A Novel Approach:

Exploring Novels as Text Sources in Art Song

by

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ABSTRACT

Oxford's Grove Dictionary of Music describes art song as "song intended for the concert repertory, as opposed to a traditional or popular song," but despite this broad definition, poetry is the primary text source for art song. Poetry is stereotypically considered more suitable for art song because of its rhythm, meter, and rhyme. However, poems are not the only sources for art songs.

Many examples of prose are used in song, such as Libby Larsen's *Try Me, Good King*! which sets the last words of the wives of Henry XIII, and Patrice Michaels' *The Long View: A Portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Nine Songs*, which sets texts from Justice Ginsburg's life. Despite the wealth of potentials texts, there are not many songs set to text from novels. Even setting letters is more common than novel excerpts, including Stacy Garrop's *My Dearest Ruth* and Libby Larsen's *Songs from Letters*.

There may be concerns which prevent text from novels being set to song, for example, the short length of a song may limit its ability to contextualize plot or character relationships. Composers and performers may also face challenges in approaching narration or dialogue from multiple characters to be sung by only one voice. Additionally, prose often contains more filler words and colloquial language. All of these are challenges which must be faced when adapting and performing text from novels.

Despite these challenges, using text from novels can be a rewarding experience for musicians and audiences, as they bring to life the drama and emotion of a character. Some authors, such as Jane Austen, use novels to reflect their characters' worlds as well as their own cultures and societies. Paired with art song, an intimate way of sharing

human experiences with audiences, songs with text from novels have the potential to become profound snapshots of a character or author's world.

This paper will discuss art songs with prose text excerpted from novels and will analyze sources of both poetry and prose to determine if there are fundamental textual differences which prevent the performance of songs with text from novels.

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INTRODUCTION

Art song is a medium which takes two components, text and music, and treats them as equal partners. In performing art song, the text is just as important to the study of a piece as the music itself. The text is usually the first part of the product to exist, and the inspiration for the composer to bring their creativity and style to serve the words and the story.[1]

While there are no parameters requiring that art song be composed to poetic texts, the majority of music in the art song repertoire is set to poetry. Some of the stereotypical assumptions about poetry that one might argue make it more suitable as a text source for song are the ideas that poetry is purely emotional and self-contained, meaning that it has the ability to stand alone with no additional context required. However, these concepts are not necessarily inherent in the text itself and come from analysis of texts made by poets and theorists in the seventeenth century.[2] These theories are generalizations and are not always true, as there are many different styles and forms of poetry. For example, not all poetry is inherently emotional. In fact, many poets do not fall into this stereotype of writing poems that are purely centered around emotion. Langston Hughes, for example, sometimes wrote poems which were often reflective and full of "profound simplicity."[3] Gertrude Stein is another example, taking inspiration from Cubism in the way that she

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[1] Carol Kimball, *Art Song: Linking Poetry and Music* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2013), 18.

[2] Eva Müller-Zettelmann and Margarete Rubik, *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 7-10.

[3] "Langston Hughes," Poetry Foundation, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/langston-hughes.

utilizes words in a way that is intentionally abstract and atmospheric as she describes a subject.[4]

Despite the fact that poetry and prose have different structures, varying in form, length, and style, both forms have the ability to convey strong emotion. Impassioned speeches, personal letters, and the feelings, conflicts, and tensions of fictional characters are all examples of ways in which prose can invoke deep emotion from readers. Though narrative fiction may be considered by some to be less authentic because an author has fabricated characters, settings, and plots, this does not account for the fact that authors often infuse their own voices and experiences into their work. It also makes the incorrect assumption that poetry cannot be fictional. For instance, Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and Poe's *The Raven* are popular narrative poems which tell a historical story in the case of the former and a supernatural story in the latter.

There are many forms of prose writing including narrative fiction such as novels or short stories, as well as letters, diaries, essays, speeches, plays, and even cookbooks, and therefore there are many diverse types of prose that can be set to song. Some composers are extremely creative when choosing text to set. For example, American composer Gabriel Kahane set text found on Twitter for a cycle titled *Twitterkrei*s, and also composed *Craigslistleider*, set to ads found on Craigslist. In this paper I will analyze various texts to examine the differences between poetry and prose in order to discover if novels are appropriate text sources for art songs. I will also discuss existing art song repertoire set to prose from novels. For the purposes of this paper, my analysis will focus on texts originally written in English.

[4] "Gertrude Stein," Poetry Foundation, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/gertrude-stein.

NOVELS AND ART SONG – AN INTIMATE PAIRING

It is much more typical to see novels adapted into operas, rather than excerpted for art songs. Notable examples of this in English include Mark Adamo's *Little Women,* Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd*, and Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men*. Opera gives composers and performers the ability to bring the full picture of a novel to life with sets, costumes, and all of the characters fully realized. Conversely, while the short nature of art song provides constraint in terms of time and length of text, it gives performers the opportunity to isolate one meaningful moment of a story. This isolation can allow audiences to connect with the text and character on a smaller, more personal level than in an opera. Additionally, art songs provide opportunities to bring portions of novels to audiences without need for the time or resources necessary to produce an opera.

As a genre, art song is an intimate medium. Composer John Musto describes song as a "quiet" medium, an "intimate communion" between the composer, author, performers, and audience.[5] The use of piano and voice together along with the voice's unique capability to include text in music gives art song the opportunity to convey deep storytelling and emotion. It also has the ability to give voice to characters and, through those characters, their authors.

Novels, while by definition are fictional stories with invented characters, can often be reflections of their author's lives and feelings, created in the context of culture and society of the time period in which they were written. It is common for some authors,

[5] John Musto, "Foreword," essay, in *Listening to Art Song: An Introduction* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), ix.

whether consciously or unconsciously, to infuse aspects of themselves into their stories and characters.[6]

The way in which authors express their experiences through literature may vary. Sometimes, the general sentiment and environment of a novel are reflections of an author's lived experience, such as in *Little Women*. The story of an American family with four sisters, one of whom is a tomboy and a writer, is extremely close to the details of author Louisa May Alcott's life. Similarly, in her novels, Jane Austen places focus on women and their relationships not just with romantic suitors, but also with other women, particularly depicting the bonds between sisters. This could be considered a reflection of Austen's own life, as she was close with her own sister Cassandra and never married. However, in addition to writing about personal relationships, Austen also comments on Regency Era society and the roles of women in it through her writing. Her novel *Northanger Abbey* takes a satirical view of society and its expectations of men and women in featuring Catherine Morland. Austen's overly dramatic and naïve heroine is contrasted with her love interest Henry Tilney, who plays the role of the stereotypical man interested in a woman to whom he can be seen as more intelligent and superior in comparison.[7] In this way, Austen reflects her experiences as a woman in Regency England, as well as expressing her view on society through her characters and their circumstances. While of course not all novels reflect an author's beliefs or their world,

[6] Idha Nurhamidah, Sugeng Purwanto, and Nur Ekaningsih, "A Literary Work as Self-Reflection of the Author: Why and How It Is Manifested," *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature and Culture* 4, no. 2 (September 4, 2019): 194, https://doi.org/10.30659/e.4.2.194-203.
[7] Beth Lau, "Sexual Selection and Female Choice in Austen's Northanger Abbey," *Studies in the Novel* 50, no. 4 (2018): 465–82, https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2018.0038, 476.

some authors include pieces of themselves, their environments, and their cultures through their work.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POETRY AND PROSE AS SOURCES FOR ART SONG TEXT

In her book *Art Song: Linking Poetry and Music*, vocal repertoire scholar Carol Kimball writes, "poetry is simply language," and "all words have a rhythm and sound inflection of their own."[8] Yet, if all words have rhythm and inflection, why do composers use text from literature so infrequently?

Table 1 is a list of the top twenty most popular authors of English novels in the public domain, as stated by Project Gutenberg, the oldest digital library which contains full texts of works in the public domain. Data for this table was compiled using the LiederNet Archive. While this is not a fully comprehensive source, LiederNet is a reputable database frequently used by performers to find and catalog art songs and is helpful to understand the frequency these authors' works are used as text sources.

While not every author included in Table 1 wrote poetry, of those that did, nearly all of them had their poetry set more often than excerpts from their novels. The most notable example of this is R.L. Stevenson. Despite having published ten novels, among them the popular *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Stevenson's prose is only found once in the LiederNet Archive, while his poetry is found in over 500 settings. Yet even in this one instance, a song titled *Pirate Song* by Henry F. Gilbert, the text is taken from a poem within a novel. *Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest* is a song from Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, written with the form and rhyme

[8] Carol Kimball, *Art Song: Linking Poetry and Music*, 29.

scheme of a poem. Another example of this is Ernst Bacon's *Billy in the Darbies*, which takes text from Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*. The excerpt set by Bacon is the final text found in the novel, written by the author as a ballad of the same title as Bacon's song. While these texts are technically from novels, they are both poems within novels and are therefore not examples of art song settings of prose.

Author	**Settings from Novels**	**Settings from Poetry**
Jane Austen	0	0
Charles Dickens	12*	8
Mary Shelley	2	0
Mark Twain	8*	3
Herman Melville	2*	7
Oscar Wilde	0	112
L.M. Montgomery	0	0
George Eliot	2	8
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle	0	2
E.M. Forster	0	0
Lewis Carroll	43*	40
Elizabeth Gaskell	0	0

R.L. Stevenson	1*	500+
Elizabeth von Arnim	1	0
H.G. Wells	0	0
Henry Fielding	0	0
Nathaniel Hawthorne	0	0
H.P. Lovecraft	0	0
Edgar Allen Poe	0	81
F. Scott Fitzgerald	1*	0

*number includes settings of poems existing within a novel
Table 1

What is it then that makes poetry so much more appealing for art song than prose? This may be because poetry is known for its use of symbolism and language that has meaning beyond the words, therefore possessing the ability to represent distinct concepts or emotions.[9] Encyclopedia Britannica defines poetry as "literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm."[10] However, evoking imagination and emotion and arranging language are not techniques used exclusively by poets. Writers of prose are also capable of evoking strong emotions from

[9] Anne-Sophie Bories and Pablo Ruiz Fabo. *Computational Stylistics in Poetry, Prose, and Drama*. Berlin/Boston. 2022. 38.
[10] H. Nemerov. "Poetry." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2024.

readers, and also consider their words and the contour and sound of sentences carefully, despite a lack of rhythm, meter, or rhyme.

As a generalization, prose tends to be more similar to everyday speech, while poetry is often constrained by forms such as rhythm and meter and can be described as having a "heightened artificiality" in the way the words are manipulated to conform to these formats.[11] The natural rhythm of a poem, as well as its delineation of stanzas which can correspond to musical phrases or sections, is one of the main reasons poetry may be considered more musical. This musicality in poetry is found even amongst readers, who are not singing or speaking a poem aloud, and yet experience patterns in sound and contour of phrases.[12] Unlike most prose, poems are already meant to be experienced off the page and read aloud. Not only can speaking aloud help singers better understand a poem, but it can also give insight into the natural rhythm of the words and how the poet may have meant them to be heard.[13]

Poems also typically have a set form or structure, whether in rhyme scheme or in form, such as a sonnet, villanelle, or haiku. These elements often result in poetry being highly structured with forms that are easy to quantify and measure.[14] These structures sometimes lend themselves well to music; for example, many composers take strophic poetry and write strophic songs. Regardless of form, poetry possesses a cadence that lends itself naturally to song. When reading or speaking a poem, the reader assumes that

[11] Müller-Zettelmann and Rubik, *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*, 8.
[12] Stefan Blohm et al., "Reading Poetry and Prose: Eye Movements and Acoustic Evidence," *Discourse Processes* 59, no. 3 (January 25, 2022): 159–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853x.2021.2015188, 160-161.
[13] Carol Kimball, *Art Song: Linking Poetry and Music*, 52-54.
[14] Bories and Ruiz Fabo, *Computational Stylistics in Poetry, Prose, and Drama*, 1.

this cadence is intentional and that any manipulations of natural speech patterns or uses of improper grammar are meant by the poet to draw attention and meaning.[15]

One of the most notable considerations when setting prose is that the length of a poem differs from that of a novel or even a letter or speech. It is often easier to choose a poem to set to song that is a few pages long at maximum, as opposed to choosing an excerpt from a 60,000-word novel. However, one of the advantages of setting prose text is its closeness to speech which often possesses a conversational quality. Composer Libby Larsen, known for setting both poetry and prose, says, "I don't feel that composers have an obligation to write music that is accessible to the average person, but it's long been a desire of mine to do so."[16] Conversely, the previously described manipulations found in poetry can be considered to be a form of forcing language "beyond its communicative limits,"[17] which means performers may run the risk of alienating audiences, who might not connect to or understand the text being presented.

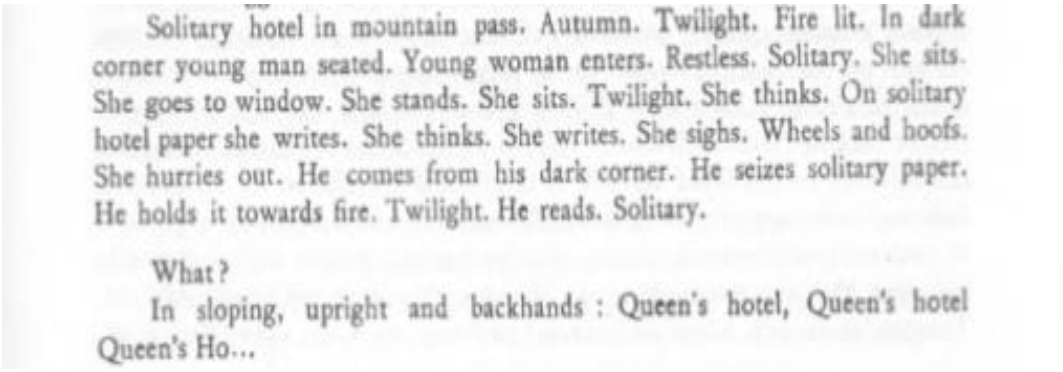
WHAT IS PROSE?

The definition of prose is quite broad, described as a "form of written language that is not organized according to the formal patterns of verse; although it will have some sort of rhythm and some devices of repetition and balance, these are not governed by a regularly sustained formal arrangement, the significant unit being the sentence rather than the line." This means that prose can come from a number of sources, such as diary or journal entries, letters, articles, nonfiction books, plays, autobiographies, instructional

[15] Bories and Ruiz Fabo, *Computational Stylistics in Poetry, Prose, and Drama*, 38.
[16] G.P., Zavracky, *Libby Larsen's My Antonia: The Song Cycle and the Tonal Landscape of the American Prairie* (2014), 7.
[17] Müller-Zettelmann and Rubik, *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*, 7.

texts, children's books, short stories, or full-length novels. Unlike poetry, prose is made up of paragraphs rather than stanzas and sentences rather than lines. While most poetry contains definitive line breaks and lines that are similar in length to one another, prose has much more variation in sentence structure and length.

Much of the difference between poetry and prose lies in the audience's perception of the genre. In poetry, readers may expect the material to be more metaphorical or to contain more use of symbolism and less literal meaning. Often, simply rearranging the words from a novel into stanzas or lines may give it the feeling of a poem.[18] For example, the text for Samuel Barber's song "Solitary Hotel" from *Despite and Still* is taken from James Joyce's novel *Ulysses.* In Joyce's original printing of this text, it is formatted in the following way:[19]



Solitary hotel in mountain pass. Autumn. Twilight. Fire lit. In dark corner young man seated. Young woman enters. Restless. Solitary. She sits. She goes to window. She stands. She sits. Twilight. She thinks. On solitary hotel paper she writes. She thinks. She writes. She sighs. Wheels and hoofs. She hurries out. He comes from his dark corner. He seizes solitary paper. He holds it towards fire. Twilight. He reads. Solitary.

