

Revelations in Schubert's *Ihr Bild*

Heine's three-stanza text is remarkably regular in its construction. Example 1 shows both the pattern of iambic feet and the rhyme scheme:

i wouldn't say that
Anlitz rhymes with
heimlich, would
you?

Example 1: The regular accent and rhyme scheme from Heine's text "Ihr Bild."

Each of the stanzas consists of alternating accent patterns A and B. Unsurprisingly, some small variations exist to accommodate additional unstressed syllables, particularly in pattern B. The stressed syllables, however, consistently occur three per line. The rhyme scheme deserves a bit more attention as its surface appearance hides a series of deeper connections:

Rhyme Scheme		Linked Couplets	
-men	a		-
-an,	b]]
-litz	c		
-gann.	b		
-sich	c		
-bar,	d]]
-nen	a		
-paar.	d		
-sen	a		
-ab	e]]
-ben,	a		
-hab!	e		

Example 2: Linked rhyming couplets in Heine's text "Ihr Bild."

Heine's text consistently rhymes the end of the second and fourth lines of each stanza.

Additionally, the rhyme scheme unfolds as a chain-link series of couplets, tying every other line integrally to another. Even the unlinked first and penultimate line can be theoretically linked across the poem so that no line is missing its mate. This last feature indicates a dramatic link between the beginning and end of the poem. Furthermore, the sturdy, close-knit structure of the

rhyme propels it forward and demonstrates a high degree of internal consistency that will be mirrored in the way Schubert sets the text.

this is wonderful writing.

The structure of the poem's content is critical to understanding Heine's approach to dramatic revelation. The word "revelation" here is meant to account for the phenomenon where idea A is only completely understood in light of and with the full implication of a sequential idea B. Idea B represents a crucial bit of information that retrospectively colors an interpretation of idea A. Idea B is likely the goal and consummation of expectations prompted by idea A, but often those expectations remain hidden until the presentation of B. In this case, idea B functions to both bring to the surface subterranean expectations in idea A and realize the implications of those expectations. Such revelations are found in each of the text's three stanzas and the poem as a whole:

<i>Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen und starrte ihr Bildnis an, und das geliebte Antlitz Heimlich zu leben begann.</i>	narrator in gloominess, loneliness			
	the portrait comes to life!		revelation!	
<i>Um ihre Lippen zog sich Ein Lächeln wunderbar, Und wie von Wehmutstränen Erglänzte ihr Augenpaar.</i>				
	the portrait smiles!		revelation!	
	the portrait cries!		revelation!	
<i>Auch meine Tränen flossen Mir von den Wangen herab Und ach, ich kann es nicht glauben, Daß ich dich verloren hab!</i>	narrator cries out of happiness? sadness? wonder? disbelief? profound loss!		revelation!	revelation!

this is awesome; i'd add that each of these two vertical "revelations" occupies a different depth of revelation; the last one is necessarily singular while the earlier ones can be (and are) plural.

Example 3: Revelations in each stanza and the entire poem in Heine's "Ihr Bild."

The first revelation in stanza one is that the portrait that occupies the narrator's gloomy daydreams comes to life. The final line in the stanza is a turning point beginning with the word *Heimlich*, literally translating to "secretly." The secret life of the painting opens the door into a dream-like world in which the narrator watches the life in the portrait blossom, first with a smile

and then with glittering tears. This second stanza is dominated by the compound word *Wehmutstränen* meaning “melancholy tears,” casting this otherwise glad meeting between the narrator and portrait in a shadow of pity and foreboding. The second stanza contains a pair of revelations each relating to the miraculous vitality of the portrait: she smiles, she cries. The final and most important revelation comes as the narrator cries out in a mix of wonder and disbelief: his beloved is forever lost to him. The exact nature of the narrator’s loss evades clear definition. However, the tone of the first two stanzas indicates a deeper sense of loss than unrequited love or physical separation. The phrase *dunkeln Träumen*, “dark dreams,” and the pervading melancholy in stanza two promote a theory of profound and unrecoverable loss. The last line of the text acts as both a local revelation to the third stanza and as a larger revelation for the entire poem. All previous material must be reconsidered in light of the narrator’s loss: the tears shared

excellent writing!

between the portrait and narrator are more clearly tears of sorrow, the dark dreams are of the narrator’s loss, and the entire experience of the portrait-come-to-life is the fantasy of a grieving mind.

