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# The Poems of Schubert's Die Winterreise

English Translation

Barry Mitchell

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## Preface

### About the Author

Barry Mitchell was born in Belfast in 1958. He studied music at Queen's University Belfast where after completing a first degree he studied for an MA in composition. He is also a graduate of The Open University. He has taught music for several colleges and universities in the UK including The Open University and Rose Bruford College of Theatre & Performance. He has worked as a music examiner for Edexcel Foundation and International Baccalaureate Organisation and has been a reviewer for *The Times Higher Education Supplement*. He is currently a freelance teacher and lives in Twickenham in Greater London. He founded Theory of Music in 2007.

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### Some artists who have used this translation

Music for a While

Music for a while is a Norwegian jazz quintet headed by cabaret diva Tora Augestad. Their album *Graces that Refrain* (Grappa Records, 2012) delivers chamber music/jazz transformations of classical songs. The translation in Schubert's Wanderers of *Der Leiermann* from Schubert's song cycle *Die Winterreise* is featured in the CD booklet.

Sarah Walker at Oxford Lieder Festival's "Schubert Project 2014"

World renowned mezzo-soprano Sarah Walker CBE used the translation of *Winterreise* from the Theory of Music publication *Schubert's Wanderers* (which this translation is taken from) at her Oxford Lieder Festival masterclass on 16 October 2014 at St. Columba's Church, Alfred St. Oxford. See: <http://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/events/1280>

# SCHUBERT'S DIE WINTERREISE: ENGLISH TRANSLATION

## Chapter 1 Introduction to Schubert's Die Winterreise

An English translation of Schubert's *Die Winterreise*, settings of poems by Wilhelm Müller and a synopsis of the story told by the poems.

The twenty-four poems of *Die Winterreise* were written in 1821 and 1822. The first twelve poems were published separately in 1823 and the cycle was published in full in 1824. Schubert made his settings of the poems in 1827.

These translations are in free verse and are designed to introduce readers to Schubert's song cycle. I have ignored the original metrical scheme but have tried to make the translations as accurate as possible. I have also tried to use a vocabulary that suggests Romantic poetry.

### Synopsis

*Die Winterreise* is primarily about feelings and atmosphere, but there is nevertheless a story, albeit told in a fragmented narrative. A young man, the hero (or anti-hero) of the poems, arrives in an idyllic town in May (Good Night). There he befriends a family of mother, father and daughter and is invited to live with them (Good Night). He falls in love with the daughter and his love is returned, or so he is led to believe (Feeling Numb). However, the daughter rejects him to marry a wealthy suitor with the approval of her parents (The Weathervane). It is now winter and the hero leaves his adopted home in the dead of night after writing a farewell message to his beloved (Good Night). As he leaves the town crows shower him with snow from the roofs (Looking Back) and he begins a painful journey, constantly tortured by memories of his past happiness (Frozen Tears, On the River, The Watercourse). On his journey he is joined by a raven, possibly symbolic of a death wish (The Raven). Eventually he arrives at another town (Solitude) where it seems he stays for some time as he writes of the post arriving there (The Post). The song cycle ends with a particularly bleak image. An organ-grinder or hurdy-gurdy man has a pitch near the town where he plies his trade ignored by the townspeople and harassed by dogs. It is ironic that in this final poem the poet asks if the hurdy-gurdy man will set the poet's songs to music, an invitation that was ultimately accepted by Schubert.

## Chapter 2

**No. 1. Good Night (Gute Nacht), No. 2. The Weathervane (Die Wetterfahne),  
No. 3. Frozen Tears (Gefror'ne Thränen), No. 4. Feeling Numb (Erstarrung),  
No. 5. The Linden Tree (Der Lindenbaum)**

*Die Winterreise* No. 1. Good Night (Gute Nacht)

