Chapter 7
Chopin: Nocturnes, Mazurkas, and Études

Relatively little is known about Chopin's early training as a composer—much less, certainly, than is known about Mendelssohn's. We do know that Chopin was passionately attached, in his adult life, to the music of Bach and Mozart, and that he appeared to dislike much of the music of his own time. He even had little use for most of Beethoven's music. His taste seems to have run more to those early-19th-century composers who had more or less bypassed Beethoven's influence—Cramer, Clementi, Hummel, Field, and perhaps Weber as well.¹

Despite these signs of conservative taste, Chopin was not brought up in an 18th-century cultural milieu as Mendelssohn was. As Charles Rosen has pointed out, Chopin's two piano concerti and his C Minor Sonata, all very early works, are anything but Classic in form, especially as regards their key relations.² Mendelssohn was part of an unbroken 18th-century tradition; Chopin, like Schumann and Brahms, had to rediscover that tradition for himself—to compose his way into it, as it were. Therefore it is not surprising that certain features of the Classic style came naturally to Mendelssohn but not to Chopin. The handling of sonata form is only the most obvious point of difference between the two in this respect. In their character pieces, Mendelssohn employed phrase expansion more frequently than did Chopin; furthermore, Mendelssohn's expansions more often resemble those found in Classic music (see Examples 6.8–6.9). Although many and perhaps most of the Songs without Words can be traced back to symmetrical underlying phrase structures in duple hypermeter, few of the pieces actually retain those symmetries at the surface without some expansion or other variation. This is not true of Chopin's character pieces, particularly the earlier ones. Even in his more complex later music, symmetries often lurk just beneath the surface, concealed by artifices of a strikingly original nature—rhythmic devices that differ noticeably from those commonly used by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, or Mendelssohn.

The famous Nocturne in Eb Major, Op. 9, No. 2 (1830), is an early character piece not very far removed from the nocturnes of Field. In fact, it is often compared to Field's first nocturne, which is in the same key. Until the last phrase of its coda, Chopin's nocturne follows an absolutely regular pattern of four-measure phrases, each phrase being repeated with embellishments: the layout of the whole is 1–A+B+A+Coda, where each letter represents one four-measure phrase, and the repeats are written out and varied. What is truly remarkable is how much rhythmic variety Chopin manages to create within this seemingly rigid framework. Even if we disregard the varied reprises—an obvious opportunity for variety—the A phrase itself, to be heard four times in four different variations, already demonstrates Chopin's exquisite rhythmic sense (see Example 7.1).

Example 7.1. Chopin: Nocturne in Eb Major, Op. 9, No. 2, mm. 1–4

Example 7.2 is based on a voice-leading graph of mm. 1–4 by Oswald Jonas.³ The first part, 7.2a, shows the underlying third-progressions of the melody, which occur at two different structural levels—the overarching third g⁴–f⁴–e⁴ and the smaller offshoots that descend from g⁴ and f⁴; the second part, 7.2b, adds some elaborations to this skeletal structure, including two new third-progressions that belong to the foreground (E♭–D–C in the bass and a♭–g³–f³ in the melody). All of these third-progressions in the example are descending ones, but the two just named—the two

Example 7.2. Voice-leading reduction of mm. 1–4 (after Jonas, Introduction to the Theory of Heinrich Schenker, p. 65)
that have least to do with the underlying structure—play a special role as carriers of rhythmic continuity.

We can observe this special role more closely if we recompose the passage in a less ornate way, keeping the underlying structure and the basic melodic motives intact. This might give us the uninspired results shown in Example 7.3 (in which the left hand is given only as a bass line; the inner voices can be imagined).

![Example 7.3. Recomposition of mm. 1-4](image)

Among other things, this pedestrian version brings us considerably closer to the style of Field (see Example 6.1). But how little of Chopin has been changed! This proves how much of the genius of this nocturne resides precisely in its foreground elaboration rather than in its middleground structure, however impressive the nested third-progressions of the latter (Example 7.2a) may appear.

The subphrase organization of Example 7.3 is clearly of the sentence type; that is, the subphrases follow the pattern 1+1+2 (in measures). The durational pattern of each measure is identical, except that m. 4 lacks an eighth-note upbeat, thus reinforcing the unity of the two-measure segment (mm. 3–4). In m. 2, the melodic high note c\(^4\) has been changed to f\(^2\), lower neighbor to g\(^2\), and a similar change has been made at the second beat of m. 3 (g\(^2\) changed to e\(^\#2\)). These changes serve to avoid the outlining of awkward melodic intervals—a ninth b\(^1\)-e\(^\#\) in mm. 1–2, a seventh a\(^5\)-g\(^2\) in mm. 2–3. They also cause the melody to move more closely—that is, less imaginatively—to the skeletal structure shown in Example 7.2b. a\(^5\) is now more clearly an incomplete upper neighbor to g\(^2\) (m. 2), and the descending third-progression in mm. 3–4 also stands out more clearly. Finally, the change in m. 2 eliminates an apparent third-progression, c\(^5\)-b\(^4\)-a\(^5\), which prepares the connective third-progression a\(^5\)-g\(^2\)-f\(^2\) (connecting the upper neighbor e\(^\#\) to the more structural f\(^2\) of m. 3).

On comparing Examples 7.1 and 7.3, it becomes clear that the phrase as Chopin wrote it likewise shows a sentence type of subphrase organization, 1+1+2, but that the boundaries of the subphrases are covered over by the two connective third-progressions eliminated from Example 7.3 (and from Example 7.2a). In m. 1 the end of the first subphrase, e\(^\#\), coincides with the passing tone D of the bass third-progression. In mm. 2–3, a connective third-progression between two subphrases substitutes for an upbeat beginning to the latter subphrase (compare Example 7.3). Chopin’s slur in m. 2 pointedly emphasizes the connection by not ending at a\(^5\); this is a simple example of his utterly individual manner of slurring—in this case, using a legato slur to disguise a subphrase boundary. By contrast, the separate articulation of f\(^2\) in m. 3 helps the listener to connect this tone with g\(^2\) in m. 1.

