

Harmonic Parenthesis in Early Chopin

Michael Rector

In a well-known journal entry—from April 1849, the year of Chopin’s death—Delacroix describes a day spent with the composer saying, ‘he talked to me about music, and it revived him.’¹ The journal makes the two men appear intensely sympathetic. Delacroix relates an artistic credo that he attributes to Chopin, but could equally apply to himself: ‘[Art] is reason itself, adorned by genius, but following a necessary path and contained by higher laws.’² In contrast to contemporary critics, who tended to emphasize Delacroix’s use of colour and loose brushwork to label him ‘romantic’, the painter thought of himself as a classicist continuing a tradition represented by the Renaissance masters and Peter Paul Rubens.³ Similarly, Chopin idolised Bach and Mozart. Later in the same entry, Delacroix shares the composer’s critique of Beethoven; unlike Mozart, ‘he turns his back on eternal principles.’⁴ The boundary between Enlightenment and Romantic ideas is more porous than easy periodisation implies; Chopin and Delacroix are not the only nineteenth-century artists whose work is sometimes more productively understood as an evolution rather than a repudiation of eighteenth-century practices.⁵ In the present article I will examine a quintessentially Chopin-esque harmonic device as a development of a technique found in Beethoven.

The middle section of the Nocturne op. 9, no. 1 (see Ex. 1) contains a harmonic digression.

¹ Eugène Delacroix, *Journal de Eugène Delacroix*, no. 1 (Paris: Plon, 1932), 365.

² Delacroix, *Journal de Eugène Delacroix*, 365.

³ Stephanie Mora, ‘Delacroix’s Art Theory and His Definition of Classicism,’ *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 34, no. 1 (2000): 57–75.

⁴ Delacroix, *Journal de Eugène Delacroix*, 365.

⁵ For a clear summary of this question in literature, see Aidan Day, *Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 2011), 57–71.

Example 1. Chopin, Nocturne No. 1 in B-flat minor, op. 9, no. 1, bb. 19–27

19 *sotto voce.*
pp
simile.

22 *poco rallent.*
ppp
 D: V^{6/5} I 6/4

25 *a tempo.*
f
cresc.
p
 5/3 Db: vii°7/V

For nearly every pianist on record, the unexpected harmony in bar 23 requires a response in tempo deviation, tone colour and voicing.⁶ That demand for pianistic manipulation has a corollary: a demand for hermeneutic explanation. The first part of this article traces a line of evolution for this kind of digression, which creates the effect of a parenthesis, from Beethoven to Chopin through a possible model in instrumental music by Louis Spohr. The second part, an attempt to read the passage in terms of narrative meaning, discusses operatic versions of the same harmonic device in a repertoire known to Chopin. Subtle changes in compositional technique differentiate depictions of rational possibilities from unfulfillable fantasies. The final section investigates modes of reception in Chopin's audience using contemporary Polish poetry that mirrors broader trends in European Romanticism.

Chopin and Spohr: Digressive Harmonic Rhetoric

As Chopin developed his own modern voice on the foundation of his idols, Bach and Mozart, he had a sympathetic model in Spohr. His music, like Chopin's, owes a great debt to the Classical style. Spohr also looks daringly forward, with programme music, leitmotifs and harmonies that

⁶ Bellman argues that the melodic F to E motion would have been even more highly coloured in the kinds of unequally tempered tuning systems common in Chopin's lifetime. See Jonathan D. Bellman, 'Nineteenth-century Temperaments and the Music of Chopin,' *Chopin Review* 3 (2020): 66.

may have inspired Wagner.⁷ Accounts of Chopin's compositional development have tended to explain the influence of canonical composers, opera and contemporary piano music.⁸ More recent work has situated Chopin in the early nineteenth-century marketplace and more closely examined the Warsaw culture of his youth.⁹ Spohr's music lies outside these categories but shows an intriguing point of contact with Chopin at the cusp of his mature style.

Chopin's letter of 18 September 1830 to Tytus Woyciechowski contains the following: 'I played Spohr's Quintetto for pianof[orte], clar[inet], bas[soon], French horn and flute [op. 52]. Exquisite. But dreadfully unpianistic. Everything that he wanted to write specifically to show off the piano is unbearably difficult, and often you can't find your fingers.'¹⁰ Through these difficulties, several features of the work must have appealed to Chopin. Friedrich Niecks, Chopin's early biographer, ruminates that 'the gliding cantilena in sixths and thirds of the minuet and the serpentine chromatic passages in the last movement of [Spohr's quintet] must have flattered his inmost soul.'¹¹ Chopin's claim that the piece is pianistically awkward—Spohr was a violinist and conductor and this quintet was his first piece to feature the piano in a leading role—suggests that the young composer was inspired by more than instrumental texture. In this movement, Bellman finds:

an opening paragraph that is strongly influenced by Beethoven's 'C-Minor mood,' even including a local modulation to G-flat major that seems almost directly lifted from the first movement of the Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, op. 37. An inflection to G-flat minor, though, instantly removes us from a Beethovenian context and puts us in a highly colored enharmonic realm of the kind later associated with Chopin himself. Were passages like this standard at the time, or did this work provide Chopin with a signature harmonic device?¹²

Spohr's stratagem is a small-scale digression contained within a phrase, a through-the-looking-glass moment of harmonic strangeness and stability accessed, not through a sequence or modulatory process, but through an immediate moment of harmonic rupture. Examination of instrumental and operatic repertoire known to the young Chopin shows that passages like this were far from common. Spohr's quintet may have provided a model for an identifiably Chopin-esque technique. More importantly, the way Chopin developed this technique shows how his mature compositional voice grew out of earlier styles—Spohr's and Beethoven's.

The effect of the digression relies on three elements: the method of entry, the kind of music inside and the method of exit. Spohr's first movement is in sonata-allegro form, with a transition

⁷ Clive Brown, *Louis Spohr: A Critical Biography* (New York: CUP, 1984), 199–200.

⁸ See, for example: Jim Samson, 'Chopin's Alternatives to Monotonicity' in *The Second Practice of Nineteenth Century Tonality*, ed. William Kinderman and Harald Krebs (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 34–45; Anselm Gerhard, 'Ballade und Drama: Frederic Chopin's Ballade Opus 38 und die Französische Oper um 1830,' *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 48, no. 2 (1991): 110–25; Robert Wason, 'Two Bach Preludes/Two Chopin Etudes,' *Music Theory Spectrum* 24, no. 1 (2002): 103–20.

⁹ See, for example, Jonathan Bellman, 'Middlebrow Becomes Transcendent: The Popular Roots of Chopin's Musical Language' in *Chopin and His World*, ed. Jonathan Bellman and Halina Goldberg (Princeton University Press, 2017), 147–70; Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (New York: OUP, 2008).

¹⁰ David Frick, trans. *Chopin's Polish Letters* (Warsaw: Fryderyk Chopin Institute, 2016), 177.

¹¹ Fredericks Niecks, *Frederic Chopin as Man and Musician*, vol. 1 (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1973), 213.

¹² Jonathan Bellman, review of *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, by Halina Goldberg, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62, no. 1 (2009): 229.

that grows out of a restatement of the main theme. Example 2 includes the original version of the main theme; Example 3 is the beginning of the transition. The abrupt harmonic shift in bar 23 engenders forward-looking sensitivity, but the music in G-flat Major expresses stasis—the composing out in time of a single moment. The key change is motivated by a half-step shift in the main theme—the first violin’s G-natural in bar 4 becomes G-flat in bar 23. The passage in G-flat recalls previously heard melodic material in a distant key area. The harmony is subsidiary to the melodic change. Tonic and dominant harmony oscillate in a prolongation of G-flat Major that arrests forward harmonic motion. Return from the distant key area creates a two-measure internal phrase expansion. The parallel passage (bb. 5–12) occupies eight measures, while the digression to G-flat Major takes ten. After the turn towards G-flat minor in bar 28, V/III gradually emerges as the harmonic destination. Importantly, the harmonic way-finding does not disturb the two-bar repetitions of melodic material; Spohr eschews fragmentation and melodic liquidation. A classically standard transition resumes with a sudden change of texture in bar 33. In total, the harmonic digression can be understood as a parenthesis—a commentary not participating in, but placed alongside of, the main argument of the movement.

Example 2. Spohr, Quintet for Piano and Winds in C minor, op. 52, mvt I: Allegro moderato, bb. 1–11

Flöte

Klarinette in B

Horn in Es

Fagott

Klavier

Allegro moderato (♩ 120 Rh., 104 Mälz. Metr.)

