

In The Dark Shadow: Enharmonic Equivalence as Subtext in Two Wolf *Lieder*

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Abstract

Chromatic chord usage in many of Hugo Wolf's songs often results in progressions that require enharmonic reinterpretation of certain notes in order to return to the original key. In two songs, "Und steht Ihr früh am Morgen auf vom Bette" from the *Italianisches Liederbuch* and "In dem Schatten meiner Locken" from the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, repeated enharmonic progressions result from chordal root motion by ascending major thirds. Because of the phenomenological confusion inherent in enharmonic progressions (Has the music moved to another tonal region, or has it returned to where it started?), such progressions can play an important role in the interpretive process. I suggest an interpretation of these enharmonic shifts, and demonstrate how such enharmonic progressions can form a structural musical basis for the perception of a richer subtextual meaning of text and music.

1 Introduction

Hugo Wolf's chromatic harmony has been the subject of many analytical studies.¹ One feature of chromatic harmony is the use of harmonic progressions that divide the octave evenly, or similar progressions that leave the main key area and return through an enharmonic "back door." The nineteenth- and twentieth-century composers who use this type of progression exploit the twelve-tone chromatic universe that provides for this enharmonic equivalence—a musical realm where C♯ can stand in for D♭ despite the distinction between them in musical notation. This enharmonic "exchange value" would in the early twentieth century become an essential ingredient in the twelve-tone free atonal style of the Second Viennese School.

In tonal music, however, where functional harmony controls the musical syntax, C♯ and D♭ play different functional roles; and their equivalence on the piano keyboard, and in the design of most other instruments, is simply a practical matter of temperament. Temperament, in terms of the tonal language, is a compromise based on the practical consideration that an instrument should be playable with a reasonable amount of facility without having a different fingering system for each major or minor key. Because Wolf's musical language was decidedly tonal, despite his reliance upon highly chromatic harmonic materials, it will be revealing to examine his music from both perspectives—one that embraces enharmonic equivalence as well as one that enforces tonal strictness with regard to diatonic spelling. My approach is biased toward the tonal viewpoint, at

¹One such study is Deborah Stein's text on the subject.

least at the surface level. I will not embrace enharmonic equivalence initially, but I will allow for the possibility that a larger view of the piece will require acceptance of enharmonic equivalence for tonal understanding.

In my analysis of two songs, “Und steht Ihr früh am Morgen auf vom Bette” from the *Italianisches Liederbuch*, and “In dem Schatten meiner Locken” from the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, I will show how mentally differentiating enharmonically equivalent chords or pitches can help to add a layer of meaning to the interaction of music and text. There is a phenomenological confusion inherent in enharmonic progressions. Specifically, the listener is forced to ask whether the music has moved to another tonal region, or whether it has returned to where it started. In the case of the two Wolf songs, the enharmonic progression is by ascending major thirds. While with this progression it is easy enough to hear the last chord as being the same as the first, it is also easy to imagine how one might lose track of tonic if each of these chords is expanded into a key area in a piece of music. This perceptual ambiguity between moving away from and returning to tonic is the key to my interpretation of this music; it represents a “hermeneutic window” where a dramatic subtext can enter into the musical interpretation.

