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The Expression of the Female Subject in Clara Schumann's Works as Seen from "Rorelei"

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Abstract. The approach of traditional studies to female art is often unconsciously dominated by essentialist, falling into the task of equating female expression with subtlety, introversion and a non-dramatic climax and is in opposition to the so-called male grand narrative. Although the idea underlying such a binary division is a contrast of the genders, it might end up mirroring the gender stereotypes and could tend to assume what women can create and what cannot. A good case to consider this model is the art song Lorelei of Clara Schumann. Looking into the eyes of the demoness, Heine, Clara manages to balance thin psychological description and dramatic tension with the musical terminology. In this article, the author attempts to transcend the stylistic residue dichotomy of reserved or dramatic in order to understand the way Clara, through musical language in Lorelei, enacted an undefined expression of the female subject. It does not only mirror the active participation of female composers in the discourse space within the gender context of the 19th century, but also indicates the possibility of many openings regarding the expression of the female subject, which is seemingly not restricted to one of the aesthetic paradigms.

Keywords: Clara Schumann, Lorelei, female subjectivity, feminist musicology, Romantic art song

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

During the Romantic period of the 19th century, art songs, as a highly integrated genre of poetry and music, became an important form of expressing individual emotions and subjective consciousness. However, in the long male-dominated tradition of creation and criticism, female figures and the artistic expressions of female composers were often placed under specific gender imaginations, and their creative styles were given relatively fixed aesthetic expectations. With the development of feminist musicology, the academic community began to refocus on the creative practices of female composers during the Romantic period, but some studies, while correcting historical neglect, still unconsciously followed the essentialist analytical approach, linking "female expression" to subtlety, introversion, or non-drama, and opposing it to intense drama. This dichotomy has, to some extent, limited understandings of the diversity of female subject expression.

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The art song of Clara Schumann, Lorelei, was written on the steps of Heine in which the female image in the text has always been a part of the male gaze narration. Clara reconsiders the painting with voices of music without any text change, thus it is a complicated and multi-layered statement of both a depiction of psychology and a depiction of emotional conflict in the piece (as Reich demonstrated) [1].

1.2. Aim and relevance of the study

1.2.1. Purpose of the study

The work under consideration is the art of song by Clara Schumann, title Lorelei, it is based on a purpose and analysis of the poem, and exploratory investigation of the particular presentation of the female subject expression in the piece of art. By considering elements of music, including its melody, harmony, texture and structure, it will seek to show how Clara creates a vocal role to the female subject within the context of text and genre that is established, and also consider whether the articulation of the female subject must inevitably relate to the set aesthetic paradigm.

1.3. Implications of study

1.3.1. Theoretical significance

The paper analyzing particular works adds to the debate on the expression of the female subject in feminist musicology and they are trying to break the fixed relationship between female expression and particular music style, which when looking at the issue of gender and music in romantic art songs is much more open-endered.

1.3.2. Practical implications

A close reading of the article, Lorelei, assists in enhancing knowledge on the attributes of the composing music song of Clara Schumann and offers an analytical framework that integrates music and gender to interpret and teach similar works.

In the situation of Clara Schumann, this subjective reconstruction is reached through musical means so that the voice of the singer is no longer an alienated female voice as stipulated by the external world, but rather a witness to his or her emotions. It is implied in the work that the layers of the female emotions are complex due to the different melodies and harmony before the work of Lorelei to become the object of the myth of creation by the man and the object that can narrate itself and express itself.

1.4. Definitions of nouns

Lorelle: The term originally referred to a rock formation along the Rhine River in Germany. According to legend, there lived a beautiful female demon who lured ships with her singing and caused people to drown. She symbolizes seduction, danger and mysterious feminine power. Her image was constantly recreated by literature and music in the 19th century, especially by Heinrich Heine's poem of the same name. Heine's Lorelle, which was both seductive and tragic, became a typical symbol of the "deadly woman" in German romantic literature. This image reflects the male poet's gaze and fear of the "otherization" of women, and also reflects the suppression of female desires and subjectivity in the romantic era.

