



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Absent subjects and empty centres

**Citation for published version:**

Taylor, B 2017, 'Absent subjects and empty centres: Eichendorff's romantic phantasmagoria and Schumann's Liederkreis Op. 39', *19th-Century Music*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 201-222.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2017.40.3.201>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1525/ncm.2017.40.3.201](https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2017.40.3.201)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

19th-Century Music

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

Published as Absent Subjects and Empty Centers: Eichendorff's Romantic Phantasmagoria and Schumann's Liederkreis, Op. 39  
Benedict Taylor *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 40 No. 3, Spring 2017; (pp. 201-222) DOI: 10.1525/ncm.2017.40.3.201  
© 2017 by University of California Press. Copying and permissions notice: Authorization to copy this content beyond fair use (as specified in Sections 107 and 108 of the U. S. Copyright Law) for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by University of California Press for libraries and other users, provided that they are registered with and pay the specified fee via Rightslink® or directly with the Copyright Clearance Center.

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# Absent Subjects and Empty Centers: Eichendorff's Romantic Phantasmagoria and Schumann's *Liederkreis*, Op. 39

BENEDICT TAYLOR

A Rose Garden. Nightingales are singing in the valley below. The confused murmur of brooklets babble melodiously through the night and a breeze rustles through the treetops. Beyond lies the old castle bathed in moonlight. Someone is awaiting a beloved. But something is terribly wrong. For the castle is far from here; and she died many years ago. . . .

A heady summer night under starry southern skies. Our young hero, guitar in hand, walking through the bewitching garden, sings softly to himself. Trees are rustling; the flickering light of the moon illuminates the marble statue among the half-sunken walls. In the magical play of moonlight it is as if the ancient goddess has come alive to walk her enchanted realm once again . . .

Night. The soft tones of horns are welling up out of the distance, their siren sounds casting a spell over the depths of the forest. Autumn breezes play through the fading blooms of the garden and waft through the open windows of the castle into the

bedroom. A narrow shaft of moonlight illuminates the stately chamber. The knight looks down at his lover lying beside him. Her face has taken on a strange, unearthly pallor. She has turned to stone. As dawn breaks the next morning he rides hastily away. Innumerable birds are singing as the sun rises in splendor. Across the valley spring is blooming. The moss-covered remains of the castle lie in ruins, and a profuse jungle of weeds chokes the once magnificent gardens. No one has lived there for hundreds of years. . . .

He was standing once more on the beautiful hills overlooking the Neckar by Heidelberg. Night was falling. Over the mountains came an old and beautiful song from his past; he followed its tones over the sleeping landscape, lying silent and pale in the shimmer of the moon, towards his childhood home. Stepping over the inert body of the doorkeeper slumped against the garden gate he entered the familiar garden; statues of gods slumbered on their pedestals. In the fitful moonlight he suddenly glimpsed the beguiling figure of his sweetheart among the trees; but she seemed to elude him as he approached, as if he was chasing his own shadow. At last within the bushes he caught up with her and grasped her hand. And as she turned to meet his gaze he saw—to his horror—his own face, grinning hideously back at him. The marble statues awaken; the doorkeeper is dead.

---

I would like to thank Walter Hinderer for first directing me toward Eichendorff's prose works in a graduate seminar on German Romanticism at Princeton back in 2006 (a literary realm that has gradually enticed me ever more into its deceptive depths), Sarah Hibberd for helpful discussions on the phantasmagoric, and Ceri Owen and the other contributors to this issue for their thoughts and comments on this piece. All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

For those who know Schumann's *Liederkreis*, op. 39, some of the scenes just described might sound strangely familiar, if curiously estranged. The first, indeed, is a retelling of the poem set in the second of the two songs entitled "In der Fremde" in Schumann's collection (No. 8, "Ich hör' die Bächlein rauschen").<sup>1</sup> But it could have been pretty much any of countless such episodes from Eichendorff's novels, novellas, or poems. The images and phrases are the same: moonlight, nightingales, rustling woods, tinkling streams and murmuring brooks, beguiling gardens, Romantic castles—we encounter such tropes time and time again throughout Eichendorff's work. Substitute a few details and we could find ourselves in any of innumerable scenes from the 1815 novel *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (Presentiment and Present) or the satirical novella *Viel Lärmen um Nichts* (Much Ado about Nothing), the original locations for five of the poems in Schumann's cycle. The second might recall Schumann's "Schöne Fremde," especially in the context of Eichendorff's 1834 novel, *Dichter und ihre Gesellen* (Poets and Their Companions), where Fortunat, on his first evening in Rome, takes his guitar and asks the fantastic night what, in dreams, it is "confusedly trying to tell him" ("Was sprichst du wirr, wie in Träumen, zu mir, phantastische Nacht?"). But it is actually taken from the author's earlier novella *Das Marmorbild* (The Marble Statue, 1819), where Florio, newly arrived in Lucca, picks up the instrument his friend Fortunato has left lying around and slips out to make his nocturnal perambulations. The theme of statues fantastically coming to life at night, of the dangerous enticement of the primeval goddess of love and the perils of unbridled Romantic fantasy, could easily have come from a number of points elsewhere in *Dichter und ihre Gesellen*, though (the young poet Otto's comparable experiences in Rome, or his enticement in the "Melusina Garden" later in book III), from the account of the eponymous protagonist's arrival in Rome in *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts* (From the Life of a Good-For-Nothing), from the bewitched

<sup>1</sup>Joseph von Eichendorff, *Sämtliche Gedichte* (Frankfurt: Insel, 2001), 173–74.

island of Frau Venus in *Eine Meerfahrt* (A Sea Journey), or from several passing allusions in *Die Entführung* (The Abduction).<sup>2</sup>

The third example above, drawn from the early novella *Die Zauberei im Herbst* (Magic in Autumn), finds no direct parallel in Schumann's op. 39, but the attentive follower of Schumann might note a number of familiar situations cropping up: the ruined castle, the figure turned to stone, and strange temporal juxtapositions creating a jarring dissonance—all characteristic of "Auf einer Burg," while the wider theme of enticement in the depths of the forest and the undoing of a proud knight recalls "Waldesgespräch."<sup>3</sup> The attentive reader of Eichendorff would find the parallels almost limitless, starting perhaps with the attempted seduction of Friedrich in Countess Romana's castle in book II of *Ahnung und Gegenwart*.<sup>4</sup> And the final passage describes the nightmarish dream of Prince Romano from *Viel Lärmen um Nichts*, which recapitulates the motive of the beloved waiting in the garden from "In der Fremde" and that of the soul taking wing on *ein altes, schönes Lied* and flying *nach Hause* across a moonlit landscape, found in Schumann's "Intermezzo" and "Mondnacht." The ending, however, with its warning of Romantic self-infatuation and narcissism, is distinctly darker than that of either of those two songs and approaches the psychological disturbance of the former setting in Schumann's cycle.<sup>5</sup>

What these examples clearly illustrate is the use of a limited range of images, themes, character names, and situations recurring throughout Eichendorff's narrative prose and interpolated poetry. "There is scarcely another writer in the German language whose entire literary production is so self-reminiscent as Eichen-

<sup>2</sup>Joseph von Eichendorff, *Dichter und ihre Gesellen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987), book II, chap. 15, 122–24; *Das Marmorbild*, in *Sämtliche Erzählungen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990), 35–38; cf. *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*, chap. 7 (*Sämtliche Erzählungen*, 143–44).

<sup>3</sup>Eichendorff, *Die Zauberei im Herbst*, in *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, 19–21.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph von Eichendorff, *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), chap. 13, 165–71.

<sup>5</sup>Eichendorff, *Viel Lärmen um Nichts*, in *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, 211–12.

dorff" claims Oskar Seidlin.<sup>6</sup> These commonalities do not serve to impart a unity to the larger body of work but if anything may have a bewildering effect, reappearing in kaleidoscopic variations throughout. Episodes appear almost interchangeable; one scene could often be transposed directly into another. "Seldom in Eichendorff is a particular landscape linked with a particular plot event or experience of a person" explains Richard Alewyn in a classic study of the poet. A scene "could be missing from its position without leaving behind a gap. It could appear at a hundred other places in his work, and would be no less in place."<sup>7</sup> Also apparent is the downplaying of any clear sense of plot. The situations described above are largely sensory evocations of atmosphere and feeling; they are dreamlike, fantastical, at once in motion but strangely static.<sup>8</sup> Image follows image with little causal link in evidence. What narrative or action that there is appears elementary if not simply confusing; any sense of dramatic tension resides in a disparity between subjective perceptions and objective reality.

Something is often wrong at the heart of these scenes. For all the beautiful allure of the Romantic visions—moonlight, the garden of red and white roses, glimmering statues of gods, nightingales—danger or deception lurks under the surface. And yet, while the positive connotations a situation seems to promise may often prove deceptive, here and there an identical scenario in another context may turn out for the better. (Is the second scene, the enchanted Italian night, positive or negative? In virtually all instances in Eichendorff, this scenario signifies dangerous enticement through sensual love and poetic fantasy, one to which the protagonist may either succumb [Otto] or in some cases manage to escape [Florio in *Marmorbild*].

