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Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies

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After a period of relative neglect, the question of how musical meaning can be conceived, assessed, and described has begun to attract renewed interest. Semiotics has been the basis of several recent approaches,[1] while some aspects of philosophical aesthetics have suggested others.[2] The model for the present approach is not aesthetics, nor even semiotics save in the most general sense, but an area of study called narratology, which inhabits both literary criticism (Roland Barthes and Jonathan Culler) and philosophy of history (R. G. Collingwood, Paul Veyne, and Paul Ricoeur).[3] Narratology deals with ways of understanding units larger than sentences, and deals with this in a less rigorous, systematic way than semiotics. While it does require confirmation of inter-subjective validity in that it must persuade, it does not claim the objective verifiability that we associate with science. The present approach is deductive, not inductive: its goal is better to understand made objects. It is subjective in that it depends on the education, intuition, and talent of the individual critic-interpreter. As such it may be seen as a branch of hermeneutics.

[1]For a recent examination of the field, see Jean-Jacques Nattiez, _Musicologie générale et sémiologie_ (Paris, 1987).

[2]See my summary of recent essays in Anthony Newcomb, "Sound and Feeling," _Critical Inquiry_ 10 (1984), 614–43.

[3]See Roland Barthes, _S/Z_ (Paris, 1970); Jonathan Culler, _Structuralist Poetics_ (Ithaca, N. Y., 1975); R. G. Collingwood, _The Idea of History_, ed. T. M. Knox (Oxford, 1956); Paul Veyne, _Comment on écrit l'histoire_ (Paris, 1971); Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," _Critical Inquiry_ 7 (1980), 169–90 and _Temps et récit_, 3 vols. (Paris, 1983–85).

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Like the hermeneutics of Gadamer and others, the approach outlined here has a crucial historical dimension. Not only is it concerned with conventions in their historical context; it is also concerned with evidence as to how they were understood in their own era—not as a limit to how we should understand the music now, but as a source of insight into the operations of a competent listener of that time. Those operations, in dialogue with our current operations, may enrich our techniques of understanding.

I

As an introduction to the narratological approach, let me begin with a general analogy—that between paradigmatic or conventional narrative successions in literature and history on the one hand, and formal types in music on the other. This analogy makes sense, I believe, for two reasons. First, the two represent similar things, in that both can be thought of as a series of functional events in a prescribed order. Second, both are critically or theoretically derived in the same fashion: Seymour Chatman points out that a narrative structure is "a *construct*, . . . a construct of features drawn by narratologists from texts generally agreed to be narratives."[4] Musicologists across the ages (whatever they have called themselves) have proceeded in exactly the same way in order to arrive at the theoretical formulations of such musical formal structures as ritornello, sonata, rounded binary, ternary song form, and so on.

The kind of narrative structure (and the kind of literary model) that seems closest to the musical instance and that provides the best point of departure for the exploration of my analogy is the one first proposed by the Russian Formalist critic Vladimir Propp in his now sixty-year-old study of Russian folktales.[5] Propp studied a closely circumscribed and highly conventionalized body of literature, in which one finds a relatively large number of recurrences of the same structural relations, and in which (to quote a historian of the Russian formalist movement)

"the basic unit of the tale is not the character but his function," and "the sequence of these functions is always the same."[6] A similar situation obtains in the more recent structural studies of Theban myths by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who reduces a diversity of myths to narrative structures determined by a limited number of plot functions and character roles.[7]

Important for my purposes is what such structural studies of narrative have in common. They deduce from a particular body of literature a standard series of functional events in a prescribed order—what one might call a paradigmatic plot. This is not the same thing as a quasi-architectural formal schema, such as ABA, with its patterns of repetition and complementarities. The paradigmatic plot may be a unidirectional unfolding of events, without overt repetition. Nor is it the same as a series of musical sections defined by specific thematic content. The surface content of each individual instance of the series may differ widely. The paradigmatic plot is a series of functions, not necessarily defined by patterns of sectional recurrences or by the specific characters fulfilling the functions.

Much Classical and Romantic music—music from ca. 1720 to 1920—depends in some way on the musical analogue to paradigmatic plots. Especially in the earlier part of this period, a limited number of often-recurring successions governed the structure of music (especially music without text or social function—so-called absolute music) at every level, from phrase to section to movement to cycle of movements.[8] Later in the period, although formal-functional successions were subject to greater distortions, they were still interpreted

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[4]Seymour Chatman, "Reply to Barbara Herrnstein Smith," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1981), 804.