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Regarding the expression of the female subject:It refers to the process in which female creators manifest self-awareness and self-narration in their artistic creation, namely, from the "otherd" position regulated by the male narrative to the "self" with the ability to feel, think and choose. In the context of musicology, this is not only reflected in the changes of the lyrics, but also in the transformation of the musical structure and the sound narrative. In the context of Clara Schumann, "Lorelei" achieves this subjective reconstruction through musical means, making the singer's voice no longer the "alienated female voice" defined by the outside world, but a self-witness of emotional experience. The work suggests the complex layers of female emotions through variations in melody and harmony, saving "Lorelei" from the myth of male creation and making it a subject capable of self-narration and expression of experience.

Clara Schumann (1819-1896): Schumann was among the most ideal female composers or piano players of all times in the history of German music in the 19 th century, with her creative output being felt in her musical performance or composition. Her artistic personality had long been misrepresented as the wife of Robert Schumann, and she also spent much of her life as a female artist in the male-dominant system of art. Nevertheless, the application of feminist musicology studies in the recent past, has revealed slowly the intellectual and linguistic trait of Clara as the independent creator. The writer feels that the works by Clara particularly her art songs reflect introverted feminine articulation in form of fragile melodic lines and harmonic motions. Her songs do not anticipate passion or emotional self-expression, but about depicting feminine emotions by holding back and being subtle.

Feminist Musicology: A research approach that developed in the Western music world in the late 20 th century, focusing on re-evaluating the forgotten or marginalized female experience of music history, work analysis, and cultural form through a gender lens. The area does not simply concentrate on female composers, performers and their work but also covers the still gender ideologies within musical works and musical practices including the male gaze, femininized body, and unequal power of creative control. The aspect of feminist musicology is that music is not value-neutral and occurs in the context of gender construction of the society. Instead, it is a kind of expression incorporated in a particular social culture, and, therefore, aimed at showing the gender order and code meaning underlying the interpretation of the work. This style of research is a significant theoretical foundation of exploring the re-understanding of the creative strategies and subjective representations of female composers of the 19 th century.

1.5. Literature review

The presence of international literature on Clara Schumann and the female subject was largely produced in response to the formation of the feminist musicology at the close of the 20 th century. Susan McClary postulates in Feminine Endings that even the form of music is not neutral, but can include gendered meaning, and feminine subjectivity can be seen in the reworking of the history of termination logic, and in the flow of time [2]. This theory would be a significant methodological starting point of further researches to bring about gender issues based on the interior structure of music. On the sub-periodic level of work research by Ruth A. Solieand Rufus Hallmark, the art songs of the Schumans were re-read, both on the basis of the text and the story, and it is possible that even in the first-person narration by a woman, the work may support a value logic oriented on males [3,4]. These analyses further validate the awareness of the vested image of the constructed female which is often dominated by the textual and story level, yet authored comparatively less specifically on how female composers can express the subject in the musical language. The attention has in the past few years changed to the creative approaches of the female composers themselves. According

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to Melinda Boyd, female composers of the 19th century tended not to assert subjectivity by disrupting the genres and texts, but through a re-allocation of the musical expressing space on a more comfortable and accepted set of norms [5]. The specified opinion offers valuable perspectives on how Clara Schumann managed to re-create the music narrative in Lorelei without making any changes to the text. In general, the gender composition of female composers is completely uncovered by foreign research, although in particular works, the representation of the female subject is usually intuitively expected to be introspective, or non-dramatic, and more may be said regarding the variety of styles.

Chinese research on Clara Schumann is relatively limited, mostly focusing on the discussion of her life, social circumstances and identity as a female composer, with less in-depth musical analysis of her specific works. For example, Liu Yingaegues that in "The Artistic Achievements of Clara Schumann from a Sexist Perspective", she points out that Clara's creations have long been overshadowed by her identity as a wife, and her expression in art songs reflects a "writing strategy of presenting female experience in an understated way" [6]. However, the article mainly discusses the predicament of female creators from a macro perspective and does not specifically touch upon the musical details of "Lorelei". Cao further emphasizes in "Drowned Voices - Thoughts Triggered by Clara Schumann" that Clara's works are often "passively incorporated into the male narrative tradition", and the aesthetic value of her creations has not been given sufficient attention [7]. Although the article suggests that "there is a faint voice of female subjectivity hidden in Clara's music, " it lacks detailed arguments on how this subject expression is achieved in specific works.From the perspective of art song compositon, Zhou Xiaotong points out that Clara Schumann demonstrates a high degree of structural awareness in her heading of melody and piano texture. However, exisitng research has yet to engage in sufficiently detailed analysis at the level of individual works [8].

