Schumann's Eichendorff *Liederkreis* and the Genre of the Romantic Cycle

DAVID FERRIS

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To Hannah Goodwin and Allan Keiler

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PREFACE

The present book is the culmination of a study that began with a seminar on the nineteenth-century song and piano cycle that I took as a graduate student. Our primary interest was in how nineteenth-century composers used the cycle to experiment with musical forms and, in particular, how they tried to create musical structures that expanded beyond the boundaries of a single movement. Many of the scholars whom we read at the time based their explanations of the cycle's formal organization on traditional assumptions about organic unity and primarily relied on motive and voice-leading relationships as they tried to analyze the cycle as a unified whole. When I began the seminar, I, too, assumed that this was the path that would ultimately lead us to a theory of the cycle, but by the end of the semester we had raised so many questions about this approach that we began to wonder if such a theory was either possible or desirable. In my case, these questions soon gave birth to a dissertation on Schumann's Eichendorff *Liederkreis*, in which I argued that we needed to shift our focus from the whole to the part in order to understand the Romantic cycle. Rather than try to demonstrate how the *Liederkreis* creates a unified structure, I explored the ways in which the individual songs are fragmentary and open-ended.

As I worked on my dissertation, I sometimes worried that by the time I got to the end of it, I would have completely done away with the genre I was writing about. If all I had left was a series of individual songs, then where was the cycle? Fortunately, the members of my committee never asked that question. As I have continued to think about Schumann's cycles, I have come to see that in asking the question myself, I was missing the whole point of the Romantic aesthetic that led to the genre in the first place. I still believe that the cycle does not bind the songs into a unified whole, but I now see that the open-ended form of the individual song itself implies larger relationships that we, as listeners, performers, and analysts, must imaginatively realize as we engage with the work. It is in this sense that Schumann's cycles are Romantic fragments, "always only becoming," never fully completed. Schumann makes us aware of the potentiality of a higher unity, and it is this that gives the cycle its aesthetic and expressive power.

Although he has not directly participated in the creation of the present book, I am most gratefully indebted to Prof. Allan Keiler, who taught that graduate seminar and patiently advised and shepherded me through that dissertation. He

remains my greatest intellectual inspiration and my model of what a true scholar should be. I am equally grateful to my wife, Hannah Goodwin, who has always been my most perceptive critic and my most demanding editor. She often knows what I am thinking better than I do, and it is only through her patience and perseverance that many of the ideas in the pages that follow have assumed a coherent form.

Thanks to Rufus Hallmark, Susan Youens, Kristina Muxfeldt, Emery Snyder, Janet Schmalfeldt, Joseph Lubben, and Adrianna Ponce, who offered many suggestions and much support, and to Karol Bennett and John McDonald, who so beautifully brought the Eichendorff songs to life and shared their insights about the music and the poetry. Thanks to the students in my three seminars on Romantic song, at Rice University, the University of Houston, and Amherst College. As is so often the case, I feel as if I learned more from them than they could possibly have learned from me. Thanks to Dean Michael Hammond, for his financial support and for the strong words of encouragement that he offered me when we first met. And thanks to Maribeth Anderson Payne, Maureen Buja, and Jonathan Wiener of Oxford University Press, for their faith in the value of my project and for their work to turn it into a published book.

I would also like to offer my gratitude to a group of people who feel like old friends, even though I have never met most of them and have only spoken briefly with the others. They are the late Arthur Komar, Barbara Turchin, John Daverio, Charles Rosen, Patrick McCreless, David Neumeyer, Ruth Bingham, Reinhold Brinkmann, Charles Burkhart, Jürgen Thym, and Jon W. Finson. The pages that follow could not have been written without the benefit of their collective scholarship and creativity. I have greatly enjoyed engaging and debating them, albeit one-sidedly, and I can only hope that my work has met the high standards that they have set.

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Part I

The Genre of the Cycle

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1 INTRODUCTION

As the title of this book suggests, it is concerned both with the genre of the Romantic cycle in general and with Robert Schumann's Eichendorff *Liederkreis*, opus 39, in particular. Scholarly studies that are focused on musical works, or on works of art in any field, almost always provoke the same vexing question: Is the objective to discover what it is that is engaging and unique about the single work and that sets it apart from every other artistic creation? Or is the work at hand an example, the study of which will, we hope, lead to the formulation of general principles that can apply to all of the works in a given genre, or by a given artist, or from a given time and place? Gérard Genette comments on this conundrum in the preface to his book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, a study of both narrative method and Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and confesses his reluctance, or perhaps his inability, to choose either of these "apparently incompatible" explanations of his approach. He cannot imagine treating "the specificity of Proustian narrative" as an example of anything other than itself. However, although his study is an analysis of this specific narrative, each of the individual elements that his analysis uncovers "lends itself to some connection, comparison, or putting into perspective." Genette fatalistically concludes: "I must therefore recognize that by seeking the specific I find the universal, and that by wishing to put theory at the service of criticism I put-criticism, against my will, at the service of theory."[1]

I must also refuse to make such a choice. On the one hand, the study of a work that belongs to a genre such as the cycle, which is so open-ended and varied and for which so few general principles have been formulated and so few adequate definitions put forth, cannot be expected to result in the creation of a model that can be applied in a straightforward way to all of its fellow members. On the other hand, I cannot pretend that my choice of subject—the Eichendorff *Liederkreis*—is an arbitrary one or that it was guided only by my desire to learn more about this single work, with no concern for the more general questions that are inevitably encountered in the course of such a study. Schumann's opus 39 is recognized as one of the greatest nineteenth-century song cycles, yet it lacks the attributes that have traditionally been used to define the cycle, such as a coherent narrative and an immutable order, attributes that are generally associated

with organicist conceptions of musical structure. The problem already manifests itself in the circumstances of the work's composition. Schumann did not derive his text from a coherent, preexisting literary source but arranged twelve apparently unrelated poems that his fiancée, Clara Wieck, selected from Eichendorff's collected edition. And the only complete surviving set of manuscript sources provides evidence that Schumann did not begin to consider the order of the songs until after he had finished composing them. Given such a history, it is not at all surprising that scholars have found that the Eichendorff *Liederkreis* makes such a poor fit with the accepted model of the song cycle. They have struggled mightily, nevertheless, to squeeze it in as best they can.

