Schubert’s Idyllic Periods

STEPHEN RODGERS

This article explores Schubert’s distinctive handling of the period theme-type, focusing on a particular kind of period that appears often in his Lieder: the idyllic period. Schubert’s idyllic periods are characterized by their symmetry, diatonicism, transparent voice-leading structure, simple piano texture, and association with poems about nostalgia and hopefulness. I analyze three representative idyllic periods in Schubert’s late songs: “Am Meer” (looking not only at the song itself, but also at its relation to the other Heine Lieder from *Schwanengesang*), “So lasst mich scheinen,” and “Am Fenster.” Collectively, these analyses reveal the diverse but related expressive connotations of this theme-type in Schubert’s music. Moreover, they suggest that Schubert’s musical evocations of naivety and innocence demand as much scrutiny as his most radical experiments with tonality and form.

Keywords: Schubert, period, theme-type, *Schwanengesang*.

No other composer of song has ever surpassed (or even demonstrated the ambition to match) Schubert’s ability to represent the inner movement of experience in sound. Schumann’s language is that of an ironist, Schubert’s profoundly, if sometimes deceptively, naïve.¹

It is possible to find the sweetness of the opening theme a little cloying, but when at the words “Und nun blüht in stummen Nächten” it is combined with a countermelody in the voice, which moves in contrary motion, all such reservations vanish.²

This is music contained within narrow bounds, its melodic symmetries remarkable, its diatonicism pure, its bass restricted to the tonic and dominant pitches only. In contrast, the music for stanzas 2 and 4 is drenched in Schubertian chromaticism of the sort we expected from a composer who sought from boyhood to extend tonal possibilities. Why this contrast?³

The superficially idyllic scene depicted in stanza 1 is set in C major. At the beginning of stanza 2, when nature shows herself to be somewhat less benign (mist rising, water swelling), Schubert turns to C minor.⁴

Each of the quotations above points to a quality of feeling, a type of bearing that is unmistakable in Schubert’s music—a “superficially idyllic” mode of expression, a “profoundly, if sometimes deceptively, naïve” idiom, a “sweetness” that might even strike some listeners as “cloying,” as overly sweet. This quality is on full display in the two songs to which these authors refer: “Nachtviolen,” D. 752 (1822) (Muxfeldt and Reed) and “Am Meer,” from *Schwanengesang*, D. 957 (1828) (Youens and Chusid). The beginnings of these songs appear in Examples 1 and 2.

What makes these passages sound so idyllic and sweet? Youens points out some of the features that add to the gentleness and naivety of the opening measures of “Am Meer”: the phrases are symmetrical, there is no chromaticism whatsoever, and the harmonies are simple, even simplistic (only tonic and dominant, and only in root position). In addition, the dynamic is *pianissimo*, the tempo is slow (*Sehr langsam*), the piano texture is transparent, with parallel thirds in the right hand that move in perfect coordination with one another and with the vocal line, and the tonality is C major, the purest of keys. Everything is without strain. The same is true of “Nachtviolen,” also in C major: its opening theme likewise uses a simple harmonic palette, with only tiny dabs of chromatic color, like the G⁷ and F⁷ in the third and fourth measures of the theme;⁵ its phrases are very nearly symmetrical (unbalanced only slightly by the final two measures, which reiterate the IAC from m. 12); its tempo is likewise slow (*Langsam*); and its accompaniment is as sparce as can be, three perfectly conjoined voices in a high register.

The resemblances between these two openings, however, extend even further, encompassing also *theme-type*. Both passages are parallel periods. This may seem coincidental, of only minor significance compared with the more obviously expressive features noted above. Yet the thematic architecture of these songs is no less central to their emotional impact, no less a part of what lends them a sense of tranquility and simplicity. Not all of Schubert’s periods exhibit these qualities, nor do all of his tranquil and simple themes contain periods. But the correlation between these qualities and this particular theme-type is striking enough to give us reason to look more closely at passages like the beginning of “Am Meer” and “Nachtviolen.” Doing so sheds

¹ Muxfeldt (1997, 137).
² Reed (1997, 343).
³ Youens (2007, 64).
⁵ The piano introduction, of course, provides more chromatic color and contrast—note, for instance, the descending chromatic line in the alto voice over mm. I–4 (C–B–B⁰–A–A⁰–G)—but the main theme itself is much simpler.
EXAMPLE 1.  *Nachtviolen,* mm. 1–14

EXAMPLE 2.  *Am Meer,* mm. 1–11

2 music theory spectrum o (2017)
light on the contexts in which Schubert used the period and the reasons he may have chosen this theme-type over another. In short, it helps us to understand what the period meant to him.

It may seem strange to speak of the meaning of a period. After all, a theme-type (or any formal type) might be seen as nothing more than an abstract model, not meaningful in its own right but only potentially meaningful, depending upon how that abstract model is realized. In Schubert's music, however, the choice of one theme-type over another (whether a period, a sentence, a hybrid, a small ternary form, or a deviation from one of these forms) often has profound expressive implications. This is particularly true of his Lieder, where the shapes of his melodies often interact in striking ways with the structure and sense of the poetry associated with them. In an earlier article from this journal, I explored some of these theme/text interactions in the sentential themes from Die schöne Müllerin. My present article builds on this work, as well as on other recent writing about theme-types in vocal music. I examine a type of period that occurs frequently in Schubert's Lieder, above all, in his late Lieder: what I call an idyllic period. I use the word “idyllic” not so much in a literary sense, to refer to pastoral or rustic scenes, but rather in a more conventional sense, to refer to musical themes that are pure, simple, and undisturbed—passages that represent an idealized realization of the period theme-type.

In general, Schubert's idyllic periods are characterized by:

1. symmetrical phrases, with parallel antecedent and consequent;
2. transparent voice-leading structures, with relatively little elaboration and an interruption often separating antecedent and consequent;
3. simple pianistic textures;
4. diatonic melodies and harmonies, with little, if any, chromaticism;
5. major-mode tonalities;
6. slow tempi;
7. quiet dynamics;
8. poetic texts that are either nostalgic or hopeful (looking backward to blissful times in the past or forward to blissful times in the future).  

Example 3 lists twenty-four idyllic periods in Schubert's Lieder, along with relevant information about phrase structure, cadential structure, texture, and poetic context. All of these periods are parallel periods. Not every example exhibits every one of the characteristics listed above, but enough characteristics are present to place these themes under the idyllic period umbrella. I intend this list to be representative, not exhaustive; still, scrolling through it should give readers an idea how prevalent these themes are in Schubert's output, especially his late output. (Based on my survey of Schubert's Lieder, I would estimate that one in six of the songs he wrote between 1823 and 1828 contains an idyllic period.)

As we will see, Schubert's idyllic periods tend to be passages that stop us in our tracks, moments that involve crossing a threshold that separates present from past, reality from dream, and sorrow from consolation. Indeed, one of the things that fascinates me most about these periods is that they are arresting not because they distort normative models. Quite the contrary, they are peculiarly un-distorted; they are icons of structural perfection and order, oases of calm, islands of refuge surrounded by turbulence.

In what follows, I analyze three representative Schubertian periods in detail. Each analysis places special emphasis on one of the characteristics mentioned above. First, I return to “Am Meer,” focusing especially on how the theme’s clear formal design relates to its clear voice-leading structure; I also consider how the song relates to the other Heine Lieder from Schwänzengesang and propose that “Am Meer” functions as a thematic focal point in the cycle. I then turn to two other late Schubert songs that resonate with “Am Meer”: “Lied der Mignon: So lasst mich scheinen,” D. 877 (1826), and “Am Fenster,” D. 878 (1826). These songs feature pianistic textures that appear in a surprising number of Schubert’s idyllic periods, “Am Meer” included, suggesting that for Schubert the period was a form with structural, textual, and textural associations. “Am Meer” thus acts as a reference point for this project; it offers a window through which to look anew at the Heine Lieder from Schwänzengesang, and a touchstone from which to get a sense for the richness of one of Schubert’s most expressive thematic designs.