In summary, the existing research provides an important basis for understanding the gender context of Clara Schumann and her art songs, but there remanins a tendency to restrict the expression of the female subject to particular stylistic features in the analysis of individual works. On this basis, on this paper selects "Lorelei" as a case study and employs close readings of both text and music to explore the multiple possibilities of female subject expression in the specific creative context, with the aim of providing supplementation and correction for related research.

1.6. Research methods

This study mainly employed a combination of literature review and detailed musical case analysis. First, by interpreting the text of Heine’s poem “Lorelei”, the narrative perspective and gender construction methods are sorted out to lay the foundation for understanding the cultural and semantic background of the work. Secondly, the study analyzes the melodic direction, harmonic configuration, texture relationship and structural layout of the work in combination with musical examples, and focus on examining the role of these musical elements in shaping the vocal position of the female subject. On this basis, this paper introduces relevant research in feminist musicology as an analytical perspective, but does not use it as a preconceived conclusion, but as a theoretical reference for understanding the relationship between musical details and gender meaning. Through a comprehensive examination at the textual and musical levels, an effort is made to present the diversity and complexity of the expression of the female subject in the analysis of specific works.

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2. Analysis on the art song Lorelei by Clara Schumann

In this chapter, the author will address the art song Lorelei by Clara Schumann and perform a deep analysis of this work both in relation to the poetic text and the music language. The female figure is enclosed in the gender discourse of the Romantic epoch, as the work is rooted in the poetry of Heine, which explains why a review of the text structure is useful in identifying the object and the problem that is responded to in the music. In nineteenth century song, Kramer affirms that musical form does not just imitate poetic meaning, but actively makes the song redefine its narrative meaning through works of time and tonality [9] .This chapter is not initiated by assessment of style or appreciation of value but, instead, dwells on how Clara transformed the existing female image by using musical instruments like melody, harmony, texture and form without altering the text. By means of textual analysis and close reading of music examples, the given paper will provide the way the female subject is expressed in particular musical practice and will provide the analytical background to the following chapters that will refer to aesthetic and gender meaning of this expression.

2.1. Poetic text analysis

"Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten, Dass ich so traurig bin" (I don't know why I'm always so sad) Heine establishes the narrative center in the first person "Ich" at the beginning of the poem, This narrative position, though not grammatically marked by explicit gender, echoes the narrative structure of the male actor (der Schiffer) that follows in the traditional context of romantic lyric poetry, forming a default male subject perspective, thus laying the foundation for the female image to be seen and interpreted. As Solie points out, even if the work appears to be female-centered, its narrative structure may still serve the male subject, and whether the female acquires subjectivity depends on whether she is given a true narrative vocal position) [3].

The static position at the top of "Die schonste Jungfrau sitzet, Dort oben wunderbar" (a young girl sitting on the top of a rock, with unparalleled beauty and charm) intensifies her image as the object of gaze rather than the subject of action. Immediately after, the poem uses a large number of images to depict her appearance: goldnes Geschmeide (gold ornaments), goldenes Haar (blonde hair), goldener Kamm (golden combs), avoiding any depiction of the character’s inner mental life. Lorelei's only "act" in the poem is singing: "Und singt ein Lied dabei; Das hat eine wundersame, Gewaltige Melodei "(she sings, the tune is so beautiful and captivating), and her singing is not understood as an expression of thought or emotion, but is described as a dangerous, uncontrollable force.