Other details of melodic elaboration also help to sustain rhythmic interest throughout the phrase. The detour upward in m. 2, with the ensuing illusion of a fifth-progression from the cover tone c\(^5\) down to f\(^2\), provides a running start for the motion past the subphrase boundary and into m. 3. The analogous detour in m. 4—the two are obviously related—is more cadenza-like, foreshadowing the increasingly elaborate cadenzas to come and leading to the ascending third c\(^5\)-d\(^2\)-e\(^\#\) (which connects to b\(^1\) at the beginning of the measure), played forte. In the voice leading of m. 4, d\(^2\) is cast in an ethereal half-light by virtue of its clash with the suspended e\(^\#\) in the left hand; the suspension robs d\(^2\) of any middleground function, since it points to the resolution—d\(^2\) in the left hand and d\(^2\) in the right—as the “real” D, the goal of the third-progression f\(^2\)-e\(^\#\)-d\(^2\) (mm. 3–4). This dissonant clash should be treated delicately but lingeringly in performance, though probably less lingeringly here than on its elaborated return in mm. 16 and 24.

Even this early example—a relatively simple one, for Chopin—points in the direction that was to occupy him throughout his life. The use of lead-ins (in this case the connective third-progressions) is but one way to avoid a stark division between successive melodic segments. Chopin often went to much greater lengths to avoid such divisions, becoming bolder and more original as he progressed.

An unusually complex example for this early period is the middle section of the A \(\text{Ab}\) Major Mazurka, Op. 17, No. 3 (1832–33). Here, too, the basic technique employed is the lead-in between subphrases, with overlap used between complete phrases. An excellent voice-leading graph of this piece appears in Schenker’s Free Composition; this is reproduced as Example 7.4. The first part of the middle section itself is shown in Example 7.5.

Schenker’s portrayal of mm. 41–56 requires some explanation. First, his graph in effect shows only the consequent phrase, which starts at m. 49. The antecedent is the same, except that the concluding fifth-progression shown in the graph is interrupted at f\(^1\) (2) over the dominant harmony; the consequent, as usual, provides the complete descent. Analogous interruptions in the two A sections are also not shown by Schenker (though he alludes to them in the accompanying text), and the final A section is given in abbreviated form.

Secondly, Schenker’s analysis of the sequence in mm. 41–46—three times two measures—may not appear immediately convincing. I believe it to be correct, however. A more detailed analysis (my own) of the antecedent phrase is given in Example 7.6; it emphasizes the counterpart between the melody and the upper notes of the left hand. As this reduction shows, there is a pattern of parallel sixths between the upper voice and the tenor, although this is somewhat concealed by rhythmic displacements. The sixths in mm. 42 and 44 do not actually appear until the second beats of their respective measures. The first sixth in m. 43 is merely implied, since the second beat (when d\(^1\) is sounded) the melody has already moved on from b\(^1\) to a\(^1\). The sixth in m. 46 (also b\(^1\)/d\(^1\)) is similarly implied.
Example 7.4. Schenker, Free Composition, Figure 30a

Example 7.6 shows descending three-note motives where Schenker (Example 7.4) shows two-note motives. But the first note of each descending third is in fact a suspension, either prepared in the soprano (m. 41) or transferred upward from the tenor (mm. 43 and 45). Schenker is therefore correct to show the two-note motive, beginning with the suspension’s resolution, as basic, the main melodic tone in each bar throughout mm. 41–45 thus falls on the second beat (see the score, Example 7.5). Significantly, this explanation of the voice leading also serves to explain why the subphrases end on the second beats, not the downbeats, of mm. 42 and 44—despite the sixteenth rests in those measures, and despite the continuing slur in m. 44. (Note the square brackets in Example 7.6.) Chopin frequently uses the rhythm J 72 as a sprihtlier variant of J 71, especially in the mazurkas, without any implication of a break in the phrase or subphrase. Analysts who use rests as phrase indicators, rather than voice leading and harmony, are often led astray by such rests. In Chopin, at
least, they are elements of articulation (here indicating a kind of staccato), not indicators of phrase structure.

If Chopin's rests are potentially confusing, his slurs are an analytical minefield. No composer so frequently slurred against the phrase structure of his music rather than in support of that structure. Chopin's practice alone should be proof enough that legato articulation and phrase structure are inherently different aspects of music, related only in so far as the former may be used to delineate the latter. This passage is a good case in point: the division between the antecedent and consequent phrases is obscured not only rhythmically, by the continuing eighth-note motion into m. 49 and the lack of a bass note on that downbeat; it is also obscured through harmonic means (V\(^7\) continues), through articulation (the slur continues), and through Chopin's mandated smorzando ("dying away").\(^{11}\) Finally, it is obscured melodically, in that f\(^\#\) at the end of the antecedent (see Example 7.6, m. 48) is linked to f\(^\#\) at the beginning of the consequent (remember that g\(^\#\) is an appoggiatura). It seems almost as if Chopin wishes us to not to know that one phrase is ending and another beginning. This is more than a simple phrase overlap; it is an attempt, within a basically regular phrase structure, to melt away the seams in that very structure.

