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Fear and Death in Schubert's Lieder: Annotated Bibliography

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Fear and Death in Schubert's Lieder

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Abstract: The themes of death are common throughout the genre of German Lied. However, fear is a much more subjective emotion that is often overlooked in textual and musical analysis of death. Schubert's works "Erlkönig" and "Der Tod und das Mädchen" both illustrate situations of death, but they also include a deep permeation of fear. However, fear is dealt with differently between these two works, both in terms of historical context and importance as well as in general harmonic setting. This annotated bibliography includes sources that describe in detail Schubert's compositional style, his approach to both the text and musical setting of both of these works, as well as sources which discuss practical and historical analysis of works composed by Schubert in an attempt to discover the true relation of fear and death within these two works.

- 1 Antokoletz, Elliott. "Sturm und Drang Spirit in Early Nineteenth-Century German Lieder: The Goethe-Schubert 'Erlkönig.'" *International Journal of Musicology* 2 (2016): 139-147. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43858436>.

This work was written by Elliott Antokoletz, Ph.D. and appeared in the *International Journal of Musicology* in 2016. Antokoletz was a long time Professor of Musicology at the University of Texas in Austin. He wrote a number of books, most of them related to Twentieth Century Music. He also published over 75 articles in various journals and was well-versed in a wide variety musicological and musical theory topics. He earned degrees from the Juilliard School of Music, Hunter College, and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. This particular work is focused on the use of *Sturm und Drang* in Schubert's setting of Goethe's "Erlkönig." Antokoletz asserts that Schubert's setting of Goethe's "Erlkönig" clearly demonstrates and is a direct reflection of "Goethe's own personal, philosophical, and historical position as he stood astride, indeed belonged to, two polarized eras of dramatic change in both literary and musical assumptions."¹ Within this piece, there is a directed musical layout which moves towards death, a movement which is driven by the gradual chromatic ascent of the triplet minor-scale outline. It is highlighted in particular that the harmonic progression of the piece centers around the harmonic ascension towards the death of the child, immediately after which the harmonies revert and form a penultimate descent from G minor to Ab minor. Thus, the overarching harmonic progressions within this piece (ascension until the death followed immediately by descent) are clearly representative of the ever-increasing range of emotions in the text. Thus, this source clearly demonstrates the deep connections between emotions (textual and harmonic), narrative, and harmonic structure within Schubert's "Erlkönig."

¹ Elliott Antokoletz, "Sturm und Drang Spirit in Early Nineteenth-Century German Lieder: The Goethe-Schubert 'Erlkönig.'" *International Journal of Musicology* 2 (2016): 140. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43858436>.

2 Clark, Suzannah. *Analyzing Schubert*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011

Suzannah Clark, Ph.D., is a Morton B. Knafel Professor of Music, Director of the Mahindra Humanities Center, and has taught at Harvard College since 2019. She has earned degrees in music from King's College London and Princeton University. Her areas of specialization include Franz Schubert, music theory, and medieval music. She has authored the book *Analyzing Schubert* and has edited several others. In this work, Clark begins by discussing how Schubert and his works were received during his lifetime and shortly thereafter. She cites previous work completed by Christopher H. Gibbs, wherein Schubert is seen as an initially undiscovered composer who was not, as promoted by Johann Michael Vogl, a great natural composer gifted with divine inspirations. Rather, he was someone who had nurtured and worked to increase a musical gift. Similar to the analysis of the 6/8 chord discussed by Temperley, Clark highlights the complex issues facing analysis of Schubert's works. Indeed, his modulations are often seen as "free and odd." (58). Clark goes on to suggest that Schubert was inspired in terms of musical structure and setting from Johann Friedrich Reichardt. Additionally, when considering the analysis, she highlights that musical design is not always a product of the text. She then continues to expound upon these techniques to discuss Schubert's use of them within Sonata form., specifically how he borrowed and was inspired by a variety of other compositional techniques but was able to bend and morph all of them into his own interpretations and uses. Finally, Clark proposes a new theoretical method of analyzing Schubert which centers around late 18th century and early 19th century thought. Although similar to some of the analytical techniques discussed by Temperley and Tuomas, Clark's analytical process is centered more around previous historical analysis. The primary focus of this technique is to understand that the 19th century critics who analyzed much of his music as "flawed" were not speaking about it negatively, instead, they suggest that he often departed from the musical norms that were expected of composers during his time. By understanding this, one is better able to comprehend his unique ability to create and morph certain harmonic and compositional techniques within his works.

