Chapter III. Sighs

Sighing Beauty in the Staircase

From the perspective of Victorian critics, the Hunters embodied, as Drewrey Ottley put it, “very natural difference in the tastes.”¹ Twentieth-century biographers and critics followed this lead. But it is precisely an appeal to the “very natural” that is typically found in separate-spheres rhetoric and its attendant, culturally-constructed binarisms. Especially if the public/private divide was described as natural precisely because it was in fact constructed, then an investigation of the assumption of opposition is called for. In this vein I turn first to the concept of beauty, which, Janus-faced, ascends and descends the staircase between Anne’s and John’s worlds.

That beauty figured prominently in Anne’s upstairs world is not surprising: Edmund Burke’s aesthetic of “the Beautiful” is clearly a feminine-gendered one, just as William Hogarth’s celebrated “line of beauty” found its classic form in the corseted female torso. Descriptions of Anne’s poetry make thorough use of familiar Burkean “beautiful” qualities, such as timidity, smallness, delicacy, smoothness, and clarity, each inspiring feelings of affection and tenderness.² William Gardiner, writing in 1818, brings Haydn’s musical settings of Anne’s texts into the equation, referring to Hogarth’s serpentine ideal when he calls “A Pastoral Song” a “perfect exhibition of the

line of beauty in music.” “The intervals through which the melody passes,” he wrote, “are so minute, so soft, and delicate, that all the ideas of grace and loveliness are awakened in the mind.”

And yet, these conceptions and vocabulary are not far removed from contemporary descriptions of John’s world. John is described as devoted to the “beauties” of nature. His bottled preparations are “beautiful,” “delicate,” and “elegant” -- exactly the words Nares used to describe Psyche’s superior influence. Beauty-vocabulary appears frequently in descriptions of the obstetrical work in which John assisted his brother William, a physician: “elegant” displays of wax-injected veins, “delicate” preparations of vessel networks around the placenta, and “beautiful” cervixes, pregnant uteruses, and genital tissues preserved in spirits.

The Hunter brothers’ collaboration is cataloged in the *Anatomia Uteri Humani Gravidi* of 1774, a costly, almost life-sized collection of elaborately detailed engravings of dissected pregnancies (Fig. 3.1). In the accompanying text, William repeatedly mentions that the depictions are “a faithful representation of what was actually seen,” for “not so much as one joint of a finger [has] been moved.”

Disconnected torsos, with varying amounts of

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Figure 3.1 Selected plates from William Hunter, *Anatomia Uteri Humani Gravidii* (1774)
tissue removed or pulled back, expose fetuses finely detailed down to
miniature fingernails, single strands of hair, and gleaming moisture on the
umbilical cord. The wax-injection procedure, William claims, “renders the
smaller [vessels] much more conspicuous, and makes thousands of very
minute ones visible [...] which are otherwise imperceptible.”6 He also
repeatedly defends the expense and extravagance of his publication: the
engravings, he says, “convey clearer ideas than words can express“ and he
preferred to “risk the being censured for having done too much rather than
too little.”7 Indeed, the rich and artfully presented images are the focus;
Hunter employed well-known artists to complete the renderings, and the
printer Baskerville to use his specially-invented glossy paper and very black
ink. Meanwhile, the accompanying texts on each facing page are strictly
limited to labels of the various body parts. This is not an anatomical textbook,
nor an instructive guide to midwifery or surgery. At the price of six guineas
each, the gilt-edged volume seems to have been directed more to the
privileged gentleman than to the medical practitioner seeking a practical
manual. Beauty, it would then seem, refers to a finely-wrought balance of
accuracy and artfulness.

