Schumann’s “Im Legendenton” and Friedrich Schlegel’s Arabeske

JOHN DAVERIO

References to Friedrich Schlegel, arguably the chief early Romantic critic/philosopher, are few in discussions of music. Yet Schlegel was an intriguing figure: at once the architect of the theory of Universalpoesie, crusader for the Roman, writer of enigmatic fragments that number in the thousands, and author of Lucinde, a little book of evil repute that is itself a fragment. Perhaps the noted Germanist Erich Heller has described him best, as a “complex simpleton and profoundly prophetic fool.” Less polished and lucid an author than his brother August Wilhelm, and not as anxious to embrace music as Novalis, Tieck, Wackenroder, or Hoffmann, Friedrich Schlegel has been consigned to a passing reference in the introductory chapters of monographs on Romanticism, or to specialized studies by literary scholars. It is true that Schlegel was reluctant to view music as a “progressive” art in the same sense that poetry might aspire to that ideal, while he was certain that music could embody a “sentimental theme,” he was less convinced that this might be cast in a “fantastic form,” his other requisite for the Romantic artwork. Still, he addressed a number of monograms on Romanticism, or to specialized studies by literary scholars. It is true that Schlegel was reluctant to view music as a “progressive” art in the same sense that poetry might aspire to that ideal, while he was certain that music could embody a “sentimental theme,” he was less convinced that this might be cast in a “fantastic form,” his other requisite for the Romantic artwork. Still, he addressed a number of

“Überhaupt hängen die verdammten Dinger so zusammen.”
—Friedrich Schlegel, letter to A. W. Schlegel, March 1798

19th-Century Music XI/2 (Fall 1987). © by the Regents of the University of California.

1Erich Heller, Thomas Mann: The Ironic German [South Bend, Ind., 1958], p. 158.

References to music as a sentimental art which appeals to us where “spiritual feeling” prevails, are numerous in Schlegel’s writings. See
musical issues that are usually associated with the younger generation of Romantics. E. T. A. Hoffmann’s glorification of pure instrumental music (in “Beethovens Instrumentalmusik,” 1813), his association of Romantic opera and the “marvelous” (in “Der Dichter und der Komponist,” 1813–19), Weber’s concerns with the form that German opera should take (expressed in his 1817 review of Hoffmann’s Undine)—all of these points have precedents in Schlegel’s writings.3

I am less concerned here, however, with Schlegel’s thoughts on music than with those aspects of his literary theory that might be useful in assessing the more disruptive qualities of nineteenth-century musical form. We are coming to realize that form remains a perplexing issue in studies of Romantic music because of our tendency to conceptualize it in architectural terms—an analogical mode of thought more appropriate to music of the late eighteenth century. Schlegel supplies us with a painterly analogy better suited to artworks, both literary and musical, of the succeeding century. This essay, then, focusses on a concept that played an important part in the critical ideas that Schlegel began to formulate around the turn of the nineteenth century: the Arabeske [arabesque]. In a limited sense, the arabesque refers to humorous, witty, or sentimental digressions that intentionally disturb the chronological flow of a narrative. But as a total form, the arabesque tempers a seemingly chaotic diversity through a deliberately concealed logical process.

By way of demonstration, this twofold principle is applied here to the first movement of Robert Schumann’s C-Major Fantasy for Piano, op. 17 [revised version, 1838], a seminal work for musical Romanticism, the formal processes of which can be illuminated by turning to Schlegel’s ideas. This choice, however, raises the question of the degree to which Schumann was familiar with Schlegel’s writings. It is certain that he was acquainted with some of Schlegel’s poems, and interestingly enough, with Schubert’s settings of them. The motto which heads the first movement of the Fantasy (“Durch alle Töne tönent / Im bunten Erdentraum / Ein leiser Ton gezogen / Für den der heimlich lauscht”) is the closing quatrains of Schlegel’s Die Gärten, a poem which Schubert set in its entirety [D. 646]. The undulating sextuplet accompanimental figure that runs through Schubert’s setting is called up in the last movement of Schumann’s Fantasy, which, in addition, begins with a variant of the harmonic progression that opens Schubert’s song. The Fantasy finale also evokes another of Schlegel’s Schlegel settings, Der Fluss, D. 693. The opening of this song, in turn, makes melodic reference to Wo die Berge so blau, the second song from Beethoven’s An die ferne Geliebte, the last song of which plays such an important role in the first movement of Schumann’s Fantasy. Thus, the Schlegel motto at the beginning of the Fantasy is not merely a fanciful poetic citation—it is the key to a dense web of musical allusions.5

Of Schumann’s familiarity with Schlegel the critic there is less direct evidence. His own Arabeske, op. 18, for instance, cannot be clearly linked with Schlegel’s critical category.6 Still, it was Friedrich Schlegel who first fashioned the complex of ideas that were to form the philosophical underpinnings of German Romanticism—ideas that were widely disseminated through the Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur (1808–09) of his brother August Wilhelm.7 And although it cannot be

3In an often quoted letter of 9 June 1839, Schumann identified Clara as the “Ton” in the motto. See Jugendsbriefe von Robert Schumann, ed. Clara Schumann (3rd edn. Leipzig, 1898), p. 303. But aren’t there really several “leise Töne” that run through the Fantasy, that point to Beethoven and Schubert as well?
5But cf. n. 48, below.
shown that Schumann was directly influenced by the critical theories of Friedrich Schlegel, we
can be sure that their artistic and intellectual
dispositions revolved about the same spiritual
center.