Cm: i V6/5 I° iv 10. V6

Example 3. Spohr, Quintet for Piano and Winds in C minor, op. 52, mvt I: Allegro moderato, bb. 19–33

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 19 to 24, and the second system covers measures 25 to 33. The score is written for a quintet (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and horn) and piano accompaniment. The key signature is C minor (three flats). The tempo is Allegro moderato. The score includes various dynamics such as *f*, *pp*, *fz*, and *p doloc*. Performance markings include *cresc.* and *tr*. A red box highlights a specific passage in the first system, and a red vertical line is drawn through the score. The harmonic analysis at the bottom right of the first system is $Fm: vii^{\circ}7 \ i \ N6$. The second system includes a 2 m. expansion (tonic minor) indicated by a dashed line.

Example 3 continues over

harmony drives towards Eb:V, melody keeps 2 m. motive

Describing this passage as a parenthesis invokes the critical framework of narratology—the notion that music tells a story. Audiences in the 1830s were comfortable hearing stories without words, not only in the context of programme music by the likes of Berlioz, but in the more widespread middlebrow genre of programmatic fantasies.¹³ Chopin's interest in musical narrative extended beyond allusions to topics or genres not indicated by the piece's title, such as a hymn within a nocturne (op. 15, no. 3), or a march within an impromptu (op. 36).¹⁴ Parakilas has shown how Chopin's development of the instrumental *ballade* relied on finding music analogues for specifically diegetic aspects of storytelling; the *ballades* do not merely represent the elements of a story (mimesis) but posit a narrator telling a story.¹⁵ Davis's recent work on the Romantic piano sonata—including Chopin's Sonata in B Minor, op. 58—describes how certain compositional decisions 'can also be understood as carrying heightened expressive significance within a Romantic aesthetic environment that relies on a fragmented sense of narrative temporality to create novelistic effects.' He goes on to state that:

they can be interpreted as discursive shifts that signal not logical continuations of an ongoing story or logical extensions of an ongoing phrase but rather forms of discontinuities—deflections away from the narrative's expected path and into an atemporal stream in which we experience the story not mimetically but rather diegetically, focalized through a subjective agential presence.¹⁶

By 'novelistic' Davis refers to the digressive rhetoric of the novel, with its ability to jump between timelines, expand a single important moment over several pages, or compress years of story time into a paragraph. The most prominent critic of narratology in music analysis has been Nattiez, whose foremost critique is that referentiality is not inherent in the composition but

¹³ For a fuller discussion of 'stories in tones' in the 1830s, see Jonathan Bellman, *Chopin's Polish Ballade: Op. 38 as Narrative of National Martyrdom* (New York; Oxford: OUP, 2009), 35–54.

¹⁴ The literature on this subject is rich. For a starting point, see Jim Samson, 'Chopin and Genre' *Music Analysis* 8, no. 3 (1989): 213–231. For more recent scholarship based on genre markers, see James Parakilas, 'The Barcarolle and the Barcarolle: Topic and Genre in Chopin,' in *Chopin and His World*, ed. Jonathan Bellman and Halina Goldberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 231–48.

¹⁵ James Parakilas, *Ballads Without Words: Chopin and the Tradition of the Instrumental Ballade* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1992).

¹⁶ Andrew Davis, *Sonata Fragments: Romantic Narratives in Chopin, Schumann, and Brahms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 91.

rather in the mind of the listener.¹⁷ This important objection lacks salience in the present context; the goal of this discussion is to locate Spohr's and Chopin's parentheses in thick historical context. Contemporary listeners often described pieces of absolute music in programmatic terms, the most famous example being Schumann's review of Chopin's Variations, op. 2.¹⁸

Spohr's G-flat Major passage stands out as a rarity within a harmonically conservative movement—congruent with late eighteenth-century Viennese practice. Key to this passage's affect are the sense of interruption and the static, a-temporal quality of the music after the rupture. The interruption is clear; a Neapolitan chord replaces a more conventional dominant in the main theme's restatement. The area of distant harmony is contained within a phrase, rather than being articulated by cadences at its endpoints. The oscillating harmony expanding the local tonic, the distant key area and changes of texture, orchestration and dynamics create the impression of a static space separate from the conventional flow of events in the form. These technical means disrupt the listener's sense of a consistently forward-moving chronological sequence of music events, creating separate temporal streams.¹⁹ The parenthetical music seems to describe something outside of real time, a memory or dream. Simply put, the parenthetical effect is created by the passage's harmonic strangeness and stability and the sense of abrupt disconnection with the surrounding music.

To recap, the compositional elements that create a parenthetical effect in Spohr's quintet are:

- incorporation of a distant key area;
- appearance within a phrase (as defined by cadences);
- motivation by a stepwise melodic variance;
- restatement of melodic material heard in a conventional key area;
- abruptness of harmony change—lack of a pivot chord;
- lack of directed harmonic motion within the parenthesis.

After 1830, Chopin frequently used this strategy to incorporate distant harmonies in his pieces, particularly in melodic rather than in figural passages.²⁰ In fact, the term parenthesis has been used before, by Gerald Abraham, to describe similarities between Spohr and Chopin.²¹ I will be looking narrowly at the construction, influence, and extra-musical resonance of the particular kind of parenthesis found in Spohr's quintet. My examples are a subset of the phenomena that Abraham describes, selected for their melodic-motivic content, and moment of sudden, unconventional harmonic rupture.

The Parenthesis in Music Theory

The etymology of 'parenthesis' is Greek, 'to place alongside of.' The sense of interruption or juxtaposition can be created through rhythmic or hyper-metrical means, as in the passages

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, 'Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 115, no. 2 (1990): 240–57.

¹⁸ Robert Schumann, 'An Op. 2,' in *On Music and Musician*, ed. Konrad Wolff, trans. Paul Rosenfeld (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946): 126–28.

¹⁹ Andrew Davis, 'Chopin and the Romantic Sonata: The First Movement of Op. 58,' *Music Theory Spectrum* 36, no. 2 (2014): 271–74.

²⁰ This is a seemingly banal but actually important distinction in the context of music born of the *stile brillante*. See John Rink, *Chopin: The Piano Concertos* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 6–12.

²¹ Gerald Abraham, *Chopin's Musical Style* (New York: OUP, 1939), 91–92. 'Tonal parenthesis' for Abraham means 'those abrupt transitions to keys a tone, a semitone, or a third away which one finds so frequently in Chopin and other romantic composers.' His examples involve reharmonisation of common tones and brief tonicisations caused by secondary dominants or diminished sevenths, which he calls 'interdominants.'

that Caplin characterises as ‘interpolations.’²² In such cases, the aural punctuation marks must be applied retrospectively; the interpolation’s status as extraneous depends on the later resumption of expected musical process. An abrupt and unexpected harmonic procedure can also cause an interruption of normal musical grammar. In Spohr’s quintet and Chopin’s Nocturne, we hear the punctuation mark at the beginning of the parenthesis. The harmonic rupture places the listener in a state of heightened sensitivity to the narrative process; it is essentially forward-looking. Most frequently, the harmony and phrase rhythm work together to create parenthetical effects. Parenthesis also depends on a degree of contrast—whether textural, harmonic, melodic-motivic—between the music inside and outside the punctuation marks. The example from Chopin’s op. 9 and its model in Spohr’s quintet are interesting because they create parenthesis without hyper-metrical deviation. The effect is almost entirely dependent on harmony.

Historically, the concept of a parenthetical statement in music has been invoked to describe a range of similar techniques. Koch is the earliest exponent of the term parenthesis, treating the subject in his *Introductory Essay on Composition*.²³ Riemann uses the term ‘*Stillstand auf der Penultima*’ to describe an insertion immediately preceding a cadence.²⁴ The clearest example of this kind of parenthesis is the cadenza in a concerto. Chopin’s teacher Józef Elsner discusses something similar to this technique in his *Treatise on Melody and Chant*: ‘The lengthening of the final or penultimate bar ... does not contradict the above-indicated principles of symmetry, but rather, for logical-aesthetic reasons, helps and in some ways is necessary for the concluding punctuation in symphonies, arias, etc.’²⁵ Tovey’s ‘purple patch’ is a kind of parenthetical insertion that involves a harmonic digression. Rothstein’s discussion of parenthesis compares expanded phrases to previously stated or implied prototypes.²⁶ Parenthetical material can be excised without disturbing the passage’s Schenkerian middle ground. Because Rothstein approaches parenthesis from the perspective of phrase rhythm—characterising such passages as ‘internal expansions’ of the phrase, since they are not articulated by cadences—he does not analyse episodes of harmonic disjuncture contained within normative four- or eight-measure phrases.²⁷ Kinderman has developed the concept of ‘parenthetical enclosures’, a special case of *Stillstand auf der Penultima*, to describe a technique for relating contrasting themes.²⁸ His examples are the first movement of Beethoven’s op. 109, and the ‘Et incarnatus est’ from the Credo of *Missa Solemnis*; his definition of the technique is: ‘The interpolation of weighty passages at the threshold to a

²² For example, in one such passage, he defines an interpolation ‘as musical material that is inserted between two logically succeeding formal functions, yet seeming not to belong to either function.’ Caplin, William, *Classical Form* (New York; Oxford: OUP, 1998), 55.