The ending of the poem clearly attributes the tragedy to Lorelei "Und das hat mit ihrem Singen, Die Lorelei getan" (which was caused by Lorelei with her singing). The act of the boatman losing his way due to gazing has not been reflected upon, but the narrative responsibility has been transferred to the female singing. It transforms Lorelei from the object of being watched into a symbol of disaster. From this, it can be seen that Heine's text structurally continues the narrative logic of the male gaze. Although the female figure occupies the center of the poem, there is always a lack of space for the subject to speak, and music provides the structural space for redistributing the right to speak in the narrative.

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2.2. Analysis of musical examples

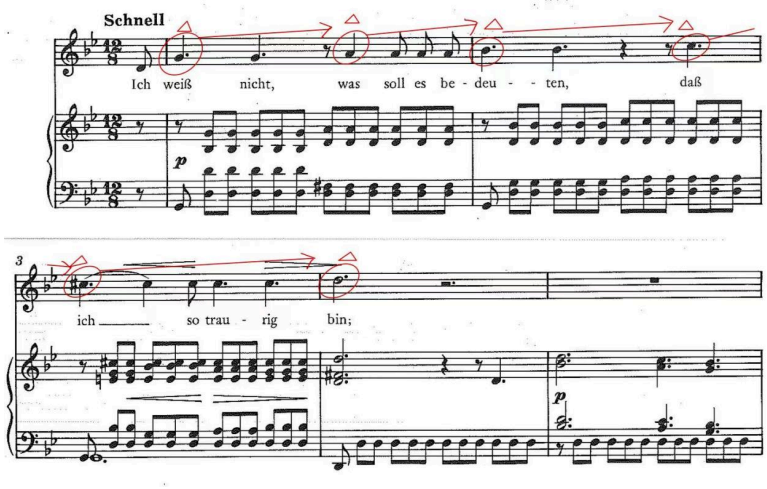

Figure 1. Bars 1-3, showing the advances of vocal melodies

The singing melody in the introduction of the composition is performed mainly in the form of an upward movement in steps (see Figure 1) and the change of the pitch is characterized by a clear and constant directional nature. This melody is based on tension as it progresses unlike rondo or decorative melodies that were popular in the romantic art songs. Of note is the fact that the pitches that are important in the melody are usually the strong beat, and their importance on the beat is enhanced by the presence of the vocals on the strong beat to further bolster on their control over the planning of the musical time thus enhancing their control over the story that is evoked by the music. According to McClary, subjectivity of music is not linked to characteristic style names but rather is created by way of time progression and distribution of tension in the framework [2]. Such arrangement of the melody makes the vocals the heart of the story which is actually moving it. Only by achieving the propelling posture as the initial gesture of the work, Clara Schumann can provide the female image with the opportunity of the continuing expression on the musical level, where it will not occupy a fixed position of being observed or characterized.

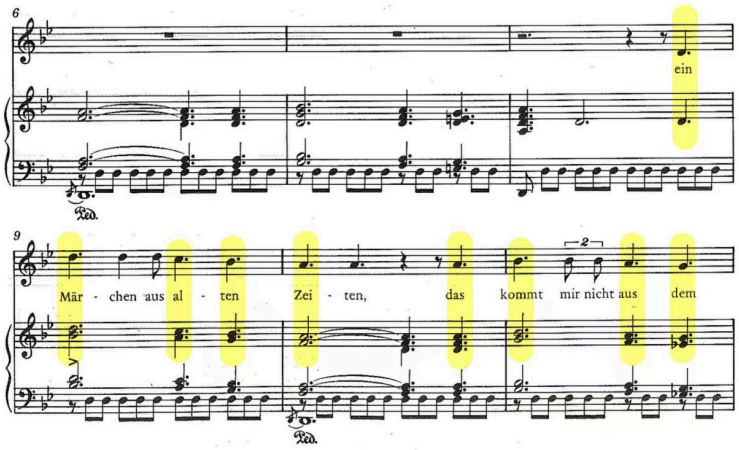

Figure 2. Shows the piano's imitation of the vocal part in bars 8-11

The work has used imitation extensively in matters of piano parts treatment. In this article, some representative passages have been chosen (see Figure 2) to be explained. The piano forms a very

