Schubert’s Dream

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"Beethoven composes like an architect, Schubert like a sleepwalker." Alfred Brendel adds that he means no slur on Schubert’s craftsmanship or on Beethoven’s sensitivity. His observation concerns their respective senses of form and feeling, reflected in their use of musical structures. "In Beethoven’s music we never lose our bearings, we always know where we are; Schubert, on the other hand, puts us into a dream." That dream is not merely comforting or lulling, numerous passages in Schubert are intentionally nightmarish or terrifying. Furthermore, Schubert’s dream is not capricious or vaguely associative. The connections he makes between seemingly unrelated tonal areas or themes are mysterious but compelling; how can one understand them?

I suggest that Schubert himself gave an instructive parallel to his compositional procedures in a brief prose work he composed and dated 3 July 1822, entitled "My Dream." I do not mean to say that this tale is the program for a particular musical work but that certain characteristic musical procedures find parallels in the symbolic patterns of the tale; although


the music is masterly and the tale awkward, both emerged from the same imagination. The parallelism may or may not have been consciously shaped by Schubert, but it can be made specific. "My Dream" centers on the motif of double banishment; his music often shows a parallel structure of two shifts around a "circle of sixths." To illustrate this, I shall discuss the first movement of his Piano Sonata in B♭ Major (1828, D. 960); although written six years after "My Dream," its structure offers a particularly full parallel. This structure appears in a number of other works and may provide a way of understanding Schubert’s characteristic three-key sonata exposition. Furthermore, in his song "Der Neugierige" Schubert gives an important clue to the inner meaning of the sixth-relation so important to these larger structures.

The Dream Narrative

It is unclear whether "My Dream" is a record of an actual dream or personal experience or is a self-conscious literary work. The title of Schubert’s manuscript is written in the hand of his brother Ferdinand; Schubert’s intimate friend Franz Schober also kept a copy, probably in his own hand. Robert Schumann, noting only that the text is "open to deeper interpretation," was the first to publish it [1839].5 Otto Erich Deutsch took it to be a "literary effusion of a contemporary of German romanticism . . . an embodiment of ideas in the style of Novalis." Deutsch deprecated attempts to treat it as biographical fact and referred, perhaps ironically, to the way it has been "psycho-analytically and otherwise speculatively interpreted."5 Maynard Solomon considered it "not only a retrospective account of Schubert’s alienation from his father but also a prospective allegory expressing his profound wish to return to the paternal bosom."6 Without entering into biographical speculation, I shall examine the tale in the context of his musical compositions.7

In comparison with his music, Schubert’s text has a certain awkwardness that reflects his uneasiness with literary expression. Yet the same man wrote the music and "My Dream," and the possible relations between them may be subtle. On the one hand, Arnold Schering surely went too far when he took "My Dream" to be the program of the "Unfinished" Symphony.8 Whatever one may think of the suggestion, its relation to Schubert’s intentions is uncertain, absent any definitive statement on his part. Then there is the invidious assumption of the priority of the program to the music. On the other hand, one can avoid this kind of difficulty by addressing parallelisms that do not require making such dubious assumptions. Schubert’s text is more likely to be informed by musical procedures than vice versa. This may reflect not only his well-attested awkwardness with words but also his groping to find a verbal correlate for his musical preoccupations. Indeed, the story revolves around the dreamer’s songs and culminates in "a wondrously lovely sound."

