

Schubert's Self-Elegies

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Schubert's Later Music and the Elegiac Tradition

The later music of Franz Schubert confers a remarkable blend of impact and intimacy.¹ Some masterpieces, such as *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, capture striking images of despair and loneliness.² Others, such as the String Quartet in A minor, the Piano Trio in E_b major and the String Quintet in C major, carry stirring impressions of struggle culminated by success.³ Yet all captivate us with sensitivity and sincerity, the products of considerable self-investment.

Compelling also are Schubert's Impromptu in G_b major (Op. 90, No. 3; D. 899; 1827) and the Andante sostenuto from his last piano sonata in B_b major (Op. posth., D. 960; 1828). However, these compositions appear to communicate a very different intention: *self-elegy*.⁴ Each conveys grief, conflict and reconciliation

¹ I am grateful to Susan Youens, whose conversations during the Thirteenth International Conference on Nineteenth-Century Music at Durham University in 2004 stimulated the development of this study and led to her invitation to include it within this special Schubert-centred issue of *Nineteenth Century Music Review*. I also am indebted to Robert Hatten, whose observations enabled better characterization of Schubert's novel expressive genre, the musical self-elegy. Finally, I extend thanks to my anonymous readers, who reaffirmed the instrumental value of close structural analysis in the service of serious musicological inquiry.

² Susan Youens examines *Die schöne Müllerin* (D. 795; 1823) and *Winterreise* (D. 911; 1827) in *Franz Schubert: Die schöne Müllerin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), *Schubert, Müller, and Die schöne Müllerin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Franz Schubert's Winterreise* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³ Schubert's String Quartet in A minor (Op. 29; D. 804; 1824), Piano Trio in E_b major (Op. 100; D. 929; 1827) and String Quintet in C major (Op. post. 163; D. 956; 1828) feature comprehensive contextual processes that unfold over the course of their four-movement spans and sustain engaging dramatic conflicts that are convincingly resolved near the ends of their finales. See James William Sobaskie, 'Tonal Implication and the Gestural Dialectic in Schubert's A Minor Quartet', in *Schubert the Progressive: History, Performance Practice, Analysis*, ed. Brian Newbould (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003): 53–80; James William Sobaskie, 'A Balance Struck: Gesture, Form, and Drama in Schubert's E_b Major Piano Trio', in *Le Style instrumental de Schubert: sources, analyse, évolution*, ed. Xavier Hascher (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2007): 117–48; and James William Sobaskie, 'The "Problem" of Schubert's String Quintet', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 2/1 (2005): 57–92, respectively.

⁴ *Self-elegy* refers to a mourning of one's own anticipated death. Forming a subgenre within the elegiac tradition of poetry, self-elegies became more common during the mid-nineteenth century, and especially during the twentieth century. Those of William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) are among the best known. However, in his book *Yeats and the Poetry of Death: Elegy, Self-Elegy, and the Sublime* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 5/2 (2008): 71–105. Copyright © Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

through the simulated pursuit of a musical problem not surmounted until near its end.⁵ And each confesses Schubert's interiority through subtle, self-referential details.⁶ Together, they confide that Schubert aspired to some form of spiritual transcendence in his final year. To begin, let us consider poetic precedents.

Elegies are lyrical lamentations that may rue the loss of loved ones, friends, or the famous.⁷ Others deplore more general woes, like a social calamity, the fate of humanity, or simply death itself.⁸ Predominantly written in the first person,

Jahan Ramazani observes: 'Don't all elegists, like Milton, Gray, and Shelley, "turn" to lament their own destined urns? ... Yeats does not invent the self-elegy – witness the epigrammatic self-epitaphs of Raleigh, Coleridge, and Swift, the satiric "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," and the death poems of Keats, Dickinson, Whitman, and Christina Rossetti' (136). It is neither difficult nor unreasonable to imagine that Schubert, aware of the implications of his syphilis, may have felt the impulse of self-mourning.

⁵ Arnold Schoenberg's notion of *musical problem* offers a valuable metaphor for interpreting certain contextual processes in music. Schoenberg believed that the essential motivic impulse of a composition – what drove it forward and determined its formal structure – emanated from a relatively brief gesture or theme, stated near the start of the piece, that he referred to as a *basic shape* or *Grundgestalt*. A distinctive and memorable musical idea, the basic shape embodied a purely musical kind of imbalance Schoenberg called a 'problem': 'Every succession of tones produces unrest, conflict, problems ... Every musical form can be considered as an attempt to treat this unrest either by halting or limiting it, or by solving the problem ... A theme solves the problem by carrying out its consequences.' Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (New York: Faber, 1967): 102. For more, see: Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea, and the Logic, Art, and Technique of its Presentation*, ed. Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995): 226–7 and 395–6. While Schoenberg's notion of musical problem may seem most appropriate for illuminating 'tonal' problems within the context of his harmonic theories, Schoenberg's own writings suggest he believed musical problems could assume many forms. For analyses of other kinds of musical problems, see James William Sobaskie, 'The Problem of Schubert's String Quintet', and James William Sobaskie, 'Contextual Drama in Bach', in *Music Theory Online* 12/3 (2006), <http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.06.12.3/toc.12.3.html>.

⁶ Several of Schubert's instrumental works bear titles referring to death, including an early nonet for winds, *Eine Kleine Trauermusik* (D. 79; 1813), the *Trauerwalzer* (D. 365; 1821) for piano solo, a *Trauermarsch* (D. 819; 1824) and a *Grande marche funèbre* (D. 859; 1825) for piano duet. However, none of these is elegiac or autobiographical, like the compositions under consideration here. Indeed, the title *Trauerwalzer* came from Schubert's publisher Diabelli; see Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography* (London: Dent, 1946): 88–9 and 200. Of course, Schubert's String Quartet in D minor (D. 810; 1824), popularly known as the 'Death and the Maiden' quartet for its slow movement, which consists of five variations on the melody of his lied, *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (D. 531; 1817), must be the most famous of Schubert's instrumental works associated with mortality.

⁷ The term *elegy* comes from the ancient Greek word *elegos*, which initially meant 'song', and later denoted a 'song of mourning'. Often such laments would be accompanied by the sound of a pipe, as well as the lyre, and thus were musico-poetic utterances.

⁸ For more on the elegiac tradition, see: Martin West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974); Georg Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1969); Paul Allen Miller, *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Celeste Marguerite Schenck, *Mourning and Panegyric* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1988); Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Classical German Elegy 1795–1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Claire Raymond, *The Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing from Mary Shelley to Sylvia Plath* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

though occasionally in the third, elegies are formal, public expressions of sorrow for a regrettable event. Yet they often reveal much about the elegist and his relationship with the elegized. Arising in Classical antiquity, the genre revived during the Enlightenment and flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Romantic and Modern aesthetics encouraged exploration of darker themes.⁹ Although style and substance varies considerably, a three-part scheme frequently appears in this plaintive poetry.

Elegies typically begin with an acknowledgement of death, an invocation of the deceased, and a voicing of sorrow, usually uttered in relatively dispassionate terms. Later, an outpouring of emotion often occurs, perhaps with railing against the loss and the injustice that permitted it, or with reification and exaltation of the deceased. Finally, an expression of acquiescence eventually emerges, leading to solace and amelioration. While this tripartite arc parallels the familiar dramatic design of exposition, conflict and resolution, it also reflects the grieving process by incorporating elements of isolation, yearning, anger, denial, despair and acceptance.¹⁰

Abnegation distinguishes many elegies.¹¹ A poet, after grieving his loss and revisiting its circumstances, may simulate recognition and admission of the inevitable, disabusing himself and his readers of the notion that death is a barrier to life. In verse, death is recast, redefined, becoming a door to the beyond through which the deceased has passed. This breakthrough, a transcendent moment whose effect is akin to the perceptual reorganization that occurs when solving a problem or grasping a paradox, enables rationalization and permits progress beyond the tragic event. Such a moment may come as a surprising realization or a serene revelation, but, either way, it represents a positive turning point. Thus,

⁹ The Greek idylls of Theocritus (3rd century BC) include several elegies, as do the Latin eclogues of Virgil (1st century BC), but other Roman poets, including Ovid, Catullus, Tibullus and Propertius, are more closely associated with the poetic form. Reflecting their influence are Edmund Spenser's *Astrophel* (1595), John Milton's *Lycidas* (1638) and Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751). *To Thyrsa: And Thou Art Dead* (1812) by George Gordon, Lord Byron, and *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats* (1821), by Percy Bysshe Shelley, represent later examples. While Schubert's acquaintance with this Classical and English literature may have been limited, even in translation, he may have been acquainted with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Römische Elegien* (1795), *Euphrosyne* (1798) and *Marienbader Elegie* (1823), and is likely to have known elegies written by Ludwig Höltz, Friedrich Matthisson, Friedrich Rückert, Friedrich Schiller and Wilhelm Schlegel, whose poetry he often set.

¹⁰ The literature on grief has expanded considerably since the appearance of *On Death and Dying* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), by Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, in which the psychiatrist proposed that human bereavement features five sequential and sometimes overlapping stages, including *denial*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depression* and *acceptance*. More recently, Dr John Bowlby identified four phases of the grieving process, including *shock and numbness*, *yearning and searching*, *disorganization and despair*, and then *reorganization*, states that could be experienced non-sequentially and sometimes simultaneously; see John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, Vol. 3: *Loss: Sadness and Depression* (London: Hogarth Press, 1980).

¹¹ *Abnegation* denotes the self-willed resignation to and acceptance of an irremediably negative situation that is not rectified but risen above. Robert Hatten explores this concept in *Musical Meaning in Beethoven* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994): 59–63 and 281–7, and in *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004): 142–4.

elegies can offer both catharsis and consolation, comforting the poet as well as anyone sympathetic to his sorrow.