Over the last forty years, the scholarly reception of Schumann's Eichendorff *Liederkreis* has been remarkably consistent. Commentators have sought to explain the cycle as an integrated musical whole that is unified by a web of motivic relationships and a symmetrical arrangement of keys. They have described the text of the cycle as an ordered sequence of moods, bound together by the recurring use of landscape, time of day, and imagery, that leads up to the ecstatic fulfillment depicted in the last song. This ongoing attempt to make the Eichendorff *Liederkreis* fit its presumed generic model has required a certain amount of tinkering. Some elements of the work cannot be reconciled with the model and must simply be regarded as exceptional, and some aspects of the model must be altered and expanded so that the work can fit in more easily. At the same time, scholars have replaced the organicist terminology that pervaded the earlier literature on the song cycle, but the model has essentially remained intact, and its underlying premise—the presence of some form of coherent unity—has not been questioned. The problem with all of this is that in searching for ways to make the Eichendorff *Liederkreis* into a cycle scholars have been drawn to some of the least remarkable aspects of the work and have ignored many of the most interesting.

My own study of the Eichendorff *Liederkreis* has led me to question whether organic unity really is the most compelling model for the Romantic song cycle. The prestige and popularity that this work has enjoyed, coupled with the very obvious difficulty we have had in fitting it into the genre, have made the problems with the model especially apparent. But if we look a bit further afield and consider the entire corpus of songs that Schumann composed in his *Liederjahr*, we find that the problems we encounter with the Eichendorff songs are really just the tip of the iceberg. The two Schumann cycles that have become central to the genre—*Frauenliebe und Leben* and *Dichterliebe*—may fit the traditional model more easily, but they, too, need to be forced in to some extent, and in the process we have ended up losing sight of some of their most interesting aspects as well. In addition, of course, a number of Schumann's cycles have proven to be at least as problematic as opus 39, and these have been either marginalized or excluded from the genre, and thus from the repertory, altogether. When we consider that we have been able to use the model of organic unity to account for only a small number of Schumann's song cycles and that it has not worked all that well even for these, we are left with the question of how this came to be the defining premise of the cycle in the first place.

The Cycle as a Romantic Genre

One reason that the definition of the Romantic song cycle has made such a poor fit with the actual works it is intended to explain is that it was not formulated until many years after those works were composed, and in the meantime the aesthetic sensibility that had motivated the creation of the genre had waned. It is considered a truism in the study of music history that theory typically lags behind practice in this way, and one of the examples that is often cited is sonata form, which was first defined in a series of composition treatises in the 1840s. But if we cannot find a formal definition of something that is called sonata form in the late eighteenth century, we can at least find detailed descriptions of how the first movements of the symphony, the sonata, the string quartet, and the concerto are typically structured, as well as an acknowledgment that these forms are related, and thus contribute to the establishment of a clearly defined family of genres. The treatises and music dictionaries of the early nineteenth century, the period during which the Romantic song cycle came into being and reached its creative peak, likewise contain no formal definitions of the terms *Liedercyclus* and *Liederkreis*, but they also contain no descriptions of anything that remotely resembles a song cycle. And while such terms and descriptions do show up in contemporary music journals, their occasional and casual nature gives the impression that the idea of the song cycle as a meaningful genre was not very well formulated.

In fact, it would be more accurate to say that the Romantic conception of genre itself is more pliable than ours and the sense in which the cycle functioned as a genre for a composer such as Schumann is quite different from the way it functions for us today. There are both practical and aesthetic reasons that the cycle was a congenial way for Schumann to publish his piano character pieces from the 1830s and his songs from 1840–41. Since so many of these songs and pieces are extremely brief—often no more than twenty or twenty-five measures—he clearly needed to place them within larger collections for publication. And since he tended to compose in concentrated bursts, during which he would quickly write a group of such works, it was natural for him to then publish the group as a whole. It is not surprising, given this method of composing, that there are such strong resemblances and connections among the works of each opus. Today we are quite concerned with these connections, and we classify Schumann's publications in terms of the unity, or coherence, of the songs and pieces within them. This process of generic classification is implicitly a process of evaluation as well: we are distinguishing Schumann's "true cycles" from his "mere collections."