For once, in "Schöne Fremde," the aptly named hero is indeed fortunate and does end up with his beloved Fiametta at the end of the novel. Yet the literary depictions are indistinguishable from each other.) As so often in Eichendorff, there is frequently a sense that time (and perhaps space too) is "out of joint." Incompatible temporal levels are superimposed: our beloved is waiting for us in the rose garden despite having died so many years ago; autumn passes to spring in a single night and years have passed since the castle stood in full splendor. We have been lost to the world—or to ourselves—for an indeterminate time.

The operative word here is *Verwirrung*—confusion, bewilderment. "The word 'wirr' is one of his favorites," observed Theodor W. Adorno in a pioneering account of Eichendorff from 1957. "It proclaims the suspension of the ego, its disclosure to a chaotic urging."<sup>9</sup> Eichendorff's phantasmal images are at once ultra-Romantic and highly critical of Romanticism, of the enticements of nature, erotic love, and even the artistic imagination. Through such means, he creates a vision of the world as profoundly ambiguous and confusing, where stable notions of the self are constantly imperiled and attempts to make narrative sense of the succession of external events and impose casual order on our lives are often in doubt. It will doubtless not have escaped the reader that such a worldview resonates with what is surely the most celebrated musical setting of Eichendorff's work, and its problematized reception down to the present day.

Schumann's Eichendorff *Liederkreis* has long lain in the penumbra cast by its fellow cycles from the composer's famous "year of song" of 1840, *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und Leben*. It is not that anyone disputes the quality of Schumann's music: indeed this collection—a work which, as John Daverio claims, "in sheer beauty and lyric intensity, is perhaps unsurpassed among Schumann's cycles"—may well be one that many *Schumannianer* have secretly

<sup>6</sup>Oskar Seidlin, *Versuche über Eichendorff* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 260.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Alewyn, "Eine Landschaft Eichendorffs," *Euphorion* 51 (1957), reprinted in *Probleme und Gestalten* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1974), 206, 205.

<sup>8</sup>Eichendorff's dynamic landscapes, involving the extensive use of spatial prepositions, directional verbal prefixes and untypical employment of the accusative instead of the dative, are justifiably famous: see the studies by Alewyn, "Eine Landschaft Eichendorffs," and Leo Spitzer, "Zu einer Landschaft Eichendorffs," *Euphorion* 52 (1958): 142–52.

<sup>9</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, "Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs," in *Noten zur Literatur I* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1958), 121 ("es meldet die Suspension des Ichs, seine Preisgabe an ein chaotisch Andrängendes an").

admired the most.<sup>10</sup> The problem essentially lies in the designation of the opus as a cycle and the precise type of coherence the twelve songs are felt to possess.<sup>11</sup> Views on the matter are divided. Some commentators purport to find an underlying story or at least a central unifying protagonist holding the set of twelve songs together.<sup>12</sup> More common is a concession that there is no clear narrative to the collection and possibly no single persona behind it, either; as most writers are aware, the poems are drawn from separate sources, and several were sung by different characters, both male and female, in their original prose context.

Even after professions of such justifiable caution, however, some form of subjective and (broadly speaking) narrative continuity is almost invariably smuggled in to such accounts. The *Liederkreis*, so it is claimed, traces a succession of emotional or spiritual states, an expressive trajectory, often split into two smaller half-cycles, finding its fulfillment in the last song, "Frühlingsnacht." Coherence may be found in "general emotional movement" whereby "two balanced arches of emotion . . . transform the poetic mood from introverted melancholy to exuberant joy."<sup>13</sup> Apparently an

overriding narrative and central protagonist have disappeared. But still, *who* is finding fulfillment in the spring garden by night? *Whose* is the consciousness that progresses from feelings of alienation through expectation and epiphany to joy (it is not merely the listener's that is meant)? A shadowy subject as the central manifold for these impressions, soul-states, or moods reemerges even as it is denied. As soon as some larger course is traced across these songs, be it the love between man and woman, the increasing union with nature, or the path to spiritual transcendence, some tacit form of causality and meaningful temporal progression is introduced, one which implicates a human protagonist as necessary subject for the diverse emotions and sensory impressions found throughout the cycle.

This problematizing of narrative coherence, of a central protagonist, of a unified self as subject, is not merely incidental to the cycle, I contend, but might profitably be viewed as essential to its meaning. Indeed, Schumann's work, and its reception history, offers a reflection of one of Eichendorff's overriding themes, one to which the writer continually returned in his fiction and poems—the search for deeper meaning amidst the confusing mass of experiences surrounding us. This article proposes applying an Eichendorffian aesthetic to Schumann's *Liederkreis*, seeing the recurring Ro-

<sup>10</sup>John Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 215.

<sup>11</sup>The existence of two versions of op. 39—the 1842 edition, starting with "Der frohe Wandersmann," and a second edition from 1850, which replaced this song with the first "In der Fremde" setting ("Aus der Heimat hinter den Blitzen rot," which appears to have been Schumann's original conception)—has further complicated discussions of the work's unity. In case any ambiguity arises the reader may assume that I am referring to the familiar second edition in the following discussion.

<sup>12</sup>See, for instance, Barbara Turchin, "Schumann's Song Cycles: The Cycle within the Song," this journal 8/3 (1985): 236–37, or Jon W. Finson, "The Intentional Tourist: Romantic Irony in the Eichendorff *Liederkreis* of Robert Schumann," in *Schumann and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 160. More implicitly, the idea that there is a single protagonist behind the moods and feelings described in the cycle is supported by Daverio (*Robert Schumann*, 214–15) and in Jürgen Thym's most recent account, "A Cycle in Flux: Schumann's Eichendorff *Liederkreis*," in *Of Poetry and Song: Approaches to the Nineteenth-Century Lied* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 375.

<sup>13</sup>The passage cited is from Karen A. Hindenlang, "Eichendorff's *Auf einer Burg* and Schumann's *Liederkreis*, Opus 39," *Journal of Musicology* 8/4 (1990): 570, but comparable formulations may be found throughout the literature on op. 39. See Adorno, "Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs"

("Coda: Schumanns Lieder"), 137; Jürgen Thym, *The Solo Song Settings of Eichendorff's Poems by Schumann and Wolf* (Ph.D. diss. Case Western Reserve University, 1974), 219–20; Barbara Turchin, *Robert Schumann's Song-Cycles in the Context of the Early Nineteenth-Century Liederkreis* (Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, 1981), 272–83; Patrick McCreless, "Song Order in the Song Cycle: Schumann's 'Liederkreis,' Op. 39," *Music Analysis* 5/1 (1986): 25, and Jon Finson, *Robert Schumann: The Book of Songs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 91–92. A similar duality is even found in David Ferris's important study *Schumann's Eichendorff Liederkreis and the Genre of the Romantic Cycle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), probably the account most critical of earlier attempts at finding unity in Schumann's work. For Ferris, "there is no single narrator, nor even the hint of a plot" (208); yet, despite his well-founded skepticism about earlier narrativist or expressivist readings of coherence, the author still proposes that the work "symbolizes the inner growth of the lyric subject," "an ongoing process of spiritual growth" culminating in transcendence (212).

mantic images, absence of clear narrative order, temporal dislocation and sense of loss of self, as profoundly reflecting the concerns of Eichendorff's work. It is not that Schumann's cycle *does* possess a unified narrative and central protagonist, nor that it should simply be seen as disparate group of songs, but—some-what more dialectically—that the tension between the two alternatives is the most crucial factor in coming to an aesthetic understanding of the work. Unity is problematized as an essential part of the cycle, both at the level of its individual songs and in attempts to trace any larger causal progression or narrative across the set of twelve.<sup>14</sup>

"Who can intimate what the secretive murmuring of the dreaming woods wish to proclaim to me?—I hear the streams running below, and know not where they lead, I am so full of shimmers and sounds and love, and yet know not where my future sweetheart lives!"<sup>15</sup> The term "phantasmagoria" is not commonplace in Eichendorff circles but is nonetheless found from time to time in scholarly discussion of his work. I am using it here to signify those repeated images and verbal formulations that possess an enticing yet often deceptive character, above all those associated with the night and its Romantic enchantments. These should be distinguished from similar formulae—normally those bound up with dawn, morning, and the arrival of God's light—which appear invariably to have a positive connotation for Eichendorff.<sup>16</sup> To the extent that its songs designate a temporal location, Schumann's op. 39 appears to oc-

cupy a predominantly nocturnal, or at least crepuscular, realm.<sup>17</sup>

Phantasmagoria, originating in the name coined for early-nineteenth-century illusory visual displays, relies on visual imagery and sound; it creates the illusion of movement but offers no narrative and is marked by a sense of irreality and the capacity for provoking cognitive uncertainty or fear.<sup>18</sup> The term appears tailor-made for describing Eichendorff's nocturnal evocations, with their dynamic quality, concentration on image and sound, frequent narrative disjunction, and constant capacity to suggest psychological disorientation. As scholars have also argued, music may be ideally suited to producing phantasmagoric effects, powerful as it is in conveying mood and atmosphere, a sense of motion unallied with any obvious physical object, and a comparative weakness for imparting narrative.<sup>19</sup> Schumann's music in particular has often been characterized in analogous terms. This is a music that, in the words of Roland Barthes, "continuously refers to concrete things: seasons, times of the day, landscapes, festivals, professions. But this reality is threatened with disarticulation, dissociation, with movements . . . ceaselessly 'mutant': nothing lasts long, each movement interrupts the next: this is the realm of the *intermezzo*, a rather dizzying notion that extends to all of his music."<sup>20</sup> Schumann's second "In der Fremde" setting may stand as a prototypical example of such phantasmagoric *Verwirrung* at the level of the individual song. Eichendorff's

<sup>14</sup>To this extent, my account situates itself broadly in the recent tradition of "deconstructive" or "fragmentary" studies of Schumann, such as the work of Ferris, or Beate Perrey, *Dichterliebe and Early Romantic Poetics: Fragmentation of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), or Lawrence Kramer, "Rethinking Schumann's *Carnaval*: Identity, Meaning, and the Social Order," in *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 100–32.

