

# After Schubert's *Winterreise*: Contemporary Aesthetic Journeys

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## I. INTRODUCTION/PROLOGUE

**Abstract**—Following previous studies about *Writing and Seeing*, this paper focuses on the aesthetic assumptions within the concept of *Winter Journey (Voyage d'Hiver/Winterreise)* both in Georges Perec's *Saga* and the *Oulipo Group* vis-à-vis with the creations by William Kentridge and Michael Borremans. The aesthetic and artistic connections are widespread. Nevertheless, we can identify common poetical principles shared by these different authors, not only according to the notion of *ekphrasis*, but also following the procedures of contemporary creation in literature and visual arts. The analysis of the *ongoing* process of the French writers as individuals and as group and the visual artists' acting might contribute for another crossed definition of contemporary conception. The same title/theme was a challenge and a goal for them. Let's wonder how deep the concept encouraged them and which symbolic upbringings were directing their poetical achievements. The idea of an inner journey became the main point, and got "over" and "across" a shared path worth to be followed. The authors were chosen due to the resilient contents of their visual and written images, and looking for the reasons that might have driven their conceptual basis to be. In Pérec's "Winter Journey" as for the following fictions by Jacques Roubaud, Hervé le Tellier, Jacques Jouet and Hugo Vernier (that emerges from Perec's fiction and becomes a real author) powerful aesthetic and enigmatic reflections grow connected with a poetic (and aesthetic) understanding of *Walkscapes*. They might be assumed as ironic fictions and poetical drifts. Outstanding from different logics, the overwhelming impact of *Winterreise Lied* by Schubert after Wilhelm Müller's poems is a major reference in present authorship creations. Both Perec and Oulipo's author's texts are powerfully ekphrastic, although we should not forget they follow goals, frameworks and identities. When acting as a reader, they induce powerful imageries - cinematic or cinematographic - that flow in our minds. It was well-matched with William Kentridge animated video *Winter Journey* (2014) and the creations (sharing the same title) of Michael Borremans (2014) for the *KlaraFestival, Bozar, Cité de la musique*, in Belgium. Both were taken by the foremost Schubert's *Winterreise*. Several metaphors fulfil new Winter Journeys (or Travels) that were achieved in contemporary art and literature, as it once succeeded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Maybe the contemporary authors and artists were compelled by the consciousness of nothingness, although outstanding different aesthetics and ontological sources. The unbearable knowledge of the road's end, and also the urge of fulfilling the void might be a common element to all of them. As Schopenhauer once wrote, after all, Art is the only human subjective power that we can call upon in life. These newer aesthetic meanings, released from these winter journeys are surely open to wider approaches that might happen in other poetic makings to be.

**Keywords**—Aesthetic, *Voyage d'Hiver*, Georges Perec & Oulipo, Schubert's *Winterreise*, William Kentridge & Michael Borremans.

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*DIE Winterreise* is a famous title that still seduces our imagination when we are acquainted with writings, musical compositions or images (drawings, paintings, videos...) that are aesthetic branches from the quite well known fragments of Schubert's *Lieder*, after Wilhelm Müller's poems. Lines such this excerpt of "Gute Nacht" (Goodnight) translate timeless feelings and ideas that might be shared by people from any time, place or condition:

For my journey I cannot  
choose my own time;  
I must pick the way myself  
through this darkness.  
My mooncast shadow acts  
as my companion  
and on the white meadow  
I look for deer's footprints. [1]

The visual terms within this fragment overwhelms self-perceptions and are absorbed by performers as inner sceneries as well for readers, listeners and audiences in general. All along the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, authors and visual artists' created new meanings for early romantic *Die Winterreise* according to their aesthetic and poetic purposes. The idea of free poetic appropriation displays unlike motivations; expands the nineteenth century authors' compulsive overcoming and reveals an utmost artistic excellence that disclosures a moving/emotional attraction.

*Die Winterreise* has always held a special fascination for the performer and listener alike. Famous artists such as Hermann Prey and Dietrich Fischer Dieskau occasionally perform the cycle as the entire program on a solo recital and have competed for the distinction of having recorded its "definitive" interpretation. Singers frequently refer to the performance of *Die Winterreise* as the culmination of their careers, worth years of years of preparation [1].

Regarding the short novel *Winter Journey* by Georges Perec, the conflict of authorship is the centre of the riddle, taken in an overwhelming and ironical assumption. Let's remember that in the late sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, discussions about this subject were held in a philosophical and literary levels by Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, among others – according to different points of view and convictions.