As a stranger I arrived

As a stranger I shall leave

I remember a perfect day in May

How bright the flowers

How cool the breeze

The maiden spoke of love

The mother had kind words

But now the world is dreary

With a winter path before me

I can't choose the season

To depart from this place

I won't delay or ponder

I must begin my journey now

The bright moon lights my path

It will guide me on my road

I see the snow-covered meadow

I see where deer have trod

A voice within says – go now  
Why linger and delay?  
Leave the dogs to bay at the moon  
Before her father's gate

For love is a thing of changes  
God has made it so  
Ever-changing from old to new  
God has made it so

So love delights in changes  
Good night, my love, good night  
Love is a thing of changes  
Good night, my love, good night

I'll not disturb your sleep  
But I'll write above your door  
A simple farewell message  
Good night, my love, good night

These are the last words spoken  
Soon I'll be out of sight  
A simple farewell message  
Good night, my love, good night

*Die Winterreise* No. 2. The Weathervane (Die Wetterfahne)

The wind is turning the weathervane  
On the roof of my sweetheart's house  
Round and round it mocks and teases  
Teases and mocks my sighs and my tears

If only I'd seen this fickle symbol  
Before I entered that house  
I would not have hoped so much  
Of one inconstant, though so fair

For Nature plays with our hearts  
As the wind plays with the vane  
What do they care if my heart is dying?  
Their child will be a wealthy bride

*Die Winterreise* No. 3. Frozen Tears (Gefror'ne Thränen)

Some frozen tears  
Cling to my face  
Have I really been crying  
And not noticed them flow?

Teardrops, heavy teardrops  
What chills you through  
What turns you into ice

Like drops of early dew?

From this poor bosom tears flow

Flow with burning heat

Flow enough to melt

The winter frost and snow

*Die Winterreise* No. 4. Feeling Numb (Erstarrung)

I look for traces of her footsteps

I look for them in vain

Where leaning on my arm

She crossed the bright green field

I'll kiss the wintry carpet

And with my scalding tears

Dissolve the freezing snow

I'll bring that field to life again

Do flowers still bloom?

Is the grass still green?

All the flowers have died

The grass is withered and thin

Earth, can you remind me

Of yesterday's happiness

When my sorrows fall silent



Who will speak to me of her?

It seems my heart is frozen

Her face etched on the ice

If my heart ever melts

Her face will fade away

*Die Winterreise* No. 5. The Linden Tree (Der Lindenbaum)

Before the doorway is a well

A linden tree stands there

Many times I've sought its shade

A place of rest and pleasant dreams

When dreaming there I carved

Some words of love upon the bark

Both joy and sorrow

Drew me to that shady spot

But now I must wander

Through this blackest night

In darkness I passed this tree

But couldn't bear to look

I heard the branches rustle

As if they spoke to me

"Come to me my old friend

“Come, find peace with me”

Cruel winds were blowing

Coldly cutting my face

My hat was blown behind me

I quickly sped on my way

I’m now many miles distant

From that dear old linden tree

But I still hear it whisper

“Come – find peace with me”

### Chapter 3

**No. 6. The Watercourse (Wasserfluth), No. 7. On the River (Auf dem Flusse),  
No. 8. Looking Back (Rückblick), No. 9. Will O' the Wisp (Irrlicht), No. 10.  
Rest (Rast)**

*Die Winterreise* No. 6. The Watercourse (Wasserfluth)

My tears have made

Deep marks in the snow

The cold flakes

Absorbing all my sorrows

When the grass begins to grow

And feels a warmer breeze

The swelling ice begins to break

And the sun melts the snow

Snow, you know of my yearnings

Tell me, where do you go?

Take my tears with you

As you flow to the stream

Flow through the town together

Go where the road leads

You'll feel my hot tears

As you pass where my loved-one lives

*Die Winterreise* No. 7. On the River (Auf dem Flusse)

River, once so restless  
Flowing fast and bright  
Why are you now so still  
Lifeless, chilled and silent

A hard and icy case  
Is now your winter prison  
You lie cold and dreary  
Pressed fast upon the earth

I'll write upon your cover  
With a pointed stone  
My loved one's name  
A day and a time

The day when I first met her  
The day when my love began  
I'll draw a broken ring  
Around that name and date

Does my heart see  
Your image in this river?  
Does it swell and quiver  
In its own icy case?