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intimate relationship with the vocal line with the relentless repetition of vocal melodic lines and rhythmic motives. Instead of making the expression less emotional or base, the piano accompaniment repeats, trails, and even reinforces the tension of the melody beneath it, and thereby lets dramatic tension build up by the exemplification. In this imitative writing the narrative posture of the vocals is always proved and reinforced. This onomatopoeic effect of the vocal and piano, in relation to sound, fails to build a consistent and calming mood; on the contrary, the whole work remains in this ambiguous position, not yet cleared. The unremitting drive of the vocals by the piano does not allow the emotions to revert to the introspective monologues and pushes it to a more dramatic mode of expression. Setting of this vocal relation enables the demonstration of the feminine image to preserve the psychological delicacy yet has a powerful exterior force and in the process violate the classic perception of the expression of the female subject as one of restraint or inertia.

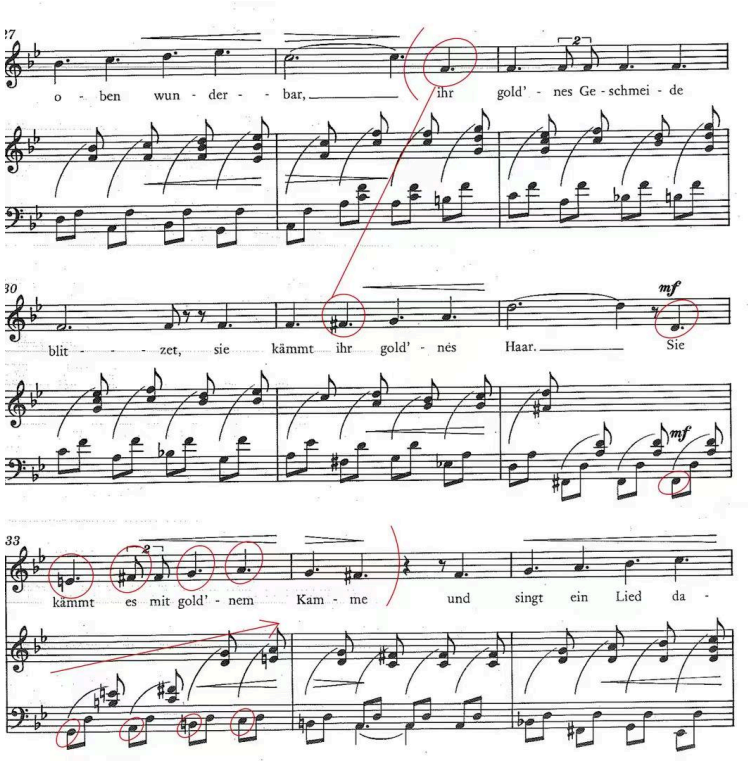

Figure 3. The detour shown on the 4 and #4 notes in bars 28-34- a linear progression in the same direction between the vocals and the piano parts

The vocals switch between Fa and sharp Fa (see Figure 3) in the middle of the melodic development a writing style that postpones the tonal stability to provide the melody with the audible effects of tension and entrapment. The semitone relationship is stressed and in suspense, unlike in semitone advances in which the clarity of the output is sought. To the author, this semitone relationship musical text is more accurate in terms of the active experimenting in musical expression by Clara Schumann. She was not going by the tonal adjustments or emotional cushioning of the contemporary art songs, but instead, she held in the melody the contradictions and discomfort that held the heart of her melodies. This type of writing not only reveals the active disposition of the composer over the tension of the piece of writing, but it also reveals the capacity of the composer to establish the position of personal creative intent in the heart of their expressive endeavors. Boyd suggests that the subjectivity of 19 th -century female composers was frequently represented in the

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way they modified the expressive place within the structure of existing genres instead of struggling against the norms directly [5]. Caines also stressed on the fact that Clara Schumann was always a very conscious composer, and a musical decision by her was an unambiguous structural command and elegant expression [10]. In this regard, the deviation of Fa and ascending Fa is not only the reflection of the psychological situation of the character, but also the creative liveliness of Clara Schumann as a composer in the active molding and popularization of the musical story within the already existing style system.

