Introduction

Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*, Op. 42, is one of the composer's three great song cycles, along with *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48, and the Eichendorff *Liederkreis*, Op. 39. This cycle, like its companions, remains a staple on the concert stage, in voice studios, and on recordings. *Frauenliebe* was probably Schumann's most popular song cycle in the nineteenth century. His genius as a lied composer remains undisputed today. These songs demonstrate his compositional mastery with their sensitive treatment of poetic form and sentiment and their inherent musical expressiveness.

The poems, by Adelbert von Chamisso, a noted figure in his day, are among his "lyric-epic" creations – poems that are at once individual, first-person lyrical utterances and, when taken as a whole and in sequence, delineate a narrative. The *Frauenliebe*[1] poems portray moments in the life experience of a young German woman of the early nineteenth century, from adolescent infatuation to love, engagement, marriage, conjugal intimacy, motherhood, and (early?) widowhood. Chamisso's poetry in general, and these poems in particular, were immensely popular in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Few if any will deny the beauty and expressiveness of Schumann's songs. Yet modern performers, audiences, and critics nearly always qualify their praise with an acknowledgment that the poems on which they are based, more than many other nineteenth-century lyrics, are out of touch with modern sensibilities. Even in the 1940s, the famous singer and lied interpreter Lotte Lehmann wrote: "One often hears Chamisso's poems for this cycle criticized as being old-fashioned."[2] To be sure, Lehmann herself proceeds to write about the songs sincerely and whole-heartedly, but her remark reflects a growing adverse opinion of the cycle. One modern view

[1] The title of Chamisso's poetic cycle is *Frauen-Liebe und Leben*, but Schumann's title for his songs is *Frauenliebe und Leben*. In this work I use the form *Frauenliebe und Leben* for both the poems and the song cycle, and also for the similarly titled *Lebenslieder und Bilder*. For the sake of brevity I also occasionally use the short titles *Frauenliebe* and *Lebenslieder*.

Unless otherwise indicated all translations are the author's own.

[2] Lotte Lehmann, *Eighteen Song Cycle: Studies in Their Interpretation*. London: Cassell / New York: Praeger (1972), 93.

even asserts that the poems must have presented stereotyped images of women and marriage unacceptable even in their own day. And since Schumann was drawn to these poems and set them, his music also comes under suspicion of fostering the outdated attitudes and ideas.[3]

Thus one approaches this cycle at a certain disadvantage. The songs come with a good deal of "baggage." A question that hovers around this work without ever being explicitly acknowledged is whether it should even be performed any longer, since many find its sentiments uncomfortable, or worse, insulting and demeaning. How can a singer and pianist put their all into a performance, how can listeners enjoy the songs, if they have misgivings about the texts, and therefore about the music, which so sincerely embraces Chamisso's poems? And yet on the evidence of the recital repertory and recordings, as I mentioned earlier, it is clear by and large that neither performers nor audiences reject this cycle.

Must we remain at such a dissatisfying impasse and live with this somewhat debilitating tension? The aim of this book is, at least partially, to suffuse the discussion of *Frauenliebe und Leben* with information about the social, philosophic, poetic, and musical contexts of Chamisso's poetry and Schumann's songs so that we may come to a more balanced view of them. I do not seek to convert anyone to a particular point of view, but I do hope to bring new information to the dialogue to promote a more nuanced perspective. I do not set out to "whitewash" Chamisso or Schumann, but to understand their achievements sympathetically from within their own era and culture. Chapter 1, then, is a prologue in which I offer a characterization of early nineteenth-century German society, ideas, and practices relating to women and marriage. I hope it provides readers with something more than "a naïve historical relativism"[4] to help them understand and appreciate the poems and songs on their own terms.

The book also sets out to provide the English-speaking reader with a fuller portrait of Adelbert von Chamisso's life and work than can be gleaned from most English-language sources.[5] Chapter 2 provides a biographical sketch and introduction to his poetry, including a representative sampling of poems (with translations). Most English readers know little or nothing

[3] For a summary of other similar and more recent opinions, see Ruth A. Solie, "Whose Life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's *Frauenliebe* Songs," in Steven Paul Scher, ed., *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, Cambridge University Press (1992), 219–240.

[4] *Ibid.*, 220.