2 How a Woman’s Beauty Can Transform Nature

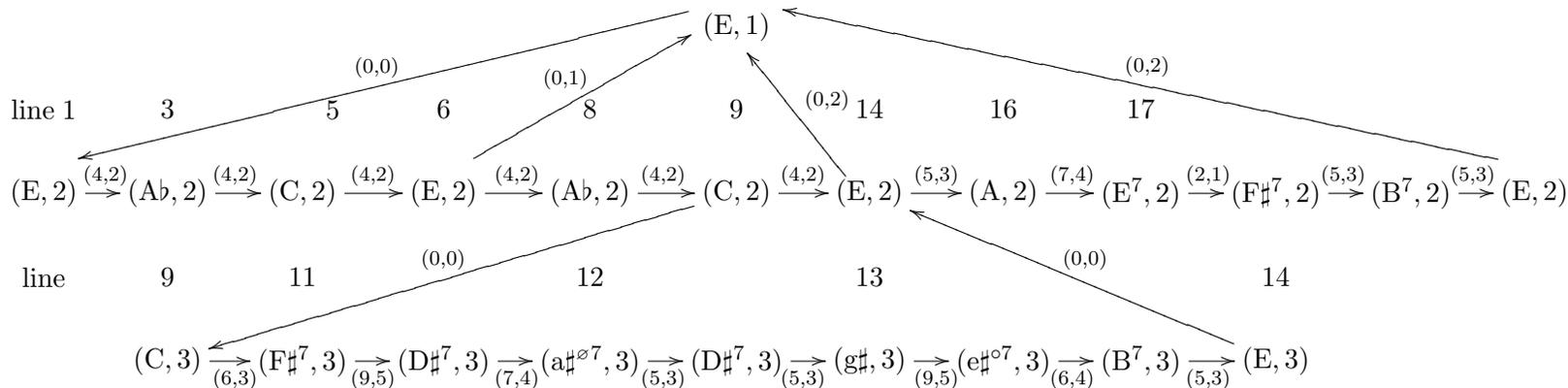
In the song “Und steht Ihr früh am Morgen auf vom Bette,” Wolf sets a text by Paul Heyse. Figure 1 gives my analysis of the harmonic structure as encapsulated in a transformational network, and an English translation of the text appears below it.

Some explanation of the notation used here will make the organization clear. Each chord appears in parentheses, using the note name of its root for identification. Chord quality is represented by standard notation involving capitalization of the note name and the addition of symbols for other chord features such as sevenths. For ease of reading, the chord roots are spelled as they appear in the score, even if my diatonic reading would indicate a different note name for the pitch class. After the chord designation appears an Arabic numeral indicating the level of analysis. The higher the number, the closer the chords match the actual musical surface structure.

The ordered pair of numbers accompanying each arrow shows the transposition level of the harmonic progression’s root motion. The first of the two numbers gives the transposition in semitones. Thus, the arrow on level two between E and A \flat indicates that the root motion is by four semitones when moving from the E chord to the A \flat chord. The second of the two numbers indicates how many scale steps are required to transpose the first chord to the second chord. For example, between the E and A \flat chords, the first chord is transformed into the second by transposition up two diatonic steps (a major third), despite its representation in the music (and in the letter names in the graph) as a diminished fourth. My adherence to diatonic strictness dictates that root motion must be a major third here because a progression by the chromatic interval of a diminished fourth makes little tonal sense.

The ordered pair notation can thus be translated into standard tonal interval names. To obtain the generic interval size, add one to the second number of the pair, so that zero will be a unison, one will be a second, two will be a third, and so on. The quality of the interval—major, minor, augmented, or diminished—is encapsulated in the first number of the pair, but is dependent upon the second number. For example, an interval of a second that has one semitone is a minor second, a second that has two semitones is a major second, a second that has three semitones is an augmented second, and so forth.

Figure 1: Transformational network describing Wolf, “Und steht Ihr früh am Morgen auf vom Bette.”



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| | | |
|---|---|----|
| Und steht Ihr früh am Morgen auf vom Bette, | And when you rise early from your bed, | 1 |
| Scheucht Ihr vom Himmel alle Wolken fort, | You banish every cloud from the sky, | 2 |
| Die Sonne lockt Ihr auf die Berge dort, | You lure the sun onto those hills, | 3 |
| Und Engelein erscheinen um die Wette | And angels compete to | 4 |
| Und bringen Schuh und Kleider Euch sofort. | Bring your shoes and clothes. | 5 |
| Dann, wenn Ihr ausgeht in die heil'ge Mette, | Then, when you go out to Holy Mass, | 6 |
| So zieht Ihr alle Menschen mit Euch fort, | You draw everyone along with you, | 7 |
| Und wenn Ihr naht der benedeiten Stätte, | And when you near the blessed place, | 8 |
| So zündet Euer Blick die Lampen an. | Your gaze lights up the lamps. | 9 |
| Weihwasser nehmt Ihr, macht des Kreuzes Zeichen | You take holy water, make the sign of the cross | 10 |
| Und netzet Eure weiße Stirn sodann | And moisten your white brow, | 11 |
| Und neiget Euch und beugt die Knie ingleichen— | And you bow and bend the knee— | 12 |
| O wie holdselig steht Euch alles an! | Oh, how beautifully it all becomes you! | 13 |
| Wie hold und selig hat Euch Gott begabt, | How sweetly, blessedly has God endowed you, | 14 |
| Die Ihr der Schönheit Kron empfangen habt! | Who have received the crown of beauty. | 15 |
| Wie hold und selig wandelt Ihr im Leben; | How sweetly, blessedly you walk through life; | 16 |
| Der Schönheit Palme ward an Euch gegeben. | The palm of beauty was bestowed on you. | 17 |

