To the South!
A Study of Exoticism in Fanny Hensel’s Lieder

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**INTRODUCTION**

Longing for a place that is not one’s native land, or the exotic, is a familiar theme in German Romantic music, literature, and art. Though exoticism is often tied to Orientalism and the contrast between eastern and western cultures, many Germans also considered southern Europe to be exotic. As Nelson Moe puts it,

> Between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, north and south became charged moral categories in the cultural imagination of Europe. In the work of philosophers and poets, historians and novelists, the idea that Europe was divided between northern and southern peoples and countries acquired a new evocative power and explanatory force. For many, Italy was the southern country par excellence. The lands and peoples of Italy were central to the elaboration of the idea of the south, while the south played an important role in the representation of Italy and Italianness. (13)

These notions, when expanded to include music, apply well to Fanny Hensel, for whom Italy held a great fascination. Even though she belonged to the German Romantic musical tradition, her compositions are seldom included in the standard repertoire. In this thesis, I examine how her music displays largely unrecognized talent and a wealth of associations with exoticism.

My goal for the thesis has been to shed light on the music of Hensel that evokes a sense of longing for a distant place, which was often Italy. The south captivated her imagination and provided the themes of many of her Lieder. In letters to her family and close friends, she often voiced her constant desire to travel, as her brother Felix Mendelssohn could do when he went abroad for performances in France, Switzerland, England, and Italy. In his book, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic*, Timothy Morton explains that a southern “‘happier clime’ is admired for its roses and oaks,” while posing an attractive travel destination for northern Europeans (88). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whom Hensel greatly admired, was
likewise captured by these images; for instance, he described Venetian “houses [which] grew upward like closely planted trees” (61).

In Chapter 1, I discuss the Mendelssohn family and Hensel’s early life. During a brief family vacation, she saw Italy from afar, but never arrived there, a failure that triggered a lifelong wanderlust. She captured these feelings with music colored by a broad palette of exotic traits. As detailed by Ralph Locke, these include non-normative modes, shifting or static harmonies, departures from continuity, quick ornaments, and distinctive uses of vocal tessitura (54). Many of her Lieder include playful appoggiaturas to evoke Italy, or rippling arpeggios that conjure thoughts of Venice or the Adriatic Sea beyond. Chapter 2 takes a closer look at her relationship with her brother; the dynamic between the siblings directly influenced the compositions of both. Included in this discussion are a few of Mendelssohn’s works and a discussion of the siblings’ “songs without words” for piano: his Lieder ohne Worte, her Lieder für das Pianoforte. Chapter 3 concerns Hensel’s visit to Italy in 1839-1840, a trip that she had desired for so long, and the outpouring of compositions and boost in confidence that followed the journey. Ultimately, the thesis reveals the extent of the inspiration that this prolific composer drew from the notions and the realities of Italy.
CHAPTER 1
Zum Lande der Poesie: An Examination of Exoticism in the Music of Fanny Hensel

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805-47) was born in Hamburg, Germany, to an upper-class Jewish family. She was the oldest of four children, of whom her brother Felix Mendelssohn is the most well-known. Although she was educated together with her brother and encouraged to excel in her studies, their careers diverged at a certain point: Mendelssohn pursued a public career as a performer and composer, while Hensel remained in the domestic sphere (Reich 86).

According to Nancy B. Reich and Françoise Tillard, Hensel’s father, Abraham Mendelssohn, directly disapproved of her efforts in composition, as this was considered to be an inappropriate pursuit for a woman of her class (Tillard 72 and Reich 86). However, her mother, Lea Salomon Mendelssohn, was a gifted pianist who modeled musicianship and supported Hensel’s composing activities. In the end, however, only her opus 1 was published during her lifetime. This was due to a number of factors, including discouragement from the family patriarch and not having a female composer as a mentor, neither of which encouraged her self-esteem.

With respect to her musical talent, the attitudes of her father and brother toward Hensel were no doubt influenced by the widespread anti-Semitism in Germany in the early nineteenth century; they wanted to preserve the family’s wealth while remaining inconspicuous. After the French occupation of Hamburg in 1811, a subsequent decline in trade affected the family directly since the negative impact of this shift caused Abraham, a banker, to take his family back to Berlin, his birthplace (Tillard 49, Todd Fanny 4). Having shown exceptional musical talent from early childhood, both Fanny and Felix were tutored by Carl Friedrich Zelter, a prominent German composer, conductor, and teacher. Zelter was even said to have favored Hensel, praising the affinity that she shared with her brother for Johann Sebastian Bach to Johann Wolfgang von

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1 From Italien (see next footnote).
Goethe (Todd *Fanny* 26). Though Abraham was proud of both children, he encouraged his son to pursue music seriously as a career, while he wanted it to be a mere hobby for Hensel. Despite this view, Abraham was considered a liberal during his time, and Hensel was thoroughly educated. Also, in the hopes of fully assimilating into German society, he converted his entire family to Christianity and appended the Christian name Bartholdy to Mendelssohn in 1821 (Citron *Grove* 388). Thus, the limits imposed on Hensel were predominantly an issue of class, and not gender.

Hensel had many strong women within her prestigious family to inspire her. In addition to her mother’s being a pianist, her great-aunts Fanny von Arnstein and Sarah Levy were also musicians. The former was a *salonnière*, a woman who organized informal cultural or typically art-oriented gatherings in her home in Vienna (Todd *Fanny* 10, Bilski and Braun 1); the latter was a skilled pianist who had studied under Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and commissioned works by his brother Carl Philipp Emanuel (Todd *Mendelssohn* 10). Hensel’s talents were showcased throughout her childhood in the Mendelssohn’s grand salons, and during the early 1830s, she became well-known in Berlin for her “Sunday concerts” (Citron *Grove* 388). Her compositions were often premiered at these events by her younger sister Rebecka, while Hensel accompanied her on piano (Todd *Fanny* 121).