*Die Winterreise* No. 8. Looking Back (Rückblick)

It feels like I'm walking on fire  
Though underfoot is ice and snow  
I've hardly time to draw breath  
So keen am I to leave that town

Every stone has made me stumble  
In my haste to get away  
From every roof I've passed  
Crows have showered me with snow

How different when I arrived  
How well you greeted me then  
Your shining happy streets  
Where the lark and nightingale sang

A linden tree whispered in the breeze  
The murmur of the sparkling stream  
Then the spell cast upon my heart  
From a beautiful maiden's eyes

Now when I think of that day  
I'm tempted to turn and look back  
To retrace my weary way  
To stand before my loved one's house

*Die Winterreise* No. 9. Will O' the Wisp (Irrlicht)

Will O' the Wisp has led me  
Deep into a rocky maze  
I look from right to left  
I seek a path but there is none

I'm about to lose my way  
All paths appear the same  
Our joys and sorrows are no more real  
Than this teasing phantom light

Through the gorge where the river rushed  
I'll calmly travel on  
Every river flows to the sea  
Every sorrow will come to an end

*Die Winterreise* No. 10. Rest (Rast)

At last I rest and only now  
I feel weary

Nothing could tire me  
While I pressed on  
Over desolate winter paths

I was carried along as if on wings

It was too cold to stop

The winter wind helped me on my way

A helping hand on my back

## Chapter 4

### **No. 11. Spring Dreams (Frühlingstraum), No. 12. Solitude (Einsamkeit), No.13. The Post (Die Post), No. 14. The Grey Head (Der greise Kopf), No. 15. The Raven (Die Krähe)**

*Die Winterreise* No. 11. Spring Dreams (Frühlingstraum)

I had a dream of bright flowers

Bursting forth in May

I had a dream of a grassy meadow

With the sound of endless birdsong

When the cock crowed

I awoke in my bed

Everything was cold and dismal

The ravens croaked overhead

Who drew those leafy flowers

Upon the window pane?

Why do you mock the dreamer

Whose garden blooms in winter?

I had a dream of a lovely maiden

And of the love we shared

There were sweet kisses in the dream

And many blissful caresses



When the cock crowed  
I started from my dreams  
Now I'm sitting alone  
With a memory of that dream

My eyes are closing again  
Once more my heart begins to throb  
Will the leaves ever turn green?  
Will I ever embrace my sweetheart?

*Die Winterreise* No. 12. Solitude (Einsamkeit)

Dark clouds are drifting  
Across the bright blue sky  
Soft breezes gently sigh  
In the dark forest

But in moody silence  
I walk with sluggish feet  
Alone and unnoticed  
In this busy street

Why is the air so tranquil!  
Why is the world so fair!  
Even in the raging storm  
I never felt such despair

*Die Winterreise* No. 13. The Post (Die Post)

The post-horn rings

Rings through the streets

Heart, where do these feelings come from?

The post has no news for me

So heart, why do you grieve?

The post has arrived

From the town

Where once, my heart

I loved so dearly

I'll ask the postman, Heart

If he has been to that town

And if he has seen

The fair one you loved

*Die Winterreise* No. 14. The Grey Head (Der greise Kopf)

A white sheen covers my head

A frost has done its work

I imagine I am old and grey

A pleasant dream for me

But then comes the thaw

My hair returns to black

Once more I am young

And peace is far away

They say one night of torment

Can make black hair turn white

The frost leaves my hair untouched

I have wandered but must wander more

*Die Winterreise* No. 15. The Raven (Die Krähe)

A raven has flown beside me

Since the day I left the town

Raven, bird of ill-omen

Will you ever leave me?

Do you stalk me

In the hope I will be yours?

