Structuring the Infinite:
Irony and Multivalency in Robert Schumann’s *Humoreske*, Op. 20

THESIS

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Abstract

Robert Schumann’s piano cycle, *Humoreske*, Op. 20 (1839), is an oft-misunderstood work, relegated to a secondary status amongst the composer’s more popular piano cycles from the preceding decade. Carl Koßmaly’s first published review of the work in 1844 serves as an access point for recapturing a nineteenth-century view of the piano cycle within the context of Romantic irony. The writings of Schumann’s literary and philosophical contemporaries of the post-Kantian generation provide a basis for understanding Schumann’s changing compositional aesthetic, one whose aim is to represent the open concept of the infinite within the closed form of a musical score. The *Arabeske*, Op. 18 and the *Blumenstück*, Op. 19 served as Schumann's smaller prototypes for the *Humoreske*, and a detailed analysis of those two pieces shows the composer forming his new aesthetic of the infinite.

In the late nineteenth century, changing attitudes in editing practices and the aesthetic of the character piece contributed to variant editions of Schumann’s *Humoreske*, particularly in regard to the discrepancy between thin-thin and thin-thick double barlines. By subtly altering the first publication of 1839, Clara Schumann’s 1887 edition divided the grand work of one movement in 963 measures into four smaller sections, further contributing to its perplexing reception history. A post-modern view of *Humoreske* with attention given to various internal divisions by way of digital tracking/banding on CD and MP3 offers a plethora of ways of reinterpreting the work.
Dedicated to my parents, Paul and June,

for their unflagging support and encouragement.
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“Music is the most romantic of all the arts… for its sole subject is the infinite.”
- E.T.A. Hoffmann

“Sometimes it even seems to me that I could play forever and never come to an end.”
- Robert Schumann

Artist cancellations for public concerts due to personal reasons or illness are commonplace, especially in a city as large and with as active a concert scene as New York, yet such an occurrence often opens the door for a replacement by a fortunate up-and-coming artist. Such was the case for a 2010 solo piano concert in New York’s Town Hall, when Ingrid Fliter was replaced at the last minute by fellow Gilmore Artist Award recipient, Kirill Gerstein. In a New York Times review of Gerstein’s emergency side-step to New York, Allan Kozinn gave him high praise for “spellbinding” renditions and a “fascinatingly constructed program.” The same could not be said, apparently, for one of the works on the program. For the performance of Robert Schumann’s *Humoreske*, Op. 20, Gerstein’s technique was lauded in spite of the “structural unwieldiness that afflicts the work,” making for an exciting reading that “overcame the score’s shortcomings.”

Unfortunately, such reviews of *Humoreske* are not that rare. Charles Rosen upholds Schumann’s *Humoreske* as the last of the great piano works from Schumann’s early compositional period and as “one of the most sophisticated of his creations,” yet in

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4 Ibid.
the same sentence, the elevated status he just bestowed on the work is struck down by a swift value judgment.\textsuperscript{5} In a comparison with two of Schumann’s earlier works, Rosen claims that the \textit{Humoreske}’s “large-scale structure is no longer controlled with the full power and the energy” of the \textit{Davidsbündlertänze} and the \textit{Fantasie}.\textsuperscript{6}

Kozinn’s and Rosen’s reviews seem to contradict the original review of \textit{Humoreske}. Carl Koßmaly (1812-1893) – one of the original members of Schumann’s Davidsbund, a music critic for the \textit{Neue Zeitschrift für Musik}, and Schumann’s appointed successor as editor of the same journal\textsuperscript{7} – contributed the first substantial review of Schumann’s piano works. He praised Schumann’s compositional style in this 1844 review in the \textit{Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung}. Koßmaly asserts that \textit{Humoreske} is “one of the most significant, outstanding showpieces of the entire collection.”\textsuperscript{8} Rosen echoes this verdict. Yet Rosen faults the work for not being very logical or cohesive, whereas Koßmaly perceives “the great variety of content and form” to be “always natural and unforced.”\textsuperscript{9} Koßmaly goes on to compare it – along with the Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 22 – to slightly earlier piano works that he believes show Schumann still working out his new style, one that I believe represents the infinite within the context of Romantic irony. Koßmaly says that “the plan and scope of \textit{Humoreske} is incomparably broader and more significant, [its] form and dimension [is] more fully imagined and larger and in

\textsuperscript{6} Rosen, \textit{The Romantic Generation}, 658.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
[it] everything is more developed and worked out…. In general [it] reveals a higher, bolder flight of ideas.”\textsuperscript{11}

After considering the two opposing viewpoints of Humoreske’s structure, one is led to ask how such a difference in understanding can occur. One possible reason could be the difference in contextual approach. Cecelia H. Porter notes that Schumann, who personally appointed Koßmaly to be his successor as editor of the NZfM, commended Koßmaly’s reviews for their philosophical depth.\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, when Koßmaly praises the Humoreske as a work that “transcends earthly bounds” and brings listeners “rather closer to [the truth],”\textsuperscript{13} one realizes the breadth of Koßmaly’s perspective and the importance of his understanding of the early Romantic philosophies and aesthetics that shaped Schumann’s musical works. To understand Schumann, one must understand Koßmaly.

In accordance with the post-Kantian tone of Koßmaly’s description, I will begin my argument by presenting the notion of the nineteenth-century “work concept” as Lydia Goehr discussed it in The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works. In establishing the emerging concept of a work of art that is able to reference an absolute idea beyond the score, I will introduce the early Romantic concept of irony – a paradoxical notion that helped nineteenth-century artists and philosophers represent and understand infinity. By linking Robert Schumann to this contemporary school of thought, I will demonstrate that his oft-misunderstood trio of piano cycles from Vienna – particularly the Humoreske – shows him moving to a new compositional style, one that reflects the new experimental

\textsuperscript{12} Porter, “Kossmaly, Carl.”
aesthetic of representing the infinite within a finite structure. In the second section of this paper, a detailed analysis of the *Humoreske* will help in presenting an interpretation that concurs with Koßmaly’s original 1844 review. In the final section, I will address the issues of musical editing and variant readings of the work which may have contributed to the shakiness of the *Humoreske*’s reception history. I will then conclude the paper with a post-modern view of the work, considering the multivalent readings suggested by the tracking on recordings.
Part I. *Humoreske* and the Nineteenth-Century Work Concept

Lydia Goehr’s monumental book, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, is a necessary resource for those attempting to recapture a nineteenth-century person’s sense of a nineteenth-century work. Goehr clearly states that her ontological exploration of a work is necessarily tied to an historical context.\(^{14}\) She goes on to stress that the musical work does not exist in an historical context as an object, but rather as a concept that has five specific criteria.\(^{15}\) These five criteria are central to her argument and therefore will be briefly explained below.