Charles Rosen has aptly characterized the
Fantasy as “the monument that commemorates
the death of the Classical style.”8 Understand-
ably enough, critical attention has centered
on the first movement, generally
considered a highwater mark in the young
Schumann’s creative handling of the sonata
form.9 The point to which most commentators
have drawn attention, as a sign of Schumann’s
imaginative formal approach, is the evocative
“Im Legendenton,” a self-contained Charakter-
stück in its own right, which Schumann placed
more or less at the midpoint of the movement.
“Im Legendenton” is thus usually designated as
an interlude, or episode that either substitutes
for the more usual development section,10 or
occurs within the developmental process initiated
at the Im Tempo of m. 82.11 For Rosen, the
placement of “Im Legendenton” imparts to the
first movement an overall ternary design some-
what akin to the eighteenth-century da capo
aria.12

In my view, these descriptions of the position
of “Im Legendenton” within the total design are
curiously mistaken. It is misleading to charac-
terize the interlude as part of a development
section, for it is preceded by two clear references
to the opening material in the tonic (mm. 97–
105 and 119–28). In other words, the recapitula-
tion would appear to have begun before it. Like-
wise, a ternary view of the movement is
problematic, for the third form-part (mm.
226ff.) would correspond not to the opening of
the movement, but to the passage beginning at
m. 29. Thus, “Im Legendenton” can only be de-
scribed as an interlude within the recapitula-
tion—a by no means small or insignificant dif-
ference. Although the Im Tempo at m. 82
commences with all the rhetorical posturing
and tonal instability of a development section,
it soon becomes clear that this was just so much
false motion; with the reappearance of a variant
of the opening material at its original pitch level
(m. 97), the recapitulation is already under way.
(It is true that the point of recapitulation is
somewhat understated, as indeed it must be, for
the movement begins, in medias res, over a V9
pedal. Still, the motivic correspondences be-
tween mm. 97–128 and the opening, and more
important, the establishment of C major, make
it clear that m. 97 marks the initiation of the re-
capitulation.) That “Im Legendenton” inter-
rupts the recapitulatory process is further clari-
fied by a simple comparison: the point at
which the recapitulation is resumed following
“Im Legendenton,” m. 226, proceeds from mm.
126–28, where the recapitulation breaks down
just before it, just as m. 29 (with its upbeat) pro-
ceeded from mm. 27–28 in the exposition. The
correspondences are aligned for comparison in
ex. 1.

An awareness of this shift in position—from
developmental interlude to recapitulatory di-
gression—is crucial in understanding the
unique formal process in the first movement of
the Fantasy. Of course, we might view “Im Le-
gendenton” as yet another anomalous feature of
Schumann’s early essays in the sonata form (in
which case this study would rapidly draw to a
close). Or we might attempt an evaluation of
the movement in more positive terms, as a
manifestation of “Romantic form.” Although I
will try to define and develop the second alter-
native, it is not without its problematic aspects.
For how are we to define that ideal form that
Schumann hoped to create when he proclaimed
the piano sonata an outmoded genre: “and this
is, to be sure, in the order of things, for we can-
not repeat the same formulas for another hun-
dred years and at the same time concern our-
selves with fashioning something new?”13 And
if the sonata-allegro is no longer the single for-

9See Amfried Edler, Robert Schumann und seine Zeit
[Laaber, 1982], p. 144; also, the similar assessment in Joan
Chissell, Schumann Piano Music [Seattle, 1972], p. 36.
10See Edler, Schumann, p. 142; Thomas A. Brown, The Aesthet-
ics of Robert Schumann [New York, 1968], p. 157;
Kathleen Dale, “The Piano Music,” in Schumann: A Sym-
posium, ed. Gerald Abraham [London, 1952], p. 47; Ronald
Taylor, Robert Schumann: His Life and Work [New York,
1982], p. 143.
11Chissell, Schumann Piano Music, p. 36.
12Rosen, Classical Style, p. 453.
13Robert Schumann, Gesammelten Schriften [hereafter GS]
[Leipzig, 1914], I, 395. All translations are mine unless oth-
otherwise noted.
mal criterion for movements such as the first of the Fantasy, to what other formal concept can we turn?14 It is here that Schlegel’s Arabeske—the notion through which he projected his views on fantastische Form—might be helpful, in particular in assessing the formal anomalies called up by Schumann’s “Im Legendenton,” and in general, by providing us with a positive statement of Romantic form.