In 2014, four decades after the episode "performed" by Perec, Calvino and the Oulipo Group, two visual masterpieces were released by the contemporary artists: Michael Borremans and William Kentridge.



Fig. 1 William Kentridge, *Winterreise*, 2015

The South African artist, in an interview for the *New York Times*, said: “This “*Winterreise*” is a “celebration of incomprehension,” a defense of the “half-understood” [2]. Nothing is only what it seems to be. William Kentridge was seduced by German Lieder since childhood though he did not understand the language. He was compelled by the composition and – when invited to create his version – recovered his childhood memories and turned it into black and white images produced in a cinematic mood for the stage performance.

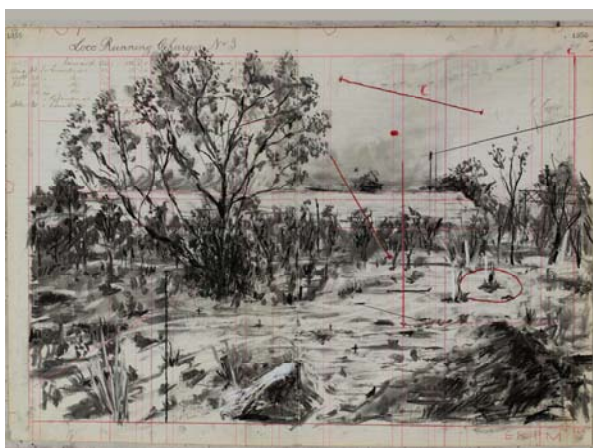


Fig. 2 William Kentridge, *Winterreise*, 2015, drawing

Concerning Michael Borremans’ approach to *Winterreise* we recognize other background and tracks. At first sight it might seem to be held with a strong dramatic emphasis. The singer is also affirmed by his quality as an *actor*. His face is covered with white ink, which reminds us the visual aesthetic of an oriental theatre, mime-dramatic expression or even the *Commedia dell’ Arte* characters.

In both approaches, the creations were driven by their own aesthetic principles and ideological/conceptual determinations, always valuing the core of Schubert-Müller stroke of genius.

## II. FRANZ SCHUBERT'S *WINTERREISE*'S: A CHRONOLOGICAL PATH

Il est bien difficile en géographie comme en morale de

connaître le monde sans sortir de chez soi<sup>1</sup> [3].



Fig. 3 Michael Borremans, *Winterreise*, 2014, painting

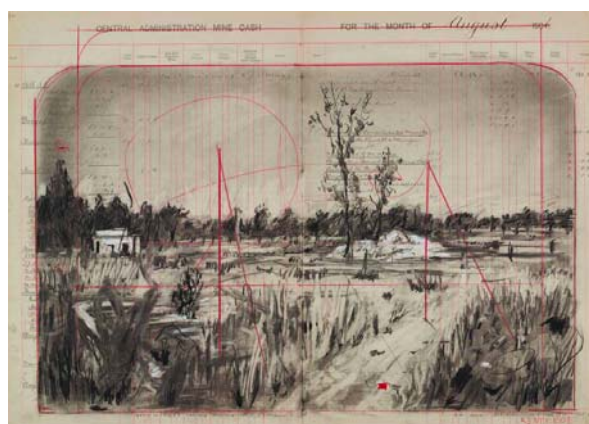


Fig. 4 William Kentridge, *Winterreise*, 2015, drawing

Along the 24 poems by Wilhelm Müller, the misfortune of the young man takes place. He left – and was left by - his beloved. He drifts towards an (non)endless journey. He undertakes himself as a stranger. The doors have been closed behind him. She no longer loved him. He ran from that absent presence facing his ultimate loneliness. He crossed symbolic places, such as the cemetery, the river. He noticed objects and places bursting emotional meanings, promoting his feelings of desired despair: the wind fane, the *Parélios*, the *Wisp Light*, the river... He passed by a village, got himself lost from humankind, submerged in space and felt apart. The difficult weather conditions decided his fate, his soul projected in the winter coldness; the snow embraced him with no redemption. The ice froze his will. Warm tears became sculptures of ice; the nature phenomena prevailed over his tenacity: *Erstarrung* [*Solidification; Freeze*].

These winter journeys are guided by a fluctuating aesthetic that needs to try out non-recommended paths. The presence of trees and rocks, the lines that draw the ways in the plain guide the hero sentimental pilgrimage:

Just now my journey took me  
past it at dead of night,

<sup>1</sup> “It is quite difficult in geography as in morals to know the world without leaving your home.” (Translation by the author)

and even in the darkness

I had to close my eyes (5. "The linden tree") [4].