<sup>15</sup>Eichendorff, *Viel Lärmen um Nichts*, 217. The passage, unexpectedly adopting an authorial voice, is evidently intended as a parody of the author's own style and favored images.

<sup>16</sup>For instance, Eichendorff's favored word "Aurora," the archetypal closing phrase "die Sonne ging prächtig auf," or more neutral idioms such as "alle/unzählige Vögeln sangen."

<sup>17</sup>"Intermezzo" implicates no specific time of day; only "Auf einer Burg" involves a daytime setting without also describing the coming of evening or night.

<sup>18</sup>The term "phantasmagoria" was introduced in 1802 in reference to spectral illusions evoked by magic lanterns. By revealing the deceptive nature of human perception it afforded a subjectivization of vision and offered an exploration of the darker realm of the unconscious. See Terry Castle, "Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphors of Modern Reverie," *Critical Inquiry* 15/1 (1988): 26–61.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Grey, "Fingal's Cave and Ossian's Dream: Music, Image, and Phantasmagoric Audition," in *The Arts Entwined: Music and Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marsha L. Morton and Peter L. Schmunk (New York: Garland, 2000), 83.

<sup>20</sup>Roland Barthes, "Loving Schumann," in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 295.

poem (one of the half dozen in op. 39 not originally drawn from a larger prose work) is a model of sensory blurring and confusion. In the recurring murmur of sounds and fantastical flicker of moonlight the protagonist knows neither where nor when he is. Alienated from reality, from the bearings of space around him and the time of the present, he becomes lost in his subjunctive mood of fantasy.

Ich hör' die Bächlein rauschen  
Im Walde her und hin,  
Im Walde in dem Rauschen,  
Ich weiß nicht, wo ich bin.

Die Nachtigallen schlagen  
Hier in der Einsamkeit,  
Als wollten sie was sagen  
Von der alten, schönen Zeit.

Die Mondesschimmer fliegen,  
Als sah ich unter mir  
Das Schloß im Tale liegen,  
Und ist doch so weit von hier!

Als müßte in dem Garten  
Voll Rosen weiß und rot,  
Meine Liebste auf mich warten,  
Und ist doch [so] lange tot.<sup>21</sup>

(I hear the brooklets rushing  
In the woods fro and to,  
In the woods in the rustling,  
I know not where I am.

The nightingales resound  
Here in the solitude,  
As if they wished to tell something  
Of the beautiful times of old.

The shimmering moonbeams fly,  
As if I saw below me  
The castle lying in the valley,  
And yet it is so far from here!

As if in the garden  
Full of white and red roses,  
My darling must be waiting for me,  
And yet she is [so] long dead.)

Schumann's setting responds to the poet's bewitching vision by circling round and round on

<sup>21</sup>Eichendorff, *Sämtliche Gedichte*, 173–74; the word “so” was added by Schumann.

itself in a dizzying ceaseless shimmer of sixteenth-note movement, tracing recurring harmonic cycles on multiple levels that forestall any larger sense of directed purpose (ex. 1). As with the preceding “Auf einer Burg,” Schumann sets Eichendorff's four stanzas to two pairs of musical verses, creating a larger two-part AB|AB design, with a brief coda that threatens to cycle back to the opening material, as if the music would repeat indefinitely. On a smaller scale the accompaniment alternates at one-measure intervals throughout, between a running legato figure in octaves in the accompaniment (suggestive, perhaps, of the bewitching murmuring of brooklets running confusedly “fro and to” in the woods around us) and a quicksilver harmonic texture broken between the two hands that supports the detached vocal phrases. In the first and third stanzas the latter circles through a recurring  $i-\frac{6}{3}-iv-V$  cadential pattern, which in turn oscillates between tonic and dominant; the alternating stanzas trace sequentially descending Phrygian progressions slipping away to the illusory regions of the subdominant minor and relative major. Only in the very last measures does the music break free of this incessant harmonic cycle, but even here, in a typically enigmatic moment of Schumannesque understatement, the realization that his beloved is already dead seems barely to register on the protagonist. The phrase needs to be repeated twice, each time with increasing cadential definition, before the flow of sixteenth notes disperses in a distinctly uneasy plagal close.

As we have seen, Eichendorff's formula is the concatenation of alluring images without any necessary connection or narrative thread holding them together, often followed (as here in “In der Fremde”) by a dark twist or *Stimmungbruch*. The poems Schumann selected for his *Liederkreis* are particularly rich in examples. In “Waldesgespräch,” for instance:

A hunter spies a beautiful woman alone in the forest and decides to lead her home. The hunter becomes the hunted; he will never leave her forest home.

Or twofold in “Auf einer Burg”:

A knight stands watch in his castle tower; the knight has been dead for hundreds of years. Down on the

*Zart, heimlich* *p*

Ich hör' die Bäch - lein rau - schen im Wal - de her und hin, im

*mf*

6  
Wal - de, in dem Rau - schen ich weiss nicht, wo ich bin. Die

10  
Nach - ti - gal - len schla - gen hier in der Ein - sam - keit, als woll - ten sie was

15 *ritard* *p* *Im Tempo*  
sa - gen von der al - ten schö - nen Zeit! Die Mon - des schim - mer flie - gen, als

*ritard* *p* *Im Tempo*

20  
säh' ich un - ter mir das Schloss im Tha - le lie - gen, und ist doch so weit von

Example 1: Schumann: "In der Fremde" (II), *Liederkreis*, op. 39, no. 8.



25  
hier! Als müsstest du in dem Garten voll Rosen weiss und roth meine

30  
Liebste auf mich warten, und ist doch so lange todt, und

34  
ist doch lange todt, und ist doch lange todt.

Example 1 (*continued*)

Rhine a wedding party sails by, the musicians are playing gaily; the beautiful bride is in tears.

Even in "Wehmut" we find a similar reversal:

I can often sing as though I were happy. Yet no one feels the deep pain in the song.

In some instances the warning is directed against the dangers and deceptions that lurk in the external world:

Be on guard, for your friend is plotting ill against you ("Zwielicht").

Possibly it is nothing less than a loss of the subject's own sense of identity that is at stake

here, the "self-alienation of the ego" as Adorno says with reference to this song.<sup>22</sup>

One of the clearest illustrations of such dissociation of images, and the problematization of the subject perceiving them, is the eleventh song in the cycle, "Im Walde":

A wedding procession passes by; the observer hears birds calling. A merry hunt flashes past, the riders sounding their horns. The sounds have already died away. Night descends. The subject feels an unaccountable fear.

For all the apparent cheerfulness of the opening images (as so often, both visual and sonic) there

<sup>22</sup>Adorno, "Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs," 121.

is a peculiarly disconcerting quality to the account. How are the external impressions connected, and what is the relation of the perceiver to them? One can barely speak of narrative here. The events related are episodic in nature, passing vignettes of outdoor life, whose temporal succession appears chronologically consistent yet strangely dissociated: we might suppose some time has elapsed between the wedding and the hunt, and certainly before the onset of evening, but all is compressed into a few lines without any causal link being offered. A first-person subject position is given in Eichendorff's second line ("Ich hörte die Vögel schlagen"), but nothing is known of the perceiver beyond the perception he (or she) has.

A succession of external impressions without any logical link passes over the subject. Before we know it, all has vanished. What remains? Suddenly the emptiness in the center becomes palpable: we feel afraid. Eichendorff's conception might serve as a paradigmatic expression of the nature of the modern self—the Humean "bundle of perceptions," a series of sense impressions in constant flux with no causal links demonstrable among them, the vacant stage on which these phantasmagoric images glide in and out. If, as Hume holds, "I never catch myself *without* a perception, and never observe anything *but* the perception," how can one ever know one's own self?<sup>23</sup> The answer lies here in the fear that suddenly overtakes us, in *feeling* (*Gefühl*)—for the German Romantics the only way we can obtain unmediated access to the self.<sup>24</sup>

The dissociation of scenes is already manifest in Eichendorff's poem, but Schumann's setting responds in kind through its continual harmonic slippage between harmonic centers and a corresponding fragmentation of the musical-poetic discourse. In harmonic layout the song is formed from the large-scale composing-out of an  $\hat{8}-\hat{4}\hat{7}-\hat{6}-\hat{4}\hat{7}-\hat{8}$  schema (ex. 2). Starting from the tonic A major, the successive images chart

a large-scale movement down via tonicizations of  $\hat{4}\hat{7}$  (G major, leading plagally to D major),  $\hat{6}$  (F# major) and back up to  $\hat{4}\hat{7}$  (G# minor), prolonging the dominant E for several measures before a somewhat indecisive return to A at the end (probably still heard in a plagal relation to E). Although the opening music is as merry as could be wished (the  $\frac{6}{8}$  time signature and bouncing rhythm recall a hunting topic), the abrupt shifts between tonal centers and constant ambiguity between tonic and dominant relations splinter any sense of continuity and association across the successive images. No one harmonic shift is the same as another: A major leads to G by abrupt shift down a tone (with cheerfully rustic parallels); D major to F# by single-voice semitonal shift followed by common-tone linkage; F# to G# minor via the passing I—>ii modulation already present in the original phrase; and G# minor to E via a *Leittonwechsel* shift. And apart from the large-scale dominant prolongation near the end (perhaps compensatory, though as we have seen even this dominant function is undercut), what is conspicuous throughout is the complete absence at a medium level of conventional dominant-tonic tonal articulation. The successive episodes are held together merely by an abstract linear thread.

