cation of reference which seems to tear the work, at least momentarily, away from any possible outside reality: it becomes a fragment, a complete form ripped from a larger context. Unlike music, language always appears to have a reference outside itself. The musical inspiration of much Romantic literature is betrayed by the terminology of the period: in 1811 E. T. A. Hoffmann asserted that the first Romantic composers were Haydn and Mozart. This is a reasonable claim when we remember that one of the ideals of Romantic art was the creation of a coherent world which does not depend on reality or simply reflect it, but runs parallel to it: the independence of a work of art, music, or literature may be legitimately thought of as a form of Romantic alienation. Yet for most of the important works of what is generally considered Romantic style today, the independence of the work is never clear-cut but always ambiguous, even compromised.

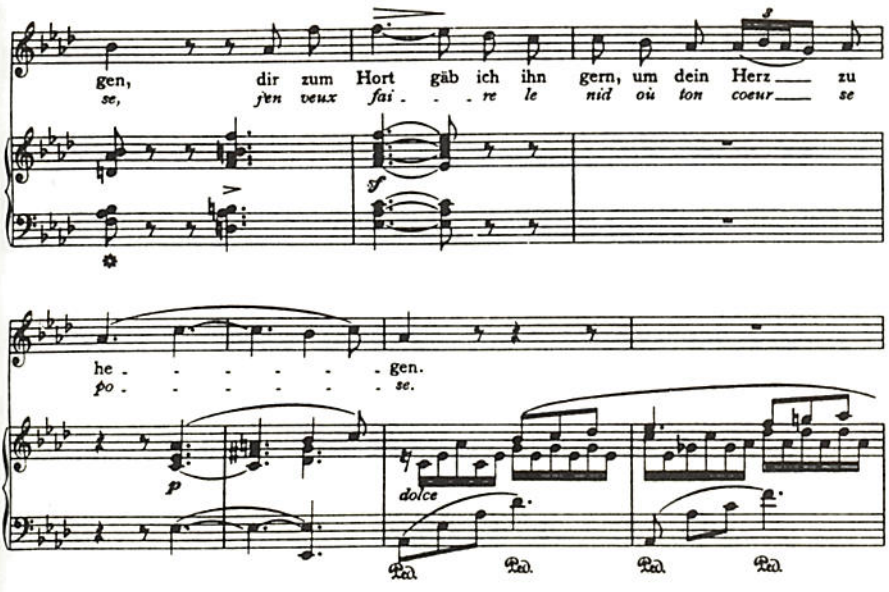
Tieck's *Puss-in-Boots (Der gestiefelte Kater)* of 1797, for example, incorporates what are apparently members of the public into the play, and when one of them remarks, "The play itself seems to be a play within a play," we may reflect that what we see is a play within a play within a play, like a set of Chinese boxes. "Tell me," the King says to Prince Nathaenael von Malinski, "How do you speak our language so fluently, since you live so far away?" The prince replies, "Be quiet, or the audience will notice that there is something unnatural." These tricks are derived from the Baroque drama, above all the works of Jonson and of Beaumont and Fletcher (acknowledged by Tieck as models), where the allusions to the stage are as frequent as they are in Shakespeare and Calderón. In his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, however, Walter Benjamin observed that the Romantic revival of these deliberate destructions of stage illusion have a new purpose: in the Baroque they served to show that life is an illusion, like a play; in the Romantic period they attempt to give a new status to the work, to persuade us that art is real life. This is a pretension to which no previous age aspired, but it is revealed by even the smallest details of the most original works. "More in my next letter" *(Nächstens mehr)* are the last words of Friedrich Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion*, and we conclude that the book is to continue indefinitely into a reality beyond the last page, as the first song of the *Dichterliebe* extends into an undefined future.