The arabesque was first used as a critical term in Germany during the late eighteenth century, where it was applied to literature by way of its association with the pictorial arts and architecture. Indeed, the period saw a revival of interest in the arabesques of ancient Pompeii—fanciful but symmetrically arranged patterns depicting tenuous, plant-like shapes or fabulous creatures that were used as a framing device to finish off a wall that had a small picture in the middle (see plate 1). Raphael had applied similar decorative paintings, around 1515, to the pillars of the pal loggias. In the early nineteenth century, it was Philipp Otto Runge who attempted to raise the arabesque from a purely ornamental art form to one with serious allegorical implications. In Der kleine Morgen, one of Runge’s several representations of the times of day (see plate 2), the arabesque frame is an integral part of the painting itself. Likewise, the complexly symmetrical arrangement of fantastic figures about a central point marks an attempt to transform ornamental patterning into the very substance of the painting.15

Goethe, in his essay “Von Arabesken”(1789), spoke of “eine willkürliche und geschmackvolle Zusammenstellung der mannigfaltigsten Gegenstände,”16 each of which defining characteristics—arbitrariness, tasteful juxtaposition, infinite variety—was taken up in the critical theories of Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel continued to associate the arabesque and the picturesque,17 but began to apply the term, analogically, to fanciful qualities of literary form. The novels of Laurence Sterne, for instance, which Schlegel found attractive for their departure from strict chronological narration through the

---

14See Charles Rosen, Sonata Forms [New York, 1980], p. 315. Rosen, in his discussion of Schumann’s F♯-Minor Piano Sonata, op. 11, concludes that the anomalous aspects of Schumann’s sonata-form movements require the discussion of “similar effects” in Caravaggio, Carnival, Dichterliebe, and so on— a tantalizing thought upon which he does not elaborate.


introduction of digressive elements, reminded him of "those witty wall-paintings . . . that are called arabesques."  

Between 1797 and 1801, Schlegel fashioned the arabesque into an all-embracing literary critical category in his various collections of fragments, and perhaps most notably, in the "Gespräch über die Poesie" of 1799. In one sense, Schlegel intended the arabesque as a specific genre of "modern" literature of roughly the same scope as the Novelle, Märchen, Legende, Idyll, Romanze, and Elegie. Diderot's satiric Jacques le fataliste, with its ironically inclined narrator, frequent digressions, and complex narrative structure, is the example that he fastens upon in the "Gespräch." More important for our purposes, however, is Schlegel's dual-natured concept of the arabesque as a category of literary form. In its more limited application,

---

Plate 1: Wall painting with surrounding arabesques from the home of Sulpicius Rufus, Pompeii (Nederlands Instituut, Rome).

---

20Ibid., p. 331.
the arabesque might refer specifically to those
digressive interpolations or ornamental vari-
tions that interrupt the chronological flow of a
conventional narrative. Thus, in no. 421 of the
Athenäum Fragmenta (1797–98), Schlegel
commented, somewhat disapprovingly, on the
frequent digressions in Jean Paul’s Siebenkäs,
labeling them “leaden arabesques in the Nürnberg style.”21 He felt that Tieck handled the ara-
besque element, in this case a series of interpo-
lated Märchen, more successfully in his Franz
Sternbalds Wanderungen.22 At the same time,
Schlegel conceived the arabesque as the formal
principle that governed the whole of the Ro-
mantic artwork. As a category of total form, the
arabesque plays on the balance of the most var-
ied profusion of diverse elements by way of an
artfully designed constructive logic, and thus
mediates chaotic disarray and symmetrical or-
der.23 In the “Rede über Mythologie,” from his

21Ibid., p. 247. The digressive arabesque, in other words, was
not necessarily a positive feature. As Marshall Brown has
noted (Shape of German Romanticism, p. 93), it rather rep-
resented a beginning step toward a perfected Romantic po-
etry.

23See also Karl Konrad Polheim, Die Arabeske (Munich,
1966), pp. 12–14. Blackall, in The Novels of the German Ro-
mantics (p. 272), questions Polheim’s formulation of the
Schlegelian arabesque as a total form; however, most of
Schlegel’s references to the term are understandable only
when the arabesque is considered in its broadest sense.
“Gespräch,” Schlegel put forth a particularly colorful metaphor for the arabesque as all-encompassing form: the whole of classical mythology, with its “motley throng of ancient gods,” formed an arabesque in this larger sense.