Schubert's Impromptu in G_♭ major and the Andante sostenuto offer powerful yet poignant messages of mourning. Neither work is a strict imitation of the literary form or a through-composed tonal analogue. Instead, both are musical interpretations of the elegiac tradition that achieve expressive effects similar to those of their poetic predecessors. As we will see, they do so by means of suggestive signals at several levels.¹²

The Impromptu in G_♭ major

Schubert may have completed the four Impromptus of his Op. 90 (D. 899) in the autumn of 1827. Tobias Haslinger published no. 1, in C minor, and no. 2, in E_♭ major/minor, in Vienna on 10 December of that year.¹³ Impromptus nos 3 and 4, in G_♭ major and A_♭ minor/major, respectively, were to be printed in 1828, but, inexplicably, their publication was delayed until 1857, when Haslinger's son Karl finally issued them.¹⁴ Other than their common appellation, there is no evidence to suggest that Schubert saw the four Impromptus as an integral set meant for performance in series, like his dances.¹⁵ Instead, he probably considered them independent essays in the manner of his *Moments musicaux*, Op. 94, albeit on a broader scale and with greater dramatic implications.¹⁶ Indeed, the generic title

¹² The psychological approach taken within this analytical examination of Schubert's music is neither unprecedented nor uncommon. For an example close at hand, see "'In dunklen Träumen': Schubert's Heine-Lieder through the Psychological Prism", by Xavier Hascher, in this issue of *Nineteenth Century Music Review*.

¹³ Deutsch indicates that the eight Impromptus of Op. 90 (D. 899) and Op. 142 (D. 935) were finished in December of 1827, but because there are no references to them among Schubert's letters, we cannot be sure when they were begun. Haslinger published the first two of Op. 90 individually, each titled in French: *Impromptu pour le Pianoforte seul par Franç. Schubert*. See Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 587 and 691.

¹⁴ It is unclear why the G_♭ Impromptu did not appear with its companions in 1827. Perhaps the publisher was taken aback by its signature of six flats, which may have been seen to stifle sales among amateurs, as the first edition (1857) presented it transposed to G major; see Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 692. Similarly, Schubert's song *Iphigenia* (D. 573; 1817), whose manuscript originally opened with the six flats of G_♭ major and ended with the five flats of D_♭ major, was transposed when first published by Diabelli, who lowered it by a semitone so that it began in F major and closed in C major.

¹⁵ In a letter to the publisher Schott on 21 February 1828, Schubert offered what would become his Op. 142 (D. 935), declaring: 'I have the following compositions in stock ... Four Impromptus for pianoforte solo, which might be published separately or all four together'. Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 739. Since the Impromptus of Op. 90 initially appeared individually, it would seem that Schubert conceived their genre as self-contained.

¹⁶ The *Moments musicaux*, Op. 94, were published by the Viennese firm of Leidesdorf on 11 July 1828, but two of them had appeared earlier; no. 3 had been released in 1823 under the title *Air russe*, and no. 6 was published in 1824 under the subtitle *Les plaintes d'un Troubadour*. See *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 306, 388 and 791. These French subtitles suggest that Schubert's publishers believed that the *Moments musicaux* and the Impromptus would appeal to amateurs and professionals outside German-speaking lands.

seems deceptive, for it belies the serious and carefully structured nature of the G₁ major Impromptu, which is neither improvisatory nor inchoate.¹⁷

The pianoforte readily projects a singular persona, corresponding to the first-person stance of an elegy. And it would be most appropriate for representing Schubert's 'voice', since that instrument had become his primary performing medium.¹⁸ Example 1 (see p. 76) presents the opening of his Impromptu in G₁ major.

As this excerpt illustrates, Schubert's music is well suited to early nineteenth-century keyboards, whose smaller, registrally varying tone enabled emulation of the singing voice – a task more challenging on modern pianos without meticulous attention to articulation and pedalling.

Schubert's tonality facilitates such textural differentiation by favouring the black keys of the instrument, which, in turn, allows a higher hand position and a lighter touch. However, the signature of six flats may have had special significance for him. In a study of its use, Hugh MacDonald described G₁ major as an 'extreme key', one regarded as 'remote' by musicians of Schubert's era, a mode with Romantic overtones that must have appealed to the composer:

Whereas a Haydn string quartet would conceal its tonality from the listener, music for keyboard in six sharps or six flats would strike a contemporary listener at once as something distinctively odd, unpleasant even ... In Schubert a new key sensibility is at work. Unlike Haydn and Beethoven, his preference was for G₁, rather than F₁, a definite innovation. He composed only one piece in F₁, the song *Die Mondnacht*, D. 238, of 1815, while there are at least eight pieces in G₁, ... Many Schubert works touch on G₁, in passing, greatest among them the B₁ sonata, D. 960, which plunges into G₁, within twenty measures almost in conscious reference to Beethoven's op. 78 sonata [in F₁]. But the breakthrough toward a new concept of key was achieved with the third Impromptu of the set of four, D. 899, composed in 1827 ... Caressing the black notes in this Impromptu may not have been Schubert's prime object, but it undoubtedly belongs to the romantic sensibility that grew up around that key.¹⁹

Such an unwonted key might appear appropriate to a composer of a musical elegy in the early part of the nineteenth century, given the unusual nature of his expressive intent.²⁰ Perhaps, too, it may be taken as symbolic of the distancing

¹⁷ Deutsch observed that the first works titled 'Impromptu' were those of Johann Wozzischek (Jan Vorisek), published in 1822 by Mechetti of Vienna, and that the title was used again by Leopold Czapek for his Op. 6 of 1826, also published by Mechetti, concluding that the name did not originate with Schubert; see *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 692. Yet the French title may have beckoned to Schubert for its relative lack of pre-existing associations and its suggestion of fluctuating moods.

¹⁸ Schubert studied violin as a boy (see Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 12) and later played the viola when joining his father and brothers to play quartets (see Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 913), but was most often heard at the piano, either accompanying his lieder, performing his own chamber music, or playing his solo works.

¹⁹ Hugh MacDonald, [Treble clef, 9/8 metre, G₁, Major Key Signature], *Nineteenth-Century Music* 11/3 (1988): 223–5.

²⁰ In his influential treatise, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (1784), Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart (1738–91) described the key of G₁ major thusly: 'Triumph over difficulty, free sigh of relief uttered when hurdles are surmounted; echo of a soul which has fiercely struggled and finally conquered lies in all uses of this key.' This translation comes from Rita Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 2nd edn (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 117. Steblin

Ex. 1 Schubert, Impromptu in G_b major, Op. 90, No. 3, bars 1–8

Andante

death brings.²¹ In any event, Schubert's Impromptu remains the first truly distinguished work in G_b major within the Romantic canon, pre-dating the appearance of Chopin's 'Black Key' *Etude*, Op. 10, no. 5, by five years. And if it

concludes: 'It is evident that by the 1830s a tradition of key characteristics ... influenced to a great extent by Schubart, had become well established. Writers like Schilling and Hand, who believed that these traits were inherent in the keys, were no longer concerned with creating new subjective descriptions but rather with clarifying and illustrating earlier ones.' See Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics*, 184. As an example, Steblin cites Gustav Schilling's account of F_# major and G_b major in his *Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* (1835–36), paraphrasing Schilling thusly: 'Schubart's "triumph over difficulty" is used to describe each key, but in F_#, according to Schilling, the soul seizes its joy violently, while in G_b the soul is not yet sure of its goal, but anxiously peers across at the newly opened realm of joy.' See Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics*, 184.

²¹ Beethoven used the signature of seven flats in the third movement of his piano sonata, Op. 26 (1801), marked *Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe*, which begins in A_b minor and ends in A_b major. Seven flats also appear within Schubert's posthumously published piano piece, D. 946, no. 2, distinguishing a section set in the minor subdominant of the framing key of E_b major. Like the G_b major Impromptu, each of these compositions also aspires toward exceptional expression. As we will see, the signature of seven sharps plays a crucial role in a movement of Schubert's last piano sonata.

does represent an instance of musical self-elegy, certainly it must be among the very first.

With its impression of remove, G₁ major also may represent a self-referential choice. Surely in the professional realm, with no official position, no publicly successful operas or symphonies, and no reputation as a piano virtuoso, Schubert must have felt isolated. Yet in the personal domain, plagued by an incurable malady that prevented permanent attachment and intimate affection, Schubert must have felt even more alone. In lines written to Leopard Kupelweiser on 31 March 1824, the composer's desolation is profound:

In a word, I feel myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and who in sheer despair over this ever makes things worse and worse, instead of better; imagine a man, I say, whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom the felicity of love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain, at best, whom enthusiasm (at least of the stimulating kind) for all things beautiful threatens to forsake, and I ask you, is he not a miserable, unhappy being? – 'My peace is gone, my heart is sore, I shall find it never and nevermore,' I may well sing every day now, for each night, on retiring to bed, I hope I may not wake again, and each morning but recalls yesterday's grief.²²

Depressing to read and to contemplate, Schubert's letter portrays a despondent soul, without comfort or hope. If the composer, finally having come to grips with what he thought to be his fate, were to choose a key for music that nobly mourned his own end, then the oft-shunned key of G₁ might well seem fitting.

Schubert's choice of Andante for the tempo of his Impromptu may not appear all that extraordinary, but his choice of metre certainly is significant. Notated in a most exceptional time signature, $\phi\phi$, Schubert's composition employs the minim as its primary duration, corresponding to its relatively slow pulse.²³ With four differentiated beats to the bar, as well as undulating sextuplet figuration and two-bar hypermeasures, the music creates an effect of almost timeless breadth.²⁴ While the uncommon key and unconventional time signature may not be apparent to most listeners, the visual impact of these notational rarities may have been meant for the pianist, intended to elicit the elevated state of mind

²² Deutsch, *Schubert, A Documentary Biography*, 339. The quote, 'My peace is gone, my heart is sore, I shall find it nevermore' (*Meine Ruh' ist hin, Mein Herz ist schwer, Ich finde sie nimmer, Und nimmermehr*) is a refrain from Goethe's *Faust*, Part I, lines 3136–9, where it is repeated by Gretchen (Marguerite) alone in her room at her spinning wheel, that was set by Schubert a decade earlier in *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (D. 118; 1814).

²³ In his study on the use of G₁ major in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hugh MacDonald noted that the increased use of 'extreme' keys corresponded to an increase in the use of atypical time signatures, and added: 'Schubert's adoption of the style was characteristically fresh ... Of the four Impromptus, D. 899, the first is marked *c*, yet as much as it is in $\frac{3}{8}$; the second is marked $\frac{3}{4}$ yet is almost pure $\frac{3}{8}$ throughout; the third is marked ϕ but is in fact $\frac{12}{8}$ or perhaps $\frac{2}{4}$. Here, intertwined, bloom both G₁ and $\frac{12}{8}$, with an aroma that intoxicated so many composers of Romantic piano music.' Hugh MacDonald, [Treble clef, 9/8 metre, G₁ Major Key Signature], 255.

