

ELOQUENCE, REFERENCE, AND SIGNIFICANCE
IN CLARA SCHUMANN'S OPUS 20
AND JOHANNES BRAHMS' OPUS 9

By

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Department of music

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date October 5, 1994

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall
Sunday, March 24, 1991
8:00 p.m.

"Solo"

GRADUATE RECITAL *

=====

STEPHEN SMITH, Piano

Fantasy and Fugue in G minor Bach-Liszt

Carnaval, Op.9 R. Schumann
(1810-1856)

 Préambule
 Pierrot
 Arlequin - Valse noble
 Eusebius
 Florestan - Coquette - Réplique
 Papillons
 Lettres dansantes
 Chiarina - Chopin - Estrella
 Reconnaissance
 Pantalon et Colombine
 Valse Allemande/Paganini
 Aveu
 Promenade
 Pause - Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins

- INTERMISSION -

Four Fugues, Op.72 R. Schumann

Two Songs Schumann-Liszt

 Frühlingsnacht
 Liebeslied (Widmung)

Fantasy and Fugue on B-A-C-H F. Liszt
(1811-1886)

* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in piano performance.

~~THE~~ UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall
Sunday, February 9, 1992
2:30 p.m.

"Chamber"

GRADUATE STUDENT RECITAL*

STEPHEN SMITH, piano

with

**Grace Edie, soprano
Mark Ferris, violin
Stephen Robb, clarinet
Brian Mix, cello**

Chants de terre et de ciel

**Olivier Messiaen
(b. 1908)**

- I. Bail avec Mi
- II. Antienne du silence
- III. Danse du bébé-Pilule
- IV. Arc-en-ciel d'innocence
- V. Minuit pile et face
- VI. Résurrection

INTERVAL

Quatuor pour la fin du temps

Olivier Messiaen

- I. Liturgie de cristal
- II. Vocalise, pour l'Ange que annonce la fin du temps
- III. Abîme des oiseaux
- IV. Intermède
- V. Louange à l'éternité de Jésus
- VI. Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes
- VII. Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps
- VIII. Louange à l'immortalité de Jésus

* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree with a major in Piano Performance.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall
Saturday May 28, 1994
8:00 p.m.

"Lecture"

DOCTORAL LECTURE-RECITAL*

STEPHEN SMITH, piano

Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 20

**Clara Schumann
(1819-1896)**

Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9

**Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)**

*** In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree with a major in Piano Performance.**

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall
Thursday, September 22, 1994
8:00 p.m.

"Thesis"

THESIS RECITAL*
STEPHEN SMITH, Piano

Sonata in F Major, Op. 54

**Tempo d'un Menuetto
Allegretto**

**Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)**

Sonata in Bb Major, Op. 106

**Allegro
Scherzo: assai vivace
Adagio sostenuto
Largo -- Allegro risoluto**

Ludwig van Beethoven

*** In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree with a major in Piano Performance.**

ABSTRACT

Clara Schumann's op. 20 variations and Brahms' op. 9 variations on the same theme are both intensely communicative works. This thesis seeks to discover their emotional content by examining subtle musical and textual clues in the light of Robert Schumann's aesthetic theory and practice, and with in-depth reference to biographical context. The author brings together many threads from pre-existing literature about these works and their composers in order to trace the significance of the shared theme and to explore certain psychological issues surrounding the composition of the two sets of variations. Special attention is given to the tightly-knit internal relationships and the many external references, whether deliberate or unconscious, which enrich the Brahms work.

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INTRODUCTION

This document examines three nineteenth-century works for piano: a neglected set of variations by a magnificent composer, a magnificent set of variations by a neglected composer, and the subtly complex theme which underlies them both.

The biographical context of these compositions is well known: the mutual adoration of Robert and Clara Schumann, the passionate intimacy of Clara and Johannes Brahms, the worshipful respect of Brahms for Robert, and Robert's enthusiastic admiration of Brahms. Though of course it is wrong to assume that all composition is necessarily pure autobiography, I believe it can be shown that external circumstances did have significant impact on form, melody, character, and style in the pieces under consideration. In fact, these three pieces taken together afford an excellent look at the range of possibilities for the interpenetration of life and music within the aesthetic realm inhabited by their composers.

This aesthetic realm was defined primarily by Schumann, and it will be the goal of Chapter One to offer a clear idea of its boundaries, and then in Chapter Two to apply that understanding to the analysis and interpretation of Schumann's op. 99 no. 4, which became the theme for variations by Clara and later by Brahms. Chapter Three discusses Clara's eloquent set of 1853, a sensitive prolongation and heightening of the theme's latent moods; and Chapters Four and Five examine Brahms' composition of the following year, a prodigious catalogue of musical relationships and references, pointing to an emotional core of great complexity.

Like much of Robert Schumann's music, Clara's op. 20 and Brahms' op. 9 are poised on the borderline between private expression and public utterance, between subjectivity and objectivity. Thus it is incumbent upon the student of these works to seek out the points at which musical form and emotional content meet and fuse.

Ludwig Finscher, writing in 1979 about German romantic music, deplored

the habit, even in current musicological practice, of avoiding the interpretation of content by falling back on mere description of form, with a concomitant relegation of questions of content to the realm of the ineffable. Although the widespread timidity before the task of bringing into words the transmusical content of large, structurally demanding works is all too understandable after our experience with common program-booklet hermeneutics and with the historically insufficiently grounded hermeneutics of Schering [who posited Shakespearean programmes for Beethoven quartets, etc.], this timidity can scarcely be allowed to define the considered behaviour of a historian toward his object of study.¹

These sentiments are echoed in a recent *New York Times* article responding to Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. The author, K. Robert Schwarz, applauds McClary's avoidance of "dehumanized formal analysis" and her willingness to "ask hard questions about music's meaning."² It is my hope that the following pages ask—and even help to answer—some of those same questions.

CHAPTER ONE

SCHUMANN AND MUSICAL MEANING

The issue of meaning in music was of great interest to Schumann and his contemporaries. Two very different streams of aesthetic thought in the mid-nineteenth century were given cogent expression by Eduard Hanslick and Richard Wagner. A third view was articulated by Schumann, though in a somewhat haphazard way, through his letters, diaries, and critical writings. An excellent article by Edward Lippman,¹ which goes some way toward consolidating and clarifying Schumann's scattered and paradoxical remarks on the subject, is the principal source of the following sketch of Schumann's aesthetic position.

Schumann believed that music is informed by current events and physical surroundings, and by musical and literary experience, but not necessarily in a direct way. In his famous review of the *Symphonie fantastique* he wrote,

People err when they suppose that composers prepare pens and paper with the deliberate predetermination of sketching, painting, expressing this or that. Yet we must not estimate outward influences and impressions too lightly. Involuntarily an idea sometimes develops itself simultaneously with the musical imagination.²

Music transcends its causal influences, "but bears their imprint in its character."³ The process of creation fuses musical and non-musical components in an indefinable way: external factors

affect the composer's soul, and the moods of the soul or psychological states (Schumann calls them *Seelenzustände* or *Stimmungen*) are then conveyed through his or her music.⁴

Music that is "not representative of inner life and personality" is "mechanical and empty, completely devoid of value."⁵ On the other hand, music which attempts merely to depict a scene or tell a story does not fulfill the true function of music, which is to communicate feeling. Schumann was aware of music's ability "automatically to contain the nature and structure of particular happenings,"⁶ although he never discussed the specific ways in which this happens; and he assigned great importance to the psychological reactions of listeners.⁷

Schumann's delicately balanced position clearly echoes that of his (and later Brahms') idol, E.T.A. Hoffmann, who acknowledged that "instrumental music possesses a certain means to draw into its domain occurrences of the outside world,"⁸ and claimed for music "the power to portray emotional experiences," yet believed that music should operate in an "unknown realm" where "distinct feelings" are subsumed in an "inexpressible yearning."⁹ Schumann's aesthetic credo also (not surprisingly) shows the influence of Jean Paul, who held that "art should be the union of the particular and the general. It does not copy [but] must not annihilate the world."¹⁰

Some paradoxes remain. Lippman writes, "A knowledge of the particular experience bearing on any composition is not in general an essential factor in the comprehension of the music;"¹¹ yet Schumann wrote to Clara in 1839, "You will only understand the 'Phantasie' [op. 17] if you recall the unhappy summer of 1836, when I had to give you up."¹²

Also, Lippman writes that "imagination does not convert the material of life into music in a demonstrable fashion, so that each circumstance produces a corresponding tonal expression."¹³ Yet Schumann praised Beethoven and Schubert for their ability to "translate

every circumstance of life into the language of tone."¹⁴ Schumann writes in the same review of the "finer shades" of feeling which give great music its significance, and elsewhere of the "commonplace lyrical effusions" and absence of extramusical influence which make lesser works unsatisfying.¹⁵

Indeed, Lippman cites a dictionary article in which Schumann identifies musical character (the musical representation of "states of the soul") with unequivocality of meaning:

Character, musical, is possessed by a composition when a disposition expresses itself predominantly, or so obtrudes itself that no other interpretation is possible.¹⁶

This seems to contradict the position inherent in Schumann's own journalistic practice of "polyphonic criticism" (Lippman's term), where differing views of a work are juxtaposed as equally valid.¹⁷ Lippman notes Schumann's delight in "mysterious ambiguity of character" and asserts that "lack of definition" of musical content is central to Schumann's concept of Romanticism in music.¹⁸

Perhaps the apparent discrepancy here can be resolved by accepting that the character of a piece can be particular, unmistakable, and unique to that piece, yet ultimately impossible to fix or define with a single image or verbal analogue. Ultimately, Schumann's actual practices as a composer and his candid admissions in private correspondence may reveal more about his view of extra-musical influence than his theoretical and critical writings.

For example, in a letter of 1838, Schumann said, "My Clara will know how to find the real meaning of [the *Davidsbündlertänze*], for they are dedicated her in a quite special sense."¹⁹ In another letter to Clara, regarding *Kreisleriana*, we find: "You and one of your ideas are the principal subject."²⁰ The op. 17 *Fantasie*, he told his betrothed, is "one long wail over

you."²¹ And in 1837 he went so far as to say, "I have but one thought to depict everywhere in letters and chords—Clara."²²

Over the years, scholars have suggested that certain melodic shapes which occur again and again in Schumann's music have some association with Clara. As long ago as the 1920's, Erwin Bodky identified the pattern C-B-A-G(#)-A as a "Clara theme."²³ Robert Schauffler in 1945 and Paula and Walter Rehberg in 1954 pointed out a different motive—a descending five-note scale pattern. Schauffler believed this motive originated in the "Andantino de Clara Wieck," the undiscovered and perhaps non-existent piece on which Schumann wrote variations in his op. 14 sonata. For Schauffler, any five-note scalewise descent was potentially significant, regardless of the placement of the semitones within the pattern; and many of his so-called five-note motifs are in fact arbitrarily isolated from much longer scale passages.

In 1964, Roger Fiske, writing about Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze* in the *Musical Times*, expressed his belief that

a descending scale, whether of five notes or more, starting on *mi* (or having the tones and semitones placed as though it did), was very closely associated in Schumann's mind with Clara, especially during their [enforced] separation [of 1836-37].²⁴

Fiske tentatively traced the motive to a "Notturmo" by Clara, from her op. 6 *Soirées musicales*, composed in 1835 or 36 (see ex. 1).

ex. 1

The musical notation for example 1 consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 6/8. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody in the treble clef starts on G4 and descends to D4. The bass line provides harmonic support with a similar descending pattern.

A response to Fiske's article by Nicholas Temperley correctly pointed out that a passage in Schumann's eighth *Novelette* marked "Stimme aus der Ferne" (Voice from the Distance) is a virtual quotation of this "Notturmo" theme of Clara's. Since Clara was indeed distant at the time the *Noveletten* were composed (March 1838), Temperley regards this connection as "a definite link between Clara and a descending five-note scale beginning on *mi*."²⁵

Fiske also discovered a version of Bodky's Clara theme, transposed to B minor and in retrograde, as a unifying idea in the *Davidsbündlertänze*, and posited its origin in another composition by Clara, "Scène fantastique: Le Ballet des Revenants" from op. 5 (composed in 1835 or 36), where, interestingly, it is combined with the descending five-note motive (see ex. 2).²⁶



We will return shortly to this second motive, but first, two other possible sources in Clara's early compositions for the descending figure should be mentioned. It appears in the following form (see ex. 3) as the head motive of her *Valses romantiques*, op. 4, composed probably in 1833:



Schumann clearly alluded to this passage in the "Valse allemande" from *Carnaval*, imposing a new key signature on the original notes²⁷ (see ex. 4).



An even earlier source, suggested by Joan Chissell,²⁸ might be Clara's 1832 *Caprices en forme de valse*, op. 2 no. 7, the third section of which begins as in example 5.



Perhaps it was not any single one of these manifestations of the five falling minor scale degrees which caused Schumann to attach significance to the pattern, but rather his observation of its frequent recurrence. If the figure already had a symbolic or associative meaning for Clara, I have not discovered it. We have seen in the above examples four prominent melodic appearances of the figure from four works composed by the young Clara Wieck over a period of four years. It may be thought insignificant that a figure so simple and apparently commonplace occurs with that degree of frequency. But one may search in vain for those five notes in Schumann's works from the same period (pre-1835). One or two similar ideas flit about in his op. 3, but those melodies are of course Paganini's.

For an understanding of the significance of the other Clara motive mentioned above, we must look to a series of articles written by Eric Sams between 1965 and 1970.²⁹ These articles are in themselves works of art, in which Sams, simultaneously wearing the hats of detective, cryptographer, historian, music analyst, and philosopher, lucidly presents a huge amount of mutually-corroborative data demonstrating that Schumann musically enciphered words in many of his works, and delves into the aesthetic and psychological reasons behind

that practice. Like the music they describe, these essays are exquisite mind-games, cleverly structured and laced through with word play and extraordinary metaphors. The following summary can only set forth a fraction of the evidence and insight that Sams provides.³⁰

For Schumann, as has often been remarked, music went hand in hand with literature. He inherited a literary inclination from his father, who was an author, translator, publisher and bookseller; and he left several unpublished novels and copious diaries in addition to the very significant writing he did during a decade as editor of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Through musical criticism he brought his love of music into contact with his talent for writing.³¹ He also brought a love of words to his composing: "Nearly all of Schumann's music," writes Sams, "contains or derives from words, whether as texts, titles, programmes or epigraphs."³²

In addition to the literary inspirations or connections of specific works, two books seem to have influenced Schumann's musical practice in a more fundamental and far-reaching way. One, on Schumann's own testimony, is Jean Paul's novel *Die Flegeljahre*. The other, on abundant circumstantial evidence, is Johann Klüber's cipher manual, *Kryptographik*. These books were both published by the firm of Cotta in Tübingen in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and both of them deal, though in very different ways, with the notions of mystery, symbolism, disguise, and transformation.