From the inception of its use as a critical term, the arabesque was applied metaphorically. A term from painting was applied to literature; why not also apply it to music? Schlegel himself suggested as much in the query posed by no. 15 of his *Fragmente zur Poesie und Literatur II* (1800–01): “Does not the arabesque relate to the pictorial arts as the fantasy does to music?” Indeed, the concept of the arabesque is especially apt for a discussion of the “fantastic form” of the first movement of Schumann’s Fantasy. In its more limited sense, the arabesque manifests itself as a local event in the dreamy “Im Legendenenton,” but in a larger sense, the arabesque as total form is called up by the effect that Schumann’s evocative interlude has on the design of the movement as a whole. Although the focus of this study is the “Im Legendenenton” section, we should begin with a brief consideration of its surroundings.

II

The opening thematic material of the first movement is presented in three “waves” (labeled A^1, A^2, and A^3 in ex. 2) that, through a process of phrase-length compression (17 + 9 + 4 mm.) and diminution (cf. A^2 and A^1) suggest a kind of metric crescendo. The harmonic/melodic background for the first theme group is supplied by an underlying periodic construction. A^1 (mm. 2–10, and by extension, mm. 10–19) is fashioned as a double antecedent, its first phrase cadencing on V, its second (if only briefly), in V. A^2 (mm. 19–28) more or less interprets the opening eighteen measures in diminution (an event prepared in the rhythmic diminution at the close of A^1: cf. mm. 14–17, and 17–19), but it too fails to bring harmonic closure. Thus, what amounts to a gigantic “question” (mm. 1–28) is answered by A^3, but a minor third higher, in E_b. At first, we might interpret the harmonic displacement as a sign that the transition has begun, but in fact the juxtaposition of keys removed by a minor third (here, C/ E_b) emerges as a fundamental feature of thematic presentation in the movement as a whole

With the appearance of B (m. 33), the transition is under way. It proceeds in two sequential units, each rising by fifth: the first (mm. 34–37) from C minor to G minor, the second (mm. 37–41) from G minor to D minor. The tonal layout of the second theme group (C^1 and C^2 in ex. 2) is dependent on the coupling of D minor and F, the material presented in mm. 41–52 recurs (after a figurational transition) in mm. 61–72 at the remove of a minor third, complementing the C/E_b tonal juxtaposition of the first theme group. Thus, less crucial than the tonal endpoints of the exposition (tonic and subdominant), is the recognition of two parallel tonal pairings—C/E_b and Dm/F—one hinging on the minor third, and separated by the two rising fifths of the transition.

Thus far the outlines of the general design are quite clear, in spite of what are admittedly

---

Example 2: Schumann, Fantasy, 1st movt., motivic connections.
unusual features of the movement up to this point, namely, the tonal pairings in both of the theme groups, and the avoidance of definitive closing gestures. (The final cadence of the exposition arrives on a solitary, unharmonized F, the second element of a relatively weak vii°–I progression.) Likewise, the development appears to begin with the *Im Tempo* at m. 82, but as previously noted, we recognize it as a sham at m. 97, when the opening theme recurs in the form of A². Although the passage starting with the upbeat to m. 106 (an outgrowth of the sigh figure from the close of A²) suggests a return to developmental procedures, the gestural flurry is again deceptive. The appearance in m. 119 of A⁴ (which combines the grandiosity of A¹ with the melodic/rhythmic shape of A²) reconfirms the notion that the recapitulation is in progress. But within the space of ten measures, “*Im Legendenton*” proceeds to interrupt the natural flow of the form.

It is decisive for an understanding of the special character of Schumann’s “*Im Legendenton*” to make note of the degree to which it differs from the central section of an A B A form; for the B of a *Bogen* form does not so much disrupt an ongoing process as it presents another block in a series of alternating, self-contained musical units. “*Im Legendenton*” has been intentionally placed to disturb what otherwise have been an absolutely symmetrical form: exposition—“*Im Legendenton*”—recapitulation. It is rather positioned *between* the two tonal elements of the first theme group in the recapitulation, C/E♭ (see fig. 1), while its own tonality, C minor, acts as a mediating force between those that surround it.

The designation of “*Im Legendenton*” as digression or interruption, however, does not sufficiently characterize its highly individual properties. We might get at these better by linking them, analogically, to the characteristics of the literary arabesque, each one of which can now be considered in turn.

The concept of the arabesque in its limited application, as digression, was best formulated by Schlegel in his discussion of the episodic elements in Greek comedy (“Charakteristik der griechischen Komödie,” 1803–04). Here Schlegel used the Greek term *Parekbasis*, which occupies a position in his critical theory of Greek comedy similar to that of the arabesque in his theory of the contemporary *Roman*. Schlegel defined the *Parekbasis* as “a speech occurring in the course of a play, spoken by the chorus (in the name of the poet) to the audience. It indeed represented a total interruption and brought the action to a halt.” At the same time, the consequent structural irregularity was only apparent; it was not a sign of any lack of artfulness on the author’s part. The link with Schumann’s digressive interlude is clear, for in “*Im Legendenton*” the composer steps out of the “real time” of the movement (that is, the interrupted sonata form), and spins out a dreamy legend in sound. But whereas Schlegel’s *Parekbasis* is directed outward, to the audience, Schumann’s “*Im Legendenton*” is marked by a certain *Innigkeit*.