Even outside her family, Hensel encountered many inspiring women of the arts. During a brief stay in Paris in 1816, both Hensel and Felix Mendelssohn were taught the piano by Madame Marie Bigot de Morogues, a prominent pianist and pedagogue (Todd *Fanny* 26). Another accomplished woman and Hensel’s contemporary was Clara Schumann. As a member of the bourgeois class, she was able to pursue a public career as a composer and pianist (Todd *Fanny* 200). Though Hensel was not able to publicly showcase her talents, she made good use of
her Sunday concerts and her output of compositions was more prolific (Citron Women 229). Many friends and relatives who visited the Mendelssohn household remarked upon Hensel’s extraordinary skill as she continued studying piano and composition into her teenage years. But Abraham’s support for Hensel’s musical endeavors shifted to mere tolerance as she grew older and, eventually, to outright disapproval (Tillard 67). She stayed behind in Berlin while the younger teenage Felix Mendelssohn toured Europe as a composer, pianist, and conductor.

Despite her restriction from traveling as a public performer, Hensel did not harbor any ill sentiments toward her brother, nor did it affect their early relationship. She was a constant source of inspiration for him, partly because she was four years older, and also highly skilled at the keyboard (Tillard 67). During Felix’s early travels, she would often write to him, her letters radiating motherly concern and affection. She even addressed him on multiple occasions as “my dear son” (Citron 1, 4). Felix wholly returned this affection, often asking for advice and commenting upon her considerable gifts as a pianist. On one occasion, he remarked that he wished he could perform a particular passage with her style and fluency (Kimber 3). This is not to say that Felix did not understand the limitations society cast upon Hensel. For the time being however, he looked up to his talented older sister as his equal.

Through their tutor Zelter, Mendelssohn met Goethe in 1821 (Todd Fanny 98); Hensel was introduced to him the following year (Tillard 102). Goethe was deeply impressed with the siblings and declared both child prodigies. Both Mendelssohn and Hensel would go on to set many of Goethe’s poems to music. Indeed, Goethe’s Romantic view of Italy struck a particular chord with Hensel, and several of her Lieder depicting distant lands were based on his poetry. Not all of Hensel’s songs revolved around Italy and Southern Europe—many of them are set to French, Latin, and even English texts. During her lifetime, she composed almost three hundred
songs set to German texts, as well as twenty French, seven English, five Italian, and one Latin (Hellwig-Unruh).

Hensel draws on special musical markers in setting texts that evoke a sense of the distant or exotic to represent unfamiliar ideas, and these markers are often distinct from those of her contemporaries, including her brother Felix. Exoticism can be found in the use of unconventional harmonies, specific keys, certain motifs, word painting, and other musical elements designed to conjure imagined or foreign settings. A prime example is Italien (Italy, op. 8 no. 3 under the name of Felix Mendelssohn). Other representative Lieder include Das Heimweh (Homesickness, published as op. 8 no. 2 under the name of Felix Mendelssohn), Sehnsucht (Longing, op. 9 no. 7 under the name of Felix Mendelssohn), Fichtenbaum und Palme (Fir and Palm Tree, op. 8 no. 9), Wanderlied (Wandering Song, op. 1 no. 2), Gondellied (Gondolier’s Song, op. 1, no. 6), Frühling (Spring, op. 7 no. 3), and Nach Süden (To the South, op. 10 no. 1). Keyboard pieces including Il saltarello romano (The Roman Dance, op. 6 no. 4) share these evocations, incorporating ideas from Mendelssohn’s works such as the Italian Symphony, op. 90. According to Ralph Locke, exoticism in music comes from, refers to, or evokes a place other than “here,” or in this case, Hensel’s Berlin (1). Perhaps inspired by Goethe’s Italian Journey, Germans valued Italy as a desirable destination (Goethe 14 and Moe 16). Due to the gender assumptions of the time, Mendelssohn was able to travel and have the experience that Hensel lacked, thus the

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3 H-U 129
4 H-U 219
5 H-U 328
6 H-U 317
7 H-H 377
8 H-U 464
9 H-U 383
10 H-U 372
subjects of his Lieder contrast directly with hers (Bilski and Braun 2). Examples include *Im Grünen* (In Nature, op. 8 no. 11) and *Auf der Wanderschaft* (Wanderings, op. 71 no. 5). Both these pieces suggest a sense of belonging and comfort with his surroundings which Hensel’s pieces lack.

In 1822, the Mendelssohn family departed from Berlin, planning to travel to Italy (Tillard 106). Their travels sparked a burst of creativity around this period in the adolescent Hensel, who produced several Lieder reflecting her fascination with places beyond Berlin. She composed *Italien* shortly after the Mendelssohn family spent time in Switzerland, which afforded them a vantage point from where they could see Italy (Tillard 106), even though circumstances prevented them from getting there (Rothenberg 691). Mendelssohn published *Italien* among his own Lieder in op. 8 and op. 9 (1827), to which Hensel contributed four additional Lieder. At this time, she was only twenty-two years old and he eighteen. Mendelssohn never attempted to pass off Hensel’s work as his own and openly credited her for the works published under his name (Todd *Fanny* 95). During one of Mendelssohn’s visits to England, Queen Victoria stated that *Italien* was her favorite among his Lieder, to which he had to admit that Hensel was the actual composer (Todd *Fanny* 95).

This song, composed around August 24, 1825 (Todd 95), is a setting of a poem by Franz Grillparzer (1791-1872), an Austrian writer famous for his dramatic works. In this poem, one can indeed sense the drama for which he is known:

*Italien*  
Schöner und schöner schmückt sich der Plan,  
Schmeichelnde Lüfte wehen mich an,  
Fort aus der Prosa Lasten und Müh’  
Zieh’ ich zum Lande der Poesie;  
Gold’ner die Sonne, blauer die Luft,  
Grüner die Grüne, würz'ger der Duft!  