²⁴ Familiar precedents with similar effects include the *Pifa* from Handel's *Messiah* (in $\frac{12}{8}$), the second movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 21, K. 467 (in *c* with continuous triplets) and the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 27, no. 2 (in ϕ with continuous triplets). See Robert Hatten, 'Beethoven's Italian Trope: Modes of Stylistic Appropriation', *Beethoven Forum* 13/1 (2006): 1–27, for more on this rhythmic phenomenon.

essential to a sublime performance.²⁵ And the atypical nature of each may be taken as reflective of Schubert's self-view.

Several general cues establish the Impromptu's 'poetic' character – most obviously, its texture. From first bar to last, a long-breathed, lyrical melody, literally a song without words, commands our rapt attention, with no rests or *Luftpausen* and few full lifts to relieve its fervour, becoming a sustained utterance of great eloquence that releases us only at its last note. Ranging from B₃ to G₅, roughly equivalent to the soprano register Schubert must have had when as a boy he sang in Salieri's choir, the long line is supremely vocal in character, featuring mostly steps and skips with the occasional dramatic leap, animated by relatively simple, yet noble and articulate rhythms.²⁶ Only during certain spans, when long-held repeated tones serve interludial purposes (bars 35–37, 51–53, 74–75 and 78–80), does one sense any retreat of the Impromptu's simulated vocal persona. Continuous arpeggiation accompanies the strain, recalling the sound of the harp, if not eliciting an image of the lyre itself. With rolling sextuplets starting an octave below the notes of the lyrical line and rarely coinciding with them, plus a deep, sonorous bass, the harmonic accompaniment both highlights and colours, serving as a most effective aural foil. Together, melody and harmony reveal that the vocal nature and ancient tradition of the metrical art informed Schubert's Impromptu.

The opening passage of Schubert's Impromptu in G, major, bars 1–24, also demonstrates the influence of poetry through its phrase structure. As Ex. 1 shows, the familiar four-bar phrase paradigm emerges immediately, expressed twice in succession at the start. Expectations are manipulated by the following eight-bar phrase, composed of three concatenated segments of two, two and four bars respectively, which defers the satisfaction of a cadence until bar 16. Example 2, which continues where Ex. 1 left off, illustrates this.

The music of bars 9–16 recurs in bars 17–24 (not shown) with registral and ornamental variations that increase intensity as the opening span comes to a close. In its metricality, founded on sets of four bars, the initial section of the Impromptu subtly suggests a stanza of six lines – a sizaïn – organized into three couplets, each concluded by a full stop (corresponding to the authentic cadences of bars 8, 16 and 24). The first of these would seem to be split by a comma (corresponding to the half-cadence of bar 4), while the others appear enjambed. An inconspicuous feature, fully perceived only after the section is over, the Impromptu's phrase structure here quietly invokes an impression of poetry through its patterning and punctuation.

However, expectations thus set are soon dashed by an outburst. As Ex. 3 (see p. 80) illustrates, two three-bar phrases, both delineated by half-cadences, unfold next, violently disrupting previously established regularity and relative calm. The first of these phrases may be more striking, owing to the bass's *forzandi* of bars 25 and 26, but the second slacks little, intensifying the content of the first with melodic variation and the bass trill in bar 29. Together they introduce a new, contrasting span of the Impromptu. Distinguished from the opening passage by shifting dynamics, increased accentuation, registral extremes, and briefer, more

²⁵ Had it been notated in ϵ , with alternating downbeats instead of one downbeat in every four, the Impromptu would not sound nearly as broad as it does.

²⁶ In the system of pitch identification employed in this article, 'middle C' is C₄.

Ex. 2 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat major, bars 9–16

angular melodic gestures, the phrases of Ex. 3 initiate the second section of a ternary form.²⁷

Sustaining the tumult of this music, indeed surpassing it in vehemence, are bars 40–48 (Ex. 4). Accented passing tones and *appoggiaturas* in the upper voice, countered by an even more wide-ranging and angular bass, intensify the contrast offered by the central section of the Impromptu. Initially in E \flat minor (which was presaged by the second sonority of the piece in bar 2), the central span of the Impromptu ends not in that relative minor key, but in the chromatic submediant key of E \flat major, before tonic G \flat returns at the start of the reprise.

Example 5 (see p. 82) offers a comprehensive view of the Impromptu's formal design, coordinated with a summary of its harmonic structure.²⁸ As this

²⁷ Perhaps the best-known exemplar of its genre, Gabriel Fauré's *Elegie*, Op. 24 (1880), for cello and piano (arranged for cello and orchestra in 1901), also exhibits ternary form.

²⁸ In Ex. 5, upper-case letters identify the Impromptu's primary parts, lower-case letters indicate main sections subsumed by primary parts, and lower-case letters with numbers isolate subsections subsumed by main sections, whose divisions are marked by cadences. Prime and double-prime symbols individuate notable variations. Stemmed and beamed minims, accompanied by Roman numerals, represent tonic G \flat and the cadential dominant corresponding to that of the fundamental structure. Crotchets and Roman numerals symbolize cadentially confirmed secondary tonalities (C \flat major and E \flat major), as well as the abruptly assumed key at the start of the centre section (E \flat minor).

Ex. 3 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat , major, bars 25–30

diagram illustrates, the middle of the Impromptu features considerably more sectionalisation, as well as more tonal flux.

In the manner of a poetic elegy, the middle section of Schubert's Impromptu owns a restive turbulence evocative of a search for an elusive solution to an intolerable situation. Yet its disquiet is not quelled by the resumption of the tonic harmony in bar 55, whose immediately preceding dominant harmony – so brief and in first inversion – robs that return of any aura of achievement. Nor does the reprise of the Impromptu's calmer opening music offer much of a respite. Consequently, the ultimate reassertion of the tonic harmony at the very end of the composition becomes all the more imperative, as well as poignant.

Repetition marks many elegies, suggesting struggle with the acceptance of loss and resistance to relinquish that which remains dear. Within Schubert's Impromptu in G \flat , the rhetorical strategy of intensified restatement holds sway, operating at multiple levels throughout the work. We perceive this 'rule of twos' immediately in the antecedent/consequent relation of the opening period, shown above in Ex. 1, where the second phrase (bars 5–8) not only fulfills the promise of the first (bars 1–4), but also embellishes much of the earlier-heard material. Rising sequential replication follows in bars 9–12, as Ex. 2 illustrates, offering a slight sense of striving before a more gradual decline. And as noted earlier, bars 17–24 elaborate the content of bars 9–16 (see Ex. 2), while bars 28–30 elaborate that of bars 25–27 (see Ex. 3). Similarly, bars 44–47 vary bars 40–43 (see Ex. 4). Finally, bars 55–58 repeat the content of bars 1–4, while bars 59–62 vary that of bars 5–8. Example 5 summarizes these returns, which are rarely exact, and most

Finally, stemless noteheads and slurs sketch prolongational elements that support and sustain the effects of more significant structural elements. The analytical notation used in Ex. 5 draws upon the tonal theories and graphic analytical techniques of the Austrian music theorist Heinrich Schenker.

Ex. 4 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat major, bars 40–48

[F \flat , A \flat , C \flat]
E:m: N⁶ (E:M)

often intensified by more melodic motion, increased dissonance, dramatic leaps, and other types of variation. For the most part, however, these reiterations fail to convince because of their frequency, communicating increasing frustration.

Questioning also distinguishes elegies, corresponding to a grappling with the vagaries of fate. Within Schubert's Impromptu in G \flat , the effect of inquiry may be observed within its harmony. For example, the harmonic progressions of bars 9–10 (equivalent to IV–V $\frac{4}{3}$ –I in A \flat minor, repeated in bars 17–18 and 63–64) and bars 11–12 (equivalent to IV–I $\frac{6}{3}$ –V $\frac{4}{3}$ in C \flat major, repeated in bars 19–20 and 65–66), tonicize scale degrees ii and IV in the key of G \flat major.²⁹ Drawing attention

²⁹ Heinrich Schenker recognized the forward-facing character of the harmonic progressions in bars 9–12 of Schubert's Impromptu. Initially he described them as 'anticipations ... of the whole subsequent scale step'; see Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony*, ed. Oswald Jonas, trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, [1906] 1954): 304–5 and Ex. 275. In bars 9–12 of the Impromptu, the 'anticipated' scale steps are the ii and IV harmonies in G \flat major. Schenker characterized such anticipatory progressions as instances of 'harmonic inversion', noting how they 'created a tension of high artistic value'; see *Harmony*, 31–7. Later Schenker indicated they were 'auxiliary cadences' – spans generated via the hypothetical transference of forms of the fundamental

Ex. 5 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat major, formal design and tonal structure

A

B

A'

forward, leading *to* a point of stability rather than initiating *from* one, these spans elicit expectations and engender effects similar to those of verbal questions.³⁰

In addition, questioning may be perceived in the modulatory progress of the turbulent central section of the Impromptu. Example 5 illustrates that after the abrupt assertion of E \flat minor in bar 25, C \flat major is temporarily tonicized in bar 35. However, E \flat , inflected to the major, is retaken shortly thereafter by the cadence

structure to lower levels, which were understood to be abbreviated by the omission of the initial tonic bass, and in some instances also by the omission of a linear descent in the uppermost voice. See Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, [1935] 1979): 88–9 and Fig. 110, b2, for his discussion of auxiliary cadences, where Schenker's sketch of bars 9–12 and 17–24 is rendered in G major, evidently based on the transposed edition of the Impromptu first published by Haslinger in 1857.

³⁰ Forward-facing harmonic progressions such as these represent what I have called *precurse prolongations*; see James William Sobaskie, 'Tonal Implication and the Gestural Dialectic in Schubert's A Minor Quartet': 56–65; James William Sobaskie, 'The "Problem" of Schubert's String Quintet', 57–92; and especially James William Sobaskie, 'Precurse Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin', *Journal of the Society for Musicology in Ireland* 3 (2007–08): 25–61 (downloadable as a PDF at www.music.ucc.ie/jsmi/index.php/jsmi), which features a comprehensive exposition of the concept.

in bar 51. This regression to E_b after C_b may be interpreted to simulate the effect of reconsideration.

Beyond these general elegiac signals, and within the context they create, certain musical elements serve as tragic cues in Schubert's Impromptu. For instance, the many elongated neighbour prefixes – such as the A_b4 in bar 8 of Ex. 1, as well as the D_b5 of bar 10 and the F_b5 of bar 12 shown in Ex. 2 – play on our expectations, making us wait for their stepwise descending resolutions.³¹ Heralded by the similar dissonance of the accented passing tone G_b4 on the third beat of bar 3 (see Ex. 1), these *appoggiaturas* recall the poignant 'sigh' motif, whose expressive significance has been known since the Renaissance.