A recurrent theme in Schlegel’s broader formulation of the arabesque is the notion that it

---

29 *KFS*, vol. XI, p. 88.

[Figure 1: Schumann, Fantasy, 1st movt., overview of form.]

---

158
projects a random or arbitrary quality. In no. 389 of the *Athenäum Fragmente*, he characterized the grotesque (often used interchangeably with the arabesque up to about 1800)\(^{30}\) as “that completely arbitrary or random connection of form and matter.”\(^{31}\) In the first movement of Schumann’s Fantasy, it is the placement of “Im Legendentont” within the total form that appears random, capricious, whimsical; almost by chance is it wedged between the two tonal components of the first theme group. Yet its position there is necessary if we are to perceive it as a musical daydream, a narrative aside. The designation itself, “Im Legendentont,” is rich in narrative connotations; but we can now recognize it as more than a private indication, shared only by composer and performer. The *Legende*, as a removal into a level of time different from that of the surrounding movement, is clearly manifested in the form itself.\(^{32}\)

Yet another of the categories of the Schlegelian arabesque touches on the apparent juxtaposition of the most fiercely varied elements. In no. 418 of the *Athenäum Fragmente*, Schlegel commented on the “intentional diversity” of the arabesques in Tieck’s novels.\(^{33}\) This quality manifests itself in the first movement of the Fantasy through the absolute contrasts which the rhetorical character of “Im Legendentont” sets up with its surroundings. While Schumann’s sonata form tends toward extravagantly

extended phrase lengths and eschews harmonic closure, the phrases of “Im Legendentont” are arrayed as brief, clearly articulated blocks, and harmonic closure arrives already in the interlude’s eleventh measure with a full cadence in C minor.

Still, the powerful contrasts of the Schlegelian arabesque are justified, perhaps balanced, by a tempering force. The arabesque’s confusion is at once “constructed in an orderly and symmetrical fashion,” and “artfully designed”; its caprice is an “educated caprice,” its formlessness is no “poorly formed monstrosity,” but rather an “intentional formlessness,” its chaos is an “artful chaos.”\(^{34}\) But in order for the creative mind to fashion such an artfully ordered chaos, and for the listener to perceive the underlying logic amidst apparent confusion, we must have recourse to the mental faculty which Schlegel called “Wittz.”\(^{35}\) It is the power whereby one may detect connections between elements that are seemingly independent, totally contrasted and varied.

Certainly, Schumann’s musical arabesque shows signs of what Schlegel would have termed “witzige Konstruktion,”\(^{36}\) most clearly in its motivic connections with the surrounding sonata form. Here, however, we must distinguish between two types of motivic links. The first might be called “logical,” and refers to those connections unfolded as part of an ongoing organic process. Beethoven’s developmental procedure and Brahms’s *Verknüpfungstechnik* are paradigmatic for this type. Examples are also at hand in the first movement of Schumann’s Fantasy, e.g., the successively varied presentations of the opening material \([A^1, A^2, A^3; \text{see ex. } 2]\), or the outgrowth of the bass-line of B from the cadential tail of \(A^3\). The motivic associations of “Im Legendentont” are of a different order, and might better be thought of as “witty.”


\(^{31}\)KFSA, vol. II, p. 238, along the same lines, see Athenäum Frag. 305 (KFSA, vol. II, p. 217) and Fragmenta zur Literatur und Poesie (1797), Frag. 1075, where the association with the Arabeske, as opposed to Groteske, is specifically made \([KFSA, \text{vol. XVI, p. 174}].\)

\(^{32}\)One further narrative designation attaches to the movement as a whole. In a letter to Clara \([14 \text{ April 1838}],\) Schumann indicated that he had at last fastened on an overall title for the Fantasy: *Dichtungen.* See Robert and Clara Schumann, *Briefe einer Liebe*, ed. Hanns-Josef Ortheil (Regensburg, 1982), pp. 103–04. The title appeared in the revised manuscript \([\text{signed and dated 19 December 1838 but was crossed out in favor of Phantasie at some point before the work was published in April 1839.}}\) Alan Walker, “Schumann, Liszt, and the C-Major Fantasy: op. 17: A Declining Relationship,” *Music & Letters* 60 (1979), 156–57.

\(^{33}\)KFSA, vol. II, p. 245.