But through closer examination of Hunter’s prose, we can uncover (as
that rhetoric goes) additional layers of meaning in the application of the
vocabulary of beauty to the apparently grisly, even shocking and violent
world of anatomy, dissection, and physiological investigation. William
Hunter provides a clue when in his surgical lectures he compares an
anatomist to a military general: the human body, he wrote, “is the country

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
which labours under a civil war or invasion; the physician is, or should be, the dictator and general, who is to take the command, and to direct all the necessary operations." This sort of “beauty,” then, applies to a highly ambivalent body -- a “war zone” of contradiction. This is true of the subject matter, for what Hunter insistently calls accurate and realistic is actually an unreal moment that simultaneously represents both death and life. These are cadavers, but with injections of colored wax that prevent the collapse of veins and suggest the untouched, the still alive. (One might even say they are embellishments to the extent that they articulate and define the vessel network to a point of heightened clarity that never exists even in life.) The spirit of contradiction holds true in terms of the treatment, as well. The images are at once tender (in their lovingly detailed treatment of the child) and savage (the mother reduced to a carcass of lacerated genitals and thighs). That which is private and intimate is simultaneously made public and treated like an object. Similarly, altruistic medical goals mingle with a startling, even lurid entertainment and delectation for the non-specialist.

This complicated sense of “beauty” sheds a different light on the application of the term to Haydn’s canzonettas. On the one hand, Gardiner was not wrong when he described “A Pastoral Song” (Ex. 3.1) in the traditional, “upstairs” sense. The melody is smooth, proceeding mainly by triadic or stepwise motion, rarely leaping more than a fourth. As with most canzonettas, the size is miniature, the articulation smooth and the dynamics reserved. In this context, the fz markings of mm. 16, 17, and 18 suggest to the historically-informed performer not jarring surprises, but something more gentle -- what Sandra Rosenblum and many others term the familiar “sigh”

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8 Hunter, Two Introductory Letters, 70.
27. A Pastoral Song

Allegretto

Example 3.1 Joseph Haydn, Dr Haydn’s VI Original Canzonettas [1794]
Example 3.1 (continued)

blue.

For why, she cries, sit

bear.

And while I spun my

still and weep, while oth-

ers dance and play?

flax-

en thread, and sing my sim-

ple lay.

a-

the

last! I scarce can go or creep, while Lu-

bin is a-way;

vil-

lage seems a-sleep or dead, now Lu-

bin is a-way;

the

a-

last! I scarce can go or creep, while Lu-

bin is a-way, while

vil-

lage seems a-sleep or dead, now Lu-

bin is a-way, now

the

a-

Lu-

bin is a-way, is a-way, is a-way,

Lu-

bin is a-way, is a-way, is a-way.
This sigh motive appeared already in mm. 2, 10, and 14; in the second verse of text (m. 23), Haydn adds an additional kind of sigh where a series of descending chromatic half-steps accompanies an account of the mother’s cajoling. The latter (perhaps even more evocative) sighs find their genesis in the introduction as well: at m. 3, the left hand takes up the same starting note, E, and proceeds in the same sighing rhythm, short-long, short-long, while the right hand foreshadows the melody in its chromatic descent from E to C#. These pitches appear again, in augmentation, in the lowest notes of the left hand in mm. 5-7 (paralleled in the right hand by the notes D descending to B in mm. 5-6) and are the same pitches as the archetypal sigh in mm. 16, 17, and 18, with the addition of a D-natural passing tone.

But on the other hand, since Haydn’s musical accompaniment abounds with audible sighs (notwithstanding the singer’s claim that she sighs “when none can hear” (v. 3)), the constant sighing blends music and the female body itself, leaving more than a trace of the physical throughout the piece. The performer not only sings about sighs, she actually sighs (just as she not only sings a song but sings about singing a song). With its profusion of sighs, Haydn’s accompaniment heightens this self-reflexivity, amplifying a process by which the protagonist becomes an artifact for observation. Like the delicate, elegant “beauty” of an alcohol-soaked anatomical sample in a jar, this musical “beauty” is a bodily, “downstairs” kind, inviting a visual appreciation of a physical specimen that, in this case, is already restricted by the bands, ties, ribbons, and lace that the mother bids her daughter display. What is more, Haydn’s setting resonates with the text’s mood of stillness and captivity: the