We may remember the odyssey undertaken by Goethe's Faustus after Marguerite, willing to take his way to find Mephistopheles. He drove himself towards enigmatic trails, wandered willingly, trying to overcome life, to gain eternity and the possible immortality is a primary goal in Goethe's creations. The masterpieces from the past shine, they enlighten us. They represent a safeguard, redemption over the failure of mankind. They are a most reliable answer for people, so they would be released from forgetfulness or historic erasure. The metaphors extracted from previous works of Art, Literature or Music, become irreplaceable. Now and then, people feel like resurrecting aesthetic residues from timeless endeavours. That conceptual impulse conforms a suitable methodology for further achievements, and it is noticeable since long. This substantive intention prevails as a structural concept, moving forward with past energy and signs – reshaping artistic and poetic creations. It consists of a both ways movement, running between art expressions that interrelates images, sounds and words, generating a kind of triptych, together as complicit.

The aesthetic experiences are developed through unexpected energies which emerge according to the empathies the artist or composer discovers. The process of creation implies research and emotions connected in harmony, accomplishing a journey the author wants to apply for. We could say that almost every artistic creation develops from a *winter journey* [*Winterreise*], as an ultimate journey that leads and – at in parallel - runs against dead and oblivion.



Fig. 5 Michael Borremans, *Winterreise*, 2014, painting

We may ask how and why contemporary art borrows those title and main concept from previous *Winter Journeys*: they are linked because the authors want to celebrate those masterpieces; or because they are called upon the impact of such glamour and decadence for further plans; or, even we recognize that we are dealing with something deeper, touching the soul of contemporary authors that deconstructing feelings, ideas and utopias. The seventh Lied is called *Rückblick* [Review]: "Whenever that day comes to mind, /I long to look back once more,/ long to stumble back again/and stand in silence outside her house" [5].

The aesthetic inputs are various. They melt present time back into the past and aim for the future. The winter journey is done when the wandering between artistic ages and aesthetic tendencies generates new productions. The *winter journey* both frames and nourishes poets, artists and composers reminding romanticist moods and concepts that overlapped the nineteenth century. These *winter journeys* are aesthetic journeys into no man's land. They arise from several languages and countries in Europe, everlasting each period of History. The authors always lead their way in search of self-awareness.

As Bernard Fernandez recalls, the concept of inner-journeys or journey of self-discovery are adjustable to Schubert's *Winterreise*. The thin figure of a lonely man is almost submerged in the adverse climatic nature. The protagonist is on his way to an unknown destination. This scenery of a figure driven by landscape invokes the mood "have to grab identity from self-oblivion", "have to gain me back" from melancholy [*Acidia*], from self-exclusion...need to claim myself back from this ultimate achievement. The goal looks aim the conquest of inner-knowledge, overlapping (upon) the vacuity of the surrounding.

Through time and space, aesthetic journeys were accomplished in various typologies in European culture and celebrated as heritage. For sure, the inner [winter] journeys are a geographic subject born from individual hope and common fear, prone to visual and sound translation. Inner journeys might never happen; they were quite a challenge that nourished it as potential artistic and poetic *beings*.

The *Winterreise* is more than a fulfilled journey to accomplish a human displacement from one point to another, in order to reach a certain location. As suggested before we are dealing with a kind of pilgrimage that some people recognize, in spite of generation and over the finitude of time. In this sense, it might be acquainted with the concept of *Grandtour*, that implied the individual *self* that travelled in a connected sojourn, that wanted to visit (and stay) specific remains of cultural heritage, the ruins of the most meaningful artistic references with a purpose of an aesthetic education. Let's recall and underline that, in historical terms of time, those typologies of journeys are close in chronology, moved by mutual aesthetic commitments although promoted by diverse social and ideological impulses.

One of the most conciliatory ideas that gain interest in *Winterreise's* poems lies in the dramatic assumption of the premature loss, both of the poet and the composer. This idea matches with the early death that hit both of them, and in a short period of time. Wilhelm Müller did not have the opportunity to know the pieces composed by Schubert, shortly before his decease. Romantic motivation intersects with the authors' circumstances of life, like other protagonists in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who disappeared prematurely. The contents, enunciated throughout the 24 songs of *Winterreise*, repeat poetic variations driven by the inexorable awareness/certainty of death [6].