²³ See Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Introductory Essay on Composition*, ed. and trans. Nancy Baker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 53. The following summary of the history of the term ‘parenthesis’ is based largely on William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1989), 87–93.

²⁴ Hugo Riemann, *System der Musikalischen Rhythmik und Metrik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1903), 259–70.

²⁵ Halina Goldberg, ‘Phrase Structure in Chopin’s Early Works in the Light of Elsner’s Instruction,’ *Indiana Theory Review* 28, no. 1/2 (2010): 10.

²⁶ Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm*, 92–93.

²⁷ For the complete discussion of internal phrase expansions see Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm*, 74–94.

²⁸ William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (New York; Oxford: OUP, 2009), 240–65.

cadence which is thereby interrupted and held in abeyance.²⁹ Harmonic rupture at the most conventionally forward-progressing moment in the phrase creates the sense of unfinished business that must be resumed once the parenthetical passage is finished.

The notion of harmonic rupture depends on perception of its unconventionality. Kopp has argued that modulation by chromatic third relations in many cases should not be considered ‘incipiently degenerate coloristic phenomena.’³⁰ Kopp states:

One of the key elements of Schubert’s approach to harmony—and, more broadly speaking, of the beginning of the nineteenth-century dissolution of the norms of classical-style harmonic practice—is the redefining of constrained chords such as these [e.g. bVI in the first theme of Schubert’s Piano Sonata in B-flat, D. 960] as chords harmonically stable and valid in their own right.³¹

Kopp shows many examples of modulation by common tone that sound smooth and functional. However, Chopin and Spohr signal the colouristic nature of their harmonic digressions through performance directions and texture. Chopin writes *poco rallentando* and *ppp*, which are counteracted by *a tempo* and *f* in bar 25. Spohr also uses the lowest dynamic level so far indicated in the piece: *pp* in the piano part. Furthermore, his choice of horn for the melodic line with arpeggiated accompaniment, in contrast to the earlier contrapuntal textures, connotes, ‘distance and disembodiment.’³² Unlike Kopp’s examples from Schubert, notation of parentheses in Chopin and Spohr calls attention to their status as outside the main tonal argument of their context.

Beethoven: A Model for Spohr

The digression in the first section of Spohr’s quintet recalls a similar passage in Beethoven, his idol. A modulation to G-flat Major in a C minor piece was not unprecedented, as Bellman points out in the review quoted above. In Example 4, a passage from the first movement of the Piano Concerto No. 3, Beethoven shows that distant harmony is not a sufficient condition for the effect of parenthesis. E-flat minor is achieved through modal mixture; the chord on the second beat of bar 190 is far less shocking than the first G-flat Major chord in the quintet, because it continues the tonic harmonic function, and only one of its three notes is unprepared. Unlike Spohr’s example, the surprising chord is not motivated by a melodic deviation. It occurs at a cadence point, so that the surprising harmony is safely contained by grammatically appropriate punctuation. Beethoven’s insistent cadential progressions create a more forward-driving music than Spohr’s oscillation between tonic and dominant. To continue the grammatical analogy, Beethoven crafts a complete sentence that develops and intensifies a previously expressed idea. Spohr uses a harmonic rupture, a sort of musical punctuation mark, to set off a commentary from the sentence that contains it. The G-flat Major passage from Beethoven’s concerto presses the argument forward; Spohr’s parenthesis decorates it.

²⁹ Kinderman, *Beethoven*, 256–57.

³⁰ David Kopp, *Chromatic Transformations in Nineteenth-century Music* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 3.

³¹ Kopp, *Chromatic Transformations*, 29.

³² Daniel Beller-McKenna, ‘Distance and Disembodiment: Harps, Horns, and the Requiem Idea in Schumann and Brahms,’ *The Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 1 (2005): 47–89. The memorable phrase describing harps and horns as ‘emblems of distance and disembodiment’ is from John Daverio, ‘Schumann’s Ossianic Manner,’ *19th-century Music* 21 (1998): 259.

Example 4. Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, op. 37, mvt I: Allegro moderato, bb. 189–99

The image shows a musical score for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3, Example 4, measures 189-199. The score is in C minor and features a digression. Red boxes highlight specific harmonic changes in the piano part. Chord symbols are provided below the piano part.

Measures 189-199:

Chord symbols:

189: Ebm: i⁶

190: VI

191: iv

192: Gb: ii

193: V⁷

194: I

195: ii⁶

196: V^{6/4}

197: V^{6/5}/vi

198: vi

199: I

More generally, Beethoven's digressions differ from this example by Spohr in how they are integrated with their surroundings. The passages that Karol Berger describes as episodes of 'absent-mindedness'—for example, the shift to E Major in the last return of the rondo theme in op. 7, movement IV, or the F Major digression in the last movement of op. 2, no. 2 (see Ex. 5)—begin with a moment of rupture, contain melodic-thematic elements, and end with a process of finding their way back to the correct key.³³ The process of returning home nearly always features fragmentation and melodic liquidation—elements that imply formal 'loosening' or are marked in a functional sense as transitional.³⁴ Those transitional measures seem to compensate for the digression, rationalising it and joining it more closely with the main argument of the music. Rothstein describes this tendency, stating:

It seems as if the more remote harmonically a 'patch' is, the more likely it is to be rhythmically unessential. Thus the modal mixture of the tonic triad so frequently found in Schubert's music generally does not indicate phrase expansion, while unexpected passages on bVI, in a major-key context, very often do, especially in sonata forms and other large structures.³⁵

Spohr's avoidance of this type of processual passage removes an important component of Beethoven's 'shifts from one ontological level to another.'³⁶ If the parenthetical harmonic digression represents the realm of fantasy, it is more immediate in Spohr, as it is literally unmediated by a modulatory phrase expansion.

³³ Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 293–329.

³⁴ Caplin, *Classical Form*, 84–85, 125–39.

³⁵ Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm*, 91.

³⁶ Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, 295.

Example 5. Beethoven, Sonata No. 2 in A Major, op. 2, mvt IV: Rondo, bb. 139–51

The first movement of Spohr's quintet resembles Beethoven's concerto so closely that Spohr's deviation from Beethoven's model can be read as a broader commentary on generational differences. He uses a modified version of an identifiably Beethovenian strategy for incorporating distant key areas. The hammering on a note or chord is a specific example of what Scott Burnham, in describing Beethoven's heroic style, calls the 'monumentalization and dramatization of classical-style morphology and syntax.'³⁷ When Spohr and others of his generation recall Beethoven's harmonic digressions without the hammering, they are actively avoiding the heroic style and its concomitant psychological baggage. In the heroic style Beethoven earns the right to access unconventional key areas or disturb formal expectations; the processual passages and compensatory codas enact a wilful control of the musical fabric. Spohr's passage in G-flat is an escapist commentary. The way it references Beethoven marks it by contrast as intuitive or decorative.

Parenthetical Strategies in Early Chopin

The music that began this article—the middle section of the Nocturne in B-flat Minor, op. 9, no. 1—shows similarities to Spohr's quintet. Chopin tonicises the Neapolitan, restating his melodic material. The distant key area is accessed not by a modulatory process, but immediately with an unconventional chord. The harmonic digression is not articulated by a cadence, but occurs within a phrase. Inside the parenthesis, harmony oscillates in a tonic expansion, suspending the phrase's forward motion. Chopin's elegance surpasses Spohr in the melodic motivation. The subtle engine of the modulation is the enharmonic recontextualisation of F-flat, a technique familiar from Mozart.³⁸ Chopin only changes one note—the A-flat becomes A-natural—to

³⁷ Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 40.

³⁸ This technique appears, for example, in the retransitions of K. 332, mvt I and K. 451, mvt II.

create an extremely distant and colourful chord in bar 23. Chopin gives a Mozartian touch to Spohr's post-Beethovenian technique.