**DEFINING THE PERIOD**

The period is of course a musical concept with a long history. Periodic structure was discussed extensively by theorists in the eighteenth century, beginning with Johann Mattheson. Here and elsewhere, I use the terms “design” and “structure” in a similar sense to David Beach: “design,” for my purposes, refers to the succession of a work’s sub-phrases, phrases, and sections (and the associated names and functions of these segments), whereas “structure” refers to a work’s voice-leading structure in a Schenkerian sense. See Beach (1993, 2012).

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For useful discussions of the period and the sentence (as well as other phrase models) from the perspective of the history of theory, see Burnham (2002, 881–97), Fischer (1992), Dahlhaus (1989), and Ratner (1956).


6 Rodgers (2014).
8 Janet Schmalfeldt (1991, 60) refers to this type of period as an “interrupted period.”
9 My discussion of idyllic periods in Schubert’s songs overlaps in some ways with Marjorie Hirsch’s (2007) discussion of the “lost paradise” myth in nineteenth-century Lieder. The Lieder that Hirsch explores likewise express nostalgia and hopefulness, conjure other worlds, and are marked by simplicity and naturalness. The main difference is that Hirsch focuses on Lieder that convey a longing for three main things: Greek antiquity, childhood, and folk song. I am less interested in the particular object of longing (or reverence or remembrance) that we see in these songs and more in the fact that they tend to convey a feeling of simplicity and tranquility.

10 Here and elsewhere, I use the terms “design” and “structure” in a similar sense to David Beach: “design,” for my purposes, refers to the succession of a work’s sub-phrases, phrases, and sections (and the associated names and functions of these segments), whereas “structure” refers to a work’s voice-leading structure in a Schenkerian sense. See Beach (1993, 2012).

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>D.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>mm.</th>
<th>Phrase structure</th>
<th>Cadential structure</th>
<th>Texture</th>
<th>Poetic Context and Other Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>An den Mond 296</td>
<td>c. 1816</td>
<td>6–11</td>
<td>3+3</td>
<td>A♭:HC—A♭:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 3-voice with melody doubled in 8ves</td>
<td>A gentle hymn to the moon, which brings rest; in last two stanzas the piano melody is tripled in 8ves, and the voice withdraws into a middle register, as the poet withdraws from the world.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Die Nacht 358</td>
<td>1816</td>
<td>2–12</td>
<td>4+4 (+3 cad. rep.)</td>
<td>D:AC—b:PAC (-B:PAC)</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 4-voice</td>
<td>Several people sit in a grove at night, pleasantly drinking wine and enjoying its &quot;holde Dunkelheit&quot; (gentle darkness).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Der Unglückliche 713</td>
<td>1821</td>
<td>8–30</td>
<td>8 (+2 trans.) + 9 (+4 cad. rep.)</td>
<td>in b: D:HC—B:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, hymn-like, largely 3-part with soprano and alto doubled at the octave</td>
<td>A hymn to night, and the comfort it offers to weary souls.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Die liebe hat gelogen</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>3–6</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>c:HC—C:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 4-voice</td>
<td>Somber mood; a forlorn lover expresses his sorrow, but with restraint and dignity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aus Heliopolis I 753</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>24–32</td>
<td>4+5</td>
<td>E:HC—B:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, hymn-like, 4-voice but with tenor and bass on I and with soprano and alto moving in parallel 6ths</td>
<td>The opening section of the song, in E minor, depicts the &quot;kalten, rauhen Norden&quot; (cold, hard North) where men are entangled in conflict, but the second section brightens to E major as the persona turns to a flower, chosen by the sun god Helios, which gazes at the sun.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greisengesang 778</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>6–13</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>b:AC—B:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, only 8ves, gradually filled out over each phrase; texturally resembles &quot;Ihr Bild&quot;</td>
<td>The persona keeps warm inside, even as frost covers his house; passion still flows in his heart, though his youth has faded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vergissmeinnicht 792</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>10–18, 20–31</td>
<td>4 (+1 ext.) + 4, then 4+8</td>
<td>F:HC—A♭:PAC; then A♭:HC—A♭:PAC</td>
<td>Simple and chordal in first period (more elaborate in second period); first period uses 4-voice writing but shifts to 3-voice texture (with soprano doubled) at both cadences</td>
<td>Another flower ballad (like &quot;Viola,&quot; D. 786), and a song of spring; first period describes the waning of spring; second period describes its &quot;Wiesenschneez und Saatengrün&quot; (radiant meadows and green cornfields).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thänenregen 795</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>5–12</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>A:HC—E:PAC</td>
<td>Relatively simple, 4-voice, at times contrapuntal</td>
<td>The miller sits by the book with the miller maid, enjoying an (imagined?) moment of bliss, until the rain comes and the miller maid leaves; the final strophe of the song recasts the opening period in A minor and as a Hybrid 3 (ant+cad).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Der Neugierige 795</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>23–32, 43–52</td>
<td>4+4 (+2 cad rep.); then 4+6</td>
<td>B:HC—B:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, arpeggiated, 4-voice</td>
<td>The miller sings a sort of love song to the brook, asking whether the miller maid loves him or not.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Des Müllers Blumen 795</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>7–14</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>A♭:E:PAC; rest of strophe leads to cadence in A</td>
<td>Simple, arpeggiated, 4-voice</td>
<td>The miller picks blue flowers and plants them by the miller maid’s window; a song of blissful naïveté.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gondelfahrer 808</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>4–12</td>
<td>4+5</td>
<td>in C: a:HC—C:IAC</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 4-voice</td>
<td>A boatman contrasts his sleepless, agitated state with the seeming freedom and peacefulness of the moon, the stars, and his drifting boat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Das Heimweh 851</td>
<td>1825</td>
<td>12–19</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>a:HC—a:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, only 8ves with an occasional chord</td>
<td>Somber mood; a gravedigger longs for death and heavenly rest; religious connotations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wiedersehen 855</td>
<td>1825</td>
<td>5–12</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>G:HC—D:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 4-voice</td>
<td>The persona longs to be reunited with his beloved; he feels in the spring sun and the gentle west wind a promise of future bliss.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Um Mitternacht 862</td>
<td>1825</td>
<td>7–16</td>
<td>4+6</td>
<td>B♭:HC—B♭:IAC</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 4-voice</td>
<td>A gentle hymn to night and dreams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Periods</td>
<td>Texture</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Das Zügenglocklein</em></td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>5–13</td>
<td>3+6</td>
<td>A♭:HC—A♭:PAC</td>
<td>Simple, l.h. plays a 3-voice texture while r.h. plays an inverted pedal, intoning 5</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lied der Mignon: Heiss mich nicht reden</em></td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>5–12</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>G:HC—e:HC</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 4-voice</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lied der Mignon: So lasst mich scheinen</em></td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>6–13</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>B:HC—B:HC</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 3-voice with multiple parts doubled or transposed</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lied der Mignon: Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt</em></td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>7–14</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>a:HC—C:HC</td>
<td>Simple, arpeggiated, 4-voice</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Am Fenster</em></td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>6–15</td>
<td>4+6</td>
<td>F:HC—F:HC</td>
<td>Simple, hymn-like, 3-voice with soprano doubled and alto transposed</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Im Frühling</em></td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>1–4</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>G:HC—G:HC</td>
<td>Simple, chordal, 4-voice</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Rückblick</em></td>
<td>1827</td>
<td>28–35</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>G:HC—G:HC</td>
<td>Simple, 3-voice (including vocal melody) with vocal melody and l.h. moving in parallel 10ths and r.h. repeating 5; texture thickens slightly at cadences</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Das Weinen</em></td>
<td>Late 1827, early 1828</td>
<td>5–14</td>
<td>5+5 (with piano echoes at end of each phrase)</td>
<td>D:HC—b:HC</td>
<td>1 voice at first, then gradually filling out to 4 voices, chorale-like</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Der Kreuzzug</em></td>
<td>1827</td>
<td>5–12</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>D:HC—b:HC</td>
<td>Simple, hymn-like, 4-voice but with static 5 in tenor</td>
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</tbody>
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_Some idyllic periods in Schubert’s Lieder_
and culminating in Heinrich Koch’s *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition* (1782–93), an exhaustive study of various kinds of phrases, as well as the relationship between cadences and melodies, and the compression, extension, and concatenation of phrases into larger *Perioden*. For Koch, a *Periode* was essentially a musical unit that ended with a formal cadence. Although he showed a marked preference for the four-measure phrase and categorized cadences according to their relative strength, he did not see a period as by definition a musical form that fell into two four-measure segments, with a “weak” cadence and then a “strong” one. The idea of a period as a theme with two symmetrical phrases of different tonal weights did not develop until much later, in the work of several early- to mid-nineteenth-century theorists, such as Jérôme-Joseph de Momigny, Antoine Reicha, and A. B. Marx.13 Even then, as Carl Dahlhaus has shown, periodic terminology tended to be used with a certain inconsistency.14 It was not until the twentieth century that the “textbook” notion of the period—an eight-measure theme consisting of two phrases with strong–weak cadential articulation and similar motivic material—began to take hold, particularly in the writings of Arnold Schoenberg and his student Erwin Ratz.15 William Caplin’s influential work on formal analysis, and analytical categories from these more recent authors, Ratz and Caplin especially, using their ideas to explore the inner workings of Schubert’s pristinely beautiful periods and the other themes that interact with them. It was Ratz’s work, in fact, that first got me thinking about idyllic periods in Schubert’s songs. In a passage from *Einführung in die musikalische Formenlehre* (1951), Ratz describes the period and the sentence as being opposed both formally and expressively:

In the case of the period we have a symmetrical structure that has a certain “repose in itself” due to the balance of its two halves, which are more or less equal. . . . The eight-measure sentence, however, contains a certain forward-striving character due to the increased activity and compression in its continuation phrase, making it fundamentally different in construction from the symmetrical organization of the period.17

My experience with Schubert’s songs is that they often bear out this expressive distinction between the two theme-types. As I have noted elsewhere, *Die schöne Müllerin* is full of sentences that are often associated with expressions of anger, aggression, and impetuosity (particularly in what I call Schubert’s “manic sentences,” sentences with hyper-repetitive presentation sections).18 In this cycle, Schubert appears to have recognized and exploited not only the sentence’s structural features but also its expressive potential. The same might be said of the periods in *Die schöne Müllerin*, even though there are far fewer of them: the two clearest periods in the cycle appear in “Des Müllers Blumen” and “Thränenregen,” back-to-back songs in A major and $\frac{6}{8}$ meter, which provide a moment of repose between the more irregular sentential themes of “Morgengruss” and “Mein!”19

If *Die schöne Müllerin* contains far more sentences than periods, however, the opposite is true of the Heine Lieder in *Schwanengesang*: among the six Heine songs periods predominate—and “Am Meer” contains the most normative period of them all. As we will see, the song thus provides a formal and expressive model with which to understand all of the Heine Lieder; it projects an image of perfection, becoming a center of gravity around which the other songs revolve.

**“AM MEER”: THE STRUCTURE OF THE IDYLIC PERIOD**

“Am Meer” is one of Schubert’s most enigmatic songs, and it has attracted considerable analytical attention.20 What makes the song so puzzling is not its tonal idiosyncrasy but, paradoxically, its tonal normalcy—or, more to the point, its stark juxtaposition of chromaticism and pure diatonicism. We have already seen how Schubert sets the first stanza of Heine’s poem to music of absolute simplicity. (Ex. 4 contains the text and translation of the poem.)21 The A section returns, unaltered, after a more turbulent and chromatic B section, and is followed by a varied repetition of B. It is the wholesale, unmodified repetition of section A that has posed the most difficulty for commentators on the song. Why does Schubert recapitulate the idyllic beginning when the corresponding stanza of Heine’s poem describes a scene that has such un-idyllic consequences—the protagonist’s ingestion of his lover’s toxic tears, or (more metaphorically) the sexual experience that leaves him poisoned, forever damaged? Why, for these lines that signal trouble, does Schubert use such untroubled music?

A number of scholars have hazarded answers to this question, but Susan Youens offers the most convincing interpretation.22 For Youens, the exact repetition of the tranquil music

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13 Momigny (1803–6); Reicha (1814, 1824–26); Marx (1837–47). See also Logier (1827).
14 Dahlhaus (1889, 190). To choose only one example: for Koch, a “period” could comprise a musical unit as small as a theme or as large as an entire sonata exposition.
15 Schoenberg (1967, written 1937–48); Ratz (1951).
17 Ratz (1951, 226); translated by Caplin (1994, 152).
18 Rodgers (2014).
19 See Ibid. (65n35).
20 See especially Youens (2007), Chusid (2000b), and Cone (1998 and 2000), to each of which I will return below.
21 All German translations are adapted from Wigmore (1988).
22 Cone (1998, 122), for example, argues that the exact return of A-section material suggests “a moment of renewed affection.” Chusid (2000b, 139) writes: “With Heine’s exaggerated response to the tears . . ., Schubert returns to major and the music for stanza 1. This might be interpreted as an attempt to re-create the idyllic situation of the poem’s beginning. But
from the opening underscores the poetic persona’s “obsessive remembrance,” his desperate need to recall the passionate moment as something pure and beautiful, despite its tragic consequences. “The result of the passion,” she writes, “may be disease and disaster, but we are reminded by this music of its origins in something that was, and remains, beautiful.” This is music that, for Youens, sounds “all-too-pure, all-too-perfect.” What appeals to me most about Youens’s analysis is its emphasis on the role that memory plays in this song.

Although the first three stanzas of Heine’s poem are written in the simple past tense, they seem to recall not one timeframe, but two different timeframes, or two different states of mind: one before the rush of tears, a time of innocence described in the first stanza, and another during the rush of tears, a later time of confusion described in the second and third stanzas. What is most striking, however, is that the music seems to try to reclaim the earliest time of innocence all the while that the text continues to describe the more recent moment of confusion. Stanza 3 proceeds chronologically from stanza 2 (the tears that were shed in stanza 2 now fall on the beloved’s hands, and the protagonist sinks to his knees and drinks them), but the music associated with stanza 3 jumps back in time (though the tears and confusion continue, he tries in vain to remember a time before they ever happened). I say he “tries in vain” because one of the most remarkable things about Schubert’s song is that it reveals the insufficiency of the protagonist’s efforts to regain this past perfection. Indeed, it calls into question whether the perfection ever existed at all. Here, Youens’s words are apt: the music of the opening is “all-too-pure, all-too-perfect.” Schubert composes a theme that sounds too good to be true, and then, in the stanza where the poisoning takes place, at the moment when there is no turning back, he does just that: he turns back to the beginning, and he does so exactly, in a way that seems oblivious to the intervening music and the reality it depicts.

at this point I think Schubert opted in favor of a logical musical design; that is, he wrote the music for stanza 4 almost exactly like that of stanza 2, with different cadences.” Johnson (2000, 78) feels that “there is something religious about this music,” which is appropriate for a scene where the poet kneels before his lover “as if she were a holy icon.” Stein, for his part, expresses only bafflement; for Stein, the ABAB’ form of the song “negates the main effect of the poem” (1971, 87).

Youens (2007, 70).

Ibid.

Ibid.