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daughter cannot “go or creep” (v. 2) but rather spins in place (v. 4); she is stationary, as if an extension of the moss that gathers on the stone where she sits. Accordingly, the music lingers; rather than moving forward, it ceaselessly repeats sigh material and languishes over extended tonic and dominant pedal points, most notably in the directionless hovering over E in mm. 21-27 (almost the entire second verse of text). If viewed through the medical magnifying glass of John’s world, then, “A Pastoral Song” seems an “upstairs” specimen fit for the “downstairs” collection. Haydn brings out the presence of “downstairs” beauty in the “upstairs” realm, an act that exposes a crack in the conceit of opposition.

Sighing Out the Canzonet

The sigh, long a figure of English poetry, takes on special meaning when the vocabulary of medical symptomatology creeps into canzonet texts.

The protagonist of a canzonet by Miss Poole complains,

To weep without knowing  
The cause of my anguish  
To start from short slumbers  
And wish for the morning  
To close my dull eyes  
When I see it returning  
Sighs sudden, and frequent  
Looks ever dejected  
Words that steal from my tongue  
By no meaning connected

Her condition renders her devoid of reason, so she is neither cognizant of its cause and nor able to communicate it coherently. Tellingly, her lament is couched literally in terms of symptoms, for in ensuing lines she asks “how these symptoms befell me?” and “say, what were these symptoms?” Sighing - - which this protagonist seems to experience involuntarily -- is here a physical
symptom, something contemporaries were eager to chronicle and observe. At the same time, it connects the woman who sings to her body in a way that results from intuitive physical nature rather than reasoned choice.

Table 3.1 attempts to catalog the meanings of the sigh as they appear in the texts of canzonet sets. Such an endeavor is fraught with difficulties. One problem with tables is that by their very nature they appear to be an objective account of concrete data. Table 3.1 is by no means an objective account, nor would such a thing be possible to produce. In reading poetry, one deals with images and concepts that appear relatively straightforwardly or sheerly by allusion or implication, with infinite degrees of directness across the spectrum in between. For the present purposes, it is useful to keep track of concepts as they appeared explicitly, which is to say that while a particular concept (such as absence or sympathy) appears explicitly a certain number of times, it doubtless is implied in many additional cases. (And indeed, even a song that never explicitly mentions the word “sigh” could potentially be replete with sung sighs.) Moreover, even the “straightforwardness” of a concept’s appearance within a poem is a matter open to interpretation.

A second problem with tables is that they suggest themselves to be a quick-read -- that is, a synopsis of a phenomenon that actually takes place in greater detail than can be represented. For this reason it is important to note that the table says relatively little about the meaning of the concepts that appear across its top row, since those meanings tend to be derived from context.

These concessions granted, Table 3.1 clarifies a great deal about the sigh’s meaning and function in this repertory. Most importantly, the sigh is in
### Table 3.1 Sighs in Canzonets

