only evoke in phrases of oxymoronic ambivalence worthy of Mörike himself ("this condition of inspiration is exquisite torment to me, not pure happiness"). "Am I really one of the elect?", he asked, and then wrote, "I believe I am mad," the foreshadowing of his descent into insanity nine years later terrible to read. That February, however, he was at the height of his powers, composing "Der Knabe und das Immlin," "Jägerlied," and "Ein Stündlein wohl vor Tag" (The Boy and the Little Bee, Hunter's Song, An Hour before Daybreak) in a single day. To his circle of intimates, he characterized "Nimmersatte Liebe" (Insatiable Love) as "a regular student's song" – that students then as now are preoccupied with sex is the implication – and "Zur Warnung" (Warning) as "so weird and strange that I am quite afraid of it." A leitmotif of the letters is enormous pride at what he was finally able to accomplish, after years of struggle. "Erstes Liebeslied eines Mädchens," he wrote, "is of such intensity that it would lacerate the nervous system of a block of marble." "What I write now, dear friend, I write for posterity too," he said – not hyperbole, but statement of fact.

Elective affinities are only partially explicable, if at all, but surely one source of Wolf's love for this poet was the nature of creativity as both men experienced it. For them, artistic creation was a matter of inexplicable visitations by an unreliable Muse, incalculable in her arrivals and departures, and both men suffered horribly during her frequent absences. In the poem "Muse und Dichter" (Muse and Poet), Mörike's weak, ill poetic speaker begs desperately for the return of his lyre and is given only the most equivocal of answers, while Wolf compared life without musical creation to "a frog's existence . . . not even a galvanized frog"; the Stoic humor of some (not all) of his references to Polyhymnia's sulky withdrawals could not hide his misery.⁹ In a letter to his friend Friedrich Vischer in 1832, Mörike writes "I live here in a place that my Muse herself (and I have a very subjective and self-willed Muse) could not have sought out better."¹⁰ Wolf too knew of willful Muses, capable of mocking, shocking, and deserting their hapless human prey; the inebriate tone of his announcements to friends of creativity redivivus are a measure of the relief he felt when the seasons of drought were over. Neither poet nor composer could court his Muse by any inducement; disciplined work-habits and the greatest of desires to create were of no avail in this fealty where she, not they, held the reins. I wonder whether Wolf felt a pang

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of recognition when he read Mörike's "An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang" (On a Winter Morning, Before Sunrise), the "flagship poem" in each of the four editions of Mörike's poetry directed by the poet himself, with its invocation of "eiderdown lightness" and "new worlds" stirring within him ("O fläumenleichte Zeit der dunkeln Frühe! / Welche neue Welt bewegest du in mir?"). The poet's "bright swarm of images," bathing in his breast like goldfish in a pond, became for the composer an inner swarm of musical ideas, and Wolf too lived in hope that new music would move and stir within him. For this composer, it was wintry death-in-life when he could not compose and the first day of creation when he could.

Another source of Wolf's attraction to Mörike's poetry is surely Mörike's many-sidedness and slipperiness of categorization. He cannot be pigeonholed as wholly Romantic, neo-classical, Biedermeier-idyllic, or folkish, although he partakes on occasion of each of the above and has an instantly recognizable "voice" in whatever context. He wrote poems of many types, his works encompassing love-sonnets, folksong-like (but with a twist) ditties, free verse, blank verse, *Knittelvers*, sarcasm, good-natured humor, poetry about poetry, *Rollenlieder* ("role poems," in which stereotypical characters speak), ballads of the supernatural, *Dinggedichte* ("thing poems," in which vast recesses of meaning are glimpsed in seemingly insignificant objects), eroticism bordering on pornography, occasional poems, religious poetry, fantasy and fairy-tale worlds, Nature poems, and poems which burst the bounds of convention. His love of masks delighted Wolf, who also prided himself on his one-man carnival act, on the variety of characters he could clothe in music. In a letter to Kauffmann of 15 December 1891, Wolf, rejoicing over the initial work on the *Italienisches Liederbuch*, wrote "It [the songbook] is once again an entirely different world, and you will be not a little astonished at my Proteus-nature, that can now enter this skin."¹¹ He had already demonstrated his shape-shifting abilities in the Mörike volume, although "Wölferl's own howl," as he called it, those harmonic predilections, voice-leading procedures, textures, and so forth that he made his own, is manifest in every song.

