

Oh the Horror of Song!

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Bard Conservatory of Music

Sunday, May 9th 2021, 3pm

Graduate Degree Recital

Murderous Bookends

The Peculiar Case of Dr. H.H. Holmes (2010)

Libby Larsen (b.1950)

I. I state my case

II. As a young man

III. I build my business (*a polka*)

IV. Thirteen ladies and three who got away (*grand waltz macabre*)

V. Evidence

Requiescat

A Kingdom by the Sea (1901)

Arthur Somervell (1863-1937)

The clock of the years

from *Earth and Air and Rain* (1936)

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

The choirmaster's burial

from *Winter Words* (1956)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

short 10min pause

Die Volksgeschichten

Waldesgespräch from <i>Liederkreis, Op. 39</i> (1840)	Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Der Feuerreiter from <i>Mörikelieder</i> (1888)	Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)
Der Erlkönig from <i>Drei Balladen</i> (1817)	Carl Loewe (1796-1869)
Der Doppelgänger from <i>Schwanengesang</i> (1828)	Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Horreur

La vague et la cloche (1871)	Henri Duparc (1848-1933)
Danse macabre (1872)	Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Murderous Bookends

After Hearing a Waltz by Bartók (2013)	Zachary Wadsworth (b.1983)
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Oh the Horror of Song!

When I was a child, I was deeply afraid of the dark. So much so that I refused to sleep in my own room, opting instead to sleep in the living room, always with a light or the TV on. One day during my undergraduate studies I decided that I was going to overcome my fears. One night, when I was alone in my dorm, I turned off all of the lights, ordered a pizza, and put on the scariest movie I could think of at that time: *The Evil Dead*. I was terrified and had a really hard time getting to sleep but the next time I watched something like that, it wasn't so bad. Nowadays, I can't sleep unless I have a practically pitch black environment and I believe it is because I embraced the genre of horror that I was able to move past those anxieties.

You may be asking yourself, "Why horror? Why now? It's not October, spring is here and the flowers are blooming, it's Mother's Day for Pete's sake! This seems to be the most inappropriate time to have a recital on this subject." I'm here to tell you, yes. Now [insert placement] is as good a time as any to explore themes of madness, lost love, desperation, and human failings. You may feel unsettled, scared, or disturbed by the contents of these works. It's true, the world is a scary place; but, through the medium of horror, I believe that we can safely explore and consider our reactions. H.P. Lovecraft said: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." Through this recital, I hope that you feel better prepared to face the unknowns of life with a braver heart than before.

Before we begin, I'll issue a fair warning: Depictions of violence may be unsettling to some listeners.

Remember, there is always a pause button.

Murderous bookends

Modern day horror is often presented in an anthological style and I have taken this approach with my program. What better way to start than with a classic slasher story? We begin with *The Peculiar Case of Dr. H.H. Holmes* by Libby Larsen. Centered around one of America's first documented serial killers, this piece blends narratives from Holmes' confession, William Randolph Hearst's tabloid, and accounts of Detective Robert Corbitt's investigation. Born Herman Webster Mudgett (1861-1896), Holmes only confessed to a total of 27 murders (nine of which were confirmed), it is speculated that he possibly committed as many as 250. Throughout the work, we see

Holmes go from an insurance fraudster to murderer for pleasure, until he slips up and is eventually caught following the escape of three near victims. The madness is underscored by a prepared piano, which adds twang in the highs and thuds in the lows creating an eerie and unsettling atmosphere that enhances the storytelling throughout. Holmes' need to kill is almost natural: an impulse that grows so great that it becomes almost automatic. At the close of the program a similar story will be instead born out of passion.