As the music progresses and the afternoon turns without warning to evening, the dynamic level drops to *pianissimo*, the boisterous repeated rhythmic figure in the accompaniment attenuates into a single inner voice, and major turns to minor. Most curiously of all, Schumann's setting of Eichendorff's final line ("Und mich schauert im Herzensgrunde") conveys little of the dread that might be expected from the words. As with other examples in Schumann (the Heine settings from the same year, for instance), the disjunction cannot be unintentional. Perhaps the amelioration of the poem's disconcerting tone is made to smooth the emotional progression to the joy of the final "Frühlingsnacht" in Schumann's cycle. Or, informed by Eichendorff's narrative practice, one could point to the hymnlike tone of these closing measures as seeking the only solace from loss of self in religion. In Eichendorff's stories it is often an appeal to God or a pious song sung by a voice in the distance that saves

<sup>23</sup>David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 252.

<sup>24</sup>See Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), esp. 69–101.

Ziemlich lebendig *mf* *ritard.*.....  
Es zog ei - ne Hoch - zeit den Berg ent - lang,  
*p* *ritard.*..... **Im Tempo**  
7 *ritard.*..... **Im Tempo**  
ich hör - te die Vö - gel schla - gen,  
*ritard.*..... **Im Tempo**  
13 *f* da blitz - ten viel Rei - ter, das Wald - horn klang, *f* das  
18 war ein lu - sti - ges Ja - gen!  
23 *ritard.*..... **Im Tempo**  
Und eh' ich's ge - dacht, war al - les ver - hallt.  
*pp* *ritard.*..... *p*

Example 2: Schumann: "Im Walde," *Liederkreis*, op. 39, no. 11.

28 *p* *ritard.* *p*  
Die Nacht be-de-cket die Run-de, nur von den

34 *ritard.* *p* *Im Tempo*  
Ber-gen noch rau-schet der Wald, und mich schau-ert's im Her-zens-

40 *pp*  
grun-de, und mich schau-ert's im Her-zens-grun-de.

Example 2 (*continued*)

the erring protagonist from utter ruin.<sup>25</sup> Neither reading offered here strikes me as entirely convincing. Here, as so often, the song remains fittingly enigmatic.

The conjunction of disparate episodes witnessed here in “Im Walde”—their running on without measure of temporal succession—points to the problem of the constitution of time for the modern subject. Elsewhere in the cycle, Eichendorff creates yet more jarring dis-

sonances between temporal levels by juxtaposing historical layers without offering any explanatory mediation or a consistent subject position. Foremost among such examples is “Auf einer Burg.” Schumann’s response to this poem is justly celebrated as one of the most extraordinary songs in the cycle, with its bare, archaic imitative writing, the endless question mark over its tonality (is it in A minor as the key signature suggests, or rather in E minor as the greater part of the music implies?), and grinding diatonic dissonances that scar its seemingly imperturbable course. The term “timeless” is often encountered in descriptions of this song, but it might be more apt to read the disorientating effect as resulting from a sense of time being “out of joint,” created by the

<sup>25</sup>For instance, the song Florio hears sung by Fortunato outside Venus’s palace in *Marmorbild* and his inner plea for God not to let him go astray in the world, which cause her enchantment to crumble (60–61), or the *Nachtlied* Friedrich hears sung by the voice of Leontin outside Romana’s castle in *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (chap. 13, 170–71).

overlapping and clashing between incommensurable timescales.

These features reach their apex at the end of the second stanza (mm. 14–18)—coinciding with the only attempted confirmation of the nominal A-minor tonic in the song. But they are set up in the harmonic and metric dissonances instigated by the opening of this verse. Having moved to C major, from m. 9, both the vocal part and accompaniment trace a sequentially ascending pattern in two-measure units (the  $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{1}$ – $\hat{6}$  of the vocal line reworking the contour of the opening verse). But the two processes are half a measure out of phase, the piano initiating its cycles a half note too early, in an example of what Harald Krebs would call metric “displacement dissonance.”<sup>26</sup> The effect may be shown by rewriting the passage in ex. 3a as given in ex. 3b, where the reworked overlapping of linear processes results merely in mild passing dissonances between a consonant starting and end point.

The result of Schumann’s temporal misalignment is an increasing buildup of diatonically dissonant chords arising purely from the linear logic and holding no functional explanation—first sevenths (mm. 10<sup>3</sup>–11<sup>3</sup>), then three-note clusters embedded within triads. The momentary relief of a pure A-minor triad on the first beat of m. 14 is deceptive, as the melodic peak in the second half of the measure and metric downbeat of the piano’s displaced phrase cycles coincide with the most dissonant sonority in the piece—a chord composed of four adjacent tones [C, D, E, F]. There is a sense of inevitability to this dissonance that is partially misleading, in that the piano part has at this moment broken out from the previous linear model in favor of a functional cadential approach; the outlandish [C, D, E, F] cluster is rationalizable in quite conventional tonal terms as a 9–8 suspension, doubled in sixths, over a pre-dominant ii<sup>6</sup>. But perhaps this is the irony: left untouched, the sequence would have led to a consonant F-major triad on this beat. Forcing functional behavior upon the music creates more

dissonance than if time had been left to run its course. Without this imposition the sequence could have carried on indefinitely without ever finding its way to the supposed tonic of A minor.

Just as powerful is the grating dissonance at the cadence in m. 17, the bass line resolving prematurely to the tonic while the harmonies and melodic line remain fixed to the V<sup>4-3</sup> suspension and continue with utter disregard of the process taking place beneath. This moment has been created from the unexpected elongation of the vocal part in the preceding measures and the stalling of the cadential progression. In all seven earlier instances Schumann has fitted the four trochaic feet of Eichendorff’s line into two measures. Here, though, the final four syllables (“Stil-len Klau-se”) are stretched out from one to three measures, while the harmonic approach to the tonic is already in danger of being retarded by the start of the line at m. 15 and becomes yet more so with the cadentially superfluous move to vii<sup>7</sup>/V for the second half of the measure. If anywhere music is able to show time “out of joint,” falling to ruin before our ears, it is surely here.

“Do you see the mountain range over there?” he said, pointing to the distant mountains. “There lies a much more beautiful land . . . do you hear, as now, amidst the wide silence the streams and brooks murmuring and enticing you wondrously on? If I go yonder into the mountains, I would go onwards and ever onwards, you would become old in the meantime and the castle would also crumble and the garden long lie deserted and in waste.”—With these words I recalled my dream once again. . . . A fear I had never felt before overcame me.<sup>27</sup>

Eichendorff’s fiction constantly points to deeper meanings hidden under the surface, latent connections between characters and events, an underlying identity ever on the verge of articulation. Something about Leontin reminds Friedrich of his elder brother, Rudolf, who was enticed as a youth into the more beautiful land

<sup>26</sup>Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33–45.

<sup>27</sup>Eichendorff, *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, chap. 5, 50; Friedrich is revealing his innermost self in confiding his childhood memories of his long-lost brother Rudolf; Rosa is falling asleep.

a. first and second stanzas, mm. 1–21.

BENEDICT  
TAYLOR  
Schumann's  
*Liederkreis*

Adagio  
*p*

Ein - ge - schla - fen auf der Lau - er o - ben ist der al - te Rit - ter, drü - ben ge - hen Re - gen - schau - er

7  
und der Wald rauscht durch das Git - ter. Ein - ge - wach - sen Bart und Haa - re und ver - stei - nert Brust und Krau - se,

13  
sitzt er vie - le hun - dert Jah - re o - ben in der stil - len Klau - se.

b. rewritten second stanza, mm. 9–14.

9  
Ein - ge - wach - sen Bart und Haa - re und ver - stei - nert Brust und Krau - se, sitzt er vie - le hun - dert Jah - re

(delayed)

Example 3: Schumann: "Auf einer Burg," *Liederkreis*, op. 39, no. 7.

beyond the mountains and has never been seen again. (We read the entire novel expecting the revelation that Leontin is this brother, only to be disappointed. A disillusioned and jaded Rudolf turns up late in book three. But maybe there was another brother. . . . We never learn.) Characters shudder with unexplained fear on hearing news; on first seeing him Rosa dreams that she has known Friedrich for a long time; the girl in the painting reminds Friedrich of someone from his childhood; the landscape is strangely familiar, as if he had encountered it long ago in his past or in a dream.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes these tantalizing hints have narrative consequences and are linked at a deeper level. (The girl in the painting is the daughter of his brother and their childhood playmate Angelina and none other than Erwin, the supposed "youth" who has attached himself to Friedrich; this is the castle and picturesque surroundings where Friedrich grew up.) Sometimes, however, they do not: the promise of meaning is deceptive, the image phantasmagoric.