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the vast majority of cases an evidence of love (64 of 83 occurrences), often of lovers’ absence or separation from one another (43 occurrences). Canzonet singing amounts to a means for women to physically embody the emphasis on love and devotion that is their destiny. The process by which this is accomplished has multiple prongs. Perhaps most apparent, directly in the texts, is the fact that sighs frequently share a tandem focus with physical parts of the body, which may even stand for the protagonist herself. Bosoms heave, rend, throb, shake, fill, rock, burn, and pant; hearts agitate and tear, eyes tremble and beguile, lips smile, arms wreathe, and nerves come unstrung. The sigh in Johann Peter Salomon’s “Can the Force of Rapture’s Lay” (Ex. 3.2) joins a litany of body parts: “fault’ring tongue, bursting sigh / nerves unstrung, joy fraught eye” which is set off from the smooth, melodic opening with an echo effect and mid-measure accents that mimic the abruptly choppy text. In “When Sickness and Sorrow” (Ex. 3.3) from the same set, the left hand of the keyboard part vacillates calmly as Anna’s lover recalls the bosom that cradles, pillows, and subdues him (the equation of lover with a suckling baby is here thinly disguised). John Worgan’s “Come Bid Adieu to Fear” (Ex. 3.4) repeats a four-note descending motive of parallel thirds, four times in a row, at “Sigh to am’rous sighs returning / Pulses beating, bosoms burning / Bosoms with warm wishes panting.” But another aspect of the process by which canzonets are made physical lies in the relationship of text and tone. Fully a quarter of the sighs in canzonets appear with tears, another physical yet wordless indication of sentiment. In Thomas Billington’s “Ah! Gentle Zephyr,” for example, the phrase “tell her thou art a sigh sincere” is rhymed musically with “tell her thou’rt swelled by many a tear.” But on the whole, few tears receive musical text painting, while sighs frequently do. Charles
Example 3.2 Johann Peter Salomon, *A Second Set of Six English Canzonets* [1804]
“Can the Force of Rapture’s Lay,” mm. 17-31
Example 3.3 Johann Peter Salomon, A Second Set of Six English Canzonets [1804]
“When Sickness and Sorrow,” mm. 12-24
Example 3.4 John Worgan, *Six Canzonets for Two and Three Voices* [1789] “Come, Come Bid Adieu,” mm. 13-31
Kensington Salaman, in his setting of “Are other Eyes Beguiling, Love” by Letitia Landon (known to her contemporaries as “L. E. L.”), even alters the setting of the word “sigh” in his otherwise stanzaic structure; this level of detail indicates the high import of the sigh as a signifying device, drawing attention to the body. Indeed, sighs are often especially dramatic. In addition to the well-known two-note slur type of “sigh motive,” fermatas, melismas, or ad lib indications typically draw out the sigh. Some composers favor variations on the two-note motive, for example Thomas Miles’s upward sigh in “Touch Once Again Thy Breathing Wire” (Ex. 3.5). George Pinto’s approach to sighs is in keeping with his penchant for the peculiar. In “A Shepherd Loved a Nymph So Fair” (Ex. 3.6) the keyboard and voice playfully trade sighs that, although traversing the traditional half step, go against the grain by moving upward in range and increasing volume. In “Soon as the Letters,” a canzonet with words from Pope (Ex. 3.7), cloistered Eloise enjoins Abelard to hold nothing back when writing to her regarding his misfortunes:

Lost in a convent’s solitary gloom  
There stern religion quench’d th’ unwilling flame  
There dy’d the best of passions love and fame  
Yet write oh! write me all that I may join  
Grief to thy griefs and echo sighs to thine.

Sighs transcend the distance that separates the lovers; the melody joins the two in repeated notes accompanied by shifting related harmonies. The especially melodramatic “Canzonett on the Death of a Friend” (Ex. 3.8), marked Adagio e Patetico, is replete with interpretive indications (crescendo, dim, lento, esp) and juxtaposition of contrasts (pp and f in mm. 37-40, con spirito and dol in mm. 43-44); here the account of a dying man’s final sigh is unaccompanied, recititative-like and followed by an “orchestral” tremolo. The song ends by harkening to a reunion in heaven, the empyreal accompaniment
Example 3.5 Thomas Miles, *Three Canzonetts* [1830?]
"Touch Once Again Thy Breathing Wire," mm. 20-32
Example 3.6 George Frederick Pinto, *Six Canzonets* [1804]
“A Shepherd Loved a Nymph So Fair,” mm. 1-15
Example 3.7 George Frederick Pinto, *Four Canzonets and a Sonata* [1807]
“A Canzonett, The Words from Pope’s Abelard & Eloisa,” mm. 27-41
Example 3.8 George Frederick Pinto, *Four Canzonets and a Sonata* [1807]
“A Canzonett, on the Death of a Friend,” mm. 31-54
Example 3.9 Timothy Essex, *Six Canzonetts* [1802]

"Sonnet to a Sigh," mm. 14-25
entoned *dolce*, with a ii-V-I cadence over a tonic pedal in the parallel major. The consistent incorporation of real sighs (albeit in many forms), not just textual references to sighs, in canzonet settings increases the physicality of singing in a manner complementary to the explicit mention and repetition of parts of the body. The expressly performative nature of these sighs makes singing the canzonet an especially bodily act, one which directs attention to the body that sings.