But there is no evidence that Schumann made such distinctions himself. First of all, he is quite casual in how he designates his sets of songs, not only using *Liedercyclus* and *Liederkreis* interchangeably but also, for example, changing the designation of *Frauenliebe und Leben* from "Cyklus in acht Liedern" on the set of piano drafts to, simply, "Acht Lieder" on the title page of the published edition. And while there are very few records of any performances of Schumann's

songs and character pieces in his lifetime, a point to which I shall return later, the records we do have consistently describe the performance of single pieces and almost never a complete cycle, suggesting that the integrity of the whole was not as inviolable in his day as we have made it today. There is little question, by the way, that Schumann himself acquiesced and even approved of such performances, since his wife was frequently the performer. However, the most significant evidence we have that Schumann did not use the premise of a unified whole to distinguish his cycles from his other collections is the fact that there is no evidence. Given the centrality of the cycle to his compositional output, why is it that he never explains what cyclic unity should be like or even asserts the need for it? In fact, aside from a few passing references in his correspondence, there is scarcely any explicit mention of the cycle at all in his abundant writings on the music of his day.[2] Admittedly, this does not provide us with conclusive proof that our conception of the cycle differs from Schumann's. But when we consider the difficulties we have had in applying our conception to his works, it should at least make us wonder whether we are justified in clinging to it so tenaciously.

I would like to propose an alternative conception of Schumann's cycles, which can be summarized as follows: The cycle is not generically opposed to the collection but is a particular kind of collection in itself, a collection that is composed of pieces whose forms tend to be fragmentary and whose meaning tends to be obscure. The cycle does not create an overarching unity that provides such pieces with completion and clarity but is itself discontinuous and open-ended. The context that the cycle sets up is provocative; it implies structural connections and hints at larger meanings, but it never makes them explicit or definitive.

We cannot know with any certainty how Schumann himself defined and conceived of the song cycle, and in some ways this is just as well, since it relieves us of the temptation to simply identify ourselves with him, rather than construct our own historical understanding. But if my definition of the cycle is not necessarily Schumann's definition, it is at least consistent with the scanty evidence we do have of his viewpoint and can be used to explain all of the works that he explicitly published as cycles. Moreover, in defining the cycle as I have, I am specifically identifying it as a Romantic genre. I believe that Schumann's cycles provide us with especially interesting examples of how the intellectual context of literary Romanticism influenced him as a composer.

Among the enduring legacies of the Schlegels and their Jena colleagues is a new understanding of the role of literature and, by extension, of all the genres of art. They believed that, in contrast with the Classical works of the ancients, which are complete wholes, the Romantic works of the modern age are inherently fragmentary and unfinished. This aesthetic stance is highly suggestive, and we can find much evidence that it profoundly influenced Schumann and his associates. One implication, for example, is that the role of the audience in perceiving and comprehending works of art must change dramatically. Rather than remaining a passive receptor, who simply soaks up the meaning that is inherent in the work, the reader of Romantic literature and the listener to Romantic music

must become actively engaged in the creation of that meaning, which will change not only from one era to another, or even from one performance to another, but also in each perceptive act by each individual person. The cultivation first of the lyric cycle by German poets and then of the song cycle by their musical colleagues is one of the most significant manifestations of this new conception in the early nineteenth century. If it seems difficult to come up with a universal definition for the Romantic cycle that will enable us to consistently explain how such works cohere, it is not simply because different cycles have different means of coherence, as many recent scholars have assumed. Rather, in composing such works Schumann and his contemporaries were experimenting with the very question of aesthetic coherence itself and leaving it up to their listeners, each in his or her own fashion, to realize and develop whatever unifying meaning the songs of the cycle may imply. I believe that in seeking to explain such a work by trying to impose a fixed coherence on it we not only end up misunderstanding the work, but we also undermine the imaginative and liberating aesthetic that gave it life.

The expectation that their audience would play an active role in creating aesthetic meaning inevitably led the Romantics to severely circumscribe that audience, so severely, in fact, that it sometimes disappeared altogether. This phenomenon is well documented in the case of Schumann's early piano music, where it manifested itself both in the poor sales of his publications and in the difficulties faced by Clara Wieck in trying to program her fiancé's music in her public performances.[3] On the few occasions when she did perform his piano character pieces during the 1830s and 1840s, it was almost always in a private setting, such as her father's home, and she invariably selected a single piece or a small group of pieces from one of Schumann's cycles. One of the few accounts that we have of a complete performance of a piano cycle during this period is in a letter that Wieck wrote to Schumann from Berlin on November 21, 1839. She describes playing his opus 21 *Novelletten* for "several music connoisseurs." It is clear from her letter that this was an unusual occurence, since she does not simply write that she played the *Novelletten*, or even the cycle of *Novelletten*, but that she "played all of [his] *Novelletten* one after the other," and she prefaces her account by excusing the "absent-minded" quality of her writing with an appeal to her understandable exhaustion from having accomplished such a pianistic feat.[4] If Schumann's character pieces in and of themselves appealed only to a very small and sophisticated audience and were perfomed only rarely, then the complete cycles that he created out of those pieces were even more private and more inaccessible.

One factor that motivated Schumann's sudden turn to lieder in 1840 was undoubtedly his desire to publish in a more marketable genre, as several scholars have recently argued.[5] Song publications were very popular throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and in contrast with his early piano music, which must have been unplayable by most of the amateur musicians of his day, Schumann's songs would have been easily within their grasp. We also know, from the contemporary song reviews that were aimed at these amateurs, that there was at least the expectation that a cycle of songs would be sung through from beginning to end.[6] However, there are even fewer known performances of

Schumann's songs during his lifetime than there are of his character pieces, probably because the lied was considered a private genre. This does not simply mean that it was unsuitable for performance in large public concert halls but also in the smaller private spaces that still proliferated in the early part of the nineteenth century. Two 1844 reviews from Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, for example, specifically suggest that lieder should not be performed in the salon, a setting that has become emblematic of private music making in the nineteenth century:

> These songs will not make a noisy triumphal procession through the salons, but in a peaceful cell they will refresh quiet receptive souls with their unadorned gracefulness, their poetic fragrance.
>
> If this collection is not well suited to a salon recital—for which a real lied, and least of all the most soulful, should not be chosen—then it is especially suitable for the shortening of lonely hours or to the stimulating conversation of a close and refined circle of poetic souls.[7]

Both of these reviews use Romantic rhetoric to depict the ideal setting in which lieder should be sung. The image of a peaceful cell, with its unmistakable allusion to monastic life, in the first passage and the reference to a circle of poetic souls, who are sharing intimate conversation, in the second both point to a communal and almost mysteriously private conception of lieder singing. These reviews do not necessarily tell us, of course, what the people who bought the songs of Schumann and his contemporaries actually did with them, but they do give us some insight as to how he and his colleagues conceived them. If on one level Schumann intended his song publications as a practical way of selling music and making a reputation for himself as a marketable composer, on another level they take their place among his most Romantic artistic creations, which are accessible only to the most refined and poetic sensibilities.

The Cycle as a Public Genre

By the time that the earliest known definition of the synonymous terms *Liederkreis* and *Liedercyclus* appeared in Arrey von Dommer's edition of *H. C. Koch's musikalisches Lexicon* in 1865, the cycle had already started to decline as a compositional genre. The question has been raised as to why a definition of the song cycle suddenly appeared at this point, nearly fifty years after the terms were first used as designations for a published song collection.[8] While there is certainly no single explanation, it is probably not coincidental that the first public performances of complete song cycles by Schubert and Schumann occurred a few years before the publication of Dommer's lexicon.[9] As composers became less interested in the cycle, performers became more so. It was now a public genre, and as it became accessible to a relatively large audience for the first time, they presumably wanted to understand what they were hearing. Dommer does not de-

fine the cycle in terms of the Romantic conception that I have outlined in the foregoing section. One reason for this is that the aesthetic ideals that influenced its creation no longer held sway at the time he wrote his definition. But another, related reason is that the Romantic view was no longer relevant once the cycle became public. In the late nineteenth century, as in Schumann's day and as in our own, it could not be expected that a general audience would have the capability or the desire to actively engage in the construction of musical and poetic meaning in the way that the early Romantics demanded. Attending a concert is typically treated as a passive experience, and for most audience members it is not enhanced by the feeling of uncertainty. And so begins the search for a definitive definition of the song cycle, which could contain it by clearly enunciating the conventions of the genre and find a place for it by comparing and contrasting the genre with others that are more familiar. In other words, what was needed, once the song cycle began to reach a wide public, was a definition that could tell us what to expect when we heard one, a definition that could be used as an aesthetic standard. Dommer's reads as follows:

> *Liederkreis, Liedercyclus.* A coherent complex of various lyric poems. Each is closed in itself, and can be outwardly distinguished from the others in terms of prosody, but all have an inner relationship to one another, because one and the same basic idea runs through all of them. The individual poems present different expressions of this idea, depicting it in manifold and often contrasting images and from various perspectives, so that the basic feeling is presented comprehensively. As far as the music is concerned, it is certainly typical for each individual poem to be through-composed. A main melody would essentially be retained for all of the strophes (of the same poem), and only altered and turned into something else where it seems suitable or necessary. Naturally, however, the melody and the entire musical form change with each poem, and so does the key, and the individual movements are typically bound to one another through the ritornelli and transitions of the accompanying instrument. The accompaniment is essentially developed so that it portrays and paints the situation in a characteristic way, and also supplies, in regard to the expression, what the voice must leave unfinished. In comparison with the dramatic solo cantata, the *Liederkreis* is actually missing nothing more than the recitative and the aria form of the songs [*Gesänge*] instead of the lied form. Otherwise one finds it is rather close to the cantata, or regards it as a middle genre between through-composed lied and cantata.[10]

We can divide Dommer's definition into three component parts: a description of the text, a description of the music, and a comparison with the genre of the solo cantata. The fact that Dommer begins with the text and appears at first to be defining the cycle as a poetic genre is one element that connects his definition to the critical tradition of the earlier nineteenth century, in which the poetic text is almost always considered to be of equal or greater importance than the

musical setting. His account of the typical song cycle text should be familiar to us in a number of respects. He emphasizes the need for coherence, and he describes the tension between the integrity of the individual poem and its relationship to the larger whole, as well as the balance within the whole between variety and unity. One striking omission, at least in comparsion with more recent definitions, is any reference to a narrative that runs through the poems and determines their order. But if Dommer begins his definition by describing the cycle as a lyric genre, he ends it by comparing it to a dramatic genre, the solo cantata. He tells us that the only difference between the two is that the cycle consists of lieder, where the cantata alternates recitative and aria, in other words, that the one is lyrical and the other is dramatic. This is not a minor difference, as Dommer implies, but an essential distinction between the two genres. We can easily imagine how such a self-contradictory comparison might lead to confusion in the later reception of the song cycle.

The most curious aspect of Dommer's definition is his description of the music, which bears no relationship whatsoever to the song cycles of Schumann, Schubert, or any of the numerous *Kleinmeisters* who composed in the genre. One would be hard-pressed to come up with a general description that would fit all or even most of the song cycles composed in the first half of the nineteenth century, as several scholars have observed, but it is significant that Dommer resolved this difficulty by turning to one of the earliest and most anomalous cycles—Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*. Although Dommer does not mention this work by name, his description records so many of its distinctive features that there can be no question that it served as his model. Each of the songs in *An die ferne Geliebte*, with the exception of the last, is strophic, with only minor variations in the melodies, but Beethoven varies the accompaniments extensively from one strophe to the next, so that they take on the role of characterizing the changing situations and provide the expressivity that the strophic melodies cannot. And, of course, the use of instrumental ritornelli and transitions is one of the most celebrated techniques that Beethoven employs in unifying his cycle. But since each one of these aspects is unique to Beethoven's cycle, Dommer's definition is completely useless for anyone who wants to know what to expect in a typical nineteenth-century song cycle.

