A Musical Poet: Themes in the Lieder of Robert Schumann’s Year of Song

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A Musical Poet: Themes in the Lieder of Robert Schumann’s Year of Song

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Abstract

My thesis will research themes of solitude, love, nature, mood or emotional states, and the duality of joy and pain in the Robert Schumann's *Lieder* composed around the year 1840. This year was the year of Schumann's marriage to his music teacher's daughter Clara Wieck and is, consequently, the year when Robert Schumann turned to writing *Lieder* or songs. *Lieder* were a unique lyric genre created in Germany during Romantic era. These songs combined the works of great German poets of the time with the artistic expression of emotions captured by the composer.

Tracing the themes in Robert Schumann's *Lieder* will lead to an understanding not only of the connection between his *Lieder* and his life, but also of the relationship between the voice and piano in his lieder. From a performance perspective, knowledge of Schumann's lieder will lead to a better idea of how to perform these works in order to express the emotions and themes Schumann's *Lieder* emphasize.
Introduction

German *Lieder* are one of the most important genres of music created during the Romantic movement. Romantic poets in England such as Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley were writing prolifically but it was German musicians who used their love of their own native poets to create a genre unique to Germany. Although *Lieder* were created in and for the Romantic time period, the form has been continued by composers into the next century.

Translated from German, *Lied* simply means song, and *Lieder* is plural, songs. In the history of music the name has been used twice as the specific name for a genre of music. In the Renaissance the name was used to describe the German version of the Italian madrigal. These were secular, four part choral *Lieder*, sung without accompaniment. It was during the Romantic period that the term *Lied* was applied to the genre which combined German poetry and music in the form of a voice with piano. Also during this time, in literature, a poetic movement called *Sturm und Drang*\(^1\) after the play written by F. M. von Klinger, took place in 1770 -1784. As with literature of the time period in England these works stressed themes of nature, the evils of contemporary society, and subjectivity.

The rebellious, youthful nature of *Sturm und Drang* challenged the old neoclassical style. Its individualism was met by the new availability of the piano. Middle class families could now afford to buy pianos for private use and have their children instructed on how to play. The ability to print copies easily also made music marketable.

\(^1\) The *Sturm und Drang* movement made German authors the leaders of the time in literature. Their works were inspired by the ideas of Rousseau, but more directly by the authors Herder and Lessing.
to the middle class. Lieder were written for these private performances in the home where family and friends would gather in a close room for entertainment.

*Lieder* are intended to be an intimate blend of composer and poet. While the concept of blending poetry and music is simple, the actual process is much more complicated. *Lieder* combine two completely separate works: a poem, and a song. The poetry used is not written by the composer himself; neither is it the malleable work of a librettist, or lyricist. The *Lieder* must convey the composer's own interpretation of the work of a genuine German poet chosen by the composer. The music is created to match his or her personal interpretation, and enhance the feelings evoked. In order to achieve this connection between poetry and music the composer must have an emotional tie to the poetry of his or her lieder. Composer, notes, the touch of pianist, the voice of the singer, the setting, the reception of the audience - every element aids in creating the intimacy so distinctive to *Lieder*.

In *Lieder* the piano accompaniment is a second voice interweaving text to music and music to text. The piano continues the mood of the poem beyond the singer's final phrase. The interweaving nature of the two voices strengthens once more the connection between composer and the themes of the *Lieder*'s text. The singer unifies singer, poet, and composer into one body.

German *Lieder* were based on the poetry of the Romantic movement in Germany which emphasized nationalistic fervor, glorification of nature, and individualistic ideals. While romantic poetry was produced in England as well, *Lieder* are a distinctly German creation. They are songs composed by German composers using their own German poets. Goethe (1749-1832) was one of the most celebrated authors of the movement.
Goethe wrote in many genres including dramatic works, novels, and poetry. His poetry and the poetry of those who followed in his footsteps, such as Heinrich Heine and Eichendorf, are repeatedly used in the Lieder of Franz Schubert, Lowe, and Robert Schumann.

The emphasis on rebellion against more traditional forms in music also meant that German art music at the time was instrumental music. Romantic composers felt that the purity of instrumental music, unmarred by lyrics, was best to convey emotion, and often a specific setting to an audience. The changing social status of middle class citizens was also changing the face of music. Instrumental works may have been considered art, but it was now becoming possible for a composer to sell simpler piano pieces and make a profit as a musician. Before this time the church and the royal courts had dictated the form music would take; now the middle class had a role. The rise in the availability of the piano had led to increased buyers. Middle class families could now afford to buy a piano for their homes and train their children to play. It was especially popular to have songs sung and self-accompanied by the daughters of the house, for guests. It was in this spirit that the Lieder were formed. The simple piano and voice could be easily done in the home, the use of German poets increased the likelihood of buyers, and the intimate songs suited the intimate parlor settings in which these works were originally performed.

Franz Schubert established the genre (1797-1828). Schubert composed some 660 different vocal arrangements of settings during his lifetime. His song cycles also set a standard for creating a collection of songs connected by an overlying storyline. Schubert’s Lieder tend to lean more heavily towards an emphasis on the music than the
poem in balancing the voice and piano. Later composer Loewe (1796–1869) composed 375 Lieder. He too could have served as a model for Schumann. Where Schubert emphasized the piano’s voice, however, Lowe gave more emphasis on the words in the Lied.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was a child of the Romantic Movement. Born in 1810 he became engrossed from an early age with literature and music. His father was able to feed that passion through his rising financial status and his bookstore. Schumann formed clubs to play music and recite poetry but did not decide to devote himself to music until he was twenty years old, and even then, he was trained as a performer not a composer. Schumann did not exclusively compose Lieder, he was a prolific composer over his short musical career: he composed symphonies, overtures, chamber music, piano music, choral works, quartets, trios, duets, and many other works.