From *Flegeljahre* come not only the twin personalities Walt and Vult with whom Schumann identified psychologically, but also the twin images of a chrysalis (*Larve* in German) and a masked ball (*Larventanz*). Each of these is a highly important romantic symbol in itself—the masked ball evocative of illusion, duality, and uncertainty about identity;³³ the chrysalis an "infinitely suggestive symbol whose complex significance includes the notion of metamorphosis and thus possesses an affinity with the significance of the masquerade."³⁴

These concepts fascinated Schumann and informed his music throughout his life. The possible impact of the masked ball image on music is easy enough to conceive (and to perceive in Schumann's works, from the waltzing theme of op. 1 to the *Ballszenen* and *Kinderball*, opp. 109 and 130); but the connection between music and larvae is perhaps less apparent. Sams explains it this way: for Schumann, music could give words "new freedom by a change of existence from one mode to another, as a chrysalis changes into a butterfly."³⁵ Jean Paul himself once likened butterflies to ideas—daytime ideas, specifically, while he calls night thoughts "sphinxes" or moths.³⁶ Regarding ideas, Schumann once wrote of his pleasure when they came to him "clothed in lovely melodies."³⁷ Here is where Klüber and his ciphers come in: this change of mode, this clothing in melody, can be effected by systematically substituting notes for letters. Renaissance composers had incorporated verbal messages into their works; Bach had composed his own name into his music; and beginning with his op. 1, *Variations on the Name Abegg*, Schumann embarked upon a lifetime of exploring "what's in a name," musically speaking.

Sometimes, as with op. 1, the name is spelled using only "musical" letters (A through G, plus H which is B \sharp in German nomenclature, S (Es), which is E \flat , and the combination AS, which is A \flat). This is the case in *Carnaval* (op. 9), the *Six Fugues on BACH* (op. 60), and in the "Nordic Song (Greeting to G)" in the *Album for the Young* (op. 68), in all of which Schumann acknowledges the alphabetical nature of the themes.³⁸

However, it seems that Schumann experimented with a system of substitution cipher in order to make "unmusical" words yield melodies as well. Following suggestions in Klüber's manual, he first used a twenty-four-letter alphabet (omitting Y and Z) in three lines, as shown in example 6.

ex. 6

b 4 or # → or any scale,
 depending on
 chosen tonality.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X

Sams finds traces of this cipher system in *Papillons*,³⁹ and I believe the op. 4 *Intermezzos* and the op. 7 *Tocatta* also betray the use of this system in a precompositional way.⁴⁰

From about 1834, when he fell in love with Clara, Schumann altered the top line of this grid to D H A B C E F G, which had the symbolic result of bringing Clara's initial C alongside those of Eusebius and Florestan (Schumann's alter egos).⁴¹ This change meant that Clara's name would yield the basic shape shown in example 7, though the pitches could be inflected at will and the whole figure transposed.

ex. 7

C L A R A

Note that at the pitch shown, the musical letters of Clara's name, C and A, still translate directly to the pitches C and A.

Schumann used this motive frequently between the years 1834 and 1841: in songs like "Die Lotusblume" (op. 25 no. 7) and "Mit Myrthen und Rosen" (op. 24 no. 9), in the *Davidsbündlertänze* and the op. 47 Piano Quartet, and culminating in the Fourth Symphony, which Schumann referred to as his "Clara symphony."⁴²

Sams' articles reveal encipherments of other names—Paganini, Mendelssohn, and Schumann's brother Eduard, for example; and occasionally whole verbal phrases are embedded

in the musical ones. The sheer number of examples precludes any suspicion of mere coincidence. Nevertheless, Schumann biographer Peter Ostwald is dubious about the use of ciphers, because, first, no mention of the practice is found in Schumann's diaries, and second, none of his contemporaries seemed to be aware of it.

Even in the absence of specific references, however, Schumann's diaries certainly reveal a personality which would revel in the mystery, symbolism, and metamorphosis inherent in a musical cipher system. And as for the second point, Sams argues that

Schumann would not want [his use of ciphers] to be disclosed during his lifetime. Composition in the romantic era came by inspiration; any suggestion of the intervention of the discursive intelligence, especially by so contrived a process as encipherment, would have been universally condemned.⁴³

In any case, the ciphers were not primarily intended as a means of communication: Schumann clearly used them as a precompositional device—a way of creatively limiting his thematic and compositional choices.

The private nature of the ciphers was important to Schumann. Mystery was "a major attraction for the Romanticist."⁴⁴ Schumann "liked mystification for its own sake, and didn't much care if people saw through it or not."⁴⁵ The presence of unexplained elements helps to give Schumann's music its fantastic character and its singularity.⁴⁶ We enjoy the fact that "the whole aesthetic surface fizzes and fumes with mystery and allusion."⁴⁷ Joan Chissell brilliantly observes that the very nature of Schumann's piano writing, the "remarkable amount of activity within his closely woven texture," heightens "the impression of hugged inner secrets."⁴⁸

Among recent writers, Clara's biographer Nancy Reich concedes that ciphers are present in Schumann's works,⁴⁹ and Malcolm MacDonald also endorses the concept, saying:

The Romantic enthusiasm for symbolism stimulated afresh the possibilities of musical ciphers, and no composer was more passionately devoted to them than Schumann, whose love of codes and cryptograms found its way into the very structure of his music.⁵⁰

Anthony Newcomb includes ciphers in a discussion of how meaning arises in Schumann's music.⁵¹ Newcomb also discusses the fact that this music "gains associative meaning through allusion to, even veiled quotation of, other music" and through verbal references.⁵² He cites as an example the "rather complex ideas" conveyed by the use of the BACH motive in the finale of the Second Symphony, where it seems to constitute "a nod of gratitude to the role of craft, exemplified by Bach, as a source of strength and health through personal distancing."⁵³

An observation by Peter Ostwald⁵⁴ sheds further light on the importance of quotation. He speculates that Schumann's desire, in adding a finale based on "Proud England Rejoice" to op. 13 before its belated publication in 1837, was to emotionally update the piece. The quotation, together with the dedication to Sterndale Bennett, somewhat erases the work's true origins in Schumann's brief and, by 1837, embarrassing engagement to Ernestine von Fricken.

Ostwald, himself a psychologist, has explored the notion that music can act as a so-called "transitional object" or "linking phenomenon." We will have occasion to return to these concepts, as well as to his views on musical works as gifts and as offspring, as we turn now to the specific works in question.

CHAPTER TWO

SCHUMANN'S OP. 99 NO. 4

Schumann assembled his op. 99 in 1852 from short pieces which for various reasons had never found their way into his previous publications. He called the collection *Bunte Blätter* (Many-coloured Leaves), and subdivided the opus into "Three Little Pieces" (nos. 1-3), "Five Album Leaves" (4-8), and a further six pieces with individual titles (9-14). The double titles can be confusing: the little piece shown in example 8 is both no. 1 of the "Albumblätter" and no. 4 of the *Bunte Blätter*.

ex. 8

Ziemlich langsam.

5

9

13

17

21

p

sf

dim.

p

pp una corda

Ped.

The title "Albumblatt" suggests something of special personal significance, such as might have been written in a nineteenth-century album as a memento. The related title *Bunte Blätter*, as well as pointing to the diverse origins of the pieces in the set and the absence of any cyclic intentions on Schumann's part, may also punningly add the image of autumn leaves—their fragility, intricate detail, and melancholy implications.

Op. 99 no. 4 has been described as "simple and plaintive,"¹ but in fact its apparent simplicity conceals a wealth of subtle details. For example, there is the canonic implication of its first phrase, with the soprano C#s answered two bars later in the left hand. Also in the opening bars, the alto and tenor voices have a quasi-diminution of the rhythm of the outer parts (see ex. 9).



The faster rhythm is taken up by all four voices in the middle section of the piece.

An especially pleasing feature is the arch structure created by the mirror symmetry of the two outer periods.² The last eight bars seem at first glance to be merely a reharmonized reiteration of the first eight, ending in the tonic instead of the mediant. However, on closer inspection, it appears that the two phrases which make up those eight-bar periods are reversed on their return, so that the cadence of bars 19-20 reflects that of bars 7-8, and the last four bars of the piece are almost exactly like the first four.

The expressive intent of this subtle alteration is clear from Schumann's interpretive indications. The long *legato* phrase marks of the first period are absent at the end, as are the dynamic "hairpins." The shorter phrases, combined with the "flat" *piano* and *pianissimo* dynamic levels, confirm the sense of fragility, resignation, and inward-turning which is

inherent in the musical material (the broken diminished chord of bar 17, the painful dissonance of bar 18, the drooping fourth of bar 20, and the final falling fifth).

The middle eight bars of the piece are subdivided into two two-bar phrases and one four-bar phrase, each of which ends on a different inversion of a C#-minor chord. This can be seen, along with other middleground events, in the following diagram, which also draws attention to the hidden presence of a passacaglia-like formula in the opening and closing bars (see ex. 10).

ex. 10

bars: 1 5 9 17 21

i III v III i

That formula, the F#-B-C#-F# of bars 1-5 and 21-24, relates this piece to Schumann's op. 5, *Impromptus on a Theme by Clara Wieck*, which begins as follows (ex. 11):

ex. 11

The piece continues by adding a melody by Clara to this bass line, and ten variations and a fugue follow. The relationship of these two bass lines is most interesting in light of certain aspects of the Clara and Brahms variations to be discussed later on.³

Another allusion—or at least resemblance—must be mentioned here. Denis Matthews cautiously points out the "uncanny precedent" for Schumann's bars 17-20 in the slow movement of Beethoven's C-minor violin sonata, op. 30 no. 2, bars 20-22 (see ex. 12).⁴



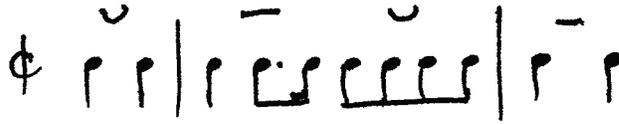
Recalling the famous occasion when Brahms had to transpose this very sonata up a semitone in a performance with Remenyi, Matthews contents himself with speculating that Brahms must have experienced *déjà vu* when playing Schumann's Albumblatt. But a deliberate allusion is not out of the question: the openings of the two pieces are also very similar. Schumann had a "very active musical memory,"⁵ and his reviews in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* often draw attention to reminiscences of Beethoven in the works of his contemporaries.⁶ Regarding his own op. 10, he wrote:

while I was working on number 4, the funeral march from Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony hovered before me. Perhaps the listener could hear this for himself.⁷

Clara once pointed out a Beethoven "theft" in an unpublished B \flat -major sonata movement by Schumann. Apparently it was an unintentional quotation, but he wrote to Clara that he was looking forward to being shown it: "I must say that I'm pleased when I discover anything like that in my compositions."⁸

One wonders if Clara was practising the Beethoven violin sonata at the time Schumann composed his miniature in 1841.⁹ One wonders too if the metrical organization of the Beethoven (see ex. 13) might have been in Schumann's mind.

ex. 13



If so, the 2/4 time signature he chose was not as clear as Beethoven's way of indicating the upbeat nature of the first two quarter notes. But Schumann does show a *crescendo* through those first two beats to the downbeat of bar 2, after which bar 3 is dynamically unstressed. Perhaps Beethoven's "slow-motion gavotte" notation seemed unrepeatable to Schumann; or perhaps he preferred the ambiguity of his own notation.

There would appear to be no other correspondences between these two works: Beethoven's is major, Schumann's is minor; Beethoven's is leisurely and expansive, Schumann's is compact and terse. Indeed there is a repressed quality to Schumann's piece, particularly in the way the melody in the middle section twice comes up against a high G#. Example 14 shows this G# in the context of the melodic middleground.



The descending impulses of the first two phrases having only succeeded in reaching A, the next section displaces the G# that should follow by an octave, and initiates the motion that finally reaches F# in the last bar of the piece.¹⁰

This descent from C# to F# is of course, as Joan Chissell recognized, the "motto so often used by Schumann to enshrine [Clara's] image."¹¹ Bars 14-16 and the last four bars are the motive pure and simple, in C# minor and F# minor respectively. The opening bars

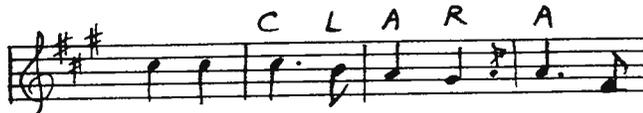
contain another statement of the motive, only with a detour to A enroute to the tonic, the reason for which will be seen shortly. First of all, however, it should be noted that the repeated C#s (bars 1-2, 21-22) enhance the resemblance to specific previous uses of this Clara theme (see examples 3 and 4). The most obvious precursor is the "Andantino de Clara Wieck" (see ex. 15), with which the later piece shares both its dotted rhythm and its heavyhearted character.

ex. 15



A novel feature of op. 99 no. 4 is that, embedded in the familiar falling figure, is the other Clara theme, the one that spells her name (see ex. 16).

ex. 16



(Bars 5-8 and 17-20 restate this motive.) This double allusion to Clara is "underpinned by alternating F sharps and E sharps"¹²—the first six bars of the alto line consist of nothing else. Joan Chissell has proposed, and I think it is highly likely in this context, that these two notes stand for Florestan and Eusebius. It may be mere coincidence, but in addition, the letters that spell "Schumann" in Clara-cipher on F# are all found in the left hand of bars 1 and 2 (see ex. 17).

ex. 17

The image shows three musical staves. The top staff is a bass clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. It contains a sequence of eight quarter notes: D, H, A, B, C, E, F, G. Below this staff is a cipher key with three rows of letters: the first row contains D, H, A, B, C, E, F, G; the second row contains I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P; and the third row contains Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X. The middle staff is a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, containing a sequence of eight quarter notes: S, C, H, U, M, A, N, N. The name 'SCHUMANN' is written above the notes, with a bracket under 'U M A N N'. The bottom staff is a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, containing a sequence of four notes: a quarter note G, a quarter note A, a quarter note B, and a quarter note C. Arrows point from the middle and bottom staves to the right.

One may well ask what, if anything, these ciphers might mean to a performer or listener. I would suggest that, first of all, the presence of an enciphered name lends intimacy and import to what is being "said," just as naming a person to whom one is speaking adds impact and directness. Awareness of a personal greeting or address of this sort can subtly influence the range of interpretive possibilities. In this case, the presence of Clara's name tells us that the piece is not, for example, a funeral march—though that would be a plausible enough inference from the pervasive dotted rhythm, the tolling C#s, and the stately chordal style.¹³ But then, there are also purely musical safeguards against a too-rigid, funereal interpretation: the grace notes of bars 3, 7, and 17; and the many crescendi and diminuendi.