More telling is the rhythmic gesture introduced within the first two bars. Observable in Ex. 1, the top voice's durational sequence of $\circ \downarrow \downarrow \circ \circ$ quietly imparts a processional impression. Recurring exactly in bars 55–56, slightly varied in bars 5–6, 11–12, 19–20, 59–60, 65–66 and 70–71, and echoed at the close of the Impromptu in bars 84–86, the motif's solemn, deliberate effect is suffused throughout the work.³² Some observers will note that Schubert's rhythmic gesture recalls the pervasive motif $\downarrow \downarrow \downarrow \downarrow \downarrow$ of the *Allegretto* of Ludwig van Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, Op. 92, mvt II – surely a funeral march in every way but name. Indeed, in its first instance, Schubert's gesture even incorporates the corresponding *staccati* of Beethoven's motif on its second and third notes.

Those same observers also may note a similarity involving the *Marcia funebre* of Beethoven's Third Symphony, Op. 55, mvt. II, whose abrupt motions, growling bass, and minor mode are recalled by the central section of Schubert's Impromptu. Yet each work draws upon an older source for its gravity, the French *ouverture* style, whose dotted rhythms and downbeat-rushing gestures, as well as its triplets and trills, suggest seriousness of purpose. Of course, the middle of the Impromptu is no march, but an unsettling juxtaposition of the ceremonial and the chaotic, reflective more of a state of mind than representative of an actual event. As Ex. 3 reveals, the rising, rushing, deliberate dotted bass of bars 25–26 and 29–30 appears to elicit more florid melodic responses in the treble and tenor registers of bars 26–27 and 29–30, simulating a swell of internal tension that finds release in the subsequent multi-voiced response.

Finally, and perhaps most evocatively, Schubert's Impromptu incorporates effects of pealing. Example 6 (see p. 84), drawn from a quiet moment within the otherwise tempestuous centre section of the work, suggests the tolling of a bell by the relatively low, slow, quiet, repeated C_b4 tones in the treble staff of bars 35–37.

Accompanied by fitful, impulsive gestures in the bass, this interludial passage bears an uneasy calm that attracts attention to itself via the unusually diminished melodic motion of its upper voice and *ppp* dynamic level. Similar knells occur in bars 51–53, 74–75 and 78–80, subtly evoking funereal effects more vaguely sensed than consciously perceived, as well as an impression of absence, of a void. With the more general elegiac cues of the Impromptu's continuously lyrical texture, phrase and formal structures, use of repetition, and hints of questioning, as well as the more specific signals provided by its melodic neighbour prefixes,

³¹ At the surface level, these neighbour prefixes – sometimes referred to as *appoggiaturas* or incomplete neighbour tones – also represent precursive prolongations whose accented dissonance and contextual dependence imply their forthcoming stepwise resolutions.

³² A similar rhythm, expressed by the durational sequence of minim–crochet–crochet–minim–crochet–crochet distinguishes Schubert's lied *Der Tod und Das Mädchen* (D. 531; 1817), where it is associated with the persona of Death.

Ex. 6 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat major, bars 31–37

31

pp *decresc.* *pp*

[Fb, Ab, Cb]

E \flat m: N 6

33

[Fb, Ab, Cb]

C \flat M: IV

35

ppp *fz* *p* *pp*

[Fb, Abb, Cb] [Ab, Cb, Ebb, F]

C \flat M: iv C \flat M: Ger+ 6

distinctive rhythmic motif, and invocation of ceremonial style, these bell sounds contribute to an evocative context within which a unique musical process unfolds.

The comprehensive contextual process within Schubert's Impromptu in G \flat major proceeds from a musical idea that is both melodic and harmonic in nature, and appears in the form of a phrase at the start of the work. Most readily discerned by its bass component, which initially projects a descent in thirds, the idea expresses a gesture of motion away from tonic that eventually returns.³³ The Impromptu's contextual process involves the progressive variation of this melodic/harmonic impulse so as to simulate a search for a contextually satisfactory version whose content is anticipated by the unfolding musical fabric. Through the unique nature of the musical idea, as well as certain strategically placed details in the work, a specific harmony and bass emerge as a 'solution' to the 'problem' it poses, an essential element of its contextually satisfactory form. And through the unfolding of this musical process, Schubert's Impromptu communicates an impression of conflict, quest and discovery in tone that is similar to that of elegies who depict loss and its reconciliation through verse.

³³ Perhaps these descending thirds inspired the so-called 'death-thirds' of Johannes Brahms, including those in the Fourth Symphony, Op. 98, and in *O Tod, o Tod, wie bitter bist du*, the third of the *Vier ernste Gesänge*, Op. 121, no. 3; for more, see Kenneth Hull, 'Allusive Irony in Brahms's Fourth Symphony', in *Brahms Studies 2*, ed. David Brodbeck (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998): 135–68.

This process begins within the initial phrase of the Impromptu, the antecedent of its opening period. Bars 1–4, shown above in Ex. 1, introduce the work's essential musical idea. Example 7, shown below, reproduces its bass line with a harmonic analysis:

Ex. 7 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat major, analysis of bars 1–4

G \flat M: I vi ii⁶ V⁷ $\frac{4}{2}$ I⁶ vii⁶⁵/V V ,

Beginning on tonic G \flat 2, the bass first descends a minor third to E \flat 2, and then a major third to C \flat 2, before turning back toward the tonic via the dominant. Like a ball thrown vertically, the musical motion reaches a certain limit before being drawn back to its point of origin. The bass's accompanying chord progression is diatonic and conventional at first (I–vi–ii⁶), though a small amount of chromaticism (vii⁶⁵/V–V) enters at the end. The phrase's half-cadence, as well as its juxtaposition of diatonicism and chromaticism, conveys an effect of instability that seems to call for a more satisfactory restatement of the idea.

The consequent phrase of the Impromptu's opening period, also shown above in Ex. 1, presents a variation of the musical idea embodied by its antecedent. Simulating the effect of a 'second try' at expressing the original gesture of motion away from tonic, the consequent features more dynamic fluctuation and more elaborate harmonisation. Example 8 renders its bass and summarizes its accompanying harmonies:

Ex. 8 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat major, analysis of bars 5–8

G \flat M: I vi V⁷/vi IV ii V⁷ I

Descending thirds in the bass, G \flat 2–E \flat 2–C \flat 2, expressed on the downbeats of bars 5–7, re-emerge as the musical idea's foundation. Here they support the progression I–vi–IV. Chromaticism, in the form of the secondary dominants V⁴₃/vi and V/vi (the latter exceptionally resolved to IV, not vi), intensifies the gesture's impression. Ending on tonic, the consequent offers a degree of local closure, yet fails to fully resolve the implications and instability expressed by the opening phrase. Taken together, the first two phrases of the Impromptu may be heard to simulate the statement of a musical 'problem', plus an initial 'attempt' at resolution.

At the start of the central section of the Impromptu, it is not hard to hear the ascending thirds in the basses of the first two phrases as counterparts of the descending thirds in the opening section's initial phrases. The bass sequence E \flat 2–G \flat 2–B \flat 3 sounds in bars 25–26 and 28–29 (see Ex. 3), where it is expressed by dotted

minims and tied breves. Like their predecessors, these instances are composed of a minor third followed by a major third, and thus represent melodic inversions of the original bass line. While their durations and harmonic accompaniments differ from those of the falling thirds in bars 1–3 and 5–7, and here triplets connect the long tones, these ascending bass gestures may be understood as imaginative variants of the Impromptu's fundamental musical idea.

Similarly, the bass sequences A₂–C₃–D₃–F₃ and A₁–C₂–D₂–F₂, appearing in bars 40–41 and 44–45 of Ex. 4, may be heard as inverted versions of the original gesture, wherein the sequence of thirds is elongated by the addition of an internal step and thus expanded in extent. Suggestive of an ongoing search for a satisfactory response to the problem posed by the Impromptu's opening musical idea, these new transformations, along with those of bars 25–26 and 28–29, simulate solution-seeking.

A broad expression of the Impromptu's foundational gesture sounds within its first two sections, articulated by the work's principal tonal areas. As Ex. 9 clarifies, the first firmly established local keys following tonic G_b are those of E_b minor and C_b major:

Ex. 9 Schubert, Impromptu in G_b major, principal tonal areas of bars 1–54

G_bM: I vi IV VI

Corresponding to the bass and essential harmonies found within the second statement of the Impromptu's musical idea (see bars 5–7 of Ex. 1, as well as Ex. 8), the motion from G_b major through E_b minor (bar 25) to C_b major (bar 37) is thwarted from further motion away from tonic by a retreat to E_b (bar 51). Like its predecessors, this grand 'attempt' quietly sustains the 'search' for a contextually satisfactory version of the Impromptu's musical idea, but does not conclude it.

A repetition of bars 1–8 occurs in bars 55–62, as the formal sketch in Ex. 5 suggests, returning the first two statements of the Impromptu's fundamental musical idea in their original states. This simulates effects of review and reconsideration. However, as this reprise continues, an abrupt diversion emerges in bar 70, just as a cadence on tonic G_b is expected. This cadential evasion, which elicits expectations of a more convincing close, leads to a brief dynamic flare in bar 71, before the anticipated cadence materializes in bar 74. Example 10 presents the end of the Impromptu, starting in bar 70:

As this shows, two more swells occur in bars 76 and 80, each more intense, before the Impromptu ends with a deep, dark, soft sonority surely suggestive of *quietus*. Within this final span, Schubert's comprehensive contextual process concludes.

