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Schumann's Use of Musical Personae in the Eichendorff-Liederkreis, Op. 39, Nos. 1 & 8 "In der Fremde"

Though the first and eighth songs of Schumann's Eichendorff-Liederkreis, Op. 39, have the same title "In der Fremde" they each illustrate remarkably different landscapes and psychological states of the characters involved, both through text and musical affect. The texts alone provide unique perspectives on the same concept, but it is Schumann's setting of these texts and his manipulation of poetry, voice, and accompaniment combined that truly creates a distinct and complex character and setting within each song.

The poetic persona of No. 1 uses the foreign place of the title, not as the subject of his soliloquy, but rather, as a vantage point from which to speak about both his past and his future. In fact, in this text there is virtually no description of der Fremde the foreign place from which he is speaking. The speaker's lack of attention to his surroundings could imply a number of emotional states apathy, restlessness, unhappiness, to name a few but what is certainly not present in this speaker's mind is a sense of fulfillment or connection with the foreign land that he finds himself in, for if this were the case, he would most likely speak about his life and surroundings there. Instead, he focuses entirely on places other than "here". Clearly this speaker is longing to be somewhere else.

His homeland, however, is not that place. The

physical description he provides red lightning, clouds moving towards him suggests a great deal of turmoil there, and his description of his relationship with his homeland his parents are long dead, no one knows him anymore suggest an attachment which, while once present, is now completely severed. Thus, from his descriptions (or lack thereof) both of where he once was and where he currently is, the reader could infer that this speaker wants to be, literally, neither here nor there. This is particularly evident in the parallel phraseology between, "Es kennt mich dort Keiner mehr," and "Keiner kennt mich mehr hier". The fact that the speaker uses a nearly identical sentence structure when referring to both "here" and "there", as well as the straightforwardness of the two statements, suggests that his ties to both places are equally broken and that he accepts his disconnection from both places with equal resignation.

The place where he wishes to be, then, is not within the physical realm at all, but rather in the peaceful rest of death. The statements about his own death are by far the most positive in the text, containing such comforting images as "stille Zeit" and "ruhe ich". In fact, the speaker never even uses the word "death" when referring to himself, and the only way the reader knows for certain that he is referring to death is in his reference back to his parents' death with the word "auch". This clearly suggests that the speaker does not think of death as something to be feared, but rather as a much-anticipated ending to the displacement and suffering he has experienced on earth.

Schumann's setting of this text in many ways remains true to the poetic persona's emotional state but also adds extra layers of psychological meaning that create a more complex and sometimes ambivalent character. The key of f-sharp minor creates an appropriately dark setting. However, Schumann sets up an immediate and dramatic contrast between the content of the text and the way in which it is portrayed by creating a vocal persona which, while speaking about very tumultuous events surrounding his homeland, sings in what is virtually a monotone a line with a range of three notes, all centered around the tonic, in a very steady, predictable rhythmic setting. The cadences at the end of each sentence express a certainty perhaps even resignation about the speaker's statements. By choosing these particular compositional devices, Schumann creates a subtext (one of many which he could have successfully used with this poem) of a man who is so despondent as to be numb to the world around him and has faced his earthly fate with a defeated acceptance.

The accompaniment, on the other hand, provides yet another emotional layer to the character, for while the vocal persona is reserved and almost detached, the accompaniment, with its constant, undulating sixteenth notes and off-beat accents, creates a sense of turbulence which belies the vocal persona's anesthetized state. Thus, when the poetic, vocal, and accompanimental personas are combined, they create an extremely complex complete musical persona: a man who is speaking of painful events in an unnaturally aloof manner, while experiencing a great inner disturbance which he may not even be consciously aware of. This reading certainly corresponds to the content of the poem, and, yet, with this musical setting, Schumann creates a new and richer set of psychological implications that the poem could not possibly have expressed standing alone.

In the musical setting, as in the poem, it is only in thinking of his own death that the vocal persona finds any hope. This is clearly illustrated musically when, in m. 9, the key changes to A major. More telling, however, is the shift in the character of the vocal line. No longer a static, weighted melody, the voice suddenly begins to make wide leaps and make use of its upper register, indicating a new emotional engagement from the vocal persona. The accompaniment affirms this with right-hand figures that float easily above the vocal line. This newfound hope, however, is not without its doubts, as seen in m. 14-15 when "da ruhe ich auch" is repeated but ends on an unexpected and disconcerting a-sharp which will begin a brief visit to b minor.

By m. 20, both the vocal and accompanimental persona are back where they began in f-sharp minor, with a limited, tonic-oriented vocal line. As the vocal persona's thoughts return to earth, he becomes once again depressed and distant, singing a melody which is identical to that of his first statements. He

shows a brief spark of emotion in his final statement as he leaps to a D in m. 34, only to sink back down to the tonic to end his despairing monologue. However, while the vocal persona ends in the same place that he started, the accompanimental persona begins experiencing a shift in character at m. 21, as the a-sharp which had shown such uncertainty at m. 15 now allows the accompaniment to shift to f-sharp major, even while maintaining its constant sixteenth-note motion. This indicates that, while the character may remain outwardly unchanged, and while his inner turbulence may not have ceased, he has, to some degree, made peace with his place in the world, even if he is not fully aware of his change in attitude. The postlude illustrates this well, as the accompaniment, on the one hand, affirms what the vocal persona has said by repeating his final statement, but, on the other hand, suggests a certain degree of hope by ending in f-sharp major.