What?

In sloping, upright and backhands : Queen's hotel, Queen's hotel Queen's Ho...

Figure 1

In writing out the text, Barber formats the words like a poem. Compare in Table 2 the text of "Solitary Hotel" as Barber writes it out, with another work by James Joyce, his poem "Night Piece."[20]

[18] X. J. Kennedy, Dana Gioia, and Dan Stone, *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing* (Boston: Pearson, 2020), 1009.
[19] James Joyce, *Ulysses,* Shakespeare and Company, Paris, 1922.
[20] James Joyce, "Night Piece," Poetry Foundation.

“Solitary Hotel” – excerpt from *Ulysses* -James Joyce	“Night Piece” – poem -James Joyce
Solitary hotel in mountain pass. Autumn. Twilight. Fire lit. In dark corner young man seated. Young woman enters. Restless. Solitary. She sits. She goes to window. She stands. She sits. Twilight. She thinks. On solitary hotel paper she writes. She thinks. She writes. She sighs. Wheels and hoofs. She hurries out. He comes from his dark corner. He seizes solitary paper. He holds it towards fire. Twilight. He reads. Solitary. What? In sloping, upright and backhands: Queen's hotel, Queen's hotel, Queen's Ho…	Gaunt in gloom, The pale stars their torches, Enshrouded, wave. Ghostfires from heaven's far verges faint illume, Arches on soaring arches, Night's sindark nave. Seraphim, The lost hosts awaken To service till In moonless gloom each lapses muted, dim, Raised when she has and shaken Her thurible. And long and loud, To night's nave upsoaring, A starknell tolls As the bleak incense surges, cloud on cloud, Voidward from the adoring Waste of souls.

Table 2

With Joyce’s words from *Ulysses* written in this format, a reader who did not know that “Solitary Hotel” was an excerpt from a novel might assume that this was a

poem. The repetitions of text, alliterations such as “seizes solitary,” as well as the fragmented sentences like “Restless. Solitary.” are qualities one might associate with poetry. Joyce uses similar techniques in “Night Piece.” He fragments sentences, uses words descriptive words such as “sindark, enshrouded, and illume.” But there is nothing in the poem aside from the format of seven lines per stanza which makes the text notably different from the novel excerpt without the context of the rest of Joyce’s story.

Carol Kimball writes that “because they lack regular poetic meter” settings of prose “will be quite different in metric organization, and in other musical elements.” However, she also states that some composers “approach their texts without regard for the natural inflection and stress of words—either by choice or lack of sensitivity.”[21] While many composers write music using the meter and inflection of the poetry, others may not. If this is the case, is there a notable difference between composers setting prose and composers setting a poem without regard to the rhythm or meter?

TEXT ANALYSIS

In order to explore the differences in texts, I have chosen the following examples from a poem, a letter, and a novel to analyze: *A Winter Night*, a poem by Sara Teasdale, *He Never Misses*, a letter written by Calamity Jane (Martha Jane Canary Hickock) to her daughter Janey, and *Enfold,* an excerpt from Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening*.

A Winter Night, by Sara Teasdale (set by several composers including Lori Laitman and John Duke), consists of three stanzas each containing four lines of similar lengths, and an ABCB rhyme scheme. Though it is written in first person, there is a formality to the words, and the text seems to lilt as one speaks it.

[21] Kimball, A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature, 17.

A Winter Night – Sara Teasdale:[22]

My window-pane is starred with frost,
The world is bitter cold tonight,
The moon is cruel, and the wind
Is like a two-edged sword to smite.

God pity all the homeless ones,
The beggars pacing to and fro.
God pity all the poor to-night
Who walk the lamp-lit streets of snow.

My room is like a bit of June,
Warm and close-curtained fold on fold,
But somewhere, like a homeless child,
My heart is crying in the cold.

The song "He Never Misses" is from Libby Larsen's *Songs from Letters,* based on letters from Calamity Jane to her daughter Janey. The letter reads as though the author is speaking directly to Janey, resulting in a close, intimate emotion through the use of first person as Jane describes an encounter with Bill. The sentence lengths also vary in a way that is more typical of prose than of poetry. The author begins with similar, mid-length sentences, followed by a short one. She then uses ellipses and creates a longer sentence, followed by another mid-length sentence. This is similar to the way someone would actually recount a story and seems more informal than a poem.

He Never Misses – Calamity Jane:[23]

I met your father 'Wild Bill Hickok' near Abilene. A bunch of outlaws were planning to kill him. I crawled through the brush to warn him. Bill killed them all. I'll never forget...blood running down his face while he used two guns. He never aimed and he was never known to miss.

[22] "A Winter Night by Sara Teasdale," by Sara Teasdale, All Poetry, https://allpoetry.com/poem/8504503-A-Winter-Night-by-Sara-Teasdale.
[23] "He Never Misses," Song of America, https://songofamerica.net/song/he-never-misses/.

Cara Haxo's *Enfold,* a vocal chamber music piece for soprano, two flutes, clarinet, and viola, uses text from the beginning of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening.*[24] The prose here is lush and descriptive, the voice of a third-person omniscient narrator rather than dialogue or a specific character's point of view. There is no poetic structure or rhyme scheme, and the sentence lengths vary, but the text has some poetic elements with vivid depictions of the sea and its sounds.

> *The Awakening – Kate Chopin*:[25]
> The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring […] in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

At a glance, it would be difficult to know whether or not this excerpt is prose or poetry. In fact, the composer writes the words out in the following format:

> *Enfold – Cara Haxo*:[26]
> The voice of the sea is seductive.
> never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring […]
> in abysses of solitude.
> to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.
>
> The voice of the sea speaks to the soul.
> The touch of the sea is sensuous,
> enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

With the text written in such a way, as though the words make up stanzas in a freeform poem, there is not much to distinguish it between poetry and prose, and therefore no argument against setting Chopin's words on account of them being prose and not poetry.

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[24] Haxo's *Enfold* is a work of vocal chamber music, rather than an art song. However, Haxo's excerpting and restructuring of the text for the vocalist is similar to the way one might approach the text of an art song.
[25] Kate Chopin, *The awakening*. Lexington, KY: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.
[26] "Enfold," Cara Haxo, https://www.chaxomusic.com/enfold.html.

THE CHALLENGES OF SETTING PROSE

One of the main challenges in setting prose rather than poetry is the lack of rhythm and rhyme. Additionally, sentence structure in prose can be much more irregular and varied, both in length and in style. The colloquial style of prose, more similar to speech than poetry, often results in the use of more filler words. These words are quick to skim over in reading but are often omitted in poetry for the sake of fluidity. In 2022, a study was conducted by researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics and the University of South Australia School of Psychology to examine the eye movements of participants while reading both poetry and prose. They concluded that when reading, words were most frequently skipped over by participants while reading prose. The words skipped were typically "short critical function words."[27]

Included within "short critical function words" are conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and determiners, which are articles (a, an, the), possessives (ours, yours, mine, hers), demonstratives (this, that, these), and quantifiers (many, all, few). These frequently overlooked words are found more often in prose than in poetry. Take, for example, Emily Dickinson's poem *Will there really be a Morning?,* set by numerous composers including Lori Laitman, John Duke, and Ricky Ian Gordon, and a passage from George Eliot's *Adam Bede,* set by composer Tom Cipullo. In each example, I have shown the short critical function words bracketed in bold.

Will there really be a Morning? – Emily Dickinson:[28]

Will there really be **[a]"**Morning"?
Is there such [**a]** thing [**as]** "Day"?

[27] Blohm et al, Reading Poetry and Prose, 173.
[28] "Will There Really Be a Morning?," Song of America, February 11, 2018, https://songofamerica.net/song/will-there-really-be-a-morning/.

Could **[I]** see **[it from the]** mountains?
If [**I]** were [**as]** tall **as [they]**?

Has [**it]** feet like Water lilies?
Has **[it]** feathers like [**a]** Bird?
Is [**it]** brought [**from]** famous countries?
[Of] which [**I]** have never heard?

Oh some Scholar! Oh some Sailor!
Oh some Wise Men [**from the]** skies!
Please [**to]** tell [**a]** little Pilgrim
Where [**the]** place called "Morning" lies!

Rapture – George Eliot:[29]
[Our] caresses, **[our]** tender words, **[our]** still rapture **[under the]** influence **[of]** autumn sunsets, **[or]** pillared vistas, **[or]** calm majestic statues, **[or]** Beethoven symphonies, **[all]** bring **[with them the]** consciousness **[that they]** are mere waves **[and]** ripples **[in an]** unfathomable ocean **[of]** love **[and]** beauty; **[our]** emotion **[in its]** keenest moment passes **[from]** expression **[to]** silence, **[our]** love **[at its]** highest flood rushes **[beyond its]** object **[and]** loses **[itself in the]** sense **[of]** divine mystery.

These two passages have nearly the same word count, 76 words for Dickinson and 75 for Eliot, yet the Dickinson poem contains 23 short critical function words while the Eliot passage has 35. Without these words, sentences are more compact and naturally give focus to more descriptive words. This means that when composing a melody with prose, composers often have to find natural ways to incorporate these filler words, or they must take the time to edit the text to eliminate them.

In David Evan Thomas's song "A Ghost Story" from *Moonlight on a Midnight Stream,* the composer removes some of these short critical function words. Below is the original text from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, with the words omitted by Thomas bracketed and in bold.

[29] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, London: Penguin, 2008.

Frankenstein – Mary Shelley:[30]

I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark **[of being]** into the lifeless thing **[that lay]** at my feet. It was already one in the morning; **[the]** rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, **[and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.]** How **[can I]** describe my emotions **[at this catastrophe, or]** how delineate the wretch **[whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful.]** Beautiful! Great God! **[His]** yellow skin scarcely **covered [the work of]** muscles **[and]** arteries **[beneath]; [his]** hair **[was of]** a lustrous black, and flowing; **[his]** teeth **[of a]** pearly whiteness.

Many of these changes involve removing short critical function words (of, that, the, and, his, beneath), but others such as "at this catastrophe" remove details that aren't necessarily imperative to the text. This is an example of a way some composers choose to adapt prose using techniques that are not as common when setting poetry.

[30] Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*. New York: New American Library, 2000.

CHAPTER 2

PROSE IN ART SONG

TYPES OF PROSE TEXTS

As there are many different forms of prose, composers have a wide variety of texts to choose from when composing songs. Common prose sources set in the art song repertoire include letters, diary or journal entries, speeches, or essays. For example, there are numerous settings of passages from letters, including Libby Larsen's *Songs from Letters*, Stacy Garrop's *My Dearest Ruth*, Juliana Hall's *A Northeast Storm* and *Letters from Edna*, and Lori Laitman's *Into Eternity*.[31] Diaries are also popular in song, such as in Dominck Argento's *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, as well as speeches, including Patrice Michael's "On Working Together" from *The Long View: A Portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Nine Songs, and* Libby Larsen's "Anne Boleyn" from *Try Me, Good King.* Additionally, essays have been used as a source for art songs, such as Lori Laitman's *Beauty,* a letter excerpted from an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson, and *Dear Future Roommate*, an excerpt from Mike Goia's college admissions essay.

This is not a comprehensive list, but a few representative examples of the non-poetic text sources in the art song repertoire. While there are still challenges in setting prose sources which do not exist in poetry, excerpts from diaries, letters, and speeches are much more commonly found in the art song repertoire than excerpts from novels. One reason for the lack of settings from novels is length. However, despite typically being

[31] A. Chan, "Unusual Song Texts: Selected 20th- and 21st-Century American Art Song Repertoire Using Non-Poetic Texts," *UNUSUAL SONG TEXTS: SELECTED 20TH- AND 21ST-CENTURY AMERICAN ART SONG REPERTOIRE USING NON-POETIC TEXTS* (dissertation, University of Maryland (College Park, Md.), 2023).

shorter than novels, other prose sources are still long in comparison to most poems, and often need to be excerpted or modified. In Dominick Argento's *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, for example, only one of the songs is a direct quotation from Woolf's diary. The others are adaptations which the composer created by cutting bits and pieces of the text to create his own version of Woolf's writings.[32] This trimming and reordering of text is much more common in prose than in poetry. Removing words from a poem might eliminate some of the emotion or tension which the poet is trying to convey. However, in a longer prose text, omitting words which are less important to the emotion or story can help tighten the dramatic effect of a text.

Each of the aforementioned songs brings with it tension and passion from the context of the situation. For example, Stacy Garrop's *My Dearest Ruth* is a setting of Martin Ginsburg's last written words, a letter to his wife, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. This text was written while Ginsburg was in the hospital before he passed away from testicular cancer at the age of seventy-eight.

> *My Dearest Ruth – Martin Ginsburg:*[33]
> My Dearest Ruth,
> You are the only person I have loved in my life, setting aside, a bit, parents and kids and their kids. I have admired and loved you almost from the day we first met some fifty-six years ago. What a treat it has been to watch you progress to the very top of the legal world!! I will be in the hospital until Friday. Between then and now I shall think hard on my remaining health and life, and whether on balance the time has come for me to tough it out or to take leave of life. The loss of quality now simply overwhelms. I hope you will support where I come out, but I understand you may not. I will not love you a jot less.
> Signed,
> Marty

[32] Jacquelyn Matava, *Dominick Argento's From the Diary of Virginia Woolf: A Preparation Guide for Performers* (2014), 8-9.
[33] Stacy Garrop, *My Dearest Ruth*, Inkjar Publishing Company, 2013.

This text does not need a poetic form in order to deliver the emotion to the audience, as the raw and straightforward style of Ginsburg's writing as he speaks to his wife of over fifty years does that on its own.

NON-FICTION VS. FICTION

In works such as autobiographies, the lines between non-fiction and fiction can become blurred. While a work such as Brenda Ueland's 1938 autobiography set by Libby Larsen in her cycle *Me (Brenda Ueland)* is an account of real events and emotions from a person's past, most people do not have accurate memory of exact events or precise quotations which were spoken to them. In this way, the words of an autobiography give the reader insight into the writer's emotions and experience of an event, but the events and words themselves are fictionalized, in a sense. Similarly, events described in letters or journals face the same issues. As most people do in everyday speech and storytelling, events get filtered through the author's own lens of emotion and past experience, creating a text that is at least somewhat fictional, whether that is the writer's intention or not.[34]

On the text level, dialogue is not technically much different from a letter or a journal entry. In a letter or diary, authors often write as though they are speaking directly to the reader, just as a character in a novel or a play would speak to another character. For example, Patrice Michael's song cycle *The Long View: A Portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Nine Songs* uses a speech written by Martin Ginsburg which was delivered posthumously by Justice Ginsburg.

[34] Aino Koivisto and Elise Nykänen, "Introduction: Approaches to Fictional Dialogue," *International Journal of Literary Linguistics* 5, no. 2 (May 17, 2016), https://doi.org/10.15462/ijll.v5i2.56, 11-12.

The text of the following speech, excerpted below, reads as though Ginsburg is speaking directly to the audience, which of course he would have been in the moment of the actual address. This speech could be easily mistaken for dialogue from a play, film, or novel.

> *From "On Working Together" – Martin Ginsburg:*[35]
> So, as you can see, in bringing that tax case to Ruth's big room forty years ago, I changed history. For the better. And, therefore, I shall claim, I thereby rendered significant service to our Nation. All in all, great accomplishments from a case where the tax in dispute totaled exactly two hundred ninety-six dollars and seventy cents.