\(^{35}\)Schlegel makes the connection between Arabeske and Witz specific in “Lessings Gedanken,” KFSA, vol. III, pp. 84–85.

The derivation of the opening of "Im Legenden-
ton" from the transitional motive (B), for in-
stance, is just such a hidden connection. The
two phrases are far enough removed in time [by
nearly one hundred measures] that their rela-
tionship is not immediately apparent—nor is it
intended to be. The transitional motive does
not seem to offer any possibilities as a theme on
first hearing. We must, at one level, "forget" it
by the time that "Im Legenden-ton" begins.
Likewise, the appearance of material in mm.
157–61 prefiguring the An die ferne Geliebte
quotation at the close of the movement, and the
reference to the second theme (C) in mm. 182–
93 have less to do with the process of develop-
ment than with the evocative gestures of a mu-
sical daydream. The first is a premonition that
can be understood only in retrospect, the sec-
ond a vague reminiscence (appropriately enough, in
the vaguely remote key of D♯).

There remains but one aspect of the ara-
besque as total form to consider, its associa-
tion with the notion of Mannigfaltigkeit or Fälle,
that is, abundance, richness, infinite variety.
And as this category requires a comprehen-
sive view of the artwork in its entirety, a few com-
ments on the conclusion of the movement will
be necessary.

Following on the completion of "Im Legen-
denton," the recapitulatory process is resumed
as if it had never been interrupted. A3 [mm.
226ff.] gives way to the transitional motive (B),
which is recomposed in accordance with the
mechanics of sonata-allegro procedure. Only
the first of the two sequential phrases appears,
and while it had cadenced on G minor in the ex-
position (m. 37), it cadences here [m. 234] on G
major (V/C), thus preparing for the lengthy par-
allel statement of the second theme group in the
tonic tonal pair, Cm/E♭.

The Im Tempo beginning at m. 275, however,
brings yet another unusual twist to the proceed-
ings. Schumann repeats the same pattern that
followed from the exposition: a pseudo-devel-
opmental passage [mm. 275–86] gives way to a
restatement of the opening material in the form
of A2. In a very real sense, the form is made to
turn back on itself.37 The move confirms the no-
tion of circularity that was suggested at the very
beginning of the movement. The vague wash of
sound that Schumann makes of the opening V9
is intended to suggest that we are tuning in to
the middle of a piece already in progress. Thus,
the movement has not so much a vague begin-
ing, as no real beginning, while the circles that
the form describes imply that it will have no
real end. Of course, Schumann does bring the
movement to a close, but this closure is im-
posed from without by means of the famous
quotation of the last song from Beethoven's An
die ferne Geliebte. That the movement as a
whole is end-directed, that all points toward the
closing Lied quotation, seems clear enough. In-
deed, Schumann withholds a firm cadence in
the tonic, C, until this very moment. The high-
lighting of the Beethoven reference is not dif-
ficult to account for—after all, when Schu-
mann first began work on the Fantasy in 1836,
he intended the proceeds from its sale to go to-
ward the erection of a Beethoven monument. In
addition, the original version of the Fantasy in-
cluded a full recapitulation of the Beethoven
material at the conclusion of the last move-
ment.38 [The idea was ultimately rejected, per-
haps because it seemed too facile a means of
binding the whole work together.] But as far as
the first movement is concerned, it is import-
tant to recognize that the concluding reference is
circuitously reached; musical time must over-
come the circularity of Schumann's sonata-
allegro pattern, as well as the digressive inter-
ruption provided by "Im Legenden-ton."

Insofar as the Beethoven quotation is per-
ceived as such [and Schumann surely meant to
be], it too is an arabesque of sorts. The quo-
tation establishes a dialectical relationship
with its real surroundings, in the Fantasy, as
well as with its imaginary surroundings, in

37 Again, the procedure is characteristic of the early Schu-
mann sonata-allegro. The form of the first movement of the

op. 14 Concert sans Orchestre [where the recapitula-
tion merges with a recomposed presentation of material from
the development] is likewise circular. In the second move-
ment of the Fantasy, the impression of circularity is ensured
by more sophisticated means. It opens with a closed A B A' 
unit. This is followed by a trio-like middle section [Etwas
langsamer], that gives way to a fragmentary statement of the
opening ternary unit [B A']. But here, the form circles back,
with the appearance of material from B, before all is brought
to a close in the virtuosic coda [Viel bewegter].