Unlike the poetic persona of no. 1, who is, for the most part, not psychologically present in der Fremde and uses it only as a setting for his thoughts, the poetic persona of no. 8 is both present and involved in der Fremde and describes his experience there. However, a more interesting and subtle contrast appears when examining the way in which these two characters describe the events taking place around them. While the character in no. 1 is extremely distanced from his current surroundings, he is nevertheless grounded in reality. He speaks only of actual events — even if they are from the past or the future — and he describes them all in the present tense.

The poetic persona of no. 8, however, moves easily between both reality and fantasy, past and present. One of the clearest indications of this in the text is the poetic persona's consistent use of the subjunctive case — "als wollten sie,"; "als säh' ich"; "als müsste… meine Liebste," — all indicating events that seem to be happening, but in actuality are not. This grammatical construction indicates that der Fremde in this song is very much toying with the speaker's grasp of reality, and the phrase "ich weiss nicht, wo ich bin." tells the reader unequivocally that this poetic persona finds himself in a disorienting place. However, in spite of his confusion, the speaker is still able to see beauty in his surroundings, describing the little brooks, the nightingale, moonbeams, and an overflowing rose garden. Such poetic descriptions indicate that while the speaker is most definitely lost, he does not feel that he is in danger.

In this setting, Schumann chooses to strongly emphasize the speaker's confusion, so much so that he creates a musical persona who, while still able to notice the beauty around him, is so nervous as to be not at all comforted by it. The choice of a-minor as the primary key area indicates that the vocal persona is quite uneasy with the uncertainty of his mystical environment. (It is interesting to speculate that by simply using the major mode here, Schumann could have possibly created a very different but equally plausible character who was perfectly comfortable with being lost.). Unlike the phraseology of no. 1, with cadences weighting the end of many statements, both voice and accompaniment do not cadence until the very end of the piece, suggesting that the musical persona does not rest in this foreign place. Rather, he is perpetually moving, perhaps searching for a way out.

The vocal persona's frequent leaps, jolting, hesitating rhythms, and avoidance of the tonic show a character who — unlike the vocal persona of no. 1 — is visibly disturbed. The accompanimental persona, for the most part, affirms this disturbed emotional state. Its circling, sixteenth-note figure (m. 1) illustrates a sort of dizziness, and the fact that this is alternated with a figure of steady eighths in the left-hand (m. 2) could indicate that the character can not find sure footing, that every time he begins to move along steadily, he is interrupted by some new, puzzling feature of the landscape.

The key scheme is also indicative of how out of touch with reality the character is at any given point in the song. The piece begins in a minor, although the frequent tonicizations of the dominant (m. 3-4, m. 7-8) make it difficult for the listener to get a firm grasp of the tonic. As the character begins to speak of the nightingale in m. 9-10, and at a parallel point in m. 25 when he begins to describe the garden, Schumann shifts keys to the subdominant, D, but by avoiding scale-degree three, is unclear about whether he has entered

d major or d minor. The b flats in m. 10 and 12 suggest d minor, but the very brief touches on f sharp in m. 13 and 15 could indicate d major. This ambiguous shift of keys suggests that the musical persona is entering the realm of fantasy. He moves even further into his own imagination in m. 14 and 30 when the character begins to fantasize about his past and the vocal and accompanimental personas move from the key of D to the key of C. Here Schumann is, again, ambiguous about the mode in which he is working. While the a-flat and b-flat strongly suggest c minor, the lack of an e flat throughout the passage leaves the listener unconvinced. In addition, while the key of C is closely related to the original key of a minor, the fact that Schumann approaches it from the distant key of D causes this passage to sound very strange and foreign. Thus, in the places where the poetic persona is as far from the here and now as he can possibly be -- in both places, the character is speaking about past events in the subjunctive case Schumann sets up a distant and ambiguous key to reinforce the disconnection from reality.

The fact that the voice, text, and accompaniment are so closely aligned, not necessarily in musical features, but in emotional affect, implies that this character is more transparent and open than the musical persona of no. 1. His words, actions, and thoughts are, for the most part, consistent. However, his relationship with time and space is far more complicated than the musical persona of no. 1. He freely moves in and out of his own memories and daydreams, and, in some cases, finds it difficult to separate them from reality.

Both characters also have very different relationships with der Fremde of their titles. In no. 1, the musical persona is clearly discontent with the place from which he is speaking, but all evidence suggests that he at least understands it he knows where he is and why he is there. Schumann illustrates this musically by juxtaposing a static, tonic-oriented vocal line with a surging, fretful accompaniment. In no. 8, on the other hand, the musical persona does not know where he is and is openly upset about this fact. Der Fremde in this case is a much more mysterious and disconcerting place than in no. 1 an idea created more by Schumann's setting than by the text. The erratic nature of both voice and accompaniment, as well as the tonal ambiguity throughout, suggest a disorientation in the character that the poem alone never could have expressed. Thus, in both cases, Schumann takes two texts which convey different meanings about a single idea and, through his thoughtful treatment of the three independent personas, creates a rich and distinct musical persona for each individual song.

References

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