"My Dream" tells a story of banishment and reconciliation. It begins and ends with an evocation of the bliss of familial intimacy; in the middle there is anger, alienation, wandering. It has a musical form, A B A’: the peaceful origi-

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5 Solomon, "Franz Schubert’s ‘My Dream’," p. 150; this article contains references to earlier psychological and biographical interpretations of the tale.


nal material returns at the end, transfigured and transformed, after a contrasting dramatic section that develops the initial motifs. Beyond this schematic form Schubert’s tale contains two deaths, first of the mother, then of a “pious maiden” (fromme Jungfrau). There are also two banishments, first by the father, then by the dreamer himself after his father strikes him, and two returns, after the mother’s death and again after the death of the maiden. The mysterious reversals and banishments indeed have a dreamlike quality. Their ambiguous power is indicated by the strong mixture of pain and pleasure in Schubert’s tale. “For long years I felt torn between the greatest grief and the greatest love. . . . Whenever I attempted to sing of love, it turned to pain. And again, when I tried to sing of pain, it turned to love. Thus were love and pain divided in me.” It may be helpful to think of the tale in connection with one of Schubert’s songs, such as the Erlkönig, in which one singer performs all the parts. The dreamer may be identified both with the son, repelled at his father’s garden, and with the father who strikes him in anger, and even with the mother and the maiden. The singer, or dreamer, gathers a divided state into a single voice.9

A rich mixture of pain and pleasure gives a heartbreaking quality to Schubert’s music, especially to those passages one might expect to be least dissonant because they are the long-awaited moments of return. A highly dissonant chord often serves to intensify a moment of return and climactic reconciliation, as at the end of the first movement in the B♭ Sonata (mm. 337, 342), or the wrenching dissonance preceding the final cadence of the F-Minor Fantasy for Piano Four-hands (m. 567; 1828, D. 940). The rending force of these dissonant moments represents both profound tonal conflict and the emergence of a miraculous resolution. In Schubert’s tale, death evokes the climactic interpenetration of love and pain, of conflict and resolution, parallel to the simultaneous experience of two seemingly irreconcilable tonal forces. The wandering “into far-off regions” is the prolonged preparation for the ecstasy of “eternal bliss compressed into a single moment.”

These structures resonate in Schubert’s designs, whose outlines I shall first sketch and later amplify. Both the tale and the Sonata begin with a “feast” of untroubled “family music,” the tonic and its closely related tonal degrees. The complications in the dream begin with the “sadness” of the dreamer; likewise, in the Sonata an ambiguous chord appears (♭VI), not securely related to the tonic and dominant. The dreamer’s divergence alters or disrupts the simple beginning and draws it to wander. This wandering extends more widely until it reaches a critical estrangement from its origin, represented by the death of the mother in Schubert’s tale. The father’s angry blow shows that the wanderer is unreconciled with his home. Similarly, the “home” key is no longer a haven but the locus of the most dissonant relations. In the development, Schubert redoubles the relation ♭VI to ♭vi/♭VI, a double banishment that then circles back to the home key, regaining the tonic through the most distanced separation.

In the tale, the final return is prepared by another death, that of the “pious maiden,” who seems to recall the figure of the mother. This reconciliation proceeds from the “wondrously lovely sound” that the entire unbroken circle utters. In the Sonata, there is no simple confrontation with the home tonic but a larger reconciliation of the disturbing implications of ♭VI for the whole tonal order. In the tale, the wider circle of many youths and old men replaces the smaller family circle. Finally, the father joins the dreamer in weeping; after the mother’s death, the father had only been “mellowed by sorrow.” The wanderer’s homecoming augments his father’s weeping; the prodigal father and son are finally reconciled in tears.

The Dream and the Sonata

The dreamy quality of this movement is evident from the very first measures, which emerge as if the music had already been going on a long time. This quality depends on the pianissimo hush and the gliding rhythm, but even more on a kind of harmonic stasis. This theme recollects the first theme of Beethoven’s “Archduke”

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Trio, op. 97, movt. I (mm. 1–8) in its key and rhythm. Where Beethoven hesitates slightly as he moves to the dominant, Schubert hesitates and floats even more; his melody climbs slowly to 4 (on IV, m. 5), but never reaches 5 even as the harmony touches the dominant. Beethoven’s line climbs confidently to 5 in crescendo, while Schubert’s fades away in a mysterious fermata.10

