

Disorders

The Romantic fragment and the forms it inspired enabled the artist to face the chaos or the disorder of experience, not by reflecting it, but by leaving a place for it to make a momentary but suggestive appearance within the work. The sense of chaos, its creative role, was seen by some of the early Romantics as essential to modern art. Many of Friedrich Schlegel's notes from the years 1797 to 1802 are speculative fragments (they remained unpublished until recently)¹⁴ on the relation of art and chaos, concerned above all with the most characteristic of modern Romantic forms, the novel (*Roman*). One statement of 1798 is decisive:

Form of the novel a refined artistic chaos.

Roman in der Form ein gebildetes künstliches Chaos.

Somewhat later in 1802, this is extended in summary fashion to contemporary style in general, and relates the sense of chaos to a representation of the organic:

Vegetable = chaotic is the character of the Modern.

Vegetabilisch = chaotisch ist der Charakter der Modernen.

Chaos has become a metaphor for the biological disorder of a nonmechanistic universe, the disorder of everyday experience. It is above all a signal of the problem of representing such a universe within an artistically ordered form.

The chaotic was not the fragmentary (since the Romantic fragment was "complete in itself and separate from the rest of the universe"): Schlegel in fact explicitly opposed them. The opposition was not a perfect one, however, as two notes of 1798 on style betray:

Rhyme must be chaotic, and yet as chaotic with symmetry as possible.
From this can be inferred the system of Romantic meter.

Der Reim muss so chaotisch und doch mit Symmetrie chaotisch sein als möglich. Darin liegt die Deduction des romantischen Sylbenmaasse.

In other words, a rhyme must appear to be a happy accident, not a forced imposition of the poet: yet it imposes a symmetrical order. The combination of chaos and symmetry seemed to grant the Romantic critic of poetry his usual

pleasure of having his cake and eating it too. Schlegel extended this combination to prose as well:

The principle of Romantic prose exactly like that of verse—*symmetry and chaos*, quite according to the old rhetoric; in Boccaccio both are very clearly in synthesis.

Das Princip der romantischen Prosa ganz wie das der Verse—Symmetrie und Chaos, ganz nach der alten Rhetorik; im Boccacaz diese beiden in Synthese sehr deutlich.

The most successful Fragments preserve the clearly defined symmetry and the balance of the traditional forms but allow suggestively for the possibility of chaos, for the eruption of the disorder of life. This prevision acts like the quills of the hedgehog, which both sharpen and blur the perfect definition of the animal's shape.

As Schlegel wrote in the *Athenaeum*:

You can only become a philosopher, not be one. As soon as you think you are one, you stop becoming one.

Man kann nur Philosoph werden, nicht es sein. Sobald man es zu sein glaubt, hört man auf, es zu werden.

Apparently simple, this Fragment is symmetrical, well balanced, and closed in expression—but it invites and even forces the reader to crack it open by speculation and interpretation. Its outward balance demands to be transformed into a more fruitful disorder. The form is closed and rhetorically conventional but the awakened resonance is open.

The technique of the Fragment was, for a brief time, an unstable but successful solution to the problem of introducing the disorder of life into art without compromising the independence and integrity of the work. In music, the Romantic Fragment similarly leaves a place—ambiguous and disconcerting—for an unresolved detail which undermines the symmetry and the conventions of the form without ever quite destroying them. The most famous of Chopin's Fragments is the Prelude in F Major, from opus 28, with its poetic ending on a dominant seventh chord:



4

8

12

16

19

poco ritenuto in tempo.

dim. amorz.

Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦

Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦

Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦

Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦

Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦ Ped. ♦

Fine

It may seem astonishing that the accented E_b at the end does not weaken the tonic chord. On the contrary, the four-times repeated V/I cadence made the last bars absolutely final: the E_b only makes it mysterious—an extraordinary achievement as there is nothing mysterious about the common dominant seventh chord. This is not merely an effect of sonority, although the accent on the E_b makes it ring like a bell: the dissonant note serves to prolong the final chord beyond the confines of the little form.

It could be maintained that in this prelude the ending on a dominant seventh chord does not arrive unprepared. There is a surprisingly heavy frequency of dominant seventh chords in this short prelude (in bars 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 21), and the way the last note in the left hand

delicately alters the sonority in bars 8 and 12 makes them very similar to the final bars. It is true, therefore, that the final chord is prepared, but it is in no way palliated or excused. One might even speak of a shock value unaffected by the passage of a century and a half if the effect were not so lovely and so delicate. But if the E_b does not weaken the final tonic, it does serve to expose that tonic as an artificial symmetry, an arbitrary convention, to suggest a different world of musical experience outside the formal traditions that Chopin's contemporaries knew and that we still largely recognize today. The E_b is clearly an intrusion that enlarges the significance of the form and makes the final tonic chord uncanny. It is an ideal example of the alienation that was the defining characteristic of Romantic style for Novalis: "to make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar."

Quotations and memories

Schumann was even more attached than Chopin to the effect of a note, a phrase, or even a section that seems at first hearing to arrive from outside the form. With "Florestan," the second part of his double self-portrait in *Carnaval*, he made it a part of his signature. Florestan was the extrovert, violent, and capricious side of Schumann's personality, and his portrait is interrupted after the first phrase by a reminiscence of one of Schumann's earliest published works:

PASSIONATO.

Pedale

8 - nu - to leggiero

Adagio

Tempo

16 ri - tenuto

Adagio

Tempo

(Papillon?)