Death in Winterreise*: Musico-Poetic Associations in Schubert's Song Cycle*. By Lauri Suurpää. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

Review by Kofi Agawu

Schubert has become increasingly central to Anglo-American music studies. If Beethoven was the go-to figure for analysts in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries (Czerny, A. B. Marx, Riemann, Schenker, Schoenberg and Reti, among others), Schubert has emerged as a figure of great interest in the latter part of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. His music features prominently in studies of gender and sexuality (McClary, Brett), musical meaning (Hatten), notions of subjectivity (Kramer), style (Wollenberg), harmony (Damschroder), neo-Riemannian transformations (Cohn, Clark), musical form and narrative (Fisk), the nature of perception (Lewin), and of course text-music relations (Muxfeldt, Youens, Schachter, Dunsby). In the music theory classroom, considerations of such topics as modal interchange, enharmonicism, third relations, augmented-sixth chords, three-key expositions, and subdominant recapitulations regularly turn to Schubert for vivid examples. Where fidelity to convention is concerned, Schubert's music possesses a greater interrogative quality than Beethoven's.

Lauri Suurpää's new book adds to this growing library an important and original study of one of Schubert's most celebrated works, *Winterreise* (1827). Although a number of extended commentaries preceded his own (Fischer-Dieskau, Bostridge, Reed, Youens), Suurpää's is the most rigorous theory-based analysis of the work. In a mere 224 pages, the author analyzes the songs in part 2 of *Winterreise* (all except "Die Post"), and does so with exemplary methodological self-awareness. The result is a cogent demonstration that the complex layering of signifying components in song can be explained using different (but notionally complementary) technologies. Students of Schubert's songs will find much of value in the book, as will Schenkerian analysts, and of course theorists of song.

The book is organized in three parts. Part 1 provides the background necessary to understanding Schubert's cycle and the approach taken. Part 2 deals with songs 14–24, the focus of the study. Songs are treated individually, although a few are considered as parts of groups. Part 3 tackles the idea of cycle both as a historical genre and as a pertinent horizon for *Winterreise,* both conceptually and perceptually. With this broad plan, the author aims to accomplish three things. The first is to fill in a gap in received analytical knowledge through a series of close readings of 11 of the 12 songs that make up part 2 of the cycle. ("Die Post" [13] is excluded because it was repositioned from Müller's published order and is thought to disrupt the emerging mood of the cycle). Secondly, by teasing out the poetic themes using a methodology that attends to structural elements at the subsurface, the author hopes to "challenge the widely accepted view that there is no goal-oriented trajectory in the cycle." The cycle for him proceeds from past love in part 1, from a longing for the beloved, to a longing for death (future death) in part 2. A third aim is to enrich understanding of song in general and Schubert's in particular by contributing fresh perspectives on musico-poetic associations.

These are all reasonable aims, but none of them yet marks a radical break with previous studies. We may infer that the book's significance is likely to take the form of refinement and complementation. Support for this preliminary inference is evident in the very wide range of topics covered. Consider, for example, the first part or 'Background.' The prerequisites for an adequate understanding of *Winterreise*, it emerges, include historical as well as systematic factors. One is to rehearse the work's compositional history, declare a preference for one of its versions, and then map out the broad progress of the thematic narrative across the cycle of Müller's twenty-four poems. We know that composers frequently modify the poetic texts they set, so it is not surprising to find that Schubert tampered with the order of publication of Müller's poems. Nor is it surprising to find that, between the autograph and the first edition, he transposed four of the songs ("Wasserflut," "Rast," "Mut," "Der Leiermann") down a step and one ("Einsamkeit") down a minor third. These changes are well known and have engendered a certain amount of speculation about what might have

motivated them, but if one takes the pragmatic view that such transpositions, whatever the reasons for them, both disrupt old tonal-harmonic relations while bringing new ones into view, then one need not dwell for too long on what is ultimately an unanswerable question about Schubert's decision-making process. In developing his own analyses, Suurpää opts for the keys of the first edition.

The question of an underlying narrative for *Winterreise* is another of those issues that will be difficult to answer definitively. There is no question that a *potential* for a narrative reading exists insofar as Müller's poems feature a protagonist whose winter journey, both actual and psychological, is recounted intermittently. Suurpää has devised nine rubrics to capture the cycle's action: Departure (poems 1–5); The Continuation of the Journey and the Outpouring of Misery (poems 6–9); Rest and Dreams (poems 10–11); The journey continues: Deep Depression (poem 12); Continuation and Back References (poem 13); Death as a Positive Option (Poems 14–15); Reflecting on the Idea of Death and Renouncing Love (poems 16–19); The Choice of Death (poem 20); and finally, the Inability to Find Death (poems 21–24). The actual narrative is glossed as a pair of successive illusions, one in which the protagonist looks back to the past (part 1), and the other in which he looks ahead to the future, a future shaped by the desire for death (part 2).