The first of these three dynamic surges (bars 70–71) precedes the coda, which then starts in bar 74. It also appears to precipitate the descent of the Impromptu's fundamental line and corresponding background-level cadence that marks the start of the final section. Example 11 offers a comprehensive voice-leading sketch of the work, coordinated with its primary divisions:

The completion of the composition's fundamental structure in bar 74, occasioned by the arrival of $\hat{1}$ and I shortly after the dynamic surge of bars 70–71,

Ex. 10 Schubert, Impromptu in G_♭ major, bars 70–86

70 *pp* *cresc.* *fp* *pp*

72 *dimin.*

74 *cre* *scen* *do*

76 *ffz* *p* *pp*

78 *pp* *cresc.* *cresc.* *tr*

80 *ffz* *p* *pp*

continued overleaf

Ex. 10 concluded

Ex. 11 Schubert, *Impromptu* in G \flat major, comprehensive voice-leading sketch

A B A' coda

b 1 15 16 23 24 25 35 51 54 55 69 74 86

G \flat M: I (vi IV VI V \sharp ³)I V I

marks the end of its broad tonal flow.³⁴ Usually such an event also marks the end of a tonal composition's essential musical narrative, to which a coda serves as an epilogue. In Schubert's *Impromptu*, however, the completion of the fundamental structure does not signal the end of its unique contextual process. As we will see, that drama, founded on the variation of the composition's primary musical idea, has yet to play out, and will do so in the coda.

At the start of the coda in bars 74–77, a more deliberate expression of the *Impromptu*'s musical idea occurs, as Ex. 10 illustrates. Distinguished by its stepwise bass motion, more gradual dynamic rise, and increased chromaticism, this statement represents the most emphatic instance of the idea yet. Example 12 reproduces its bass and summarizes its harmonic content.

As this shows, the original sequence of descending thirds, a minor third followed by a major third (G \flat ₂–E \flat ₂–C \flat ₂), is reversed, forming the sequence of a major third followed by a minor third (G \flat ₂–E \flat ₂–C \flat ₂). With a new, more chromatic harmonization that features forms of the minor subdominant (iv⁶ and iv), borrowed

³⁴ For a Schenkerian study of this work, see William Renwick, 'Schubert's *Impromptu* in G \flat : A Response to Adam Krims', *Canadian University Music Review* 20/2: 31–41.

Ex. 12 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat major, analysis of bars 74–77

74 *pp* *cre* ----- *scen* ----- *do* *tr* *fz* *p* *pp*

G \flat M: I $\overset{4}{V^2/iv}$ iv^6 $\overset{4}{V^3/iv}$ *iv* Ger+ 6 V

6 — 7
4 — 5
3 — 3

from the parallel minor of G \flat major, as well as a new bass tone, E \flat $_2$, this instance projects an earnest intensity unlike previous instances. Yet it still fails to offer satisfaction or closure.

A more determined assertion of the Impromptu's musical idea ensues in bars 78–81 (see Ex. 10). Repeating the aural content of bar 74 and the first half of bar 75, this instance reaches even greater levels of dynamic volume and chromaticism. Exceeding all predecessors in virtually every way, its bass progresses from G \flat $_2$ past C \flat $_2$ to a striking, chromatic sonority on B \flat $_1$ in bar 80.³⁵ Example 13 offers an analytical overview:

Ex. 13 Schubert, Impromptu in G \flat major, analysis of bars 78–81

78 *pp* *cresc.* *cresc.* *tr* *ffz* *p* *pp*

(D \sharp = E \flat) (B \flat = C \flat)

G \flat M: I $\overset{4}{V^2/iv}$ (iv^6) $\overset{4}{V^2/bii}$ bii Ger+ 6 V

6 — 7
4 — 5
3 — 3

breakthrough!

The phrase's sequence of two major thirds, enharmonically expressed and linearly elaborated, considerably expands the tonal motion away from tonic. Enharmonically equivalent to A \flat minor, which is the minor Neapolitan harmony in G \flat major, the first-inversion G minor sonority in bar 80 represents a successful 'solution' to the idea's 'problem', the key element in a contextually satisfactory version of the phrase.³⁶ It also represents a 'breakthrough', as well as the dramatic climax of the Impromptu. Approached by its own secondary dominant (V^4_3/bii), and left by an enharmonically equivalent German augmented sixth in G \flat minor (the chord in bar 80 consisting of E \flat , G \flat , B \flat , and C corresponds to that composed of D, F \sharp , A, C in bar 79), this extraordinary harmony exists within the sphere of G \flat ,

³⁵ The pitch classes G \flat and B \flat , which frame the bass in bars 78–80, correspond to the first two melodic tones in the upper voice of the Impromptu; see bars 1–2 of Ex. 1.

³⁶ Heinrich Schenker offered an alternative interpretation of the goal chord at the start of bar 80, identifying it as an instance of bIV and suggesting that the melodic tone in the uppermost voice arose through neighbour motion; see Schenker, *Free Composition*, 82 and Fig. 100, 3f. Given Schubert's exploration of the Neapolitan relation in his later works, I am inclined to believe that this particular sonority may be best understood as a deliberate harmonic choice rather than the contrapuntal elaboration of a chromatically lowered subdominant chord.

major as one of the most distant from a tonic that is itself regarded as 'remote'.³⁷ It sounds 'just right' – exactly what we have been waiting for. But why? How was its harmonic content adumbrated? That is, why does this particular chord and bass offer a satisfactory solution to the gesture's problem and resolution of the Impromptu's contextual process?

The contextual clues that point toward the sonority of the minor Neapolitan sixth of bar 80 – the G minor harmony with B_♭1 in the bass – are many, varied, and sometimes subtle, yet effective in preparing for closure. For instance, a hint of the Impromptu's harmonic objective may be observed in its exploitation of melodic range. After B_♭4 appears in the upper voice at the very start, the next highest pitches are C_♭5 and D_♭5, introduced in bar 10 (see Ex. 1), followed by E_♭5 and F_♭5 in bar 12 (see Ex. 2). The pitch F5 first sounds in bar 26, within the central section of the Impromptu, and is repeated in bar 29 (see Ex. 3). The very highest tone of the piece, G_♯5, finally emerges in bar 49. This gradually rising registral ceiling dramatically highlights the pitch class G, marking it for memory. Thus distinguished, its significance is revealed in retrospect when the G minor triad resounds on the downbeat of bar 80.

More portentous allusions appear within the B section of the Impromptu. Example 6, above, reveals that a Neapolitan sixth sonority (♭II) appears within the local tonality of E_♭ minor in bar 31. But this first-inversion F_♭ major chord is treated unconventionally: instead of progressing to the dominant of E_♭, as expected, the ♭II diverges in preparation for the forthcoming modulation to C_♭ major, which is later realized in bar 35.³⁸ This irregular resolution draws attention to the lowered supertonic in retrospect, making it a harbinger of the minor Neapolitan in bar 80. A new F_♭ major harmony arises in bar 33, but there it represents the subdominant of the gradually emerging new local key of C_♭ major. The enharmonic relation expressed by these two F_♭ major chords finds its parallel in the secondary dominant and German augmented sixth that surround the Impromptu's solution sonority. However, when the subdominant on F_♭ next appears in bar 35 (see Ex. 5), and later in bar 37 (not shown) it is made minor by modal mixture. This inflection to F_♭ minor anticipates the minor subdominants heard in bars 75, 76 and 79, just before the minor Neapolitan appears, but it also anticipates the inflection of the more familiar major Neapolitan to the minor we hear in bar 80.

Shortly thereafter, German augmented sixths sound in bars 36 (see Ex. 6) and 38 (not shown). While these do not directly predict the Impromptu's minor Neapolitan, they prepare for the manner in which that harmony is left. Another Neapolitan sixth appears in bar 46, as Ex. 4 reveals, shortly before the local tonic of E_♭ begins to reassert itself. Like its predecessor in bar 31, this ♭II is composed of the tones F_♭, A_♭ and C_♭, but unlike it, this major Neapolitan resolves more conventionally to the dominant. Finally, the inflection of the relative minor key of E_♭ minor to E_♭ major, a bold chromatic exchange within the central section of the Impromptu, also may portend the similar substitution of ♭iii for ♭II found at the climax. All of these harmonic elements participate in the problem-solving process simulated within the work, representative of the tiny, apparently

³⁷ In private communication, Robert Hatten eloquently captured the contextual process of Schubert's G_♭ major Impromptu as 'an evolving, developing, variational treatment that moves more deeply into the labyrinth of tonal space, whereby G minor is ultimately discovered in the heart of darkness'.

³⁸ F_♭ major chords sound in bars 11 and 19 (see Ex. 2 for the former).

unrelated insights that eventually lead to a 'flash-of-light' and 'discovery' of a long-sought 'solution'. Of course, Schubert pre-determined that solution and controls progress toward it, but in doing so he enables us to vicariously experience the process of discovery.

The penultimate statement of the Impromptu's musical idea in bars 74–77 sets the stage for the long-awaited *dénouement* of the minor Neapolitan of bar 80. Its stepwise bass motion incorporates a crucial substitution of E_b2 for E_b2, introducing iv⁶, a chord borrowed from the parallel minor, in a location previously occupied by vi.³⁹ It also creates a series of two whole steps at the start, enabling the musical idea to express the descending minor tetrachord – G_b2–F_b2–E_b2–D_b2–(C_b2–E_b2)–D_b2 – a gesture of lamentation that may be traced back at least as far as Monteverdi.⁴⁰

In the immediately following revision of the musical idea within bars 78–81, that series of whole steps is extended to four – G_b2–F_b2–D_b2–C_b2–B_b1 – distorting the diatonic descent. At the end of that downward thrust, the minor Neapolitan (♭ii) represents revelation and release, the culmination of the Impromptu's comprehensive musical process. Offering a brief view of a most distant harmonic point, Schubert's music then quickly returns us to the familiarity of G_b major and proceeds to conclude.

Within the context created by its lyrical texture, patterned phrase structure, and three-part form with agitated central section, as well as its use of repetition and suggestion of questioning, plus more overt signals, like elongated *appoggiaturas*, rhythmic motif, evocative bass, bell effects, and other allusions, the Impromptu simulates pursuit of satisfactory closure via its comprehensive contextual process. In this way, it communicates similar effects of grief, quest and discovery similar to those of poetic elegies. Creating an impression of a breakthrough in bar 80 by touching on what may be the most distant tonal point from G_b major – the first first-inversion G minor harmony – Schubert portrays impressions of a flash of insight, abnegation and transcendence. But what makes the Impromptu in G_b major a self-elegy, rather than a lament on the loss of someone the composer admired?

Schubert's use of pianoforte solo, rather than some other medium, may be understood as self-referential. Similarly, the choice of 'remote' key of G_b major may be taken as symbolic of the personal isolation Schubert undoubtedly felt. And perhaps, by 1827, Schubert may have realized that his contribution to the genre of the lied was then unequalled, so his masterfully sustained mimesis of the human voice within the Impromptu may be regarded as self-reflective. But there is other evidence within his musical technique.