Goehr first describes the work concept as open and tied to continuity.\(^{16}\) This idea of an open concept means that the boundaries for understanding the work are flexible, allowing for a concept’s identity to change over time depending on the shifting practices of any given generation. Such a stipulation is central to my own argument, as it encourages a view of *Humoreske* within Schumann’s own historical context – a view steeped in the contemporary literary and philosophical issues that Koßmaly observed. However, as will be seen later, the concept of the open work also allows our own postmodern reconsideration of the work vis-à-vis Marshall McLuhan’s statement,


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 89-90.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 90-97.
“The medium is the message” – a statement that encourages us to consider recordings as an update on printed editions.\textsuperscript{17}

The second criterion for Goehr’s work concept is that it correlates to an ideal, which, she notes, is different from an identity condition.\textsuperscript{18} An identity condition demands to be met, whereas an ideal is merely action-guiding. An ideal, therefore, is not something that must necessarily be realized or something that can ever be realized, for that matter. As will be seen, Schumann must necessarily fail in his attempt to represent the infinite as an open concept within the confines of the closed structure of a musical work, yet he can still gesture toward that ideal. The tension created by the contradiction between pure theory and the indeterminacy of practice is therefore a positive one, according to Goehr. This allows the artist to continue to strive toward an ideal in spite of the limitations constricting any representation of that ideal.\textsuperscript{19}

Goehr next discusses the musical concept as regulative.\textsuperscript{20} The regulative stipulation is a “structuring mechanism” that is adhered to when one “complies with the score, plays these notes and not others, plays in such a way as to indicate respect for the genre musically and historically conceived.”\textsuperscript{21} Of course, working within such boundaries can become complicated when there is a change in aesthetic practice, but the issue is resolved according to the open characteristic of the concept as stated above.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} Goehr, \textit{The Imaginary Museum}, 101.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 106.
Goehr also describes the work concept as projective, which is to say that it exists in a projected form rather than in an abstract object. G. Thomas Tanselle parallels this notion in his differentiation between the terms “work” and “text” – the work being the ideal in the mind of the composer which lies behind the text, or the realized form. Such a stipulation narrows the existence of the work to realized texts – a tactile score or the sonic presentation of a score through a performance. This view is further supported by Stanley Boorman, who argues that different texts of a work exist both in print and in sound through performance. On the other hand, Mark Kingwell presents Glenn Gould as the twentieth-century’s seminal proponent of the recording as musical work, a musician whose disinterest in the performance hall coincided with an interest in making music accessible through radio and recording. Therefore, a consideration of the work in the form of a musical score later came to be countered by the work as represented in multiple recordings, which I will discuss further below.

Finally, Goehr posits that the work concept is emergent, which implies that our process of discovering it is retroactive. Only when we become familiar with the concept can we begin to identify a work’s possible meanings and functions as they change over time. As Goehr states, “these tasks match the intention to trace the history of the musical

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23 Goehr, The Imaginary Museum, 106.
24 See G. Thomas Tanselle, “On the Nature of Texts,” in A Rationale of Textual Criticism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 11-38. The following quotations are of particular interest: “Works do not depend on [such] vehicles [as sound waves or the combination of ink and paper] for their existence.” (p. 17); “Works do not exist in paper or in sound.” (p. 18); “But no text – embodied on paper or film or in memory – of a literary, musical, choreographic, or cinematic work can serve this function because none of them is the work.” (p. 32).
work as an open concept in the different stages of its life.”28 Such an intention, as Goehr presents it, allows us to peel back the layers of the various texts presented to us in order to find a reading of Schumann’s *Humoreske* that is closer to Koßmaly’s interpretation. As will be seen later, some of the various layers that I will argue subsequently obfuscated Koßmaly’s interpretation include Clara Schumann’s editorial changes and a general shift in nineteenth-century aesthetics typified by Brahms’s autonomous larger character piece.

Having established the parameters of her theory, Goehr proceeds to explain that the emerging work concept was formulated roughly around 1800 and coincided with a shift in aesthetics in continental Europe.29 Goehr suggests a two-fold change of reasoning, both interpretations stemming from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The first – the notion of “romantic transcendence” – represents a reaction against Kant, while the second – “the separability principle” – is largely in keeping with Kantian philosophy.

Kant’s landmark *Critique of Judgment* from 1790 opens with the striking proclamation that one is unable to convey truth through the aesthetic process: “The judgment of taste is therefore not a judgment of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical, by which we understand that whose determining ground can be no other than subjective [sic].”30 For Kant, the three-fold process of perception, imagination, and aesthetic understanding yielded an infinite number of readings or assessments – all ultimately subjected to the individual’s unique position. No one interpretation will ultimately stand as the “right” one, constantly challenging the individual’s own

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29 Ibid., 148.
assessments of the artwork—an assessment process that continues into infinity while also rejecting any singularity of understanding or truth.\textsuperscript{31} For the early Romantic generation of philosophers and aesthetes, Kant’s aforementioned ideas sparked a reaction. The Romantics certainly gravitated toward Kant’s suggestion that the aesthetic process was an infinite one, yet they simultaneously viewed Kant’s rejection of truth-value in art as a shortcoming that needed to be addressed.\textsuperscript{32}

The early Romantic philosophers typically recognized as taking such a position that were centered in the city of Jena in the years leading right up to the turn of the nineteenth century. Situated as a bridge between the two philosophical giants Kant and Hegel, the Jena group included Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, and Ludwig Tieck, among others.\textsuperscript{33} In their writings one can notice, as Goehr does, a shift in attitude toward the work of art—one that entertains art’s ability to transcend its temporal sphere of cognition and point to a greater, universal truth.\textsuperscript{34} Goehr’s “romantic transcendence” is thus exemplified in Schelling’s claim that “every object is ruled by an eternal concept.”\textsuperscript{35}

Goehr also notes that along with this larger shift in the perception of art, music emerged from among all the arts as a prime candidate for the autonomous work that could not only suggest truth, but encapsulate it.\textsuperscript{36} Friedrich Schlegel states simply,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{31} Kai Hammermeister, in conversation with the author, Columbus, OH, January 11, 2010.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Goehr, \textit{The Imaginary Museum}, 153.
\textsuperscript{36} Goehr, \textit{The Imaginary Museum}, 154.
\end{flushright}
“Where philosophy stops, poetry has to begin.”

Tieck further defines the poetic legacy, stating that [instrumental] music is the “supreme poetic language” because it “strikes out on its own path in disregard of text and underlying verse, composing and explicating its own poetry.”

Perhaps it is E.T.A. Hoffmann who puts it most clearly when he proclaims that “[Music] is the most romantic of all the arts… for its sole subject is the infinite.”

The Romantics’ quest for the infinite led them to seek it in the abstract structure of the artwork. For them, the infinite could only be seen in a specific composed form of the work – one embodying their notion of irony. Schlegel defines Romantic irony as the following: “Irony is the form of a paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great.” And in another fragment, he writes, “An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antithesis, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts.”

According to Schlegel, the notion of a paradox – a set of irreconcilable differences – is crucial to the form of irony. The Romantic, in his quest to transcend the finite, takes a position, thereby initiating the process of aesthetic judgment. Yet in taking any one position, he realizes that the Absolute has not been met, so another position is required, and the pattern continues.

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40 Schlegel, *The Fragments*, 149.
41 Ibid., 176.
ad infinitum as one realizes that any attempt to demonstrate the Absolute in an art work once and for all results in failure. Frederick Beiser details the artist’s quest:

The Ironist creates forever anew because he always puts forward a new perspective, a richer concept, a clearer formulation; but he also destroys himself because he is forever critical of his own efforts. It is only through this interchange between self-creation and self-destruction that he strives forward in the eternal search for the truth.

In this way, the artist fails to communicate the Absolute through irony while still maintaining the necessity of doing so. In his demonstration that every attempt is futile, however, the artist actually wins, so to speak, by achieving a sense of liberation from the notion of the Absolute.