[5]Vladimir I. Propp, *Morfologija skaski* (Voprosy poétiki, vol. XII, Leningrad, 1928).

[6]Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism* (New Haven, Conn., 1981 [first published 1955]), p. 250.

[7]See the trenchant critiques of Lévi-Strauss's position in Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven, Conn., 1974), pp. 68–74; and Harold S. Powers, "Language Models and Musical Analysis," *Ethnomusicology* 24 (1980), 16–22. Lévi-Strauss's theories were originally published in "The Structural Study of Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 68 (1955), 428–44.

[8]See, for example, Ian Bent on Koch's (1782–93) and Momigny's (1803–06) functional understanding of the construction of everything from individual phrases to entire movements, "Analysis," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 344–45.

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against the same relatively limited number of conventional successions.[9]

It cannot be denied that, as the nineteenth century evolved, the importance of thematic character and transformation grew greatly as well. The role of theme in musical narrative—in some ways analogous to that of character in verbal narrative, in some ways not—is fundamental to any discussion of musical narrative as a whole, but it cannot be included in an essay of this size, which focusses on matters of plot.

Pioneering structural studies of paradigmatic plots in verbal narratives, such as those of Propp or Lévi-Strauss, tended not to be concerned with an aspect of plot that is particularly crucial to music: the temporal aspect of the perceiver's activity as he proceeds through the unrolling series. In dealing with this aspect of perception as applied to music, the narratological methods sketched in recent years by Jonathan Culler and developed especially by Paul Ricoeur seem particularly promising.[10] The study and typology of paradigmatic plots should concern itself, in Culler's words, with "some explanation of the way in which plots are built up from the actions and incidents that the reader encounters."[11] The individual series of events, then, becomes a coherent story to the extent that we interpret its events according to sets of relatively conventional narrative paradigms. To quote Ricoeur, "a story is made out of events to the extent that a plot makes events into a story. . . . Following a story is understanding the successive actions, thoughts, and feelings in question insofar as they present a certain directedness. . . . We reply to [the development of] the story with expectations concerning the outcome and the completion of the entire [implied] process."[12]

The aspect of understanding that we invoke in thus "following a story" is what Ricoeur calls

the "configurational dimension"; to it is opposed the "episodic dimension."

Every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological, and the other non-chronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events.

The basic aesthetic activity of "following a story" variously confronts and combines both sequence and pattern in a temporal dialectic that not only reckons with time but recollects it. This dialectic is "implied in the basic operation of eliciting a configuration from a succession."[13]

In what Ricoeur calls following a story, then, the reader or listener shifts frequently back and forth between, on the one hand, the actions, incidents, or events that he perceives as he reckons with passing time and, on the other, a fund of patterns or configurations into which these events could fit. This second part of the activity is a version of Ernst Gombrich's matching of perceived visual image to a pre-existent repertoire of visual schemas present in the viewer's mind, as developed in *Art and Illusion*.[14] It also seems to be what Barthes is describing in his discussion, in *S/Z*, of how a *lexie* is identified and placed as a unit of code, which is a catalog of these units.[15] The units themselves are fragments of past experience, that which has been already read, seen, done, lived. In Barthes's view the codes group together these units, or *lexies*. The grouping of units into successions of events happens under what Barthes calls the proairetic code. Barthes, too, comments that the typology within this code is neither very detailed nor very systematic: "Its only logic is that of the 'already-done' or 'already-read'."[16]

The stress that Barthes lays on the reader's appeal to the already-read or already-heard corresponds to the activity of the listener to music, as he isolates the *lexie* (which corresponds, in

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[9]See ibid., p. 351 on A. B. Marx's idea (1837–47) of "certain principal forms" from which are derived "certain compound or composite forms which are made up of these or variations of them" (Marx's words). For a fuller exposition of the explicit tension in early nineteenth-century theory between conventional formal successions and their deflection for the purpose of achieving depth of emotional content, see Thomas Grey, *Aesthetic Premises of Music Criticism, ca. 1825–1855* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1987), ch. 2.

[10]See n. 3 above.

[11]*Structuralist Poetics*, p. 219.