Jürgen Thym also highlights the role of memory in Schubert’s late Lieder (though not in this song, specifically): “Perhaps there is something like a ‘late’ style in Schubert after all: it manifests itself in his songs in a particularly poignant and heart-rending to invoking memory in music” (2016, 403).

I am reminded of David Lewin’s (2006, 135–49) analysis of Schubert’s “Ihr Bild,” a song that also features an exact repetition of earlier major-mode music in a place where one least expects it. The final couplet’s outcry (“Und ach, ich kann es nicht glauben, / Dass ich dich verloren hab!”)
How do the formal design and voice-leading structure of the theme contribute to this sense of “impossible perfection”? Example 5 provides both a formal analysis and analytic overlay of the A section. The abbreviations “b. i.” and “c. i.” refer to “basic idea” and “contrasting idea,” respectively; I draw these terms from William Caplin. The design of the theme, with its symmetrical periodic construction, simple root-position harmonies, pure diatonicism, and so on, is as clear as can be, as is the underlying counterpoint. Note that the passage features a clear-cut interruption, typical of periods—\[\text{3–2–1}\]—and that this structure is only minimally elaborated, which renders it plainly audible. The embellishments themselves elegantly reinforce that underlying structure: the “nested” \[\text{3–2–1}\] motions (slurred in the analytic overlay) mimic, in microcosm, the larger \[\text{3–2–1}\] motion of the melody. The theme, we might say, is “all-too-perfectly” transparent, both formally and structurally.

“Am Meer’s” theme is also texturally transparent. Example 6 outlines an imagined process by which the thick, chordal accompaniment of “Am Meer” might have been generated from a simple model. I call this an “imagined” process, because I am not suggesting that this is how Schubert developed the accompaniment; rather, I mean only to speculate about its conceptual origins in something simpler.

28 Cone (2000, 80) likewise notes that the theme in “Am Meer” is a period, though he does not attempt to relate its design to the design of other themes in the cycle. Interestingly, Cone also describes the entire form of “Am Meer” as periodic: it forms what he calls “a huge period, framed by the mysterious chords of the famous prelude and postlude” (Ibid.; see also [1998, 122]). Here, he seems to be suggesting that the first half of the song (AB) is an antecedent and the second half (AB’) is a consequent. Cone argues that the song’s form could also be interpreted as ternary (ABA–B’), with the final B’ section functioning as a sort of coda (Cone [2000, 81]).

Youens (2007, 64) and Hascher (2008, 64) note this as well. Hascher (2007, 64) describes the accompaniment as having “four parts section is much more loosely constructed than the A section. There are no parallel periods here; the prolongational progression, i–ii–V6–i, lasts only two, but the prolongation of ii takes up four full measures (mm. 14–17, outlining a iv–V7–i progression in the context of D minor). A nominally secondary chord assumes primary importance, unlike the A section, where structure and duration were perfectly coordinated, with the tonic taking up the most time, interrupted only briefly by embellishing dominants.

One other detail merits comment—the famously mysterious opening (and closing) chords of the song. This enigmatic chord progression can be interpreted in a variety of ways: for Joseph Kerman, it is an “oracle framing or glossing the poetic statement”; for Richard Kramer, it “conveys the passage of time and action”, to my mind, it also evokes the sound of thunder or of water crashing against the shore, even perhaps a jolt of pain. Irrespective of the representational function of the progression, however, one of its musical functions is to make the main theme of the song sound even more idyllic—too idyllic, in fact. This is the marvel of “Am Meer”: with the simplest of techniques—compose a conventional, balanced, purely diatonic theme, surround it with disturbance, and then repeat it exactly—Schubert manages to enact the complex inner workings of memory: the poet, the music seems to say, does not just remember an event; he misremembers it, making it more beautiful than it really was.

As idyllic as this theme sounds in the context of the song itself, it sounds even more idyllic in the context of the five other Heine Lieder, several of which refer to it, though never with the same crystalline beauty. There is only space here to sketch some of those relationships, touching on three songs with themes that allude to the idyllic period in “Am Meer”: “Ihr Bild,” “Das Fischermädchen,” and “Die Stadt.” I do so not to settle or even really grapple with the ongoing debates about the proper order of the cycle, rather, I intend only to suggest what might be gained by looking at the entire cycle from the perspective of theme-type.

Furthermore, the harmonic rhythm of the passage is out of sync with the relative structural importance of its harmonies: the opening tonic (m. 12) and the structural predominant (m. 21) last only one measure, and the structural dominant (mm. 22–23) lasts only two, but the prolongation of ii takes up four full measures (mm. 14–17, outlining a iv–V7–i progression in the context of D minor). A nominally secondary chord assumes primary importance, unlike the A section, where structure and duration were perfectly coordinated, with the tonic taking up the most time, interrupted only briefly by embellishing dominants.

The perfection of the A section seems all the more ephemeral because it is dissolved by the swelling waves and gathering fog of the B section that follows it. In terms of underlying voice leading, the B section is quite conventional: as Example 7 shows, it leads to 2 2 over V, setting up the half cadence that precedes the return of A, and, at a middleground level, it outlines a normative harmonic progression that traverses a long T–PD–D path (mm. 12–20 trace a tonic–prolongational progression, i–ii–V6–I, and mm. 21–23 lead through a structural predominant to a structural dominant).

Formally and harmonically, however, the B section is far less straightforward. There are no parallel periods here; the section is much more loosely constructed than the A section. The irregular B section conforms with the tendency toward looser structures of “contrasting middles” in general. See Caplin (1998, 75–81).

Youens (2007, 64) describes the accompaniment as having “four parts…flushed out with doublings,” but I see this as an enriched three-voice texture.

Youens (2007, 64) and Hascher (2008, 64) note this as well. Hascher describes the song’s piano texture in terms similar to my own, noting that “the added voice is reinforced in the lower octave, while both upper parts are set into resonance by the left hand of the piano, transforming the solo song into a fantasized love duet” (Ibid.). His linear reduction of the song accordingly shows only parallel sixths above a bass line (Ex. 3e, 59).

The irregular B section conforms with the tendency toward looser structures of “contrasting middles” in general. See Caplin (1998, 75–81).
I am not the first to suggest that “Am Meer” and “Ihr Bild” are related—Youens (2007, 64), for example, draws a connection between the distinctive accompanimental texture of “Am Meer,” with thirds in the uppermost voices of the right hand, and a similar texture in mm. 18 and 22 of “Ihr Bild,” where the right hand also moves in parallel thirds—but to my knowledge no one has pointed out that their themes are so similar. (Ex. 8 provides a formal analysis and analytic overlay of the first section of the song. I have placed the melody of “Am Meer” above it—transposed to Bb major, in order to facilitate the comparison.) My analysis of the theme’s voice-leading structure differs from Wintle’s (2000, 16). Wintle regards the eighth-note D in m. 3 as an instance of “reaching over,” a superposition of an inner voice. His structural melody thus rises stepwise from Bb to C to D, and his analysis emphasizes the “not fully supported” quality of 3 (Ibid., 19). Hascher (2008, 58) likewise shows an initial ascent to D. I prefer a slightly more orthodox analysis, which emphasizes the theme’s relationship to a conventional interruption archetype (3–2 // 3–2–1). Wintle, incidentally, shows an interrupted structure in his background view of the song (Ex. 6 [iii]), but he places

“Ihr Bild”

...
that is, we regard a period as a theme that involves two parallel phrases. It is perhaps best described as a “hybrid,” specifically what Caplin calls a “hybrid 2,” which begins with an antecedent and ends not with a proper consequent but with a cadential progression (antecedent + cadential). The theme’s underlying melodic skeleton is also similar to “Am Meer’s” outlining an overall $3\rightarrow2 // 3\rightarrow1$ pattern. Moreover, the meters of the songs are identical (cut time), the rhythms of their melodies are similar (note especially the dotted-quarter–eighth–quarter pattern), and they share a striking number of scale degrees.