Though the prose texts discussed in the earlier examples are taken from the words of real people, rather than fictional characters, a singer would still need to do a character study and attempt to embody the person whose words they are going to sing.[36] Like Ginsburg's speech, many of these works read in a similar fashion to dialogue. Yet, it is not as common to set dialogue, or even to set text from novels which are written to emulate a diary format, such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights.* Nor are there many examples of settings of text from epistolary novels, despite the popularity of works such as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. Some authors, such as Jane Austen, do not write an entire novel in an epistolary style, but include letters in their text. In fiction, letters serve a narrative purpose but can also give insight on historical context of the time period in which the book is set and societal expectations in relationships.[37]

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[35] Patrice Michaels, *The Long View: A Portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Nine Songs*, 2017.
[36] Jacquelyn Matava, *Dominick Argento's From the Diary of Virginia Woolf), 4*
[37] Joe Bray, *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 2014), 3.

To investigate any potential reason non-fiction letters might be more suited to song settings than fiction letters, I will compare and contrast the text of Juliana Hall's *A Northeast Storm* and text from Cherise Leiter's "Willoughby" from *From the Ladies of Jane* in order to analyze any differences that might make non-fiction letters more appealing to set and perform than fictional ones. The texts are listed below as the composers have set them. Both are from longer passages which Hall and Leiter have excerpted. In the Dickinson letter, the author writes to her brother Austin to inform him of how she and her family are doing. In the excerpt from *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood is writing to her suitor Willoughby who has been ignoring her previous letters.

> *Letter from Emily Dickinson to her brother Austin*:[38]
> It might not come amiss, dear Austin, to have a tiding or two concerning our state and feelings. Our state is pretty comfortable, and our feelings are somewhat solemn. We are rather a crestfallen company, what with the sighing wind, the sobbing rain, and the whining of Nature. We are enjoying this evening what is called a 'northeast storm' – a little north of east in case you are pretty definite. Father thinks it's 'amazin' raw,' and I'm half disposed to think that he's in the right about it, though I keep pretty dark and don't say much about it! Vinnie is at the instrument, humming a pensive air concerning a young lady who thought she was 'almost there.' Vinnie seems much grieved, and I really suppose I ought to betake myself to weeping; I'm pretty sure that I shall if she don't abate her singing.

> *Jane Austen: fictional letter from Marianne Dashwood to Willoughby, Sense and Sensibility*:[39]
> I cannot express my astonishment at not having received any answer to a note which I sent you above a week ago. I have been expecting to hear from you, and still more to see you every hour of the day. Pray call as soon as possible and explain the reason of my having expected this in vain. You must be very much altered indeed since we parted, but I will not suppose this possible and I hope very soon to receive your personal assurance of its being otherwise.

[38]Emily Dickinson, "A Northeast Storm," LiederNet.
[39] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, New York, NY: Puffin Books.

The letters are similar in that in both cases, the writer is communicating with someone she has a close, personal relationship with. Understanding Dickinson's relationship with her brother and Marianne's relationship with Willoughby may be helped by greater context than what is provided in these letters. However, the archetypes of a sister communicating with her brother, and a woman communicating with an unresponsive suitor are both relationships of which most readers have a general recognition without knowing intimate details of either situation. In terms of being a stand-alone song, the Austen letter does not require as much context as the Dickinson, as it does not mention any additional characters. The text only requires the knowledge of the speaker and the person to whom they are speaking. Dickinson, however, mentions several other people when talking to her brother, as the purpose of her letter is not to address only her own feelings, but also the feelings and circumstances of their family.

Next, in comparing short critical function words, the letters contain a nearly identical number. The Dickinson passage contains 48/145 short critical function words and the Austen 30/89, meaning that these filler words make up 33.10% and 33.71% of the words in each letter, respectively.

In terms of emotion, both Emily Dickinson and Marianne Dashwood are writing to express their sorrow in the text. However, the fictional letter written by Jane Austen might be considered more distant in emotion. Dickinson makes direct references to being solemn and crestfallen, Marianne's sadness is more implied. She mentions her astonishment at Willoughby's behavior and lack of response to her letters, but her yearning to see and hear from him again is told through her urgent tone and her discussion of her hopes as she wishes to see him "every hour."

Additionally, one of the elements considered fundamental in poetry is descriptive language. The Dickinson text contains fourteen adjectives (9.65% of the text), while the Austen text contains only three (3.37% of the text), instead using more nouns and verbs.

Again, context must be understood in order to make sense of this difference in style between these two authors and their ways of discussing emotions. As Austen is emulating a style of writing that would be appropriate for a young woman to write to a suitor in the Regency Era, her words have a sense of formality that Dickinson's lacks in speaking to a close family member with whom she is comfortable putting into words a precise account of her feelings. Both of these excerpts are full of emotion; however, Dickinson's text more explicitly states what those emotions are while Austen's creates the feeling through the words without actually naming them. This difference in the display of emotion in the text could stem from the fact that Dickinson's skill as a writer and a poet undoubtably had an effect on her everyday writing style, and the character of Marianne Dashwood is not meant to be incredibly poetic or elegant. In this way, Austen is creating a voice for Marianne's character which is reflected in the text, despite the comparative lack of emotional or descriptive language.

Judging purely from the text itself, one might argue that the Dickinson letter is more poetic and therefore more suited to art song text. In analyzing these two letters, each has its own merit and reasons which might make it a better choice for use as a song text. Austen's fictional letter does not require the listener to have as much context to understand the characters or situation, while Dickinson uses more descriptive words such as adjectives. Both contain a similar number of filler words and express the speaker's specific emotional state, albeit in unique styles. When considering the text from these

angles, there are no differences in the text remarkable enough to warrant the definitive statement that either non-fiction or fiction prose is more suitable for art song.

CHAPTER 3

SELECTING PROSE FOR ART SONG: NOVELS

One major aspect that distinguishes a novel from poetry is length. Setting only a portion of a text means that by nature, the composer will need to leave out many details, plot points, and characters that may be critical to the book. Practically, it can be difficult to sift through an entire novel to choose one portion, especially when the excerpt may need to be edited further so that plot points and additional characters do not cause the audience any confusion when the passage is taken out of context.

TEXT LENGTH AND CHOOSING AN EXCERPT

The first problem in selecting text from a novel is determining starting and ending points from the book. Poems have a strong sense of form and structure, with a clear beginning and ending. Therefore, there are often no decisions to be made about excerpting, and composers can simply take the poem at face-value and set it to music. However, when selecting text from a novel, the composer or commissioning musician needs to uncover a passage to set. Novels can be anywhere from 45,000 words, in the case of older novels such as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* or Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, to over 100,000 words in novels from the present day. Compared to the Dickinson poem examined earlier which is only seventy-six words total, this is a massive difference in length. Even poets who write longer poems than Emily Dickinson in her signature short style of writing typically only reach a few hundred words.

Some composers make similar choices when setting long poems such as Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*. This free verse epic poem contains approximately 15,000 words and is far too vast for one song. However, portions of Whitman's *Song of Myself*

have been set by many composers, including Lee Hoiby in his cycle *I was There*. In this cycle, the song "I was There" takes one portion from Whitman's 33rd section of *Song of Myself*. This use of excerpting indicates that while it may be difficult to select a passage from a novel, length is not necessarily a limiting factor.

TEXT ADAPTATIONS

Rather than choosing an excerpt from a novel in its exact form, some composers may choose to edit and reconfigure the text. This can be as simple as omitting text or rearranging sentences, and as complex as turning the author's text into a makeshift poem of the composer's own adaptation.

To illustrate a version of this with only a few small modifications, take the previously discussed text from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as set by David Evan Thomas in "A Ghost Story." Thomas rearranges the passage, moving the exclamation "Beautiful! Great God!" to the end of the song, creating a more definitive and declamatory ending, as the text in the novel itself continues on throughout the remainder of the chapter. He also omits some words from the passage that aren't necessary in order to achieve the affect and emotion needed from the song. Below is the original text in Shelley's novel, followed by the text as Thomas has set it. In the original passage, words bracketed and in bold represent words omitted by Thomas, while words underlined represent words changed or moved to another place in the song.

Frankenstein – original Mary Shelley text:[40]
I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark **[of being]** into the lifeless thing **[that lay]** at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull, yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, **[and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.]** How can I describe my emotions **[at this catastrophe, or]** how delineate the wretch **[whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful.]** Beautiful! Great God! **[His]** yellow skin scarcely covered **[the work of]** muscles **[and]** arteries **[beneath; his]** hair **[was of]** a lustrous black, and flowing; **[his]** teeth of a pearly whiteness.

"A Ghost Story" – David Evan Thomas:[41]
I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark into the lifeless thing at my feet. It was already one in the morning: rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my lamp was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull, yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard. How to describe my emotions...? How delineate the wretch? Yellow skin scarcely covering muscles, arteries; hair a lustrous black, and flowing; teeth all pearly whiteness. I had chosen these features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God!

In this example, the composer adjusted and rearranged some of Mary Shelley's original words to make the song work as an individual piece out of context of the full story of *Frankenstein*.

In her song cycle *My Ántonia,* Libby Larsen takes this level of rearranging text to an extreme. Rather than setting the text from Willa Cather's novel exactly as it appears, she creates her own adaptation of Cather's words and turns them into poems. For example, the words of the first song are taken from the introduction to Cather's *My Ántonia*, originally in the format shown below. The words that Larsen chose to excerpt from this passage to create the first song of the set are bracketed and in bold.

[40] Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*. New York: New American Library, 2000.

[41] David Evan Thomas, *Moonlight on a Midnight Stream,* 1995.

Willa Cather – My Ántonia:[42]
[We were talking about what it is like to] spend one's **[childhood in little towns]** like these, **[buried in wheat]** and corn, under stimulating extremes of climate**: [burning summers]** when the world lies green and billowy **[beneath a brilliant sky.]**

Larsen takes words and phrases from this passage, but plays with their placement, changing and reshaping them until they form shorter phrases than Cather's original lengthy sentences, and are written out in stanzas with many repetitions of text.[43]

The first song in the cycle, "Landscape – From the Train," sets the following text:

"Landscape – From the Train:"[44]
We were talking about what it was like to be a child
in a little prairie town
buried in wheat
in burning summers
beneath a brilliant sky

As the train flashed,
We were talking about (childhood in a little prairie town)
blustery winters
nothing but snow
and the feeling that the world was left behind

As the train flashed
We were talking
about windy springs
(and) blazing summers
and fall afternoons (when) the…prairie was like the bush
that burned with fire

(Oh!) I wish I could be a little boy again!
As the train flashed
We were talking
(of prairie towns
and boyhood
and Ántonia, my Ántonia!)

[42] Willa Cather, *My Antonia*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.

[43] Zavracky, *Libby Larsen's My Ántonia*.
[44] Libby Larsen, "Landscape - from the Train," Song of America.

Larsen continually mentions the train “flashing,” a phrase used by Cather in the third sentence of the introduction, and repeats this phrase like one might in a poem. By touching on pieces of the text and then adding her own phrases, such as “I wish I could be a little boy again!” Larsen sets up the story and the themes found in Cather’s novel without directly quoting. This use of the text illustrates that there are many ways to approach setting text from novels, and one can adapt the text to suit their own compositional purposes.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHALLENGES OF SETTING TEXT FROM NOVELS

CONTEXT

In addition to their expansive length, novels can provide challenges as text sources for art songs because they often contain more structural elements than poems. Novels can consist of multiple plot lines, settings, and characters, and it can be difficult to excerpt a text without requiring the audience to understand context in order to fully know and appreciate the words.

Many poems do not need preamble or context in order to be accessible to an audience. Typically, they do not have characters an audience needs to recognize or a lengthy plot that might confuse listeners. In the previously discussed *My Ántonia*, Libby Larsen adds this context by adapting the text so that the audience can immediately understand the themes of the novel, which the song cycle will then explore. Other composers, such as Tom Cipullo in his song *Rapture* and Rick Sowash in *From The Enchanted April*, set texts which do not include any character names, dialogue, or plot points. This makes it easier for the words to stand alone.

In the song *Rapture,* Tom Cipullo sets a passage from the following paragraph of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*.

Adam Bede – George Eliot:[45]

[Dinah pressed his hand with rather a sad look in her loving eyes, and then passed through the gate, while Seth turned away to walk lingeringly home. But instead of taking the direct road, he chose to turn back along the fields through which he and Dinah had already passed; and I think his blue linen handkerchief was very wet with tears long before he had made up his mind that it was time for him to set his face steadily homewards. He was but three-and-twenty, and had only just learned what it is to love—to love with that adoration which a young man gives to a woman whom he feels to be greater and better than himself. Love of this sort is hardly distinguishable from religious feeling. What deep and worthy love is so, whether of woman or child, or art or music.] Our caresses, our tender words, our still rapture under the influence of autumn sunsets, or pillared vistas, or calm majestic statues, or Beethoven symphonies, all bring with them the consciousness that they are mere waves and ripples in an unfathomable ocean of love and beauty; our emotion in its keenest moment passes from expression to silence, our love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object and loses itself in the sense of divine mystery. **[And this blessed gift of venerating love has been given to too many humble craftsmen since the world began for us to feel any surprise that it should have existed in the soul of a Methodist carpenter half a century ago, while there was yet a lingering after-glow from the time when Wesley and his fellow-labourer fed on the hips and haws of the Cornwall hedges, after exhausting limbs and lungs in carrying a divine message to the poor.]**

The words in bold are the portions Cipullo did not set. These sections of the paragraph leave out specific details about the preceding events and about Seth and Dinah's relationship. The text in the song also stops before reaching the portion of this paragraph that discusses more about religion and history, which might not be as accessible to all audiences. This setting of a text which does not mention details about characters, time, or location, means that the audience does not need prior knowledge about the story. Instead, the text is capable of standing on its own and could be interpreted to be about love between any two people.

[45] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, Penguin, 2008.

In Rick Sowash's song *From The Enchanted April*, the composer chooses a passage which eliminates the preceding sentences' specific references to the setting and the characters' vacation in Italy. He also omits the bolded lines from Elizabeth von Arnim's text:

> *The Enchanted April – Elizabeth von Arnim:*[46]
> She stared. Such beauty; and she there to see it. Such beauty; and she alive to feel it. Her face was bathed in light. **[Lovely scents came up to the window and caressed her. A tiny breeze gently lifted her hair. Far out in the bay a cluster of almost motionless fishing boats hovered like a flock of white birds on the tranquil sea.]** How beautiful, how beautiful. Not to have died before this . . . to have been allowed to see, breathe, feel this…She stared, her lips parted. Happy? Poor, ordinary, everyday word. But what could one say, how could one describe it? It was as though she could hardly stay inside herself, it was as though she were too small to hold so much of joy, it was as though she were washed through with light.

The context provided by the highlighted words is important for someone reading the novel, as they help the reader feel immersed in the physical setting and experience the world through the narrator's eyes. However, in a song, these details are unnecessary and removing them allows the audience to imagine any context for themselves. Eliminating these sentences places the focus of the song more on the character's emotions than her physical surroundings, crucial in the novel, but limiting and potentially confusing in a performance.