The meaning of physical sighs is often written directly into the text. “A Sonnet to a Sigh,” the text by Mrs. Robinson, catalogs some of the personified traits of the sigh: it plays, whispers, steals, and tempts. In the musical setting by Timothy Essex (Ex. 3.9), these verbs are set with playful sixteenth-note melismas and trill figures.

![Go sigh, go viewless herald of my breast
And breathe upon the roses of his cheek
Play round his brow with waving ringlets drest
And whisper more than timid love dares speak.](image)

Ah steal not hear his lip presumptuous sigh
Sure fascination will enthrall thee there
Nor tempt the dear delicious dang’rous snare
That lurk about the witchcraft of his eye

But in the third verse, with contrasting accompaniment to set it apart, we hear of the sigh’s most crucial ability: to communicate love.

![But to his pensive ear impart my love
In murmurs soft my tender woes relate
Tell him eternal anguish is thy fate
If cold indiff’rence should thy tale reprove
Then if he scorns thee come poor trembling guest
And live the silent tenant of my breast.](image)

The sigh, then, is a messenger; embodied sighs not only overcome the timidity of the lovers for whom they speak, as suggested by this poem, they also communicate emotions where words would be unseemly. Nine of the
canzonets treated here explicitly figure the sigh as a sort of secret messenger; six explicitly mention wordlessness, as in J. A. Stevenson’s “O! breathe in soft whispers / O! tell with a sigh / That you will consent to be mine / [...] No words can my tender emotions express / These sighs must my passion declare” or James Hook’s “For he who could speak / ne’er felt passion like mine.” William Linley’s “Sacred Night” sums up: “Then I will woo but with mine eyes / love no language has like sighs!” Suett’s sigh banished words by closing the lips; Essex’s sigh, already victim to the same fascinations and threats from which the lady suffers, “breathes” and “whispers” for her, then collapses into and ultimately becomes one with her. This is communication of a physical, not intellectual, sort.

The subtlety of the sigh’s communication is especially clear in the following text, one that must have been especially familiar since it was set by both Richard Suett and “A Lady” (identified as Miss Paxton). It is a sort of ode to the sigh:

Gentle air, thou breath of Lovers
Vapour from a secret fire
Which by thee itself discovers
Ere yet daring to aspire

Softer notes of whisper’d anguish
Harmonies refined part
Striking while thou seemst to languish
Full upon the list’ners heart

Softer messenger of passion
Stealing thro’ a crowd of Spies

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10 The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that the notion of a sigh as the bearer of meaning that cannot be spoken continues through the 19th century, e.g. “A sigh of admiration is his full heart’s only language now” (M. A. Brown, tr. Runeberg’s Nadeschda 38). See “Sigh,” in The Oxford English Dictionary, ed. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 15:442. A Biblical example may be found in Romans 8:26 — “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Revised Standard Version).
Who constrains the outward fashion  
Close the lips and watch the eyes
Shapeless sigh we ne’er can show thee  
Fram’d but to assault the ear
But ere to their cost they know thee  
Every nymph shall read thee here

Lovers sigh, their sighing increasing and compounding their love. Soft like a whisper, the sigh itself dares not obtrude; refined like harmony, it “languishes” unnoticed despite generating its undeniably powerful effect.