The sequence that begins each phrase shows a similar conflict between the simplicity of the underlying structure and the complex continuity of the surface. The lead-ins between subphrases consist of ascending four-note arpeggiations in the melody, spanning an octave in each case (b–h\(^\#\) in mm. 42–43, d\(^\#\)–f\(^\#\) in mm. 44–45). As Example 7.6 shows, each lead-in overlaps the end of one subphrase and leads to the first note of the next, while transferring upward a tone from an inner voice—b in m. 42, d\(^\#\) in m. 44—to initiate the following subphrase.\(^{12}\) In addition, each lead-in retraces the path of the immediately preceding descending arpeggiation, shown in unstemmed noteheads in Example 7.6. The resulting down-and-up motion within each triad joins the subphrase to the lead-in and thence to the next subphrase. The total effect is to de-emphasize the points of juncture almost completely.

Once again Chopin finishes the job with his seemingly capricious articulation. The first lead-in (mm. 42–43) is played mostly non legato but with pedal. The second and fourth lead-ins (mm. 44–45 and 52–53) are slurred into the following subphrases. The third lead-in (mm. 50–51) is articulated in yet another way, emphasizing the end of the consequent's first subphrase and thus the end of the ambiguous passage surrounding the phrase overlap. (In the otherwise literal recapitulation of the entire parallel period, mm. 65–80, the articulation is again different!)

There are other features of this middle section that have not been touched upon here—for example, the relation of the stressed motion g–f\(^\#\) in mm. 45 and 53 to the ubiquitous bass motive g–a in the A sections of the mazurka (and to the enharmonically equivalent f–g\(^\#\) in mm. 43–44). From the standpoint of phrase rhythm, however, the curious thing about this section is the disparity between the regular, sixteen-measure parallel period—with its two eight-measure phrases divided into subphrases of two, two, and four measures—and the apparent striving for seamless melodic continuity (the latter evident from the use of lead-ins, phrase overlap, and slurring against the phrase structure). Even the passage following this one begins with an upbeat (to m. 57) that mimics the original lead-in of mm. 42–43. One might well ask: if Chopin sought to transcend points of articulation (division) between melodic segments, why did he employ phrase structures that by their very nature are highly articulated? In a mazurka, of course, such structures probably derive from the heritage of the dance, with its innate bias in favor of duple hypermeter and symmetrical phrase structures. In some other pieces, even in his early period, Chopin did not feel so constrained.

The boldest of Chopin's early works—rhythmically as in other respects—are the twelve études of Op. 10, composed between 1829 and 1832. (Perhaps Chopin felt that an étude, which is usually based on a single rhythmic figure, particularly requires imaginative treatment of its larger rhythms in order to avoid monotony).\(^{13}\) Most of the Op. 10 Études feature phrases of regular duple length, but one—No. 3, in E Major—opens with a five-measure phrase. The first part of this three-part piece (ABA') is given in Example 7.7.

An issue that has been widely commented upon in regard to this piece is the tempo marking in the original autograph, vivace ma non troppo; a second autograph gives simply vivace, while the first edition has lento ma non troppo. Rudolf Steglich, in an essay largely devoted to this question, regards the vivace indication as a matter of expressive character rather than of actual speed. He points to the syncopations of the left hand as a clue to the legato character appropriate to the piece—quite different from the languid expression it often receives in performance.\(^{14}\) Steglich is surely right on this point. A similar case is the first movement of Brahms's B Major Piano Trio, Op 8, marked allegro con brio. The first theme, with its syncopated accompaniment remarkably similar to that of Chopin's étude, is almost always played as if it were the most calmly melodic melody in the world, disregarding both the rhythmically unstable accompaniment and Brahms's con brio marking.\(^{15}\)

In the étude, the syncopation within each quarter-note beat reappears at a larger level in the syncopations across the bar lines—in melody and bass both—in measures 1–5. These syncopations are so persistent that one might be tempted to speak of an actual shift in the meter—that is, a metrical pattern starting on the notated weak beats, as we saw occur several times in Mendelssohn's Songs without Words. In this case the temptation should be resisted, however. First, there is no consistent pattern of conflicting downbeats outside of the recurring five-measure phrase and thus no systematic metrical conflict such as exists in the Mendelssohn examples; therefore, we are not dealing with a case of long-range metrical conflict and resolution. Second and more important, any perception of the stressed weak beats as downbeats vitiates the local rhythmic tension generated by the syncopations. In spite of Chopin's apparently final decision in favor of the lento ma non troppo marking, it is vital to the expressive character of the piece that the syncopations be heard as such. The correspondence between the small syncopations (\(\overline{\text{J}}\)) and the larger ones (\(\overline{\text{J}}\)) may be taken as structural evidence for this conclusion.

Schenker, in Free Composition, uses the larger syncopations as a way of explaining the five-measure length of the opening phrase. He clearly implies that the
odd-numbered length stems from an underlying duple ordering. He also takes note of an acceleration in m. 4, maintaining that a version without the acceleration would necessarily have occupied six measures.\footnote{16}

Although one might choose to take the unusual length of the opening phrase simply as a given, we can perhaps reconstruct Schenker’s reasoning as follows: a four-measure version of the phrase might look like Example 7.8a, with one principal melodic tone per beat. Example 7.8b lengthens all but the first and last of the principal tones, creating a six-measure phrase with syncopations. Example 7.8c then compresses the third, fourth, and fifth bars of this last version into two measures, resulting in the acceleration noted by Schenker, whose sketch of the phrase is given in Example 7.8d.