Then a stranger arrives: the low trill that blends Gb and F. I take the opening to parallel Schubert’s happy family at the opening of his tale, and the Gb stranger to parallel the dreamer, the prodigal son on whom the story turns. Edward T. Cone makes a similar identification of \( \mathrm{vi} \) in his memorable discussion of the *Moment musical* no. 6 (1824, D. 780), a reading that also is true to the tale: “It dramatizes the injection of a strange, unsettling element into an otherwise peaceful situation. At first ignored or suppressed, that element persistently returns. It not only makes itself at home but even takes over the direction of events in order to reveal unsuspected possibilities.”11 As many commentators have observed, the trill Gb–F is a seed from which emerge the largest and smallest details of the first movement of the Bb Sonata.12 At its first appearance it is enigmatic; one does not know to what extent the Gb is just an upper neighbor to the dominant, F, or whether it persists greater digression to come. Here the dominant at m. 7 remains suspended as a six-four chord until the root position is heard, very briefly, as the trill resolves. Thus the stranger intervenes at a critical moment, corresponding to the moment when the “Archduke” theme had attained its half-cadence. The ensuing silence underlines the difference: in Beethoven’s Trio the violin and cello take up the theme without such interruption. In contrast, Schubert holds the silence; then the theme rebegins and this time moves smoothly back to the tonic without further interruption. Although the opening harmonies include IV6 at m. 5, Schubert substitutes vi for the subdominant as early as m. 14. Then another low trill is heard, this time in measured thirty-second notes on Bb–C#, as if to remind us of the continuing presence of this new element (m. 19). To confirm this, the trill resolves to Gb, which now forms the harmonic center of a restatement of the first theme on vi. Schubert emphasizes the close relation between vi and the subdominant; the closeness between the dreamer and his mother parallels the close kinship between vi and IV.

Beethoven treated \( \mathrm{vi} \) as a region of inward exaltation and tended to bracket it carefully in his larger architecture.13 Schubert allows it to expand significantly. For almost sixteen measures \( \mathrm{vi} \) is extended, first as a pedal tone under the restated theme, then freely elaborated as a rocking between I and IV of G major. As he returns to Bb via its dominant (m. 35), to the first theme now *forte* and more animated, it seems that the tonic balances Gb, now explained as the upper neighbor of the dominant. But now, at the point in this theme where the trill first appeared, a decrescendo and enharmonic shift suddenly propels us into Gb minor = F# minor (mm. 48–58), which has a lonely, frightened sound; the high melody and its bass countermelody follow each other over a chasm. The triplet accompaniment (emerging from the warm rocking movement of the first theme, and the more insistent repeated notes of mm. 44–47) underlines this, as does the new tone color of the upper register of the piano. This is the beginning of Schubert’s second group, which

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10Newbould emphasizes the similarities to the “Archduke” in Schubert, pp. 334–35.

13The “Archduke” Trio’s slow movement (in D) finally dissolves into its \( \mathrm{vi} \), the main key of the other movements, Bb. Unforgettable passages of the Ninth Symphony Adagio are spent in that domain, among numerous other moments, including the “Appassionata” slow movement (Db, as \( \mathrm{vi} \) of the first movement’s F minor). See the classic account in Donald Francis Tovey, “Tonality in Schubert,” in *The Main Stream of Music* [New York, 1949], pp. 134–59. See also Susan McClary, “Pitches, Expression, Ideology: An Exercise in Mediation,” *Enclitic* 7 (1983), 76–86, which I will address below.
involves two keys. Until this point, the movement had been bathed in major harmonies; the Gb was at first only a small cloud, then a mysterious radiance that irradiated the theme. Schubert saves the first extended use of the minor mode for Gb = F#. Gb major shares with the tonic the note B and can be heard as a kind of heightened subdominant; F# minor shares no tones with I or IV. In this decisive apartness from the tonic and subdominant, the shift to F# (prepared by the earlier motion to IV) parallels the first banishment from the parental home in the tale.

