

INTRODUCTION

Despite his reputation as a loveable and readily understandable composer, Schubert is a great imponderable. Although he has been much stereotyped as both an artist-outsider and an archetypally *gemütlich* Viennese, he left few clues to either his aesthetic principles or his sense of identity. His early biographers presented him in terms stamped by inferiority which have stuck to his music and problematized its canonical standing. Schubert is the only “great composer” who comes down to us as naïve, passive, self-indulgent, childlike, and feminine; Mozart is a bear by comparison. Recent discussion has added the possibility of homosexuality to the mixture, shaking up the ostentatiously heterosexual *mise-en-scène* of classical music.

In *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song*, I argue that this Schubertian “identity crisis” is not a problem to be solved by further scholarship but a constitutive feature of Schubert’s historical, and with it his aesthetic, situation. His music, especially in its preoccupation with song and the songlike, can be heard as a response to the emergence (or consolidation) of a new form of western social organization in the first years of the nineteenth century.

According to Michel Foucault, this was (and still is) an organization in which social power flows through techniques of observation, regulation, and classification – techniques that can be grouped loosely under the rubric of “discipline.”¹ A key feature of the “disciplinary society” is the determination of human identity by reference to central norms around which various forms and degrees of deviation are ranged. Identity is no longer regarded as a direct and natural expression of one’s social position, but as a product of one’s “voluntary” performance of whatever disciplines define and support the system of norms. Similarly, violations of the boundaries of identity are no longer regarded as problems of behavior, but as expressions of an inner tendency to stray from the center, an “abnormality” that defines the offender as an instance of an irregular human type.

A basic problem with the disciplinary regime is that norms are collective and anonymous. Normative identity shapes people as individuals, but it is not individual itself in the sense of being personal and distinctive. The disciplinary subject gains such an individual identity not through proximity to the norm, but through dis-

1 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1979), 135–228.

tance from it. The subject becomes distinctive only insofar as he or she deviates into dangerous, marginal, or prohibited areas of experience – areas of criminality, secrecy, illness, madness, childlikeness, and, above all, sexuality, the area that tends to infiltrate or engross all the others. The consequence of this link with deviance is by no means a devaluation of individual identity; on the contrary, such identity is highly prized. The consequence, rather, is that certain deviations are granted a measure of tolerance and legitimacy in order to support the possibility of individual identity. Certain deviations are submitted to an interpretation that places them, after all, in acceptable proximity to the norm. The availability of such normalizing interpretations, which *recuperate* a limited body of deviations for the social order, is basic to the project of Romantic individualism. Not coincidentally, that project develops right alongside the disciplinary society, alternately cultivating and constraining types of subjectivity – aesthetic, psychical, and sexual – that cannot be disciplined.

In musical aesthetics the problem of deviance and normalization is familiarly posed in terms of originality, which, as Carl Dahlhaus has emphasized, is the problem of nineteenth-century music *par excellence*.² Its earliest exemplars are Beethoven and Schubert, in a perennial pairing that has usually worked to the latter's disadvantage. Beethoven's historical success comes partly from his original use of expressive and formal deviations that could be recuperated as normative with respect to ideals of musical form or logic, although sometimes at the cost of considerable misrepresentation. Schubert's relative failure lay in his use of deviations that are hard to recuperate in this way, especially as manifest in his apparent willingness to sacrifice form and logic to sensuous or emotive fullness.

Schubert's practice can be understood as an effort to imagine identities that resist, escape, or surmount the regime of the norm. In one sense, this claim is hardly surprising, and needs no elaborate conceptual apparatus to back it; Schubert's predilection for evoking wanderers and other Romantic outcasts, especially in his songs, is a truism. Yet to invoke the truism is to trivialize Schubert by relegating him to a textbook Romanticism. It was not easy to deviate from the norms of Schubert's Biedermeier Vienna, which well exemplified the disciplinary society with its repressive political order, its elaborate official codes of social classification, and the omnipresence of Count Josef Sedlnitzky's secret police. And given the hard core of opacity that has so haunted Schubert's critical reception, it is hard not to divine something at stake for him beyond merely generating sympathy for the outcast. Such sympathy, in any case, easily blends with a sentimental benevolence that supports more than it subverts the regime of the norm. Unless we find the persistent kitsch image credible, Schubert's effort is, and sounds, genuinely subversive. Schubert comes close to identifying the norm, not as the subject's anchor, but as its grave. He seeks to represent deviation as affirmation, as positive difference rather than default, as desirable lack rather than insufficiency.

2 Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 40–78.