My journey can't last much longer

My strength begins to fail

Raven, surely you will be true

Until death overtakes me

## Chapter 5

**No. 16. The Last Hope (Letzte Hoffnung), No. 17. In the Village (Im Dorfe),  
No. 18. The Stormy Morning (Der stürmische Morgen), No. 19. Illusion  
(Täuschung), No. 20. The Guide-Post (Der Wegweiser)**

*Die Winterreise* No. 16. The Last Hope (Letzte Hoffnung)

A few gaudy leaves remain

On the winter branches

I shelter beneath

I begin to dream

I stare at one leaf

I stake my hopes on it

If the breeze moves it

I shiver and shake with fear

If the leaf falls

And flutters down

My hopes will fall with it

My heart will sink too

My last hope will be gone

*Die Winterreise* No. 17. In the Village (Im Dorfe)

The watchdogs are barking

And straining at their chains

The people are sleeping

And the village is at rest

What dreams they have

What joyful pleasures

Of good, of evil

According to their souls

But in the light of morning

Their treasures are all gone

What then?

They've had their fill

But hope in vain their dreams are real

Bark long, bark loud

My brave guards

The world sleeps

But gives me no rest!

My dreams have ended in tears

Why should I linger here?

*Die Winterreise* No. 18. The Stormy Morning (Der stürmische Morgen)

A storm has ripped

The grey robe of the sky

The clouds fly apart

In wild disorder

A flame reaches out and grasps the earth

The scene without, the soul within

One hot and fiery

The other cold and bleak

*Die Winterreise* No. 19. Illusion (Täuschung)

I see a flickering guiding light

To left and right, now here, now there

I'll follow this light, though I know

It will mislead and tease me

Those who are lost, as I am

Will trust a friendly guiding light

That in the darkness, ice and snow

Shows the path to a welcoming house

I see a fair face within

This trickery is my gain

*Die Winterreise* No. 20. The Guide-Post (Der Wegweiser)

Why should I leave the beaten path

Where the other wanderers tread?

Why do I seek hidden tracks

On unmarked mountain snow?

I have injured no one  
No need to shun mankind  
It is only foolishness  
That makes me seek the wild

At every crossing there is a post  
It points towards the town  
I will travel far beyond them  
I'll seek rest, but find none

I see a guide-post standing  
Before my face it stands  
It points me to a path  
One no wanderer can retrace

## Chapter 6

### **No. 21. The Wayside Inn (Das Wirthshaus), No. 22. Courage (Muth), No. 23. The Mock Suns (Die Nebensonnen), No. 24. The Organ-Grinder (Der Leiermann)**

*Die Winterreise* No. 21. The Wayside Inn (Das Wirthshaus)

I've laboured upon my journey  
A path to this lonely graveyard  
I was looking for a welcoming inn  
To rest my weary head

These green funeral wreaths  
You could be the sign  
That tells the tired traveller  
That a cool retreat awaits

Among all your rooms  
Do you have one for me?  
I'm tired and ready to rest  
Unwelcoming inn, do you deny me shelter?

*Die Winterreise* No. 22. Courage (Muth)

Snow falls on my cheek  
I carelessly brush it away  
If my heart speaks of its troubles  
I'll drown it out with a happy song



I won't listen to the heart's complaints

I won't listen to its fears

I'm content to wander

Through the wind and the snow

I have my trusty staff

I have my cheerful song

We will journey on together

*Die Winterreise* No. 23. The Mock Suns (Die Nebensonnen)

I saw three suns in the bright cold sky

I stared at them long and hard

Unmoving they stared back at me

As if they would last forever

You three do not belong to me

Go and shine on others

I used to have three suns

But the best two have gone

If the third goes out

I will welcome the darkness

*Die Winterreise* No. 24. The Organ-Grinder (Der Leiermann)

Up behind the village

The organ-grinder has his pitch

He stands barefoot or shuffles

On the frozen ground

With stiff fingers

He coaxes out the sound

His saucer is empty

Gifts for him are rare

No one listens to him

Or looks at him, or cares

Dogs snarl at him

Dogs chase him

But he wears a smile

He shows no fear or disappointment

But turns the handle round and round

Shall I join you on your journey?

Will you play the music to my songs?

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