Requiescat

In his essay *The Philosophy of Composition*, Edgar Allen Poe writes “the death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world.” *A Kingdom by the Sea* tells the story of a tremendous love between the poet and Annabel Lee—the titular character of Poe's original poem— so tremendous, even the angels in heaven are envious, until their love is abruptly cut short by a “wind out of the clouds.” Arthur Somervell sets the poem as a quaint parlor song underscoring its macabre nature with a simple, tuneful melody that pulls at the heartstrings. *The Clock of the Years*, published in Gerald Finzi's cycle *Earth and Air and Rain*, concerns itself with a powerful spirit which, appearing to a grieving man at the deathbed of his beloved, offers to turn back time. Thomas Hardy is believed to have written this poem about his wife Emma who had passed away before it was published. The poem reminds us to cherish the memories that we have even if the one remembered is no longer with us. *Requiescat* closes with *The Choirmaster's Burial*, a rather lighthearted tale in which a vicar, too concerned with the wind and the weather, refuses to give the choirmaster his final wish: to be laid to rest with his favorite hymn tune, *Mount Ephraim*. Where man fails, however, God provides and, with that provision, the vicar is given the fright of his life.

Die Volksgeschichten

Things that go bump in the night, a rustle in the bushes, a mysterious figure darting through the trees... all these things conjure dangerous creatures in our minds and with these selections I want to do the same. Germanic literature is rife with such figures drawing upon legends from Scandinavia and stories built around natural formations that refuse to bend to the ever increasing presence of man in nature's domain. It is one of these landmarks—a rock formation located on the eastern bank of the Rhein near the town of St. Goarshausen—that inspired the poet Heinrich Heine to compose *Die*

Lorelei in which the eponymous character sits atop the rock as a sort of siren, distracting sailors and causing them to crash. This character appears in multiple poems throughout the German Romantic Era including *Waldesgespräch*, written by Joseph von Eichendorf, in which a travelling hunter comes upon a beautiful woman in the woods. Believing her to be in need of an escort, he bravely offers to take her home, but soon finds that he is the one in greater danger. Robert Schumann's setting of this piece incorporates ingenious text painting that expertly establishes character and context, drawing the listener in with the call of hunting horns and the gentle sound of waves lapping the sides of the dangerous rock. The action mounts with Hugo Wolf's setting of Eduard Mörike's ballad *Der Feuerreiter*, a tale of a man who, having the ability of precognition, rushes to the scene of a fire in an attempt to save a mill. Wolf's frantic setting could underscore a silent movie with the amount of tension that it lends to Mörike's words. It stands as a reminder to the reader that pride can be anyone's downfall no matter how amazing one's abilities.

As children, our imaginations can conjure up any number of wild horrors that, to an adult, would seem utterly ridiculous. In Carl Loewe's setting of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's ballad *Der Erlkönig* we see a father and son swiftly riding through the woods. During the ride which is accompanied by the piano as the galloping of horses the boy recognizes the Erlking, an evil and wicked creature who causes death, beckoning to him. The boy warns his father of the danger but his pleading is not heeded. As the piece continues, the Erlking gets closer and closer enticing the boy with goodies, adventures, and his daughters as a sweet, coursing tremolo sounds in the piano. The Erlking is an external threat lurking where man dare not go but what happens when the monster is manifested from your own obsession? In *Der Doppelgänger* we find such a creature. Franz Schubert's final song cycle *Schwanengesang* was collected posthumously by his editor. Composed in the midst of syphilitic insanity, the pain that Schubert was experiencing in his final moments can be experienced within. We see a man who brings himself to the steps of a house every night where a woman he loved once lived, while time lugubriously marches forward. The poet's lament is echoed in the accompaniment which plays the role of the doppelgänger by mirroring tones and rhythms, mocking the sorrow that he feels.

Horreur

La vague et la cloche tells of a strange, terrifying dream where the sleeper, knocked unconscious by a night of drinking is subjected to the tumult of the mind. Henri Duparc's fabulous writing is a harrowing backdrop to the nightmare as the dreamer is thrashed about by the winds and the

waves. Psychological horror is perhaps one of my favorite types of horror because it is what lurks within us. We often think of sleep as a safe haven but what is lurking in those dark corners of the mind that only dreams can reveal?