For several reasons, this effort leads him to elevate song to the status of high art and to give it an unprecedented centrality in his output. Song provides a collection of *dramatis personae* through which identities can be concretely imagined; it centers performatively on the human voice as a nonvirtuoso instrument, and therefore as a vehicle for sincere expression rather than artistic display; and it centers topically on sexual roles and desires, the exemplary media for the interplay of norm and deviation and the pivotal domains of subject formation as a social process.

Schubert tends to reconstruct subjectivity in song according to either of two broad strategies. On the one hand, he writes songs that ally themselves with the norm by projecting an image of virile strength and confidence; the attitude ranges from naïve cockiness in “Heidenröslein” to assured vitality in “Willkommen und Abschied,” from exuberance in “An Schwager Kronos” to bravado in “Mein!” from *Die schöne Müllerin*. In most such songs, however, Schubert qualifies the virile ideal by relaxing its rigor at a crucial point, putting the text in dialogue with musical intimations of self-doubt, dependency, and passive, even masochistic, desires. (As we will see, such qualification is the primary business of *Die schöne Müllerin* as a cycle.) The norm is thus revealed as a fiction which the subject may use more or less defensively, (self-)deceptively, or creatively.

On the other hand, Schubert writes songs that openly explore alternative subjectivities, a process Susan McClary has also found at work in certain instrumental pieces, notably the “Unfinished” Symphony.³ This involves him in a process of social and above all of sexual bricolage, an improvisatory tinkering with the building blocks of both desire and identity that stands in contrast to the official elaboration of these terms around a central normative structure. As my dual invocation of desire and identity suggests, the possibilities of both sexuality and gender are involved here. The ambiguity that always hovers between these terms, which can neither be firmly bound together nor decisively kept apart, forms part of the *métier* of Schubert’s songwriting in general.

Songs of this type explore an “errant” subjectivity without assuming its subordination (and sometimes suggesting its insubordination) to a normative model. A suffering woman may resist compassion (Goethe’s Mignon) or a glad one insist on excess (an expectant lover from August Schlegel, a secret one by Caroline Klenke); a youth may discover transcendental possibilities in homosexual desire (Ganymede); a man may choose to live out the implications of a deficient, psychosexually castrated masculinity (the lovelorn miller); a deformed man or even an effigy may affirm the dignity of betrayed love or unappeased longing (Matthias von Collin’s dwarf, Johann Mayrhofer’s Memnon). Schubert often seems to seize expressively on whatever is potentially most extreme, most insistent or resistant, in the persona or hero of a text, as if to raise the question: how can such a subject be bound within the

3 Susan McClary, “Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert’s Music,” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 205–34.

norms of the Lied as a genre, or even by the norms of musical common practice? Behind this hovers the more radical question: how can – why should – such a subject be bound by norms at all?

Most of the songs that pose this question do not so much work against the norm as make the norm work against itself. Even the more outlaw songs that Schubert tends to reserve for extremes of pleasure (“Ganymed”), desire (“Die verfehlt Stunde”), or anguish (“Du liebst mich nicht”) sound normal enough to begin with. Sooner or later, however, the songs of Schubert’s errant subjects venture into a border area where something – a structural oddity, a textual twist, an expressive gesture – potentially transforms the observance of normative discipline into a deviation from it. (This is one reason why Schubert’s contemporaries sometimes criticized him for exceeding the proper boundaries of song. More was at stake in the criticism than the conventional violation of convention.) The means of regulating deviant subjectivities may thus come to appear as the basis of the “deviant” subject’s self-affirmation. In Foucault’s model, the subject of discipline acts as if always potentially overseen or overheard, and therefore as one who always speaks or acts for the Other – taking “for” to mean both “at the behest of” and “on behalf of.” (My capitalization here is meant to associate the supervisory agency with Jacques Lacan’s “big Other,” the symbolic order into which every subject must be enrolled, here anonymously personified by the observant eye or ear.⁴) In this guise the subject acts as a function or position within an authorized external discourse; the subject is also represented “for” the Other, performs “for” the Other. Schubert’s alternative subjectivities, however, often find ways of speaking or acting “for” themselves in one or more of the senses invoked here. They may divert musical form or structure into an unorthodox channel. They may affirm themselves by a momentary, often climactic change in the behavior of the singing voice. They may implant, within a normative discourse – generic, musical, or social – traces and fragments of a counterdiscourse. In a few cases, they may even absorb a whole song into such an internal, unauthorized, counterdiscourse. It must be added, though, that much depends here on performance, and much on the listener’s readiness to both hear and tolerate deviation without seeking to explain it away.