Beethoven's *Liederkreis*. In terms of its actual placement, the quotation is developed both “logically” and “wittily.” It can be taken as a logical outgrowth of A² and its continuation (mm. 287ff.; see ex. 2), with which it shares the same shape and rhythmic/gestural quality (cf. the appoggiatura figure in mm. 289, 293, and 298). But in another sense, it has been wittily prepared. Bits and pieces of the quotation, seemingly placed at random, have pervaded much of the movement: the continuation of A¹ (mm. 14ff), the closing measures of C (mm. 49, 69, 242, and 262ff.), and the phrase beginning at m. 157 of “Im Legendenorton.” The profusion of witty connections forces us to ask what does in fact serve as the primary material of the movement. Is it the opening thematic complex, out of which most of the subsequent motivic material is generated (see ex. 2), or is it the Beethoven quotation, toward which all of the previous material aspires? Perhaps Schumann’s motivic network was fashioned to produce the general impression that everything is related to event thing else, both forward and backward in time, but that much like the Leitmotive and Leitmotive families in Wagner’s music dramas, it is not possible to pinpoint an Ur-motivic form.

The dialectic is intensified when the quotation is compared with its imagined surroundings in Beethoven’s song cycle. Schumann’s melodic reference comes in C major, in a movement where Eb is the subsidiary key. Conversely, the last song of *An die ferne Geliebte* is in Eb (the key of the cycle), but is approached from the C tonality of the previous song. Beethoven’s melody (“Nimm Sie hin denn, diese Lieder”) is ultimately left “open”; the last song is completed by its extended reminiscence—in fact, a “witty” development—of the first. Schumann, on the other hand, imparts closure to the melody (by fashioning its cadential phrase anew), and thus to the whole of the Fantasy’s first movement.

We may now turn to one further manifestation of the arabesque as total form: the arabesque as an expression of infinite richness and variety. Schlegel elaborated on the notion of Mannigfaltigkeit or Fülle in his theory of the Roman, which was not so much a genre as a romantisches Buch, an ideal artwork in which the various literary forms and genres were at once brought together but ultimately surpassed.39 We would claim too much in suggesting that the first movement of Schumann’s Fantasy exemplified such a grand mixture. Nonetheless, the combinative element is much in evidence. In formal terms, the movement combines an interrupted sonata-allegro (without a true development, and leaning toward the rondo given the three-fold recurrence of the opening thematic material) with a self-contained rondo structure (“Im Legendenorton,” which is organized as an A B A’ C A” unit). As to genre, Schumann suggests the weighty first movement of a piano sonata, the Charakterstück (“Im Legendenorton”), and finally, through the Beethoven quotation, the Lied.

Most important, however, is the opposition between sonata (and by implication, sonata-allegro form) and Charakterstück, the two genres that best represent the young Schumann’s poles of creative activity. His critical writings point up a certain ambivalence to both genres. Although Schumann admitted the importance of the Charakterstück as a “concentrated composition,”40 he ultimately viewed it as a means of preparing for the composition of “higher forms”: concerto, symphony, sonata.41 At the same time, he realized that the “higher forms”—the sonata in particular—were somewhat out of date. The modern composer had to find a way to create a new class of higher forms. In part, the dialectic between sonata and Charakterstück is played out in the first movement of the Fantasy, where the two genres are not so much synthesized as they are fancifully juxtaposed in the overall arabesque structure.

III

The analogical use of the literary arabesque as a formal category that I have suggested carries with it no extra-musical connotations. Yet we might well ask to what extent Schumann’s

---


40 Schumann, *GS*, vol. II, p. 64.

form is purely musical. The novels of his beloved Jean Paul, noted by literary critics for their digressive arabesques and largely unreadable today because of them, come to mind as possible models. In *Flegeljahre*, the novel which Schumann described as “a book that approaches the Bible in kind,” the digressive elements cluster around *Hoppelpoppel*, the novel within a novel on which the brothers Walt and Vult are at work. (To complicate matters, *Hoppelpoppel* itself is conceived as an arabesque, with Walt providing the substance and Vult the digressions.) The young Schumann was well acquainted with a broad spectrum of contemporary literature, in which the digressive arabesque played an important part; it was not the sole property of the novels of Jean Paul, but a standard feature in those of Tieck, Novalis, Arnim, Brentano, and E. T. A. Hoffmann. Thus, it might be better to assert that musical/literary formal similarities represent distinct, but culturally related manifestations of one and the same Romantic form. This is probably true of the handling of time in the Romantic artwork as well. The circularity that is such a vital aspect of the first movement of Schumann’s Fantasy has an analogue in the early nineteenth-century novelists’ retreat from the strictly chronological narrative. Friedrich Schlegel’s own *Lucinde*, for instance, has been described as a purely circular form. Its central section, “Lehrjahre der Männlichkeit,” a traditional narrative account of the hero’s development up to the point at which the novel begins, is flanked on either side by six shorter arabesques, each in a different literary form, and each circling about the all-pervasive but unspoken theme of love. In a letter to Clara of 29 January 1839, Schumann spoke in remarkably similar terms of a work that he had recently completed. It consisted of “Variationen, aber über kein Thema,” and he planned to call it *Girtlände*. (If only we could be certain that Schumann was in fact referring to his *Arabeske*, op. 18) In any event, both the break with traditional narrative modes, and the capricious play with musical time are again but parallel aspects of an overriding Romantic formal conception.