As the mood shifts to this disturbing tonal region, Schubert reintroduces the pitch B, but now as a plangent, dissonant note against the background of F#. He reinterprets G minor (F# minor: v) as vii of D minor, sliding back into B major (mm. 70–79), but now with a dominant pedal on F (mm. 70–73) that shifts to a pedal on V of V (mm. 74–79). This dominant preparation leads to a clear cadence on the dominant at mm. 80, the latter part of the second group. Once again it seems that the mysterious cloud around Gb has dispersed, leaving us with a calm and simple second theme. This simplicity recalls the warm “family singing” of the initial theme; the most obvious triads and seventh chords accompany the arpeggiated theme. After the shadow of F# minor, this simplicity comes as a relief, a reassurance that nothing terrible has happened and that we can return to the untroubled warmth with which we began. The very slightest touches of flatted neighboring tones (here D♭, as IV of the dominant) recall the initial incursion of the G. These hints are not entirely relegated to the distant background; there is an odd outburst that veers toward G minor, then A♭ major, then A minor. At first

this makes no sense, but then one wonders if the music is transfixed, running precipitously backward, veering back to B♭ major by chromatic steps (mm. 103–05). After these emphatic chords, the texture returns to crystalline simplicity, sometimes a single voice singing quietly to itself, sometimes a cadence once again affirming the dominant. The first ending insistentement dramatizes the Gb and the low trill fortissimo. Brendel even argues that this return spoils the subtlety with which Schubert had almost neutralized the stranger, since it brings Gb back so emphatically and obviously.

There is no doubt about the stroke wrought by the second ending, which, in one quiet measure, turns from F major to its F, C# minor (mm. 117b), which Tovey interprets as D♭ minor. Here is a moment that might look like Schubert “sleepwalking,” moving aimlessly from key to key. But a telling pattern is revealed. The turn from I → F (♭vi) of V exactly replicates that same turn when the shift to F# minor overshadowed the exposition. These may also be recollections of Beethoven’s use of F (♭vi) as the key of the desolate slow movement of the “Hammerklavier” Sonata. As earlier in the movement, this tonal region has the sense of a pursuing fatality, of the cold wind of death chilling the warmth of the common chords. This tonal shift had earlier evoked a lonely duet over the abyss; now the opening theme is heard in this desolate region (mm. 118–25). As the development begins, Schubert leads us to A major as VI of C# minor; the dialectical alternation of VI and F may be unmistakable. To do this, the latter theme of the second group sequentially, moving downward from A major to G minor, then down (by another sixth) to B major, which slides down to B♭ minor and then (yet another sixth) to D♭ major. This motion by sixths has brought him back, enharmonically, to his starting point, C# = D♭, which now becomes a repeated pedal tone that begins a long sequence of pedals.

Chromatic descent lowers this pedal to C, then B, as V of E. The lowest and highest voices keep moving apart, and the harmonies pass downward by thirds through C and A♭, touching B minor and arriving dramatically at D minor = E♭ minor as VIVI (m. 173). This marks the second move around what I call the “circle