Overarching progressions of this sort may well help some listeners find their bearings within the unfolding narrative, but it is not always possible to be definitive because the temporal progression in *Winterreise* is not straightforwardly goal-oriented. Suurpää indeed affirms as much when he asserts somewhat guardedly that "the poetic cycle does have a *kind of plot*, albeit a *vague* one" (my emphasis). Given that the cycle consists of 24 songs, each of them individual and closed, each of them in possession of a beginning, middle and ending; given that none of the songs is in any meaningful sense a fragment, or dependent on another; the question of a narrative (or plot, overall unity, or goal-directed action) is again probably not resolvable. We might say that *Winterreise* invites different sorts of hearings. Some listeners will seek—consciously, perhaps—to affiliate groups of songs or

particular successions based on key, motivic cross references, or ambience; others may embrace the contrasts of mood, affect and subject matter and delight in succession rather than progression. And still others may wish to switch between the two modes of hearing. It would seem, then, that the value of this portion of Suurpää's text (chapter 1, as well as chapters 12 and 13, where the idea of cycle is considered in depth) is largely methodological. Readers are exposed to the kinds of issues one might consider in arguing for the coherence or unity of a multi-piece such as *Winterreise*.

One aspect of the 'Background' is of largely historical interest, and that is the discussion of the lied and song cycle in the early nineteenth century. Suurpää rehearses the views of writers like Heinrich Koch and E. T. A. Hoffmann, raising questions about "the primacy of text over music," the idea of a song cycle, and notions of love and death and their artistic rendition in literature. Here, as elsewhere in the book, the author helpfully latches on to core issues and contextualizes the movement of ideas by presenting capsule forms of larger event-successions. For example, drawing on A.M. Abrams, he rehearses a three-fold characterization of eighteenth-century artistic theory and practice: art as an imitation of the external world in the first half of the eighteenth century (Mimetic theories); art as expression of emotion later in the century (Pragmatic theories); and art as a reflection of the artist's inner sentiments and fantasies in the last decades of the century (Expressive theories). Such neat encapsulations are helpful in orienting the uninitiated to a variety of activities, but it is obvious that they will need to be nuanced in application in order to avoid flattening out what is in reality a complex and contradictory set of practices.

I was struck by a line from E. T. A. Hoffman about the composing of Lieder: "The best command of counterpoint is useless [here]." What the song composer needs instead are tools that promote varieties of simplicity. Another way perhaps of formulating the point is to say that the learned style (speaking now in terms of topic theory) is not one of the preferred topical choices for the genre of Lied. On the surface, this does seem indeed to be the case, not just in *Winterreise* but in Schubert's song oeuvre as a

whole. But if the learned style is "useless" here, which topics might be useful? Pursuing this question opens the door to a new valuation of *Winterreise*'s materials in ways that differ somewhat from Suurpää's. We might point to such topics as march (1, 3, 7, 20), musette (24), hymn (23), singing style (4, 15), dance (19), recitative (12, 14), horn calls (5, 13), and varieties of Sturm und Drang (4, 7, 8, 18). To be fair, Suurpää indeed notes in passing the sarabande-like rhythm of 23 and the chorale-like texture towards the end of 16, with its religious overtones, but a committed topical reading of *Winterreise* lies beyond his agenda here. Such a pursuit may shed light on the role of mimesis in expressive theories, and further enhance our understanding of Schubert's complex negotiation of the domains of the conventional and the personal.

Part 1 of the book also includes a valuable discussion of methodological and analytical issues. Suurpää summarizes the nature of the relationships between text and music in the form of five propositions. The first two propose that the music in Lieder is not representation but can include imitation. By denying a representational burden for music, the author wisely grants song the potential to assume the character of the poem (chameleon-like) without necessarily taking on the burden of translating text into music. Propositions 3 and 4 assert that music and text in Lieder can include similar (or contrasting) emotions and have similar underlying structural features. The fifth and final proposition is designed to capture the contingency of text-music relations, relations that are "established through on-going and interactive interpretation." Underpinning all five propositions is a view of text and music as separate or separable domains. This point will be made explicit in the analytical model advanced in chapter 4, which prescribes three successive stages in the analysis of song: analysis of music, analysis of text, and finally analysis of musico-poetic aspects.