The exhausting pattern of constant changes in position left an emotional residue for some philosophers. Hammermeister explains Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger’s tragic version of romantic irony as that which happens to the artist in an attempt to incorporate the infinite in a finite structure. In *Erwin*, his little-known work on irony, Solger admits, “Immense sadness must grip us when we see the most glorious dissolve into nothing through its necessary earthly existence.”

A similar reaction is elicited from Jean Paul, the author Robert Schumann proclaimed his favorite, in his seminal work on literary theory, *The School for Aesthetics*. In his discussion of “The Annihilating or Infinite Idea of Humor”, Jean Paul states:

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44 Hammermeister, conversation, January 18, 2010.
When he measures out the small world, as humor does, against the infinite world and sees them together, a kind of laughter results which contains pain and greatness. Whereas Greek poetry, unlike modern poetry, made men cheerful, humor, in contrast to the ancient jest, makes men partly serious; it walks on the low soccus, but often with the tragic mask, at least in its hand.

One can see such intense emotional reactions of the Romantic grappling with the infinite in some of the following telling statements made by Robert Schumann concerning his piano cycle, *Humoreske*, Op. 20. In a letter to Clara Wieck, he wrote, “The whole week I sat at the piano in a state and composed, wrote, laughed, and cried; now you can find all this beautifully painted in my Opus 20, the great Humoreske.” In another letter to Ernst Becker, he said, “The *Humoreske*, I think, will please you; it is, however, a little funny and perhaps my most melancholy work.” And in yet another letter to Simon de Sire, he reveals, “Everything comes to me on its own, and it even seems to me sometimes that I could play forever and never come to an end.” These statements by Schumann seem to encapsulate every aesthetic element discussed above – from the stark contrasts to the seemingly infinite positions taken by the artist and even the profound internal wrestling he experienced during the composition of his *Humoreske*.

As stated above, the Romantics believed they could behold the Absolute by observing romantic irony in the form of art. Carl Dahlhaus demonstrates this nineteenth-century concept when he presents Hoffman’s idea that “to understand music means…”

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grasping the structure, the harmonic and thematic logic of a work, so as to be able to fathom its aesthetic meaning.” Jean Paul, the author who resonates most closely with Schumann, reiterates Hoffmann’s belief – yet adds some detail: “Humor [as perceived in music]… destroys entire tonal sequences by introducing an extraneous key and storms alternately between pianissimo and fortissimo, presto and andante.” Finally, Schlegel echoes Jean Paul’s notion of the artwork as a unified presentation of such violent, paradoxical contrasts: “Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos.” It would follow, then, that Schumann’s compositional display of romantic irony could be observed in the very structure of *Humoreske*. 

Schumann composed *Humoreske* in 1839 while in Vienna on an extended leave of absence with a two-fold purpose: he was looking to secure financial backing for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* and he was hoping to find a job teaching in Vienna so he could support himself and his soon-to-be bride, Clara Wieck. *Humoreske* was the third of a trio of piano compositions that marked a break from the idiomatic keyboard compositional style that he had developed over the previous decade. A glance at Table 1: “Major Works of Robert Schumann” (Appendix A) will reveal that aside from his Opp. 18-20 from 1839, Schumann only composed two other one-movement piano works – the Toccata in C major, Op. 7, and the Allegro in B minor, Op. 8, both from his earliest compositional endeavors as a hopeful piano virtuoso. These early works, though, are not unusual in that the former was intended as a virtuosic etude under the title of a

52 Jean Paul, *School of Aesthetics*, 93. 
well-established keyboard genre and the latter part of a projected piano sonata in B minor that never materialized beyond the extant first movement. 55 Other works from this earliest phase include additional sets of etudes (Opp. 3, 10, 13) and variations (Opp. 1, 5, 13). With his innovative Papillons, Op. 2, Schumann begins a penchant for composing large-scale piano cycles comprising multiple smaller character pieces, as evidenced by Carnaval, Op. 9, and to a lesser extent the Intermezzi, Op. 4, which Schumann described as “extended Papillons.” 56 A period of grappling with traditional large-scale classical forms – or his own rendition of such forms – followed around mid-decade with the three piano sonatas (Opp. 11, 22, and 14) and the Fantasie in C major, Op. 17. Out of that emerges a return to the large-scale piano cycle featuring what have become perhaps his most popular achievements in that genre – the Fantasiestücke, Op. 12, the Davidsbündlertänze, Op. 6, the Kinderszenen, Op. 15, and Kreisleriana, Op. 16.

Considering Schumann’s compositional trajectory, his subsequent turn to smaller one-movement works in 1839 comes as something of a shock. The Arabeske, Op. 18, and the Blumenstück, Op. 19, both clock in at under ten minutes, the former at a total of 224 measures and the latter at a total of 158 measures. While the Humoreske, Op. 20 comprises 963 measures and clocks in at just under 30 minutes, it shares common stylistic features with the immediately-preceding two opuses and shares one additional striking feature with the Blumenstück. In addition to the sharply contrasted musical material, Schumann composed the entire work with only final double barline

(thin-thick, as opposed to a thin-thin), which is to say that all of the work’s various parts are glued together with less visually-imposing thin-thin barlines before the viewer finally arrives at one ultimate final stop.

The form of the Arabeske can be likened to a rondo with one small unusual feature at the end. Its A section in C major – “Leicht und zart” – alternates with two contrasting sections in E minor and A minor, respectively – Minore I and Minore II – yielding a seemingly symmetric A – B – A – C - A structure with a final thin-thick double barline after the final A. After the third statement of A, however, Schumann tacks on a fourth section in the same key of C major, with the heading “ZUM SCHLUSS” – printed in all capital letters and actually centered in the middle of the page immediately preceding its following D. This added section does not return to A but rather drifts off into its own ending, leaving an overall form of A – B – A – C – A – D. In his discussion of Schumann’s radical formal approach to the first movement of the Fantasie with its interruptive Im Legendenton, John Daverio discusses Schlegel’s borrowing of the Arabeske concept from art theory. To summarize, the Arabeske can be seen as a form in which the ancillary, decorative design (Beiwerk) manifests itself to such an extent as to threaten the constitutive artwork itself (Hauptwerk). While Daverio, in an aside, remarks that Schumann’s own Arabeske, Op. 18, “knows nothing of the asymmetry of the Schlegelian Arabeske”58, I would argue that Schumann’s inclusion of the “ZUM SCHLUSS” in the same key as the main work itself completely upsets the symmetry of

58 Ibid., 25.
the rondo form. By way of its insistence on redundantly closing the piece after the final return of A, Schumann subtly shifts the balance from the significance of the A section’s Hauptwerk to the interruptive sections’ Beiwerk.

Schumann’s Blumenstück is yet another overlooked example of the composer’s subtle innovation in form. Schumann again presents another bizarre version of rondo form, differing from the Arabeske in that the Blumenstück unfolds completely before one final thin-thick double barline. Instead of typical texted headings, Schumann designates each section with a Roman numeral, yielding the following form according to the composer’s markings: I – II – III – II – IV – V – II – IV – II. Laura Tunbridge categorizes the piece as a “double theme and variation form”. The second theme, as Tunbridge explains, grows out of the first (II – according to Schumann’s heading), as Schumann then abandons the initial theme of the theme variations. What is interesting to see happen is that, once again, Schumann trumps the very theme of the piece – I, or the Hauptwerk – this time with its own mutation (II) that goes on to usurp the role of the A in rondo form. In other words, the primary material that Daverio refers to is taken over by its own variation, allowing the arabeske to take center stage.

