

Schubert: The Nonsense Society Revisited

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Twenty years have now passed since I discovered materials belonging to the *Unsinnsgesellschaft* (Nonsense Society).¹ This informal club, active in Vienna from April 1817 to December 1818, consisted mainly of young painters and poets with Schubert as one of its central members. In this essay I will review this discovery, my ensuing interpretations, and provide some new observations.

In January 1994, at the start of a research project on Schubert iconography, I studied some illustrated documents at the Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien (now the Wienmuseum am Karlsplatz), titled “*Unsinnadien*.”² The documents comprise forty-four watercolor pictures and thirty-seven pages of text recording two festive events celebrated by the Nonsense Society: the New Year’s Eve party at the end of 1817 and the group’s first birthday party on 18 April 1818.³ The pictures depict various club members, identified by their code names and dressed in fanciful costumes, as well as four group scenes for the first event, including *Vivat es lebe Blasius Leks* (Long live Blasius Leks; Figure 1), and two group scenes for the second event, including *Feuergeister-Szene* (Fire Spirit Scene; Figure 6 below).⁴ Because of the use of code names—and the misidentifications written on the pictures by some previous owner of the materials—it was not initially possible to interpret these documents correctly.⁵

A few months later, in April 1994, I discovered a second set of papers, housed in the manuscript collection of the Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek (now Wienbibliothek) in Vienna’s City Hall, and these made it easier to unravel many of the society’s secrets.⁶ This second set of materials had been purchased in 1937 from a descendant of the club’s vice-editor, code-named *Zeisig* (a type of finch).⁷ It consisted of handwritten newsletters titled *Archiv des menschlichen Unsinnns* (Archive of Human Nonsense). One numbered issue of the newsletter was apparently produced each week, although the collection contained only twenty-nine newsletters, those between 17 April 1817 and 10 December 1818 (nine from



Figure 1. *Vivat es lebe Blasius Leks: Zur Unsinnade—5^{ter} Gesang* (Long Live Blasius Leks: For the 5th Song of Nonsense), 31 December 1817. Watercolor by Carl Friedrich Zimmermann (Aaron Bleistift).

1817 and twenty from 1818). Each issue, penned in *Kurrentschrift* (German running script) and usually eight pages long, begins with a motto and ends with a watercolor picture; in between are humorous and rather off-color texts spoofing contemporary politics, social mores, scientific discoveries, art, drama, and literature, each signed with the writer's code name. At the beginning of the first issue, in Zeisig's hand, is a key headed "Namen der Unsinnsmitglieder" that identifies most of the club members—twenty-two in all. This is what made it possible to link the newsletters to the documents in the Wienmuseum and, after intensive biographical research on the club's participants, establish Schubert's important role in the secret society.

Most of the members were young painters—students at the Vienna Art Academy—with code names that reflect their profession: for example, August Kloeber (1793–1864), famous for the portrait he sketched of Beethoven in 1818, was called Goliath Pinselstiel (Giant Paintbrush) and Johann Nepomuk Hoehle (1790–1835), who would paint Beethoven's studio a few days after the composer's death, was called Kratzeratti Klanwinzi (Little Scratcher). Three Kupelwieser brothers are also clearly

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identified on this list: Blasius Leks (Josef), Chrisostomus Schmecks (Johann), and Damian Klex (Leopold).⁸ Not all of the club's members are initially listed; Schubert's name, for example, is missing. Moreover, various code names that occur in the newsletters or on the individual portraits, for example that of Quanti Verdradi (Totally Mixed-Up), whom I have identified as Schubert's friend Franz von Schober, are also not on the initial list. Compounding this, at least two-thirds of the newsletters originally produced by the club are now missing (including the twenty-three issues immediately after the first one), a loss that makes a definitive interpretation of all the complicated allusions difficult.

Schubert's connection to the society was referred to in at least two memoirs by his friends but was misinterpreted by the great scholar Otto Erich Deutsch (1883–1967), who was only aware of another group, the so-called Ludlamshöhle (Ludlam's Cave). The first reference comes from Heinrich Anschütz (1785–1865), a famous Burgtheater actor, who delivered Franz Grillparzer's celebrated oration at Beethoven's funeral. He wrote in his memoirs:

I had spent my first Christmas in Vienna at the end of 1821. . . . This Christmas was of special interest to me because it brought Schubert to my house for the first time. Franz Schubert was one of the most active members of the late Nonsense Society. In this my brothers had been most intimately associated with him for years and it was through my [brothers] that he came to my house.⁹

There is no reason to doubt Anschütz's assertion about Schubert's active participation in the "late" Nonsense Society—"late" meaning that the group no longer existed in 1821. Moreover, the first two names on the list of Nonsense Society members are the actor's two brothers: "Anschütz Eduard . . . Schnautze, Redacteur" and "Anschütz Gustav . . . Sebastⁿ Haarpuder" (see Figures 2–4).¹⁰ Eduard Anschütz (ca. 1797–1855) was actually the club's leader, as well as the main editor (*Redacteur*) of the newsletters; most of the texts were written in his hand. His code name Schnautze, meaning (big) snout, is an anagram of Anschütz.

The second reference to the Nonsense Society, although the group was not mentioned by name, appears in an obituary for Schubert by Eduard von Bauernfeld (1802–1890):

At the time Schubert came out into the world several young men in his native city, mostly poets and painters (e.g. the



Figure 2. *Die Redaction: Herr Schnautze* (The Editorial Board: Mr. Snout), 31 December 1817. Watercolor by Ernst Welker (Kritzli Batzli).



Figure 3. *Schnautze Redacteur* (Snout Editor), 18 April 1818.
Watercolor by Johann Nepomuk Hoechle (Kratzeratti Klanwinzi).



Figure 4. *Sebastian Haarpuder* (Sebastian Hairpowder), 31 December 1817. Watercolor by Franz Goldhann (Ultimus).

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esteemed [Leopold] Kupelwieser), gathered together, whom genuine striving after art and similarity of views soon united in sincere friendship, and into whose circle Schubert too was drawn. The mutual communication between these youths and their artistic conversations had a great effect on him and stimulated him, if not so much to talk, at any rate to the most varied musical productivity. To several of these friends he was most cordially devoted to the end of his life, and he often expressed regret, in letters as well as conversation, that the friendly union of so many worthy young men, as will happen, became disrupted by their pursuing different careers and by other chances.¹¹

Bauernfeld's mention of "other chances" having led to the disruption of this circle of poets and painters was probably a hint that the increasingly strict police measures against club formations in Prince Clemens von Metternich's Vienna made it too dangerous for the Nonsense Society to survive. One of the friends to whom Schubert "was most cordially devoted to the end of his life" was Franz Goldhann (1782–1856), the society's oldest member—aged thirty-five—and thus code-named *Ultimus*. His father had helped Mozart out financially, and he himself would become a member of Ludwig Mohn's reading circle in late 1823, using the new euphemism "Dr. Faust." His family name Goldhann actually means golden rooster, and the portrait painted of him for the club's first birthday party depicts him holding a shield displaying a barnyard fowl of this color. The pictures are full of such hidden clues to the members' real identities. Fortified by the references from Anschütz and Bauernfeld regarding the importance of this society for Schubert and his musical output, I began the search for his presence in this extremely secretive, encoded material.

Iconographic Evidence

The most immediately compelling evidence for Schubert's participation in the Nonsense Society could be gleaned from the many illustrations that accompanied the various issues of the newsletter. One particularly striking example is *Zur Unsinnniade—5^{ter} Gesang* (For the 5th Song of Nonsense) a watercolor containing the banner "Vivat es lebe Blasius Leks" (Long live Blasius Leks) and illustrating the last poem or song that Josef Kupelwieser wrote to describe the New Year's Eve party on 31 December 1817 (see Figure 1). The term *Unsinnniade* suggestively resembles a later,

far more famous word-creation: *Schubertiade*. Could the former have served as the inspiration for the latter?

Standing in the middle of the scene is a short man with curly sideburns and wearing eyeglasses, dressed in a brown suit, whom I have identified as Schubert. He is accompanied by two young women attired in formal white dresses and blue accessories, arriving at the end of the party, perhaps after attending another festivity elsewhere. The little man on the left, wearing a hat with fancy feathers, is the still-life painter Johann Carl Smirsch (1793–1869), whose code name was Nina Wutzerl. He is mentioned in the Schubert literature for having provided the composer with the opportunity to send the deeply moving letter of 31 March 1824 to his close friend Leopold Kupelwieser in Rome.¹² The man on the right, dressed as a roughneck from Berlin and offering a toast to the two female guests, is Carl Friedrich Zimmermann (1796–1820), the one Jewish member in the club. He painted this picture, which is signed with his code name Aaron Bleistift (*Bleistift* meaning pencil, used by a *Zimmermann*, meaning carpenter). The two women are most likely Babette and Therese Kunz, sisters with whom Schubert gave concerts in March 1818 and for whom he arranged, in December 1817, his two Overtures in Italian Style as four-hand piano works (D592 and D597). The person playing the violin at the left of the complete picture is the amateur painter Ludwig Kraißl (1792–1871), code-named Pinselmo Schmialiri (Brushy Smearup). He was also a friend of Leopold Kupelwieser and played the violin in the well-known picture *Ball Game at Atzenbrugg* (dating from 1823), in which Schubert sits on the grass, smoking a pipe.¹³ Kraißl's prominent position at the forefront of the Unsinniade scene means that he serves as a kind of musical herald, announcing the arrival of his superior: the musical genius Schubert—who is placed so prominently in the center of the picture.¹⁴