Example 7.8. Chopin’s Op. 10, No. 3
\begin{enumerate}
\item a. recomposition of mm. 1–5 (as 4 bars)
\item b. recomposition of mm. 1–5 (as 6 bars)
\item c. recomposition of mm. 1–5 (as 5 bars)
\item d. Schenker, Free Composition, Figure 136, 5
\end{enumerate}

This is not quite a complete, step-by-step derivation; I have weighted the scales by adopting Chopin’s diminution—that is, his fleshing-out of the melodic skeleton—at almost every step. Thus, for example, a in Example 7.8a is embellished with an upward leap of a third rather than with the simple neighboring motion that is applied both times to ♭. It is this leap up to ♭ to which Chopin applies yet another rhythmic displacement, bringing the high note onto the beat and delaying the return of a until the following beat, where it becomes a suspension. This final detail of melodic realization is all that separates Example 7.8c from the melody as Chopin actually wrote it (Example 7.7).

The notion of relating the five-measure phrase to a four-measure model is attractive not only for Riemannian reasons, but also because Chopin adheres strictly to four-bar hypermeter in most of the rest of the piece, including the entire middle section (cadenza-like flourishes and all). However, we will now abandon this notion to concentrate on the way in which the opening phrase is integrated with the rest of the A section (mm. 1–21).

The A section is a rondo-like structure, with the opening phrase serving as the recurring theme. Measures 6–8 form the first contrasting passage, after which the full theme is heard again with only its first note changed (from e to f♯). The second contrasting passage begins in m. 14 and leads to the fortissimo climax in m. 17. This same measure begins a five-bar melodic and dynamic descent, which—while far from being a variation of the theme in any strict sense—is certainly felt to be related to it. The relation is somewhat hard to define, but it has to do with the melodic emphasis on G♯ (the primary melodic tone of the theme) and the five-measure length itself. Like the theme, this closing passage concerns itself melodically with an ascent from E to G♯ (mm. 16–17) and a descent from G♯ back to E (mm. 17–21). This time, of course, the descent encompasses two different registers instead of just one as in the theme.

It is interesting that the first contrasting passage is three measures long, for this yields an eight-measure sum when added to the length of the theme’s initial statement. Even more interesting, though, is the approach to the climax in m. 17 and the descent to the close in m. 21. The passage between five-measure units (mm. 14–16) is again three measures long, but this time there is obviously some kind of overlap at the fourth bar, m. 17. (There is also an overlap at m. 9, where the dominant seventh resolves to the tonic, which itself inaugurates the return of the theme.)

In order to understand the phrase structure of mm. 14–21, it is first necessary to understand the function of the G chord in m. 17. Six-four chords built on the dominant note may function either as part of a prolongation of V—the common cadential G acts in this way—or as part of an arpeggiation of the tonic harmony. Very occasionally a G chord will represent either a V or a I harmony all by itself, without further clarification by other chords. The G chord in this instance is clearly approached as a cadential G—a dominant harmony—since it is preceded both by V of B major and by an augmented sixth chord on G♯; both of these chords are directed toward V of E major. The expected completion of the phrase might therefore look something like Example 7.9.

Example 7.9. Recomposition of Chopin’s Op. 10, No. 3, mm. 16–17

But the resolution of the apparently cadential G to a simple V or V7 is not at all clear. The first beat of m. 18 might be taken for the resolution at first glance, but it does not sound like the resolution. This is because m. 18 is already in the midst of a sequence, and chords in the middle of a sequence generally lack the status of significant functional harmonies (or “scale degrees,” in Schenker’s terminology). The sequence itself is based on an alternating pattern of tenths and octaves between the outer voices; Example 7.10 shows this in a simplified version. In this reduction, the parenthesized note E has been inserted to show how the sequence would look if it were completely consistent: it would start with a root-position tonic and end with the same harmony an octave lower. Thus, the sequence as a whole would constitute a prolongation of I. (Note the motivic correspondence of the small third-descents, all written in small notation—as ornaments—in Example 7.10.)

Example 7.10. Analysis of Chopin’s Op. 10, No. 3, mm. 17–21

This analysis strongly suggests that Chopin has taken advantage of the identity in sound between G as dominant and G as tonic, and has reinterpreted m. 17 from the former to the latter—sealing the harmonic reinterpretation with a phrase overlap. In the overlap, the resolution of the cadential G to the simple V or V7 is elided completely; the concluding sequence represents an expanded final tonic. The sequence is necessary to bring the melody back down to its original register: a cadence
in the upper register, as in Example 7.9, would present registral problems for the piece as whole.

Chopin was one of the greatest masters of the phrase overlap, and he used the technique as one of his principal means of achieving continuity in phrase rhythm, especially in his shorter pieces. Yet, despite the far greater frequency of overlaps in his later music, I know of no other single example quite so astonishing as this overlap in the E Major Étude. Also, although many examples of ambiguous $\frac{3}{4}$ chords can be found in 19th-century music—especially at points of thematic return—in this instance the ambiguity of harmonic meaning is especially remarkable. Unlike the deceptive recapitulations in Mendelssohn (examined in the previous chapter), here two harmonic functions, V and I, stake virtually an equal claim to the $\frac{3}{4}$ chord. (In the Mendelssohn examples, the $\frac{3}{4}$ chord clearly represented a dominant.) Therefore, in spite of the general thesis being advanced here—that Chopin’s character pieces show a gradual increase in rhythmic complexity—there are examples even in his earlier music in which Chopin’s rhythmic genius is already fully evident.

Chopin’s character pieces of the middle and later 1830s continue to develop the means of rhythmic continuity already present in his earlier music. There is, however, a trend toward ever greater refinement of rhythmic technique. It is in the music of this period, too, that Chopin seems most addicted to peculiarities of articulation as a means of transcending phrase and subphrase boundaries. In his later style—after about 1840—the idiosyncratic and sometimes frankly puzzling slurs recede somewhat in importance, to be largely replaced by more organic compositional procedures.