In the year 1840 Robert Schumann composed somewhere in the vicinity of 140 German lieder; a greater output in that amount of time than Franz Schubert, the man who established the genre. For music historians this year, known as “the year of song,” is made for research. The connections between his courtship and marriage with Clara Wieck and his incredible output of Lieder have been the occasion for much correlation study. This thesis continues in that vein to seek out some of the parallels in Schumann’s life and relationships with the Lieder he composed during that time. It can generally be inferred that those themes that reoccur with regularity are those that interest or hold the greatest emotional sway with the composer. Solitude, Nature, Emotional States Love, and the Duality of Joy and Pain- these themes will be a focus point and they are found not only in the text but in the way Schumann portrays these poems through his music.
Through this research an understanding of Robert Schumann’s *Lieder*: how do the themes of Solitude, Nature, Love, Mood, and the Duality of Joy and Pain reflect of Schumann’s life and personality? when and where do these themes occur in the text of the poems Schumann chose for his *Lieder*, and how are these themes are woven from the text into the music of the *Lieder*? Ultimately a better knowledge of how the music and poetry interact with one another should aid performances.
I. The Man: Robert Schumann

Schumann’s choices in poetry make more sense with an understanding of the composer of the songs. The year in which Schumann composed the greatest number, and most popular, of his Lieder was also influential. For these reasons it is important to know Schumann’s biography leading up to this year, in order to gain a better understanding of the context of his Lieder.

Although the Schumann family had roots in trade they also had strong musical interests and Schumann was born into the family at a time of prosperity as well as the rise of the middle class. Friederich August Schumann, Robert Schumann’s father, had aspirations at a young age to become a writer. He was dissuaded from this dream by professionals who read his work and, instead of publishing his works, offered him a position in his bookstore. August was eventually further dissuaded from his dream of being a writer when he fell in love with the daughter of his host in Seitz and set up his own business. Through the years his business became very successful and he was able to set up a partnership with his brother, helping the family name. However, August’s love of writing was never completely set aside. His bookstore gave him ample opportunity to enjoy literature and he wrote occasionally.

Robert shared his father’s passion for literature and was musically inclined as well. As the youngest child Schumann received the full benefits of the family’s newly earned money. He started piano lessons at the age of seven with Baccalaureus Kuntzsc, the best that Zwickau had to offer. Although Schumann had little patience for practice his improvisations showed an enthusiasm and natural talent from a young age. From a
supplement to the *Universal Journal of Music*, “It has been related that Schumann, as a child, possessed rare taste and talent for portraying feelings and characteristic traits in melody, -ay, he could sketch the different dispositions of his intimate friends by certain figures and passages on the piano so exactly and comically that every one burst into loud laughter at the similitude of the portrait.” (Von Wasielwski, 18). Much of Schumann’s practicing would consist of improvisations of this kind, and of a more serious nature, throughout his youth and manhood.

Equally important to the understanding of Schumann’s *Lieder* is his constant love of literature. This passion was greatly encouraged by his father who provided fuel for the interest with a supply of books. Schumann was inspired by his father throughout his life, and kept a picture of him while at the University.

August died in 1826 and his death deeply affected Robert Schumann, as did any death in his family. He wrote in his journal entries on how much he missed his father. His longing for his father was probably heightened by his distaste for the rest of his family’s views on his future. Johanna Schumann was fond of music, and sang herself; however, she and the rest of the family had solid ideas about the vocation Schumann should pursue. The family sought to make use of the money August had earned and to raise the family’s social standing beginning with Robert Schumann. It was really the family that decided that Schumann would attend the University in Leipzig with the intent to become a lawyer (Von Wasielwski, Jensen).

Schumann avoided both Leipzig and any schooling that had to do with law. He himself admits that his attempts at studying law consisted mostly of walking to the doors of the lecture halls, pausing, and walking back to his apartments. Instead, he was devoted
to spending time at the piano and his roommates would often find him there playing with a cigar in his mouth picking out melodies or studying the works of other composers. Despite his obvious apathy for the study of law Schumann would delay making a decision and informing his mother and guardian of his decision to pursue music until the summer of 1830. In his letter to his mother he said “My whole life has been a twenty years’ war between poetry and prose, or, let us say, music and law.” (Von Wasielwski, 56) Although Schumann seems to say that the debate was always between music and law but Eric Jensen reminds his readers that “Schumann at age seventeen revealed greater attraction to literature than to music” (14).

The surrounding areas of Schumann’s first University in Liepzig did not appeal to him at all. Robert Schumann’s deep love of nature was evident from a very early age and affected his mood and work deeply. His studies in Leipzig seemed much more arduous due to the fact that its bustling streets did not suit the Schumann’s romantic nature. As a boy and a man Schumann enjoyed walks in the fields and woods, and his letters home after moving from Leipzig to the University of Heidelberg show a dramatic change of mood. He greatly praised the scenic qualities of the town and the fresh air. His interest in nature can also be seen through his travels. On several occasions Schumann made a trip out of going back to school with long stops along the way (Von Wasielwski).