Even now, it is quite a challenge, the will and action of walking in the snow. The surrounding sounds dysfunction the

precision of the real location in the perimeter. The movement of walking carries the tension caught between strength and weakness. The decision of leaving home for the unknown is quite real and in winter it assumes a definitive role in life of those who are thrown out by despaired and doubtless. The figure of the *Wanderer* gets closer to this traveller without land. Let's recall the short story by Herman Hess, where he wrote about his *walkscapes* around the village, pointing out tradition, memory and routine.

### III. GEORGES PÉREC'S *VOYAGE D'HIVER* AND THE FOLLOWING OULIPOS WRITINGS

There still is a renewed interest about *Winter Journey*. From generation to generation, both for the public and researchers, this issue arouses with a superior aesthetic connivance, reaching a level of consonant excellence and aesthetic affinity. The seduction around the *Winter Journey* is reborn under the aegis of a title, at the end of the 20th century, in order to fulfil a new dialectic around the idea of authorship, sublimated in exquisite enigmas that engender simulations and effectiveness in a concatenation never realized, as we might agree. The impulse that motivated the sequence of texts thought and written by the different authors of the Oulipo Group derives from the textual plot of Géorge Pérec [7]. Maybe the feelings and ideas connected with the mystic of *Winter Journey/Winterreise* express an appealing mysterious and hermetic substrate. In 1969, when pondering about Schubert's enigma, Jacques Chailley recalls a previous study of his, concerning precisely the esoteric dimension of *Winterreise* (*Révue d'Esthétique*, Avril-Juin 1965).

*Voyage d'Hiver* was the name of Hugo Vernier's book, the one Vincent Degrael found in his friends' library, in August 1939, just before the beginning of the WW2.

The winter journey was a kind of story written in first person and located in a semi-imaginary country, whose heavy skies, dark forests, winding hills and channels cut by greenish locks, evoked the landscapes of Flanders or the Ardennes with insidious insistence. The book was divided into two parts [8].

Hugo Vernier was the leading figure held by Georges Pérec and that afterwards guided the odyssey built by Oulipos' Group [9]. The obsession with such title continued as a truthful saga. The book written by Vincent Degrael (Perecs' 2<sup>nd</sup> leading figure), after the WW2, was also entitled *Voyage d'Hiver* and from 400 pages only 392 had written contents. The quest Degrael undertook was almost in vain, we may think, carrying out the expectations that would truly fulfil the literary and philosophical Oulipos' Saga.

Let's recall that Hugo Vernier's *Winter Journey* was divided in two parts:

The first, shorter, described in sibylline terms a journey with an initiatory air, of stages that seemed to be marked by failure, and at the end of which the anonymous hero, a man who believed that he was young, arrived at the edge of a lake immersed in thick mist [9].

The 2<sup>nd</sup> part was longer and its contents were surprising: the unexpected presence of lyrics, sentences that Vincent

recognized as anticipated inputs, long before the majors' French symbolist poets would have written it – as it will be mentioned forward. We might wonder who plagiarized who, and who had that stylish impulse on such a poetry, which emerges from the darkness in a *Winter Journey*, a self-knowledge journey.

Ce qui différencie ce type de roman des autres est son penchant encyclopédique, non pas de façon traditionnelle, mais plutôt une encyclopédie-rhizome: il s'agit d'un réseau narratif où tous les points peuvent se connecter avec les autres afin que tous les voies soient possibles et que tout soit centre et périphérie au même temps, en abolissant termes tels que “noyau”, “satellites”, “intrigue”, “détail”, “personnage principal” et “figurant”<sup>2</sup> [10].

The connections between the set of Oulipos' writings are unexpected, driven by extraordinary qualities, such as innovation, imagination and illusion. Let's attend to the onomatopoeic links of the titles: Jacques Roubaud, *Le Voyage d'Hier*; Hervé Le Tellier, *Le Voyage d'Hitler*; Jacques Jouet, *Hinterreise*; Jan Monk, *Le Voyage d'Hoover*; Jacques Bens, *Le Voyage d'Arvers*; Michelle Grangaud, *Un Voyage divergent*; François Caradec, *Le Voyage du ver*; Reine Haugure, *Le Voyage du vers*; Harry Mathews, *Le Voyage des verres*; Mikhail Gurlouk, *Si par une nuit un voyage d'hiver*; Frédérick Forté, *Le Voyage des rêves*; Jacques Jouet, *Le Voyage du Grand Verre*; Reine Haugure, *Le Voyage d'H...Ver*; Hugo Vernier, *Le Voyage d'Enfer*; Michèle Audin, *IV-R-16*; Paul Fournel, *Le Voyage d'Hébert*; Marcel Bénadou, *Le Voyage divers*; H. Verni..., *Divers voyages. Textes et dessins collectés, annotés et présentés par Étienne Lécroart*; Paul Braffort, *Le Voyage d'Yvert*; Daniel Levin Becker, *Le Voyage Obscur*; Jacques Roubaud, *Les Voyages différents. Postface suivi d'un Appendice et de deux Post-scriptum*.