Schubert’s setting of the text incorporates musical revelations that rely on hidden implications made explicit only by their realization. A microcosm of this phenomenon exists at the outset: the octave B’s in mm. 1–2 present a bare and solemn scene. The implication of these sonorities is unknown and might be associated with sleep, tenderness, or love. As the first line unfolds, it becomes retrospectively apparent that the octaves represent the narrator’s dark dreams. The content of those dreams occupies the majority of the piece, providing even more meaning to the loneliness of the opening bars. The concluding line of the text provides the crucial piece to the puzzle and suggests that those gloomy octaves are in fact a funeral bell toll. The entirety of the piece unfolds in this fashion, gradually revealing clues about previous

yes

material, culminating in the final at loss that casts a giant retrospective shadow over the whole work.

Schubert performs this feat by disturbing the prevailing motivic and harmonic consistency with unexpected variation. The musical consistency in this work centers

around the interval of a third. This interval pervades both surface figures and deep structure.

The first interval in the piece is a unison leap away from B \flat up to D \flat . The brevity of the move belies the importance of the minor third. However, the major third also has a prominent role on the surface appearing first in mm. 9–10. Example 4 details many thirds in the work, both major and minor:

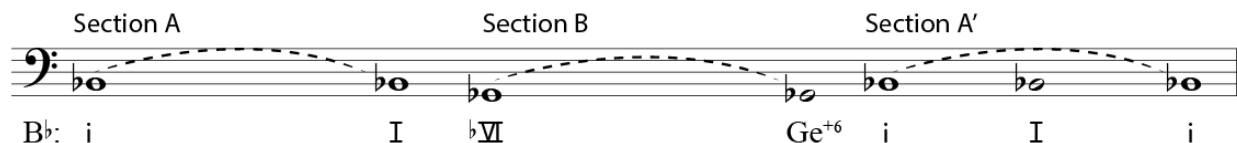
The musical notation displays piano accompaniment for Schubert's *Ihr Bild*. It is organized into two systems. The first system includes Section A (measures 3-12) and Section B (measures 15-22). The second system is labeled Section A' and covers measures 22-34. The notation highlights specific intervals (thirds) in the right and left hands across these measures.

Example 4: Major and minor thirds on the surface of Schubert's *Ihr Bild*.

There is an obvious preponderance of B \flat which acts as both departure and destination for thirds. Many thirds occur between B \flat and D \flat or D \sharp . The struggle between D \flat and D \sharp highlights a clear harmonic device that Schubert employs in the piece: mode switching. One critical question for any listener is whether this piece is in B \flat major or B \flat minor. By the numbers, it spends nearly equal time in both modes. It begins and ends in B \flat minor, cadencing in B \flat minor only once in the final measure. In contrast, three cadences occur in B \flat major in mm. 12, 14, and 34. The

mode switching causes some confusion, but as we shall see, Schubert uses it as a vehicle to communicate revelation.

Another critical question is the relationship of the two A sections in B \flat major/minor of this ternary form to the B section in G \flat major. Example 5 shows a large-scale map of the key centers in relation to B \flat :



Example 5: A large-scale tonal map showing a submediant relationship in Schubert's *Ihr Bild*.

Schubert's choice of the submediant for the B section is by no means unusual. Besides enabling a return to B \flat through a German augmented sixth chord, this harmonic choice acts as a deep structural third, linking it to the many surface level thirds. The integration of the micro into the macro is one possible way to connect Heine's chain-link rhyming couplets with Schubert's setting. As the text is imbued with an internally consistent rhyme scheme, so the music is internally consistent in its pitch structure. excellent

Besides the importance of thirds, the piece exhibits regularity in a number of other ways.