*Italy*  
More and more beautifully the plain adorns itself,  
Caressing breeze drifts to me,  
Away from the burdens and trouble of prose  
I move to (/transfer) the land of poetry;  
More golden the sun, more blue the air,  
More green the green, more aromatic the fragrance!
Dort an dem Maishalm, schwellend von Saft,  
Sträubt sich der Aloe störrische Kraft!  
Ölbaum, Zypresse, blond du, du braun,  
Nickt ihr wie zierliche, grüßende Frau’n?  
Was glänzt im Laube, funkelnd wie Gold?  
Ha, Pomeranze, birgst du dich hold?  

There on the corn stalk, swelling from juice,  
Bucks the aloe’s unyielding force!  
Olive tree, cypress, you fair, you dark,  
Are you nodding like dainty, welcoming women?  
What gleams in the foliage, sparkling like gold?  
Ha! Bitter orange, are you hiding yourself charmingly?

Trotz’ger Poseidon, warest du dies,  
Der unten scherzt und murmelt so süß?  
Und dies, halb Wiese, halb Äther zu schau’n,  
Es wär des Meeres furchtbaren Grau’n?  
Hier will ich wohnen, Göttliche du!  
Bringst du, Parthenope, Wogen zur Ruh”?  

Defiant Poseidon, was it you,  
Who jests and murmurs so sweetly below?  
And this, to behold half meadow, half air,  
Would be the terrible horror of the sea?  
Here I want to dwell, divine one!  
Parthenope, will you bring the waves to rest?

Nun dann versuch’ es, Eden der Lust,  
Eb’ne die Wogen auch dieser Brust!  

Now try it then, Eden of Joy,  
Dampen the swellings of this breast too!

Within the beautiful imagery depicting Italy in all its light and natural beauty, Grillparzer introduces a shadow of conflict by addressing the third verse to the sea-God, Poseidon. Hensel fully adopts the tumult of the third verse to contrast with the buoyancy of the rest of the song. The Lied follows a modified strophic form, with three verses: AA’A”. The differences between verses mirror the abundant changes in scenery.
Through successive, highly chromatic phrases featuring a series of tonicizations and diminished seventh chords (m. 35-39), Hensel embodies the unfamiliar “horror” and divine transcendence of the situation. Having spent most of her life in Berlin, she naturally saw the sea as a novelty since she was unable to visit it and was left to explore it through her music. The intensified setting of this text serves well in illustrating her distinctive treatment of an exotic element – the mysteries of the depths build over modulating chromatic harmonies as text is translated into music. The rest of the Lied is a fantasy of joy, evoking an airy Italian dance.
Italien begins and ends in a bright G major, carried along by a sweeping 6/8 heightened by the quarter-note appoggiaturas on the downbeats of measures 2 and 4. The grace note in measure 3 is a flirtatious upper neighbor, onomatopoeic for “schmeichelnde” where it indeed caresses the word in the lightly ornamented way mentioned by Locke (54). Though the progressions are deceptively simple, Hensel succeeds in capturing the unmistakable essence of Italy with time signature, ornamentation, and light phrases.
In contrast, *Das Heimweh*, set to a text by Friederike Robert (1795-1832), speaks to a longing for home and the familiar. It shows a preoccupation with location and the idea of distance. In this Lied, dated July 19, 1824, Hensel adapts Robert’s longing for Swabia (in southwestern Germany) to her own desire to reunite with Felix after he has left Berlin (Todd *Fanny* 81).

*Das Heimweh*  
*Homesickness*

Was ist's, das mir den Atem hemmet,  
What is it that constricts my breath,  
Und selbst den Seufzer unterdrückt?  
And even represses the sigh?  
Das stets in jeden Weg sich stemmet,  
That insinuates itself into every pathway,  
Und Sinn und Geist mir so verrückt?  
And so disturbs my mind and spirit?  
Es ist das Heimweh! O Schmerzenslaut!  
It is homesickness! Oh cry of pain!  
O Schmerzenslaut, wie klingst im Innern mir vertraut!  
Oh cry of pain, how familiar you sound within my innermost being!

Was ist's, das mir den Willen raubet,  
What it is that robs me of my will,  
Zu jeder Tat mich mutlos macht?  
Makes me discouraged about every task?  
Das mir die Flur, so grün belaubet,  
That transforms the meadow, so green and leafy,  
Verwandelt in Gefängnisnacht?  
Into a night of imprisonment?  
Es ist das Heimweh! O Jammerton!  
It is homesickness! Oh sound of lamentation!  
O Jammerton, wie lange tönst im Herzen schon!  
Oh sound of lamentation, how long you have already been ringing in my heart!

Was ist's, das mich erstarrt und brennet,  
What is it that makes me freeze and burn,  
Und jede Freud' und Lust vergällt?  
And turns every joy and passion to gall?  
Giebt es kein Wort, das dieses nennet,  
Is there no word that describes it,  
Giebt es kein Wort in dieser Welt?  
Is there no word in this world?  
Es ist das Heimweh! O herbes Weh!  
It is homesickness! Oh bitter pain!  
O herbes Weh! Die Heimat, ach! ich nimmer seh'.  
Oh bitter pain! My home, ah! I shall never see you again!

Here, the Lied is in a purely strophic form. The passionate verses are accompanied by agitated arpeggios in the piano. Each question is answered by the refrain: “Es ist das Heimweh!” where the agonizing homesickness is heightened by repeated chords in the accompaniment.
Sehnsucht, in opus 9 also published under Mendelssohn’s name, is set to a poem by the historian Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884). It is dated June 24, 1828. Unlike Italien, however, it does not depict a distant place or a physical landscape, but rather the musings of a maid (Das Mädchen) as she looks back on a distant memory. Once again, Hensel keeps to the theme of longing for a place and reiterates her preoccupation with combining the ideas of desire and location.