The first of six chapters, “Interpretive dramaturgy and social drama,” serves as an extended introduction. It argues that the Schubert Lied is designed to foreground the agency of three distinct but sometimes overlapping subjectivities, those of the composer, the poetic speaker, and the performer. The result is to constitute song as a

4 Jacques Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” and “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 30–113 (esp. 61–75) and 292–325. As an antidote to Lacan’s notoriously cryptic texts, see the essays in *Interpreting Lacan*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), esp. William J. Richardson, “Lacan and the Subject of Psychoanalysis,” 51–74, and Edward S. Casey and J. Melvin Woody, “Hegel, Heidegger, Lacan: The Dialectic of Desire,” 75–112. An excellent general introduction is Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

kind of theater of subjectivity which can register and help advance or retard the sociocultural processes of subject formation so in ferment during Schubert's lifetime. The first part of the chapter offers a new model of text–music relations in the Schubertian and post-Schubertian art song; the model is meant to be equally sensitive to the roles of composition and performance in projecting poetic and social meaning by musical means. The second part of the chapter concentrates intensively on a single song, the Goethe setting “Erster Verlust,” to illustrate the workings of the model as Schubert deploys it.

Chapter 2, “Undisciplined song: scorings of the subject,” expands and complicates the model of chapter 1. It argues that the dynamic of the modern subject is spurred by the problem posed when, over the course of the eighteenth century, the location of the “self” changes from the nexus of social relations to a private interiority. This interiorization develops alongside social mechanisms, the norm prominent among them, that seek to regulate subjectivity; the further the subject migrates from the external scene of social relations, the more urgent the need for a regulation that seems to arise from within. Schubert's songs explore the possibility of refusing such regulation, not by rebelling against it, but by being impervious to it.

Many of the songs proceed by “marking” normative types of musical or poetic discourse – perhaps only here or there – with signifiers that such discourse cannot fully assimilate or recuperate. The effect of this marking is not to shut normative discourse down, but to decenter its claims of social and symbolic authority, to inscribe it with intimations of a different psychosocial order than the one for which it speaks. Schubert's use of this strategy is explored across the spectrum of some eighteen songs; the selections create an emphasis on the relationship between subjectivity and sexuality in areas ranging from eroticism (“Heimliches Lieben”) to mortality (“Der Tod und das Mädchen”) to the uncanny (“Der Doppelgänger”).

Chapter 3, “Mermaid fancies: Schubert's trout and the ‘wish to be woman,’” focuses on one of Schubert's richest explorations of an alternative subjectivity, as pursued both in a song, “Die Forelle” [The Trout], and an instrumental work, the set of variations on that song to which the “Trout” Quintet owes its nickname.

Recent critical studies have suggested that the representation of women by nineteenth-century male painters and writers sometimes reflects what Isabelle de Courtivron calls the wish to be woman.⁵ The underlying aim of this wish is to escape the aggressiveness, Oedipal rivalry, and emotional detachment central to masculine identity as it is normatively constructed for middle-class men. The mechanism of the wish is to fantasize feminine images for masculine identification, or in other words to figure femininity as an alternative mode of masculinity. Both “Die Forelle” and the quintet movement based on it do something very like this.

5 Isabelle de Courtivron, “Weak Men and Fatal Women: The Sand Image,” in *Homosexuality and French Literature: Cultural Contexts, Critical Texts*, ed. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 210–27; Thais Morgan, “Male Lesbian Bodies: The Construction of Alternative Masculinities in Courbet, Baudelaire, and Swinburne,” *Genders* 15 (1992), 37–57.

The song turns on the recognition that its fish story is an allegory of seduction and male rivalry centered on the feminine image of the trout; the quintet movement turns on a process of “decomposition” in which elements drawn from the song are deployed to reinvolve, but also to rewrite, this scenario. In both pieces the guiding genius of the music turns out to be the figurative fish, which attacks and revalues an image-repertoire of women, water, mermaids, nixies, undines, and sirens that flourished as a discourse of sexual difference throughout the nineteenth century.

Chapter 4, “The Ganymede complex,” turns to the most controversial of Schubert’s alternative subjectivities, the homosexual one. The chapter, which largely consists of a close study of the song “Ganymed” and cognate texts, has an unimpeachable homoerotic topic. Its homosexual element, however, does not depend on Schubert’s own sexuality, which remains uncertain (as it may have been to Schubert himself), and which, whatever his sexual behavior, could not have been “homosexual” in the modern sense. Nonetheless, Schubert’s adumbration of male–male desire in this song partly coincides with the representational strategies that accompany the late nineteenth-century development of modern homosexual identity, a development that, as Richard Dellamora has argued, is itself at one level a practice of resistance to the dominant norms of masculinity.⁶ The song from this perspective opens onto the larger project that Schubert shares with many others in the century, that of making homosexual desire a main venue for constructing the modern subject.