Perhaps more famous as a work for violin and orchestra, Camille Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre* is a jaunty, twisted tune that depicts Death savagely playing upon his violin while skeletons, rustics, and royals revel in the music. The Dance of Death was a popular *memento mori* (a Latin phrase meaning "remember you have to die") arising during the middle ages. It is a reminder to us that no matter how much we achieve in life, no matter the fame or wealth we accrue, death is there in the end playing his fiddle and waiting for us to join in the round. Saint-Saëns' genius interpretation of the text by Henri Cazalis highlights the tritone in the piano accompaniment. This interval, often called "diabolus in musica" or "The Devil in music", is used both to create a feeling of instability in the listener and to conjure the image of death tuning up his instrument to play the night away.

Murderous bookends

We go back to where it all started with a final, spectacular, albeit completely made-up, murder. The story in *After Hearing a Waltz by Bartók* by Zachary Wadsworth (b. 1983), though, is quite different from that of H.H. Holmes. It is purely a crime of passion brought on by jealousy and rage. This is textually, the most explicitly violent piece on the program. The listener is dropped right into the middle of the action where a horrible crime has just been committed. We see the killer descend into madness as he comes to grips with his actions. The gruesome text is enhanced with Wadsworth's maniacal piano music. Wadsworth said: "I was drawn to this Amy Lowell (1874-1925) poem because I have never read such a visceral, grotesque, psychological, and thoroughly musical poem as this one. The repeated waltz-counts "One, Two, Three" provided a wonderful connection to music, and the poem's intense melodrama called out for an operatic "mad scene" treatment."

I hope that we can revel in the madness together.

The peculiar case of Dr. H.H. Holmes

Libby Larsen (b.1950)

I. I state my case

A room, unused since I ceased to reside there.

In it a stove that still bears the traces of fire.

a little spinning top and a tin man

a topcoat

a trunk with a strip of blue calico mending a seam

a woman's shoes

an ink bottle

a handful of pearl dress buttons

A gentleman — I am - the kind you want for your companion

A civic-minded man — the kind you want in your circle

A business man — the kind you want for your partner

Doctor, Pharmacist, Land development,

Glass bending, Gas refinery, Hotelier

HUMANUS INTELIGENCIUS ARACHNOIDUS

My business — profit

My resources- people

ANIMA, ANIMUS, ANIMATO

My products

a little spinning top and a tin man

a topcoat

a trunk with a strip of blue calico mending a seam

a woman's shoe

an ink bottle

a handful of pearl dress buttons

... bones

II. As a young man

September of my 20th year.
I study medicine in Ann Arbor — hundreds of miles from friends and relatives.
Wife and child in New York,
Sixty dollars in my pocket
Nine months of work ahead.

I need money — HUMANUS
And a plan — INTELLIGENCIUS

It is well known
That in the state of Michigan - if one studies medicine —
All the materials needed for dissection
Are supplied by the State.

The State needs materials — HUMANUS
For which they pay handsomely — ARGENTUS

I supply the materials with the help of my classmate — BUSINESS
We graduate, and we find that doctoring is not PROFITUS

We devise a plan for doing BUSINESS

Fraud in the form of a little waltz -

..... a trusted friend, of modest means, already insured for life,
increases his policy to protect his child and wife.
Later on, the trusted friend begins to drink quite heavily
And kills his wife, and kills his child, and blames it on insanity
Some months later, a body is discovered, badly decomposed
With the body, is a letter, a suicide note.
A relative collects the money, we split it into three -
The relative, the trusted friend, my classmate and me.

We need three bodies - RIGOR MORTUS
Hidden in three cities - HIDE-US SEEK-US

The plan is too complicated
I kill my classmate instead
I use his insurance
To bide my time.

III. I build my business (*a polka*)

It is well known that business done with men is straight on, clean and quickly settled.

