2006-06-06

Text, Context, and Reception History of the Richard Dehmel Poems "Venus Mater" and "Wiegenlied" and Their Lieder Settings by Hans Pfitzner and Richard Strauss

Marie Tavianini
University of Miami, m.tavianini@att.net

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations

Recommended Citation
https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/51

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.
TEXT, CONTEXT, AND RECEPTION HISTORY OF THE RICHARD DEHMEL POEMS “VENUS MATER” AND “WIEGENLIED” AND THEIR LIEDER SETTINGS BY HANS PFITZNER AND RICHARD STRAUSS

By
Marie Ann Tavianini

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida
May 2006
This study examines the social and cultural circumstances surrounding the publication of the poems “Venus Mater” and “Wiegenlied” by the late nineteenth-century German poet Richard Dehmel, and the composition of the corresponding lieder by Hans Pfitzner and Richard Strauss. An accurate history of the publication and reception of Richard Dehmel’s poetry has been difficult due to the existence of multiple similar versions of his poems. By referring back to the primary sources of his poetry, it is shown that “Venus Mater” and “Wiegenlied,” although very similar, were discrete works published at different times in different anthologies of Dehmel’s poems. Further examination of the circumstances behind the publication of these two poems shows that the social and cultural reaction to the differing sources of these poems were substantially different. While “Wiegenlied” never aroused any controversy in fin-de-siècle German society, “Venus Mater” was a component of Die Verwandlungen der Venus, a poetic cycle which was one of Dehmel’s most problematic works, the publication of which resulted in charges of blasphemy and obscenity against the writer.

In light of the circumstances under which Dehmel’s poetry was published and received, the musical settings of these poems by Hans Pfitzner and Richard Strauss are investigated. It is shown that, contrary to many previous accounts, Pfitzner’s textual source for his lied “Venus Mater” was Dehmel’s notorious Die Verwandlungen der
*Venus*, while Strauss’ source for his “Wiegenlied” was Dehmel’s uncontroversial *Erlösungen*. The effects which these different texts and their contexts had on the composition and reception of the composers’ lieder is explored through an examination of the composers’ own writings, the writings of other scholars and critics, and a brief music analysis of the two lieder. The elucidation of these details reveals some ways in which cultural and social ideologies, such as representations of gender and sexuality, can be transmitted through both text and music.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, thanks go out to those countless friends and colleagues from coast to coast who have (perhaps unwittingly at times!) encouraged me to pursue this long-standing dream.

To my mother, who constantly shows me the meaning of tenacity and strength, and to my father, who still demonstrates a curiosity for learning new things – I thank you for your love and your example of how to live. To my husband Peter, who has backed my quest to finish this degree for almost as long as we have been married – I thank you for your patience, your faithful support, and your constant love.

If there were a place for an honorary member of one’s doctoral committee, Julia Kemp of Westminster Choir College would certainly deserve one. Not only has she helped with deciphering many of the complex German texts that are translated in this essay, she has been an source of inspiration and motivation to me through her positive and generous spirit.

I am grateful to my DMA committee at the University of Miami for taking the time to do the work necessary to review my doctoral essay. In particular, Dr. Hardenbergh and Prof. DeAcha deserve my thanks for graciously consenting to being on my committee and giving me some very appropriate suggestions for improving this essay.
And finally – words cannot express my gratitude to David Alt and Paul Wilson for all they have done to help me in my quest to finish this degree. I hate to admit how long these two have stood by me though the multiple iterations of committees and degree objectives, but their support has never wavered. I never would have had the confidence to finish if both of them weren’t there to encourage me and occasionally prod me to do what was needed. My association with both of you has made this all worthwhile, and I hope that both of you will remain as colleagues and friends to me.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION: “ART IS A PRODUCT OF CIVILIZATION”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situating the Study: Dehmel, Pfitzner, and Strauss at the <em>Fin-de-siècle</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the Work</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 VERSIONS OF “WIEGENLIED” AND “VENUS MATER”</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehmel’s Personal Views as Reflected in His Writings</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Publishing History of Dehmel’s “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater”</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Wiegenlied” (<em>Erlösungen</em>, 1891)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Venus Mater” (<em>Aber die Liebe</em>, 1893)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Wiegenlied” (<em>Erlösungen</em>, 1898)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Venus Mater” (<em>Die Verwandlungen der Venus</em>, 1907-1920)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” (1899) and Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” (1901)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” op.41, no. 1 (1899)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater,” op.11, no. 4 (1901)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published References to the Poetic Sources of Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” and Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater”</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 CENSORSHIP IN WILHELMINE GERMANY: THE CASE OF RICHARD DEHMELO ................. 40

Art and Society: The *Lex Heinze* ......................... 42

Richard Dehmel and the *Lex Heinze* ..................... 46
  *Aber die Liebe* (1893-94) .......................... 48
  *Weib und Welt* (1896-97) ......................... 51
  *Aber die Liebe* (1899-1900) .................... 58

The Power of Context in the Reception of Dehmel’s Poetry ........ 63

4 TEXT AND CONTEXT: HANS PFITZNER’S “VENUS MATER” AND RICHARD STRAUSS’ “WIEGENLIED” ............... 67

Pfitzner and “Venus Mater”– Perspectives from Composer and Commentators ................................. 69
  Pfitzner as a lieder composer ...................... 70
  Pfitzner on music and text ....................... 72
  Pfitzner and *Meine Liedertexte* .................. 74
  Pfitzner, Dehmel, and the meeting over “Venus Mater” .... 76
  The “erotic narcotic”— the malleability of interpretation ..... 78

Strauss and “Wiegenlied”– Different Perspectives, Different Contexts ................................. 85
  Strauss as a lieder composer ...................... 85
  Strauss, Dehmel, and “Wiegenlied”: the intersection of composer and poet .......................... 87
  “Wiegenlied” and *Drei Mutterlieder* .............. 89

Musical Comparisons: Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” vs. Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” ................................. 91

5 CONCLUSIONS ................................................. 99

The Intersection of Gender and Music ..................... 101

Challenges to the Study of Gender and Music .......... 103

 Chapter  Page
APPENDIX

Richard Dehmel’s “Venus Consolatrix” ......................... 110
REFERENCES ................................................ 114
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dehmel’s poetry published up to 1901</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Comparison of different versions of Richard Dehmel’s poems “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater”</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The various versions of the text “Venus Mater” of Richard Dehmel and Hans Pfitzner</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The censored version of “Venus Domestica” from <em>Die Verwandlungen der Venus</em> as printed in <em>Aber die Liebe</em></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The uncensored text of “Venus Domestica” from <em>Der Verwandlungen der Venus</em></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pfitzner’s introduction to <em>Meine Liedertexte</em></td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Pfiltzer’s “Venus Mater,” mm. 1-8</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pfiltzer’s “Venus Mater,” mm. 12-16. Arrival at F# major</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Pfiltzer’s “Venus Mater,” mm. 52-55. Final tonality of B major</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” mm. 1-6. Opening ostinato motif in piano accompaniment</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” mm. 81-84</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: “ART IS A PRODUCT OF CIVILIZATION”

Art is a product of civilization. It is not its “calling” to lead a self-sufficient, isolated existence in accordance with “laws” which are first arbitrarily formulated or designed to meet the needs of the moment and then proclaimed to be “eternal”: its natural calling is to bear witness to the civilization and of a people.

Richard Strauss, Recollections and Reflections

Richard Strauss wrote these words in 1903 for an introduction to a series of musical essays. In this introduction Strauss lets his disdain show for those who assumed that an artistic object, particularly music, was completely dissociated from the society in which it was produced. This is a surprisingly progressive viewpoint, and one that many espouse today. For Strauss, as well as for modern thinkers who subscribe to this opinion, much of art, whether fine or popular, whether visual, musical, literary or an admixture of these, cannot be produced without “bearing witness” in some manner to the culture of its time. However, art in all forms also transcends its time- and culturally-bounded qualities in ways which simultaneously render it universal. It is this enigmatic combination which, in part, epitomizes artistic value.

Artistic engagement with society is not always intentional, or even considered desirable by the artist – for example, Haydn is often quoted as feeling that his creativity flourished in the backwater of the Esterhazy palace, Charles Ives reveled in his isolation from the intelligentsia of early twentieth-century American music, and the bulk of J. S.
Bach’s creative life was spent far from musical trendsetters as a Kappellmeister in Leipzig. Yet, for many that by either choice or chance create their art in isolation, there are as many examples of those who create as an integral response, interpretation, commentary, or reaction to their time and place. For them, part of their inspiration would be lost if they did not connect their art to the larger society in which it existed.

Even with this immediate connection to society, certain works endure, although there is not universal agreement as to the components of a musical work which render it transcendent or grant it admission to the canon. However, the project of understanding canonicity is one which will always occupy musical scholarship. The elucidation of those factors in a musical work which somehow reflect the Zeitgeist is even less clear, and often arouses debate that borders on the confrontational. Still, such endeavors have taken their place alongside more traditional studies, and many believe that “the most profound changes in [music scholarship] within the last decade have come about in response to pressures from without to relinquish the notion of music as autonomous” (Schmalfeldt 1998).

One example that merges canonical musicological studies with a more nuanced view of social circumstances is Jeffrey Kallberg’s examination of Frederic Chopin’s multiple versions of many of his extant piano works (Kallberg 1996, 215-228). Kallberg posits that these multiple versions were produced because of Chopin’s constant re-evaluation of his pieces for their intended audiences and performers. From a more traditional viewpoint of those interested in publication history, finding more than one authoritative version of a piece is a “problem” which must be resolved. In the view of
Kallberg, and perhaps of Chopin, composition is a process that relates to its social and cultural circumstances:

For when we conceive of variants as something basic to the existence of the work of art, they become less of a “problem” and more a necessary part of our informed understanding. (Kallberg 1996, 215)

The project outlined in this essay will apply a perspective similar to Kallberg’s to a study of the multiple versions of a poem by the late nineteenth-century German poet Richard Dehmel and their settings as lieder by Hans Pfitzner and Richard Strauss, two important composers of late German Romantic art song. The two poems by Dehmel to be examined are “Wiegenlied” (Lullaby), a single poem in the 1898 anthology Erlösungen (Redemptions) which was set by Strauss in 1899, and “Venus Mater” (Venus-mother), part of the cycle Die Verwandlungen der Venus (The Transformations of Venus) published in the anthology Aber die Liebe (But Love. . . ) of 1893 and set by Pfitzner in 1901. Although “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” seem to be virtually identical poems when considered out of context, the circumstances under which they were published and received were extremely different. Similarly, though the lieder “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” have commonly been assumed to arise from essentially identical poems, the musical reactions of the composers to the radically different contexts of these poems are very different.

As Kallberg might put it, the elucidation of the details of these poems and of the corresponding lieder is a necessary part of our informed understanding of their existence. In addition, the details of the creation and reception of these specific works may also lead to important general insights concerning culture and society. Three specific topics will
be addressed in this essay in order to shed light on these details. First, the publication history of Richard Dehmel’s “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” will be clarified, including documentation of previous errors made concerning the publication of these poems. Next, the censorship of Die Verwandlungen der Venus, the source of “Venus Mater,” will be reviewed. Finally, the composition of Richard Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” and Hans Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” will be examined, with particular attention given to evidence of the reaction of the two composers to the different poetic sources and contexts.

How, then, might the specifics of this essay’s findings be generalized to “bear witness to civilization”? In elucidating the facts of the publication and reception of these poems and lieder, the importance of gender representation transmitted through music and poetry in fin-de-siècle German society will be highlighted. Far from a fixed trait of individuals determined by biology, gender is also embedded in cultural and social institutions and artifacts in fundamental ways that are not always immediately apparent to the casual observer. Because gender is determined by the ways in which we interact within society, we “do gender” in many (some would say most) of our activities of everyday life. In light of this, feminists, sociologists, musicologists, music theorists and others concerned with issues of gender in music have ventured to begin explaining how aspects of gender influence music’s creation, performance, and reception. Ruth Solie’s introduction to Musicology and Difference states the problem eloquently:

The question, then, is . . . “How do social life and culture construct the differences that all of us understand and enact in daily life?” For musicologists, as for other scholars of cultural phenomena, this particular line of reasoning may be of great importance; if identities are a matter of
social role, we may be able to study the mechanisms – including musical ones – by which these roles are delineated, communicated, learned, and perhaps challenged. (Solie 1993, 10)

These differences are delineated, communicated, learned, and challenged through the actions and interactions of all of those involved in the creation and reception of a musical work. Poet, composer, performer, and listener may either validate or contest gender norms by their actions and interactions in complex ways, and the context in which the work is received can be as important as the work itself in determining the reception of gender. I hope to demonstrate that these works provide a viable case study through which gender in music can be examined.

Situating the Study: Dehmel, Pfitzner, and Strauss at the Fin-de-siècle

At the end of the nineteenth century in Germany, often referred to as the fin-de-siècle, or by the German term Jahrhundertwende, a great deal of political, cultural, economic, and social foment resulted in a metamorphosis of the social structure of the country. The radical artistic, literary and musical community of fin-de-siècle Germany often clashed with the official stances of Wilhelmine morality and conservatism. Issues of gender and sexuality were in flux with the emergence of the erotic in poetry, art, literature, music and drama. Richard Dehmel’s 1896 poem Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night), Lovis Corinth’s 1897 painting The Temptation of St. Anthony, Thomas Mann’s 1902 short story Gladius Dei, Richard Strauss’ early opera Feuersnot (Fire-famine) of 1901, and Oskar Panizza’s play Das Liebeskonzil (The Council of Love) of 1893-94, are just a few examples of the fascination with these issues which manifested itself in artistic expression.
One of the most important characters in this national drama was the aforementioned poet Richard Dehmel. As a writer of a number of works which challenged normative views of gender and sexuality in German society, Dehmel attracted the attention of German legal authorities who wished to suppress his writings. His status as one of the most important members of the artistic community of Berlin allowed Dehmel to interact with a number of composers who lived in the area. Among these were Hans Pfitzner and Richard Strauss, both major composers of lieder who often used Dehmel’s poetry in their songs. Not surprisingly, both Pfitzner and Strauss set many of the same texts of Dehmel to music.

What appeared to be the definitive version of a poem was, to Dehmel, an excuse to edit and alter, granting his texts a degree of fluidity that has made it difficult to trace just how many versions of a particular poem existed, and what version of a poem was the inspiration to a particular composer. Small changes in the texts of songs, often discounted by musicologists as insignificant editing introduced by the composer or otherwise ignored as unimportant, are actually proof of the fact that different versions of a particular text were being used. The importance of such changes for the present essay is that these “virtually identical” poems were probably received at the time of their publication in quite different ways due to the context in which these poems were published. Some of Dehmel’s poetry was considered both blasphemous and lascivious at the time that it was published, leading to legal action against him a number of times in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Dehmel’s justification for publishing such texts
was a plea for new and revolutionary views of sexuality and, indeed, of gender roles themselves.

As mentioned above, the poems in question are “Wiegenlied,” an independent poem published in the 1898 anthology *Erlösungen*, and “Venus Mater,” part of the cycle *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* published in the anthology *Aber die Liebe* in 1893. Although these two poems are extremely similar – in fact, one might argue that one is based on another – the context of the two are extremely different. Whereas *Erlösungen* never attracted the attention of the morality police, *Aber die Liebe*, in particular, *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*, was one of Dehmel’s most problematic works. Dehmel was charged with blasphemy and obscenity numerous times for his writings, narrowly escaping being jailed once for a conviction on these offenses.

As stated above, Strauss set “Wiegenlied” in 1899, while Pfitzner set “Venus Mater” in 1901. How much either Pfitzner or Strauss knew of Dehmel’s legal travails concerning his works is not absolutely clear, though all three were all living simultaneously in Berlin at the time when Strauss and Pfitzner wrote their songs. There are a number of documented meetings between Dehmel and Strauss, as well as a well-recounted meeting between Dehmel and Pfitzner where the composer discussed his interpretation of “Venus Mater” with the poet.

Previous writings from others assumed, for the most part, that “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” arose from the same source, and that inconsequential differences between the two texts were introduced by the composers. However, my initial reaction to Pfitzner’s and Strauss’ settings of this poem were that these two composers must have
been reacting to very different poetic characteristics in their musical reactions to these “identical” poems. This lead to a closer examination of the sources that the two composers used for their words; it became clear that these sources were quite different, and more importantly, on further examination it was also clear that the social and cultural reactions to these different sources were substantially different.

First, the different editions of Dehmel’s poems “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” will be deciphered. By referring back to the primary sources of his poetry, it will be shown that “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater,” although very similar, were indeed discrete works published at different times in different anthologies of Dehmel’s poems. A careful examination of the details of these two versions will eventually allow for the conclusion that Richard Strauss used one of these versions for his setting of “Wiegenlied,” while Hans Pfitzner used a separate version for his setting of “Venus Mater.” To set the record straight, a short survey of other writings on the poetic sources of these two lieder will be documented.

The significance of the circumstances surrounding the publication of Dehmel’s “Venus Mater” as compared to “Wiegenlied” will next be considered. A number of sources will be used to examine contemporary accounts of the reception and other reactions to this poetry. Among those to be used will be the two-volume anthology of Richard Dehmel’s letters, contemporary newspaper accounts, and H. H. Houben’s 1924 book Verbotene Literatur von der klassischen Zeit bis zu Gegenwart (Forbidden Literature from Classic Times to the Present), which is an account of the legal travails of a number of historical and contemporary figures in German society resulting from their
challenges of censorship laws, including Dehmel. It will be shown that Richard Dehmel was consciously questioning prevailing attitudes of morality by writing Die Verwandlungen der Venus, including “Venus Mater”; legal authorities took umbrage with those challenges and prosecuted him a number of times for his perceived offenses.

With this detailed understanding of the circumstances under which Dehmel’s poetry was received at the time it was published, the musical reactions of Pfitzner and Strauss to these poems will be considered – whether the choices mirror those made by Dehmel, or whether they diverge from the poet. There is much more written by and about Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” than about Strauss’ “Wiegenlied”; thus, while some concrete conclusions about Pfitzner’s work may be possible, more will have to be inferred about Strauss’ rationales. The composers’ own writings on this subject will help illustrate these ideas. In addition, the views of other scholars and critics on these compositions will also be presented.

Importance of the Work

As well as placing “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” in their proper historical and cultural contexts, the ideas presented in this essay will deal with some possible ways that gender can be represented in a musical work. Of course, a crucial participant in the formation of a work’s representation of gender is the composer. Even so, the composer’s identity can be quite complex when investigating art song. In most musical forms, there is no question of the identity of the composer – the composer is the person who writes the music. However, when one is dealing with a hybrid form that is comprised of both words and music, the question becomes significant. A number of different genres qualify as
hybrids, such as opera, musical theater, and art song; these genres give different importance to words and music. Operatic librettos are typically not celebrated in their own right, and musical theater works usually exist in a conjoined form wherein the identities of the writer of music and lyrics are not considered separately, but as a single entity – Lerner and Loewe, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Leiber and Stoller. Art song may be unique among text-based musical forms in that the importance of the words is on almost the same plane as the music. The text, whether poetry or prose, usually exists as a separate entity from the song’s composition; thus, even though the poet’s contribution to the song’s creation is usually involuntary, there must be some acknowledgment given to the poet’s independent creative work.