The way Chopin exits the parenthesis takes Spohr's idea one step further. Spohr returns to the main argument of his sonata form through sequential harmonies, and a two-bar internal phrase expansion; he avoids the Beethovenian fragmentation and liquidation. Chopin's return is as abrupt as his departure. This lack of a phrase-expanding, finding-our-way-back passage leaves the D-Major door open. Chopin reinforces this feeling with three repetitions of this eight-measure phrase. The luminous, accented B-natural from bar 24 returns (spelled C-flat) as a scrupulously unresolved chordal seventh in bar 51 (see Ex. 6). The Nocturne's coda attempts to force C-flat into the conventional tonal hierarchy, resolving downward to the tonic. It fails to exorcise the revenant completely, with C-flats insistently returning and several not resolving in their own register (see Ex. 7). Chopin keeps the memory of the harmonic digression alive, a subtle tension between the rational and irrational remaining in the listener's mind after the final chords.

Example 6. Chopin, Nocturne in B-flat minor, op. 9, no. 1, bb. 49–61

49 *a tempo.* *f* *ff* *Ca. V⁷/IV*

52 *Ca.* *** *Ca.* *** *Ca.* ***

55 *con forza.* *pp*

58 *sempre Ped.* *ppp legatissimo.*

I?

Example 7. Chopin, Nocturne in B-flat minor, op. 9, no. 1, bb. 77–85

Chopin performed Spohr's quintet in September of 1830, shortly before leaving Poland forever. He began composition of the op. 9 Nocturnes, two of which feature a version of Spohr's parenthesis, during his stay in Vienna from October 1830 to July 1831, though they were not published until 1832.³⁹ Though many of Chopin's early works feature colourful harmonic moments and daring modulations, nothing that Chopin composed before 1831 features a parenthesis of the type found in Spohr's piece. The particular balance of an exotic tonicisation accessed through a harmonic rupture that entered Chopin's vocabulary in 1830 to 1831 resonates conspicuously with Spohr.

The technique in op. 9, no. 1 synthesises several features of Chopin's style from before 1830. The earlier works frequently feature distant key areas, most commonly as the goal of a modulatory process. In Example 8—from the Krakowiak-Rondo, op. 14—Chopin reaches a distant key by sequencing the repetitive figure of bars 597 to 603. The sequence destabilises the sense of local tonic key, preparing the colourful G-flat Major arrival. The music in G-flat Major is harmonically static; an insouciant version of the piece's main motive repeats over oscillating dominant and tonic harmony. This is a common device in *stile brillante* music, see Hummel's Piano Trio in E major, op. 83, movement IV and Piano Concerto op. 113, movement III for examples known to Chopin.⁴⁰ This passage from the Krakowiak-Rondo lacks a moment of harmonic rupture. Even though the material in G-flat Major is similar to the parallel passage in the Nocturne—distant key, oscillating harmonies, thematic restatement—it is joined too smoothly to the surrounding music to create the sense of separate tonal streams.

³⁹ John Rink, 'Tonal Architecture in the Early Music,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 88.

⁴⁰ Frick, *Chopin's Polish Letters*, 141, 145.

Example 8. Chopin, Krakowiak-Rondo in F Major, op. 14, bb. 597–608

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's Krakowiak-Rondo in F Major, op. 14, bb. 597–608. The score is in F major and 3/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple staves. The upper staves show a melodic line with grace notes and a bass line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The lower staves show a dense harmonic texture with chords and arpeggiated figures. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'pp', 'legatissimo', 'dolcissimo', and 'poco a poco cresc.'. A red bracket highlights a section of the score, and the word 'sequencing' is written above it.

Distant modulations occur frequently in Chopin's early works in the bravura figurations that come between thematic sections. The colourful harmonies are usually derived from sequences. This kind of passage does not create parenthetical effects because of the lack of a clearly defined central and subsidiary tonality. Thus Example 9—from the final movement of Chopin's Piano Sonata in C Minor, op. 4—does not achieve the same effect as the Nocturne, op. 9, no. 1. This passage has no harmonic rupture, no signal for a change of narrative trajectory, and the harmonic change occurs at a predictable place in the phrase (bar 211)—a deceptive cadence replaces an authentic cadence.

A general idea of parenthesis created through harmony must have been part of Chopin's education; a form of the technique was used by his composition teacher in Warsaw, Józef Elsner. In the exposition of his Grand Sonata in B-flat Major (see Ex. 10), a deceptive cadence is magnified to extreme proportions. A static block of D-flat Major harmony becomes, through prolongation, an alternative key area. The whole phrase seems to lie outside the argument of the sonata in the manner of a parenthesis, because the harmonic language and phrase structures in the rest of the piece are extremely conservative. The character of this passage is similar to the examples from Spohr and Chopin's op. 9; the parenthetical insertion suspends forward progress, creating an a-temporal moment outside the main stream of the music. The key differences between this passage and the parenthesis in op. 9, no. 1 are the lack of thematic restatement and the way that the passage is articulated by cadences.

Chopin used this kind of parenthesis—a harmonic block articulated by cadences, presenting new melodic material—in his Mazurka op. 7, no. 4 (see Ex. 11). The phrase in D Major at m. 33

Example 9. Chopin, Sonata in C minor, op. 4, mvt IV, bb. 205–17

205

p

209

p

Eb: V bVI

214

cresc. b

p

fz

fz

Example 10. Elsner, Grand Sonata in B-flat Major, mvt I: Allegro, bb. 29–36

29.

dol

p

pp

fz

F: V bVI

Ge+6 V

V. S.

Example 11. Chopin, Mazurka in A-flat Major, op. 7, no. 4, bb. 29–37

29

staccato.

p

riten.

sempre legato.

33

pp sotto voce.

smorz.

a tempo.

Rea * Rea * Rea * Rea *

could be eliminated entirely with no loss of coherence. Like the example from Elsner's Sonata, this passage suspends forward harmonic motion. Elsner taught Chopin to use reharmonisation as a tool to avoid closure and vary phrase structure.⁴¹ Chopin uses reharmonisation on a larger scale to vary the effect of the entire four-bar phrase. Rigid four-bar phrase structure was a convention in dance pieces that Chopin was unwilling to break in his early works. Harmonic digressions like Example 11 create variety in the listener's sense of temporal progression.

These examples from Chopin's early works show the young composer experimenting with various methods of incorporating highly coloured harmonic areas into his music. In general terms, Chopin used distant key areas in sequences, as the goal of a modulatory process or in harmonic blocks articulated by cadences. Sequences, particularly when they occur in *stile-brillante* figural passages, prohibit the feeling of harmonic rupture. The processual nature of sequences and modulatory processes integrates distant key areas into the prevailing temporal stream. The harmonic-block type creates an interruption, but on a much larger scale than Spohr's quintet. By avoiding preparation for the harmony change and de-synchronising the melodic restatement from the harmonic shift, the example from op. 9, no. 1 creates the sense of atemporality or an altered psychological state.

The Spohr-modelled parenthesis appears twice in op. 9. The third Nocturne, in B Major, features the technique in its dramatic B-minor middle section (see Ex. 12). Chopin abruptly moves to C major in bar 89. Music heard previously in a closely related key is stated in a distant key. A melodic variant is supported by an unconventional chord; the deceptive resolution of the secondary dominant in bar 99 comes as a surprise. The harmonic change happens not at

Example 12. Chopin, Nocturne in B Major, op. 9, no. 3, bb. 96–104

96 *a tempo.*
cresc.
 8 1 3 2 1
 Bm: V7/iv

99
ff dimin.
p
f
 4 2 1 2 1
 deceptive resolution

102
smorz.
pp
 8 1 3 2 1

⁴¹ Halina Goldberg, 'Phrase Structure in Chopin's Early Works in the Light of Elsner's Instruction,' *Indiana Theory Review* 28, no. 1/2 (2010): 8–10.

a cadence point, but within a phrase. The passage is harmonically static—a tonic expansion featuring consecutive voice exchanges. As in op. 9, movement I, the digression does not disturb the four-bar hypermeter.

Parenthesis in later works occurs at bar 72 in the Nocturne in C-sharp minor, op. 27, no. 1 (see Ex. 13), from 1835, and at bar 16 in the Fantasy in F minor, op. 49 (see Ex. 14), from 1841. The elements of the Spohr-modelled parenthesis are present—restatement of material in a distant key, lack of a pivot chord, motivation by melodic variant, tonicisation not confirmed by a cadence and oscillating harmonies. In the Nocturne, a notably Beethovenian piece, exit from the distant key area comes through several measures of fragmentation and melodic liquidation.⁴² The parenthesis in the Fantasy creates a somewhat different effect because of its close integration to its phrase; it leaves the phrase rhythm of the previously stated prototype unchanged. The single line leading to C-flat is a comparatively smooth way to introduce the distant key. The feeling of harmonic rupture is dependent on the expectation generated by the three previous, diatonic iterations of the same material. The parenthetical world of E major seems more distant because of the force with which Chopin drives the music back to the tonic.