It is these many similarities that make the differences between the themes so noticeable. “Ihr Bild” of course begins in minor, not major, and its piano accompaniment is as sparse as can be, moving only in octaves. Joseph Kerman has described the famous Bbs of the piano introduction as a “condensation” of the enigmatic opening progression of “Am Meer”; indeed, the entire antecedent phrase of “Ihr Bild” seems to condense “Am Meer’s” antecedent to its barest essentials. In this light, we might imagine that the octaves of “Ihr Bild” have been stripped of the right-hand thirds that accompanied the octaves in “Am Meer.” We might see “Ihr Bild” as an imperfect version of the perfect period in “Am Meer,” an idyllic period drained of all its color—until mm. 7–8, where the piano’s two-measure “echo” duplicates the pianist’s referential hand configuration from “Am Meer,” and mm. 9–12, where the cadential phrase turns to major and

The initial D$\flat$ (3) in parentheses, because while it is present in the music it is “only weakly represented” (2000, 27).

Caplin (1998, 61). See also Caplin (1994). The second phrase of this hybrid might be described as an “expanded cadential progression,” but one whose predominant harmony is either missing or placed between the two statements of the cadential $f$ (note the C-minor chord on the downbeat of m. 11). On the concept of the “expanded cadential progression,” see Caplin (1987). Cone (2000, 75) describes the song’s opening as a “period” with a “minor antecedent” and a “major consequent,” presumably thinking in terms of a so-called contrasting period. He does not, however, relate this theme to the period in “Am Meer.”

The $3$, however, is delayed in the second phrase of “Ihr Bild,” arriving only in the third measure of this phrase.

continues with a denser piano texture. This phrase seems to perform two contradictory functions. On one hand, it distances the theme from “Am Meer”; this phrase is the very thing that prevents the theme from being a bona fide period. But, in a more profound sense, it draws the two themes into even closer contact: this denser, major-mode phrase suggests not just a coming to life of the beloved’s image, but also a coming together of these two songs, an evocation of “Am Meer’s” theme, brought about by the piano’s echo and its striking textural change. In sum, no matter the order of the songs, when viewed in relation to the perfect period of “Am Meer,” the hybrid theme of “Ihr Bild” seems all the more fitting, for it distills the idyllic period of “Am Meer” to its essence and then seems almost to conjure it, however incompletely.

The only other major-mode song in the cycle is “Das Fischermädchen,” and not surprisingly its theme also resembles “Am Meer’s.” (See 9 for a formal analysis and analytic overlay of the A section.) Note again the structural similarities with “Am Meer”: the third line, the interruption (with an implied 2 at the HC, as was also the case with “Am Meer”), and the nested 3–2–1 in the first two measures. Again, though, the differences are just as telling. The
repetition of the consequent phrase ratchets up the energy, as does the cadential extension in the last two measures and the fact that this period involves not an exact repetition of the basic idea at the start of the consequent but a sequential one. The narrator repeats his appeals with ever-greater insistence, and Schubert responds in kind, presenting us not with a restful period but with a restless one—which, in both versions of the cycle, precedes “Am Meer,” offering a promise of the perfection to come.

“Die Stadt”

Outwardly, the melodies to “Die Stadt” and “Am Meer” are quite different: the contour of “Die Stadt” is upward, not downward, and it lacks an interruption altogether (Ex. 10).

But they share the same tonic, use similarly hymnodic accompaniments, and begin with similarly ambiguous harmonies. Even aside from that, the phrase structure of “Die Stadt” resembles that of “Am Meer,” however faintly. The theme moves in two four-measure phrases, leading first to an IAC in F minor and then to a PAC in C minor, and though the phrases are not parallel they begin with the same rhythmic pattern, such that the move up to C in m. 11 brings to mind the model of a period with a sequential consequent—the kind we saw in “Das Fischermädchen.” In comparison with the idyllic period of “Am Meer,” the main theme of “Die Stadt” is a funereal period, with its dirge-like rhythm and its low-register piano part that seems to keep the theme rooted to the spot.

41 On sequential consequent phrases, see Caplin (1998, 53). Cone (2000, 79) also notes that in “Das Fischermädchen” Schubert “doubles the length of a normal eight-measure period”—again, though, he draws no explicit connection between this period and the period in “Am Meer.”

42 Here, I disagree with Stein (1971, 85), who finds the song’s melody merely charming, with “no hidden implications whatsoever.” To my ears, the sequential consequent and the excessive repetition in this theme gives the music a tone of over-eagerness and persistence, even a whiff of insincerity.

43 “Die Stadt” famously begins with an arpeggiated diminished-seventh chord, whose function is unclear: it includes the note C and is followed by a C–minor triad, but it does not so much resolve to this chord as merely precede it. On the ambiguity of the song’s opening, see Hascher (2008, 60–61), Youens (2007, 55), Chusid (2000b, 137), Johnson (2000), Cone (1998, 120), Kerman (1986, 153), and Morgan (1976, 58–60). Like the main theme of “Am Meer,” the main theme of “Die Stadt” also features local harmonic progressions that are based on fifth motions (note the I–V in mm. 7–8 of “Die Stadt,” the V–I in F minor in mm. 9–10, and ii–V–I in mm. 11–14—not quite the harmonic simplicity of the simple tonic/dominant harmonies of “Am Meer,” but nevertheless something that both recalls and transforms the basic harmonic vocabulary of the idyllic period).
Yet, it is a dirge whose melody pulls against the weight of its accompaniment, like the city’s towers that rise through the mist.44

As mentioned above, I am not interested in settling the matter of the “proper” order of the Heine Lieder (nor do I think it is possible, or even advisable, to do so).45 Rather, I would like to propose that our understanding of both versions of the cycle might be deepened if we view it from the perspective of theme-type, if we see it as containing themes with more and less “repose in themselves” (to return to Ratz), with “Am Meer” as the thematic perfection against which other songs might be measured.

In the published order, based on the autograph score (“Der Atlas,” “Ihr Bild,” “Das Fischermädchen,” “Die Stadt,” “Am Meer,” “Der Doppelgänger”), “Am Meer” functions as a thematic culmination. In this version, the cycle is framed by two non-periodic songs: “Der Atlas,” whose theme is an archetypal sentence with as little “repose-in-itself” as any melody in the cycle, and “Der Doppelgänger,” whose melody moves in successive phrases ending with HCs, until its last phrase, which finally produces a PAC. Significantly, each of these poems expresses only pain—the unending present misery of Atlas, who must carry the weight of the world, and the hand-wringing agony of the Doppelgänger, who mocks the poetic persona’s past lovesickness—so it makes sense that the themes of these songs would be far from idyllic. Within this frame, the cycle’s four periodic songs progress from a promise of thematic perfection (in “Ihr Bild”), through a gradual movement away from that perfection (in “Das Fischermädchen” and “Die Stadt”), to a full realization of that perfection (in “Am Meer”). This musical process interacts meaningfully with the narrative process that unfolds over this version of the cycle: each of the four internal songs enacts a memory of the persona’s experience with his beloved (staring at her image in “Ihr Bild,” entertaining her to take his hand and rest her head on his shoulder in “Das Fischermädchen,” remembering the town where they were once together in “Die Stadt,” and recounting an amorous encounter in “Am Meer”), and the most intimate of those experiences happens in “Am Meer.” Thematic perfection, in other words, corresponds with physical and emotional unity.