Comparison with other uses of the same cipher motive may contribute shades of meaning. If Brahms and Clara were indeed aware of the hidden names in this piece (which would help to explain why they both chose it for variations), they may also have been alive

to subtleties in the use of the Clara cipher motive such as the occurrence of the major form (C# rather than Cb) within a minor key.

However, in general, a cipher theme is not an *idée fixe*: musical developments of the theme do not necessarily carry narrative meaning. Though F# and E# may allude to Schumann at the outset of the piece, the absence of these notes in bars 7-20 need not symbolize Schumann's absence.

More important to the psychological unfolding of this piece is the constant vacillation between A and G#, which suggests a feeling of futility. These two notes appear first in the tenor (bars 1-2), and then through voice exchange they move to the soprano in bars 3 and 4. This pattern is repeated in the next four-bar phrase. The A-G# then moves to the bass, and as example 18 indicates,

ex. 18

The musical notation for example 18 consists of two staves. The top staff is the tenor voice and the bottom staff is the soprano voice. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The tenor voice starts with a half note G# in bar 1, followed by quarter notes A and G# in bar 2. The soprano voice has a whole note G# in bar 1, followed by whole notes A and G# in bar 2. The pattern repeats in bars 3 and 4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The notation includes a dashed box around the first two bars of the tenor and soprano staves, with lines connecting the notes between the two staves to illustrate the voice exchange. The bottom staff has two whole notes in parentheses in bars 3 and 4, indicating they are not part of the primary voice exchange.

the middleground motion is a kind of augmentation of the foreground. Then follow the only bars in which this alternation desists (17-18). The next five bars resume the voice exchange between soprano and tenor, until the soprano G# of bar 23 falls to F# instead of rising to A.

The meaning of Schumann's op. 99 no. 4 does not primarily consist in the fact that it symbolizes Clara or Robert Schumann. Schumann's imaginative extrapolation of the basic material results in a musical design that can be understood and appreciated without any background knowledge. The first cadence, with the third (A) on top, hints at the optimistic A-major cadence of the second phrase. In the middle section the A-major chord is repeatedly

contradicted by C# minor, the final contradiction involving a five-note descent from G# to C# which foreshadows the way the piece will end. The phrase with the A-major cadence returns, but the piece ends with a phrase which falls sadly but purposefully past the A to F#.

As short as it is, this tiny work still lives up to Schumann's concept of musical value: it does not paint a picture or tell a story, but it does depict states of the soul, and indeed such finely differentiated states that finding verbal equivalents is difficult. It seems to move from a precarious hope through frustrated yearning to a state of resignation—but an inconclusive, not a despairing, resignation.

The element of inconclusiveness, a result of the extreme brevity of the piece and the psychological complexity compressed within it, makes it ideally suitable for variations; and interestingly, the two composers who knew Schumann best decided to employ his piece in exactly that way, within a year of each other, and amidst circumstances of great emotional intensity.

CHAPTER THREE

CLARA SCHUMANN'S OP. 20

On May 29, 1853, Clara Schumann noted in her diary,

Today I . . . began . . . for the first time in years to compose again. . . . I want to write variations on a theme of Robert's, out of *Bunte Blätter*, for his birthday. But I find it very difficult—the break has been too long.¹

The negative feelings associated with the composition of this piece are not unique: Anna Burton, in a psychoanalytical study of Clara Schumann, comments that "expressions of uncertainty, and even a consuming self-dissatisfaction" are commonly associated with the act of composing in her letters and diaries.² For example, at age nineteen she wrote to Robert:

I always comfort myself with the thought that I am a woman after all, and they are not born to compose.³

And at twenty, she wrote:

I once thought that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea: a woman must not desire to compose. Not one has been able to do it, and why should I expect to? It would be arrogance, though indeed my father led me into it in earlier days.⁴

Years later, after an evening the Schumanns spent listening to Mendelssohn performing his own music, Clara confided to her diary:

Robert's eyes radiate joy, and it is very painful for me to have to feel I can never offer Robert anything like that.⁵

When she presented him with his birthday variations in 1853 (which she wrote in only six days, be it noted⁶), it was with a self-deprecating dedication:

For my dear husband, for June 8, 1853, a weak attempt once more on the part of his Clara of old.⁷

Yet despite this deep insecurity about her talents as a composer, she could write of her *Six Songs*, op. 23:

[They] have given me many happy hours. There is nothing which surpasses the joy of creation, if only because through it one wins hours of self-forgetfulness, when one lives in a world of sound.⁸

The ability to escape to this world of sound, whether by composing or playing, was essential to Clara. In a letter written to Joseph Joachim in September 1854, when Robert was living out his last months in an asylum, she prayed for "strength to endure the terrible agitations" of her situation, and said, "My old friend, my piano, must help me in this." She says what a "splendid thing" it is to be able to turn her suffering into "divine music," and then adds, typically, "How much better you must know [this] than I, since you can *create!*"⁹

In this connection, it is extremely interesting to know that Clara "wrote notes and understood rhythm before reading and writing"¹⁰—that she did not speak even single words, and gave no evidence of language comprehension, until she was four and a half. Inhibitions

about speaking and a strong sense of the inadequacy of words persisted throughout Clara's life, according to Anna Burton's study of her letters and diaries.¹¹

Psychologists have observed a connection between arrested development of speech and emotional unavailability of the mother during the crucial twenty-second to twenty-fifth months.¹² Clara's mother, a concert pianist herself, was particularly heavily burdened during that period in her daughter's life, producing a baby in August 1821, and performing two piano concertos in October of the same year. Burton suggests that music replaced language as a channel of communication during this time; that Clara identified music with her mother, whose practising she constantly heard; and that her derivation of "psychological nurturance from her languagelike comprehension of musical ideas and feelings" during her first two years led to a "lifelong need for music."¹³

A "languagelike comprehension" of music and a reliance on music for "psychological nurturance" were two things which Clara shared with Schumann.¹⁴ It was music which initially brought them into contact and which cemented their relationship from the beginning. According to one of Clara's biographers,

During the years 1830-1836, the two young musicians were working and playing in such close proximity that it is often difficult to determine the origin of many musical ideas they shared.¹⁵

And a Schumann biographer writes,

This process of musical exchange seems to have delighted them both. [It allowed them to] engage in endless flirtation and teasing over their musical "offspring."¹⁶

One piece from this period with a rather complicated lineage is Schumann's "first musical homage to Clara,"¹⁷ the op. 5 *Impromptus on a Theme by Clara Wieck*. The theme referred to in the title had been used by Clara in her op. 3 *Romance varié (sic)*, written in 1831 and published in 1833 with a dedication to Schumann (making it Clara's first musical homage to him). But the basis of this theme, in turn, was a four-bar fragment which had been jotted down by Schumann in September 1830, just before he came to Leipzig to study with Clara's father.¹⁸ The frequent occurrences, discussed in Chapter One, of a descending five-note motive are further evidence of the creative cross-fertilization that took place during Clara and Robert's courtship.

The musical offspring became fewer after 1840, when the couple were producing human offspring—although Schumann still occasionally dedicated a work to his wife, and Clara of course continued to perform Robert's works regularly. Rarely after 1841 does Schumann use a "Clara-theme." His whole musical outlook became somewhat more objectified after that time, and its personal content decreased.¹⁹ In choosing to vary a theme by her husband in 1853, Clara was thus harking back to the musical sharing of the early years of their relationship. And to judge by the theme she chose, this reminiscence was more than a little tinged with sadness.

In general, the op. 20 variations stay close to their theme, decorating it chromatically, occasionally altering the harmonies, and only once extending a phrase beyond its original length. Analytical interest therefore centres on the harmonic and rhythmic foreground.

Semitone dissonance is a feature of Clara's style in any case, but especially so in this piece, as a result of her exploration of the lower neighbour-notes which are so prominent in the theme (F#-E#-F#, A-G#-A, and C#-B#-C#). Already in the third bar of variation 1, the left hand figuration is grinding against the right hand chords (ex. 19).

ex. 19

The musical notation for example 19 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a more active line with triplets indicated by a '3' below the notes.

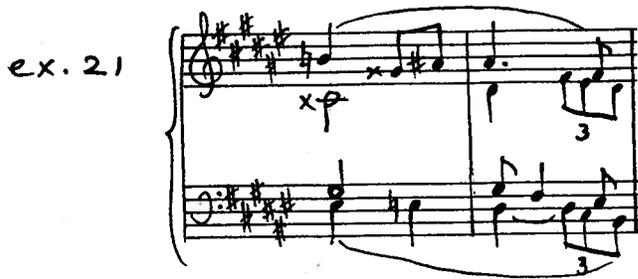
The convoluted nature of the chromaticism (which gives the impression of intense engagement with a difficult problem) is well exemplified by bar 42 in the same variation,²⁰ where three dissonant notes on the downbeat all resolve separately (ex. 20).

ex. 20

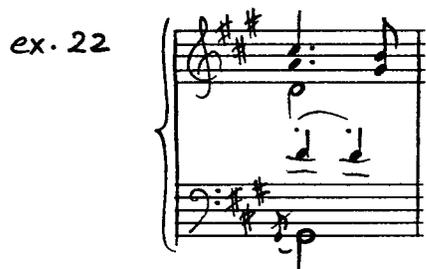
The musical notation for example 20 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The right hand starts with a grace note followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand has a single note on the downbeat.

Of the 208 sixteenth-note chords in variation 2, fifty-eight (more than a quarter) contain semitone dissonance. The otherwise anomalous grace-note before the very first chord is explained by Clara's desire for maximum chromatic colouration.

This same goal is operative in the richly-hued third variation with its bass line winding upwards from the depths of the keyboard, hovering, and eventually subsiding. The sensuous feel of F# major noted by Hugh Macdonald in a recent article²¹ has seldom been better exploited than by this variation, with its widely-spaced chords and its mesh of double sharps. There is an extraordinary rhythmic and harmonic "knot" in bars 94-95 composed of syncopation, two-against-three, and every imaginable kind of non-chord tone (see ex. 21).



Chromatically-descending scales in powerful double octaves are a feature of variation 5, and the canonic variation 6 includes a heart-stopping half-diminished seventh chord with a double appoggiatura (b. 169—see ex. 22).



The figuration in variation 7 is entirely based on upper and lower neighbours; the thirty-second notes entwine themselves like tendrils around the theme. Following the seventh variation is a finale which will be discussed shortly.

There is a rhythmic scheme underlying the progress of the variations as a whole. Except for numbers 3 and 6, which provide moments of repose, the variations all employ continuous motion of some kind. In variation 1, a few dotted figures and the occasional two-against-three alleviate the basic triplet motion. Variation 2 is a toccata in sixteenth notes. The rhythmic accelerando continues with the triplet sixteenths of variation 4. Variation 5 reverts to ordinary sixteenths, but variation 7 completes the progression with thirty-second notes (see ex. 23). This design gives a feeling of increasing fluency and freedom of expression.



As mentioned above, the outline of the theme is always strongly projected underneath the considerable surface activity of these variations. It is interesting that, while Clara's figuration extends to both extremes of the keyboard (C#1 and F#7 are both used), she does not in general allow the melodic intervals of the theme to expand; even the suppressed climax of the theme's middle section remains suppressed in all but one variation. Only in variation 3 does the melody stretch its boundary, and then only by a semitone, and with the greatest difficulty, conveyed by the grating dissonance at the point of expansion (see ex. 24).



Indeed, the gesture seems to sap the energy of the variation completely—the next six bars can only slide helplessly downward; but the result in the final phrase is clearly an attainment of peace.

Because of the uniqueness of variation 3, the composer chose to reprise it in a finale. At the end of variation 7, the piece suddenly breaks free of the theme and turns to the major mode (b. 194). There is a rapid build-up over a dominant pedal to a cadenza-like diminished chord flourish; at this point in Clara's original version (preserved in manuscript copies made for Schumann in June 1853 and Brahms in July 1854), variation 3 returns, giving the listener

a second chance to experience its exquisite tension and release. Next, by way of a coda, there is a chromatic descent filling out the thematic interval of a fifth over an F# pedal (bars 226-30), and then a plagal extension utilizing the minor subdominant (231-34). A final chromatic curlicue (234-35) and two wispy chords complete the piece.

However, when Brahms studied this work in the summer of 1854, in the course of writing his own variations on the same theme, he noticed that it was possible to combine the beautiful third variation with another melody of great significance—the melody whose complex lineage was traced at the beginning of this chapter—the theme of Clara's first musical homage to Schumann and of his first homage to her (see ex. 25).

ex. 25

a. op. 3



b. op. 20, bars 202-205



Brahms communicated this discovery to Clara, who was delighted and incorporated the allusion into the finale before her variations were published. On September 14, Clara's diary noted,

Proof of my *Variations* from Härtel. Brahms has had a splendid idea, a surprise for you, my Robert. He has interwoven my old theme with yours—already I can see you smile.²²

Notice that Clara refers to the Romance melody as "her" theme and the Albumblatt melody as Robert's, even though both themes are very much "joint property." Clara's words imply that she thought of the passage in its final form as essentially a duet between the soprano, which carries Schumann's theme, and the *innere Stimme* containing her own. The notion of a duet amply justifies the canonic imitation which she introduces at bar 210 when the quotation has run its course.

The somewhat naïve melody which Clara calls "my old theme" must have recalled the circumstances of her life when it was written, some twenty years previous. Its poignancy in this context is partly the result of its transposition from the simplest of keys (the original C major) to the most complex and tonally remote key, F# major. Schumann himself was "reluctant to admit the romantic quality" of F# major, but he did once say that "simple feelings require simple keys; complicated ones require those that rarely meet the ear."²³ If there were any doubt that complicated feelings are being expressed here, one would only need to note the extraordinary dissonances created by the weaving of this quotation into the already high chromatic texture. The profusion and pungency of the appoggiaturas here is more characteristic of Clara than of Brahms, so the passage seems at home in her composition.