In Figure 1, The transformation between levels from the E-major tonic chord at level one to the initial tonic chord in level two is by (0,0). The ordered pair (0,0) between the levels, then, indicates that no transposition operation has taken place. The surface-level E chord ascends by three major thirds to the E chord that completes the cycle. To verify that these three transformations return us to an E-major chord, we add the first numbers in the ordered pairs. Four (from E to Ab) plus four (from Ab to C) plus four (from C to E) is twelve half steps. As in any twelve-tone transposition operation, the operation is addition modulo twelve. The result of our addition, twelve, thus reduces to zero because of octave equivalence. Hence we know that, at least in terms of twelve-tone equal temperament, both the first and fourth chords are E-major triads.

If there is no enharmonic shift involved, we can also expect all of the second numbers in the ordered pairs to add up to zero, when reduced modulo seven. Here, the numbers two, two, and two add only to six. This tells us that we do not finish on the same diatonic scale step as where we began. In this mod-seven representation of scale-step intervals the transposition operation T_6 is equivalent to T_{-1} (just like in the familiar mod-twelve universe T_{11} is equivalent to T_{-1}). We are now one diatonic step lower than the initial E chord, and thus theoretically on D \sharp instead of E. The arrow that returns from this second “E” back to the E on level one thus cannot be (0,0). We must transpose up one diatonic step (by a diminished second) to return to the E-major triad on level one. This explains the transformation by zero half steps and one scale step accompanying that arrow. The low-numbered levels in these graphs, then, show how, at some degree of abstraction, certain chords that are spelled differently at the musical surface are equivalent at this more abstract level.

This process of reconciling surface-level transformations with the large-level tonic chord will therefore generate all arrows in these graphs that point from a higher-numbered level back to a lower-numbered level. When chords on the two levels are diatonically different, they will be indicated by a transposition with zero as the first number and one or six as the second number. An ordered pair of (0,1) indicates that the progression has drifted down by a diatonic step, and must be shifted back up to be completely equivalent to the starting pitch level. An ordered pair of (0,6) indicates that the progression has drifted up by a diatonic step, and must be shifted back down to be completely equivalent to the starting pitch level. In the present case, both songs analyzed here only drift downward diatonically, and therefore (0,6) will not be seen in the transformational graphs.

The text of the song concerns the aspects of a woman’s daily activities that underscore her beauty, and how her beauty seemingly affects or enhances aspects of the world around her as well. The final four lines of the poem focus on how God has blessed the woman with her beauty, and thus has accomplished great works through her beauty. The immediacy of the simple texture, dominated by arpeggiated major chords and pedal point, underscores the primary focus of the poem’s description: beauty, as found in both the woman and nature. The repeated progression by ascending major third mirrors the positive transformations that the woman’s beauty effects upon the morning: clearing the skies, bringing the sun into the heavens, drawing angels to her, and brightening the lamps at church.

I would be satisfied to leave my interpretation there, as indeed the simplicity and directness of both the music and text are, in my mind, the source of their beauty. The fact that the major third cycle results in diatonic drift, however, can further enhance one’s understanding of the poem’s structure. Although the poem is a single stanza, Wolf’s musical setting clearly organizes the text into three sections. The first involves rising in the morning, the second moves the setting to the church, and the third serves to summarize the text, providing a reason for the miraculous effects

that the woman's beauty has on her surroundings. Whereas the first two sections convey a storyline, describing transformations in nature, the third section is more static, having arrived at a dramatic plateau built on the woman's beauty.

This structure is contradicted somewhat by the harmonic activity, where the only point at which Wolf breaks free from pedal point technique is at the end of the most active parts of the text. There is a dramatic increase in harmonic rhythm that begins in line 9 and concludes with the authentic cadence that starts line 14. Perhaps this "harmonic crescendo" in the music signifies a welling up of emotion on the part of the narrator resulting from the beauty he is describing.