A comparison of the early Eb Major Nocturne (Example 7.1) with the B Major Nocturne, Op. 32, No. 1 (1836–37; Example 7.11), reveals some of the subtle

![Example 7.11](Image)

changes that have taken place in Chopin’s rhythm in little more than five years. The two pieces make an especially good comparison because they are both dominated by the motive of a stepwise, descending third. To make the comparison easier, Example 7.12 gives a voice-leading reduction of mm. 1–8 of Op. 32, No. 1, corresponding to

![Example 7.12](Image)

Example 7.12. Voice-leading reduction of Chopin’s Op. 32, No. 1, mm. 1–8

Example 7.2. The same eight-measure phrase is recomposed in Example 7.13 in a manner similar to Example 7.3−this time with even more dreadful results.

Like the first phrase of the Eb Major Nocturne, the opening phrase of Op. 32, No. 1, has a sentence type of subphrase structure, $2 + 2 + 4$ measures. (It was $1 + 1 + 2$ in the earlier piece.) The unity of the final and longest subphrase is slightly concealed by the rhetorical pause at the end of m. 6, but the harmonic and linear continuity over this break is very clear. (In Example 7.13 the pause is omitted.)
Example 7.13. Recomposition of Chopin's Op. 32, No. 1, mm. 1–8

The first two subphrases in the B Major Nocturne are run together—and run into the third subphrase—in a manner reminiscent of Op. 9, No. 2. There the three segments of the phrase were linked by connective third-progressions, first in the bass and then in the upper voice (see Example 7.2b). Here they are linked in part by an apparent third-progression, fF–e♭–d♭, which obviously imitates the descending third (d♭–c♭–b♭) of mm. 1–2. Chopin's legato slurs emphasize this linking function, especially over the bar line separating mm. 2 and 3 (compare Example 7.13, where the links are omitted).

But in the B Major Nocturne there is an important inner-voice motion, shown in Example 7.12, which makes the tonal and rhythmic situation somewhat more complex than it was in Op. 9, No. 2. As the voice-leading reduction indicates, an exchange of voices takes place between the melody and the inner voice, in two-note groups (C♯–B, E–D♭). Partly as a consequence of this, the descending third in mm. 1–2 sounds less complete than the corresponding third in the B♭ Major Nocturne (m. 1), and the linking motive fF–e♭–d♭ becomes something more than a mere lead-in to the preserve the rhythmic flow. Although the subphrase structure may seem to be adequately expressed by Example 7.13, in fact the voice leading itself creates an overlapping of subphrases at the downbeats of mm. 3 and 5. This is an example of the use of counterpoint as an aid in achieving rhythmic continuity. Chopin would draw on this resource increasingly in his later music.

Other sources of continuity in Op. 32, No. 1, are more readily apparent. The sudden entrance of a dissonant chord on the second beat of m. 8 does not obscure the preceding cadence, but it does propel the motion forward—especially since its entrance in tempo necessarily sounds a bit rushed after the poco ritenuto of the cadence. (The repeated and syncopated [d♭], just before the cadence, is a virtual cliché of the bei canto style; the second and longer d♭ demands to be rushed toward and then drawn out somewhat.)

The linking passage over the dominant pedal, mm. 8–12, first seems to aim toward the half cadences in mm. 10 and 12. A lead-in, d♭–d♭–e♭–d♭, then appears to overlap the beginning of the next phrase (downbeat of m. 13). But since d♭ in m. 13 is also the resolution, on a larger scale, of the dominant seventh e♭ in mm. 9 and 11, this overlap, too, is grounded in the voice leading of the piece and is thus "organic." (See the reduction in Example 7.14.) In fact, basing a phrase on a large-scale neighboring note virtually guarantees an overlap when the neighboring note finally resolves, since the resolution will generally coincide with the beginning of the next phrase. Such is the case here: mm. 8–12 constitute a large prolongation of V, with e♭ as upper neighbor to the primary tone d♭; the resolution of e♭ to d♭ in m. 13 also marks the beginning of a recapitulation of mm. 1–8. The broad arpeggiation of the tonic chord in m. 13 is the perfect expression of the overlap; it highlights the resolution in the lower register (d♭) and its transfer to the higher one. The local upper neighbor that follows, e♭ in m. 13, should be played with special poignancy, as it sums up the entire linking passage in its relation to d♭ (the primary tone).

A passage similar to mm. 8–12 was seen in Example 7.7 (the E Major Étude), mm. 6–8. Although more complicated in its voice leading, that passage similarly linked two statements of a theme by prolonging a motion to V—in that case, by way of IV and II (V of V). There, too, an upper neighbor to V was involved, its resolution overlapping the return of the theme. Such linking passages involving the dominant seventh are not uncommon in Chopin. Another instance is the middle section of the F♯ Major Nocturne, Op. 15, No. 2, which Schenker analyzes as a fantastically expanded linking passage prolonging V. According to our definition of phrase, these linking passages are not really independent phrases, because they prolong a dissonant neighboring harmony (V) that is completely dependent on the surrounding harmonies (usually tonics). Such passages can more accurately be regarded as links between complete phrases.

The C♯ Minor Mazurka, Op. 33, No. 1 (1837–38; see Example 7.15), is an outstanding example of Chopin's whimsical articulation. The phrase structure itself seems rather whimsical in this piece, but Chopin's slurs are still more so. Sad as this mazurka is (mesto), Chopin begins it with an old witticism from the Classic period: he uses a cadence—a phrase ending—as a phrase beginning. Then he concludes the opening phrase—basically a symmetrical, eight-measure phrase—with the same cadential formula (mm. 7–8). A repetition of the latter half of the phrase follows; but, since a single slur continues from m. 7 through m. 9, mm. 7–8 take on a double meaning, functioning both as end and beginning. That is, mm. 7–12 assume the character of an abbreviated repetition of mm. 1–8 (abbreviated by the omission of the unaccompanied rising line from mm. 3–4).