One source of regularity is the rhythmic scheme of the vocal part:



Example 6: Rhythmic regularity in the vocal part from Schubert's *Ihr Bild*.

With only a few small variations, the rhythm of the vocal line is largely consistent with itself. This matches the regularity of the poetic accent in the text. One place where Schubert works against the text is in the middle of both lines from section B (mm. 16 and 20). Here, unlike in the A sections where a stressed half note on the down beat resolves to a quarter note in beat three, Schubert flips the pattern to quarter–half disrupting the textual accent and adding some syncopation. This subtle deviation from an otherwise consistent pattern functions in two possible ways. The first function is to lighten the mood of the B section. Introducing a hint of syncopation, in conjunction with the playful skipping thirds in mm. 18 and 22, imparts a sense of vitality in an otherwise sullen surrounding. The second function is that of gradual revelation and requires a lengthier discussion below.

i like this discussion of what works against the rhythm

As suggested before, I believe that Schubert reflects the revelations of the text by interrupting regularity with surprises. One of his primary musical devices for creating surprise is modal shifting. The first example of this occurs in m. 9 when the previous B \flat minor material suddenly switches to B \flat major. This revelation reflects the subject of the text as it turns from dark dreams to the vision of a living portrait. As discussed before, this raises issues of ambiguity in terms of the predominant mode. Example 7 shows harmonic motion in section A:

m. 1	5	6	9	11	12
B \flat : i	N	→ V	I 6	ii	V I

the "lack" of subdominant harmonies in B-flat minor is a valuable addition to our knowledge of this work.

Example 7: Harmonic motion in section A of Schubert's *Ihr Bild* showing the lack of subdominant in B \flat minor and the sudden modal switch to B \flat major.

As argued above, B \flat major appears to be the more firmly established mode with the inclusion of the subdominant. Importantly, the cadence in B \flat major is echoed in the piano part in mm. 12–14 removing any doubts about the mode.

Or does it? The unison B \flat minor statements of the opening bars still loom large in the listener's ear and the beginning of section B appears to play with these ambiguities to great effect. Measures 14–15 recall the opening both in the use of monophonic texture and the pitch B \flat . Example 8 shows how the harmony unfolds in a way that promotes a gradual transformation from B \flat to the submediant G \flat major:

mm. 15–18

B \flat : I or ?
i

V² — (IV or ?) → iv (!)

I

V₄ — 3 — I

\flat VI

Example 8: A gradual transformation from B \flat to the submediant G \flat major in Schubert's *Ihr Bild*.

The whole tone dyad on beat four of bar 15 departs from the monophonic texture and raises the question of mode. This sonority follows close on the heels of two prominent B \flat major cadences so it would not be surprising if the dyad opened up to a G \flat and B \flat in m. 16 suggesting the major subdominant. Instead, Schubert's G \flat in m. 16 promotes a rootless minor subdominant and retrospectively confirms the suspicion that m. 15 was in B \flat minor. The rootless minor subdominant is also purposefully ambiguous allowing Schubert to move to a cadence in G \flat major. This second revelation colors the listener's understanding of m. 16 to view the rootless minor subdominant of B \flat ([E \flat]-G \flat -B \flat) as a tonic of G \flat major (G \flat -B \flat -[D \flat]) instead. To further complicate this retrospective reevaluation, the following four measures (mm. 19–22) begin again with monophony and sound again like B \flat minor. The likely cause is that G \flat is not a true modulation and instead acts as a secondary tonal level that exists only locally in both mm. 16–18

this is a wonderful idea!

and 20–22. The flimsiness of G^b major here likely mirrors the hallucination of the portrait smiling and crying. The final revelation in section B is the sudden return to the funeral bell tolls from the introduction now harmonized in B^b minor.