The most innovative aspect of Suurpää's methodology lies in its adaptation of aspects of Greimassian narrative theory to the analysis of song. Although Greimas is familiar to students of musical semiotics from the writings of scholars like Eero Tarasti and Marta Grabocz, he has yet to feature in a major way in Anglo-American traditions of song analysis. Suurpää's direct and unmediated adaptation aims to capture events as relations, as

components of a dynamic system. So, instead of simply identifying discrete characters and protagonists, the author places the emphasis on action, on something happening to someone. The three most fundamental components of this relational scheme (all given the appropriate symbolic notation) are the conjunction between subject and object, disjunction between subject and object, and motion from one state to another, which also captures some kind of action or transformation. The subject-object pair is referred to as primary actants, and it is supplemented by another opposition that represents communication between sender and receiver. These elements are usefully illustrated on the terrain of song 12, "Einsamkeit," a song that marks the end of part 1 of *Winterreise*.

Suurpää completes the portrait of the 'Background' by acknowledging previous studies of text-music relations in nineteenth-century music and distinguishing his approach from others'. It is rarely possible to be complete in performing this academic ritual (I did not, for example, find any references to Dunsby or Muxfeldt). Also, the declared differences between his approach and those of others are not always pronounced. What emerges unequivocally, however, is the fact of the book's Schenkerian orientation and the author's interest in the work of similarly-minded analysts.

At the core of *Death in Winterreise* lies a series of detailed analyses (collected in part 2 of the book). Beginning with "Der greise Kopf" (14) and ending with "Der Leiermann" (24), the author offers close readings of songs by deploying the tools introduced earlier. Since the overarching narrative theme is the shift from past to future, a future in which death is contemplated as a positive option, Suurpää devises a number of rubrics to capture this progress: emergence of death as a positive option in "Der greise Kopf" (14); contemplation of death in "Die Krähe" (15); the conjoining of past and future in "Letze Hoffnung" (16); reflection on lost hope in "Im Dorfe" (17), "Der stürmische Morgen" (18), and "Täuschung" (19); choosing death in "Der Wegweiser" (20); death eluding the wanderer in "Das Wirsthauss" (21); and finally, an "inability to find death" in "Mut" (22), "Die Nebensonnen" (23), and "Der Leiermann" (24).

Few readers of Müller's poems will need to be persuaded that the landscape on which the entire mini-drama is staged is a bleak one, that the prospect of death is never far away. The actual narration is, however, neither straightforwardly teleological nor narrowly focused on death. Our protagonist is lonely and dejected, plagued by memories both pleasant and unpleasant, given to dreaming, conflicted in his reactions to the past and in his desires for the future, and given to fits of interiorization. What death actually means remains ambiguous. Early in the book, Suurpää wrote that "in *Winterreise* death has a symbolic or metaphorical meaning; death is not a concrete, physical event." In the final discussion of death in the course of his epilogue, he now says that "any unequivocal assessment of the precise meaning of death in *Winterreise* is, in the end, impossible." The point, presumably, is to discourage reductionist readings of Müller's verses, or the drawing of facile correlations between musical signifiers and death.

Each analysis is organized around the author's three-tiered method comprising successive considerations of music, text, and musico-poetic aspects. 'Music' is captured principally by means of voice-leading graphs, typically featuring an initial overview graph supplemented by more detailed sketches of either whole songs or significant portions of songs. Suurpää is quite comfortable in his embrace of Schenkerian technology, and he uses it efficiently to convey large-scale coherence, sub-surface voice leading, and selected motivic relationships. 'Text' is captured using his Greimassian technology according to which key actions that determine the progress of the narrative are rendered symbolically in terms of initial disjunctions culminating in terminal conjunctions often through some act of transformation. The idea here is to accord the text a degree of analytical attention comparable to that accorded to the music during phase 1 of the analysis. Finally, 'musico-poetic aspects' is something of a catch-all category for any observed reflections of text in the music. The expressive and mimetic belong here; indeed, components of the text that signify directly but were overlooked at the 'text' stage are restored at the 'musico-poetic' stage if they seem to contribute directly to a song's expression.

The author's three-tiered methodology works well enough, but as he himself recognizes, there is something artificial about the division. What does it mean, for example, to analyze the 'music' with absolutely no recourse to the text in phase 1? And, by the same token, how can one analyze the text without being mindful of the music—especially if one encounters it typically as text-underlay in a Schubert score, complete with pitch and rhythm, rather than separately as a printed poem? One virtue of this way of proceeding is that it ensures that each of the phases is accorded a certain level of autonomy. The phases are not given comparable space, however, judging from the number of pages devoted to each. In general, 'text' is dispensed with in two or at most three pages; 'musico-poetic aspects' vary from three to six pages. The 'music' gets the lion's share of attention, extending from no fewer then five pages to as many as eight. Debates about the ontology of song may have sometimes discouraged analysts from looking at the music independently of the text, but Suurpää's demonstration makes a case for the intrinsic interest of musical relations that are not necessarily tied to text or in service of a musico-poetic idea.