On the second beat of m. 12, however, the entire expanded phrase—eight measures plus repetition—truly ends. The slurring here is almost perverse in its
Example 7.15. Chopin: Mazurka in G♯ Minor, Op. 33, No. 1 (beginning)

Willful disregard of the phrase structure. Chopin articulates the bass note f♯ separately, in order to establish the hypermetrical downbeat for this rhythmically more incisive phrase (mm. 13–20), but otherwise he does everything possible—especially in his smoothly stepwise voice leading—to cover over the phrase division. It is minimized even in the bass, by the lead-in g♯-g♭-f♯ (which is too compelling as a linear motion to be affected by the break in articulation).

At the end of the eight-measure phrase on the F♯ major harmony (mm. 13–20; see Example 7.16), a clear echo of mm. 1–2 impels the motion onward into the following phrase. This motion, mm. 20–21, is also so compelling that no slur is needed to bring it out; even the sudden forte dynamic cannot disrupt it. The parallel with mm. 12–13 is a strong one: there the motion over the bar line proceeded in tenths, b♭-g♯; here it does likewise, beginning with the same tenth that was reached in m. 13—thus, a♯-g♯-f♯-e.

Example 7.16. Chopin's Op. 33, No. 1, mm. 20–25

The most obvious articulation for mm. 21–24 would be in two-measure units, with a new slur starting from e♮ in m. 23 (compare m. 25). But Chopin links e♯ and e♮ over the bar line by a slur, and—more strikingly—by a hemiola-creating accent on the higher E. In this way he connects the two registers, claiming e♮ for the right hand after its stint in the accompaniment and preparing the octave doubling beginning at m. 25.

Only at the recapitulation of the opening phrase (Example 7.17) does the double function of mm. 1–2 come completely into its own: those two measures, which began the piece, now sound first as an ending, then as a beginning. In a most ingenious use of register, Chopin lets the bass sink to its lowest depths for the final cadence of the B major section, mm. 35–36. Not since m. 10 has this low B been exceeded in the bass, and the lower F♯ (m. 35) is the lowest note in the entire piece.

Example 7.17. Chopin's Op. 33, No. 1, mm. 33–40
(The B major cadence eight measures earlier occurred with the bass an octave higher.) Because of this registral placement, the return in mm. 37–38 corresponds to mm. 35–36 not only by virtue of the similar bass leap (a perfect fourth) in both places; in addition, the bass notes D♭-G♭ complete a literal ascending appoggiatura of the G♭ minor triad, beginning with the low B in m. 36. The harmonic progression thus emphasized, III–V–I in G♭ minor, closes a harmonic circle that opened with the first phrase of the piece. Example 7.18 illustrates this remarkable midground progression.26

Example 7.18. Voice-leading reduction of Chopin’s Op. 33, No. 1 (after Schachter)

Thus the recapitulation of the opening phrase begins with a cadence that resolves a harmonic motion spanning some thirty-seven measures! This is a realization of the full potential for ambiguity (end versus beginning) of mm. 1–2. It is also phrase overlap with a vengeance. For surely the final cadence of a long harmonic progression marks the end of a phrase, even if (as in this case) it is a phrase comprising most of the piece. Any danger that the cadence in m. 38 might sound too final—thus eliminating the need for continuation—is avoided by the lack of any melodic motion starting from the primary tone D♭ (5); that is left for mm. 40–48 (see Example 7.18). Also, after the very long and gradual motion toward the cadence in B major (III), a two-measure final cadence (V–I) would seem inadequate to end the piece.

By revealing the very large phrase motion spanning mm. 1–38, Example 7.18 also suggests why the smaller phrases within that motion are made to flow into each other so continuously. The nearly static phrase on F♯ (mm. 13–20) is a good clue here: “pausing” for eight measures on the tenth degree, the phrase points beyond itself to its surroundings—its origin and its goal—which it needs even more than most phrases to clarify its purpose. That purpose is also suggested in Example 7.18: the motivic third b♮-a♭-g♭, reproduced in the small in mm. 20–21, is reproduced in the large in mm. 10–21 (see the square bracket between the staves in the example).27 The continuing slur through mm. 11–12 and beyond helps to make the necessary connections for the listener, chiefly by de-emphasizing the closing function of m. 12 and stressing instead the link between the two occurrences of b♮ in mm. 11–12. In this way the enlargement of the descending third stands at least a chance of being heard: if the slur had ended with the cadence in m. 12, the strong melodic descent to g♭ (I) would probably have obscured the large-scale importance of b♮ (3). Therefore the seemingly aimless slur, which puzzled even Schenker, seems to have a purpose after all. If we are still to call Chopin’s articulation in this piece “whimsical,” we must at least allow that his were whims of the most purposeful kind, however arbitrary they might strike us at first.

The later works of Chopin—those composed after 1840—are known for their often dense chromaticism, which has sometimes been said to anticipate Wagner’s chromatic harmony. This is not the only sense in which Chopin’s name might be linked with Wagner’s, however. During the decade of the 1840s, both composers were moving toward an increasingly seamless style of melodic writing, which in Wagner’s case has become famous under the name of endless melody (Wagner’s term). We will follow Wagner’s development in the next chapter; here we will examine a few aspects of Chopin’s late style as they relate to phrase rhythm.

In the works of Chopin examined thus far, we have observed a tendency to undermine the effect of divisions between phrases, and between subphrases as well. This tendency is so strong and so consistent that it must have been intentional on Chopin’s part. In its more advanced stages, especially in some of the late works, there seems to be an attempt to transcend phrase boundaries altogether, so that the melody flows unbroken throughout a long section of music or even through an entire piece. This trend in Chopin’s music has not been sufficiently recognized. If endless melody is the term used to describe roughly similar phenomena in Wagner’s music, then the same term can with justice be applied to Chopin—at least to some of his late compositions in which complete melodic seamlessness is nearly attained. It would not even be too farfetched to imagine that Chopin may have influenced Wagner in this area, as he apparently did in the area of chromaticism (partly through the mediation of Liszt).

