Brahms’s Elegies

Nicole Grimes provides a compellingly fresh perspective on a series of Brahms’s elegiac works by bringing together the disciplines of historical musicology, German studies, and cultural history. Her exploration of the expressive potential of Schicksalslied, Nänie, Gesang der Parzen, and the Vier ernste Gesänge reveals the philosophical weight of this music. She considers the German tradition of the poetics of loss that extends from the late eighteenth-century texts by Hölderlin, Schiller, and Goethe set by Brahms, and includes other philosophical and poetic works present in his library, to the mid-twentieth-century aesthetics of Adorno, who was preoccupied as much by Brahms as by their shared literary heritage. Her multifaceted focus on endings – the end of tonality, the end of the nineteenth century, and themes of loss in the music – illuminates our understanding of Brahms and lateness and the place of Brahms in the fabric of modernist culture.

Nicole Grimes is Assistant Professor of Music at the University of California, Irvine. She serves on the Editorial Board of Music Analysis and is a member of the Board of Directors of the American Brahms Society. Her previous works include Mendelssohn Perspectives (2012) and Rethinking Hanslick: Music, Formalism, and Expression (2013).
MUSIC IN CONTEXT

Series editors

J. P. E. Harper-Scott
Royal Holloway, University of London

Julian Rushton
University of Leeds

The aim of Music in Context is to illuminate specific musical works, repertoires, or practices in historical, critical, socio-economic, or other contexts; or to illuminate particular cultural and critical contexts in which music operates through the study of specific musical works, repertoires, or practices. A specific musical focus is essential, while avoiding the decontextualization of traditional aesthetics and music analysis. The series title invites engagement with both its main terms; the aim is to challenge notions of what contexts are appropriate or necessary in studies of music, and to extend the conceptual framework of musicology into other disciplines or into new theoretical directions.

Books in the series

Simon P. Keefe, Mozart’s Requiem: Reception, Work, Completion
Nancy November, Beethoven’s Theatrical Quartets: Opp. 59, 74, and 95
Rufus Hallmark, ‘Frauenliebe und Leben’: Chamisso’s Poems and Schumann’s Songs
Anna Zayaruznaya, The Monstrous New Art: Divided Forms in the Late Medieval Motet
Helen Deeming and Elizabeth Eva Leach, Manuscripts and Medieval Song: Inscription, Performance, Context
Emily Kilpatrick, The Operas of Maurice Ravel
Roderick Chadwick and Peter Hill, Olivier Messiaen’s Catalogue d’oiseaux: From Conception to Performance
Catherine A. Bradley, Polyphony in Medieval Paris: The Art of Composing with Plainchant
Daniel M. Grimley, Delius and the Sound of Place
Nicole Grimes, Brahms’s Elegies: The Poetics of Loss in Nineteenth-Century German Culture
Brahms’s Elegies

The Poetics of Loss in Nineteenth-Century
German Culture

NICOLE GRIMES
University of California, Irvine
For Dad

And in memory of my Mum (1946–2006)
Contents

List of Figures [page viii]
List of Music Examples [ix]
List of Tables [x]
Acknowledgements [xi]

Introduction [1]
1 Brahms’s Ascending Circle: Hölderlin and Schicksalslied [18]
2 The Ennoblement of Mourning: Nānie and the Death of Beauty [64]
3 A Disembodied Head for Mythic Justice: Gesang der Parzen [120]
4 The Last Great Cultural Harvest: Nietzsche and the Vier ernste Gesänge [163]
5 The Sense of an Ending: Music’s Return to the Land of Childhood [206]

Epilogue [242]

Appendix: Translation of Theodor Adorno, ‘Brahms aktuell’ (1934) [250]
Bibliography [254]
Index [271]
Figures

1.1 Brahms’s annotations to Hölderlin’s poem ‘An die Parzen’.
Reproduced with the permission of the Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna [page 21]

1.2 The piano reduction of Brahms’s proposed ending for Schicksalslied.
Reproduced with the permission of the Brahms-Institut an der Musikhochschule, Lübeck [59]