**Sehnsucht**

Fern und ferner schallt der Reigen.
Wohl mir,
    um mich her ist Schweigen auf der Flur.
Zu dem vollen Herzen nur
Will nicht Ruh sich neigen.

**Longing**

Far and farther echoes the dance.
While here
    around me the meadow remains silent.
Only to my full heart
Will peace not yield itself.
Horch! die Nacht schwebt durch die Räume. 
Listen! The night wafts through the space.
Ihr Gewand 
Her garments
   durchrauscht die Bäume lispelnd leis'. 
rush through the trees whispering softly.
Ach, so schweifen liebeheiß 
Alas, thus wander, burning with love
Meine Wünsch' und Träume. 
My wishes and dreams.

Hensel chose to set this short, unassuming poem as a strophic Lied. Once again, she demonstrates her expertise in setting text. Like the poem, the music is deliberate and ponderous, especially in the accompaniment, thus embodying the wistful message.

Though each strophe is very distinct in composition and inflection, the music adapts to both, through manipulation of the rhythm. Hensel subtly guides “Das Mädchen” either to stand alone, or to follow the shape provided by the piano accompaniment. Thus, the singer is able to accent the “schallt” or follow the lead of the piano to stress “Horch!” In both cases, Hensel is able to bring the sense of the phrase to the forefront, successfully conveying what the maid is trying to express. The object of the maid’s pining is not mentioned, yet there is an unmistakable sense of distance as the melody weaves from the forefront and back, once again embodying Hensel’s preoccupation.

These compositions, along with those of Mendelssohn and of their contemporaries, were shared with large audiences in the salons that Fanny eventually hosted. Despite Hensel’s exclusion from the public eye, she successfully created a social space and amassed receptive audiences to witness her pursuits in the arts in a “semiprivate” manner (Kimber 120). Similarly,
she replaced extensive travel with musical representations in her imaginative compositions. This perseverance in bringing into experience what society had barred her from is a true testament to her agency and the power of her music.
Hensel’s continuous, deep relationship with Mendelssohn inspired her musical endeavors in both performance and composition, a role she reciprocated for Mendelssohn. They were a constant source of inspiration for each other. In fact, her *Lieder fur das Pianoforte* seem to have influenced Mendelssohn’s own pursuit of “songs without words,” as his were called, for piano. After Mendelssohn adopted the idea and began writing his own, it was his publisher who suggested the title, *Lieder ohne Worte*, to better attract an audience (Todd *Fanny* 348). Hensel often convinced him to make changes in his works, as with some passages in his *Lieder ohne Worte* she deemed “awkward” and in his 1824 C-minor Symphony, which she edited before publication (Citron *Letters* 124). Even as they were frequently separated by Mendelssohn’s travels to visit other artists and musicians and to perform, they maintained a consistent correspondence, motivated by Hensel, the older sister adopting a maternal role. As previously mentioned, Hensel would often address Mendelssohn as “my dear son” in her letters, (Citron *Letters* 1, 12).

During Mendelssohn’s first visit to Goethe in Weimar in 1821, Fanny remained behind in Berlin (Todd *Fanny* 49). She was however, able to experience vicariously the encounter with the lauded poet through Mendelssohn’s detailed letters. Mendelssohn was highly admired by Goethe and well-received during his travels, while Hensel sent him a continuous stream of supportive letters. In 1822, Hensel met Goethe, and he was equally impressed by her musicality (Tillard 102).

As Mendelssohn and Hensel were physically separated, the underlying themes in their music began to diverge. Mendelssohn’s choice of poetry tends to reflect the ease of setting a

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11 Homesickness, in reference to *Das Heimweh*.
more diverse range of poetry that constant travel brought about, while Hensel’s evoked far-away places. For example, Mendelssohn’s *Im Grünen* was published as op. 8 no. 11 in 1828, the same collection that included several of Hensel’s songs. Both Hensel’s and Mendelssohn’s music contained exotic elements, a common Romantic idea, but Hensel’s preoccupation was a deeper longing that pervaded her numerous settings of texts depicting distant lands. In contrast, Mendelssohn was typically at ease with his location and showed it with his selection of texts. The poem *Im Grünen* was written by Droysen, under the pseudonym Johann Heinrich Voß, whose texts were also frequently adopted by Hensel.

**Im Grünen**

Willkommen im Grünen!
Der Himmel ist blau,
Und blumig die Au,
Der Lenz ist erschienen!
Er spiegelt sich hell
Am luftigen Quell,
Willkommen im Grünen!

**In Nature**

Welcome to nature!
The sky is blue,
And the meadow is full of flowers,
The spring has arrived!
It glows brightly
On the airy spring,
Welcome to nature!

Willkommen im Grünen!
Das Vögelchen springt
Auf Sproßen und singt:
Der Lenz ist erschienen!
Ihm säuselt der West
Ums heimliche Nest,
Willkommen im Grünen!

Welcome to nature!
The bird leaps
On sprouts and sings:
The spring has arrived!
The West wind whispers
Around its hidden nest,
Welcome to nature!

The text expresses only contentment with the speaker’s surroundings. Likewise, the accompanying music is triumphant and somewhat ostentatious, displaying none of the agitation included in Hensel’s contributions to the opus. The song is in strophic form and displays harmonic stability within a circumscribed scale. It features no remarkable or peculiar harmonic traits, like those seen in Hensel’s pieces as reference to the exotic.
The accompanying chords add a strong accent on the main beats, and a repeated dotted figure that drives the piece forward. At “im Grünen,” m. 27-34, that one word is drawn out for several measures while the piano accompaniment continues to build to a climax, with an unexpected staccato triplet to drive the motion forward. The high B sung forte adds emphasis, and Mendelssohn offers an alternate voicing to enhance the performance in the refrain through
an upward octave leap. These elements, buoyant and unique, stand in contrast with Hensel’s music when the text speaks of distance and longing.