Endless melody was Chopin’s ultimate response to the Rhythm Problem, which he seems to have felt more acutely than most other 19th-century composers. It is interesting—and surely not coincidental—that Chopin’s solution was more radical than that of his contemporary Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn, who came more naturally to the older and more flexible Classic techniques of phrase rhythm such as expansion, had less need of radical solutions than did Chopin. Wagner, whose rhythm in his early operas is often astonishingly wooden, bore the fullest brunt of the Rhythm Problem; therefore his solution was the most radical of all.

It would be an oversimplification to assert that all of Chopin’s later music achieves, or even strives for, endless melody. Some works show the tendency more than others, as do some genres. Among the shorter pieces, the late nocturnes and mazurkas are the most adventurous in this regard. The three late waltzes (Op. 64) are more conservative, as the waltzes are generally. Among the larger works, the Polonaise-Fantasy (Op. 61) is the most radical in this as in other respects; the middle section of the largo movement from the B Minor Sonata (Op. 58) also comes to
mind, as does, to a lesser degree, the E Major Scherzo (Op. 54). The Berceuse (Op. 57), while essentially a set of variations, can also be regarded as a virtual exercise in endless melody, since the four-measure variations—while still distinct—overlap continuously up to the coda, largely avoiding perfect cadences along the way.

The means by which Chopin pursued endless melody in his music after 1840 were for the most part extensions of those techniques he used throughout his life. Overlaps and lead-ins remain the favored devices. But these devices are now used so lavishly that, in some pieces, few melodic segments remain unaffected by them. Two additional elements in the late music are an increased use of counterpoint—partly to aid in fostering rhythmic continuity—and an avoidance of expected full or half cadences. The latter element, the avoidance of cadences, is the one most reminiscent of Wagner's practice in his music dramas (all of which, of course, were composed after Chopin's death).²⁸

An instance of a phrase overlap accomplished by contrapuntal means is shown in Example 7.19. It occurs in one of the most complicated of the mazurkas—Op. 59, No. 1, in A Minor (1845)—at the beginning of the middle section. The first phrase is six measures long and ends with a perfect cadence in m. 42; the melodic close can be seen in the lower of the two voices on the treble staff. But a second and higher voice is added just before the cadence, obscuring the end of the first phrase and beginning a new one. This added upper voice recaptures the original melodic register of the mazurka, which was abandoned at the beginning of the middle section; it also reestablishes the primary melodic tone, e² (♯). The cadence has a distinctive melodic rhythm (derived from the first section of the piece), which identifies it at each occurrence. These occurrences are several, because—until the final two measures (Example 7.20)—a higher voice always interposes to force the motion onward.²⁹ Even in Example 7.20, the higher octave of the cadential note, a², is added.


The six-measure length of the first phrase in Example 7.19 is unusual for a mazurka, as it would be for any dance piece. This mazurka, like all of Chopin's, is not meant for actual dancing, but it is one of only a few in which the duple standard for phrase lengths is largely abandoned. (Another is the B Major Mazurka, Op. 56, No. 1.) The opening period of the first section, for example (see Example 7.21), is twelve measures long, consisting of three four-bar hypermeasures, each of which can also be considered a small phrase. This twelve-measure length does not arise from a phrase expansion, and thus the period as a whole cannot be reduced to a basic phrase of, say, eight measures. Rather, the period is formed by giving one four-bar hypermeasure to each of three main harmonies—I, III, and V—each of which is preceded by its own dominant. The third and last hypermeasure also includes a IV–V–I cadence in the tonic.³⁰

The middle period of the A section, like the first period, is constructed sequentially. In the A section, too, each of three triads is preceded by its own (applied) dominant seventh chord—E major, E♯ major, and D major, a chromatic descent.³¹ The last V–I progression, in D major, is prolonged tonally and expanded rhythmically by the interpolation of four measures over an A pedal (V of D major). These measures, placed in parentheses in Example 7.21, delay the arrival of the expected sixth measure of the period, which now appears as m. 22. The twelve-measure unit between the first period and the return of the theme—that is, mm. 13–24—can therefore be heard as an expanded eight measures (unlike the first period itself, which is irreducible).

But the true rhythmic situation is even more complex than this. The harmonic goal of the middle period is not IV−V (D major) but V♯ (E major), as the diminished seventh chord on D in mm. 23–24 makes clear. The harmonic skeleton of the period is thus V♯−IV−V, a large neighboring motion about the dominant, with the
initial sequence serving to connect V and IV. This skeleton is an enlargement of the harmonic motion in mm. 10–11 (see NB in the example), except that there the IV was minor. The expanded V of D, five measures long in total (mm. 17–21), thus corresponds to the same harmony on the last beat of m. 10. In both cases—mm. 10–11 and mm. 13–26—the progression V–IV–V amounts to a prolongation of the dominant.

Since the middle period does not reach its goal until m. 26, it is clear that the return of the theme in the left hand, at m. 25, overlaps the concluding half cadence. This time, Chopin’s articulation—the slur ending in m. 26—clarifies rather than obscures the phrase structure, as does the continuation of the dotted rhythm through m. 26. The first measure of the theme itself, which in m. 1 would probably be taken to represent an arpeggiated tonic harmony, now arpeggiates the cadential Ⅵ—moving, in m. 26, to the simple V harmony.

