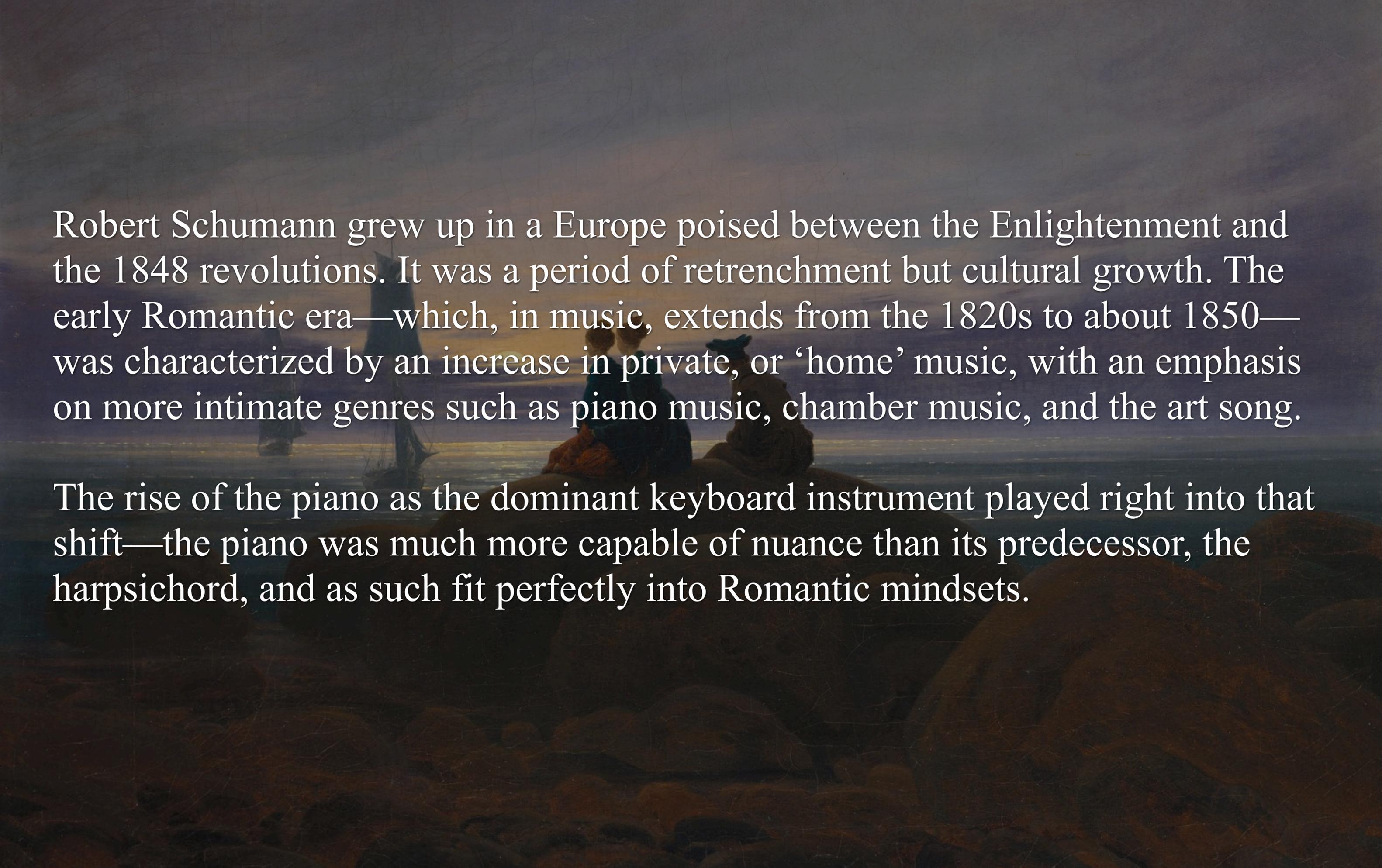


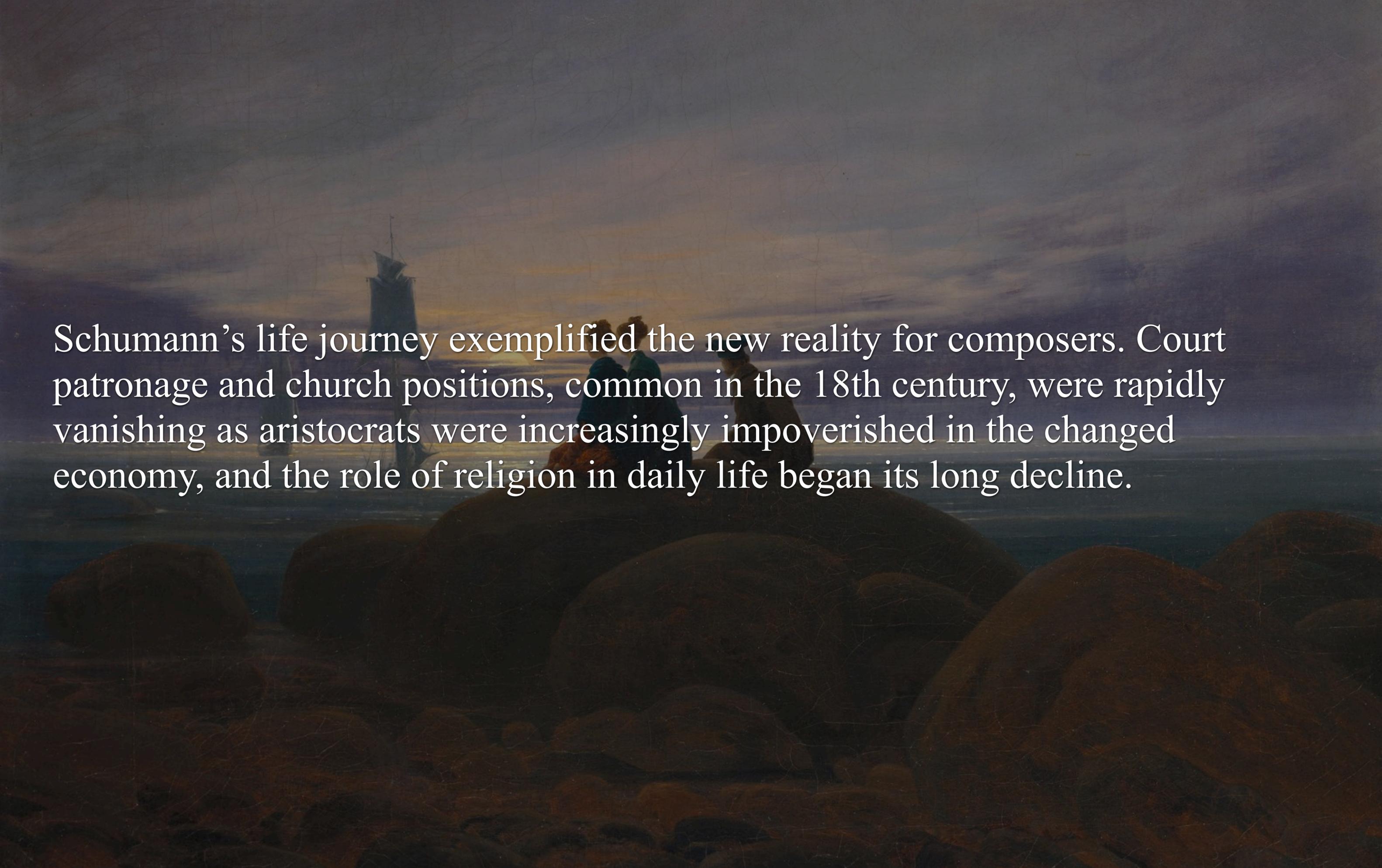
Music as Mirror

Music for the Heart: Schumann's *Dichterliebe*

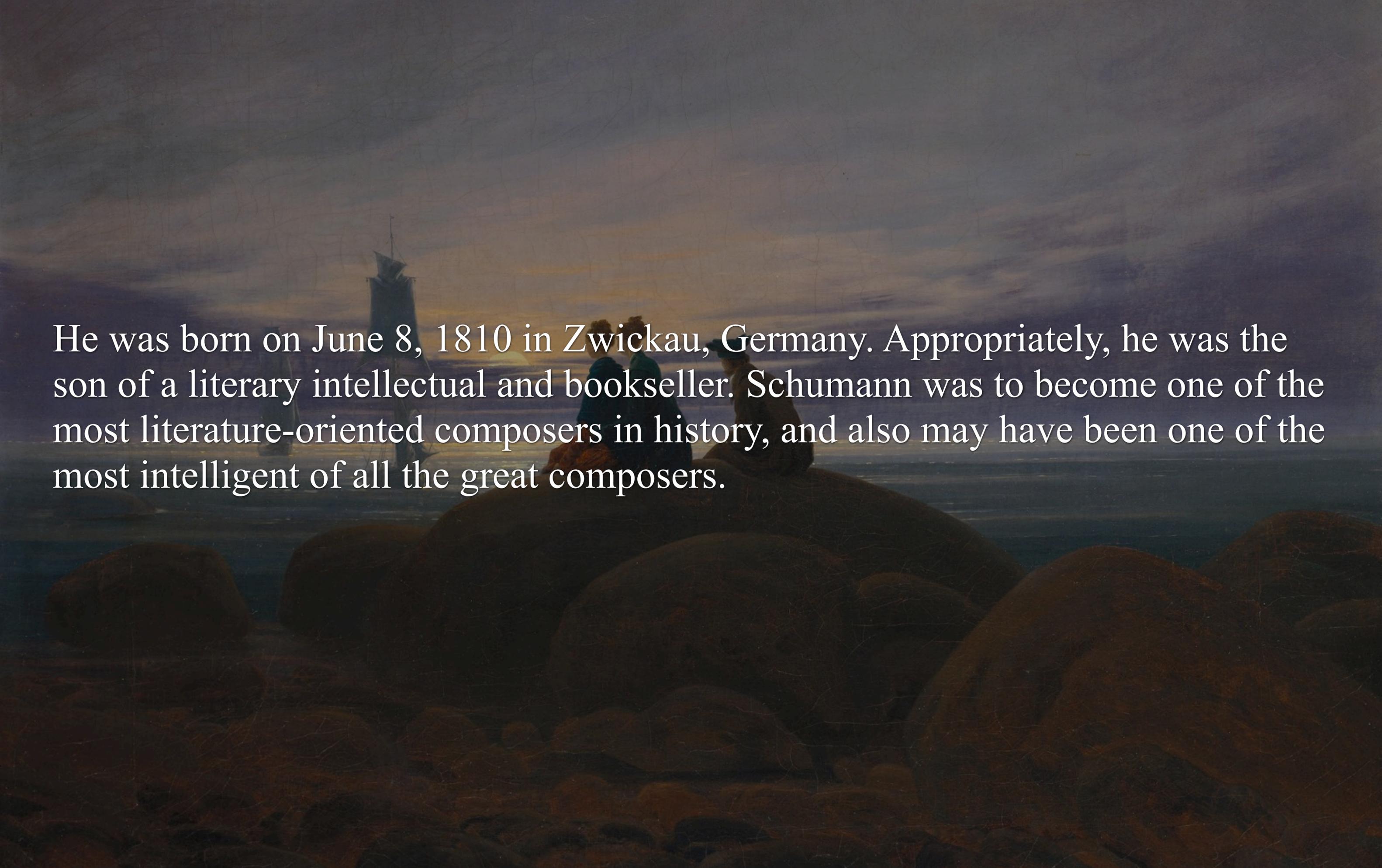
A painting of a woman and a child sitting on a rocky shore at sunset, looking out at a sailboat on the water. The scene is dimly lit, with the warm glow of the setting sun reflecting on the water and the silhouettes of the figures and the boat against the bright horizon.

Robert Schumann grew up in a Europe poised between the Enlightenment and the 1848 revolutions. It was a period of retrenchment but cultural growth. The early Romantic era—which, in music, extends from the 1820s to about 1850—was characterized by an increase in private, or ‘home’ music, with an emphasis on more intimate genres such as piano music, chamber music, and the art song.

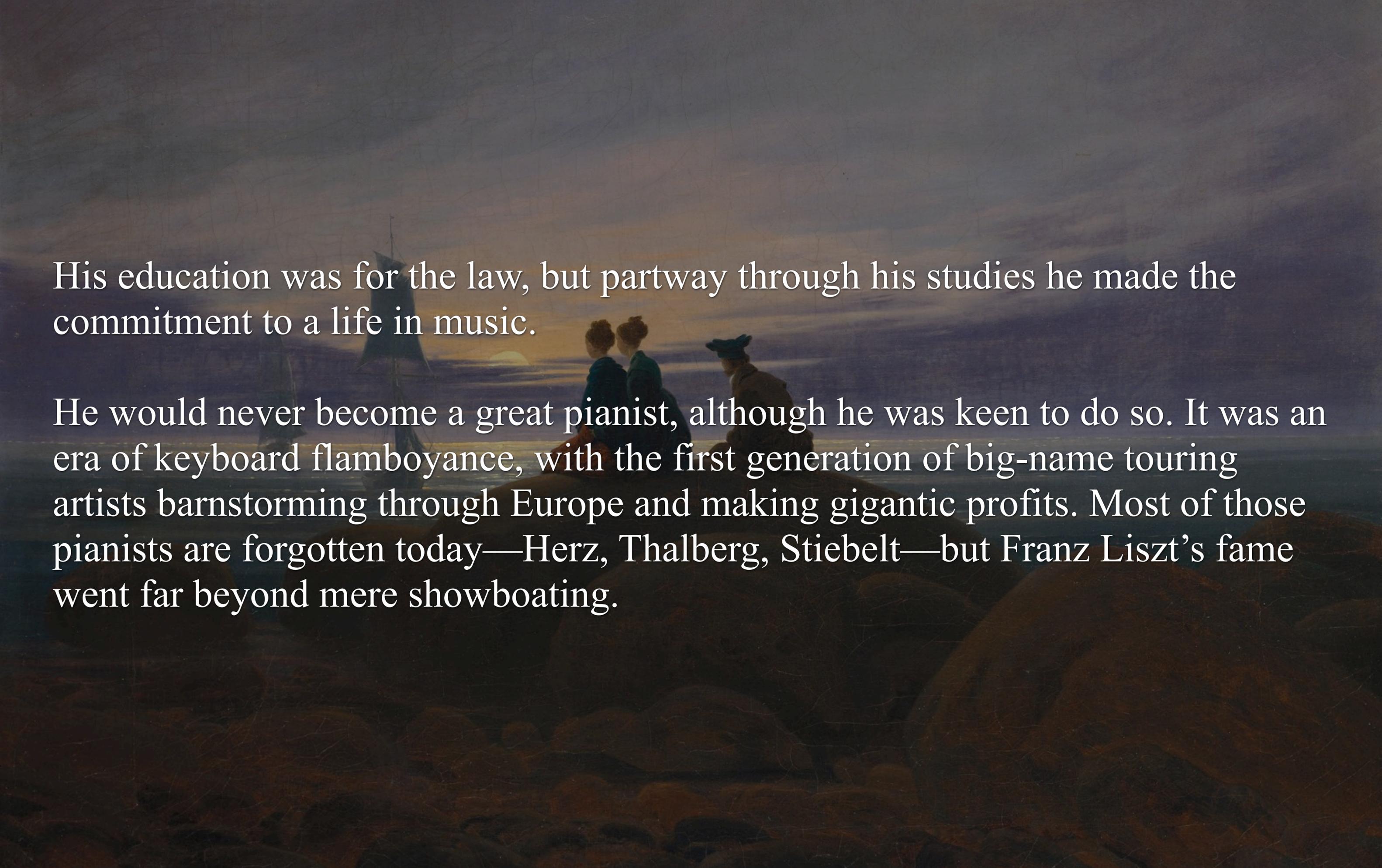
The rise of the piano as the dominant keyboard instrument played right into that shift—the piano was much more capable of nuance than its predecessor, the harpsichord, and as such fit perfectly into Romantic mindsets.

A painting depicting a sunset over the ocean. In the foreground, several large, dark, rounded rocks are visible. In the middle ground, three people are sitting on a rock, looking out at the sea. In the background, a large sailing ship is visible on the horizon. The sky is filled with soft, warm colors of sunset, transitioning from orange near the horizon to a darker blue at the top. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Schumann's life journey exemplified the new reality for composers. Court patronage and church positions, common in the 18th century, were rapidly vanishing as aristocrats were increasingly impoverished in the changed economy, and the role of religion in daily life began its long decline.

A painting depicting three figures sitting on a rocky shore, looking out at a large sailing ship on the water under a dramatic, sunset sky. The scene is rendered in a classic, somewhat somber style with muted colors and strong contrasts between light and shadow. The figures are silhouetted against the bright horizon, and the ship is a prominent feature in the middle ground.

He was born on June 8, 1810 in Zwickau, Germany. Appropriately, he was the son of a literary intellectual and bookseller. Schumann was to become one of the most literature-oriented composers in history, and also may have been one of the most intelligent of all the great composers.

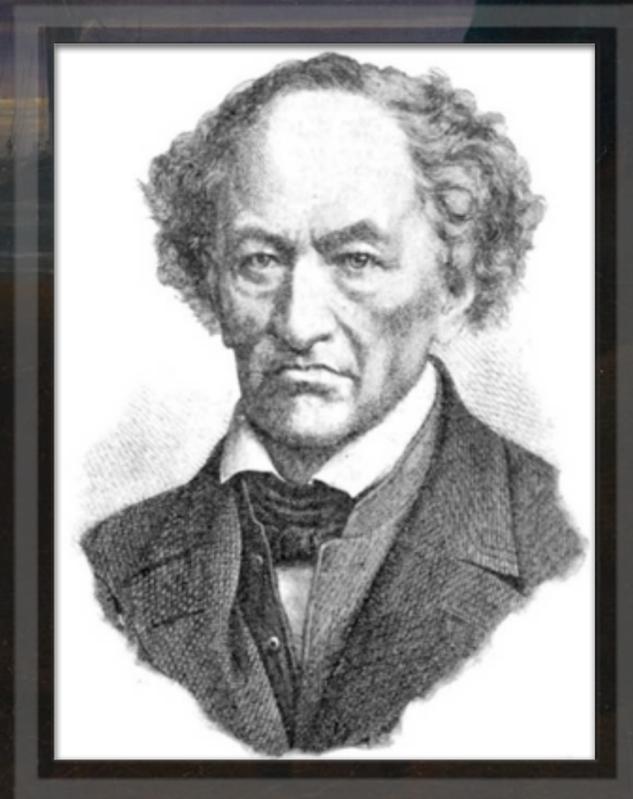
A painting depicting three figures sitting on a rocky shore at sunset. Two women in dark dresses are seated together, and a man in a dark coat and hat sits to their right. They are looking out over a body of water where a sailboat is visible. The sky is a mix of dark blues and oranges from the setting sun.