There is apparently no precedent for Dommer's tacit reliance on *An die ferne Geliebte* as a model for the Romantic song cycle, but it has become the most enduring aspect of his definition. And, in an odd way, we can see why it would be tempting to use Beethoven's cycle and to emphasize just those elements that make it unique within the genre. What *An die ferne Geliebte* has, which is lacking in virtually every other Romantic cycle, is a clear sense of unity and coherence. Schumann's cycles derive much of their expressive force from setting up an irreconcilable tension between the part and the whole. The tonal ambiguity and open-ended formal structures that characterize his songs imply that they are incomplete parts of a larger form, but the discontinuity from one song to the next prevents the cycle from becoming a unified entity. In Beethoven's cycle, there is no such tension, both because the songs are so straightforward formally and

tonally and because the transitions between them help us to easily subsume them within the whole. For this reason, *An die ferne Geliebte* is much closer to the continuous instrumental forms that provide us with the familiar exemplars of organic unity, and as a cycle it is more accessible. But if this helps to explain why *An die ferne Geliebte* has persisted as an implicit model for the Romantic song cycle, it also gives us some idea of why defining the genre has been so difficult.

The Cycle as a Whole

I will now skip ahead about a century, to the publication of Arthur Komar's famous essay "The Music of *Dichterliebe*: The Whole and Its Parts."[11] On the one hand, Komar's assumption that Schumann's cycle "constitutes an integrated musical whole" reveals the influence that the model of *An die ferne Geliebte* still exerted, and one wonders whether Komar would have written such an essay in the first place if he did not have this example before him. On the other hand, he is no longer interested in the very specific aspects of *An die ferne Geliebte* that Dommer describes and never actually mentions Beethoven's work in his essay. By the time Komar was writing it, *An die ferne Geliebte* had become less well known among listeners and performers and his chosen cycle, *Dichterliebe*, had become far more popular, so much so that today we define the genre largely in terms of our understanding of this single cycle. But despite *An die ferne Geliebte's* increasing unfamiliarity, we continue to regard it, perhaps unconsciously, as the prototype for *Dichterliebe* and for the Romantic song cycle in general.

Komar's essay marks the beginning of the modern attempt to define the Romantic cycle as a genre. Earlier studies explain how a set of Schumann's songs or piano pieces is organized as a cycle, such as Rudolph Réti's analysis of *Kinderszenen* and Theodor Adorno's essay on the Eichendorff *Liederkreis*, both of which were published in the 1950s.[12] But neither of these studies had much of an immediate impact within Schumann scholarship, and, in fact, Réti's remains virtually unknown even today. It was only with the publication of Komar's analysis of *Dichterliebe*, in 1971, that a sustained scholarly interest in the Romantic cycle began, an interest that has continued in some form or other up to the present day. Since my book takes its place within this scholarship and to some extent must be understood in relation to it, I think it will be useful to briefly outline its history.

We can divide the recent scholarship on Schumann's cycles into three distinct but chronologically overlapping phases. At first, the cycle was considered in theoretical terms, as analysts tried to build on Komar's effort and establish a set of defining criteria that could be demonstrated through analyses of Schumann's works. Then attention shifted to the construction of a wider historical context, and scholars began to study the origins and development of the song cycle by surveying the works of Schumann's lesser known predecessors and contemporaries and reading what nineteenth-century music critics had to say about them. Finally, within the last several years, there has been a growing interest in what I have already described as the intellectual context of the Romantic cyle,

by which I primarily mean the way in which the creation and development of the genre resulted from the influence of literary Romanticism. It is only in the first, analytic phase that the model of organic unity has been explicitly identified as the defining premise of the genre, and, in fact, the desire to place Schumann's cycles within broader contexts originated in large part as a reaction against the organicist viewpoint. But while a variety of alternative ideas about the cycle have been explored by recent scholars, all of them inevitably end up returning to some way of explaining the unity of the whole.

What Komar has in mind, when he describes *Dichterliebe* as an integrated musical whole, is a Schenkerian voice-leading structure that extends through the entire cycle, a coherent plan that is created by the sequence of keys among the songs, and the presence of a single overarching key that unifies them. Since his essay appeared, subsequent analysts, such as David Neumeyer, Patrick McCreless, and Peter Kaminsky, have expanded on his conception by considering other unifying elements such as motive and poetic narrative and have applied it to a growing number of Schumann's song and piano cycles.[13] These scholars have attempted to construct a theory of cyclic coherence by engaging in detailed analyses of individual cycles. In the process, they have employed a variety of analytic techniques and have learned a great deal about Schumann's music. Their work has led to the emergence of a common set of theoretical premises and a shared analytic terminology that has been used to explain these cycles as coherent musical entities. The explicit goal, in Kaminsky's words, is to "define the term *cycle* in a way that distinguishes it from the *collection*." He goes on to explain how that distinction should be understood:

> We generally think of a collection as a set of independent, closed tonal movements whose integrity would not be destroyed if they were arranged in a different order or even transposed. For a cycle, on the other hand, we assume that some sense of unity flows from a coherent tonal and formal organization.[14]