The inclusion of this quotation strengthens the link between Clara's variations and the later Brahms set; symbolically, it also strengthens the link between the two composers. By adopting Brahms' suggestion, Clara may have been symbolizing her willingness to admit Brahms in some way into the holy union between herself and Robert. But Brahms' contribution was not symbolic of himself (as a quotation from one of his own works would

have been); rather he offered Clara a reflection of herself and of Robert to incorporate into her work. In terms of their actual relationship, it was this reflective aspect of Brahms to which Clara was attracted, as the following extracts from her diary testify:

[May 27, 1854] Brahms is always the person with whom I most like to talk of Robert. . . . [August 1854] I cannot but thank heaven for sending me such a friend in my great sorrow; one who raises my whole mind, who reveres my dearly loved husband with me, and suffers with me.²⁴

With Brahms she was able to have the kind of intellectual intercourse she had once shared with Schumann. And furthermore, Brahms helped her to recapture something of her own lost youth:

[May 9, 1855] [Johannes] was very merry . . . so that I too seemed to grow younger, for he whirled me along with him. [July 1855] He draws in great breaths of nature, and one grows young with him.²⁵

Despite all the layers of personal significance which Brahms' quotation brings to Clara's piece, the quotation does have a degree of objective musical effect. Portentous musical gestures draw the listener's attention to its presence (bars 194-201); and if the performer uses what Brahms called his "tenor thumb," the quotation will easily be heard and experienced as meaningful. To a listener who is acquainted with Schumann's op. 5 or Clara's op. 3 (and a performer could easily programme one of those works with Clara's variations), the significance of the quotation is its familiarity in another context; but to the uninitiated, its significance is simply its unfamiliarity in the present context. The altered reprise of variation 3 is in fact a perfect example of what Robert Hatten calls a "marked form": music heard before returns,

superimposed by something unfamiliar (which in this case creates radically new harmonies—indeed dissonances).²⁶

It is tempting to find in bar 201 of the finale another allusion—namely, to Schumann's *Romance*, op. 28 no. 2, bar 30 (see ex. 26).

ex. 26 a. Schumann



b. Clara, bar 201



There would be a certain fitness in introducing one *Romance* quotation with another; and given that Schumann's op. 28 no. 2 is one of his very rare excursions into the key in which Clara found herself, the appropriation of this little characteristic cadential figure seems apt. Clara's avowed love for the piece would seem to clinch the argument: she wrote in 1840,

I lay claim to the *Romances*: you absolutely must dedicate something more to me as your betrothed, and I know of nothing more tender than these three *Romances*, especially the middle one, which is the most beautiful love duet. Ah! Robert, you cannot escape, I will not give up the *Romances*.²⁷

However, we need only go back a few more bars in this finale to find an instructive example of an apparent quotation which was certainly unintended. At the beginning of Clara's coda is a chord progression (major-augmented-minor-diminished) which is reminiscent of Liszt generally and of a moment in his B-minor *Sonata* in particular. The match between Clara's bars 194-95 and Liszt's bar 433 is unbelievably close, even to the *espressivo* designation and the structural placement at the beginning of the coda (see ex. 27). Furthermore, the Liszt sonata was dedicated to Schumann.

ex. 27

Yet Clara never set eyes on Liszt's B-minor sonata until May 25, 1854—a year after she wrote her variations. On that day, the newly-published sonata arrived at the Schumann household, and Brahms (who had fallen asleep when he heard Liszt himself play the work from manuscript the previous year²⁸) played it through for Clara. Perhaps Brahms' sight-reading did not do the piece justice: Clara called it "gruesome,"

merely a blind noise—no healthy ideas any more, everything confused; one cannot find a single clear harmonic progression. . . . It really is too awful.²⁹

Critical response to Clara's Variations has never been quite so harsh, though Pamela Susskind finds the work "nondescript" and "unpolished."³⁰ But Chissell remarks that while it betrays Clara's "allegiance to the . . . decorative virtuoso tradition," the figuration is "imaginatively pianistic, never mere mechanical patterning."³¹ And James Sykes, in notes made for his recording of the work, describes it as "an exploration of piano colouration,

resonance, and *Volubilität*.³² Liner notes for other recordings call op. 20 Clara's "most ambitious solo piano work"³³ and "doubtlessly [her] more important and mature work for piano, . . . full of variety and atmospheric density."³⁴ Perhaps most importantly, the piece gave Robert Schumann, for whom primarily it was written, "much delight."³⁵

The core of meaning for the whole work seems to be contained in the third variation and its altered reprise. The other variations, virtuosic and inventive though they are, merely provide a context for the enunciation of that meaning. An observation by David Lidov seems appropriate with reference to the decorative nature of much of Clara's op. 20. Ornamentation, he writes, is

a sign of eloquence of expression. It represents the freedom of the melodic line to give voice to the passions which motivate it.³⁶

Despite her verbal inhibitions, then, Clara could wax eloquent in her music; her melodies could express what words could not.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENERAL NOTES ON BRAHMS' OP. 9

There have been a number of brief studies of Brahms' op. 9 in recent years, notably those by Floros and Danuser in German, and by Neighbour, Sisman, Ostwald, and Cummings in English (see Bibliography). Several complementary perspectives on the work emerge from these studies. The piece is seen as:

1. A homage to Schumann and an outgrowth of Brahms' intensive study of his works
2. A response to Clara's op. 20 and a gift of consolation and love for her
3. A musical link between the separated Schumann couple
4. An expression of Brahms' identification with a literary figure, and
5. A synthesis of variation traditions (and specifically also a response to the "Beethoven challenge").

The piece is also a contrapuntal treatise, an essay intended to justify Schumann's prophetic "New Paths" declaration, a symbolic liberation of Schumann, and an expression of grief at his decline. These various facets deserve some comment before the individual variations are examined in detail.

The threefold relationship among Brahms and the Schumanns blossomed rapidly after their first meeting on September 30, 1853. Robert took "great pleasure" in Brahms, "both as a man and an artist,"¹ and he wrote a famous article for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* called

"Neue Bahnen" (New Paths), in which he praised Brahms in extravagant terms and predicted that the future of music lay with this twenty-year-old genius.²

Only five months later, Brahms read in a newspaper of Schumann's suicide attempt and rushed back to Düsseldorf, where he arrived on March 3. Clara's diary records, "He said he had only come to comfort me with music, if I had any wish for it."³ The next day, Schumann was taken to an asylum in Eendenich, from which he was never to return.

Brahms "virtually sacrificed the next two years of his life" for the Schumanns.⁴ He helped take care of the children, kept the household accounts, and visited Robert in hospital (Clara was forbidden by the doctors to see him); meanwhile he composed and eked out a meagre existence by giving lessons and borrowing from friends. On April 10, 1854, Clara wrote:

That good Brahms always shows himself a most sympathetic friend. He does not say much, but one can see in his face, in his speaking eye, how he grieves with me for the loved one whom he so highly reveres. Besides, he is so kind in seizing every opportunity of cheering me by means of anything musical.⁵

As one Brahms biographer has put it, "Brahms clearly felt himself fulfilled and invigorated by his double duties as a creative artist and guardian angel to the stricken Schumann family."⁶

On May 24, Clara, who was then almost nine months pregnant, played her op. 20 for Brahms and a few other friends. The situation is charged with powerful emotion: Clara was performing variations which she had, as it were, "conceived" with the germ of Robert's theme, while their unborn child listened from her womb. Not surprisingly, the performance made Clara "terribly sad." She wrote,

It is just a year since they were composed, and I was so happy thinking of surprising him with them. This year I must spend his birthday alone, and he will not even know the day.⁷

A few days later, after a walk in the Eller woods (which she had first visited the year before with Robert), Clara wrote, "[Brahms] is remarkable. . . . One learns to . . . love him more and more."⁸ Brahms, for his part, was beginning to realize that his feeling for Clara was more than compassion. It was not long before he would confide in a letter to his friend Joachim,

I often have to restrain myself forcibly from just quietly putting my arm around her and even—I don't know, it seems to me so natural that she could not misunderstand.⁹

It was at this time that Brahms undertook to write his own variations on Schumann's Albumblatt, op. 99 no. 4. Originally, the variations were fourteen in number; and with the title "Little Variations on a Theme by Him, dedicated to Her," Brahms presented them on June 15, 1854, to Clara,¹⁰ who was just recuperating from the birth of her son Felix.

Although of course Brahms was well-intentioned, the act of composing variations on a theme already used by Clara, especially one so significant to her, had an element of thoughtlessness: it could have been seen as an arrogant attempt to prove his superiority (especially given Clara's feelings of inadequacy as a composer), or as an unwelcome intrusion into very private territory. As Joachim wrote around this time,

Brahms is egoism incarnate, without himself being aware of it. He bubbles over in his cheery way with exuberant thoughtlessness.¹¹

But there is no indication that this clumsiness of Brahms was felt as such by Clara, in this case at least. On June 18 she dispatched a note to Brahms, who was living nearby, in which she said:

Your delicate attention has given me very great pleasure. I cannot tell you what I felt when I read the dedication. But you know already when you were writing it ... [The piece] is genuine Brahms, and I know you to be both serious and humorous.¹²

In her diary that same day, she wrote:

[Brahms] sought to comfort me; he composed variations on that wonderfully heartfelt theme that means so much to me, just as last year when I composed variations for my beloved Robert, and moved me deeply through his sweet concern.¹³

A mutual friend of Clara and Brahms, Julius Grimm, perceptively christened the work "Trost-Einsamkeit" (Consolation in Loneliness).¹⁴ It is this therapeutic aspect which attracts Peter Ostwald. He notes that op. 9 "symbolizes effectively and in musical language Brahms' special position as a mediator between Clara and her alienated husband,¹⁵ and he employs terms from psychological literature to describe the music's soothing, healing function. For psychologists, "transitional objects" and "linking phenomena" denote "tangible physical items" which carry personal meanings and "are capable of temporarily allaying the anxieties produced by separation from a true love object." When an art object functions this way it can be "valuable not only for individuals but for entire cultures."¹⁶ We will have occasion to return to this last point shortly.

Brahms sent a copy of his new work to Joachim, who responded on June 27 as follows:

Dearest Johannes, how every note of your Variations gladdened me; how I sunned myself in the wealth of feeling and intellect

contained in them! . . . I place [them] side by side with the deepest and most beautiful works, not even excepting my favourite. I have not mentioned his name for fear of startling you, but he lived at the beginning of this century. Each variation is a little temple to the glory of the spirit concealed in the subject. And however varied their architecture may be, this spirit breathes the same love through them all.¹⁷

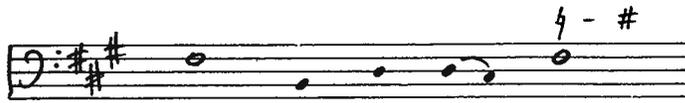
Joachim hits upon several significant factors in this letter: he notes the combination of feeling and intellect, teasingly refers to Beethoven, speaks of the variations as "little temples" (suggesting the homage they pay to Schumann), uses the apt word "architecture" (implying that the variations relate to one another in a carefully structured way), and finally remarks that love seems to be communicated through the whole set.

Joachim's evocation of Beethoven was echoed by Clara on July 30 after Brahms played his variations for her. Her diary records, "Today I was more struck by them than ever before—the spirit of Beethoven breathes through them all."¹⁸ In addition to several possible allusions to Beethoven in op. 9, which are listed in table 1, there is a Beethovenian freedom and thoroughness in the work. Yet there are differences too: for example, Brahms' variations are "a very personal message: no solace here for all mankind as in the variations of Beethoven's op. 111."¹⁹ Nor is there the discrepancy between theme and variations that we find in the Diabelli set: Brahms' variations and Schumann's theme speak from the same place.²⁰

In the month following the composition of the Schumann-Variations, Brahms had requested and received a manuscript copy of Clara's op. 20 (as it was to become), and had continued to ruminate about the two sets of variations. This bore fruit in August, when he produced two new variations (10 and 11 of the final version). Their insertion corrected a tonal

imbalance which Brahms no doubt perceived²¹ and created a very interesting overall key scheme (see ex. 28)²²

ex. 28



Vars: th- 8 9 10 11 12-14 15-16
 keys: f# b D [f#:G#6-V] f# F#

—interesting because of its relationship to the bass line of the theme (see ex. 29).

ex. 29



When Brahms wrote to Joachim about his additions, however, he made no mention of key schemes, but told his friend excitedly that in one of them, "Clara speaks!"²³—meaning that he had contrived to work into his tenth variation a fragment of her *Romance Varié*, just as he suggested Clara should do in her op. 20 finale.

Brahms' two new variations bear the significant date of August 12, which was Clara's nameday;²⁴ they also have the inscription, "Roses and heliotrope have bloomed."²⁵ The importance of this phrase is open to question, but at the very least it is indicative of the peculiar nature of Brahms' art that, as Karl Geiringer says, such a purely romantic notion as blooming flowers should be attached to "a creation of the strictest structural perfection."²⁶ Variation 10 with its canons, inversions, and diminutions was clearly not intended as an academic exercise, but as an intensely expressive gesture.

What, specifically, it expresses may be partly revealed by the allusion to the language of flowers. As everyone knows, the rose is symbolic of love. Heliotrope may not be as ubiquitous, but it too has a long-established symbolic meaning which would have been better known in the nineteenth century than now: heliotrope stands for devotion and faithfulness. Brahms' mention of flowers is intriguing because the language of flowers (something which also fascinated Schumann²⁷) is a "concealed mode of conducting social intercourse," yet it is paradoxically part of a "'universal' set of symbolic meanings."²⁸ The parallel with op. 9 is striking: through these variations, Brahms communicates on two levels—privately, to Clara and Robert Schumann, and also publicly, to the rest of the world.

Some comments by Ostwald regarding Schumann's song "Ich hab' im Traum geweinet" address this issue of private versus public symbolism:

On a personal level, Schumann's song allows the forlorn, motherless child [himself], by way of dreams, poetic imagery, and music, to come to terms with the anxieties of a new painful reality, the unrequited [?] yearning of the adult for his distant beloved. And on a public or social level, Schumann's song serves as a semiotic link to future generations of empathic listeners who are able to experience the composer's anguish of separation and unfulfilled love.²⁹

Brahms' op. 9 went out into the world, along with Clara's op. 20, in November 1854, thanks to Breitkopf and Härtel. Some proofs must have been sent to Schumann at Endenich, for in October he wrote to Clara acknowledging receipt of Brahms' variations. And on November 27, having had time to study the piece, he wrote to Clara, "The variations by Johannes delighted me at first sight and do so still more on deeper acquaintance."³⁰ At the same time he sent a letter of thanks to Brahms himself. Both the first draft of this letter and the one actually sent have been published in various sources in both German and English, and

as the comments they contain are general and not particularly illuminating, they are not reproduced here.³¹

Schumann's praise for his work filled Brahms with "joy and hope."³² The encouragement of the master he revered meant the more to him since he got little positive response from the larger musical world. Hans von Bülow found op. 9 "unaesthetic,"³³ and Jenny Lind believed that it manifested "perverse tendencies!"³⁴

Yet Schumann's ability at this stage to fully appreciate what Brahms had written must be doubted. Although he had access to a piano at the institution where he was incarcerated, and reported to Brahms that he had learned to play the slower variations of the set, he was probably drugged by his doctors³⁵ and certainly was not fully in command of his faculties. The extent of his mental decline is shown by a pathetic line in his last letter to Brahms (December 2, 1854): "Clara wrote to me that on page 14 [of op. 9] the music recalls something. What is it? Out of a song?"³⁶ Schumann apparently did not recognize the theme being quoted in Brahms' tenth variation, and despite Clara's hint, clearly missed this beautiful double tribute to himself and his wife.