It is well known that in his later music Schubert exploited Neapolitan relationships. Maurice Brown even went so far as to declare: 'From 1820 onwards, the chord and its implications occupy a larger and larger place in Schubert's musical thought, until in his later years they begin to dominate his whole harmonic approach; the entire output of his last year, ranging from the Mass in E_b to the smallest of the 'Swansong' cycle, is shot through with the strong colouring

³⁹ This stepwise motion was presaged by the bass sequence E_b2–D_b2–C_b2–B_b1–A_b1–G_b1–F1 in bars 51–54 that effected retransition to the reprise.

⁴⁰ See Ellen Rosand, 'The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament', in *The Musical Quarterly* 65/3 (1979): 346–59. Su Yin Mak examines the descending tetrachord in Schubert's music, including instances in the lied *Die Liebe hat gelogen* (D. 751; 1822) and the G major String Quartet (D. 887; 1826); see Su Yin Mak, 'Schubert's Allusions to the Descending Tetrachord', in *Le Style instrumental de Schubert: sources, analyse, évolution*, Xavier Hascher (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2007): 163–79.

of Neapolitan harmony'.⁴¹ While Brown's assertion may be an exaggeration, prominent instances of harmonies on the lowered second scale step, as well as extended tonicizations of the degree, shape Schubert's D minor Quartet (D. 810; 1826 [*Death and the Maiden*]), E_♭ major Piano Trio (D. 929; Op. 100; 1828), and especially the String Quintet in C major (D. 956; 1828), among many others.⁴² Schubert had to be aware that he had exploited the Neapolitan's potential to a previously unsurpassed degree, and may have come to regard it as a personal harmonic 'fingerprint'. Thus, its exploitation here, where the most unusual minor Neapolitan sounds, rather than the major, seems most self-revelatory.

Indeed, in its harmonic virtuosity, the Impromptu in G_♭ major offers a telling portrait of Schubert's technique. While only Schubert himself could conclusively confirm that the Impromptu in G_♭ major represents a self-elegy, the aforementioned features suggest that it is. Yet the Impromptu was not Schubert's final expression of self-mourning, for his last completed piano sonata contains a rather personal codicil to this more public testimonial.

The Andante Sostenuto of Schubert's Piano Sonata in B_♭ Major

Schubert composed his last three piano sonatas, the C minor (D. 958), A major (D. 959) and B_♭ major (D. 960), in the spring and summer of 1828. Finishing the last of these on 26 September, he performed them at a gathering of friends the next day – less than two months before his death on 19 November 1828 at the age of 32.⁴³ Each of the sonatas rightly stands among Schubert's best music. However, their achievement seems even more astonishing, indeed heroic, when one recalls they were composed contemporaneously with the String Quintet in C major (D. 956) and *Schwanengesang* (D. 957) – all at a time when Schubert's health was quite poor.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Maurice J.E. Brown, 'Schubert and Neapolitan Relationships', *The Musical Times* 85/1212 (1944): 43–4. Brown offers an interesting observation regarding the G_♭ Impromptu: 'A word might be said in conclusion about Schubert's use of the minor form of the Neapolitan sixth. In the article quoted just previously, Tovey refers to the use of an E_♭ minor chord at the end of the first movement of the D minor String Quartet; but he quotes it as if it were an isolated case, which it is far from being. More familiar to most people probably, is the sudden swerve into G minor at the end of the G_♭ major Piano Impromptu. Other examples are frequently to be found in the songs of 1827–28 – there is an emphatic use of it in the final cadence of "Herbst" – and also in the Sonatas of 1828' (44). The article to which Brown refers is Donald Francis Tovey, 'Tonality', in *Music and Letters* 9/4 (1928): 341–63, wherein the author discusses the D minor Quartet on p. 354.

⁴² For instance, see also Schubert's *Moments musicaux* in F minor and A_♭ major, Op. 94, Nos 5 and 6 (D. 780; 1828), and the Impromptu in A_♭, Op. 142, no. 2 (D. 935; 1827), as well as the earlier 'Wanderer' Fantasy in C major (Op. 15; D. 760; 1822), whose central span in C_♯ minor invokes the minor Neapolitan degree of the primary tonality.

⁴³ Deutsch, *Schubert, A Documentary Biography*, 701, 742, 807–8. Schubert offered his last sonatas to Probst, who already had agreed to publish the Piano Trio in E_♭ major (D. 929), but aroused no interest. After Schubert's death, his brother Ferdinand sold them to Haslinger, though ultimately Diabelli published them in 1838. See Deutsch, *Schubert, A Documentary Biography*, 811.

⁴⁴ Regarding the state of the composer's health in late summer, Deutsch confided: 'Schubert removes, on the advice of Dr. Ernst Rinna von Sarenbach, to his brother Ferdinand's in the Neue Widen suburb, No. 694, 1st September 1828. Schubert was ailing. He suffered from effusions of blood and fits of giddiness.' Deutsch, *Schubert, A Documentary Biography*, 803. Rinna was the physician who attended Schubert in the composer's last days.

Epic, poetic and confident, the sonata in B, boasts artistic balance, internal integrity and cogent unity. Each of its four movements is complementary, essential to the success of the whole.⁴⁵ However, the second movement, an *Andante sostenuto*, is so disarmingly direct and heartrendingly honest that it takes on a life of its own, much like a vignette or episode. Example 14 offers its initial bars.

Ex. 14 Schubert, Sonata in B, major (D. 960; 1828), *Andante sostenuto*, bars 1–13

Andante sostenuto

pp col Ped.

C#m: $\begin{matrix} 5 & & 4 & & 6 & & 5 & & 8 & & 7 & & 6 & & 8 \\ 3 & \text{---} & 3 & & 4 & \text{---} & 3 & & 3\# & \text{---} & 4 & & 4 & & 4 \\ i & \text{---} & & & & \text{---} & & & I & (V/iv?) & & & i & (not\ iv!) \end{matrix}$

cresc.--- f decresc.

C#m: $\begin{matrix} 8 & & 9 & & 8 & & 7 & & 8 & & 8 & & 9 & & 9 & & 8 \\ 6 & \text{---} & 6 & \text{---} & 5 & & 6 & \text{---} & 5 & & 6 & \text{---} & 5 & & 6 & \text{---} & 5 \\ & & 4 & \text{---} & 3 & & 4 & \text{---} & 3\# & & 4 & \text{---} & 3 & & 4 & \text{---} & 3\# \\ i & \text{---} & & & & \text{---} & V & & & & & & & & & & & V & , \end{matrix}$

An air of resignation dominates the opening phrase of the *Andante sostenuto*. Rising octaves (C#2–C#3–C#4–C#5), played *col Ped.*, create an effect of resonant spatiality that bespeaks loneliness. Recurring in numerous transformations throughout the movement, these ascending octaves become emblematic of ‘separation’. Bounded by and to the tonic harmony of C# minor, the barely moving melody within those echoing octaves, initially doubled in thirds, is poignantly forlorn. It introduces not just a desolate ambience, but also a burdened, dispirited presence. Schubert’s personal isolation seems to reverberate here.

Two ascending melodic gestures follow in bars 4–8 and 8–13, the second more assertive than the first. However, the arc in bars 4–8 introduces what represents a tonal ‘problem’ within the *Andante sostenuto* and serves as the basis of its comprehensive contextual process. Circles in Ex. 14 reveal that an initially ascending chromatic motion unfolds in the inner voice of the treble staff: E4–E#4–F#4–A4–F#4–E4. The long-held E#4 of bar 5, a chromatic passing tone, ever-so-slightly undermines the minor mediant scale degree of C# minor, E, by temporarily replacing it as an inflection. In this way, E#4 subtly introduces tonal

⁴⁵ James M. Baker observed that Schubert created long-range structural connections by exploiting the low-bass register in all four movements of the piano sonata in B, major (D. 960); see his essay, ‘Skirting the Structural Tonic’, in *Le Style instrumental de Schubert: sources, analyse, évolution*, ed. Xavier Hascher (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2007): 230–47.

conflict that calls for resolution.⁴⁶ And the rising phrase that follows in bars 8–13 surely communicates an increasingly disquieted response. While modulation or tonicization does not immediately occur as a result of this chromaticism, and E4 returns at the end of the circled melodic sequence, the minor mediant degree's permanence is question. As we will see, the comprehensive contextual process of the *Andante sostenuto* involves the destabilization of the minor mediant, and its ultimate replacement by the major. Of course, this process is none other than *mixture*, a technique found in many of Schubert's most characteristic works.⁴⁷

Example 14 shows that a half-cadence concludes in bar 13, anchored by a back-relating dominant of C# minor, producing an abrupt break. The harmony's major third, B#4, is then dramatically de-inflected to B:4 in the following bar, initiating a modulation away from C# minor. Example 15 illustrates that the divide leads to a transitional phrase that tonicizes the relative major key of E major in bar 17.

As this shows, thematic material from bars 1–13, originally heard in C# minor, now returns in the locally tonicized key of E major within bars 18–29. The ongoing process of destabilizing the minor mediant degree of C# minor (E) continues in this new environment, where the local tonic, E, soon is undermined by new chromatic motion. The circled tones in bars 21–25 of Ex. 15 highlight the initially descending sequence of E4–D:4–C#4–D#4–E4. Here, the long-held D: displaces the leading tone of E major, further weakening the local tonic E. In yet a different way, the tonal identity of the pitch-class E is temporarily undermined within the *Andante sostenuto*.

Another half-cadence occurs in bar 29, marking the end of this short excursion into E major, and tonic C# minor suddenly returns in bar 30. Its rapid resumption conveys an air of frustration, as if the previous episode in E major were a brief vision of possibility that slipped away, or perhaps an errant effort that produced little of value. Yet its effect also seems ambivalent, for the striking and surprising B:4 heard in the main melody on the second beat of bar 32 is contradicted by the B:3 heard in the inner voice below. Even so, the B:4 resists rising, remaining in memory after even as the melody continues downward. The opening section of the work then concludes with two statements of the same curious harmonic progression: Fr⁶–ii^{o4/3}–V⁷–i in C# minor. Example 16 illustrates their instances within bars 33–42.