The final and most important musical revelation is the contrast between the two piano statements than conclude both A sections. The first piano statement reiterates the B^b major cadence found immediate preceding mm. 12–14. The second piano statement provides a surprising ending by immediately shifting modes and cadencing in B^b minor:

mm. 12–14 34–36

B^b: I IV⁶—⁵ V I I iv⁶—⁵ V i

Example 9: Harmonic reduction of the two contrasting piano statements that provide a musical revelation in Schubert's *Ihr Bild*.

By altering the mode of the subdominant in the chromatic bass line decent, Schubert is able to cast a minor shadow across the entire piece. This sudden turn of events reflects the dramatic revelation in the text that the narrator's beloved is forever lost to him.

This would constitute the conclusion of this analysis if it were not for the nagging sense that Schubert's dramatic timing is somehow off. I suggested at the outset that Schubert not only appropriately sets the text according to Heine's parameters but also comments on it. He does this by deviating from the poem's revelation structure shown in Example 3. Instead of presenting the first stanza's pattern of three lines and then a fourth line revelation, Schubert places the musical revelation on the third and fourth lines with the sudden switch to the major mode in mm. 8–14. While the music generally follows the emotional flow of the poem, moving from minor-keyed dark dreams to a major-keyed living portrait, the music appears to lack the

dramatic punch of Heine's fourth line revelation. I hear this as an unmarked implication that will be recognized and realized later (see Example 10):

this is tremendous

Line	Textual Content	Textual Revelation	Key	Musical Content	Musical Revelation
1	narrator in gloominess, loneliness		b \flat	funeral bell toll	
2			A		
3			B \flat		
4	the portrait comes to life!	revelation!	B \flat	piano statement	too soon?
5	the portrait smiles!	revelation!	B \flat	B	revelation!
6			b \flat		
7			G \flat		
8	the portrait cries!	revelation!	b \flat	funeral bell toll	revelation!
9	narrator cries out of happiness? sadness? wonder? disbelief? profound loss!	revelation!	A'		ironic??
10					
11			B \flat		
12			b \flat	piano statement	revelation!!

Diagram illustrating the relationship between textual and musical revelation in Schubert's *Ihr Bild*. A red line connects the textual revelation at line 4 to the musical revelation at line 12. A dashed arrow labeled "unmarked implication" points from the musical revelation at line 4 to the musical revelation at line 12. A solid arrow labeled "marked implication" points from the musical revelation at line 12 to the musical revelation at line 4.

Example 10: A diagram comparing textual revelation with musical revelation showing implication and realization in Schubert's *Ihr Bild*.

The B section of the piece follows Heine's revelation scheme. Schubert uses the gradual transformation from B \flat minor to G \flat major as a parallel to both the smiling and crying portrait. The tone of the section is both melancholy and sweet, interrupted only by the sounding of the funeral bell toll (mm. 23–24). The return of the A section sustains B \flat minor. This makes more sense musically than poetically. Heine's third stanza leaves room for ambiguous interpretation. Schubert appears to ignore this and opt for the somber, monophonic music, prefiguring the end of the work.

The greatest surprise occurs in mm. 30–43. Heine's pronunciation of extreme loss is accompanied by a cadence in B \flat major. This highly ironic juxtaposition is not only marked for memory but triggers a retrospective connection between the unmarked implication stemming from the textual incongruity in m. 8. Both of these implications are forcefully and fully realized in the *forte* piano statement that concludes the work. In Schubert's setting, the emotional

reaction to the text lags behind the content of the text. This angle functions to both increase the emotional impact of the text and retrospectively recast the entire work. Here at the conclusion of the piece, the listener understands that the preoccupations with both B^b major and G^b major were passing daydreams in the light of a B^b minor reality. wonderful

Drawing from the regularity of the text, Schubert's ternary song *Ihr Bild* lulls the listener into a fantasy world of safety, regularity, and ultimately pity: pity for the beloved lost, pity for the narrator left behind. Reality is a break from regularity, a world of surprises, and an ironic major mode that ultimately triumphs in minor. Schubert's song conveys both these realms by using musical revelations that both conform to and comment upon the text. In this way, Heine's text expands in dimension through Schubert's music in both its meaning and emotional impact.

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