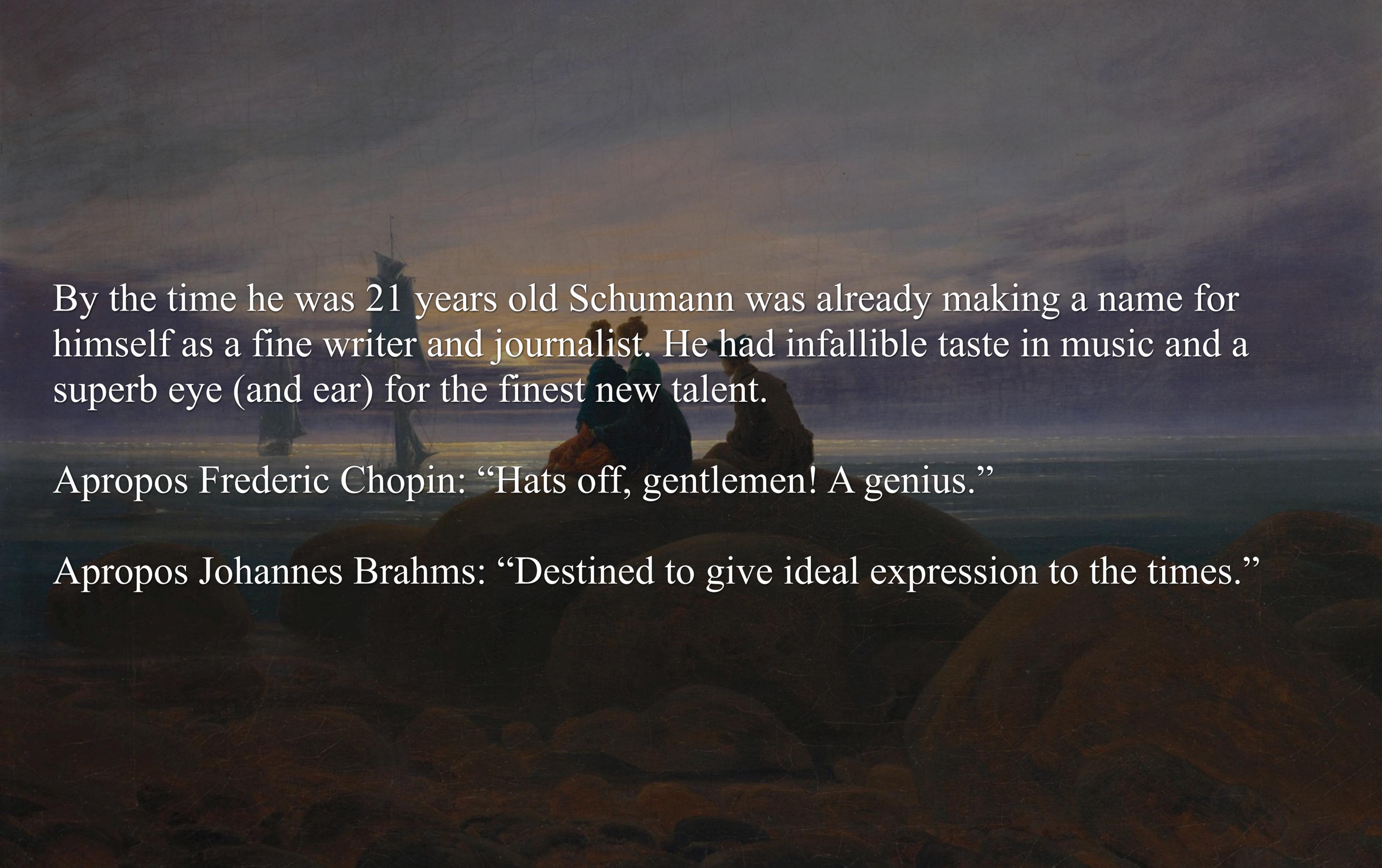
His education was for the law, but partway through his studies he made the commitment to a life in music.

He would never become a great pianist, although he was keen to do so. It was an era of keyboard flamboyance, with the first generation of big-name touring artists barnstorming through Europe and making gigantic profits. Most of those pianists are forgotten today—Herz, Thalberg, Stiebelt—but Franz Liszt's fame went far beyond mere showboating.

Schumann settled in Leipzig in 1830 in order to study with Friedrich Wieck, one of the major piano teachers of the era.

He was probably best known for teaching his own daughter Clara, who was destined to become a ranking pianist of the 19th century.





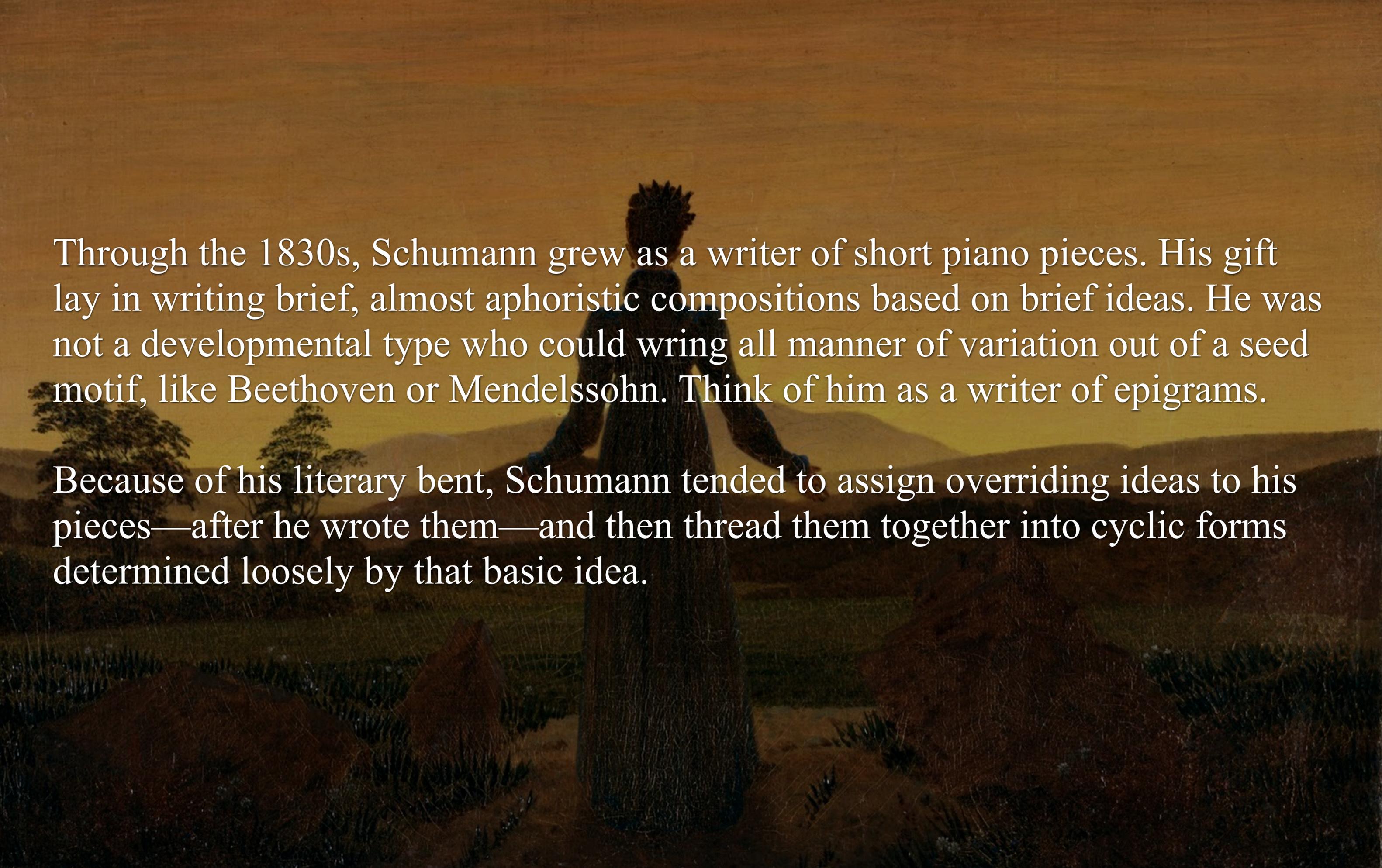
By the time he was 21 years old Schumann was already making a name for himself as a fine writer and journalist. He had infallible taste in music and a superb eye (and ear) for the finest new talent.

Apropos Frederic Chopin: “Hats off, gentlemen! A genius.”

Apropos Johannes Brahms: “Destined to give ideal expression to the times.”

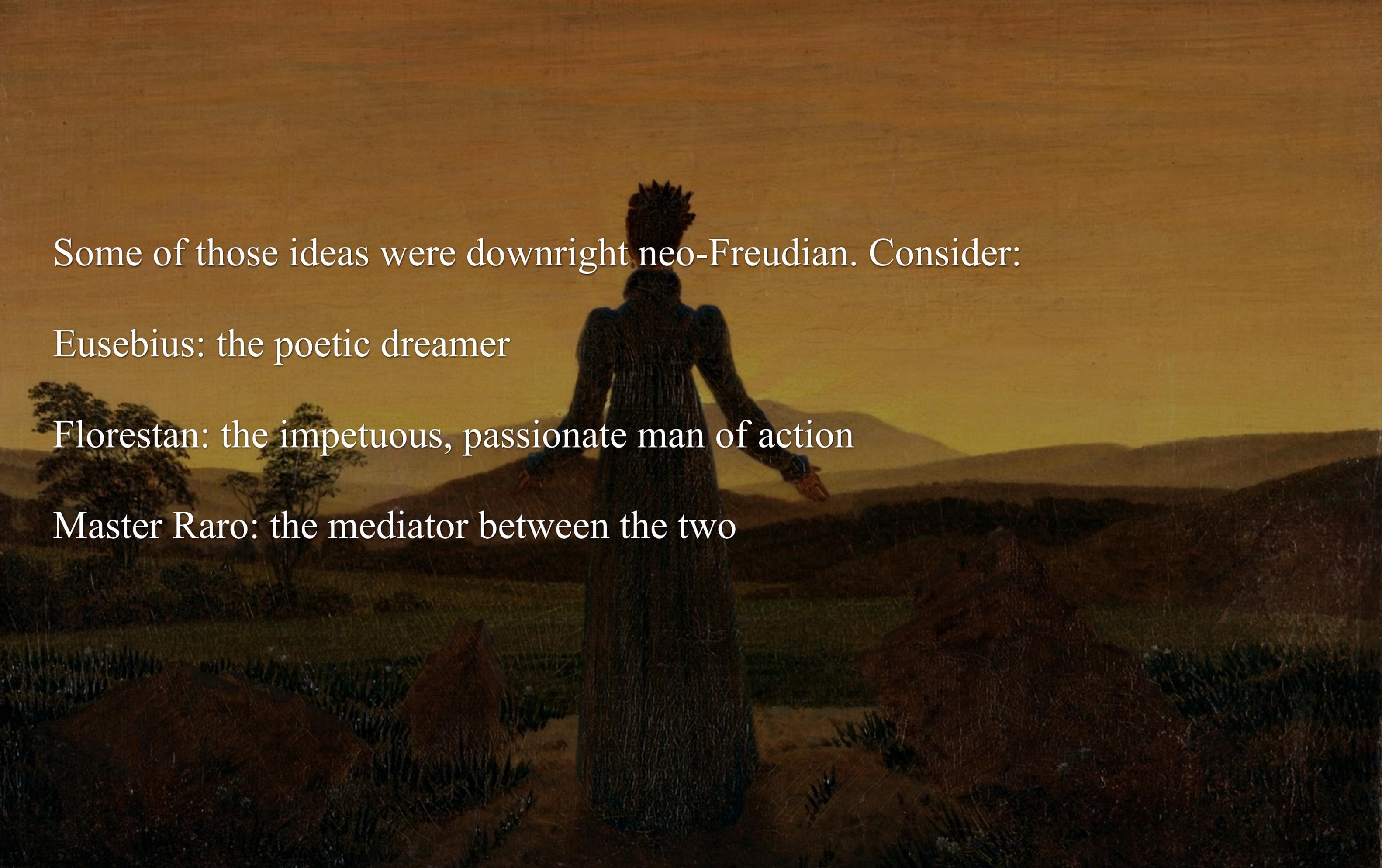
Schumann wrecked his hand with a silly gizmo called a *chiroplast*. He wound up with an almost useless left-hand middle finger.



A painting of a person with spiky hair, seen from behind, standing in a field of tall grass. The person is wearing a long, dark, textured coat. The background shows rolling hills under a warm, golden sunset sky. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Through the 1830s, Schumann grew as a writer of short piano pieces. His gift lay in writing brief, almost aphoristic compositions based on brief ideas. He was not a developmental type who could wring all manner of variation out of a seed motif, like Beethoven or Mendelssohn. Think of him as a writer of epigrams.

Because of his literary bent, Schumann tended to assign overriding ideas to his pieces—after he wrote them—and then thread them together into cyclic forms determined loosely by that basic idea.



Some of those ideas were downright neo-Freudian. Consider:

Eusebius: the poetic dreamer

Florestan: the impetuous, passionate man of action

Master Raro: the mediator between the two

Eusebius: the basic idea

Adagio

sotto voce

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Adagio'. The score is presented on a yellow background. It consists of two staves: a vocal line on top and a piano accompaniment line on the bottom. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line begins with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a quarter rest, followed by quarter notes B4, A4, and G4. A slur covers the first six notes. The piano accompaniment starts with a half note chord consisting of G3, B2, and D3. The tempo marking 'Adagio' is centered above the vocal staff, and the performance instruction 'sotto voce' is placed below the vocal staff.

Repeat it a step higher



Repeat it a step lower

7

The image shows a musical score on a yellow background. It consists of two staves. The top staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). A slur covers a sequence of seven notes: B-flat, C, D, E, F, G, and A. Above the staff, the number '7' is written. The bottom staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. It shows two notes: B-flat and G, with a slur underneath them. A fermata is placed over the G note.

Add a finishing figure



But if you just play it, nothing much happens:

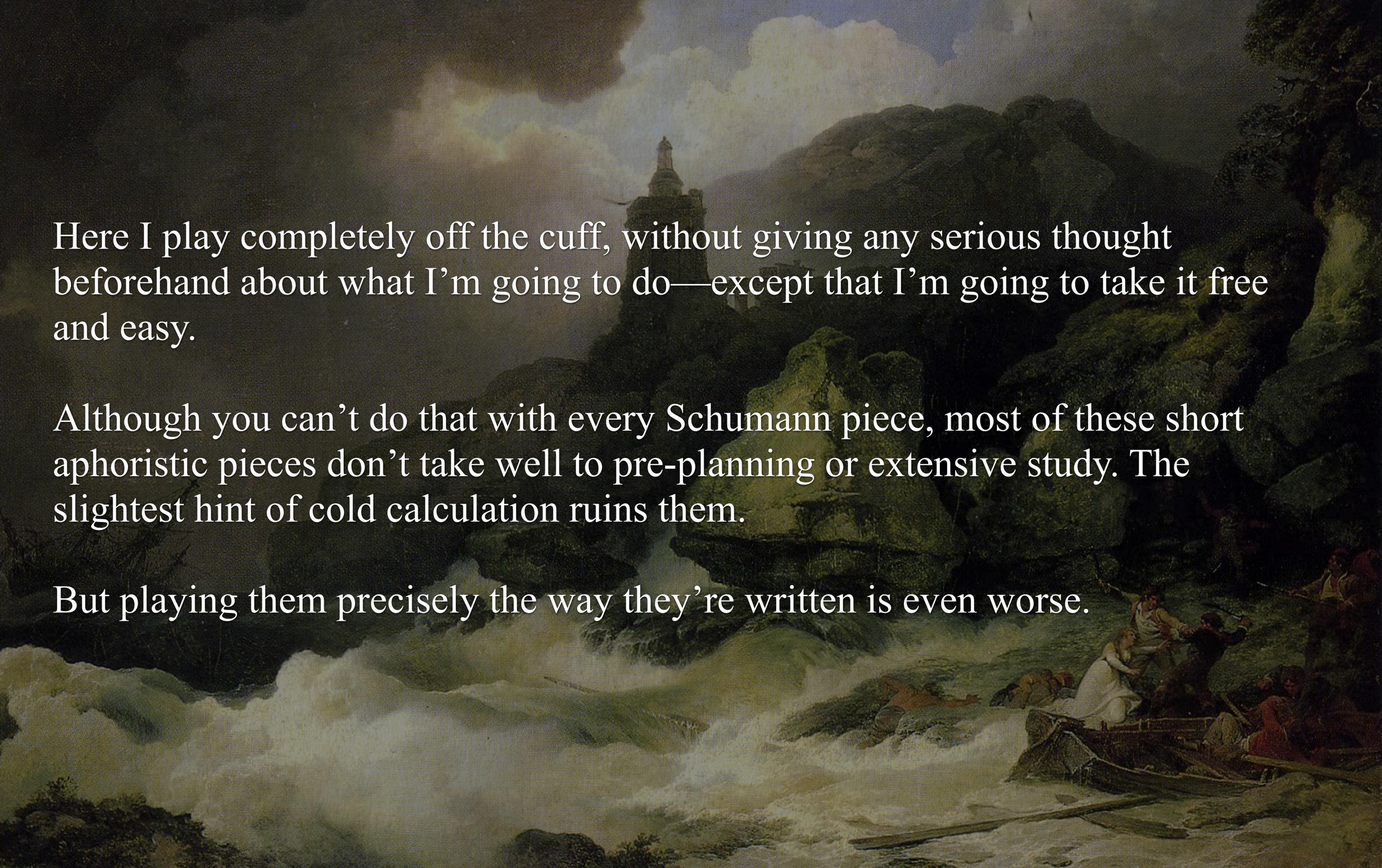
Adagio

sotto voce

5

7

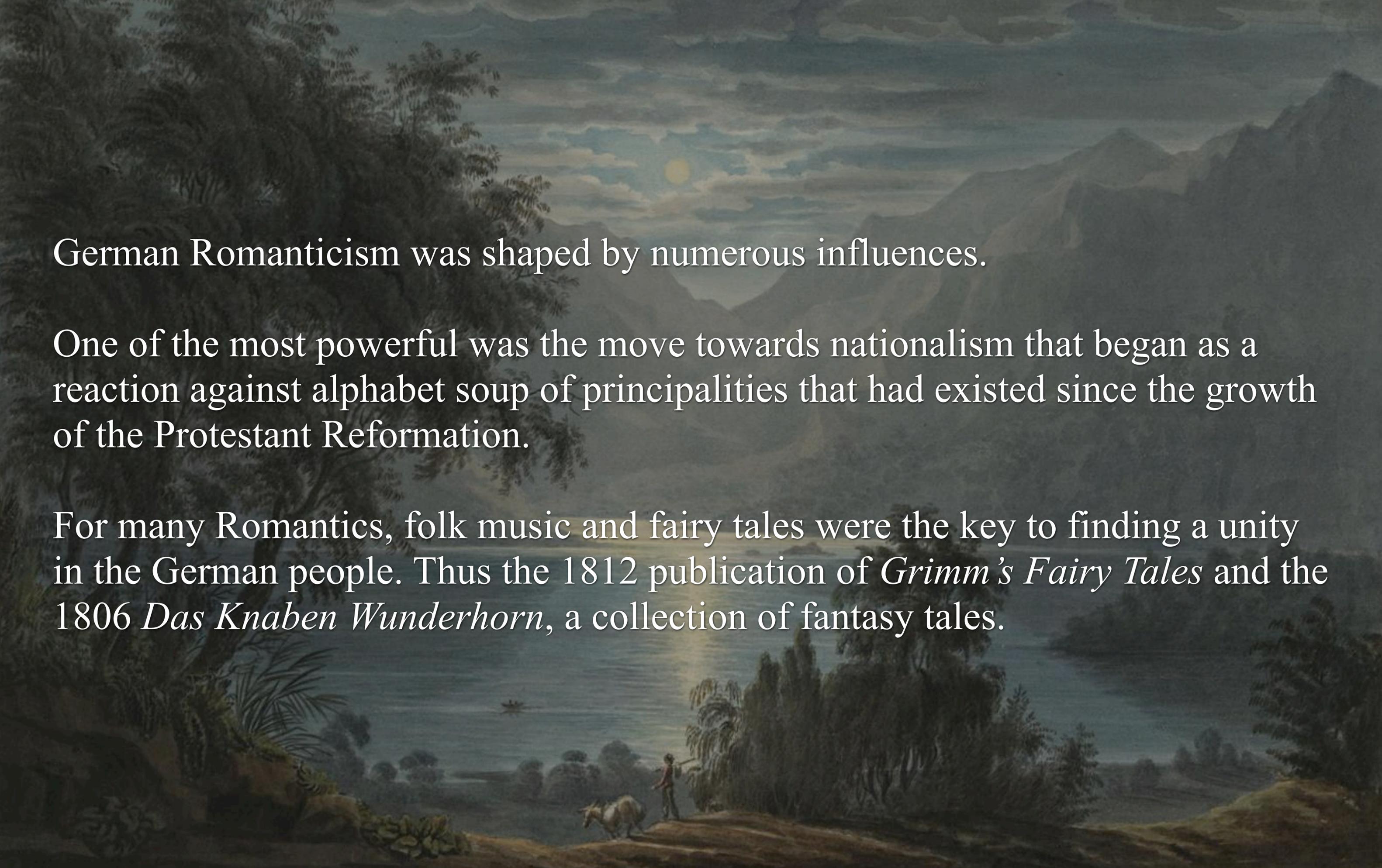
7

A dramatic landscape painting featuring a river with a waterfall. In the background, a tall, dark tower with a lantern on top stands on a rocky outcrop. The sky is filled with large, billowing clouds. The overall tone is dark and atmospheric.

Here I play completely off the cuff, without giving any serious thought beforehand about what I'm going to do—except that I'm going to take it free and easy.

Although you can't do that with every Schumann piece, most of these short aphoristic pieces don't take well to pre-planning or extensive study. The slightest hint of cold calculation ruins them.

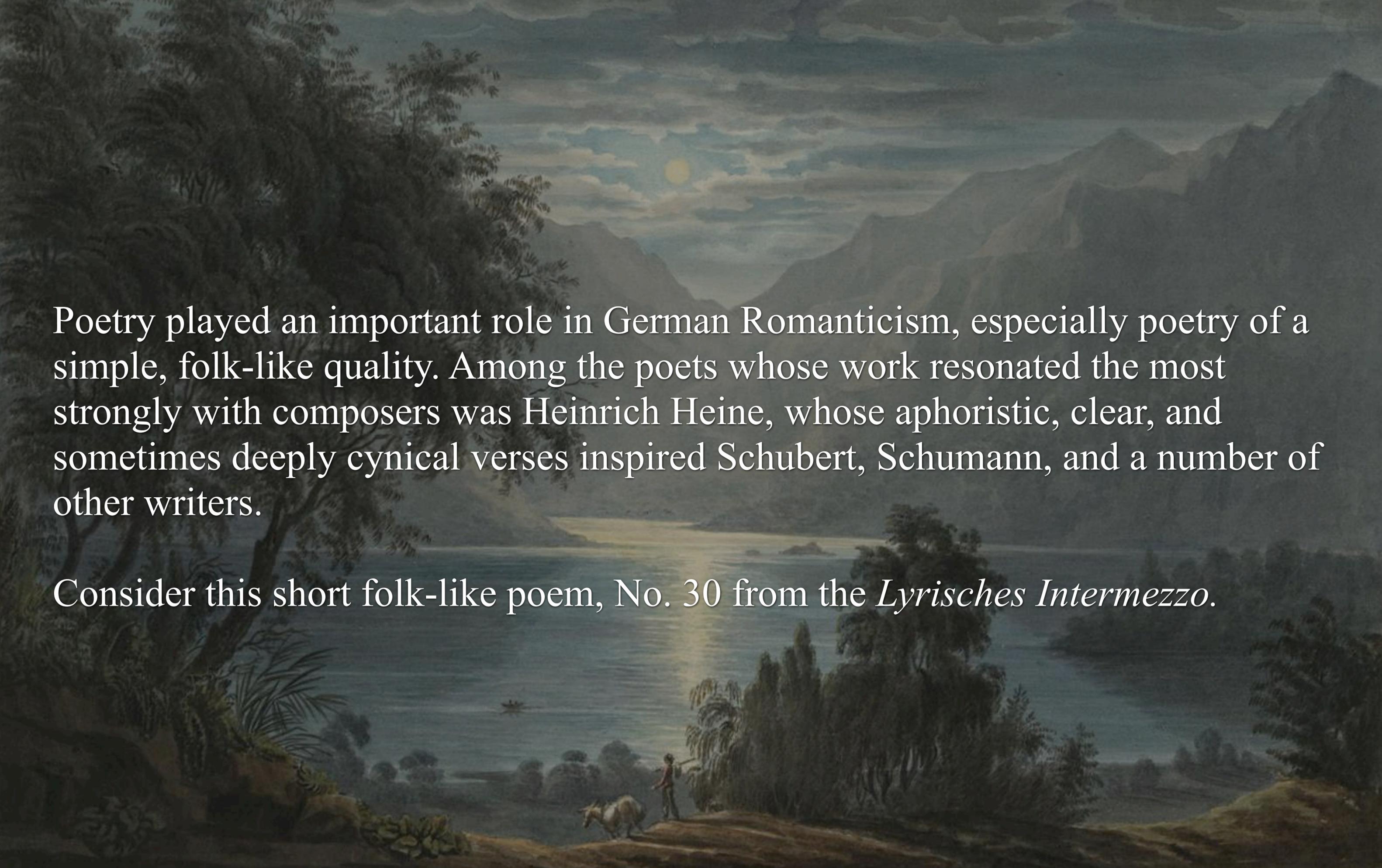
But playing them precisely the way they're written is even worse.

A Romantic-style landscape painting. In the foreground, a person stands on a grassy bank next to a white goat. A river flows through the middle ground, reflecting the sky. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky with a bright sun or moon. The overall mood is serene and naturalistic.

German Romanticism was shaped by numerous influences.

One of the most powerful was the move towards nationalism that began as a reaction against alphabet soup of principalities that had existed since the growth of the Protestant Reformation.

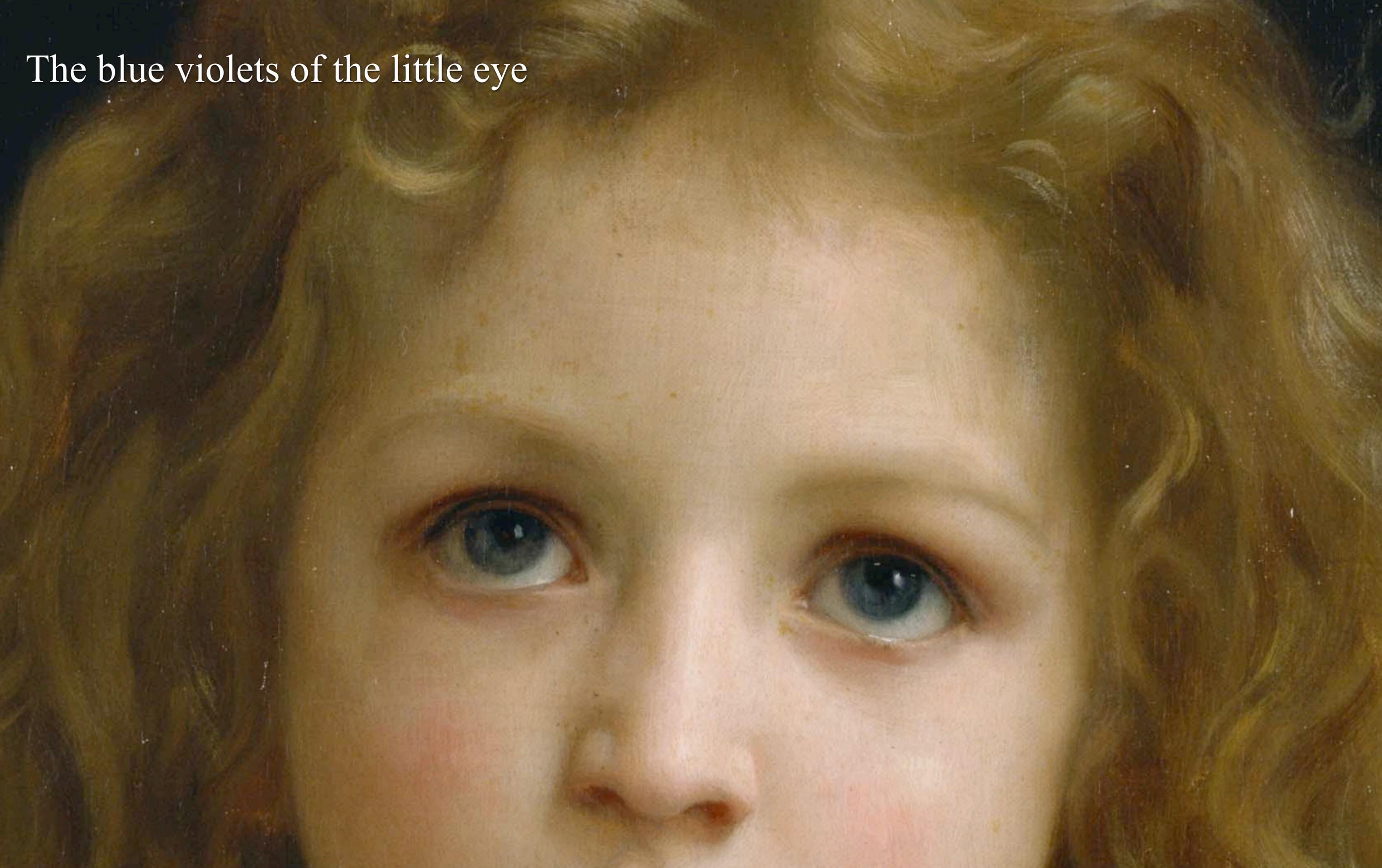
For many Romantics, folk music and fairy tales were the key to finding a unity in the German people. Thus the 1812 publication of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and the 1806 *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*, a collection of fantasy tales.

A Romantic-style landscape painting. In the foreground, a person stands on a grassy hillside, holding a staff, with a white goat beside them. The middle ground features a calm lake reflecting the sky, with a small boat in the distance. The background is dominated by layered, hazy mountains under a soft, overcast sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative, characteristic of the Romantic era's emphasis on nature and the individual's experience.

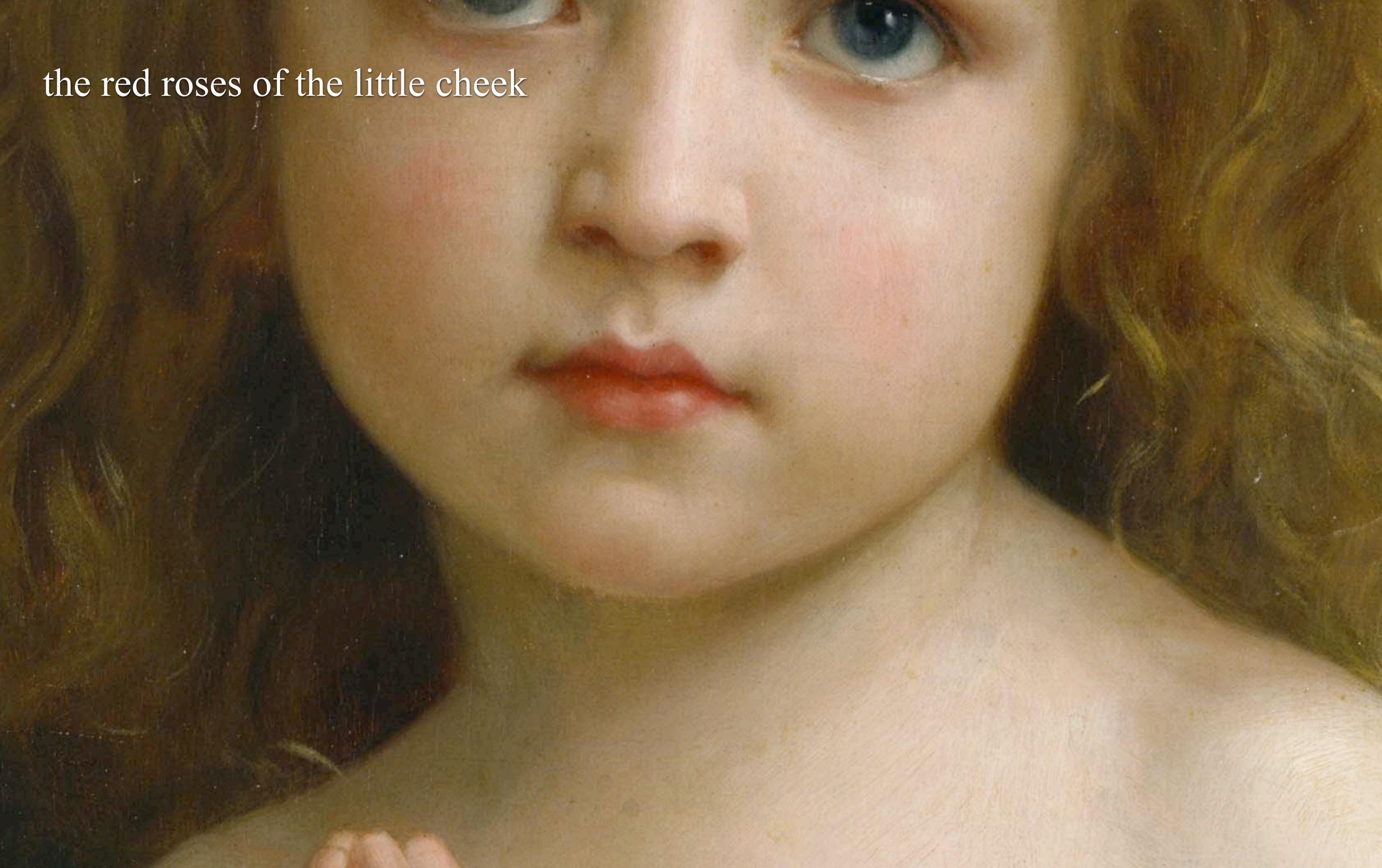
Poetry played an important role in German Romanticism, especially poetry of a simple, folk-like quality. Among the poets whose work resonated the most strongly with composers was Heinrich Heine, whose aphoristic, clear, and sometimes deeply cynical verses inspired Schubert, Schumann, and a number of other writers.

Consider this short folk-like poem, No. 30 from the *Lyrisches Intermezzo*.