Perhaps most important, Wolf could claim Mörike as his own discovery for song. This poet came along too late for Schubert's brief hold on life; while Schumann's Mörike settings from his later years (including "Die Soldatenbraut" and "Das verlassene Mägdlein," from the *Romanzen und Balladen*, op. 64, nos. 1 and 2; "Er ist's!", op. 79, no. 23; "Der Gärtner," op. 107, no. 3; and "Jung Volkers Lied," op. 125, no. 3) have much that is admirable, Mörike was not Schumann's alter ego as was Heine, to whose name he is evermore linked. A few earlier composers (mostly close friends of the poet) had set Mörike to music, but despite their virtues, they are not Wolf's equal. Mörike was not yet recognized in 1888 as one of Germany's best poets, although a few critics had begun to point out his significance; it was Wolf who lit a bonfire from the embers of the poet's modest reputation and broadcast his name as never before. "The good Swabians shall yet come to know their poet!", Wolf declared in a letter of 9 November 1890 to Emil Kauffmann in which he announced the possibility of a concert tour with the singer Ferdinand Jäger to Dresden, Leipzig, Berlin, Cologne, and Tübingen; two recitals in Tübingen, where Mörike had received his seminary training, would be devoted entirely to Mörike songs.¹² When I contemplate the Mörike exhibits at the Schiller-Nationalmuseum or walk along Mörikestraße

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in Marbach or visit the Mörike Bookstore in Ludwigsburg, I do so in part because of Wolf's actions on Mörike's behalf.

Wolf's championship of this poet was hardly disinterested: it was born of gratitude for the music Mörike helped him to create. Between 16 February and 18 May (a mere three months), Wolf composed forty-three songs.¹³ At the end of May, he had to leave the Brunnergasse house in Perchtoldsdorf because the Werner family wished to use it, and set off on a walking tour before returning to Vienna in July. Shortly thereafter, he joined Eckstein and the Langs near Grinzing, where he occupied himself with rebuilding an old piano. After going to Bayreuth in late August, where he was reportedly moved to tears by a performance of *Parsifal*, he returned first to Grinzing and then back to Vienna. It was at Eckstein's house at Siebenbrunnergasse 15 in Vienna that Wolf composed Eichendorff's "Verschwiegene Liebe" (Secret Love) on 31 August. He had earlier tried and failed to set it to music, and the success of his renewed encounter with the poem impelled him to seek solitude once again in order to compose. This time, he made use of the Eckstein family's country house at Unterach am Attersee in the Salzkammergut, where he composed ten songs in nine days to complete his Eichendorff project. But he was not yet done with Mörike and wrote nine more songs between 4 and 11 October, beginning with "An den Schlaf" (To Sleep) and ending with "An die Geliebte" (To the Beloved),¹⁴ before beginning his journey home to Vienna on 12 October. The final Mörike song, "Auf eine Christblume II," was composed some six weeks later at Perchtoldsdorf, where it all began, on 26 November.

The end of composition did not spell the end of Wolf's reverence for this poet. References to Mörike recur as a leitmotif in Wolf's letters for years after the miracle of 1888. On 25 April 1891, during his visit to Swabia, Wolf wrote to his friend Oskar Grohe to say "Today Urach will be visited," mimicking the title of Mörike's poem, "Besuch in Urach" (Visit to Urach).¹⁵ On 3 March 1893, following the birth of Grohe's son Helmuth on 27 February, Wolf wrote to say, "Bravo!", followed by a doggerel mélange of Mozart and Mörike:

<p>Das haben Sie einmal gut gemacht – über Nacht. Bald werden Sie's weiter noch bringen – mög' es gelingen – Zu Papagenos und Papagenas, jedoch mit Maß. Laut klappert nur einer "im lustigsten Ton,"</p> <p>Hellmutig er grüßt und flieget davon. . . . Ihr Hugo Wolf, priv. Kinderweibel und Komponist außer Diensten.¹⁶</p>	<p>You have done well once more – overnight; soon you will bring forth more – may you be successful – Papagenos and Papagenas, but with moderation. Only one loudly rattled its beak "in the merriest key,"</p> <p>He salutes you right merrily and flies away. . . . Your Hugo Wolf, private child-nanny and composer off-duty</p>
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The references are to Papagena's and Papageno's duet in act 2, scene 9 of *Die Zauberflöte* ("Es ist das höchste der Gefühle, / Wenn viele, viele Papageno, Papagena / Der Eltern Segen werden sein") and to Mörike's comic ballad "Storchenbotschaft" (Storks' Message), in which a pair of storks herald the arrival of twins. Grohe, the composer teased, may still catch up with his operatic predecessors but should do so "mit Maß," with Mörike-esque moderation. However, this merry squib has a sad subtext in Wolf's inability to compose, due to a compositional block lasting from 1892 to 1895, hence the designation of himself as an "unemployed" or "off-duty" composer. He too wished to give birth, but to more music

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and not “mit Maß.” He had two more years to endure before this season in an arid hell of the mind was over.