What makes these progressions odd, and thus memorable, is that the French augmented sixth (Fr⁶) – conventionally treated in the tonal literature as a climactic chord, an element that usually simulates the effect of a breakthrough by ushering a cadential dominant – is blunted in both, undercut by the interposition of the half-diminished supertonic seventh ii^{o4/3} before the V harmonies of bars 36 and 40. Contained within the first instance of the harmonic progression, and identified on Ex. 16 by circles, is a chromatic progression, G#3–F*3–F#3–A3–G#3. This chromatic descent appears to 'aim' for the mediant degree in C# minor, represented by the pitch E3, but avoids it at the last moment. In the subsequent repetition of this harmonic progression in bars 37–42, another chromatic descent

⁴⁶ The E# recalls what Edward T. Cone identified as a 'promissory note ... a troubling element of which one expects to hear more', in the composer's *Moment musical*, Op. 94, no. 6 (D. 780), yet its implications may be less clear. See Cone, 'Schubert's Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics', *19th-Century Music* 5/3 (1982): 236.

⁴⁷ Schubert's fondness for *mixture*, which involves the interchange of harmonies between parallel major and minor modes, is well known. Among the first essays to discuss this Schubertian 'fingerprint' is Eric Blom's 'His Favourite Device', *Music and Letters* 9/4 (1928): 372–80.

Ex. 15 Schubert, *Andante sostenuto*, bars 14–31

EM: 1^6 IV V I $\frac{3}{2}$

C[#]m: (\flat III⁶) \flat III

6 — 7 — 8 — 7 — 6 — 7# — 8

4 — 3 — 5 — 4 — 4 — 5

EM: — I — 3 — (V/IV) — I (not IV!)

C[#]m: \flat III

8 — 8 6 — 5 9 — 8

4 — 3 4 — 3 4 — 3

EM: I V V ,

C[#]m: \flat III , i iv

occurs, as circles reveal. However, this time E3 sounds at the end in bar 41–42. While the minor mediant surely is reaffirmed by the second of these two harmonic progressions, the first, which conspicuously avoids that degree, communicates hesitancy. Throughout bars 33–42, ascending octaves reverberate, reinforcing the opening span's unmistakable disconsolation.

A new section of the *Andante* set in A major begins in bar 43, as Ex. 16 illustrates. Providing striking contrast to the sombre music of its predecessor, this new span is noble, sturdy, and even stalwart. Its melody, chordally reinforced and supported by perpetually moving semiquavers in the accompaniment, conveys considerable vigour. Its antithetical character thus determines the *Andante*'s ternary design. Example 17 offers a view of the *Andante*'s form.

In comparison, the B section of the *Andante* has more discrete sections and greater tonal flux than the A. Repetition and variation in bars 43–88 seem to convey the effect of musing on a cherished image. If the central section of the G,

Ex. 16 Schubert, *Andante sostenuto*, bars 33–50

C \sharp m: i Fr+6 ii ϕ ⁴₃ V⁷ i Fr+6 ii ϕ ⁴₃

C \sharp m: V⁷ i AM: I
bVI

AM: V I V⁷/ii ii⁶ I⁶ V⁷ I
C \sharp m: bVI

Impromptu major reminds of a jeremiad against fate, then that of the *Andante sostenuto* resembles a hero's encomium. No obvious evidence of the *Andante's* destabilized minor mediant appears within the central section, as if the work's inherent tonal conflict were somehow suppressed.

The B section of the *Andante* ends with a dramatic pause in bar 89, as Ex. 18 (see p. 98) shows. Suggestive, perhaps, of the experience of rapidly regaining reality after surrendering to reverie, the sudden silence also marks the start of the movement's formal reprise. Yet the return of opening material was hardly unexpected, for the insistent ascending octaves heard in bars 80–88 could not have suggested otherwise. Another expression of the chromatic sequence E4–E \sharp 4–F \sharp 4–A4–F \sharp 4–E4 sounds in the inner voice of the treble staff, as the circles of Ex. 18 show. Here, however, this chromatic inner line seems even more intense, perhaps made so by the melodic skip to B4 in the upper voice of bar 94, which produces a dominant seventh sonority. Yet this striking B \sharp , like its other prominent predecessors earlier in the movement, also presages a forthcoming tonal development.

Ex. 17 Schubert, *Andante sostenuto*, formal design

A

B

(B) **A'**

A' **coda**

C#m: i C#M: I V I

As in the A section of the *Andante sostenuto*, the first three phrases of A' lead to a half-cadence in bar 102. A striking change in local key appears just afterward, as Ex. 19 (see p. 99) shows.

A most transcendent moment, the assertion of C major in bar 103 and its cadential confirmation in bar 106 communicate a quality of calmness and focus associable with sudden insight. Only a semitone away from tonic C#, C major represents a paradox of sorts, since the two keys share so few pitch-classes and thus are quite 'distant'. One of these, of course, is the pitch-class E, which serves

Ex. 18 Schubert, *Andante sostenuto*, bars 80–97

7 ——— 6
3# ——— 4

C#m: i I (V7/iv) i (not iv!)

as the mediant in both keys. Even more surprising, however, is the absence of a new expression of the *Andante*'s musical conflict during the reprise, which might be expected in bars 110–113, the span that corresponds to bars 5–8. Instead, a variation of the opening phrase, expressed over the dominant of E, corresponds to bars 26–29, as Ex. 17 suggests. And after the half-cadence of bar 118, C# minor returns, as if it never really left. Yet the events of the previous section, as well as the earlier resummptions of C# minor, make the now-familiar transitional phrase, bars 119–122, seem hushed with possibility.

The *Andante*'s dramatic musical process culminates in bar 123. As Ex. 20 illustrates, the last span of the movement suddenly escapes C# minor to C# major.

Here, the minor mediant scale degree becomes major, fulfilling the promise of the passing tone E#4 heard in bar 5. Through this shift, tonal conflict involving the mediant degree ends, with the raised form prevailing, thus bringing the work's comprehensive contextual process to a close. With exceptionally soft dynamics (*ppp*) and low registers, the closing section of the *Andante sostenuto* conveys no sense of triumph or success, but release and relief. In the penultimate bar, a rising arpeggio seems to vanish like vapour as it ascends. And in the last bar, a long-sustained C# major chord brings a most welcome quiescence.

Ex. 19 Schubert, *Andante sostenuto*, bars 98–107

C#m: V ————— V ,

CM: I IV V I
C#m: VII ————— VII

Lovers of Schubert's music know that mixture was a favourite technique of the composer, perhaps even more idiosyncratic than his use of the Neapolitan relation. So it may not seem all that unexpected or out of place here. But Schubert has taken care to prepare its emergence at the end of the *Andante*, enhancing its transcendental effect.

For instance, the first two departures from C# minor within the *Andante* involve motion to major keys: the modulation to E major in bars 14–18 and the assumption of A major in bar 43. These may be understood to very generally anticipate the *Andante*'s close in the major mode. More significant, however, are the transient tonicizations of the Neapolitan key of D major – a semitone above tonic C# – in bars 61 and 79, as well as the movement to C major – a semitone below tonic C# – in bars 103–107. These ascending and descending half-steps may be understood to allude to the chromatic inflection of the minor third to the major at the end of the *Andante*.

Indeed, distinctive semitonal motion frequently appears at the musical surface of the *Andante sostenuto*. For example, we perceive it in the *appoggiaturas* of the uppermost melody of bars 9, 10 and 12, as Ex. 14 illustrates, plus those in bars 98, 99 and 101, as Ex. 18 shows, whose descending semitones respond to the 'problem' expressed in bars 5 and 94. The repetitive semitonal neighbour figure heard in the bass of bars 90–96 and 98–101 (see Ex. 18), as well as 120–122 (see Ex. 20), incorporates both descending and ascending semitonal motion, offering a restless reminder of the E4–E#4 inflection of bars 4–5. And a brief instance of mixture occurs within bars 68–75, when A major temporarily displaces A minor in bars 71–74, as if to 'try out' the procedure.

Yet some of the most effective hints and crucial reinforcement of the transformation of tonic minor to tonic major at the end of the *Andante* sound in the motion of inner voices during the movement's most marked and memorable harmonic progressions, as we have seen. There they insinuate without obvious

Ex. 20 Schubert, *Andante sostenuto*, bars 119–138

C#m: i iv V i C#M: I

C#M: IV V I V⁷/V ii^ø₃⁴

C#M: V⁷ I V⁷/V ii^ø₃⁴ V⁷

C#M: I I

emphasis, and are perceived almost subconsciously. Example 21 reviews nine of these, identifying each of these chromatic motions via lettered labels, bar numbers, and slurs.

Progressions A) and E), whose corresponding music appears in Exx. 14 and 18, feature chromatic inner voice lines that begin on E4, pass into and then beyond E#4, but move no further by semitone. Apparently 'stalled' at F#4, despite the skip up to A4, the inner voice seems 'pulled back' to E4 at the end. Progression B), whose music appears in Ex. 15, also features two consecutive semitones in its inner voice, descending from E4 to C#4, before returning to E4.

Progressions C) and H), whose corresponding music appears in Exx. 16 and 20, also incorporate two descending semitones, yet their chromatic inner voice melodies descend toward the mediant degree, but never reach it. Progression D),

Ex. 21 Schubert, *Andante sostenuto*, harmonic progressions

4 5 6 7 8

A)

21 22 23 24 25

B)

33 34 35 36 37

C)

37 38 39 40 41

D)

93 94 95 96 97

E)

102 103 104 105 106

F)

(C \sharp m)C \sharp M!

122 123 124 125 126

G)

126 127 128 129 130

H)

(C \sharp m)C \sharp M!

130 131 132 133 134

I)

whose music closes the first section of the *Andante* and appears in Ex. 16, also boasts two descending semitones, though its inner voice's closing tone is E3, the minor mediant.

Progression F), whose music appears in Ex. 20, introduces C major. Progression I), from the final phrase of the piece, offers long-awaited affirmation and closure. Its three descending semitones, G \sharp 3–F \sharp 3–F \sharp 3–E \sharp 3, coordinated with the completion of the *Andante*'s fundamental structure, provide fully satisfying closure. While the music corresponding to progression F) initiates

transformation from C# minor to C# major, that of progression I) concludes that process to simulate complete transfiguration.

As in the G_b major Impromptu, the choice of an 'extreme' key such as C# major may be taken as symbolic of an unusual expressive intent within the Andante sostenuto, as well as a self-referential element significative of its author. Similarly, the movement's lyrical nature speaks 'Schubert' from beginning to end. Certainly the dolorous character of the A and A' sections, contrasted by the exalted reverie of the B section, corresponds to the progress of moods typical of many poetic elegies. Yet it is the musical 'problem' of the Andante, represented by the destabilized and ultimately transformed mediant scale degree, that most convincingly realises the spirit of a musical elegy. By simulating the transfiguration of that degree from minor to major, the Andante sostenuto portrays abnegation, the acceptance of an impossible situation. And in doing so, it renders a self-elegy.