We can see, in the definitive language of this passage, that the genre of the cycle has been defined far more clearly than it was in the nineteenth century. But we can also see how rigid and un-Romantic our definition has become, especially in comparison with the flexible and open-ended formal strategies that Schumann employs in his cycles. It is understandable that musicologists began to sense that what we were defining and explaining had somehow become quite different from what Schumann was composing and to embark on a more comprehensive study of the genre as it was understood in the early nineteenth century. But how do we shed our twentieth-century assumptions and reconsider the historical material with an open mind? As Barbara Turchin points out in the introduction to her 1981 dissertation, still one of the most important of the recent attempts to write the history of the Romantic song cycle, this is not an easy proposition. Even the preliminary step of deciding which musical works should be considered requires us to establish "a priori, definitions, categories and criteria by which to judge the

nature and characteristics of a song cycle." Establishing the generic boundaries of the early nineteenth-century song cycle is especially problematic, as Turchin was quick to discover, because the use of designations that clearly identify works as members of the genre, such as *Liederkreis* and *Liedercyclus*, was the exception rather than the rule. Most of the song publications that appeared in the first half of the century had titles such as "Zwölf Lieder" or "Sechs Gedichte," but many of the works that were given these innocuous designations were apparently intended as song cycles nevertheless. In order to find her bearings in this unmarked terrain, Turchin came up with the ingenious solution of reading reviews of song publications from various nineteenth-century music journals in order to see which sets of songs were considered to be cycles and how these cycles were explained and described.[15]

Turchin's method led her to make a number of interesting discoveries about the history of the song cycle. She found, for example, that while Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* continued to be held in high regard throughout the nineteenth century, it was far less influential than the *Frühlingslieder* and *Wanderlieder* cycles of Conradin Kreutzer, which were composed at about the same time. Kreutzer's cycles were imitated by many subsequent composers and were explicitly held up as models by contemporary critics. They bear little resemblance to Beethoven's, and, significantly, Kreutzer does not employ a cyclic return or connect the songs with piano transitions, and neither of his cycles is unified by an obvious tonal structure.[16] Turchin also found that in defining song publications as cycles critics relied almost exclusively on the text, rather than the music, and described a variety of ways in which the poems of a cycle could be related, including not only a narrative sequence but also mood and theme. More surprising still, critics were rarely concerned with the question of coherence or unity, and, on the contrary, they more often evaluated cycles in terms of the variety and contrast between the poems.[17] All of these conclusions point us away from a single organicist model for the Romantic song cycle and suggest that in the nineteenth century the genre was far more fluid and open-ended than it is today.

Other scholars have subsequently followed up on this suggestion and have argued that the definition of the cycle as a set of songs that is organically unified is too narrow and too anachronistic. Ruth Bingham, for example, has questioned the premise that there is any meaningful distinction between a cycle and a collection at all. She believes that our insistence on this distinction results from our underlying bias toward unity as an aesthetic standard and our consequent reliance on *An die ferne Geliebte* as the ideal model for the song cycle. Bingham suggests that if we study early song cycles in greater numbers, then "the 'cycle-versus-collection' question may ultimately prove to be irrelevant, its main function to reveal how ambiguous the boundaries between the two are." In her own definition of the song cycle, Bingham replaces the term *unity* with the related term *coherence*, which has more wide-ranging connotations and is not tainted by the historical baggage of organicism. Her intention is to acknowledge that there are a variety of ways that song cycles may cohere and to avoid privileging one over another.[18] Similarly, in a recent chapter on the nineteenth-century song cycle

John Daverio writes that the genre "resists definition," in part because it is so variable, both in terms of the "choice and arrangement of texts" and in terms of the musical connections that may adhere between the songs. He, too, argues that the only defining criterion is "a demonstrable measure of coherence," and he concludes that scholars need to take a more ecumenical approach and "attempt to describe the nature and quality of this coherence as it manifests itself in individual cases."[19]

The Limits of the Historical Model

The acknowledgment of generic diversity among the song cycles of the nineteenth century, the attention to lesser known works, and the attempt to understand the cycle from a contemporary perspective are all positive developments that have contributed in significant ways to our understanding of the genre. And yet, ultimately, I am not sure that the recent historical research has changed our conception of the song cycle as much as one might think. First, although the term *coherence* suggests a more inclusive model than *unity*, the similarities between the two are far greater than the differences, and when scholars have explained what it is that they have in mind when they describe the song cycle as coherent it usually turns out to be the same kinds of relationships that have traditionally been associated with organicism. Second, while the evidence that Turchin and Bingham have found is often at odds with our modern-day assumptions about the cycle, they both rely on those same assumptions in order to make sense of the evidence and inevitably find ways to make it fit.