The blue violets of the little eye



the red roses of the little cheek

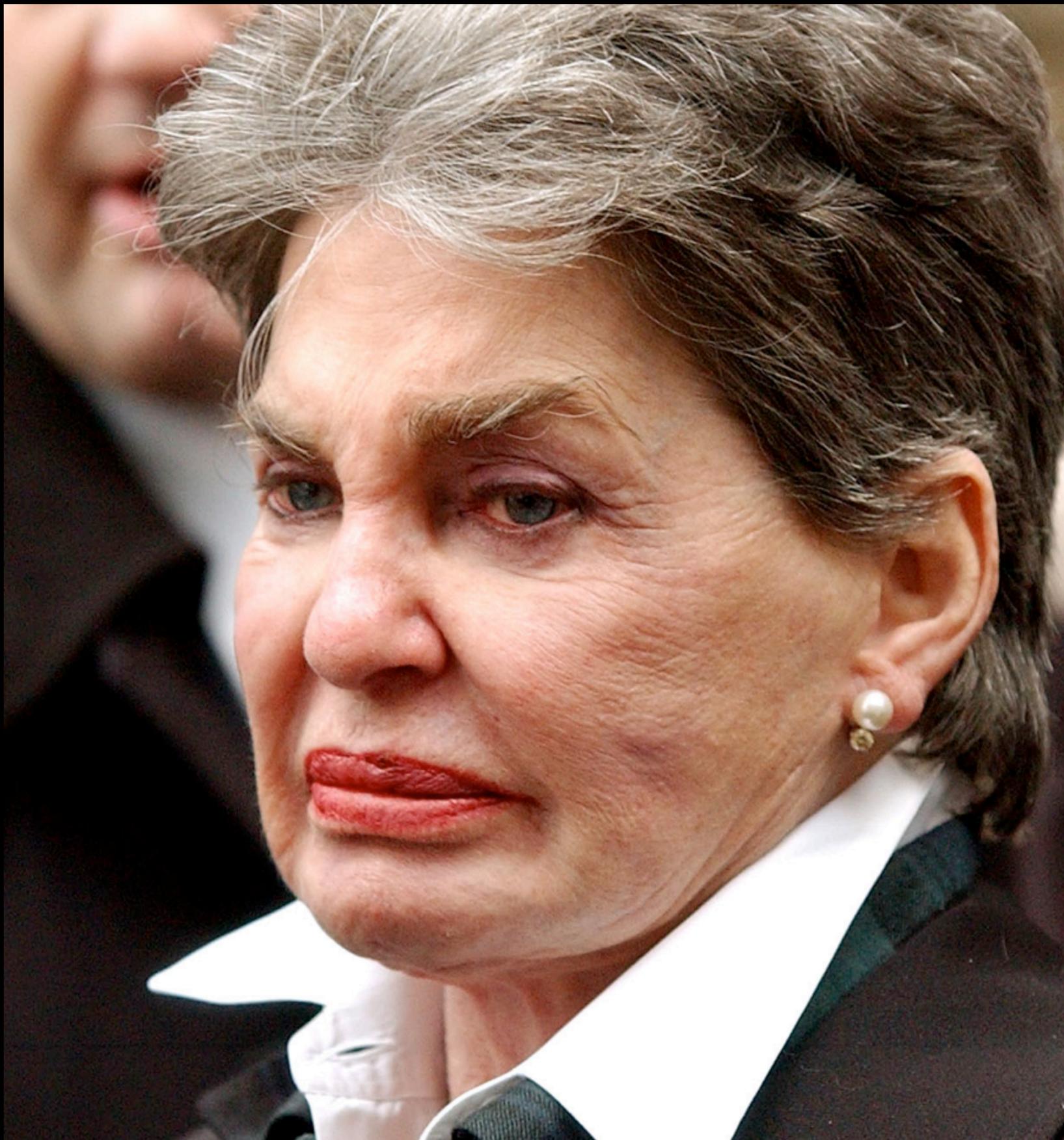




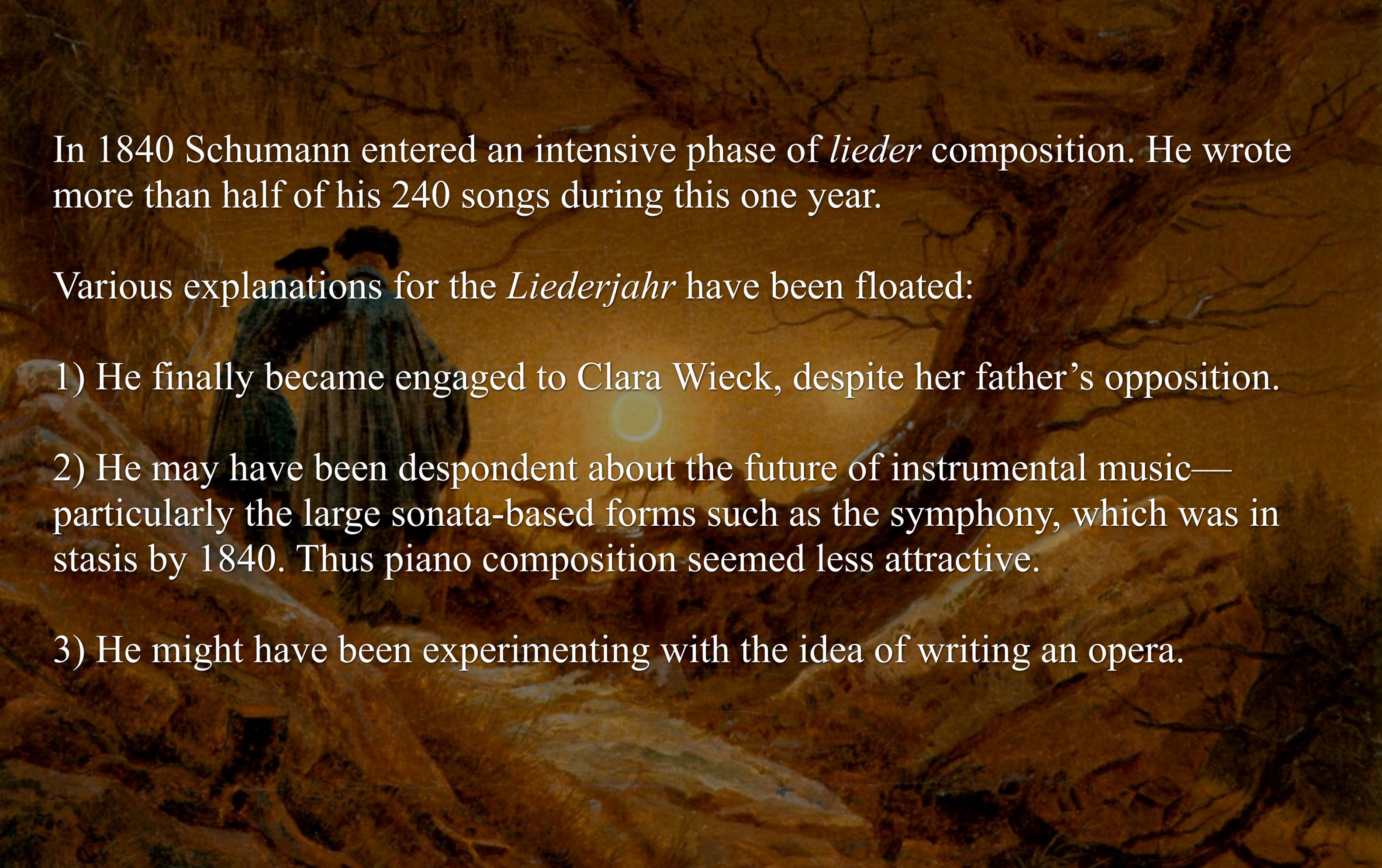
the white lilies of the little hand



they bloom and bloom always,



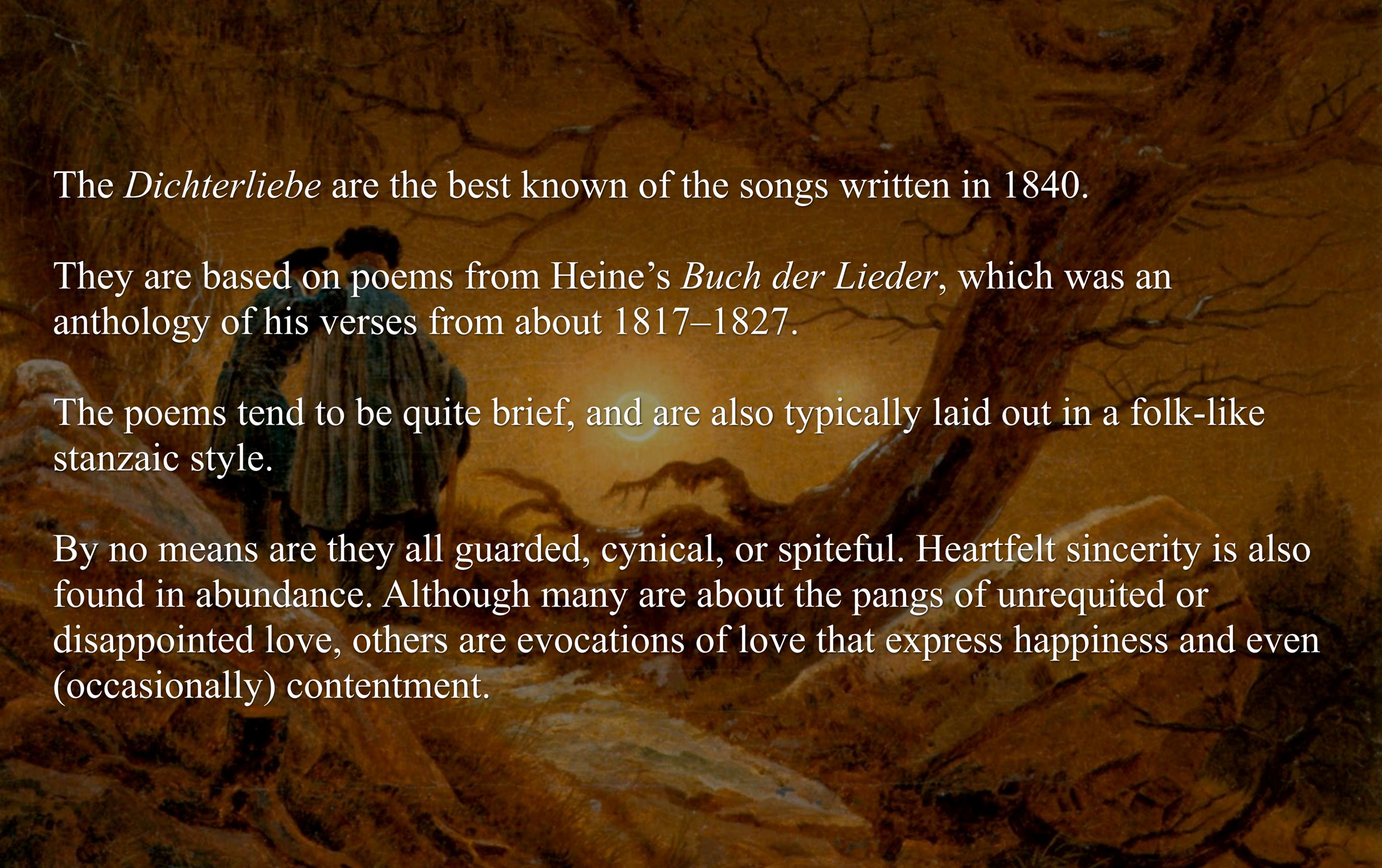
and only the little heart is dried up.

A painting of a man and a woman in 19th-century attire standing in a wooded area. The man is wearing a dark coat and a hat, and the woman is wearing a light-colored dress and a hat. They are standing in a wooded area with a large tree trunk in the foreground. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with trees and a bright light source, possibly the sun or moon, creating a lens flare effect.

In 1840 Schumann entered an intensive phase of *lieder* composition. He wrote more than half of his 240 songs during this one year.

Various explanations for the *Liederjahr* have been floated:

- 1) He finally became engaged to Clara Wieck, despite her father's opposition.
- 2) He may have been despondent about the future of instrumental music—particularly the large sonata-based forms such as the symphony, which was in stasis by 1840. Thus piano composition seemed less attractive.
- 3) He might have been experimenting with the idea of writing an opera.

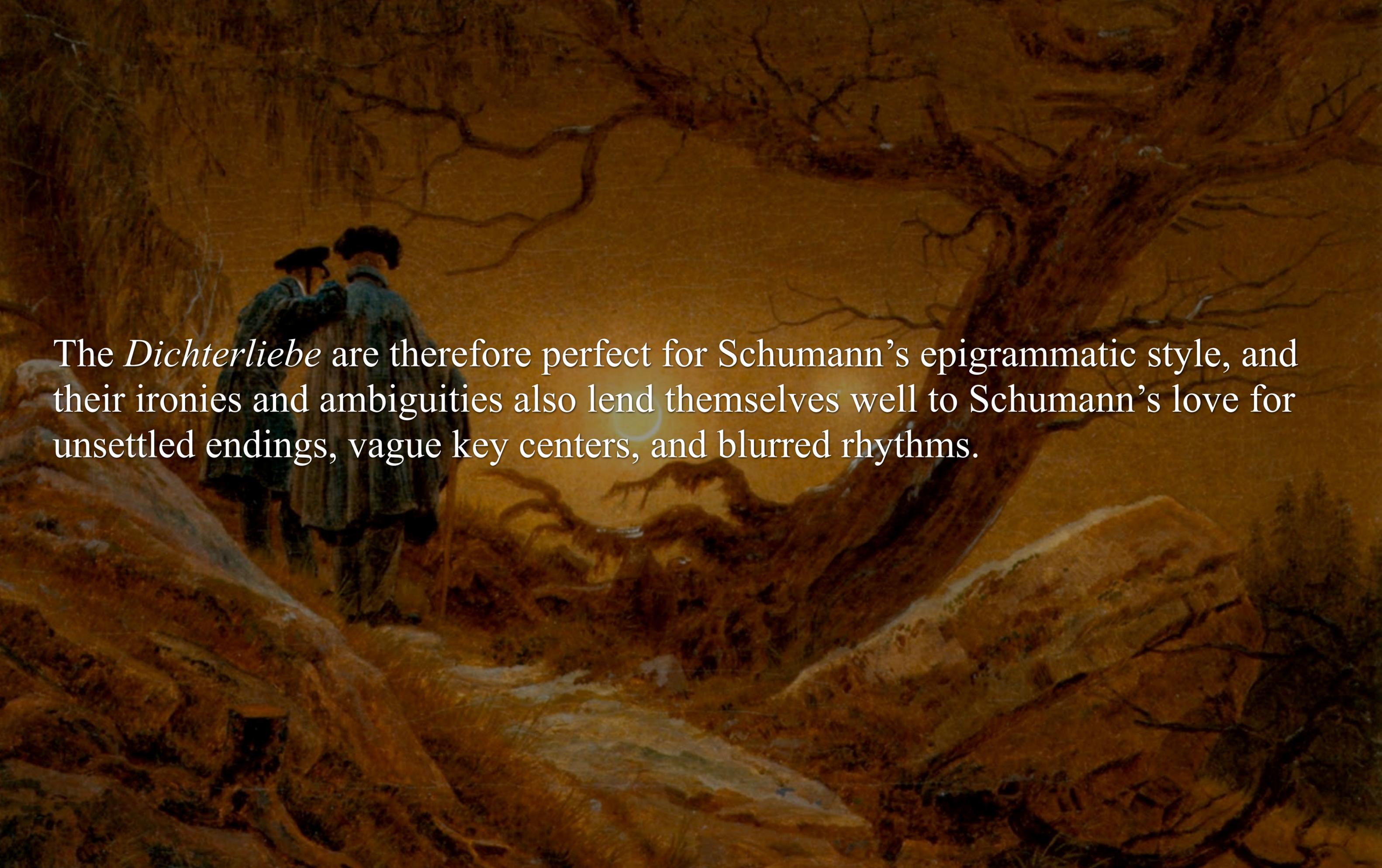
A painting of a man and a woman in a forest at sunset. The man is on the left, wearing a dark coat and hat, looking towards the woman. The woman is on the right, wearing a light-colored dress and a hat, looking back at the man. They are standing on a path that leads through a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The sky is a warm, golden-orange color, suggesting the setting or rising sun. The overall mood is romantic and contemplative.

The *Dichterliebe* are the best known of the songs written in 1840.

They are based on poems from Heine's *Buch der Lieder*, which was an anthology of his verses from about 1817–1827.

The poems tend to be quite brief, and are also typically laid out in a folk-like stanzaic style.

By no means are they all guarded, cynical, or spiteful. Heartfelt sincerity is also found in abundance. Although many are about the pangs of unrequited or disappointed love, others are evocations of love that express happiness and even (occasionally) contentment.

A painting in a dark, monochromatic brown and orange palette. Two figures, possibly a man and a woman, are seen from behind, standing on a rocky ledge. They are wearing heavy, dark clothing and hats. The background is a vast, desolate landscape with jagged, dark rock formations and a pale, hazy sky. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

The *Dichterliebe* are therefore perfect for Schumann's epigrammatic style, and their ironies and ambiguities also lend themselves well to Schumann's love for unsettled endings, vague key centers, and blurred rhythms.