Other illustrations also point to Schubert. The caricature in Figure 5, *The Kaleidoscope and the Draisine*, was painted by Leopold Kupelwieser (signed with his code name Damian Klex) and is attached to the newsletter of 16 July 1818.¹⁵ It spoofs the composer as a portly schoolteacher, holding a stick and peering through a kaleidoscope, and the artist himself as a young student riding the newly invented draisine, a forerunner of the bicycle. The picture's meaning is explained in the accompanying article “Zum Kupfer” credited to the editorial board—that is, Eduard Anschütz:

The latest example of contemporary history proves just how dangerous the new invention of ice-slides is in Paris. But even the seemingly harmless inventions of the kaleidoscope and the draisine have their dangers, as the accompanying

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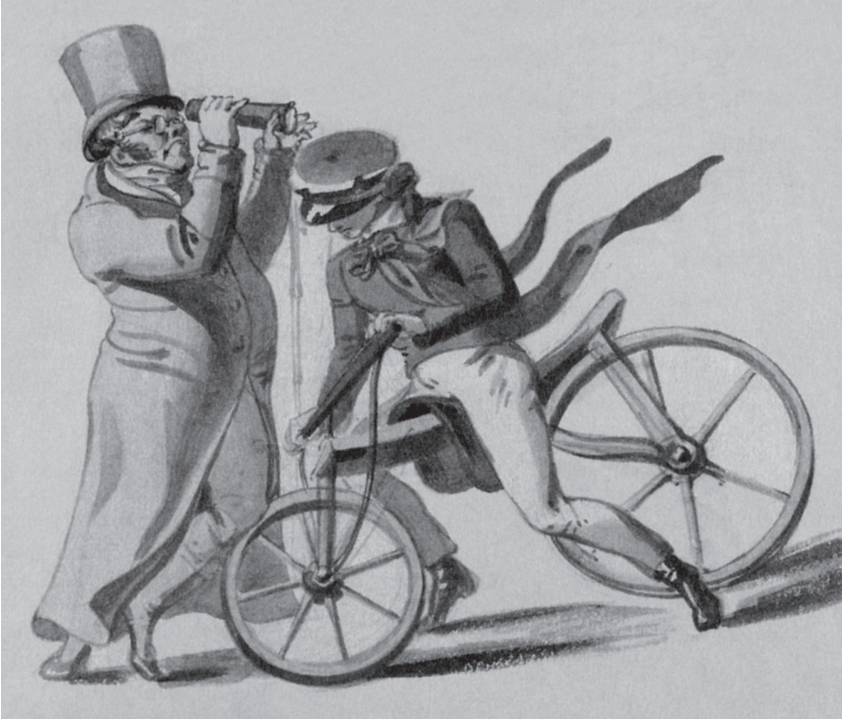


Figure 5. *Das Kaleidoskop und die Draisine* (The Kaleidoscope and the Draisine), 16 July 1818. Watercolor by Leopold Kupelwieser (Damian Klex).

picture illustrates. The stout gentleman is absorbed in the contemplation of the kaleidoscope's wonderful play of colors—the dark glass makes him even more nearsighted than usual. He is about to be knocked to the ground by a passionate draisine rider, who likewise has his eye fixed only on his machine. Let this be a warning for others. There is already supposed to be a police order in the works on the strength of which every blockhead is strictly forbidden, on account of the danger, from using both new inventions.¹⁶

The nearsighted Schubert was habitually associated in the newsletters not only with eyeglasses, but with other optical devices as well, such as the kaleidoscope.¹⁷ This new invention was patented by Sir David Brewster in 1817 to create inexhaustible forms of symmetrical geometric patterns; the draisine was likewise invented in 1817, by German Baron Karl Christian Ludwig Drais von Sauerbronn.

These illustrations provide vital clues for unlocking coded references to Schubert in the newsletters. Once a word or object was associated with a member, subsequent issues developed the association in other creative ways, which in turn could lead to further associations. Thus Gustav Anschütz, using the kaleidoscope as a coded allusion to Schubert, writes as follows in a newsletter dated 10 September 1818:

The undersigned has the honor of faithfully informing the venerated public that he has for sale a kind of kaleidoscope (also known as looking-through-tube) with the unique property that one can use it to see through all kinds of clothing. The great benefit of this optical device should be apparent to everybody since it discloses some items that are at present carefully kept hidden. Especially for young men who like to go walking on the Graben.

Today the Graben is filled with expensive shops, but in Schubert's time it was associated with prostitutes, the notorious "Graben nymphs." In another account, Josef Kupelwieser warns that the kaleidoscope can have a strong effect not only on the eyes, but also on the nose. He may be alluding to an advanced stage of syphilis in which the nose is eaten away. It is known that Schubert eventually contracted this disease, most likely in late 1822—probably through contact with a prostitute. The exact nature of Schubert's illness was hushed up by his contemporaries, but Wilhelm von Chézy, whose mother, Helmina, in 1823 penned the text to the drama with incidental music *Rosamunde* (D797), came close to revealing this in his recollection of the composer, published in 1841: "Schubert adored women and wine. Unfortunately this taste had caused him to stray into wrong paths from which he could no longer find his way back alive."¹⁸ Indeed, as we shall see, there is enough evidence provided by the surviving Nonsense Society materials to suggest strongly that Schubert was already using prostitutes in 1817.

Kupelwieser's caricature also alludes to Schubert's work as an assistant at the school where his father was headmaster, for it shows him carrying a stick. This attribute—associated with the disciplining stick used by teachers, sometimes known as a "Spanish rod"—occurs repeatedly in the newsletters, again pointing to the composer. For example, the issue dated 24 September 1818 describes the invention of a new machine called the *Hiebeidoskopf*—a play on the words *Hiebe* (blows, strokes) and *Kaleidoskop*—whereby a quantity of installed Spanish rods could give out the desired number of blows.¹⁹ The machine could also be used to beat the dust from

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clothing. Directly following is a newsletter article by Josef Kupelwieser describing the search for a theater librettist and the conditions under which he is to serve. The article closes as follows: “A composer is also required, under similar terms, except that he must also clean the boots and clothes of the director.”²⁰ Thus, in this encoded manner, a composer (Schubert) is associated with both the kaleidoscope and the stick. The stick occurs again in connection with “Ritter Zimbal” (Knight Cimbalom), in a newsletter dated 5 November 1818: here Schubert’s code name follows the phrase “25 blows with a stick on the backside of a Hungarian soldier.” What is more, a long serial drama by Schnautze Redacteur that appeared in the last five surviving newsletters (dated 12 November to 10 December 1818) satirizes Schubert as a *Genie* (genius) who flies out of a *Schublade* (a drawer) to the sound of music. After being transformed into a stick, this *Genie* warns about how dangerous it is to consort with a prostitute, disguised as a seductive woman in white.

Der Feuergeist

These allusions to Schubert in 1818 all refer back to an article in the second surviving newsletter, dated 25 September 1817, in which Schubert’s role as composer emerges in a context completely unknown to music historical accounts. Under the rubric “Theateranzeige” (Theater News), Eduard Anshütz announces that the Nonsense Society was about to begin rehearsing a drama in four acts with choruses and stage machinery called *Der Feuergeist* (The Fire Spirit). The text was written by Blasius Leks (Josef Kupelwieser), and Schnautze himself was to play the role of the fire demon.²¹ Schubert must have composed the music for this work; this is attested by the watercolor titled *Feuergeister-Szene*, painted to document a production of the drama that took place at the club’s first birthday party in April 1818 (see Figure 6). This picture is remarkably similar to a scene in Schubert’s three-act melodrama *Die Zauberharfe* (The Magic Harp; D644), a work he supposedly composed in a mere few weeks in the summer of 1820. Although the libretto to *Zauberharfe* is lost, the program for the 19 August 1820 premiere at the Theater an der Wien names such characters as Sutur, an evil fire demon; Count Arnulf; his estranged wife, Melinde; and their son Palmerin, who plays the magic harp. The plot, as reconstructed on the basis of Schubert’s music and the first newspaper reviews, contains a scene in Act 3 that unfolds as follows: Arnulf is happy and wants to reconcile his differences with Melinde, but the demonic Sutur appears and reminds her of



Figure 6. *Feuergeist-Scene* (Fire Spirit Scene), 18 April 1848.
Watercolor by Franz Goldhann (Ultimus).

an oath she had made to him earlier. With the help of his fire demons, Sutur tries to destroy her. Palmerin flies in to the rescue, playing on his magic harp. His music overpowers the evil forces and saves the true love of his parents. This is exactly the situation depicted in the illustration. In keeping with the nonsense theme of the society, Arnulf is portrayed here as a *Bierhäuselmensch* (a beer-house person) and Melinde—the role played in 1817 by Schnautze—is a barmaid.

In Eduard Anschütz's prose description of the birthday party—"Il giorno di nascità"—he identifies the players and their parts, and we learn that they were assigned roles different from the original production. Schnautze concludes: "The fire demons drank everything up. All the actors competed honorably with each other, the choruses fell apart beyond all expectation and the piece disintegrated marvelously. What a wonder therefore that the performance ended with much laughter, art's beautiful reward."²² Role reversal, that is, spoofing the identities of other members, was one of the defining features of the club, and the exchanged parts no doubt led to the performance's disintegration.