Related with the sequence of texts after Georges Pérec's *Voyage d'Hiver* (1979-1993), let's underline that, also in 1979, the Italian writer Italo Calvino published a book paraphrasing the theme. In spite of being centred in a Journey's idea, he emphasized the timetable as for the *night*, the cycle and season in the *winter* and introduced a leading figure, the so-called *traveler*. All the items were conditioned by the slightest article “if”...what induces the condition of ponderability of being or happening, installs the doubt about the chance of acting and, even more, calls upon the power versus breakability of any action at all. As for Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979): all along the book, the reader follows ten interrupted, incomplete and unfinished beginnings of a romance. Once and again, the reader becomes the author, and is conducted the gaps of the plot, and sometimes it might be quite impossible to read the whole book until the end. That's why he provided us with ten beginnings

<sup>2</sup> “What sets this type of novel apart from others is its encyclopedic bent, not in a traditional way, but rather an encyclopedia-rhizome: it is a narrative network where all points might be connected with the others so that all ways are possible and that everything is centered and peripheral at the same time, by abolishing terms such as “nucleus”, “satellites”, “plot”, “detail”, “main character” and “extra.” (Translation by the author)

of chapters. Considering that the act of reading must be a fruitful and comfortable experience, we should not persist if we do not feel like. Thus, the reader must perform the act reading as the author advises, like someone who prepares himself to a journey:

Well, what are you waiting for? Stretch your legs, go ahead and put your feet on a cushion, on two cushions, on the arms of the sofa, on the wings of the chair, on the coffee table, on the desk, on the piano, on the globe. Take your shoes off first. If you want to, put your feet up; if not, put them back. Now don't stand there with your shoes in one hand and the book in the other. Adjust the light so you won't strain your eyes. Do it now, because once you're absorbed in reading there will be no budging you [11].

The reader is an ever renewed author, lost in the riddles of fiction, freezing more and more as the misunderstanding gets out of control. In consequence, the impulse of the journey is a cold entry in winter, regarding the symbolic attachments the season leads to and carries in sociocultural and mythic terms. Not necessarily the winter of people age, but the winter of miscounting.

*If on a winter's night a traveler; Outside the town of Malbork; Leaning from the steep slope; Without fear of wind or vertigo; Looks down in the gathering shadow; In a network of lines that enlance; In a network of lines that intersect; On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon; Around an empty grave; What story down there awaits its end?* These are the titles of the 10 chapters here transcribed, written as a whole, composing a sort of visual paragraph. Now, let's face the interpretation proposed by Luca Zera for each of the 10 chapters:

1. If on a winter's night a traveler: detective romance located in a foggy railway station;
2. Outside the town of Malbork: family romance focused in the body;
3. Leaning from the steep slope: sick man diary, although involved in the escape of a man;
4. Without fear of wind or vertigo: political-existential novel describing a love triangle between revolution and war;
5. Looks down in the gathering shadow: dark romance about the brutal revenge of a malfesant, from the novelist Silas Flannery, but the real author is Bertrand Vandervelde;
6. In a network of lines that enlance: inner monologue of an anguished professor invited to an United States campus;
7. In a network of lines that intersect: a sort of Nouveau Roman where a millionaire builds worlds which reflect one another until they are dangerously messed together;
8. On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon: novel which recovers Kawabata style, full of eroticism and perversion and telling the relations between an young man and his master, his wife and his daughter;
9. Around an empty grave: novel seeming to be part of

“réalisme magique”, whom protagonist is a young man searching for his identity ;