Schumann’s first formal training as a musician was made with the ultimate intent of being a performer. He wrote to his mother in 1830 and received permission to take lessons from Friedrich Wieck. Wieck was a well respected teacher whose daughter
Clara was quickly becoming a virtuosic performer. This training was not to last very long; Wieck was wary from the start of Schumann’s practicing habits and set up a trial period of a year to see how he progressed. During that time Schumann’s admiration for Wieck slowly decreased. Wieck was intent on creating a performer out of his daughter and spent more time with Clara, than with Schumann (Von Wasielwski, Jensen).

At the time Schumann also attempted learning harmonization and music theory with Heinrich Dorn, leader of the orchestra at the royal theatre. His completions of the first tasks were unorthodox in their methods; however, he was eager to learn anything as quickly as possible. “The first four-part chorale—which he had to do for me as an indication of his knowledge of harmony—broke all the rules of part-writing.” (Jensen, 64) However as with piano playing he was more interested in doing his own studying. By himself, Schumann poured over scores composed by his favorites like J.S. Bach, and Schubert.

It was Schumann’s impatience with practicing and his eager nature that led to the ruin of his career as a performer. “I have a numb, broken finger on my right hand...I can hardly use the hand at all for playing.” He wrote to a friend in April of 1833. (Jensen, 69) Without letting anyone know, Schumann had been using a contraption designed to speed up the learning process for his fingers. Designed to improve individual fingering, the device would hold one finger steady while the others played. It caused the middle finger on his right hand to become permanently injured. The finger had lethargic and stiff movements. Schumann could play but he would never be a performer. There are different views as to how upsetting this was to Schumann himself. His temperament was not suited to performance but he continued to compose at all times. (Jensen, 69-71)
One thing that should be known about Schumann is his deep emotional connection with his family and friends. His brothers and only sister all died before he did, and he took their deaths extremely hard. The death of his sister in law, and imminent death of his brother were most probably the onset of that night’s turmoil. Schumann’s mental state was never stable and during that night it is possible that he attempted to commit suicide; a prelude to the famous attempt that led to his hospitalization and death. After that night he moved from his apartment of the second floor, to the first floor, and forever after had a fear of heights. It is speculated that he thought of throwing himself from the window though it is hard to tell for sure from his journal entry or letters. One of the people to whom he sent a letter on that terrible night was Clara Wieck, the daughter and star pupil of his old instructor Friedrich (Von Wasielwski, Jensen).

Schumann’s relationship with Clara is generally assumed to be some part of the reason for the enormous output of songs in the year 1840. Schumann had composed Lieder before but never to this extent. Clara was not the only woman in Schumann’s life however; before their courtship he had been engaged once and at one point had a mistress. The affair he had with a young woman named Christel filled Schumann with guilt. He had always had an irresistible urge for women and drink which he continually suppressed. He was torn between his nature and the feeling that such emotions tainted the pure nature of a poet. He wrote “God! I want to change myself, I swear it to You. Give me just one person—only one—on whom I can lay my heart! I can then become reconciled to myself, to everything!” (Jensen 67-68) His engagement was with Ernestine Von Fricken, a former pupil of Wieck’s; however, the engagement was dissolved shortly before Schumann’s courtship of Clara began.
The development of Clara and Schumann’s relationship, courtship and marriage, is one that is continually analyzed. The relationship began through Robert’s admiration of Clara as a performer and her nature and deepened into a romantic relationship. When Clara was not quite fourteen, and Schumann twenty-three in August of 1833 Clara sent Schumann her own composition, dedicated to him. He wrote back and sent her variations on the theme she had composed, dedicated to her father. The letter contains some of the initial signs of Schumann’s romantic desires for Clara. “Tomorrow precisely at eleven o’clock I will play the adagio from Chopin’s Variations and at the same time I shall think of you very intently, exclusively of you. Now my request is that you should do the same, so that we may see and meet each other in spirit.” (Jensen, 77-78)

Both Clara and Robert shared an interest in music and in the composer Chopin specifically. After Clara’s returned love for Schumann was acknowledged Schumann tried to attain the blessing of Friedrich Wieck, but Wieck was obstinate. Wieck voiced concerns over Schumann’s financial status and claimed that his daughter was too young for marriage. This appeased Schumann for a short while, but the drastic measures Wieck went to in order to keep the lovers apart soon aroused his anger. In order to ensure that the two would not see each other Wieck took his daughter to Dresden in January of 1836. It was Clara that would reinitiate correspondence with Schumann. She wrote and asked for the letters her father had forced her to return. Schumann refused to send back the old letters but wrote new letters, and a mutual friend passed the letters between the lovers. On August fourteenth of the same year the young couple became engaged without her father’s permission. The next month Schumann wrote for permission to marry Clara, but
Wieck again refused. He demanded that the relationship be put on halt for two years, and that until that time the couple were not to be left alone together nor correspond through letters.