Item: Dr. Russel, a tenant in my hotel. Rent Due.
I struck him on the head with a heavy chair.
I sold his body — Forty five dollars

Item: Mr. Rogers, an acquaintance from Virginia.
I took him fishing and struck him on the head with the oar.
Just practice.

Item: Charles Cole — A Southern Speculator.
The vicious blow crushed his head so badly that he was almost useless
To the party that bought him. Two thousand dollars.

Item: Robert Latimer, my janitor.
Discovering my business, he wanted money.
In locked him in the vault of my hotel and slowly starved him.

Item: Benjamin Peitzel — My business partner. And his son.
After seven years of practice, I carried out my PLAN ORIGINALUS
INSURANCE FRAUDUS

Item: Wade Warner. I bought my glass bending furnace from him.
I paid a fortune for it.
Asking him to demonstrate the furnace, I locked him in it.
INCINEROUS...CORPUS INVISIBILUS
FORTUNE RETURNUS
BUSINESS EXPANDUS

IV. Thirteen ladies and three who got away (*grande waltz macabre*)

It is well known that when you gain the confidence of women, you must learn to juggle trust.

Introduction:

First you set the stag — You build a hotel
Then you set the method — secret vaults, secret rooms.
You employ young ladies: stenographers, cooks, waitresses, maids:

Waltz:

Lizzie, little Lizzie, a domestic in my hotel,
Quinlan, my partner, took a fancy to her
I called her, to my office, on the pretense of a raise.
I invited her to step into my vault to retrieve a cup and tray
I closed and locked the door — she cried

She pled me, to let her out — denied,
Unless she wrote a letter leaving Quinlan for good.
If she wrote the letter then release her I would
She did. I killed her.

Thirteen ladies, there may have been more than
Thirteen ladies, I cannot say for sure.

Minnie and Nannie Williams, of wealthy estate
Required my protection, which I freely gave.
Minnie came to live with me of her own volition,
My visits to Nannie, ignited her suspicion.
Minnie murdered Nannie — Ah!
I disposed of Minnie — Ah!
Being their protector — Ah!
I was their estate's executor — Ah!

Thirteen ladies, there may have been more...

Sarah Cook, her unborn child and Mary Haracamp
A three-for-one they became.
Julie Connor, her daughter Pearl
Came to me and never came away.
Nellie and Annie Peitzel, suffocated in a trunk
Anna Betts, Gertrude Conner, poisoned just for fun
Emmeline, my mistress, she broke my heart
I locked her in my vault, and watched her slowly starve.

Thirteen ladies...
Thirteen ladies...

Three waitresses in my restaurant, I thought I could connive
To chloroform all three at once, of course to watch them die.

They escaped.
They ran to the authorities.
Suspicious were raised.
The end of my story.

V. Evidence

a little spinning top and a tin man
a topcoat
a trunk with a strip of blue calico mending a seam
a woman's shoe
an ink bottle
a handful of pearl dress buttons
a strand of hair caught on the stovepipe
a jawbone — seventeen teeth
two human ribs, one partially consumed
.... bones
It's the bones that betray.

A Kingdom by the Sea

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my Annabel Lee—
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

The Clock of the Years

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

‘A spirit passed before my face: the hair of my
flesh stood up.’

And the spirit said,
‘I can make the clock of the years go backward,
But am loth to stop it where you will.’
And I cried, ‘Agreed
To that. Proceed:
It’s better than dead!’

He answered, ‘Peace;’
And called her up—as last before me;
Then younger, younger she grew, to the year I first had known
Her women-grown
And I cried, ‘Cease!—

‘Thus far is good—
It is enough—let her stay thus always!’
But alas for me—He shook his head:
No stop was there;
And she waned child-fair,
And to babyhood.

Still less in mien
To my great sorrow became she slowly,
And smalled till she was nought at all
In his checkless griff;
And it was as if
She had never been.