Each one of the aforementioned works presents a series of contrasting sections, juxtaposed within one over-arching form. In that sense, they sound very similar to Schumann’s traditional piano cycles. Yet these new pieces mostly unfold before one final thin-thick double barline, which unifies the work instead of presenting a multi-movement set of character pieces. The constant move across sections marked by thin double bar

lines has its literary parallel in the writings of Lawrence Sterne, as noted by Jean Paul in the following statement: “Humorous totality … is expressed, for example, in the structure of Sterne’s periods, which bind with dashes not parts, but wholes.”

According to a Jean-Paulian reading of Schumann’s Opp. 18 and 19, Schumann’s linking of various “wholes” with “dashes” – or thin double bar lines – is an expression of romantic humor, a branch of romantic irony based in the necessary opposition of contrasting ideas.

How much more innovative, then, is Schumann’s next opus, the *Humoreske*, with its similar working out of stark contrasts within one overarching structure, but on the scale of his larger piano-cycles. With the very title of *Humoreske*, as in the *Arabeske*, Schumann introduces a new literary genre to the world of music. The nineteenth-century sheet-music-consuming public could have had no possible expectation for this musical genre outside of their familiarity, if any, with contemporary literary and aesthetic trends. Even then, readers would have to draw their own parallels between the two genres. Over the span of 963 measures, Schumann presents a single movement with 29 different internal tempo markings (excluding all appearances of *ritardando* or its variants), as shown by in Table 2: “Tempo Markings in *Humoreske*” (Appendix B). Gone are the separate characteristic titles given to the clearly marked miniatures of Schumann’s earlier piano cycles – such as “Kind im Einschlummern” and “Der Dichter spricht” from *Kinderszenen*, or “In der Nacht” and “Ende vom Lied” from the *Fantasiestücke*. One can find no trace of the fantastic assemblage of fictitious or real people mentioned in *Carnaval* – such as Pierrot, Arlequin, Paganini, and Chopin. Not even one mention of

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60 Jean Paul, *School of Aesthetics*, 90.
Schumann’s own ubiquitous literary personalities of Florestan and Eusebius is given, as in *Davidsbündlertänze* – either by name or simply by initial. Even the more abstract subtitles like “Eight Fantasies” from *Kreisleriana* are withheld from *Humoreske*. In fact, Schumann even gave a greater indication of clearly marked sections in the previous opus, *Blumenstück*, with its Roman numeral headings. Instead, in the *Humoreske*, the listener or performer is led through Schumann’s most abstract work with only the basic contrasts of tempo, key, and dynamics.

The work is primarily divided into alternating sections centered around the keys of B-flat major and its relative key, G minor. Initial themes are contrasted with subsequent themes, and sometimes Schumann rounds off subsections with a return of an initial theme. Such examples are often marked by typical Schumannesque headings – “Erstes Tempo” and “Wie im Anfang”, or “Wie vorher”. Some subsections are simply interrupted by other subsections with headings such as “Intermezzo”, “Sehr lebhaft”, or “Mit etwas Pomp”. Schumann no doubt intended to create a large-scale piano cycle constructed solely on the idea of romantic irony. As the work progresses through the barrage of juxtapositions, one gets the sense that Schumann could continue the process *ad infinitum*. In fact, as mentioned before, Schumann even admitted that “it even seems to me sometimes that I could play forever and never come to an end.”

Carl Koßmaly, one of the original members of Schumann’s *Davidsbund* and a contributing critic to the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, was the first to publish a review of Schumann’s *Humoreske* in 1844 within a quite substantial discussion of many of
Schumann’s solo piano works. ¹ This review is fascinating insofar as it puts Koßmaly’s appreciation and presumably that of other significant musical thinkers in a larger context. In an astonishing anticipation of Lydia Goehr’s discussion of the rise of the autonomous musical work, Koßmaly writes: “If we look at Schumann’s piano works in the order of their composition, it is interesting to observe how the composer gradually gains in simplicity and increasingly works his way toward spiritual autonomy.”² With this statement, we see Schumann’s contemporary acknowledging the composer’s incorporation of ideas from Hoffmann and Schlegel – ideas that place poetry, and more specifically music, as the successor to philosophy and the means by which the artist can access the Absolute.

With regard to Humoreske, Koßmaly refers specifically to this work as “significant and autonomous” as it “reveal[s] a higher, bolder flight of ideas.”³ The critic observes Schumann’s playing out of romantic irony through “the great variety of content and form, the continual and quick, although always natural and unforced succession of the most varied images, imaginary ideas and sentiments, fantastic and dreamlike phenomena swell and fade into one another, and not only maintain but continually increase one’s interest from beginning to end.” Through Schumann’s rapid juxtaposition of musical ideas, the observer/listener is made a witness to the artist’s progression – to again quote Beiser – of “self-creation and self-destruction” as “he strives forward in the

³ Ibid., 312, 314.
eternal search for the truth.” Koßmaly, familiar with the Romantic aesthetic, would himself be striving forward in the eternal search for truth. As this final Koßmaly quotation demonstrates, in *Humoreske* – perhaps Schumann’s greatest achievement in Romantic musical form – the observer/listener might finally be able to access the Absolute that Kant thought was inaccessible through art.

*Humoreske* gradually communicates itself to the listener and fills him with a feeling of satisfaction that is as perfect, blissful, and profound as can be elicited only by those melodies that spring from the deepest, most secret source of the heart and from that genuine enthusiasm which transcends earthly bounds – then we believe that we shall not have missed the truth but instead come rather close to it, even if in our own way.  

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64 Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 129.
Part II. The Structural Infinity of *Humoreske*

To echo E.T.A. Hoffmann once again, the Romantics believed that “to understand music [meant]… grasping the structure, the harmonic and thematic logic of a work, so as to be able to fathom its aesthetic meaning.”66 To view the Romantics’ understanding of the infinite as an aesthetic of irony played out in the art work, then, one could consider how Schumann assembled his *Humoreske*. In the following section, I will argue that through his use of an open beginning, an internal continuum of the infinite, and an open ending or inconclusive finale to his opus 20, Schumann transformed an aesthetic concept into a large-scale piano cycle of structural coherence and formal ingenuity.

One must look no further than the very first notes of the work to already see and hear Schumann’s compositional realization of a musical infinity. Katrin Messerschmidt identifies a clear reference to the genre-type of the Lied in the descending accompanimental figure at the opening.67 (Example 1) What is striking about these first measures is that Schumann sets the “voice of the song” as the initial participant, only then followed an eighth note later by the accompaniment. It is as if the listener is invited in to a performance that has already been in progress, leaving one to ponder an imagined music that came before.

A second striking feature about the opening is the very chord on which the work begins. *Humoreske* is largely in the key of B flat major, yet the listener is presented with an augmented B flat chord on the anacrusis that immediately resolves to the subdominant, E flat major. The F sharp of the opening augmented chord is not fixed, so to speak, until the third chord of the opening chromatic progression, in which the F sharp is replaced by the diatonic F natural of the dominant seventh chord. Following the first four chords, the musical phrase continues with a more traditional four-chord harmonic response.