Whether Schumann was able to appreciate it or not, Brahms' op. 9 was a homage to him in more ways than one. Of course, the act of writing variations on another composer's theme was a gesture of homage in itself:

By taking up the theme of an older, established musician and incorporating it into his own work, an ambitious young composer could express admiration for the model and at the same time exhibit his own special talents.³⁷

Brahms took up not only Schumann's theme, but also elements of Schumann's way of varying a theme. It was a principle of the older master that "the style of a set of variations

should be in keeping with that of the theme."³⁸ Hence Brahms' appropriation of Schumannesque rhythms and figuration in op. 9, and hence also, in later years, the baroque topics of the Handel Variations and the virtuosic display of the Paganini set.³⁹

Secondly, Brahms' op. 9 attaches great importance to pianism, in the manner of Schumann's *Études Symphoniques* with their alternating "variations" and "studies."⁴⁰ And thirdly, Schumann's "dependence upon bass and melody as starting points" and his free approach to phrase structure and harmonic progression⁴¹ are adopted by Brahms in this work, as the analytical remarks of Chapter Five will show.

Another leaf which Brahms took from Schumann's book (or from his album, as it were!) was the imaginary division of his personality into two composers, each of whom symbolically contributes specific short pieces to a larger cycle. Since the age of sixteen or seventeen, Brahms had identified strongly with the figure of Johannes Kreisler, himself a sort of alter ego of the writer E.T.A. Hoffmann. Schumann too identified somewhat with this character, "whose desire for inner truth [in art] was so strong that it could be understood by society only as madness,"⁴² and his *Kreisleriana*, op. 16, a work of "tortured soul-searching"⁴³ from 1838, pays him tribute.

Brahms used the pseudonym "Johannes Kreisler junior" along with his own initial B when signing several early works, including op. 1, op. 5, and the first version of op. 8. These works all show Brahms reaching for an unknown goal with an arrogance and a wild expressivity fully in keeping with the character of Kreisler. In his article "Brahms and E.T.A. Hoffmann," Siegfried Kross implies that in coming to "know and revere" Schumann's music, Brahms was helped to move beyond this "mere romantic enthusiasm"—as indeed Kreisler eventually did—towards "rational, conscious creation from the centre of his being."⁴⁴

Elaine Sisman explains that op. 9 represents a "refinement" of Brahms' earlier practice of ascribing his works to two people, in that here either Kreisler or Brahms, not both, are credited with individual variations. The similarity to the Florestan and Eusebius labels in the *Davidsbündlertänze*, she says, "surely cannot be coincidental."⁴⁵

But more than this, the separation of the names indicates that Brahms was dissociating himself from his alter ego. A new self-confidence is seen in Brahms' willingness to juxtapose his own genuine work with that of Kreisler, who represents an earlier developmental stage.⁴⁶

Interestingly, *Kreisleriana* was the first work of Schumann's that Brahms discovered, in September 1853. Malcolm MacDonald notes that it must have been "an epiphany of extraordinary force" for Brahms to realize that Schumann "had entered the Hoffmannesque imaginative world before him."⁴⁷ He further points out that Schumann's influence was largely one of "validating . . . [the] creative development he had already undergone on his own"⁴⁸—his interest in counterpoint, for example. Of the truly new insights Brahms gained from the older master, one of the most significant, MacDonald asserts, was the concept of a symbol system.

It seems clear that Brahms was quickly initiated into the Schumanns' musical symbolism. In a letter written in December 1854, Brahms mentions two passages of music, one by Schumann and one by Beethoven, that he says enable him to see Clara "as it were bodily."⁴⁹ Eric Sams discovered why these two passages should have such a strong effect: they both contain the notes E♭-D-C-B-C—the Clara cipher motive in C minor. Brahms used the same figure, in the same key, in the first movement of his op. 60 Piano Quartet, begun in 1855. The B-minor form, so favoured by Schumann, constitutes the basic material of the first version of Brahms' Piano Trio, op. 8 (1853-4). And Brahms' awareness of this Clara symbol no doubt fuelled his desire to write the variations which became his op. 9.

Students of these variations have frequently seen in them references to, quotations from, and paraphrases of, various pieces by Schumann. These discoveries began soon after the work was published, when the most obvious allusion (that of variation 9 to Schumann's op. 99 no. 5) was remarked by a reviewer, and commentators ever since have been keen to point out other resemblances. The following table compiles the most convincing references to be unearthed by sixteen different authors, together with some further references of my own unearthing.

Clara frequently said that Robert's music was her greatest comfort during his illness (see diary entries for March 6, 18, and 21, 1854, for example). By incorporating so many Schumann references into his variations, Brahms not only demonstrated his knowledge of his mentor's works, but also increased the consoling power of the piece for Clara.

To complete the picture of Brahms' op. 9 as the *ne plus ultra* of allusiveness, the table below includes lists of perceived references to Clara and to Beethoven. The most deliberate-seeming and potentially significant of these references are noted and explained more fully in the analysis which follows in Chapter Five.

TABLE 1

ALLUSIONS IN OP. 9

Brahms. var.	*Source: Schumann reference**	Source: Clara reference	Source: Beethoven reference
2	Tetzl: 5/5 (1st ed.) Crowder: 13/var. 1 ("hint") Sisman: "conflation" of 1st vars. of opp. 5, 13 Smith: 16/8		
3		Smith: 20/6 (chord in bar 169)	
5	Smith: 5/9 (1st ed.)		
6	Crowder: 26/4		Smith: 53/3 (ca. b. 350)
7	Dale: op. 16 ("elliptical style")		Sisman: 120/13
8	Floros: 6/7 (opening chords)	Neighbour: 20/6 (canon) 20/7 (opening chords)	
9	van Bruyck: 99/5		
10	Lacroix-Novaro: quartet, op. 41, no. 1 (Adagio)	Tetzl: op. 3	
11	Evans: op. 7 (ca. b. 113) Pascall op. 9 (V ⁷ opening) Neighbour: 9/3 <i>et al.</i> Musgrave: 10/1 Sisman: 42/6 Smith: 9/14, 16; 5/7 (1st ed.)		

Brahms. var.	*Source: Schumann reference**	Source: Clara reference	Source: Beethoven reference
12	Floros: 12/6	Smith: 20/2 (b. 64-67)	
13	Pascall: op. 7		
	Smith: 5/3rd var. (2nd ed.)		
14	Crowder: 9/12		
15	Evans: 21/7 (trio)		Sisman: 120/8
	Matthews: 54/1 (A b section)		
	Floros: 6/14		
16	Murdoch: 15/13		Sisman: 120/20
	Crowder: 5/1st var.		
	Kraus: 6/18		Leichtentritt: 131/4 (var. 5) Smith: 120/20

*Where two or more sources make mention of the same allusion, the one with the earlier date is listed. Full details about all the sources may be found in the Bibliography, but for convenience, the authors' names are given here, with dates of publication, in chronological order: van Bruyck (1857), Tetzl (1929), Murdoch (1933), Evans (1936), Lacroix-Novaro (1936), Dale (1954), Crowder (1966), Leichtentritt (1967), Matthews (1978), Floros (1980), Pascall (1983), Danuser (1984 —adds no new references), Neighbour (1984), Musgrave (1985), Kraus (1986), and Sisman (1990).

**References are given as opus/movement.

CHAPTER FIVE
DETAILED REMARKS ON THE BRAHMS VARIATIONS

Variation 1. Although Brahms' op. 9 contains some bold departures from the theme, the first variation retains the theme's phrasing, its general rhythmic makeup, and for the most part its melody as well, though not in the soprano: Brahms instead gives it to the lowest voice (where, incidentally, we find it again in the penultimate variation).¹

The harmonic alterations begin with the replacement of the opening tonic chord by a dominant, which creates the illusion that variation 1 is a continuation of the theme.² The goal of the first period is still A major, but the second period (bars 9-16) moves into territory avoided by the theme; namely C# major.

The melody of this middle section also dares to do what the theme did not—to propel itself higher than G#. The right hand chords of bars 9, 11, and 13 anticipate the melodic arrival points of the left hand a screaming two octaves higher (see ex. 30).

ex. 30

The musical score for Example 30 consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The music is marked "espressivo più f" and "cresc.". The score shows a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. There are annotations with circles and lines connecting notes between the two staves, indicating the two-octave leap mentioned in the text. The right hand has a series of chords that anticipate the melodic arrival points of the left hand.

The contrast with the reluctant and hard-won expansion of the theme in Clara's set could not be sharper, and reflects the contrast in the composers' personalities: Clara grave and care-laden, Brahms arrogant and passionate—as Clara herself described him, "fresh and vigorous."³ As well, this passage seems to encapsulate the way in which Brahms seeks to achieve a symbolic liberation of Schumann in these variations, by releasing Schumann's theme from the constraints which bind it.

In bars 18-20, a C[#]7 chord is used as an augmented sixth to modulate to the unexpected key of D major. These bars are rather unpianistic, due to the wide spacing of the lower voices; the dotted rhythm unfortunately suffers as a result of the necessity of arpeggiating the left hand chords. Strangely, Brahms makes a concession to pianistic limitations in bars 19 and 20, moving the bass D up an octave. It is unclear why the rest of the bass line could not have been moved up, unless Brahms intended it to counterbalance the treble extremes of the previous bars. After the excursion to D major, the music returns quickly to the tonic via a diminished chord.

Variation 2. Oliver Neighbour states quite categorically that "the first eight variations contain no [specific] references to Schumann."⁴ But as can be seen from table 1, at least four people disagree with this assessment, based on variation 2 alone. In fact, of all the variations in the set, this is one of the most allusive. The obsessive repetition of a dotted rhythm is one of Schumann's best known trademarks, and the chains of syncopations, two-against-three, and "slant harmony" (non-alignment of bass and upper voices)⁵ are also highly typical of Schumann.

This variation is suddenly busier, and abandons the phrasing of the theme. The bass, and consequently the harmony, of the theme are preserved, and traces of its melody remain

(compare bars 3 and 4 with bars 9-12 of the theme); however, everything is compressed, one phrase of the theme equalling one bar of the variation. In order to compensate for this contraction, the whole thing is repeated.

Just as the "capsized" melody of variation 1 has a parallel in the fifteenth variation, so the use of the intact thematic bass line relates variation 2 to variation 16.

Variation 3 interrupts variation 2, but makes variation 2 seem like an interruption itself, in retrospect, by returning to the tempo and syntax of variation 1. Variations 1 and 3 are in fact almost twins: both are preoccupied with the theme's melody, which is given in both of them to the left hand (although in variation 3 the right hand voices sometimes cross below it). And the end of the middle section in the two variations is practically identical (see ex. 31).

ex. 31

The image shows two handwritten musical staves, labeled 'a) var. 1' and 'b) var. 3', each with a 'dim.' marking. The notation is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The left hand in both variations plays a melody that is a compressed version of the theme. The right hand provides accompaniment. In variation 3, the right hand voices sometimes cross below the left hand. The two variations end with a similar phrase.

In variation 3, the harmonic detour is to F minor and A major instead of D major.

The way Brahms preserves the arch shape of the theme is interesting. The theme, as noted in Chapter Two, achieves this symmetry harmonically (see page 15); variation 3 does so texturally, by reintroducing, at bars 19 and 20, the accompaniment figure which ended the first period (bars 7-8).

Variation 4 relates back to variation 2. Again there is the contrast of a legato, espressivo part on top, with *leggiero* movement below; here, however, the legato element is a single line, and the lighter supporting element is chordal (the reverse of variation 2).

The bass of variation 4 reduces to a simple shape, shown in example 32:

ex. 32

bars: 1 7 17 21

(The whole notes represent pedal tones.) As Elaine Sisman points out, this shape is a retrogradation of the "essential melodic outline of the theme."⁶ Meanwhile, the *melody* of the variation seems to be informed by the *bass* of the theme in a way which both complements the above relationship and foreshadows variation 10 (see ex. 33).

ex. 33

a. theme

b. var. 4

c. var. 10

The melodic idea shown in example 33b is carried sequentially through the first two phrases. Then, in bar 9, Brahms re-orders the melody notes of the theme (ex. 34),



yielding example 35, which is the basis for the middle section.



After two variations in which the melodic intervals of the middle section are not expanded, the suppressed climax is released again here, in bar 13, with a *dolce* leap of a ninth to a high B.

The rhythm of the accompaniment is unusual—a premonition of op. 119 no. 2? Tetzl notes the Hungarian end-form (ex. 36)



in the rhythm of the melody.

Number 4 is the first signed variation; in the autograph, the double bar at the end is extended into a B for Brahms. In some ways, it is also the first real departure from the theme, and as such it may symbolize Brahms' assertion of his own personality.⁷

Variation 5 and *variation 6* are signed by "Kreisler" in the autograph, and it is not surprising therefore that they are the first variations to take liberties with the proportions of the theme, extending themselves in a fantasy-like manner. *Variation 5* takes the pairs of repeated notes from the accompaniment of *variation 4* and applies them to the melody of the theme to create a forceful display piece. The fanfare octaves and general energetic character

recall the ninth of Schumann's *Impromptus*. The unexpected notes of bars 13 and 15 and the choked pause of bars 29-31 also have parallels in the Schumann (see ex. 37).

ex. 37 Schumann op. 5 no. 9 (1st ed.)

