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On June 24, 1824, the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* published an anonymous review of eleven Schubert Lieder, Opp. 21–24. The author, a self-proclaimed spokesman for “fair-mindedness and modesty,” decried the lack of order and restraint in Schubert’s music:¹

Herr Fr[anz] S[chubert] does not write actual songs and has no desire to do so . . . but rather free vocal works, many so free, that one might perhaps call them caprices or fantasies. With this purpose in mind, the poems, mostly new but of greatly varying quality, are well chosen and their translation into music generally praiseworthy; the composer succeeds almost throughout in arranging the whole and each detail in accordance with the poet’s idea. He is, however, much less successful in the execution, which tries to compensate for the lack of inner unity, order and regularity by eccentricities, barely or not at all motivated, and by often rather wild goings-on. With only these qualities [i.e., unity, order and regularity], admittedly, no artist’s work can become a beautiful work of art. Without them, however, certainly only bizarre, grotesque things will result.

Schubert’s strange tendency to modulate repeatedly within the compass of a song is deplorable, the writer continued, for “simplicity, repose, order, and clarity” are essential to a true masterwork.

This reviewer was hardly alone in his reaction to Schubert’s compositional style. An 1826 letter to Schubert from the Artaria publishing firm shows that his music was widely perceived as eccentric and inaccessible:² “I must frankly confess to you that the peculiar, often ingenious, but occasionally also rather strange procedures of your mind’s creations are not yet sufficiently and generally understood by our public.”

The interpretive confusion surrounding numerous Schubert Lieder is reflected in the array of genre headings his contemporaries used to describe these works: freier Gesang, Kaprice, Phantasie, Tondichtung, durchkomponiertes Stück, Ballade, Kantate, and Szene. While there was no consensus on which terms were appropriate for particular songs, most writers agreed that Schubert “often, and sometimes very greatly, oversteps the genre in hand.”³ His songs frequently deviate from the conventions of traditional strophic Lieder. “In our opinion,” stated one critic, “he is an actual song composer only at times.”⁴

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To a large extent, Schubert's deviations from convention betray the influence of dramatic music. Both the poetic texts and the musical settings of many Lieder exhibit traits traditionally associated with dramatic vocal genres such as the operatic scene, concert scena, and melodrama. Used in reference to Lieder, the term "dramatic" does not merely signify a striking or forceful manner, although dramatic songs often have this characteristic. Rather, it implies an attempt to mimic the acts of impersonation and portrayal of action that take place on the theatrical or operatic stage. Schubert's dramatic songs depict one or several personae, often identifiable by name, engaged in a particular course of action. Between the first measure and the last, the personae experience a change of circumstance. Simple or complex, physical or psychological, something "happens."⁵

The dramatic quality of many Schubert Lieder was unsettling to early nineteenth-century music critics. One writer complained, "The musical representation sometimes encroaches, perhaps a little too much, upon the domain of the dramatic, for which Herr Schubert seems to us to have a special inclination."⁶ Another likened Schubert's infusion of dramatic musical traits into traditional Lieder to "nations and warriors who, with the power of the sword, conquer peaceful countries and subsequently adopt the culture and language of the defeated."⁷

The critics' discomfort stemmed from Schubert's mixture of genres. This mixture operates on two levels. First, Schubert's Lied oeuvre includes traditional as well as non-traditional settings. Simple strophic folk songs stand side by side with powerful dramatic monologues. Secondly, many individual songs combine diverse traits, borrowed from lyrical and dramatic compositional models. "This kind of vocal music," concluded one early critic, "is too elaborate for genuine German song and too simple to be called dramatic."⁸

This book explores the crucial role of genre in the interpretation of Schubert's dramatic songs. Often bearing closer resemblance to dramatic vocal genres such as the operatic scene and melodrama than to folk song, many of these important works have been misunderstood and devalued. Their unusual stylistic characteristics fly in the face of traditional conceptions of the Lied. Examining Schubert's dramatic songs against the backdrop of genre, i.e., in relation to the musical traditions from which they emerged, offers new insight into individual works and shows their significance to his Lied repertoire as a whole.