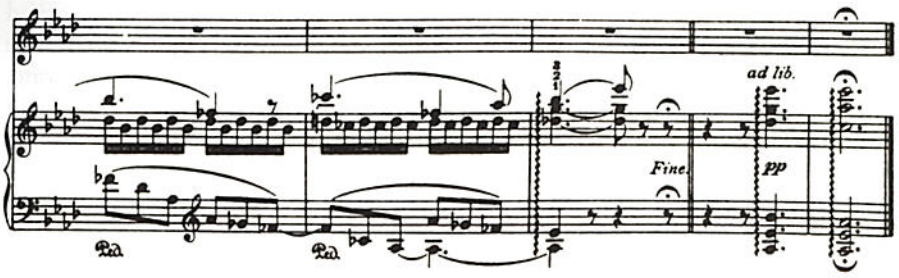
Experimental endings and cyclical forms

The extraordinary stylistic changes of late eighteenth-century music may have provided much of the inspiration for the literature of the turn of the century, but the literary forms that resulted were deeply eccentric. It was these works—paradoxical, anticlassical, often with startlingly unbalanced proportions—which in turn influenced the music of the generation of composers that followed. The most clearly affected by literature and art were Schumann,

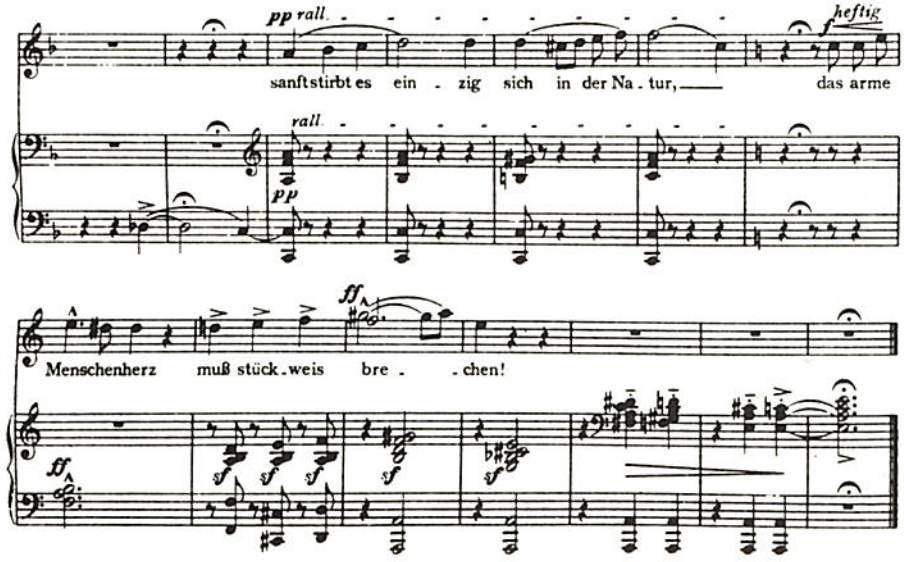
Berlioz, and Liszt, but neither Mendelssohn nor Chopin remained untouched by literary developments, like the revival of Celtic and medieval poetry, as the overtures of Mendelssohn and the Ballades of Chopin explicitly demonstrate. With Chopin, however, we must not look for a specific literary work as a narrative model but for a new tone, a new atmosphere and new structures: the literary influence does not result in a program; the music does not refer beyond itself. Just as poets and painters had attempted to recreate with words and paint the freedom and the abstract power of music, so the generation of musicians born around 1810 tried to capture the originality of form and the exotic atmosphere of the literature and art they had grown up with. The appearance of the Fragment in its most obvious form—a piece that begins in the middle or does not have a proper grammatical end—is only the simplest example of the new spirit of experiment, and the way it breaks down the established conceptions of what a work of music ought to be relates it to the major stylistic developments of the time.

The opening song of the *Dichterliebe* is not the only example of an independent piece that ends with the most naive form of the Fragment, a simple dissonance like a dominant seventh chord. One of the independent sections of Berlioz's *Lélio* is rounded off in the same way. Liszt's setting of Victor Hugo's "S'il est un charmant gazon," composed in 1844, has a lovely inconclusive ending with a dominant seventh chord over a tonic pedal. When Liszt published it in 1860, he added another optional two-bar cadence for the pianists frightened by the fragment:



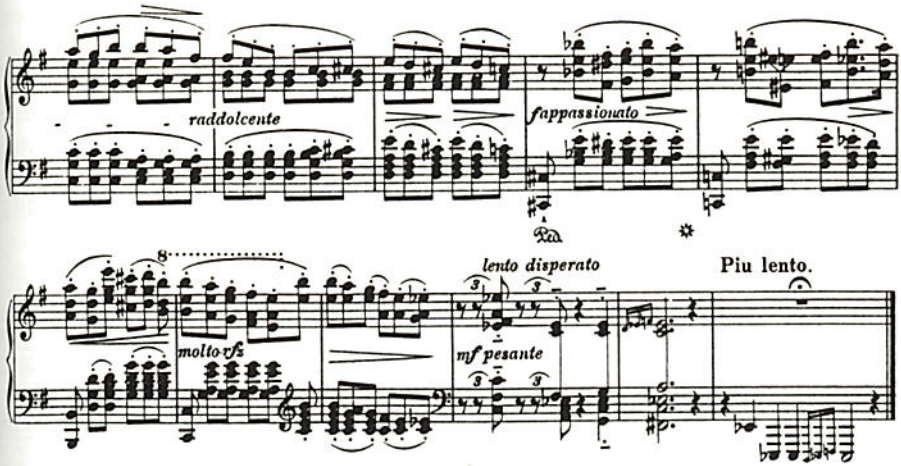


Another song written a year earlier, "Ich möchte hingehen" on a poem by Georg Herwegh, ends with a tonic chord, indeed, but approaches it with little sense of cadence and undercuts the final chord by removing the fundamental bass note and leaving an emphatic 6/4 chord:



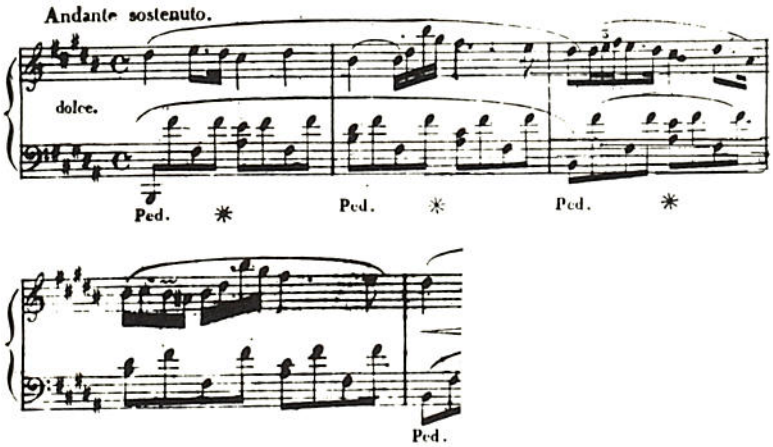
This fragment has great power, and the conclusion is justified by the final verse, "The poor heart of man must break in pieces."

The beautiful early version of *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* of 1834 ends with Liszt's favorite diminished seventh chord:



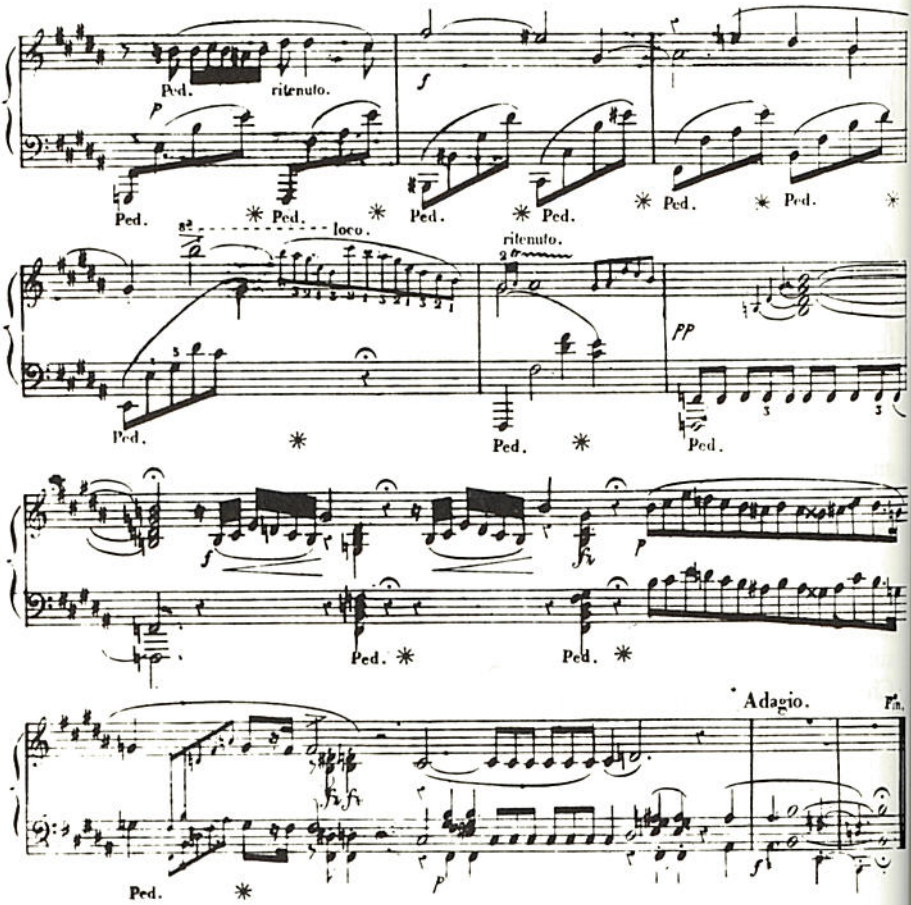
and there is a similar ending to the austere last version published in 1883 for baritone of Petrarch's sonnet no. 104.[10] Liszt was, however, unusual in remaining faithful throughout his life to the early Romantic forms and to their spirit.