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14 James Webster, “Schubert’s Sonata Form and Brahms’s First Maturity,” this journal 2 (1978), 18–35.
16 See the discussions in Lawrence Siegel, Schubert’s Harmonic Geometry: Structural Means in the First Movement of the B Piano Sonata (D.960) (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1988), and Mary-Martha Bante-Knight, Tonal and Thematic Coherence in Schubert’s Piano Sonata in B-flat (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1983).
of sixths”; it parallels the second banishment in the tale. Now Schubert greatly extends the harmonies, prolonging D minor as a repeated triad (directly or by implication) for twenty measures. The low trill rumbles twice during this extension, both times on D [mm. 186, 192], as if preparing one to hear the D as still VI of F♯ minor. This distacts one from what Schubert unveils at m. 193: the D-minor triad moves to F♯ of B♭ major, simply by shifting its A up a semitone. This would be a kind of premature recapitulation, if the ear were really to accept the shift back to B♭ major, which it doesn’t yet. One hears the first theme, pianississimo, floating in the high register above the sixth chords with the same pitches as in the initial tonic statement. Its return in this way has a beautiful irreality, as if one were seeing double: the tonic returned at last, and yet not the tonic. The harmony of E♭ minor in m. 196 again uses the telltale G♮ and, by its variance from the initial harmonic pattern, confirms the sense that we have not yet returned. This is further indicated by the return of the trill, now on B♭ considered as VI of D minor! By emphasizing this symmetry, Schubert draws to our attention the circle of sixths in the constellation B♭ → G♮ → D minor = E♭ minor → B♭. Having shown us these points along the circle, Schubert uses it to go back to D minor, where finally we hear a completely unambiguous dominant seventh of B♭ [m. 203]. I shall return to the significance of this circle in the next section.

This V♮ is the token of definitive return to the tonic, and it is confirmed by a long chromatic descent to the G♮ trill first in the middle register and again in the low register where we first heard it. By this manifold reiteration we are assured that G♮ is finally to be understood as the neighboring tone of the dominant, as it had first appeared to be. This great excursus finally lifts the overwhelming doubt insinuated by G♮ major → F♯ minor. Here the “dramatization” of the return to the tonic takes a very singular form, for it finally devolves on a single quiet voice moving gradually down the whole range of the piano, not outwardly dramatic but deeply internal. The dreamer unites the discordant forces of his dream in a solitary voice. Following this, the recapitulation unfolds not as a repetition but a kind of re-experiencing in the light of this new understanding. In the return of the first material of G♮ minor there is a sudden enharmonic shift back to F♯ [m. 238] that for two measures recalls its iciness. But then the F♯ in the bass moves to A (again a motion of a third), becoming a long pedal point emphasizing A as VII of B♭.

This return does not banish the abysses disclosed in the vii/♯iv nexus, but now comprehends them—literally encloses them—in the frame of its new understanding. The triumphal restatement of the main theme forte [mm. 255–63] leads again to the same lonely dialogue of treble and bass [mm. 267–77], but now on B minor, as an enharmonic Neapolitan (= vii, C♭ minor) hovering over the tonic, and readily sinking back to it. The remainder of the recapitulation is consistent with these details and serves to confirm and consolidate the sense of return. In the coda, the dissonant cadences already mentioned at mm. 337–41 and 341–45 outline the passage of F♯ to G, and of G♮ back down to F: a few chords crystallize the harmonic nexus of the whole movement.

The ultimate return of the theme is subtly altered to make it sound uncannily like the phrase “Venite adoremus” from the Christmas anthem Adeste Fidelis. John Reed has suggested that the original version of this theme is related to Schubert’s early Szene aus Goethe’s “Faust” (1814, D. 126), mm. 77–87, in which the choir sings the phrase “Quid sum miser tunc dicturus? quem patronem rogaturus?” from the Dies irae.18 If so, Schubert links two familiar Latin songs, transforming the prayer for deliverance at the Last Judgment (“What shall I, a wretch, then say? What patron shall I call on?”) into the adoration of the new-born Child. Whether or not this is so, the accented dominant-seventh chords [mm. 346, 348] pointedly simplify the harmonic implications of the G♮.

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17 John Reed, Schubert: The Final Years (New York, 1972), pp. 231–32, who notes that mm. 1–2 of this song also seem to reappear as an important motive in mm. 151–82 of the development of the Sonata.
When the low trill comes back for the last time, it is now enfolded in a larger context in which it is no longer a stranger but an essential element.