Example 13. Chopin, Nocturne in C-sharp minor, op. 27, no. 1, bb. 71–84

71 *pp* *ten.*

* Fr+6? C: I IV I

77 *cresc. ed accel.* *fff*

fragmentation--processual return liquidation

83 *con forsa.*

⁴² For the piece's allusions to Beethoven, see Anatole Leikin, 'Genre Connotations, Thematic Allusions, and Formal Implications in Chopin's Nocturne Op. 27 No. 1,' in *Chopin and His Work in the Context of Culture*, ed. Irena Poniatowska, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Chopinowska, 2003), 232–42.

Example 14. Chopin, Fantasy in F minor, op. 49, bb. 14–20

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's Fantasy in F minor, op. 49, measures 14 to 20. The score is in F minor and 6/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 14-17) features a complex texture with overlapping phrases and a 'cresc.' marking. The second system (measures 18-20) continues the texture with a 'ff' marking and a 'cresc.' marking. A red bracket highlights a specific phrase in both systems. Harmonic analysis below the score includes 'E: V7 * 6/4' and 'Ab: Ge+6'.

The Spohr-modelled parenthesis becomes less frequent in the later works of Chopin. As his music becomes more overtly contrapuntal through the 1840s, Chopin prized more and more the subtlety of his transitions. Rothstein notes this tendency, comparing it to Wagner's pursuit of 'endless melody.'⁴³ We know that Chopin's teacher, Elsner believed:

that although maintaining symmetry in the structure of higher rhythm assures more refined and more expressive musical art, the smoothness should not be exaggerated, because although symmetry makes every work of art lucid, easier to comprehend (resulting in musical art which is fluent and falls easily on the ear), it can also render it monotonous, and ultimately tiresome, inappropriate and tedious.⁴⁴

In both the first and third Nocturnes from op. 9, minimal phrase expansions in the outer sections give way to completely four-barred music in the middle sections. As Kinderman, Berger and Davis note, parenthetical passages, such as those in op. 9, influence the listener's perception of time.⁴⁵ Perhaps harmony, in such cases as these, should be considered alongside the overlaps and lead-ins that Rothstein notes in early Chopin, as a way to solve the 'Great Nineteenth Century Rhythm Problem.'⁴⁶

Operatic Versions of Parenthesis

Chopin's music invites hermeneutic interpretation; for two hundred years critics have been reading narrative meaning in the stylistic and technical features of his works.⁴⁷ His teacher

⁴³ Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm*, 233–48.

⁴⁴ Goldberg, 'Phrase Structure,' 10.

⁴⁵ William Kinderman, 'Thematic Contrast and Parenthetical Enclosure in the Piano Sonatas Op. 109 and 111,' in *Zu Beethoven 3: Aufsätze und Dokumente*, ed. Harry Goldschmidt (Berlin: Verlag Neue Musik, 1988), 43–53; Kinderman, *Beethoven*; Berger, *Bach's Cycle*; Davis, 'Chopin and the Romantic Sonata.'

⁴⁶ Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm*, 248.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, 'Chopin and "La Note Bleue": An Interpretation of the Prelude Op. 45,' *Music & Letters* 78, no. 2 (1997): 233–53; Jeffrey Kallberg, 'The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor,' *19th-century Music* 11, no. 3 (1988): 238–61. Halina Goldberg, 'Remembering that Tale of Grief': The Prophetic Voice in Chopin's Music,' in *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries*, ed. Halina Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 54–95.

Elsner was a composer of both instrumental and operatic works, but thought of absolute music in terms of rhetorical and syntactic function, especially in the area of phrase structure.⁴⁸ To help explain the effect of parenthesis in op. 9, no. 1, I will investigate similar passages in texted music. Parenthetical appearances of distant harmony have some precedents in the operatic repertoire familiar to Chopin in the 1820s. Though the Italian bel canto repertoire is frequently cited as an influence on Chopin's melodic style and ornamentation, French opéra-comique had a greater impact on his harmonic practice.⁴⁹

Example 15 shows a Beethoven-modelled harmonic digression from Étienne Méhul's *Joseph* (1807), a performance of which Chopin attended in Vienna in August 1829.⁵⁰ This opera, popular in German lands, is sombre, serious and emphasises reflection more than action.⁵¹ The libretto is based on the biblical story, and the opera's third number, 'The Brothers' Ensemble,' is one of the work's more dramatic sections. Simeon is tormented by guilt for his and his brothers' crime against Joseph and rejects attempts to comfort him. Respite from the surging chromatic motives in the orchestra comes with a common-tone modulation to E Major. The key of the ensemble is F minor; E Major is accessed via a modulation to A-flat minor. The highly coloured harmonic area begins with a series of chords meandering in E Major, before closing on a half cadence. Crucial to understanding this passage and its relationship to the operatic examples below is the technical means the composer uses to mediate textual expressions of synchronicity and diachronicity. This passage lacks the abrupt harmonic disconnection in the Chopin and Spohr examples above, with a transition into E Major that closely resembles the hammering common-tone modulation in the finale of Beethoven's op. 37 (Example 16). The sense of this passage as a secondary temporal stream—and thus, the contrary-to-fact condition—is created by textural contrast and especially the lack of an authentic cadence on both sides of the parenthesis. The return of the orchestra's ascending chromatic motive marks the same kind of processual return to tonic that Beethoven used so frequently in the early piano sonatas. In the E-Major section, Simeon sings of his children's innocence, a synchronic state of being outside of the progression of crime, grief, judgment, and reconciliation. The retransition emphatically denies the viability of that blessed state, locking the door on the distant key area that Chopin in op. 9 leaves barely open.

Boieldieu's opera *La dame blanche*, with its Scottish setting, supernatural elements, and deft handling of both French and Italian musical elements, was hugely popular in Warsaw.⁵² Chopin attended the opera and performed an improvisation on one of its themes during his

⁴⁸ For example, Goldberg states: 'Elsner detailed the potential of the successive degrees of the scale to take on the various syntactic functions, generating a comma, a colon, or a semicolon. To illustrate his point, he presented a straightforward eight-bar period, which he likened to the sentence "[He] who loves his homeland is a good citizen" and then showed the various means of extending it, by avoiding closure on a perfect authentic cadence. Ultimately he arrived at a musical phrase that he understood as a double or triple period and compared to the sentence "[He] who loves his homeland, is a good and virtuous citizen, does not spare [his] fortune, nor health, nor life".' See Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 126–7.

⁴⁹ See Jonathan Bellman, *Chopin's Polish Ballade: Op. 38 as Narrative of National Martyrdom* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 2009); David Kasunic, 'Chopin's Operas,' in *Chopin and his Work in the Context of Culture*, 387–404.

⁵⁰ Frick, *Chopin's Polish Letters*, 114.

⁵¹ Steven Meyer, *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 59.

⁵² Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 244.

Example 15. Méhul, *Joseph*, 'The Brothers' Ensemble,' bb. 84–102

84 flich ih - ren Arm, der mich umschlingt.
suis dans leurs bras ca - res-sants.

88 Sie lächeln voll Unschuld mir ent - ge -
Mal - gré leur na - ivo in - no - cen -

94 gen, sie lä - cheln voll Unschuld mir ent - ge - - gen, doch
ce, mal - gré leur na - ivo in - no - cen - - ce je

99 Schre - cken und Wahn - sinn er - grei - fen mich, doch
sens re - dou - bler mon ef - froi, je

103 Schre - cken und Wahn - sinn er - grei - fen mich, ich les in
sens, je sens re - dou - bler mon ef - froi, je lis aux

common tone hammering

processual return to F minor

Edition Dettinger 8878

Example 16. Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, op. 37, mvt III: Rondo, bb. 258–69

first visit to Vienna.⁵³ The opera's harmony is generally simple and diatonic; as shown in the examples below, distant key areas are used to depict the idealised past. The plot, based on several novels by Sir Walter Scott, describes a family of tenant farmers (Dickson and Jenny) attempting to save their land from Gaveston, the corrupt steward. In this they are aided by Gaveston's ward, Anna, the titular 'white lady,' and Brown, an English army officer who turns out to be the estate's rightful heir. Two examples incorporating distant key areas beg comparison and illuminate the narrative effect of the compositional device of parenthesis.