The recurring images and themes across Eichendorff's works, and especially the fitful suggestions of (perhaps illusory) deeper connections within them, offer a novel perspective on the relationship between the songs in Schumann's cycle. Beyond the numerous recurring poetic motives (night-time, moonlight, woods, birds, castles, dreams), a feature of op. 39 familiar to many listeners is how here and there unexpected connections between the individual songs crop up—a motivic shape held in common, an analogous harmonic scheme, a salient repeated progression.

One of the most readily apparent of such links is found between "Auf einer Burg" and the adjacent "In der Fremde," whose melodic line clearly reworks the falling fifth and filled-out rising third of the preceding song; the tonal ambiguity between E and A minor in the former setting, and the uneasy close on E as an apparent dominant, is likewise confirmed in the clear

<sup>28</sup>For an account of these features, see Detlev W. Schumann, "Rätsel um Eichendorffs *Ahnung und Gegenwart*: Spekulationen," in *Ansichten zu Eichendorff: Beiträge der Forschung 1958 bis 1988*, ed. Alfred Riemen (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1988), 206–38, who teases out many plot contradictions, red herrings, and enigmatic moments in Eichendorff's early novel.

A minor of the second song. Similarly, despite some surface differences, the harmonic template initiating each of the three verses in "Frühlingsnacht" (I-ii-iii-ii [F#-g#-a#-g#]) reverses the larger tonal arch we witnessed in the preceding "Im Walde" (I-#VII-VI-#vii [A-G-F#-g#]). And throughout the cycle there are numerous passing hints of thematic interconnections. Sometimes one appears to stumble into another song for a moment: toward the end of "Im Walde" (mm. 32–38), we suddenly run into the ascending sequence from the second stanza of "Auf einer Burg" for no evident reason (compare ex. 2 and ex. 3a; the reference is quite unmistakable; whether it means anything is less clear). The approach to the final cadence in "Waldesgespräch" (mm. 60–61) conjures up the famous repose toward the tonic seventh that releases the enormous dominant prolongation of "Mondnacht"; both songs are in E major, and they share a similar vocal line at this point. Just as with Eichendorff's repeated scenes and situations, we might easily slip from one piece into the other here. Most frequently theorized is a motivic cell consisting of a rising fourth or fifth, which appears at the opening of "In der Fremde" (mm. 9–10) and may be perceived to reemerge in many of the following settings. Its motivic transformations across the larger span of the cycle are often presented as ensuring not merely musical linkage but also logical growth and progression.<sup>29</sup>

Many analysts have seized on these features to argue for the work as constituting a unified cycle: in the absence of an obvious external narrative, coherence and logical continuity are created by musical means (by implication, perhaps, a deeper, more satisfactory unity). Skeptics, on the other hand, could argue that such

<sup>29</sup>For a range of accounts outlining motivic connections within the cycle, see Herwig Knaus, *Musiksprache und Werkstruktur in Robert Schumanns Liederkreis* (Munich: Emil Katzschler, 1974), 5–12; Thym, "The Solo Song Settings," 215–17; Turchin, "Schumann's Song Cycles," 240–43; McCreless, "Song Order in the Song Cycle," 14–17; Daverio, *Robert Schumann*, 215–16; and Margaret Elaine Henry, *Motivic Cross References in Schumann's "Liederkreis," Op. 39* (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2000). Ferris also points to "recompositional pairings" of "Frühlingsnacht" and "Intermezzo," and "Mondnacht" and "Schöne Fremde" (Schumann's *Eichendorff Liederkreis*, 141–67).

similarities might well arise from the nature of tonal grammar, or reflect aspects of Schumann's personal style, especially given that the composer wrote these songs in a flurry of activity within a few weeks of May 1840. For hermeneutists, the cross-reference clearly has some poetic meaning: it might denote irony, for instance, or signify transfiguration; witness how the evaded approach to the tonic in "Waldesgespräch," in which the protagonist is condemned never to leave the Lorelei's forest home, is transformed into a benign, spiritual home in "Mondnacht."<sup>30</sup> Understood within the Eichendorffian aesthetic proposed here, the matter is deliberately left uncertain. Schumann's inter-song relationships seem to invite an interpretation which may not be intended, which may or may not have deeper meaning. There are links between numbers, but these are tantalizing stimuli to uncovering a wider-ranging, deeper unity that possibly "isn't there" in the music, but merely created by the perceiver. This ambiguity is part of the enigmatic quality of the work, part of the worldview expressed by Eichendorff, and a quality long associated with Schumann's Romantic aesthetics.<sup>31</sup>

The urge to find deeper meanings and hidden connections between songs finds its peak in attempts to find a larger narrative course across the work as a whole. The commonly held belief that the *Liederkreis* traces a redemptive course to a joyful conclusion seems to be based to a considerable degree on the fact that the last song is to all appearances happy. The preceding five have not been, but by offering just one song in a strategic place, Schumann has invited a larger interpretation that simply is not warranted by the balance of expressive moods and would be hard to justify as the logical outcome of the stages that precede it. And at this stage, too, another question must really

be posed: just how positive *is* the message of "Frühlingsnacht"? It would be hard to deny that Schumann's song is one of the most ecstatically joyous outpourings in Romantic music; but deeper knowledge of Eichendorff's imagery, and indeed the previous setbacks in the cycle, would cause at least a tiny note of concern to creep in—not enough to diminish the effect of the song when we are in the midst of its performance, but sufficient to give us pause for thought after its sounds have died away.

In Eichendorff, romantic love seldom solves much. Some stories have a happy end, but many do not, and when they do it is never with a lover alone in a garden at night.<sup>32</sup> Most worrying on this matter is the imagery Eichendorff draws upon in this poem. Night, moonlight, nightingales, rustling groves, the garden in the bloom of spring: the scene is entrancing, but so often dangerous. We are in the perilous realm of Venus.<sup>33</sup> Barely concealed, too, is a tendency toward Romantic solipsism, a fantasizing imagination that perceives inanimate objects speaking to oneself, corroborating the love of a woman who is conspicuously never actually present. For amidst all the romantic elation, where is the beloved? Love scenes generally involve two people: here the ecstatic swelling of subjective emotion is in danger of overshadowing the identity of the woman who the moon and the stars and the dreaming woods tell the protagonist is his.<sup>34</sup> Given the history throughout the cycle of

<sup>30</sup>On the latter setting, see especially the analysis by Janet Schmalfeldt, "Coming Home," *Music Theory Online* 10/1 (2004) <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.04.10.1/mto.04.10.1.schmalfeldt.html>.

<sup>31</sup>See John Daverio, "Schumann's Systems of Musical Fragments and Witz," in *Nineteenth-Century Music and the German Romantic Ideology* (New York: Schirmer, 1993), 49–86; David Ferris, "'Was will dieses Grau'n bedeuten?': Schumann's 'Zwielicht' and Daverio's 'Incomprehensibility Topos,'" *Journal of Musicology* 22/1 (2005): 131–53.

<sup>32</sup>Closest to any putative narrative of Schumann's cycle might be *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts* (1826), whose lovable, bumbling musician hero wins his beloved Flora at the end. This novella, widely read in Schumann's day, and the source for "Der frohe Wandersmann," which appears virtually at the start, is the only narrative by Eichendorff that ends in romantic fulfillment at night. (Times of day are immensely important for Eichendorff: almost invariably, he prefers mornings for the concluding point of a story.) The protagonist is not alone, however, but amidst a happy group of friends.

<sup>33</sup>A point noted by Knaus, *Musiksprache und Werkstruktur*, 88. For Eichendorff, the pagan forces of erotic love and spring are in eternal conflict with the higher spiritual truth of Christianity, an idea expressed at the end of *Das Marmorbild* and in Romana's long recitation in chapter 12 of *Ahnung und Gegenwart*.

<sup>34</sup>One might think here of the fevered dreams of Otto in chapter 23 of *Dichter und ihre Gesellen*, alone in the moonlit garden, surrounded by lilac blossoms and nightingales, and fantasizing that an imaginary beautiful woman living in the deserted residence is enamored of him. At the end



undercutting such moments of apparent fulfillment, can we fully believe she is really his now? *Und ist doch lange tot*: just think back to the miraculous day of 18 May 1840, on which Schumann not only wrote this “Frühlingsnacht” and the setting of “Wehmut,” but also composed the second “In der Fremde.”<sup>35</sup> In the spring garden of one, the beloved is strangely absent; in the other, the figure waiting in the garden of red and white roses was long since dead.

The *Liederkreis* has an absence at its very center—perhaps even a double absence, as the subject often appears distracted or missing. The cycle is filled with Romantic images of nightingales and moonlit castles, of dreaming woods, rustling streams, and the sound of distant hunting horns. But it is also shot through with uneasy images of loss, passing, absence, and phantasmagoric illusion. Figures are often missing, and joy can quickly turn to emptiness. Only once in all of the thirteen songs is the object of the protagonist’s desire actually present; for this one moment we even hear her voice. And here she turns out to be the Lorelei—and the subject is lost.<sup>36</sup>

This is not to say that the close of “Frühlingsnacht” is not a happy end; just that by the end of the cycle there is sufficient doubt created through the continual reversals to make us wonder whether (to paraphrase Eichendorff’s *Taugenichts*) “all, all will be well!”<sup>37</sup> We are

---

of the chapter, in a strangely moving scene, the poet is led by an orphaned child (perhaps a vision of himself) “nach Hause,” to the “stille Zeit” in the “Waldeinsamkeit,” from which this weary “Wandersmann” never wakes again. The resonance with other songs in Schumann’s cycle should be evident.