It is irresistible to see Brahms' bars 12-15 as foreshadowing a device used by Messiaen in the *Quartet for the End of Time*. Messiaen describes his procedure as "change of register": "the low notes of the theme pass to the extreme treble, the treble to the extremely low in abrupt leaps."⁸ In the *Quartet*, the figure

ex. 38

becomes

ex. 39

Brahms does exactly the same thing, though less strictly, when the passage

ex. 40

is transformed into example 41 (following page).

ex. 41

bars 12-15

Variation 6. In variation 6, Brahms combines the melody of the theme with the bass line from Schumann's *Impromptus* (see ex. 42),

ex. 42

though this is hidden within a very animated texture (the busiest so far) involving arpeggio figuration in the right hand and numerous leaps of a fourth in the bass. Bars 9-13 are Beethovenian in texture, and are especially close to a passage in the finale of the "Waldstein" Sonata (see ex. 43).

ex. 43

Perhaps it is the association with the "Waldstein" that propels the music at this point towards the remote key of C major. After three bars of intense G^7 , the bass pounds out a low C octave, but the chord of D-B-F above it refuses to go away. It repels itself in the middle

of bar 14 as D-B-E# and thereby foils the harmonic plans of the bass for the time being: the C resolves to a C# and the opening material returns. However, a whirlwind harmonic progression, provoked by a series of leaping fourths in the bass (see ex. 44), leads us from F# minor through C# minor, A, D, D⁷ and G to C major at bar 20.

ex. 44

The extended four-bar answering phrase is represented by the addition of one extra chord with a fermata over it. The only precedent for this kind of distillation is Beethoven, in his Diabelli Variations.

The clever way in which Brahms reinterprets the middle section in this variation is worth noting. Instead of expanding upwards to higher and higher notes, he returns three times to an E; but each time, the E is approached from a lower pitch—first a C, then a B, and finally a B \flat —so that, while the intervals still expand, the passage avoids the kind of melodic climax of other variations, which would seem overwrought in the context of this understated little piece.

Michael Musgrave finds this variation "radical," not only in its extreme compression, but in the extent of its harmonic alteration and use of changing metres. It also reverses the metrical organization of the theme—or at least exploits the metrical ambiguity of the theme (see ex. 47).

The image contains two musical examples, labeled 'ex. 47'. Each example consists of two staves of music in G major (one sharp). The top staff is labeled 'theme' and the bottom staff is labeled 'var. 7'. In the left example, the theme is in 2/4 time and Variation 7 is in 3/4 time. In the right example, the theme is in 3/4 time and Variation 7 is in 2/4 time. A wavy vertical line separates the two examples. Arrows point from the notes in the theme staves to the corresponding notes in the variation staves, illustrating the metrical ambiguity.

Variation 8. To quote Craig Cummings, "Variation 8 functions as both a return after the developments of the previous variations and a restatement from which the ensuing variations are generated."⁹ Neighbour also finds number 8 a point of demarcation; specifically, he says that it marks the end of the first, Clara-oriented half of the variations. Remarking that Brahms' use of canon here derives from Clara's variation 6, and that his arpeggiated opening chords derive from Clara's variation 7, Neighbour surmises that Brahms'

intention was to match Clara's "eight variations with eight of his own," and that he then "turns to her husband in variation 9" (the parody of Schumann's second Albumblatt).¹⁰

However, this view is somewhat problematic; first, because Clara's finale is not an eighth variation. Furthermore, the argument is based on Neighbour's belief that there are no special allusions to Robert in the first eight of Brahms' variations, and it ignores the fact that the most obvious allusion to Clara is yet to come, in variation 10.

The similarity which Neighbour spots between the openings of this variation and Clara's seventh is clear enough (see ex. 48), but this does not, as he suggests, exclude the possibility of a simultaneous allusion to no. 7 of Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze* (ex. 49).

ex. 48

a. Brahms

b. Clara

ex. 49

And neither of these references diminishes the fact that the opening chords of Brahms' variation 8 are the same as the opening chords of his *own* variation 7 (ex. 50).

ex. 50

8

Variations 7 and 8 are further connected by the same tempo marking, and more significantly, by the fact that the reversal of metrical weight which Brahms employed at the

level of the bar in the terse variation 7 is applied to the phrase in variation 8 (though this does not become clear until the entry of the bass in bar 5) (see ex. 51).

ex. 51

Handwritten musical score for ex. 51, showing two systems of piano music in D major, 2/4 time. The first system has six bars with a treble and bass staff. The second system has three bars, ending with "etc.". Chord symbols are written below the bass staff: $f\#:$ $i_{6/4}$ V i $i_{6/4}$ V in the first system, and i $A: I_{6/4}$ I in the second system.

Like variation 5, variation 8 ends with a *tièrce de Picardie*. The link between the two cadences is made more explicit by the use of basically the same chordal spacing (see ex. 52).

ex. 52

Handwritten musical score for ex. 52, showing two systems of piano music in D major, 2/4 time. The first system is labeled "Var. 5" and the second "Var. 8". Both systems show the same chordal spacing in the bass staff: a triad of D, F#, A in the bass, with a D in the treble.

Variation 9 can best be described as a paraphrase of Schumann's op. 99 no. 5, reworked so as to resemble his op. 99 no. 4. Written in 1838, no. 5 has a chimerical quality which was

originally reflected in the title "Fata Morgana." It is reproduced in full in Plate I (following pages). The critic Karl van Bruyck detected its similarity to Brahms' ninth variation in a review of op. 9 in the *Wiener Zeitung* of September 25, 1857, but assumed that the resemblance was unintentional. As Sisman recounts, Brahms retorted that "on the contrary, both intention and connection are utterly self-evident," especially since the piece alluded to "follows the F# minor theme directly in the original collection."¹¹

van Bruyck's error can be forgiven, because of the remarkable way the paraphrase is made to fit in with its surroundings, as if it grew naturally there, instead of being transplanted. Its ubiquitous 6/4 chords (which begin every bar except bars 11-14) have been prepared by the prominent second inversion chords of variation 8 (bars 5, 7, 9, *et al.*). The leaping fourths in the bass recall variation 6. And Brahms uses Schumann's metrically ambiguous rhythm¹² to create an ideal transition between the weak-strong metrical organization of variations 7 and 8 and the clear strong-weak organization which returns in variation 10.

It is interesting to speculate as to why Brahms chose to paraphrase this piece. Perhaps he noticed certain similarities between its basic harmonic progressions and those of his theme: in both pieces the middle section moves from mediant to dominant, and the ends of both pieces employ the subdominant. Another attraction of the second Albumblatt might have been that its melody (such as it is) seems to be a stuttering Clara-motive that never resolves (D-C#-B-A#-).

Schumann's original and Brahms' paraphrase taken together provide a fascinating microcosm of the stylistic differences between the two composers. Schumann's piece is more symmetrical and more regular in its phrasing (see ex. 53).

ex. 53

Brahms

Schumann

4 + 4 + 6 + 7

4 + 4 + 4 + 4 | 4 + 4 + 6 + 6

PLATE I

Schumann op. 99 no. 5 (Albumblatt no. 2)

Albumblätter N^o 2

(Komponiert 1838)

Schnell

5

pp

cresc.

Ped. simile

cresc.

PLATE I continued

The musical score consists of six systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The notation includes various musical elements:

- System 1:** Treble staff has three measures with accents (^) and slurs. Bass staff has notes with fingerings 2 and 1.
- System 2:** Treble staff has three measures with accents (^) and slurs. A *cresc.* marking is present. Bass staff has notes with slurs.
- System 3:** Treble staff has three measures with accents (^) and slurs. Bass staff has notes with slurs.
- System 4:** Treble staff has three measures with accents (^) and slurs. *sf* (sforzando) markings are present. Bass staff has notes with slurs and asterisks (*).
- System 5:** Treble staff has three measures with accents (^) and slurs. *sf* markings are present. Bass staff has notes with slurs and asterisks (*).
- System 6:** Treble staff has three measures with accents (^) and slurs. *p* (piano) and *dimin.* (diminuendo) markings are present. Bass staff has notes with slurs and asterisks (*).

It is longer, yet less varied than the Brahms: while Brahms is already inverting the two-note melodic motive in the fourth bar, Schumann obsessively repeats the motive, mostly at the same pitch, for twenty-six consecutive bars (except that bars 11 and 23 have a rest inserted between the notes). After so much repetition, Schumann's ending relies on contrast for closure, while Brahms' ending is motivically more organic.

In both pieces, a quasi-independent voice splits off from the figuration in the middle section. Schumann's coda resolves this added voice into the lower register, as befits the self-contained nature of the piece. But Brahms leaves his G (bar 14) hanging—indeed, he carries it up an octave more in the diminished flurry of bars 19-20, and leaves that unresolved as well.

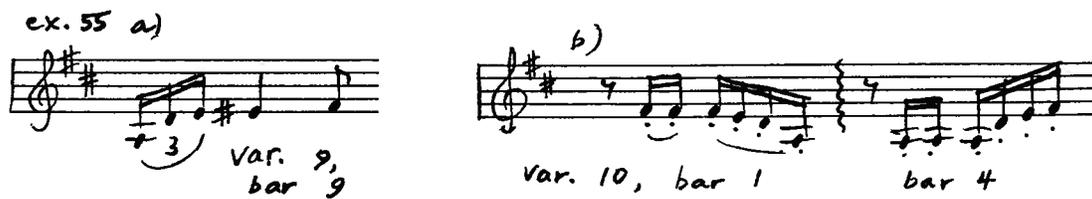
Schumann's comment on this variation in his letter to Brahms was, "How beautiful in form!" That was in fact the only comment he could in modesty make, since the *content* of the piece was his own! The form, as defined by harmony and motivic identity, is AABA', where A moves from i to III, B moves from III to V, and A' moves from i through iv back to i. The more patchwork-like form of Schumann's piece, for comparison, is AABAA'B'A" coda (A: i-V, B: III⁶-V, coda: iv-i).

Variation 10, as mentioned above, restores the metre of the theme unambiguously and immediately in the first two bars, with the higher notes of the melody and the lower notes of the bass on the downbeats (see ex. 54).

ex. 54

The musical notation for example 54 consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a melodic line starting on G4, moving down stepwise to B3. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It contains a bass line starting on G2, moving up stepwise to B3. A large curly brace on the left side groups both staves together, with the label 'ex. 54' written to its left.

The melody is, of course, a transformation of the bass of the theme, and the bass is that same melody inverted. But in its immediate context, the descending fourth with which the melody begins has more to do with the ostinato falling fourths of the bass in variation 9. The 6/4 chords with which variation 9 was preoccupied also turn up, in an inner voice in bars 1, 4 and 5 (see ex. 55).



Harmonizing with this in bar 1 is the incipit of the theme, transposed to D major and in diminution (ex. 56).



As well, the interpolated repetition (although altered) of the first section is a point of similarity with variation 9.

As noted earlier, the melodic use of the theme's bass line was foreshadowed by variation 4. The connection between these two variations is reinforced by the semi-staccato sixteenth-note accompaniment which they share, and the triplet sixteenths which are a feature of the melodic lines in both.

This triplet rhythm takes over in bar 9 and underlies the altered repetition of the first period, in which the bass line temporarily abandons its mirroring of the soprano and instead an inverted form of the melody is given to the alto, replying to the soprano at one bar's distance.¹³

The crossing of the canonic voices in bars 11-12 is seen by Eugen Tetzl as having symbolic significance.¹⁴ What that significance might be he does not specify, but if the two canonic voices represent two people, their turning towards each other and intersecting could symbolize physical contact—an embrace or a kiss, perhaps. Without suggesting that Brahms necessarily set out to achieve such a depiction, it does seem like an appropriate interpretation, given the character and context of the piece, and the romantic inscription on the manuscript.

The middle section (bars 17-24) returns to the simultaneous inversion of the melody in the bass, employing some exquisite dissonances and emotive suspensions. The last eight bars include the allusion to Clara's *Romance varié*. But unlike the appearance of this fragment in Clara's op. 20, its use here is truly hidden, and has much more the nature of a private message (despite Brahms' discreet accent marks). It is given no structural prominence as it is in Clara's finale: the first note even dovetails with the left hand accompaniment figure. It creates no harmonic surprises as in Clara's composition. The canon too distracts one from the quotation.

If one were analyzing this variation closely, in ignorance of the quotation, one would certainly query this inner voice. But the first three notes could be justified as another manifestation of the 6/4 chord which is outlined so often elsewhere. The next three notes could be considered an imitative reflection of the soprano (see ex. 57),



and the remaining notes of the intrusion (two filled-in tritones) are clearly related to the primary melodic material of the variation (note especially bars 25-26: see ex. 58).

which part of *Carnaval* Brahms might have had in mind, because as Neighbour says, "In referring to one piece [he] refers to all."¹⁷ There are certain parallels with "Arlequin," more still with "Lettres dansantes," which like variation 11 is "based almost entirely on a dominant pedal that never resolves;"¹⁸ rhythmically it is reminiscent of "Réconnaissance" and melodically of the "Valse allemande" (bars 9-15).

The piece derives much of its interest from its copious use of the neighbour-notes—for example, the G#-A of bars 2-3, the B-C of bars 5-6, and the teasing alternation of D and D# with E in bars 10-12. The right hand inner voice of bars 4-8 employs both upper and lower neighbours of F# (see ex. 59).



The left-hand offbeat chords begin by referring to the melody of variation 10 (ex. 60),



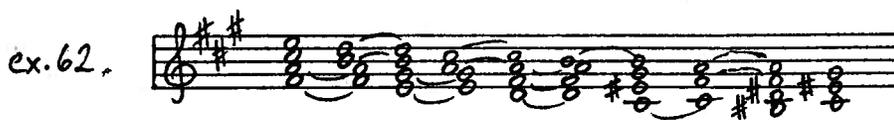
and then engage in a playful alternation of sharp and natural lower neighbours to the A (ex. 61).



Even the bass line occasionally leaves off reiterating Ds to contribute to the chromaticism (bars 10-13). And, as Craig Cummings points out, the entire variation is really just the harmonization of a prolonged neighbour-note, C—harmonized, I would add, by a pedal D, those two notes being upper and lower neighbours respectively to the C# on which they duly converge at the end of the variation.

Variation 12, as full of the atmosphere of *commedia dell'arte* as anything in *Carnaval*, returns to the key and basic structure of the theme. Rather than emulating the melodic lines of the theme, however, the variation encapsulates its main motive in numerous descending leaps of a fifth. In the middle section, the theme's expanding repetitions are transformed for the first time into a harmonic sequence (a procedure used again in variation 14).

The piece manages to work itself around to a dominant seventh chord on D (b. 17)—a familiar enough sonority from the previous variation—before a brilliant coda, marked "molto crescendo e stringendo," in which the thematic descending fifth is pointillistically articulated over a throbbing C# pedal and a pungent series of suspensions (ex. 62).



The complex rhythm and the stringendo effect of this coda have a close parallel in another coda by Brahms: that of op. 76 no. 5.

Variation 13, like variation 11, explores chromatic neighbours. It employs a harmonic and phrase structure which is strikingly similar to that of variation 9 (see ex. 63).

ex. 63	A	A	B	A'
	4 bars	4 bars	9 bars	7 bars
	i-III	i-III	III-II	i-iv-i

The figuration is that of the Schumann *Toccata*, but the gestures are unmistakably those of the theme: the vascillation around C# followed by a descent; the same repeated; then the contrary-motion expansions of the outer voices and another descent (from a higher point); and the final section like the beginning, but with a few subtle alterations.