The first harmonic parenthesis occurs in the following passage from Act 2, Scene III (see Ex. 17). Anna advises Gaveston 'Vous qui voulez prendre la place / Des anciens maîtres de ces lieux, / Imitez-les, faites comme eux', which translates as 'You who wish to take the place of the ancient masters of these premises, imitate them, do as they did.' E-flat Major harmony enters by common tone in a G Major duet on the words 'des anciens maîtres.' The harmonic disjunction emphasises the temporal disconnection in the text. Anna describes a static, ideal world; Gaveston should imitate not a specific person, but an old way of living. The exit from this parenthetical statement is equally abrupt and does not disturb the four-bar phrase rhythm. Oscillating tonic and dominant harmonies suddenly, by common tone again, give way to a dominant seventh in C minor. The modulation from E-flat to C minor could easily have been smoothed by a pivot chord. Instead Boieldieu emphasises the impossibility of the synchronic state of grace described by Anna, with a wrenching crescendo and crowbar-style juxtaposition of B-flat and B-natural on the word 'si chacun', which translates as 'if each one.' The parenthesis expresses a contrary-to-fact conditional statement.

⁵³ Frick, *Chopin's Polish Letters*, 116.

Example 17. Boieldieu, *La dame blanche*, Act II, no. 7: Duo et Trio, bb. 48–67

48 Vous, vous qui voulez prendre la

min

52 pla - ce Des an - ciens mai - tres de ces

56 lieux, I - mitez - les, faites comme

60 eux; Si cha - cun si cha - cun

63 - ci les ré - vè - re Si cha - cun i - ci les ré :

pp

p

pp

f

con anima

cédez.

pp

suivez,

G:I

Eb:10

Eb: I

Cm: V^{4/3}

The difference between this passage and the Brother's Ensemble from *Joseph* could be described in terms of degrees of Romanticism; that is, to what extent does the music tie up the loose ends created by the harmonic rupture. Méhul, like Beethoven in op. 37, integrates the harmonic digression with the main stream of the music, with a compensatory transition. Simeon acknowledges the impossibility of a return to innocence and the orchestra agrees with him. Boieldieu uses harmonic rupture to show that Gaveston will not attain that synchronic ideal. However, the E-flat Major dream is not banished completely by a forceful transition back to G Major. The rightful heir will achieve happily-ever-after, as the treatment of a distant key area in his next aria suggests.

A striking modulation occurs in the opera's most famous number—Brown's 'Viens, gentille dame' (see Ex.18), in which he attempts to summon the supernatural protector of the estate. The key of E-flat Major connects this music to the 'anciens maîtres' of the previous number. The distant key area is again flat VI, but accessed through the parallel minor, which arrives at a natural break in phrasing. The pivot-chord modulation back to E-flat is similarly smooth, with a six-bar delay of the new key's confirmation. The text describes Brown's premonition of a supernatural revelation, but it emphasises that the emotional state is not the sublime—'Mais

Example 18. Boieldieu, *La dame blanche*, Act II, no. 8: Cavatine, 'Viens, gentille dame,' bb. 63–78

The image displays a musical score for a cavatine from Boieldieu's opera *La dame blanche*. It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The systems are numbered 63, 66, and 69. The lyrics are: 'Et que ce doux mys - tère Ont de char.mes pour moi de char - mes pour moi! Oui, je sens qu'à ta vu - e L'âme doit être é -'. The piano accompaniment features various textures, including arpeggiated chords, sustained chords, and rhythmic patterns. There are dynamic markings such as *pp* and *crese.*. A red box highlights a specific section of the piano accompaniment in the second system, starting at measure 66 and ending at measure 70. Below the piano part of the second system, there are chord symbols: Eb: i, Cb: iii, and V7.

The image shows a musical score for a duet, likely from an opera. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 72-74) features a vocal line with lyrics: "72 - uu - e, Mais, mais ce n'est pas d'effroi Non, non," and a piano accompaniment. The second system (measures 75-77) features a vocal line with lyrics: "75 non, ce n'est pas d'effroi... Non, non, non, non, non, non, non!" and a piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical markings: "stacc." above the first vocal line, "poco" above the piano accompaniment in measure 73, "smorz." above the piano accompaniment in measure 74, "poco cresc." above the piano accompaniment in measure 75, "rit." above the vocal line in measure 76, "a piacere..." above the vocal line in measure 77, and "suivez." above the piano accompaniment in measure 77. The piano accompaniment includes triplets in measure 77.

ce n'est pas d'effroi,' which translates as 'But this is not terror.' The white lady (Anna) will reveal Brown's true identity as the heir to the estate, returning the protagonists' lives to the state longed for in the above-described duet. The distant key area signifies the supernatural presence and alludes to the synchronic experience of time, but the smooth modulatory process shows it as a real possibility, rather than a longed-for but unfulfillable fantasy.

One of Chopin's musical models for an essentially Romantic style was Weber's opera *Der Freischütz*. The Warsaw Romantics saw Weber's opera as a model, in their quest to create art that would satisfy the particular needs of the Polish people, through its use of folk mythology and vernacular language.⁵⁴ Already familiar with the music from popular piano arrangements, Chopin saw the opera performed in Warsaw in 1826 and in Berlin in 1828. The salient feature of Weber's harmony in *Der Freischütz* is how it represents characters and themes in the drama. Weber was among those German opera composers seeking to define a national style; some of their most important models were in the French opéra-comique.⁵⁵ Displaying a strategy similar to Boieldieu's *La dame blanche*, the folk-inflected diatonic choruses of *Freischütz* are contrasted with the supernatural elements connected to Samiel. This contrast, as an abrupt modulation to a distant key, signifies the terrifying grasp of the spirit world as well as the concept of parenthesis, as expressed in Spohr and Chopin, in two particular passages that resonate with it.

Though *Der Freischütz* does not contain a passage that is exactly like those examined above in Spohr's quintet and Chopin's op. 9, it occasionally presents distant harmonies in a parenthetical way. In the act 2 trio 'Wie? Was? Ensetzen! (see Ex. 19), Weber creates a kind of parenthesis to depict moonlight. Max sings 'Noch trübt sich nicht die Mondenscheibe; / Noch strahlt ihr Schimmer klar und hell; / Doch bald wird sie den Schein verlieren,' which

⁵⁴ Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw*, 228–9.

⁵⁵ Meyer, *Carl Maria von Weber*, 55–57.

translates as 'The moonlight is not waning yet; / Its shimmer still beams clear and bright; / But soon it will lose its gleam.' This line recalls the dialogue from Act 1, when Max learns that the free bullets can be forged during the lunar eclipse. Max wants to prolong the moonlight and delay his dangerous task. Like Faust, but for different reasons, he might have said 'the swift moment I entreat: / Tarry a while! You are so fair!'⁵⁶

Example 19. Weber, *Der Freischiütz*, Act II, no. 9. Trio, 'Wie? Was? Ensetzen!' bb. 76–93

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is marked with hypermeter numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 1 above the vocal lines. Red boxes highlight specific measures: measure 76 in the first system, measure 81 in the second system, and measure 89 in the fourth system. The lyrics are: 'trübt sich nicht die Mon - den_schei_be, noch strahlt ihr Schim - mer klar und hell, doch bald wird sie den Schein ver - lie - ren. Willst du den Him_mel ob_ser_vi-ren? Das wär' nun'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. Performance markings include *erese.* and *leggierrmente*.

⁵⁶ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, trans. Walter Arndt, ed. Cyrus Hamlin, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2001), 46. This is Faust's sometimes-misunderstood wager with Mephistopheles. Faust is not asking for such an experience, but betting that the devil cannot provide one.

The exotic harmony enters smoothly, through modal mixture. C-flat Major is not confirmed with a cadence, merely prolonged in a way that halts the harmonic progression. Weber's parenthesis does not begin as abruptly as Chopin's op. 9 or Spohr's quintet. The shattering disconnection between dream and reality comes at the end of the passage. A diminished seventh chord, Samiel's sign, supports Max's violent tritone leap. C-natural replaces C-flat, exploding the dreamlike harmonic digression. The diminished-seventh chord causes a hiccup in the hypermeter; a three-bar extension disturbs the otherwise smooth four-bar grouping. This irregularity highlights the violence of the harmonic rupture and impossibility of Max's dream. Many aspects of Spohr's parenthesis are present. Essential to the feeling of parenthesis, and present in this example, is the temporal expansion of a distant but static harmonic space. The distant harmony accommodates a variation of a previously heard melody. The C-flat Major chord arrives in the middle of the phrase. The abruptness of the diminished-seventh chord creates the sense of distance. This passage, technically similar to Spohr's quintet and Chopin's op. 9 Nocturnes, expresses longing for the impossible, synchronic experience of time.