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FRITZ WUNDERLICH, TENOR

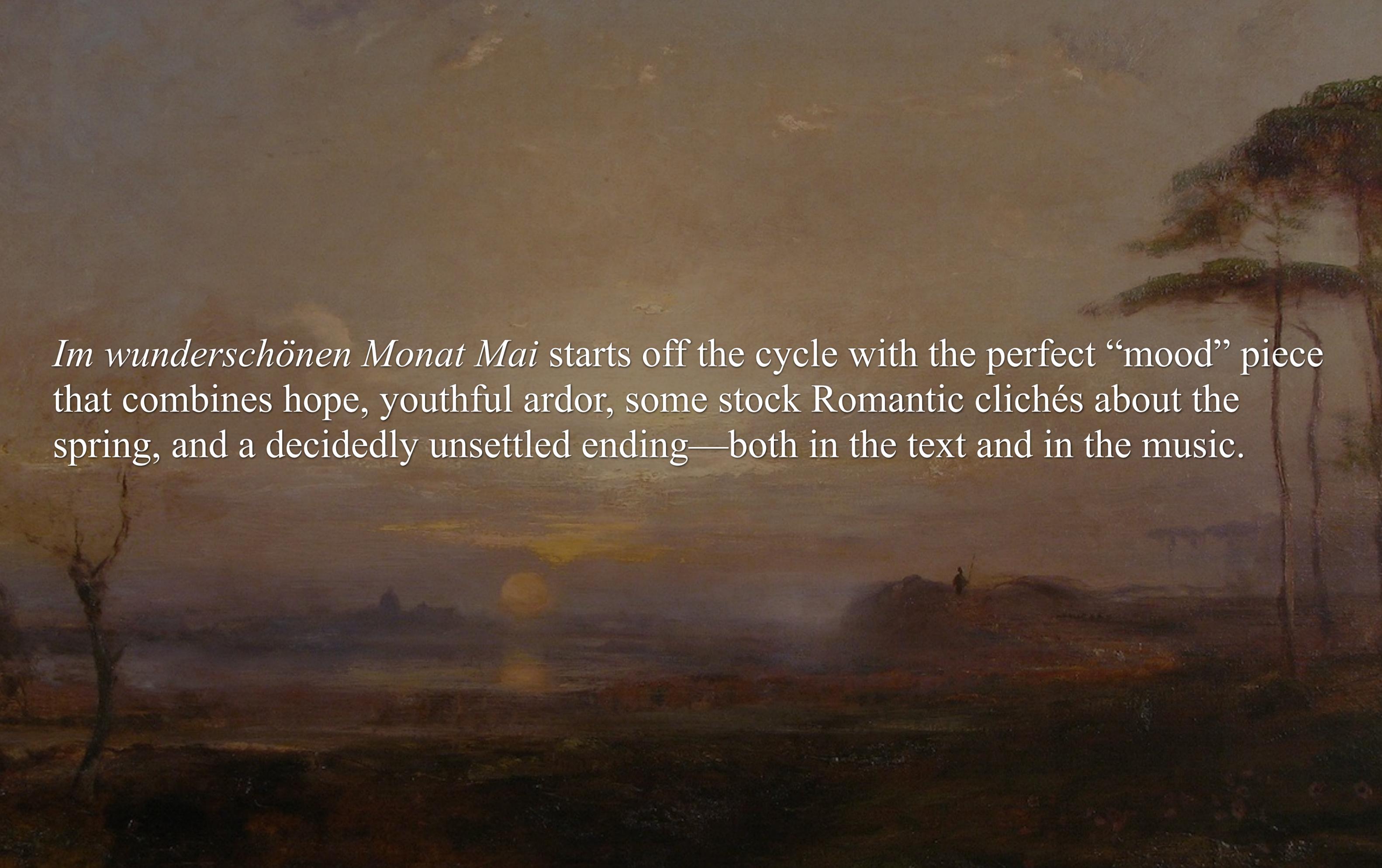
SCHUMANN: DICHTERLIEBE - BEETHOVEN · SCHUBERT

HUBERT GIESEN, PIANO

STEREO

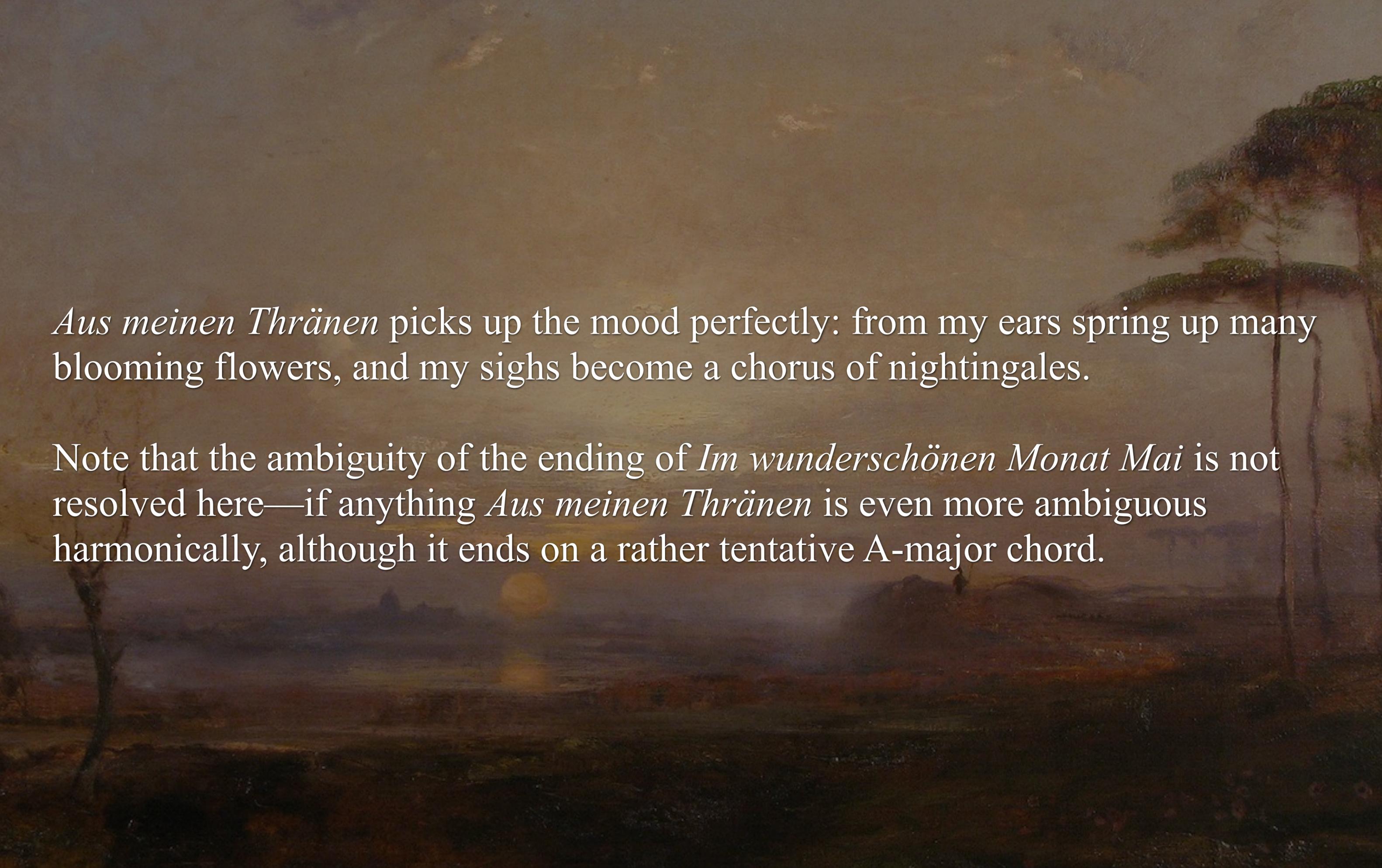
Dichterliebe, Op. 48

Fritz Wunderlich, tenor / Herbert Giesen, piano

A Romantic-style landscape painting. The scene is a vast, hazy landscape with rolling hills and a distant mountain range. A small figure of a person stands on a hill in the middle ground, looking out over the landscape. The sky is filled with soft, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is contemplative and atmospheric. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

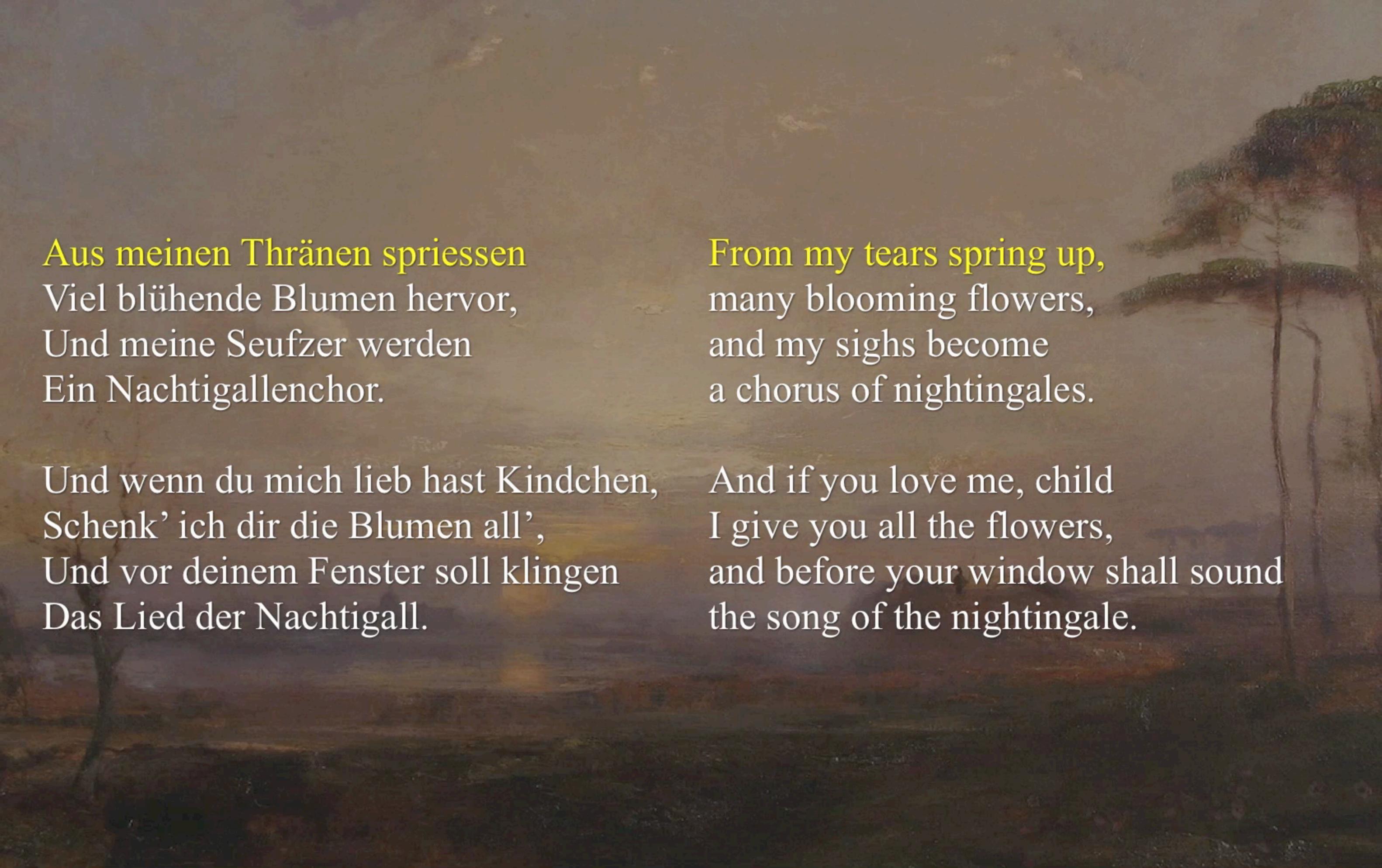
Im wunderschönen Monat Mai starts off the cycle with the perfect “mood” piece that combines hope, youthful ardor, some stock Romantic clichés about the spring, and a decidedly unsettled ending—both in the text and in the music.



A painting of a landscape with a cloudy sky and trees. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds, and the ground is dark and shadowy. There are several trees, some with green foliage and others with bare branches. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

Aus meinen Thränen picks up the mood perfectly: from my ears spring up many blooming flowers, and my sighs become a chorus of nightingales.

Note that the ambiguity of the ending of *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai* is not resolved here—if anything *Aus meinen Thränen* is even more ambiguous harmonically, although it ends on a rather tentative A-major chord.

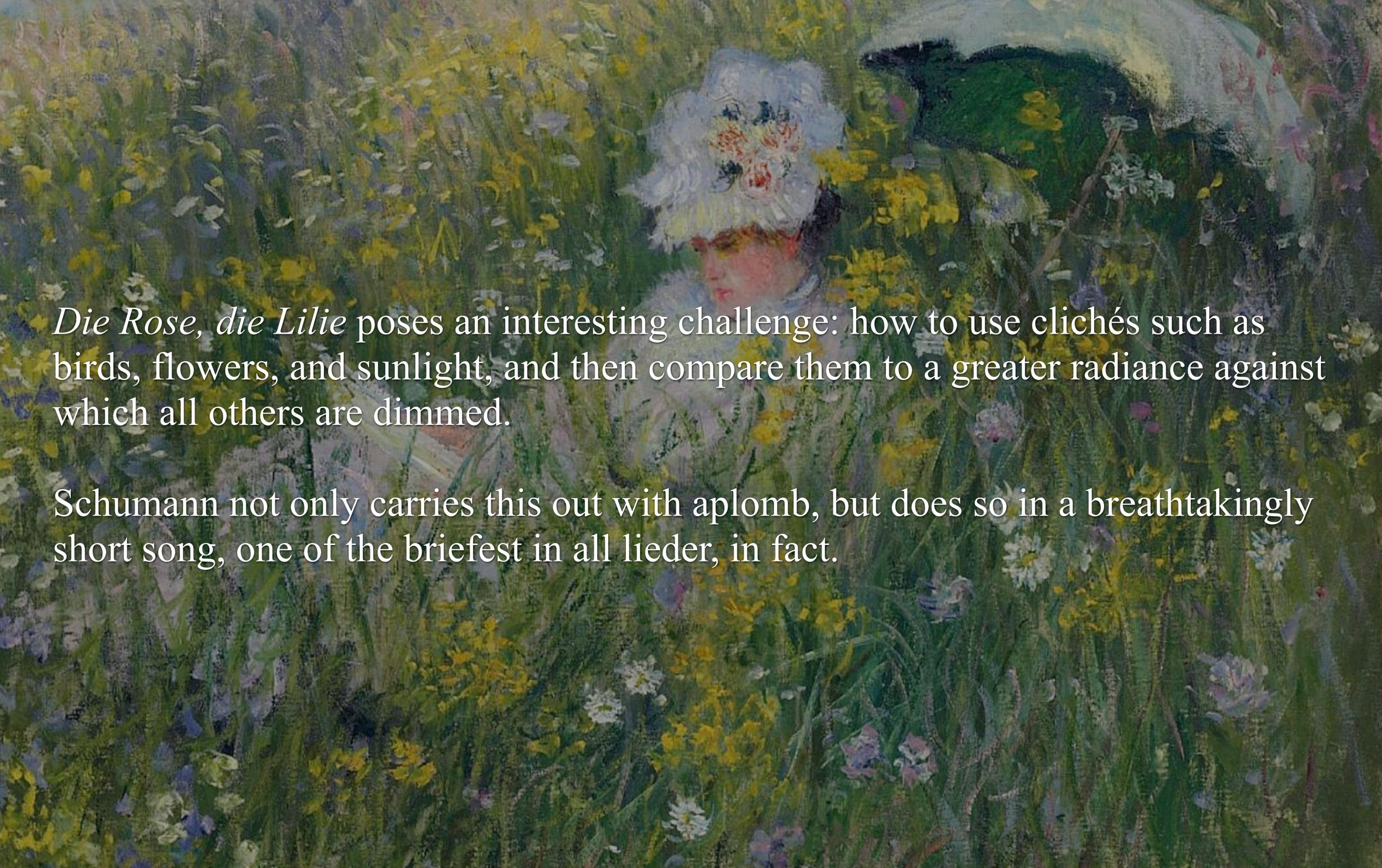
A painting of a misty landscape. In the foreground, there are dark, silhouetted trees. The middle ground shows a body of water reflecting the light from the sky. The background is a soft, hazy sky with some light clouds. The overall mood is melancholic and serene.

Aus meinen Thränen spriessen
Viel blühende Blumen hervor,
Und meine Seufzer werden
Ein Nachtigallenchor.

Und wenn du mich lieb hast Kindchen,
Schenk' ich dir die Blumen all',
Und vor deinem Fenster soll klingen
Das Lied der Nachtigall.

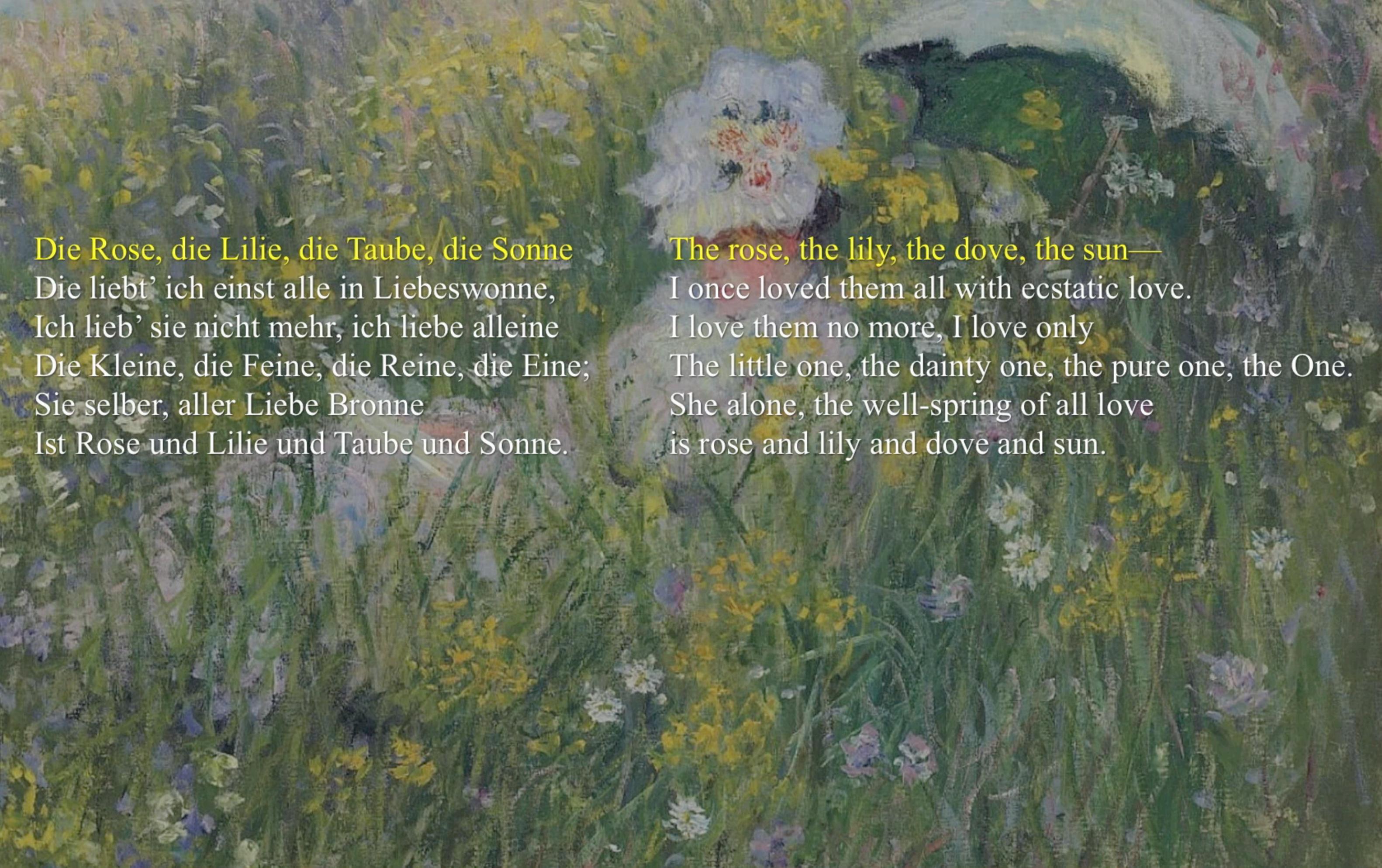
From my tears spring up,
many blooming flowers,
and my sighs become
a chorus of nightingales.