The question of contributions of various people involved in the creation of a song has been pursued by many, most notably by Edward Cone in his influential book The Composer’s Voice (Cone 1974). Cone gives the dominant “role” in the creation of a song to the composer, that is, to the person who writes the music. Cone denies an equal role to the poet’s contribution, saying that, in fact, the setting of a poem to music is one of many readings, one that takes on a number of choices dictated by the desires of the composer and not the poet. As Cone states, the composer “appropriates” the poem, “making it his own by turning it into music.” Nevertheless, even Cone allows for some contribution of the poet, for he acknowledges that the composer speaks, “in part, through the words of the poet” (Cone 1974, 19). With that in mind, one has to grant that the composer would be mute if the poet did not provide the words to speak, and thus (if only out of courtesy) grant the poet a percentage of recognition for the genesis of a song.
As the multiple levels of song are analyzed, the idea of the composer’s identity becomes murkier. To those for whom the musical “text” exists only in its performance, the singer (and the pianist) also contribute to the multivalency of the composer – as Lawrence Kramer puts it in reference to Schubertian song, a “staged collaboration among the composer, the poet, and the singer, none of whom has automatic priority in the mixture” (Kramer 1998, 9-10). This addition to the mix of the contributions of performer or performers greatly increases the complexity of defining the composer. It is in vogue in the twenty-first century to declare that works of performative art, such as music, drama, and dance, only exist as far as they are given life by performers, yet Cone declared essentially the same thing thirty years ago:

[A]ll music, like all literature, is dramatic; . . . every composition is an utterance depending on an act of impersonation which it is the duty of the performer or performers to make clear. (Cone 1974, 5)

Thus, if one accepts this argument, it can be said that all of those who participate in the creation of a song have a specific and important role in its interpretation in a manner which may be equated to a form of composition. An understanding of the contribution of each “impersonator” to the song as a whole – of the composer, the poet, the performers, and the listeners – is a path by which a more profound interpretation will be achieved. And, through Cone’s very use of the word “impersonation,” he allows for a variability of identity by the creators of a musical work which mirrors one of the core contentions of gender in society – that is, gender is not something that one is, but rather something that one does, something that is defined and manifested in the interactions and intersections of people and ideas, rather than an unchanging trait. Thus, it can be
concluded that gender can be studied as a component of the creation and the performance of music, whether it be art song or some other form.

Ultimately, the goal of this essay returns to a question raised by Hayden White as one of the core concerns of music scholarship today:

. . .the desirability of a hermeneutic operation, intended to reveal the ways in which the social context bears upon, determines, influences, or otherwise informs the production, form, content, and reception of the musical artifact and, conversely, the ways in which the artifact may affect its context(s). (White 1992, 290)

White would ask if these lieder transcend the social conditions of their production (aestheticizing), or whether they reflect or are even determined by the interests of social groups and classes at specific moments (politicizing) (White 1992, 290). To determine this, I contend that gender can be used as a lens through which to interpret the ways that the musical artifact reacts with society as well as the ways that it transcends societal specifics. While I would attest that the value of these works is, at least in part, determined by the milieu in which they are produced, the obvious social and cultural determinants dissipate as time passes. I hope to be able to discuss the context of their production with respect to the ways that gender is represented in these works without compromising their aesthetic assessments. In this way, I think that a richer appreciation of the works can be achieved.
Chapter 2

VERSIONS OF “WIEGENLIED” AND “VENUS MATER”

It has been suggested that Richard Strauss and Hans Pfitzner represent two disparate musical poles of German composition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – Pfitzner the adherent to classical ideals, Strauss a champion of innovation (Vogel 1987, 125). While a more accurate general description of their music might be that of two points along a continuum of late Romanticism, the musical treatment of their versions of the poem by Richard Dehmel – Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” and Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” – are positioned farther apart on this continuum than are many of their other works. The heterogeneity in the cultural and literary environment under which Dehmel’s poems were published may account in part for the composers’ differences in their musical interpretations. In particular, the examination of differences in gender and sexuality that were being explored in German fin-de-siècle society are reflected in the contrasting musical concepts of Strauss and Pfitzner.

Dehmel’s complex and sensual poetry was well suited as the subject for lieder. The New Grove Dictionary characterizes his work as follows: “His richly symbolic poems, often concentrating on a moment of transcendent spiritual awareness, attracted many composers in the decade 1895-1905, largely because his brilliant images revealed the intense inner emotional life (sexual or religious or both) that artists in all fields (and

13
psychologists) were concerned to explore” (New Grove 1980, s.v. “Dehmel, Richard”).

Grove lists Schoenberg, Webern, and Reger, as well as Strauss and Pfitzner, among the composers who found inspiration for their lieder in the poems of Dehmel; Schoenberg’s string sextet Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night) was also predicated upon Dehmel’s poem of the same name.

Today Dehmel is considered to be a minor poet when compared to his colleagues, such as Liliencron, Hofmannsthal, Georg, Rilke, and Thomas Mann. Current studies on Dehmel, either in German or in English translation, are few as compared to many of these other writers. Yet, in his time, he was extremely influential as well as controversial, and was viewed as one of the leaders of the community of German-language writers that emerged in the fin-de-siècle.

The relative paucity of modern Dehmel scholarship has meant that a less-than-accurate picture has been painted of the facts behind the publication history of his works. Additionally, Dehmel’s own tendency to revise and reshuffle his poems as new editions of his poetry were released has made an accurate history quite challenging to decipher. His reasons for this were many, but can probably be attributed to his fluid and changing vision of the aesthetic and artistic value of his work. As an example, he gave a harsh self-assessment of his very earliest poems which were published in the first editions of Erlösungen and in Aber die Liebe:

You know from Erlösungen that my first poems copied the simple language of the classical authors with considerable clumsiness (NB! my earliest poems are located not in the first part of Erlösungen, but mostly in
the second. 1) Then I became attentive to the “modern movement” . . . ; one can accuse all the poems which arose at this time of an over-
sumptuousness of expression, a certain overloading with florid empty
phrases, which should make the so-called basic ideas vivid/
haunting/urgent. These poems also are mostly in Erlösungen (first and
third part), some also still in Aber die Liebe. 2

This self-critical assessment of his work was typical of Dehmel; indeed, his
aesthetic vision of many of his poems often changed dramatically from first to final
version. Because of this, the general assumption is that the Gesammelte Werke
(Complete Works) of Dehmel, first published in 1906-1909, represents the final word on
his poetry and thus negates the significance of any earlier editions. 3 However, it was, in
large part, the legal and artistic reception of the early editions, not his collected works,
which made him a cause célèbre in German literary society.

No author ever was more stubbornly resisted, more cynically ridiculed by
one part of the press, more extravagantly praised, more sincerely idolized
by the other, than Dehmel. His first books were condemned as
diabolically immoral, blessed as the revelation of a new religion. (Lessing
[1912] 1967, 65)

1This second section of Erlösungen contains Dehmel’s first version of “Wiegenlied” to be
discussed below.

2Sie wissen aus den “Erlösungen,” daß meine ersten Gedichte mit ziemlicher Unbeholfenheit die
einfache Sprache der Klassiker nachahmten (NB! meine frühesten Gedichte stehen nicht etwa im I. Teil der
“Erlösungen, sondern meistens im II.) Dann wurde ich aufmerksam auf die “moderne Bewegung”. . . ; in
dieser Zeit sind alle die Gedichte entstanden, denen man eine Überüppigkeit des Ausdrucks vorwerfen
cann, eine gewisse Überladung mit blumigen Floskeln, die den sogenannten Grundgedanken eindringlicher
machen sollten. Auch diese Gedichte stehen meistens in den “Erlösungen” (I. u. III. Teil), einige auch noch
in “Aber der Liebe.” (Dehmel 1922-23, 1:255)

3For instance, a bibliographic dissertation on the works of Dehmel does not comment on the
significance of the earlier editions of his poetry (Orth 1980).
Dehmel’s Personal Views as Reflected in His Writings

Much of Dehmel’s philosophy concerning his views on life and literature can be surmised from his letters. Two volumes of letters were published shortly after his death (Dehmel 1922-23); most of what is reviewed in this chapter comes from these letters and other writings of Dehmel, as well as accounts from his contemporaries.

Dehmel’s letters reveal his cantankerous nature and his exasperation at those who did not (or could not) grasp the complexities of his writings. Undoubtedly his legal and literary travails were amplified by his belligerent attitude, but there were also a large number of people who recognized the merit of his writings and defended his work.

During his lifetime and in the decade following his death in 1920, a number of accounts can be found concerning Dehmel’s work and its significance. Many of these focus on the recurring theme in his work of the erotic and redemptive power of love in all of its forms.

As Emil Ludwig noted in *Genius and Character*:

Venus obsessed him. He has experienced and depicted her in a series of transformations; . . .it was precisely those transubstantiations which lifted him from the gloomy world of the senses, where he once brooded with impatience, into the brightness of Dionysiac revels . . . . In Eros he resolved all discord. Love for him was no lyrical theme, no romantic adventure; it had become a sacred service, a rite of procreation and birth, the joy of fulfillment as the sexes grow and develop towards their culmination in union. (Ludwig 1927, 283)

Dehmel’s personal identification with his poetry was often interpreted as a device for his individual deliverance from worldly tribulations. This candor with which he brutally revealed his inner autobiographical conflicts through his verse was commented on by a number of critics, particularly when Dehmel presented his frank views of love:
In Dehmel’s verse, we find chiefly an expression of the struggle between man’s physical being and his spiritual aspirations. The scandal of his erotic poems is somewhat too well remembered, since these (Die Verwandlungen der Venus) constitute an organic part of the poet’s self-expression, and are numerically less excessive than the agitation of the puritans would lead one to believe. This exaggeration obstructs a true estimate of the excellence of Dehmel’s verse. He essays [absolute expression] with deliberate earnestness, in full consciousness of its perils, as a sort of self-documentation and self-analysis whereby he may presently approach his ultimate goal of perfection. The concrete human semblance which this ideal assumes for Dehmel proves him almost a better philosopher that a lyric poet has a right to be. (Drake 1928, 329)

In these accounts of Dehmel’s difficulties arising from the publications of his poetry, it is easy to overlook the antipode of his “physical being” often present in these works – that is, his “spiritual aspirations.” Possibly this is because reference to the spiritual often took on qualities unfamiliar to many people, such as his frequent references to gnosticism (Dehmel 1922-23, 1:238). However, both the spiritual and the corporeal were important to his total conception as a poet.

It is not always easy to decide whether Dehmel’s “lyric poet” is real and coexistent with the rest of his being (as might be implied in Drake’s account above), or whether it is a virtual, lyric “persona” assuming a role. What seems more important to this discussion is the idea coursing through both Dehmel’s letters and his poetry that this acting out of fluid identities is an essential component of both his poetic personae and his real person. These identities may take on a number of different forms, but the most striking one which is germane to this discussion is the idea of experimentation with gender and sexual identities. A letter written in 1893, explaining some of the meanings of the poems in Der Verwandlungen der Venus as published in the 1893 Aber die Liebe, takes up this idea in an intriguing fashion:
Furthermore, is it not stated clearly in the last verse [of “Venus sapiens”]: “Jonathan, I was your father!” Therefore I, David, was Saul! Thus, is this split personality something that is so shocking? “Two souls live, alas, in my breast,” Goethe has said. Thus, is it so difficult to leap to the assumption that a person who examines his past discovers yet other personalities in himself, which are in conflict with each other? . . . Even if the results of modern psychophysiology are well-known to so few people that a well-educated person does not know about it, that actually in one and the same individual several totally different personalities are effectively both simultaneous and periodic, conscious and unconscious. . .

This idea of the coexistence of the conscious and unconscious working together parallels in some sense the idea of the coexistence of multiple personae present in the performance of a song as discussed in Edward Cone in *The Composer’s Voice* (Cone 1974, 33-34). Later in the same letter, Dehmel connects this idea of multiple personalities with the concept that such multiple personalities may constitute a multiplicity of gender identities, at least in his poetry.

You see, it is at the same time the lyrical depiction of the conflicts between old and new idealism, including the critically pessimistic period of transition; and the sensuality of the poem is rooted in the rudimentary bisexuality of the two sexes and the mimicry/representation of the emotions and sensations between man and woman coming from this.
For Dehmel, the categories of man and woman are not universal, but fluid. In the preceding paragraphs, Dehmel presents the possibility of one of the guiding paradigms of modern thought concerning gender and sexuality: gender is an act, or gender is constituted through a series of actions and interactions with other actors. He contests the very idea of reified forms of man and woman, suggesting that, instead, a kind of multiple or split personality – in this case, a number of different manifestations of gender – coexists simultaneously within a person.

Dehmel accepts with some certainty the androcentric character of most nineteenth-century cultural determinants of gender. Yet, he also states that for every law of nature, there are exceptions:

Now, I appreciate however, dear comrade, the anomalous case – how, indeed, God has no rules of the laws of the world that do not have exceptions. Neither man nor woman are up to now so differentiated that there should not be a small part of man with almost feminine, and a small part of woman with almost masculine brains and other functions. . . . And if such a person in the shape of a woman confronts me, I say: Here, dear comrade, my hand! We are brothers.6

Dehmel’s reluctance to insist on a unitary meaning of gender is just one manifestation of a larger characteristic of the editions of his work, in which he constantly changes and edits his writings in order to be coherent with his evolving aesthetic viewpoint. This underlying dissatisfaction with his works and his attempts to improve them is a theme that consistently comes up in his letters to other people. As will be seen,

6Nun weiß ich aber, lieber Kam’rad, das Anormale zu schätzen. Wie ja auch der liebe Gott keine Regel ohne Ausnahme in die Welt gesetz hat. Und weder Mann noch Weib sind bis dato so in sich differenziert, daß es nicht Männlein mit fast weiblichen und Weiblein mit fast männlichen Gehirn- und sonstigen Funktionen geben sollte. . . . Und wenn mir ein solcher Mensch in Gestalt eines Weibes entgegentritt, so sage ich ihm: Hier, lieber Kam’rad, meine Hand! Wir sind Brüder. (Dehmel 1922-23, 1:162)
these self-editorial acts result in a number of very similar but distinct works within the contexts of different cycles and anthologies. These differences have usually been either ignored or minimized, but it is my contention that the subtleties of these changes and, much more importantly, the differing contexts in which similar works were presented contributed to the tempestuous reception of some of these works. Understanding these factors is an essential part of understanding the differing compositional reaction of Strauss and Pfitzner to these works.

The Publishing History of Dehmel’s “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater”

As mentioned earlier, both Strauss and Pfitzner found inspiration for their lieder in the poetry of Richard Dehmel. Both composers set multiple poems of Dehmel, including “Wiegenlied,” composed in 1899 by Strauss, and “Venus Mater,” composed by Pfitzner in 1901. An understanding of the origins and development of Dehmel’s “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” is essential to the evolving concepts of his meaning of the works, as well as the reception of his poetry – both literary and legal – in German fin-de-siècle society.

Up to 1901 – the time of the composition of Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater,” the second of the songs considered – Dehmel had published the following anthologies of poetry: 

Erlösungen (1891); Aber die Liebe (1893); Lebensblätter (Pages of Life) (1895); Weib und Welt (Woman and the World) (1896); Erlösungen, zweiter Ausgabe (second edition) (1898); Weib und Welt, zweiter Ausgabe (1901a). Not all of these anthologies

7 In addition, two anthologies of selections of previously published poems were also released by 1901 (Dehmel 1897; Dehmel 1901b); however, neither “Wiegenlied” or “Venus Mater” were included in either of these anthologies.
contained versions of “Wiegenlied” or “Venus Mater”; one poem or the other was published in *Erlösungen* (1891), *Aber die Liebe* (1896), and *Erlösungen* (1898). The details of this are summarized in Table 1 on page 38. In the following sections, the multiple versions of “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” will be examined further.

“Wiegenlied” (*Erlösungen*, 1891)

Dehmel’s first collection of poetry, *Erlösungen*, was published in 1891. This collection established Dehmel as one of a group of young German writers transitioning from late Romanticism to Expressionism (Pascal 1973). The anthology combines a passionate amalgamation of sense and sensibility, masculine and feminine “essence” and the redemptive powers of sexuality, or *Geschlechtlichkeit*.

Thus, after 1871 a system of bourgeois morality is fully developed which has the following program: from the depths and darkness of the subject, and of materialism . . . upward to the heights of light, spirit and “the ideal” . . . . Typically, gnosticism terms this world-view as, for example, “clarification” and “redemption”, naturally Christian terms, but which are bent in an esoteric direction. It is necessarily called a gradual ascent of judgement, a gradually graded “collection”, a “moral mountain climb” or a “scramble” with some assistance from above . . . . Richard Dehmel’s *Erlösungen* of 1891 plays with this terminology in the realm of the erotic, in a case between the sexes.8

*Erlösungen* is organized into three *Stufen*, or steps, the course by which, it might be assumed, one can attain final redemption. Within the second *Stufe*, entitled *Liebe*

---

(Love), a poem with the title Wiegenlied – a cradle-song or lullaby – is included (Dehmel 1891, 107).

Wiegenlied
_nach Schuberts Melodie, op 98, nr. 2_

Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben,
von dem Garten, der im Himmel blüht, --
Engel wohnen da und weben
um dein Seelchen deiner Mutter Lied:

Dream, dream, you, my dear life,
of the garden that blooms in Heaven, –
An angel lives there and weaves
your mother’s song around your little soul:

Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe,
von der stillen, von der heiligen Nacht,
da die Blume seiner Liebe
diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht!

Dream, dream, blossom of my love,
of the still, holy night,
that the flower of his love
made this world a heaven for me!

Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Wonne,
von dem Lichte, das die Blume trinkt, --
von der goldenen Himmelssohne,
die der Blüte Deiner Seele winkt!

Dream, dream, bud of my joy,
of the light that the flower drinks, –
of the golden sun of Heaven,
that waves from the blossom of Your soul!

This poem utilizes the imagery of joy, redemption, and completion that comes from motherhood, a theme amply covered in German Romanticism. While the personae of this lullaby are not specified, one might speculate from the atypical capitalization of the final possessive adjective (“Deiner”) that Dehmel intended to refer to the Deity. Given later interpretations of Dehmel’s works, one retrospective interpretation is that Dehmel intended this to be a lullaby sung by the Virgin to the Christ child.

Some other clues to Dehmel’s inspiration for this poem could come from the subtitle of “Wiegenlied”: “nach Schuberts Melodie op. 98 nr.2.” Schubert’s opus 98, number 2 (D498) is a strophic song entitled “Wiegenlied.” According to documentation in the _Neue-Schubert-Ausgabe_, the author of the poem used for Schubert’s “Wiegenlied”

---

9Capitalization of the “familiar” second-person singular (as in Deiner) is commonly only done when addressing someone in a written letter; thus the atypical nature of this construction heightens the special nature of the address. There is no apparent evidence that Dehmel was using the form of a letter as a kind of literary device in this poem.
is unknown, although early references proposed Matthias Claudius as the author of the poem (Reed 1993, 438-39).¹⁰

Schubert’s “Wiegenlied”

Schlaf e, schlaf e, holder, süsser Knabe,  
leise wieg t dich deiner Mutter Hand;  
sanfte Ruhe, milder Labe  
bringt dir schwebend dieses Wiegenband.

Schlaf e, schlaf e, in dem süßen Grabe,  
noch beschützt dich deiner Mutter Arm;  
alle Wünsche, alle Habe  
faßt sie liebend, alle liebewarm.

Schlaf e, schlaf e in der Flaumen Schoße,  
noch umtönt dich lauter Liebeston;  
eine Lilie, eine Rose,  
nach dem Schlaf e werd’ sie dir zum Lohn.

Sleep, sleep, dear sweet boy,  
softly your mother’s hand rocks you;  
gentle peace, tender comfort  
this cradle-band brings to you.

Sleep, sleep in the sweet grave,  
your mother’s arm still protects you;  
all wishes, all possessions  
she holds lovingly, all the warmth of love.

Sleep, sleep in the downy lap/womb/bosom,  
pure sounds of love still echo around you;  
a lily, a rose,  
will be your reward after sleep.

There are obvious superficial structural similarities between Dehmel’s and Schubert’s “Wiegenlied” in that the metrical and rhyming patterns are identical in both pieces. Unlike the unalloyed happiness of the Dehmel poem, the poem used in Schubert’s “Wiegenlied” combines both the joy and gentleness of Mutterlieb, or mother-love, with fears for the child’s welfare (“sleep, sleep in the sweet grave, your mother’s arm still protects you”), a trope that runs through numerous references to Madonna and Child. Even so, as John Reed points out, “the shadow of the grave, which obtrudes here as in so many early Romantic pieces on the subject, finds no place in Schubert’s music” (Reed 1993, 438). As in Dehmel’s “Wiegenlied,” there are no explicit references in Schubert’s “Wiegenlied” such that we can unequivocally conclude that it represents a

¹⁰Yet another theory as to Dehmel’s inspiration comes from the speculation that the stimulus for “Wiegenlied” might have arisen, Goethe-like, from the limitless wellspring of German folksong. (Heller 1994, 73)
lullaby of the Virgin for the Christ child. Some of the imagery suggests a sacred interpretation as one option; for instance, the images of the lily and the rose as symbolic of both Christ and the Virgin are widespread in art, literature, and Scripture, although it is also true that German Romantic poetry is filled with similar imagery that is not clearly sacred (for instance, Goethe’s poem used by Hugo Wolf in “Frühling übers Jahr” and Heine’s poem in Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* [“Die Rose, Die Lilie. . .”] both employ flower images). And, although sleep as a metaphor of death was often used when referring to Jesus before the Resurrection (the final recitative in Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* BWV 244 “Nun ist der Herr zur Ruh gebracht” is a good example, in which each verse closes with the line “Mein Jesus, gute nacht”), that image is also a common one in all Romantic poetry.