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An additional clue pointing to Schubert's involvement with *Der Feuergeist* is Schnautze's use of the word *Schub* (push, thrust) in describing the birthday performance. This is how he begins the introduction to his prose account: "When a woman gives birth, a human being is born and this is a *Hauptschub* [major event]. But, if an exceptional person is born, this is a little bit more, and if a God of Nonsense is born, this is still two bits more."²³ Thus, by using the word *Schub* and referring to an "exceptional person," Anschütz gives an encoded allusion to Schubert's important role in this celebration, although the composer himself was not present at this particular event. Later, in a newsletter dated 15 October 1818, Schnautze builds on this analogy in a children's ballet titled *Insanius auf Erden* (Insanius on Earth). Schubert is featured here as the ABC (primary school) teacher called Hymen Halbgott (Hymen Half-God); the God of Nonsense "Insanius" appears as a "3/4 Gott"—three-quarters being "a little bit more than half," and also alluding to dances in 3/4 time.

In the summer of 1820, when Schubert was under great time constraints, he must have reused some of the music of *Der Feuergeist* for *Die Zauberharfe*. Other evidence supports this supposition. The overture to *Die Zauberharfe* contains music that he had already composed in November 1817. Much comes from the introduction and coda for the Overture in the Italian Style in D Major (D590) that Schubert arranged in December 1817 in a four-hand piano version (D592) for the Kunz sisters. An earlier dating of the music to *Zauberharfe* would also explain the great confusion that exists in the numbering of the scenes in the manuscript material. When Schubert's *Zauberharfe* was staged for the first time in August 1820 at the Theater an der Wien, its librettist remained officially anonymous. A diary entry by Josef Karl Rosenbaum names him as Georg von Hofmann, who usually wrote for the Kärntnertheater. I suspect that Rosenbaum may have been mistaken. Moreover, one of the newspaper reviewers of the *Zauberharfe* production, "B. S.," generally thought to be the poet and Schubert-friend Baron von Schlechta, called the librettist "ein ehrlicher Kämpfer für den Unsinn" (an honorable fighter for nonsense).²⁴ Perhaps Schlechta was here admitting his inside knowledge that the real librettist was Josef Kupelwieser. Schubert's melodrama was criticized by contemporary reviewers for its many drinking choruses. Since the picture from 1818 shows the ensemble of fire demons behind a table loaded with drinks, Schubert must have written many such choruses for the Nonsense Society. The early collaboration between Schubert and Kupelwieser is important in light of their later joint venture, *Fierabras* (D796), usually considered Schubert's best opera.²⁵

The Knight of the Keyboard

It should come as no surprise that Schubert's ingenious talents as a composer found their way into a wide range of allusions in the newsletters. In fact, his primary code name in the Nonsense Society was Ritter Juan de la Cimbala (Don Giovanni of the Keyboard), *Cembalo* being the German—actually Italian—word for harpsichord.²⁶ This name, although not found on the list of members attached to the first newsletter, is the only code name for any of the members with a musical meaning. It occurs in the issue dated 13 August 1818, written by the vice-editor at a time when Schubert was away from Vienna serving as music master in the home of Count Johann Esterházy at his summer residence in Zseliz, in what is today southeastern Slovakia but what was then part of Hungary:

According to reports from Spain, the inquisition has arrested the famous painter Juan de la Cimbala because, owing to his own admission, he has been occupied with black magic in addition to his usual duties. Nevertheless, we hope that he will get out of this alive, in that even before his arrest he had severely burned himself.

Zeisig, the author of this extremely encoded entry, has in typical nonsensical fashion turned Hungary into Spain and the musician Cimbala into a painter. The passage “owing to his own admission” probably indicates that Schubert had recently sent a letter to his friends in the Nonsense Society, relating his activities in Zseliz. This must have been similar to the well-known account addressed on 8 September 1818 to Schober and six of Schober's friends in which he describes in great detail the people at the Esterházy estate, including “the chambermaid very pretty and often my companion . . . the manager my rival.”²⁷ Other letters make it clear that the composer had two groups of Viennese friends at this time—“the city friends” and the Schober circle.²⁸ (It goes without saying that many of Schubert's letters are lost.) I interpret the “black magic” in Zeisig's account as referring to the compositional activities of the Spanish Don Juan (Schubert), in addition to his usual teaching duties for the Esterházy family in Zseliz, where he was “confined” for about five months. He had “burned” himself earlier by writing a secretive 19-bar palindrome for *Feuergeist*. When musicologist Brian Newbould discovered this amazing feat in its later version in *Die Zauberharfe*, for music associated with the fire spirit Suttur, he described this achievement as the “product of intellectual manipulations, the willful reversal of values, as in the ‘black mass.’”²⁹

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There may also be a double meaning in the word *burned*. Since Schubert had hinted in his correspondence that he was having a love affair with the maid-servant (Pepi Pöckelhofer), he was again “playing with fire”—having severely burned himself earlier in his relations with prostitutes.

Another newsletter, written on 5 November 1818 while Schubert was still in Zseliz, uses the name “Ritter Zimbal,” an appropriate reference to cimbalom, the Hungarian hammered dulcimer. The next newsletter, one week later, is headed with the motto “Heidideldum! Heidideldum! Hopsasa hopsasa Heidideldum!” and opens with an article by Blasius Leks (Josef Kupelwieser) about the Spanish nobleman “Hans from the Hinterland” riding back to Austria on a *Hanselbank* (sawhorse). The words “Hans in Wien” are underlined for emphasis. Hans, of course, is the diminutive for Johannes, the German form of (Don) Juan, hence another allusion to Schubert as Ritter Juan de la Cimbala. Kupelwieser elaborates on the name to announce that Schubert is about to arrive back in Vienna from his long stay in the “hinterland” of Hungary.³⁰

A remarkable observation regarding Schubert’s sojourn in Hungary is his composition there of a work that explicitly refers to his moniker in the club: Variations on a French Song (D624). This is the four-hand piece consisting of eight variations on *Le bon chevalier* (*Der treue Ritter* or The Good Knight) that Schubert later dedicated to Beethoven as Op. 10. It seems highly likely that Schubert chose this particular song about a faithful knight relating the tale of hopeless love (no doubt with autobiographical elements as well) as a tribute to his role as Ritter Juan in the Nonsense Society.

The code name Cimbala/Zimbal is clear in its reference to his musical instrument, the keyboard. But what about the Spanish nobleman—Don Juan? There are, in fact, many jokes in the newsletters about Ritter Juan’s pursuit of women.³¹ In the same month that Schubert composed his piano duet variations—September 1818—we find the following tale about “Chevalier Touchetout” in the newsletter:

L’observateur curieux [The Curious Observer] has reported—that in the dilemma in which *Madame Culronde* [Roundbottom] has felt herself placed as the ardent *Chevalier Touchetout* [Touches Everything], who casually undertook some physical-anatomical investigations with her, and his hand, to the misfortune of the lady and the great astonishment of the *Chevalier*, instead of the assumed natural curves pulled out some socks—nothing further other than that her dilemma was without end.

There are numerous clues that point to Schubert in this passage. The immediately preceding newsletter item mentions *Schuhe* (shoes)—*Schubert* actually means “shoemaker”—and the item directly following discusses a “Caleidoscop.” The French word *touche* (German *Tasten*) means not only “touch,” but also piano keys. *Chevalier* is the French word for *Ritter* (knight), Ritter Juan is the only code name with this title. In the newsletter dated 12 February 1818, the poem “Impromptu”—which dealt with a sock—follows an article about “a fortepiano for sale.” The poem also jokes about Ritter Cimbala’s lack of expertise as a painter—obviously an inside joke among the many visual artists in the society.

From such passages we can already begin to see the value of this material in uncovering details about Schubert. A close look at the text and illustrations of the Nonsense Society reveals something of a running commentary on what scholarship has been able to piece together from other sources regarding these twenty-one months of Schubert’s life. By April 1817, Schubert, having passed his pedagogy exams in 1814, had been working for some time as an assistant teacher at his father’s school in the district of the Rossau, and the major event of 1818 was his appointment working for Count Esterházy in Zseliz. This remarkably detailed chronicling, or rather spoofing, of the main activities of Schubert’s life during his membership in this club sheds light on other events as well.

The Rossau

According to Deutsch, Schubert moved to the Rossau—the suburb closer to the inner city than the parish of Lichtental, where he grew up—at the end of 1817, after his father was appointed director of the new schoolhouse there.³² Interestingly, the Rossau is mentioned in two Nonsense Society newsletters from November 1817, the very month that the school year began.³³ The suspicion therefore looms large that there was already a connection to the Rossau in the newsletters from this month and that these texts contain hidden messages involving Schubert. The fifth surviving newsletter, dated 6 November 1817, begins with the following item, titled “Politisches Allerley” (Political Miscellany), and is signed by Schnautze:

According to reports from the Rossau, a ship is being built there, but we have not yet been able to discover its purpose. However, it is not to be used for war, and one suspects, on account of its build, that it will not at all serve as a transport or

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merchant ship. But, from its interior furnishings, we believe we may conclude that it will function as it had previously—as a place of eating and drinking [*Einkehrwirthshaus*]³⁴—especially as a man who has already shown himself to be a good host is supposed to be appointed as its commander.