[12]"Narrative Time," 171 and 174.

[13]Ibid., 178.

[14](Princeton, 1960).

[15]See especially pp. 16–21 of the English translation: Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1974).

[16]*S/Z*, sections VII, X, XI.

all its vagueness, to the musical motive or phrase) and matches the successions of these *lexies* with what he has heard before, in order to see where they may fit in various patterns or paradigms of his proairetic code. It corresponds to this activity, that is, save that the proairetic code of the listener includes far fewer terms and is far less difficult to typify than that of Barthes's reader. This is true even of the best listener and even in the nineteenth century, when the large-scale structures of music begin to become looser and more varied. Nonetheless, establishing the typology of musical plots and musical *lexies* is a task that remains to be done.

The two general questions that arise are: first, what are the codes, or conventions, by which we isolate musical events as discrete identities; and, second, what are the codes or conventions by which we locate them in a paradigmatic series of events, pre-existent in our minds and drawn from past experience? This second question leads to many more specific ones. How many paradigmatic plot structures do we classify—how many under "sonata form," for example? How do we identify or define (deductively) the events fulfilling the relevant functions in the various paradigmatic plot structures? For example, is there, in isolation (but within a given style), a difference between a first theme, a transitional passage, a second theme, a closing theme, which enables us to propose a place for the musical event we are hearing in a particular series of events, and hence to interpret the context around that event accordingly? Do beginning strategies or transitional strategies differ in rondos and sonatas?

To return for a moment to Lévi-Strauss, clearly the proper analogies to his structural charts of Theban myths are not polyphonic scores (as he would have it) but the formal diagrams in music appreciation text books, with their series of functional events.[17] But these formal diagrams never question how we identify a particular stretch of music as having a particular function in a particular series. For them the series is given. They do not ask which beginning, or transitional, or closing strategies are appropriate to, and hence signal, certain places in certain kinds of structures. A careful formula-

tion of narrative paradigms in music would have to do this. The result would define an important component of our listening to at least nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music, where the structures are mixed, or hybrid. This, incidentally, would provide a set of structural topoi analogous to the referential or semantic ones that Constantin Floros has been working out in his extensive study of Mahler.[18]

The thrust of this abstract-theoretical introduction has been that in instrumental music one can see musical events as tracing, or implying at any given moment, a paradigmatic plot— in the sense of a conventional succession of functional events. The question then becomes: how does the composer handle this narrative; what is the nature of the interaction between paradigmatic plot and succession of events in the individual movement or piece? This issue is not purely formal-structural. It might be seen as going to the very heart of musical meaning, which lies in modes of continuation. Inasmuch as music may be (and is by many listeners) heard as a mimetic and referential metaphor, the mimesis involved is of modes of continuation, of change and potential.[19] And modes of continuation lie at the very heart of narrativity, whether verbal or musical.

II

Analysis along narratological lines can help illuminate broad distinctions between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music. Robert Schumann was an especially early and influential proponent of a shift in musical narrative strategies. He also offers a specific historical case of the interdependence of verbal narrative and narrative elements in textless instrumental music. It has long been known that Schumann loved and immersed himself in the novels of the early German Romantics, especially those of Novalis, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and, first and foremost, Jean Paul. The response to this, on the part of both musicologists and literary historians, has almost always been to assess the potential influence of the early German Romantics on Schumann by studying what they had to

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[17]Powers (n. 7 above), 16–28, makes a similar point.

[18]Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1977–85), esp. vol. 2 (1977).

[19]Cf. Newcomb, "Sound and Feeling" (cited in n. 2 above).

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say about music (which was plenty). I am proposing that we turn the tables and consider how they practiced their own art, in order to see what influence this may have had on Schumann. After all, Schumann referred often and admiringly not to their theories about music but to their novels. Presumably he was intrigued by some aspect of how they made these things, how they told a story (or avoided doing so), how they connected incident to incident, how they put event together with event to form a larger whole. He was, in short, intrigued by what we would now call their poetics.