“Venus Mater” (*Aber die Liebe*, 1893)

Dehmel himself offers no insight of his own as to the role of Schubert’s “Wiegenlied” in the creation of his own poem. However, the possibility of Dehmel’s connection with the sacred is made clearer in the next version of his poem. Dehmel himself rejected much of this first version of *Erlösungen*, considering it to be technically flawed, which might explain the confusion as to the identities of the personae in this version of “Wiegenlied.” In a letter to his friend Hans Thoma on the occasion of the publication of his next poetic anthology, *Aber die Liebe*, Dehmel contended that the first version of *Erlösungen* contained many flaws, and thus intended to publish a second set of poems that would rectify this situation.

You have written very dear words to me about my first book *Erlösungen*, and I feel the same, that I followed an “inner star” that I too often since
Sie haben mir sehr liebe Worte über mein erstes Buch "Erlösungen" geschrieben, und ich fühle
selber, daß ich damals einem innern Sterne folgte, den ich inzwischen zu oft aus dem Auge verlor, als
Mensch und Dichter. Zwar als eigenartiger Künstler, als Formkünstler, stelle ich jetzt an mich viel höhere
Ansprüche und fühle mich ihnen gewachsen, so daß mir mein erstes Buch durch seine vielen technischen
Unvollkommenheit arg verleidet ist; in einer zweiten Ausgabe würde ich Vieles weglassen und would
file/archive virtually everything.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Aber die Liebe} was published in 1893. The volume includes a 22-poem cycle,

\textit{Die Verwandlungen der Venus} (The Transformations of Venus). One of the poems in the
cycle is entitled "Venus Mater," which is probably a revision of the earlier "Wiegenlied"
that appeared in the 1891 Er\l{o}sungen; an endnote within Dehmel's \textit{Ausgewählte Briefe}
states that the poem titled "Wiegenlied" in the 1891 version of \textit{Erlösungen} is later
entitled "Venus Mater" (Dehmel 1922-23, 1:435).

\textbf{Venus Mater}

Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben,  
von dem Himmel, der die Blüten bringt;  
Blumen winken da, die beben 
von dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt . . .

Dream, dream, you, my sweet life, 
of the heaven that brings the blossoms;  
Flowers wave there, they tremble 
with the song that your mother sings. . .

Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen, 
von dem Tage, da die Blume sprießt, 
von dem hellen Blütenmorgen, 
da dein Seelchen sich der Welt erschließt . . .

Dream, dream, bud of my sorrow, 
of the day that the flower sprouts, 
of the bright blossomed-morning 
that your little soul opens to the world. . .

Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe, 
von der stillen, von der heiligen Nacht, 
da die Blume Seiner Liebe 
diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht . . .

Dream, dream, blossom of my love, 
of the still, holy night, 
because the flower of His love 
made this world a heaven for me. . .

A number of changes in details from the 1891 version to the 1893 version have
occurred. The most apparent change is in the title, from “Wiegenlied,” or “Lullaby,” to

\textsuperscript{11}Sie haben mir sehr liebe Worte über mein erstes Buch “Erlösungen” geschrieben, und ich fühle
selber, daß ich damals einem innern Sterne folgte, den ich inzwischen zu oft aus dem Auge verlor, als
Mensch und Dichter. Zwar als eigenartiger Künstler, als Formkünstler, stelle ich jetzt an mich viel höhere
Ansprüche und fühle mich ihnen gewachsen, so daß mir mein erstes Buch durch seine vielen technischen
Unvollkommenheit arg verleidet ist; in einer zweiten Ausgabe würde ich Vieles weglassen und fast überall
feilen. (Dehmel 1922-23, 1:141-142)
“Venus Mater,” or “Venus-mother.” There are multiple alterations in phrases, words, and capitalizations in the 1893 “Venus Mater,” and the second verse of the earlier 1891 “Wiegenlied” has been moved almost without alteration to the third verse of the 1893 “Venus Mater.”

Even if interpretation of the significance of minor changes in “Venus Mater” can be subjected to conjecture, Dehmel makes himself quite clear as to the global meaning of the poems in *Aber die Liebe*. Hearkening back to the title of the first anthology *Erlösungen*, Dehmel suggests in his writings on *Aber die Liebe* that the basic meaning of many of its poems (including the poems of *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*, presumably including “Venus Mater”) refers to the redemption or immortality of humanity arising from the birth of new life – not necessarily in the sense of Christian doctrine, as the birth of Christ as savior of humanity, but from mortals:

And only the new love, the love through and for the new life, for the child, can therefore rescue mankind for humanity again! . . . That is the thread that reaches through this quatrain “Love” [i.e *Aber die Liebe*, page 79] up to the last member of the Venus-Cycle [i.e *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*].

As many, including Dehmel himself, have pointed out, Dehmel’s ethos considered love as one of the primary pathways to redemption; the amalgamation of the sexual and the sacred in his poetry was an attempt to represent this concept. This fusion of erotic and holy imagery is apparent in some of the titles of the individual poems of *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*. A sampling of the titles of these poems finds “Venus”

---

12 Und nur die neue Liebe, die Liebe durch und für das neuen Leben, das Kind, kann da den Menschen wieder für die Menschheit retten! . . . Das ist der Faden, der von diesem Vierzeiler “Liebe” bis an das letzte Glied des Venus-Cyclus reicht. (Dehmel 1922-23, 1:158)
juxtaposed with many different modifiers: Venus Gloria, Venus Religio, Venus Madonna, and Venus Mater at one end of the spectrum, and Venus Adultera, Venus Perversa, and Venus Bestia at the other. The texts of the individual poems refer to many of the persons in both the Old and New Testaments: David, Saul and Jonathan, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and Joseph.

Thus, one could see how confusion could reign in these poems. Was Dehmel writing sacred poetry or erotic? Were these poems blasphemous or worshipful? Even if any one individual poem, taken out of context, appeared benign, the sum of all the individual parts could color the interpretation of any and all of the poems.

The power of context of the poems is much more apparent than in the earlier “Wiegenlied” of the 1891 Erlösungen; certainly the case for one interpretation of the poem as a lullaby of the Madonna for her child is made clearer in this version because of this context. As will be seen in the next chapter, the ambiguities in interpretation led to much tribulation as well as notoriety for Dehmel over this version of Aber die Liebe for most of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

“Wiegenlied” (Erlösungen, 1898)

The third version of the poem, again titled “Wiegenlied,” appeared in 1898. Dehmel, making good on his self-critical stance of the value of the 1891 Erlösungen, published a revised version of that anthology. He sent a copy of the 1898 edition of Erlösungen to Richard Strauss in 1898 with the following admonition:
I am sending you under open cover the new edition of my *Erlösungen*. Please, please throw the first edition on the fire, so that you are not led again to set poems [from it] . . . The hazardous distortions of syntax, the far-fetched images and the unimportant things worked to death in them! (Schuh 1982, 440)

The content in this version of *Erlösungen* has changed considerably; in addition, instead of being divided into three “steps,” the poems are presented without any demarcation. A poem entitled “Wiegenlied” is again presented in the anthology.

Wiegenlied
*nach Schuberts Melodie, op. 98, nr. 2*

Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben,
von dem Himmel, der die Blumen bringt;
Blüten schimmern da, die beben
von dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt.

Dream, dream, you, my sweet life,
of the heaven that brings the flowers;
Blossoms glimmer there, they tremble
with the song that your mother sings.

Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen,
von dem Tage, da die Blume sproß,
von dem hellen Blütenmorgen,
da dein Seelchen sich der Welt erschloß.

Dream, dream, bud of my sorrow,
of the the day that the flower sprouted,
of the bright blossomed-morning
that your little soul opened to the world.

Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe,
von der stillen, von der heiligen Nacht,
da die Blume Seiner Liebe
diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht.

Dream, dream, blossom of my love,
of the still, holy night,
because the flower of His love
made this world a heaven for me.

Although the 1898 version of “Wiegenlied” has the same title and Schubertian subtitle as the 1891 version of “Wiegenlied” appearing in the first edition of *Erlösungen*, it bears more resemblance to the 1893 “Venus Mater” of *Der Verwandlungen der Venus* than it does to the 1891 “Wiegenlied.” Some of the descriptive language has changed slightly from the 1893 “Venus Mater” in this version. Perhaps a more significant change occurs in the second verse of this version; instead of being set in the present tense as in “Venus Mater,” the mother recalls the “day that the flower sprouted” as an event that has
already occurred. This implies that birth or creation has already happened, and takes this from the imaginary future into the realm of past remembrance.

“Venus Mater” *(Die Verwandlungen der Venus, 1907-1920)*

Dehmel must have been satisfied with the text of “Wiegenlied,” for the body of it is not edited in subsequent appearances. However, when it does appear again, the title has changed back to “Venus Mater.”

Dehmel was asked by his publisher to prepare his poetry for publication as a ten-volume complete works edition. He took this opportunity to again revise both individual texts as well as the groupings of various poems. The fourth volume to appear, in 1907, was a self-contained cycle entitled *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*—the same title as the cycle which appeared in the 1893 *Aber die Liebe*. The 1907 version was expanded to over 120 pages of text, and now contained a number of “Venus” poems and other verses which had previously appeared in Dehmel’s other anthologies, e.g. *Weib und Welt, Lebensblätter, Erlösungen*, as well as many reworked versions of poems from the original *Verwandlungen* in the 1893 *Aber die Liebe*. A poem entitled “Venus Mater” is again present within *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*, but the text is now identical with “Wiegenlied” from the 1898 edition of *Erlösungen*.

*Venus Mater*

Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben,  
von dem Himmel, der die Blumen bringt;  
Blüten schimmern da, die beben  
von dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt.

Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen,  
von dem Tage, da die Blume sproß,  
von dem hellen Blütenmorgen,  
da dein Seelchen sich der Welt erschloß.

Dream, dream, you, my sweet life,  
of the heaven that brings the flowers;  
Blossoms glimmer there, they tremble  
with the song that your mother sings.

Dream, dream, bud of my sorrow,  
of the day that the flower sprouted,  
of the bright blossomed-morning  
that your little soul opened to the world.
The controversy that dogged Dehmel throughout the 1890's must have still been associated with *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* in 1907. “Venus Consolatrix,” from the 1896 anthology *Weib und Welt*, was the only poem for which Dehmel was actually convicted on charges of immorality. It is included as one of the poems in *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*, but twenty-two lines in the middle of the poem have been censored, replaced with a series of dashes. An explanation is given for this censorship:

The middle part of this poem, which shows the mythical virtues of the female nature united in the representation of Mary of Magdala and Mary of Nazareth, was judged by the regional court of Berlin on 30 August 1897 to be immoral, and thus may not be printed.13

Even so, Dehmel seemed to be satisfied with this version of *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*; as he wrote to a friend in 1907: “The old *Verwandlungen* is still rooted in the sorrow about the old paradise; the new culminates confidently into a new paradise” (Dehmel 1922-23, 2:138). In 1913 (reprinted 1920) the ten-volume work was consolidated into a three-volume set, but the changes were minimal in *Verwandlungen*. One significant change was that, by 1920, verses that were previously censored in the 1907 and 1913 editions of *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* were again printed in their

---

13 Der Mittelsatz dieser Phantasie, der die sagenhaften Tugenden der Magdalenischen und der Nazarenischen Maria in dem hier dargestellten weiblichen Wesen vereinigt zeigt, ist durch Urteil des Berliner Landgerichtes von 30. August 1897 für unsittlich erklärt worden und darf daher öffentlich nicht mitgeteilt werden. (Dehmel 1907, 124)
original, uncensored form. Dehmel wrote in 1919: “in the next edition of the volume [Die Verwandlungen der Venus] my publisher now wants finally to dare and print the censored verses” (Dehmel 1922-23, 2:452).

**Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” (1899) and Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” (1901)**

As has been shown, many variations of Dehmel’s works were extant while Strauss and Pfitzner were composing their songs. With all of the various versions of Dehmel’s poems simultaneously in print, it is not surprising that confusion has arisen about the origins of the lyrics to Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” and Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater.” If this were just a matter of trying to clear up the question of which anthology each composer used as a source, this would be limited to peripheral reference to the facts. The real interest comes from examination of the atmosphere surrounding the reception of the both anthologies. Briefly, while no documented controversy surrounded the publication of any of the versions of Erlösungen, a number of morality charges were brought against Dehmel throughout the 1890's for some of the content of Aber die Liebe. Indeed, Dehmel’s controversial reputation in German literary life was a well-publicized fact in the media at this time that could not have been lost on either Strauss or Pfitzner, who were living in Berlin, as was Dehmel, at the time of most of the controversy.

Since the manuscript versions of “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater” are not extant (Trenner 1964, 351; Rectanus 1979, 220), the best evidence for Strauss’ and Pfitzner’s poetic sources comes from a closer examination of the published poetry of Dehmel available to the composers at the time of the composition of the songs. A compelling case can be made for Strauss’ use of “Wiegenlied” from the 1898 version of Dehmel’s
Erlösungen, and, likewise, for Pfitzner’s use of “Venus Mater” from the 1893 version of Die Verwandlungen der Venus in Aber die Liebe simply by comparing the words as written in the “authorized versions” of Strauss’ and Pfitzner’s songs with the Dehmel volumes.

**Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” op.41, no. 1 (1899)**

Dehmel’s “Wiegenlied” (1898)  
Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben,  
von dem Himmel, der die Blumen bringt;  
Blüten schimmern da, die eben  
von dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt.

Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” (1899)  
Träume, träume du, mein süßes Leben,  
von dem Himmel, der die Blumen bringt;  
Blüten schimmern da, die eben  
von dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt.

Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen,  
von dem Tage, da die Blume sproß,  
von dem hellen Blütenmorgen,  
da dein Seelchen sich der Welt erschloß.

Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen,  
von dem Tage, da die Blume spross,  
von dem hellen Blütenmorgen,  
da dein Seelchen sich der Welt, der Welt erschloss.

Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe,  
von der stillen, von der heiligen Nacht,  
da die Blume Seiner Liebe  
diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht.

Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe  
von der stillen, von der heil'gen Nacht,  
da die Blume Seiner Liebe  
diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht.

The changes between Dehmel’s “Wiegenlied” as published in Erlösungen (1898) and Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” of 1899 are minor. Except for the repetition of two phrases of Dehmel’s poem to fit the musical line, one contraction (“heil’gen” for “heiligen” in the original), and some minimal changes in punctuation, the texts are identical. Significant to this discussion, Strauss did not change the original title of the poem. Given the letter quoted above by Schuh that Strauss received from Dehmel on the receipt of the 1898 Erlösungen, as well as this textual evidence, it can be inferred that this volume was the source of the text for Strauss’ song. In addition, Reinhold Schlötterer’s recent reference
on Strauss’ textual sources for his lieder (Schlötterer 1988, 200) also documents that the 1898 version of *Erlösungen* is the source of Strauss’ “Wiegenlied.”

**Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater,” op. 11, no. 4 (1901)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dehmel’s “Venus Mater” (1893)</th>
<th>Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” (1901)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The most likely source for “Venus Mater” is this poem as included in *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* from Dehmel’s 1893 *Aber die Liebe*. The text of Dehmel’s poem is almost identical to Pfitzner’s song; notably, Pfitzner also did not change the title of the poem. Given Pfitzner’s reputation as a composer for whom fidelity to the original text was important (the “passionate advocate of the true work,” as one author put it [Heller 1994, 49]), it makes more sense that *Aber die Liebe* was the original source. An alternative possibility, that Pfitzner used the 1898 “Wiegenlied” from *Erlösungen*, would assume more editorial intervention with the text than was characteristic of Pfitzner. The Pfitzner song has only three changes in text: “da” (because, since, that) in the second and third stanza of the Dehmel text is changed to “wo” (where) in Pfitzner’s lyrics, and the capitalized “Seiner” (His) in the third verse of Dehmel’s poem is changed to “seiner” (his) in Pfitzner’s version. The one thing that is absolutely clear is that it would have
been impossible for Pfitzner to use the text of “Venus Mater” from the 1907 Die Verwandlungen der Venus since it had not been published by the time Pfitzner composed his song.

Published References to the Poetic Sources of Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” and Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater”

A number of authors have made textual and musical comparisons to Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” and Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater,” often commenting on the “same text” which inspired differences in musical style by the two composers. For instance, Richard Mercier’s book on the complete songs of Pfitzner makes the following comments about “Venus Mater”:

This glorious song [“Venus Mater”] is marked “very slow” and contains magnificent progressions filled with contrapuntal dissonances which create harmonic tension. Unlike the ethereal lullaby setting of the same text by Richard Strauss. . . (Mercier 1998, 89)

While Mercier does draw some comparisons between Pfitzner’s and Strauss’ settings, it is not clear from these observations that he is aware of the the different poetic sources. The more likely premise from this is that Mercier assumes Pfitzner and Strauss were using the same sources. John Williamson draws a similar conclusion when comparing the two settings:

As early as “Venus Mater,” a vein of pronouncedly chromatic writing in a post-Tristan idiom is apparent, so much so that commentators rushed to draw comparisons with Strauss (who set the same text in the famous “Wiegenlied”). (Williamson 1992, 233)

Barbara Petersen’s commentary on the songs of Strauss acknowledges the problems that can arise when different titles for a work are extant. However, she assumes
that Strauss was responsible for a change in title, and thus makes an erroneous conclusion as to Strauss’ textual source:

. . . Dehmel’s *Venus Mater*, which the composer [Strauss] changed to *Wiegenlied*. These Dehmel titles present a good example of the confusion that composers’ titles can cause. . . . *Venus Mater* (“Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben!”) from Dehmel’s *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* was used for Strauss’ *Wiegenlied*, op. 41, no. 1 (1899) . . . . Hans Pfitzner retained the original title in his op. 11, no. 4. (1903) [sic]. (Petersen 1980, 20)

No mention is made by Petersen of Dehmel’s *Erlösungen* of 1898 as the probable textual source of Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” nor that “Wiegenlied” was the title originally given to the poem by Dehmel. The complete edition of Richard Strauss’ lieder also assumes that Strauss’ source for “Wiegenlied” is “Venus Mater” in *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*: “The poem [“Wiegenlied”] comes from the cycle “The Transformation of Venus” and carries the title “Venus Mater.”14 This assumption is perpetuated in Norman Del Mar’s 1986 commentary on Richard Strauss. Although he does not refer to it as such, Del Mar identifies the 1907 version of Dehmel’s *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* as the source for Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” even using Dehmel’s 1907 subtitle for the cycle (“Erotic Rhapsody”) in his discussion. A more recent reference book to the complete songs of Strauss gets the story correct as to Strauss’ sources. The author is aware of Pfitzner’s setting, although no mention is made of *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* in *Aber die Liebe* as Pfitzner’s source for “Venus Mater”:

To prove how extensively Dehmel sometimes revised already published poems would also be shown by the first version of his “Wiegenlied” [*Erlösungen* 1891] . . . Later Dehmel incorporated “Wiegenlied” under the

---

title “Venus Mater” into the cycle “Die Verwandlungen der Venus.” . . . Also set to music by. . .Hans Pfitzner (op. 11, 4, Title “Venus Mater”).

In a symposium on the lieder of Pfitzner, Werner Heller offers another theory as to the origin of “Venus Mater”:

How did Pfitzner come to the title “Venus Mater”? Not long after its first publication in the second edition of *Erlösungen*, Dehmel incorporated his poem into the cycle *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*, namely, under the title “Venus Mater”. That must have happened, at the latest, at the beginning of the year 1901, for this integration must have been present in the printing when Pfitzner composed the song. 16

Heller is probably correct in assuming the version of “Wiegenlied” which was published in the second edition of *Erlösungen* was the ultimate source of “Venus Mater” published in *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* of 1907. However, this author does not mention the version of “Venus Mater” in *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* from the 1893 edition of Dehmel’s *Aber die Liebe* as a source for Pfitzner’s song; in fact, Heller never mentions *Aber die Liebe*. It is not clear from Heller’s article whether he consulted either Pfitzner’s original sources or Dehmel’s poetry directly in order to draw his conclusions. Although, as stated numerous times, Dehmel had a tendency to reorder volumes of poetry, I did not find any version of *Erlösungen* which included “Venus Mater”; thus I do not find Heller’s hypothesis compelling.