On 28 October 1817 a petition had been made by the parish priest in the Rossau to appoint Schubert's father as the new school director. He is praised for having raised all of his sons to be worthy schoolmen. Moreover, he had promised that his sons would provide the music services for the Rossau church for free, thus amounting to a savings for the parish of several hundred Gulden annually. Schubert's activities for the Nonsense Society, however, help to explain the lack of any substantial sacred music dating from 1818 and suggest that he was now more interested in writing theater music for his friends. The petition was submitted to the higher authorities for approval on 5 November 1817 and one day later the Nonsense Society was already joking about how a ship in the Rossau—meaning the newly built schoolhouse, which would also have included the home of the Schubert family, the only new building constructed in that suburb—would serve them as a place of refreshment. The next item, also written by Eduard Anschütz, begins:

The Klosterneuburger ship's captain Blaser has safely arrived at the Schanzel this morning with his ship, called Herr Dekan. But, according to his own report, he had to withstand a great deal of adverse wind which he attributes to the load carried by his vessel, since it consisted mainly of garlic and green beans.

The rest of the article is about a rather obscene battle with women selling fruit at the Schanzel, a marketplace alongside the Danube Canal. The ship's captain "Blaser" is obviously Blasius Leks, that is, Josef Kupelwieser, and his ship—with its name meaning a school dean (*Dekan*)—is Schubert. Since Josef had a short time earlier written the text to *Feuergeist*, which the club had begun rehearsing in September 1817, it makes sense that the two friends—librettist and composer—would then have been in close contact.

This ship's tale, with its mention of wind created by eating gassy foods, probably inspired the story of the voyage through Vienna's suburbs that appeared in the next surviving newsletter, dated 20 November 1817, illustrated by the picture *Windhosen: Der sechste Welttheil in Europa* (Wind Trousers: The Sixth Area of the World in Europe; see Figure 7). There

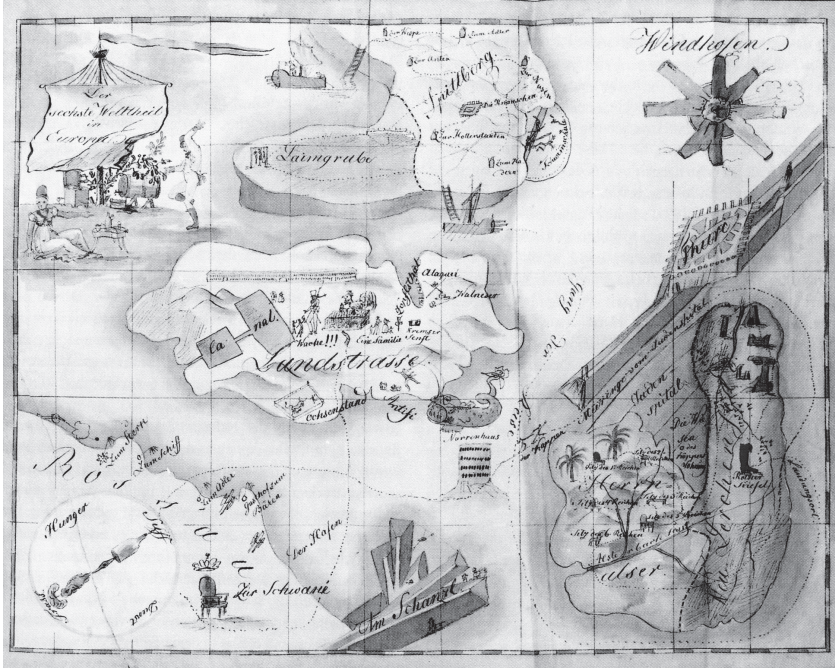


Figure 7. *Windhosen: Der sechste Welttheil in Europa* (Wind Trousers: The Sixth Area of the World in Europe), 20 November 1817. Watercolor by Johann Carl Smirsch (Nina Wutzerl).

are many clues pointing to Schubert here, including his profile on the section of the map labeled “Rossau”: his snub nose and cleft chin are especially visible on the shoreline (to the lower left). The round glass on Schubert’s cheek, with its compass pointing to *Frass* (gluttony) and *Suff* (boozing), harks back to the previous mention of eating and drinking. The long text, signed by Blasius Leks, contains the following passage:

Now we sailed to the Rossau where we thought we could fix our foremast which had suffered significantly during the Spittelberg storm and which we, because we lacked help [*Hülfe*], were in danger of losing completely. The Rossauers might have already noticed us from afar because we saw clearly how they brought wood onshore from the timber rafts in the harbor, in order to defend themselves as we drew closer. Thus we did not find it advisable to land directly at

the harbor, but disembarked at a place some distance away, next to the Schanzel bath. There we snuck around via some detours, undergoing cannon fire from the Bear, Eagle, Ship and Star (forts skirting the harbor), deeper into the countryside and finally arrived at the main goal, the Swan, where we—unrecognized—had some refreshments and then continued on our journey.³⁵

Spittelberg was a Viennese suburb notorious for its prostitutes. The foremost seems to be Schubert, who as we have seen is often associated in the newsletters with sticks, but also with wood—and, of course, with the Rossau, which was a place where piles of wood were stored. An additional clue is the word *Hülfe* since Schubert's official profession at this time was that of a *Schulgehilfe* (assistant school teacher). The word *Swan* in the text, and the prominent inscription “Zur Schwane” next to the throne (or armchair) topped by a crown and the letter *S*, was probably added because of the association of Schubert with a “singing swan” (desiring a euphemistic death). The prominent stack of wood labeled “Am Schanzel” next to Schubert's face has a tiny drawing on it: of a couple making out behind the woodpile. Since Schubert's first teacher was named Michael Holzer, this may have been a source of the many jokes associating him with wood (*Holz*).³⁶

The boot at the top of the map, resembling Italy (see Figure 7a), contains the names of various inns—some real, some nonsensical—located in the suburb of Spittelberg, including the made-up name “Zur Nasen” (At The Nose), written on a drawing of Leopold Kupelwieser's nose.³⁷ Next to his mouth is the sign “Schwimmschule” (Swimming school)—referring to Leopold's noted skill in swimming. Next to the fortress of “Thuri”—the small suburb directly adjoining Schubert's birthplace—is a green “tower,” obviously pornographic, labeled “Neu Lerchenfeld” (see Figure 7b). This was the suburb where Josef Kupelwieser—a notorious womanizer—lived, in the house “Roter Stiefel” (Red Boot), as is indicated by the caption “Die Wiesen des Koppers Wohnung” (The Meadows of Kopper's Residence), with its wordplay on his name, *Koppel* meaning a fenced-in grazing meadow. *Fortress* was a term used for a prostitute in Schubert's (and Beethoven's) Vienna, and the erect green tower indicates the promised land next to the Egyptian desert of Hernals, another of Vienna's suburbs. I suspect that Schubert's Lied *Auf der Riesenkoppe* (D611), which translates as “On the giant peak” and which he set to a text by Theodor Körner in March 1818, may have been inspired by this map. The song begins: “High on the summit / Of your mountains / I stand and marvel

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/ With glowing fervor, / Sacred peak, / You that storm the heavens.”³⁸ Schubert may have been spoofing Josef’s prowess with women here. (Later, in 1823, Josef would suddenly abandon his Court Theater position to run after the actress Emilie Neumann, with disastrous results for the planned production of *Fierabras*.)

Swimming from the Spittelberg next to the “Narrenhaus” (House of Fools, the Viennese insane asylum), is a fish wearing eyeglasses—Schubert. He is about to swallow the name “Antifi,” which as we will see has musical significance. The island in the middle of the map is labeled “Landstrasse” and contains a cage with a rooster on top—the regular meeting place of the Nonsense Society. Under the cage is a beckoning finger. This clue, together with the throne topped by a crown and the letter *S* already mentioned, again point to Schubert’s important role in the society. The newsletters often parodied the works of the popular Viennese theater writer Joachim Perinet (1763–1816), whose hit piece at the time was the travesty opera *Aschenschlägel*, a Cinderella story with the genders reversed. Schubert, perhaps not surprisingly, was the club’s Cinderella. One of the lines in Perinet’s play reads: “Aschenschlägels Ebenbild ist ein unschuldiger Schwann” (Cinderella’s image is an innocent swan). He sits at the hearth baking buns—hence the necklace of buns which Schnautze wears in his second individual portrait, the one with the gesturing finger (Figure 3). But, instead of losing a slipper, this male Cinderella finds a glove (lost by *Insanius*, the club’s God). This story line is especially evident in the children’s ballet *Insanius on Earth* featuring the half-god Hymen (Schubert). Scene 6 contains this passage:

Hymen and the children as geniuses. They have ABC books in their hands and are supposed to learn how to read. They refuse and Hymen gets mad. The children throw their books at his head. Hymen runs around the theater like a fool [*Narr*] and looks for his stick. He finds *Insanius*’s glove and dances a minuet with the children who are so astonished that they run away. Hymen alone. He studies the glove and recognizes it. He is happy that *Insanius* is also here.

An armchair (like the throne on the map) also makes an appearance in the play about Hymen; it is transformed into a tree trunk (that is, wood).