[5] The most that readers can find about Chamisso in English are encyclopedia entries and chapters in literary histories of Germany. Furthermore, very few of Chamisso's poems are published in translation.

about Chamisso other than that he authored a fable about a man named Peter Schlemihl who sold his shadow to a mysterious man in gray – students of German literature will know this – or that he authored the poems that served as texts for Schumann's song cycle – musicians are likely to be aware of this. But Chamisso deserves to be better known. He led a fascinating life and was an accomplished scientist and a beloved poet. Besides his "marvelous tale" of Peter Schlemihl and his collected poems, his chronicle of the trip he made around the world as the naturalist on an exploratory voyage was widely read. His scientific observations were significant contributions to the biological, geological, anthropological, and linguistic knowledge of the time. His poetry may suffer if we bring to it the same expectations that we bring to the work of his romantic predecessors and contemporaries, for he neither shared their aesthetic goals nor chose the same subjects for his writing. But his social and political poems are informative, insightful, and invigorating, and his narratives are well crafted, entertaining, and sometimes gripping and moving. And he had a delightful sense of humor. Chapter 3 will look more specifically at contemporary poems about women, both Chamisso's and others, and will sample some poems *by* women as well. Our notions of his gender biases may be tempered by a better acquaintance with others of his own poems about women as well as by an appreciation of his liberal politics in other regards. The poems of *Frauenliebe und Leben* may grow in the estimation of readers when they are compared with some contemporaneous efforts in the same vein as well as with poetry by women.

If Chamisso's cycle of poems is better appreciated when contextualized, so are Schumann's songs, for he was by no means the only composer who set Chamisso's texts. Chapter 4 will portray the reception of Chamisso's poems in music, giving an overview of the cycles by Franz Kugler, Carl Loewe, and Schumann, comparing the features that make their songs cyclic compositions and considering some contemporary reviews. A number of individual songs based on Chamisso's cycle by other composers round out the picture of the musical reception of these poems. Finally, some of the de luxe, illustrated editions of Chamisso's poems from the later nineteenth century will close the chapter.

Chapter 5 tells the reader about Schumann's composition of *Frauenliebe und Leben*. The fresh interpretations of Schumann's songs in this book are based in part on insights gleaned from the study of the composer's manuscripts. Schumann's preliminary sketches, his full autograph draft or working manuscript, and his corrections and emendations in the copyist's manuscript furnish details that are often interesting in themselves and that also provoke new interpretive speculation and insight.

Chapter 6 sets forth the author's analysis and interpretation of Schumann's songs, drawing together the poems, Schumann's compositional decisions, and comparisons with other musical settings. While the superiority of Schumann's songs over the cycles by Franz Kugler and Carl Loewe and over the settings of individual poems by other composers may seem a foregone conclusion, it is nevertheless revealing to consider the musical and expressive qualities of these other contemporary songs. Careful comparisons may serve to intensify our appreciation of the subtle psychological insights of Schumann's musical readings of the poems. Occasionally another setting may rival one of Schumann's in some way.

This is a propitious time for bringing together much new research and discussion concerning *Frauenliebe und Leben*. A number of scholars have taken a strong interest in this cycle in recent years and have presented a variety of arguments about the poetry and the music. The most significant, in chronological order of publication, are the articles by Ruth Solie, Kristina Muxfeldt, Matthias Walz, Elissa Guralnick, and Herbert Hopfgartner (see the bibliography). Their provocative and insightful essays have all contributed to the discussion in this book. Solie's article, to which I shall often refer, has pride of place. It is not far-fetched to say that her essay launched a new wave of study of this cycle, for Muxfeldt's and Guralnick's articles both take her arguments to some extent as points of departure. Her work has been a great catalyst for my own work on *Frauenliebe*; I am very grateful to her not only for the essay itself, but also for her stimulating correspondence and discussions with me through the years.

In the matter of primary manuscript materials, Kazuko Ozawa has studied the original sources of this cycle (as well as of Schumann's other Chamisso songs) and has transcribed the varying versions the songs, tracing their evolution painstakingly from sketch to first edition. Her book makes unnecessary a minute and thorough discussion of the sources here and allows me to bring to the fore only those original passages and emendations that, in my opinion, hold particular fascination and provide both insight into Schumann's creative mind and evidence for new critical interpretations. Chapter 6 will draw on and respond to this rich vein of primary documents and secondary literature.