It would be simplistic to limit a discussion of the Fragment to pieces with inconclusive final chords. The concept was capable of broader interpretation, and even the final cadence could be a tonic triad and still convey a sense of subtly opening up the ending. The Nocturne in B Major, op. 32, no. 1, by Chopin begins unpretentiously with a lovely two-bar phrase, repeated at once and prettily decorated:



10. Renumbered sonnet 90.

This does not allow one to suspect the final page:



The increased passion is only a partial preparation for the astonishing operatic recitative that follows, which seems both unprovoked and satisfying, as it completes without resolving. Chopin often placed the climax near the end, but here the climax takes place after the nocturne is strictly over. Previously Schubert had also experimented with minor endings to pieces in the major mode (although in this nocturne the final chord is not exactly minor, as the triad is removed to leave only an octave tonic still sounding).

The literary prestige of the Fragment accounts for the popularity of sets of musical miniatures in the early nineteenth century, but it remained for Chopin and Schumann to exploit the full possibilities of the miniature. Schumann's piano cycles, like *Carnaval* and the *Davidsbündlertänze,* are based on the recurrence of the same motifs throughout the work. The precursors of this technique are the Baroque suites of dances and of characteristic pieces (the

suites of Handel and the *Ordres* of Couperin, for example), where successive dances often begin with the same motif. Schumann was also clearly influenced by the eighteenth-century variation set, in which a progressive complexity of texture often determines the treatment of the theme (sometimes with a less complex section at the center, as in Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor for Organ). The *Impromptus on a Theme of Clara Wieck*, op. 5, with its free treatment of Clara's theme, prepares the piano cycles to come. In Schumann, however, the order of the pieces is never a simple progression: caprice and imagination play determining roles.

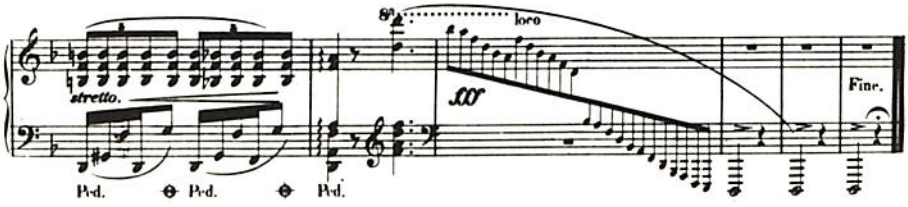
Chopin's Preludes, op. 28, seen from the outside as a simple collection of disparate short pieces, is the most impressive example of a set of tiny Fragments. It is often considered a "cycle"; it achieves unity apparently through the simple addition of one piece to another. It is clear that a complete performance of opus 28 was not thinkable during Chopin's lifetime, either in the salon or in the concert hall; nor is there any evidence that Chopin played the whole set privately for a friend or pupil, as Bach is said to have played the entire first book of the *Well-Tempered Keyboard* for a student. Jeffrey Kallberg has argued eloquently that only individual preludes or small groups of preludes were intended by Chopin as the effective presentation,[11] and this was, indeed, the way that Chopin himself actually performed them. Today's fashion of playing them as an entire set does not allow us fully to appreciate the extraordinary individuality of the single numbers.