Returning to the map and another favorite writer parodied by the club, Friedrich von Schiller, in particular his poem “Der Handschuh” (The Glove): among its opening lines are the phrases: “Saß König Franz / Und wie er winkt mit dem Finger, / Auf tut sich der weite Zwinger” (King

Franz sat / And as he gestured with his finger, the distant prison cell opened). Thus, in this cleverly encoded way, the club joked that Schubert was their “King Franz.” The upper left-hand corner of the map shows a woman sitting in front of a three-legged object that looks remarkably like a spinet. Next to a keg of wine is a man dancing the Austrian “Schuhplattler”—a courtship dance in 3/4 time in which the man slaps the sole of his shoe. Thus, we have here the nonsensical version of “wine, women, and song”—with “song” being replaced by “dance.”³⁹

A similar scenario to the Rossau map is suggested by a two-part tale written by Eduard Anschütz, “Die Fee Musa oder Die verwandelten Jünglinge” (The Fairy Musa or The Transformed Youths) that appeared in the newsletter on 10 and 17 September 1818.⁴⁰ This fairy tale relates that two members of the Nonsense Society had been so mesmerized by the sensuous charms of the water-nymph Aqualine that they abandoned the virtuous Musa for damp, swampy regions. The two youths were transformed into a fat singing frog (Schubert) and a tall, eloquent carp (Schober), and were so delighted with catching flies in the water that they refused to be rescued by their draisine-riding friends (led by Leopold Kupelwieser). The serialized tale was accompanied by two illustrations: the first one, showing the frog and carp diving into the swamp, was painted by August Kopisch (1799–1853). This young painter and poet from Breslau, whose code name was Galimathias Hirngespinst (Gibberish Headspinner), would later become famous for discovering the Blue Grotto of Capri (in 1826) and for penning the tale about the “Heinzelmännchen of Cologne” (in 1848)—the elves who worked secretly in the night for the tailor, the baker, etc. The second illustration is by the landscape painter Tobias Raulino (1785–1839)—code name Bubone di Stivali (Bubo of the Boots)—and depicts the frog and carp cavorting in an accurate representation of the swimming pool in Vienna at the time. Both pictures also show the incensed Musa and the enticing Aqualine. This illustrated tale is actually a moral message presaging the upright Josef Kenner’s later report to Ferdinand Luib about Schober’s “lasting and pernicious influence over Schubert’s honest susceptibility,” and how this “false prophet, who embellished sensuality in such a flattering manner” helped to drag the composer’s “soul down to the slough of moral degradation.”⁴¹

The illustrations that accompany Schnautze’s tale about Musa and the transformed youths are full of sexual innuendos. Clever wordplay clearly identifies Schubert and Schober as the frog and the carp. For example, such words as *écossaise*, *Posaune*, *Flötentöne*, and *Genius* are used in connection with the fat singing frog, while the carp is described with such terms as *alles Reden* (full of talk) and *Krümmungen seines Schweifes* (his crooked

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tail)—referring to Schober’s reputed eloquence and bowed legs. The mysterious appearance in the tale of an antagonist—the coach-driver “Sepperl” (the name is a diminutive of Josef)—is probably a reference to Josef Kupelwieser and his rivalry with Schober. In my opinion, many other words—some of which are associated with Schubert elsewhere in the newsletters—point to the composer: *Auge* (eye), *Zedernholz* (cedar wood), *Fuß* (foot), *Musik*, Aqualine’s enticing singing “mit bezaubernder Laubfroschstimme” (with a spell-binding tree frog voice), *Stiefel* (boot), *ein dummer Spitzbub* (a silly rascal), *Zauberstab* (magical stick), and so forth. And, the words *Persian* and *Chinese* in the subtitle of the tale “Fragment eines persischen Märchens aus dem chinesischen übersetzt” (Fragment of a Persian Fairy Tale, Translated from the Chinese) point to the exotic lady’s man: Schober. Since wordplay was such a favorite pastime in the Schubert circle, in particular, the making up of poems or short stories on a set number of given words, I believe that Schubert’s later allegorical tale “My Dream” (1822) may have been written as part of such a game.⁴² Indeed, it is not hard to determine what might have been the given words, for example: *Bruder*, *Vater*, *Liebe*, *Lustgelage*, *Speise*, *Schmerz*, *Tod*, *Leiche*, *Augen*, *Garten*, *Jungfrau*, *Seligkeit*.

Schubert’s Friends

Franz Schubert is not, of course, the only person of interest in the pages of the *Archiv des menschlichen Unsinnns*. We have already seen open allusions to two friends well known to Schubert research, Leopold Kupelwieser and Franz von Schober, but there are others whose presence in the composer’s life was previously unknown and who add to our picture of the Viennese cultural scene in sometimes surprising ways. Carl Friedrich Zimmermann, who had come to Vienna from Berlin in 1816 to study at the Art Academy and who roomed with August Kloeber, likewise from Berlin, painted the final group scene for the New Year’s Eve’s party in 1817, signed with his code name Aaron Bleistift.⁴³ As mentioned, this image (Figure 1) shows Schubert in a brown suit next to two young women and the artist himself as a duel-fighting roughneck. Earlier in the evening, however, Zimmermann had worn a different costume and, in my opinion, had come disguised as Schubert (see Figure 8). This double portrait, painted by Kloeber, shows Aaron Bleistift on the left as a fine gentleman with curly hair, clad in a brown suit and peering through double glasses at Leopold Kupelwieser. A conspicuous handkerchief hangs from the gentleman’s suit tail—similar to the piece of linen wrapped around the tail of the fish with eyeglasses



Figure 8. *Play with Double Glasses*. Carl Zimmermann (as Schubert) and Leopold Kupelwieser, 31 December 1817. Watercolor by August Kloeber (Goliath Pinselstiel).

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Figure 9. *Franz Schubert*. Oil portrait attributed to Josef Abel, ca. 1814.

swimming toward the Rossau in the *Windhosen* map—and he wears exaggerated signet rings at his waist.

I believe these valuable items were meant to parody Schubert as he was depicted in the oil portrait attributed to Josef Abel (1764–1818),⁴⁴ which shows the nearsighted composer, gripped by inspiration while seated at a fortepiano, with a number of signet rings at his waist (Figure 9). The dress, the glasses, the hair reproduce the Abel portrait with stunning accuracy. Perhaps the pencil (*Bleistift*) placed so prominently on the

piano even became an inside joke, associating Aaron Bleistift—whose father in Berlin was actually a “Holz-Inspector”—with Schubert, who as we have seen is often connected with wood in the newsletters. In the Abel portrait, a name is inscribed on the fortepiano with the decipherable letters reading “[?]enie.”⁴⁵ I now believe that the artist, who was famed for incorporating symbolic attributes in his paintings, meant the nameplate to indicate: *Genie*, a designation that finds prominent mention in the newsletters in association with Schubert.

Zimmermann, who painted four surviving pictures for the society, was a popular member, praised for his artistic talent and teased for his pursuit of women. One of the newsletter reports, titled “Psychologische Beobachtungen” (Psychological Observations) and dated 2 April 1818, begins with an obscene spoof on pretentious intellectual writing, using passages in pseudo-Yiddish, and then describes Zimmermann proudly riding a horse down the Rotenturmstrasse. The article ends with the following passage mentioning a shoemaker apprentice named “Hansel”—that is, Schubert:

But let us consider a small group of shoemaker boys, full of innocence. . . . He [Zimmermann] stops suddenly in front of a house in the Rotenturmstrasse and his whistling mouth closes in silence. His eyes are directed upwards and he smiles gently. What is the object of his fixed gaze? It is a maid, washing the windows on the second floor. To balance herself, she has stretched out her right leg rather carelessly into the street. The shoemaker apprentice, absolutely delighted, calls to one of his comrades: Hansel, stop! Here you can see the whole city of Paris!

The double mention here of shoemaker and Hansel, implying Ritter Juan, reinforces the connection made in the double portrait between Zimmermann and Schubert. The artist’s unexpected death in 1820 in a drowning accident, soon after he had married a member of the extended Mendelssohn family, was a tragic loss to art: his stunning illustrations of Goethe’s *Faust* are the visual counterpart to Schubert’s 1814 masterpiece in song: *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (D118).⁴⁶

Since Eduard and Gustav Anschütz have scarcely been mentioned previously in the Schubert literature, it is worth devoting a few lines to them here.⁴⁷ Among the pictures in the Wienmuseum are individual portraits of the brothers, showing how they were dressed for each of the celebratory events. Figures 2 and 3 depict the younger brother, Eduard,

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the club's leader and newsletter editor. In each portrait he holds a staff or scepter topped by a rooster. The club's *Stammlokal* (regular haunt), where the members met every Thursday evening, was the inn called the Roter Hahn (Red Rooster)—still standing today as a hotel with that name—in the suburb of Landstrasse just southeast of the inner city. (Although Schubert was working at his father's school in 1817, he would normally have had Thursday afternoons and evenings free.) Eduard was a poet—in 1816 the Vienna *Theaterzeitung* published a poem by him criticizing the Italian prima donna Angelica Catalani for her vanity—and he later pursued a career as an actor.