In *Auf der Wanderschaft* (op. 71 no. 5), set to text by Nikolaus Lenau, Mendelssohn also displays an ease with location that Hensel lacks. The Lied holds the theme of travel and distant lands. The speaker seems to prefer to stay with his beloved than leave, possibly drawing parallels with Mendelssohn and Hensel’s relationship.

**Auf der Wanderschaft**

Ich wandre fort ins ferne Land,
Noch einmal blick’ ich um, bewegt,
Und sah, wie sie den Mund geregt,
Und wie gewinket ihre Hand.

Wohl rief sie noch ein freundlich Wort
Mir nach auf meinem trüben Gang,
Doch hört’ ich nicht den liebsten Klang,
Weil ihn der Wind getragen fort.

Daß ich mein Glück verlassen muß,
Du ruhier, kalter Windeshauch,
Ist's nicht genug, daß du mir auch
Entreißest ihren letzten Gruß?

**On the Wanderings**

I wandered forth to a far-off land;
Just one more time I looked back with emotion,
And saw how she moved her mouth,
And how she waved with her hand.

She must have called a friendly word
To send me on my gloomy way,
But I did not hear one beloved sound,
Because the wind had carried it away.

That I must give up my happiness,
You raw, cold blast of wind,
It should be enough, yet must you also
Tear from me her last farewell?

The song follows a modified strophic form: ABA’ and remains relatively stable with the exception of a few poignant tonicizations of the major key and a chromatic interlude at the conclusion. Even though Hensel also frequently used the modified strophic form, her more individualized harmonies often suggest an entirely different tone in the refrain. Mendelssohn displays a simplicity that is almost at odds with Hensel’s turbulent musical stylings.
Even during their periods of limited correspondence, Mendelssohn and Hensel drew inspiration from each other. In February of 1836, Hensel wrote two vocal trios for a cappella sopranos and tenor – *Frühzeitiger Frühling*,\(^{12}\) a frequently used Goethe setting by Romantic composers, and *Wie Feld und Au*,\(^ {13}\) – that later inspired Mendelssohn enough to set music to the same text, translated into English, with his *Frühzeitiger Frühling*, op. 59 no. 2 alluding to Hensel’s opening due to its triple time and similar message about the joys of spring (Todd *Fanny* 203). Both are composed for voice, featuring soprano leaps while the supportive bass retains a similar contour throughout.

\(^{12}\) H-U 289

\(^{13}\) H-U 288
Fanny Hensel, *Frühzeitiger Frühling*

Felix Mendelssohn, *Frühzeitiger Frühling*, op. 59 no. 2
In addition to this exchange of musical material, Hensel often performed and even premiered Mendelssohn’s works. She joined the chorus in the premiere of Mendelssohn’s first oratorio, *Paulus (St. Paul)* (Todd *Fanny* 204). Though her part was relatively small, she stepped forward to sing the correct notes when one of the singers lost his bearings. The following success of *Paulus* was as much a success for Hensel as it was for Mendelssohn; she had been adamant in removing a section from the chorus in the Second Part, which Felix ultimately conceded (Hensel *Tagebücher* 82). Lea Mendelssohn remarked that Hensel’s *Lieder für das Pianoforte* bore resemblance to Mendelssohn’s *Lieder ohne Worte*. Their musical styles and influences were so deeply intertwined that it was difficult to determine if the resemblances were intended or not, though the former is more likely, given how impressed he was with her music. Even when they weren’t privy to each other’s work because of the distance, their independently-composed pieces were exceptionally similar, as in the case of Hensel’s Andante con espressione in B-flat major and Mendelssohn’s Prelude in B-flat major, op. 35 no. 6 (Todd *Fanny* 214). Both pieces feature a bass figuration that rolls to the treble to meet the high melodic line.

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Fanny Hensel, Andante con espressione in B-flat major (1837)

Felix Mendelssohn, Prelude in B-flat major, op. 35 no. 6 (1836)
Another such example is Hensel’s *Il saltarello Romano*, op. 6 no. 5, completed in March 1841, and Mendelssohn’s *Italian* Symphony, op. 90, composed between 1833-1834. The two works share the key of A minor and there is little doubt that Hensel based her *saltarello* on Mendelssohn’s Finale, which he called a Saltarello. As the movement progresses, it accelerates into a tarantella. Both the Finale and the *Lied für das Pianoforte* are intense and fierce (Presto and Allegro molto, respectively), with notable dissonances, syncopated accents, and a distinctive use of triplets. Like many of Hensel’s other Lieder, *Il saltarello Romano* successfully embodies Italian folk music (Todd *Fanny* 265).

Fanny Hensel, *Il saltarello Romano*, op. 6 no. 5 (1841)
Both pieces use the triplet figure in small leaps. As an analysis of the Italian Symphony notes, “the prominent role of the neighbor-tone motive in the last three movements of the A major Symphony constitutes one aspect of the work’s musical language that would have signified Italy for contemporary audiences” (Cooper 171). Hensel’s interpretation of Italy shares this use of upper-neighbor tones to evoke the airy dances of Italy, in both this piece and others, such as *Italien*. 
Likewise, Hensel’s Lied *Das Meer erglänzte weit hinaus*\(^\text{15}\) (The Sea Was Shimmering Far Away) and Mendelssohn’s *Lied ohne Worte Venetianisches Gondellied* share many parallels. Both pieces are in minor keys, 6/8 time, and share a subdued character. The arpeggiation in the bass, a barcarole, suggests ripples of water lapping against the gondola, a typical evocation of Venice.