Like the paired excerpts from *La dame blanche*, comparing Agatha's Cavatina (see Ex. 20) from Act 3 of *Der Freischütz* with Example 19, shows the difference in meaning between parenthetical presentation and a more straightforward modulation. Agatha sings 'Und wär' dies auch mein letzter Morgen, / Rief' mich sein Vaterwort als Braut,' which translates as 'Even if this were my last morning, / His paternal word would call me as a bride.' This is sung over a chord progression that resembles the moonlight music in Act II. Mercer-Taylor has demonstrated the parallelism of these passages, as a part of Weber's strategy for unifying the music of the opera on the largest scale.⁵⁷ This parallelism encourages scrutiny of the different harmonic procedures in the two passages. As in the Boieldieu examples, the treatment of the distant key area depicts the changed dramatic situation specifically. The techniques, which made the earlier example parenthetical, are now lacking. Entry and exit from C-flat Major are achieved smoothly. E-flat minor serves as a pivot chord going in. The seventh between G-flat and F-flat in bar 46 is resolved to a sixth between G and E-flat at the end of bar 47, creating a dominant seventh chord in the home key of A-flat Major. This return to the tonic quotes Samiel's diminished seventh chord, but takes away its sting by subsuming it into a more natural harmonic progression. C-flat Major does not oscillate in a static prolongation. The melody in the C-flat Major section is new, not a variant of something that happened before. Agatha foresees the possibility of her own death, but her faith in God enables her to accept her fate. Here, C-flat Major does not represent a longing, contrary to possibility as it did for Max in Act II, but a safe and vivid future. Weber represents the unfulfillable, Romantic desire with parenthesis, and inspired forbearance with modulation.

Méhul's, Boieldieu's, and Weber's compositional technique for incorporating distant key areas is subtly variable, but remarkably consistent in how it relates to the dramatic situation. Use of distant key areas is uncommon in this pre-1830 repertoire. Given Chopin's interest in crafting stories in sound, and his passion for the opera, these passages must have informed his musical language or even served as models for his own harmonic digressions. Likewise, these operas trained sensitive listeners in the kinds of relationships between harmony and

⁵⁷ Peter Mercer-Taylor, 'Unification and Tonal Absolution in 'Der Freischütz',' *Music & Letters* 78, no. 2 (1997): 220–32.

Example 20. Weber, *Der Freischütz*, Act III, no. 12. Cavatina, 'Und ob die Wolke sie verhülle,' bb. 37–50

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a vocal piece with piano accompaniment. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). Red vertical brackets highlight specific harmonic changes in the piano part.

System 1 (Measures 37-41): The vocal line begins with the lyrics "auch der Va-ter sor-gen, dem kind lich Herz und Sinn ver- traut, und wär' dies". The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. A red bracket is placed under the piano part from measure 39 to 41.

System 2 (Measures 42-45): The vocal line continues with "auch mein letz- - ter Mor- gen, rief mich sein Va- terwort als". The piano accompaniment has a more rhythmic, chordal texture. A red bracket is placed under the piano part from measure 42 to 45. Below the piano part, the following chord symbols are listed: Ebm: i, Cb: iii, V4/3, I.

System 3 (Measures 46-50): The vocal line starts with "Braut: Sein Au- ge e- wig rein und klar, nimmt meiner". The piano accompaniment is simpler, with a clear melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line. A red bracket is placed under the piano part from measure 46 to 50. Below the piano part, the following chord symbols are listed: Vcel., V. A. 14., and dim 7th!

narrative detailed above. *La dame blanche* and *Der Freischütz* were exceptionally popular works. *Der Freischütz* was staged in all the major cities of Europe and even reached New York and New Orleans by 1826.⁵⁸ Scenes from Boieldieu's story decorated omnibuses in Paris between 1828 and 1855; the opera received its thousandth performance at the Opera-Comique in 1862.⁵⁹ In the same way that Davis views non-normative events in Chopin's sonatas in dialogue with Classical-era conventions, certain harmonic techniques can be read in dialogue with opera.⁶⁰ For a musical public, ready to hear stories in sound, text provides a cipher.

Corollaries in Romantic Poetry

The rhetorical content of the music described above converges interestingly with Romanticism in poetry. The musical parenthesis expresses a concept crucial to Romantic philosophy.

⁵⁸ Francien Marx, 'Falling Silent: The *Freischütz* Controversy,' in *ETA Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 414.

⁵⁹ Nicole Vilknor, 'The Opera and the Omnibus: Material Culture, Urbanism and Boieldieu's *La Dame Blanche*,' *Cambridge Opera Journal* 32, no. 1 (2020): 90–114.

⁶⁰ Andrew Davis, *Sonata Fragments: Romantic Narratives in Chopin, Schumann, and Brahms*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 82–122.

Opera composers Méhul, Weber, and Boieldieu use the above-described contrast, between conventional and unconventional harmony, to dramatise a contrast between diachronic reality, and mythical or supernatural synchronicity, and unfulfillable desire. Investigation of this opposition is a major theme of Romantic poetry. Examples in English abound, but closest to Chopin in 1830 must be Adam Mickiewicz. The aesthetic of the artists' work is closer than their cool personal relationship might suggest.⁶¹

Mickiewicz's early works were exceedingly popular during Chopin's teenage years in Warsaw. The first poem in his collection *Ballades and Romances* (1822), 'Romanticism,' defines the titular impulse with the story of a woman who sees and converses with the ghost of her dead husband. The townspeople believe the woman—'His ghost must be here, walking at her side' (line 50)—but a bespectacled scholar denounces the scene. The speaker admonishes this naysayer: 'Feeling and faith to me far more reveal / Than eyes and spectacles, though learned, do' (line 64).⁶² The supernatural world is not an alternative to the rationally observable one, but a complement to it. Furthermore, the world of fantasy here is one of synchronicity; the ghost stands outside of time's progression.

Chopin's first Nocturne reflects this intuitive, anti-rational stance with its refusal to compensate for the harmonic digression and the revenant C-flat. The operatic parallels above justify equating Chopin's harmonic digression with supernatural elements. George Sand's description of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* could equally describe Chopin's Nocturne—'The world of fantasy is not outside, neither above nor beneath; it is at the heart of everything, it moves everything, it is the soul of all reality, it inhabits all the facts.'⁶³ Chopin's classicism is evident throughout the Nocturne, creating a productive tension with the subtle deviations from normative expectations. Phrase structure tends toward the Mozartean—periodic with clearly defined cadences. Surface chromaticism is related to a Classical harmonic structure in the background. At first, the sudden shift created by unconventional use of harmony gives the impression not of a pervasive fantasy, but clearly defined alternative narratives. The repetitive return of the D-Major digression, and especially the unresolving C-flat, create loose ends that the coda references but fails to resolve unambiguously. Though Chopin's fantasy is not as pervasive as Mickiewicz's in 'Romanticism,' it lingers on after the Nocturne is finished.

Longing for the fullness of synchronic experience is a common subject in Romantic art. A version close to Chopin can be found in Mickiewicz's 'Ode to Youth,' a poem written during his student days at the University of Wilno, and also included in *Ballades and Romances*. The speaker calls upon youth—'give me wings, that I may rise / Above this dead world' (lines 2–3)—to free him from the confines of diachronic time.⁶⁴ Youth's point of view is like the sun's, in contrast to the aged man who can only see to the horizon. Mickiewicz's poem pictures youth as the renovating force that will create a better world. That better world is not a counterfactual,

⁶¹ For Chopin's relationship to the Polish émigré community in Paris and Mickiewicz's nationalistic project, see Jolanta Pekacz, 'Deconstructing a 'Nationalist Composer': Chopin and Polish Exiles in Paris, 1831–1839,' *19th-century Music* 24, no. 2 (2000): 161–72.

⁶² George Rapall Noyes, ed. and trans., *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz* (New York: Polish Institute of Sciences in America, 1944), 69.

⁶³ George Sand, 'Essai sur le drame fantastique,' in *Souvenirs et impressions littéraires* (Paris: E. Dentu, n.d.), 65.

⁶⁴ Noyes, *Mickiewicz*, 69.

longed-for, impossible state, but a graspable reality. Like 'Romanticism,' 'Ode to Youth' presents the world of fantasy, not as an alternative to, but a superior replacement for mundane existence.