3 Eerola, Tuomas. "Analyzing Emotions in Schubert's Erlkönig: A Computational Approach." *Music Analysis* 29, no. 1/3 (March-October 2010): 214-233.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289726>.

Tuomas Eerola, Ph.D. is a Professor of Music Cognition at Durham University. He has led several research projects related to music cognition and has published over 70 journal articles in the last decade. He previously served as the President of the Finnish Musicological Society. This work outlined agreement with Antokoletz that structure is an essential element of driving emotion within music, but it advocated for the correlational method of analysis wherein "an existing expressively rich musical work is analyzed in various way and the resulting data are mapped onto emotions by means of statistical

models.”² Cognitively, there is a connection between the musical features and what listeners hear, and this particular data collection and presentation centered around the correlation between MIR feature analysis and emotional designation. Each primary emotion (sadness, anger, ect.) was awarded its own musical characteristics based upon the data collected, and, when utilized to analyze Schubert’s “Erlkönig,” this data revealed how often these particular characteristics appeared within the piece. Written in response to Spitzer’s analysis of fear as a constant backdrop within “Erlkönig,” Eerola utilized the previous structural segmentation created by Spitzer to perform more specified data analysis. The results of this data collection confirm that fear is indeed the dominant emotion throughout the piece, including in the sections that were previously marked as “tender” and “happy.” Following this analysis of “Erlkönig” using both a film-soundtrack model and a piano-performance model, the import of fear being analyzed as a connective emotion was clear, which resulted in the emphasis that future analysis should center on the micro-timing in expressive performance and the techniques of vocal expression.

4 Gibbs, Christopher H. “‘Komm, geh' mit mir’: Schubert's Uncanny ‘Erlkönig.’” *19th Century Music* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1995): 115-135. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/746658>.

Christopher H. Gibbs, Ph.D. is the executive editor of *The Musical Quarterly* as well as *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*. He is the author of *The Life of Schubert*, and he has contributed to a variety of journals and collaborative musical sources including the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *19th-Century Music*. He has taught a variety of music-related topics, including music theory and musicology, at Bard Conservatory of Music since 2002. This work centers around analyzing Schubert’s “Erlkönig” in a deconstructive and psychoanalytical manner so as to determine how the poetry interacts with and is combined with the music. With clear attention paid to the melodic offerings of the figure of the Erlking, there has been much scholarly debate on whether or not the character should be set to a sweet and alluring melody and harmonic structure or whether it should be more angry and terrifying so as to justify the boy’s response of fear. Goethe himself saw the ideal setting of the poem as simple and strophic with shifts in character being conveyed solely by the talent of the performer. Thus, many in the musical community at the time of its publication thought that Schubert’s setting was too much of a ballad to be a correct musical interpretation of the poetry. Antokoletz also commented on Schubert’s distinct compositional style of a ballad for this piece but left out the historical controversy behind such a setting. Prior to Schubert’s setting of “Erlkönig,” a common reading of the poem was that the father and son were calmly riding home instead of frantically through a torrential storm. However, Schubert’s psychological innovations (such as the repeated triplet figure) reshaped the common reading of the poem to one of fear with frantic motion and elevated lyricism and drama over narrative. Additionally, in Schubert’s setting, the figure of the Erlking completely erases the

² Tuomas Eerola, “Analyzing Emotions in Schubert’s Erlkönig: A Computational Approach.” *Music Analysis* 29, no. 1/3 (March-October 2010): 214. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289726>.

“binary logic of both the critical debate and the manifest composition because...his presence leased the disturbing tensions unresolved, and indeed calls their resolution into question.”³ The uncanny and seductive themes within the music underscore the conflicting combination of sweetness and terror which accompanies the figure of the Erlking. Thus, this source analyzes in-depth how the character of the Erlking was composed around a series of juxtapositions and, in this way, unsettles the listener much as it does the boy in the poem.

5 Malin, Yonatan. “Metric Displacement Dissonance and Romantic longing in the German Lied.” *Music Analysis* 25, no. 3 (October 2006): 251-288.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25171374>.