Fanny Hensel, *Das Meer erglänzte weit hinaus* (1838)

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\(^\text{15}\) H-U 335
Felix Mendelssohn, *Venetianisches Gondellied*, op. 57 no. 5

Unlike Mendelssohn, Hensel breaks up the barcarole figure between the right and left hand of the piano accompaniment. Repeated diminished seventh chords in both Lieder provide a murky texture, perhaps to represent fog. Even the use of parallel thirds in the treble voice of the piano is retained between the two Lieder.

It is clear that Mendelssohn and Hensel influenced each other to a great extent. They both shared a love for Italy, which pervaded their compositions. Though Mendelssohn enjoyed Italy, he did not write about it frequently in his diary entries, and he did not carry the theme to as far an extent as Hensel did (Hensel *Italienisches*). It is Hensel’s treatment of exoticism that makes her music so unique and compelling.
Eventually, the physical distance between Mendelssohn and Hensel lessened their emotional and musical bond. From 1829 onward, she saw very little of Mendelssohn (Todd *Fanny* 202). In 1829, she married her longtime suitor Wilhelm Hensel (1794-1861) and the next year she gave birth to a son, Sebastian. Her marriage widened the separation between her and Mendelssohn. The lapse of physical contact culminated in November of 1835 with their father’s death during a winter Hensel described as “monotonous, sad, and quiet” (Hensel *Tagebücher* 81). After a brief visit to Düsseldorf with her brother Paul and his wife, Hensel returned to Berlin, vowing never to go away without her family again and wholeheartedly immersing herself in educating her son in an “ideal artistic atmosphere” (Todd *Fanny* 205). While she attempted to resurrect her Sunday concerts, they diminished in number until November 1836, and Hensel admitted to Mendelssohn that her performances had fallen into a slump. Even her commitment to composition was fading, since Mendelssohn was a “sufficient public” but seldom in Berlin to boost her confidence. Her drive to compose came from within, but after Abraham’s death and Mendelssohn’s continued absence, her motivation was wavering. In a letter to Karl Klingemann, a family friend living in London (Citron *Letters* 13), Hensel reveals:

I enclose two pianoforte-pieces which I have written since I came home from Düsseldorf. I leave it to you to say whether they are worth presenting to my unknown young friend, but I must add that it is a pleasure to me to find a public for my little pieces in London, for here I have none at all. Once a year, perhaps, someone will copy a piece of mine, or ask me to play something special—certainly not oftener; and now that Rebecka has left off singing, my songs lie unheeded and unknown. If nobody ever offers an opinion, or takes the slightest interest in one’s productions, one loses in time not only all pleasure in them, but all power of judging their value… But my own delight in music and Hensel’s sympathy keep me awake still, and I cannot help considering it a sign of talent.

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16 From *Wanderlied.*
that I do not give it up, though I can get nobody to take an interest in my efforts. But enough of this uninteresting topic. (Hensel The Mendelssohn Family 31).

What she describes is clearly diminished confidence induced by Mendelssohn’s absence, compounded by her compromised health due to several miscarriages. More importantly, she did not voice these concerns to Mendelssohn, her usual confidant. By this time, Hensel had admitted that he held a “demonic influence” over her—as just witnessed in Il saltarello Romano and his Italian Symphony Finale—and she considered herself his “student” (Citron 214). Indeed, with their father’s passing, Hensel’s letters lack any motherly sentiment and instead suggest that Mendelssohn had now adopted a paternal role over her and her activities. He refused to endorse publication of her work, claiming that it would interfere with her familial duties and would not suit her temperament (Todd Fanny 209). Their “alienation” was further intensified by his 1837 marriage to Cécile Jeanrenaud, whom Hensel did not meet for months after their wedding. During this period, Mendelssohn was so preoccupied that he no longer sent his compositions to Hensel for evaluation before publication, and she saw them “with the eyes of a stranger” (Sebastian Hensel 36).

However, Hensel was not to be deterred. Filling in for Mendelssohn’s absence and acting as her support was Wilhelm Hensel. As an artist himself, he understood and sympathized with his wife’s need for a musical outlet. According to R. Larry Todd, her mother Lea was more flexible than Felix in her views of Hensel’s role in the home and public eye. Despite Mendelssohn’s criticism, in 1837 Hensel nevertheless released Die Schiffende with one of Mendelssohn’s duets. Upon its success, he congratulated her wholeheartedly and even performed

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it at a Gewandhaus benefit concert in Leipzig. Hensel resolved to reinvigorate the Sunday concerts, through which she introduced Mendelssohn’s *Paulus* to Berlin (Todd *Fanny* 210).

With her husband’s support and the return of her health, Hensel embarked on a prolific output of compositions. With this returned the yearning for travel, specifically to Italy. Thus, on August 27, 1839, Fanny, Wilhelm, and Sebastian Hensel set off for the South by railroad. On their way, they spent a week with Mendelssohn and his family, but did not linger long and found themselves in Italy in late September. During this entire time, the landscape and scenery was an inspiration for Hensel, and she drew upon it to pen many new works. Many of these new compositions shared the theme of longing for a distant place that was voiced in her earlier Lieder. Moreover, the Hensels met many lauded composers, musicians, poets, and artists at the French Academy in Rome with whom Hensel exchanged ideas and music. At the *Studi pubblici* art museum, Hensel met the mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot García, to whom she had been introduced in Berlin in 1838 (Todd *Fanny* 251). Similarly, the composer Charles Gounod was deeply impressed with her memory and skills as a pianist and composer (Todd *Fanny* 247).