It was to Kauffmann, however, that Wolf would speak most often of Mörike, since Kauffmann could relay personal anecdotes to Mörike’s latterday admirer and could show his Viennese friend artifacts from the Kauffman family treasure-trove of Mörike memorabilia. (It is due to the efforts of several generations of Kauffmanns that there is so much Mörikeana in Marbach for scholars to study, from the red Hussar’s jacket worn by the four-year-old future poet to autograph manuscripts and the books in his library.) On 2 April 1892, Wolf wrote to Kauffmann of his desire to own another photograph of Mörike; he had, he told Kauffmann, only the well-known image of the poet in his last years, showing Mörike in profile and reading a book.¹⁷ Kauffmann replied with the description of a different daguerrotype, and the composer’s curiosity about “our poet”¹⁸ was piqued. “Might I beg for your picture?”, he asked eagerly.¹⁹ The obliging Kauffmann sent him the image, and Wolf was duly grateful:

Of all the portraits of the poet that I know, this seems the most successful, especially in the refined, sober tone of the execution, the rich modelling with regard to light and shadow on those striking features, over all of which lies the purest expression of thoughtful contemplation and gentleness. Truly, a glorious aspect that brings back to mind all of the wonderful hours that once, blessed by his genius, made me so deeply happy. A thousand, and yet again a thousand, thanks.²⁰

On 26 September 1894, Wolf again wrote of his gratitude for Kauffmann’s gift of a book by Rudolf Krauß on *Mörike als Gelegenheitsdichter* (Mörike as Occasional Poet) – Kauffmann was sending Wolf books hot off the press²¹ – and recounts a tale of having taken the book with him on a picnic, intending to read selections from it aloud to his friends, only to find that it must have fallen out of the wagon. Everyone searched, then gave the book up for lost, until a package arrived by post from Wolf’s friend Hugo Faißt, who had found the missing treasure. “You have gladdened me doubly with the book,” Wolf wrote Kauffmann, “and therefore you deserve double the thanks.” In the same letter, Wolf writes of his belief that from henceforth, biographies of Mörike should include his [Wolf’s] name as well; Faißt had promised to drop a word to that effect in Krauß’s ear.²² Wolf knew that he would figure prominently in the history of Mörike-reception from that day on, and so he has.

But it is perhaps just as well that Wolf only knew Mörike’s poetic works (minus the *Nachlaß*) and little else when he composed his songs, since his enthusiasm for the poet as a man, not as an artist, dimmed with greater knowledge. When he first encountered Mörike’s letters and heard Kauffmann’s tales, he was deeply moved, writing Kauffmann a letter on 22 November 1892 in which he reminisces about his visit to Tübingen in autumn 1890. On that occasion, Kauffmann had brought out Mörike’s letters to his (Kauffmann’s) father and read them aloud. “What fresh, youthful life breathed forth from these yellowed pages! These were no dead letters: the living word resounded throughout, and all was so full of meaning and feeling, shaped in the fullest image of life,” Wolf wrote.²³ But it is an irony of history that, with the exception of the Hermann Kurz – Mörike correspondence published in 1885, Mörike’s letters only began to emerge in print after the composition of Wolf’s Mörike lieder. On 17 May 1895, Wolf wrote to Melanie Köchert that he had read Mörike’s letters on the train en route to the Lipperheides’ villa at Matzen where he would

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work on his opera *Der Corregidor*. What, one wonders, was he reading? The Mörike – Theodor Storm exchanges published in the *Deutsche Rundschau* for 1889 or the volume of Mörike’s letters to Moritz von Schwind published in 1890?²⁴ If the latter, as seems likely, did Wolf know of the earlier connection between Schwind and Schubert? Whatever it was, Wolf dismissed the first half as “weak and fairly uninteresting,” the latter half meeting with greater approval, although “I had imagined the letters to be wittier and more original. A certain antiquated tone is all too prominent . . . I suspect we would not have gotten along well after all.”²⁵