Bingham, for example, presents the history of the nineteenth-century song cycle as a two-pronged development in which first the use of texts that are associated by a common theme is replaced by the use of texts that have a coherent narrative and then the reliance on the text as the principal means of cyclic coherence ultimately gives way altogether to "musically-constructed cycles," in which coherence depends more on the music. By using this historical schema to explain the wide variety of song cycle types that were composed in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Bingham encourages us, perhaps unwittingly, to view them as developmental stages that led up to the song cycle that is familiar to us today, by which she means an organically unified whole that is modeled on Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*. The central figure in this culminating stage of Bingham's history is Schumann, who borrowed techniques from his instrumental piano cycles in order to create musical coherence in his song cycles and thus helped to effect an "aesthetic shift from vocal mimetic to instrumental organic paradigms" within the latter genre. In other words, Schumann moved away from the model of the song cycle as primarily a setting of a text and toward the model of a coherently unified musical structure.[20] As Bingham acknowledges, her explanation of Schumann's role in this history as a composer is closely related to Turchin's explanation of his role as a critic. The song cycle reviews that appear in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in the 1830s and 1840s "mark a new stage," ac-

cording to Turchin, because Schumann and his colleagues distinguish the cycle in just the way that earlier critics fail to: by recognizing that it is a musically coherent entity in which the composer uses relationships between the keys of the songs to express the relationships between the poems.[21]

In his analysis of *Dichterliebe*, Komar argues that the cycle is an integrated whole in large part because it has a coherent tonal structure. According to Turchin, this is the same element that Schumann considers to be the most important source of cyclic coherence. It is not surprising that she discovers Schumann sharing our modern conception of the cycle, since it is this conception that provides the initial premise for her study. She explains that her intention in reading nineteenth-century song reviews is to "reveal sets of songs, recognized as such by contemporaries, that exhibit features separating them from mere collections and that, therefore, should be considered in a history of the song cycle."[22] In other words, Turchin's conviction that there is a meaningful distinction between a cycle and a collection not only determines how she evaluates the reviews that she reads but also determines which ones she selects in the first place. She cites a handful of reviews from the *Neue Zeitschrift* that mention the keys of songs, for example, but ignores the fact that the vast majority that appeared during Schumann's tenure are primarily concerned with the expression of the text and avoid the subject of cyclic coherence altogether. And she assumes that a reference to the key of a song had the same significance to Schumann and his colleagues that it has to us today, even though the original context often argues against this assumption. In Schumann's 1836 review of Carl Löwe's *Esther, ein Liederkreis in Balladenform*, he mentions the keys of three of the five songs and comments that the last song returns to the key of the opening. All of these references occur within a discussion of how Löwe responds to the events that are depicted in the text and expresses the "special tone" of each of the poems. But for Turchin, the fact that Schumann mentions the keys, as well as the "tonal relationship" between the first and last songs, is "especially noteworthy," and this review becomes a central piece of evidence for her argument that Schumann considers tonal coherence to be essential to the song cycle.[23]

It is not so much the conception of Schumann's cycles that has changed, in the wake of the research that Turchin and Bingham have done, as it is the kind of evidence that is used to support that conception. In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars primarily relied on the analysis of individual cycles to demonstrate the importance of musical coherence in defining the genre. More recent scholars have turned to the historical record and have used Schumann's own words to make the argument for them. We find an especially clear example of this in Daverio's recent biography. Commenting on the same review of Löwe's *Esther* that Turchin discusses, Daverio writes:

> Schumann noted the various means through which the composition attained textual and musical coherence—narrative consistency, large-scale tonal logic, and motivic recall—without insisting dogmatically that the presence of all these features is a necessary condition for cyclic construction.[24]

Daverio then uses the three criteria that Schumann mentions in his review to determine which of the sets of songs that he composed in 1840 and 1841 "qualify as cycles" and to explain how each of these cycles coheres. But while it is true that Schumann tells the entire story of *Esther* in the course of his review and mentions both the use of the same thematic material in two different songs as well as some of the keys, there is no indication that he intends his comments as a definition of cyclic coherence or that he is even concerned with the song cycle as a genre. In fact, there are several reasons to believe that this is not his intention. First, it is noteworthy that Schumann does not use his review of *Esther* as a platform from which to generalize about the song cycle, especially when we consider that one of the hallmarks of his criticism is the fact that he is often more concerned with the state of music and with the compositional trends of his day than he is with the piece he is ostensibly reviewing. Second, Schumann never reviewed another song cycle again and never even mentioned the cycle anywhere else in his criticism. In the case of other genres, such as piano music and the symphony, we can trace the development of Schumann's ideas through a series of reviews, which provides a coherent context to support our interpretation of specific comments. The one song cycle review that we have does not offer sufficient evidence for us to come to any firm conclusions about his view of this genre. But the absence of any explicit discussion of cyclic coherence or of any attempt to explain to his contemporaries how they should create such coherence strongly suggests that this was not a significant concern for Schumann.

Finally, neither Turchin nor Daverio points out that the elements that Schumann comments on in his review of *Esther* are not at all typical of either his own song cycles or those of his contemporaries. First of all, as Löwe's unusual designation for *Esther—ein Liederkreis in Balladenform*—suggests, this work is actually a hybrid of two genres that were normally considered to be antithetical, and the fact that the text is a dramatic narrative is an element that marks the work as a ballad and not as a song cycle.[25] Second, while the use of thematic return between the songs of a cycle is not unique to *Esther*, it is very rarely encountered, and Schumann employs it in only two instances. And so, it is conceivable that in devoting so much attention to the narrative and dramatic aspects of the cycle and in pointing out the recurrence of thematic material Schumann is simply describing the distinctive aspects of this particular piece.