Chapter 5 focuses on the most extreme instance in Schubert of the affirmation of a “damaged” virility, the song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin*. Both this cycle and its successor, *Winterreise*, concern the equation between desire, desirability, and discursive power. Both cycles focus on young men who, not being desirable enough, can gratify neither their own nor their beloved’s desire. Both cycles stage an attempt to construct discursive authority for oneself – or, more exactly, to construct a self with discursive authority – under such conditions.

The protagonist of *Die schöne Müllerin* makes this attempt by a startling means. He affirms himself as a masochistic subject, in terms that seem to prefigure the classical articulation of masochism in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s novel of 1870, *Venus in Furs*. Following the psychoanalytic model of masochistic subjectivity developed by Gilles Deleuze, Schubert’s miller-lad can be described as a subject who fails to enter the regime of the norm, or Lacan’s symbolic order, but whose failure becomes the source of a contrarian order that reverses the normative logic of pain and pleasure. The song cycle traces out this process both musically and narratively.

Chapter 6, “Revenants: masculine thresholds in Schubert, James, and Freud,” broadens and deepens the affinities between Schubert’s experiments in subjectivity and other, later forms of modernist enterprise. At the same time, like the epilogue to

6 Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

my *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*,⁷ the chapter seeks to open new avenues of critical writing, expanding the acceptable discursive boundaries of scholarship to foreground the inescapable role of subjectivity in the formation of claims to knowledge. Returning, appropriately enough, to “Der Doppelgänger,” and conjoining it with the E♭ major Piano Trio, in which the main theme of the slow movement returns several times in the finale, the chapter explores compulsive repetition as a vehicle in which a leading imperative of “damaged” masculinity plays itself out. This is the mandate – both injunction and authorization – to construct a masculine subjectivity in the absence of a feminine other or object, retaining discursive authority but *without* resorting to the masochism of *Die schöne Müllerin*. Compulsive repetition thus becomes a vehicle by which “damaged” masculinity may be affirmed rather than regretted.

My approach throughout these chapters will raise two points of method that may invite debate, and so need to be spelled out here. First, because my focus is on the songs as examples of cultural practice, not as autonomous artworks, musical analysis will serve here as a means, not an end. My approach regards musical technique, not as the ground of musical meaning, but as grounded in it; technical observations, whether of structure, texture, design, or expressivity, concern themselves only with those features that articulate the meanings under scrutiny. There is no a priori assumption that such observations need to base themselves on a comprehensive or unified analytical account, which is not to deny that this need may arise in certain contexts. There is no a priori hierarchy of technical features; the expectation, rather, is that the features of primary importance to meaning will change from piece to piece, and even from one interpretation of a piece to another. Finally, although technique is firmly understood here as the indispensable medium of musical meaning, there is no a priori assumption that every technical feature of a work is equally active, or active at all, in the formation of its meaning. It is important to stress that these positions imply no antagonism at all to analysis, but only a conviction that analysis is most valuable when it forms a strand within a larger, more comprehensive fabric of thought.

Second, although my argument about Schubert’s exploration of errant subjectivities can invoke history as a general context and evidential resource, it can proceed in detail only by assuming that the interpretation of individual (but representative) songs has evidential value. For this reason, the argument cannot be proven in an empirical sense. All interpretation can do is show what *may* be true. All my argument can do is show what we can hear if we listen from the perspective of a certain understanding of social and cultural history. What we *can* hear, not what we must: for no interpretation, however strong, can rule out the possibility of others, sometimes

⁷ Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 227–42.

including its own opposite. These limitations, however, should be regarded as indicating, not the defect of the knowledge proposed here, but its character. The first point acknowledges that interpretation comes in where the facts (however the “facts” are posited) run out. (The facts, of course, may change – as a result of interpretation, among other things.) Interpretation is part of a general process of social exchange in which meaning is continually constructed and negotiated, but never quite settled; when we respond to a song, even just by humming the tune, we involve ourselves in that always unfinished process. Interpretation, like psychoanalysis, is the impossible profession. The second point recognizes that the recurrent possibility of a certain kind of interpretation is itself a kind of fact, a mode of evidence. If, in this case, the subjects in Schubert’s songs can be, may be, plausibly heard as counternormative, we have good reason to think that they should be. Interpretation, like politics, is the art of the possible.