<sup>35</sup>The autograph score reveals that the order committed to paper was “In der Fremde,” “Wehmut” (which Schumann appears to have partly conceived on the preceding day), and “Frühlingsnacht.” Moreover, he followed this song with the unnerving setting of “Zwielicht” the next day, perhaps the darkest song in the cycle. A facsimile is reproduced as an appendix to Knaus, *Musiksprache und Werkstruktur*.

<sup>36</sup>This song might in any case be interpreted as one in which the “persona” is speaking in role, retelling a ballad (as in the original appearance of the poem in chapter 15 of *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, where its performance is shared between Leontin and one of the young hunters [Romanal]).

<sup>37</sup>Eichendorff, *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*, 183. A biographical explanation would obviously read the absent

not sure, and this is the point. In Eichendorff, the same beautiful image may be redemptive or fatally enticing; the problem his work continually struggles with is how the “irdische” and “überirdische” melody running throughout the world can so often appear to be the same.<sup>38</sup>

“My God!” he exclaimed, ‘Count Leontin—from *Ahnung und Gegenwart!*’ ‘He is immediately recognizable by the guitar’ added the rotund figure of Faber.<sup>39</sup> In his influential account of Schumann’s cycle, Adorno adumbrates a number of features that most later commentators would follow him in observing, consciously or otherwise: these include the symmetrical key scheme of the familiar 1850 version, moving from the F# minor of the opening song to F# major at the end; the merging of this succession of tonalities with “a modulatory path from melancholy to ecstasy”; and the division of the cycle into two parts with a caesura after No. 6, “Schöne Fremde.” “This architectonic relationship expresses a poetic one,” Adorno adds: “The sixth song ends with the utopia of future great happiness, with presentiment [*Ahnung*]; the last, the *Frühlingsnacht* with rejoicing: ‘Sie ist Deine, sie ist dein’, with the present [*Gegenwart*].”<sup>40</sup> Clearly, Adorno’s phrasing forms an allusion to the title of Eichendorff’s novel, a work mentioned several times in his preceding discussion. But what are we to make of this?

There have been some suggestions in the literature that Schumann may have been alluding in his cycle’s succession of songs to the plot of Eichendorff’s novel, which provided the source for four of its poems and is related indirectly to a fifth.<sup>41</sup> Or, more accurately, some

---

beloved and purported happy ending as reflecting Robert’s love for Clara, from whom he was still separated, especially in the work he claimed “contained much of her.”

<sup>38</sup>Lawrence Radner, *Eichendorff: The Spiritual Geometer* (Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Studies, 1970), 2.

<sup>39</sup>Eichendorff, *Viel Lärmen um Nichts*, 189: Prince Romano encounters two characters from an earlier novel up to mischief in his own story.

<sup>40</sup>Adorno, “Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs,” 136–37.

<sup>41</sup>The opening “In der Fremde” is sung in *Viel Lärmen um Nichts* by Julie, one of three characters from *Ahnung und Gegenwart* to reappear (albeit in an ironic light) in the later novella.

scholars have suggested that other scholars—namely Adorno and Herwig Knaus—have suggested Schumann may have been alluding to the plot of Eichendorff's novel.<sup>42</sup> We can make two larger claims here.

First, it is extremely improbable that Schumann selected his poems to correspond to the plot of *Ahnung und Gegenwart*. Indeed, to the extent that the *Liederkreis* does suggest some overarching plot, one can safely say that it is the complete reverse of what happens in this novel. The disputed protagonist of Schumann's cycle ends up in a spring garden in the ecstatic belief that his beloved is his. "Sie ist mein!" he cried out to himself, "sie ist mein!" So exclaims Friedrich thinking of his beloved Rosa in *Ahnung und Gegenwart*.<sup>43</sup> But this is virtually at the start of the novel, in chapter 3; the love story gradually goes downhill from this point on. Rosa, seduced by worldly blandishments, is more or less raped in the forest by the philandering Prince at the close of book II (the scene foretold in the veiled warning of "Zwielicht"), and at the end of the novel Friedrich turns his back on the world and the confused present time that he feels to be so out of joint, and finds repose sequestered in the cloister. And to be fair, both Adorno and Knaus are unlikely to have been implying the stronger narrative view attributed to them.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>For instance, Barbara Turchin dismisses Knaus's "interesting, but highly speculative" view that Schumann's sequence corresponds to the plot of *Ahnung und Gegenwart* ("Robert Schumann's Song-Cycles," 277–78); Ferris queries whether Adorno was intending to imply some narrative order by this reading (*Schumann's Eichendorff Liederkreis*, 256, n. 36).

<sup>43</sup>Eichendorff, *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, chap. 3, 25. There is also a familiar image from the later poem "Mondnacht" that occurs in chap. 12: recognizing Rosa in the beautiful figure before him, Friedrich feels that the moonlit evening outside "was to him the dawn [*Aurora*] of a future, wide, glorious life and his entire soul flew as with great wings out into the wonderful prospect" (136–37). Again, the joy proves deceptive in the larger context of the novel.

<sup>44</sup>As his earlier discussion of Eichendorff reveals, Adorno knew full well that this novel does not end in the protagonist's marriage ("Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs," 117)—at least of Friedrich's. (It does end in the marriage of the secondary figure of Leontin, whose wife, Julie, later sings the song that opens the 1850 cycle. But this would again imply a reversed temporal order.) Adorno's allusion to the title (suggested to Eichendorff by Dorothea Schlegel) remains enigmatic: possibly it is no more than a literary conceit. It is unclear what point Knaus is trying to make

But—far more significantly for this discussion—even if the poems had come from a single work, the effect would not be much different: which is to say that the attempt to trace a clear narrative thread through either of Eichendorff's novels or most of his novellas is nearly as confusing as finding one in Schumann's *Liederkreis*. And I would like to suggest that this quality—this affinity which may quite possibly be accidental—is nonetheless aesthetically fundamental to an understanding of both artists' works. What Schumann is doing, yoking together different poems in such a way as to hold out the possibility of a narrative order that perhaps is never there, is homologous to the presentation of Eichendorff's favorite themes of confusion and phantasmagoric enticement.

Let us take *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, Eichendorff's longest and most important prose narrative and one which we have seen to be linked in at least some ways to Schumann's cycle. A large number of poems are interspersed throughout the novel—fifty-two, scattered across the twenty-four chapters. Even by nineteenth-century standards this number was considered unusually large.<sup>45</sup> The poems are sung by a range of characters and are normally reported as being overheard by another figure, even when the latter is quite some distance away on another mountain top; characters are remarkably adept at discerning the words to a song in Eichendorff—perhaps because they are themselves always breaking into song.

Of the four poems used in Schumann's *Liederkreis*, two are sung by the youth Erwin (who after his death turns out to have been a girl, though the reader doesn't know this until then), one is shared between Leontin and a mysterious hunter (who is also revealed at this point to have been a woman, the seductive

by asserting that selection of four songs from *Ahnung und Gegenwart* corresponds to the plot of the novel (*Musiksprache und Werkstruktur*, 14, an admittedly weak argument); one senses he wishes to strengthen the case for interpreting individual songs in light of their original narrative context. But he does later explicitly claim that Schumann's eventual order across the whole cycle was "not based on any novelistic plot" and is "without progression of external events" (17).

<sup>45</sup>Witness the review in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, February 1819 (reprinted in the appendix to *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, 368–69).

Romana), and one is sung by a disembodied voice in the forest that may be Romana (but equally may not; Eichendorff loves insinuating connections that may well turn out to be deceptive or at least are never confirmed).<sup>46</sup> The poems are all linked through being heard by a single protagonist, in this case the novel's central figure, Friedrich (we might say that the listener is invited to occupy his subject position), though he often appears to be little more than empty stage over which these assorted impressions flit. Even if Schumann had set all fifty or so poems in their original order, there would still be well-nigh no narrative continuity discernible in the resulting collection; the overall effect would be no more coherent than the cycle he actually wrote.