Yonatan Malin, Ph.D. currently serves as an Associate Professor in the College of Music and Program in Jewish Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. His primary areas of research include German Lied, music-text relations, theories of rhythm and meter, and Jewish music. He has published a book on German Lied as well as numerous articles in various journals including *Music Analysis* and *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*. This article discusses some of the primary points of Yonatan’s PhD Dissertation (discussed below), a main theme of which is that, while much music reverts to utilizing displacement dissonances to express longing, this is not always a necessity in German Lied. Although there is no analysis of either “Erlkönig” or “Der Tod und Das Mädchen” within this piece, an analysis of “Wanders Nachtlid II,” which is also a setting of a Goethe text, provides valuable insight into harmonic and melodic uses (or lack thereof) within German Lied. In this analysis, musical characteristics, such as syncopation, serve to create a sense of animation, which directly leads to an ascending melodic gesture of longing. Additionally, it is suggested that the suspension of meter and harmony in various passages are representative of both emotions, such as hope, as well as material subjects mentioned within the poetry, such as the hanging leaf in “Letzte Hoffnung.” Similarly, metric displacements are framed as a common yet effective compositional technique wherein a range of emotions and overarching melodic schemes are expressed. However, unlike Gibbs’ analysis, the analysis presented by Yonatan is focused more on the literal interpretations of the text (for example, a melodic phrasing which seems to represent the tranquility of nature) rather than the emotional interpretation and guidance behind the music itself; although a metric displacement could be representing an emotion or desire of some sort, in Yonatan’s analysis it could just as easily be representing a physical subject.

³ Christopher H. Gibbs, “‘Komm, geh’ mit mir’: Schubert’s Uncanny ‘Erlkönig.’” *19th Century Music* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1995): 129. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/746658>.

- 6 --- "Metric Dissonance and Music-Text Relations in the German Lied." PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2003. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

In this thesis, Yonatan expands upon the themes and musical characteristics discussed in his article "Metric Displacement Dissonance and Romantic longing in the German Lied." The features of German Romanticism, primarily the idea of flux and stasis, interiority, and Sehnsucht, are discussed at length, with particular attention given to how they are created by the combination of metric dissonances and individual texts. In this, metric dissonances (syncopations) are used as a tool to draw out deeper meaning from a text both in the emotional and storytelling sense. Although the emotions and feelings vary by the piece analyzed (in this thesis, that includes works by German Romantic composers such as Brahms and Schubert), the theme of metric displacement as a compositional tool to invoke a sense of longing is clearly prevalent. In drawing on the analytical work of Harald Krebs and Richard Cohn, this thesis introduces several new tools and extensions of metric-dissonance theory including "metrically-reinforcing" and "rhythmically-complementary" displacement-dissonance superpositions and Ski-hill isographies, which model metric equivalencies and hierarchies. Using these analytical techniques, it is concluded that a true analysis will take into consideration the correlations between metric dissonances and the various other common elements of musical analysis such as harmony and form. The metric dissonances analyzed also correlate with the composition technique of each composer. For example, the metric dissonances often found in Schubert's pieces created forms of motion and stasis that were associated with certain psychological states.

- 7 Norman, Jessye. "Jessye Norman—A Portrait—Erlkönig (Schubert)." Uploaded March 27, 2008. Accessed October 25, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8noeFpdfWcQ>.

Jessye Norman was a highly skilled, classically trained Soprano. She studied voice at the Interlochen Center for the Arts, Howard University, the Peabody Conservatory, and the University of Michigan School of Music, Theater, and Dance. She won a variety of national and international singing competitions, and she performed many times at The Royal Opera and the Metropolitan Opera. She has received honorary doctorates from over 30 different colleges, and she published her memoir *Stand Up Straight and Sing!* in 2014. This particular recording is highly representative of the necessary skill of the performer described by both Gibbs and Pesic. Within the performance, Norman not only realizes a wide range of dynamics, but she also achieves the expectation of Schubert in that she changes her voice based upon which character she is embodying. Indeed, she even alters her face and body based upon the character. All of these performance aspects are what were described by both Gibbs and Pesic, and they were what were most likely expected by Schubert as a correct and emotional rendition of his setting of "Erlkönig."

- 8 Pesic, Peter. "Schubert's Dream." *19th Century Music* 23, no. 2 (Autumn 1999): 136-144. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/746920>.