Nevertheless, the aesthetics of the fragment would suggest that the opposing demands of the opus as a whole and of each individual prelude are intended to coexist without being resolved. The conception of a unity that transcends any possible mode of presentation is not one that was foreign to the Romantic period—or, indeed, to the Baroque of the early eighteenth century, as (among many other examples) the third part of Bach's *Klavierübung* can attest. The series of chorale-preludes arranged in the order of the text of the ordinary of the mass, preceded by the *St. Anne's* Prelude and followed by the *St. Anne's* Fugue as a frame, is a wonderfully satisfying intellectual form that can have had no relevance for performance at the time, whatever audiences of today might be prepared to accept.

The Preludes of Chopin are modelled on those of the *Well-Tempered Keyboard* in many ways, above all by their purely systematic ordering. Chopin's scheme is as simple as Bach's rising chromatic scale: all the major keys ascending the circle of fifths, each one accompanied by its relative minor mode (that is, C major, A minor, G major, E minor, D major, etc.). Like Bach's first prelude, Chopin's will always be understood as an opening piece. However, unlike Bach's final Prelude and Fugue in B Minor, Chopin's final Prelude in D Minor is conceivable only as an ending—remarkably so, since its last bars

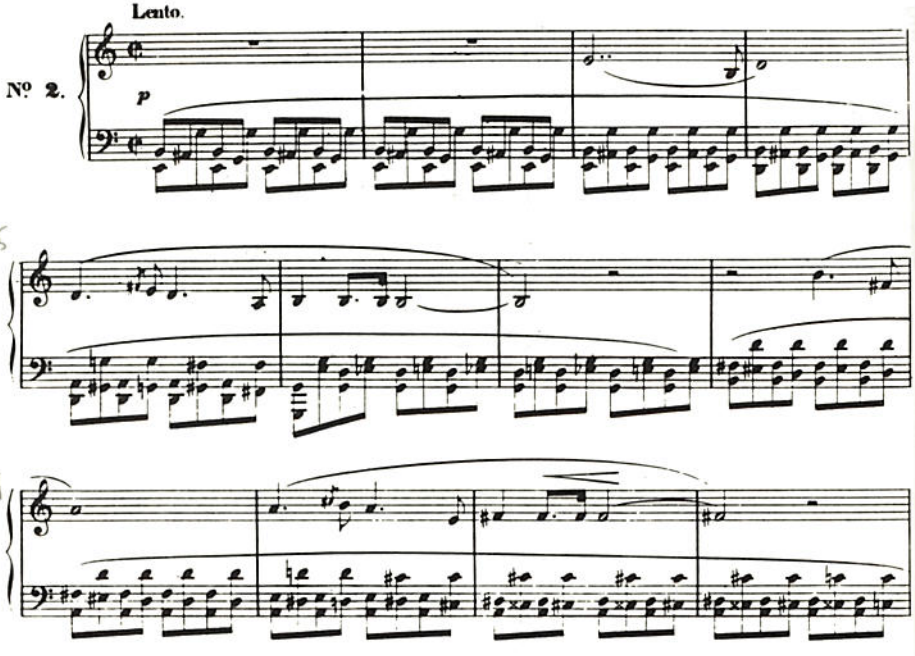
11. Jeffrey Kallberg, "Small 'Forms': In Defence of the Prelude," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge, 1992).

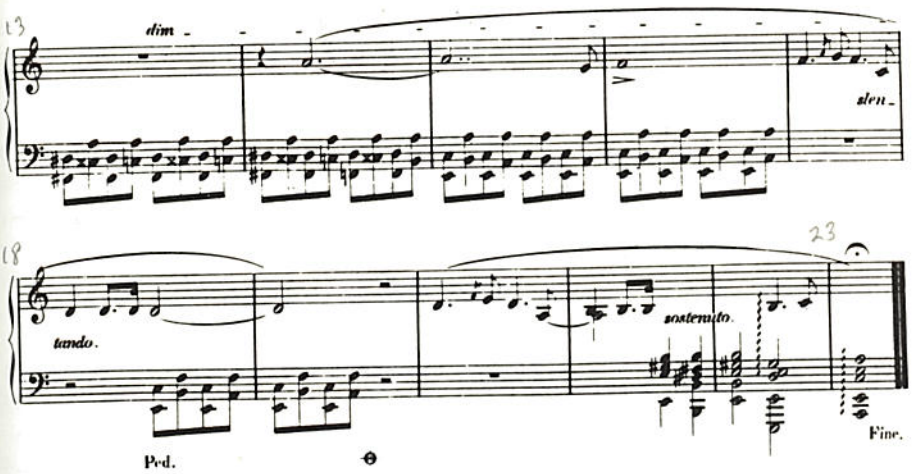
present a sonority that is not fully a closure but seems to project beyond the work:



In addition, the tonal sequence chosen by Chopin is much more satisfactory in terms of successive listening than Bach's chromatic scale. Each prelude is harmonically related to the previous one, and Chopin often exploits this relationship strikingly when he begins a prelude with the last melodic note of the preceding one.

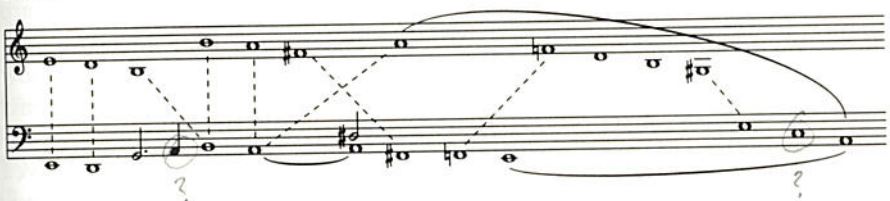
He appears to proclaim this as a kind of manifesto at the very opening of the set, as the second prelude is intelligible above all as a modulation from the final E of the opening prelude to its own A minor cadence:





This affecting, mysterious Fragment consists of four almost symmetrical four-bar melodic phrases, each one framed by interruptions of the accompaniment as in the *Lieder* of Chopin's contemporaries, and this gives an extraordinary flexibility to the rhythm (see chapter 4). Although the opening note of the second phrase is slightly shortened, and that of the third phrase lengthened, the melody is regular, while the interludes of accompaniment give a new rhythmic form which does not affect the melody, seemingly independent. This builds into the prelude the rhythmic freedom generally left to the performer and demonstrates the new identity of composition and realization.

The piece opens with the final E of the first prelude. Much ink has been spilt over the question in which key the second prelude begins: Heinrich Schenker's answer of G major is the most cogent, as that is certainly the first complete cadence, and also the dominant of the preceding C major Prelude. Nevertheless, to Chopin, here as elsewhere, line is more basic than harmony, and he arrives at A minor above all through the two lines of treble and bass, which are partially identical (the parallel octaves are impressive) and partially out of phase:

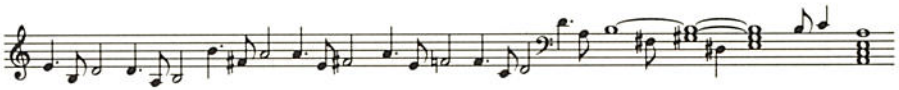


Both treble and bass by the ninth bar descend to the A, which will become the tonic, and the bass remains there briefly instead of going to the expected D,

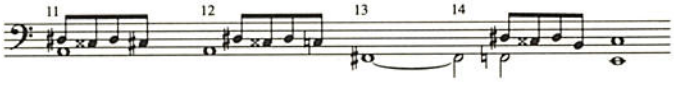
while the melody, in a perfect echo of the first phrase, moves down to F♯. The expressive inner voices remain steady, creating this chord

which remains basically unaltered as treble and bass exchange their notes:

The bass then descends chromatically to the dominant, and the melody impels its motif downward in thirds to the tonic cadence:



Both melody and bass descend essentially from E to E, and transform the meaning of this note from the third of C major to the dominant of A minor; the process is the occasion for the most mysterious poetry, grave and moving. Perhaps the principal element of expression is the exquisite inner-part writing which holds everything together at the crucial moment of transformation:



In passages where the texture and harmony appear most radical and most ambiguous, Chopin's counterpoint (which, as he remarked to Delacroix, was the "logic" of music) is the controlling agent.