Although the static quality of the music accompanying line 14 is virtually the same as in lines 1 and 6, both the authentic cadence that initiates line 14 and other more complicated factors create a sense that this part of the music is more static than in lines 1 or 6, just as the text is more static. In this regard, my transformational graph in Figure 1 clearly shows how diatonic spelling enhances this musical stasis. Not only does the downward diatonic drift stop around the same time the harmonic activity increases, but more importantly it seems to "settle down" to the final diatonic level where it remains during the entire third part of the song. This "settling in," in my view, comes from an important musical contrast. The sudden shifts by ascending major third in the first section cause downward diatonic slips, whereas the more functional progression connecting C and E at the end of the second section enables a smoother transition into the lowest diatonic position of the tonic E.

3 Troubled Undercurrents in the Shadows

An even more compelling interpretive insight can result from inspecting the downward diatonic drift in the song "In dem Schatten". In this case, the enharmonic progressions musically support the poem's dark dramatic subtext. A transformational graph and a translation of the poem appear in Figure 2. Here analytical level two zig-zags up and down the page to conserve horizontal space. This visual design places every surface-level instance of B \flat on the same horizontal level, with each digression looping out and back. Aside from this, there is no other significance to the vertical placement of chords in level two, and the arrows merely indicate the chords' temporal order.

In the poem, a woman is musing about her relationship with her lover, who has dozed off beside her. She is concerned about their relationship, and her fears begin to mount three times during the song. In each case, she tosses off her worries with the words "ah, no" accompanied by a simple cadential formula. We get the sense that she really does need to address her feelings from the fact that each stanza moves away from the tonic, and the "ah, no" cadential formula is always in a foreign key. Each time that the woman shakes off her troubled thoughts it is the piano that must repeat the cadence in the original key for tonal closure. This fact seems to indicate that the woman is not bringing her thoughts to fruition. Although on first analysis it appears that she is cutting short her mounting fears by deciding not to wake up her beloved, at a deeper level she herself is refusing to wake up.

Wolf's musical setting captures the text's quite apparent innocence with its dearth of minor chords and the bouncy piano figuration, which never quite succumbs to the troublesome undercurrents. When one considers the tonal structure from a strictly diatonic perspective, however, the music also enhances the poem's darker subtext. The completion of the first enharmonic progression after the initial "ah, no" cadence is enacted by the piano. At this point, one diatonic step lower, the woman returns to more innocent thoughts of her hair and her struggle to keep it combed and under control. We might say that it now seems that she would rather see the enharmonic equivalence

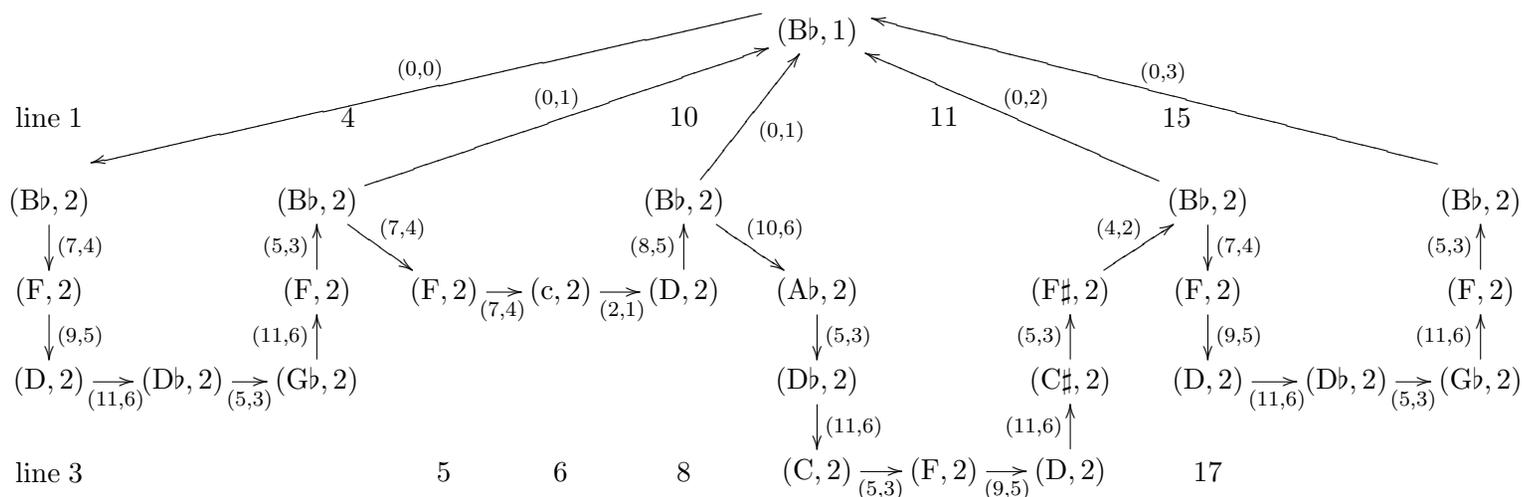
than see the tonal universe spiraling downward. By focusing on her hair and not its dark shadow she maintains tonal control, and no enharmonic shift occurs in the second stanza. Despite her refusal to allow herself to think about her problems, she still finds herself in a foreign key (D \flat) at the end of the second stanza. This time, however, the piano does not return to tonic, and she is thus compelled to think of the source of her problems: her lover's complaints.