Although this long drawn out courtship was certainly not ideal for a pair of lovers Schumann was often caught up in the romance of their situation. The obstinate father, the distant yearning, and the years spent secretly meeting and writing were inspiring. Eric Jensen writes, “Some of the letters they [Clara and Robert] sent to one another during the next two years are among the most beautiful ever written. Schumann was eloquent and eager to display his love. Clara was inspired by his passion. For Schumann in particular it was if he were once again living in a novel: two lovers destined for one another but thwarted by a reprehensible father.” (126)

In the meantime Wieck did everything possible to stop the couple from marrying. He contacted Ernestine in order to cast dispersions of Schumann’s reputation and argued with Clara that she would lose her career as a performer if she were to marry. This argument was the only one that seemed to affect Clara, she raised these concerns with Schumann. Throughout, however, Clara remained devoted to her relationship with Schumann, even when faced with other suitors, distance, and success. Her tour from October of 1837 until May of 1838 was marked by being given the honor of the position of Royal and Imperial Chamber Virtuoso by the Emperor; an honor that had only been received by two others before her. The long struggle was not all romance however, and it took its toll on both the lovers. Schumann had another attack similar to the one he had years ago upon the death of his sister-in-law, and Clara struggled to maintain herself under the opposing pulls of her father and her lover. “My spirit is strong, my heart
constant and unchanged.” Clara wrote, and she remained faithful throughout the years of struggling; only doubting when it seemed her career as a performer could not continue after marriage. (Jensen, 126)

It was not until September of 1840 that Schumann and Clara were finally married. Schumann and Clara both had written law officials to receive permission for their marriage. They had desperate hopes that they would be able to override Friedrich Wieck’s refusal and be allowed to marry. They finally received permission from Friedrich only after the court ordered he give his permission to their union.

That final year of turmoil, and of bliss for Schumann, the year of 1840 is known as the year of song. In the time around this year Schumann composed about 140 Lieder, for the most part collected in song cycles. The effects of Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann’s courtship on the output cannot be denied. Their situation was certainly a stimulus to this outflow of song. Although the separation before their marriage was painful, it served as a stimulus to Schumann’s creativity. Stephen Walsh’s book The Lieder of Schumann contains this quote from a letter from Schumann to Clara; “It is very strange…but if I write much to you, as I am doing now, I cannot compose. The music all goes to you.” (7).

The Lieder were also highly influenced by Schumann’s personal study of Schubert; however Schumann had his own unique style which was developed in one year, while Schubert composed Lieder for years. For this reason Schumann’s Lieder output are concentrated and can be seen as directly influenced by what was going on around him at the time.
Schumann has been criticized for many imperfections in his song writing. His lack of theoretical training and the apparent fervor in which he wrote these songs left errors which critics, singers and poets have bemoaned. Schumann copied the poems of his *Lieder* down with a few slight errors; for example instead of the word for cage, *Kafīg*, Schumann wrote the word for prison, *Kerker* (Walsh, 106). He also showed his lack of technical knowledge by occasionally writing music for a specific voice type outside of the range of the voice.

In any book on the *Lieder* of Schumann the debate on the propriety of setting poetry to music, and Schumann's interpretations are questioned. Stephen Walsh, in his book *The Lieder of Schumann*, writes that Schumann's copying of the text was often incorrect and could even change the meaning of the poetry. This deficiency is mentioned in analyses of his works by experts such as Eric Jensen and Eric Sams. During the Romantic Era some poets believed that setting the poems to music would destroy the works of such cherished poets as Goethe. Articles with academic debates on whether the long endings of solo piano distinctive of Schumann’s *Lieder* are a tribute to the fact that Schumann was a musician first and poet later. Or that they leave the audience without a feeling of completion.

Others say these elements are merely echoes of the poetry itself which enhance the emotions the poetry is intended to convey. Goethe himself predicted and approved the form long before it became established. Goethe thought that blending the poetry with music would complete the expression of the poetry, “Only then is poetic inspiration,
whether nascent or fixed, sublimated (or rather fused) into the free and beautiful element of sensory experience. Then we think and feel at the same time, and are enraptured thereby." (Sams, 672). If you continue to read Walsh’s book you will find that ultimately he too admits that Schumann’s emotional conveyance outweighs his spelling errors. What becomes clear through these debates is the importance of paying attention to both the voice and piano as individual parts, joined to convey the same message. Both voices must work together or the Lieder falls apart and the piano becomes simple accompaniment.

Composers who worked in the genre after Schumann, especially Wolf (1860 – 1903) were greatly influenced by Schumann’s style and methods. His union of the two voices is part of what makes research into the themes within his Lieder intriguing. The Lieder of Schumann are completely intimate and have a heart beat that draws the listener close to poet/composer/singer.
Part III. The *Lieder*

It would be impossible to analyze and discuss the themes of love, mood, nature, solitude, and the duality of joy and pain in every *Lieder* of the year of song. The nature of this paper does not allow it and so instead, it studies major works which are indicative of Schumann’s overall composition of *Lieder*. Therefore this paper will cover four of Schumann’s song cycles: *Liederkreis Op. 24*, *Liederkreis Op. 39*, *Frauenliebe und leben Op. 42*, and *Dichterliebe Op. 48*. These four song cycles contain the major themes of Schumann’s work and were written at different stages in the year of song demonstrating his style as a *Lieder* composer. The research traces how these themes are used in both the text and music how often particular themes are used versus others will be gained.

*Liederkreis Op. 24* was written in February of 1840 and represents some of Schumann’s earliest *Lieder* compositions. For this reason, some of the musical elements characteristic of Schumann’s *Lieder* are not in these works. The themes of love, nature, mood, solitude, and the duality of joy and pain, however, are present even in Schumann’s early choices. In *Liederkreis Op. 24* nature is used to help express the emotions of the poem. Sounds of nature, woven through voice and piano, help express the emotions of the poem.