In the revised order proposed by Maurice Brown, Harry Goldschmidt, and Richard Kramer (“Das Fischermädchen,” “Am Meer,” “Die Stadt,” “Der Doppelgänger,” “Ihr Bild,” “Der Atlas”), “Am Meer” functions more as a thematic starting-point. The moment of perfection and intimacy appears early, suggested by “Das Fischermädchen,” a song of love promised but not yet fulfilled, and fully realized only a song later. This leads to a dissolution of that blissful scene in the partially periodic “Die Stadt,” which recalls not so much an encounter with the beloved as a place where an encounter happened, and in the non-periodic “Der Doppelgänger,” which recalls a time of grief. Then comes a fleeting memory of the scene in “Ihr Bild,” which attempts to conjure an image of the beloved, and finally a complete abandonment of it in the sentential “Der Atlas,” where no memory can soothe the persona’s pain.

Readers can decide for themselves which musico-poetic narrative they find most compelling. (Personally, I am drawn to the second, because of its poignant moment of recollection in “Ihr Bild”—though to some extent the success of failure of either arrangement might be best assessed in real-time performance, not out-of-time analytical reflection.) My aim has only been to urge us to see thematic process as integral to that narrative, part and parcel of the cycle’s ebb and flow of sound and sentiment.

“SO LASST MICH SCHEINEN” AND “AM FENSTER”: THE TEXTURE OF THE IDYLIC PERIOD

In the analyses above, I have attempted to show that the period was not merely a mold into which Schubert poured his musical ideas but rather a form that had rich expressive associations. The example of “Am Meer” also reveals that it seems to have been a form with a tactile feeling, in that the straightforward, uncomplicated thematic form is conjoined with an equally simple accompaniment and hand configuration. “Am Meer” is hardly singular in this respect. Play through the passages listed in Example 3; it is difficult not to notice that one’s hands return to the same places on the keyboard, tracing the same basic shapes. Specifically, one finds songs whose piano accompaniments exhibit some or all of the following features:

1. homophonic, chorale-based textures, with relatively few individual voice-leading strands;
2. octave doublings of those individual strands, resulting in textures that are at once dense and simple, thick and transparent;
3. right-hand melodies that double the vocal melody, with occasional “descants” that float above it;
4. wide spacing between the hands.46

44 I derive my own analytic overlay from Schenker’s reduction of mm. 7–14. See Schenker ([1935] 1979, supplement, fig. 103, 4).
45 As Kristina Musfeldt (2001, 81) has pointed out, toggling back and forth between different interpretations of the cycle reveals as much about the richness and flexibility of Schubert’s musical designs as attempting to prove the validity of one interpretation over another.
Below, I examine two of these songs: “So lasst mich scheinen,” the third of the Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister, composed in January 1826, one of four songs based on poems from Goethe’s novel; 47 and “Am Fenster,” composed only two months later, a setting of a poem by Johann Seidl.

This song is remarkably similar to “Am Meer.” Both songs use an overall ABAB’ form, with A sections that are diatonically pure and B sections that are more chromatic (though the contrast between A and B is less severe in “So lasst mich scheinen”); the melodic range of their A sections is fairly narrow; their A sections are full of tonics and dominants, almost always in root position; and their affect is one of calm reflection. But it is in the shaping of their phrases and the feeling of their piano accompaniments that they are most connected.

The second system of Example 11 shows one possible path from the simple textural model underlying “So lasst mich scheinen” to the filled-out chords of the score. (I have transposed the song from B major to C major, for the sake of comparison with “Am Meer.”) Even a quick glance at systems 1 and 2 reveals how intimately the songs’ textures are related.

For all these similarities, however, the songs’ themes and textures are obviously not identical. If the texturally simple example 11. “Am Meer,” “So lasst mich scheinen,” and “Am Fenster,” textural models and realizations

configuration above. Lubin (2000) explores three pianistic styles in Schwanengesang, which he calls the “pleasing” style, the “serious” style, and the “avant-garde” style. None of these, however, resembles the particular textural configuration I outline here. Incidentally, these kinds of pianistic textures and periodic designs also come together in certain of Schubert’s late instrumental works. Three clear examples are the slow movement of the Piano Sonata in D Major, D. 850 (1825), the first movement of the Piano Sonata in Bb Major, D. 960 (1828), and the first movement of the Piano Sonata in G Major, D. 894 (1827). The slow movement of D. 850 is a chorale-like period with a four-measure antecedent leading to an IAC and a four-measure consequent leading to a PAC. Its first three chords even use a three-voice texture, with parallel thirds in the right hand and the alto melody doubled an octave below, and the theme’s rhythms are almost identical to those of “So lasst mich scheinen,” discussed below—a connection hardly lost on other scholars (see, for example, Black [2003, 122]). The opening of D. 960 sounds even more like “So lasst mich scheinen” (texturally and formally, if not rhythmically), and like other, comparable idyllic periods from this time period. Note the symmetrical periodic design $(9 + 9$ rather than $8 + 8$, due to the famous left-hand trill at the end of the antecedent and the sequential melodic repetition in the consequent). Even more, notice the basically three-voice texture (almost an exact replica of “So lasst mich scheinen”): a duet of parallel sixths, sounding above a static bass, with the melody doubled an octave below and the octave 5s filling out the texture. The first movement of D. 894, which opens with a four-measure antecedent and a five-measure consequent leading to an IAC, features a similarly transparent texture—with parallel thirds in the right hand and a soprano voice doubled down an octave, all above a simple bass.

47 “So lasst mich scheinen” is not the only song from this opus that contains a period. The second song in the set, “Heiss mich nicht reden,” opens with a straightforward, eight-measure period in E minor, whose antecedent leads to a PAC in III and whose consequent ends with a PAC in i, and the last song, “Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt,” Schubert’s second setting of this text in the same opus (the other is song no. 1), begins with an equally balanced $4 + 4$ period in A minor whose antecedent leads to a half cadence in the tonic and whose consequent leads to a PAC in C major.
idyllic period served as an expressive model for Schubert, it was a model capable of infinite variation as the text and context demanded. The text to this song comes from the final chapter of Goethe’s novel, in which Mignon dies. Wilhelm discovers Mignon ill and still wearing a white angel’s costume from a children’s party. She refuses to take off the costume; the white dress and gold wings give her comfort in her final days and become for her a symbol of the incarnation that she will assume in heaven. Imagining her transfigured body, Mignon sings the words shown in Example 12.

The details of Schubert’s period are beautifully calibrated to the emotions and actions of the scene (see Ex. 13 for the opening section of the song in its original key). The accompanimental texture, for example, brings to mind a hymn—even a funereal hymn evoked by the steadily pulsing eighth notes and the repeated F in the piano’s left hand. (If the religious connotations of the hymnody in “Am Meer” were somewhat veiled, here they are more exposed.) But perhaps “funereal” is the wrong term, for this is not a mournful hymn about the end of life but a consoling hymn about the afterlife, a song that looks more forward than backward, hovering between the threshold between a present world of anguish and a future world of joy. The theme itself also seems to hover, beginning with a dominant harmony that heightens the sense of expectancy. The melody hovers as well, deemphasizing 1 and 3 in favor of 2, 4, and 7, which are placed on downbeats (on syllables like “schei-nen,” “wer-de,” “mir,” and “aus”), placing the listener in a state of suspended animation, waiting for these energized scale degrees to resolve. Another detail that speaks volumes is the melody’s dip into a middle register in mm. 12–13 (on “jenes dunkle Haus”), resulting in an evasion of the expected PAC and evoking Mignon’s descent into that dark dwelling place. The upper-voice melody in mm. 12–13, hovering around F, functions as a sort of descant in its own right: the “real” melody—the one that leads to 1—is hidden in the middle of the piano’s chords, the very register where, in the next two measures, it is heard in the piano’s PAC.

As with “Am Meer,” the meaning of this idyllic period comes into sharper focus when we consider it in relation to the other sections of the song. The B section is both more chromatic and also more rhythmically active, with sixteenth notes in m. 16 (Ex. 14). The disturbance may be minimal in the

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Thus let me seem till thus I become.
Do not take off my white dress!
I shall swiftly leave the fair earth for that dark dwelling place below.