DEALING WITH DIALOGUE

A major aspect of novels which sets them apart from poetry and other prose sources, is dialogue. Dialogue, whether in books, plays, or films, has several distinct functions. It not only furthers the plot, but also establishes each character's voice. This

[46] Elizabeth von Arnim, *The Enchanted April*, New York City: Penguin Books, 2015.

voice can teach the reader things about the character such as their background, relationship to other characters, or emotional state. It also can function as a way to create tension in a situation or between characters.[47]

Not all dialogue is written to precisely emulate the way people actually talk, as many authors do not create an exact replica of the way most people candidly speak.[48] Authors often omit the stuttering, stumbling, and repetitions frequently used in natural speech. They also do not typically replicate the way speakers overlap and instead make dialogue more linear than in authentic conversations.[49] However, despite these changes to make dialogue more suitable to literature than everyday life, dialogue can be used to gain insight into the world of a character or even an author.[50]

A challenge in setting novel excerpts is deciding whose voice to set. Most poems have a singular speaker; however, novels have a narrator, or in some cases many narrators when the novel has multiple points of view, as well as many characters who have dialogue. While performing dialogue can be an emotional, exciting, and intimate way for performers and audiences to connect with characters from a novel, it can be difficult to produce a version of dialogue to set in a song. One of the predominant reasons for this is that unlike in a play or film, dialogue in a novel is typically broken up by dialogue tags such as "she said" and also by action tags. Sometimes, composers leave narration in the midst of dialogue, as authors often use speech tags to convey additional information

[47] Koivisto and Nykänen, "Introduction: Approaches to Fictional Dialogue," *4*.
[48] Koivisto and Nykänen, "Introduction: Approaches to Fictional Dialogue," Introduction.
[49] Ryan Bishop, "There's Nothing Natural About Natural Conversation: A Look at Dialogue in Fiction and Drama." *Oral Tradition*, 1991, vol. 6, no. 1: 61.
[50] Massimiliano Morini, *Jane Austen's Narrative Techniques: A Stylistic and Pragmatic Analysis*. Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor & Francis Group, 79.

about a character or a scene, prepare the reader for an upcoming event in the text, or give hints to the reader about the true intentions of the speaking character.[51] Conversely, composers sometimes choose to leave out contextual information, take only one side of a conversation, or rework it into a makeshift monologue. This means that a song may consist of fragments of dialogue which form a new version of the text.

This is the case in Cherise Leiter's "Of Music," the first in her set of songs *From the Ladies of Jane*, set to dialogue from Jane Austen novels. Below is the original passage from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in which Lady Catherine de Bourgh speaks to Mr. Darcy.

> *Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen*:[52]
> **["What is that you are saying, Fitzwilliam?]** What is it you are talking of? What are **[you telling Miss Bennet?]** Let me hear what it is."
>
> **["We are speaking of music, Madam," said he, when no longer able to avoid a reply.]**
>
> "Of music! Then pray speak aloud. It is of all subjects my delight. I must have my share in the conversation, if you are speaking of music. There are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste. If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient. **[And so would Anne, if her health had allowed her to apply. I am confident that she would have performed delightfully. How does Georgiana get on, Darcy?"]**

Leiter omits the bolded sections, including Mr. Darcy's dialogue, the narration, and portions of Lady Catherine's dialogue. She also omits all mentions of other characters, including removing Mr. Darcy's own name, taking out any mentions of her daughter Anne and her health, Elizabeth Bennet, and Darcy's sister Georgiana. This is an

[51] Koivisto and Nykänen, "Introduction: Approaches to Fictional Dialogue," 2.
[52] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice (Penguin Classics)* (Penguin, 2011).

example of a song text that remains true to the author's words and meaning without requiring the audience to understand the context or characters in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Leiter then includes a sentence of Lady Catherine's dialogue that happens several paragraphs later, saying "I often tell young ladies that no excellence in music is to be acquired without constant practice."[53] While there are no modifications of the words themselves, Leiter rearranges the text, arriving at the following version:

> *Of Music - Leiter*:[54]
> "What is it you are talking of? Let me hear what it is. Of music! Then pray speak aloud. It is of all subjects my delight. I must have my share in the conversation if you are speaking of music. There are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or better natural taste. I often tell young ladies that no excellence in music is to be acquired without constant practice. If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient."

Despite omitting Mr. Darcy's dialogue in answering the initial question posed by Lady Catherine, the composer adds a fermata directly after the question is posed, and another after "Let me hear what it is," implying that something happens in that moment of silence. Whether this silence is an emotional change for the singer or an answer from a character not pictured is left up to the performer (Figure 2).[55]

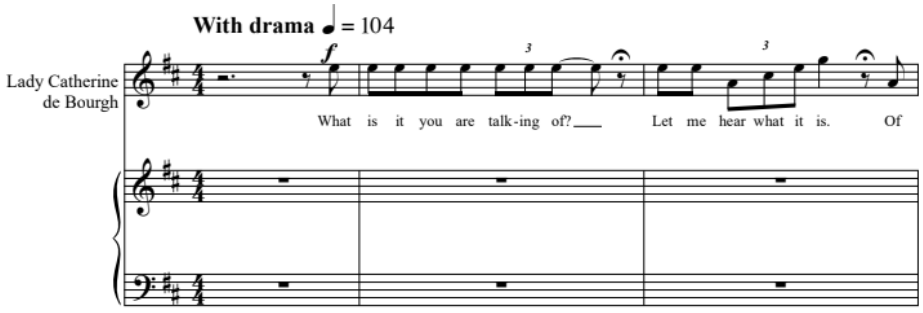

Figure 2

[53] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice (Penguin Classics)* (Penguin, 2011).
[54] Cherise Leiter, *From the Ladies of Jane,* LeiterLeider Publishing, 2012.
[55] Cherise Leiter, *From the Ladies of Jane,* m. 1-3.

In addition to rearranging the original text, Leiter also does not shy away from using repetitions, repeating "of music," several times and showing off the singer's range and skill at melismas to paint the text just as a composer might with a poem (Figure 3).[56]

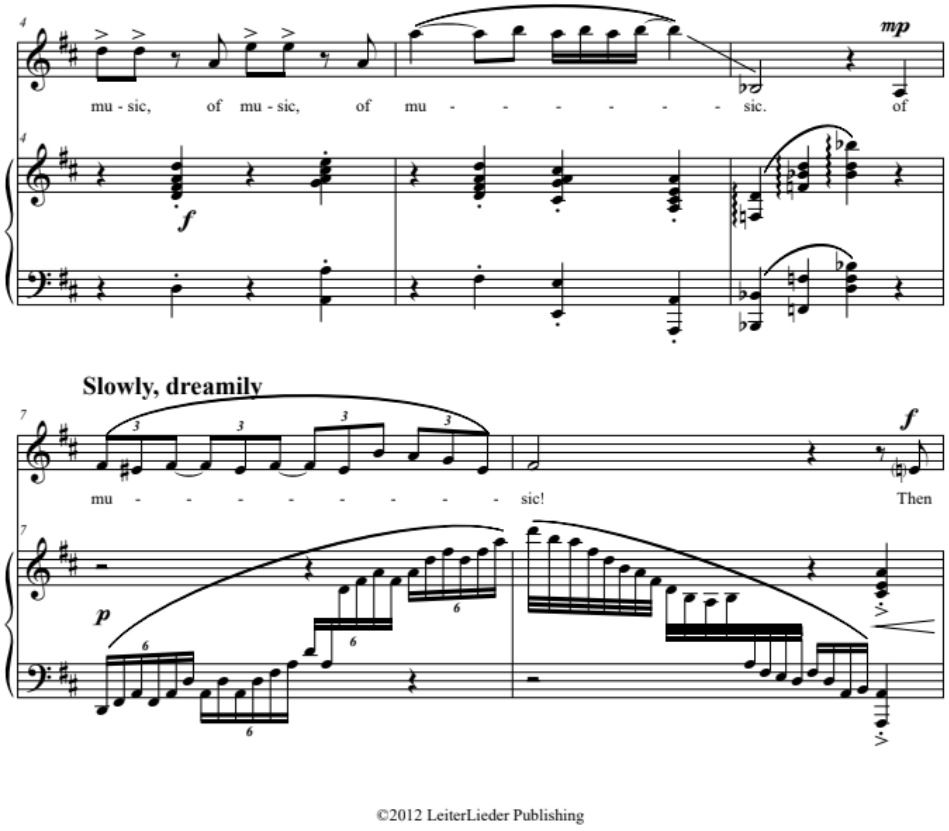

Figure 3

In this way, the setting of dialogue does not need to be treated differently from poetry. However, the text may need more adaptation than poetry, especially when working with a scene where multiple characters have dialogue.

[56] Cherise Leiter, *From the Ladies of Jane,* m. 4-8.

In some cases, such as Geoffery Bush's *Cuisine Provençale*, which uses text from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, songs may contain both text from narration and from a character's dialogue.

In this song, Bush excerpts the following text which is scattered throughout Chapter Seventeen of *To the Lighthouse*:

Cuisine Provençale – Virginia Woolf:[57]

> At that instant a maid came in carrying a great dish. "Put it down there", Mrs. Ramsey said, helping the Swiss girl to put gently before her the huge brown pot in which was the Boeuf-en-Daube. An exquisite scent of olives and oil and juice rose as Marthe, with a little flourish, took the cover off. Mrs. Ramsey peered into the dish, with its shiny walls and its confusion of sav'ry brown and yellow meats, and its bay leaves and its wine, and said, speaking with great pleasure in her voice "It is a French recipe of my grandmother's." She waited. Her husband spoke. He was repeating something and she knew it was poetry from the rhythm and the ring of exultation and melancholy in his voice:
>
> Come out and climb the garden path
> Luriana, Lurilee
> The China rose is all abloom
> and buzzing with the yellow bee.
>
> She did not know what they meant, but, like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice.
>
> Come out and climb the garden path
> Luriana, Lurilee
> To see the Kings go riding by
> Over lawn and daisy lea
> With their palm leaves and cedar
> Luriana, Lurilee,
> Luriana, Lurilee
>
> He turned slightly towards her repeating the last words:
> "Luriana, Lurilee, Luriana, Lurilee" and bowed to her as if he did her homage.

[57] Geoffery Bush, "*Cuisine Provençale*," In *Eight Songs for Medium Voice and Piano*, Stainer & Bell Ltd, 1984,

In this case, the composer separates the line spoken by Mrs. Ramsey, “It is a French recipe of my grandmother’s,” from the narration by utilizing a cesura on one side of the line and a fermata on the other (Figure 4 and 5).[58]

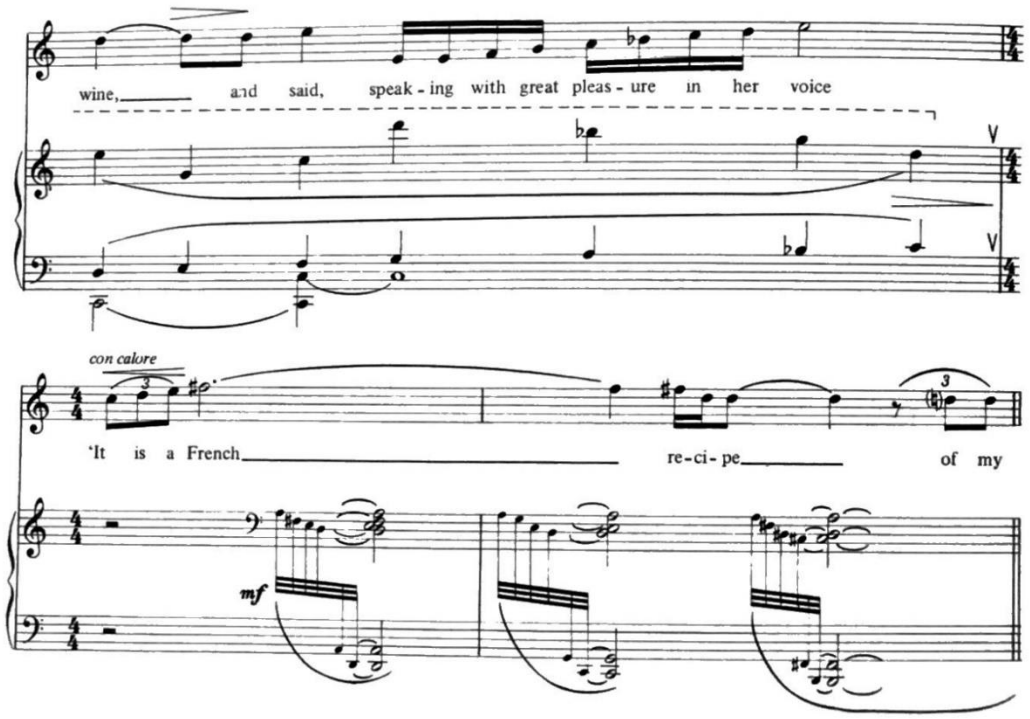

Figure 4

[58]Geoffery Bush, “*Cuisine Provençale*,” In *Eight Songs for Medium Voice and Piano*, Stainer & Bell Ltd, 1984, m. 15-18.

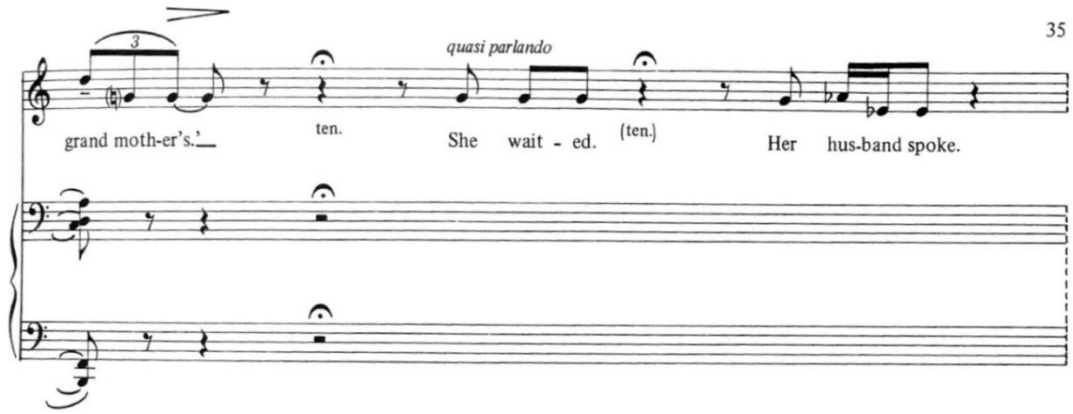

Figure 5

In this song, Bush demonstrates two ways of setting dialogue alongside narration. The second line of the song is also dialogue by Mrs. Ramsey, "Put it down there." In this line, Bush does not make much difference in the musical setting, continuing the same piano figuration and not making much difference in the singer's line. This may indicate that the instruction, "Put it down there," is to set the scene as narration would, rather than a declamatory statement.

This song is unusual in that it includes both character dialogue and narration, and that the original source itself contains a poem. In this passage of the novel, Virginia Woolf includes a quotation of Charles Elton's poem "Luriana Lurilee," spoken by Mr. Ramsey. When setting the poem "Luriana Lurilee" within this song, Bush writes the singer's line in a more melodically, almost emulating a folk song (Figure 6).[59]

[59] Geoffery Bush, "*Cuisine Provençale*," m. 22-26.