One can in fact make a documentary case that Schumann recognized as applicable to music certain narrative strategies in novels of his time, for he constantly described the music he liked best in terms of novels, and he explicitly acknowledged the inspiration that he took for his own compositions from the technique of his favorite novelists. A famous instance is the parallel he drew between *Papillons* and passages from Jean Paul's novel *Flegeljahre*.[20] A few quotations from Schumann's diaries and letters provide further illustration:

Wenn ich Sch[ubert] spiele, so ist mir's, als läs' ich einen komponirten Roman Jean Paul's. . . . Es gibt überhaupt, ausser der Schubert'schen, keine Musik, die so *psychologisch* merkwürdig wäre in dem *Ideengang*- und Verbindung und in den *scheinbar* logischen Sprüngen" (letter of November 1829).[21]

Die Schubertschen Variationen sind das vollendetste romantische Gemälde, ein vollkomner Tonroman— Töne sind höhere Worte. . . . Die Schubertschen Variationen sind überhaupt ein componirter Roman Göthe's, den er noch schreiben *wollte*. . . . Wenn ich Beethovensche Musick höre, so ists, als läse mir jemand Jean Paul vor; Schubert gleicht mehr Novalis, Spohr ist der leibhaftige Ernst Schulze oder der Carl Dolci der Musick (extracts from diary, July 1828).[22]

Schumann was not always consistent on which composers reminded him of which novelists.

On 15 August 1828, he noted a *"Fantasie a la Schubert"* (presumably improvised), going on to say "Schubert ist Jean Paul, Novalis, und Hoffmann in Tönen ausgedruckt."[23]

The tendency to describe his favorite music in terms of his favorite novelists did not disappear as he grew older. In 1840, in the now famous review of Schubert's recently discovered C-Major Symphony, Schumann wrote:

And then the heavenly length of the symphony, like a thick novel in four volumes, perhaps by Jean Paul, who also never wanted to end, and for the best of reasons—in order to allow the reader to continue creating for himself. . . . At first, we may feel a little uneasy because of the . . . charming variety of vital feeling . . . but in the end a delightful impression remains. We feel that the composer is the master of his tale, and that, in time, its connections will become clear. . . . It would not give us or others any pleasure to analyze the separate movements; for to give an idea of the novelistic character that pervades the entire symphony, one would have to reproduce it whole.[24]

Although the concern of this paper is with large-scale formal successions, Schumann's equally famous review of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (1835) can remind us of another important point, namely that musical narrativity operates at the level of phrase and small section as well:

Something still remains to be said about the structure of the individual phrases. The music of our day can offer no example in which meter and rhythm are more freely set to work in symmetrical and asymmetrical combinations than in this one. Hardly ever does consequent correspond to antecedent, or answer to question.

Schumann goes on to compare this irregular style of phrase succession to Jean Paul's prose.[25]

As soon as one takes Schumann seriously about his debt to the narrative poetics of the early Romantic novelists, especially Jean Paul,

[20]See Edward A. Lippman, "Theory and Practice in Schumann's Aesthetics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 17 (1964), 310–45, esp. 314–20.
[21]Letter of 6 November 1829 to Friedrich Wieck, in Robert Schumann, *Jugendbriefe von Robert Schumann. Nach den originalen mitgetheilt von Clara Schumann* (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 82–83.
[22]Robert Schumann, *Tagebücher, Band I, 1827–1838*, ed. Georg Eismann (Leipzig, 1971), pp. 96–97.

[23]Ibid., p. 111.
[24]Quoted from Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker. Eine Auswahl*, ed. Herbert Schulze (Wiesbaden, n.d.), pp. 177–79 (translation mine).
[25]The original review was revised by Schumann for his collected essays of 1854. The above passage is quoted from the translation of the original review given in Hector Berlioz, *Fantastic Symphony*, ed. E. T. Cone (New York, 1971), pp. 231–32.

the similarities between the narrative strategies of novelist and composer leap to the mind. One can easily draw from the secondary literature on Jean Paul well over a page of one-sentence characterizations of his narrative habits that could equally well be applied to Schumann.[26] Most characteristically, Schumann, like Jean Paul, avoids clear linear narrative through a stress on interruption, embedding, digression, and willful reinterpretation of the apparent function of an event (what one might call functional punning). He does so in such a way as to keep us wondering where we are in what sort of pattern—in such a way as to stress the process of narrative interpretation (the listener's part in what Ricoeur calls "following a story").