Neither an “outward fashion” (for lips are closed) nor a concrete object, it can nevertheless be “read” by the familiar and knowing nymph. In the case of Suett’s setting of this text (Ex. 3.10), a dominant pedal sets apart the lines devoted to the sigh’s softness and shapelessness. As such, the sigh is a subtle signifier. It feigns inconsequence even while carrying significant meaning and import.

Without external form but imbued with meaning, the sigh owes its potency to its innate ability to arouse sympathy; listeners find themselves captivated, persuaded, or conscripted. Friedrich Heinrich Himmel’s lady sighs like a zephyr fanning the air: in response, birds attend, flocks cease to wander, and the valley as a whole falls silent, allowing Echo to join the lady’s tale. James Hook’s “fair Anna” (Ex. 3.11) inspires sighs; like Orpheus, she plays the harp as “ye tender turtles gently sigh / ye birds be silent while she sings / be hush’d ye zephyrs as ye fly.” Anna strikes strings, captured musically by an arpeggiated texture, as does Thomas Miles’s lady (Ex. 3.12) with harp-like figures in the introduction (mm. 5-7) and sustained, reverberating harmonies over music’s “tone” (mm. 20-22):

Touch once again thy breathing wire!  
Its tender notes will e’er inspire
The thoughts of joys gone by
Example 3.11 James Hook, *The New Hours of Love* [1799]

“Noon,” mm. 41-64
Example 3.12 Thomas Miles, *Three Canzonetts* [1830?]
“Touch Once Again Thy Breathing Wire,” mm. 4-9; 17-22
Its music hath so sweet a tone
My heart is render’d all its own
And yet I feel it sigh.

For both Anna and Miles’s lady, the sweet tones and sympathetic vibrations of music bring about, almost involuntarily, a sympathetic or sympathy-arousing sigh. This is a physical process, the physical body (in the latter case specifically the heart) the actor. Sympathy, the result, is set in motion by a sigh that trembles and vibrates responsively, making music its ideal vehicle and leaving room for a subliminal sexual meaning. The sigh is the sign by which lovers recognize each other; by means of the sigh, lovers are sympathetically united, as in this canzonet by J. Huttenes:

You need not zephyr tell the name
Of the dear nymph from whom you came
Each soft emotion which she feels
Love faithful love to me reveals.

Oft as my Delia heaves a sigh
I know it by sweet sympathy
When tears her lovely eyes bedew
Mine drop the warm suffusion too.

In unison our bosoms move
To prove the charm of mutual love
Return kind zephyr tell her this
And greet her with a faithful kiss.

Sighing enables a sort of musical intercourse, an imagined, metaphorical, and polite intercourse for the drawing room.

And yet, Haydn’s sighing pastoral maid makes a point that she sighs alone. This assertion is not uncommon, for likewise William Shield’s 1796 collection describes “Gentle Mary of the Tweed,” who, though her lover is “to every sense of honor dead,” refuses to let her longing appear outwardly:

She heard -- but scorning to upbraid
She breath’ed alone the secret sigh
For graceful pride induc’d the maid
To hide her wrongs from ev’ry eye.

And the wronged protagonist of “Ten Long Years” by Frances Harriet Jones proclaims similarly:

   Not one sigh shall tell my story
   Not one tear my cheek shall stain
   Silent grief shall be my glory
   Grief that stoops not to complain.

But the sigh is too laden with meaning. A physical rather than reasoned act, it typically escapes involuntarily, betraying true feelings, as in this example set to a Mozartian melody:

   In vain the wary lover tries
   To hide his bosom’s tender feeling
   The gentle secret borne on sighs
   Escapes true love there’s no concealing

The outwardly performative nature of sighs, together with their ability to communicate in a manner that supercedes words, kindles sympathy and incites the “unison” moving of bosoms, ultimately calling into question any pretence to solitude by the singing lady. Its embodied, physical performance is designed for present consumption by others.

   After all, sighing is too enjoyable an activity to be limited to isolation.