In song three, “Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen”, the poet/singer is outdoors listening to the songs of the birds and thinking of the song his beloved sang. Interwoven with these themes of nature are a sense of duality between joy and pain, and of love. The birds are intended to cheer the poet from his mood of despair as he contemplates his
unrequited love. They contrast the sullen figure of the poet himself. For an example of how the piano is used to mirror the voice listen, to measures ten through twelve. The text is “Träumen, und schlich mir in’s Herz hinein” or “crept into my heart”. The music climbs a scale by thirds; creeping up the keys as sadness creeps into the poet’s heart.

![Figure 1](image)

Song number seven “Berg und Burgen schaun herunter” uses a setting found in both of the Liederkreis cycles, castles by the river. In this case the river is the famous Rhine. As the poet speaks of the beauty of the waters “golden, ruffled waves surging” the piano echoes the sound of the lapping water under the voice. The rest of the poetry contains another tale of duality and compares the beloved with the waters which appear kind and inviting yet, birgt sein Innres Tod und Nacht, “conceals within itself Death and Night”.

Underneath, the piano continues the sounds of the water until the final nine measures of piano ending. In these final measures Schumann’s ability to weave the themes of the poetry into the music is clearly demonstrated by a technique used in more than a couple of Schumann’s Lieder. By allowing the voice of the piano to take over where the voice leaves off, the audience is allowed to continue the thoughts and feelings aroused by the poetry. This technique can be so subtle that the first-time listener may not
even notice. This is the case with “Berg und Burgen”. The final line, lächelt auch so fromm und mild, “smiling so devotedly and gently”, is repeated twice in the voice and a third time in the piano. The effect is the bittersweet feeling created in the listener. The sound of the water reminds the listener of the text’s comparison between the river and the poet/singer’s beloved. Although the singer wishes to trust the exterior smile of the beloved and the river, he/she knows that both are treacherous, and the piano repeats the sound of the waves, like the poet’s continued bitterness.

It is surprising to find how many Lieder in Op. 24 end in anger. In Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden, and Warte, warte, wilder Schiffsmann the singer is driven to nearly yell the text. This is unusual for the poems Schumann typically chooses which are usually tearfully acceptant and controlled. In these few songs the singer is driven to rage.

Op. 39, Liederkreis, was published in May of 1840. As with Liederkreis Op. 24 the collection is not tied together by a specific narrative but a does have a general mood.
Instead of the anger found in Op. 24 a solitary sadness is found in Op. 39. There are accounts that this poetry, written by Eichendorff, was selected by Clara Schumann. If that were true, the cycle could be Clara’s communication of returned loneliness and sadness at their separation. Or it could be simply a collection of favorites.2

If these poems were given to Schumann by Clara, they might explain the differences in tone and mood. Despite overriding themes of solitude and even sadness Liederkreis Op. 39 does contain a few songs that end in happiness. Frühlingsnacht, the final song in the cycle, ends dramatically with the words “Sie ist deine, sie ist dein!” “She is thine, she is thine!” The Lieder of this cycle are almost replies to the Lieder of Liederkreis Op. 24; hope and endurance counter frustration. Though there are oppositions in the mood of these cycles, the themes used are similar.

In the Liederkreis Op. 39 Schumann’s style as a composer of Lieder has become more set. His tendency to compose solo piano endings, though not as long and dramatic as even later cycles, is clearly shown in the Lieder of Op. 39. Schumann’s attention to syllabic accents and habit of beginning phrases on the off beat are other elements seen more frequently in Liederkreis Op. 39 than his previous Lieder. Emphasis is placed on the stressed syllables and significant words of the text/poem. An example of this is the first part of the first song in the Liederkreis Op. 39 cycle In Der Fremde; Aus der Heimat hinter den Blitzen rot, da kommen die Wolken hier, “From my homeland, in the wake of

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2 In my own research I have not found for sure that this cycle of poems was chosen by Clara. The idea could be merely confusion due to the fact that some of the songs were in Clara’s handwriting. One such work was the only original copy of Inder Fremde, and was for some time thought to have been one of her compositions. (Fischer-Dieskau, 73).
red lightning The clouds are drifting here. Figure 3 The underlined words are stressed because of the rhythm which not only marks the syllabic pronunciation but creates a beat that lures in the listener.

Prevalent themes in the Liederkreis Op. 39 remain very similar. Nature is continually used to convey sentiment and is seen not only in the poetry but in the music itself. In Mondnacht, “Moonlight Night”, the voice quietly goes up the scale as if to imitate the soft breeze in the night of which it sings. It begins every other phrase, the beginning of couplets in the poetry, with this soft sound and changes only with a change from the description to the related feelings of the poet. “Und meine Seele spannte”, “and my soul unfolded”, is decidedly different as it repeats a low note in contrast to the rising phrases.

The second In der Fremde also uses a pattern in the piano to emphasize both setting and mood. In this song however the sound is also used to create a sense of irony. It begins with trills on the piano giving the impression of the rushing brooklets and the
beautiful scenery of the text. Between each phrase of description the trill of the piano is heard again. However, the light trills take on a solemn tone as the lover speaks of his beloved. It is only the final line of the poem that brings sadness to this Lied. The rest of the song is all a description of the beautiful landscape, until the singer repeats the final phrase³ “Und doch so lange tot...”, Yet she [the beloved] has been so long dead. The happy trills of the brooks slow slightly in the third repetition of this line. Here the irony highlights the theme of duality of joy and pain. The third repetition completes and the piano takes over, and ends what seemed like a merry song, with a solemn final chord.