There, for a brief silence, I shall rest;
then my eyes shall open afresh.
Then I shall leave behind this pure raiment,
this girdle and this rosary.

And those heavenly beings
do not ask who is man or woman,
and no garments, no folds enclose the transfigured body.

True, I lived free from care and toil,
yet I knew much deep suffering.
Too soon I grew old with grief;
make me young again forever!

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48 Stein finds fault with some of these stresses—“mir” on the downbeat of m. 8, for instance—claiming that “the ¾ time Schubert uses fits the rhythm of the poem badly, and words must often be forced awkwardly into the musical pattern” (1971, 78). I find that the ¾ meter is quite apt, as is the particular “declamatory schema” of the song (to borrow a term from Malin [2010]): because the downbeat stress alternates from the third poetic foot of a line to the first, Schubert is able to linger on crucial syllables—like “schei-nen” in m. 6, for example.

49 As with “Am Meer,” the irregularity of the B section makes it all the more characteristic of a “contrasting middle.” Until the B section returns, the first B would likely be heard as a contrasting middle.
first couple measures of the section, but soon the music is wrenched away from the tonic with a modulation as distant as it is drastic: there is no pivot chord here, just stark octaves that seem to pull the music through a narrow tunnel from one tonal world to another. We land heavily on the other side, with an emphatic cadence in D major (III), but the next phrase (“Ich lasse dann...”) shrinks away suddenly from this key, heading home no sooner than it had left: the original texture returns with the same harmonic progression from the beginning of A (tonic 6 followed by dominant), as does the tonic (first minor, then major), which is regained easily, almost nonchalantly, with a PAC in m. 23. Later in the song, when section B reappears, the tonal shift is even more jarring, leading to D minor and proclaimed at a fortissimo dynamic. As before, however, the music that follows barely registers the shock—it is just as untroubled as the earlier B section, showing no signs of the tumult that happened six measures before. Life’s “tiefer Schmerz” (deep suffering) and “Kummer” (grief), the music seems to tell us, lie in the past, and across this border they will have no more power. In this sense, “Am Meer” and “So lasst mich scheinen” make a particularly compelling pair, for they both conjure up perfect dream worlds but they do so by looking in opposite directions: in the first case, toward an idealized past available only in memory, and in the second, toward an eternal future promised in heaven.

“Am Fenster”

“Am Fenster” also looks forward to a blissful future—not, however, a future beyond the grave but a future in this world, where one is protected from loneliness and the injustices of chance. On a literal reading, the poem (shown in Ex. 15) describes someone enclosed within four walls, gazing up at the moon and imagining a time when the walls confined him rather than sheltered him. But, as Graham Johnson has suggested, the scene is more specific:

[Richard Capell, in a study of Schubert’s songs,] sums up the background to the poem thus: “the poet addresses the
walls of his old home. From this alone, it seems to me that Capell, along with the other commentators, has not quite understood the work’s scenario. Our poet is speaking from a monastery. Once this is seen, the rest of the poem makes sense. The narrator had arrived at the cloister some years before in a state of profound spiritual crisis (Verse [that is, quatrain] 2). Converted by a “new light,” he has found peace in “this sacred life,” and, above all, in the fellowship of his religious community (Verse 4). He has embraced the contemplative life where silent joy (“stille Freud,” Verse 5) in something so natural and beautiful as the moonlight has replaced his silent anguish. The walls of the monastery have born witness to his development and growth.

The poetic scenario may not be as clear-cut as Johnson supposes—I prefer to embrace the ambiguity of its subject matter, the richness that stems from the poem’s lack of specificity—but he is right to point out the religious overtones. Reading the poem as at least partly religious helps to explain Schubert’s adoption—yet again—of an accompaniment that evokes hymnody.

As with “So lasst mich scheinen,” the hymn feels very much like the hymn in “Am Meer,” due to its similarly slow tempo (Langsam) and, even more, to its accompanimental texture. In the third system of Example 11, I suggest how the accompaniment to “Am Fenster” could have been derived (again, I have transposed the song from its original key to the key of “Am Meer,” to make the relationships clearer). The basic model of “Am Fenster” likewise features parallel intervals between soprano and alto (thirds rather than sixths) and a simple bass line (including more degrees of the scale, but still nothing chromatic). Thereafter, the process is very much like what we saw in “So lasst mich scheinen”: the soprano melody is doubled down an octave, and the alto voice is transposed down an octave.

This is all simple enough, so far as it goes, but it is in the finer textural details that a song like “Am Fenster” becomes even more deeply expressive (see Ex. 16 for the opening section in its original key of F major). Note, for instance, that like “Am Meer” and “So lasst mich scheinen,” it features a descant melody in mm. 10–11, a right-hand strain that breaks free momentarily from the voice at the beginning of the consequent phrase, drifting above the melody in mm. 10–11, reconnecting with it at the beginning of m. 12, and then rising even higher. The piano’s floating descant—which emerges when we hear the words “silberglänzend niederschaut” (with a silvery sheen gaze down)—suggests the “liebe Mauern” (dear walls) that look down lovingly upon the poetic persona and also the full moon that shines in the sky. Indeed, the disposition of the hands themselves reflects the disposition of the objects in the scene: the towering chord in m. 14 (boxed in Ex. 16), which spans four octaves and a third at its extremes and two octaves and a third between the thumbs alone, evokes the poet resting down below in his cool chamber, with tall walls surrounding him and the moon overhead.

50 Capell (1973, 223).
52 In the autograph manuscript of the song these “descant” notes are drawn with upward stems, visually reinforcing the fact that they are floating above the real melody. See http://javanese.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/3/3f/IMSLP49026-PMLP39448-Am_Fenster-Manuscript.pdf.
53 In the final section of the song, an even more dramatic registral shift mimics the upward gaze of each “Freundeshaupt” (friendly head) that looks at the same shining moon (mm. 68–69).
How, then, does this textural drama play out over the rest of the song? The overall form of the song is AA0BCA. After a minor-mode version of the opening section (A0, mm. 18–29) comes a section in D major (B, mm. 30–39; see Ex. 17), in which the accompaniment suddenly becomes more active and the piano’s melody moves more freely, less tethered to the vocal melody. As energized as this section may be, however, it outlines a period that is even more balanced than the one at the beginning of the song. We may have left the tranquil world of the opening behind, but we have not left its sense of inner order and poise.

That happens in section C, corresponding with the second half of stanza 2 (mm. 40–49, shown in Ex. 18). Here Schubert jettisons the period in favor of a more restless sentential theme. (The second half of this theme [mm. 44–47] does not behave like a typical continuation, in that there is not really any fragmentation, acceleration of harmonic rhythm, increase in surface rhythmic activity, or harmonic sequence. These measures are perhaps best regarded as what Caplin [1998, 45–47] would call “continuation = >cadential,” where cadential function is even stronger than continuation function. The second half of the theme, in other words, features a kind of distorted expanded cadential progression, with the I6 chord of m. 44 launching a cadential progression that unexpectedly veers toward A major.) The sense of unrest in this passage is heightened by the chromatic harmonies (note especially the rising chromatic motion in the bass across mm. 40–45: A♭–A♭–B♭–B♭–C), the metric displacement dissonances in the piano’s right hand, and the unexpected modulation to A major, which is all the more jarring because the point of departure at m. 40 is A♭ major, a tonality only a half-step away.

Formally and tonally, section C may differ from section A. Texturally, however, it returns to the A section’s model—yet it

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**EXAMPLE 15.** Seidl, “Am Fenster,” text and translation

Ihr lieben Mauern, hold und traut,  
Dear, familiar walls,  

Die ihr mich kühl umschliesst,  
you enclose me within your coolness,  

Und silberglänzend niederschaut,  
and gaze down with silvery sheen  

Wenn droben Vollmond ist!  
when the full moon shines above.  