‘Better,’ I plained,
‘She were dead as before! The memory of her
Had lived in me; but it cannot now!’
And coldly his voice:
‘It was your choice
To mar the ordained.’

*The Choirmaster's Burial- 'The Tenor Man's Story',
Thomas Hardy*

He often would ask us
That, when he died,
After playing so many
To their last rest,
If out of us any
Should here abide,
And it would not task us,
We would with our lutes
Play over him
By his grave-brim
The psalm he liked best—
The one whose sense suits
“Mount Ephraim”
And perhaps we should seem
To him, in death's dream,
Like the seraphim.

As soon as I knew
That his spirit was gone
I thought this his due,
And spoke thereupon.
“I think” said the vicar,
“A read service quicker
That viols out-of-doors
In these frosts and hoars.
That old-fashioned was
Requires a fine day,
And it seems to me
It had better not be.”
Hence, that afternoon,
Though never knew he
That his wish could not be,
To get through it faster
They buried the master
Without any tune.

But t'was said that, when
At the dead of next night
The vicar looked out,
There struck on his ken
Thronged roundabout,
Where the frost was graying
The headstoned grass,
A band all in white
Like the saints in church-glass,
Singing and playing
The ancient stave
By the choirmaster's grave.
Such the tenor man told
When he had grown old.

Waldesgespräch

Joseph von Eichendorf (1788-1857)

Es ist schon spät, es ist schon kalt,
Was reit'st du einsam durch den Wald?
Der Wald ist lang, du bist allein,
Du schöne Braut! Ich führ' dich heim!

„Groß ist der Männer Trug und List,
Vor Schmerz mein Herz gebrochen ist,
Wohl irrt das Waldhorn her und hin,
O flieh! Du weißt nicht, wer ich bin.“

So reich geschmückt ist Roß und Weib,
So wunderschön der junge Leib,
Jetzt kenn' ich dich—Gott steh' mir bei!
Du bist die Hexe Loreley.

„Du kennst mich wohl—von hohem Stein
Schaut still mein Schloß tief in den Rhein.
Es ist schon spät, es ist schon kalt,
Kommst nimmermehr aus diesem Wald!“

Der Feuerreiter

Eduard Mörike (1804-1875)

Sehet ihr am Fensterlein
Dort die rote Mütze wieder?
Nicht geheuer muß es sein,
Denn er geht schon auf und nieder.
Und auf einmal welch Gewühle
Bei der Brücke, nach dem Feld!
Horch! das Feuerglöcklein gellt:
Hinterm Berg,
Hinterm Berg
Brennt es in der Mühle!

Schaut! da sprengt er wütend schier
Durch das Tor, der Feuerreiter,
Auf dem rippendürren Tier,
Als auf einer Feuerleiter!
Querfeldein! Durch Qualm und Schwüle,
Rennt er schon und ist am Ort!
Drüben schallt es fort und fort:
Hinterm Berg,
Hinterm Berg,
Brennt es in der Mühle!

A woodland conversation

It is already late and already cold,
Why are you riding through the woods alone?
The wood is long, you are alone,
You beautiful woman! I shall lead you home!

“Great is mans' cunning and treachery,
My heart is is broken from grief,
The hunting horns are sounding all around,
Oh flee, you do not know who I am.”

So richly adorned is the steed and lady,
So wonderfully beautiful is her body,
Now I recognize you—God be with me!
You are that witch, Lorelei.

“You know me well—from the high rock
My castle looks deep into the Rhein.
It is already late and already cold,
You will never come out of this wood again!”

Fire-Rider

Do you see at the window
There, again, the red hat?
There can be no doubt,
For he is already pacing back and forth.
And at once what a sound
By the bridge after the field!
Hark! the fire alarm sounds:
Behind the hill,
Behind the hill
The mill is burning!