1.3 Letter from Hermann Levi to Brahms. Reproduced with the permission of the Brahms-Institut an der Musikhochschule, Lübeck [60]

2.1 Anselm Feuerbach, Iphigenie (1862). Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt [73]

2.2 Anselm Feuerbach, Medea (1870), Peter Horree/Alamy Stock Photo [79]

2.3 Schiller’s categorization of poetic genres [83]

2.4 Adolph Menzel, Das Balkonzimmer (1845), ART Collection/Alamy Stock Photo [94]

3.1 The Junozimmer in Goethe’s Town House in Weimar, LOOK Die Bildagentur der Fotografen GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo [142]

3.2 Giulio Sanuto after Titian, Tantalus (c. 1565). Reproduced with permission of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam [149]

3.3 Titian, The Flaying of Marsyas (c. 1576). Lebrecht Music & Arts/Alamy Stock Photo [150]

4.1 Brahms’s Biblical Notebook. Reproduced with the permission of the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus [190]

4.2 Sketch of Brahms Vier ernste Gesänge, Op. 121, Autograph A122A.
Reproduced with the permission of the Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna [192]

4.3 Sketch of Brahms Vier ernste Gesänge, Op. 121, Autograph A122B.
Reproduced with the permission of the Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna [197]

4.4 Brahms orchestral sketch A121. Reproduced with the permission of the Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna [198]
Music Examples

1.1 Brahms, Schicksalslied, Op. 54, bars 94–103 [page 24]
1.2b Brahms, Schicksalslied, Op. 54, Postlude in C major [26]
1.3 Hermann Levi’s transcription of Brahms’s proposed ending for Schicksalslied in May 1871 in piano reduction [57]
2.1a Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 26 in E♭ Major, Op. 81a, ‘Lebewohl’, bars 1–16 [96]
2.1b Beethoven, ‘Lebewohl’ Sonata, Op. 81a, outline of the cadential structures, bars 1–16 [97]
2.1c Reduction of Brahms, Nänie, Op. 82, bars 1–2 [97]
2.2 Outline of ‘Lebewohl’ entries in the Andante, Nänie, Op. 82 [101]
2.3a Brahms, Ein deutsches Requiem, Op. 45, V, opening melody [103]
2.3c Brahms, Nänie, Op. 82, bass voice at bars 87–90 [104]
2.4a Beethoven, ‘Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder’, An die ferne Geliebte, Op. 98, bars 1–10 [105]
2.4b Brahms, Nänie, Op. 82, bars 85–95, choral parts only [106]
2.5 Beethoven, ‘Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder’, An die ferne Geliebte, Op. 98, bars 38–41 [108]
2.6 Brahms, Nänie, Op. 82, bars 137–42 [111]
2.7 Brahms, Nänie, Op. 82, bars 1–2 and 176–81 [115]
3.1 Brahms, Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73/I, bars 32–43 [131]
3.3 Brahms, ‘Mir lächelt kein Frühling’, WoO25, bars 1–22 [137]
3.4 Brahms, Gesang der Parzen, Op. 89, bars 1–2, 161–3 [139]
4.1 Transcription of Autograph A122 [193]
5.1 Brahms, Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 in G Major, Op. 78, I, bars 84–5 [225]
List of Music Examples

5.2 Brahms, Piano Trio No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 101, IV, bars 65–6 [233]
5.3 Brahms, Piano Trio No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 101, IV, bars 117–24 [234]
5.4 Brahms, Piano Trio No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 101, IV, bars 188–90 [236]
Tables