And if you love me, child
I give you all the flowers,
and before your window shall sound
the song of the nightingale.



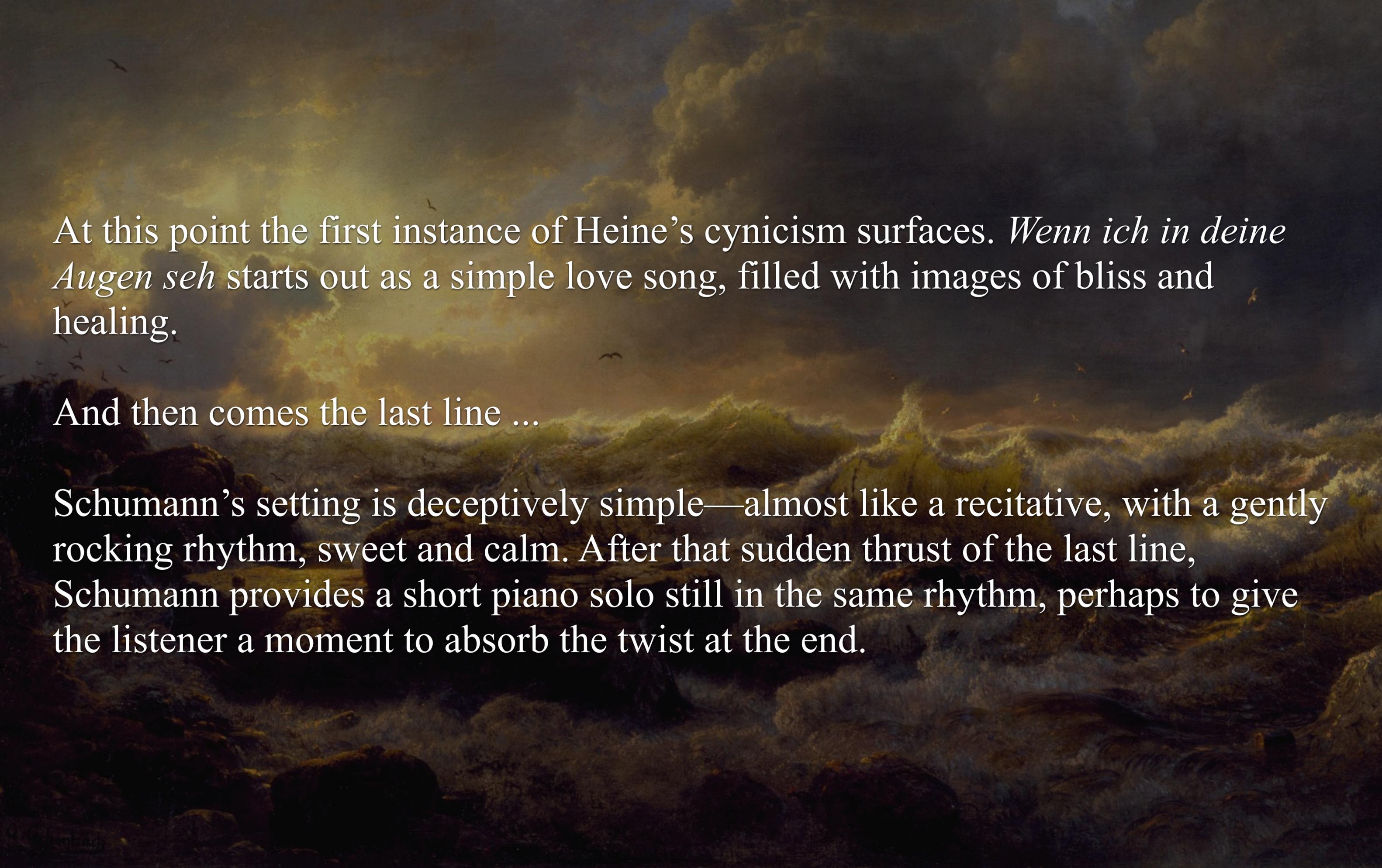
Die Rose, die Lilie poses an interesting challenge: how to use clichés such as birds, flowers, and sunlight, and then compare them to a greater radiance against which all others are dimmed.

Schumann not only carries this out with aplomb, but does so in a breathtakingly short song, one of the briefest in all lieder, in fact.

A painting of a field of flowers. In the center, a large white rose with red and yellow accents is prominent. To its right, a dove is depicted in flight, its wings spread, with a green and white body. The background is a dense field of various flowers in shades of yellow, green, and purple. The overall style is impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a rich, textured color palette.

Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube, die Sonne
Die lieb' ich einst alle in Liebeswonne,
Ich lieb' sie nicht mehr, ich liebe alleine
Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine;
Sie selber, aller Liebe Bronne
Ist Rose und Lilie und Taube und Sonne.

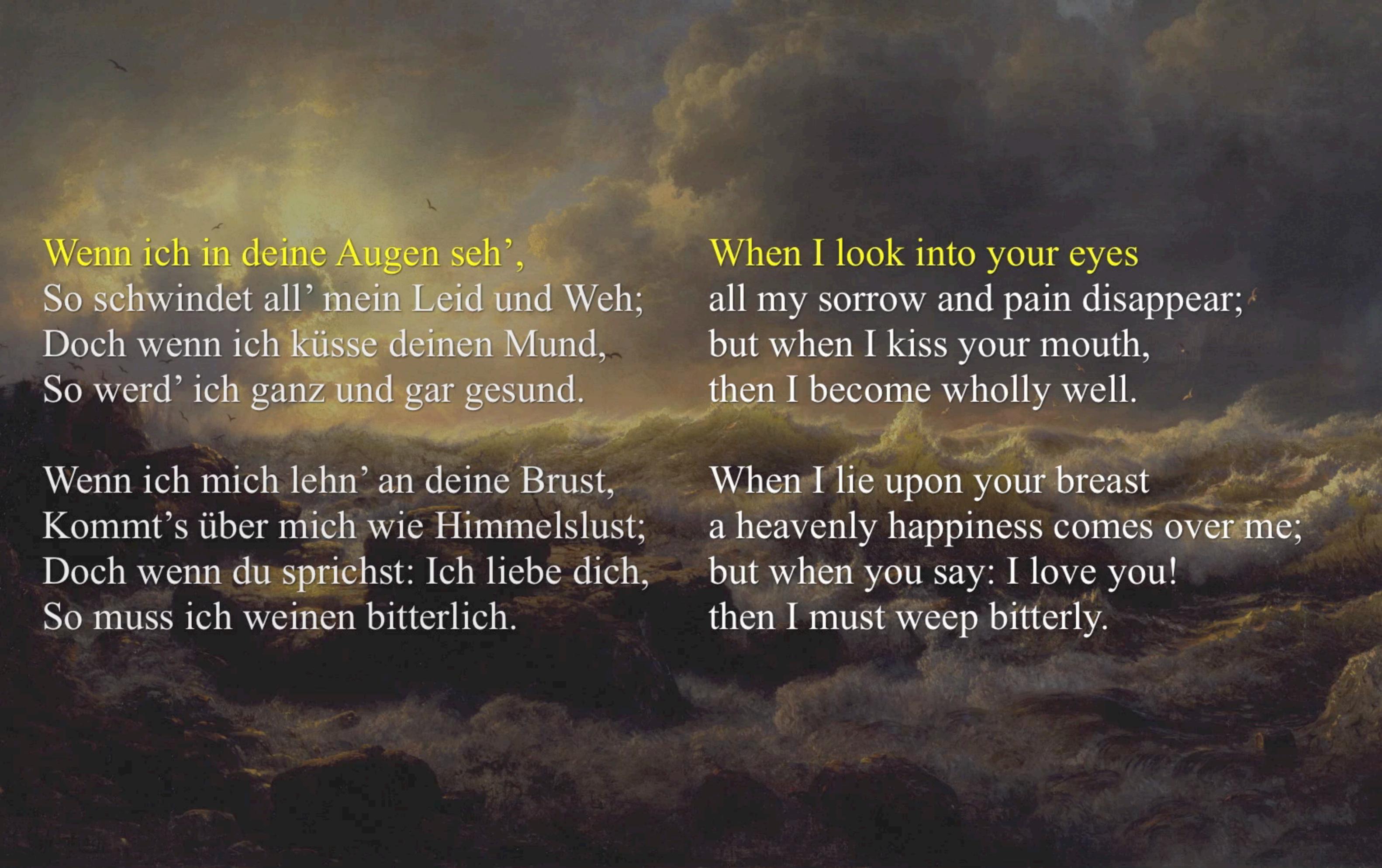
The rose, the lily, the dove, the sun—
I once loved them all with ecstatic love.
I love them no more, I love only
The little one, the dainty one, the pure one, the One.
She alone, the well-spring of all love
is rose and lily and dove and sun.

A dramatic, dark seascape painting. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, with a golden light breaking through near the horizon, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. Numerous birds are scattered across the sky, some in flight. The sea is turbulent, with large, dark waves crashing against a rocky shore in the foreground. The overall mood is somber and intense.

At this point the first instance of Heine's cynicism surfaces. *Wenn ich in deine Augen seh* starts out as a simple love song, filled with images of bliss and healing.

And then comes the last line ...

Schumann's setting is deceptively simple—almost like a recitative, with a gently rocking rhythm, sweet and calm. After that sudden thrust of the last line, Schumann provides a short piano solo still in the same rhythm, perhaps to give the listener a moment to absorb the twist at the end.

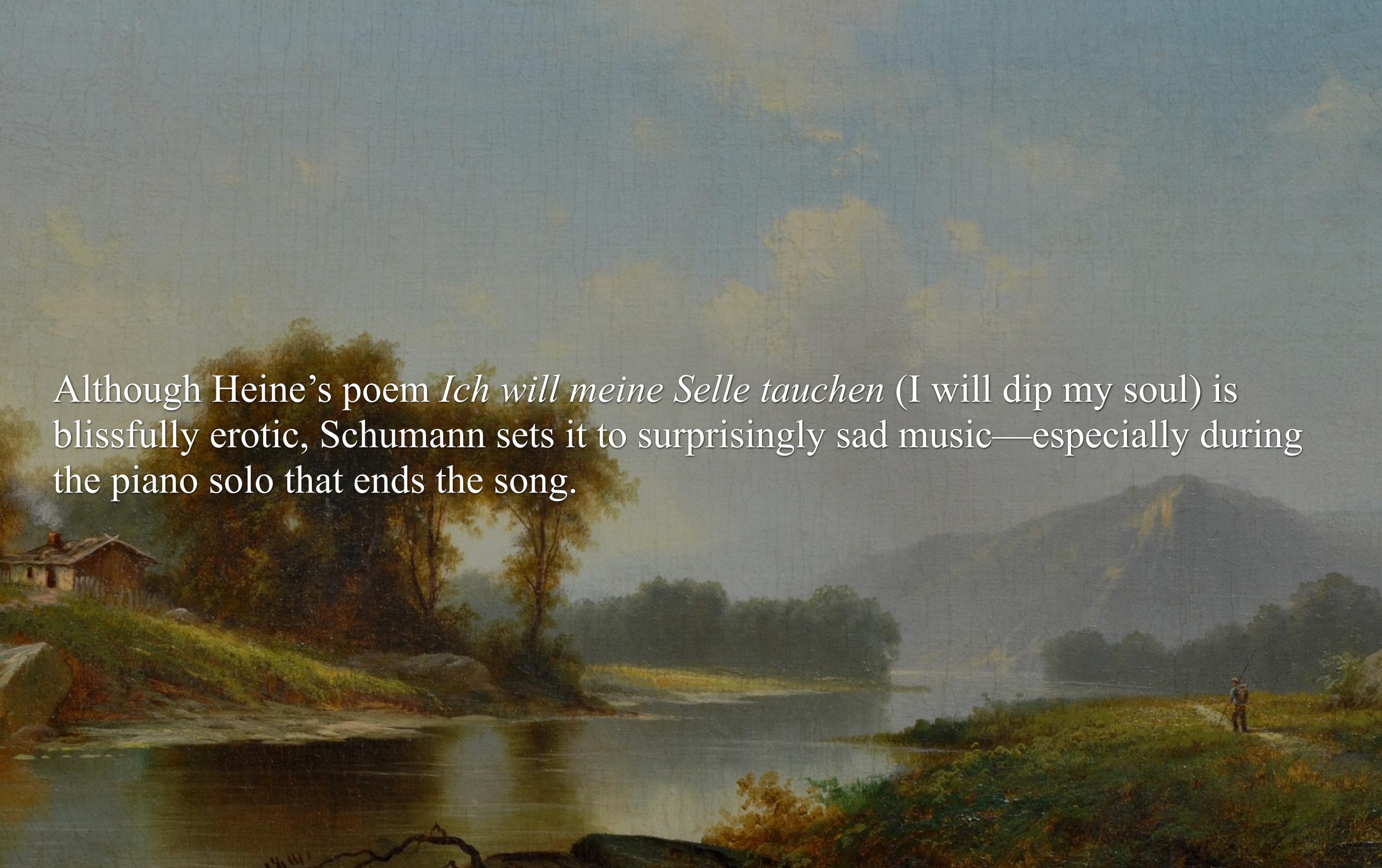
The background is a dramatic, dark landscape painting. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, with a bright, golden light breaking through near the horizon, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The sea is turbulent, with dark, churning waves and white foam. The overall mood is somber and intense.

Wenn ich in deine Augen seh',
So schwindet all' mein Leid und Weh;
Doch wenn ich küsse deinen Mund,
So werd' ich ganz und gar gesund.

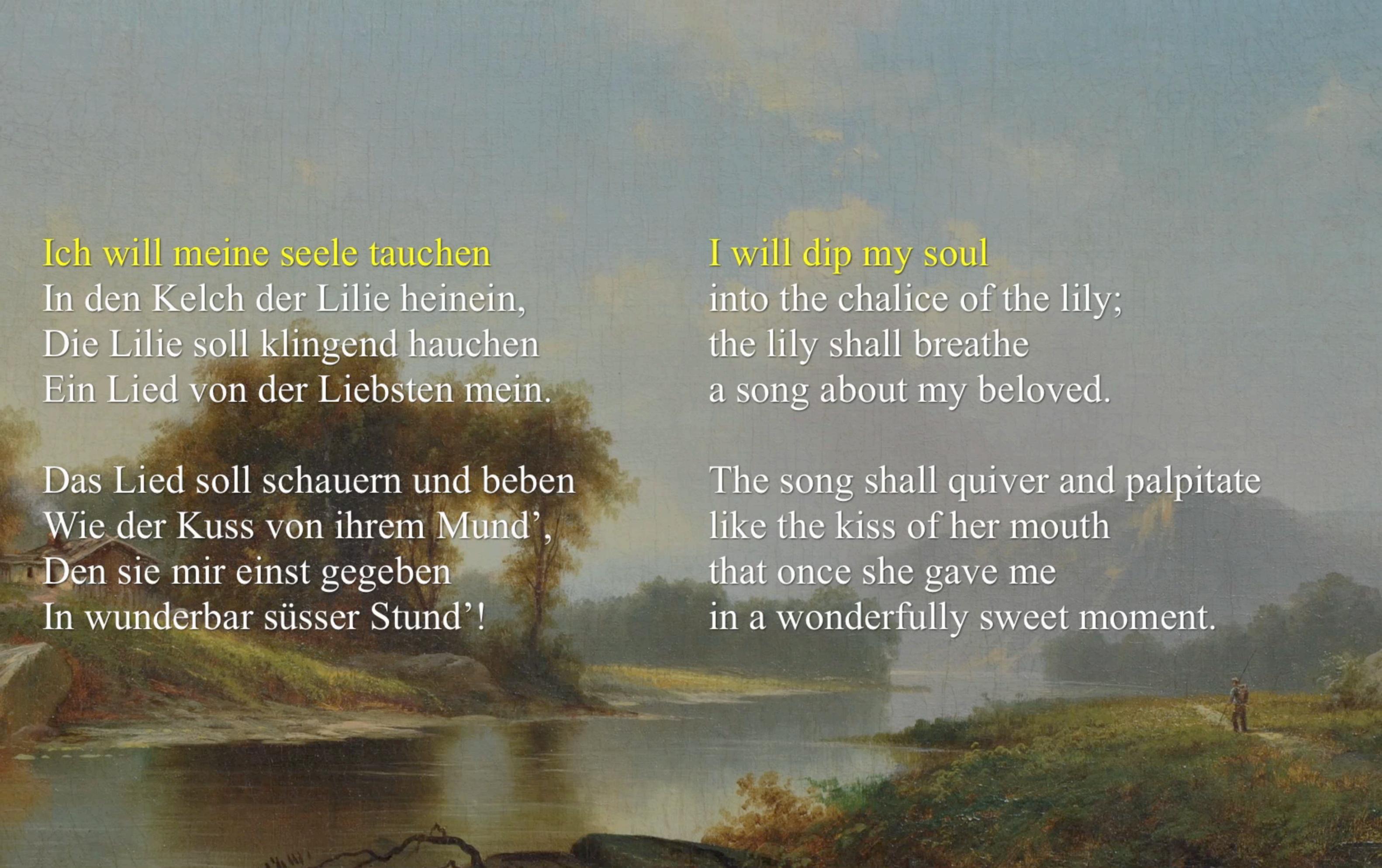
Wenn ich mich lehn' an deine Brust,
Kommt's über mich wie Himmelslust;
Doch wenn du sprichst: Ich liebe dich,
So muss ich weinen bitterlich.

When I look into your eyes
all my sorrow and pain disappear;
but when I kiss your mouth,
then I become wholly well.

When I lie upon your breast
a heavenly happiness comes over me;
but when you say: I love you!
then I must weep bitterly.

A Romantic-style landscape painting. In the foreground, a calm river flows through a lush, green valley. On the left bank, a small, rustic wooden house with a thatched roof sits on a slight rise. The middle ground is dominated by a dense forest of tall, leafy trees. In the distance, a range of misty, rolling hills or mountains is visible under a soft, overcast sky. On the right bank, a small figure of a person, possibly a fisherman, stands on a path. The overall mood is serene and contemplative, with a focus on the beauty of the natural world.