The second diatonic slip occurs in the middle of the third stanza, just as she brings to mind the fact that her boyfriend calls her a snake. While this most startling thought might perhaps prove too difficult for her to ignore, she does manage to return her thoughts to more mundane things. She does so by convincing herself that everything he said must not be entirely true if he now falls asleep in the same shadows that caused her to worry. For the third time she sings her cadence in a foreign key; and then, as before, the piano moves back to tonic, slipping down enharmonically. Although we have peacefully returned to B \flat , our diatonic interpretation tells us that the shadows have not really gone away.

4 Conclusion

The concept of enharmonic equivalence underlies our tonal understanding of all chromatic music, and thus must play a role in analysis. These two examples show how reading chromatic music additionally from a strict diatonic perspective can promote even more nuanced interpretations. The richness afforded by these diatonic analyses offers the possibility of multiple readings, and even conflicting interpretations. My graphs could certainly support other hermeneutic analyses of these two songs. In the first song, the idea of enharmonic shift as transfiguration, and in the second song, the idea of growing darkness with each return of tonic form a more basic interpretation of the enharmonic progressions—one that can play directly into performance practice without the need for a specific hermeneutic reading. In this way, maintaining diatonic strictness can be a valuable technique for enriching the analysis and performance of many chromatic works.

Figure 2: Transformational network describing Wolf, “In dem Schatten meiner Locken.”



7

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|----|
| In dem Schatten meiner Locken | In the shadow of my tresses | 1 |
| Schliefe mir mein Geliebter ein. | My beloved has fallen asleep. | 2 |
| Wecke ich ihn nun auf? —Ach nein! | Shall I awaken him now? Ah, no! | 3 |
| Sorglich strahlt ich meine krausen | Carefully I comb my ruffled | 4 |
| Locken täglich in der Frühe, | Locks, early every day; | 5 |
| Doch umsonst ist meine Mühe, | Yet for nothing is my trouble, | 6 |
| weil die Winde sie zerzausen. | For the wind makes them dishevelled yet again. | 7 |
| Lockenschatten, Windessausen | The shadows of my tresses, the whispering of the wind, | 8 |
| Schlüferten den Liebsten ein. | Have lulled my darling to sleep. | 9 |
| Wecke ich ihn nun auf? —Ach nein! | Shall I awaken him now? Ah, no! | 10 |
| Hören muß ich, wie ihn gräme, | I must listen to him complain | 11 |
| Daß er schmachtet schon so lange, | That he pines for me so long, | 12 |
| Daß ihm Leben geb' und nehme | That life is given and taken away from him | 13 |
| Diese meine braune Wange, | By this, my brown cheek, | 14 |
| Und er nennt mich eine Schlange, | And he calls me a snake; | 15 |
| Und doch schlief er bei mir ein. | Yet he fell asleep by me. | 16 |
| Wecke ich ihn nun auf? —Ach nein! | Shall I awaken him now? Ah, no! | 17 |

Und steht Ihr früh am Morgen auf vom Bette
(When in the early morning thou dost rise)

Ruhig. $\text{♩} = 60$.