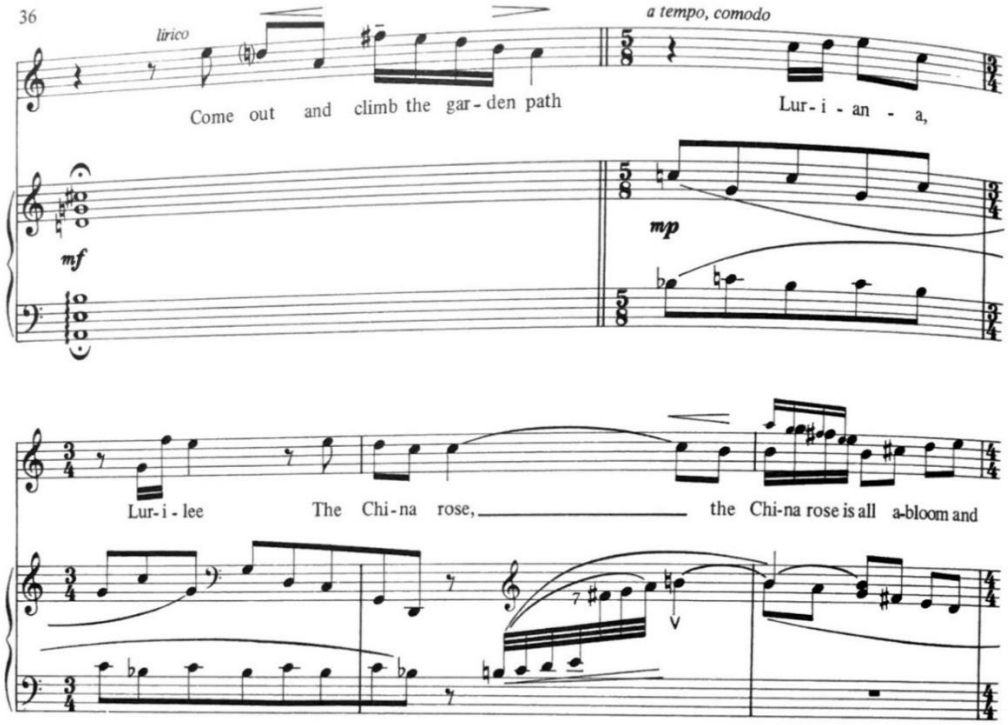

Figure 6

When the narration again interrupts this poem, he delineates it with less motion in the piano, and an almost recitative-like texture in the voice with frequent repeated notes, and a smaller range of pitches (Figure 7).[60]

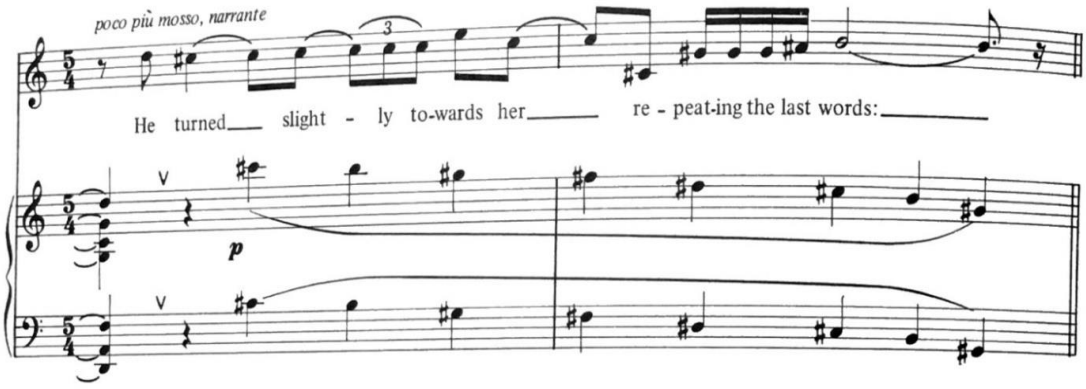

Figure 7

[60] Geoffery Bush, "*Cuisine Provençale*," m. 40-41.

There are many ways to go about setting excerpts from novels, and therefore composers have many choices they can make to adapt text. These adaptations also provide opportunity for performers to bring their own creativity and interpretations to a performance, especially in cases such as Bush's song where a singer may need to find ways to bring multiple character voices to life through their acting and musicianship.

CHAPTER 5

MUSICAL ELEMENTS - POETRY VS. PROSE

In order to compare settings of poetry and prose, I will discuss three art songs for soprano and piano to examine if there are any musical differences in the way composers set poetry, prose from non-fiction sources, and text from novels.

The three songs are "Will there really be a Morning?" (From *Four Dickinson Songs* by Lori Laitman), *My Dearest Ruth* (by Stacy Garrop), and *Rapture* (by Tom Cipullo). These three songs, representing text from poetry, letters, and novels respectively, were all written in similar time periods, composed for high voice, and have texts written in first-person present tense.

In discussing these songs, I will investigate if the musical treatment of the text is notably different based on the text source.

Author	**Source**	**Text**
Emily Dickinson	*Will there really be a Morning?*	Will there really be a "Morning"? Is there such a thing as "Day"? Could I see it from the mountains If I were as tall as they? Has it feet like Water lilies? Has it feathers like a Bird? Is it brought from famous countries Of which I have never heard? Oh some Scholar! Oh some Sailor! Oh some Wise Man from the skies! Please to tell a little Pilgrim Where the place called "Morning" lies!

Martin Ginsburg	Letter to his wife, Ruth Bader Ginsburg	My Dearest Ruth, You are the only person I have loved in my life, setting aside, a bit, parents and kids and their kids. I have admired and loved you almost from the day we first met some fifty-six years ago. What a treat it has been to watch you progress to the very top of the legal world!! I will be in the hospital until Friday. Between then and now I shall think hard on my remaining health and life, and whether on balance the time has come for me to tough it out or to take leave of life. The loss of quality now simply overwhelms. I hope you will support where I come out, but I understand you may not. I will not love you a jot less. Signed, Marty
George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)	*Adam Bede*	Our caresses, our tender words, our still rapture under the influence of autumn sunsets, or pillared vistas, or calm majestic statues, or Beethoven symphonies, all bring with them the consciousness that they are mere waves and ripples in an unfathomable ocean of love and beauty; our emotion in its keenest moment passes from expression to silence, our love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object and loses itself in the sense of divine mystery.

Table 3

LORI LAITMAN – "WILL THERE REALLY BE A MORNING?"

Lori Laitman's "Will there really be a Morning?" from *Four Dickinson Songs* sets Emily Dickinson's poem of the same title. The song contains sweeping vocal lines and full piano chords, with the instruction "tempo should be flexible and expressive throughout; mainly push a bit with crescendo and relax with a decrescendo" given to both

performers. This indication gives the singer the ability to move more rapidly through less important words and allows them to slow and linger on the most important, descriptive words such as “morning,” “day,” and “mountains.” These words are also set to the highest notes in their respective phrases, emphasizing them even more (Figure 8).[61]

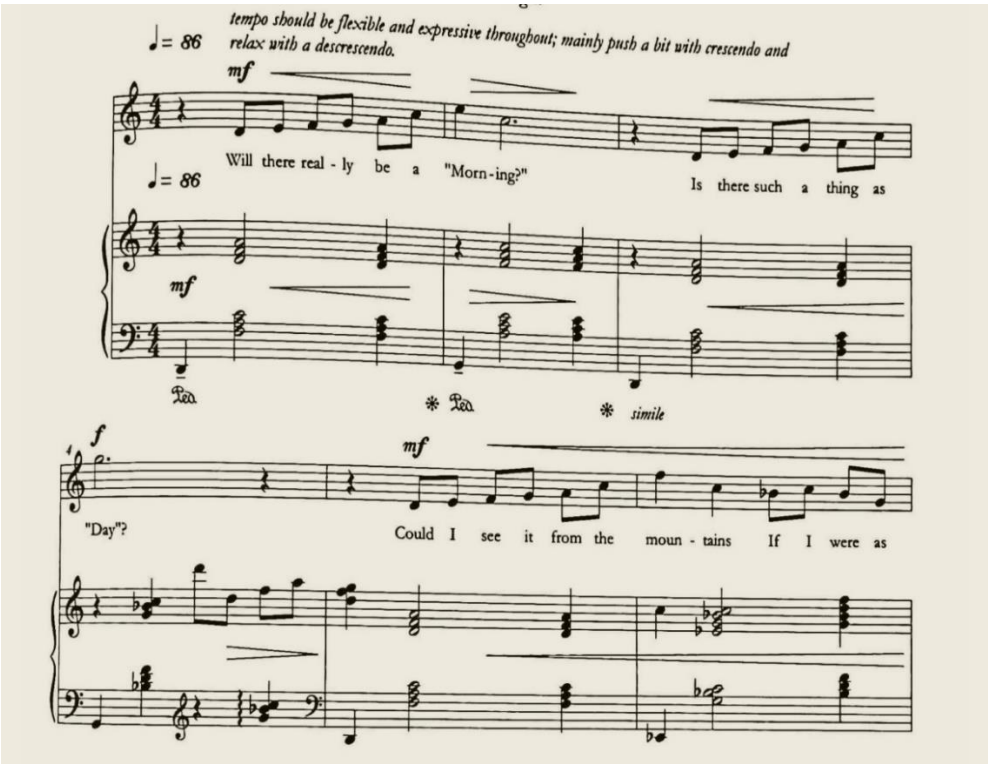

Figure 8

Laitman text paints throughout the song, for example, including a trill after the phrase “has it feathers like a bird?” (Figure 9).[62]

[61] Lori Laitman, “Will There Really Be A Morning?” In *Four Dickinson Songs,* Enchanted Knickers Music, BMI, 1996, m. 1-6.

[62] Lori Laitman, “Will There Really Be A Morning?” m. 10-12.

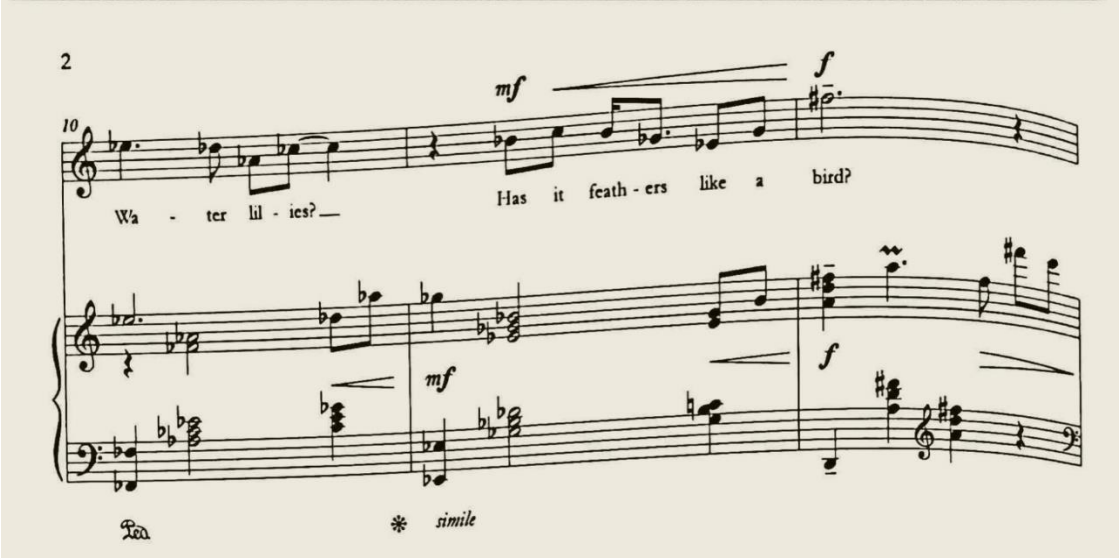

Figure 9

The piano part becomes more insistent as the poet calls on "some Scholar," "some Sailor" or "some Wise Man from the skies," adding rolled chords and a marking of *subito forte* (Figure 10). With each exclamation, the vocal line rises higher until it reaches a G on the word "skies" with a *fortissimo* dynamic.[63]

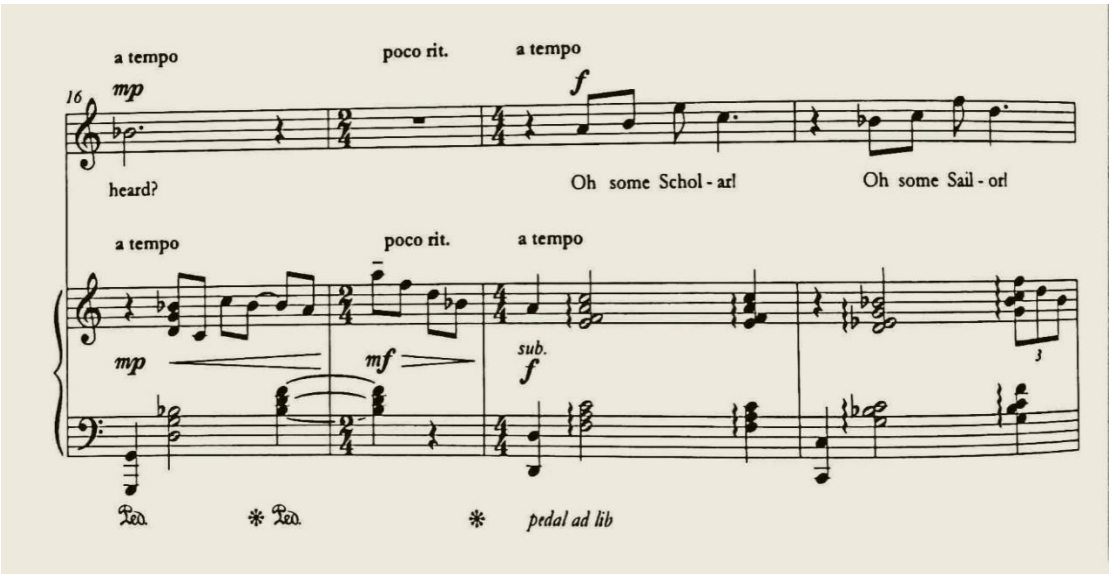

Figure 10

[63] Lori Laitman, "Will There Really Be A Morning?" m. 16-19.

The piano then decrescendos and slows, ending with a repetition of the first line of the poem, "will there really be a Morning?" with the marking "slowly/freely" and the instruction for the performers to move to a slower tempo (Figure 11).[64]

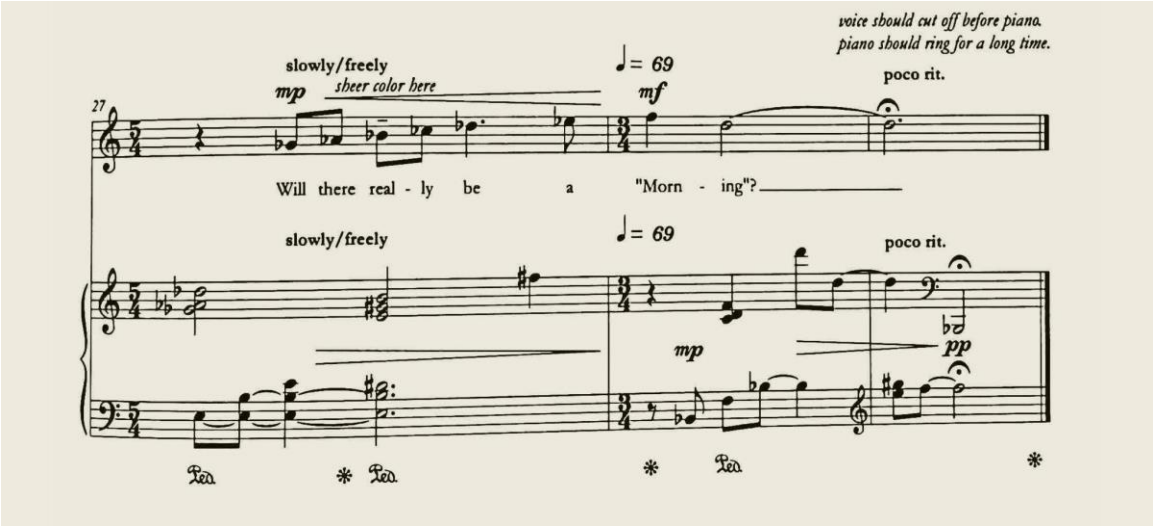

Figure 11

The repetition of the opening question reminds the audience of the initial purpose of the poem, to search for the answer to this question. It also takes the feeling of discovery and excitement that pushes through the rest of the piece with its constant motion and rise in pitch and dynamic and brings it back to the contemplative and searching nature of Dickinson's question.