References to birds are extremely common in these lieder; eight of the songs contain references to birds. The first three references are found in the songs Intermezzo, Die Stille, and Mondnacht. These three Lieder compare either the song or soul of the poet to a bird with the ability to fly to the beloved. In Die Stille the beginning of the song remains contained at an average meter. The directions are “nicht schnell, immer sehr leise”, not fast, always very soft; and this is maintained until measure seventeen. Here the meter moves just slightly faster to correspond with the line: Ich wünscht, Ich warein Voglein und soge über das Meer, “I wish I were a little bird flying over the sea.”

The other five references, in Auf einer Burg, In der Fremde (VIII), Wehmut, Im Walde, and Frühlingsnacht, refer to birds singing and are used to highlight the solitary nature of the poet. The birds seem to represent a togetherness that the poet does not have with their joyful songs to one another. In many cases they also represent happiness the poet does not have, as the poet is often separated from the beloved. However, there are

³ In German poetry the technique of changing the mood of a poem with the final line is Stimmungsbrechung, which means “mood breaking.” (Walsh, 20)
times when the birds’ songs echo the sadness of the poet as in *Wehmut*, where the nightingales sing a song of yearning.

The Liederkreis song cycles are more difficult to tie up neatly as they have no over-arching narrative. It can be said that they contrast with one another in the overall mood. The contrast between the angry lover in *Es treibt mich hin, Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden*, and *Warte, warte, wilder Schifffsmann* who nearly screams in his rage when compared with songs such as *Intermezzo, Die Stille*, and *Frühlingsnacht* in Op. 39 singing of the joys of love, even if they are still made in solitude. Liederkreis Op. 39 can almost be thought of as a reply to the earlier written Op. 24; not merely due to their timeline but the choices made behind them.

The third cycle used for analysis, *Dichterliebe*, offers a much more definitive framework. The cycle’s name means “Poet’s love”, and was published after the two *Liederkreis* cycles. One of the key themes is in the title of this work: love. With the exception of *Waldesprach* in Op. 39, the *Liederkreis Lieder* are all about love; the difference with this particular cycle is the framework for interpretation created by the title of the cycle. The title means a poet’s love making it clear that Schumann will be interpreting the love of a poet, a role to which he, as a composer, feels close. In his biography Eric Jensen quotes Schumann in a letter, “Every composer is a poet, only at a higher level.” (Jensen, 193).

*Dichterliebe* is full of themes of duality between joy and pain expressed in beautifully poignant phrases. Schumann’s ability to change the mood of a song have more refined than either *Liederkreis Op. 24* or *Liederkreis Op. 39*. For themes of duality,

*Wenn ich deine Augen seh*, *Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen*, and *Ich hab’ im Traum*
geweinet illustrate Schumann’s use of slight changes in the piano and voice, which add to themes of the two sided nature of love.

Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’ is a poem that begins with descriptions of the joys of being with the beloved; Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’, So scheindet all’ mein Leid und Weh, “When I look into your eyes, Then all my grief and sorrow vanish.” The rest of the Lied continues with the same sentiment until the last two lines. Here the slight changes in the song are a cue to the dual nature of joy and pain. The singer emphasizes Doch wenn du sprichst, “But when you say”; and here the line of the singer is broken as the piano lightly falls down the scale with a foreshadowing sadness. The singer continues, ich liebe dich!, “I love you!”; So muss ich weinen bitterlich, “Then I must weep bitterly.” Figure 4 The ritard over Liebe causes the singer to sustain the note just long enough to emphasize the greatness of the moment and then a slight accent on bitterlich, “bitterly”, completes the shift in mood from joy to pain. The piano continues in a solo ending typical of Schumann, but in this case does not continue the melody. Instead it uses the repeated played earlier in the song. Here at the end they sound like the quiet crying of the lover. It is a beautiful combination of sound and poetry.
Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen demonstrates another method of Schumann’s compositional irony. The Lied is another tale of unrequited love. This time the poet/singer describes the wedding of his beloved to another. The piano merrily plays the flutes and violins of the wedding in 3/8 creating a waltz like dance rhythm. In contrast to the high joyous notes the piano are the low notes of the singer who describes the joyous scene. Once again the song ends in sadness however; in this song there are no echoing sounds of weeping. Instead the piano continues with its dance, winding down only in the last three measures of its twenty measure ending; joyful contrast to the obvious grief of the singer. Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen’s duality is shown by using the two voices in contrast with one another. The joyous wedding is found in the piano, and the shunned lover in the singer.

Of those sixteen poems chosen by Schumann for Dichterliebe, twelve deal with the pain of lost or unrequited love. The other four are scenes in which the beloved is described or a confession of love is given. In none of the twelve Lieder is the love of the poet returned. For those who relate this cycle to Schumann’s own life and his relationship with Clara. At the time Dichterliebe was written, it was begun directly after the Eichendorf Liederkreis at the end of May when Schumann was not sure that he would ever be able to marry Clara. The couple were attempting every means at their disposal to gain permission to marry and were still parted. Schumann could take solace only in his
compositions which were inspired now, not only by Clara, but by the intense sadness and romance of their plight.

_Dichterliebe_ and _Frauenliebe und Leben_, like the two Liederkreis cycles before them are in contrast with one another. Composed in July of 1840 Schumann used eight poems by Adelbert v. Chamisso for the song cycle _Frauenliebe und Leben_, “A woman’s love and life”. Whereas _Dichterliebe_ is traditionally sung by a male, this song cycle is a decidedly female based cycle. Both the poetry and the songs for _Frauenliebe_ were written by males and therefore have much room for error in their interpretation of a woman’s feelings in both life and love

As with _Dichterliebe_ the title of this cycle frames the narrative. The young woman who falls in love progresses from feelings of love, to wishing to leave her family, through marriage, childbirth, and one last song after marriage. Since it is a briefer cycle it makes sense to approach it slightly differently and follow its narrative instead of grouping the songs according to themes.