Lastly, the notion that an underlying similarity existed between early nineteenth-century music and literature, at least as far as their aspirations toward an ideal Romantic form are concerned, emerges from a brief comparison of Schumann and Schlegel as critical thinkers. Schumann’s beautiful characterization of Chopin’s Preludes, op. 28, as “Skizzen, Etudenanfänge, oder will man, Ruinen” conveys much the same sense as Schlegel’s listing of the fundamental literary products of his contemporaries: “poetischen Skizzen, Studien, Fragmenten, Tendenzen, Ruinen, und Materielen.” The most striking word is, of course, “Ruinen,” for it leads us back to the Fantasy. In December of 1836, Schumann wrote to Kistner, a prospective publisher, of his plans to write a *Grosse Sonate* (which we now know as the Fantasy, op. 17), the movements of which he would call “Ruinen, Trophaen, Palmen.” Upon the completion of the Fantasy in 1838, the title of the first movement remained, as “Rüne,” while the last two movements were renamed “Siegesbogen” and “Sternbild.” Although all of the titles were later suppressed, we may draw some inferences from the original designation of the first movement as “Rüne” or “Rüne,” for it implies that Schumann was doing rather more than merely “commemorating the death of the Classical style.” More importantly, he was suggesting that the fragment, the ruin, was the basis of the Romantic notion of form.

For both Schumann and Schlegel, the fragment—an arabesque in its most limited sense—was the point from which the ideal Ro-

---

43Schumann, Briefe einer Liebe, p. 95.
44See Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, pp. 92–94.
46Ibid., pp. 39–41.
47Schumann, Briefe einer Liebe, p. 171.
Romantic form was built up. Not only are Schlegel’s ideas often transmitted in the form of fragments or aphorisms, but his writings point up a fascination with the very idea of the fragment as an expression of the transcendent element in the world spirit. The new philosophy which he hoped for would take the form of a series of fragmentary glosses on Kantian idealism; biography he viewed as an historical fragment, and the as yet non-existent German nation as a geopolitical fragment. Schlegel’s approach to literary forms was also strongly colored by this diaparative Weltanschauung. In no. 77 of the Athenäum Fragmenten, Schlegel proceeded upward from the fragment, which would generate a dialogue [a chain of fragments], an exchange of letters [a large-scale dialogue], then a set of memoirs [a system of fragments], and finally would produce a genre “fragmentary in both form and content.”

Schumann never proposed such a scheme, but had he done so, he surely would have taken as his point of departure the category which represened his equivalent of Schlegel’s arabesque, in its narrower and broader sense. What I have in mind is the papillon—that deceptively innocent image for which Schumann had somewhat of an obsession. Although it frequently appears in his letters as a metaphor for the process of metamorphosis that directs the creative psyche, more significant is the manifestation of the concept in his music.

The Papillons, op. 2, which probably first comes to mind, is more than a set of charming little pieces, fragments at once delightful but slight. The work rather displays a dense web of melodic and tonal connections, both logical and witty; it is, in short, an arabesque. The melodic links between nos. 1 and 12, 6 and 10, or 9 and 10, are obvious enough, as is the tonal symmetry which Schumann achieves by centering the beginning, midpoint, and end of the set on D. But the horn calls that sound in nos. 4, 11, and 12, just like the subtle play of relative major and minor in nos. 4 and 7, are animated by Schlegelian Witz. So too is the formal pattern which binds nos. 8 and 9. Oddly enough [although not so oddly for an arabesque], none of the other pieces are cast in quite the same form, so that this little group stands out almost like variations on an unstated theme.

Similar relationships might be pointed out in the Davidsbündlertänze, op. 6, Carnaval, op. 9, and Kreisleriana, op. 16, works which Schumann would have thought of as a “higher kind of Papillons.” Thus it is in these sets of character pieces that Schumann approached Schlegel’s structural ideal—the form that is fragmentary in form and content. They represent a musical equivalent of an artfully contrived collection of aphorisms like Schlegel’s Ideen of 1800. Taken as individuals, many of the fragments are not very impressive; some even fail to make much sense. They only take on a special meaning when related to other fragments in Schlegel’s cosmos of miniatures.

One last aphorism seems appropriate at this point, no. 24 of Schlegel’s Athenäum Fragmenten. “Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many of the works of the moderns are fragments as soon as they are written.” There is no precise equivalent for this formulation in Schumann’s writings, but the composer of Papillons and the Fantasy would have understood it well.

56Schumann made specific reference to Carnaval in this way. The op. 4 Intermezzi were “extended Papillons.” See Dale, “Piano Music,” pp. 33, 49.