10. What story down there awaits its end?: fantastic novel about the end of all society and institution [10, p.4].

It is an endless enigma to be. Italo Calvino journeyed us inside his book as he liked it. The chapters are in a state of an ongoing process. We recognize that sentences are (maybe) alike, sometimes a sort of “déjà vu”. That was one of the author's resolutions. Calvino dialogues with the reader, questioning feelings and thoughts. The challenging doubt concerns the questioning of authorship, after Peréc *Voyage d'Hiver's* riddle, when the lines quite reminded 19<sup>th</sup> century French Poets such as Lautréamont, Germain Nouveau, Rimbaud, Corbière, Verlaine or Mallarmé. Nevertheless, Hugo Vernier was the author of *Winter Journey*, a book written decades before those best well-known symbolist French Poets ever created their poems... The non-answer is the date of Hugo Vernier's publishing: 1820. Decades before the others were active as poets. That's why the endless quest for the biography of Vernier began and was so compulsive. It became a lifetime obsession for Vincent Degraël's that drove him to failure but not by any error of his, just by the action of fate. Maybe this ongoing situation is similar to the challenging inner pursuit of the *Traveler* in the Schubert-Müller's *Winterreise*.

Hugo Vernier, the unreachable author, was deathful for Degraël/Pérec, suggesting an anticipated disclosure, except if, the final redemption would be achieved as a symbolic inner journey, being a way out from it all. In conclusion, the final common pursuit concerned how to tame time in its plurality. *Kronos*, *Aion* and *Kairós* were the three mythic assumptions corresponding to three different but interconnected Greek gods. The elements of Mythology and Nature are powerful and organize the reason of human life according to their supreme will and power.

Every time I sit down here I read, "It was a dark and stormy night..." and the impersonality of that *incipit* seems to open the passage from one world to the other, from the time and space of here and now to the time and space of the written word; I feel the thrill of a beginning that can be followed by multiple developments, inexhaustibly; I am convinced there is nothing better than a conventional opening, an attack from which you can expect everything and nothing; and I realize also that this mythomane dog will never succeed in adding to the first seven words another seven or another twelve without breaking the spell. The facility of the entrance into another world is an illusion: you start writing in a rush, anticipating the happiness of a future reading, and the void yawns on the white page [12, p.120-121].

The *Winterreise* implies the anguish of writing, although you understand it (as a reader) as a fruitful symbolic game.

#### IV. MICHAEL BORREMANS' WINTERREISE

To conceive for a 19<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece a new version for a contemporary stage was a challenge that Michael

Borremans overcame as a genius. The visual imagery (and iconography) he created for *Winterreise* had its première in 2014, a production of the Muziektheater Transparant and Ensemble *Intercontemporain* for the Klara Festival, Bozar, Cité de la musique, in Belgium. The Belgian Artist presented a powerful *Winterreise*, creating scenery and wardrobe and set it on stage as though he was making an overwhelming installation, a grand and crucial *Umwelt*. Borremans' production was so huge and moving that the public would like to jump into transcendence and ensure a lap over human existence. When looking at the video registration of the *Première*, we immediately notice the intensity of two presences – the singer and the pianist are absolute. They dome with perfection their technique and conduct us – as viewers and spectators – towards a realm where chronology as no meaning and ensures all the possible contents of inner-consciousness.



Fig. 6 Michael Borremans, *Winterreise*, 2014, stage performance

The candlelight's arose from the past. The fire froze the tenacity of the words that kept floating as long as the singer's voice remained over the silence and the light suspended the wheel of seasons – winter ruled over the cycle. Each pronounced word expelled the each poem's mood. Each word signified both a world for any individual person and also felt the closeness of everybody on earth. The lonely traveller that stood up in *Die Winterreise* was surely a proud descendent of *Prometheus*. The loneliness of his quest was unbearable and melancholic. The whiteness of the snow and the translucency of the ice touched darkness.

The dramatic expression held by the singer was powerful and had a perfect balance with the tridimensional environment Michael Borremans designed. He was able to keep the shared understanding between text, music and the singer's performance as for the action of the pianist. They were linked with the objects that were displayed on stage. The scenery magnetism came thru the light design. It materializes the upmost theatrical visualization and seduces the audience, as we easily understand.

#### V. WILLIAM KENTRIDGE'S *WINTERREISE*

In William Kentridge's visual approach for *Die Winterreise* the aesthetic principles organized the development of the main

characteristics, which established both Wilhelm Müller's text - narrated along the 24 poems, and the iconography, illustration held according the subject. William Kentridge conceived 24 ink drawings and collages to which gave movement, projected in a huge screen as 24 stop-action films. The technical procedure was similar to the ones the Artist usually applies in his video-installations and films. The *Première* happened at the Salzburg Festival in July 2014, with the baritone Matthias Goerne and the pianist Markus Hinterhäuser as leading figures.