The slow movement returns to a crucial passage, the move to C♯ minor at the beginning of the development (movt. I, mm. 118ff.). This C♯ now becomes the tonality of the slow movement, emphasized by the use of bell-like ostinati on that note for a full eight measures (movt. II, mm. 1–8). Relations by sixths recur (the middle section is in A as C♯ minor: VI), as does the reinterpretation of G♯ = A♭ as C: I–VI (mm. 102–03). The final movements involve less harmonic complexity and more closure, but there are important allusions in the scherzo (the arrival at G♭ [B♭: vii]I becoming F♯ [A♭: VI] at movt. III, mm. 51–56; the bass progression G♭ → F in movt. III, mm. 93–94, 107–08). The finale also dramatizes F minor → G♭ major (movt. IV, mm. 156–63) and, in the parallel passage, B♭ minor → C♭ major (movt. IV, mm. 430–38); the most telling stroke is the pointed recollection of the bass motion G → G♭ → F in movt. IV, mm. 490–502, almost as if the intended closure had for a moment lost its way. Here, just before the presto peroration, Schubert considers it important to remind us of the crucial topic of I–VI as the precedent for his jubilant conclusion.

**The Circle of Sixths**

Although this reading concerns the B♭ Sonata, there are many other works that embody similar procedures; the recurrence of such patterns indicates their generality and importance. In itself, the I–VI is a characteristic Schubertian topic. To give only a few examples, Schubert reserves I–VI for the traveller’s final farewell in Abschied, m. 132, and I–VI for the climactic outcry of Aufenthalt, m. 124 [Schwanengesang: 1828, D. 957]. In the C–Major String Quintet (1828, D. 956), Schubert uses I–VI for the return of the second group [introduced in the exposition in I–III], the E♭ Piano Trio moves enharmonically to vii in (movt. I, mm. 44–48; 1827, D. 929). The I–VI is the second key area of the Grand Duo I, m. 50 [1824, D. 812], and there is an important arrival on E = F♭ in I–VI at m. 159, preparing the recapitulation to C = D♭ at m. 175. This tour around the “circle of sixths,” C → A♭ → E = F♭ → C = D♭, is the same plan that Schubert uses in the B♭ Sonata. James Webster notes in the second group of the String Quartet in G Major (movt. I, mm. 65–168; 1826, D. 887) “a characteristically Schubertian sequence of major thirds,” D → B♭ → F♭ → D. Similarly, William Kinderman notes in the F–Minor Fantasy “a circle of descending major thirds, F–D♭–A–F.” Although these examples sometimes use melodic thirds, for simplicity I shall call them sequences of sixths, since each stage in the sequence can be expressed harmonically as I–VI of the preceding stage.

Schubert may well have noted Beethoven’s use of I–VI to create the hushed mystery of the third variation in the slow movement of the String Quartet in E♭, op. 127 [1822, movt. II, mm. 60–77]. This variation begins in E, as I–VI of A♭ [the movement’s tonic], Beethoven then invokes the circle of sixths by moving first to C [I–VI/VI, mm. 71, 75] and then completes it by returning enharmonically to A♭ [as I–VI/VI/VI, mm. 77–78].

Schubert also deploys the larger key scheme of the movements of the Grand Duo in this same circle: C; A♭; C [F–minor trio]; E minor [unstable, leading to C]. As Tovey notes, he also uses this circle very rapidly in the G–Major Piano Sonata [movt. IV, mm. 154–60], as G → E♭ → B = C♭ → G = A♭ [1826, D. 894]. Here

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19See Tovey, “Tonality in Schubert,” pp. 146–59. McClary, in “Pitches, Expression, Ideology,” tends to limit the affect of I–VI by treating it ideologically as “a cruel hoax—a betrayal” [p. 80], under the rubric of “post-Enlightenment disillusion” [p. 81]. Because I–VI, however, has a deep structural role it cannot be considered merely as a “false hope” [p. 78]; it indicates something potent, though inward and subtle.

20See Webster, “Schubert’s Sonata Form,” pp. 18–35.

21Ibid., p. 20.