Janet Levy has pointed out in a recent article that we often implicitly assume teleological values as seats of aesthetic worth and unthinkingly apply them to all music.[27] For some music the metaphor of organic-teleological growth works well—for example, for the Beethoven movement discussed on p. 5 of Levy's article. But it will lead us to call other kinds of music uninteresting and even clumsy. If in the vast majority of instances our unexamined critical criteria for excellence are, as Levy claims (p. 4), "goal-directed processes" (to which are opposed "additive," "episodic," or "non-developmental" ones), and if one section must "lead imperceptibly to" the next across "concealed seams," then we shall have to reject much Schumann out of hand. If the purpose of criticism is to make the best possible argument for a piece—to help us to see where the interest and excellence of a piece lies—then it is not so much analysis that is failing us here, but the critical values underlying it.

Literary critics have long since recognized another kind of poetics, another ideal of narrative in some late eighteenth-century fiction, different from the linear or teleological. Such narratives delight in questioning (or defamiliarizing, to use the term of the Russian formalist critics) paradigmatic plots by standing their conventional situations on their heads.[28] I would maintain that Schumann often delights in doing the same thing.

III

A narrative device beloved of Jean Paul and Schlegel, which is also prominent in both the Schumann cycles of small forms and his continuous larger forms, involves what the Romantic novelists called *Witz*—the faculty by which subtle underlying connections are discovered (or revealed) in a surface of apparent incoherence and extreme discontinuity.[29] The young Schumann, in his phase of strongest infatuation with Jean Paul, seems to have practiced surface discontinuity as a primary principle. He made his larger wholes by juxtaposing highly contrasting smaller units, at least some of which, for various reasons, could not be considered autonomous and had to be heard as fragments. He then often—for example in *Carnaval*—arranged these small units in successions that implied some sort of larger narrative. His truly original idea—one that made this structural method more than just titillating—was to interconnect these seemingly disparate fragments by almost subliminal pitch connections, the musical equivalent of *Witz*. Thus a single little cell of pitches was used to build up melodies

[26]See, for example, Eric A. Blackall, The Novels of the German Romantics (Ithaca, N. Y., 1983), esp. ch. 4; and Norbert Miller, Der empfindsame Erzähler (Munich, 1968). As Miller points out, the model for the German style of which Jean Paul was an example was a certain kind of English novel best exemplified by Sterne's Tristram Shandy, which was translated into German in 1774 and found its most lasting followers in Germany. An excellent summary of the English tradition and of its French followers, in particular Diderot, is Robert Alter's Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975), esp. chs. 1–3. Alter does not discuss the German derivatives.
[27]See Janet M. Levy, "Covert and Casual Values in Recent Writings about Music," Journal of Musicology 5 (1987), 3–27.

[28]See, for example, Eugenio Donato, "Divine Agonies: Of Representation and Narrative in Romantic Poets," Glyph 6 (1979), 90–122. Donato traces in some works of German literature from the 1790s onward what he calls the "problematizing" of the "telos" of a particular paradigmatic plot: the eschatological one also treated by Frank Kermode in The Sense of an Ending (Oxford, 1966). Donato's earliest examples are Hölderlin and Jean Paul. Jean Paul is quoted at length with the assertion that he plays with the topoi of this paradigmatic plot (Donato uses the phrase "privileged narrative") in such a way as to "deny a privileged Telos to history, and hence to problematize the very nature of narrative" (p. 93).
[29]After this paper was written, I was able to read the typescript of the article by John Daverio that appears in this issue. Daverio gives an admirable exposition of the concept of Witz as developed by the early Romantic theorists.

that were superficially different in rhythm, overall melodic contour, character, tempo, and so on. A piece like *Carnaval* applies this technique to the musical analogy to the Romantic fragment. A series of musical fragments is held together by narrative framing devices and by the buried interconnections of *Witz. Carnaval* even uses the self-reflexive narrative device, often found in Jean Paul, of introducing a character from another of his novels, in this case from Schumann's earlier cycle *Papillons*.