(Example 2)


Schumann then chooses to repeat this bizarre four measure opening phrase, reiterating both a sense of harmonic openness at the beginning but also compositional assuredness, reaffirming the opening theme in its apparent entirety. This first theme, then, can be viewed as a kind of musical nachsatz, or afterthought, given that the piece seemingly begins in the middle of the phrase, only then to be confirmed that the theme itself is nothing more than a musical fragment – complete in its openness. Schumann had discovered in literature this kind of allusion to the fragment as a self-standing entity that gestures at something beyond the surface: it was a favorite form of writing for the Schlegel brothers.

Schumann further acknowledges his debt to literary figures in the second set of examples. Here Schuman advances the infinite as a musical response to Jean Paul’s definition of Romanticism. In his *magnum opus* on literary theory, *Introduction to Aesthetics* (1804), Jean Paul defines Romanticism as incorporating the notion of the sublime. Yet in typical early-nineteenth-century fashion, Jean Paul both endorses and distances himself from Kant, offering the sublime as the opposite of the ridiculous and not as the opposite of the beautiful, as Kant would believe.69 Jean Paul writes:

69 Margaret R. Hale, Introduction to *Horn of Oberon: Jean Paul Richter’s School of Aesthetics* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), xxvi.
The Romantic is beauty without limit, or *beautiful* infinity, just as there is a *sublime* infinity. It is more than an analogy to call the Romantic the undulant hum of a vibrating string or bell whose soundwave fades away into greater distances and finally is lost in ourselves, and although outwardly already quiet, yet sounds within.\(^{70}\)

Schumann’s musical interpretation and incorporation of the “beautiful infinity” can be seen in measures 251 through 513 in *Humoreske*. Charles Rosen and R. Larry Todd find the same thing in the *Humoreske*, even if they refer to it in different terms, when they describe something “absolutely inaudible” and a passage of “music for the eyes” (*Augenmusik*), respectively.\(^{71}\) The point of interest here begins at the tempo marking *Hastig*. At this moment, Schumann opens up the typical double-staffed score to include a third staff, the middle of which contains a solo voice marked *Innere Stimme*. (Example 3) Schumann intended this “internal/inner voice” to be seen but not played, hence Todd’s *Augenmusik*. Some semblance of this internalized voice, however, is actually heard by way of the echoing or sympathetic voices in the figuration of the surrounding soprano and tenor lines.

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As Rosen points out, a vague reference to the *Innere Stimme* appears some time later, following the *Nach und nach immer lebhafter und stärker*. (Example 4) A comparison of Example 4 with Example 3, especially when one follows the grace notes in the bass clef from Example 4, reveals the stark outline of a once-active counterpoint. A hint of the *Innere Stimme* can be detected amongst the distant echo’s drawn-out note values.


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The section immediately following the stark outline, marked *Wie vorher* – “as before” – is perhaps the most striking. Schumann picks up the melody where the previous outline left off. Just “as before” Schumann’s *Innere Stimme* is echoed in the outer voices with the absence of one key element – the actual *Innere Stimme* as it appeared on the added middle staff. (Example 5)


Rosen’s and Todd’s discussions allow one to see Jean Paul’s “beautiful infinity” unfold on Schumann’s page from a visual, as opposed to an aural, perspective. One at first sees the unsounded melody on the added staff resounding in the surrounding voices. Then with Schumann’s musical shell, a faint echo can be detected as if disappearing into the distance. At the final return, while the “inner voice” is no longer “sounded visually” in the score, its presence still rings on in the mind of the viewer, perpetuating into infinity long after the necessarily finite boundaries of the score dispel the music.

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Schumann offers yet another instance of *Humoreske*’s internal continuum of the infinite with the third musical example. At measure 549, the start of a passage marked *Intermezzo*, Schumann begins what I would like to call an anti-melody. As early as 1832, Schumann had thrown himself into the study of counterpoint, specifically through the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.\(^{76}\) The section marked *Intermezzo*, the beginning of which is given as Example 6, serves as a clear-cut presentation of Schumann’s strict contrapuntal piano writing.


A single B flat is given in measure 549 in the soprano register as supported by a B flat in the bass, the notes highlighted by *sforzando* and *forte* markings, respectively. In between the outer parts, Schumann presents two cascading contrapuntal lines, descending at first in parallel thirds before reaching a cadence in measure 553 without breaking the constant-16th-note pattern. Over this frenetic accompaniment, a pattern of 11 B flats in


\(^{77}\) Schumann, *Humoreske*, 22.
the soprano is established through measure 575, generating a “melody” that never really goes anywhere at all. Schumann breaks the pattern at measure 575, where the anti-melody is arpeggiated to D and F, under which the harmonies sequence through a development. At measure 601, the static B flat melody is reestablished. The rapid-fire accompaniment never ceases, yielding an absolute composite rhythm of 16th notes that only begins to relax over a cadential B flat 6/4 harmony at measure 609 until is finally dissipates at measures 614-15 with a seamless transition into the G minor melodic material from measure 514. Schumann inserts an Intermezzo in the truest sense of the word by completely separating the G minor Einfach und zart at measure 514 from its recapitulation at measure 616. This interruptive material enters as a fanfare of B flats, establishing a repetitive albeit static melody, and recesses into the background without a change. One can imagine Schumann’s anti-melody, then, as kind of eternal pedal tone that is foregrounded for a time but then recedes into the background. In this way, it is similar to the aforementioned opening of the piece – the point at which we formally access a work already in progress – and the Innere Stimme – the voice that still resonates in the memory after the trace evidence is gone.

Schumann also employs false endings as a way to trick the listener into thinking he has arrived at the end. The section beginning at measure 693, marked sehr lebhaft, has the look and sound of a traditional virtuosic nineteenth-century piano piece, particularly one that closes a larger movement or entire work. The section is in a fast duple meter, the composite rhythm is almost entirely made up of 16th notes, the right hand is most often occupied with fast arpeggiated figurations, and the left hand provides material for longer
phrases and off-beat accents. Schumann even indicates an *immer lebhafter* at measure 789 and, following a climactic half cadence and fermata, labels the subsequent section *stretta*, beginning at measure 811. Compositionally, it is not unusual to see a *stretta* indicated in a work around the year 1839. Philip Gossett defines the *stretta* as “a concluding section of a multipartite ensemble or finale.”78 Its appearance, while expected in popular contemporary Italian operas, like those of Rossini, is quite unusual in solo piano music.79 Schumann employs the label in a seemingly correct way – placing the fastest section at the end of a string of successively faster sections, even capping it off with cascading virtuosic figuration outlining a clear B flat cadence, as is shown in Example 7.

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Yet, as Example 7 also demonstrates, Schumann does not end the work with the *stretta*. Instead, he interrupts what should be the silence following the grand finale with a highly rhythmic section in an unrelated minor key, new and almost polonaise-like material that is to be played *mit einigem Pomp*. If there were any section of *Humoreske* that best encapsulates Jean Paul’s definition of humor in music as that which “destroys entire tonal sequences by introducing an extraneous key and storms alternately between pianissimo and fortissimo, presto and andante,” it would certainly be the occurrence at measure 833.

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81 Jean Paul, *School of Aesthetics*, 93.
If Romantic irony is at play through the constant juxtapositions that serve as a structural model for *Humoreske*, one might wonder how long Schumann could continue the infinite game. Even Schumann himself stated that he thought he “could play forever and never come to an end.”  