Mickiewicz's image in 'Ode to Youth' parallels a famous passage from Goethe's *Faust, Part I*, with a marked difference that highlights the philosophical gap between them. The 'Sunset Speech' (lines 1064–99) follows the same structure as the musical parenthesis. The specifically parenthetical part (1070–1091) is reproduced below:

Observe how in the flaming evening sun
 Those green-embowered cabins glitter.
 He yields and sinks, the day is lived and done,
 He hastes beyond, new life to breed and nourish.
 Oh, that I have no buoyant wings to flourish,
 To strive and follow, on and on!
 I'd see in endless vesper rays
 The silent world beneath me glowing,
 The valleys all appeased, each hill ablaze,
 The silver brooks to golden rivers flowing.
 No more would then this rugged bluff deny
 With cliff and precipice the godlike motion;
 Already with its sun-warmed bays the ocean
 Reveals itself to the astonished eye.
 At last, it seems, the god is downward sinking;
 Yet to new urge awakes the mind,
 I hasten on, his ceaseless radiance drinking,
 The day ahead of me, night left behind,
 The waves below, and overhead the sky.
 A happy fancy—meanwhile he must pass.
 To spirit wings will scarce be joined, alas,
 Corporeal wings wherewith to fly.⁶⁵

An external motivator, which for Faust is the evening light, and in Spohr's quintet is the arbitrary melodic change in bar 23, enables a dream-like, self-contained and stable image. Faust imagines himself following the sun, so that the day no longer changes into night. He is no longer subject to mortal travails; instead, he is in an infinite communion with nature and the cosmos. Spohr expresses this feeling—the absence of desire, the purely synchronic experience of time—through harmony. By prolonging the distant key of G-flat Major in the transition section, where the listener expects volatility, he creates a moment outside of the formal demands of the sonata genre. By avoiding a strongly directed cadential progression, Spohr creates music free from desire. The state that Faust desires is a paradox. It is a purely fulfilling moment, of the sort he wagers Mephistopheles will not be able to provide for him, in which he is simultaneously striving forward towards new horizons. This idea is uniquely suited to musical expression, perhaps suggesting the reason for music's primacy in many early nineteenth-century aesthetic hierarchies, because music necessarily moves forward in time. The chromatic inflection towards G-flat minor, the most poignant moment, reflects Faust's painful realisation that the moment cannot last. The vision ends abruptly; Faust states 'A happy

⁶⁵ Goethe, *Faust*, 30.

fancy—meanwhile he must pass. / To spirit wings will scarce be joined, alas, / Corporeal wings wherewith to fly.’ A true Romantic hero, like the speaker of *Dichterliebe* or Byron’s *Manfred*, is unable to resolve the contradiction between desire and reality and often dies as a result. The Mickiewicz poems above bypasses the conflict, privileging fantasy as superior to reality. In contrast, Faust recognises the impossibility of his vision. In Spohr, the prevailing conventional harmony and structure quickly resumes. The music in G-flat is kept on the local scale, preserved as a fancy instead of elevated to the level of structure by cadential confirmation.

Goethe, though far from Chopin’s milieu, suggests an interesting basis for comparison with both Spohr and Chopin in his manner of mediating the demands of Classical structure and form with Romantic materials and expression. The famous lines of Faust’s wager ‘If the swift moment I entreat: / Tarry a while! You are so fair!’ which so closely mirror the expression in Chopin’s and Spohr’s parentheses, describe a state that Faust believes Mephistopheles can never offer him. Chopin and Spohr preserve the contrary-to-fact aspect of Faust’s condition by their juxtaposition of forward-moving and static harmonic progressions, and the painful, chromatic twinge that forces the parenthesis back into the main argument of the music.

Chopin knew Goethe’s *Faust* from a performance in Dresden in August of 1829. In a letter to his family, he calls it ‘A ghastly, but great fantasy. This is not Spohr’s opera, but they played excerpts from it during the intermissions.’⁶⁶ This link between Spohr and Goethe in Chopin’s mind is enticing. As evidence that Chopin’s use of parenthesis is related to the Sunset Speech from *Faust*, it is unconvincingly circumstantial. The possibility exists that Chopin used a technical device learned from Spohr to depict a situation like the one in *Faust*. More likely, listeners of a certain sensibility may have interpreted the parenthesis in Chopin’s music as related somehow to the philosophy proffered by the Sunset Speech, ideas that were central to intellectual discourse in Europe in the first part of the nineteenth century.

The Sunset Speech is a version of Friedrich Schlegel’s ‘arabesque,’ a kind of digression in which the decorative becomes essential. The defining qualities of the arabesque are ‘movement and multiplicity,’ such that the human eye is ultimately unable to ‘fix and perceive the image in its entirety,’ thus ‘alluding to the aesthetic ideal of the Absolute, i.e., that which cannot, by definition, be signified or become manifest before our eyes.’⁶⁷ In the same way, the infinite motion that Faust describes is ultimately striving for a synchronic experience of time. Goethe—like Chopin, no indulgent Romantic—regarded the arabesque as a ‘subordinated form of art.’⁶⁸ Thus Goethe uses the arabesque in *Faust* to describe Romanticism from a critical distance. The Sunset Speech is a digression, but resolving the issues it raises is the central focus of the drama. Spohr’s parenthesis is decorative; it creates expressive harmonic variety but is not subject to resolution later in the movement. Chopin’s parenthesis in op. 9, no. 1 seems initially like Spohr’s, but then it infuses subsequent events and just barely resists final resolution.

The Warsaw Romantics, including figures like Maurycy Mochnacki and Antoni Edward Odyniec, pinned their hopes on Chopin to articulate a uniquely Polish Romanticism. As Goldberg states: ‘Chopin learned from salon debates on the intellectual topics occupying his

⁶⁶ Frick, *Chopin’s Polish Letters*, 125.

⁶⁷ Carsten Strathausen, ‘Eichendorff’s *Marmorbild* and the Demise of Romanticism,’ in *Rereading Romanticism*, ed. Martha Helfer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 375.

⁶⁸ Strathausen, ‘Eichendorff’s *Marmorbild*,’ 375.

Romantics peers, and his emerging compositional style was nourished by the new artistic tendencies surrounding him.⁶⁹ Chopin would have been familiar with the philosophy of Friedrich Schlegel and the other Jena Romantics from his university education, particularly through attending lectures from Kazimierz Brodzinski.⁷⁰ Brodzinski, a literature professor, was ‘one of the first and the most resounding voices in the debate on Polish Romanticism.’⁷¹ Though not treated well by twentieth-century critics, Brodzinski’s desire to find a middle way between the extremes of Classicism and Romanticism, parallels aspects of Chopin’s compositional style.⁷² The parenthesis in op. 9, no. 1 occupies this middle way—an arabesque that becomes critical to formal trajectory instead of remaining merely decorative, yet cannot be ultimately subsumed into the expected tonal context. Though Chopin’s use of parenthesis is probably not an active imitation of Faust’s Sunset Speech, it is a demonstrably Romantic device.

Conclusion

Harmonic parenthesis, of the specific type identified in this study, helps to place Chopin’s aesthetic within both the contemporary musical culture and the philosophy of Romanticism. The timeline of Chopin’s acquaintance with Spohr’s quintet, and the composition of his own op. 9, suggests direct inspiration. The dissimilarities between Spohr’s parenthesis and his Beethovenian models are emblematic of a shifting zeitgeist. Opéra-comique provides texted precedents for parenthesis. Distant harmonic digressions tend to portray the supernatural or synchronic experience of time and harmonic rupture underscores the contrafactual nature of those visions. Certain concepts of this nascent Romanticism are intimately connected with the musical techniques of parenthesis, in particular Schlegel’s ‘arabesque.’ Spohr’s decorative version in his quintet contrasts with Goethe’s subordinated flight of fancy in the Sunset Speech from *Faust*, with Chopin treading the middle ground in his Nocturne op. 9, no. 1. A pervasive fantasy suffuses both Chopin and his compatriot Mickiewicz’s works, though Chopin describes Romanticism from a more Classical vantage point than Mickiewicz’s visionary fervour.

The feeling that Chopin’s works aspire to opera and narrative, that they express something more than the purely musical, has been an ever-present strand in the reception of his music. Wessel’s titles, enduring arguments about Mickiewicz and the Ballades, and fanciful concert reviews must, to some extent, be based on heard musical events. Study of parenthesis provides tangible links between Chopin’s compositional development and contemporary practice, and between absolute music and the broader spirit of early nineteenth-century Romanticism.

About the Author

Michael Rector is Associate Professor of Music at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. A pianist and teacher, his research focuses on performance practices in recorded piano music.

⁶⁹ Goldberg, *Music in Chopin’s Warsaw*, 176.

⁷⁰ Hedley, *Correspondence*, 10.

⁷¹ Goldberg, *Music in Chopin’s Warsaw*, 137.

⁷² For example, Manfred Kridl claims that the author of *On Classicism and Romanticism* ‘did not, to be sure, possess great talent for synthesis nor the ability for exact reasoning.’ Manfred Kridl, *Survey of Polish Literature*, trans. Olga Scherer-Virski (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 210.