1

INTERPRETIVE DRAMATURGY AND SOCIAL DRAMA: SCHUBERT'S "ERSTER VERLUST"

VOICING INTERPRETATION

Schubert revolutionized song: on that, everyone agrees. But how did he do it? For Carl Dahlhaus, Schubert "ushered in a new era" by devising ways to combine strophic and through-composed forms, collapsing what had formerly been a sharp distinction between them. Mixed forms reject the "servility" demanded of the composer by strophic song, in which the music frames a recitation of the poet's sentiments and the singer rather than the composer provides variety of expression. Even more than the incoherence of unrestricted through-composition, strophic servility hampers the "pretensions to the status of a work of art" that Schubert sought for the Lied. A work requires an author, and, for Dahlhaus and many others, the enlarged role of the composer in the Schubert Lied gives central value to an authorial "lyric ego" housed in the music.¹

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this musical subject is automatically normative, synthesizing, or autonomous. Schubert's mixed forms enhance rather than negate the singer's expressive role, which now includes both the possibility of varying the realization of strophic passages and the necessity of integrating these into a larger whole. The singer thus enters into an expressive dialogue with the authorial subject, whose province is the design of that whole. At the same time, the active presence of the authorial subject emphasizes the authorial role, which here involves the creative understanding of yet another author, namely the poet. Hence Schubert's contemporaries tend to treat his songs as forms of discovery: not only as restatements of poetic sentiments, but also as revelations of inner meaning.² The Schubert Lied, therefore, does not so much present itself as the work of a single musical subject than as a staged collaboration among the composer, the poet, and

This chapter originated in a paper delivered at the Aston Magna Academy at Rutgers University in June 1993. The presentation was accompanied by multiple performances of "Erster Verlust" (by Thomas Gregg, tenor, Maureen Balke, soprano, and Michael Zenge, piano) which realized the interpretive possibilities that the paper envisions.

1 Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 98–9, 105. The most influential recent exposition of the lyrical ego is Edward T. Cone's *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

2 For a fuller discussion of this topic, see chapter 4, below, 101–04.

the singer, none of whom has automatic priority in the mixture. The authorial “lyric ego” stands between the poet and the singer and must negotiate, audibly, with both. The possibility of thus representing multiple subjectivities in action may be part of what attracted Schubert to the Lied. It may have encouraged him to give the piano, too, the status of a fully participatory subject, and to shape even simple strophic songs in implicitly dialogical terms. Above all, however, it is what enabled him to utilize the Lied as a vehicle for exploring the great transformations of subjectivity characteristic of his era.

The purpose of this chapter is to develop the foregoing observations, first by proposing a model of the Lied equally sensitive to performance, composition, and the discovery of meaning, and second by providing a case study showing how a single Schubert Lied participates in one of its era’s major dramas of subjectivity. (Here and hereafter, the term “Lied” refers specifically to the genre as transformed by Schubert, endowed with “the status of a work of art.”) The chapter to follow will extend the model and position a series of Lieder along a broader spectrum of subjectivities.

By common agreement, the Lied expresses in music the affective meaning of its text. Whereas earlier vocal music concentrates on expressing emotion *per se*, the Lied expresses the interrelations of emotion with the cognitive values of mood, attitude, and sentiment. The Lied, we might say, expresses the world-views of feeling. Most of the literature on this topic agrees with Dahlhaus that the Lied since Schubert grounds this expressivity in compositional design. The design represents what is immutable in the musical passage from poetry to performance. It may not be varied in the course of being realized, and it transcends all of its realizations, even as it becomes manifest only by means of them. As I have just suggested, however, Schubert’s Lieder characteristically affirm the expressive value of compositional design without necessarily giving it unqualified priority. The poet’s contribution may not be entirely subsumed in the work of the composer, who projects in music a lyric ego that must generally both reproduce and transform that of the poet, must be both *döppelgänger* and descendant. The composer’s contribution, similarly, may depend on that of the singer to ratify the character of the music’s lyric ego or even to supply its identity.

In sum, the trajectory from text to music to performance in the Lied is always both lyric and dramatic, both synthesizing and dynamic. It is fair to say that each term in this series “expresses” its predecessor(s), but only if “expression” is understood to mean more than an adequate, or even a revelatory, replication in one medium of what has been “said” in another. The Lied, as part of its generic definition, presents itself as a reaction to a poem of independent interest. This is a formal, not necessarily a causal, relation. The song endows itself with expressive truth by representing the text as a source of latent, veiled, or unsuspected meaning that only the song can reveal. To that end, the song can not only replicate but also extend, narrow, appropriate, subvert, debase, exalt, eroticize, lyricize, dramatize, fragment, unify, analyze, sublimate, or sublate the text, and so on. With Lieder that set texts of serious