Schumann's music in general has not fallen from grace; it is held in high regard by performers, listeners, and thinkers alike. We need make no allowances for his compositions. In this regard, of course, his lasting reputation differs from Chamisso's, whose work is much less well known and valued. In an afterword I offer a way for English-speaking readers,

particularly Americans, to construe a poet like Chamisso, by discussing a parallel case in nineteenth-century American literature.

As much as I have come to enjoy and admire Chamisso and his poetry, and though my love and admiration for Schumann's lieder continues to grow, I have endeavored to maintain a critical detachment in this book, perhaps not always successfully.

> As soon . . . as the critic sees that his approvals and disapprovals reflect his own bias positions, he will take a more mature attitude toward his function as a critic. He is no longer a legislator, he is an explicator. He is no longer handing down a value judgment from on high; he now sees that he is merely explicating and elucidating the complex nexus of preferences on which every particular judgment of taste is based.[6]

I trust that readers will listen with interest and open minds to what I have to say in this book and that they will, perhaps after even further reading and reflection, make up their own minds. I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to them.

[6] William Thomas Jones, *The Romantic Syndrome*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff (1961), 237.

1 Prologue – women in early nineteenth-century Germany: societal conventions, ideology, relationships

> We lay on the ground and kissed. Perhaps you smile. That we only lay on the ground and kissed. You young people can lend your bodies now, play with them, give them as we could not. But remember that you have paid a price: that of a world rich in mystery and delicate emotion. It is not only species of animal that die out, but whole species of feeling. And if you are wise you will never pity the past for what it did not know, but pity yourself for what it did.
>
> John Fowles, *The Magus*

> Writers such as . . . Chamisso . . . may have projected their own desires into the portraits of women that appear in their work, but they were also recording the change that perceptive contemporaries had observed.
>
> Eda Sagarra, *Tradition and Revolution in German Literature and Society, 1830–1890*

German women were unquestionably subordinate to men in the early nineteenth century. In the light of our modern convictions about gender equality and the great strides that have been made in women's rights, the conditions under which women lived were deplorable. The legal system, societal attitudes and norms of behavior, and prevalent philosophical ideas were magnified by the relative cultural isolation of Germany. These factors supported male supremacy, the casting of women in the fixed roles of housewife and bearer and nurturer of children, and the attribution to women of sex-determined characteristics such as weakness, emotionality, and dependence. The information we have suggests also that women for the most part accepted this state of affairs. Furthermore, even liberal-minded reformers had much more modest goals than we might imagine and did not challenge many of the basic assumptions of the patriarchal society. As curious, alien, or repugnant as we in the twenty-first century may find this state of affairs, it is necessary to understand it as the context for Chamisso's poems and Schumann's songs about women.

The period of German history between the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the revolutions of 1848 is variously named. From a political perspective

it is usually designated the *Vormärz*, the post-Napoleonic restoration era preceding the initial outbreak of workers' revolutions in March of 1848. Culturally the period is commonly known as "Biedermeier." The latter term takes its name from a minor literary creation – a character who is a parody of Philistinism in contemporary society. As such the term, which generally refers to "lowbrow" middle-class culture, has an opprobrious connotation.[1]

The standard explanation of Biedermeier taste takes a rather Hegelian dialectic form. Germany had been overrun by Napoleon's forces, and an almost predictable reaction set in. Middle-class German people, weary from warfare, foreign domination, and insecurity, did an about-face from the bracing ideals of the French revolution and submitted to reactionary government because it was their own and offered order, peace, and security. They found solace in home, family, and work. For their relatively modest homes they bought comfortable, practical furniture that featured simple design, slight, humble decoration, and the natural beauty of unpainted wood grain. They went to concerts to marvel or swoon at the excessive technical display and expressiveness of instrumental virtuosi, to opera houses to be caught up in the melodramatic works of Marschner or to be gently charmed by the comedy and sentiment of Lortzing. At home they played simple piano miniatures and sang unassuming lieder. They had themselves painted in informal family gatherings. They enjoyed realism in the form of landscapes and the representation of scenes from their daily life. The humorous paintings of Carl Spitzweg have become emblematic of the period.

