Winterreise is a ballet for 12 dancers that keeps the original title of Franz Schubert's most famous Lieder cycle, following the images conjured up by Wilhelm Müller's poem: its romantic impressionism, the emotions and the feelings it conveys. Its dramatic and choreographic basis is the idea of a long act of suicide in slow motion. A man wishing to die lets himself be carried on a winter journey: everything he sees and everything he encounters leads him towards that fate, caused by a lost love. No single dancer, however, plays the part of the solitary traveller; actually, solos and duets express the ever-changing facets of his personality and the varying ways in which he relates to others, as interpreted by different performers.

The traveller is a man, but it could be Schubert himself, his female side or even a woman. The ballet's drama and choreography allow for this change in gender from male to female. Even more: following the thread of ambiguity, the death towards which the traveller is moving could even be imaginary, or else coincide with the petite mort (the French for orgasm), i.e. the search for ultimate pleasure.

The ballet’s atmosphere as well as the set and light design and the costumes are steeped in romantic melancholy, where the voluptuousness of suffering is accompanied by the idea of death as a pleasure. The journey is dominated by black, but as in Müller’s poem, hope and light, albeit slight, do emerge. On stage, there is a progression leading from the darkest colours to romantic shades and half-shades (in the finale). The appearance of colour should be interpreted as a kind of mirage, as when a traveller crossing the desert fancies he sees an oasis and rejoices in the illusion of being saved. Following Schubert’s musical language, so rich in rhythmical subtlety, the protagonist and his various incarnations embodied by the other dancers come together to create an unreal possibility of salvation. Thus he is able to proceed on his journey, but any progress is false: the traveller is certainly returning towards his despair.

(Traduzione di Chris Owen)