---


There are additional passing references to either “Wiegenlied” or “Venus Mater” in numerous other song anthologies and recording notes. An exhaustive catalog of these sources would restate the various authors’ inaccurate conclusions summarized above.

From the preceding evidence, it is clear that the most probable source for Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” is the poem of the same name in the 1893 version of *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* in *Aber die Liebe*, while Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” arose from the poem of the same name in the 1898 anthology *Erlösungen*. If this analysis ended with deciphering the minutiae of differences in the versions of the two poems which allows this conclusion, this work would be relegated to a footnote in the complete songs of the two composers. The real interest from such meticulous analyses will become clear when it is shown in the next chapter how differently Dehmel’s poetry was received in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Since the origins of these two poems can be now be traced to two different sources, a comparison of the reception of those sources for these poems might give some insight into the choices made by each composer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher and date</th>
<th>Wiegenlied</th>
<th>Venus Mater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Erlösungen. Eine Seelenwandlung in Gedichten und Sprüchen.</em></td>
<td>Stuttgart: Göschen, 1891</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aber die Liebe. Ein Ehemanns- und Menschenbuch.</em></td>
<td>Munich: Albert, 1893</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lebensblätter. Gedichte und Anderes.</em></td>
<td>Berlin: Verlieger der Genossenschaft PAN, 1895</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Weib und Welt</em></td>
<td>Berlin: Schuster &amp; Loeffler, 1896</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Comparison of different versions of Richard Dehmel’s poems “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wiegenlied</th>
<th>Venus Mater</th>
<th>Wiegenlied</th>
<th>Venus Mater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>nach Schuberts Melodie op. 98, nr. 2</em></td>
<td><em>in Die Verwandlungen der Venus</em></td>
<td><em>nach Schuberts Melodie, op 98, nr. 2</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

from *Erlösungen* 1891 from *Aber die Liebe* 1893 from *Erlösungen* 1898 from *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* 1907
Chapter 3
CENSORSHIP IN WILHELMINE GERMANY: THE CASE OF RICHARD DEHMEL

As Germany evolved from a series of independent states to a unified country in the last half of the nineteenth century, it encountered many troubles arising from its growth and emergence as an industrial society. All of the concomitant urban ills associated with movement of people into the cities – poverty, prostitution, and violent crime – became concerns of the new German republic. A trial associated with one such urban crime resulted in a series of laws that greatly affected the freedom of expression of a number of German playwrights, poets, writers, and publishers in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The ascendancy of Wilhelm II in 1888 as German emperor gave him unprecedented political power as well as influence over the social, artistic, and moral compass of the society in which he was ruler. He wielded his power with great zeal, as something that he felt was essential to his rule by divine right. In his notion of the righteousness of Imperial Germany, and his desire to be personally involved with everyday rule, his impact was felt in a number of arenas having to do with freedom of expression. Wilhelm thought of himself as progressive, yet his tastes ran to the banal, and his idea of morality was one that was quite restrictive to artists in all media of the day.
A challenge to the aesthetic opinions of the Kaiser could bring down the wrath of the law upon one’s head, for there were ordinances preventing the dissemination of material considered to be obscene, blasphemous or uncomplimentary to the government; the criteria for defining all of these were quite broad. “Art should help to educate the people; if art does nothing more than paint misery more ugly than it is, it sins against the German people” (Richie 1998, 222).

This view of art was counter to the Naturalist movement which emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Naturalist writers, artists, and playwrights presented everyday life and the commonplace in unsentimental, stark, and graphic language. In its depiction of gritty reality, Naturalism was a reaction to Romanticism of the earlier part of the century. It was not concerned with minimizing poverty, crime, or sexuality in its representations, and instead looked at “the alcoholism or the prostitution, beggars and suicides, degeneration and bestiality, marriage breakdown and child labour, illnesses of poverty and slavery to machines” (Richie 1998, 181). Yet, as much as Naturalists were concerned with realism, they also showed humanity rising above the commonplace in life, even being characterized as having the same agenda as the most noble goals of the French Revolution. Kaiser Wilhelm did not see it in the same way, decrying Naturalism, along with Impressionism and other movements, as “art from the gutter” (Richie 1998, 219).

The Naturalist movement attempted to comment on the changes resulting from the modernization of German society. The loss of German culture’s connection with its rural past probably contributed to the problems encountered in this newly industrialized
state. As a reaction to this perceived loss, many, including the Kaiser, were favorable towards depictions in the arts that glorified the monarchy and views of the past. Even so, this did not stop the remarkable communities of artists, writers, and composers in the new cities and towns of the newly unified country from experimenting and challenging the status quo. Indeed, the Industrial Revolution, which catalyzed the unification of the independent states of Germany, also was one reason that artists and writers were brought together in the first place.

**Art and Society: The Lex Heinze**

One reaction to this transformation of society was enactment of stricter laws pertaining to freedom of expression in Germany. Most of these laws were defined under the rubric of *Lex Heinze* (Heinze laws). These censorship laws arose from the notorious trial of a pimp named Heinze who murdered a night-watchman in Berlin in 1891. The sensational trial led to a decade-long debate over the role of the government in the legislation and enforcement of moral standards on the population. A result of this debate was the inclusion of sections in the criminal code which attempted to define obscenity, blasphemy, and lèse-majesté in various media. Many conservative factions believed that the moral fiber of German society was breaking down because of artistic representation; the Kaiser was only too happy to support these factions (Lenman 1973, 86). It was believed that art’s purpose was to serve the higher ideals of mankind, and that art in all of its manifestations was obliged to reject themes that would break down such ideals.

The laws that resulted from this trial began as modifications to existing legislation that increased punishment against urban criminals; it was only later in the 1890's that the
statutes were modified to include the broad interpretation of obscenity and blasphemy as part of the code. The morality movement responsible for the widespread application of the code was spearheaded by right-wing conservatives who were influential in the Reichstag. Cultural conservatives chose to attribute the destabilization of the society to the development of avant-garde literature and art that spread the message of materialism and discouraged traditional religious and moral values, since it was widely considered that life imitated art (Makela 1996, 191). Depictions that could somehow be construed as critical of the government were also deemed inappropriate, and, while it might be expected that subjects such as nudity and prostitution would be banned, so too were particular styles of art and literature; how something was portrayed was as culpable as what was portrayed. A recent web site lists the articles of the Criminal Code pertaining to the Lex Heinze:

The Criminal Code amendment of 1899, the so-called Lex Heinze, made action possible against literature and art. With reference to different articles of the Criminal Code - “distribution of lascivious writings” [i.e. obscenity] (§ 184 StGB), “blasphemy” (§ 166 StGB), “offense” (§ 185-187 StGB) or “lèse-majesté” (§ 95 StGB) - the distribution of unacceptable works could be prevented.¹

Playwrights, authors, and artists were subject to scrutiny, and publishers and booksellers of forbidden material could also be charged under these laws. The government could be quite supportive of artists who advanced the government’s agenda

¹ Die Strafgesetznovelle von 1899, die sogenannte Lex Heinze, ermöglichte ein Vorgehen gegen Literatur und Kunst. Unter Berufung auf verschiedene Artikel des Strafgesetzbuches - "Verbreitung unzüchtiger Schriften" (§ 184 StGB), "Gotteslästerung" (§ 166 StGB), "Beleidigung" (§ 185-187 StGB) oder "Majestätsbeleidigung" (§ 95 StGB) - konnte die Verbreitung unliebsamer Werke verhindert werden. (Deutsche Historisches Museum, 2005) Some of these statutes still exist to this day in modified form in German law (Brown 2001).
(Richie 1998, 185, 225), but in those cases where it was perceived that art or literature in any form was counter to official policy, the penal code was applied with a great deal of enthusiasm (Richie 1998, 221). Any or all of the above clauses could be invoked in order to ban a particular work in question (Makela 1996, 188; Lenman 2000, 60-61), often by rallying public sentiment against avant-garde works considered decadent, blasphemous, and even pornographic. While some of the materials prosecuted under these laws are still considered offensive today (Brown 2001), twenty-first-century sensibilities might find it difficult to understand why a work such as Max Liebermann’s 1879 painting *The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple* (original in the Kunsthalle, Hamburg) was thought to be “vulgar,” “vile” and “blasphemous.” Although the young Jesus appears as an ordinary teenage boy to us, Liebermann was compelled to alter his image of Jesus in the painting after criticism that his original depiction of the adolescent was too ethnically Semitic. These details, along with the fact that the picture was painted by a Jewish artist seemed to be the major reasons that conservative commentators were aggravated (Makela 189-190). The image that one sees today in the painting is of a young man with more Western European features. This particular example of Naturalistic realism applied to a religious subject is one of many that were problematic to conservative critics (Lenman 2000, 60). As another example, Thomas Mann (1988) plays with this anxiety in his 1902 short story “Gladius Dei,” in which a cleric visits destruction on a particular example of “immoral” art (in the case of the story, on a painting of Madonna and Child): “a Madonna, painted in a wholly modern and entirely unconventional manner. The sacred figure was ravishingly feminine, naked and beautiful.
Her great sultry eyes were rimmed with shadow, and her lips were half parted in a strange and delicate smile. . .”

The artistic community’s anxiety about the application of the *Lex Heinze* to their work was only part of larger concerns about more general punitive interpretations of the Criminal Code by the government (Lenman 1973, 97). However, instead of frustrating the actions of the artistic community, harassment might have had a counterproductive effect from the perspective of those applying these laws, in that “the legal and political threats to artistic freedom were probably, on balance, a stimulus to experimentation rather than an obstacle” (McClelland 1996, 48). Rather than discouraging and dividing them, “all the notable bans served to consolidate writers, artists and intellectuals, and to make them feel a common interest, even if they might be moved by different motives” (Pascal 1973, 270).

Interest in reviving and expanding the issues covered by the original *Lex Heinze* peaked between 1898 and 1900. The legislation was re-introduced in more radical forms to the Reichstag during this time. In particular the right-wing conservatives instrumental in reviving this issue wanted to greatly expand the definitions of obscenity and blasphemy (articles §166 and §184) of the Criminal Code. Many in the artistic and intellectual community became increasingly concerned that, not only would aesthetics become a matter of police scrutiny, many works would be banned altogether by government legislation. In protest, artists, poets, publishers, stage directors, academics, 

---

2In fact, negative publicity might have had a salutary effect on a person’s reception; one defendant in a censorship trial noted later that “nowadays authors can make it commercially only when they get involved in some scandalous political or sexual affair” (Lenman 2000, 63).
and industrialists began a series of public demonstrations, primarily in Berlin and Munich, in order to publicize what they saw as a growing threat to German intellectual life posed by these laws (Lenman 1973, 92-108). The intellectuals were ultimately successful in pressuring the government to alter and reduce most of the restrictions of the *Lex Heinze* by June of 1900 (Lenman 1973, 110). These protests were not lost on the international community; even the *New York Times* reported on these trials in their pages (New York Times 1899, 1900a,b, 1903).

**Richard Dehmel and the *Lex Heinze***

Richard Dehmel was one of the writers most affected by the application of the *Lex Heinze* and related censorship laws in the 1890's. Even though the enforcement of these laws reached a peak at the end of the 1890's, they had been used with some success throughout the decade to harass Dehmel for poetry considered to be either obscene or blasphemous. The writings that were subjected to repeated prosecution were the version of the cycle *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* published in the 1893 anthology *Aber die Liebe* and the poem “Venus Consolatrix” from the 1896 anthology *Weib und Welt*. Although Dehmel was undoubtedly notorious for other writings, it should be noted that the other poetic anthologies published in the 1890's, including the two editions of *Erlösungen*, were not subject to the same level of legal scrutiny as either *Aber die Liebe* or *Weib und Welt*.

The legal resistance that Dehmel encountered in attempting to publish his poetry was extensive. In a letter written in 1914 to two writers planning on publishing an anthology of previously banned literature, Dehmel stated that he was charged with
blasphemy and obscenity three times (Dehmel 1922-23, 2:341-342). The first time charges were leveled against Dehmel was in 1894 in Munich over the cycle *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* in the anthology *Aber die Liebe*. Dehmel was charged in 1897 in Berlin over “Venus Consolatrix” in the anthology *Weib und Welt*. In 1900, charges were again leveled in Berlin over *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* in *Aber die Liebe*. He was only convicted once for obscenity (in 1897 for “Venus Consolatrix”), although he did not serve any prison time for this conviction.

This concise summary of his legal travails does not reveal the extent of his harassment by the government and other factions, as well as the concomitant notoriety afforded to him by the publicity in the press over these problems over the entire decade of the 1890's. As a kind of whipping boy for the forces of the right-leaning governmental authorities on morality, and as a hero to those who were concerned with freedom of expression of writers and poets, Dehmel was a touchstone and lightning rod for all of these concerns. It is important to realize that this notoriety was, at least in part, played out in the popular press (both in Europe and elsewhere) such that it was available to anyone who would care to read about it. Even if the laws of the *Lex Heinze* were not specifically invoked each time Dehmel’s work was subjected to scrutiny, it seems clear that the spirit of these laws allowed the harassment to continue.

An important volume written about the time of Dehmel’s death – H. H. Houben’s *Verbotene Literatur von der klassischen Zeit bis zu Gegenwart* (Forbidden Literature from Classic Times to the Present) – gives a detailed account of the various times that Dehmel’s writings were subjected to critical and legal scrutiny (Houben [1924], 1992).
Because it is an account of these problems based on primary documents in the Dehmel Archives, it is probably the best summary of what was going on at the time. Much of the following discussion is based on the information contained in this book, as well as Dehmel’s published letters and other documents (Dehmel 1922-23; Schindler 1963).

_Aber die Liebe (1893-94)_

_Aber die Liebe_ was published at the end of 1893 in Munich. As outlined in the previous chapter, this was Dehmel’s second volume of poetry to be published (the first edition of _Erlösungen_ was published in 1891). In the opinion of Houben, it shows Dehmel at his most imaginative and challenging, and is a volume which seems to widen the distance between new forms of expression and more conventional works.

The appearance of the volume’s typeface and illustrations were in themselves noteworthy to critics, but the ambiguity of meaning throughout the anthology had Dehmel’s critics stymied. In one of Dehmel’s letters to the critic Franz Servaes, Dehmel chastises Servaes for focusing on the pessimistic parts of the volume over the more optimistic sections. Dehmel recognizes that his vagueness is somewhat difficult to fathom, but posits that the duality reflects the capriciousness of love and of life:

I, for my part as an artist, strive to distribute both – the negative as well as the positive – equally into the harmonious bowls of the scale, and as a man and a poet I feel dedicated absolutely more to the gospel of becoming and existence than to the mystical inspiration of passing. The tricky “But” that I placed before Love is not merely the dreary “But” of my hieroglyphic motto, but also the blessed “But” of this motto, namely: “Life sits and rejoices!” and at the same time reminiscent of the word of [the apostle] Paul: “But love is the greatest among them” – despite everything!

---

1Ich für mein Teil was als Künstler bestrebt, Beides -- Negatives wie Positives -- gleichermaßen auf die Schalen der harmonischen Wage zu verteilen, und als Mensch und Dichter fühle ich mich durchaus mehr dem Evangelium des Werdens und Bestehens zugetan als der mystischen Beseelung des Vergehens.
Dehmel goes on in this letter to imply that, although his writings might appear to his contemporaries to be artless, naive, and mystical, he was confident that time would prove the artistic worth of his innovations.

The juxtaposition of the sacred and secular that Dehmel exemplified by the scriptural paraphrase of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in the previous quotation is one of the hallmarks of his writing. However, many readers were not ready for such innovative expression. As early as December 1893, the Munich district attorney’s office allowed the confiscation of *Aber die Liebe* from bookshops and publishers based on the denunciation by a cleric that the volume contained at least three examples of blasphemy and ten to twelve examples of indecency. Dehmel’s defenders in the press noted that these offenses were only beheld in the minds of “theologians and jurists,” while the artist’s heart was free from any crime. 4

Undoubtedly, the publishers must have anticipated that there would be problems with the book, for they indulged in some censorship of their own before the book was printed. Within the cycle *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*, the publishers replaced much of the content of the poem “Venus Domestica” with dashes, rendering it incomprehensible (Figure 1, page 65). 5 A footnote by Dehmel expressed his frustration with this editorial decision:

---


5“Venus Mater” was printed on page 216, two pages before “Venus Domestica.”
The hooks replace syllables and lines suppressed by the publisher out of consideration of the paragraphs believed to be blasphemous. I cannot help but protest against such a strict and definite interpretation of my humanly poetic, purely artistic intentions. 6

An uncensored copy of “Venus Domestica” is in the collection of the Houghton Library of Harvard University; the complete text with translation is printed in Figure 2, page 66. This particular poem illustrates Dehmel’s Naturalistic style through, for example, the fatigue and gloom depicted during the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt, and the unflinching description of Saint Joseph as essentially being cuckolded by his situation, yet retaining a certain nobility while accepting his fate. Undoubtedly the publishers were uneasy with such a graphic representation of a Biblical story, including the sexual subtext, that could be offensive to general readers, which is probably why the publishers took it upon themselves to edit the poem before Aber die Liebe was published.

As well as his consternation over the censorship of “Venus Domestica,” Dehmel articulates his astonishment over some of the other problems found in Aber die Liebe by the legal authorities:

“Even in ‘Venus Madonna,’” he announced immediately to his friend Liliencron “one has detected blasphemy, and in the ethical burlesque ‘Die Beide Schwestern’ immorality. If I could only at least have laughed.”7

6 “Die durch Haken ( )ersetzen Silben und Zeilen hat die Verlagsanstalt aus Rücksicht auf den Gotteslästerungsparagraphen unterdrücken zu müssen geglaubt. Ich kann nicht umhin, mich gegen eine solche Deutung meiner menschlich dichterischen, rein künstlerischen Absichten ausdrücklich und entschieden zu verwahren.” (Footnote to “Venus Domestica,” Die Verwandlungen der Venus [Aber die Liebe 1893])

Dehmel, his publisher, and a bookseller were charged with offenses against religious morality for *Aber die Liebe*, yet in May 1894 the Munich district court found them innocent. Houben states that it is unclear why the courts did not prosecute them. Even though Dehmel and the others were acquitted, a revised version of “Venus Sapiens,” one of the other poems from *Die Verwandlungen der Venus* in *Aber die Liebe*, was published in the August issue of *Gesellschaft*, probably to defuse accusations of this particular poem’s “incomprehensibility."

_Weib und Welt* (1896-97)

*Aber die Liebe* was prosecuted again in 1900, yet before this happened, another serious battle ensued over Dehmel’s literary output. *Weib und Welt* was released in October 1896. Like *Aber die Liebe*, *Weib und Welt* was innovative both in appearance and content, and, like *Aber die Liebe*, society was divided as to the merit of *Weib und Welt*’s innovation. But the disdain invoked by this volume blossomed into a protracted battle in the press as well as in legal circles which called into question Dehmel’s intrinsic worth as a writer. Houben states that the controversy over *Weib und Welt* was initiated by an article in the journal *Die Kritik* of April 10, 1897, by a young law student and poet, Börries Freiherr von Münchhausen.