Chamisso wrote largely about and for this German middle class. The portrait that follows is, therefore, of middle-class women. There were certainly women of the aristocracy and of the uppermost middle class to whom the ensuing description would not apply and who would and did protest contemporary doctrinaire ideas about their sex. One woman, for example, wrote, "It is ignorant of people to imagine that our [women's] spirit is different and suited to other needs, and that we could live entirely upon the existence of a husband or a son."[2] But the speaker is Rahel Levin Varnhagen (1771–1833),

[1] See Friedrich Sengle's magisterial study *Biedermeierzeit. Deutsche Literatur im Spannungsfeld zwischen Restauration und Revolution, 1815–1848*, 3 vols, Stuttgart: Metzler (1971, 1972, 1980); also, Karl Buchheim, *Deutsche Kultur zwischen 1830 und 1870*, Frankfurt: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion (1966); Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, Princeton University Press (1966); Michael Titzmann, ed., *Zwischen Goethezeit und Realismus. Wandel und Spezifik in der Phase des Biedermeier*, Tübingen: Niemeyer (2002).

[2] Juliane Jacob-Dittrich, "Growing Up Female in the Nineteenth Century," in John C. Fout, ed., *German Women in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History*, New York: Holmes & Meier (1984), 203–204.

who presided over a brilliant early nineteenth-century salon of Berlin intellectuals. Though Chamisso moved in such circles in Berlin, and even though Rahel's husband, Varnhagen von Ense, was a friend of his, it was not for or about Rahel Levin that Chamisso wrote his poetry.

In nineteenth-century Germany, children were the legal property of their father, not of both parents, from the age of five, and even adult women, if unmarried, remained under the legal jurisdiction of their fathers.[3] Girls and young women were thus at the mercy of their fathers when it came to marriage, and fathers (then as now) were capable of being more concerned about the economic foundation and respectability of marital matches than about love. Girls were considered to enter their *Wartezeit* (waiting time) as early as the age of fourteen, and from that time for many of them the yearning to be released from their fathers' domination must have added to their motivation to marry. Chamisso, as we shall see, treated the subject of marriageable daughters and overbearing fathers in his poetry, portraying both the humorous and the tragic sides of the situation.[4]

The education of a girl beyond basic literacy and numeracy consisted largely of domestic skills. In Protestant areas girls were allowed and encouraged to read the Bible, sermons, selected poetry, and, of course, cookbooks. In 1795 a woman in Bremen wrote that her parents had allowed her only the Bible, a catechism, and selected sermons to read.[5] A painting entitled *Hausgarten* by Erasmus Engert depicts a woman sitting with her Bible and her knitting, implying that the two were equally appropriate activities for women.[6] In households that could afford an instrument, girls learned to play the piano. Wider culture and unlimited reading were to be avoided. Parents seem to have wanted to protect their daughters from books as some wish to shield them from certain music today, and for the same reason: a fear that they will grow up too fast. A craze for reading was considered excessive, even a vice.[7] Chamisso alludes to the parental attitude toward books as pariahs in his humorous poem "Recht Empfindsam" (see further in Chapter 3).

[3] See Eda Sagarra, "German Law and Women," in *A Social History of Germany 1648–1914*, New York: Holmes & Meier (1977), 405; see also Rudolf Huebner, *A History of Germanic Private Law*, Boston (1918), 664, cited in Nancy Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press (2001), 9n19.

[4] See the discussion of "Recht Empfindsam" and *Tränen* in Chapter 3.

[5] Sagarra, *A Social History of Germany*, 408.

[6] See Renate Möhrmann, "The Reading Habits of Women in the *Vormärz*," in Fout, ed., *German Women*, 105.