Peter Pesic is a writer, musician, and educator who has written six books and sixty papers with topics centering around the history and philosophy of science and music. He serves as director for the Science institute at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico and is an Associate of the Department of Physics at Harvard University. This particular article addresses Schubert's work "My Dream" in the context of his musical compositions. It is unclear whether or not this piece was a true experience or an imaginary narrative. However, this work highlights Schubert's compositional technique of using a "circle of sixths" to create movement throughout a work. Pesic compares "My Dream" to "Erlkönig" in terms of the emotional expressiveness required of the performer. Similar to the metric dissonance described by Yonatan, Pesic highlights that passages of "wandering" (created by an ambiguous introduction of and movement toward the bIV) are frequent and serve to increase the tension towards the anger and fear later in the piece. This also relates back to Gibbs' idea of repetition or ambiguity to increase a certain feeling or emotion (in "Erlkönig," this was the repeated triplet figure). Thus, in addition to the analysis techniques discussed by Gibbs and Yonatan, Pesic's harmonic analysis of Schubert's compositional technique of exploring the dialectic of V and bIV to create harmonic elongation should also be taken into consideration when analyzing his works.

9 Solomon, Maynard. "Franz Schubert's 'My Dream.'" *American Imago* 38, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 137-154. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/26303747>.

Maynard Solomon was a musicologist who wrote biographies of Beethoven and Mozart, one of which was a finalist for the 1996 Pulitzer Prize in biography, in addition to a wide variety of articles. He founded Vanguard Records in 1950 and taught at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and the Juilliard School. This particular article discusses Franz Schubert's "My Dream" and particularly focuses on whether or not it was factual (as many early historians believed) or if it was an artistic reflection of events within his personal life. Solomon asserts that there is no evidence that "My Dream" was conceived as a literary exercise. However, psychoanalytic investigation reveals a narrative of sin, punishment, and absolution, and many of the actions described within this work are driven by some form of fear, specifically fear of being separated from his father as a result of his alleged (by Solomon) proclivity toward homosexuality. Solomon further summarizes that this fear opened his creativity to its full extent as Schubert then continuously was searching for reparation and restitution. Although "My Dream" was composed after "Erlkönig," this scholarship by Solomon raises the question of whether or not the fear that was transcribed into the musical setting of "Erlkönig" and "Der Tod und das Mädchen" was a musical reflection of the personal inner turmoil felt by Schubert. This could perhaps explain why his setting of "Erlkönig" in particular was, as summarized by Gibbs, more fearful (with the repeating triplet figure) than other settings of the same text.

- 10 Spitzer, Michael. "Mapping the Human Heart: A Holistic Analysis of Fear in Schubert." *Music Analysis* 29, no. 1/3 (March-October 2010): 149-213. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289725>.

Michael Spitzer is currently a Professor of Music at the University of Liverpool, where he moved after teaching at Durham University for 20 years. He has published approximately 50 music related articles with topics ranging from Western music to more ethnographic styles, and he has also written four monographs. Similar to Eerola, Spitzer asserts that musical structure and emotion are intertwined in such a way that they are inseparable. The Expression Model, wherein phrase patterns contain and emanate emotional dialogue, was often utilized by Schubert as a type of blending technique between text and music. Two Schubert pieces are analyzed: *Unfinished* Symphony and "Erlkönig." The *Unfinished* Symphony highlights the idea of "fight" in response to fear, whereas "Erlkönig" illustrates the "flight" response. In "Erlkönig," the progression that Schubert wrote is a clear linear descent from happy to tender to sad. The triplets, however, are viewed as an ever-present threat to the subject (the boy and his father). In conjunction with scholarship by Robinson and Joseph LeDoux, Spitzer asserts that the piece begins with "startle potentiation" which then quickly turns into fear when the triplets are first sounded. Additionally, the child's cry is accompanied by a melodic 5[^]--6[^]--5[^] fear motive which further underscores the ever-increasing pattern of fear within the piece. The lack of attentive response by the father underscores another type of fear which has not been mentioned in any of these other sources; Spitzer argues that "Erlkönig is driven by two kinds of Fear paradoxically folded into each other: the terror of a child and the deafness symptomatic of the father's panic...In short, the Lied is expressive of 'Fear as deafness to Fear.'"⁴

- 11 Temperley, Nicholas. "Schubert and Beethoven's Eight-Six Chord." *19th Century Music* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 1981): 142-154. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/746403>.