Gustav Anshütz (1793–1839) used the code name Sebastian Haarpuder. In the portrait depicting his costume for the New Year's Eve party, he wears a late Baroque outfit, including a wig from which a sign hangs reading "Extra fein Haarpuder" (Extra fine hair powder), and he is deep in discussion with a portrait of Pythagoras (see Figure 4). Since he grew up in Leipzig, his code name probably had some connection with Johann Sebastian Bach, especially since the "mathematical" Bach wore a powdered wig. It has also been argued that Bach composed the *Art of the Fugue* to display Pythagorean principles, including mirror images.⁴⁸ Was Gustav aware of this inside information? Gustav later worked as a jeweler and was a passionate dancer. At his death in 1839 he was survived by his wife, who taught singing, and his two young children. Since his brother Eduard died unmarried, the question arises: Who inherited the still-missing Nonsense Society materials? Perhaps they will be found one day, owned by descendants of either Gustav or Heinrich Anshütz.

In the context of this predominantly male society of close friendships it would be remiss to disregard the question of sexuality, especially in light of the plethora of contributions to this topic in recent Schubert literature. Indeed, even a casual glance at the newsletters and watercolors at times suggests feminine allures and cross-dressing among some of the members of the club. Closer inspection, however, reveals a rather more heterosexually oriented form of banter. A case in point is Smirsch, alias Nina Wutzerl (see Figure 10).⁴⁹ Although this member took on a woman's role in the club and was teased for his "tender" traits, the hat he wore decorated with peacock feathers represented his teaching specialty at the Polytechnical Institute: painting flowers and feathers. (Smirsch later sang with the Wiener Männergesangverein, amassed a huge fortune as a financier, and married his longtime cook at the age of seventy-seven.) He is featured in a picture, *Nina's Triumph*, attached to the newsletter dated 12 November 1818. This sacrilegious triptych spoofs a barbershop scene in which Nina introduces an untutored new member to culture.



Nina Wutzerl.

Figure 10. *Nina Wutzerl*. 31 December 1817.
Watercolor by Johann Nepomuk Hoechle (Kratzeratti Klanwinzi).

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This member, named “Alebrand,” as well as a witness to the scene named “Mordschlag” are still unidentified. The text describing the picture explains that it was painted by Rafaele van der Riso di Zaardam (Carl Peter Goebel, a prize-winning student at the Vienna Art Academy) as a form of penance for his having produced bad art for the society. In an earlier newsletter, Riso di Zaardam had been punished by Zeisig with a disciplining stick for being lazy in his creative efforts. The stick would seem to be an allusion to Schubert and his high artistic ideals.

An earlier picture, attached to the newsletter dated 23 July 1818, shows another sacrilegious scene: a parody of Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*, with the club gathering for their Thursday meeting in a shed topped by a huge red rooster, thus representing their *Stammtisch*. This picture was painted by Goldhann, who included himself, his wife, and two young daughters as a family of golden chickens in the left foreground. A chicken in a fancy hat decorated with colorful feathers—Nina—stands in front of a music stand and sings. Goldhann, who also wrote the accompanying text, explains that we see in this pretty bird “the unfortunate capon [eunuch] whose single pleasure is in singing and whose only listener is the splendidly dressed-up gallus galinaceus or turkey.” This turkey, who judges the singer, is obviously meant to represent Schubert. He is placed right in the middle of the picture, directly under the huge red rooster, but faces in the opposite direction, thus suggesting a “verkehrte Welt” (topsy-turvy world), another favorite theme, in addition to the “ship of fools,” that characterized this society.

There is also the case of the super-macho former soldier Ferdinand Dörflinger (1790–1818), the author of many unsavory articles in the newsletters about cooking and prostitutes.⁵⁰ He had adopted the persona and dress of the notorious actress Elise Hahn, who had cuckolded her husband, the famous poet Gottfried August Bürger. Dörflinger’s hasty marriage on 14 September 1817—his bride was already pregnant—served as the butt of many jokes, including Schnautze’s literary parody of Schiller’s poem “Hektors Abschied” with the travestied title “Lisels Abschied, als sie Mariage machte” (Lizzy’s Farewell, as She Got Married), and Nina Wutzerl’s painting of a Parisian fashion plate of fancy hats dedicated to “her” disreputable girlfriend “Elise Gagarnadl von Antifi.” The *Windhosen* map (dated 20 November 1817) shows the voyage of a fish wearing eyeglasses—Schubert—swimming from Spittelberg, with its loose women, toward the Rossau with its piles of wood. The fish, with a piece of (dirty?) linen wrapped around its tail, is about to swallow the name “Antifi.” In December 1817 Schubert composed the original (longer)

version of *Das Dörfchen* (The Little Village, D598) for four unaccompanied male voices in what I believe is the musical counterpart to the earlier literary and painterly jokes on “Elise.” Schubert must have chosen this text—the author of the poem is none other than Bürger—not only because of the connection to Elise Hahn, but also because of the wordplay (*Dörfchen*) on Dörflinger’s name. The absolute giveaway is Schubert’s selection of several verses mentioning “Elise”—for example, “Schön ist die Flur; / Allein Elise / Macht sie mir nur / Zum Paradiese”; that he omitted these humorous verses, with their private message, when he published the work later in 1822, in the shorter, better-known version of the work in Op. 11, No. 1 (D641) is itself revealing.

Schubert likely composed other works “für Elise,” including the Lied fragment *Entzückung eines Lauras Abschied* (Delight at the Departure of Some Laura, D577), on a text by Schiller, in August 1817. The title is not a mistake, as Deutsch had thought, but a deliberate attempt to spoof “some kind of woman’s” pending farewell. The Schiller text “Elysium” (D584), which Schubert set in September 1817, ends with the celebration of an eternal wedding feast: the word *ewig* (eternal) is stretched out in an exaggerated word parody for an incredible ten bars. Since it is set for high tenor voice, I suspect that Schubert sang this himself at a wedding party for Dörflinger, hosted by the club.

Johann Nepomuk Hoechle became famous as the painter of battle scenes for Emperor Franz—and is still remembered today for his Beethoven depictions: these include an ink wash drawing of the composer walking in the rain, the well-known music-studio scene painted on 30 March 1827 with the bust of Schubert in the window, and a quick sketch of Beethoven’s funeral procession.⁵¹ Under his code name Kratzeratti Klanwinzi, Hoechle drew eleven surviving pictures for the Nonsense Society, including the group scene *Zur Unsinniade—2^{ter} Gesang*, an “action shot” of the New Year’s Eve party, and the illustration “*Zebedäus*” in *His Studio* in the newsletter dated 8 October 1818. This image makes fun of the extremely old director of the Vienna Art Academy, Martin Fischer (1741–1820), identified in the double wordplay: “Mr. Zebedäus from Fisher Alley.” The name of the biblical fisherman Zebedee is reinforced by the name of the street where he lives. A similar kind of wordplay points to Schubert: for example, in the reports about a musician who lives in the “ABC house” or a curly-headed “Jean” who lives at Erdberg (where Schubert stayed with the Watteroth family in 1816).⁵² Hoechle’s picture shows old Fischer making some anatomical investigations of a woman’s bottom, the same theme found in the tale about Chevalier Touchetout pulling out some socks. This in turn reflects the mention of

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Ritter Cimbala in the poem “Impromptu” about a sock, in the newsletter dated 12 February 1818. The poem follows immediately a tale about a fortepiano signed by Quanti Verdradi (whom I assume to be Franz von Schober), and which reads as follows (note the double wordplays):

Fortepiano to play out. A completely new played-out *Fortepianoforte*, fitted with many notes and provided with a quantity of fine and coarse [*grob*] strings, as one would wish to have it, and which in addition has already been admired by many admirers, is to be had by a certain gentleman for playing purposes—because the drums and trumpets produce tones by themselves when one presses the so-called Turkish Turkish [!] music stops up and down with one’s foot. The beginning of this play is on the third of this [month] in the house of the person playing. Quanti verdradi.

The mention of *grob* here was probably a deliberate reference to Therese Grob (1798–1875), Schubert’s beloved singer, whom he had hoped to marry in 1816.⁵³

In mid-November 1818, after Schubert returned to Vienna from his five-month stay in Zseliz, he abandoned his teaching position and moved into an apartment with the older poet Johann Mayrhofer (1787–1836).⁵⁴ A lengthy account written by Josef Kupelwieser for the newsletter dated 26 November 1818 spoofs Mayrhofer’s daytime job with the government police office as a censor of books. Here are a few excerpts:

Advertisement. The following prohibited and permitted works are on public sale at the editor’s publishing house:

1. Prohibited

Multiplication tables from 1 to 1000 and back again in reverse order.

ABC book with pictures by a priest of the Jacobin order. . . .

2. Permitted Books

Introduction to the art of revolution. Paris 1792. . . .

On the art of deceiving the course of nature, for the benefit of the population, by a misanthrope. . . .

Introduction to the art of defrauding people, along with thorough instructions on how to declare a false bankruptcy.

Vienna, Police House, 1818.