_Seit ich ihn gesehen_ is the first song of the cycle. In it the young woman sings of being blinded by love: _Wo ich hin nur blicke, seh’ ich ihn allein_, “Whither I am looking, I see him alone”; and expresses detachment from her family; _Nach der Schwestern Spiele nicht begeh’ ich mehr_, “The games of my sisters I want to share no more”. It is a slow and solemn song. Despite the waltz meter it has the feel of a march. This feeling is created by the repeated chords of the piano which continue even after the singer has finished. This repetition emphasizes the singer’s numbness to her surroundings.

_Seit ich ihn gesehen_ does not have the themes of nature or duality common to the two _Liederkreis_ cycles and _Dichterliebe_. In fact it is pointedly devoid of these themes.
In this song the theme of love and of an emotional state, or mood replace themes of nature.

*Er, Der Herrlichste von Allen,* “He, The Most Glorious of All” describes with happiness all the lovely features of the beloved. The woman/singer humbles herself, *Nur betrachten deinen Schein,* “Only to look at your light”, however, her humble love is not devoid of thought or caution. Already there is a theme of duality in love foreshadowed by the text.

*Will mich freuen dann und weinen,*
*Selig, selig bin ich dann,*
*Sollte mir das Herz auch brechen,*
*Brich, o Herz, was lieget daran?*

“I shall rejoice and I shall weep then,
Blissful, blissful I am then,
Even though my heart should break,
Break o heart, what does it matter?”

With this text the music changes to a variation of the melody. This creates a sad sound, and as the first phrase, *Er, der Herrlichste von allen,* He, the most glorious of all,” is repeated at the end of the *Lied.* The originally happy line takes on a new meaning when set to this new, sad tune.

The next three songs: *Ich Kann’s Nicht Fassen, Nicht Glauben,* “I Cannot Grasp, Nor Believe It”; *Du Ring An Meinem Finger,* “You Ring On My Finger”; and *Helft Mir, Ihr Schwestern,* “Help Me, My Sisters” follow the young woman through her engagement, and marriage. The fourth song concludes the process with an intimate moment with the new husband. All four songs are devoid of any of the typical themes of
Schumann with the exception of the very broad: love. The singer rejoices in her love, and the virtues of her beloved. They are all completely typical in the joys of a stereotypically dutiful bride. Some slight anxiety is mentioned in *Helft Mir, Ihr Schwestern* but it is quickly shed away. The music holds the only hints of sadness or pain, as a foreshadowing element, heard only in the piano endings.

The seventh song *An Meinem Herzen, An Meiner Brust*. “On My Heart, On My Breast”, is about a mother’s love for her child. Here the happiness has shifted from the husband to the child; *Du lieber, lieber Engel, du, Du schaust mich an und lachelst dazu!*, “You dear, dear angel you, You look at me and you smile at me!” The shift is foreshadowed by the final lines of *Süsser Freund* in which the young woman speaks of a having a child who will inherits the face of her beloved.

All the songs truly can be said to be songs of mood or emotion states. They are developed around one moment of intense emotions. Most of Schumann’s *Lieder* are centered are developed in this way, and centered around the an individual in a moment of great passion whether happy or sad. In most cases the other themes distract from this but in *Frauenliebe und leben*, with all other themes stripped away, the narrative becomes the only binding element of importance. Ultimately the listener follows through the woman’s eyes and misses the over-arching theme.

Throughout this cycle there is no mention of nature; however, there is a strong over-arching theme of solitude, and the duality of joy and pain. These become clearer with the final song. The young and naïve young woman who falls in love, is married, and has a child all within the course of these seven songs is, at the end, alone. *Nun hast Dum*
mir den ersten Schmerz getan. "Now You Have Caused Me the First Pain" this final song of pain and solitude is sung almost as in recitative. As she sings of her loneliness and her beloved's apathy she begins to withdraw into herself; Der Schleier fällt, Da hab' ich dich und mein verlor'nes Glück, Du meine Welt!, "The veil is falling, Then I have you and my lost happiness, You, my world!" The complete sadness and irony of the relationship does not end with the singer's final words however; the piano has a long ending of twenty-one measures which follows the lonely woman to her thoughts, and returns to the melody of the first song. The soft and slow processional sound continues the ultimate theme of the duality between pain and love and remains with the woman as she slowly withdraws into her memories.
IV. Conclusions

Schumann wrote in a letter to his mother that, "Music is to me the perfect expression of the soul, while to some it is a mere intoxication of the sense of hearing, and to others an arithmetical problem..." (Composers on Music, 92) Schumann is known to have been an improviser who let out a wealth of emotions on the piano. Although he composed in a wide range of genres the *Lieder* from Schumann's year of song hold a special connection with the composer in their unique and intimate blend of poetry and music. The themes that occur and reoccur in Schumann's *Lieder* are themes that appealed to the composer himself and therefore correlations can be drawn between the composer's life and the themes of his *Lieder*. The *Lieder* reveal an intimacy with the composer as well as Schumann's ability to weave poetry and music together.