Indeed, one can go further and say that even the prose narrative in Eichendorff can often be as episodic, bewildering and disconnected as the extracted succession of poems found within. "Nothing much happens in *Ahnung und Gegenwart*" asserts Egon Schwarz. "The main characters are always on the move, but hardly do anything that would reveal personality or narrative purpose." "There is no firmly delineated plot, the characters are psychologically undeveloped," and the succession of scenes is highly episodic.<sup>47</sup> "Usually a new chapter starts with a change in scenery or shift in perspective, [being] devoted to a new character or written in another key."<sup>48</sup> Walther Killy likewise

speaks of the "addition of episodes" in Eichendorff's novel, the "mere succession of events and situations that drive towards no goal." "In the chance succession of life's situations and the incomprehensibility of their connection the enigmatic character of existence becomes ever more enigmatic."<sup>49</sup> And it is not simply that twentieth-century critics have misunderstood nineteenth-century standards of narrative continuity. Contemporary reviews of the first publication spoke of a "confusing mass of appearances" and noted that characters "were not presented as finished personalities but hovered in a half-light, to such extent that readers were in danger of losing themselves." "The entire novel has so suspended a stance; figures appear bathed in the breeze of Romanticism, and are essentially so far removed from real life that any indication of time and place might better have been avoided."<sup>50</sup> Even the author seemed aware of this quality. "Your novel certainly contains too many unsolved and enigmatic figures, apparitions, and strange little incidents, that only make the reader uneasy" wrote Eichendorff's friend Count Loeben to the author—to which the latter noted "very true" twice in the margins of the letter.<sup>51</sup>

We must be clear that this feature is not simply the result of bad or faulty technique in a youthful literary production. Eichendorff's second and last novel, *Dichter und ihre Gesellen*, is at once more controlled and yet more kaleidoscopic in its teeming multiplicity; it is hardly clear in this work who the central protagonist is.<sup>52</sup> Eichendorff even appears to satirize this

<sup>46</sup>Women are always dressing up as men in *Ahnung und Gegenwart*: Rosa does the same in the ill-fated hunt that closes book II. A point worth making here in the context of whether Schumann's cycle is better sung by a male or female voice is how often the gender of singing voices is unclear or indistinguishable for other characters in Eichendorff (even when this would seem distinctly unlikely in a real-world scenario). In a sense, gender distinctions don't matter; a soprano can vocally imitate a man in Eichendorff's fictional world. The idea that "Die Stille" and "Wehmut" are songs from a woman's subject position should also not be fetishized: in context, these are songs that are sung by a male character, Erwin (even if the "nur einer" of the former is slightly enigmatic, much about this character is likewise). It is not until long afterward that we realize "he" was a "she" (and Friedrich's niece, too).

<sup>47</sup>Egon Schwarz, "Joseph von Eichendorff: *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (1815)," reprinted in *Ansichten zu Eichendorff: Beiträge der Forschung 1958 bis 1988*, ed. Alfred Riemer (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1988), 345, translation modified from a related English version of the discussion in *Joseph von Eichendorff* (New York: Twayne, 1972), 26, 25.

<sup>48</sup>Schwarz, *Joseph von Eichendorff*, 30.

<sup>49</sup>Walther Killy, "Der Roman als romantisches Buch: Über Eichendorffs *Ahnung und Gegenwart*," in *Wirklichkeit und Kunstcharakter: Neun Romane des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 1963), 46, 44.

<sup>50</sup>Review in *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, February 1819, *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, 368, 367, 368.

<sup>51</sup>Cited by Schumann, "Rätsel um Eichendorffs *Ahnung und Gegenwart*," 209.

<sup>52</sup>It would seem to be Fortunat, but the figure of Victor becomes gradually more important by the end. As the plural of the title might imply, one should probably not seek a single central subject in this novel. See further Ernst L. Offermanns, "Eichendorffs Roman *Dichter und ihre Gesellen*," reprinted in *Ansichten zu Eichendorff: Beiträge der Forschung 1958 bis 1988*, ed. Alfred Riemer (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1988), 151–69, who contextualizes the novel through the *teatro mundi* trope of Eichendorff's admired Calderón.

aspect of his style in *Viel Lärmen um Nichts* (1832), the author having to step in as a character in his own novella to sort out the endless confusion. So what is the purpose of this *Verwirrung*? What might this obscurity mean?

The ever-returning themes and images, the intimations of “hidden meanings behind a surfeit of improbabilities,” the bewildering variety of barely connected scenes—all instantiate a crucial aspect of the work’s message.<sup>53</sup> Among the episodic succession of moods, feelings, scenes, and impressions the protagonist—and the reader—attempts to piece together some order and sense from the events around them. Narrative continuity and subjective identity are the problems of the work, and they are not given but must be sought. There is plainly no direct connection in plot between *Ahnung und Gegenwart* and Schumann’s Eichendorff *Liederkreis*: one should hardly expect there to be one. Paradoxically, however, it is in the very absence of a clear plot—but with the continual insinuation that there might be one, or should be one, and that a meaningful narrative coherence is what the characters, and the reader or listener, are struggling to find—that Schumann’s work approaches Eichendorff’s wider aesthetic, as realized in the particular style of this novel and throughout his writing by the phantasmagoric confusion of repeated images, scenes, secretive connections, and narrative dead ends.<sup>54</sup>

It is uncertain—and disputed—to what extent Schumann might have known the novels and novellas of Eichendorff. The immediate source for op. 39 must have been the 1837 first edition of *Gedichte*, as Knaus has shown, and the only Eichendorff volume remaining in the Schumanns’ library today is an 1850 edition of the poems given to Clara by Brahms long afterward.<sup>55</sup> On one side, proponents of a link point to the fact that from his earliest years, Schumann, the son of a bookseller, was well read and had a developed literary taste, and was

thus extremely likely to have been acquainted with the well-known prose works of one of the poets he idolized. (Eichendorff was as famous for the novellas *Taugenichts* and *Marmorbild* as for his poetry during the 1830s.) Often, they suggest, knowledge of the novelistic context sheds light on the nature of Schumann’s setting.<sup>56</sup> Skeptics, on the other hand, dismiss this discussion as just speculation. The circumstantial evidence is inconclusive.<sup>57</sup>

I would like to think that the composer was at least familiar with Eichendorff’s more popular works at the time he wrote his *Liederkreis*, but admit there are no hard facts that will allow us either to affirm or deny this. What can at least be claimed is that *if* Schumann *had* dipped into Eichendorff’s fiction he would have encountered a richly phantasmagorical and enticing confusion of images, events, and characters, a worldview on the one hand distinct from that of Jean Paul or E. T. A. Hoffmann in its highly critical attitude taken toward Romanticism, but nevertheless highly congruent with the Romantic themes of those authors. That worldview would have surely resonated with the artist who gave the world the kaleidoscopic “decentering of the subject” of his piano cycles not long before.<sup>58</sup>

In one important respect, however, Schumann and Eichendorff differ. For the Roman Catholic Eichendorff, it is only in religion that can one find a stable sense of self, a true homecoming in which one may attain peace in this

<sup>53</sup>The phrase is Schwarz’s (*Joseph von Eichendorff*, 34).

<sup>54</sup>This reasoning may seem to some readers to be a case of the dark night in which all cows are black; I would rather see it as the moonlit night in which all nightingales are brown.

<sup>55</sup>Knaus, *Musiksprache und Werkstruktur*, 95.

<sup>56</sup>See, for instance, Knause, *Musiksprache und Werkstruktur*; Reinhold Brinkmann, *Schumann und Eichendorff: Studien zum Liederkreis Opus 39* (Munich: Edition Text+Kritik, 1997), 70; Eric Sams, *The Songs of Robert Schumann* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 93; Graham Johnson, accompanying booklet to *The Songs of Robert Schumann*, vol. 10, Hyperion CDJ33110 (2007).

<sup>57</sup>For instance, Schumann used a number of quotations from the author as epigrams to the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, but these are from poems and all date from the years following the composition of the *Liederkreis*. Christiane Tewinkel suggests that Schumann’s use of Eichendorff here largely corresponds to the image of the pious poet of nature and religion (*Vom Rauschen singen: Robert Schumanns Liederkreis op. 39 nach Gedichten von Joseph von Eichendorff* [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003], 114).

<sup>58</sup>The phrase is Roland Barthes’s, referring to *Carnaval* (“Loving Schumann,” 296).

perplexing and often deceptive world. As Schwarz explains, the purpose of the author's critique of Romanticism's seductive dangers is to give the impression "that human existence is incomplete and confused if lived without a clear religious consciousness, and that a deeper truth lurks behind the surface appearances. It is precisely this tormented quest for clarification . . . that impels the main figures toward their self-fulfillment."<sup>59</sup> Here Schumann and Eichendorff part company. Schumann's cycle does not propose religion as a solution, but ends in the personal ecstasy of the promise of romantic love. Rather than the path to God, Schumann chooses love and subjective feeling—the way of young Otto, not Victor, of the world-weary, disappointed Rudolf, not the devout Friedrich. It may end well, but may well not. Schumann's protagonist(s) are condemned to wander through the Romantic realm of the phantasmagoric, a world of beauty and enchantment, but one fraught with the attendant dangers of enticement and loss of self.

Schumann leaves us in the forest, as dusk descends and horn calls resound confusedly through the trees. So without a path we press ever onward; and the forest, and the night, may be unending.

Here he suddenly stopped, inwardly alarmed; one could hear singing deep in the garden; in the breeze that wafted towards them they could clearly make out the following words:

Hear you not the trees rustling . . . enticing you down . . . where many brooklets run wondrously in the moonlight, and silent castles look down from on high? . . .

