

RUFUS HALLMARK, *FRAUENLIEBE UND LEBEN: CHAMISSO'S POEMS AND SCHUMANN'S SONGS* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). ISBN 978-1-00230-2. 276pp, €99.

Robert Schumann's somewhat controversial song cycle, *Frauenliebe und Leben*, a setting of poetry by Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838), was one of the composer's most popular works in the nineteenth century, extensively performed and admired by audiences. However, for modern audiences, the cycle justifiably causes some mild unease in its decidedly conservative treatment of the milestones in the life of its female protagonist, whose focus is centred entirely on the man she loves. Ruth Solie, in her pioneering research on the cycle, points out that 'today it is awkward to hear the cycle' and observes the intellectual strategies that are employed to help overcome any qualms we might have with the work, such as 'focussing on the music itself'.¹ Elissa Guralnick puts it aptly, 'Glorious music, ridiculous words', and asserts this is a 'near universal response' to the song cycle in the twenty-first century.² Kristina Muxfeldt attests to the negativity that is generally directed at poetry and at Chamisso himself when she states that 'rarely has the reputation of a poet come to be bound so closely to a musical setting as is the case with Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838) and Robert Schumann's song cycle *Frauenliebe und Leben*'.³ The negative reception of the poetry may explain why, despite a surge in scholarly interest in the cycle in recent decades,⁴ there has, until now, been no monograph about the work. Rufus Hallmark's engaging exploration of *Frauenliebe und Leben*, in which he demonstrates his extensive and intimate knowledge of Schumann's compositional processes as well as his passion for the composer's music, is thus timely.

Hallmark is quick to acknowledge the complex nature of the reception of *Frauenliebe und Leben*. He admits that the poetic cycle is 'out of touch with modern sensibilities' (1) and that the work comes 'with a good deal of baggage' (2), with Schumann's music coming 'under suspicion of fostering the outdated attitudes and ideas' (2) just as

¹ Ruth Solie, "'Whose Life?" The Gendered Self in Schumann's *Frauenliebe* Songs', in Steven Paul Scher (ed.), *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 219–40: 220.

² Elissa S. Guralnick, "'Ah Clara, I am not worthy of your love": Rereading "Frauenliebe und Leben", the Poetry and the Music', *Music & Letters*, 87/4 (November 2006), 580–605: 580.

³ Kristina Muxfeldt, '*Frauenliebe und Leben* Now and Then', *19th-Century Music*, 25/1 (2001), 27–48: 27.

⁴ See notes 1–3 above. See also Matthias Walz, '*Frauenliebe und Leben* Op. 42. Biedermeierdichtung, Zykluskonstruktion und musikalische Lyrik', in Gerd Nauhaus (ed.), *Schumann Studien 15. Wissenschaftliche Arbeitstagung zu Fragen der Schumann-Forschung, Zwickau 1992* (Cologne: Studio, 1996), 97–118; and Herbert J. Hopfgartner, 'Adelbert Chamisso: Revolutionär oder Biedermann? Der Liederkreis *Frauenliebe und Leben* im soziokulturelle Diskurs', *Studia Niemcoznawcze*, 37 (2008): 113–129.

much as Chamisso's poetry. But he also acknowledges the tension that exists between our present-day misgivings about the work, given that 'by and large ... neither performers nor audiences reject this cycle', and asks, 'Must we remain at such a dissatisfying impasse?' (2). His self-professed aim is to help the twenty-first-century reader traverse this impasse: 'to suffuse the discussion of *Frauenliebe und Leben* with information about the social, philosophic, poetic, and musical contexts of Chamisso's poetry and Schumann's songs so that we may come to a more balanced view of them' (2).

Following the introduction, which sets forth the rationale and objectives for the book, Chapter 1 is a 'prologue' that provides an ideological overview of the role of women in nineteenth-century German society and thus the context in which to understand the poetry and the music. Hallmark explores the nineteenth-century phenomenon of the 'cult of the family', to borrow Sagarra's term (13), how this provided a source of fulfilment for many women, and how the middle-class family shared a new intimacy that is embodied in the poetry of *Frauenliebe*. He shows how even progressive thinkers accepted the role of wife and mother (18) and admits that we should probably avoid the notion that nineteenth-century women viewed themselves as 'victims of repressive societal attitudes' (20). The reader is reminded that Chamisso was writing when times were changing for women (9), of the transitional nature of the social and cultural context in which *Frauenliebe* was brought to fruition, and of the evolving nature of gender roles at the time. In effect, Hallmark is asking us, the reader, to put our twenty-first-century prejudices aside: the onus is on us to understand the work better, rather than dismiss it as sexist. After all, it is one of the few major musical works of the nineteenth century that at least *attempts* to provide a feminine perspective, and it probably does so as well as two male artists could do.

There then follow two parts that consider the poetry and the music of *Frauenliebe*, with the musical discussion invoking rich textual references. In Chapter 2, Hallmark achieves his stated aim of providing 'the English-speaking reader with a fuller portrait of Adelbert von Chamisso's life and work than can be gleaned from most English-language sources' (2). He deals with Chamisso sympathetically, exploring the poet's complex sense of his own identity, for example, his nationality—he was French, but grew up in Germany; he had an affinity for German language and literature ('I almost feel I am a German poet'), yet was somehow never fully assimilated—and the divided nature of his professional life, which was split between poetry and his career as a botanist. Hallmark highlights and affirms the poet's liberal political sense, which, along with the reference to Werner Feudel's view that his poetry was intended to 'portray life, as it is, not as it should be' (48), helps begin to erode the view of Chamisso as conservative and chauvinistic.