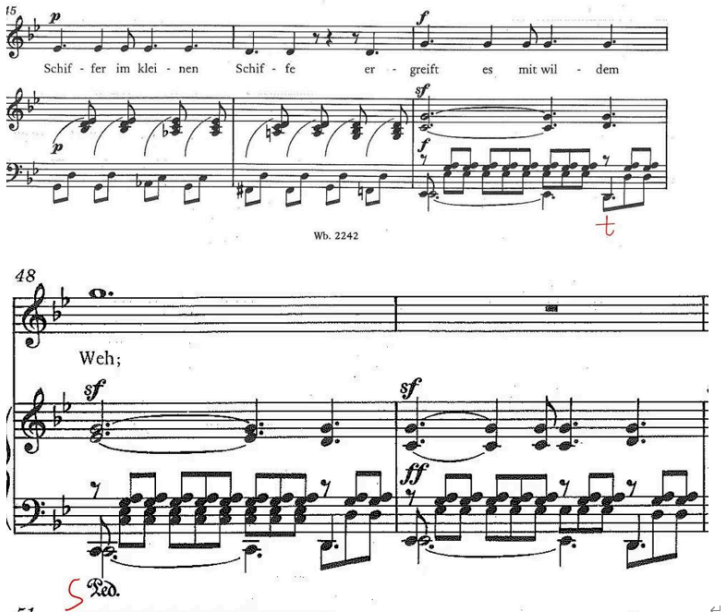

Figure 4. Bars 47-48 show the transformation from the main to the subordinate in the climax of the entire piece

The vocals culminate into the highest note of the whole piece in the climax part of the composition (see Figure 4). But, contrary to the customary traditionally "climax-steady" pattern popular in classic romantic art songs, the piano texture in this case does not complete the mood in the majority-dominant termination or in the state of dominant role, but in a transpositive circulation between the major chord and the minor chord (t-s), in melody changing the rather stationary state of affairs to a more free function. This pendulum motion is a musical feeble structure of the conceptual balance, which a climax must possess, and disruptions the classic resolution scheme. This manner of writing, in contrasting the variety of climaxes to functional instability, is an added dramatic force to the piece. The vocals do not have a structural landing position in strategic vocal intensities, but are suspended in the musical process that is going on. This strategy does not aim at interpreting the expression of female emotions as the linear catharsis or final return, but leaves the incompleteness at the structural level so that the female subject can be open and unclosed even when it becomes a limit of expression.

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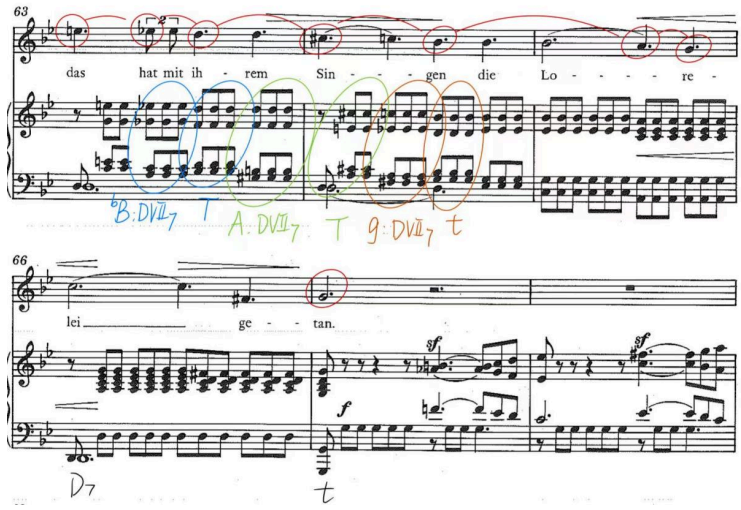

Figure 5. Bars 63-67 show the vocal part of the polar progressive descending and the continuous lead chord resolution leading to the tonic chord