While many writers have noted individual dramatic traits (e.g., recitative, throughcomposed form, progressive tonality) in Schubert's Lieder, the interrelationship among them has received little attention.⁹ This study examines the network of characteristics that helps to identify various kinds of dramatic song. That investigation serves as a springboard for understanding how Schubert revolutionized the Lied. By combining elements of dramatic and traditional lyrical genres, he transformed the Lied into a highly expressive, flexible musical medium which could convey the complexities and

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nuances of the poetry. This was Schubert's great legacy to the nineteenth century.

Schubert's departure from traditional Lieder

The chasm separating dramatic songs from "actual song," as this term was understood in the 1820s, becomes strikingly evident through a comparison of the two Schubert Lieder published together in 1823 as Op. 24: "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus" and "Schlaflied." These songs, both composed in 1817, are among the eleven Lieder discussed in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* review quoted at the outset.¹⁰ While the critic devotes no more than a few sentences to either work, he clearly recognizes that they have little in common.

"Gruppe aus dem Tartarus" (D583) is one of the most bizarre songs in Schubert's oeuvre.¹¹ This musical portrait of a group of damned souls in hell departs radically in subject, structure, and style from the traditional strophic Lied – the ideal song type in the minds of many early nineteenth-century writers. The dramatic nature of the setting, involving both textual and musical features, stands in sharp contrast to the "Volkstümlichkeit" characterizing traditional Lieder.

Schiller's poem draws its subject from Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*.¹² In this episode, Aeneas, guided by a prophetic Sibyl, travels to the Underworld in search of his father, Anchises. Before reaching the blissful Elysian fields where Anchises resides, they pass by the flaming fortress of Tartarus, from which emerges a dreadful din. In response to Aeneas' fearful queries, the Sibyl describes in ghastly detail torments suffered there by those who dared to rival the gods.

Schiller's poem compresses the Tartarus episode into three stanzas of four, six, and four lines, respectively:

Gruppe aus dem Tartarus (translation on p. 139)

Horch – wie Murmeln des empörten Meeres,
 Wie durch hohler Felsen Becken weint ein Bach,
 Stöhnt dort dumpftief ein schweres, leeres,
 Qualerpreßtes Ach!

Schmerz verzerret
 Ihr Gesicht, Verzweiflung sperret
 Ihren Rachen fluchend auf.
 Hohl sind ihre Augen – ihre Blicke
 Spähen bang nach des Cocytus Brücke,
 Folgen thränend seinem Trauerlauf.

Fragen sich einander ängstlich leise,
 Ob noch nicht Vollendung sey? –
 Ewigkeit schwingt über ihnen Kreise,
 Bricht die Sense des Saturns entzwei.

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The first stanza concentrates on the auditory aspects of the scene, the second on the visual. At the start, an unidentified speaker calls attention to a mysterious noise nearby. Suspense mounts as Schiller interposes two related similes comparing the strange sound to that of rushing water. Thanks to the peculiarities of German syntax, not until the last word of the first stanza does one discover that the mysterious sound is actually a human cry. At this moment, the tormented souls suddenly come into view. The speaker then describes the contorted expressions on the faces of a group of sufferers. Pain and despair lock their jaws in a perpetual curse. Their hollow eyes gaze fearfully, anxiously, toward the bridge over Cocytus, the legendary river of lamentation. Crossing this bridge represents their only hope for salvation.

The third stanza marks the poetic climax. Schiller finally makes explicit the fateful question that underlies both of the previous stanzas: will these torments ever cease? The devastating answer, written in the heavens above, is that punishment in Tartarus lasts forever.

The poem conveys an unusual kind of dramatic immediacy. From the speaker's opening "Listen!", the reader assumes the role of Virgil's Aeneas, witnessing the horrible torments of Tartarus directly. Yet the scene depicted is a static tableau. The suffering souls struggle to escape their misery, but time seems to have stopped, with the dramatic action frozen into a fixed image. Schiller's poetic depiction of "transfixed motion" captures the essence of their fate. Thus it is not a change in the circumstances of the damned souls that accounts for the dramatic quality of the poem, but rather the experience of the reader. The drama lies in the gradual discovery process that takes place from the first stanza to the last.