He was probably right. The Mörike–Storm and Schwind letters come from late in the poet’s life, not from the youthful years in which Mörike wrote many of the poems Wolf set to music, but Wolf might not have found the earlier letters that much more sympathetic. Mörike was monarchist in what little politics he was willing to espouse and conservative in many of his views, while Wolf was not; Mörike was bound to his family in ways Wolf was not; and Mörike was angst-ridden in matters of love and sex where Wolf was not. Mörike’s anti-Wagnerism would have roused Wolf’s ire to a surety, and Mörike would have been horrified by Nietzsche and by Wolf’s partial partisanship of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Even their religious dubieties, seemingly an element in common between poet and composer, were unlike beneath the surface. But in 1888, Wolf could find no fault with “divine Mörike,” and for that, the world of music is fortunate. Protected by historical circumstance from knowledge that might have marred his involvement with Mörike’s poetry, Wolf was able to claim the poet as his own for music.

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And yet, there is an enormous aesthetic gap between these two men, the gulf exemplified in their differing musical tastes and their uses of music. Wolf would have known from Mörike’s works that the poet loved music (Emil Kauffmann, a musician and the son of a musician, might have told him more of Mörike’s passion for music), but Wolf’s *métier* meant something other to the music-loving poet than to the practicing composer. Their opposing stances vis-à-vis Wagner make the point most strongly – had they met in real life, one can imagine their mutual disgust with each other – but Wagner is not the only point of disagreement. Ironically, both looked back to an earlier generation, Mörike to Mozart and Wolf to Schumann and Wagner, but they were attracted to different pasts for different reasons. Mörike, one is forced to conclude, would have neither understood nor liked Wolf’s settings of his poetry.

Despite his love of music, Mörike had limited technical understanding of it; he may even have rejected, consciously or unconsciously, specialized knowledge for fear of how that might affect the operations of music in his writings. To him, music was a Janus-faced phenomenon, both a source of beauty and a dangerous force which could cause listeners to lose their hold on the concrete world, music’s workings thus related to similar effects wrought by Eros and creativity. The seventeen-year-old Mörike wrote the following passage in a letter of February 1822 to his friend Wilhelm Waiblinger:

Truly music has an indescribable effect on me – it is a recurrent sickness, but not constant. I tell you, a moving but not necessarily sorrowful piece of music, often a merry one, can sometimes release

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what is innermost in me; then I sink into the most melancholy fantasies, where I want to embrace the whole world, where what is petty and bad is apparent in all its nothingness, where everything appears in a different, transfigured light. When the music breaks off, I want to throw myself from a high wall, I want to die; at those times, it fares with me as with the wandering Harper [Goethe's Harper in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*].²⁶

If adolescent self-dramatizing is evident in the passage, similar experiences were written into his mature poetry. After the poetic persona hears someone singing in "Auf einer Wanderung" (On a Walk), he is no longer enclosed by an ordered space, with buildings and people in their proper places, but instead is magically transported outside of the town, beyond the bounds of human society, into an incandescent realm in which forms and shapes dissolve. Here, the experience is rapture, a passageway to the Muse's "breath of love," but the unanchored state induced by music is also akin to death in its dissolution of the self and hence threatening. The alliance of music with the destructive forces of creation, initial rapture ceding rapidly to illness and annihilation, is as much a leitmotif of the poems as music in its more beneficent guises. In "Josephine," sacred music in a Catholic church seems to soar into the heavens "like a sun-drunk eagle," summoning the wind to make the tapers waver and causing the poetic speaker to sicken at heart, while "Evil Greta" of the ballad "Die schlimme Greth und der Königssohn" (Evil Greta and the King's Son) is a musical demon who "howls a death-song" as she throws the prince's body into the sea at the end. A more potent compound of music and sexual fear would be hard to imagine. Time itself alters under music's spell; in a letter of 14 May 1831 to his fiancée Luise Rau, Mörike told of visiting his home town of Ludwigsburg and hearing an Aeolian harp, whose "sweet tones fused the entire past within me."²⁷ Music was a means to an end for Mörike, and that (non-musical) end was a state conducive to the creation of poetry.