STACY GARROP – *MY DEAREST RUTH*

In *My Dearest Ruth,* Stacy Garrop sets the emotional final letter of Martin Ginsburg to his wife, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. In this letter, Ginsburg talks through his feelings about his illness and facing the final days of his life. Garrop has set the letter almost exactly as it was written; however, she removes the specific dates and locations

[64] Lori Laitman, "Will There Really Be A Morning?" m. 27-29.

written by Ginsburg in the text to "create a more timeless feel."[65] For example, rather than using the full name of the JH Medical Center, she simply says "hospital," and also changes "Friday, June 25" to just "Friday."

The music begins simply, with single notes in each hand in the piano, reflecting the simple start to the letter with the words "My dearest Ruth" (Figure 12).[66] This simplicity continues as Ginsburg lets his wife know how much he loves her, and that she is the only person in his life whom he has ever loved. As his emotion grows, and he talks more about his admiration and joy for her and recounts the day they met, the piano texture grows, incorporating more chords and rhythmic motion, as if reflecting the way his love for her grew over the "fifty-six years" of their relationship.

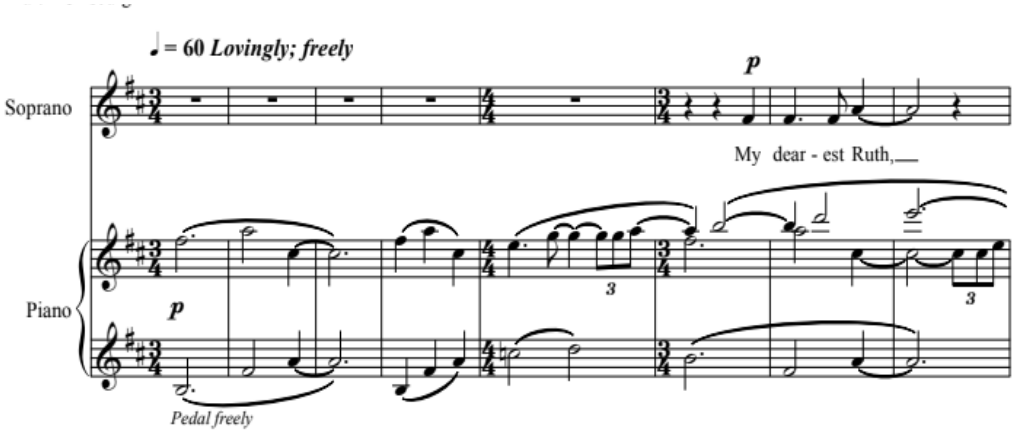

Figure 12

As he discusses his time with Justice Ginsburg, the music reflects his joy in watching her succeed in her legal career, rising high in the vocal line to text paint the word "top" and using quick sixteenth note rhythms to express his excitement. This then

[65] Stacy Garrop, *My Dearest Ruth*, Inkjar Publishing Company, 2013.
[66] Stacy Garrop, *My Dearest Ruth*, Inkjar Publishing Company, 2013. m. 1-8.

transitions into a short piano interlude with a boisterous triplet rhythm and rolled chords (Figure 13).[67]

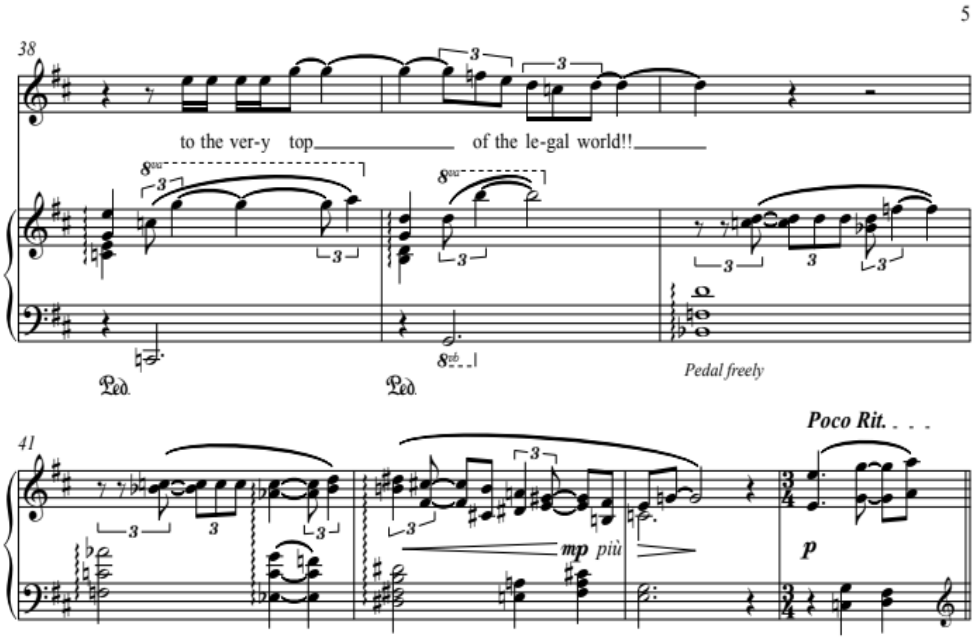

Figure 13

However, as the interlude ends, the music becomes pensive and reflective, with a sparser texture in the piano as Ginsburg shifts the topic of the letter and discusses how long he will be in the hospital and his desire to reflect on his life as he remains in there (Figure 14).[68]

[67] Stacy Garrop, *My Dearest Ruth*, m. 38-44.
[68] Stacy Garrop, *My Dearest Ruth*, m. 45-56.

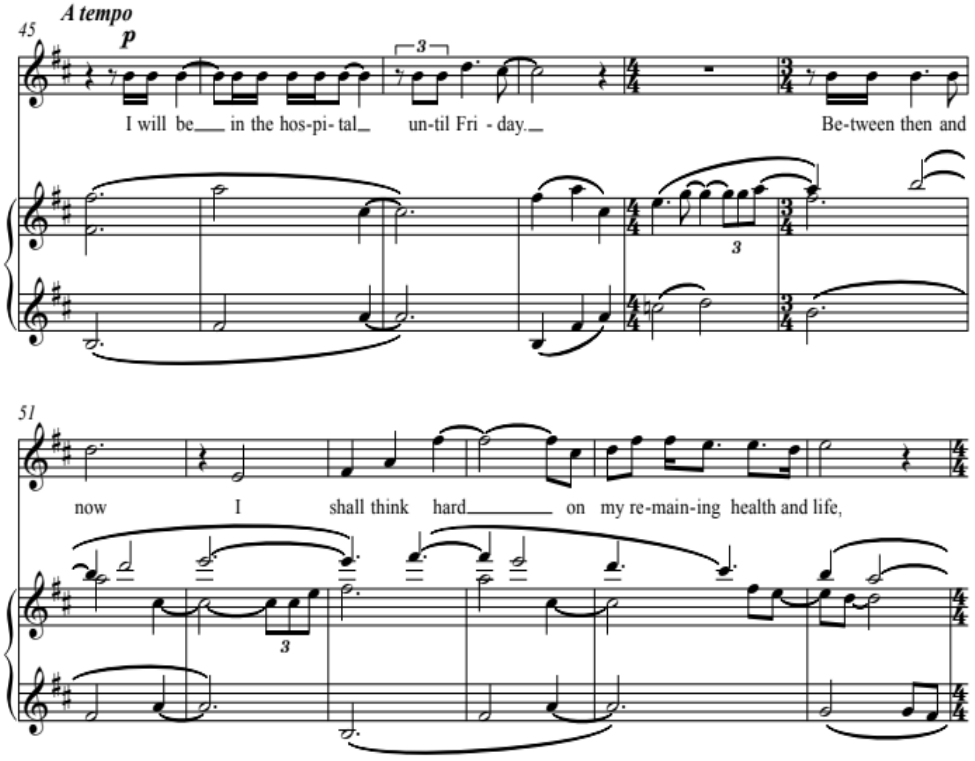

Figure 14

As he discusses his options, to either fight his illness or succumb to it, the vocal line rises and the piano texture thickens, increasing the rhythm and becoming more insistent until the author states that the circumstance of his health "simply overwhelms." Following these words, the composer paints this sentiment of feeling overwhelmed through an accelerando and a crescendo, sending the singer higher in pitch than they have been yet in the entire song as Ginsburg pleads for his wife to support him (Figure 15).[69]

[69] Stacy Garrop, *My Dearest Ruth*, m. 65-73.

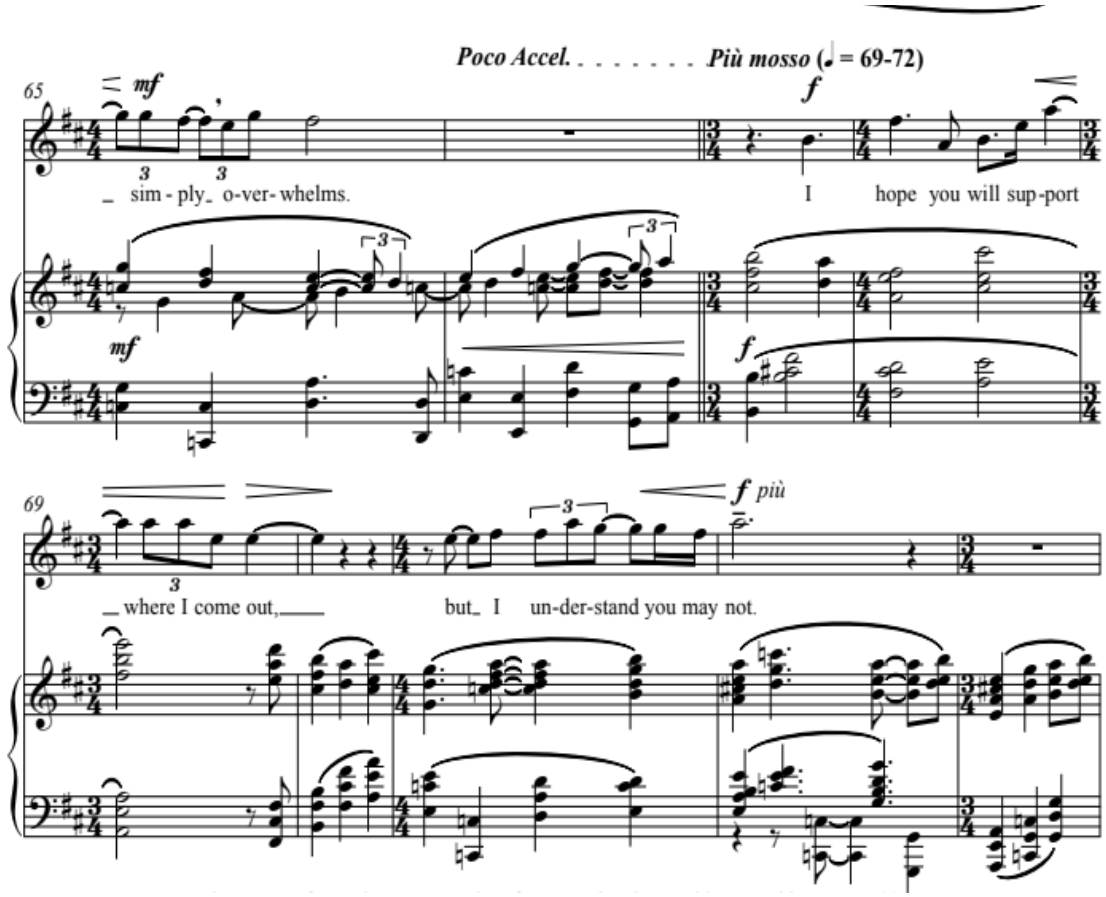

Figure 15

Following this exclamation, the piano plays a dramatic interlude full of loud dynamic markings and full chords in both hands, as if the weight of what the author is saying is finally crashing into him as he decides how to feel about his wife's potential reaction. Finally, the solo ends in a ritardando which sets up the author's words, "I will not love you a jot less" (Figure 16).[70] The composer also states that she added a repetition of "Not a jot" at the end to increase the "dramatic effect" or the ending.[71]

[70] Stacy Garrop, *My Dearest Ruth*, m. 74-84.
[71] Stacy Garrop, *My Dearest Ruth*, Inkjar Publishing Company, 2013.

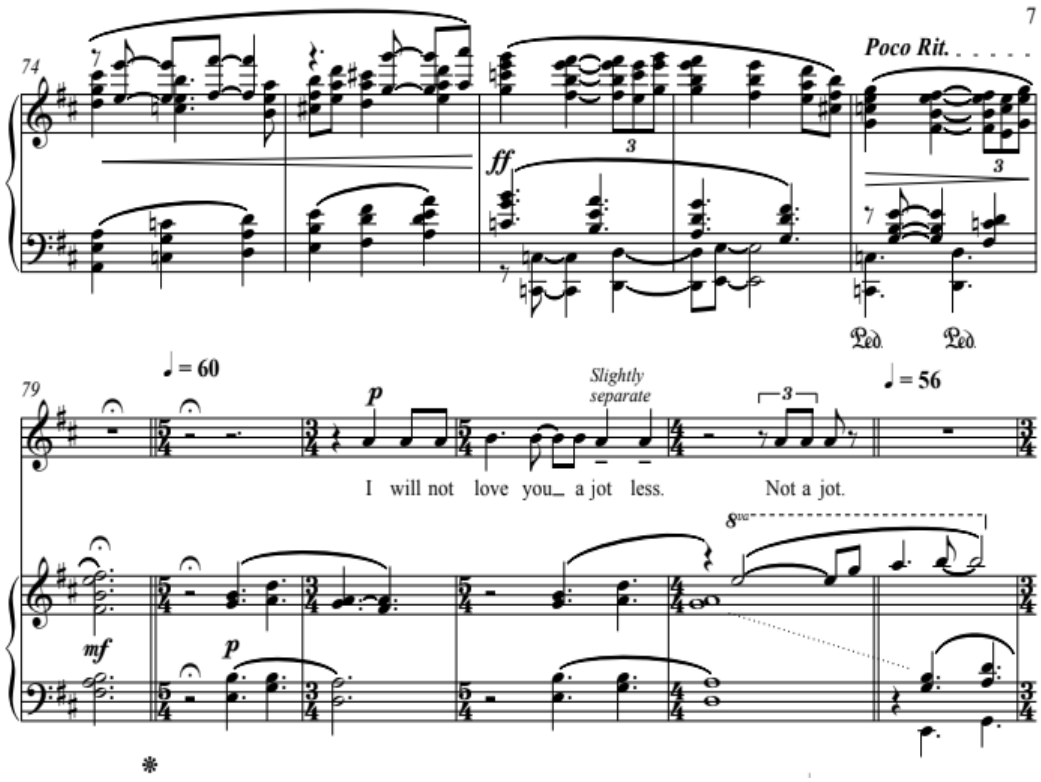

Figure 16

The singer is then asked to speak the words, “Signed, Marty,” softly. The piece ends with a slow, quiet piano postlude, as if reflecting on everything Ginsburg has just written to his wife.