Schubert's musical setting intensifies the dramatic effect of the poem. The song is throughcomposed, with three distinct sections – differentiated through tempo, texture, meter, and rhythm – corresponding to the three poetic stanzas. Because the poetic stanzas do not have the same external structure, throughcomposition was a virtual necessity. But this untraditional song form has an interpretive function as well; each musical section portrays a different stage in the drama surrounding the fate of the damned souls in Tartarus. Suspense mounts until the denouement in the last stanza. Any large-scale musical repetition would contradict the rising tension and destroy the impression of an unfolding drama.

The extreme degree of chromaticism in the song, also foreign to traditional Lieder, helps to illustrate the agony of the damned souls. Schubert establishes this association immediately in the wildly turbulent piano introduction. The low groans that rise from the depths of hell are depicted with an ascending chromatic pattern that swells and recedes in regular intervals (Ex. 1). Although the song begins on open C octaves, any sense of a stabilizing tonal center is quickly lost. Indeed, it is difficult to tell whether the key signature indicates C major or – in the manner of recitative – no key at all. For most of the song, the vocal part doubles the slow, inexorable

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Ex. 1 Schubert, "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus" (D583), mm. 1-7

Etwas geschwind

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part consists of a right-hand treble clef and a left-hand bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 3/8. The tempo is marked *Etwas geschwind*. The score includes dynamic markings: *p* (piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), *ff* (fortissimo), and *p* (piano). The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Horch, wie" in the fourth system. The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with various articulations and dynamics throughout.

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chromatic ascent of the accompanimental bass line. Rarely does it have any traditional sort of melodic character.

The Divine response in the last two lines of the poem coincides with a sudden shift to diatonicism. At the word “Ewigkeit,” the tension-ridden dominant (to which the chromatic motion has ultimately ascended) finally resolves to a majestic C major tonic. Supporting the mighty octave leaps of the vocal part, the accompaniment sweeps up and down the keyboard in grand chordal arpeggios. Although the remainder of the song includes traces of the previous chromaticism, these passages do not threaten the harmonic stability. Diatonicism, associated with the deities in heaven, rules the day. The minor tonic chord with which the song concludes symbolizes

Ex. 2 Schubert, “Gruppe aus dem Tartarus” (D583), mm. 83–93

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "bricht die Sen - se des Sa - turns ent -" and the piano accompaniment starting with a fortissimo (*ffz*) dynamic. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third system concludes the passage with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking.

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the essence of the harmonic battle fought and won (Ex. 2). The “chromatic” pitch E \flat enclosed within the stable tonic octaves at the final resolution no longer represents a disruptive force. Rather, it sounds the note of tragedy.

In almost every respect, “Gruppe aus dem Tartarus” forms a sharp contrast to the traditional Lied. The quasi-dramatic text, classical subject, throughcomposed form, intense chromaticism, unmelodic vocal line, and orchestral-sounding piano accompaniment suggest that this setting belongs to a different genre altogether.¹³ The song may best be described as a “mixed-genre Lied,” whose poetic and musical characteristics derive largely from dramatic compositional models. Possibly the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reviewer sensed this, for while he harshly criticized compositional eccentricities of the sort exemplified by “Gruppe aus dem Tartarus,” the song nevertheless elicited his grudging admiration: “Op. 24, no. 1 text-paints in the beginning but does so quite well, and the modulations, although very harsh, are excusable, perhaps even justified, here.”¹⁴

The reviewer had far less trouble comprehending Schubert’s setting of Mayrhofer’s “Schlaflied,” Op. 24, no. 2 (D527).¹⁵ This Lied, he asserts, comes “more or less near” to “actual song.” In Schubert’s day, “actual song” meant a simple, strophic Lied, such as those of the Berlin composers Reichardt and Zelter. Heinrich Christoph Koch’s *Musikalisches Lexikon* of 1802 provides a concise description of the Lied’s principal traits:¹⁶

Lied. With this name one generally designates any lyrical poem of many strophes that is intended for song and associated with a melody repeated for each strophe, and that is capable of being performed by anyone who has healthy and not entirely inflexible vocal chords, without need of artistic instruction. It thus follows that a Lied melody should have neither so wide a range nor such vocal mannerisms and extended syllables as characterize the artificial and cultivated aria; rather it should express the sentiment in the text through simple but hence all the more efficient means.