In that poetry, he often waxes nostalgic for the late eighteenth-century world of his two gods: Goethe and Mozart. Everything Mörike found compelling in music had its epitome in Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, especially the Mozart of the mature operas, and there was little in the music of his own century that he liked.²⁸ For him, *Don Giovanni* was the *ne plus ultra* of music, the artistic wholeness of this work and the rest of Mozart's oeuvre being lost, so Mörike thought, to his own less fortunate generation. (On hearing *Don Giovanni* for the first time in December 1876, the sixteen-year-old Wolf "liked it very much," but was already too Wagner-obsessed – he noted the presence of anti-Wagnerians in the audience – to find in Mozart an object of veneration equal to the composer of *Parsifal*.)²⁹ In Mörike's sonnet "Seltsamer Traum" (Singular Dream), written in 1828 after attending a performance of *Le nozze di Figaro* in Stuttgart, the poet dreams of springtime gardens in which a hundred miniature Figaros dance with equally diminutive Cherubinos; the scene is espied through a veil of dream-illusion and as if through a reversed telescope, the objects smaller and more distant. Like stars in a far-away firmament, the Mozartian figures are multiplied, visible but not of Mörike's own world. The poet himself appears in the last line as a Hanswurst, singing on the flowery field; he could only fulfill his desire to belong to Mozart's realm, to sing with Mozart's characters, in the disguise of a clown, a clumsy, masked mimicry of earlier authenticity, and then only in dreams.³⁰

Mörike's opinions about music are a leitmotif of his letters, especially his correspondence with the musically talented members of his circle, Wilhelm Hartlaub (1804–85) and Ernst Friedrich Kauffmann, and with his music-loving family (his brother Adolph

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became a piano-builder, and his brother Karl was a composer). In an amusing missive of 6 February 1825 to his mother and older sister Luise, Mörike tells of attending a student orchestra rehearsal at the Lutheran seminary in Tübingen, a rehearsal led by the Stift's music director, the young Friedrich Silcher (1789–1860) before his fame as a folksong arranger.³¹ On this occasion, the musicians performed the overture to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, to Mörike's pleasure, and a "modern" composition by someone named Vogel, first name not supplied and not to the poet's pleasure. Manuals of concertgoing etiquette should not be based on this incident, except as a negative example; one suspects Mörike exaggerated the story for his family's entertainment (as we shall see in chap. 2, this event occurred six months after multiple traumas in Mörike's life, and he was attempting to spare his mother and sister concern for his well-being, to pretend that he was all right):

When a bad piece was played, however, full of affected melancholy and plagiarisms, my amusement tempted me into all sorts of secret pantomimes and mockery which, without my noticing it at first, made the neighboring listeners break out in loud and hearty laughter. The laughter grew as it spread through the hall until the uproar brought the melting sighs of the overture to a halt. The angry musicians cast their instruments aside and jumped up, upon which I could hardly slip out the door fast enough. Silcher . . . could no longer keep going. I was both rueful and delighted [Es reute mich und freute mich] over what I had done to the miserable piece. (It was by Vogel.)³²

Consigning the wretched composer to a parenthetical afterword is mockery indeed, but it is the dislike of "heart-on-sleeve" emotionalism that one most notes in this letter. He was already averse to Romanticism in music, and he would become more so with age.

But emotions unleashed by Mozart were another matter. Although more poet than scholar, Mörike was a classicist who cherished Greek and Roman antiquity, and it is surely in part for that reason that he was so drawn to *La clemenza di Tito*. In a letter to his friend Johannes Mährlen of 5 June 1832 from Ochsenwang, Mörike describes how a sudden summer thunderstorm had affected him:

At the window, I saw a storm draw near from the Teck side; a minute later, I heard the first roll of thunder, and all my life-spirits in delight began secretly to wait for it. With incredible swiftness, the storm broke over our heads. Broad and mighty lightning strikes, one after another, such as I had never seen before in daytime, fell like a shower of roses in our white room. Old Mozart might at that moment have been standing invisibly at my back, beating on my shoulders with his Kapellmeister's staff. It was as if the devil had let loose the overture to *Titus* in my soul, so incessant, so glorious, so piercing that with each brassy cry of the Roman trumpet ["römische Tuba," Mörike writes, punning on the Latin "Tuba mirum spargens sonum" of the Requiem – Mozart yet again], I clenched both fists in rapture.³³

In this fantasy, Mozart is still living, grown old but no less powerful, and directing the forces of Nature itself. The equation of music with the diabolical-elemental could not be more vividly expressed.