Although Heine's poem *Ich will meine Selle tauchen* (I will dip my soul) is blissfully erotic, Schumann sets it to surprisingly sad music—especially during the piano solo that ends the song.



Ich will meine seele tauchen

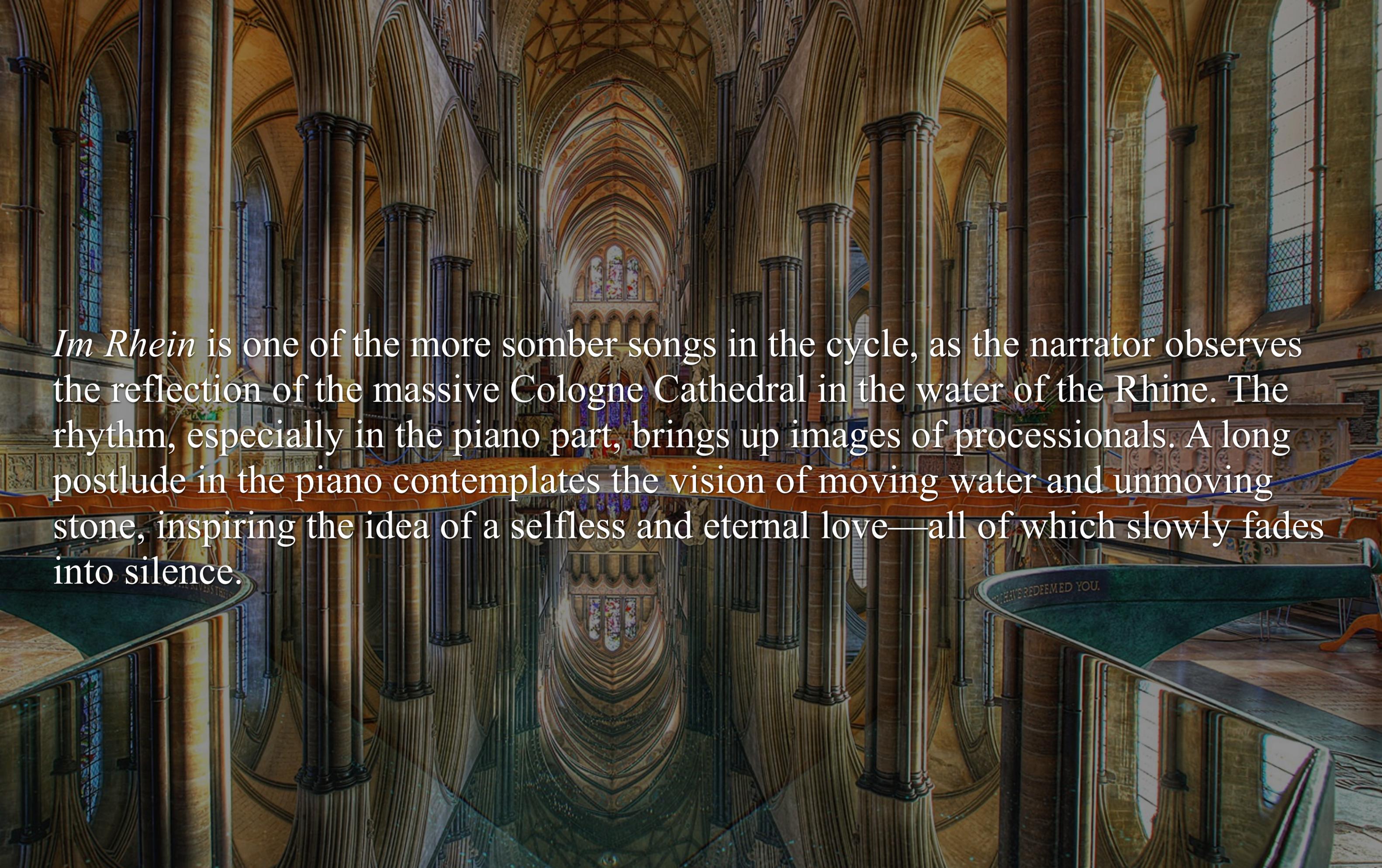
In den Kelch der Lilie heinein,
Die Lilie soll klingend hauchen
Ein Lied von der Liebsten mein.

Das Lied soll schauern und beben
Wie der Kuss von ihrem Mund',
Den sie mir einst gegeben
In wunderbar süsser Stund'!

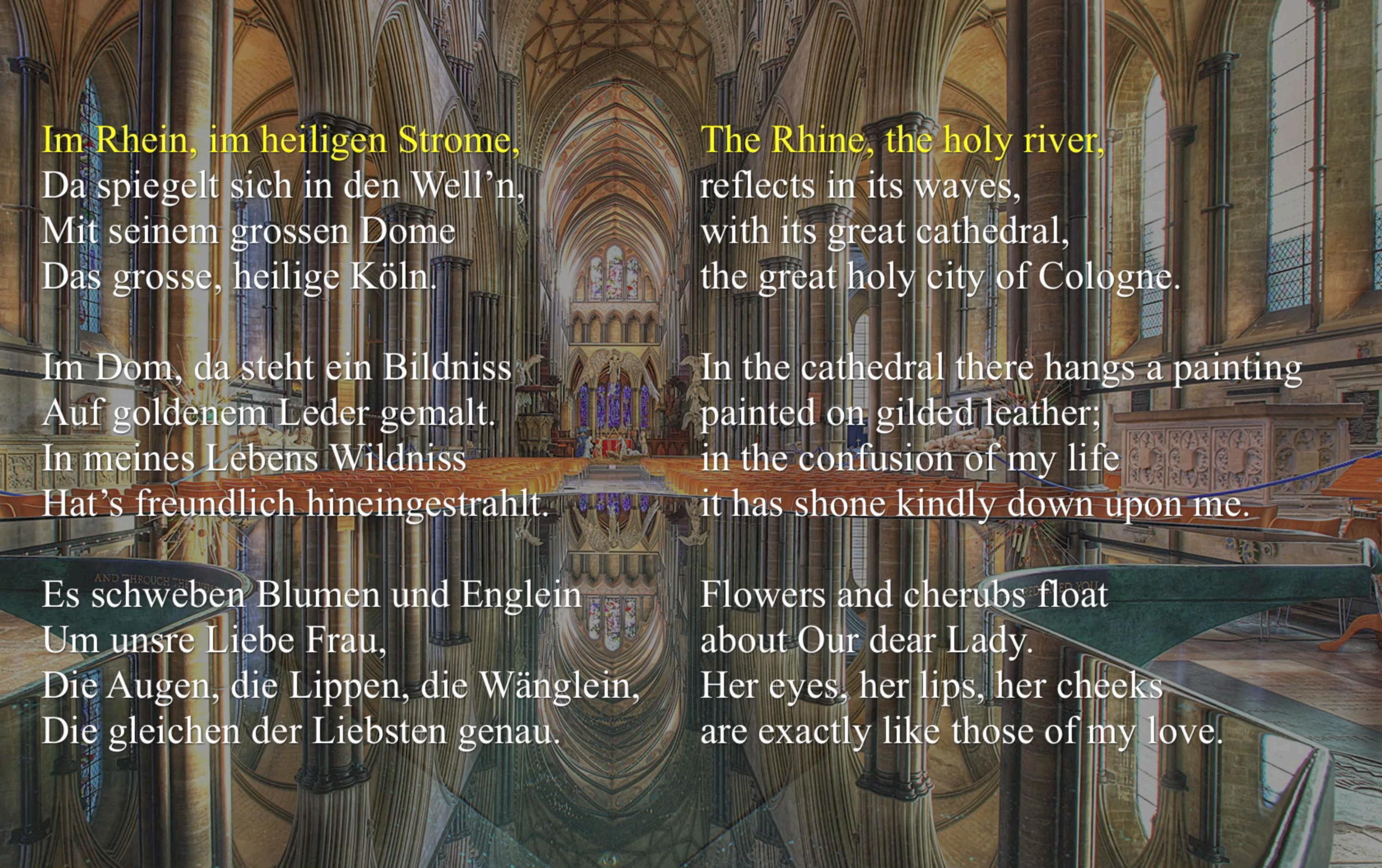
I will dip my soul

into the chalice of the lily;
the lily shall breathe
a song about my beloved.

The song shall quiver and palpitate
like the kiss of her mouth
that once she gave me
in a wonderfully sweet moment.



Im Rhein is one of the more somber songs in the cycle, as the narrator observes the reflection of the massive Cologne Cathedral in the water of the Rhine. The rhythm, especially in the piano part, brings up images of processionals. A long postlude in the piano contemplates the vision of moving water and unmoving stone, inspiring the idea of a selfless and eternal love—all of which slowly fades into silence.



Im Rhein, im heiligen Strome,
Da spiegelt sich in den Well'n,
Mit seinem grossen Dome
Das grosse, heilige Köln.

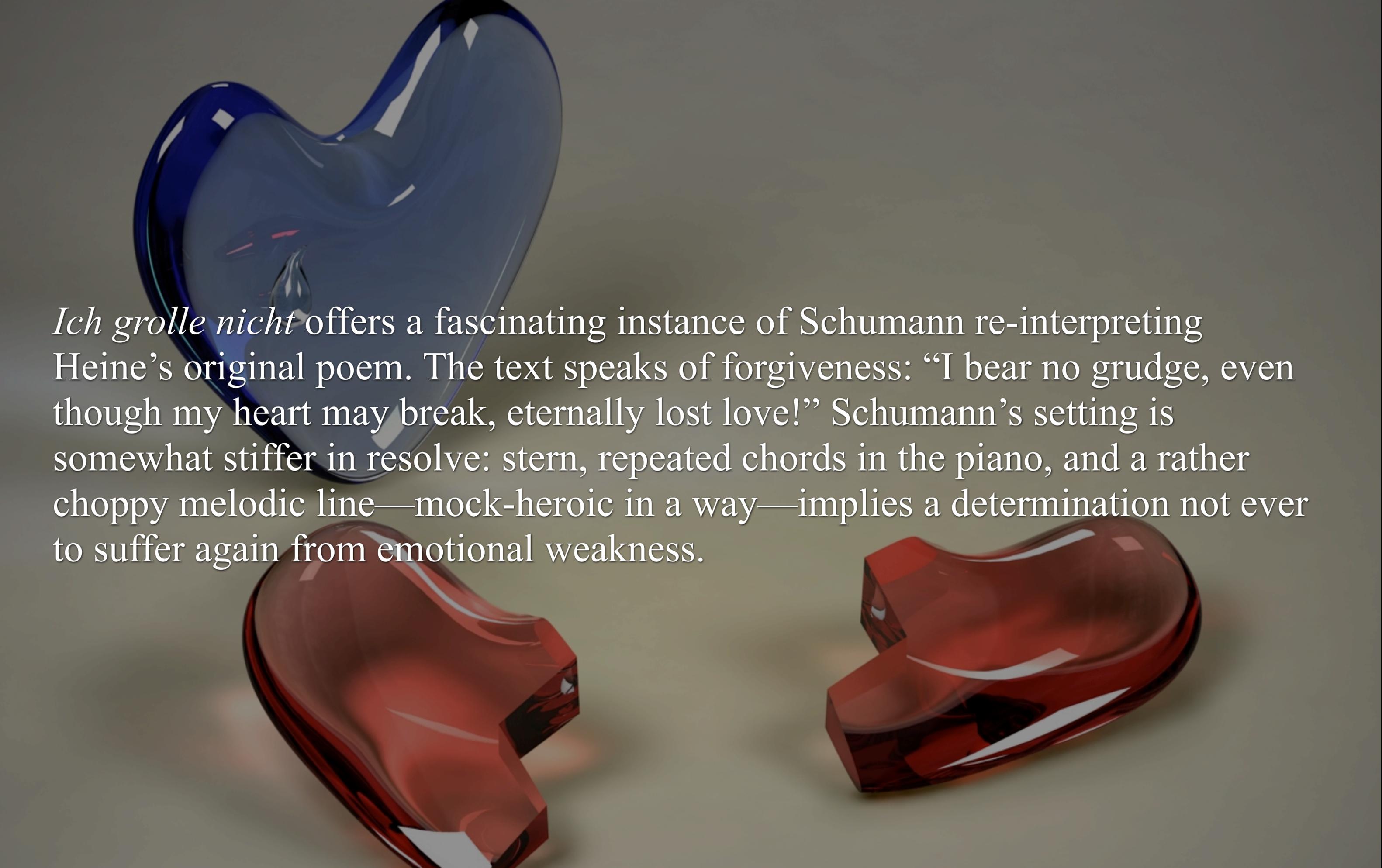
Im Dom, da steht ein Bildniss
Auf goldenem Leder gemalt.
In meines Lebens Wildniss
Hat's freundlich hineingestrahlt.

Es schweben Blumen und Englein
Um unsre Liebe Frau,
Die Augen, die Lippen, die Wänglein,
Die gleichen der Liebsten genau.

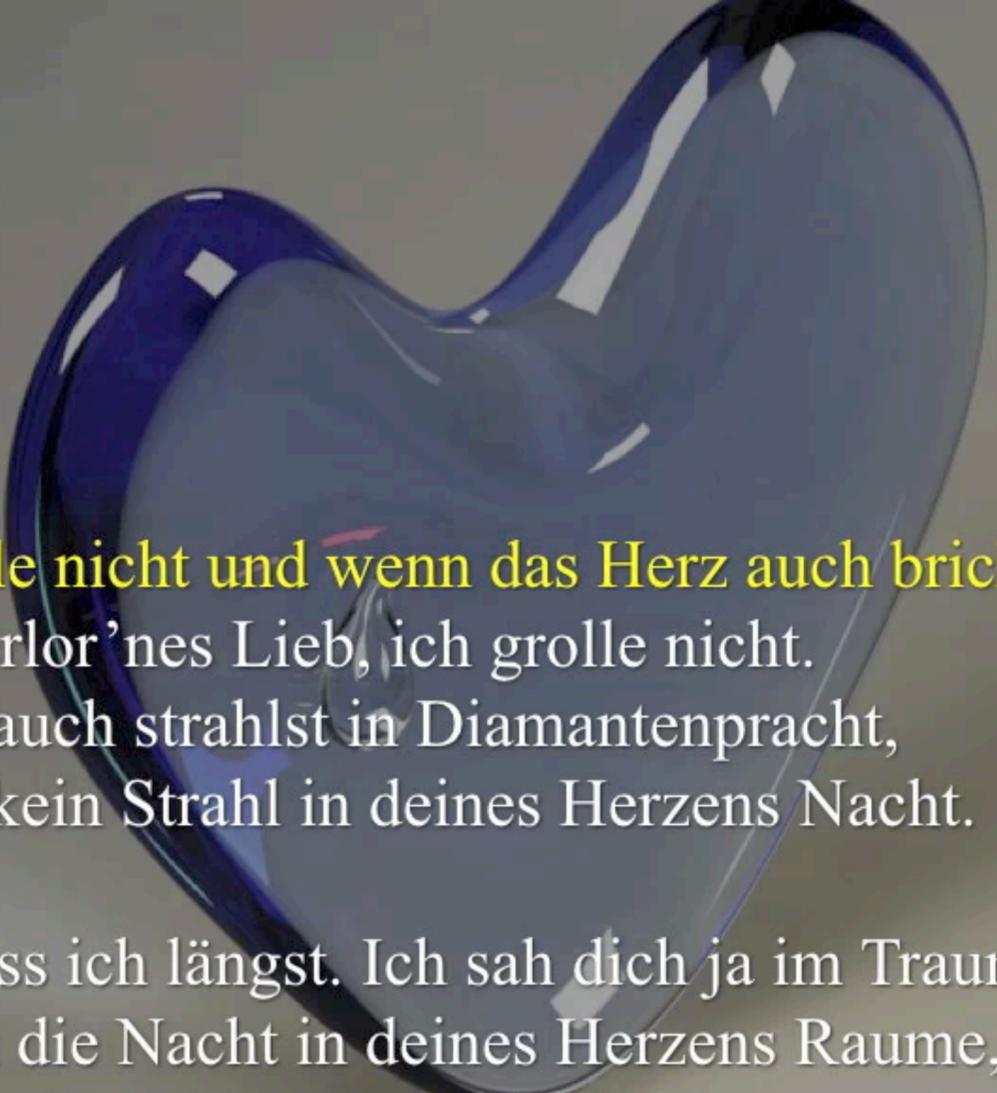
The Rhine, the holy river,
reflects in its waves,
with its great cathedral,
the great holy city of Cologne.

In the cathedral there hangs a painting
painted on gilded leather;
in the confusion of my life
it has shone kindly down upon me.

Flowers and cherubs float
about Our dear Lady.
Her eyes, her lips, her cheeks
are exactly like those of my love.

A blue heart with a single tear falling from it is positioned in the upper left. Below it, two broken red hearts are shown, one on the left and one on the right, representing emotional damage. The background is a plain, light gray.

Ich grolle nicht offers a fascinating instance of Schumann re-interpreting Heine's original poem. The text speaks of forgiveness: "I bear no grudge, even though my heart may break, eternally lost love!" Schumann's setting is somewhat stiffer in resolve: stern, repeated chords in the piano, and a rather choppy melodic line—mock-heroic in a way—implies a determination not ever to suffer again from emotional weakness.