As Koch’s definition suggests, simplicity, popularity, and naturalness lie at the heart of the strophic Lied.¹⁷ Intended to be sung by common folk rather than trained musicians, the Lied eschews musical artifice in favor of a plain, unpretentious manner. Koch’s definition aptly describes many songs dating from the mid-eighteenth through early nineteenth centuries, including a substantial number by Schubert. One of these is Mayrhofer’s “Schlaflied.”

Typically, “Schlaflied” announces its genre affiliation in the title. The song is a lullaby, such as a mother might sing to her child (or, more accurately, an artistic recreation of a lullaby, since the song does not actually belong to the oral tradition). Here, uniqueness of expression is less important than appropriateness of gesture. Not surprisingly, the song shows similarities to other lullaby settings composed by Schubert and his contemporaries.¹⁸

Mayrhofer’s poem conjures a peaceful pastoral scene in which a young boy falls asleep in a meadow:

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Schlaflied (translation on p. 139)

Es mahnt der Wald, es ruft der Strom:
 "Du liebes Bübchen, zu uns komm!"
 Der Knabe kommt, und staunt, und weilt,
 Und ist von jedem Schmerz geheilt.

Aus Büschen flötet Wachtelschlag,
 Mit irren Farben spielt der Tag;
 Auf Blümchen rot, auf Blümchen blau
 Erglänzt des Himmels feuchter Tau.

Ins frische Gras legt er sich hin,
 Läßt über sich die Wolken ziehn,
 An seine Mutter angeschmiegt,
 Hat ihn der Traumgott eingewiegt.

Although the poetic speaker does not explicitly urge a drowsy child to fall asleep, as happens in most lullabies, the words nevertheless have this same intent. The tranquil imagery and repetitive verse structure create a soporific effect. And in the last stanza, Mayrhofer makes an implicit comparison between the boy asleep in the fields of Mother Earth and the child to whom the song is ostensibly sung, now presumably asleep in its mother's arms.

Schubert's use of strophic form (each poetic stanza set to the same musical strophe) is appropriate for several reasons. First, the poem comprises three stanzas with essentially the same external structure – borrowed from the tradition of folk poetry. Each stanza has four lines and the rhyme scheme aabb; each line is composed in iambic tetrameter with accented final syllables. In Schubert's day, it was generally expected that a poem comprising identically structured stanzas would receive a strophic musical setting.¹⁹ Moreover, although the poem relates a short narrative, it sustains a single mood throughout. There is no need for a throughcomposed musical structure to depict contrasting poetic sections. The strophic repetitions, of course, also have an immediate functional purpose: to lull the listener to sleep.

Schubert's setting exemplifies several additional characteristics of traditional Lieder. The piano accompaniment, for example, has an extremely limited role. In this song, the melody appears solely in the vocal line. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support and supplies rhythmic definition, but never doubles the tune. Nor does it engage in any clear text-painting.

Like most traditional Lieder, "Schlaflied" conveys an air of simplicity. For most of the song, the phrasing falls into regular four-measure groups.²⁰ The rhythmic patterns in both vocal part and piano accompaniment are simple and highly repetitive. The vocal declamation is primarily syllabic, never including more than two notes per syllable. With the exception of several quick modulations in the middle of the song, the harmonic progressions are routine, moving from tonic to dominant and subdominant and

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back again. The brief journey through d minor, E♭ major, and f minor – a short chromatic interlude in an essentially diatonic setting – has no obvious textual stimulus. Schubert probably wanted to provide at least a small degree of contrast with the otherwise simple harmonies. On the whole, the song has the feel of a piece that anyone could sing.

Ex. 3 Schubert, “Schlaflied” (D527), mm. 1–2

Moderato

The musical score for Schubert's "Schlaflied" (D527), measures 1-2, is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (F major), and the time signature is 12/8. The tempo marking is "Moderato". The piano part begins with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and features a repetitive rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords, creating a rocking motion. The vocal line is mostly rests, indicating the beginning of the song.