TOM CIPULLO - *RAPTURE*

In Tom Cipullo’s Rapture, taken from Eliot’s novel *Adam Bede*, the composer uses the text in a way that both honors the spoken inflection of the English language and the overall meaning of the text through text-painting. The song begins with the indication “slow, always expressive and free," as the pianist spans a wide range of notes and rolls

chords in the introduction in anticipation of the expansive nature of love that the singer will express (Figure 17).[72]

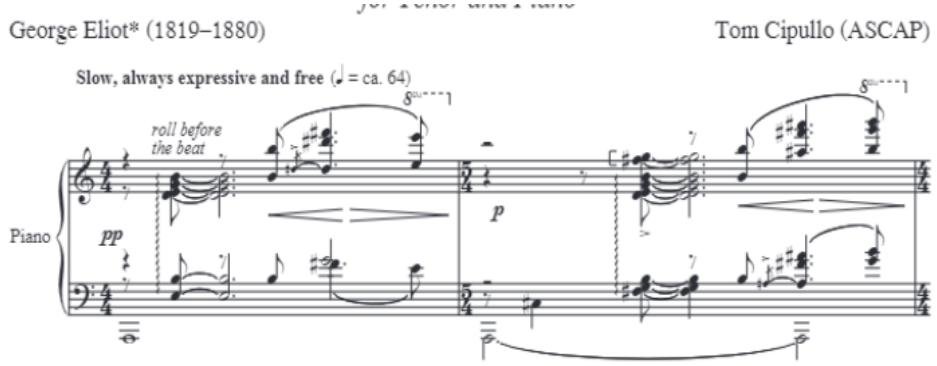

Figure 17

The singer's entrance is marked *ppp* followed by *pp*, illustrating the author's use of the words "tender" and "still." This is then contrasted with the word "rapture" (Figure 18) which is suddenly *forte*, having grown from *mezzo-piano* only one bar before. Here the singer sings long and high on "rapture," while the piano presses the tempo and dynamic forward, not only through an accelerando but with faster moving sixteenth notes.[73]

[72] Tom Cipullo, "Rapture," In *Songs for Tenor* 1, Vol. 1. E.C. Schirmer Music Co, 2019, m. 1-2.
[73] Tom Cipullo, "Rapture," m. 7-8.

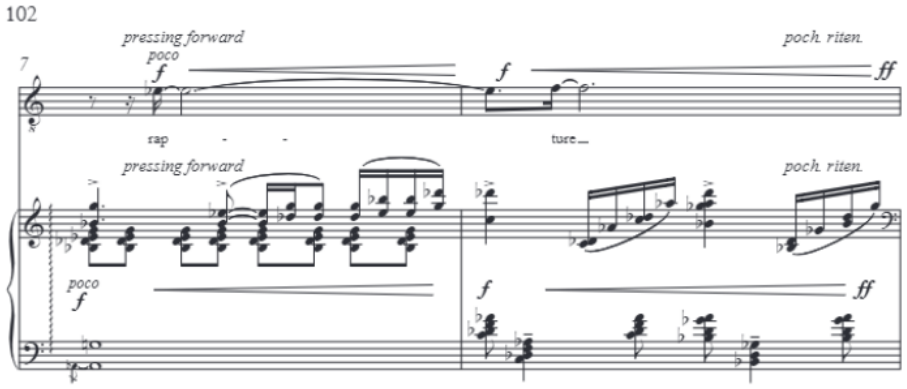

Figure 18

The tempo continues to be full of rubato, with Cipullo frequently indicating where to push forward and pull back. This gives the impression of "rapture" and a sense of excitement associated with love.

Throughout the song, the text setting reflects the natural speech pattern of the English language. In Figure 19, Cipullo sets more important words and syllables on longer notes, such as "autumn," "sunsets," and "calm," and moves quickly through short critical function words such as "the" and "or."[74]

[74] Tom Cipullo, "Rapture," m. 9-13.

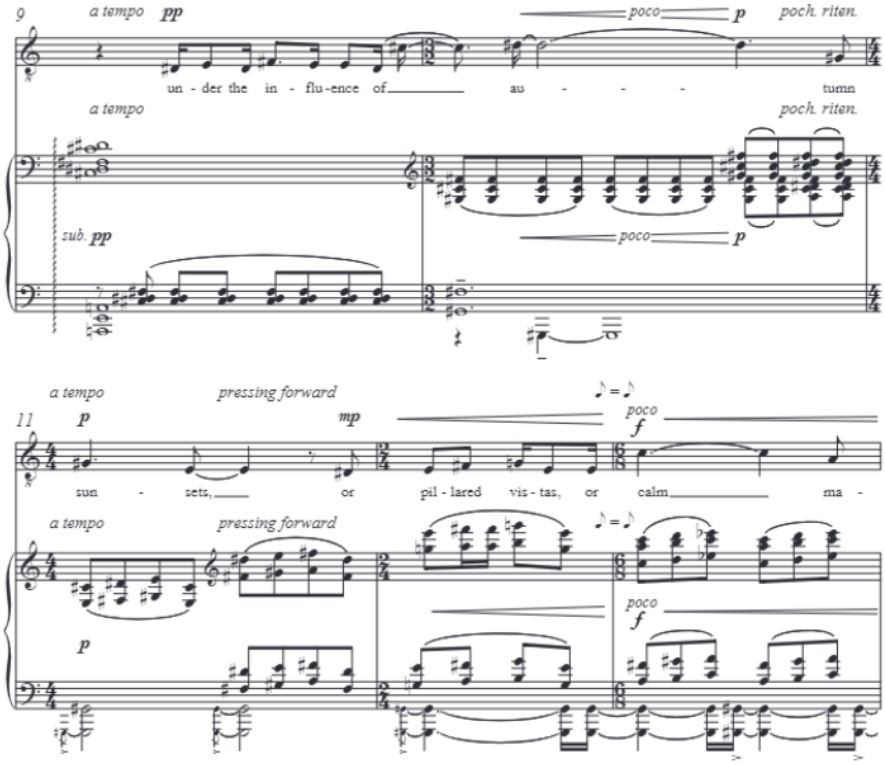

Figure 19

As the text begins to depict waves and the ocean, the piano begins to play two-note slurs as well as rolled chords, alternated with jumps down to low registers, giving the effect of waves rolling and the depth and power of the ocean (Figure 20).[75]

[75] Tom Cipullo, "Rapture," m. 20-22.

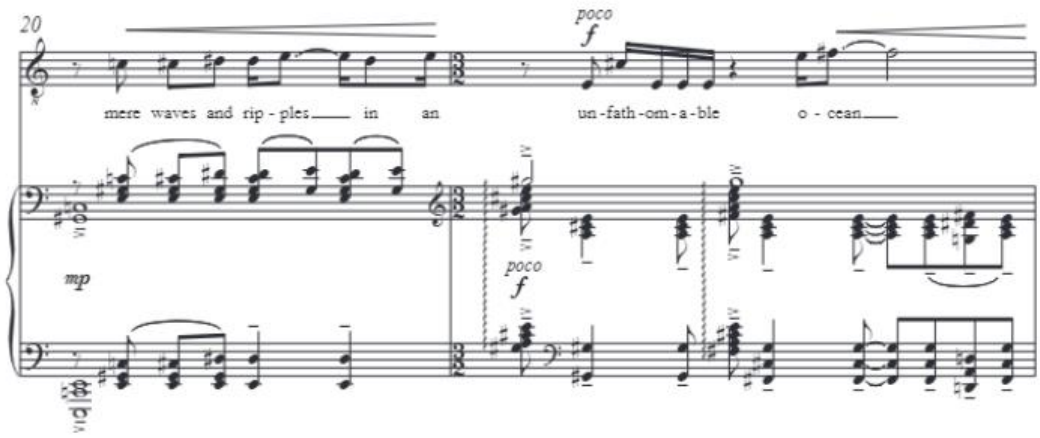

Figure 20

Each time the word "love" is sung by the singer, it occurs on a high note, growing higher and higher with every expression of the word until the final iteration ends on a high A-flat with the singer instructed to have a "floating" sound. However, unlike with the word "rapture" at the start of the piece, every repetition of the word "love" grows quieter than the last and gradually slows (Figure 21).[76]

[76] Tom Cipullo, "Rapture," m. 35-38.

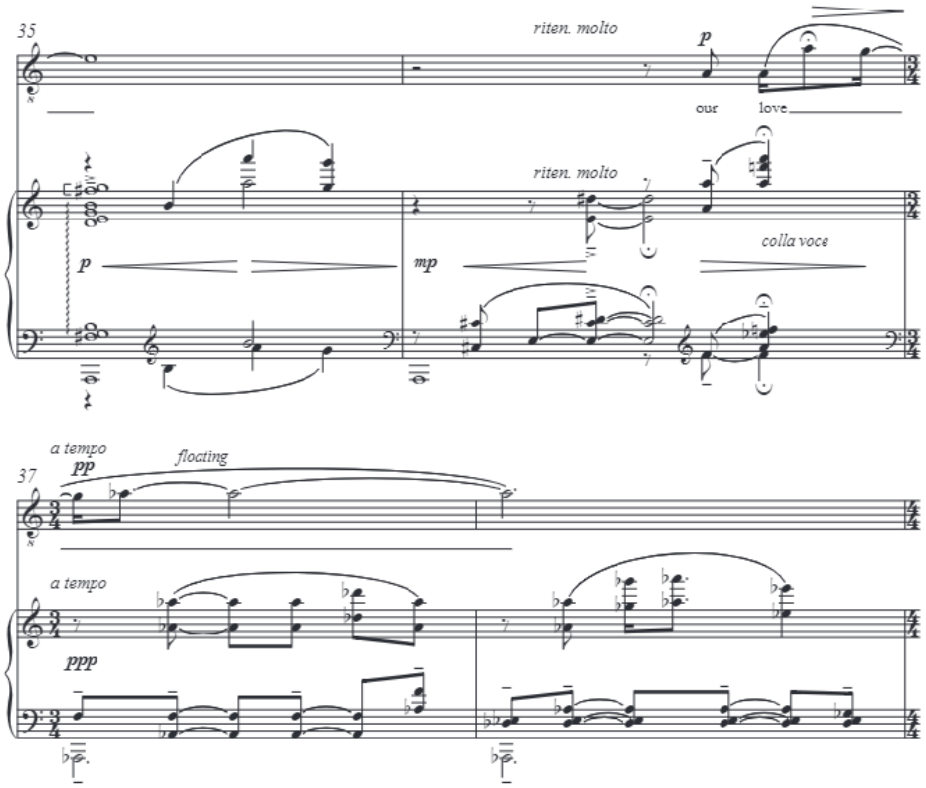

Figure 21

This contrasts the subsequent words which again speak of water and floods, and the music pushes forward in both tempo and dynamic to capture the essence of rushing water. The tempo continues to quicken through repetitions of the words "losing itself" until the words "in the sense of divine mystery" where the composer indicates a slower tempo and a ritardando as the performers pull back to *ppp* on the word "divine" (Figure 22).[77]

[77] Tom Cipullo, "Rapture," m. 45-48.

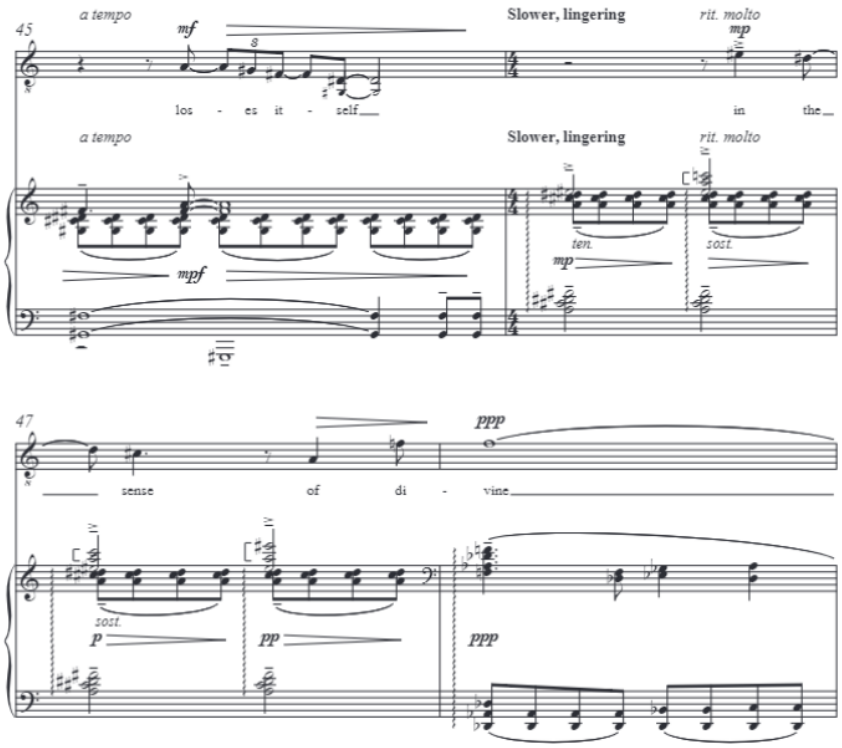

Figure 22

The song ends with the hushed calm of the beginning, repeating the words "our caresses, our tender words, our still rapture," this time with simple rolled chords and less motion beneath from the piano. After the movement and excitement of the rest of the piece, it ends with the singer holding a high F (or optional A-flat) as both performers gradually let the sound die away. Throughout this song, Cipullo uses text painting and inflection to bring Eliot's words to life and to create an overall sound in the piece which resembles "rapture" and the youthful exuberance of first love.

While Laitman, Garrop, and Cipullo each have their own musical styles, the way in which they treat these texts is not notably different. Each example honors the spoken inflection of the English language and brings out the emotion of the text. All three use text painting, varied accompaniment figures, and melodic vocal lines which create an atmosphere for the story being portrayed. While the selection and adaptation of an

excerpt from a novel may be a different process than setting a poem, these composers use similar musical techniques to bring words and emotions to life and treat the words with equal care regardless of the source text.

CHAPTER 6

A SELECTIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE GUIDE TO SONGS SET TO TEXT FROM NOVELS

In considering performers who may be searching for art song repertoire set to text from novels, I have created this brief guide of songs. This list,[78] while not comprehensive, contains examples of art songs for voice and piano which set prose text from English novels. The guide includes information about the composer, author, song cycle if applicable, novel from which the text is excerpted, and date of composition.

Samuel Barber – *Nuvoletta Op. 25*

Composed in 1947, Samuel Barber's *Nuvoletta* is a stand-alone song for soprano and piano. Barber excerpts text from James Joyce's novel *Finnegans Wake*. *Finnegans Wake,* while written in English, uses Irish dialect, portmanteaus, and linguistic idiosyncrasies that make the style of writing unique. In selecting the text for *Nuvoletta*, Barber excerpted phrases from within three pages of the novel. The song calls for a wide range for the soprano and features a difficult cadenza, and Barber said that his inspiration from Joyce's text led him to set the words "instinctively, as abstract music, almost as a vocalise."[79]

[78] The following pieces were compiled using research from the databases LiederNet, Song Helix, The Kassia Database, and The Boulanger Initiative.

[79] H. Pollack. Singing Finnegans Wake: A key to Samuel Barber's "Nuvoletta." *Journal of Singing, 78* (2021), 320.

Samuel Barber – "Solitary Hotel"

"Solitary Hotel" is the fourth song from Samuel Barber's cycle *Despite and Still Op. 41,* published in 1969. Originally written for and dedicated to soprano Leontyne Price, "Solitary Hotel" takes unaltered text from James Joyce's modernist novel *Ulysses.* The piece features a wandering, tango-inspired piano part, interspersed with dissonant cluster chords. The short, choppy phrases paint Joyce's curt sentences and indicate the restless characters in the text.

Geoffery Bush – *Cuisine Provençale*

Geoffery Bush wrote the song *Cuisine Provençale* in 1982 for mezzo-soprano and piano. The text is from Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The composer adapted the text, taking various lines from a passage in which Mrs. Ramsey, Mr. Ramsey, and a group of their friends and family are dining together. Bush uses Mrs. Ramsey's dialogue as she instructs a serving girl and tells the group that the dinner is her grandmother's recipe, but he mixes these with portions of the narration, and also includes a poem from the passage which Mr. Ramsey speaks to Mrs. Ramsey in the scene. This poem is a portion of "Luriana Lurilee" by Charles Elton, which Virginia Woolf partially (and incorrectly) quotes in *To the Lighthouse*.