Variation 14. Here again Brahms uses canon to create a variation of great expressive beauty. This is the last variation in F# minor, and it harks back to the yearning quality of earlier variations, particularly 1, 3, and 7. The resemblance to "Chopin" from Schumann's *Carnaval* has often been remarked. The bass line of bars 13-22 (see ex. 64)



is an inversion of the Clara motive from the theme (C#-B-A-G#-A).

Variation 15. The tonic major steals in at the beginning of variation 15 in 6/4 position with the third on top, which is touchingly reminiscent of the arrival of F# major in Clara's finale (see ex. 27b). However, Brahms chooses to notate variation 15 in Gb major, and one has to wonder why. Of course the reason could be simply that the III⁷ chord and the chromatic inflections thereof around the twelfth and thirteenth bars are too complicated-looking in F#, but Brahms does not worry about such things in variation 16, which has A#-diminished, E#⁷ and A#-minor chords in abundance. The flat signature does make the

reference to number 14 of the *Davidsbündlertänze* (which is in E♭) more obvious. But could there be a symbolic significance in the six flats?

According to Hugh Macdonald, "For a mid-nineteenth-century composer to adopt [the key of G♭] was to make a statement about the nature of the music."¹⁹ G♭ carried a "sense of remoteness" which F♯ lacked because of its kinship with F♯ minor, "a common enough key in classical parlance."²⁰ For Macdonald, the *locus classicus* for the use of G♭ is the celebrated love scene in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, where it conveys not only the ecstasy of love, but also "a sense of stasis" and of suspended time.²¹

Brahms' fifteenth variation certainly has some of these same characteristics. The piece seems to be harmonically suspended, never reaching a point of repose until the last bar. The slow tempo and the augmentation of the repeated notes of the melody do give the piece a certain static quality. Remoteness is perhaps conveyed by the widely separated canonic voices, spanned by a fragile thread of arpeggios.

But the primary *affekt* of this penultimate variation is surely tenderness and consolation. The accompaniment figuration suggests the stroking of a gentle hand or perhaps the quiet lapping of waves on a beach. There is something soothing too in the bass's reassuring canonic "answer" to the soprano's "questioning." It seems likely that the choice of key had something to do with this desire to soothe. At a practical level, the key signature of six sharps has a prickly appearance which makes it subconsciously unsuitable for a piece which is intended to comfort.

Variation 16. The long-awaited cadence in bar 26 of variation 15—postponed even further by a *molto ritenuto*—could be the end of the entire piece, in terms of the emotional resolution attained by this variation; but out of that cadence emerges a faint yet deliberate

voice. At the same time, the key changes to F# major. Is this just so that Brahms can end the work in the nominally correct key, or is it a hint to the performer that what follows is quite different in import from the last variation?

Commentators have had very disparate views of the emotional significance of this final variation. Schumann himself remarked that the piece ended "beautifully and blessedly."²² Detlef Kraus detects in the "gentle sighs" of the right hand the same spirit of "radiant bliss" which is present at the conclusion of the *Davidsbündlertänze*.²³ For Tetzl, the piece is illusive, taciturn, and shy—a "secret exchange of souls."²⁴ Yves Lacroix-Novaro hears "meditative and religious" overtones.²⁵ For Denis Matthews, the variation "resolves [the] yearnings" of the theme;²⁶ and to Louis Crowder it is "deeply moving and somehow comforting."²⁷ Yet Hugo Leichtentritt calls variation 16 a "dissolution"—a "pale, inanimate shadow of the theme;"²⁸ and Malcolm MacDonald notes the poignant fragmentation and isolation of the melodic material, which, he says, convey "a sense of infinite regret."²⁹ It is probably not necessary to decide among these interpretations. Remembering that Brahms is in F# major, the key of the most "complicated feelings," we can accept that all of these conflicting meanings may be present simultaneously. In the manuscript this variation is signed with a B for Brahms, and it bears his signature figuratively too, in its fundamental ambiguity.

One aspect of the meaning of variation 16 is accessible only to people with special knowledge of Schumann's piano music. At the time these variations were written, the two people in the world who best knew Schumann's piano music and for whom it had the most resonance were probably Clara Schumann, the dedicatee, and Brahms, the composer. The special insight into this last variation that those two people would thus have shared would be a unique bond between them.

Brahms clearly intended, and Clara would certainly have recognized, that the faint yet deliberate voice which speaks in this variation is none other than Schumann's, in a double allusion to the first variation of the *Impromptus*, op. 5, and to the last of the *Kinderscenen*, op. 15.³⁰ (These are reproduced in Plate II on the following page.)

The presence of the *Impromptus* has been felt throughout these variations. Brahms must have been specially attracted to their combination of youthful romance and compositional discipline. The *Kinderscenen*, composed in 1838, are suffused with Schumann's nostalgia for childhood. Brahms' allusion to that work must have been filled with irony in 1854 in light of the fact that Schumann, then 44, was in a sense experiencing his "second childhood." The movement to which Brahms refers is "a typical Schumannesque epilogue, of the kind he so often favoured in his songs and song-cycles, fading away into characteristic distance and silence."³¹ It is entitled "The Poet Speaks."

It is as though Brahms wanted merely to be a channel, in this final variation, for the creative voice of his friend—the voice now rapidly fading away into silence forever. Accordingly, Brahms strips away all of his decoration and invention, and allows Schumann, who had the first word in this work, to have the last word as well.

PLATE II

Schumann: Kinderscenen, op. 15 no. 13, "The Poet Speaks," bars 13-end.

a tempo

p

Ped. come prima

This system shows the first two staves of the piece. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over the first four measures. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The dynamic is piano (*p*). The instruction *a tempo* is written above the first staff. The instruction *Ped. come prima* is written below the first staff.

pp ritardando

pp *ritardando*

pp

Call

This system shows the final two staves of the piece. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over the first four measures. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The dynamic is pianissimo (*pp*) and the instruction *ritardando* is written above the first staff. The instruction *pp* is written below the first staff. The instruction *Call* is written below the second staff.

Schumann: Impromptus on a Theme by Clara Wieck, op. 5,
1st Variation.

2

p

poco a poco perdendosi

This system shows the first two staves of the piece. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur over the first four measures. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The dynamic is piano (*p*). The instruction *poco a poco perdendosi* is written above the first staff.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing pages have made use of various approaches to the works under consideration: elements of old-fashioned romantic interpretation are combined with a more sophisticated reading of underlying symbolism derived from semiotics and psychoanalysis; motivic, harmonic, rhythmic, and structural analysis is juxtaposed with reception history.

Both Clara Schumann's op. 20 and Brahms' op. 9 are beautiful works which can be appreciated without any specialized knowledge. But for those who wish to seek further, there are hidden messages and symbolism just under the surface. We have seen how elements of the Brahms set, such as its Schumann allusions, use of canon, and the alternation of "strict" and "fantastic" variations, can be traced to the specific circumstances under which the work was written. We have also seen how the intense chromaticism and the rhythmic accelerando of Clara's set, the inclusion of a quotation, and her reluctance to expand the intervals of the theme, can be seen as reflecting aspects of her personality and circumstances.

Clara's work, while highly pianistic and immediate in its emotional impact, does not stand up to the same kind of analytical scrutiny as Brahms' op. 9 with its extraordinary intellectual penetration of the theme. But both pieces deserve to be played more often: Clara's for its sheer sensuous beauty, Brahms' for its compositional daring, characteristic ambiguity, and a certain appealing crudeness which is absent from more mature works.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Ludwig Finscher, "Zwischen absoluter und Programmusik': zur Interpretation der deutschen romantischen Symphonie," in *Über Symphonien: Festschrift Walter Wiora*, ed. Christian-Hellmut Mahling (Tutzing: Schneider, 1979): 108; trans. in Anthony Newcomb, "Once More 'Between Absolute and Program Music': Schumann's Second Symphony," *19th-Century Music* 7/3 (April 1984): 248.
2. K. Robert Schwarz, "Composers' Closets Open for All to See," *New York Times*, June 19, 1994, H24.

CHAPTER ONE: SCHUMANN AND MUSICAL MEANING

1. Edward A. Lippman, "Theory and Practice in Schumann's Aesthetics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 17 (1964): 310-45.
2. Robert Schumann, "Symphonie von Hector Berlioz," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 1835; trans. Fanny Raymond Ritter in *Music and Musicians* (London: W. Reeves, 1877), 250.
3. Lippman, 336.
4. Leon B. Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 120.
5. Lippman, 331.
6. *Ibid.*, 338.
7. Plantinga, 117.
8. E.T.A. Hoffmann, quoted in Paul Moos, *Die Philosophie der Musik* (Berlin: Schuster und Loeffler, 1992), 123.
9. E.T.A. Hoffmann, quoted in Thomas Alan Brown, *The Aesthetics of Robert Schumann* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1968), 19.
10. René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 2: 101.

11. Lippman, 336.
12. Letter to Clara Wieck, March 1838; trans. in May Herbert, *Early Letters of Robert Schumann* (London: Bell and Sons, 1888), 266.
13. Lippman, 332.
14. Schumann in *NZfM* 1 (1834): 10; trans. in Plantinga, 121.
15. Letter to Clara Wieck, April 13, 1838; trans. in Herbert, 270.
16. *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker von Robert Schumann*, 5th ed., rev. Martin Kreisig (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1914), 2: 207; trans. in Lippman, 331.
17. Lippman, 321, 329.
18. *Ibid.*, 340.
19. Letter to Clara Wieck, February 6, 1838; trans. by Hannah Bryant in Karl Storck (ed.), *The Letters of Robert Schumann* (New York: Dutton and Co., 1907), 181.
20. Letter to Clara Wieck, April 13, 1838; trans. in Herbert, 268.
21. Letter to Clara Wieck, April 22, 1839; trans. in Herbert, 290.
22. Letter to Clara Wieck, October 9, 1837; trans. in Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life, from Diaries and Letters*, trans. and abridged Grace E. Hadow (London: Macmillan, 1913; reprint, New York: Vienna House, 1972), 1: 112.
23. Eric Sams, "The Tonal Analogue in Schumann's Music," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 96 (1969-70): 113.
24. Roger Fiske, "A Schumann Mystery," *Musical Times* 105 (August 1964): 576.
25. Nicholas Temperley, letter to the editor, *Musical Times* 105 (October 1964): 744.
26. Schumann's own combination of the two motives can be seen in bars 77-80 of op. 6 no. 3.
27. Another example of this kind of transformed quotation occurs in Schumann's F#-minor sonata, where a motive from Clara's "Ballet des Revenants" is disguised by a change of clef. (Shades of the Renaissance puzzle canon!) See Yonty Solomon, "Solo Piano Music (I): The Sonatas and Fantasies," in *Robert Schumann: The Man and his Music*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), 46-47.
28. Joan Chissell, *Schumann Piano Music*, BBC Music Guides (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), 13. See also Gregory Harwood, "Robert Schumann's Sonata in F-sharp Minor: A Study of Creative Process and Romantic Inspiration," *Current Musicology* 29 (1980): 21. Unfortunately, both of these authors muddy the

motivic waters by failing to distinguish between four-note and five-note descending patterns and by equating a descending skip of a fifth with a filled-in interval of a fifth. Harwood, in addition, incorrectly imputes the cryptographic meaning of the motive E-B-E (in German E-H-E—"marriage") to open fifths on any pitches.

29. Eric Sams, "Did Schumann Use Ciphers?" *MT* 106 (August 1965): 584-91; "The Schumann Ciphers," *MT* 107 (May 1966): 392-400; "The Schumann Ciphers: A Coda," *MT* 107 (December 1966): 1050-51; *The Songs of Robert Schumann* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1969), 21-26; "The Tonal Analogue in Schumann's Music," *PRMA* 96 (1969-70): 103-17; the latter somewhat expanded as "Schumann and the Tonal Analogue" in Walker (ed.), *Robert Schumann*, 390-405.
30. Although I find the *Musical Times* articles thoroughly convincing, I am dubious about some of the assertions on pages 21-26 of Sams' book, *The Songs of Robert Schumann*. By the time he wrote his book, Sams had expanded the repertoire of Clara themes, without apparent justification, to include a filled-in tritone, a rising minor scale of five notes, and two four-note figures. It is of course possible to use altered forms of a Clara theme developmentally, after it has been presented in its normal form, but there would seem to be no point in calling all these vaguely related versions "Clara-themes." Sams implies in his book that all the forms he puts forward are related by belonging to a fragment of a minor scale (the "mine of themes meaning Clara"), but in fact he accepts variants of many of the themes with their pitches inflected so that they don't belong to a minor scale at all. (Sams never published his promised book on Schumann's ciphers—one wonders if the project got out of hand!)
31. Some of his reviews are even cast in the form of dance suites or ball programmes. Sams, "Tonal Analogue," 108.
32. Sams, "Tonal Analogue," 103.
33. Brown, 169.
34. Lippman, 319.
35. Sams, "Tonal Analogue," 108.
36. Jean Paul, *Politische Fastenpredigten* (Tübingen, 1817), quoted in Sams, "Tonal Analogue," 109. One thinks immediately of the "Sphinxes" in *Carnaval*.
37. Robert Schumann, "Symphonien für Orchester," *NZfM*, 1843; trans. in Ritter, 60.
38. The "G" being greeted in op. 68 no. 41 is the Danish musician Nils Gade. In *Carnaval*, the title of number 10 and the "Sphinxes" notated between numbers 8 and 9 acknowledge the letters used but not their significance: Asch is the name of a little Bohemian town where Ernestine von Fricken lived, and the same four letters are the musical letters in Schumann's name.
39. Sams, "Did Schumann," 589.