Münchhausen’s article on Dehmel in this journal condemned the appearance of the volume, the apparently fragmented content and the subject matter— from the “childlike foolishness” of some works to the charges of blasphemy and obscenity on the poem “Venus Consolatrix,” even attributing the erotic content of “Venus Consolatrix” to a rumor of adultery by Dehmel’s wife.
Houben condemns Münchhausen’s assessment of *Weib und Welt* for many reasons -- not only because much of what Münchhausen objected to in Dehmel’s poetry was taken out of context, but, more seriously, because the motivation of this attack was not purely literary. Houben charges Münchhausen with attempting to increase his reputation as an attorney and public prosecutor by his filing of a legal complaint against two of Dehmel’s poems from *Weib und Welt*. Perhaps because of this action, others decided to jump into the public fray against Dehmel and his poetry. One of the most vituperative attacks was from another law student, Carl Bulcke, who also wrote a response in *Die Kritik* on June 19, 1897. Bulcke was critical, even incredulous, of the fact that other poets of the day found Dehmel’s poetry to be worthy of praise. Bulcke expanded his criticism beyond that of Münchhausen’s to include other works of Dehmel’s besides *Weib und Welt*, including *Der Verwandlungen der Venus* from *Aber die Liebe*. His explanation of Dehmel’s poetry was that:

[I]t is animal sexuality and brutality. Dehmel is not reluctant to create the most disgusting lust, the most perverse, smutty thoughts in the milieu of his poetry, against which the Criminal Code has set up its sections. His “Verwandlungen der Venus” bears witness to a shamelessness from its emotions of brutality and repulsiveness, that not even other brilliant poems, standing near there, can repair it. He has judged himself.8

---

While Dehmel’s case was being argued in the press, he was simultaneously being charged in the courts; the district court of Berlin only considered the poems brought forward by Münchhausen in its judgement.

Dehmel himself had much to say in defense of his writings that were being charged. In an open letter (“Offener Brief”) to the courts dated June 23, 1897, Dehmel made a careful and detailed justification for his poems that would negate any charges of immorality. In this letter, he makes a forceful argument that it is not the job of an artist to censor passion, for he posits that anything that reveals “animal instincts” serves morality better than many a “manners-preaching informer,” and finally states that anything, even writings from the Bible, when taken out of context, could be considered immoral:

Finally, permit me the obvious comment that through removing certain places from their intellectual context the writings of all poets, from antiquity to the present -- even biblical writings -- could be interpreted as extremely immoral. Such an effort would throw no shadow on the reverend character of these writings, however, but only on the inclination of those who would be scandalized through malice or misunderstanding.9

According to Houben, Dehmel was cleared of suggesting impropriety in the poem “Mit [Houben “Von”] heiligem Geist”; the judge could not find any explicit evidence of advocating adultery in the poem. The judge also states that because it was possible

---

9Schließlich erlaube ich mir noch die naheliegende Bemerkung, daß durch Herausreißung gewisser Stellen aus ihrem geistigen Zusammenhang die Schriften aller Dichter, vom Altertum bis in die Neuzeit, ja selbst die Biblischen Schriften, benutzt werden könnten, um höchst unsittliche Machwerke daraus zusammenzustellen. Das dürfte aber keinen Schatten auf den ehrwürdigen Charakter dieser Schriften werfen, sondern nur auf die Gesinnung dessen, der sie aus Bosheit oder Unverstand in schlechten Ruf bringen möchte. (Schindler 1963, 126-127)
without difficulty to come up with alternative interpretations of the poem that could not be regarded as strictly lascivious or blasphemous, the poem should be acquitted:

thus interpreted that the highest degree of perfection would be present in living together of man and woman, apart from the existence of a marital union, if both are completely in agreement– each woman has chosen the right, i.e., the truly suitable and appropriate father for her unborn child– and until then, every woman can withdraw from her selection, there is not necessarily situated in the demand the violation of marital fidelity. It can be assumed that in the above verses the meaning is not marriage and conjugal faithfulness at all, but in fact meant the “final day,” impending eternity, an unrestrained coexistence of woman and man.10

The interpretation by the judge of Dehmel’s verse expounding mutual agreement of a male and female in a relationship as being an extremely important part of a union is one which is revolutionary. Although marriage fidelity itself is acknowledged as being important, self-determination by the woman, in this case in choosing the father of her child, is recognized as also being important. Indeed, Dehmel is granted an alternative interpretation of transcendent existence beyond matrimony for both female and male.

As Houben put it, “Thus, the ‘depth’ or (after Bulcke) the ‘nonsense’ of Dehmel’s verses came in handy to the writer” (Houben [1924] 1992, 115), probably implying that the obtuseness and difficulty of interpreting Dehmel’s convoluted meanings enabled him to escape prosecution on this poem. Nevertheless, a different fate awaited Dehmel in reference to “Venus Consolatrix,” the other poem named in the

prosecution. The graphic portrayal of nudity in this poem led the court to declare the poem to be “immoral, God-criticizing and confused; ” the condemnation of the poem was also linked to the sexual content of the poem and the assumed intention of the author to arouse its readers erotically. Moreover, because the woman in the poem is a amalgamated representation of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, the symbols of changeless and redeemed virtue in the Catholic Church, the erotic depiction was considered to be a serious instance of blasphemy against the Church. The poem was thus charged with violation of sections §184 (obscenity) and §166 (blasphemy) of the Criminal Code. However, because the statute of limitations had come into effect before the matter was brought before the court (Dehmel 1922-23, 1:168-69), Dehmel could not be prosecuted. The court’s solution to the problem was to destroy copies of the poem as well as the printing plates used for their production.

The literary world in Germany was keenly aware of this case. Two of Dehmel’s friends, the writers Otto Julius Bierbaum and Julius Meier-Graefe, organized a survey among fifty of Germany’s literary intelligentsia, not about the specifics of the blasphemy and obscenity charges in Dehmel’s case, but more generally, about their concern with the evaluation of essentially artistic matters in the court system. The forty-four persons who answered were uniformly upset with the idea of juridical evaluation of the moral and artistic worth of literature (one respondent referred to the denunciation as an “insulting high treason in the court of art”); many also condemned Münchhausen, the original filer of the complaint against Dehmel’s work, as either being petty, jealous, or attempting to
It is not indicated whether Münchhausen sent both “Venus Consolatrix” and “Mit heiligem Geist” to the polled individuals. The results of Bierbaum and Meier-Graefe’s survey were published in the Frankfurter Zeitung on November 7, 1897.

Münchhausen was not content to let the matter drop. Considering it dishonest that Bierbaum and Meier-Graefe did not refer to the specifics of Dehmel’s poetry under consideration, and noting that a number of the respondents were not familiar with the works, Münchhausen submitted the poems under question to them with another questionnaire, which was published in the Deutschen Zeitung on December 8, 1897.

Seven of the original respondents (as well as five other poets) answered Münchhausen with the evaluation that, indeed, the poem(s) were distasteful, even though they did not approve of Münchhausen’s methodologies.

A flurry of other legal complaints were filed by Münchhausen, all of which were rejected by various courts. At the same time the respondents to the original poll were discussing the matter; in summary, they did not feel that Bierbaum and Meier-Graefe were concealing anything in their first survey, and still stood firm with their original condemnation of Münchhausen’s denunciation of Dehmel’s poetry in the press and in the courts.

As Houben stated, the Dehmel-Münchhausen case played itself out both in the courts and in the press. The most lucid rebuttal to Münchhausen’s repeated attacks on Dehmel came from the poet Ferdinand Avenarius. In a long essay published in Kunstwart on November 15, 1897, Avenarius pleaded for the freedom of the artist to pursue his artistic vision unencumbered by the evaluation of legal authorities, even as

---

It is not indicated whether Münchhausen sent both “Venus Consolatrix” and “Mit heiligem Geist” to the polled individuals.
Avenarius admitted to disagreeing with Dehmel’s artistic vision in *Weib und Welt.* Avenarius urged the public to take the long view about art, since “Whether progress or regression is present, no contemporary can say for sure about this point; the descendants only recognize it by its fruits . . .”  

He was confident that, ultimately, the value of an artistic work would be realized by the process of “self-regulation” of the artistic life, not by the regulation of the courts.

Münchhausen took on Avenarius’ article in a rebuttal to the same journal in January 1898, and continued his direct attacks on Dehmel. He found a compatriot in the publisher of the journal *Gegenwart,* who willingly helped take up Münchhausen’s vendetta against Dehmel and against Dehmel’s publisher Schuster & Loeffler.  

Münchhausen’s attacks were broadened to include volumes by a number of poets published by Schuster & Loeffler that were accused of being pornographic, obscene, and otherwise worthless as literature. Münchhausen never lost sight of his major adversary, Richard Dehmel, in all of this:

“All these people like Schur, Dauthendey, Scheebart, R. F. Weiβ, etc., are just spiritual children of the Pankower head-pornographer Richard Dehmel” it literally says!  

In this same article, from June 18, 1898, in issue number 25 of *Gegenwart,* Münchhausen quotes verses from Dehmel’s *Aber die Liebe* and specifically accuses him

---

12 “Ob Fort- oder Rückschritt vorliegt, darüber läßt sich Sicheres von keinem Zeitgenossen sagen; die Nachkommen erst erkennen es an seinen Früchten . . .” (Houben [1924] 1992, 122)

13 Speculation existed that Zolling, the publisher of *Gegenwart,* had a history of business conflicts with Schuster & Loeffler, and thus decided to take up this fight as a form of revenge against the company (Houben [1924] 1992, 123).

of celebrating “the masturbation and self-satisfaction of the woman before the impotent man.”

_Aber die Liebe (1899-1900)_

Münchhausen’s persistence paid off; on June 20, 1899, _Aber die Liebe_ was again confiscated, this time by the Berlin district court. The court referred to a manuscript of an article (“On lascivious literature”) that was to be published in _Gegenwart_. The court said that this article offered proof that Dehmel’s writings had already offended the public:

> The places emphasized in it, explained the public prosecutor, are highly relevant to a violation of a sense of shame and feeling of morality, but are by no means complete; in Dehmel’s work he pointed out not fewer than 32 pages which dealt with “almost all extra-marital sexual intercourse or perverse sexual tendencies. Frequently the titles— particularly in ‘Der Verwandlungen der Venus’ – refer to the obscene content therein and facilitate the understanding of any ambiguities.”

The indictment of _Aber die Liebe_ was included in proceedings with a number of other confiscated books; however, before the matter came before the courts, some of these were dropped from further inquiry. The proceedings against _Aber die Liebe_ and the other books remaining under indictment occurred in Berlin on March 21-22, 1900. From Houben’s account, it did not appear to go well for the prosecution. Houben reports that

---

15 “die Onanie und die Selbstbefriedigung des Weibes vor dem impotenten Manne besungen.” (Houben [1924] 1992, 125)

16 Apparently the article was never published (Houben [1924] 1992, 125).

Dehmel’s publisher Schuster took great delight in the fact that when the other confiscated books were read in their entirety in court, the “ignorant” clerk mispronounced every foreign word. Perhaps to avoid any further embarrassment, the court was satisfied on the second day with limiting its reading of *Aber die Liebe* to the parts emphasized in the indictment (Houben [1924] 1992, 126).

The court passed down its decision on March 22, 1900. Dehmel was completely acquitted of any wrongdoing in *Aber die Liebe*. Houben states that the reasoning behind the acquitting opinion is so sensitive and subtle that it almost equals an aesthetic appreciation of Dehmel:

The court assumes that a “marriage and humanity book” with the title “Aber die Liebe” naturally must also deal with sexual relations, and now analyzes the individual incriminated places, with the result that none of them, neither alone nor in context, is lascivious, even if sensuality is situated in it.18

After disagreeing with assessment by the prosecution of the offensive nature of some of the other poems in the anthology (one is said to be “no more shocking than student songs”) the court goes on to a more detailed analysis of *Der Verwandlungen der Venus*. The graphic sexual depictions in some of the poems of the cycle are understood by the court as “allegorical representations of human error” rather than mere obscenity, and are thus seen as “serious and bitter criticism of human wrongness.” The rest of the cycle was not seen as objectionable:

---

In the remaining poems of the cycle, the judgment of the court concluded that “despite the natural reflection of expression of Venus as predominantly sensual, nothing lascivious is found.” The judgment of the whole work, however, must be “evenly divided between a subjective assessment regarding the purpose and artistic intention of the poet, and an objective consideration of the insight and reactions of the readership for which the book is intended”; such readers will not be shocked at the apparent offensiveness of the author. “A collection of such continuously philosophical, allegorical character,” so reads the conclusion of the judgment, “is difficult fare and is only appropriate for friends of this literature, who will not be offended by its occasional crude passages.”

Even in examples that might be taken as being offensive sexually, the poet is acquitted by the court in their view because of the extended allegorical sense of the poems. Perhaps more significantly, the intended audience is also allowed to make a judgment for themselves as to the appropriateness of the text, instead of having a particular “interpretation” imposed upon them by the court or by any other person.

The prosecution filed an appeal of the acquittal, which was rejected by the court. This was the conclusion of the legal battles against Dehmel’s writings, although questions of censorship still persisted in some of his works. Dehmel prepared a multiple-volume edition of his Gesammelte Werke (Collected Works) which were first released beginning in 1907. Rather than just a compilation of earlier published works, many portions of the Gesammelte Werke were either extensively edited from previous editions or were entirely new. Poems were re-named and re-grouped in the new volumes; the

---

most significant to this discussion was the free-standing volume *Der Verwandlungen der Venus*, which included most of the “Venus” poems from earlier editions of Dehmel’s works, including “Venus Mater” originally in the 1893 version of *Der Verwandlungen der Venus* and “Venus Consolatrix” from *Weib und Welt*, the one poem which was found to be blasphemous and obscene under the *Lex Heinze* laws. In the 1907 version of the cycle, much of the text of “Venus Consolatrix” was replaced by dashes. However, by 1920, when a new edition of a second, three-volume compilation of Dehmel’s complete works was published, “Venus Consolatrix” was included in its original unexpurgated form. The censored text of “Venus Consolatrix” from the 1907 *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*, as well as the complete, uncensored text and translation of the poem is presented in the Appendix.

Even Dehmel himself acknowledged that later society would not understand the debate that swirled around his writing:

Today’s youth will hardly now grasp how this poem [“Venus Consolatrix”] at one time was indicted for lewdness and blasphemy, including many others that the courts now pardoned because of their “incomprehensibility.”

Dehmel summed up his vision of his poetry and of his frustration about his constant harassment by the press and the courts in the following *Plädoyer* (closing argument) for *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*:  

---

20Die heute Jugend wird kaum noch begreifen, wieso dies Gedicht einmal unter der Anklage der Unzucht und Gotterlästerung stand, nebst manchen andern, die der Gerichtshof nun ihrer “Unverständlichkeit” wegen begnadigte.(Dehmel 1922-23, 2:452)

21The date given for this pleading paper is August 30,1897, which correlates with the second of Dehmel’s prosecutions by the courts (for *Weib und Welt*); however, with its reference to the partial reading of *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*, it could also refer to the third and final prosecution in 1900, which dealt with *Aber die Liebe* and *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*. 


High court of justice, it is difficult to say something in my defense. As an honest and wise man, I can only simply give expression to my indignation that I am even obliged to justify myself here. In this poem, one wrestles with the highest ideals which mankind has wrestled since primeval times: the dominance of spirit over carnal instincts. And I believe I can say that one wrestles here triumphantly. Admittedly, it is not the victory the Christian spirit of the Middle Ages achieved or the heathen spirit of antiquity; it is the victory of a new humanism. The present can condemn me for it, but the future will acquit me. I understand, esteemed judges, that you have to defend the spirit of the present; but in this spirit lives the future as well. The need of an inner renewal is recognized more and more in broad circles of our society, and all renewal requires change. When I was allowed to read my entire Verwandlungen der Venus for you, none of my accusers understood it intellectually and emotionally; if they had understood, I believe not one of them would have supported the charges. And in any case, I trust that a council of men whose reasoning has been sharpened by the most intellectual of all sciences would make a more just decision than a little lump of fearful idealists who, certainly with the best intentions, argue for antiquated prejudices with little insight about this poem. A person of clearer and no less idealistic intellect would have to laugh. High court of justice, I do not ask; I hope, indeed, I trust that this poem will be acquitted.22

The Power of Context in the Reception of Dehmel’s Poetry

In his insistence on fusing the sacred and erotic, Dehmel complicates the reading of his poems. Nowhere is this more striking than in many of the poems that make up
Der Verwandlungen der Venus. While some of the furor over his poetry may seem antiquated to twenty-first-century sensibilities, I would posit that others still have the ability to provoke an intense reaction in the reader. It is noteworthy that commentary on artistic expression by organizations not usually concerned with such matters is not just a modern phenomenon; like today, the motivations for such regulation had far-reaching implications. As well, the court of public opinion was able in those times to answer such charges.

It is not unreasonable to expect that the context of Dehmel’s “Venus Mater,” a poem included in Der Verwandlungen der Venus, would influence its interpretation. “Wiegenlied,” the similar poem from the undisputed Erlösungen, would likely have been read quite differently. In short, “Wiegenlied” probably would have been interpreted as a simple lullaby without the help of additional context. The erotic and sacred content of Der Verwandlungen der Venus would likely have had some bearing on the reading of “Venus Mater.” However, Dehmel’s complex works deserve further analysis in order to understand them fully.

This essay was not meant to be solely a study of Dehmel’s writings. The reaction of the composers Hans Pfitzner and Richard Strauss to Dehmel’s poetry, specifically to “Venus Mater” and “Wiegenlied,” is the other major thrust of the essay. In modern parlance, the next chapter will examine the multiple “readings” of Dehmel’s two poems by these composers. In other words, how do Pfitzner and Strauss react to “Venus Mater” and “Wiegenlied” through their music?
In the words of Lawrence Kramer, “a Lied . . . can extend, (mis)appropriate, subvert, debase, exalt, eroticize, lyricize, dramatize, fragment, unify, analyze, sublimate, or sublate the text. . .”(Kramer 1994, 7). In the next chapter, it will be assessed whether Pfitzner or Strauss are, in the words of Kramer, appropriating or misappropriating the texts. Both the words of the composers themselves as well as the reactions of other writers will be examined. Together, these writings will begin to help elucidate the multiple factors that go into a composer’s interpretation of a poem.
Figure 1. The censored version of “Venus Domestica” from Die Verwandlungen der Venus as printed in Aber die Liebe (Dehmel 1893, 218-219).
Venus Domestica

Ja: die heilige Familie. . .
Josef schreit: Marialeben!
i-a, echot es daneben;
denn das Esulein freute sich eben
an dem Heuduft einer trockenen Lilie.

Und so pilgert er mit müden Gelenken
hinter Ihr und Ihrem Reisekram,
Hahnhör Josef lobesam.
Oh ich kann mir’s beinahe denken,
daß er ihr den Fall nicht übelnahm.

Wenn man so von drei vier Kindeln
erst gewohnt ist, wie das riecht,
ist man wol nicht weiter mißvergnügt,
wenig mal in den alten Windeln
grade nicht was Eignes liegt.

Blos, hm, weißt du – meint er so im
Wandern,
und es niest das graue Tier --
bitte, zeige dich nicht nackt vor mir;
deinen Leib, den schenk’ ich dir,
und vielleicht sogar ’ nem Andern . . .

Weine nicht, mein Herz! der gute
Josef war ein weiser Mann.
Dein Gesicht ist Dein – und Mir ein Bann;
doch was sonst so drum und dran,
hast du sehr gemein mit jeder Pute!

Und, trotz innersten Gelübden,
aber hör’ ich manchmal so dies Schrei’n
hier von Unserm Jesulein,
möcht ich auch wol nach Egypten,
blos – alleine, ohne Esulein!

Yes: the holy family...
Joseph cries: Maria’s life!
i-a, it brays off-key;
because, at the moment, the little donkey
is enjoying the hay smell of a dry lily.

And thus he makes a pilgrimage with tired
joints behind her and her things for travel,
The cuckolded Joseph praises thus.
I can almost imagine that he did not feel
resentment at her mistake.

If one is already used to three, four
children, how it smells,
one is not really so unhappy if,
sometimes, in the old diapers
lies that which is not exactly his own.

Only, hmm, you know - he says while
walking,
and the gray animal sneezes-
please, do not show yourself naked
before me; your body, I give that to you,
and maybe even to some other . .

Weep not, my dear! the good Joseph was a
wise man. Your face is yours - and casts a
spell on me; however, that which is around
and in it, you have in common with any
turkey!

And, in spite of the most innermost
solemn vows, I sometimes hear
this cry from our little Jesus,
I also want to go to Egypt
but– alone, without the little donkey!

Figure 2. The uncensored text of “Venus Domestica” from Der Verwandlungen der Venus. (Dehmel 1893, text in collection of Houghton Library, Harvard University.)
Chapter 4

TEXT AND CONTEXT: HANS PFITZNER’S “VENUS MATER” AND RICHARD STRAUSS’ “WIEGENLIED”

[M]usic (like other kinds of human artifacts) is assembled of heterogeneous elements that lead away from the autonomy of the work to intersect with endless chains of other pieces, multiple – even contradictory – cultural codes, various moments of reception, and so on.