Look! he gallops wildly
Through the gate, the Fire-rider,
Upon his rail thin steed,
As if upon a fireman's ladder!
Across the field! Through smoke and heat,
He is already running and has arrived!
The bell still ringing in the distance:
Behind the hill,
Behind the hill,
The mill is burning!

Der so oft den roten Hahn
Meilenweit von fern gerochen,
Mit des heiligen Kreuzes Span
Freventlich die Glut besprochen –
Weh! dir grinst vom Dachgestühle
Dort der Feind im Höllenschein.
Gnade Gott der Seele dein!
Hinterm Berg,
Hinterm Berg,
Rast er in der Mühle!

Keine Stunde hielt es an,
Bis die Mühle borst in Trümmer;
Doch den kecken Reitersmann
Sah man von der Stunde nimmer.
Volk und Wagen im Gewühle
Kehren heim von all dem Graus;
Auch das Glöcklein klinget aus:
Hinterm Berg,
Hinterm Berg,
Brennt's! –

Nach der Zeit ein Müller fand
Ein Gerippe samt der Mützen
Aufrecht an der Kellerwand
Auf der beinern Mähre sitzen:
Feuerreiter, wie so kühle
Reitest du in deinem Grab!
Husch! da fällt's in Asche ab.
Ruhe wohl,
Ruhe wohl
Drunten in der Mühle!

You who so often had smelled
The red flames from miles away,
With a fragment of the holy cross
Tries to banish the blaze —
Woe! he is grinning at you from the rafters
There Satan bathed in the hellish light.
God have mercy upon your soul!
Behind the hill,
Behind the hill,
He rests in the mill!

It was not long
Until the mill was reduced to rubble;
Yet the proud Rider
Was never seen by any one ever again.
People and carriages in the crowd
Turned from the horror;
And the bell ceased to sound
Behind the hill,
Behind the hill,
It burns!

After some time a miller found
A skeleton with the red hat
Upright on the cellar wall
Sitting with his bony mare:
Fire-rider. how cooly
You ride into your grave!
Whoosh! he crumbles to dust.
Rest well,
Rest well,
Down there in the mill!

Der Erlkönig,

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind:
Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,
Er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.

„Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?“
„Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif?“
„Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.“

„Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir;
Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand,
Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand.“

„Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht,
Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?“
„Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind:
In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind.“

„Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn?
Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön;
Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reihn
Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein.“

„Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort
Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?“
„Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh es genau:
Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau.“

„Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt;
Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch ich Gewalt.“
„Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt fasst er mich an!
Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan!“

Dem Vater grauset's, er reitet geschwind,
Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind,
Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe und Not:
In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.

Erlking

Who rides late through the night and the wind?
It is a father and his child;
He has the boy in his arms,
He holds him safely and keeps him warm.

My son, why do you fearfully hide your face?
Do you not see the Erlking, father?
The Erlking with crown and tail?
My son that is a wisp of fog.

You lovely child come with me!
We will play such fun games;
Many colorful flowers are on the strand
My mother has many golden trinkets.

My father! Do you not hear what the Erlking promises me?
Be calm, stay calm my child
It is the wind in the brittle leaves.

Do you want to come with me fine boy?
My daughters shall wait on you so sweetly;
My daughters lead the nightly dance,
And rock and dance and sing you to sleep.

My father do you not see?
The Erlking's daughters in that dark place?
My son, my son, I see it now,
It appears to be the old grey branches.

I love you, I desire your beautiful form;
And if you're not willing, then I need to use my power.
My father! Now he has me!
The Erlking has hurt me!

The father was terrified, he rode swiftly
He held in his arms the crying child
He reached home with great effort;
In his arms, the child was dead

Der Doppelgänger

Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

Still ist die Nacht, es ruhen die Gassen,
In diesem Hause wohnte mein Schatz.

Sie hat schon längst die Stadt verlassen,
Doch steht noch das Haus auf demselben Platz.