Schumann's *Lieder* demonstrate careful attention to the themes and interpretation of the poetry he chose to use. By analyzing his *Lieder* many of Schumann's techniques for highlighting those themes are revealed. Solo piano endings which often continue the mood of the song, contrast the mood to add irony, follow the voice of the singer, or continue the sounds of the setting are used to bring themes from the text into the music. By using specific meters, and dynamics Schumann carefully assures that the text is highlighted in a way that adds to the emotions it creates. These and other musical elements: interludes between phrases, introductions, and transitions between songs in the same cycle are all evidence of Schumann's careful consideration for translating the themes of the text into music. It can be inferred that those themes that are the most prevalent reflect the composer's disposition and life. When analyzing the themes in his
Lieder love was obviously a major theme, but unrequited love was the most common type of love. Of all the Lieder above half were specifically about unrequited love. There are multiple reasons in Schumann’s life and disposition which might have led him to choose poetry with this sad theme.

First, Schumann’s romantic nature seems to have delighted in the bittersweet romantic relationship. His rocky courtship with Clara caused him to produce some of the most beautiful letters and expressions of love in his life. The same hardship that led to these inspired letters might have led to his choice of text for his Lieder. Schumann is sure to have been influenced by his difficult courtship of Clara. It was not until late in the year that the couple was united and their separation could certainly have been a stimulus to his choices of poems about unrequited love.

Schumann may also have been influenced by the couple’s relationship in another way. Clara Wieck was a very independent woman, who was recognized across Europe for her skills at the piano. Schumann is very likely to have been as intimidated by her as he was in love with her. His struggles to deal with feelings of inadequacy, Schumann had not been recognized for his playing or his compositions at the time probably led to fears of unreturned love and influenced his outlook on love in general.

The theme of nature is interwoven in a very specific way in Schumann’s Lieder. Instead of being used as an independent theme nature aids in the conveyance of the emotional themes of the text. By using two themes together Robert Schumann adds to the richness of the Lied.

With the knowledge acquired through researching the biography and Lieder of
Robert Schumann come even more questions to be answered. Research into how these musical themes should and have been performed, Clara’s opinions on Schumann’s Lieder, and even a continuation of the studies of this thesis which only begin to analyze how Robert Schumann blended themes found in poetry into the sounds music.

The Lieder of Robert Schumann have been analyzed according to how he altered the text of poems to fits songs, or how many words he wrote incorrectly, and arguments that debate his use of long piano solos. However, from this research it is clear that Schumann was deeply concerned with how the poetry was used. His errors in technical aspects of the poetry whether he repeated a line, or changed a word can be noted but should not — his beautiful attempts to express the emotional interpretations he himself must have felt in order to set these poems to music.

In a letter mentioned before Schumann wrote these words to Clara, “It is very strange...but if I write much to you, as I am doing now, I cannot compose. The music all goes to you.” (Walsh, 7) Schumann’s music came from somewhere within his soul not a sense of technical knowledge. His musical training was limited, he was not a musical genius, but his music demonstrates an attention to emotional detail that is moving. Robert Schumann was a musical poet with the ability to weave words and music into songs that have moved listeners since 1840, the year of song.
References


Schumann, Robert. *85 Songs for Voice and Piano.* International Music Company


Methodology

There is no strict method within the music history field on researching and writing on your findings. The research done for this thesis will not involve in depth musical analysis of the individual *Lieder* but instead will be broad and use terms individuals outside the field can understand. Any musical terms regarding the speed, of dynamics will be explained within the thesis.

The research is conducted mainly through reading of multiple texts which on the *lieder*, Schumann’s life, the Romantic Era, etc. Materials being used include international printings of the *Lieder* and the song cycles of Robert Schumann, biographical books, essays, letters, musical analysis books and articles. Analysis will be conducted by reviewing first the text of the *Lieder*, and then the music in order to understand how Schumann translated the themes of poetry into his music. This information will be collected and conclusions as to the connection these themes have with Schumann’s life will be made from these studies and from research into Schumann’s biography. The final conclusions will contribute to those findings already available in the academics of music. These conclusions will shed light on a new perspective of Schumann and his *Lieder*.
Bibliography


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Schumann, Robert. *90 Songs for Voice and Piano*. International Music Company


Discography

Robert Schumann: Dichterliebe, Liederkreis
Performed by Hans Peter Blochwitz, Rudolf Jansen
EMI Records Limited

Robert Schumann: Lieder
Performed by Thomas Hampson, Geoffrey Parsons
Teldec Classics International

Robert Schumann
Performed by Lorraine Hunt, Kurt Ollman, and Michael Barrett
KOCH International Classics

Schumann
Performed by Thomas Allen, Roger Vignoles
Virgin Classics Limited

Schubert and Schumann: Lieder/Songs
Performed by Ally Ameling, Jorg Demus, Hans Deinzer
BMG Music

Schumann: Legendary Song Cycle Recordings
Performed by Gerhard Hüsch, Hanns Udo Müller, Lotte Lehmann, Fredrich Schorr, and Fritz Kitzinger
Pavilion Records Limited

Schumann: Dichterliebe
Performed by Fritz Wunderlich, Hubert Giesen
Polydor International

Schumann and Brahms
Performed by Jorma Hynninen, Ralf Gothoni
Odine Incorporated

Schumann: Dichterliebe, Liederkreis Op.39
Performed by Olaf Bär, Geoffrey Parsons
EMI Records Limited
Robert Schumann: Lieder
Performed by Peter Schreier, Norman Shetler
Berlin Classics