As with Miles’s “Breathing Wire,” sighing combines with the sweet charm of music and memories, which, although occasions for tearfulness, are nevertheless satisfyingly soothing as well. Sighing is thus a symptom of “pleasing pain,” or, in the following case, “pensive pleasure” (from Mrs. William Cumberland):

   Oh if you knew the pensive pleasure
   That fills my bosom when I sigh
   You wou’d not rob me of a treasure
   Monarchs are too poor to buy.
James Fisin provides a vivid metaphor for the painful aspect of the sigh’s pleasure by describing the sighing lover as a moth near a flame: “Still I court the painful blessing / seeing her again and sighing.” Equally yielding and acquiescent is Sir John Andrew Stevenson’s lady: “now trac’d with the tear streaming eye, / I know that my sorrows are vain / Yet love to indulge the fond sigh”; likewise this line from Edmund Phelps-Macdonnell: “Thus is love the frail offspring of hope and of fear / Thus alive both to pleasure and pain.” The one who renders a musical sigh does so with relish, and a fermata or other text-painting indicates embellishment to be lingered on, savored, and enjoyed.

In all these cases, the pleasing pain of sighing serves love and devotion. Love is painful, but for the female, irresistible. Pinto’s Eloise, who joined herself with Abelard via sighs in Ex. 3.7, describes her situation in terms of pleasurable pain: “No happier task these faded eyes pursue” (Ex. 3.13). She pores -- and sheds tears -- over her lover’s letters. As she reads and weeps, reads and weeps, D-minor scales descend conclusively. Resistance is never considered; it would be futile, impossible, contrary to her nature. The final tonic chord repeats, resigned, *pianissimo*.

* * *

Where love has once fix’d his abode
And fondness unboundedly flows
Each affection confesses the god
Each passion is lul’d to repose.

The dew of meek sympathy’s eye
Of his empire the freedom can boast
And the tender compassionate sigh
Breathes an incense that greets him the most.

John James Ashley, *Three Canzonets* 1799
Example 3.13 George Frederick Pinto, *Four Canzonets and a Sonata* [1807]
“A Canzonett, The Words from Pope’s Abelard & Eloisa,” mm. 47-60
“Thou wilt needes thrust thy necke into a yoke, weare the print of it, and sigh away sundaies” groans Shakespeare’s Benedict in Much Ado About Nothing (1.1.204), taking up a sense of “sigh” that connotes spending, consuming, or whiling away time. As the lady sits down to sing and play a canzonet, she indulges a pastime that “sighs out” and “sighs away” her time, both figuratively and literally. Outwardly she may profess the “tender compassionate sigh” as a means to domesticate the worldly passions, to “lull [them] to repose” -- but the palpably performed nature of that sigh is an act to be observed, to be consumed visually. Trembling with sympathetic vibrations, reveling in the corporeal, she engages a necessarily wordless, bodily gesture perceived by the eyes in social space. Seemingly aware of the danger inherent here, Dussek’s protagonist (Ex. 3.14) rejects the entreaties of a would-be lover:

Shepherd cease thy fond reproaches  
Sigh no more thou sigh’st in vain  
The jealous lover but encroaches  
And we mock his self taught pain.

Exasperated, she disparages the sighing lover, male and female (represented by Flora and Damon); here the keyboard part transforms from spirited accompaniment of the melody to foreboding, pianissimo broken chords, after a “warning” transition of bass octaves and sforzandi:

Damon wastes away with sighing  
Flora weeps consum’d by care  
Each distracted raves of dying  
Hopeless victim of despáir.

Finally she exposes the sigh’s true identity:

Oft thou wouldst my heart enslaving  
Bind me in eternal chains  
Shepherd surely thou are raving  
And my soul the yoke disdains.
The lady has recognized the meaning of the sigh and rejects its enslaving power -- the binds, chains, and yoke of love.

Example 3.14 Jan Ladislav Dussek, *Six Canzonets* [1804]  
“Shepherd Cease Thy Fond Reproaches,” mm. 41-59