In the *Carnaval*-style composition Schumann experimented with the interaction between the ideal of riddling discontinuity and the requirements of larger continuity, as posed in the cycle of small character pieces. Equally, perhaps even more interesting are his experiments with continuous larger forms in pieces such as the first movement of the Fantasy, op. 17. Here the series of events of a movement in sonata-allegro form—the paradigmatic plot invoked—is interrupted by an embedded digression, a slow dream-like vision (even the heading of the section, "Im Legendenton," invokes this character). This embedded tale is subtly—in Jean Paul's sense wittily—connected to a fragment of transitional theme from earlier in the movement, but even after a number of listenings we may not consciously realize that the "Im Legendenton" refers to mm. 33*ff.* earlier in the movement.[30]

More important than the connection is the narrative digression itself (and here my interpretation of the formal situation differs from that of John Daverio in his article in the present issue). Up to this point in the movement one might think one knew where one was in what kind of series or story. A passionate, active first theme had been succeeded by an unstable transition, by a stable lyric second theme, and by a slowing of harmonic motion leading to a repeated cadential sentence in a new key. After this large articulation came a sudden eruption of unstable material, with incomplete refer-

ences to the first theme. So far the succession of events is that of the mid-nineteenth-century sonata form up to and including the beginning of the development.

So is the relative size and weight of events. Thus measure 97 is too early in the development section of a movement of these dimensions (the development begins in m. 82) to represent a recapitulation, as Daverio proposes. To the listener who has recognized Schumann's paradigmatic plot, the arrival of the "Im Legendenton" sounds like an interruption or digression within the development, since no clear retransition and recapitulation has been heard before it. Yet my main point does not depend on this particular interpretation. Whether the "Im Legendenton" is heard as coming in the development or the recapitulation, in either case it deflects one's progress through the standard succession of events and raises a sudden question as to what kind of form—even what genre of piece—one is in. (As is well known, the piece was originally called a Sonata, which was later changed to Fantasy.) For a moment at least, for the duration of this dream vision, ritual logic is replaced by riddle.

After 1840 Schumann turned to writing more traditional genres, for various reasons that need not be rehearsed here. But the narrative habits that he had developed in the 1830s remained with him, affecting these more convention-influenced genres.[31] A compact illustration of this thesis is offered by the last movement of the String Quartet in A, op. 41, no. 3 (1842). The narrative game here is the gradual realization—from the point of view of the listener—of reversal of formal function in the units of a work that seems to declare its plot type extremely clearly, and one whose sectional articulations are unambiguous. The case is particularly striking because thematic manipulation plays almost no role in this movement. There is no thematic transformation or "developing variation." Instead, the movement depends for its effect al-

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[30]In his excellent book on the German novelistic tradition of which Jean Paul forms part, Norbert Miller writes of the "geheime Fäden" that bind Jean Paul's distinctive landscape and dream visions to the narrative context in which they are embedded as seemingly separate things. (See Miller, *Der empfindsame Erzähler*, pp. 303–25, esp. p. 323.)

[31]In a separate article I have developed at some length the way in which these narrative habits transform even what is perhaps his most classicizing, that is, his most *durcherzählte* work—the C-Major Symphony, op. 61. See Anthony Newcomb, "Once More 'Between Absolute and Program Music': Schumann's Second Symphony," this journal 7 (1984), 233–50.

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most exclusively on transformation of the functions of events in a paradigmatic plot.

Before discussing this movement, it is necessary to back up a bit in order to pick up the narrative thread. When we come upon the movement, we are moving from the third to the fourth movement in a four-movement sonata-cycle in A major. In terms of the large-scale paradigmatic plots for such cycles, this situation suggests that we are about to hear perhaps a variation set, more likely a movement in sonata form or a rondo. As the movement begins, its opening theme presents itself with the rhythmic vigor, the straightforward homophony, and the chunky phrase-structure of a rondo tune. These signals as to plot paradigm seem confirmed by the move without transition to a sharply contrasting second thematic unit. At this point the listener may well say: fine, a rondo finale—apparently a rather straightforwardly sectional one.

A typical late eighteenth-century example of this musical plot paradigm would be the last movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in C Minor, op. 18, no. 4. The individual sections are tuneful, clearly formed, and clearly articulated one from the other. The principal theme is a closed, rounded-binary tune whose first section is an antecedent-consequent phrase pair, and whose structurally unaltered recurrences in the tonic dominate the movement. The first episode is similarly structured, if slightly larger. The second episode is smaller and less clearly structured than either of these, with two repeated sections of only six and eight measures respectively. The principal theme begins and ends in the tonic; the episodes are in other keys. As we hear the beginning of Schumann's last movement, its above-mentioned elements seem to signal that we are entering into a similar paradigmatic plot.[32]

But already there is something wrong. Let us return to the temporal situation at the beginning of the movement—to our place in a series of musical events.