Susan McClary, Conventional Wisdom

These words of Susan McClary echo the sentiment of Richard Strauss which opened the first chapter of this essay. The creators of a work of art, as well as their creations, may have a certain degree of autonomy; however, they also cannot totally escape the society or the age in which they exist. It is my contention that Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” and Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” were not written in a cultural vacuum, but were, and are, a reflection of a number of contexts: the different contexts of the sources of the two poems, the particulars of the disparate cultural and legal circumstances surrounding the reception of Dehmel’s volumes of poetry, and the time-dependent reaction to the music over the century since they were written.

From the historical evidence presented in the last chapter, it has been seen that a number of Dehmel’s poetic texts contested prevailing social ideologies concerning gender and sexuality in the last decade of the nineteenth century. “Venus Mater,” the poetic source of Pfitzner’s lied of the same name, was included in one of Dehmel’s most controversial cycles of poetry. Dehmel’s similar poem “Wiegenlied,” the source of the
identically-named Strauss lied, was part of a totally separate anthology by Dehmel which was never subjected to the scrutiny and publicity of the source of “Venus Mater.” It might be expected that the contexts of the two poetic sources would influence the compositional reactions of the two composers, an issue that will be explored in this chapter. Could the composers disregard the intent of the author? Were the composers reacting to the two different subtexts being presented by the author – in “Wiegenlied,” that of maternity, and in “Venus Mater,” of eroticism and sexuality? Pfitzner himself left some information regarding his interpretation of the lied “Venus Mater,” and a number of other scholars have offered their own particular readings of “Venus Mater.” The examination of these writings support the conclusion that Pfitzner did not totally avoid the implications of sexuality and gender representation manifested in the source of “Venus Mater.” Richard Strauss did not express his motivations or interpretations for the composition of “Wiegenlied” as specifically as Pfitzner did for “Venus Mater,” and there are fewer scholars who have analyzed Strauss’ lied. Even so, the fact remains that Strauss dedicated this piece to his wife Pauline on the birth of their son, and this probably had an effect on his musico-poetic concept.

However, it is extremely difficult to actually correlate musical attributes to aspects of non-musical meaning. In other words, what could it be about the music of “Venus Mater” that would allow one to hear it as erotic? What is it about “Wiegenlied” that places it in the category of a lullaby? In an even broader sense, are there musical attributes of Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” that challenge the Zeitgeist of late nineteenth-
century Germany, much as Dehmel attempted to challenge society through his poetry? Conversely, does the music of “Wiegenlied” reinforce ideologies of the time?

The definition of specific signifiers of the representation of gender and sexuality in music is one of the most controversial topics in modern musical thought – one which is too broad to cover for the scope of an essay of this nature. However, the collection of historical and modern evidence concerning the relationship of gender to musical composition and interpretation, such as the work in this essay, is an important intermediate step toward forming a comprehensive theory of gender representation in music.

**Pfitzner and “Venus Mater”– Perspectives from Composer and Commentators**

Few composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century seem to engender as much discussion, vilification, and rehabilitation as Hans Pfitzner. During his lifetime he was celebrated as an important member of German cultural life, but today he is dismissed as a minor player in the twentieth-century panoply of German composers, particularly when compared to such contemporaries as Mahler, Schoenberg, and especially Richard Strauss. Because his numerous writings in defense of nationalism in music and his expression of the nefarious views of National Socialism have overshadowed his musical contributions, his reputation as a composer is still being restored by the disciples of Pfitzneriana.

However, this paper has little or nothing to do with a discussion of Pfitzner’s social and political views in the decades surrounding the Second World War. In short, examination of Pfitzner’s music does not make me either an apologist or a critic of
Pfitzner’s political views. It is necessary to realize that his high profile in German artistic society meant that his music was analyzed and written about by scores of critics and other examiners of culture during his lifetime. This has helped in that a record of reaction to his work has been left behind which might not have been so easily obtained had not his profile in German musical society been as high as it was.

Many different writers on Pfitzner’s music have much to say about “Venus Mater.” Not every writer foregrounds the issues of gender and sexuality that seemed to be so apparent in the original poem, but the undercurrent of such in most of the evaluations of the piece leads to the conclusion that gender representation can be heard in a creative work as well as it can be read, seen, and “done.”

**Pfitzner as a lieder composer**

Pfitzner’s lieder represent an important part of his entire compositional output. The two-volume set of *Sämtliche Lieder* (Pfitzner 1979-1983) contains 106 published songs as well as a number of unpublished songs and fragments. He engaged in song writing throughout most of his career, from the time he was a conservatory student to his last songs written in 1931. A number of the songs, including “Venus Mater,” which were originally conceived as piano-vocal works were later set as orchestral lieder, and some (also including “Venus Mater”) were also rearranged as short works for solo instrument and piano.

Like many of his compositional ancestors and contemporaries, Pfitzner selected from the vast array of German-language poetry for the words of his lieder. The great poets of German literature (e.g., Goethe, Heine, Eichendorff), school friends of Pfitzner
(e.g., James Grun, Paul Nikolaus Cossmann) and contemporary writers (e.g., Liliencron, Huch, and Busse, as well as Dehmel) are all represented in Pfitzner’s lieder.

Pfitzner set three of Dehmel’s poems to music – “Die stille Stadt” and “Der Arbeitsman,” as well as “Venus Mater.” All three of these were texts that were also chosen by a number of composers (see http://www.recmusic.org/lieder for examples). Hans Rectanus, the editor of Pfitzner’s complete songs, noted in an e-mail communication that the manuscript of the work is not extant and the date of the work’s premiere is not known exactly, although the date of composition is marked as 1901.

John Williamson, one of the only English-language scholars on Pfitzner, comments on “Venus Mater” in his biography of the composer (Williamson 1992, 233-235). Williamson implies that the chromatic nature of “Venus Mater” gives it much in common with a Wagnerian (as he put it, “post-Tristan”) idiom that became more apparent in Pfitzner’s later lieder. Hans Rectanus also remarks that Pfitzner’s complete opus 11 songs (of which “Venus Mater” is the fourth in the set) marks the starting point of a period in Pfitzner’s lieder composition characterized by “unusual pianoforte accompaniment and almost impressionistic structures” (Rectanus 1979, 9). Thus, both of these scholars imply that Pfitzner was attempting musical innovation in this lied, perhaps stretching previous conventions of song writing at the time.

Pfitzner himself had much to say about “Venus Mater,” as did many of his contemporaries. These issues will be explored subsequently. However, before the specifics of “Venus Mater” are considered any further, it will be instructive to see what
Hans Pfitzner had to say about his approach to setting texts, and about composition in general.

**Pfitzner on music and text**

Pfitzner saw himself as one of the last torch-bearers of a tradition that saw music as a divinely inspired enterprise rather than a rational and formal process. (His one great opera, *Palestrina*, characterized the Renaissance composer’s method of composition as God-given rather than originating in the intellect. Many [e.g. McClatchie 1998] have commented on Pfitzner’s perceived kinship with the earlier composer.) It was troubling to him that early twentieth-century composers would apply technical mastery to intrinsic musicality and inspiration. As Leon Botstein puts it, Pfitzner was disturbed by composers who were “intent on blurring the boundary between the concreteness of music and its power of expression on one hand, and language, thought, and ideas on the other, all in order to cover up their lack of spontaneous musicality” (Botstein 2001, 67-68).

Pfitzner was referring to composition in general, but he was quite specific in his purported methods of setting texts to music which mirror these more general comments on the art of composition. In *Die neue Aesthetic der musikalischen Impotenz* (The New Aesthetic of Musical Impotence) he comments on various methods used historically by composers in order to set text to music—*das Wort-Ton-Verhältnis*, or the relative importance of text and music, discussed by so many Germanic composers. In one method (which he characterizes as “the bulk of vocal music in the past,” including Italian opera and church music) he notes that a composer starts from a purely musical standpoint, leaving the text to “sort itself out.” The mirror opposite, which he
characterized as the method used by many of his contemporaries, started from text declamation, which he charged led to a certain unmusicality, such that the “virtue of the song [is] endangered.” As he put it, the musical “organism” was dispensed with by the literary composer, and the musical “residue” rendered meaningless (Williamson 1992, 211-212).

The third method, which he advocates as the proper way to approach a song, is such that words and music can be conceived independently, but may result in an almost mystical correspondence:

There are the cases in the art where two different sources of the same spirit run and flow together to an entity in which word and tone become one, where the mood accords as in a pure consonance. But it must flow from deep springs, especially the music; this is not born wearily from the spirit of the poem; it must come from its own domain and in its own way independently conjure the same atmosphere which the poem expresses; this can happen entirely independently, before knowledge of the poem, or gently touched by it, as with a divining rod. (Williamson 1992, 214)

Pfitzner might have been chagrined to read essentially the same assessment of text-setting by his polar-opposite fellow-composer Arnold Schoenberg in the essay “The Relationship to the Text” (Schoenberg 1950). Schoenberg implies that many of his songs were composed without any real knowledge of the poetic content of the texts he was setting, yet, in hindsight, apprehended the meaning of the poem with great clarity.

Of course it would be naive to consider that text declamation alone – whether in a poem or fused to a vocal line, represents the sine qua non of a poem’s or song’s mood. Music, by virtue of its non-representational nature, is able to accommodate many different malleable interpretations – which is why both Pfitzner and Schoenberg posit the ability to compose a song independent of the knowledge of text. Yet, to read the previous
paragraphs, one might think that Pfitzner disregarded poetic content and context totally when writing a song. Other writings of Pfitzner show that this was not the case.

**Pfitzner and *Meine Liedertexte***

In 1941 Pfitzner published a small volume of poems which he had set as lieder. An introductory page (Figure 3, page 97) gave his motivations for publishing *Meine Liedertexte*:

The herein printed texts of my complete published songs do not always correspond exactly to the words of the poem which can be found underneath the notes. There are barely any song composers who carefully and philologically compare the wording of a poem with the composed text which he hands in to be printed. During the composition process he carries the poem in his head and it so happens that a part of the poem is not printed in precise fashion. Of course, this happened to me various times and, in such instances, the composition has to remain, with the little “memory lapses” regarding the poem, in its present state.

The situation is quite different, however, when the poems are presented to the reader. In this case, especially with regard to valuable poems, highest precision is essential. Therefore, I have compared the poems with the original wording and, accordingly, had them printed correctly. But even during this process I did not proceed with absolute consistency, but rather accepted, in some instances, the wording in the “composed” version, in cases where the original wording was already inconsistent in the various interpretations of the poem, but also because the original wording seemed inseparable from the musical declamation.

Of course I did not change a single poem’s syllable indiscriminately.

Munich 1 January 1941

There is a great deal of fodder for discussion in these few paragraphs. John Williamson warns that too much can be made of Pfitzner’s frequent discussions on musical creativity, preferring to grant that the composer was occasionally inconsistent in his thoughts, and, more importantly, points out that imprecise concepts of mood or imagery in music could easily hint at a number of related texts (Williamson 1992, 214).
One thing can be taken from these paragraphs—Pfitzner, at least sometimes, was aware of a poetic text and was influenced by it when composing a song ("During the composition process he carries the poem in his head and it so happens that a part of the poem is not printed in precise fashion. Of course, this happened to me various times and, in such instances, the composition has to remain, with the little ‘memory lapses’ regarding the poem, in its present state.") Thus, contrary to some scholars who attribute to Pfitzner the ideal of respecting the poet’s words above anything else (Heller 1994), it can be seen that Pfitzner is quite willing to impose his own reading on other author’s poetry, even when publishing the texts as independent entities:

But even during this process I did not proceed with absolute consistency, but rather accepted, in some instances, the wording in the “composed” version, in cases where the original wording was already inconsistent in the various interpretations of the poem, but also because the original wording seemed inseparable from the musical declamation. ¹

A cursory comparison of the poems presented in Meine Liedertexte shows that they do not always correspond precisely to either the poet’s original words, or to the lyrics of Pfitzner’s lieder. Pfitzner occasionally repeated a poetic phrase in his lieder or altered a preposition or conjunction from the original poem. In addition, Pfitzner sometimes included a phrase in his lieder not in the original poem, as in his setting of Eichendorff’s “Der Gartner” (Pfitzner 1941, 22-23), and also deleted a phrase from the poetic version in Meine Liedertexte that is both in the poet’s original as well in his lied

¹It is not known what “various interpretations of the poem” Pfitzner is referring to—whether he is referring to different versions from the author, or different settings of a particular poem by different composers or by Pfitzner himself.
setting, as in Mörike’s “Denk es, o Seele” (Pfitzner 1941, 76-77). Clearly, Pfitzner was not above imposing his own reading on the original words of a poet.

As has already been shown, many different versions of Dehmel’s text entitled “Venus Mater” were published. Like Richard Dehmel, Pfitzner seemed not to be satisfied with a single version of this poem. The version of “Venus Mater” published by Pfitzner in *Meine Liedertexte* does not correspond to Pfitzner’s 1901 setting of the poem, nor does it correspond to any of the versions of “Venus Mater” published by Dehmel. Pfitzner’s version in *Meine Liedertexte* is essentially a combination of the two versions published by Dehmel, and summarized in Table 3, page 98. This might upset the notion presented in previous chapters that Pfitzner was specifically using the 1893 version of “Venus Mater” from *Aber die Liebe*. However, I believe that my original assertion of the source of Pfitzner’s text is correct. *Meine Liedertexte* was published in 1941, four decades after Pfitzner composed “Venus Mater.” By this time, a number of versions of lieder using Dehmel’s texts were extant, as were the numerous published versions of the poem by Dehmel himself. For Pfitzner, it is conceivable that, by 1941, an amalgam of texts represented Dehmel’s *Werktreue* to him. It is thus left to posterity to decipher these variants.

**Pfitzner, Dehmel, and the meeting over “Venus Mater”**

Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” is one of his lieder in which there is some documentation of his interpretation of the text. Because of this, it is assumed that he thought of this lied as one of his more important compositions. In 1902 Pfitzner and Dehmel met at a concert of Pfitzner’s music. Pfitzner sent this note to Dehmel before the
concert: “Dear Sir: It may give you joy to learn of a new composition to your beautiful poem; therefore, allow me to send you a copy of this lied.” 2 Pfitzner recalls the meeting in a subsequent article. He writes: “Before the concert I took tea with [Dehmel]. I still remember this opportunity to have a very thought-provoking conversation with Dehmel about his poem ‘Venus Mater’ composed by me.” 3

Unfortunately, Pfitzner leaves no other indication of his intentions when setting “Venus Mater,” so we must rely on the account of this meeting from Pfitzner’s biographer, Walter Abendroth, for any additional information on Pfitzner’s thoughts:

Poet and composer of “Venus Mater” engaged in a conversation about the meaning of Dehmel’s verses, which Pfitzner understood to concern the love for the still-unborn child; an interpretation which is justified by the text of the poem (“dream, bud of my sorrows, of the day where the flower blossoms”), just as the solemn undertone of Pfitzner’s composition gives it a “sublime” fervor. Apparently, Dehmel had not attached this meaning to his words, but thoughtfully agreed with Pfitzner’s interpretation, as if they were speaking about the poetry of some third person, and he could accept this interpretation of the content of his poem even if he had not yet thought of it in that way. 4

---

2Sehr geehrter Herr: vielleicht macht es Ihnen Freude, eine neue Composition Ihres schönen Gedichtes kennen zu lernen, ich erlaube mir daher, Ihnen beifolgendes Lied zu übersenden. (Pfitzner 1991, 1: 86) The notes to this letter (Pfitzner 1991, 2: 144) indicate that the “beautiful poem” is Dehmel’s “Venus Mater.”


4Dichter und Komponist der “Venus Mater” gerieten hier in ein Gespräch über den Sinn der Dehmelschen Verse, den Pfitzner so auffällte, daß es sich darin um die Liebe zum noch ungeborenen Kinde handele; eine Auslegung, die durch den Wortlaut des Gedichtes (“träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen, von dem Tage da die Blume sprießt”) ebenso gerechtfertigt wird, wie sie der Pfitznerschen Komposition der weihevollen Grundton, die gleichsam “gehobene” Innigkeit gegeben hat. Dehmel hatte seinen Worten diese Bedeutung anscheinend nicht beigemessen, stimmte aber Pfitzners Auffassung nachdenklich zu, so, als wäre die Rede von der Dichtung irgendeines Dritten, von deren Inhalt er auch diese Auslegung annehmen könne, wenn er auch an sie noch nicht gedacht hätte. (Abendroth 1935, 123) Dehmel does not comment in his letters about this conversation with Pfitzner; his only commentary about this incident is a critique of the concert itself in a subsequent letter to his friend and concert companion Detlev von Liliencron.
Later in this book, Abendroth proffers his own assessment of Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater”:

If one wants to know who Pfitzner is, he needs only to compare Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” to the composition of the same poem by Richard Strauss. It is an even more interesting comparison because Pfitzner in the song (which Kroll notes correctly on p. 144) comes peculiarly close to Strauss harmonically. In spite of its warmth and ardor, Pfitzner’s setting is lacking that erotic narcotic, and the voice-leading never gives up its noble, internally-bound restraint even where it begins its blossoming development.$^5$

The “interesting” choice of words in Abendroth’s commentary, particularly that of Pfitzner avoiding the “erotic narcotic” of the poem (and perhaps, by extension, implying that Richard Strauss’ setting induces narcosis), suggests that the erotic dimension of the poem was in the foreground for Abendroth.

**The “erotic narcotic”– the malleability of interpretation**

This one phrase– “erotic narcotic”– speaks volumes about interpretation. A number of possibilities are suggested by this wording. Perhaps Pfitzner’s music suggested sensuality to Abendroth independent of Abendroth’s knowledge of the poem’s context; perhaps Pfitzner discussed his interpretation with Abendroth, including the possible “erotic” context of the poem and music (or lack thereof); or perhaps Abendroth imposed his own interpretation onto Pfitzner’s lied because he knew the history of Dehmel and *Die Verwandlungen der Venus*.

---

$^5$Wenn einer wissen will, wer Pfitzner ist, so braucht er nur dessen “Venus Mater” mit der Komposition des gleichen Gedichtes von Richard Strauß zu vergleichen. Ein um so interessanterer Vergleich, als Pfitzner in diesem Lied (wie Kroll S. 144 sehr richtig bemerkt) harmonisch Strauß merkwürdig nähertückt. Bei aller Wärme und Innigkeit fehlt der Pfitznerischen Gestaltung jedes erotische Narkotikum, und die Stimmführung gibt auch dort, wo sie zu blühender Entfaltung aufbricht, ihre edle, innerlich gebundene Grundhaltung nicht auf. (Abendroth 1935, 357)
However, any interpretation must be read with some caution, because Abendroth, like Pfitzner, occupied a problematic position within German society. The biography’s published date of 1935 is after the 1933 takeover of the German government by the Nazi party. Concomitant with this takeover was a well-documented increase in censorship and scrutiny of most publications. Pfitzner was one of the favorites of the nascent Nazi party, and as the biographer of such a person, Abendroth would have tailored his commentary to conform with acceptable views. It is conceivable that the content of this book was subjected to the scrutiny of Party officials and edited to toe the official line – including that of “approved” views of gender and sexuality – and to put Pfitzner in a favorable light.

The possibility of editorial interference by the Party, and the resulting misrepresentation of information, is discussed by Werner Diez in 1968:

A large portion of the questionable literature comes from 1933-1945, and clearly carries characteristics of this time. But it would certainly be wrong to look at the circumstances of those years as the only reason for a certain lack of objectivity and unsubstantiated bias in personal and factual areas. In the literature about Pfitzner this prejudice appears time and again – most conspicuously, and for today’s reader most appallingly, in Walter Abendroth’s important Pfitzner biography of 1935. In this book it becomes quite clear how much the complexes of the time interfere with opinions and judgments. These were by no means politically enforced, but had previously existed and were now simply validated officially. . . . The book still remains the most comprehensive source for anyone who is searching for biographical material about Pfitzner; and it remains regrettable that there is still no revised edition which separates and eradicates useless and irritating opinions from important facts.  