Und steht Ihr früh am Morgen auf vom Bette,
When in the early morning thou dost rise, -

schauet Ihr vom Him-mel al-le Wol-ken fort,
thy pre-ence of all clouds dost clear - the skies,

die Sonne leuchtet Ihr auf die Berge dort,
the sun is hared up - on the hills by there, -

9.

- nen um die Welt, und bringt die neuen Tag-ten -

11.

- der Euch so fort,
- wenn wir - so thue.

14.

Dann, wenn Ihr aus-geht in die Welt, - so geht in die Welt, -

16.

so zieht Ihr al-le Men-schen mit Euch fort,
the peo-ple stop to gaze - as thou drawest near,

28. *Wie hold-se - lig stoh' Euch al - les an!*
o wie hold - se - lig stoh' Euch al - les an!
and ev' - ry moment above thy beauty rare.
Wie hold - und so - lig
Was wuns - von gyfts dir

31. *hat Euch Gott be - gah't, die Ihr der Schönheit Kron' - en - pfan - gen habt!*
Loveth hath lookt to thee, the crown of beauty thou hast!

34. *Wie hold und an - lig was - delt Ihr im Le - ben; der Schönheit Pal - me ward an*
Thou'rt us - ev' - ry en - dow'd with ev' - ry charm; the beauty's palm - tree ward an

37. *Euch ge - ge - hen, beamt's palm.*

19. *und wenn Ihr nicht der be - so - del - ten Sitt - le, so zün - delt Eu - er*
for al - ter - long's do all be - come a - gain, their fire - brand

20. *Blick die Lam - pen an, weh - was - ser nehmt Ihr, up - on thy breast thou*
by these eyes do bright!

23. *macht des Kron - zes Zel - chen und set - zt Eu - in weh - we*
maketh the so - cret sign - and them dost crown thou ev' - ry

25. *so dann und set - get Euch und wegt die Knie in - g'ed chen -*
of thine; them thou dost bow thy head in ad - vent pres - er,

In dem Schatten meiner Locken (In the shade of my tresses)

Leicht, zart, nicht schnell
(Lightly, delicately and not fast)

molto rit.

In dem Schat - ten mei - ner Lo - cken schliesst mir mein Ge - lieb - ter
In the sha - dow of my tress - es, my be - loved to sleep has

a tempo

4. *pp*
eis. Weck ich ihn nun auf?
gone. Will not wake them, love,

a tempo

acmpre pp

6. *f*

Ach nein! *mf*
sleep on!

Sorg - lich
I fear

13. *f*

strahlt ich mei - ne kraut - sen Lo - cken tig - lich in der Frü - he,
couch shrouded erst now hid, e - rry warm I comb my tress - es,

16. *f*

doch um - zogen ist mei - ne Mü - he, weil die Win - de sie ver -
all in east, for tress - es - en and the winds my locks dis -

20. *f*

san - sen
are - all.

23. *poco rit.*

Lo - cken - schat - ten, Win - des - san - sen schlü - fen den Lieb - sten ein.
Kneels my tress - es wind - die - are - all, may be - loved to sleep has gone.

27. *pp*
 Weck ich ihn nun auf?
 Will not wake him, now,
 Ach *strep.*
 And he sleeps, now,
a tempo
p

32. *sein!*
 He - ren muß ich, wie ihn grü - ße,
 And he tells me, how he greets me, that he
p

36. *schmach*
 - tet schon so lan - ge, daß ihn Le - ben geb - und
 Ac - cept - ed me so long, that for me e - ven death - ing,
p

39. *neh. me die - se wei - ße brau - so Was - ge.*
 Stand - ing, on my burn - ing knee - so feed - ing.
pp

43. *Und er nennt mich sei - ne*
Callie me "Fiz - on" in his
p

45. *molto ritien.*
p
 Schla - ße,
 an - geist,
 und doch schlief er bei mir ein.
 and yet at my side he sleeps.
a tempo
sempre pp
pp

49. *pp*
 Weck ich ihn nun auf?
 Foud love nig - ti - keeps,
 Ach wein! - and
 and weeps!
pp

54. *pp*
 (John Bernhoff)
 dim.
pp