"That is the song!" cried Otto, and hurried totally bewildered up the mountain. But from below the song came anew:

Know you not the erring songs, from the beautiful times of old. . . .<sup>60</sup>

Subjective identity and the narrative order on which it is supported and which it in turn supports is a problem, foregrounded by the work of Eichendorff, that has accompanied

Schumann's op. 39 throughout the latter's recent reception history. The paradox of Schumann's cycle, as Jon Finson observes, lies in "its various pairings and juxtapositions," which "constantly invite a wanderer's narrative which does not exist, a coherence that never materializes, an implied causality without effect."<sup>61</sup> Yet nearly all recent commentators, Finson (and myself) included, resort at some level to characterizing the cycle in terms which cannot avoid implying an underlying subject or "persona," in such a way that at least some episodes are seen as standing in a meaningful causal relation to each other. In other words a protosubject and the beginnings of a narrative thread are surreptitiously introduced.<sup>62</sup> And this is entirely natural.

As many philosophers have argued, narrative continuity is fundamental to the modern notion of the self. Self and narrative appear mutually dependent: the modern subject "can only find an identity in self-narration." "We experience and interpret our present experiences not as isolated moments but as part of an ongoing story."<sup>63</sup> "The unity of a human life," as Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, "is the unity of a narrative quest."<sup>64</sup> Even among those who dis-

<sup>61</sup>Finson, *Robert Schumann*, 91.

<sup>62</sup>I am using the term "narrative" here in quite a broad sense (indebted to the work of Paul Ricoeur), to denote any attempt to connect temporally separated events into a coherent and seemingly causal chain—the temporal "story" we tell about them in order to give them meaning. Thus we need not trace the story of a particular human subject (e.g., the protagonist of a *Wanderlieder* cycle) in Schumann's *Liederkreis* to speak of narrative: even a thematic process of growth and culmination across the songs is a type of narrative, one which treats the music as a surrogate organic life-form obeying familiar Aristotelian principles of entelechy. Indeed, the sense of narrative may well be stronger in a formalist reading than in one which sees the *Liederkreis* as a succession of soul-states, in which the implied subject becomes the necessary—though contested—point of continuity (a distinction which maps onto the customary division between narrative and character). On this idea of Romantic music as a series of "soul-states," see further Anthony Newcomb, "Once More 'Between Absolute and Program Music': Schumann's Second Symphony," this journal 7/3 (1984): 233–50.

<sup>63</sup>Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 288; Marya Schechtman, "The Narrative Self," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 398.

<sup>64</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 219.

<sup>59</sup>Schwarz, *Joseph von Eichendorff*, 35.

<sup>60</sup>Eichendorff, *Dichter und ihre Gesellen*, chap. 9, 76, poem contracted.

pute the reality of the self, there is nevertheless a widespread belief that the self is narrative in structure, albeit a fiction.<sup>65</sup> We might see what both Eichendorff's and Schumann's works are doing as, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, "putting narrative identity to the test," via an "unsettling case of narrativity" which exposes selfhood "by taking away the support of sameness."<sup>66</sup>

As I have emphasized, there is often little sense of a clear plot in Eichendorff's episodic, phantasmagoric narrative prose, and even less in Schumann's assortment of seemingly disconnected scenes. Neither, however, is there much of a superordinate sense of character to provide the self-constancy of a coherent subject. Eichendorff's principal characters are ever searching for identity, but strangely have little of their own. Poised precariously between the two poles of *ipse* and *idem* identity, the characters experience diverse life experiences pass over them and yet they continually seek identities already given to them (knowledge of concealed birth relations, the recovery of a childhood state, a higher truth glimpsed through anamnesis).<sup>67</sup> Even more plainly, there is no consistent subject or persona across Schumann's songs, at least on the surface. So what is left? It might seem to be nothing—and those who resist hearing any sense of a consistent subject in Schumann's cycle, or who reject Eichendorff's writing as just another instance of undisciplined Romantic incoherence, would be bearing out this view by their reaction. But perhaps, as most responses to the cycle suggest, there is something that remains, something that is crucial to how we attempt to understand our lives.

The reception of Schumann's *Liederkreis* reveals how much the desire for coherence is ingrained in our expectations of narrative and

psychological identity. Twelve lyrical episodes are set forth in succession, the majority of which implicate a subject or subject position, and we attempt to join the dots to make a coherent picture.<sup>68</sup> Like the sense of an enduring self across time, like the self problematized in such songs as "Im Walde," the identity is created, perhaps just a regulative fiction; "the 'subject'," as the disbelieving Nietzsche puts it, "is not something given; it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is."<sup>69</sup> We want to find a coherent underlying "story"—whether the action of conventional narrative, a succession of moods and soul-states that could be imputed to a single implied subject, or an organic process of thematic interconnections—and clutch at those brief and tantalizing hints that are present, making them into something bigger yet more uncertain. Inverting the proposition that the term "*Kreis* suggests the presence of a thematic center from which the poems radiate," we might say that Schumann's *Liederkreis* suggests the *absence* of a center, an empty space into which we project our own need for an aesthetic subject—one which expands to encompass a circle of songs around it, which we connect by means of narrative continuity.<sup>70</sup>

This is one way of understanding the powerful sense of subjectivity felt acting in Schumann's music. As Lawrence Kramer proposes, the purpose of Romantic music "is not to express subjectivity, no matter how expressive of feeling or 'musical personality' some of it may be. Its primary action is to invite subjectivity: to address itself to a subject position."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup>See, for instance, Daniel Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," in *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. Frank S. Kessel, Pamela M. Cole, and Dale L. Johnson (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 103–15.

<sup>66</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 149.

<sup>67</sup>The distinction between *ipse* and *idem* identity—the one standing for self-constancy across change and mutability, the other for a numerical sameness and permanence—is again that of Ricoeur, *ibid.*, 2–3.

<sup>68</sup>Only "Auf einer Burg" contains no real subject position; that of "Zwielicht" is implicit from the imperative mood adopted, though here it is the apparent addressee that becomes the real subject, rather than the utterer, whose identity is shrouded in mystery.

<sup>69</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885–7*, 7 [60], in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), XII, 315; trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale from *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 267.

<sup>70</sup>The characterization is Wilhelm Müller's, as expressed by Turchin, "Robert Schumann's Song-Cycles," 276–77.

<sup>71</sup>Lawrence Kramer, "The Mysteries of Animation: History, Analysis and Musical Subjectivity," *Music Analysis* 20/2 (2001): 157.

The narrative and subjective unity of Schumann's cycle is given to the work by us: it is a creative act of the perceiver, an aesthetic act. Through this act we are doing the work of subjectivity, the work that we constantly carry out in order to tell ourselves that our own lives are coherent and have meaning. And this is a process which finds no end, but is constituted from the continual search for itself.<sup>72</sup> Schumann's cycle spirals round a center that is never there but which we populate with our own desire, a match for the fictional subject's longing for the beloved who is never present.

Our repeated attempts at making sense of the work by imposing, however covertly, a quasi-narrative order or coherence on something which continually flees from our attempt to grasp it is, in a deeper sense, one of the most Romantic qualities of the work Schumann considered his "most Romantic."<sup>73</sup> In the enticing half-light that flickers over the Eichendorff *Liederkreis*, the search for a fictive narrative and fugitive unifying subject may often—like the uncanny dream of Romano in *Viel Lärmen um Nichts*—seem to be a case of our finding merely ourselves. And in this, we have been enticed into the phantasmagoric world offered by Eichendorff and Schumann, to the extent that we no longer recognize the distinction be-

tween what really lies before us and our subjective desire.—*O holde Zauberei!*<sup>74</sup>



### **Abstract.**

A recurring theme in the reception of Schumann's Eichendorff *Liederkreis* is the question mark over its sense of narrative continuity and the presence (or otherwise) of a central protagonist. Up until now, however, scarcely any attempt has been made to view these features in the context of Eichendorff's wider literary production. This article proposes applying an Eichendorffian aesthetic to Schumann's op. 39, viewing its phantasmagoric interconnections, absence of clear narrative order, sense of temporal dislocation and persistent theme of the loss of self as profoundly reflecting the concerns of Eichendorff's prose fiction. Neither the view that Schumann's cycle does possess a unified narrative and central protagonist, nor the converse, that it should be seen as a disparate group of songs, is adequate. Instead, it is the tension between the two views that emerges as crucial in coming to an aesthetic understanding of the cycle. Schumann's procedure, in juxtaposing a number of poems drawn from disparate works, presents an extreme case whereby narrative and subjective identity are put to the test, and the listener is invited to fill the vacant space left by the withdrawal of a unifying subject with his or her own sense of subjectivity. Keywords: Joseph von Eichendorff, Robert Schumann, *Liederkreis*, op. 39, subjectivity, personal identity

<sup>72</sup>German Idealist and Romantic thought insists that the subject is not a thing but an act, and one that is never completed but rather takes part in an infinite process. Eichendorff's religious sensibility departs from this reading; for him, a character may find fulfillment and completion in God.

<sup>73</sup>"Der Eichendorffsche Zyklus ist wohl mein aller Romantischstes": letter to Clara Wieck, 22 May 1840, in *Robert Schumann in seinen Schriften und Briefen*, ed. Wolfgang Boetticher (Berlin: Hahnfeld, 1942), 340.

<sup>74</sup>The final line of the poem inscribed by Eichendorff in the Schumanns' album in 1847 during a visit to Vienna. The poem runs: "Each and every heart dreams / Of the distant land of beauty; / Thither through joy and pain / A fairy swings from wonderful tones / many a bridge— / O sweet bewitchment!" The original is given in *Briefe und Gedichte aus dem Album Robert und Clara Schumanns*, ed. Wolfgang Boetticher (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1979), 50.