This sense that Chamisso has been misunderstood is reinforced in Chapter 3, which explores poetry concerning women by Chamisso and others (including women themselves), thus providing a wider literary context for *Frauenliebe*. Hallmark presents some interesting insights into Chamisso's views, for example, the revelation that he supported the publication of women's poetry (67). We are shown examples of Chamisso's sympathy with women's situations, such as the lack of autonomy that they often experienced in marriage and relationships (82). The statement that 'the poems of *Frauenliebe und Leben* may grow in estimation of readers when they are compared with some contemporaneous efforts in the same vein as well as with poetry by women' (3) rings true with Hallmark's unveiling of Amadeus Wendt's *Bilder des weiblichen Lebens* as a 'likely model for and as a foil to Chamisso's famous cycle' (96). Wendt's cycle tends toward the mediocre, where the 'characters and situations seem merely to be excuses for Wendt's Polonius-like pronouncements' (100). Bearing in mind Feudel's earlier statement apropos Chamisso's poetry, Hallmark reminds us that:

Chamisso composed the *Frauenliebe* poems as part of an unconscious 'project' to depict many different characters from contemporary German middle-class society, including women; because few women were publishing verse that proclaimed women's thoughts and feelings; and because he found Wendt's *Bilder* utterly regrettable and knew he could do something much better in the same vein. (107–8)

Part II of the book, dealing with the music, begins with Chapter 4. Exploring the musical reception of *Frauenliebe*, it reveals the extent of the popularity of Chamisso's poetry among composers, both well-known figures such as Liszt and Loewe, and lesser-known ones such as Franz Kugler and Franz Lachner. His contemporary status as 'one of Germany's favorite writers' (136) contrasts markedly with the negative reception of his poetry today.

In Chapter 5, 'Schumann at work on his songs', Hallmark shares his rich insights into the manuscripts sources for *Frauenliebe*. He undertakes a painstaking investigation of the manuscripts and unveils the mastery and subtlety of Schumann's compositional processes. As Hallmark admits, his taste for detail may be something of an 'acquired taste'. Nevertheless, his level of acquaintance with the primary sources richly informs the later analytical work.

Chapter 6 contains nuanced analyses and comparative interpretations of various settings of Chamisso's cycle. The analyses comprehensively reflect on the songs, showing their psychological insight and literary awareness. Hallmark highlights the profound mastery of Schumann's cycle—his interpretation of 'Seit ich ihn gesehen' is the most 'psychologically incisive and sympathetic' (177)—though without dismissing settings by other composers. Indeed, the array of songs explored reveals Chamisso's poetry to be a rich source of inspiration for many composers.

Hallmark brings a human understanding to the song cycle, helping us to realize that the poems are ‘more realistic than they are often taken to be’, and he inspires the reader to delve in the songs, which he entitles ‘wonders of nuanced expressiveness’ (235). He proposes some alternative readings to those of his colleagues. For example, he challenges Solie’s reading of ‘Er, der herrlichste von allen’, suggesting that the reprise of the modified version of the first stanza is the ‘irrepressible excitement and returning hope of the protagonist’ (185) rather than the assertion of patriarchal rule. He also bears in mind the performer, providing some useful guidance on interpretation, and arguing against some existing practices in performing the songs. For instance, the tendency in recordings to interpret the *larghetto* tempo marking as too slow is ‘deleterious to the musical effects Schumann composed’ in ‘Seit ich ihn gesehen’ (164).

Hallmark consults an impressive array of sources in both English and German, from the nineteenth century to the present day, alongside Schumann’s manuscript sources. The link to adjunct online resources containing additional texts, music examples and illustrations is useful and to be welcomed. A ‘select’ bibliography provides a comprehensive list of sources for those interested in pursuing further research on the cycle. The various headings in this bibliography are useful, although readers would have benefitted from one that was devoted to the *Frauenliebe* cycle itself.

Beautifully presented, well-structured and generally user-friendly, this book is an important addition to the rich output of recent English-language scholarship on the German Lied. It accomplishes an expanded and informative interpretation of Chamisso, allowing us to understand *Frauenliebe* in terms of his whole *œuvre* rather than judge him by this cycle alone; and thus reinforced, we are enabled to draw fresh insights into the poetry. In this respect, and in taking poetry as the starting point in its consideration of Lieder, Hallmark’s book is reminiscent of Susan Youens’s groundbreaking work in reimagining the reception of the previously lesser known (and less appreciated) Wilhelm Müller in relation to Schubert’s settings of *Winterreise* and *Die Schöne Müllerin*.⁵ Hallmark tellingly declares that ‘if Schumann’s settings of Chamisso’s *Frauenliebe* poems are still to be performed, then modern performers and audiences alike, if they have qualms, must somehow make their peace with them’ (161). But it is perhaps more significant and important that the work continues to

⁵ See Susan Youens, *Retracing a Winter’s Journey: Franz Schubert’s Winterreise* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) and *Schubert: Die Schöne Müllerin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Among other contemporary Lieder scholars, see also Lorraine Byrne Bodley, *Schubert’s Goethe Settings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

provoke reaction, for, to borrow Solie's term, the cultural 'work' of the song cycle is no less important than its aesthetic value. Given the current atmosphere of exploring the cultural and social value of the Lied, it is appropriate that *Frauenliebe*, a problematic but nonetheless beloved song cycle, has inspired as comprehensive a scholarly exploration as many of the other major song cycles.⁶ Hallmark's book embodies an extensive scholarly treatment of the work that is sympathetic and rigorous in its approach. I have no doubt that it will become a key reference for *Frauenliebe und Leben*, and will be an invaluable resource for students, scholars and performers.

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⁶ See note 5 and also Beate Julia Perrey, *Schumann's Dichterliebe and Early Romantic Poetics: Fragmentation of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).