______________________________

6Ein großer Teil der fraglichen Literatur stammt aus den Jahren 1933-1945 und trägt manche Kennzeichen dieser Zeit deutlich an sich. Es wäre aber sicher falsch, wenn man den Zwang der Verhältnisse jener Jahre als den einzigen Grund ansehen wollte für gewisse Unsachlichkeiten und unbegründet bleibende Voreingenommenheiten personaler wie sachlicher Natur, wie sie gerade in der Literatur über Pfitzner immer wieder auftauchen, am auffälligsten und für den heutigen Leser
In a 1999 e-mail communication, John Williamson stated that he believed the information in Abendroth’s book was reliable as far as musical matters were concerned. He did also write that Abendroth needed to be careful in writing about other, non-musical subjects, in that he had to be careful not to “offend his new masters,” in the words of Williamson. It was not discussed with him whether the book might have gone through some kind of formal censorship process. Even so, one cannot discount recent studies which describe many different cases of censorship during the Nazi years. Whether Abendroth was simply expressing an “irritating opinion” by his assertion that Pfitzner avoided eroticism in his setting of “Venus Mater,” or whether there was organized editorial intervention into the contents of this book will probably never be known. However, I would maintain that the mention of such an idea by Abendroth must have meant that the perception of the erotic nature of the music had been suggested to some people.

If other commentaries on “Venus Mater” are examined, a subtext of gender can be read in the writings that can be correlated, in some ways, to the times in which they are written. In 1924, Erwin Kroll recognized the voluptuousness of Pfitzner’s setting, particularly in comparison to Richard Strauss’ setting of “Wiegenlied.” However, the polemics associated with this are kept to a minimum:

Dehmel’s “Venus Mater” is known as one of his most solemn song creations. The effect is based above all on the inexpressibly emotional vocal melody, which far surpasses Strauss’ setting because of the power and nobility of its emotions. The lush harmonies of this particular work are less linearly constructed – in fact, they are almost Strauss-like in color.7

In the commentaries from the years surrounding World War II, a subtext has been added to these – certainly in the writing of Abendroth, as well as this evaluation from Heinrich Lindlar in 1940:

The turn to Richard Dehmel is more significant – to paraphrase Günther Müller: “He aspired to a new, genuine synthesis of soulfulness and sensuousness which could be developed into a type of soulful Lied.” In spite of the misunderstanding about the setting of “Venus Mater,” Pfitzner also played his part in this development with the songs “Der Arbeitsman” and “Die stille Stadt” which fall into his next period.8

Lindlar’s mention of the “sensuousness” of Dehmel’s poem, as well as Abendroth’s comment of Pfitzner’s elimination of the “erotic narcotic” carries a connotation that these works carried traces of gender that either needed to be remedied or asserted by Pfitzner’s interpretation of the text. Diez’s later review in 1968, however, barely comments at all on difficult-to-define characteristics such as Abendroth’s so-called erotic narcotic, preferring to remain with more uncontroversial properties such as the density of the accompaniment and the cantabile style of the vocal line:

7Dehmels “Venus Mater”... ist als eine seiner seihevollsten Liedschöpfungen bekannt. Die Wirkung beruht hier vor allem auf der unsagbar innerlichen Gesangsweise, die die Straußsche Vertönung durch Größe und Adel der Empfindung weit hinter sich läßt. Dabei ist die schweizerische Harmonik gerade dieses Werkes weniger linear bedingt, ja in Gegenteil fast Straußlich gefärbt. (Kroll 1924, 144)

In the song “Venus Mater” after a text of Richard Dehmel, Pfitzner even approaches Strauss’ style, with a broad curving vocal melody and, primarily, chordal harmonic, “thick” piano phrases in the accompaniment (even more towards the conclusion). . . . To be sure, a most graceful cantabile is found very often with Pfitzner, but not as a primary and dominant style component of a whole song; nevertheless, where this is the case, it is mostly a sign of his early style.  

In more recent times, Pfitzner has re-emerged as one of the most controversial musical figures of late nineteenth and twentieth century Germany. Pro-Pfitzner and anti-Pfitzner writers abound; each one chooses either to defend or excoriate the composer and his views. Most of these writers focus on the larger works of the composer, although there are scholars who are concerned with Pfitzner’s other compositions. The most relevant article to this essay is by Werner Heller, who compared a number of different lieder by Hans Pfitzner and Richard Strauss on the same texts (Heller 1994).

It is unfortunate that Heller is mistaken about Pfitzner’s source for “Venus Mater,” a fact reviewed in the second chapter of this essay. However, even though Heller is incorrect about Pfitzner’s poetic sources, his observations about the Pfitzner/Dehmel “Venus Mater” merit some mention. Heller is the only person who has commented on the juxtaposition of the image of Venus with conventional motherhood:

Venus Mater – the goddess of love as a mother? Anyone who takes offense at the thought that Venus is only mentioned as the seductive goddess . . . would be referred to the introduction to “De rerum natura” [“On the nature of things”] from the Roman writer Lucretius, where Venus is celebrated as “alma genetrix” . . . the life-giving mother of all creatures:

---

only “alma genetrix,” so it says here, controls the universe. . . . In the realm of humanity alma genetrix appears as a mother, as the mother who rocks her sleeping child, which with all her love envelops. Similarly, Venus as mother, as an embodiment of life created by love, clearly becomes the integration of human existence in the cosmos. . . . One will guess easily what has drawn [Pfitzner] to Dehmel’s poem: not the presence of the latent characteristics of a lullaby, but rather the deep secret of life-creating love everywhere, illustrated by the symbols of the spring, the buds, the blossoms and the flowers as the clearly perceptible marks of all becoming and growing, germinating and blossoming in nature, in which human beings are placed.\textsuperscript{10}

Heller also points out the later comparison made in the poetic cycle of Venus with the Madonna – “you chaste Venus, charming Madonna!” Heller states (Heller 1994, 50)

“What a bold equating of the Venus and the Madonna, almost provocatively emphasized through the permutation of conventional understanding by association in each case with the other’s sobriquet!” (“Welch kühne Gleichsetzung der Venus und der Madonna, fast provokatorisch noch hervorgehoben durch die Vertauschung der nach herkömmlichem Verständnis gerade jeweils der anderen zugehörigen Epitheta!”)

These comparisons of the figure of Venus with mother of the universe and of the Madonna are clear examples of what sociologists term “accounting for gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 135-137). In such an accounting, situations or actions which may

seem on the surface to challenge conventions are explained so as to allow them to be consistent with cultural expectations. Werner Heller’s justification of Venus as mother or Madonna “accounts” for her portrayal in a way that seems more congruent with normative views of women. Heller’s contemplation of Pfitzner’s attraction to Venus Mater’s representation as “life-creating love” is another way in which normative gender is accounted for and justified.

Werner Heller’s interpretation of Pfitzner’s motivations and ideas for writing “Venus Mater” could have a purpose other than merely bringing the music of this composer to the forefront. Such an interpretation of Pfitzner and “Venus Mater” helps portray the composer as a righteous and upright member of society, not the distasteful character of mid-century Germany that some of those on the anti-Pfitzner side of things wish to represent. Heller’s account is an attempt to rehabilitate Pfitzner, and his interpretation of gender is just one way of doing this.

The representation of gender is so ubiquitous in society (West and Zimmerman use the term “omnirelevant”) that this kind of interpretation can have an influence far beyond mere music. Whether the representation of gender is in the foreground, as with Abendroth’s account in 1935 or Heller’s article in 1992, or whether it is barely mentioned, as in Kroll (1924) or Diez (1968), it serves as one of the most important organizing principles of modern society. But gender representation – in music as well as other endeavors– is not absolutely independent of time or of culture. Although looking at the representation of gender through the lens of the present is valid, we err if we assume
that the interpretation of gender is unchangeable. In other words, temporal context is just as important as the fixed text.

**Strauss and “Wiegenlied” – Different Perspectives, Different Contexts**

Why do people always say “Strauss and Pfitzner.” They could say Pfitzner on his own so far as I’m concerned – greatest composer of all time – since Beethoven, that is. What little I am, I want to be alone, not in company. (Kennedy 1999, 210)

Richard Strauss despised the frequent comparisons made between him and Hans Pfitzner, as can be seen from this quote taken from a letter to a colleague in 1919. Nevertheless, the comparisons seem inevitable, given that their paths often crossed during their lives, and that their activities frequently paralleled each other. The animosity between the two is often reported to have arisen after a concert in 1900 in which both composers’ works were programmed. Pfitzner’s work was received, at best, tepidly, while Strauss’ two compositions were received with much enthusiasm. Even so, Strauss often programmed Pfitzner’s music on concerts which he conducted. History has been kinder to Strauss’ music than Pfitzner’s – while Pfitzner’s compositions have become little more than a musicological footnote, many of Strauss’ works are still frequently programmed, and some have attained the status of core repertoire.

**Strauss as a lieder composer**

Pfitzner built much of his reputation on his lieder composition. Strauss, on the other hand, treated his composition of songs as a sidelight, as something peripheral to his orchestral tone poems and his operas. Nevertheless, his song output represents a significant part of his total compositional catalog – Barbara Petersen (1980) lists “slightly
over two hundred songs” in the catalog, which include orchestral lieder as well as songs with piano accompaniment.

The small number of critical documents concerning Strauss’ songs reflects the relative lack of attention paid to this part of his compositional output. Petersen states that a comprehensive bibliography of monographs and articles on Strauss and his music from 1944-1964 lists only forty titles (out of 1700) pertaining to his lieder. As a comparison, more than seven hundred titles were devoted to his operas. Most of the critical writing on his songs are limited to a few opus numbers, with many of these devoted to the Four Last Songs. More recent writings on his music confirm the disparity of interest between his larger vocal and orchestral works and his lieder.

Strauss, like Pfitzner, selected from the vast array of German-language poetry as texts for his songs. He has often been accused of being less than discriminating in his choice of poetry for his lieder. As he put it: “I open a book of poems; I turn over the leaves casually; one of the poems arrests my attention, and in many cases, before I have read it over carefully, a musical idea has come to me” (Petersen 1980, 25). Strauss seemed to require some sort of textual catalyst in order to compose a song, unlike Pfitzner’s purported claim of a lied’s music arising independently from its poetic source.

It is unfair to claim that Strauss was totally unconcerned with the textual quality of individual choices for lieder, if for no other reason that numerous other composers set the same texts with much less criticism for the same choices (Petersen states that at least eighty-five of Strauss’ lieder used poems set by at least one other composer). However, Strauss’ motivations for lieder composition were not just finding the perfect text to set to
music. He was often more concerned with finding a poetic subject that spoke to a particular event than discovering poetic perfection; in other words, Strauss’ lieder were often seen by him as comprising “occasional music.” Strauss’ other important inspiration for song composition was the singer responsible for its first performances. He wrote a number of his lieder specifically for his wife Pauline to sing on their joint recitals while they still toured together; later opus numbers were also conceived with specific singers in mind.

Petersen points out that Strauss rarely communicated with the poets of his lieder. The few letters that do exist reveal little about his own composition or interpretive processes, and they do not include any requests for interpretive advice from the poets themselves. (It is improbable that Strauss would have had a similar conversation with Dehmel about the meaning of “Wiegenlied” as did Pfitzner with Dehmel about “Venus Mater.”) Yet, as can be inferred from the hundreds of letters that exist between Strauss and the librettists of his operas during their composition, Strauss was not totally indifferent to the quality of words which he set to music.

**Strauss, Dehmel, and “Wiegenlied”: the intersection of composer and poet**

Richard Strauss was associated with a number of major musical organizations in Berlin during the 1890's, and took up residence in the city after being named director of the Court Opera in 1898. During the time he lived in Berlin, he was associated with the group of intellectuals responsible for the flowering of literature and the arts in Germany. Not coincidentally, he turned to the writings of many of the cutting-edge poets of this circle for his lieder written during this time. Like Pfitzner, who was also living in Berlin
at this time, Strauss set a number of Dehmel poems to music. Willi Schuh (1982, 443) states that Strauss set eleven of Dehmel’s poems between the years of 1895 and 1902, from poetry of social commentary (“Der Arbeitsmann”) to lyrical poems (e.g., “Waldseligkeit”).

However, Strauss’ association with Dehmel went well beyond merely setting his verses to music. The two carried on a correspondence and met a number of times between 1895 and 1910; a significant sidelight of these meetings is that the librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal first met Strauss during a visit of both of them with Dehmel in 1899 (Schuh 1982, 442). Dehmel sent a number of poems and other writings to Strauss for his consideration; likewise, Strauss sent Dehmel a number of lieder he had set to the poet’s verses. This particular pattern of correspondence between Dehmel and Strauss does not follow the composer’s general independence from communicating with the poets of his lieder. Although there is no evidence that Strauss was asking for specific advice from Dehmel about his settings, the fact that they did have a long-standing relationship probably speaks to their mutual admiration.

Germane to the discussion of “Wiegenlied” is a series of letters between composer and poet regarding the latter’s two editions of Erlösungen. Strauss told the poet that he had set the poem “Mein Auge” from the first (1891) edition of Erlösungen; this resulted in the passionate response from Dehmel to “throw the first edition [of Erlösungen] on the fire” because he was totally unsatisfied with his early poetic efforts. With this letter (from April 1898) he sent Strauss the new, second edition of Erlösungen – the edition that contained the version of “Wiegenlied” which Strauss set to music.
According to Schuh (1982, 442) Strauss sent Dehmel his completed setting of “Wiegenlied” as well as another lied from Erlösungen; Dehmel’s acknowledgment of these lieder states his satisfaction with the other lied (“Am Ufer”), but there is no mention of “Wiegenlied” in Schuh’s excerpt of the letter. Dehmel was not reluctant to offer opinions of people’s settings of his writings, but there is no indication of his opinion of “Wiegenlied” in any published document examined. The fact that Dehmel personally sent Strauss a copy of the second edition of Erlösungen, however, lends credence to the contention that this must have been the volume from which Strauss took “Wiegenlied.”

“Wiegenlied” and Drei Mutterlieder

As Barbara Petersen stated, Richard Strauss’ motivation for writing lieder tended to arise from specific events, rather than being inspired by his internal muse. It appears that “Wiegenlied” is no different from most of his lieder in that regard. “Wiegenlied,” written in August of 1899, was often linked together in performance by Strauss and his wife Pauline with two other songs (“Meinem Kinde” and “Muttertändelei”) as Drei Mutterlieder, or Three Mother-Songs (Petersen 1980, 150). Most references indicated that “Meinem Kinde” was clearly written in tribute to the birth of the Strauss’ son in 1897, and it is probable that Richard Strauss was still in this frame of mind when composing “Wiegenlied.” If this is true, then the uncontroversial Erlösungen makes more sense as Strauss’ source of the lullaby “Wiegenlied” than does the highly controversial Aber die Liebe.

There are fewer comments on the music of Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” than there are on Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater”; the comments that do exist often compare the two songs
directly, as has already been shown in this chapter. Even if the authors of such commentary are mistaken as to the varying sources of the two works, these direct comparisons are enlightening as to the musical characteristics of “Wiegenlied.” While many commentators characterize Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” as almost Strauss-like in its use of lush harmonies, dense accompaniment, and chromaticism, the features most noted in Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” are the calm, ostinato nature of the accompaniment and the diatonicity of the melody. For example, in his comparison of the two lieder, Diez says:

If one looks, however, at Strauss’ own setting of the same text, the obvious distance in the song style of both composers certainly continues: Strauss’ song is, even by his standards, an extreme case in unrestricted smoothness and linearity in its whole construction.11

Further writings reiterate this general impression. Norman Del Mar comments on the transparency of the accompaniment, the “magical atmosphere,” and the beauty of Strauss’ simple melody (Del Mar 1986, 318-319). This assessment is all the more striking, given that Del Mar spends a paragraph explaining his erroneous conclusion that Strauss’ source of poetry was “Venus Mater” from Der Verwandlungen der Venus (covered in Chapter 2 of this essay). This sentiment is also echoed in Richard Mercier’s guide to Pfitzner’s songs, where he also comments on the “ethereal lullaby setting of the same text by Richard Strauss” (Mercier 1998, 89).

As previously stated, Strauss typically reacted to text and to circumstance in the composition of his lieder. It is also true that he often wrote works in which people find musical tropes which signify gender and sexuality, such as in Salome, Feuersnot,
Rosenkavalier, or the Symphonia Domestica – all works with representations of gender or sex in the foreground of libretto or “program.” The fact that so many people comment on Strauss’ atypical style in “Wiegenlied” would suggest that Strauss’ source was one in which issues of gender representation were not important – or rather, that the representations reiterated normative behaviors rather than challenging them. Further theoretical and analytical work is needed in order to define those tropes that signified the motherhood that seems to be detected in Strauss’ “Wiegenlied.” As well, such analysis could also be applied to the characteristics of Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” which lead to the “Straussian” reaction in so many listeners.


A brief examination of some musical examples from Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater” (Pfitzner 1979, 172-176) and Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” (Strauss 1964, 313-324) will help underscore the different musical reactions by the two composers as outlined by the observations reviewed in this chapter.

The differences are observable, and striking, even within the first few measures of the two lieder. Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater,” which begins without any piano introduction (much as if this was taken from the middle of a larger composition, like its text which comes from the middle of a poetic cycle), is harmonically ambiguous. The musical complexity of the opening phrase, where the vocal melody is opposed by a countermelody in the treble clef of the piano accompaniment, is supported by the “lush” (as characterized by Kroll) chordal texture in the bass clef of the accompaniment. See Example 1 for an illustration of the opening phrase of Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater.

The ambiguous tonality of the lied begins in B minor, arrives at F# major by the end of the first verse (Example 2), and eventually ends in B major at the end of the last verse (Example 3).


Example 3. Pfitzner’s “Venus Mater,” mm. 52-55. Final tonality of B major.
A significant postlude reiterates the countermelody of the piano accompaniment in the first verse, and reinforces the final tonal center of B major.

In contrast, Strauss’ “Wiegenlied” is unambiguously in D major. An ostinato figure in the piano introduction establishes this tonality from the beginning of the lied. The undulating ostinato figure in the right hand of the accompaniment recalls countless “rocking” motifs common to song literature as a musical image signifying a lullaby. This constant motif contributes to what Werner Diez called the “unrelenting smoothness” of the piece. The high register of the piano also contributes to the ethereal nature of Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” while, by contrast, Pfitzner takes advantage of the sonorities of the entire keyboard in his lied. Example 4 illustrates the opening of Strauss’ “Wiegenlied.”

The 32\textsuperscript{nd}-note arpeggiated figure established in the beginning of the lied continues almost constantly throughout the work, pausing significantly at the end of the third verse ("zum Himmel mir gemacht,” mm. 81-84) where there is a momentary cessation of the
ostinato. The cessation of this figure, along with the musical instruction of *calando* (becoming softer and slower) in m. 84 in the postlude might be characterized as stopping the rocking of a child as it finally falls asleep. Example 5 illustrates this phrase.

Example 5. Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” mm. 81-84.

It is interesting to compare Pfitzner’s interpretation of the analogous poetic phrase in “Venus Mater” given in Example 3. In Pfitzner’s reading, this poetic phrase signifies the music’s climactic moment, and, significantly, is the only point at which a dynamic marking of *forte* (on the word “Himmel,” m. 53) is indicated.

The probability that a composer would progressively increase the dynamic level of a work meant to characterize a lullaby, as does Pfitzner in “Venus Mater,” seems counterintuitive. Furthermore, the unsettled nature of the tonality of Pfitzner’s lied does not effect a calming atmosphere; rather, it builds anticipation of the resolution of the
piece. Certainly a number of interpretations could be attached to these observations, but an “erotically-charged” reading would certainly be a valid one. Likewise, a number of readings could be attached to Strauss’ “Wiegenlied,” but the interpretation of the piece as a lullaby due to the calm, diatonic character of the work as a whole and the presence of a motif found in many other lullabies is one credible analysis. Of course, without the accompanying texts, a number of other credible interpretations might also be suggested.

The convenient characterization of two “antipodes” of *fin-de-siècle* German music is maintained by this brief analysis. However, Johann Peter Vogel (1987) warns against a simplistic antithetical comparison of the two composers. The musical comparison of “Venus Mater” and “Wiegenlied” given above may support his view; however, what is equally noteworthy is the observation that each composer seems to take the stylistic role typically attributed to the other. There is more at work than simply two composers with different musical readings of a text. Indeed, differing texts, and different contexts – of poetry, of reception, of social and cultural circumstances – all contribute to different conceptions of the “same” words.
Vorwort


Willkürlich geändert habe ich selbstverständlich keine Silbe von einem Gedicht.