Da steht auch ein Mensch und starrt in die Höhe,
Und ringt die Hände vor Schmerzengewalt;

Mir graust es, wenn ich sein Antlitz sehe,
Der Mond zeigt mir meine eigne Gestalt.

Du Doppelgänger, du bleicher Geselle
Was äffst du nach mein Liebesleid

Das mich gequält auf dieser Stelle?
So manche Nacht in alter Zeit.

La vague et la cloche,

François Coppée (1842-1908)

Une fois, terrassé par un puissant breuvage,
J'ai rêvé que parmi les vagues et le bruit
De la mer, je voguais sans fanal dans la nuit,

Morne rameur, n'ayant plus l'espoir du rivage...
L'Océan me crachait ses baves sur le front,
Et le vent me glaçait d'horreur jusqu'aux entrailles,

Les vagues s'écroulaient ainsi que des murailles
Avec ce rythme lent qu'un silence interrompt...

Puis tout changea... la mer et sa noire mêlée
Sombrèrent ... sous mes pieds s'effondra le plancher
De la barque...Et j'étais seul dans un vieux clocher,
Chevauchant avec rage une cloche ébranlée.

J'étreignais la criarde opiniâtrement,
Convulsif et fermant dans l'effort mes paupières.
Le grondement faisait trembler les vieilles pierres,
Tant j'activais sans fin le lourd balancement.

Pourquoi n'as-tu pas dit, ô rêve, où Dieu nous mène?
Pourquoi n'as-tu pas dit s'ils ne finiraient pas,
L'inutile travail et l'éternel fracas
Dont est faite la vie, hélas! la vie humaine!

The Doppelgänger

The night is quiet and the streets are still,
My love once lived in this house.

She left the city long ago,
But her house is still here in the same place.

There is also a man who gazes into the sky,
Wringing his hands overwhelmed with pain:

I shudder when I see his face,
For the moon shows me my own image!

You doppelgänger, you pale companion
Why do you mock my pain so

That courses in me at this place?
So many nights since days of old.

The wave and the bell

Once, brought down by a powerful brew,
I dreamed that the waves and the sound
Of the sea, I looked through the night without a lamp,

A mournful rower, without hope of reaching the shore.
The ocean spat its foam in my face,
And the wind chilled me straight through with terror,

The waves went up like walls
With a slow rhythm that a silence interrupted...

Then everything changed...the sea and its dark motions
Sunk...under my feet the boat gave way.
And I was alone in an old bell tower
The sounds of the shaking bells overlapping with rage.

I obstinately grasped the sounding metal,
Convulsed and closed my eyes with great effort.
The stones were made to tremble from the sound of the bell.
So much so that as I sped up the heavy clapper.

Why did you not say, oh dream, where God will lead us?
Why did you not say if it will all come to an end,
The useless work and the eternal clash
That this life is made of, alas! this human life!

Danse macabre,
Henri Cazalis (1840-1909)

Zig et zig et zig, la mort en cadence
Frappant une tombe avec son talon,
La mort à minuit joue un air de danse,
Zig et zig et zag, sur son violon.

Le vent d'hiver souffle, et la nuit est sombre,
Des gémissements sortent des tilleuls
Les squelettes blancs vont à travers l'ombre
Courant et sautant sous leurs grands linceuls,

Zig et zig et zig, chacun se trémousse,
On entend claquer les os des danseurs,
Un couple lascif s'assoit sur la mousse
Comme pour goûter d'anciennes douceurs

Zig et zig et zag, la mort continue
De racler sans fin son aigre instrument.
Un voile est tombé! La danseuse est nue!
Son danseur la serre amoureusement.

La dame est, dit-on, marquise ou baronne.
Et le vert galant un pauvre charron—
Horreur! Et voilà qu'elle s'abandonne
Comme si le rustre était un baron!

Zig et zig et zig, quelle sarabande!
Quels cercles de morts se donnant la main!
Zig et zig et zag, on voit dans la bande
Le roi gambader auprès du vilain!