Already in the summer of 1837, Hensel had composed *Wanderlied*, a Goethe setting. The poem speaks of fulfillment and finding happiness through travel and lack of inhibition. She likely found personal meaning in it since she longed to accomplish the invitation of the text. She included the Lied in opus 1 when it was published in 1846.

**Wanderlied**

Von den Bergen zu den Hügeln,  
Niederab das Tal entlang,  
Da erklingt es wie von Flügeln,  
Da bewegt sichs wie Gesang.

**Wanderer’s Song**

From the mountain to the hills,  
Resounding through the valleys,  
There’s music, as if of wings,  
There’s movement like song.
Und dem unbedingten Triebe  
Folget Freude, folget Rat,  
Und dein Streben, sei's in Liebe,  
Und dein Leben sei die Tat.  

Bleibe nicht am Boden heften,  
Frisch gewagt und frisch hinaus,  
Kopf und Arm mit heitern Kräften,  
Überall sind sie zu Haus.  

Wo wir uns der Sonne freuen,  
Sind wir jede Sorge los,  
Daß wir uns in ihr zerstreuen,  
Darum ist die Welt so groß.  

And such unbridled yearning,  
Joy and counsel yields,  
Let your striving be governed by love,  
Let your life be the deed.  

Do not remain fettered to the ground,  
Be full of daring and cheerfully on your way,  
Head and arms with hearty strength,  
Will always find a home.  

Wherever the sun is our delight,  
We are free of every woe,  
So that we might lose ourselves in it,  
This is why the world is so great.  

Hensel’s music features energetic arpeggiation in the piano accompaniment and a similarly lively vocal line. Like many of her other Lieder, Wanderlied is in binary form ABAB.
Throughout the vocal line, she uses a chromatic lower neighbor to anticipate the dominant A, which gives the entire piece a forward momentum and sense of purpose.

The brief minor tonicization at the start of the B verses (m. 14-18) is dramatic instead of melancholy, with its arpeggiated diminished seventh chords, reminiscent of rolling waves. As the music returns to the major, she concisely uses several turns to accentuate the carefree sentiment. She successfully captures the cheerfulness of the text with her equally buoyant setting.

_Fichtenbaum und Palme_ was completed on March 30, 1830, little over a year before her journey to Italy. It is set to a text by Heinrich Heine, whom Hensel admired as a poet but disliked personally. The text reflects a binary divide between a fir tree in the North and a palm tree in the East (Todd _Fanny_ 223).
Fichtenbaum und Palme

Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam
Im Norden auf kahler Höh'.
Ihn schläfert; mit weißer Decke
Umhüllen ihn Eis und Schnee.

Er träumt von einer Palme,
Die, fern im Morgenland,
Einsam und schweigend trauert
Auf brennender Felsenwand.

Fir Tree and Palm

A fir tree stands alone
In the north, on the bare heights.
It lulls; in a white blanket
Wrapping it in ice and snow.

It dreams of a palm tree,
Which, faraway in the East,
Lonely and silent, mourns
On a burning rock wall.

Interestingly, she uses a modified strophic (ABA′) ternary division instead of Heine’s binary pair. The first verse is a static Lento in E-flat major, occasionally tonicizing minor keys to represent the fir tree frozen in the north.

In the second verse, there is an abrupt tonal and metric change to B major in 2/4 time, the rapidly flowing setting directly contrasting with the slow common time of the previous verse, embodying the palm tree in her hot East. This enharmonic shift, an augmented fifth, sounds
jarringly dissonant, with the two-octave leap further representing the distance between the trees. The shift from E-flat to B is the quintessential romantic 6th, only with the C-flat rewritten in a foreign sharp key.

At the conclusion of the second verse, she brings back the E-flat key, setting it to the second verse of the original poem. The enharmonic spelling of D-sharp in measure 27 even suggests that Hensel is trying to bring together the verses and the trees. Thus, the Lied ends with the key of the
fir tree recalling the palm, as if a memory. This suggests that both trees are lonely ("einsam") in their respective corners, and perhaps not so different after all.

The piece is centered around a tonal divide where the contrasting keys represent the chasm between the trees. Here, exoticism and longing are inextricably linked.

Accompanying *Wanderlied* into opus 1 was *Gondellied*, completed on June 4, 1841. It was set to a poem by Emanuel Geibel (1815-1884), a German poet and playwright whose verses Hensel frequently chose (Todd *Fanny* 328).

### Gondellied

O komm zu mir wenn durch die Nacht,  
Wandelt das Sterneherr,  
Dann sweb mit uns in Mondespracht,  
Die Gondel übers Meer.  
Die Luft ist weich wie Liebesscherz,  
Sanft spielt der goldne Schein,  
Die Cither klingt und zieht dein Herz  
Mit in die Lust hinein.

### Song of the Gondola

O come to me when through the night,  
Travels the multitude of stars,  
The gondola glides with us across the sea.  
The air is soft like the jesting of love,  
The golden light reflects gently,  
The zither sings and draws your heart  
Along into pleasure.
Dies ist für sel’ge Lieb’ die Stund,
Liebchen, o komm und schau,
So friedlich strahlt des Himmels Rund,
Es schläft des Meeres Blau.
Und wie es schläft, so sagt der Blick,
Was nie die Lippe spricht,
Das Auge zieht sich nicht zurück,
Zurück die Seele nicht.

This is the hour of sweetest love,
My love, O come and see,
So peacefully glows the sphere of heaven,
And the blue sea lies asleep.
And as it sleeps, a glance reveals,
What lips would never speak,
The eye des not withdraw its gaze,
Nor does the soul retreat.