[linke Seite]

München, den 1. Januar 1941

DR. HANS PFTZNER

Figure 3. Pfitzner’s introduction to *Meine Liedertexte* (Pfitzner 1941).
Table 3. The various versions of the text “Venus Mater” of Richard Dehmel and Hans Pfitzner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venus Mater</th>
<th>Venus Mater</th>
<th>Venus Mater</th>
<th>Venus Mater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben, von dem Himmel, der die Blüten bringt; Blumen winken da, die bebenvon dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt...</td>
<td>Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben, von dem Himmel, der die Blumen bringt; Blüten schimmern da, die beben von dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt.</td>
<td>Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben, von dem Himmel, der die Blumen bringt! Blüten schimmern da, die beben von dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt.</td>
<td>Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben, von dem Himmel, der die Blumen bringt! von dem Tage, da die Blume sproß, Von dem hellen Blütenmorgen, da dein Seelechen sich der Welt erschließt...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen, von dem Tage, da die Blume sprießt, von dem hellen Blütenmorgen, da dein Seelechen sich der Welt erschließt...</td>
<td>Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen, von dem Tage, da die Blume sprießt, von dem hellen Blütenmorgen, wo dein Seelechen sich der Welt erschließt...</td>
<td>Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen, von dem Tage, da die Blume sprießt, von dem hellen Blütenmorgen, Da dein Seelechen sich der Welt erschließt.</td>
<td>Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen, von dem Tage, da die Blume sprießt, von dem hellen Blütenmorgen, Da dein Seelechen sich der Welt erschließt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe, von der stillen, von der heiligen Nachtda die Blume Seiner Liebe diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht...</td>
<td>Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe, von der stillen, von der heiligen Nachtda die Blume Seiner Liebe diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht...</td>
<td>Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe, von der stillen, von der heiligen Nachtda die Blume Seiner Liebe diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht...</td>
<td>Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe, von der stillen, von der heil'gen Nachtda die Blume Seiner Liebe diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Richard Dehmel
Aber die Liebe 1893

Hans Pfitzner 1901

From Richard Dehmel
Der Verwandlungen der Venus 1907-20

Hans Pfitzner, Meine Liedertexte, 1941
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this essay I have tried to show how fin-de-siècle cultural context in Germany shaped two contemporaneous composers’ settings of two very similar texts. These texts are shown to either reflect or challenge the prevailing moral conservatism of the era through the analysis of their specific contexts. More specifically, contrasting representations of gender are characterized through the simultaneous images of woman as maternal figure and woman as erotically-charged mythological and sexual symbol as read through the texts and their contexts. Each of the composers reacted to the very different reception accorded his specific version and source of the text, and each reaction shows the impact of that reception through each composer’s respective approach to the song’s composition and to its expressive character.

The following specific examples were employed to illustrate these points. I undertook a detailed analysis of the different versions of Richard Dehmel’s poems “Wiegenlied” and “Venus Mater,” and established that these two very similar works were parts of two distinct collections of poetry published in the last decade of the nineteenth century. When examining the social and cultural milieu under which these two volumes were produced, I uncovered drastically different reception histories for the two volumes. These specific differences in reception reveal the ability of texts to transmit ideologies of
gender as well as the enormous significance that representations of gender and sexuality have in the society in which they are received.

Hans Pfitzner’s setting of “Venus Mater” and Richard Strauss’ setting of “Wiegenlied” were also examined. After exploring some general concepts from each composer about the composition of lieder, I reviewed the particular circumstances under which each lied was written by looking at the historical record. I also looked at a number of interpretations of each song from other commentators. From this information, I have concluded that each composition was, at least in part, a reaction to the specific text and its context as well as larger personal and cultural issues in play at the time these were written. Moreover, these differences can be detected by those hearing the music, even if the details behind the compositions are not always understood.

The reader, however, might have some reservation about this study. Indeed, the reader might question how much of this essay has actually dealt with music, and how much with text. The adjectives which differentiate Pfitzner’s composition from Strauss’ – chromaticism vs. diatonicity, density vs. transparency, or complexity vs. linearity – are descriptions which could be applied to any number of musical works, some of which have little to do with gender representation in music. Certainly, they could as easily be applied to musical works which do not have an associated text as they are to a texted work. This dilemma codifies, in some ways, the difficulties that present themselves in trying to explain how (or whether) a non-representational form of expression such as music can be expected to transmit a specific ideology, such as gender.
There still are limitations on our understanding of the relationship of gender and music. Even so, the large number of recent books and articles concerned with the rubric “gender in music” is evidence of the acceptance of this as a legitimate mode of inquiry. This last chapter will review some topics and methodologies concerning the intersection of gender and music in order to understand what the current thinking is on the topic, and where future studies might be headed.

**The Intersection of Gender and Music**

The larger importance of studies of gender and music, as stated eloquently by Ruth Solie (1993, 10) in her introduction to *Musicology and Difference* and quoted in the first chapter, is that music, as an integral part of society and culture, helps both to construct and challenge social roles, including gender, that we all implicitly understand. In interrogating the roles of music in forming gender identities, we will have a clearer vision of our existence.

Some branches of music have already seen extensive work by scholars examining aspects of gender; a small sampling—by no means representative of the breadth of work being done in the field—would find studies as diverse as the transmission of gender ideology through musical genre (Kallberg 1996), the representation of gender via musical form (McClary 1991), the claiming of performance opportunities by women musicians outside canonical institutions (Bowers and Tick 1986), the obstacles encountered by female composers for acceptance into the musical academy (Citron 1993), the representation of gender in musical iconography (Leppert 1988, 1993; Koza
A favorite field of inquiry concerning gender in music is the diversity of aspects which make up opera. However, while opera has held much interest for scholars of gender, the genre of art song has attracted relatively little consideration. Because of the individuality and interiority that is fundamental to the performance of song, it may be more difficult to observe the workings of gender within art-song literature and performance than within opera. Even so, virtually all scholars of gender have contended that gender is “performed” in every human activity, including music, so it should be eventually be as observable in art song as it is in other endeavors which have thus far attracted more attention.

There are some critical readings of art song literature and practice that examine the implications of gender and society in their composition and performance. Ruth Solie’s oft-quoted polemic on Schumann’s Frauenliebe und -leben (Solie 1992) is possibly the best-known analysis of a song cycle from a feminist/gender perspective. Lawrence Kramer has devoted a large part of his output to examinations of the role of gender in songs of Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Wolf (Kramer 1984, 1990, 1994, 1998). Other noteworthy papers include David Gramit’s examination of the transmission of social ideologies, including gender, through the performance of Schubert’s opus 81 songs (Gramit 1995); David Schroeder has examined the idea of the feminine voice speaking through Schubert’s laments (Schroeder 1994); and Kristina Muxfeldt (1996, 2001) has questioned Schubert’s sexuality as transmitted through his lieder, as well as serving as
gender “apologist” for Schumann’s Frauenliebe songs. These papers form a foundation for further work in the area of gender studies in art song literature (particularly that of German lieder), but the field has by no means been exhaustively examined. It is hoped that further studies, including this essay, will help remedy this deficiency.

**Challenges to the Study of Gender and Music**

Musicologists and theorists have observed that music has lagged behind other humanistic studies in its acceptance of cultural methodologies. One explanation comes from the paradigm held by many that the composition, performance, and reception of music transcends history and society, and has the ability to communicate without the encumbrance of cultural specificity. It has been believed that such ideas of musical transcendence arose from the development of music analysis and criticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hanslick, Marx, Dahlhaus, Schenker, and others, while influential in codifying modern analysis and theory, are also criticized by some for their adherence to structure and form and concern for musical autonomy in their evaluation of the communication of musical meaning, because reliance on the autonomy of music is posited by some to hinder the project of alternative methods for understanding the meaning of music.

Even so, a structural emphasis for the interpretation of meaning is not contrary to the project of understanding gender in music. Ellie Hisama defends the utility of structuralist readings of music when used through a lens of feminism:

I do not find it necessary or desirable to stop analyzing music from codified principles – in short, to designate formalism as the Other in feminist music analysis. I want to claim instead that hearing pieces of music as feminists may lead us to reject our traditional analytical tools and
encourage us to develop new ones, which may be formalist as a particular piece warrants. Because some works might exceed our received ways of hearing, theorizing, and critiquing, I believe they deserve consideration through alternative theoretical models. (Hisama 1996, 21)

As music scholarship has grown to accept new and alternative ways of “hearing, theorizing, and critiquing,” gender has become one of the lenses through which music is filtered. The course this has taken looks similar in some ways to the direction of other humanistic disciplines, such as literary criticism and cultural history, in which scholars have dealt with issues of gender through biographical studies, compilations of new works in the field, or revisions of traditional historical accounts. Similar undertakings have taken their place in musicology alongside studies that exist far outside the margins of pure musicological research. Most of this work has not been dogged by controversy. However, what has engendered debate in the world of academic music is an amalgamation which combines critical or analytic stances with the traditional concerns of historical musicology.

In the best construction of what is commonly referred to today under the rubric of “New Musicology,” music analysis takes on a certain quotient of cultural contingency and context; in a similar vein, musicology, rather than being totally positivist or autonomous, is framed by its historical context. Much of what is characterized as New Musicology, of which gender studies are only one part, is really a fusion and a blurring of the borders of what was once purely positivistic historical musicology with both analysis and with social/cultural content. It is reasonable to consider that analysis/theory or musicology does not have to be totally formalist and autonomous, but rather can take on a measure of contingency and context. Multiple alternatives are probably inevitable in
the reading of new works or in new readings of established works. The final conclusion that one may arrive at in pioneering new approaches is that “no final, universally applicable decision on the matter is possible or even desirable” (Cook and Everist 1999, xi, my emphasis).

Because music is simultaneously autonomous (existing as notes on a page) and contingent (existing in time and space as performance and culture), multiple perspectives can simultaneously be “correct.” This is one reason why I feel that music is such a fruitful arena in which to study the representation of gender, and resonates with one of Judith Butler’s core contentions in her classic work *Gender Trouble:*

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (Butler 1990, 16)

The emphasis of traditional musicology on the musical work has occurred in the past because, in part, it did not have the tools to admit cultural and temporal factors into the analysis of music and its interactions with the world; however, this does not negate the findings of traditional musicology as incorrect. Even so, this may leave an uneasy and wary truce between the formalist and contextualized which seems to plague those who use one system or another in the attempt to define “The Meaning of Music.” In the words of Scott Burnham, “one is led to assume that a solution awaits, if only one knew how to read the clues” (Burnham 1999, 197). The fact stated above, that music is both an artifact and a process, allows for more than one solution, and attempts to define it.
absolutely as one way or another are imperfect at best. Jim Samson suggests the reason for our inadequacies of definition:

Music, it might be argued, is so utterly and irreducibly specific, its meaning so embedded in its essence, that we are forced to borrow from other systems of thought in order to attempt any kind of description at all. Straddling several categories of thought, it fits uneasily into any... (Samson 1999, 47)

This hearkens to a much earlier statement from Felix Mendelssohn on the same topic, when he declared “What the music I love expresses to me, is not thought too indefinite to be put into words, but, on the contrary, too definite.” Yet, if one believes that these assertions make it ultimately impossible to speak about music, or for music to somehow speak about the human condition, one should consider Burnham’s assertion that:

Analysis and poetic criticism are not either/or alternatives. One might go further and claim that we need to understand music as music, as an autonomous language, if we want to grant it the power to speak of other things: we could not reasonably expect something without its own voice to comment on anything. Something without its own voice would at best be a mouthpiece for something else. . . . In short, precisely because music is musical, it can speak to us of things that are not strictly musical. This is how we hear music speak . . . by allowing it the opacity of its own voice, and then engaging that voice in ways that reflect both its presence and our own, much as we allow others a voice when we converse with them. . . . Analysis and poetic criticism are thus mutually enhancing, if we allow that we all harbour a sense of music as music as well as a sense of music as speaking to us of things that are not necessarily musical. (Burnham 1999, 215)

What are some of those things of which music can speak to us that are “not necessarily musical”? How does music communicate those things? If we understand that social and cultural factors influence the composition, performance and reception of musical works, then an examination of society and culture can lead us to understand how
music is able to act as a conduit for extra-musical meaning while simultaneously maintaining its status as music. One of the fields in New Musicology that is the most active is the attention to gender’s involvement in the creation of musical and social reality. Much of this work strives to go beyond the limited designation of “women in music” in order to engage with the broader universe of these realities. Often, objections are raised to such an agenda when these studies borrow from other disciplines or speak in idioms not considered strictly musical. Nevertheless, as long as it is allowed that these are not efforts to replace the concerns of traditional musicology, but rather are being pursued in order to enlarge the discipline, these projects are valuable additions. These studies include examinations of the gendered aspects of musical genre, attempts to define gender-related differences in compositions of women and men similar to literary feminist theorists who have posited a specific *écriture féminine*, or “writing as/like a woman” that differs from masculine writing, and alternative theoretical readings of instrumental music from the nineteenth-century canon of musical works. Some of these readings from the standpoint of gender have been so controversial – in particular, Susan McClary’s analysis of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony which purports to detect narratives of masculine domination and violence in accordance with hegemonic ideologies present at the time of composition (McClary 1991, 126-131) – that they have made ideas of New Musicology known outside the academic musical community.

Marianne Kielian-Gilbert makes many compelling arguments for invoking both the cultural and cognitive in more inclusive readings of musical works (Kielian-Gilbert 1997). She examines the mechanisms in which culture (or “extra-musical”) and
cognition (or “formal semiotic”) factors mediate each other, not to the exclusion of either formalism or the experiential. Her allowance of multiplicity in the interpretation of works comes from her ultimate understanding of music as temporal and dynamic, and the further recognition that such choices in interpretation entail certain consequences for the interpreter— even social consequences. This dynamism parallels basic understandings of gender as temporal, social, and contingent. The admission that music can stand up to multiple readings of its texts, whether or not they transcend time or culture, is revolutionary in and of itself. Unlike literary critics, who revel in such multiple readings, musicologists and theorists have often been uncomfortable accepting the validity of alternative interpretations, preferring one definitive statement of the “meaning” of the work (McClary 1993a, 413).

Are we asking the right questions? If the academy is governed by rules that do not allow for alternative questioning, then asking questions that interrogate the representations of gender in music is going to be impossible. However, when the discussion is open to a multifaceted discourse, one which admits both formalist and contingent readings of music as well as other types of inquiries which question the role of gender in creating musical meaning, then modern musical scholarship, for all of its conflicts, will ultimately be rendered richer and more profound. For, if these inquiries are not always indisputable, they certainly prove what McClary stated:

[M]usic does not passively reflect society; it also serves as a public forum within which various models of gender organization (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested, and negotiated. (McClary 1991, 8)
Even with all of the important studies that have occurred in the past decade, there are still numerous questions to be answered about the interaction of gender and music. The transmittal of gender representation through textual-musical relationships is one aspect of these larger questions, and one that I have attempted to address in this essay. A comprehensive theory of how this is done is still anticipated. But if it is admitted that gender can be represented through music, then it is only a matter of time until more sophisticated issues can be addressed.
APPENDIX
Richard Dehmel: “Venus Consolatrix”
Die Verwandlungen der Venus

Venus Consolatrix.

Da kam Stern Lucifer; und meine Nacht erzählte schweigend vor seiner milden Pracht. Er schien auf meine dunkle Zimmerwand, und wie aus unsichtbaren Pfauen durchfloß ich Silberaden die Console, die schwankt, seit lange leer, im Winkel stand.

Auf einmal fing die Säule an zu leben, und eine Frau erhob sich aus dem Glanz; die trug im schwarzen Haupthaar einen Krön von hellen Rosen zwischen grünen Reben. Ihr Morgenkleid von weißem Sammet glänzte so sanft wie meine Heimath in der Neige, die Rüsche aber, die den Hals begrenzte, so blutrot wie die Blüte Alois, und ihre Augen träumten braun im Tief, als ob sie Sehnsucht nach dem Süden schüttel.

Sie breitete mir beide Arme zu, ich sah erstaunt an ihren Handgelenken die starken Pulse springen und sich senken, da nickte sie und sagte zu mir: Du — du bist ruhig und selig, komm.

Da sprach sie wieder und trat her zu mir:

Wer viel geliebt, dem wird auch viel verziehen. Du brauchst das große Leben nicht zu fliehen, durch das dein kleines lebt. O komm, sei fromm!

Willst du mir nicht auch in die Augen sehn? Und meine Blicke bedaten in ihr.

Richard Dehmel- Venus Consolatrix

Da kam Stern Lucifer; und meine Nacht erblaßte scheu vor seiner milden Pracht.
Er schien auf meine dunkle Zimmerwand,
und wie aus unerschöpflicher Phiole
durchflossen Silberadern die Console,
die schwarz, seit lange leer, im Winkel stand.

Auf einmal fing die Säule an zu leben,
und eine Frau erhob sich aus dem Glanz;
die trug im schwarzen Haupthaar einen Kranz
von hellen Rosen zwischen grünen Reben.

Ihr Morgenkleid von weißem Sammet glänzte
so sanft wie meine Heimatflur im Schnee,
und ihre Augen träumten braun ins Tiefe,
as ob da Sehnsucht nach dem Südmeer schliefe.

She spread both arms to me,
surprised, I saw in her wrists
the strong pulses jump and fall,
and her eyes dreamed brown in the depths,
as if longing for sleep there in the south sea.

And silently she lifted the red ruffles
and fumbled with their silken lacing
and opened the dress of white plush
and pointed to me with her finger tips,
softly the shining light of the star kissed
the brown buds of her pale breasts,
then she spoke further: See! this flesh and blood
that once made the tiny Savior holy,
befor I brought him to his great cross,
I, Maria the Nazarenerin-
O see, it is the same fleshly blood,
for which the great Savior was excited/aroused,
befor I laid him in his small grave,
I, Maria the Magdalenerin-
come, get up, and see also My wounds,
and learn redemption and recovery!
Und lächelnd ließ sie alle Kleider fallen
und dehnte sich in ihrer nackten Kraft;
wie heilige Runen standen auf der prallen
Bauchhaut die Narben ihrer Mutterschaft,
in Linien, die verliefen wundersam
bis tief ins schwarze Schleierhaar der Scham.
Da sprach sie wieder und trat her zu mir:
Willst du mir nicht auch in die Augen sehn?!
Und meine Blicke badeten in ihr.

Und eine Sehnsucht: du mußt untergehn,
ließ mich umarmt durch tiefe Meere schweben,
ich selig tiefer, immer tiefer streben,
ich glaube auf den Grund der Welt zu sehn -
weh schüttelt mich ein nie erlebtes Leben,
und ihren Kranz von Rosen und von Reben
umklammernd, während wir verbeben,
stamml ich: o auf - auf - auferstehn! -

And smiling, she dropped all clothing
and stretched in her naked strength;
like holy runes the scars of her maternity
stood on the bulging belly skin,
in lines, they ran wondrously
deeply into the black veil hair of her genitalia.
There she spoke again and stepped up to me:
Do you not also want to look me in the eye?!
And my looks bathed her.

And a longing: you must submerge/sink/drown,
let me float embraced by deep seas,
I blessedly aim deeper and deeper,
I long to believe in the basis of the world-
pain shakes me with a never-experienced life,
and her wreath of roses and shoots
clasping, while we tremble,
I stammer: o- oh-oh- revive me!

The uncensored text of “Venus Consolatrix”
REFERENCES


_______. 1903. Defend “Mary of Magdala”: Sudermann makes a strong speech against the German censor. Edition of March 22, pg. 25.


VITA

Marie Ann Tavianini was born in Los Angeles, California on September 18, 1957. She spent her early years attending the public schools of Washington, Arizona, and California. In 1974 she entered the University of California, San Diego, graduating with a BA in chemistry in 1978. She then entered Purdue University as a graduate student in the Department of Biochemistry, where she was awarded a PhD in biochemistry in 1984. After completing a postdoctoral fellowship in biochemistry at the University of Washington in 1987, she held various research faculty positions in Washington and Florida.

In 1992 she was admitted to the Graduate School of the University of Miami where she was granted a Master of Music degree in 1994 and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 2006.

Permanent address: 1455 Jericho Road, Abington, Pennsylvania 19001