[7] *Ibid.*

Times were changing, however, and once of marriageable age or married, young women found reading entertainment in the burgeoning numbers of *Almanache* and *Taschenbücher*, anthologies of poetry, stories, essays, reviews, engravings, etc. Dating their origins back into the eighteenth century, these publications found a second flourishing in the Biedermeier period.[8] *Urania*, *Minerva*, and the *Deutscher Musenalmanach* were among the many titles; Chamisso wrote for and then edited the latter annual poetry collection for the issues 1832–1839. A humorous poem in the 1831 *Musenalmanach*, when it was still under the editorship of Amadeus Wendt, provides a light-hearted impression of the transitional era. The poet debates whether to give a new bride a cookbook or an almanac. He recognizes that the last generation had regarded the cookbook "nebst Psalmenbuch und Bibel" as "des Weibes höchste Lit'ratur" (a woman's highest literature next to a psalm book and the Bible), but counters:

Doch anders wollt' der Geist der Zeiten,
Vorwärts soll mit der Bildung schreiten
Der deutschen Frauen zarten Sinn;
Nicht nur den Laren, auch den Musen
Erglüh' der Funke in dem Busen
Der sinnig keutschen Priesterin.
Begeistert nun des Theetisches Dampfe,
In schöner Seelen edeln Kampfe,
Bei Räthseln und Sonnettenklang,
In tausend rhythmischen Gestalten
Soll sich des Witzes Blüth entfalten
Zu Pfänderspiel und Rundgesang.[9]

But the spirit of the times wills otherwise;
The sensitive mind of German women
Shall stride forward with its cultivation;
Let the spark in the bosom of the thoughtful
Chaste priestess glow for the muses
As well as for the household gods.
Now is the steam of the tea table inspired
With the noble struggle of beautiful souls,
Amid the clamor of riddles and sonnets,
The blossoming of wit shall unfold
In thousands of rhythmic forms
In cardplay and round-singing.

The writer seems to be mocking women's new interest in culture in the same breath with which he announces it; or perhaps the humor is directed less at women than at the publication's low estimation of the level of women's intelligence and taste. In any case, the poet concludes that his best bet to win the appreciation of the bride for whom he is buying a gift is to get her both a cookbook and an almanac.

[8] See Margarete Zuber, "Die deutschen Musenalmanache und schöngeistigen Taschenbücher des Biedermeier, 1815–1848," *Boersenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel. Frankfurter Ausgabe*, Neue Folge 13 (July 1957), 869–964.

[9] K. R. Hagendach, "Das Kochbuch und der Almanach. An die Braut," in Amadeus Wendt, ed., *Deutscher Musenalmanach für das Jahr 1831*, Leipzig (1831), 239–240.

Young women commonly married men older than themselves. Adelbert von Chamisso was thirty-nine and his bride Antonie Piaste only eighteen. Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck were, respectively, twenty-nine and twenty when they married. It could take years for a man to gain a sufficient economic footing to be able to offer assurances to a bride's father that he could provide for her:

> [A]lthough *bourgeois* marriage may look like a trap rather than an ideal to us, this ideal of family life was reinforced in the past not only by moral constraint but, ironically, by the fact that it was so difficult to attain. Young men who wanted to reach some standing in the world had to postpone marriage until such time as they could afford it, since the wife earned nothing. . .[10]

At the same time, the husband-to-be expected a wife to be a woman of child-bearing age and of sufficient youth and vigor to manage his household. The result was often an unequal relation between husband and wife:

> The common disparity in age between husband and wife in middle-class circles made this kind of relationship more credible: the scarcity of job opportunities, especially before 1850, meant that marriage was frequently delayed until the man was between thirty and forty. . . [T]he employment situation for men and the extreme difficulty for a young woman of finding a position, meant that marriage brought security as well as status.[11]

Brides were therefore probably disposed to look up to their fiancés, who were frequently their seniors in age, wealth, and perhaps even social position. Professions of unworthiness, while perhaps nonetheless sincere, may at the same time have been accustomed attitudes adopted by prospective young wives of the older men who were in a position to free them from their fathers' controlling reach and to provide for their economic security. We come to the conclusion that self-abnegation may often have been a pose, a pose perhaps not so much calculated as inculcated to flatter and win the hearts of adoring males – particularly older specimens. In his observations of the comportment of a young German girl, an American traveler in early nineteenth-century Germany reached a conclusion consistent with this inference:

> She is full of kindness . . . She is simple, heartfelt, and self-sacrificing, and her kind manners give one the impression, at first, she is very amiable and nothing else; but after a while, you see under this, that there is a strong understanding and very

[10] Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes*, Greenwich CT: Fawcett Publications (1971), 109.
[11] Sagarra, *A Social History*, 414.