Mirroring the text, the piano accompaniment is composed of rolling arpeggiation going up and down in the right hand of the piano in a barcarole rhythm. In contrast to Wanderlied, these are smooth and sensual, like the rippling of water against a gondola.
In strophic form (ABaA’B’a), the music is constant and unchanging, except when the accompaniment switches to chords at the end of the piece and the opening text is repeated. However, this brief moment of emphasis soon gives way to the same rippling arpeggiation in the right hand, and the gondola is once again gliding through the water, moving as a postlude past the end of the vocal line opens up into the sea and subsides to the lowest point of the piece at the end.

In April or May of 1841, Hensel composed *Nach Süden*, on text by Wilhelm Hensel. It was published posthumously as the first piece in her opus 10. Following their blissful vacation in Italy, the work captures the Hensels’ love for the south.
Nach Süden

Von allen Zweigen schwingen
Sich wandernde Vögel empor,
Weit durch die Lüfte klingen
Hört man den Reisechor,
Nach Süden, nach Süden,
In den ewigen Blumenflor.

Ihr Vöglein singt munter hernieder,
Wir singen lustig hinaus,
Wenn dann der Lenz kommt,
Kehren wir wieder,
Wieder in Nest und Haus,
Von Süden! Jetzt aber hinaus!

To the South

From every branch swing
Little migratory birds aloft,
Far and wide through the air
You can hear the traveling choir sounding,
To the south, to the south,
To the land of everlasting flowers.

You little birds, sing merrily down,
We’ll sing gaily forth,
When the spring comes,
We shall return again,
Back to nest and house,
From the South! But now away!

The musical setting alternates between rising chords and sustained figures in the same register. At exciting moments, such as when the text is driving “to the South!,” the vocal line reflects the idea by moving up in register. During more introspective moments, such as when the “everlasting flowers” are pictured (m.18-21), the frenzy abates, much as when one is busy traveling and briefly pauses to admire the scenery.
Nach Süden provided a vehicle for the Hensels to collaborate and to relive their trip through music and poetry. Though it is a short Lied, it speaks closely and emphatically of the ever-present deep longing Hensel held for Italy.

In 1846, Hensel composed the joyful Frühling, published posthumously as op. 7, no. 3. It stands out among the mournful Lenau settings, such as Bitte and Dein ist mein Herz (op. 7, nos. 5 and 6), that Hensel had turned to during the last years of her life (Todd Fanny 330). A Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857) setting, this poem celebrates the arrival of spring and depicts the joy felt throughout the land. Eichendorff was a poet, novelist, and a prominent figure in German Romanticism, whose poetry was frequently set to music by composers such as Schumann, Mendelssohn, Mahler, Strauss, Wolf, and others.
Frühling

Übern Garten durch die Lüfte
Hör ich Wandervögel ziehn,
Das bedeutet Frühlingsdüfte,
Alles fängt schon an zu blüh’n.

Jauchzen möchte ich, möchte weinen,
Lenz und Liebe muß das sein,
Alle Wunder wieder scheinen
Mit dem Mondesglanz herein.

Und der Mond, die Sterne sagen,
Und in Träumen rauscht der Hain,
Und die Nachtigallen schlagen,
Sie ist dein, ja sie ist dein!

Spring

Above the garden and through the air
I hear the sound of migrating birds,
So the scents of spring are here,
Everything is beginning to blossom.

I want to rejoice, I want to cry,
This must mean spring and love,
All miracles shine once more
With the light of the moon.

And the moon and the stars proclaim,
And in dreams the grove murmurs,
And the nightingales sing,
She is yours, yes, she is yours!

The music is set to the bright key of F-sharp major. The rapid sextuplets in sixths in the piano accompaniment evoke a fanfare, trumpeting the arrival of spring. The vocal line is likewise declamatory, punctuated by various accents and clearly defined by each phrase.
In the second verse, the piano accompaniment becomes arpeggiated, to represent the increase of emotion within the speaker. Also highlighting this change is a brief shift to the minor key beginning in measure 19.

In May 1847, while rehearsing one of Mendelssohn’s oratorios with a choir and orchestra, Hensel died. She suffered a stroke and the resulting complications. All the more tragic, she had just begun to publish her work the year before, and she had started writing a new Lied, which was found on her table after her passing.

Overcome by grief, Mendelssohn wrote the String Quartet No. 6 in F minor in her memory. He died himself six months later. Their proximity even in death is a tribute to how much they influenced and relied upon each other.
CONCLUSION

Researching and writing this thesis have influenced my performance of Hensel’s Lieder. Thanks to this musicological study, I have become sensitive to the depth of Hensel’s longing voiced in the Lieder that I have selected for my Senior Recital.\(^{18}\) The notable use of exoticism in Fanny Hensel’s music gives her a unique voice in the history of the German Romantic Lied. Several of her Lieder for voice and *Lieder für das Pianoforte* reveal her wish to represent the exotic with:

1. technical features, such as appoggiaturas, arpeggiation, and distinctive uses of vocal range: *Gondellied, Italien, Wanderlied, and Nach Süden*
2. folk elements, departures from continuity, quick ornaments: *Italien*, the barcarole from *Gondellied*, and piano pieces including “Februar” from *Das Jahr* and *Il Saltarello Romano*
3. her choices of poetic texts: *Gondellied, Italien, Sehnsucht, Frühling, Wanderlied, Fichtenbaum und Palme, and Nach Süden*
4. an evocation of the mood of longing through non-normative modes, shifting and static harmonies: *Das Heimweh, Sehnsucht, and Fichtenbaum und Palme*

More concisely stated by Roger Célestin, exoticism can be “applied specifically to products, flora and fauna, that came from far away” during the nineteenth century (217). And what are the selected compositions but musical depictions of these faraway things? Fanny Hensel’s music truly reflects the story of her life.

\(^{18}\) I performed *Gondellied, Italien, Sehnsucht, Das Heimweh, Frühling, Wanderlied, Fichtenbaum und Palme*, and *Nach Süden*. 
Works Cited