The melody of the vocals at the conclusion of the piece also changes the relatively high point of tension to step by step drop, and the range becomes lower and lower, demonstrating a distinct pattern of closure (See Figure 5). In conformity to the tonal movement, the harmonic plane by incessantly using a sequence of motion of leading seventh chord slightly indicates the tonic chord, culminating in a complete resolution. This transition back to the tonal center when the music is unstable produces a concrete ending of the structural music as compared to the conscious pausing of the resolution of the middle and climax bits of the music, which underlines the drama of the music. This conclusion, however, is not merely the resolution of the previous tension. The downward movement of the vocal line, not eliminating the built dramatic tension previously created, accentuates the narrative with the temporality due to structural completion on the one hand, having gone through several instables and suspensions. Notably, the resolution takes place once the entire unfolding is accomplished and not as something suppressed or avoided to express. Hence, an absolute conclusion does not imply that the voice of the subject is being withdrawn, but the conclusion of an expression, which is absolutely exhausted. In this sense, the work ends in the manner that the structural order was already taken into consideration, yet the memoir of the tension of the former text was also not forgotten, but rather the expression of the female subject was supported in the entire story.

To conclude, having examined the melodic movement and the harmonic system of the song "Lorelei, " one may state that Clara Schumann has managed to incorporate a narrative process full of tension by using such musical elements as continuous progressive, withholding resolution and functional reversal. The piece preserves the gradual attitude of expression between growth, transition and end making no movement of emotions on any particular lyrical or inert reappearance. This structural manner of writing does not only recreate the female figure in the work, but also reveals the mastery of the music language in the situation of the art song, which points to the initiative taken by Clara Schumann as a composer. As McClary and Boyd establish, the articulation of the female subject is not tied to definite stylistic qualities, but they are manifested in the efforts by the composer to achieve expressive space and sustain it with the help of the structure of the music work [2,5]. The imaginative exercise of the Lorelei by Clara Schumann indicates the potential shapes of such a subjectivity of the structure.

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3. Conclusions

The paper uses art song of Clara Schumann titled Lorelei as a case in point and evaluates how the expression of the female subject could be achieved in her piece by examining the text of the poetry and musical composition. The analysis reveals that music reimbursement of the narrative logic ruled by the male gaze in the poetry of Heine and, rather, redefine the female image and position on the narrative onto musical word such that women are no longer objects to be observed or read. The musical level is built to form a narrative process that never stops in development as in a melodic progression with a definite direction, the constant maintenance of a semitone tension, and the avoidance of traditional functional solutions paths. In the climax the vocals go to the farthest point of the vocal range but do not get the spillover harmonic support and finally, after a complete development of the vocals, a structural closure occurs completing an overall time arc of delay - completion. This way does not assume seeing the female expression in a linear catharsis or emotional reversal, but instead does not close the voice of the subject in its structure. More to the point, the female subjectivity introduced in the piece titled Lorelei is not merely echoed in the visual piece made by the music, but also expressed through the selection of musical language made by Clara Schumann as a composer. She exercised certain creative initiative within the established structure of romantic art songs as she determined how melodies, harmony and texture were related. This shows that it is not where the work is just a reaction to its gender environment, but is instead an act of subjectivity in expressing creative output on limited means, and the analysis focuses on re-evaluating the value of creative writing of women composers in musical terms.

3.1. Theoretical implications

This paper indicates that the debate around the expression of the female subject does not need to be limited to the definition of stylistic devices or type of emotion, but instead indicates the way that subjectivity is produced and reproduced in particular musical languages by assessing the organization of music and the mechanisms that are involved in the narration. According to the analysis of Lorelei, the female subject is not merely a straightforward articulation of already existing paradigms, but it derives its agency and variety through the structural tension, functional delay, and time-span development. The structural analysis in this viewpoint will not consent to simplify female expression to a singular aesthetic characteristic and will offer a deeper analytical way that is more structural to examine the creative practice of female composers in the 19th century.

3.2. Limitations in the research and study directions

This article has been largely restricted by space and material constraints thus being more of case studies of single works, and has not made the systematic study of other pieces of art songs by Clara Schumann or works of other female composers of the same era. Moreover, little is discussed on the subject of interpretive practice and history of the reception. Future studies may elaborate more on the views than those of cross works comparisons, interpretation of performance, and the history of the work in a gendered context in order to show a more detailed picture of the various subject positions of female composers in the romantic music culture.

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