Fig. 7 William Kentridge, *Winterreise*, 2015, stage performance

I can and do deliberately lift this mist; but always, as I let it drop, I feel closer to the music, closer to each song. I am aware this is precarious terrain: a celebration of incomprehension. I cannot disguise ignorance, in my case ignorance of the German language, which is a lack. But I want to redeem that with the imaginative gain this lack produces [12].

Each drawing was not absolutely related to the semantics of poems, although it developed the main social and ideological themes the artist is concerned with. At a certain time, a huge drawing of an eye stands still, looking sharply at the audience, as though it was protecting the singer from the other people. The eye meant to be the conscience of mankind. Kentridge's concern with human rights and his condemn of racism were leading ideas incorporated thru icons, signs of his homeland – landscape, people dancing, trees and birds of Johannesburg - resulting in a unique artistic work. The crow was an ibis and the wide-canopied trees came from his native African land. Curiously the quest for unbearable individual goals, the longing for self-recognition symbolized the sociological and anthropological movements of a community.

Let's identify the signs as common patterns – in the poem and in the drawings, such as: the domain of darkness invades the atmosphere; the superposition of memories drives towards the tempest; the presence of the gloomy bird inflicts delusion and threatening miscounting; a ritual menacing dance in the night imposes fear and threatens people. Each slow motion drawings adds a deeply moving approach, adding dramatic intensity, tragic adherence, in a crescendo that goes from the melancholy allowed to the most poignant despair – *Winterreise*.

## VI. WINTERREISE: AESTHETIC JOURNEYS ON GOING



Fig. 8 Michael Borremans, *Winterreise*, 2014, stage performance

Michael Borremans and William visualized Schubert's *Winterreise* according to their aesthetic and conceptual principles without betraying the original poetic Masters.

As Jacques Chailley pointed out [13], the 24 lyrics by Müller were not all quite at the same level of being or understanding. Twelve poems belong to the Suite *Urania*. One year after, in March 1823, the poet published 10 poems more in *Revue Deutsche Blätter für Poesie, Literatur, Kunst und Theater*, Breslau: ns. 14- 16- 15- 17 - 18-23-20-21-22-24. Numbers 13 and 19, the two new poems, were quite apart from the love metaphors background that rules in the previous ones. And, in the same paper, he also considered they were metaphysical enough, driven by disguised and hidden meanings. The *Winterreise* achieved a higher level:

...le voyage n'était plus seulement celui du soupirant évincé; celui-ci n'était plus qu'une apparence, une image derrière laquelle se devinait à chaque instant le périple de l'homme en marche vers le tombeau: la *Winterreise* était le sinistre voyage de la vie, dans le silence glacial d'un Au-delà aussi indifférent que les passants du *Leiermann*, sous le ciel rougeoyant où l'homme peint son propre image<sup>3</sup> [16, p.109].

One year after Müller added 2 other poems following his metaphysical impulse. It was published under the title of *Gedichte aus den hinterlassenen Papieren eines reisenden Waldhornisten* (pp.75-108). And so, in 1969, Chailley concluded that the cycle *Winterreise* was not at all homogeneous, but composed by two different levels, elevating towards hugger density, what justifies the open approaches that these contemporary artists undertook before their aesthetic assignment. A few months after Schubert's death, *Winterreise* was published as *Opus 89, D. 911*. Soon it was considered a masterpiece, celebrated in a Viennese Newspaper's review as Cecilia Baumann quotes:

We therefore speak with great pleasure of the present

<sup>3</sup> "...the journey was no longer just that of the ousted suitor; this was no more than an appearance, an image behind which at every moment the journey of the man walking towards the tomb was guessed: the *Winterreise* was the sinister journey of life, in the frozen silence of a Beyond as indifferent as the passers-by at *Leiermann*, under the glowing sky where man paints his own image." (Translation by the author)

work whose publication does honour to the poet, the composer, and the publisher. Schubert has displayed a genius in his interpretation of the poet. He has truly appreciated the emotions expressed in these poems and reproduced them in music which none can sing or hear without being deeply moved [14].



Fig. 9 Michael Borremans' *Winterreise*, 2014, stage performance

Until now, the term *Romanticism* has been slightly mentioned. It was on purpose. The concepts, the words, the metaphors at *Winterreise* and *Winter Journeys* are linked with a Romantic background, in quite an exquisite approach. As it was underlined before, some references to natural elements and locations were used to substitute, for instance the word "death", which is one of the top poetic ideas that characterize the romantic aesthetic thought. Müller did not apply directly the word. He preferred to emphasize the psychological power and literary emotion condensed in related words of strong visual expression such as: "cemetery" {"Totenacker"}, "rest" {"Ruhe"}, "grave" {"Grab"}, "funeral wreath" {"Toten kranz"}, "bier" {"Bahre"}, and "mortally wounded" {"Bin tötlich schwer verletzt"} [15].