Chopin expended great subtlety to ensure a convincing movement from one prelude to the next. It is a technique that he had recently worked out in the Etudes, above all opus 25 (although already in opus 10, the third Etude, in E major, was originally marked to be followed *attacca* by the fourth, in C sharp minor). In the Preludes there is a wonderfully nuanced play of contrast of character and sentiment; two pieces of the same tempo and type never follow each other immediately. A few of the Preludes, certainly, make little sense played as single works: the C sharp Minor Prelude, half mazurka, half improvisation, is too slight, and the F Minor too unaccountably violent played out of context. Others sustain an independent performance with great effect. I think that we must accept that the Preludes are conceived only paradoxically as a whole, and yet that modern performances of the entire set bring out aspects of the work certainly present in, and even integral to, its conception, but which Chopin did not consider essential to its realization in sound.

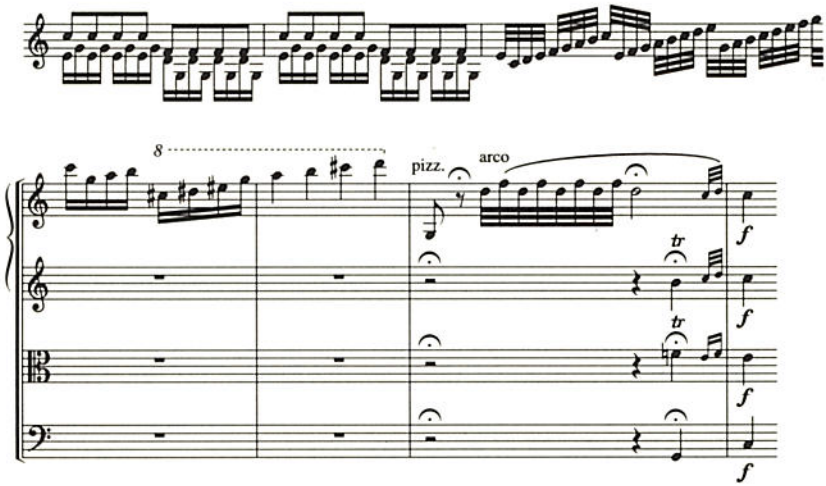
To the extent to which the Preludes are a cycle—that is, a work in which the significance as well as the effectiveness of the individual numbers depends on their place within a larger order—they are the most radical of all the Romantic examples. The unity does not depend upon thematic relationships; there are, in fact, motivic parallels between one prelude and another, but the musical power never depends in any important way upon even a semiconscious awareness of these recurrences (what significance they might have lies largely in defining Chopin's melodic style). There is no harmonic closure to the Preludes; the scheme that ties them together is purely additive, and the last prelude is only affectively, and not tonally, an ending to the whole set of twenty-four. In the sets of short piano pieces by Schumann—the *Papillons,* the *Davidsbündlertänze,* the *Humoresk*—there is, not a specific narrative program, but the suggestion of a program, an implied narrative that cannot be spelled out but that carries the music along and helps to hold the work together. The Preludes, however, imply nothing of the sort; throughout his life, Chopin's outmoded sense of musical decorum always resisted any attempt to impose an explicit nonmusical sense on any of his works.

The Preludes have been compared to the short modulations that pianists of the time used to improvise in order to introduce the tonality of the next piece, but they do not modulate or resemble in any way the improvisations that, when I was a child, I heard Josef Hofmann and Moriz Rosenthal employ in their recitals. In fact, in the strict sense, Chopin's Preludes are not preludes at all: they may certainly be used as brief prefaces to more substantial works, but they are not primarily intended to function that way. The title "prelude," puzzling to some, both acknowledges the debt to Bach—Chopin knew the only way he could rival Bach's famous twenty-four—and asserts the original character of each of Chopin's own twenty-four, at once provisional and beautifully complete. The provisional character of each prelude does not appear well when the piece is used to introduce a different and longer work, but does when it is played on its own or introduces the next prelude of the set. Although inspired by the preludes of Bach, they are more concentrated, more intense, laconic. Like a fragment of Schlegel, each one is a miniature—separate, individual, and complete in itself—that implies and acknowledges a world outside.