We have come from a sizeable, weighty, late Beethoven-like movement in D major (or perhaps a Mendelssohnian imitation of late Beethoven, as in the Quartets, ops. 12 and 13). According to convention, the principal theme of a rondo is supposed to establish the key of the movement (and, in the case of a finale, reconfirm the key of the piece). Schumann's principal theme does a pretty poor job (ex. 1). Its problems are in both tonal and metrical construction. Although it begins in A major, it ends by returning to D major, the key of the previous movement, inevitably sounding more like V–I in D than I–IV in the new key. And, though its phrasing may be straightforward in one sense—it is clearly articulated in two-measure chunks—the chunks are put together strangely. They are seven in number, and they do not cohere into a normal periodic or harmonic structure. They are additive, paratactic.[33] They give the impression of a patchwork quilt rather than of a firmly stitched tonal fabric, even of a quilt with a minimum of stitching between the patches. In numerous repetitions of the theme, the patches—that is, the two-measure chunks—remain inviolate, and all but the second of them is always repeated if it is stated at all, which emphasizes the self-contained nature of each patch. But the succession and number of the patches, and the pitch relations between them at points of juncture—these things change often.

Such is the principal theme, or refrain. In a sense one might interpret this curious refrain as embodying in riddling (or punning) ways the traditional, organic idea that a movement is, or should be, contained in its premise. For the movement, like the refrain, is going to be made of separate, clearly articulated chunks, which, though bound to each other (and to other movements of the piece) by *geheime Fäden*,[34] will on the surface be juxtaposed in additive fashion with a minimum of linking transition. Against this clarity of articulation is placed a puzzling perversity in the handling of the paradigmatic plot to which appeal is made at the outset (i.e., the rondo). Here again the refrain may be seen as reflecting the whole, since its components are standard to the point of banality, but their relationship to each

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[32]Hans Kohlhase (*Die Kammermusik Robert Schumanns* [Hamburg, 1979] vol. 1, pp. 156*ff.*) quotes Schumann's dissatisfaction in various reviews with the lack of seriousness and the looseness of the normal rondo. To give but a single instance (from 1838, concerning a string quartet of W. H. Veit):

Der letzte Satz möchte mich am wenigsten befriedigen. Ich weiss, auch die besten Meister schliessen ähnlich, ich meine in lustiger Rondoweise. Hätte ich

aber ein Werk mit Kraft und Ernst angefasst, so wünschte ich es auch im ähnlichen Sinn geschlossen.

The last movement of op. 41, no. 3, together with those of the Piano Quartet and Quintet and of the Second Symphony, show Schumann working toward a weightier, more serious rondo finale.

[33]Cf. Miller, *Der empfindsame Erzähler*, pp. 320*ff.*, on this characteristic in Jean Paul's prose.

[34]The phrase is Miller's (see n. 30 above).

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Example 1

other is not. In both refrain and movement as a whole, the functions of the successive events turn out to be not what they seemed to be when first encountered, and not what they should be according to the paradigmatic plot.

This may begin to dawn on us during the first contrasting episode, which has a more stable metrical structure and a more normal formal schema than the refrain (it is made up of an *a* phrase of four measures followed by a varied repetition, a *b* phrase of four measures, and a return of *a*—in a different key, however). This first episode also begins to suggest the expected tonic (expected because it is the tonic of the four-movement cycle) by a move from A major to E major.

A straight repetition of the refrain follows, dropping a fifth from beginning to end, as before, but now beginning in E and ending in A. Again without transition comes a new contrasting episode. This one has an even more normal rounded binary structure, with

a repeated *a* phrase of four measures (now in antecedent-consequent structure), a *b* phrase of the same structure and length, and a varied repetition of *a*. That this is also the first section that has ended in the same key as it began (F♯ minor) increases its impression of stability and weight. There follows just the opening and closing phrase of the refrain—which, here as in the initial statement, are identical but in different keys, first in F♯ minor and then in A major.

The important point here is that the harmonic and metrical construction of the so-called episodes is considerably more stable than that of the refrain. The disparity becomes progressively greater with each successive episode. As one hears this music, one has to keep asking: what is the main theme here; what key are we in?