In addition, “Schlaflied” exhibits features typical of lullabies. The meter (originally written as cut time, but later renoted as $\frac{12}{8}$ to clarify the subdivisions of the beat) and slow tempo together create a rocking motion, suggestive of a baby’s cradle (Ex. 3). For most of the song, this rocking motion is supported by the harmonic rhythm, which moves at a pace of two harmonies per measure. (During the chromatic modulations, there are four harmonies per measure, but these do not disrupt the overall effect.) The pianissimo dynamic, repetitive rhythmic patterns, and concluding tonic pedal point create a feeling of tranquility appropriate for a lullaby setting. The key of F major has, of course, long been associated with pastoral subjects.

“Gruppe aus dem Tartarus” and “Schlaflied” share almost nothing apart from their opus number and scoring for solo voice and piano. To call them both Lieder without differentiation is to say very little.

Most of Schubert’s strophic Lieder were composed in 1815–16 and fall into the traditional subcategories of folk song, e.g., Wiegenlied, Liebeslied, Klaglied, Ständchen, Romanze, Trinklied, Barcarolle, Frühlingslied, Herbstlied, Winterlied, Morgenlied, Abendlied, Hochzeitlied, Arbeitlied, Schwertlied, Schwanengesang. Many of these songs have titles explicitly identifying the subcategory to which they belong, and all exhibit textual and musical characteristics traditionally associated with their type. They are generally simple and easy to sing. Some, in fact, have passed into the oral tradition.²¹

Schubert’s interest in purely strophic settings began to fade in the late 1810s. During the 1820s, he composed an astonishing variety of modified strophic settings, which introduce certain changes into the musical repetitions,

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as well as many throughcomposed songs. Far fewer purely strophic settings date from these years.

As alluded to at the outset, Schubert's increasingly experimental approach to song composition perplexed his contemporaries. In the 1820s, the strophic Lied, with its strong link to German folk tradition, was still in various quarters regarded as the aesthetic ideal against which all songs should be measured. The mixture of genres was generally frowned upon. An article entitled "Über die Vermischung verschiedener Gattungen in der Musik," published by the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in December 1807, states this position unequivocally: "The mixture of different genres is not simply an obstacle that one must avoid in the arts; it is rather a sin that the true talent never commits."²² This attitude, typical of the generation,²³ accounts for much of the confusion and criticism that Schubert's dramatic songs frequently elicited. While some reviews of these songs were favorable, the introduction of dramatic elements within the framework of the Lied was not generally understood or perceived as a compositional advance. Indeed, when Zelter, known for his traditional strophic settings, died in 1832, critics sadly noted the passing of an age:²⁴

If, however, Zelter's Lieder have not been widely circulated, not properly valued, that is because very many no longer know nor take notice of what a true German Lied is and should be, because they have become accustomed to throw together all species of song. . .

While some writers focused solely on what had been lost, others were able to take the long view. Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, a long-standing critic of Schubert's stylistic eccentricities,²⁵ discussed the impact of Schubert's dramatic compositional style in a conciliatory review of the last two song cycles:²⁶

When one no longer feels satisfied with the continued existence of a thing, it is natural and true that all the boundaries are thrown into riotous confusion; as a result, much that is good dies, which the unbiased observer necessarily laments. It should be mentioned, however, that his lament is justified only so long as he does not lose hope of a new, more beautiful springtime and so long as he does not prejudicially and feebly reject the beneficial cleansing of the occasionally necessary storm. – So it is today with musical composition. Many of its otherwise blossoming regions have had their boundaries encroached upon. . . This fate has been suffered namely by the maternal, loving queen of song and particularly the gentle ruler of the fruitful realm of Lieder.

Like a purifying storm, the strong dramatic tendency of Schubert's Lieder had swept across all previous boundaries, revitalizing the domain of song.²⁷ Still enamored of the traditional Lied, Fink nevertheless glimpsed a "new, more beautiful springtime" in the wake of Schubert's efforts.

Fink was prescient. Schubert's fusion of elements from disparate vocal genres helped transform the Lied from folk song to art song – a genre which attracted nearly every major composer of the nineteenth century. By