Among the clues pointing here to Schubert and his roommate are “ABC book” and “Jacobin order”—the house where Schubert now lived, Wipplingerstrasse 2, had originally been occupied by the Jacobins.⁵⁵ In addition, there is the reference to a “misanthrope,” a word used to describe Mayrhofer’s character.⁵⁶ There is no evidence that the poet himself belonged to the Nonsense Society—membership in such a secret society would have been extremely dangerous for someone working for the police—but his biographer, Ernst von Feuchtersleben, reported that “every morning [Mayrhofer] entered into his diary the jokes of one such instinctive, humorous, natural person [Schubert], who was the soul of wit of a merry evening society.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

Although the episodes recounted in this overview point to the presence of the composer, one should keep in mind that there are many other passages where we are left, at best, to interpret. Certain words appear over and over again in what I believe are encoded references to Schubert. One of these is *Schuh* (shoe)—also found in combinations, such as *Handschuh* (glove)—as well as various appearances of *Auge* (eye), *Brille* (eyeglasses), or *Glas*. The words *Fest* (festival) or *Festung* (fortress/prostitute) also seem to be associated with the composer. I have already discussed such words as *Holz* (wood) and various items made of wood, including sticks—*Stab*, *Stock*, etc. I assume that the many references to music, to dance (especially the *écossaise*), and to musical instruments (especially the *Posaune*) refer to Schubert. Since he most likely composed the music for *Feuergeist*, the many jokes about *Feuer* (fire) probably involve him as well—as do the frequent occurrences of *ABC* (standing for the primary school class that he taught). A wonderful example of word combinations pointing to Schubert is the expression “handfester Holzhacker” used to describe the person who lives “beym goldnen A B C” (at the golden A B C) and who is studying Beethoven’s fantasies and variations (newsletter of 23 October 1817). I also believe that variants of the name *Juan*—for example, *Johannis*, *Hans*, *Hansel*, *Jean*, etc.—may as well refer to Schubert. Other members are also associated with particular words or concepts: Leopold Kupelwieser, for example, is represented by the draisine, swimming, and comets. And, if I am correct in assuming that Schubert’s close friend Franz von Schober was regarded as the enemy—or at least as a rival to Josef Kupelwieser (in writing librettos for the composer)—then he appears everywhere in the newsletters not only as the evil Turk, Arab,

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or Chinaman, but also as the stupid traveler to the topsy-turvy world, “Ulf Dalkensohn,” the dumbbell with a Swedish sounding name. Schober, who was born in Sweden, is thus the “Dummkopf” (blockhead) who leads the “Narr” (innocent fool), that is, Schubert, on sexually promiscuous adventures, for instance to Aqualine’s swamp, as told in the long tale about Musa and the transformed youths.

We can only also guess at the extent of the direct impact of this social circle on Schubert’s musical output, although some works in particular suggest a strong connection to his participation in the Nonsense Society: *Der Feuergeist*, an early version of *Die Zauberharfe* (D644); *Entzückung eines Lauras Abschied* (D577); *Elysium* (D584); *Das Dörfchen* (D598); *Auf der Riesenkoppe* (D611); *Variations on a French Song*, Op. 10 (D624).⁵⁸ There is also much more to discover in the annals of the Nonsense Society beyond Schubert: how a young generation of Viennese artists understood their world in the late 1810s, their awareness of current events and scientific discoveries, their view of morality and sense of humor, their artistic talents and mutual admiration. That Schubert was an integral part of this circle only adds to the richness of this discovery in the history of art and social interaction. As I expressed in 1997 in “Schubert Through the Kaleidoscope,” my first English-language article describing this new material:

This documentary find will not only open up new perspectives for research on the composer, it will also give new impetus to the fields of literature, art and theater, in particular as they relate to the sociological and cultural study of the Biedermeier period. I hope then that the future collegial work on this material by serious scholars in many fields will add innumerable splendid colors—kaleidoscope-like—to our current picture of Schubert and his Viennese circle of friends.⁵⁹

The time is still ripe for other scholars to be enticed by this rich and fascinating material and award it serious attention.

NOTES

This is a heavily edited version of the article I wrote in November 2012 for the Bard Music Festival of 2014. That article provided a more detailed account of how my research progressed and highlighted my new, unpublished ideas on this topic and was published, in its original form, in late 2013 as “New Thoughts on Schubert’s Role in the Unsinnsgesellschaft,” *Schubert: Perspektiven* 10/2 (2010): 191–223. It can be consulted there for comparative purposes.

1. All the surviving materials created by the Nonsense Society, including seventy-three watercolor pictures, have been interpreted and published in my book *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft: Franz Schubert, Leopold Kupelwieser und ihr Freundeskreis* (Vienna, 1998), 490 pages. As yet, little of this material has been examined by other scholars. The present article, in English, summarizes my findings.

2. My project to conduct new research on Schubert iconography was initially suggested by Ernst Hilmar, founder of the International Franz Schubert Institute in Vienna, and was later supervised by Gerhard Stradner, director of the Collection of Ancient Musical Instruments in Vienna. Funding was provided by the Austrian National Bank, Jubiläumsfonds, with two research grants, 1994–97.

3. These documents had been purchased by the museum in 1943 from the Viennese antiquarian dealer Gilhofer but were mistakenly identified as belonging to the Ludlamshöhle, a different club—with older members—that was also founded in 1817. For a discussion of this second club, which was raided by the police in April 1826 just as Schubert was about to become a member, see Alice Hanson, “The Significance of the Ludlamshöhle for Franz Schubert,” in *Essays on Music and Culture in Honor of Herbert Kellman*, ed. Barbara Hagg (Paris, 2001), 496–502.

4. For the record, these illustrations do not have titles. I devised the titles referred to here from the captions on the individual portraits and group scenes, as well as from the written explanations in each newsletter, titled “Zum Kupfer” (About the Copperplate).

5. Rupert Feuchtmüller made a valiant attempt to explain this material in his book *Leopold Kupelwieser und die Kunst der österreichischen Spätromantik* (Vienna, 1970), 14–15, but he confused the Nonsense Society with the Ludlamshöhle. He also published two of the costumed portraits on pages 84–85 with the following identification: “Josef Kupelwieser/als Mitglied der Unsinnsgesellschaft/Blasius Lecks/1818” and “Leopold Kupelwieser [*sic*] / als Mitglied der Unsinnsgesellschaft/Gallimatias Hirngespinst/1818.” The second picture shows August Kopisch, not Leopold Kupelwieser, whose code name was Damian Klex.

6. I wish to thank Morten Solvik for showing me the book by Gerhard Renner, *Die Nachlässe in der Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek: Ein Verzeichnis* (Vienna, 1993), that led me to make the discovery of Nonsense Society materials located in Vienna’s City Hall. These items, divided according to year, have the call numbers Jb 86.125 (for 1817) and Jb 86.126 (for 1818).

7. The vice-editor’s real name was Franz Zöpfl (ca. 1791–1871), a bookkeeper who later became an official at the Austrian National Bank. I wish to thank Michael Lorenz for establishing the biographical connection between Zöpfl and Marie Schuster, the person who sold the twenty-nine newsletters to the Vienna City Library in 1937 (see Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 8). These surviving issues make up only about one-third of the original number of weekly newsletters that must have been created (between April 1817 and the end of 1818), and it may be that Eduard Anschütz, the editor, took the other two-thirds (about 58 issues). These newsletters are still missing. The material in the Wienmuseum apparently once belonged to Josef Kupelwieser, who penned the poems called “Unsinnlieden” for the New Year’s Eve celebration in 1817. However, both the poem and the picture belonging to the third “Unsinnliede” are missing.

8. In 1997 I read a paper at the American Musicological Society Meeting in Phoenix titled “*Leks, Schmecks and Klex: Three Kupelwiesers and Franz Schubert in the Unsinnsgesellschaft*” devoted to these three brothers: Josef Kupelwieser (1791–1866), Johann Kupelwieser (1794–1856), and Leopold Kupelwieser (1796–1862).

9. Heinrich Anschütz, *Erinnerungen aus dessen Leben und Wirken* (Vienna, 1866), 264–65, cited in Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs by His Friends*, trans. Rosamond Ley and John Nowell (London, 1958), 222–23; translation amended by Christopher Gibbs. Deutsch commented that by the Nonsense Society “Anschütz probably meant ‘Die Ludlamshöhle’ to which Anschütz, though not Schubert, had belonged” (224).

10. For a facsimile of this list of Nonsense Society members, see Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 9.

11. Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs*, 32.

12. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, trans. Eric Blom (London, 1946), 338–40. The letter is discussed in Christopher Gibbs’s essay in this book as well as in John Gingerich’s.

13. See *ibid.*, plate 18, *Game of Ball at Atzenbrugg*, facing page 465.

14. According to my research on Ludwig Kraißl, funded in 2000 by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council SSHRC grant administered by the University of Victoria, B.C., Canada, this member of the Schubert circle was christened on 11 December 1792 (Vienna, Pfarre Maria Rotunda, Taufbuch Tom. I, fol. 125). He died on 10 February 1871 in Klagenfurt, where he had lived since 1824 as a painter employed by the wealthy family of the industrialist August von Rosthorn.

15. See Steblin, “Schubert durch das Kaleidoskop” (Schubert Through the Kaleidoscope), *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 52/1–2 (Schubert Special Issue 1997): 52–61.

16. For the original German, see Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 335–36, which reprints the newsletter dated 16 July 1818. Since such information can readily be found in my book under the date of the newsletter (as well as through the footnotes of my articles), I will dispense with further references here.