Nicholas Temperley, Ph.D. was a historical musicologist who specialized in the Classical and Romantic periods. He received a PhD in musicology from Cambridge University, and, after teaching at Cambridge and Yale, he was permanently hired as a Professor of Musicology at the University of Illinois. He founded the Hymn Tune Index Project, edited the 20-volume series *The London Pianoforte School 1766-1860*, and authored a number of books and articles, including a critical anthology of 18th-century English psalmody for *Musica Britannica*. He passed away on April 8, 2020, at the age of 87. This article was written in response to Maynard Solomon, who, in a previous article within this publication, had asserted that, between 1816 and 1821, Beethovenian influence was avoided by Schubert in his works. Temperley, however, argues that the publication of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony had a tremendous impact upon Schubert during this time

⁴ Michael Spitzer, "Mapping the Human Heart: A Holistic Analysis of Fear in Schubert." *Music Analysis* 29, no. 1/3 (March-October 2010): 194. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289725>.

and, as a result, his influence is clearly visible within some of Schubert's works between 1816 and 1821. In particular, Schubert made use of a chord sequence that appeared in the Trio of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Three of Schubert's works (*Der Wanderer*, *Der Geistertanz*, and *Der Tod und das Mädchen*) are clearly marked with the theme from Beethoven's Allegretto from his Seventh Symphony. All three of these pieces center around the horror and fear associated with death. Temperley asserts that Schubert heard the theme presented by Beethoven in his Seventh Symphony and then associated it with death. Additionally, the at-times ambiguous harmonic movement centers around a chord which could be labeled as an incomplete 6/4 but, to be more historically accurate, should be instead called a 6/8 chord. Schubert adopted this chord along with its movement which was a "succession of thirds over a dominant pedal."⁵ This progression was made even more haunting when Schubert at times chose to leave out the tonic and, short of resolving the resulting dissonance, this chord appears almost fragile and thin at the same time it is warm. In conjunction with the theme of death, this raises the question of whether or not the fear of death is dispelled when this chord is sounded or if it is merely obscured yet still present. Thus, the primary argument of this article revolves around Beethoven's incredibly prevalent influence on Schubert as well as the importance of taking spacing, doubling, and omission of notes into consideration during the harmonic analysis of a piece.

12 Wilkinson, Dominic. "Sleep Softly: Schubert, Ethics and the Value of Dying Well." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 47, no. 4 (2021): 218-224. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2020-106937>.

Dominic Wilkinson currently serves as the Director of Medical Ethics and Professor of Medical Ethics at the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, University of Oxford. He has published over 120 articles related to ethical issues in intensive care, and he is the author of the book *Death of Disability? The "Carmentis Machine" and Decision-Making for Critically Ill Children*. Additionally, from 2011 to 2018 he was the Editor and Associate Editor of the *Journal of Medical Ethics*. Schubert's "Der Tod und das Mädchen" was composed in a period of great creativity and productivity within his life. However, in an interesting twist, seven years later, when his health had greatly deteriorated and, upon composing his 14th string quartet, he recycled the theme of death from "Der Tod und das Mädchen." Wilkinson hears the theme of death as "awfully reminiscent of the silence that follows the breaking of terrible news. We then hear a series of variations that convey an increasingly frenzied and frenetic struggle against inevitable mortality."⁶ Additionally, the fact that Schubert revisited this death theme while ill and possibly facing death is itself telling. On the other hand, the maiden is

⁵ Nicholas Temperley, "Schubert and Beethoven's Eight-Six Chord." *19th Century Music* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 1981): 149. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/746403>.

⁶ Dominic Wilkinson, "Sleep Softly: Schubert, Ethics and the Value of Dying Well." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 47, no. 4 (2021): 219. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2020-106937>.

desperately attempting to avoid death. Wilkinson details an analytical approach wherein he takes these key themes from Schubert's song and uses them to analyze the ethics and feelings that are a key part of working with terminally ill infants. The maiden and her response to death is associated with that of the parents of the children while death in and of itself becomes an almost quiet end result. As in "Der Tod und das Mädchen," death, while calm and attempting comfort, is growing ever-closer and is unable to be stopped. This analysis highly relevant in that, while dealing with real-world topics and situations, it illuminates some of the feelings and emotions possibly felt by Schubert, particularly in response to the death motive that he composed. How he responded to it, as well as the historical context wherein he used it, demonstrates that the theme itself, while presented in "Der Tod und das Mädchen" as a relatively calm force, is no longer calm when Schubert himself is faced with his own mortality. Thus, the analysis of Schubert's personal response to death is curious because his reuse of the theme seems to suggest that he felt a certain fear and frantic struggle against the end, much as did the maiden.