Mais psit! tout à coup on quitte la ronde,
On se pousse, on fuit, le coq a chanté...
Oh! La belle nuit pour le pauvre monde!
Et vive la mort et l'égalité!

Dance of Death

Zig and zig and zig Death taps
In rhythm upon a tomb,
Death plays a dancing tune at midnight,
Zig and zig and zag, upon his violin.

The winter winds blow and the night is dark
Moans pour out from the linden trees;
White skeletons go through the shadows
Flowing and jumping under great shrouds,

Zig and zig and zig everything is shaking,
Listen to the clack of the dancers' bones,
A lascivious couple sits upon the moss
Hoping to taste the ancient delights.

Zig and zig and zag Death continues
Without end to drag his bow across the stings.
A veil has fallen! The dancer is nude!
And another dancer squeezes her amorously.

The lady, they say, is a marquess or baroness.
And the green galant a poor laborer—
Horror! And look how she abandons herself
As if the brute was himself a baron!

Zig and zig and zig what a sarabande!
Those circles of death giving their hand!
Zig and zig and zag, look in the throng
The king frolics with the villain!

But sh! suddenly the round stops,
It moves over, it flees, the cock crows...
Oh! Night is beautiful for the poor world!
Long live death and equality!

After Hearing a Waltz by Bartók
Amy Lowell (1874-1925)

But why did I kill him? Why? Why?
In the small, gilded room, near the stair?
My ears rack and throb with his cry,
And his eyes goggle under his hair,
As my fingers sink into the fair
White skin of his throat. It was I!

I killed him! My God! Don't you hear?
I shook him until his red tongue
Hung flapping out through the black, queer,
Swollen lines of his lips. And I clung
With my nails drawing blood, while I flung
The loose, heavy body in fear.

Fear lest he should still not be dead.
I was drunk with the lust of his life.
The blood-drops oozed slow from his head
And dabbled a chair. And our strife
Lasted one reeling second, his knife
Lay and winked in the lights overhead.

And the waltz from the ballroom I heard,
When I called him a low, sneaking cur.
And the wail of the violins stirred
My brute anger with visions of her.
As I throttled his windpipe, the purr
Of his breath with the waltz became blurred.

I have ridden ten miles through the dark,
With that music, an infernal din,
Pounding rhythmic inside me. Just Hark!
One! Two! Three! And my fingers sink in
To his flesh when the violins, thin
And straining with passion, grow stark.

One! Two! Three! Oh, the horror of sound!
While she danced I was crushing his throat.
He had tasted the joy of her, wound
Round her body, and I heard him gloat
On the favour. That instant I smote.
One! Two! Three! How the dancers swirl round!

He is here in the room, in my arm,
His limp body hangs on the spin
Of the waltz we are dancing, a swarm
Of blood-drops is hemming us in!
Round and round! One! Two! Three! And his sin
Is red like his tongue lolling warm.

One! Two! Three! And the drums are his knell.
He is heavy, his feet beat the floor
As I drag him about in the swell
Of the waltz. With a menacing roar,
The trumpets crash in through the door.
One! Two! Three! clangs his funeral bell.

One! Two! Three! In the chaos of space
Rolls the earth to the hideous glee
Of death! And so cramped is this place,
I stifle and pant. One! Two! Three!
Round and round! God! 'Tis he throttles me!
He has covered my mouth with his face!

And his blood has dripped into my heart!
And my heart beats and labours. One! Two!
Three! His dead limbs have coiled every part
Of my body in tentacles. Through
My ears the waltz jangles. Like glue
His dead body holds me athwart.

One! Two! Three! Give me air! Oh! My God!
One! Two! Three! I am drowning in slime!
One! Two! Three! And his corpse, like a clod,
Beats me into a jelly! The chime,
One! Two! Three! And his dead legs keep time.
Air! Give me air! Air! My God!