The concept of *Journey/ Reise* is composed by different interconnected definitions. In artistic and poetic romantic creations, the journey synthesizes multiple feelings and reflections, both "reason and sensibility", desire and spirituality. Stoicism and pleasures are contained in that no man's land that the journey signifies.

The winter landscape grows wilder as the wanderer travels farther and farther away from the village (society). He follows the will-o'-the-wisp away from pleasant brooks and meadows (where he dreamed of his love) into a forbidding wilderness with "deep rocky chasms" and "snow-capped rocky height" [19, p.45].

The *Winter Journey* is a meaningful symbolic issue, but an unsolved and endless issue to concern about. The aesthetic interest within also concerns its symbolism, not only expressed by the intention found in the keywords or keynotes the authors established but when added by the aesthetic receptions of the public all along the years. It might be difficult how to be certain about what the composer or the poet aimed with their choices and extended meanings: the relation between words and music reach opposed semantic

comprehensions and interpretations. One can ask: Does everybody recognize at the same level a sad or frightening passage, when a loud or soft sound arises, closed or constraint? Does everybody have the knowledge to decode the norms that composers apply in order to symbolize specific moods or emotions? Or are we dealing with something quite non understandable, with such an expressiveness of sounds that psychologically easily release people emotions as the ancient Greeks knew about?

H. Lowen Marshall underlines the subject, when discoursing about the Lied – *Frozen Tears*:

But when Schubert in *Gefrorene Tränen* begins the prelude with soft, detached chords, along with accents in strategic places, the over-all effect of which almost forces one to envision frozen drops of water falling to the ground, and when he then continues this in the accompaniment as the voice sings of frozen drops creeping down the wanderer's cheek, he is going beyond a mere accompaniment and is symbolizing through his accompaniment the thoughts expressed in the text [16].

Maybe the passionate effect of the singer performing on stage, the outcome of his overwhelming voice in a visual moving scenery leads to its crucial outcome. The whole environment increases reactions and passions towards a highest compulsive adherence. Maybe, all along these centuries, although the known differences in society, people still feel the pursued drama - loneliness, nostalgia, delusion and melancholy - with quite similar intensity (and urge).



Fig. 10 William Kentridge, *Winterreise*, 2015, stage performance

The traveller's saga at *Winterreise* is quite timeless. On the other hand, the presence of the pianist and the singer on stage, the way the words and the notes sound like, will always move us, if we let ourselves go - *catharsis*. This journey is an imaginary one. The traveler did not prepare his journey, he left the place. It is an inner journey, either it is a fake one or not. He does not intend to gain new memories during this journey, he wants to forget. The conditions that involve him will not be there again, because nobody swims twice in the same water flow, the same river, as Heraclitus told us. The world where the traveler was caught, is an imaginary and abstract one, it's a frail image, as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. So, why should the traveler bother to recall his previous reality...or

not? He wants to lose his sentimental references and self-remembrances.

The Winter Journey's traveller was not concerned about the presence of remains (either material or immaterial), that might be shared with other people after the journey. He was driven by inner meaning of the journey in itself. He was concerned and obsessed by his present-time-to-be; he was longing for the length and endurance. He did not aimed future, only what was developed in each instant of its longing - adding feelings one close to another. The traveller did not think about returning, exclusively in the process he was ongoing.

We know that winter is the season that lasts an endless time. Winter is an anthropophagic season that would dissolve the traveller identity in the snow. These ideas are powerful projections of what might have happened to the traveller. It reminds the real situation decided by Swiss poet Robert Walser [17], that tragically choose his fate. In a cold winter night, he kept on walking with no destiny until he collapsed. The next morning, he was found dead, lying in the snow.

During almost two centuries, different authors have been celebrating, with multiple purposes the aesthetic and philosophic Saga of *Winterreise*. As we tried to carry out along this paper, let's notice that the mentioned authors after Schubert and Müller's Saga knew how to endorse, twist and follow the original *journey*, but enriched by their own (inner) time and artistic fate.

That's a timeless consciousness of feelings and decisions that rises from the dramatic sequence of *Winterreise*, one of the supreme aesthetic journey.

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