John Cage – *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*

John Cage's 1942 art song for soprano and piano, *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*, takes an excerpt from James Joyce's novel *Finnegans Wake*. In this passage, Joyce describes the nighttime activities of several characters, in this case, lyrically

discussing the character Infantina Isobel. Throughout the song, the singer utilizes only three pitches, while the pianist plays percussively on the closed lid of the keyboard. Soprano Janet Fairbank who commissioned the work gave Cage freedom to select the text. He referred to *Finnegans Wake* "endless and attractive," and found the selected passage fluid and lyrical.[80] The sparseness of the melody in this song gives the impression of chant and allows for the text itself and its rhythm to be the main focus, contrasted against the pianist's percussive playing.

John Cage – *Nowth upon Nacht*

Nowth upon Nacht, also features text from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, was written in 1984 in memory of soprano Cathy Berberian. Despite being written more than forty years after *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs,* Cage sets words from the same passage of Joyce's novel, this time describing the pub's drunk watchman. The vocal line is high with a small range, while the pianist doesn't play the keys, but strikes the keyboard lid down three times while holding the pedal down. The song can be performed in succession with Cage's earlier song, *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*.

Tom Cipullo – *Rapture*

Composed in 2017, Tom Cipullo's song *Rapture* takes text from George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859). George Eliot is the pen name of author Mary Ann Evans. Cipullo's song sets an unaltered passage of narration from *Adam Bede's* third person omniscient narrator as they describe the character Seth Bede's new feelings of love toward Dinah Morris.

[80] L. Reinhardt, *John Cage's "The wonderful widow of eighteen springs,"* (2020), 3.

Cipullo's setting is written for high voice and piano and can be performed by either a soprano or a tenor.

Daron Hagen – "Rapture"

"Rapture," by Daron Hagen, is the first part of a "diptych" for high voice, cello, and piano called *Rapture and Regret* which was composed in 1987. The first song, "Rapture," is taken from Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves* (1931). The second song, "Regret," is an excerpt from Isak Dinesen's 1937 work, *Out of Africa*. While the text in "Regret" is also prose, Dinesen is the pen name of Danish author Karen Blixen, and this book is a non-fiction memoir of her time in Africa and not a novel.

Libby Larsen – *My Ántonia*

Libby Larsen wrote the seven-song cycle *My Ántonia* in 2000, based on texts from Willa Cather's novel of the same title (1918). The songs, written for high voice and piano, are adaptations of Cather's text made by the composer. Larsen takes Cather's words and excerpts and rearranges them to form poems. The song cycle tells the story of Jim Burden, the narrator of *My Ántonia*, as he describes his experiences with Ántonia Shimerda and the time they spent together in the Midwest of America.

Libby Larsen – *The Other Side of Silence*

Libby Larsen's song cycle *The Other Side of Silence* was premiered in 2021and commissioned by the Brooklyn Art Song Society. The cycle sets text by George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) from her novels *Adam Bede*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*.

Larsen says that in this set of songs for soprano and piano, she "shaped the selected texts into a cycle exploring the human need to place brackets on infinity."[81]

Cherise Leiter – *From the Ladies of Jane*

From the Ladies of Jane is a cycle of four songs for soprano and piano composed by Cherise Leiter in 2011. Leiter chooses texts from four of Jane Austen's novels. Each of the songs features dialogue from one of Austen's characters. The first song, "Of Music," sets dialogue of Lady Catherine de Bourgh from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) as she describes her taste in music. The second, "That of Loving Longest," is from Anne Elliot's conversation with Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* (1817) as she describes the way in which she feels women are capable of loving. Third, Leiter features Mrs. Elton from *Emma* (1816) in the song "Maple Grove," who frequently boasts about Maple Grove, the estate where she used to live. Finally, the cycle ends with the song "Willoughby," which takes text from the three letters Marianne Dashwood wrote to Willoughby in the book *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

Jeremiah Strickler – *The Vow*

Jeremiah Strickler's *The Vow* was premiered at the Chicago SongSlam in 2021. In this song, the composer sets text from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to music for baritone and piano. He adapts lines of dialogue from Victor Frankenstein's passionate vow to seek revenge on the creature who has killed his bride Elizabeth and his friends.

[81] Rick Perdian, Seen and Heard International, May 2, 2024, https://seenandheard-international.com/2024/02/a-deep-dive-into-the-minnesota-sound-with-brooklyn-art-song-society/.

Rick Sowash – *From The Enchanted April*

From The Enchanted April is a song written in 1998 by composer Rick Sowash for mezzo-soprano and piano. The text is taken from Elizabeth von Arnim's *The Enchanted April* (1922) in which Mrs. Wilkins describes the beauty of the Italian Riviera, where the four women whom the novel follows are on vacation, and the joy of being alive. The text is largely unchanged; however, Sowash omits sentences from the middle of the selected passage which reference specific locations in the novel.

David Evan Thomas – "A Ghost Story"

David Evan Thomas describes his work *Moonlight on a Midnight Stream* as a "romantic entertainment" for vocal quartet (soprano, mezzo, tenor, baritone) and piano, as it is not a chamber opera or a traditional song cycle. The entire piece, written in 1995, is around thirty minutes in length and is based on text by Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, and E.H. Trelawny. Each of the members of the quartet represents a character: Claire Clairmont (Mary Shelley's half-sister), Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Lord Byron. "A Ghost Story" is the fourth song in the set, and is sung by the mezzo-soprano, who represents Mary Shelley. The song is set to text from chapter five of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), in which Victor Frankenstein narrates as the creature comes to life.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

PERFORMING SONGS WITH TEXT FROM NOVELS

Performing songs with texts from novels gives both singers and pianists an opportunity to engage deeply with not only the music, but also with the character being portrayed and the overall story of the novel. As a performer, I find that working on songs with text from novels I know and love gives me greater connection with the music because I already have a deep understanding and fondness for the characters and context. Even if I do not know the novel already, the work of discovering a new book and putting in the time to read, study, and become familiar with new characters provides enjoyable enrichment which enhances my experience preparing and performing the music.

These songs also allow performers to engage closely with a character and their emotions not only when singing dialogue, but also when performing passages of narration. Some authors make use of free indirect speech, where the protagonist may narrate in a voice similar to how they address other characters in the book.[82] Free indirect speech, popularized by Jane Austen, is used by authors writing in third person when they want the reader to feel like they are inside the narrator's head, experiencing the world alongside the character.[83] This is the difference between a narrator saying something like "He thought she was beautiful and decided he would try to talk to her tomorrow," and "She was beautiful. Maybe tomorrow he would get up the nerve to talk to her." This

[82] J. D. Peters, FINDING A VOICE: TOWARDS A WOMAN'S DISCOURSE OF DIALOGUE IN THE NARRATION OF "JANE EYRE." In *Studies in the novel* (pp. 217–236). essay, University of North Texas (1991), 217.
[83] "Free Indirect Style," Oxford Reference.

common style of writing gives performers the ability to step into a character's shoes, even when not singing dialogue. This can provide singers with a chance to work on character studies in a way that might not be as available to them when preparing a poem. Doing this work may be especially helpful for younger singers who would like to learn more about acting and studying a character but are not ready for something as large-scale as a role in an opera. Although preparing a song or a song cycle is not the same experience as preparing for a role, being able to study a character on a smaller and more intimate scale is a chance to introduce students to these concepts.

Additionally, songs with text from novels have the potential to provide younger singers and collaborative pianists with an accessible gateway to art song. Often, interpreting poetry requires a high level of study in order for a performer to successfully analyze and find a meaningful emotional connection to a poem. However, performing text from novels such as *Frankenstein* or *Little Women* may prove easier for young performers to establish connections. Not only do novels provide storylines and characters to engage with, but also the more colloquial language can be easier to understand. This is especially true of novels which students may already be exposed to from high school courses or popular film adaptations. This familiarity can help to increase their comfort level on stage and enthusiasm for the music.

The performance of songs with text from novels can also be an engaging experience for audiences. As with young performers, many audiences are familiar with the novels in the guide provided in the previous chapter. Advertising songs which feature beloved characters and stories with which many people are already familiar, can be a great way to excite and draw in an audience.

SHE SPEAKS - ELEVATING WOMEN'S VOICES THROUGH NOVELS IN ART SONG

My own mission as a performer both individually and as a member of The Evelyn Duo, alongside soprano Shari Eve Feldman, is to elevate the voices of women in art song as composers and as writers. When I began this project, I initially set out to discover art song set to text from novels by women. However, as I researched and uncovered repertoire which uses text from novels, there is little existing repertoire by authors of any gender. After studying the repertoire and working to understand the challenges of setting and performing songs with text from novels, I hope to see more musicians embrace this music and begin to utilize novels in song. However, women have been historically underrepresented in both literature and in art song, and setting music to their words is one way to help make their voices heard. In pairing text from novels by women with music composed by women, musicians have the opportunity to give platforms to women, whose words have been overlooked in the art song repertoire.

It is for these reasons that I am committed to the creation of art song with special focus on women both as composers and authors, and I am in the process of commissioning new art songs with texts from novels by women. As part of these commissions, I am utilizing the techniques discussed in this paper in order to collaborate with composers to choose and adapt text.

One of these forthcoming commissions is a set of art songs for soprano and piano with text from children's novels by women. For one of these songs, I have asked Laura Nevitt, Boston based composer, conductor, and educator, to set a text I have adapted from Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. I selected Anne's dialogue from the

following passage because it reflects her wide-eyed wonder and infectious positivity about the world which is deeply intrinsic and essential to her character in this classic novel.

Below is the original text from chapter five of *Anne of Green Gables*:

> "Do you know," **[said Anne confidentially,]** "I've made up my mind to enjoy this drive. It's been my experience that you can nearly always enjoy things if you make up your mind firmly that you will. Of course, you must make it up FIRMLY. I am not going to think about going back to the asylum while we're having our drive. I'm just going to think about the drive. Oh, look, there's one little early wild rose out! Isn't it lovely? Don't you think it must be glad to be a rose? Wouldn't it be nice if roses could talk? I'm sure they could tell us such lovely things. And isn't pink the most bewitching color in the world? I love it, but I can't wear it. Redheaded people can't wear pink, not even in imagination. Did you ever know of anybody whose hair was red when she was young, but got to be another color when she grew up?"
>
> **["No, I don't know as I ever did," said Marilla mercilessly, "and I shouldn't think it likely to happen in your case either."**
>
> **Anne sighed.]**
>
> "Well, that is another hope gone. `My life is a perfect graveyard of buried hopes.' That's a sentence I read in a book once, and I say it over to comfort myself whenever I'm disappointed in anything."
>
> **["I don't see where the comforting comes in myself," said Marilla.]**
>
> "Why, because it sounds so nice and romantic, just as if I were a heroine in a book, you know. I am so fond of romantic things, and a graveyard full of buried hopes is about as romantic a thing as one can imagine isn't it? I'm rather glad I have one."[84]

In this section of the novel, Anne is having a conversation with her adoptive mother Marilla. Though this is a conversation and Marilla does have two short lines of dialogue, I wanted the focus of the song to be on Anne and her voice as a heroine. I also

[84] Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*. New York, NY: Puffin Books, 2014.

wanted to set only her dialogue to avoid the need for the composer and performers to have find a way to represent both Anne and Marilla, as well as the pieces of narration. I therefore chose to eliminate Marilla's dialogue and the short answers which she gives to Anne, as well as the dialogue and action tags added to Anne's lines. This gives the audience the impression that the singer, as Anne, is speaking to them directly and sharing her joy and excitement with them as a monologue.

After omitting some portions of this passage to take out Marilla's dialogue and any narration or dialogue tags, this is the text which is being commissioned:

> "Do you know, I've made up my mind to enjoy this drive. It's been my experience that you can nearly always enjoy things if you make up your mind firmly that you will. Of course, you must make it up FIRMLY. I am not going to think about going back to the asylum while we're having our drive. I'm just going to think about the drive. Oh, look, there's one little early wild rose out! Isn't it lovely? Don't you think it must be glad to be a rose? Wouldn't it be nice if roses could talk? I'm sure they could tell us such lovely things. And isn't pink the most bewitching color in the world? I love it, but I can't wear it. Redheaded people can't wear pink, not even in imagination. Did you ever know of anybody whose hair was red when she was young, but got to be another color when she grew up?"..."Well, that is another hope gone. `My life is a perfect graveyard of buried hopes.' That's a sentence I read in a book once, and I say it over to comfort myself whenever I'm disappointed in anything."..." because it sounds so nice and romantic, just as if I were a heroine in a book, you know. I am so fond of romantic things, and a graveyard full of buried hopes is about as romantic a thing as one can imagine isn't it? I'm rather glad I have one."

While this text selection may evolve as I continue to collaborate with the composer and the music they are creating, my work to choose this excerpt came not only from studying the text itself, but also from studying Anne Shirley as a character and making sure I chose a passage that exemplified her character and style of speech. In commissioning art songs with text from novels by women, particularly dialogue from

these texts, I hope to bring the voices authors and of characters such as Anne Shirley to life through music.

THE HEROINES PROJECT

In addition to commissioning new works, I have created a website called The Heroines Project with the mission of providing a resource for performers who are searching for art song repertoire with English text from novels by women. The Heroines Project provides a database of the repertoire discussed in this paper, and also has space for performers and composers to submit pieces to be included in the database. Along with the song database, The Heroines Project website contains a growing list of women who wrote novels in the public domain, in order to help composers find free potential text sources to set. The Heroines Project database can be accessed at theheroinesproject.com

Despite structural differences between poetry and prose, such as form, rhythm, and rhyme, there is no reason novels cannot be used as text sources in art song. While there are potential challenges faced in setting and performing prose, there is not enough difference found in either the text or in the musical examples presented in this paper to presume that text from novels is not be suitable for art song. I hope that in the future, composers and performers will be encouraged to create and perform art song using excerpts from novel. While the task of choosing text from novels may seem daunting, the additional work required in selecting and adapting the words does not mean that text from novels is less eloquent, emotional, or dramatic than poetry or other forms of prose. Through novels, musicians have the ability to engage with complex stories and emotions and give voices to characters and authors whose words have previously only existed on the page.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

An expressive musician and sensitive collaborator**, Mackenzie Lyn Marr** is a collaborative pianist and vocal coach. Mackenzie graduated in May 2024 with a DMA in Collaborative Piano Performance from Arizona State University, studying with Andrew Campbell and Miki Aoki. She also holds a master's degree in Collaborative Piano from the University of Maryland, where she studied with Rita Sloan, and has done additional studies at SongFest, Source Song Festival, the Castleman Quartet Program, Bay View Music Festival (Opera Fellow), The Atlantic Music Festival, and the Chamber Music Institute at Holy Cross.

Mackenzie is a member of **The Evelyn Duo**, alongside soprano Shari Eve Feldman. The Evelyn Duo has performed at the Washington Arts Club, the Epiphany Concert Series, the Dark Water Womxn in Music Festival, Music by Women Festival, District New Music Conference, and Source Song Festival. They have also been recitalists and clinicians at Hartwick College. Dedicated to new music and the elevation of women's voices in art song, The Evelyn Duo is passionate about working with contemporary composers and making unique, introverted music accessible to all audiences.

In addition to performing, Mackenzie is also an educator and has a master's degree in Piano Performance from the University of Georgia where she studied with Liza Stepanova and specialized in Pedagogy. She has worked as a teaching artist for both Arizona Opera and The Phoenix Symphony, doing outreach to bring music to public school children. In addition to teaching piano, she has also worked as an early childhood music educator, teaching young students at Washington Episcopal School in the DC area.

She has also presented at the MTNA National Conference and the MTNA Collegiate Piano Pedagogy Conference on her work teaching distance lessons to high school girls at the Moi Girls School in Eldoret, Kenya alongside collaborators from the University of Georgia Community Music School. A dedicated scholar herself, Mackenzie is also a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society and the Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society.

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