Before Chopin and Schumann others had composed miniatures, notably Beethoven and Schubert—although Schubert's are comparatively long-winded: the *Moments musicaux* constitute a beautiful set, but the individual numbers are not strikingly enriched by their context. Several of Beethoven's Bagatelles make little sense or little effect played separately, above all opus 119, no. 10, in A major and no. 2 in C major: their fragmentary quality is a comic effect. Chopin, on the other hand, has wit and irony but little humor, and his Preludes, even the grotesque ones, are never funny; when modest, they are elegant and graceful, and the most eccentric ones are deeply serious.

The comic fragments of Beethoven have the same relation to the poetic

fragments of the next decades that Mozart's use of the whole-tone scale in *A Musical Joke* bears to Debussy's works:



Mozart may have enjoyed the whole-tone scale, but he certainly thought it was funny and out of tune. Those Bagatelles of Beethoven's that are serious, such as opus 119, no. 11, in B flat major, may be played as separate pieces without loss of significance. The last set of his Bagatelles, opus 126, is a true cycle, but the individual pieces are no longer miniatures.

"Cyclical form" is an ambiguous as well as a vague term: it has another meaning in addition to that of a set of apparently independent pieces that must be understood and performed as a whole. Traditionally it also signifies a large work in which an earlier movement reappears as part of a later one. The return of part of the scherzo of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5, in the middle of the finale, is perhaps the most famous example, but it is not the first essay of its kind: that would probably be Haydn's Symphony no. 46 in B Major, where a few phrases of the minuet come back towards the end of the finale. In spite of the examples in Beethoven and Schubert, fewer than a dozen, this remained a relatively infrequent form until the late 1820s, when it became common practice with Mendelssohn and Schumann, and inspired the later attempts by Brahms and Tchaikovsky.

In this sense, cyclical form is not a form at all but the disturbance of an established form. A return is not cyclical if it is required by tradition—if it is expected, in short; a cyclical return must be a surprise. When the accepted form demands a return, then we have a sonata reprise, or a *da capo* aria, or a minuet with trio, or a replaying of the theme at the end of a set of variations. A cyclical form makes an earlier movement intrude on the domain of a later one. It is this dislocation of an accepted form which had such an appeal to the

Romantic composer: it enabled him to use a traditional form but give it a more personal urgency. In a cyclical form the return may be unjustified by traditional formal requirements, but it must nevertheless be justified by the context and by the musical material: it must appear to be not rhetorical but organic. This double aspect—a disruption of a standard form which seems to grow out of the music, to be necessary more for reasons of sensibility and inner development than of tradition—had a natural aptness for an aesthetic of the fragment: the return is both an intruder from outside the new movement and a necessary part of its inner logic.

This is already clear with the earliest examples: it is not the beginning of the minuet that returns in the finale of Haydn's Symphony no. 46 but the second phrase—which closely resembles the main theme of the finale,[12] and indicates a kinship between the two movements. Haydn delivers to us the secret of cyclical form with wit and good humor and with none of the poetic and pretentious seriousness it was later to have: the interruption breaks down the individual movement, but by so doing draws attention to a larger unity.

The same forces are at work in the scherzo's eccentric return in the finale of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5: once again it is not the opening bars of the scherzo that return but the second theme—and it is this theme which clearly recalls to every listener the opening of the first movement. The interruption slightly dislocates the structure of the finale and brings out the relationship between first, third, and fourth movements. Moreover, the return occurs not at the end of the movement but just before the recapitulation. This fulfills an important convention of finales, due most notably to Mozart rather than Haydn, and followed by Beethoven: the use of rondo form, or else the introduction of the characteristics of rondo form into a binary sonata form—in particular, the appearance of a new theme at the subdominant in the central section with the development. The tonic minor, being in the flat direction, can serve as a substitute for the subdominant: the return of the scherzo creates a larger unity, fulfills a traditional structural need, and yet breaks down the individual form unexpectedly, both by the use of material from another movement and by the sudden shift of tempo and meter. It also prepares the recapitulation in the finale in a way that parallels the opening of the movement, as the scherzo was joined to the finale without pause, and the introduction to the finale is repeated at this point.

These "cyclical" interruptions undergo a radical transformation at the hands of the Romantic composer: in the most significant cases they no longer occur after a fermata, bringing the movement to a momentary halt, but are integrated seamlessly into the texture. They are still surprising, as we unexpectedly come upon music from an earlier movement, but the point of junction is cleverly

12. For an analysis of this relationship, see my book, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*, p. 148.