17. The kaleidoscope could now be associated with Schubert’s music, as I suggested in “Schubert Through the Kaleidoscope” in 1997: “The inexhaustible variety of his melodic invention and in particular the sudden, abrupt changes between harmonic motives and keys have a kaleidoscopic effect about them” (56). My idea was then further developed by Brian Newbould in his article “Schubert im Spiegel,” *Musiktheorie* 13 (1998): 101–10, esp. 105. I later expanded this thought, connecting it with Donald Tovey’s term “star clusters” and Richard L. Cohn’s discussion of this term, in my article “Schubert’s Pepi: His Love Affair with the Chambermaid Josepha Pöcklhofer and Her Surprising Fate,” *The Musical Times* 149 (Summer 2008): 47–69, esp. 52–53.

18. This passage by Wilhelm von Chézy was discovered by Till Gerrit Waidelich and published in his book *Rosamunde: Drama in fünf Akten von Helmina von Chézy. Musik von Franz Schubert. Erstveröffentlichung der überarbeiteten Fassung* (Tutzing, 1996), 53–54.

19. Franz Lachner told the following anecdote about Schubert’s strict discipline: “Once, when with a group of friends, Schubert told of a sweetheart, who left him for the reason that she wanted to avenge herself for the beatings he had given her in the ABC class when he was a schoolteacher. He added: ‘It is quite true; whenever I was composing, this little gang annoyed me so much that the ideas always went out of my head. Naturally I gave them a good hiding then.—And now I have to suffer for it!’” See Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs*, 292.

20. Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 375.

21. *Ibid.*, 214–15. The theater announcement is signed with another code name for Eduard Anschütz: “Michael Karthauerknall Schauspieler.” *Knall* (bang, explosion) refers to the meaning of his real name *Schütz* (shot), and *Schauspieler* (actor) refers to his profession.

22. Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 195.

23. *Ibid.*, 190.

24. See Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: Die Dokumente seines Lebens* (Kassel, 1964), 106; and the discussion in Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 29. The long review by B. S., which appeared in the *Wiener Konversationsblatt* on 29 August 1820, is given in its entirety in Deutsch's 1964 German edition of Schubert's documents but only in truncated form in his translated *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 148.

25. For a lengthier discussion of *Der Feuergeist* as the forerunner to *Die Zauberharfe*, see Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 26–30.

26. See Steblin, *Babette und Therese Kunz: Neue Forschungen zum Freundeskreis um Franz Schubert und Leopold Kupelwieser* (Vienna, 1996), which is dedicated to the memory of my harpsichord teacher in Vienna, Isolde Ahlgrimm (1914–1995).

27. Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 100. Deutsch identified the chambermaid as Pepi Pöckelhofer (102). For new biographical information on her, see Steblin, "Schubert's Pepi."

28. From Ferdinand Schubert's letter from mid-October 1818: "Your city friends could not be sought out, as they were all in the country." See Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 106; and from Schubert's reply to Ferdinand, dated Zseliz, 29 October 1818: "The city friends are the limit!" (109). The German word actually used by Schubert here *liederlich* (lewd) is much stronger. See also Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 362, for my discussion of how Schober, disguised as a carp with a crooked tail, sings the words: "Ich bin liederlich, du bist liederlich" (I am lewd, you are lewd) in Schnautze's tale "Die Fee Musa" about the transformed youths (Schubert as the frog, Schober as the carp).

29. Brian Newbould, "A Schubert Palindrome," *19th-Century Music* 15 (1992): 209–10.

30. For a detailed analysis of all the clues pointing to Schubert in this message, as well as a facsimile of this newsletter page, see Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 20–22. Josef Kupelwieser would later write the libretto for Schubert's most important opera, *Fierabras* (D796), composed in 1823.

31. See Steblin, "Schubert's Relationship with Women: An Historical Account," in Brian Newbould, ed., *Schubert Studies* (Aldershot, 1998), 159–82.

32. Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 82.

33. See Steblin, "Schubert and the Pfarre Roßau: New Documents from the Diözesanarchiv Wien and the Servite Priory," *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* 46 (1998): 153–73.

34. Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 236.

35. For the original German, see *ibid.*, 249–50.

36. See Steblin, "Michael Holzer, Schubert's Music Teacher in Lichtental: A New Genealogical Study," *Schubert: Perspektiven* 10/1 (2010): 10–44.

37. See Steblin, "Schubert's Role in the *Unsinnsgesellschaft* as Revealed by Clues from Schiller and *Aschenschlägel*," in *Franz Schubert und seine Freunde*, ed. Eva Badura-Skoda, Gerold W. Gruber, Walburga Litschauer, and Carmen Ottner (Vienna, 1999), 238–45.

38. Richard Wigmore, *Schubert: The Complete Song Texts* (London, 1992), 61. Schubert's setting of this Körner text has puzzled scholars; the standard explanation is that he was thinking of his mother, since a mountain peak called Riesenkoppe was located in Silesia, although it was nowhere near the area where she grew up.

39. On 28 November 1822 Schubert wrote the traditional saying "Wer nicht liebt Wein, Mädchen und Gesang, Bleibt ein Narr sein Lebenlang" (Who loves not wine, maidens and song, remains a fool his whole life long) on an album leaf for Albert Schellmann. See Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 246.

40. See Steblin, "Schubert's Pepi."

41. Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs*, 86. See Steblin, "Schober's Love Affair with Marie von Spaun and the Role Played by Helene Schmith, the Wife of Mozart's First Violinist," in *Schubert: Perspektiven* 8/1 (2008): 49–87, in which I take issue with Susanne Eckstein's interpretation of the pictures that accompany Schnautze's tale about Musa and the transformed youths. Also, see the discussion of Schober in John Gingerich's essay in this volume.

42. For the German text of “Mein Traum” see Deutsch, *Die Dokumente seines Lebens*, 158–59; English translation in *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 26–28

43. See Steblin, “Schubert’s Hidden Past as Caricatured by the *Unsinnsgesellschaft*: The Painter Carl Zimmermann and the Jewish Connection,” in *The Past in the Present: Papers Read at the IMS Intercongressional Symposium, Budapest & Visegrád, 2000*, ed. László Dobszay (Budapest, 2003), 263–86.

44. See Steblin, *Ein unbekanntes frühes Schubert Porträt? Franz Schubert und der Maler Josef Abel* (Tutzing, 1992), for my authentication of this oil portrait. Abel was a highly regarded member of the Vienna Art Academy and an artist praised by Schubert in his diary of 1816.

45. *Ibid.*, 48n22. No fortepiano maker could be identified with these letters.

46. Two of Zimmermann’s illustrations, which he made in 1819 and 1820 in connection with the musical setting of Goethe’s *Faust* by the Polish Prince Anton Radziwill, are included in my article “Schubert’s Hidden Past,” on 283 and 285.

47. My book *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft* devotes a brief chapter to each of the members of the Nonsense Society, summarizing their biographies and the roles they played in the society. I have since conducted further research on the two Anschütz brothers and the three Kupelwieser brothers, and I provide some of this new information here.

48. See Hans-Eberhard Dentler, *Johann Sebastian Bachs “Kunst der Fuge”: Ein Pythagoreisches Werk und seine Verwirklichung* (Mainz, 2004).

49. Steblin, “Schubert’s ‘Nina’ and the True Peacocks,” *The Musical Times* 138 (March 1997): 13–19.

50. Steblin, “Schubert’s Elise: *Das Dörfchen* and the ‘Unsinnsgesellschaft,’” *The Musical Times* 140 (Spring 1999): 33–43.

51. See Steblin, “Hoechle’s 1827 Sketch of Beethoven’s Studio: A Secret Tribute to Schubert?” *Beethoven Forum* 8 (2000): 1–23. For a discussion of the Beethoven funeral procession in front of the Alsergrund Church, which is still virtually unknown, see my article “‘Höchle zeichnete mir diesen Leichenzug’: Anton Gräffer, Johann Nepomuk Hoechle und die verschollene Zeichnung von Beethovens Begräbnisfeier,” *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 58/4 (2003): 299–315.

52. Steblin, *Die Unsinnsgesellschaft*, 233–34. For Schubert’s remarks at the opening of a manuscript of six *écossaises* that he wrote for Marie von Spaun, Schober’s beloved at the time: “Composed while confined to my room at Erdberg, May 1816,” see Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, 59.

53. For a comprehensive discussion of Schubert’s relationship to this woman, see Steblin, “Schubert’s Beloved Singer Therese Grob: New Documentary Research,” *Schubert durch die Brille* 28 (January 2002): 55–100.

54. See Steblin, “Schubert’s Problematic Relationship with Johann Mayrhofer: New Documentary Evidence,” in *Essays on Music and Culture in Honor of Herbert Kellman*, 465–95.

55. I explain that the house at Wipplingerstrasse No. 2 where Schubert lived with the poet Mayrhofer had been “originally the place of rendezvous of the Jacobins” in *ibid.*, 474. Citation from Heinrich Kreissle von Hellborn, *The Life of Franz Schubert*, trans. Arthur Duke Coleridge (London, 1869), 1:48.

56. For a reference to Franz Gräffer’s 1844 mention of “misanthropic” in connection with the poet’s character, see Steblin, “Schubert’s Problematic Relationship with Johann Mayrhofer,” 480.

57. Johann Mayrhofer, *Gedichte*, ed. Ernst von Feuchtersleben (Vienna, 1843), 23.

58. See Steblin, “Schubert und die ‘Unsinnsgesellschaft’: Musikbezogene Ergebnisse,” in *Schubert neu entdeckt*, ed. Erich Benedikt (Vienna, 1999), 37–44.

59. Steblin, “Schubert Through the Kaleidoscope,” 61.