The Cycle as a Fragment

In his recent writings about Schumann's song cycles, Daverio defines the cycle as a coherent whole, whose coherence may result from either the presence of a narrative among the texts, a tonal structure created by the relationships among the keys of the songs, the recurrence of motivic material, or some combination of these three elements. But in a chapter of an earlier book, which is concerned with Schumann's piano cycles, he presents a radically different understanding of the cycle, an understanding that brings the very notion of cyclic coherence into question. Drawing a connection between Schumann's composition and Friedrich

Schlegel's conception of the Romantic fragment, Daverio suggests that Schumann intended many of his character pieces to have an unfinished or incomplete quality and even to have moments of incomprehensibility. When Schumann juxtaposes a series of such pieces within a cycle, he creates a larger structure that is likewise fragmentary and obscure, in which it is sometimes difficult to tell where one piece leaves off and the next begins. As Daverio considers the analytic implications of this approach to musical form, he argues that we should not try to "neutralize" moments of ambiguity and incomprehensibility in Schumann's music but explain them as "constitutive aesthetic qualities." He describes Schumann's cycles as "fragment clusters" and proposes that our task, as analysts and critics, is "to investigate the principles that differentiate [them] from discrete wholes on the one hand and chaotic jumbles on the other."[26] In other words, we need to abandon altogether the search for a definition of the cycle that is based on the premise of coherence and instead strive to understand how Schumann flirts with incoherence as he experiments with fragmentary and discontinuous musical structures.

With this argument, Daverio moves beyond the historical context of Schumann's fellow song composers and music critics and strives to understand his cycles in broader intellectual and cultural terms, as musical examples of the Romantic aesthetics that originated with Friedrich Schlegel and the Jena circle. We probably owe the idea that we can explain the formal experiments of Schumann's cycles in terms of Schlegel's influence on the composer and, in particular, as a manifestation of the aesthetic of the fragment to Charles Rosen, who first presented it in a lecture in the 1960s but did not publish his discussion until 1995, when it appeared in a greatly expanded form as a chapter of his book *The Romantic Generation*.[27] As the idea has been developed, in very different ways, by Rosen and Daverio, it has presented the possibility of a completely new approach to the nineteenth-century cycle, which can help us to appreciate more fully the imaginative, liberatory, and quintessentially Romantic nature of this music.[28]

But as both of these scholars have turned to a concrete consideration of Schumann's cycles, they have not followed through on the implications of this idea and have instead relied on more traditional conceptions of cyclic form, based on the notion of unified coherence. In Daverio's case, we can sense his retreat even before he has finished arguing for a radical break with earlier scholarship. Having suggested that he is about to cast off the whole enterprise of searching for a definitive explanation of cyclic coherence, he then writes that he will "propose a typology for a particular body of musical fragments, and map out the categories that animate it as a 'system' of sorts."[29] The three principal terms in this sentence—*typology*, *categories*, and *system*—are in fact the primary concerns of Daverio's chapter, and so, as he makes his way through Schumann's piano cycles, his purpose is not so much to confront their idiosyncratic and incomprehensible elements as to categorize and define them. What Daverio means when he describes Schumann's cycles as "systems of musical fragments," for example, is that, despite their apparent heterogeneity, they still have inner coherence, which we can only understand by uncovering "the hidden connections, the

allusive links, the network of relationships" that Schumann has created. Daverio thus adopts a characteristic strategy of organicism, in which apparent incongruities and discontinuities are accounted for as surface phenomena that simply disguise a deeper structural unity.[30] And as he turns to his final, culminating example, Schumann's *Novelletten*, he uses the traditional technique of motivic analysis to reveal this unity. Although Daverio's discussion of the *Novelletten* touches on several issues—tonal structure, the fragmentary and digressive forms of the individual pieces, and the use of musical topics such as the march and the waltz—his basic argument is that the entire work is unified by two melodic figures, commonly known by the rhetorical names "circulatio" and "lament," that recur in various guises throughout all eight pieces.[31]

Where Daverio is primarily interested in analyzing the ways that Schumann unifies his piano cycles, despite their fragmentary nature, Rosen focuses on the individual song and piano piece and uses the fragment as a metaphorical model for Schumann's experiments with small-scale forms. Rosen observes that "a piece that begins in the middle or does not have a proper grammatical end" is the simplest of the techniques that Schumann and other Romantic composers use to expand the limits of musical form and to call into question "the established conceptions of what a work of music ought to be."[32] One example that Rosen uses to illustrate the rich explanatory potential of the fragment is "Aus meinen Thränen spriessen," the second song from *Dichterliebe*. In contrast with the first song in the cycle, "Im wunderschönen Monat Mai," which begins and ends on a V^7 chord, and is thus an obvious example of a fragment, "Aus meinen Thränen spriessen" "appears to be a separate, closed traditional structure that satisfies all of the formal requirements, with a well-defined melody and V^7/I cadence." And yet, as Rosen observes, Schumann uses textural ambiguity to undermine the phrase structure and, in particular, the finality of the cadence. Perhaps this song "makes independent sense on paper," but it would be "nonsense" if it were performed by itself: "not merely poorer in meaning and disappointing in effect, but puzzling and even inexplicable." It is largely through this paradox that Rosen explains why the fragment has such far-reaching implications for our understanding of Schumann's cycles. They "are made up of apparently independent songs which cannot be independently performed," and for this reason they stand apart from both Beethoven's cycle, in which none of the songs have any pretensions to independence, and Schubert's, in which all of the songs can stand on their own.[33]

But it is only when Rosen turns to Chopin's opus 28 *Preludes*—a publication that has a far more tenuous historical claim to being a cycle—that he makes clear what the consequences of the fragment are for the notion of cyclic unity. He describes the *Preludes* as "the most impressive example of a set of tiny Fragments," which "achieves unity apparently through the simple addition of one piece to another." He acknowledges that the modern practice of performing the opus as a complete cycle "was not thinkable during Chopin's lifetime" and even concedes that such a performance "does not allow us to fully appreciate the extraordinary individuality of the single numbers." And yet, Rosen argues, "the aesthetics of