The book's third and final part returns to the idea of *Winterreise* as a whole and further ponders the idea of cycle before offering a final gloss on the meaning of death. For comparison, Schumann's cycles (notably *Dichterliebe*) are invoked, and the 'pro-unity' views of scholars like Komar, Hoeckner, McCreless and Rosen are contrasted with the 'anti-unity' views of Ferris, Perrey and Plantinga. The proviso that Schubert's cycle "eludes easy and clear-cut categorizations" only encourages further refinement of analytical perspective at this stage. Topics addressed in connection with overall coherence include *Winterreise* as a topical and a narrative cycle, large-scale harmonic organization, and musical cross-referencing.

It is never possible to summarize an analysis, especially one that employs a graphic symbology, so I will not attempt to do so here. But since an important part of the book's contribution resides in the close readings of individual songs, I am obliged to cite at least one analysis in illustration of the kinds of insights offered the reader. "Letze Hoffnung" (Last Hope) discussed in chapter 7 may serve as an example. As a preliminary, an initial 'overview'

summarizes the overall structure and displays the song's form, expressive genre, expressive quality, dramatic curve, and textual structure synchronically in a layered representation. Prose is then employed to elaborate on some of the relations shown graphically and to explore the poetic elements.

In this song the wanderer pins his hopes on "many a colored leaf" that can still be seen on the trees. Seeing such leaves induces contemplation. He imagines that only one leaf remains. As it is blown by the wind, his fears are similarly kindled. "I tremble violently," he says. Were the last leaf to fall to the ground, the protagonist would likewise hit the ground and "weep on the grave of [his] hopes." All is rather bleak.

Müller's poem inspired one of Schubert's most picturesque settings. Falling leaves dominate the four-bar introduction as well as the four-bar postlude; the former is open, ending on a V7 sonority, while the latter closes with a plagal cadence (mm. 46–47). When the poet says that he is often lost in thought, the singer slows down by employing longer note values, as if switching into speech mode (mm. 12–13). When the poet says "I tremble violently," Schubert's pianist doubles the micro-rhythmic action, proceeding now in sixteenth notes rather than eighth notes, and keeping the sense of the music open by perching on a dominant chord (mm. 22–24). And when the poet imagines weeping on the grave of his hopes, Schubert gives rein to a lyrical impulse, producing a deeply expressive and poignant passage that transforms the song's ambience (mm. 35–43). These and other insights are included in Suurpää's concise analysis of character (restless, unsettled, searching, rhythmically complex, unstable), form (through-composed), the unusual expressive genre (tragic-to-joyful), and the succession of a peak followed by highpoints. Included also are discussions of enharmonic ambiguity, motivic parallelisms, and the interpenetration of minor and major.

Probably the most salient moment in "Letze Hoffnung" is the affective transformation that begins in bar 35 on the word *wein* (weep). What can Schubert have meant by setting this last, most desperate line of Müller's poem to such ostensibly positive, major-mode, deeply moving music? Suurpää rejects an ironic reading, arguing instead that "Letze Hoffnung" occupies a pivotal position

in the cycle as a whole, and that it engineers a permanent transition from a past of lost love to a future of hope for death: "By the end of the song, the wanderer understands that relinquishing the beloved leads to the possibility of death and to peace; indeed this is the prerequisite for peace, since he cannot hark back to the past and simultaneously anticipate the future."

It is not possible in the limited space of a review to discuss any more than a handful of the issues raised by *Death in Winterreise*, but I hope to have suggested that the book has the potential to engender fruitful discussion and debate. One set of questions may be provoked by the author's use of Schenkerian technology. The question, when all is said and done, is whether the Schenkerian approach can be truly integrated with other approaches, or whether, on the contrary, its entailments are just too singular, too separate to be folded into a larger analytical proceeding. A second question might involve the potential for comparative analysis made possible by the author's methodology but not pursued in depth. I wondered, for example, if we might not assemble all of the middleground graphs, perhaps transpose them into a single key (C major-minor), and place them on top of each other so that the reader can immediately see and appreciate how Schubert imagines and realizes his tone spaces. Third, as regards the text, is it possible that the Greimassian method is overly structuralist, too much concerned with a deep structure, and thus somewhat removed from the more surface aspects of sounding language? As mentioned, some semantic aspects are restored at the musico-poetic stage, but it seems less than ideal that such elements of immediate signification play a limited role in considerations of 'text.'

These are minor quibbles, however. *Death in Winterreise* is a thoughtful book, a most welcome addition to both Schubert studies and to analytical studies of text-music relations. Its analyses alone will draw students into closer engagement with individual songs, and they will do so armed with firmer bearings about each song's linear goals and its particular crafting of large-scale structure. I finished the book with a lingering sense that the various analytical mechanisms remain somewhat separate; they are not necessarily integrated into a whole. Perhaps this co-existence, this assembly of partialities, speaks to the very ontology of song.

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