In one summation, *La clemenza di Tito* tells of someone who is spurred to wrongdoing by erotic passion, but is granted forgiveness for his transgression at the end; Mörike, who was not so fortunate (see chap. 2), was perhaps drawn to Mozart's last opera for this reason as well. Mörike's *memento mori* "Ach, nur einmal noch im Leben" (One Last Time before Dying), written sometime before 4 August 1845,³⁴ has its inception in Sesto's aria, "Deh, per questo istante solo," from the second-act confrontation between Tito and Sesto, when Sesto cannot bring himself to reveal that it was Vitellia who plotted against Tito's life and Tito, believing Sesto responsible for the assassination attempt, condemns him to death.

Hugo Wolf and his Mörike Songs

The remorseful Sesto implores Tito, “Just for a moment, remember our past affection, for your contempt, your coldness, make me die of grief,” before the guards lead him away. In Mörike’s poem, only the beginning of the aria is given, in seeming whimsy, to a singing garden gate, but the words not sung, the continuation of the German text, linger in the background and confirm the death-haunted atmosphere (“Ach, nur einmal noch im Leben / lass dein Herz mir offen steh’n, / ruhiger, hast du mir vergeben, / werd’ ich dann zum Tode geh’n,” or “Ah, once more in life, let your heart stand open to me; I will go more peacefully to my death if you forgive me”):

Ach, nur einmal noch im Leben!

(lines 30–54)

– Und was, frug ich nach einer kurzen Stille sie,
 Was denn noch einmal? Sprich! woher, Elegische,
 Hast du das Lied? Ging etwa denn zu deiner Zeit
 (Die neunziger Jahre meint’ ich) hier ein schönes
 Kind,
 Des Pfarrers Enkeltochter, sittsam aus und ein,
 Und hörtest du sie durch das offene Fenster oft
 Am grünlackierten, goldbeblühten Pantalon
 Hellstimmig singen? Des gestrengen Mütterchens
 Gedenkst du auch, der Hausfrau, die so reinlich
 stets
 Den Garten hielt, gleichwie sie selber war, wann
 sie
 Nach schwülem Tag am Abend ihren Kohl begoß,
 Derweil der Pfarrherr ein paar Freunden aus der
 Stadt,
 Die eben weggegangen, das Geleite gab;
 Er hatte sie bewirtet in der Laube dort,
 Ein lieber Mann, redseliger Weitschweifigkeit.
 Vorbei ist nun das alles und kehrt nimmer so!
 Wir Jüngern heutzutage treiben’s ungefähr
 Zwar gleichermaßen, wackre Leute ebenfalls;
 Doch besser dünkt ja allen, was vergangen ist.
 Es kommt der Zeit, da werden wir auch ferne weg
 Gezogen sein, den Garten lassend und das Haus.
 Dann wünschst du nächst jenen Alten uns
 zurück,
 Und schmückt vielleicht ein treues Herz vom
 Dorf einmal,
 Mein denkend und der Meinen, im Vorübergehn
 Dein morsches Holz mit hellem
 Ackerblumenkranz.³⁵

One last time before dying!

– And what, I asked it after a short silence,
 was that all about? Speak! from whence, o
 elegiac one, came that song? In your time
 (the nineties, I would guess), did a lovely child,
 the pastor’s granddaughter, modestly go in and
 out of here, and did you hear her often
 through the open window brightly singing
 to the accompaniment of a green-lacquered,
 gold-flowered dulcimer? And did you also think
 of her strict mother, the housewife who took
 such painstaking care of the garden, how in
 the evening, after a sultry day, she watered her
 cabbages; in the meantime, the pastor took some
 friends from town down the road to see them
 off; he had entertained them there in the arbor
 – a dear man, though he loved to ramble on.
 They are all gone now and will never return!
 We young ones nowadays do the same
 things more or less – gallant folk we are, but
 everyone prefers best of all what is vanished.
 The time will come when we too will have gone
 far away, leaving the house and the garden.
 Then you will sing the olden tune for us as
 well, and perhaps some true heart will come
 this way from the village, may think of me and
 mine in passing, may adorn your crumbling
 wood with a garland of wildflowers.

A skeleton by Holbein, death is visible behind every word of this poem, from its title to the mouldering wood, evocative of coffins, at the end. In this hall of mirrors, a memory contains yet another memory which in turn tells of still more memories of what is gone: all art is elegy, Mörike says. His singing gate, comic at first glance, is the saddest of symbols. One leaves Edenic Paradises – this one too has a stern guardian – by way of gates which open time as well as space, with art the amanuensis to lead us through corridors of memory and into realms of death.