82 At measure 861, he once again hints at an impending finale with the heading “Zum Beschluß.” This is, in fact, the first time Schumann ever incorporated the words “Zum Beschluß” in a composition, as preceded by the similar indication “ZUM SCHLUSS” in *Arabeske*, mentioned earlier.  

I would argue that a man of letters such as Schumann, so acutely aware of the subtleties of his own language, used the slightly different words to underscore related yet slightly different situations – an interpretation supported by the temporal proximity of the two works.  

The phrase “zum Schluss” is simply a term for an ending. With the addition of the prefix “be-,” the meaning is slightly altered. The prefix “be-” usually means that the word will take a direct object.  

84 “Zum Beschluss”, therefore, takes on a double-meaning. It can be an antiquated phrase for coming to an end. The other meaning has more to do with deciding upon something or resolving something – as in resolving a problem. Now consider these two phrases in the context of Schumann attempting to work out a new compositional process, whereby he attempts to present an open concept of the infinite in a closed musical structure. In the earlier, shorter example of the *Arabeske*, Schumann truncates the rondo form at A – B – A – C – A, followed by a thin-thick final double

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82 Schumann, letter to Simon de Sire, March 15, 1839.  
83 Schumann would only use the heading “Zum Beschluß” one other time after *Humoreske*. The following year, as part of Robert’s wedding gift to his wife, Clara, he omitted the original title of Rückert’s poem chosen to close the cycle of collected songs, *Myrthen*, Op. 25, instead substituting the title “Zum Beschluß.”  
84 Stephen Naumann, in conversation, April 24, 2012.
barline with an additional D section tacked on following the marking “ZUM SCHLUSS” – the end. Shortly thereafter with the Humoreske, a composition about four times the length of the Arabeske, Schumann segues over a thin-thin double barline, drawing the performer’s attention to the marking “Zum Beschluß.” The performer is led to believe that after all of the abrupt contrasts in compositional style, Schumann must finally be deciding upon a way to end the piece. The subtly elevated language is certainly an appropriate reflection of the gravity of this larger, more serious composition.

With Schumann’s “Zum Beschluß”, what turns out to be a rather long Adagio is brought to a possible close with a rising melodic fragment – a question-like musical phrase reminiscent of “Warum?” from Fantasiestücke. Unlike the latter, however, whose questioning melody is cadenced over a drawn-out tonic, Schumann’s question from “Zum Beschluß” ends on a half-cadence. Moreover, the question, so to speak, is posed three times, and each time in a different octave followed by a fermata. It appears that Schumann’s conclusion is an open-ended question with no resolution. In this way, one can consider Schumann’s indecisiveness in ending the piece or coming to a resolution, as “Zum Beschluß” suggests, as a kind of gesture toward the infinite.

Of course, a work of this magnitude cannot end on a half-cadence, as the sleeping child from Schumann’s Kinderszenen does. In what amounts to the musical equivalent of a rhetorical device, Schumann answers his own thrice-asked open question at measure 952 with a short, bombastic Allegro that brings the 963-measure work to a formal close in B flat. The figuration is dotted, chromatic, and marked by accents, almost coming off in a clichéd or banal fashion, as if Schumann were forced to add the closing statement to
a discussion that could have continued ad infinitum. Furthermore, the final cadence is not a strong V7 – I, or even a V – I, but rather a VII7 – I. The purposeful elimination of a leading tone at the very end has a weakening effect on the conclusion to the composition. Once again, Schumann reminds us that perhaps he could go on forever, and maybe his concept does, but in the end the open concept has to be closed; no one can write infinity on the page.
Part III. Contrasting Editions and Open Readings

To return to the ill-fated reception history of the misunderstood *Humoreske*, as recounted in the introduction to this study, I would suggest that part of the problem may lie with the work’s checkered history over the past century and a half. The composition received its first public performance by Clara Schumann only after the composer’s death. And as the following discussion will demonstrate, *Humoreske* was further challenged by practices of editing that were informed by a changing aesthetic in nineteenth-century piano compositions. One of the problems that exist between variant editions today is the appearance of the double barline, as mentioned above. Furthermore, the different ways the *Humoreske* has been internally divided over the centuries will inevitably affect the most recent textural process of division, which is banding on CDs and track divisions among MP3 files.

Whereas engraver’s copies or original manuscripts still exist for many of Schumann’s piano compositions, the earliest complete sources of Schumann’s Viennese trio of compositions – opp. 18, 19, and 20 – are the proofs for the first published editions.\(^8^5\) For the *Humoreske* in particular, only one single emendation in Schumann’s own hand was made to the proof copy, so it can be assumed that the first edition of Opus 20 by the Viennese publisher Mechetti (plate number 3132) accurately represents

Schumann’s intentions with the score.\textsuperscript{86} Having no extant representations of double barlines for *Humoreske* in Schumann’s hand, I will first suggest that the barlines in the Mechetti first edition are authoritative because they are consistent with the ways Schumann himself barred other works.

Schumann’s incorporation of the thin-thin barline to seamlessly join both related and unrelated sections of music is evidenced throughout the surviving manuscripts in his own hand. The autograph score of the Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 22, serves as a fine example, with thin-thin barlines found throughout the manuscript of the opening sonata-allegro movement as well as the scherzo. Example 8, given below, illustrates two clear sets of “thin-thin” double barlines from the opening of the Scherzo, one set after measure 4 in the first system and the second set eight measures later at the end of the second system. Also present in this manuscript is a precedent for Schumann’s thin-thick final double barline. At the close of the movement originally intended as the finale, one can see the darker final barline followed by the flourish of the composer’s pen as a kind of final signature on the movement. (Example 9)

\textsuperscript{86} Boetticher, Preface, iv.
Example 8. Robert Schumann, Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 22 – Scherzo.\textsuperscript{87}

Example 9. Robert Schumann, Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 22, Original Finale (Presto passionate, WoO 5/2) – “Energico.”\textsuperscript{88}


Although no autograph score of *Humoreske* exists, it can be assumed that no such flourish interrupted any of the internal segments of the work, as evidenced by the first page of the Mechetti first edition. (See “Facsimile of the First Page of the First Edition of *Humoreske*, Published by Mechetti (Plate Number 3132), mm. 1-36” as Appendix C, as well as Example 10 below.\(^89\)) If Schumann had intended otherwise, he most likely would have made the hand-written correction in the extant proof copy. One is led to wonder, then, why the Breitkopf & Härtel edition of 1887 presents no fewer than three internal thin-thick double barlines (at measures 36, 513, 642) in addition to the final thin-thick barline at the end of the work.\(^90\) (Compare the 1839 Mechetti first edition in Example 10 to the 1887 Breitkopf & Härtel edition in Example 11.)

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\(^{89}\) A few copies of the first edition exist in the special collections of a handful of libraries in the United States. While I was able to view one at the Newberry Library in Chicago, IL to verify my hypothesis and support my research, I am not able to reproduce any of the images taken for personal study in this document due to copyright laws.