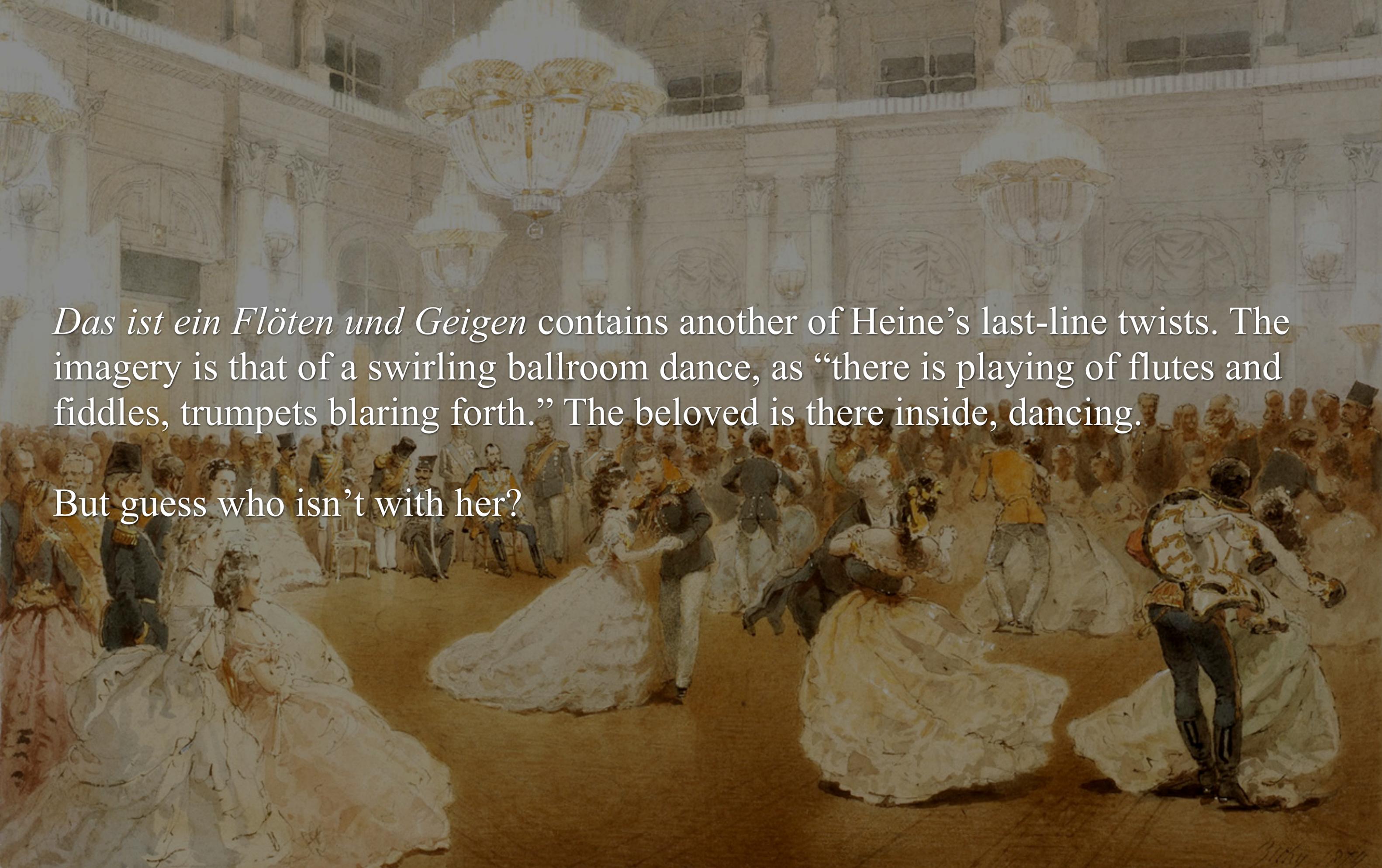
Ich grolle nicht und wenn das Herz auch bricht,
Ewig verlор'nes Lieb, ich grolle nicht.
Wie du auch strahlst in Diamantenpracht,
Es fällt kein Strahl in deines Herzens Nacht.

Das weiss ich längst. Ich sah dich ja im Traume,
Und sah die Nacht in deines Herzens Raume,
Und sah die Schlang', die dir am Herzen frisst,
Ich sah, mein Lieb, wie sehr du elend bist.

I bear no grudge, even though my heart may break,
eternally lost love! I bear no grudge.
However you may shine in the splendor of your diamonds,
no ray of light falls in the darkness of your heart.

I have long known this. I saw you in a dream,
and saw the night within the void of your heart,
and saw the serpent that is eating your heart—
I say, my love, how very miserable you are.





Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen contains another of Heine's last-line twists. The imagery is that of a swirling ballroom dance, as "there is playing of flutes and fiddles, trumpets blaring forth." The beloved is there inside, dancing.

But guess who isn't with her?



Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen,
Trompetten schmetterten darein.
Da tanzt wohl im Hochzeitreigen
Die Herzallerliebste mein.

Das ist ein Klingen und Dröhnen,
Ein Pauken und ein Schalmeln;
Dazwischen schluchzen und stöhnen
Die lieblichen Engelein.

There is playing of flutes and fiddles,
trumpets blaring forth;
there in the wedding party
my dearest love is dancing.

There is sounding and roaring
of drums and pipes
and in the midst of it
the dear angels sob and groan.

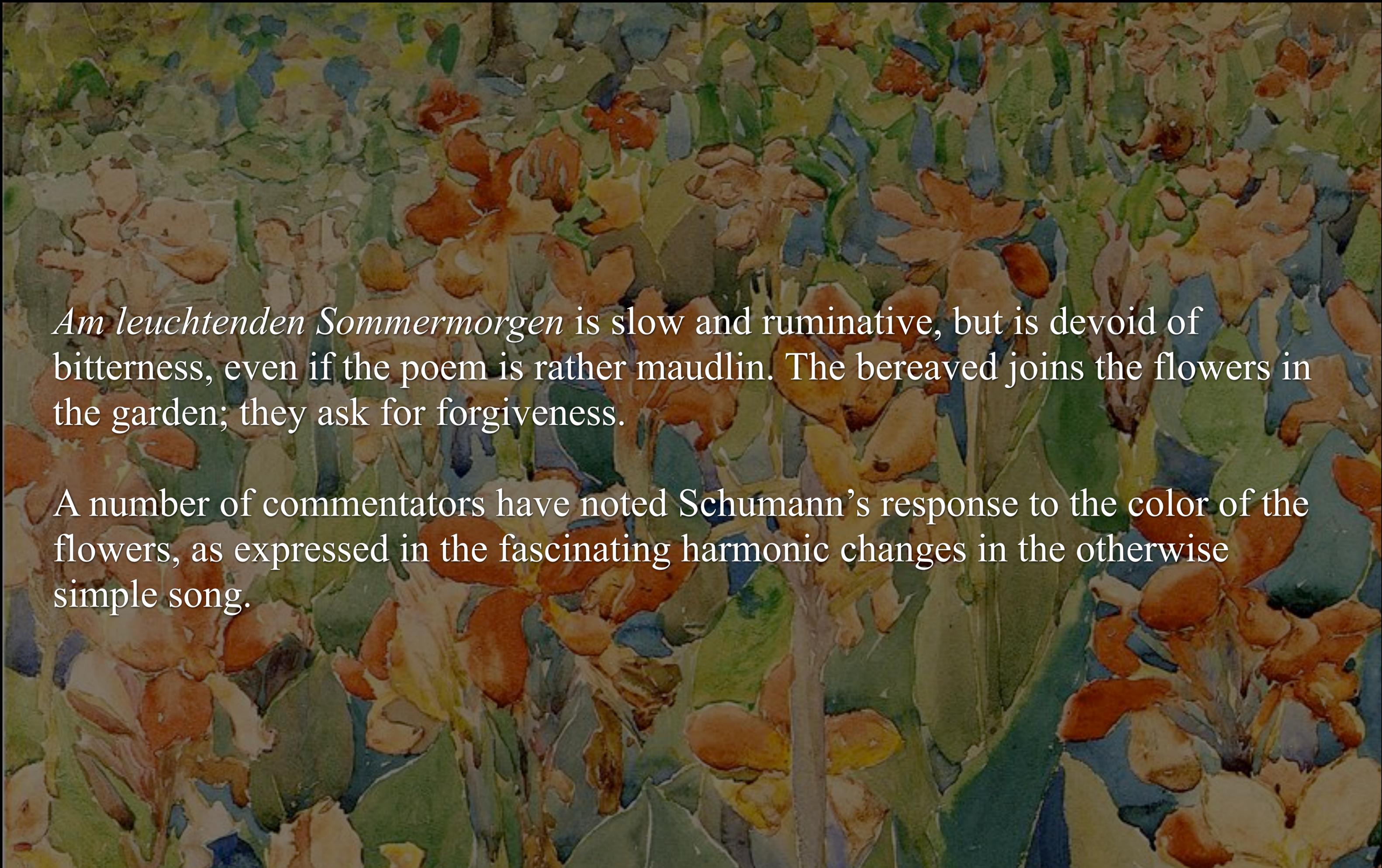
Hör ich das Liedchen klingen is one of Schumann's most evocative settings. In the piano part, from time to time (including the very opening) we hear an echo of the "song that once my true love sang," almost as though it has never been able to leave the bereaved mind. We also hear the same melody in the vocal line. There is no getting rid of the song; to the very end it persists, no matter how hard the mind tries to shake it—as the piano postlude makes all too clear.





Cross your heart

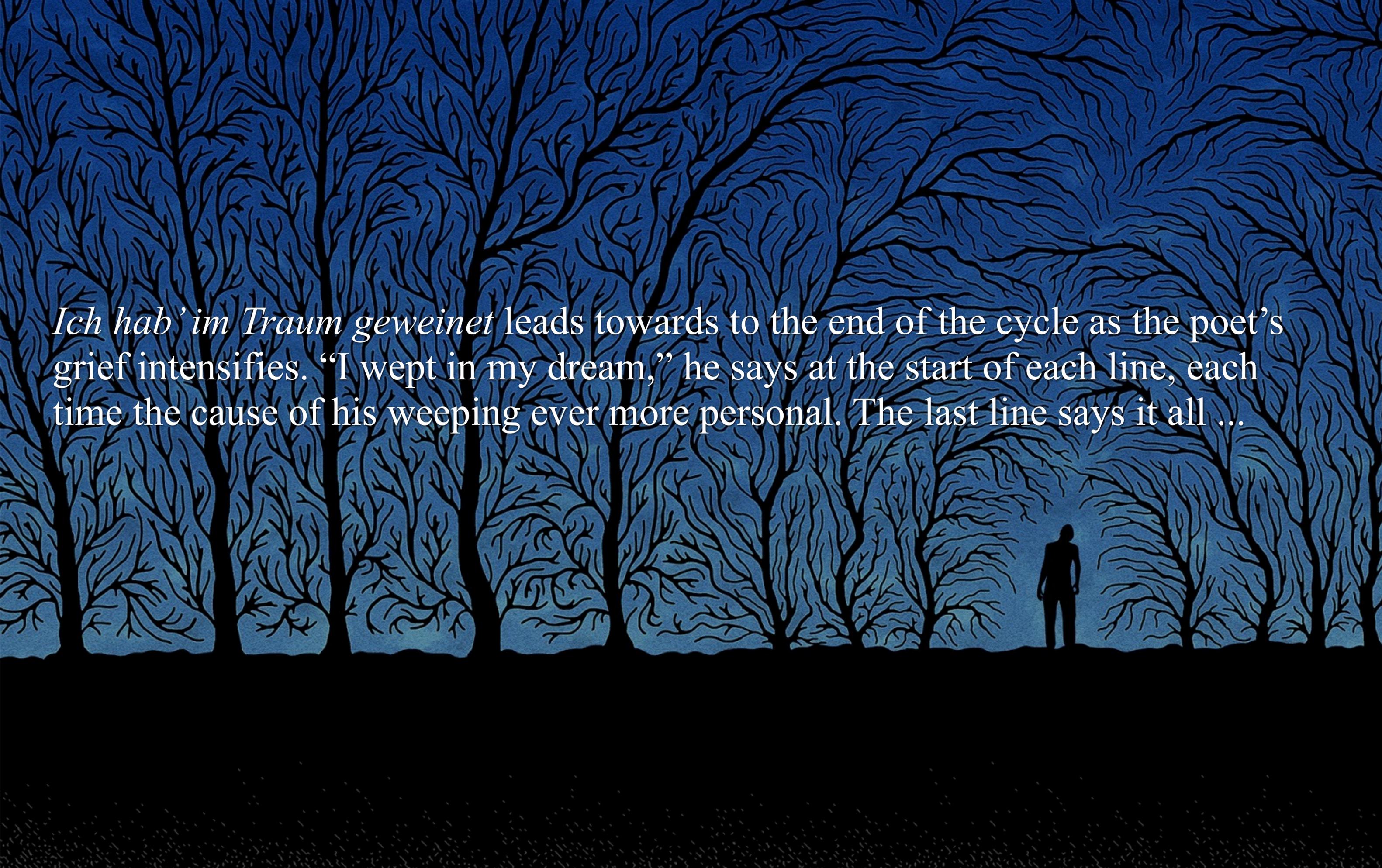


The background is a detailed painting of a garden. It features a variety of flowers and leaves in shades of green, yellow, and brown, suggesting a late summer or autumn setting. The brushwork is visible, giving the scene a textured, painterly quality. The overall tone is somewhat somber due to the muted colors and the subject matter of the text.

Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen is slow and ruminative, but is devoid of bitterness, even if the poem is rather maudlin. The bereaved joins the flowers in the garden; they ask for forgiveness.

A number of commentators have noted Schumann's response to the color of the flowers, as expressed in the fascinating harmonic changes in the otherwise simple song.





Ich hab' im Traum geweinet leads towards to the end of the cycle as the poet's grief intensifies. "I wept in my dream," he says at the start of each line, each time the cause of his weeping ever more personal. The last line says it all ...



Ich hab' im Traum geweinet.

Mir träumte, du lägest im Grab.
Ich wachte auf, und die Thräne
Floss noch von der Wange herab.

Ich hab' im Traum geweinet.

Mir träumt', du verliessest mich.
Ich wachte auf, und ich weinte
Noch lange bitterlich.

Ich hab' im Traum geweinet,

Mir träumte, du wärest mir noch gut.
Ich wachte auf und noch immer
Strömt meine Thränenfluth.

I cried in my dream:

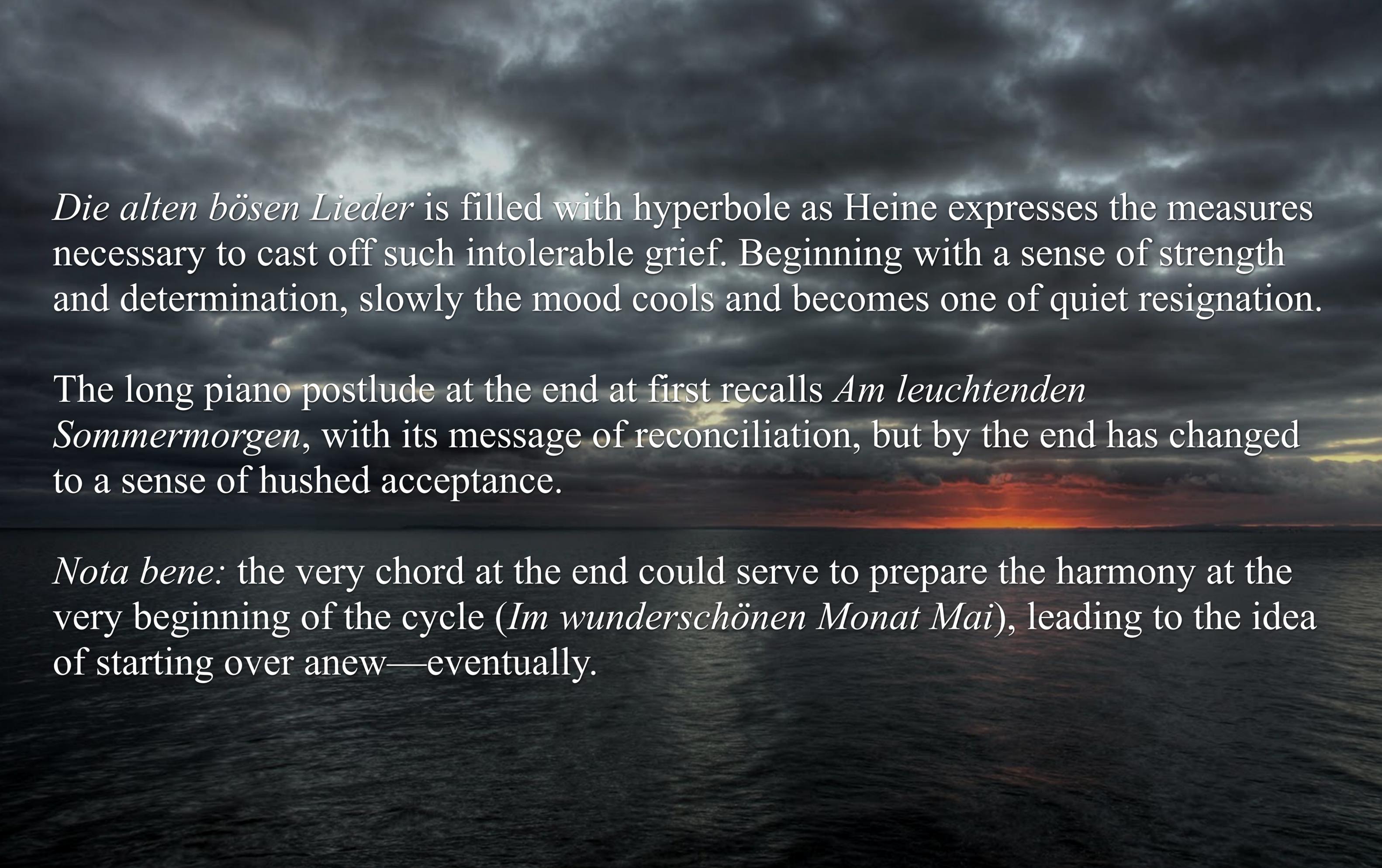
I dreamed that you lay in your grave.
I woke up, and the tears
were still streaming down my cheeks.

I cried in my dream:

I dreamed that you had forsaken me.
I woke up, and I cried
still long and bitterly.

I cried in my dream:

I dreamed that you still loved me.
I woke up, and still
the flood of my tears is streaming.



Die alten bösen Lieder is filled with hyperbole as Heine expresses the measures necessary to cast off such intolerable grief. Beginning with a sense of strength and determination, slowly the mood cools and becomes one of quiet resignation.

The long piano postlude at the end at first recalls *Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen*, with its message of reconciliation, but by the end has changed to a sense of hushed acceptance.

Nota bene: the very chord at the end could serve to prepare the harmony at the very beginning of the cycle (*Im wunderschönen Monat Mai*), leading to the idea of starting over anew—eventually.