23See McClary, “Pitches, Expression, Ideology,” p. 82, which considers these as “suggesting the possibility of infinite regress through chains of these irrational progressions [mm. 64 and 74].” One might argue to the contrary that the complete circle is finite, closed, and rational. Also, at m. 64 the harmony is not I–VI but vii/VI vii/IVI comes later, at m. 71.

24Tovey discusses this “enharmonic circle of thirds” in “Tonality in Schubert,” p. 155. The mystery of the “promissory note” E♭ = A♭ in the Moment musical no. 6 may be
Schubert indicates clearly his awareness of the circle as a whole, using it as a device to extend the tonic [G] in preparation for the return of the theme (m. 168). After broaching this device, he goes on to use E♭ VI for the next episode (m. 181, the first extended departure from the tonic). Schubert evidently considered the circle of sixths an important harmonic invention. His rapid use of it in the G-Major Sonata is exceptional; the other examples involve much larger spans, as if Schubert wished to register very deliberately the points of arrival along the circle. He must also have felt that this novel harmonic procedure required greater extension of tonal areas than heretofore, so that the ear could fully register the magnitude and import of each stage of the circle. His "heavenly length" emerges from such inner necessities, not arbitrary somnambulism. Schubert’s treatment of the dominant also shows him carefully allowing enough time for the structural relation of V to VI to clarify. In the B♭ Sonata and Grand Duo first movements, he turns to V at the end of the second group, after carefully introducing VI. Yet though he refers to the dominant at these structural points, following the conventional form, Schubert’s inner agenda relies on the repeated use of VI. "My Dream" parallels this procedure; its doubled deaths, banishments, and returns are structurally similar to the circle of sixths, which involves two intermediate stages in the passage back to the tonic: I → VI → VI/ VI → I = VI/VI/VI.25 This doubling offers a new perspective on "the double second group,” which Webster identifies as "Schubert’s chief contribution to sonata form," for the interpolation of VI both creates the doubling of the second group and opens the possibility of the circle of sixths.

**Two Little Words**

In "My Dream" and in these musical works, Schubert is trying to grasp some important inner vision, which goes beyond simple departure and return. The wanderer’s return involves an enharmonic change, a deep shift in the meaning of home. One can only speculate on the personal sources that might have led Schubert to the realizations his tale and music share. In both cases, he wished to express the heightened quality of wandering when the wanderer’s exile is doubled, and the doubling leads him home. In fact, there is important evidence about the inner meaning of the fundamental shift to VI in his song "Der Neugierige" [Die schöne Müllerin, 1824, D. 795]. The young miller is reflecting rather self-consciously about the "two little words" that encompass the whole world for him; as he names them he clearly invokes VI (ex. 1).

Here Ja is V6 [F♯] and Nein is VI6 [G], and perhaps this is the clue to VI: it represents No to the dominant’s Yes.26 To be sure, VI is a complex and subtle negation, not a simple negative. The young miller’s Nein is delicate and filled with wonder, as terrible as it will later prove to be for him. Much of this impression also follows from the chromatic voice leading

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of $V^6 \rightarrow \flat V^6$, as $F \rightarrow G$ and $C \rightarrow D$. Yes and No lie only a half step apart; their closeness indicates a sensitive ambiguity that troubles the young miller. 27 Later in the cycle, in “Pause” (B major), the miller turns to A$: \flat V^6 \rightarrow F$, to phrase a crucial question about the strange sighing of the wind plays on his idle lute: is this the echo of his love p-in? Turning back to $V$, he wonders instead if it is the prelude to new songs. 28 Lawrence Kramer has pointed out that “the chain of descending thirds, C$-A_\flat-F$, forms an independent, harmonically indefinite pattern” within “the grid of minor-sixth sonorities that governs [this] section.” 29 The incompleteness of the circle of sixths (which never returns to C) mirrors the essential incompletion of the miller’s questions at this point. Near the end of the cycle, the despairing miller uses $i \rightarrow \flat II$ to ask the brook if he knows what love can do (“Der Müller und der Bach,” m. 67), implying by this harmonic shift a far darker answer than he earlier expected when invoking $V \rightarrow \flat V^6$.