40. The *Intermezzi*, op. 4, were dedicated to Kalliwoda, whose nine-letter name yields only four different pitches in this "pre-Clara" cipher set to a scale of A—namely D, C#, A, and G#. These four notes are repeated twice, *fortissimo*, at the outset of the first Intermezzo, which then goes off on quite a different tack.
The op. 7 *Toccata* was dedicated to Ludwig Schunke, with whom Schumann was briefly infatuated. The name Ludiwig in pre-Clara cipher yields, in order, F-G-F-B-C-B, and it is not difficult to imagine the first-theme figuration of the Toccata arising from Schumann's experimentation with those notes. "Schunke," enciphered in the key of the second theme, yields the incipit of that theme: B-G-E-D.
41. In one sense, Schumann's alteration of the alphabetical order of the grid increased the arbitrariness of an already arbitrary system. On the other hand, there is, after all, no intrinsic reason for the order of the alphabet, and by rearranging its letters, Schumann personalized the whole cipher system, which no doubt enhanced its authority for him.
42. Sams, "Tonal Analogue," 113-14.
43. Sams, "Did Schumann," 585. Sams had evidently modified this view by 1969 when he wrote that Schumann's cryptography was "typically Romantic" and that Romantic art aimed to deal with "the brain as well as the heart" (*Songs of Robert Schumann*, 26).
44. Lippman, 311.
45. Fiske, 575.
46. Sams, "Did Schumann," 586.
47. Sams, "The Schumann Ciphers," 393.
48. Chissell, *Schumann Piano Music*, 8.
49. Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 200, 232.
50. Malcolm MacDonald, *Brahms*, Master Musicians Series, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: J.M. Dent, 1990), 33.
51. Anthony Newcomb, "Once More 'Between Absolute and Program Music': Schumann's Second Symphony," *19th-Century Music* 7/3 (April 1984): 233-50.
52. Newcomb, 240.
53. *Ibid.*, 247.
54. Peter Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 112.

CHAPTER TWO: SCHUMANN'S OP. 99 NO. 4

1. Chissell, *Schumann Piano Music*, 69.
2. Kathleen Dale, "The Piano Music," in *Schumann: A Symposium*, ed. Gerald Abraham (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 67.
3. Florence May, in *The Life of Johannes Brahms* (London: William Reeves, n.d.), 1: 166, states cryptically that Schumann's first Albumblatt "refers to" his earlier op. 5. But she incorrectly calls the Albumblatt "op. 99 no. 1," supplies a musical example which contains a mistake, and then gives an erroneous title for op. 5, calling it *Variations on a Theme by Clara Wieck*—all of which casts doubt on her assertion. Malcolm MacDonald's more recent Brahms biography, referred to above, devotes a muddled footnote (p. 83) to the connection between these two works, saying that the bass line of op. 5 "closely resembles the *Albumblatt*."
4. Denis Matthews, *Brahms Piano Music*, BBC Music Guides (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1978), 26.
5. Plantinga, 194.
6. *Ibid.*, 259, 152, 148.
7. Schumann in *NZfM* 4 (1836): 135; trans. in Plantinga, 261.
8. Letter from Clara of December 3, 1839, and Schumann's reply of December 8; trans. in Nicholas Marston, *Schumann Fantasie, op. 17*, Cambridge Music Handbooks, ed. Julian Rushton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35.
9. There is no record of her studying or performing the work until 1854 (Litzmann *Artist's Life*, 2: 447). This was around the time when Clara and Brahms were writing their variations, so if the connection was ever made it was probably then.
10. Diagram based partly on Craig Cummings, "Large-scale Coherence in Selected Nineteenth-Century Piano Variations" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1991), 180.
11. Joan Chissell, *Clara Schumann: A Dedicated Spirit* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), 117.
12. Chissell, *Schumann Piano Music*, 69.
13. Indeed, one interpreter at least has made this inference. Yves Lacroix-Novaro in his article "De Schumann à Brahms," *La Revue Musicale* 17/163 (February 1936), p. 90, calls the piece a "marche funèbre."

CHAPTER THREE: CLARA SCHUMANN'S OP. 20

1. Diary entry for May 29, 1853, trans. in Litzmann *Artist's Life*, 2: 36.
2. Anna M. Burton, "A Psychoanalyst's View of Clara Schumann," in *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Music*, ed. Stuart Feder, Richard L. Karmel, and George H. Pollock (Madison, Conn.: International Universities Press, 1990), 109.
3. Letter of March 4, 1838; trans. in Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 36.
4. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 1: 259.
5. Litzmann, *Künstlerleben*, 2: 86; trans. in Ostwald *Inner Voices*, 118.
6. Pamela Susskind, "Clara Wieck Schumann as Pianist and Composer: A Study of her Life and Works" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1977), 213.
7. Chissell, *Clara Schumann*, 118.
8. *Ibid.*, 117.
9. *Letters from and to Joseph Joachim*, sel. and trans. Nora Bickley (London: Macmillan, 1914; reprint, New York: Vienna House, 1972), 87.
10. Anna M. Burton, "Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck — A Creative Partnership," in *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, 445.
11. Burton, "Psychoanalysts's View," 102-3.
12. See for example Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 50.
13. Burton, "Psychoanalyst's View," 102-3.
14. See for example Ostwald, *Inner Voices*, 140.
15. Reich, 231.
16. Ostwald, *Inner Voices*, 90.
17. Janina Klassen, preface to *Clara Wieck-Schumann: Ausgewählte Klavierwerke* (Munich: Henle, 1987), viii.
18. Claudia Stevens Becker, "A New Look at Schumann's Impromptus," *Musical Quarterly* 67 (1981): 570-71.

19. Anthony Newcomb, "Schumann and the Marketplace: From Butterflies to *Hausmusik*," in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. Larry Todd, Studies in Musical Genres and Repertoires (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 258-315.
20. The bar numbering in the Clara Schumann variations follows the Henle edition, which is continuous. However, the bars are numbered separately for each variation in the Brahms.
21. Hugh Macdonald, "G♭," *19th-Century Music* 11/3 (Spring 1988): 226.
22. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 81. As clear as this is, neither Clara's principal biographer nor the editor of her piano works for Henle appears to have noticed it. Janina Klassen remarks that Brahms' op. 9, which was published at the same time as Clara's op. 20, also quotes this theme, and wonders whether Clara "had previously improvised this reminiscence or took the idea from Brahms" (preface to *Ausgewählte Klavierwerke*, viii). Nancy Reich (*Clara Schumann*, 246) also considers this a moot point.
23. *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1: 107; trans. in Hugh Macdonald, 226.
24. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 75, 79.
25. *Ibid.*, 2: 108, 86.
26. Hatten, quoted in Monelle, 237.
27. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 1: 262. Schumann did not in fact dedicate op. 28 to his betrothed, but to Count Heinrich II of Reuss-Köstritz (Chissell, *Schumann Piano Music*, 55).
28. Alan Walker, *The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*, vol. 2, *Franz Liszt* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 157.
29. *Ibid.* Clara said this with her own variations ringing in her ears, for only the day before, she had played them for Brahms! (Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 74). The passage in question can of course be accounted for on purely musical grounds: the melody is just the opening melody of the theme on a different degree of the scale, and the bass line develops quite organically from the thirty-second-note upper and lower neighbour figuration of variation 7.
30. Susskind, 213.
31. Chissell, *Clara Schumann*, 117.
32. James Sykes, notes to *Schumann and Bennett* (Orion Master Recordings, n.d.).
33. Judith Alstadter, notes to *Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn* (Musical Heritage Society, 1980).

34. Joachim Draheim, notes to *Clara Schumann: Complete Works for Piano*, vol. 2, played by Jozef De Beenhouwer (Partridge, 1991).
35. Letter from Clara to Marie Wieck, August 16, 1853; quoted in Draheim.
36. David Lidov, "The Allegretto of Beethoven's Seventh," *American Journal of Semiotics* 1 (1981): 149.

CHAPTER FOUR: GENERAL NOTES ON BRAHMS' OP. 9

1. Diary entry for October 30, 1853; trans. in Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 46.
2. See Constantin Floros, "Schumanns Aufsatz 'Neue Bahnen' in neuer Deutung," chap. in *Brahms und Bruckner: Studien zur musikalischen Exegetik* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1980), 99-114.
3. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 60.
4. Reich, 191.
5. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 69.
6. Malcolm MacDonald, 40.
7. Diary entry for May 24, 1854; trans. in Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 74.
8. Diary entry for May 27, 1854; trans. in Litzmann, *Artist's life* 2: 74-75.
9. Letter of June 19, 1854; trans. in Artur Holde, "Suppressed Passages in the Brahms-Joachim Correspondence Published for the First Time," *Musical Quarterly* 45 (July 1959), 314.
10. Not August as Chissell implies in *Brahms* (London: Faber, 1977), 30-31.
11. Letter of October 20, 1854 to Gisela von Arnim; trans. in Bickley, 91.
12. *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms*, ed. Berthold Litzmann (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1927) 1: 4-5.
13. Trans. in Michael Musgrave, *The Music of Brahms* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 29.
14. May, 1: 167.
15. Ostwald, *Inner Voices*, 288.

16. Peter Ostwald, "Johannes Brahms, Solitary Altruist," in *Brahms and His World*, ed. Walter M. Frisch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 23.
17. Trans. in Bickley, 73.
18. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 77.
19. Louis Crowder, "Brahms' Early Tribute to the Schumanns," *Clavier* 5/7 (December 1966): 19.
20. See Elaine R. Sisman, "Brahms and the Variation Canon," *19th-Century Music* 14/2 (Fall 1990), 141.
21. Oliver Neighbour, "Brahms and Schumann: Two Opus Nines and Beyond," *19th-Century Music* 7/3 (April 1984), 268.
22. Example derived from Cummings, 184.
23. Bickley, 77.
24. See letters of August 15, 1854 from Brahms to Clara in Litzmann, *Letters*, 1:7.
25. Eusebius Mandyczewski, textual notes to op. 9 (Vienna: Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, 1927; reprint, New York: Dover, 1971), x.
26. Karl Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work*, 2nd ed., trans. H.B. Weiner and Bernard Miall (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), 211.
27. Sams, "The Schumann Ciphers," 399.
28. Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 238.
29. Peter Ostwald, "The Healing Power of Music: Some Observations on the Semiotic Function of Transitional Objects," in *The Semiotic Bridge: Trends from California*, ed. Irmengard Rausch and Gerald F. Carr, Approaches to Semiotics, no. 86 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1989), 290.
30. May, 1: 177.
31. The initial draft was first published in Karl Geiringer, *Johannes Brahms* (Vienna: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1935), 187. The translation given in the English version (cited above), which is identical to that given in Matthews (also cited above), mysteriously renders the German *Substanz* as "retrogression," in the phrase, "die 6te mit ihrer Substanz im 2ten Theil." *Substanz* in general means substance or material. In musical parlance, it can mean a germ or elemental aspect, or a fusing together of two parts (see Moser, *Musik Lexicon*, 1955). Possibly the translator meant to imply "retrogression to more basic material." In any case, Schumann's meaning here is far from clear: perhaps Schumann just *liked* the material of the second part of variation 6.

For the letter actually sent to Brahms, see *Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms: Briefe*, ed. Berthold Litzmann (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1927), 1: 36-37. Here the English reader has several translations from which to choose—all of them flawed, and some verging on the nonsensical: May, 1: 177; Ostwald *Inner Voices*, 288; and Litzmann *Letters*, 1:15.

A brief article by Karl Geiringer in *The Listener* for June 8, 1939 ("New Light on Schumann's Last Years," p. 1237) suggests that a page of notes made by Schumann as he was working on the letter to Brahms reveals the true impact of op. 9 on Schumann. The sheet contains a list of some successful performances of his larger works, and the margin is full of figures which with a little decoding "speak a clear language." Says Geiringer, "They show [Schumann] deeply stirred by the genius of young Brahms, attempting to overcome the consciousness of his own incapacity by recalling past achievements and invoking mystical pictures of further great deeds in the coming years."

32. Letter to Schumann of December 2, 1854; trans. in Litzmann, *Letters*, 1:18.
33. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2:97.
34. *Ibid.*, 2: 103; and Reich, 198.
35. Ostwald, *Inner Voices*, 279.
36. Litzmann, *Letters*, 1:19.
37. Ostwald, "Healing Power," 290.
38. Dale, 78.
39. Sisman, 141.
40. Musgrave, 26.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Siegfried Kross, "Brahms and E.T.A. Hoffmann," *19th-Century Music* 5/3 (Spring 1982), 198.
43. Chissell, *Schumann Piano Music*, 44.
44. Kross, "Hoffmann," 199.
45. Sisman, 146.
46. See Kross, "Hoffmann," 199-200; also his "Brahms und Schumann," in *Brahms-Studien* (Hamburg: Karl Dieter Wagner, 1983), 4: 7-44.
47. Malcolm MacDonald, 33.

48. *Ibid.*
49. Litzmann, *Briefe*, 2: 344; trans. in Eric Sams, "Brahms and his Clara Themes," *MT* 112 (May 1971): 432-33.

CHAPTER FIVE: DETAILED REMARKS ON THE BRAHMS VARIATIONS

1. The appearance of the repeated C#s in the bass of variation 1 foreshadows Brahms' later Haydn Variations, where the first variation also picks up on the tolling repeated notes of the theme.
2. Sisman, 148.
3. Litzmann, *Artist's Life*, 2: 87.
4. Neighbour, 267.
5. Mary Evans Johnson, "Characteristic Metrical Anomalies in the Instrumental Music of Robert Schumann: A Study of Rhythmic Intention" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1979), 92.
6. Sisman, 148.
7. *Ibid.*, 147-48.
8. Olivier Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language*, trans. John Satterfield (Paris: Leduc, 1944), 1: 36.
9. Cummings, 277-78.
10. Neighbour, 267.
11. Letter of October 11, 1857; trans. in Sisman, 145 n.
12. The accented syncopations of the inner voice combine with the offbeat entries of the bass to shift the metric weight off the written downbeats, while the phrasing and the placement of the lowest bass notes simultaneously confirm the written metre.
13. Musgrave is incorrect when he asserts (p. 27) that all of the canons are strict. The alto answer in variation 10 is considerably altered, and all the other canons contain minor changes.
14. Eugen Tetzl, "Die Schumann-Variationen von Brahms: Eine musikalische Analyse," *Zeitschrift für Musik* 96/6 (June 1929): 314.
15. *Ibid.* The word in German is "gluckstrahlende."

16. Neighbour, 268.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 269.
19. Hugh Macdonald, 228.
20. *Ibid.*, 222.
21. *Ibid.*, 227.
22. Geiringer, *Life of Brahms*, 211.
23. Detlef Kraus, *Johannes Brahms: Composer for the Piano*, trans. Lillian Lim (Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, 1988), 58.
24. Tetzl, 316.
25. Lacroix-Novaro, 92.
26. Matthews, 26.
27. Crowder, 25.
28. Hugo Leichtentritt, *Musical Form* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 240.
29. Malcolm MacDonald, 83.
30. William Murdoch, *Brahms: With an Analytical Study of the Complete Pianoforte Works* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1933), 224.
31. Chissell, *Schumann Piano Works*, 48.

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APPENDIX

Many years after completing his op. 9, Brahms composed another variation on the same theme for the album of Clara Schumann's sister, Marie. It is reproduced here from Victor Joss, *Der Musikpädagoge Friedrich Wieck und seine Familie* (Dresden: Oscar Damm, 1902), 346.

Frei nach Schumann.

p legato

Für Fräulein
Marie Wieck.

Raben, 1869.