1.1 Summary of Jackson’s formal outline of *Schicksalslied*, Op. 54  [page 43]
1.2 Summary of Daverio’s formal outline of *Schicksalslied*, Op. 54  [46]
1.3 Formal outline of *Schicksalslied*  [48]
2.1 Formal outline of Schiller, ‘Nânie’  [87]
2.2 Formal analysis of Brahms’s, *Nânie*, Op. 82  [100]
3.1 Trajectory of melancholy in Brahms’s output from 1877 to the *Parzenlied*  [133]
3.2 Formal outline of *Gesang der Parzen*, Op. 89  [155]
4.1 Brahms’s Bible Notebook and its relationship to the *Vier ernste Gesänge*, Op. 121  [184]
5.1 Adorno’s Brahms finales  [220]
5.2 Formal outline of Brahms, Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 in G Major, Op. 78/III  [224]
5.3 Formal outline of Brahms, Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in A Major, Op. 100/III  [228]
5.4 Formal outline of Brahms, Piano Trio No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 101/IV  [230]
Acknowledgements

This book has two homes – Dublin and California. The research for the project ‘Brahms and the Fabric of Modernist Culture’ was carried out under the auspices of an International Outgoing Marie Curie Fellowship under the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission. During this fellowship from 2011 to 2014, I had the privilege and joy of working at two music departments, the School of Music at University College Dublin (UCD) and the Department of Music at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). My attachment to each department, however, reaches far beyond this time. Prior to taking up the fellowship, I enjoyed several very happy years working at UCD. Some years after the fellowship ended, I took up a tenure-track post at UCI. Situated in the vastly differing landscapes of the east coast of Ireland and the west coast of America, I found that what characterizes and connects these two departments is an extraordinary warmth and collegiality wherein musicological thought thrives and friendship abides. Colleagues past and present at both universities have been a continuous source of support and intellectual inspiration. At the UCD School of Music, I am especially grateful to Majella Boland, Ciarán Crilly, Melissa Devereux, Siobhán Donovan, Desmond Earley, Anne Hallinan, Jaime Jones, Frank Lawrence, Wolfgang Marx, Alan Street, and Harry White. At the UCD Research Office, I am thankful to Máire Coyle and Gillian Boyle. At the UCD Humanities Institute, my thanks are due to Gerardine Meaney and Valerie Norton. I thank all of my colleagues at the UCI Department of Music, and in particular Amy Bauer, David Brodbeck, Peter Chang, Michael Dessen, Margaret Erel, Stephan Hammel, Margaret Murata, Colleen Reardon, and Nina Scolnik, not only for providing a stimulating and fortifying intellectual environment but also for making California my home away from home. The writing process continued in the years between UCD and UCI, when I took up a number of shorter appointments. I express my gratitude to my colleagues at Royal Holloway, University of London and Keele University.

Throughout this fellowship, I had three extraordinary mentors. David Brodbeck’s probing and thoughtful scholarship has been an inspiration to
me for many years. With profound insight and the most generous spirit, he has allowed me to benefit from his rich expertise on Brahms’s music and its intricate socio-political context. Julian Horton’s fervent passion for music analysis, shared through his exemplary mentorship and code of kindness, has inspired and guided this book. His incisive insights on the aesthetic and philosophical issues surrounding Brahms’s music leave a marked imprint on these pages. Through the example of his own beautifully conceived writing, and through wisdom generously imparted, Harry White has vitally enriched my thinking on poetry and music. In an age in which the humanities are under siege, his unflinching and uncompromising insistence on the importance of thinking about music as a humanistic inquiry continues to embolden my spirit.

I am immensely grateful for J. P. E. Harper-Scott’s enthusiasm for this project from the outset, for his warm encouragement, for the many invigorating conversations on elegies, loss, and idealism, and for his patience and kindness as the book came to fruition. He and Julian Rushton, the editors of the Music in Context Series at Cambridge University Press, worked through every page of this manuscript with an incisive and insightful toothcomb. Their critical refinements have rendered the analyses more penetrating and the prose far more elegant than it might otherwise have been. They have been the most sensitive, supportive, and alert editors. At Cambridge University Press, I express my heartfelt thanks to the commissioning editor, Kate Brett, and to Eilidh Burrett Lisa Sinclair, Lesley Hay, and Mathivathini Mareesan for shepherding the book through publication with efficiency and good cheer. Profound thanks are due to Walter Frisch, who read the entire manuscript and provided perceptive feedback and warm encouragement of my work.