Ihr saht mich einst so traurig da,  
Once you saw me here so sad,  

Mein Haupt auf schlaffer Hand,  
head buried in weary hands,  

Als ich in mir allein mich sah,  
looking only within myself,  

Und Keiner mich verstand.  
understood by no one.

Jetzt brach ein ander Licht heran,  
Now a new light has dawned,  

Die Trauerzeit ist um,  
the time of sadness is past,  

Und Manche zieh’n mit mir die Bahn  
and many join me on my path  

Durch’s Lebensheiligtum.  
through this sacred life.  

Sie raubt der Zufall ewig nie  
Chance will never steal them  

Aus meinem treuen Sinn,  
from my faithful heart;  

In tiefster Seele trag’ ich sie,  
I carry them deep in my soul,  

Da reikt kein Zufall hin.  
where fate cannot penetrate.

Du Mauer wähnst mich trüb wie einst,  
Wall, you imagine I am as gloomy as I once was:  

Das ist die stille Freud;  
that is my silent joy.

Wenn du vom Mondlicht widerscheinest,  
When you reflect the moonlight  

Wird mir die Brust so weit.  
my heart swells.  

An jedem Fenster wän’ ich dann  
Then I imagine I see at every window  

Ein Freundeshaupt, gesenkt,  
a friendly face, lowered,  

Das auch so schaut zum Himmel an,  
that then gazes heavenwards,  

Das auch so meiner denkt.  
thinking of me too.

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does so gradually. Measures 40–45 (prior to the double bar) vaguely evoke the model texture from the opening of the song: the soprano melody, which in the A section sounded in the highest voice, now sounds beneath the relentless Es played by the fifth finger, and the alto voice, which previously sounded a tenth below the soprano voice has now effectively been placed in the bass, an octave and a tenth below. (See the arrows in Ex. 18.) The textural elements of the song’s opening are all present and accounted for, but they have been so rearranged as to be unrecognizable. At the point of modulation to A major (after the double bar), the texture of the A section emerges more noticeably. Measures 46–49 are effectively a transposition of mm. 14–17 (cf. Exx. 16 and 18). They duplicate both the accompanimental texture and the cadential material that ended the A section; only the metric displacement dissonances persist. To my mind, this is why the modulation to A major, for all its shock, sounds strangely like a restoration of order. Tonally, we have left the idyllic period far behind, but texturally we have come closer to home. The result is a sort of musical paradox, but one that perfectly expresses the poem’s mix of defiance and calm. The poetic persona defiantly refuses to accept the capriciousness of fate, but at the same time his defiance brings with it a sense of peace and composure, as he turns inward to the depths of his soul where fate cannot touch him (“Chance will never steal them from my faithful heart; I carry them deep in my soul, where fate cannot penetrate”). Schubert captures this mingling of opposites with music that is both different and the same, distant and near, shocking in its tonal extremity and soothing in its melodic and textural familiarity.

The following section (mm. 50–57, Ex. 19) functions as a retransition not only tonally, with A minor serving as a gateway between the chromatic mediants of A major and F major, but also melodically and texturally. Effectively, mm. 50–53
present a varied repetition of the idyllic period’s consequent phrase, with the basic idea returning in mm. 50–51 (in A minor), followed by the contrasting idea in mm. 52–53, finally in the “right” key of F major. The basic idea, however, is sounded only in the piano, not in the voice; furthermore, the texture is very nearly identical to that of the opening period, but not quite identical, because the left-hand chords appear an octave too low (compare mm. 6–7 of Ex. 16 with mm. 50–51 of
Ex. 18). The voice picks up the melody of the idyllic period and the exact texture reappears only when the home key has returned. That suggests a process by which the texture, melody, and tonality of the opening section are reconstituted, but only in stages: (1) some aspects of the texture reemerge in the most restless part of the song (section B), most notably at its end, where the referential hand configuration reemerges, along with the period's contrasting idea, in the distant key of A major; (2) the period's basic idea returns at the beginning of the retransition, but only in the piano, with a slightly different texture, and still in the "wrong" key of A minor, albeit one closer to home (mm. 50–51); and (3) finally, the period's contrasting idea is heard in the vocal melody, with the referential texture, and in the tonic of F major (mm. 52–53). All of this paves the way for the culmination of this process: the return of the idyllic period in its entirety in mm. 58ff., and the speaker's declaration of his "stille Freud" (quiet joy).

CONCLUSION

In this article I have focused on only half a dozen songs, offering close readings of only a handful of idyllic periods in Schubert's song output. I chose these songs because they seemed especially representative, but in truth, any one of the songs in Example 3 could have merited the same level of scrutiny. These themes seem to shun the things that music analysts so often prize—departure from convention, deformation of norms, obvious innovation, adventurousness—but they are no less worthy of detailed analysis. Indeed, the craftsmanship behind these stunningly beautiful stretches of music is all the more remarkable for its subtlety. In his biography of Schubert, Christopher Gibbs writes of those "passages of consoling lyrical serenity" that appear so often in the composer's late works, which are often juxtaposed with passages of "disturbing violence" or "hopeless fatalism." One naturally thinks of "Am Meer," with its calm A sections and troubled B sections, or of the sudden and distant modulations in "So lasst mich scheinen," which wrench the music away from a state of blissful composure. Schubert is justifiably famous for these astonishing leaps into hitherto unexplored abysses of chromaticism, these radical experiments at the borders of functional tonality. But we do well to remember that in his music—and in his late music especially—the oases of normalcy, order, balance, and repose are no less novel, no less artful, and no less affecting. A great part of what makes this music so deeply moving, as I have argued throughout, is the way it uses the simplest of techniques to transport us to distant worlds—worlds of peace, tranquility, and grace; worlds not of the present time, but of times vanished or promised.

54 Gibbs (2000, 155).
55 Susan Youens makes a similar point in her book about Schubert's late Lieder: "Size and heaven-storming difficulty always command attention, and Schubert made it a lifelong habit to compose songs ... that challenge singers, pianists, and listeners alike. But wellsprings of profundity are also at work in quieter songs. ... Here, one finds rare qualities of acceptance, a philosophical stance from the outermost brink of a well-lived life. If this is less dramatic than ... rage or flaming passion, it is ultimately the most moving dimension of all. That Schubert found music for it is his last gift to us" (2002, xiv).
Above all, I hope to have shown that theme-type was an essential part of Schubert’s art, a key component of his expressive vocabulary. Throughout, we have seen some of the strategies that he used to endow these “abstract” models with deep meaning—by conjoining thematic forms with different poetic ideas, voice-leading structures, and pianistic textures. Yet, these are hardly his only strategies. Choose any song from Example 3 and a world of new strategies opens up. Take, for example, “Im Frühling,” D. 882 (1826), which stages a conflict between a piano accompaniment that articulates a clear period and a vocal melody that strives and fails to duplicate it, a musical metaphor for the persona’s effort to reclaim a moment of bliss. Here again, we see Schubert using the simplest of forms to mimic the mechanisms of memory, offering up with clarity and poignancy an image of past (and hence irretrievable) perfection and happiness. Or consider “Der Kreuzzug,” D. 932 (1827), another late song about a monk in a monastery (this time, one who hears a band of passing knights singing a hymn and sings along), and marvel at its final strophe, in which the singer takes over the bass line, as though listening to the knights’ hymn fade away. As with so many other idyllic periods, Schubert again uses astonishingly simple techniques to create a feeling of peacefulness, reverence, and distance (in this case, physical distance). Any one of these songs could serve as the basis for another study, functioning as its own center of gravity in a further exploration of one of Schubert’s most expressive thematic shapes.

**works cited**