Schubert's Refuge

It is impossible to know a composer's express intentions with absolute certainty, unless he takes pains to lay them plain. Even then, a work may say more than the apparent, more than its creator is consciously aware. The evidence offered here suggests that Schubert's Impromptu in G_b major represents a formal elegy composed in anticipation of his own end. The Andante sostenuto seems to be a similar, though more intimate lament, one that portrays both regret and reminiscence, certainly, yet also acquiescence and even aspiration. While the Impromptu bears so many traditional allusions to death and a contextual process of such compelling inevitability, the Andante sostenuto is more personal and, paradoxically, more peaceful and welcoming.

Music is a form of artistic communication, and Schubert's Impromptu and Andante surely are among his most poignant utterances. However, these self-elegies also may have served another purpose: self-therapy. The works Schubert wrote after the onset of the malady that would plague him for six years reflect a restless, yet resistant response to his plight. Staggered by the implications of his disease, enduring a loneliness only temporarily allayed by conviviality with intimate friends and family, Schubert seems to have sought relief within the refuge of his imagination. Inspired and empowered by the freedom he found there, he created musical monuments of richness and depth that assured his immortality. We need only look as far as *Die Schöne Müllerin*, *Winterreise*, or the D minor string quartet for examples of engrossing tragedy. Similarly, we may turn to the String Quartet in A minor, the Piano Trio in E_b major, and the String Quintet in C major for expressions of engaging triumph. Evidence for Schubert's inward turn appears in his words as well as his music.

The first symptoms of Schubert's syphilis appeared near the end of 1822, for he was ill at the start of 1823 and unable to leave his lodgings at the end of February.⁴⁸ The following poem, penned in the spring of 1823, suggests Schubert was contemplating his own mortality:

⁴⁸ Writing to Edler von Mosel regarding his opera *Alfonso and Estrella* on 28 February 1823, Schubert indicated a visit was not possible at that time, owing to 'the circumstances of my health still forbidding me to leave the house'. Otto Eric Deutsch, *Schubert, A Documentary Biography*, 270. In his accompanying note, Deutsch speculates: 'We here for the first time learn something of an illness, which seems to have attacked Schubert already at New Year'.

MEIN GEBET

Tiefer Sehnsucht heil'ges Bangen
 Will in schön're Welten langen;
 Möchte füllen dunklen Raum
 Mit almächt'gem Liebestraum
 Grosser Vater! reich' dem Sohne,
 Tiefer Schmerzen nun zum Lohne
 Endlich als Erlösungsmahl
 Deiner Liebe ew'gen Strahl.
 Sieh, vernichtet liegt im Staube,
 Unerhörtem Gram zum Raube,
 Meines Lebens Martergang,
 Nahend ew'gem Untergang.
 Tödt' es und mich selber tödte,
 Stürz' nun Alles in die Lethe,
 Und ein reines kräft'ges Sein
 Lass', o Grosser, dann gedeih'n.
 8 Mai 1823 Frz. Schubert.

MY PRAYER

Deep longing from holy fears
 Desires to live in more beautiful worlds;
 Fill the dark space
 With an almighty dream of love.
 Great Father! hold out to your son
 Not deep suffering as a reward
 But endless as deliverance
 Your everlasting beam of love.
 See, lying here in the mud,
 Unheard-of affliction as robbery,
 My life's martyrdom
 Approaching eternal destruction.
 End it and end my self,
 Plunge now all in the Lethe,
 And a powerful ray of yours
 Let, o Great One, then increase.
 8 May 1823. Frz. Schubert.⁴⁹

On the surface, Schubert's supplication may appear to express a premonition of death and a plea for release, as well a petition for transport to a heavenly plane. However, the stock form, clichéd expressions and melodramatic tone of these verses do not suggest someone seriously convinced of imminent or inevitable demise. Further, the absence of any specific reference to Jesus Christ – Schubert was a Roman Catholic who contributed significantly to his faith's sacred vocal literature – as well as an allusion to 'Lethe' – a river in Hades whose water, according to Greek mythology, would induce forgetfulness before a soul's reincarnation – attest to a certain degree of personal and authorial distance from the poem's message. Indeed, these features would seem to indicate that Schubert might have been vicariously exploring one possible outcome of his affliction through creative fancy.

In the summer of 1823, a more ambivalent attitude appears to have emerged. In a letter to Franz von Schober on 14 August – sent from Steyr, where he was staying with his friend and favoured interpreter, baritone Johann Michael Vogl – Schubert admits:

Dear Schober,

Although I write rather late, I hope that this letter will still find you in Vienna. I correspond busily with Schäffer and am fairly well. Whether I shall ever quite

⁴⁹ The original German text of *Mein Gebet* appears in Otto Eric Deutsch, *Franz Schubert: Die Dokumente Seines Lebens und Schaffens* (Munich & Leipzig: Georg Müller, 1914): 192–3. I thank Kevin Dermott Smith for advice on my translation. In Deutsch's *Schubert, A Documentary Biography*, 279, Eric Blom's translation of Schubert's poem is rather free, evidently because he wished to create a rhyming English equivalent: 'MY PRAYER. With a holy zeal I yearn/Life in fairer worlds to learn;/Would this gloomy earth might seem/Filled with love's almighty dream./Sorrow's child, almighty Lord,/Grant Thy bounty for reward./For redemption from above/Send a ray of endless love./See, abased in dust and mire,/Scorched by agonizing fire,/I in torture go my way,/Nearing doom's destructive day./Take my life, my flesh and blood,/Plunge it all in Lethe's flood,/To a purer, stronger state/Deign me, Great One, to translate./8th May 1823. Frz. Schubert.'

recover I am inclined to doubt. Here I live very simply in every respect, go for walks regularly, work much at my opera and read Walter Scott.⁵⁰

Less morose and affected than the verses of *Mein Gebet*, these lines hint that Schubert may have begun to accept the uncertainty of his future, perhaps sublimating his anxiety by channelling energy into music for the theatre, his heroic opera *Fierabras* (D. 796; 1823–25). Mention of Walter Scott, whose historical novels enjoyed extraordinary international popularity at the time, also suggests a retreat into reverie afforded by reading, where present reality could be ignored and fictional possibilities could be vicariously experienced and explored.

A curious notebook of observations and aphorisms Schubert assembled in 1824 sheds additional light. On 27 March, Schubert wrote: 'What I produce is due to my understanding of music and to my sorrows; that which sorrow alone has produced seems to give least pleasure to the world'.⁵¹ And two days later Schubert added: 'O imagination! Thou greatest treasure of man, thou inexhaustible wellspring from which artists as well as savants drink!'⁵² While Schubert's personal investment in his music, documented by the first statement, should come as no surprise, his enthusiastic regard for artistic imagination, captured in the metaphor of his second statement, suggests he may have thought it essential to his life as well as his work.

Lines written to his brother Ferdinand in mid-July of 1824 reveal how central Schubert's interiority was to his overall well-being:

I feel more clearly than ever at this moment that you, and you only, are my truest friend, bound to my soul with every fibre! – Not to let these lines mislead you into believing that I am not well or cheerful, I hasten to assure you of the contrary. True, it is no longer that happy time during which each object seems to us to be surrounded by a youthful gloriolè, but a period of fateful recognition of a miserable reality, which I endeavour to beautify as far as possible by my imagination (thank God). We fancy that happiness lies in places where once we were happier, whereas actually it is only in ourselves, and so, although I had an unpleasant disappointment by renewing here an experience already undergone at Steyr, I am better able now to find happiness and peace in myself than I was then. – A grand sonata and variations of my own, both for 4 hands, which I have already written, shall serve you as proof of this.⁵³

Trying to reassure his brother that he was well, Schubert explains that he has found a source of joy and fulfilment within himself. Almost ecstatic, he proudly pointed toward two recently completed piano duos that would offer tangible proof of his vitality and good cheer.

⁵⁰ Deutsch, *Schubert, A Documentary Biography*, 286. In his notes for this letter, Deutsch states, 'After a few earlier hints we find here the first definite mention of a serious illness suffered by Schubert. There is no doubt that it was venereal, probably syphilis.' See Deutsch, *A Documentary Biography*, 287.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 337.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 363. Deutsch identifies the 'grand sonata' as the Duo in C major, *Op. posth.* 140 (D. 812) for pianoforte four hands, and the Variations as those in A_♭ major, *Op. 35* (D. 813), which had been written during the summer of 1824. Surely Schubert also gained considerable joy and diversion from playing these and other duets with friends and family but it would seem that, with what he faced, self-immersion in creativity supplied what kith and kin could not.

Little self-reflective evidence regarding Schubert's creative process survives from the composer's later years. However, his last letter, written a week before his death on 12 November 1828, is both heartbreaking and revelatory:

Dear Schober,

I am ill. I have eaten nothing for eleven days and drunk nothing, and I totter feebly and shakily from my chair to bed and back again. Rinna is treating me. If I ever take anything, I bring it up again at once. Be so kind, then, as to assist me in this desperate situation by means of literature. Of Cooper's I have read 'The Last of the Mohicans', 'The Spy', 'The Pilot', and 'The Pioneers'. If by any chance you have anything else of his, I implore you to deposit it with Frau von Bogner at the coffeehouse for me. My brother, who is conscientiousness itself, will most faithfully pass it on to me. Or anything else.

Your friend,
Schubert.⁵⁴

Dr Rinna was unlikely to have been able to do much to comfort Schubert, who was suffering from typhus, complicated by chronic syphilis.⁵⁵ At that point, reading may have been a source of relief for Schubert. From his emphatic request, we may surmise that fiction, such as Cooper's adventure novels, set in the New World, offered some respite from his distress in the form of intellectual distraction.

In this context, Schubert's self-elegies may well have served him as a means of self-therapy. If the art of music offered a private world in which he could imagine different realities and experience different outcomes, as well as escape from present circumstances, then the Impromptu in G, major and the Andante sostenuto may be interpreted as projections further forward into the future. Their positive conclusions would suggest that Schubert held hope for transcending what could not be changed, and even may have welcomed what would come.

⁵⁴ Deutsch, *Schubert, A Documentary Biography*, 819–20.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 823.