Along the way, I have enjoyed great intellectual camaraderie with friends and colleagues who have shaped my thinking. I thank Dillon Parmer for a Brahmsian friendship of rich and engaging conversations over many years. I am grateful to Mark Evan Bonds for his wise counsel at various stages as the project unfolded, for engrossing discussions, and for his encouragement of my work. I thank Kevin C. Karnes for his energizing positivity and for a number of stimulating conversations, which had an impact on the Nietzsche chapter in particular. For his encouragement of this project from its very earliest stages, and for reading and responding to drafts of chapters, I thank John Michael Cooper. I am grateful to Benjamin Korstvedt for having read and provided astute feedback on Chapter 4. For nourishing me intellectually and with gastronomic delights, I thank David Kasunic, whose warm friendship makes him feel like family here in California. I express my heartfelt thanks to Styra Avins for long...
Acknowledgements

discussions on Brahms and her advice on translations. I am grateful to Scott Burnham for sharing his unpublished work on Brahms’s fate-related choral compositions, and for engaging in conversation on these works. To Nina Scolnik and Natasha Loges, both of whom possess the enviable combination of being accomplished pianists and sensitive scholars, I thank you for your insights on the words and music in Chapter 2. I am grateful to Benedict Taylor, who shares my fascination with the process of recollection, for his thoughtful engagement with Chapter 1. For advice on Chapter 1, I thank Meredith Lee. To Matthew Werley, thank you for the Schnaderhüpfeln! For stimulating my thinking on the material in the book at conferences and elsewhere, I am grateful to Leah Batstone, Lorraine Byrne Bodley, Angela Mace Christian, Kathy Fry, Katy Hamilton, Aine Heneghan, Anne Hyland, David Larkin, Hannah Millington, Roger Parker, Reuben Phillips, Lee Rothfarb, Leonora Saavedra, Emily X. X. Tan, and Aidan Thomson.

The financial support of the Marie Curie Fellowship enabled me to spend extended periods in Vienna and Lübeck between 2012 and 2014, where I undertook research that was of pivotal importance for this book. For access to invaluable archival material in Vienna, I am especially grateful to Professor Otto Biba, Ilse Kosz, Ingrid Leis, and Günther Faimann at the Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. I also thank the staff at the Handschriftensammlung of the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus. For their kindness and generosity during my time in Vienna, I thank Alexander Wilfing and Christoph Landerer. At the Brahms-Institut in Lübeck, I express my gratitude to Wolfgang Sandberger; I am grateful to Stefan Weymar and Andrea Hammes not only for helping me to navigate Brahms’s library but also for their advice on deciphering the handwriting of Hermann Levi. For so graciously hosting me during my time in Lübeck, I owe my warmest thanks to Beate Carriere and Tom Carriere. For a publications subvention to offset illustration costs, I am grateful to the Lloyd Hibberd Endowment of the American Musicological Society, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

An earlier version of Chapter 1 first appeared as ‘Brahms’s Ascending Circle: Hölderlin, Schicksalslied, and the Process of Recollection’ in Nineteenth-Century Music Review (2014). Some of the material from Chapter 5 appeared as ‘The Sense of an Ending: Adorno, Brahms, and Music’s Return to the Land of Childhood’ in Irish Musical Analysis, edited by Gareth Cox and Julian Horton (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2014). I am grateful for the permission to rework this material. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are my own. It would be remiss not to acknowledge, however, with heartfelt thanks, the sage advice I have received from time
to time on translation from Styra Avins, Siobhán Donovan, and Wolfgang Marx. Any mistakes or oversights that remain are entirely my own.

Throughout the years during which this book came into realization, I have been sustained and nourished by friends both inside and beyond the academy. To them I owe my lasting gratitude for their treasured friendship and the joy they bring to my life. My warmest and deepest thanks I reserve for my family, my sisters Tamasine, Alison, and Louise, and my parents, Marie Grimes (who lives on in my heart) and William Grimes. Dad, this book is for you, with all my love.