This play with function and succession comes to a climax with the next episode, labeled "Quasi Trio," as if to compound the generic riddle—a trio is not normally an episode in a rondo. Yet this episode does

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Example 2

indeed have the double-drone rustic sound and the tonally stable, periodically balanced structure of many a trio in classical symphonies. In fact, this Quasi Trio is a sizeable, tonally stable, rounded binary form in eight-measure phrases, both of whose sections are repeated and end in the same key, and whose second (*ba'*) section strongly articulates the return to the local tonic at *a'* by preceding it with an eight-measure dominant pedal. The whole Quasi Trio is thirty-two measures long (not counting repetitions), over twice the length of any previous section.

In size and in metrical and harmonic structure, this is much the strongest, weightiest, and most stable thematic presence so far. Yet in the succession of functional events, it is just the third episode. And it is in F major (I hesitate to say the key of ♭VI, since the tonic key of the movement can scarcely be said to be well stabilized as yet). After the Quasi Trio comes a complete refrain, which, because of an unobtrusive change at the joint between its fifth and sixth phrases, for the first time ends in the same key in which it began. The key is still F.

At this point (m. 127) the initial series begins again, starting from the first episode, as before moving up a fifth (C major to G major), followed as before by the refrain, moving down a fifth (G major to C major), then by the second episode (m. 161), as before stable in one key (A minor). The refrain then begins again (m. 177), but here, for the first time in the entire movement, the initial two-measure chunk is not repeated. It is instead immediately sequenced up. Then, again for the first time in the movement, the chunk is broken up and varied internally instead of at its point of juncture with others. The music drives to a half cadence in E (m. 183), which arrival is given extraordinary prominence by these simple and striking departures from previous uniform procedure (ex. 2).

What does this important articulative gesture announce? A return of the Quasi Trio episode, beginning in E major. The *b* section of the Quasi Trio is then changed (mm. 208*ff.*) in order to place the big dominant pedal on V of A, instead of V of E. This dominant pedal is reinforced even beyond its first occurrence, providing the strongest dominant preparation of the piece, which announces the emphatic arrival on A major and the confirmation of the tonic both of the movement and of the entire four-movement cycle. Yet thematically this crucial structural moment coincides with the return to the *a'* section of the *aba'* Quasi Trio. The refrain then begins again, but is once again broken up into motives to make a scampering coda (mm. 234*ff.*).

In sum, although we soon identify the movement as a rondo—by convention it should be, and by signal it seems to be at the outset—we must deal with a growing paradox as we proceed through the movement. That the refrain is additive in structure and tonally open-ended, and that it recurs in constantly different forms and on different degrees completely alters the normal relation between function and succession of events in a rondo. The returns of the refrain are here not the center and locus of stability. They are instead the intermediaries, the transitions between the episodes, which reveal themselves increasingly clearly as the islands of stability between the recurrences of a forward-pushing, unstable, transitional refrain. We finally realize where we will come out only after that emphatic return to A major within the

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third episode, the Quasi Trio. In the process of reinterpretation, we are forced to accept a complete reversal of function within what is superficially a normal, extremely clearly articulated, rondo-like succession of events.

In some sense, the extreme clarity with which the paradigmatic plot of the rondo type is announced at the outset of the movement can now be understood as part of Schumann's point—as the laying bare of the conventions of the rondo scheme in order to turn them upside down. One of the earliest theorists of narrative poetics, the Russian Formalist critic Victor Shklovsky, held Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* to be the touchstone of the novelists' art. He did so because Sterne laid bare conventional narrative schemes in order to mock them and turn them on their heads. In so doing, Sterne not only called attention to the artful, nonrealistic side of narrative, he also "defamiliarized" (to use Shklovsky's word) narrative conventions and thereby gave them back some

of their original power. In this curious finale, Schumann has done something of the kind with the paradigmatic rondo. The attentive listener is forced to move beyond static recognition of formal schemata to dynamic questioning of formal procedures.

The problematization of Classical form at the hands of late Beethoven, Schumann, Liszt, Wagner, Mahler, and the like marks one of the deepest differences between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music. This problematization is in turn one of the principal causes of the increasingly important narrative aspect in nineteenth-century instrumental music. It forces the listener to engage in the fundamental narrative activity that Ricoeur calls "following a story," matching successions of musical events against known configurations, in order both to forge an understanding of what one has heard and to make predictions of possible continuations.

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