\(^{90}\) The final thin-thick double barline in the Mechetti first edition is very clearly different from the thin-thin double barlines. The thin-thin double barline only spans 1cm with thin lines on either side of the blank space in between, while the thin-thick double barline spans 2cm – one of which a solid black line with a width of 1cm.
The Breitkopf & Härtel edition was the first collected edition of Robert Schumann’s complete works, a project conceived as early as 1861 by Clara Schumann with the help of Johannes Brahms and Joseph Joachim, although no actual publications were released until 1880. As with most collected editions of a composer’s works from this early phase of scholarly editing in the nineteenth-century, completeness seemed to be the primary goal with a generally respectful aim to actualize the composer’s wishes. Also indicative of the period was the absence of a critical report explaining some of the changes made to the score and any significant discrepancies between various sources, let alone a comprehensive list. With nearly half a century separating the Mechetti edition and the Breitkopf & Härtel edition, it would not be a stretch to view three seemingly

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95 Ibid.
insignificant barline changes as an accidental misreading of the score, or more likely, a reading of the score through the lens of contemporary compositional practices.

The three internalized thin-thick barlines have a way of visually, and thusaurally, stopping time, thereby carving up the paradoxically unified whole of *Humoreske* into slightly larger subsections resembling distinct character pieces. Compositions of such a type were, after all, commonplace in the piano works of Schumann. In 1838, just one year before he composed *Humoreske*, Schumann published a number of larger character pieces with various internalized juxtapositions of key, tempo, texture, and character. The eight pieces known as the *Novelletten*, Op. 21, were published in installments as pairs, and *Kreisleriana*, Op. 16 – one of the most popular pieces by Schumann, and one that so grabbed the attention of the young Brahms⁹⁶ – is a collection of eight “fantasies” that is otherwise similar in length and style to the *Humoseske*. In the second half of the nineteenth century the slightly larger character piece with an abstract genre title came to replace the smaller character piece with the poetic title, especially in the case of Brahms, whose deceptively simple ABA forms take on subtly complex compositional intricacies.⁹⁷ In fact, one can even see that the very prototype of Brahms’s late Intermezzi and Fantasies can be found in the fantasies of Schumann’s *Kreisleriana*.

Perhaps much of the reception of Schumann’s *Humoreske* as a beautiful-though-misunderstood composition actually stems from its history of editorial alterations. In his

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1844 review of *Humoreske*, Koßmaly sounds remarkably close to a post-Barthesian critic, both recognizing and welcoming multiple interpretations of the same work.

If we ourselves depart in our interpretation from the actual intentions of the composer, we will find solace in the general lot of commentators, who are often clever when it comes to discovering a number of things that the artist … has unconsciously incorporated into his work. […] It is quite conceivable that there could be several different interpretations of the same work, each one eminently sensible, appropriate, intelligent, and capable, as it were, of opening some new door to understanding.98

Given that statement, why not allow ourselves to see *Humoreske* already containing the essence of the late nineteenth-century character piece, as perhaps Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms did? Such a statement certainly allows for a kind of cross-century large-scale development in genre without faulting the reader or editor. “But on the other hand,” as Koßmaly continues, “[we] may also fail to notice other things that the artist inserted into the work with full awareness and clear intent.”99

A retroactive consideration of Schumann’s *Humoreske* through Lydia Goehr’s idea of the “work concept” can most readily be used for arriving at the kind of view of *Humoreske* given in Part II – a view shared by Carl Koßmaly when he observes the nineteenth-century aesthetic of Romantic irony being played out in the artwork. Such a view operates by way of an examination of Schumann’s work through Goehr’s idea of the projected form of a score. Yet Goehr’s work concept as existent in projected form also allows for performance of a score, as Koßmaly seemed to agree. In his account of the prospects of recording, Glenn Gould – perhaps the biggest proponent of recordings in twentieth-century art music – predicted a future “entirely taken over by electronic

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99 Ibid.
media. In such a world, recordings have actually replaced the public concert stage. Thus, it is a natural progression to consider the work concept as projected through recordings, especially since Goehr’s first stipulation of the work concept as an “open” concept allows for an ideological change across generations.

Glenn Gould’s statement that “recordings deal with concepts through which the past is re-evaluated” encourages a post-digital media perspective on Schumann’s *Humoreske*. The fact is, *Humoreske*’s unique structural presentation in score makes for a fascinating and diverse array of possible presentations on CD. After all, in a work that clocks in around 30 minutes but has only one final double bar line and thus only one movement yet 29 different internal tempo markings and various unmarked subjections, it is indeed interesting to see how the work can be divided into tracks. As Figure 1: “Tracking of Schumann’s *Humoreske* Recordings” in Appendix D demonstrates, a sampling of 17 different recordings yields a wide array of possible segmentations – at least seven, to be exact.

Of the various options presented below – *Humoreske* in 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 tracks – perhaps the one that best supports Goehr’s work concept – approaching Schumann’s score as an “ideal” and as “regulative” – is the version in one track. After all, Schumann only presented one final thin-thick double bar line. All internal contrasts, therefore, can be viewed according to Jean Paul’s perception of Lawrence Sterne’s

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102 The recordings referenced later only are identified by the recording artist for the sake of simplicity and clarity. Any suggestion that the recording artists themselves are responsible for banding/tracking – which may very well be due to some aspect of production, marketing, or other various factors apart from the artist’s vision or control – is unintentional.
writings – as a series of wholes connected by dashes, all unified within one novel. That said, there are still six other possible versions presented. What is the listener to make of the work now in the age of tracks, MP3 files, and digital media?

Theodor Adorno, in an essayistic response to Walter Benjamin, bemoaned the influence of consumerism on the musical work in the era of mechanical reproduction. In his view:

Irrelevant consumption destroys [the work]…. [It is] transformed into a conglomeration of irruptions which are impressed on the listeners by climax and repetition, while the organization of the whole makes no impression whatsoever…. [Vulgarization of the work] blatantly snatches the reified bits and pieces out of their context and sets them up as a potpourri. It destroys the multilevel unity of the whole work and brings forward only isolated popular passages. 

It seems quite clear that Adorno would not condone the multi-tracked *Humoreske* recording. The partitioning of the work breaks it up in such a way that accessing any number of specific, and perhaps favorite, fragments annihilates the whole; a listening of the work becomes almost by definition a non-structural listening. The need for Romantic irony to be presented as a series of contrasts is rendered obsolete, thus destroying the original concept of the piece as laid out in the very title.

With one single track, however, one needs to experience the totality of the performance in order to hear the contrast and, thus, grasp the concept of romantic irony. With a multi-tracked recording, the contrast is visually presented to the observer in lieu of the performance, thereby making a possible case for romantic irony to be perceived in

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any other recording aside from those involving a single track. None of the following multi-tracked versions present the work as if the score itself were strictly tracked according to its various internal tempo markings. That is to say, there is no recording (to my knowledge, at least) that presents the work in 29 tracks. It is logical to assume, then, that certain recordings more successfully present the work in its various states of contrast.

In the four-, five-, and six-track versions, more-or-less regularized “movements” are created by carving out – or perhaps stringing together – subsections of roughly equal length. The Claudio Arrau version in eight tracks begins to further break down the piece according to sections with themes that are repeated later on within larger subjections (ex: 36-measure unit and 35-measure unit). This creates a piece divided into some two- to three-minute segments. With Horowitz’s version of 11 separate tracks, on the other hand, one is finally presented with frequent 90- to 120-second segments that serve to constantly interrupt the flow of the work. It may be obvious to say, then, that Horowitz’s version of stark contrasts highlighting drastic tempo changes within otherwise preconceived sections may present the notion of romantic irony to the viewer as well as to the listener who sits down to hear the work in its entirety.