Schubert’s sensitive questioning contrasts with a simpler opposition of Yes and No; for instance, in Die Zauberflöte Tamino questions himself about the meaning of Pamina’s portrait, using the dominant and tonic to move from his question to a decisive answer: Yes, this feeling must be love. 30 Schubert treats Yes and No in a different way, closer to the mysterious answer of Mozart’s chorus of priests (act I, finale). Their answer to Tamino’s question about when he will find the light, “Bald oder nie” (Soon or never), uses the expressive closeness of the half steps E $\rightarrow$ F and G$\flat$ $\rightarrow$ A. 31

The implications of Schubert’s questioning reach beyond these texted works to his textless compositions, opening a new perspective on his characteristic shifts of a half step, which [as Charles Rosen writes] “generally illustrate his most uncompromising display of power.” 32 Although not all these half-step shifts involve $\flat V^6$, they invoke a similar response to chromatic motion of the voices as in “Der Neugierige.” Perhaps these shifts are best understood as subtle juxtapositions of Yes and No. To give one possible example among many, the magical shift from C$\flat$ minor $\rightarrow$ C major near the end of the slow movement of the Bb Sonata [movt. II, mm. 98–107], heard with respect to the Bb tonality of the surrounding movements, is (enharmonically) $\flat v^6/V \rightarrow V^6$, as if to say: No, followed by Yes. This surprising affirmation reverses the pattern in “Der Neugierige,” making more intelligible how the shift in the Sonata paradoxically “creates a shock and sustains the drama at what is only apparently a lower level of intensity but is actually a subtle and breathtaking postponement,” as Rosen puts it. 33

In his exploration of the dialectic of V and $\flat V^6$, Schubert found a new and powerful way to express a compelling reality. He may have known the passage in Genesis in which Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dreams, particularly the assertion that when a dream happens twice, it will really come to pass (Gen. 41:32). In the tale, the dreamer says that “only a miracle, however, can lead you to that circle.” Schubert’s dream doubles the reality of wandering, even as it intensifies the miracle of return.

27 Although I believe this is Schubert’s only setting of these contrasting words, in Nacht und Träume [1822], D. 827 he uses I for “holy night” and $\flat V^6$ for the delusive day the sleeper wishes to escape in dreams (m. 15).
28 “Ist es der Nachklang meiner Liebespfin? Soll es das Vorspiel neuer Lieder sein?” mm. 64–69. Note that this passage is prepared by an arrival at C minor (m. 55), followed by A$\flat$ as $\flat V^6$ of C minor.
30 Mozart, Die Zauberflöte (act I, “Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön!”). Note that “Soll die Empfindung Liebe sein?” (mm. 22–25, $F^6 \rightarrow V^7$) is answered by “Ja, ja! Die Liebe ist’s allein” (mm. 26–34), expressively circling around the tonic with significant imperfect and deceptive cadences. Likewise, Tamino’s breathless question “Was würde ich!” breaks off on $V^7$; after a significant silence, his confident answer comes over a tonic pedal (mm. 40–49).
31 Although written later than Die schöne Müllerin, Beethoven’s String Quartet in F Major, op. 135 (1826), also uses the half step A$\flat$ $\rightarrow$ G to dramatize the “difficult question” (“Der schwarz gefasste Entschluss!” “Muss es sein? Es muss sein!”). For the Bb Sonata a close parallel may be Beethoven’s “Appassionata,” whose recurrent motive D–C and characteristic Neapolitan relations bear close comparison with Schubert’s use of the $\flat V^6$ trill, although he uses them very differently than Beethoven, as Charles Rosen emphasizes in “Schubert’s Inflections of Classical Form,” in The Cambridge Companion to Schubert, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 72–98, at pp. 96–97.