

Word Painting in the Song Cycle Winterreise by Schubert

In order to help the expression of the words in his songs, Schubert made great use of word painting. It was often the role of the accompaniment to provide a subtext to the song, and to help provide the listener with the feelings and emotions behind the words of the singer. A good example of this is his most famous song cycle "Winterreise".

The first song in the cycle, "Gute Nacht" starts in a minor key. Throughout the song cycle, the minor key is linked to the present, and gives the impression that the "winter's journey" that he feels he must make is not one that he is anticipating with happiness. Occasionally throughout the first song, however, during lines such as "The maiden spoke of love" however, the music drifts into the relative major key. As such, the major key becomes connected with the past, and with all that he is leaving behind. In the fifth verse, this pattern of tenses and tonality is broken; he talks about the present, and yet the music is in the major key. This indicates that perhaps he has resigned himself to the journey that he must make, and that he does so without pain. The minor key, however, that returns in the singer's final bars, however, signals to the listener the true anguish that he feels in leaving his love. The actual music of the accompaniment provides yet more information to the listener about the emotions of the singer. The repetitive, unceasing quavers in the left hand reflect the ongoing, unceasing journey that he must make. Just as the quavers never stop throughout the song, the singer feels he must continue his journey onward.

In *Der Lindenbaum*, as well as using the accompaniment to reflect the thoughts and feelings of the singer, it is used to paint a picture of the setting of the song. The rustling triplet motif figure that is used in the introduction to the piece, and again several times throughout the song reflect the rustling leaves of the eponymous Lime tree. Once again, the key of the piece, major when he thinks of the "fond words of love I made", yet minor when he realises that "today I must wander", reflects his emotions. The major key reflects the happiness he feels in reflecting upon the time that he spent with his love underneath this same lime tree. The same motif appears later, here in the minor key with added chromaticisms, showing clearly how passionately he wishes to end his journey and return to his love. The song, which is one of the few in the cycle that contains a piano codetta, ends in the major key, with the rustling motif, symbolising the fact that the singer is lost in the memories of the past, unable to truly enunciate truly how he feels.

The eleventh song in the cycle, "Frühlingstraum" makes great use of interchanging major and minor keys; at the beginning the song is set very firmly in the major – the singer is dreaming about the past. The sudden discords and increase in tempo when "the cocks were crowing" reflect his sudden awakening, and the tonic minor key, that follows signifies his disappointment at having woken up to the present, and not to the past which he to which he longs so much to return.

"Der Greise Kopf" is set firmly in the minor; this, coupled with the tonic pedal which is used throughout the introduction and the very slow tempo give the indication that there is no escape from the present, however much he thinks and dreams of the past. Despite this, the piece drifts into a major key for a few bars while he recounts a dream in which he saw himself as a happy, old man. The piece is dragged back into the present, and the mood of the piece back to one of apprehension and unease by a passage in which the piano plays very nearly in octaves with the voice who proclaims "How distant yet the heaven!". A slight variation between the lines creates a dissonance of a minor second, and creates the change from the mood of peace to that of sorrow and unease. This mood continues until the end of the piece, which is in the original minor key, and the feeling that the sorrow and anguish are inescapable is strengthened by a tonic pedal in the final bars.

The fifteenth song in the cycle, "Die Krähe" concerns the raven "that has flown with me since I started". The raven is an archetypal symbol of bad luck, and as such, the piece is set in a minor key. The gentle triplet accompaniment in the right reflects the manner in which the singer is attempting to keep himself calm. However, the enormous range of the piece, from Bb2 to F4, a range of an octave and a half, betrays quite how unnerved the singer is, faced with the terrible things that the raven will bring upon him. The long wandering piano coda is one of the few codas in the whole song cycle, and the manner in which the music does not resolve as one would wish, but meanders through various keys indicates that the singer does not have a set path that he is following, and that he is simply meandering onwards in the hope of finding happiness.

The final song in the cycle, "Der Leiermann", is in G minor, and a tonic pedal underlies the entire piece. This symbolises the drone of the Organ played by "Der Leiermann", but also implies that the misery and despair that the singer is feeling are inescapable. This is reinforced by the fact that the whole piece, save for two acciacaturas in the introduction, is completely diatonic. There is no hint of any major key, tonic or relative, and this gives the listener the impression that the singer is no longer reflecting upon the happiness of the past. The piano melodies intersecting the singer's lines reflect an unspoken dialogue between the organ grinder and the singer, indicating that perhaps, the singer has found a place to rest at last, with this organ grinder whose "gifts are rare", and who is equally as wretched as himself. The last note that the singer sings is the dominant of the key, and this leaves his tale open ended. It is impossible to know whether he has found companionship with the organ grinder, or whether he is destined to wander forever, with no destination, and always in despair.

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