The listener, as well as the viewer, is now presented with a plethora of multi-tracked versions of the same work. Yet the above explanation demonstrates that there is a difference between the 1 track version, the 4-7 track versions, and the 8 and 11 track versions. One is now forced to ask whether or not each of these differently-tracked versions is actually its own unique work, since, as the Gould statement above reveals, the past is now forced to be re-evaluated in light of recordings.
The idea of the destruction of a work as it once existed is one that Jacques Attali arrived at as an economist in a post-Benjamin (and, thus, post-Marx) era. "Reproduction, in a certain sense, is the death of the original, the triumph of the copy, and the forgetting of the represented foundation; in mass production, the model has almost no importance or value in itself."\(^{104}\) Considering this statement, the work concept as an ideal that Goehr upholds is abolished. Any reading of Schumann’s *Humoreske* as a necessary exhortation of romantic irony is rendered obsolete unless a fractured version arrives at that reading on its own. It is still possible for such a reading to occur, however, after a consideration of Attali’s “stockpiling” of time.\(^{105}\)

Attali argues that through repetition, music is objectified and commoditized – thus enabling one to actually stockpile time.\(^{106}\) An example of stockpiled time as a commodity can be seen in the CD and, to an even further extent, the MP3. Digitized audio as a compressed form of information yields new ways of looking at the musical work. While Attali, like Adorno, takes the commoditization of the work as a negative, Jean Le Moyne, echoed by Glenn Gould, views this as a positive. Le Moyne asserts that by embracing technology, we actually are able to improve our understanding.\(^{107}\) Thus, by embracing the multiple ways of digitally tracking *Humoreske* as objective information, it is possible to consider *Humoreske* as a variety of a separate constructs.

With this view, one can perhaps take the four-track version of *Humoreske* to be a work on the scale of a grand romantic four-movement sonata. In fact, Daverio writes of a


\(^{105}\) Ibid., 124.

\(^{106}\) Ibid.

\(^{107}\) Jean Le Moyne, *Convergences* (Montréal: Éditions Hurtubise, 1977), presentation by Leah Batstone in MUSIC 950.01, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, February 2, 2011.
similar reading in his brief discussion of *Humoreske* in *Nineteenth-Century Music and the German Romantic Ideology*. Here, he sees the work as a grand four-movement structure with an opening Romantic prelude, thus –

[Introduction]

I. Allegro  
II. Andante  
III. Intermezzo  
IV. Finale.\(^\text{108}\)

In keeping with this model, the six-track version can perhaps give the impression of a collection of six individual fantasies, all roughly around five minutes in length, thereby suggesting a work on par with the more famous *Kreisleriana*, and thusly the individual late-nineteenth-century character pieces of Brahms discussed above. And perhaps the eleven-track version can be seen as a kind of “variations, but not upon any theme”, as Schumann once suggested of his *Arabeske*, Op. 18.\(^\text{109}\)

With such a liberating view of the work through the diversity of digital recording, one does not even need to choose a preferred version. And in an even more ironic spin (in our quotidian twentieth-century definition of irony, that is), the simple idea of having options that one can never settle on actually supports the idea of romantic irony in a way that the score as a nineteenth-century artifact never could. One can just as easily immerse himself in the *Humoreske* as a one-movement experience – akin to the live performance –

or skip over the first fantasy in preference for the second. Or why not single out your favorite movement of the sonata – the Andante, perhaps?

The twentieth-first century experience of approaching the work in its multiplicity of forms is encouraged here in a quotation by another one of Schumann’s favorite romantic philosophers, Novalis: “A work is all the more interesting, and a genuine expression of personality, the more impulses it gives – the more meanings, varieties of interest, points of view, indeed the more ways it has of being understood and loved.”\textsuperscript{110}

References


Tieck, Ludwig. *Der gestiefelte Kater*. Edinburgh Biling


Recordings


## Appendix A

### Table 1. Major Works of Robert Schumann

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Movements</th>
<th>Average Length (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td><em>ABEGG Variations</em>, Op. 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Toccata</em>, Op. 7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td><em>Papillons</em>, Op. 2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Allegro</em>, Op. 8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td><em>6 Etudes on Caprices by Paganini</em>, Op. 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Intermezzi</em>, Op. 4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td><em>Impromptus</em>, Op. 5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>6 Concert Etudes after Paganini</em>, Op. 10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td><em>Carnaval</em>, Op. 9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Symphonic Etudes</em>, Op. 13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sonata in F-sharp minor, Op. 11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sonata in G minor, Op. 22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Sonata in F minor, Op. 14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fantasie</em>, Op. 17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td><em>Fantastistücke</em>, Op. 12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Davidsbündlertänze</em>, Op. 6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td><em>Novelletten</em>, Op. 21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Kinderszenen</em>, Op. 15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Kreisleriana</em>, Op. 16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Klavierstücke</em>, Op. 32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td><em>Arabeske</em>, Op. 18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Blumenstück</em>, Op. 19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Humoreske</em>, Op. 20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Faschingsschwank aus Wien</em>, Op. 26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Nachtstücke</em>, Op. 23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix B
Table 2. Tempo Markings in *Humoreske*\(^{112}\)

\(^{112}\) All tempo markings are taken from the first printed edition, published in Vienna by Mechetti, plate number 3132, as seen in the Newberry Library in Chicago, IL (sVM 25 S 39h 1839).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Tempo marking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Einfach(^{113})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Etwas lebhafter(^{114})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Sehr rasch und leicht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Noch rascher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191</td>
<td>Erstes Tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>239</td>
<td>Wie im Anfang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251</td>
<td>Hastig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>289</td>
<td>Wie außer Tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>290</td>
<td>Im Tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>314</td>
<td>Nach und nach schneller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>358</td>
<td>Nach und nach immer lebhafter und starker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>483</td>
<td>Wie vorher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>505</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>514</td>
<td>Einfach und zart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>549</td>
<td>Intermezzo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>640</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>641</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>643</td>
<td>Innig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>651</td>
<td>Schneller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>693</td>
<td>Sehr lebhaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>789</td>
<td>Immer lebhafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>811</td>
<td>Stretta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>833</td>
<td>Mit einigem Pomp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>861</td>
<td>Zum Beschlüß(^{115})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>892</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>901</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>906</td>
<td>Im Tempo</td>
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<tr>
<td>936</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>952</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{113}\) All bold-face tempo markings in Mechetti 3132 are .4cm tall.

\(^{114}\) All italicized tempo markings in Mechetti 3132 are .3cm tall and also italicized.

\(^{115}\) The “Zum Beschlüß” marking in Mechetti 3132 is unique in that it is clearly centered in the middle of the page, not above the first measure of a new section as every other tempo marking in the score is presented.
Appendix C
Facsimile of the First Page of the First Edition of *Humoreske*,
Published by Mechetti (Plate Number 3132), mm. 1-36.\(^\text{116}\)

HUMORESKE
von
ROBERT SCHUMANN.
Op. 20.

Einfach. (M.M. 2/2.)

Piano.

dim.

ritard.

Richard. Linnun Libbauer.

dim.

ritard.

ritard.

ritard.
Appendix D

Figure 1. Tracking of Schumann *Humoreske* Recordings\footnote{See “Recordings” for complete bibliographic entries including dates of actual recordings and label releases.}