As the reader may have noticed, there is a strong resemblance between this overlap of two periods and the overlap between the antecedent and consequent phrases in the early F♯ Minor Mazurka, Op. 6, No. 1 (see Examples 2.22–2.23 and the accompanying discussion). Like that overlap, this one takes advantage of the fact that the first chord literally presented in the piece is a dominant. There as here, the overlap connects a phrase ending with a half cadence to a return of the opening theme; the presence of a V chord rather than Ⅵ at the beginning makes the overlap possible. In both mazurkas the opening theme is constructed as a sequence moving from I to III to V—each harmony preceded by its own dominant—and in both cases the third segment of the sequence (moving from V of V to V) is executed differently from the first two segments. In both pieces the phrase overlap is a relatively extended one, in that more than a single melodic note is common to the two phrases.

Although the overlap in Op. 6, No. 1, is astonishing for a mazurka composed in 1830 (when Chopin was twenty), the overlap in Op. 59, No. 1, is even more remarkable. First, of course, there is the appearance of the theme’s first two measures in the left hand, continuing the voice leading of the accompaniment from mm. 22–24 (see Example 7.22). But, as we have already seen, there is also a more complex hypermetrical structure in this instance. Measure 22, for example, is basically the sixth bar of the sequence that begins in m. 13—expanded, however, by the interpolation of mm. 18–21. But m. 22 is also the concluding bar of a surface four-bar hypermeasure beginning at m. 19, which is marked by the distinctive dotted

Example 7.22. Voice-leading reduction of Chopin’s Op. 59, No. 1, mm. 22–26 (left hand only)
rhythm in the melody (see the metrical numbering in parentheses in Example 7.21). As a surface hypermeasure, mm. 19–22 are structurally subordinate to, or "more foreground" than, the sequence itself.\(^{33}\)

Furthermore, unlike the antecedent phrase of Op. 6, No. 1 (see Example 2.23), the middle period of Op. 59, No. 1, could easily have been expressed as an eight-measure phrase. The slow motion of the bass from \(\text{d} \over \text{e} \) to \(\text{f} \over \text{g} \) in mm. 22–26 was probably inspired by the preceding pedal on \(\text{A} \) in mm. 17–21; a quicker bass motion after the end of the pedal would have sounded abrupt. Once the parenthetical pedal is removed, however, a measure-by-measure bass progression seems most natural, because that was the harmonic rhythm in mm. 13–16. Thus we arrive at the eight-measure version shown in Example 7.23, which omits both the parenthetical measures and the phrase overlap. The middle period is thus cleanly separated from the thematic return, giving the phrase juncture a more normal appearance. In addition, note that the 4–3–2 linear motion, which Chopin divides between two voices (Example 7.21, mm. 22–26), is now contained entirely in the soprano.\(^{34}\)

Example 7.23 may be regarded, at least approximately, as the basic phrase underlying the middle period of the mazurka. The duple hypermeter of the example may be taken as the underlying hypermeter of the period. However, a satisfactory metrical model may also be obtained by joining mm. 13–17 (from the hypermetrical downbeat at m. 13 to the beginning of the parenthesis) with mm. 22–24 (the measures leading to the hypermetrical downbeat at m. 25).

The combination of phrase expansion and phrase overlap in this mazurka is unusually complicated, especially for a dance piece. That it is done within the framework of an apparently symmetrical form, \(3 \times 12\) measures—for the thematic return beginning at m. 25 is complete and basically unaltered—is extraordinary. It is ironic, too, that by recognizing an expansion in the middle period we are positing an underlying phrase structure that is asymmetrical (\(12 \div 8 \div 12\) measures) and thus in conflict with the symmetry of the outer form.

Chopin sometimes expresses the urge to unify the melody of a large section of a piece by writing a single, very long slur to cover the entire section. Such a slur appears, for example, in the middle section of the C Minor Nocturne, Op. 37, No. 1 (1838). By itself, such a slur does not constitute endless melody, although it may perhaps be taken as an indication of Chopin's desire to overcome any obvious division of his melody into separate phrases. Such may not have been his intention in the chorale-like middle section of Op. 37, No. 1—if it was, the attempt would have to be deemed unsuccessful—but endless melody does appear to be a strong factor in the slightly later Nocturne in F\# Minor, Op. 48, No. 2 (1841; see Example 7.24). A single slur covers mm. 3–25, and the repetition of this section (mm. 31–53) is similarly slurred; unfortunately, these slurs are not reproduced in all editions of the nocturne.

It may seem paradoxical that a melody containing so much repetition could be thought of as "endless." Melodic repetition—whether literal, varied, or sequential—has the effect of delineating and emphasizing the melodic segments being repeated. Thus, in this nocturne, the slightly varied repetition of mm. 3–4 (as mm. 5–6) stresses the two-measure unit. The sequential repetition of mm. 7–8 a third higher (as mm. 9–10) strengthens the identification of the two-measure unit as a standard length for melodic segments in this piece. Then, as if the consistent repetition of two-measure units were not enough, an entire eight-measure segment is repeated sequentially: mm. 11–18 are simply a repetition a fifth higher of mm. 3–10. Only the beginning of the cadential process in m. 19 breaks the pattern of repetitions. (But once the section finally concludes in m. 28, the whole thing is repeated!) With so much attention called to the individual melodic segment—whether of two, four, or eight measures—how could it possibly be claimed that the boundaries of phrases and subphrases have been transcended, that being the essential precondition of endless melody?

This is indeed a paradox; but it is a paradox fundamental to this piece. We could even say that the contradiction between the small size and frequent repetition of melodic segments, on the one hand, and the attempt to overcome all segmentation within the large section, on the other, is the source of the peculiar tension that permeates this nocturne. The segments are always ending, but the larger thrust of the melody never allows them to end peacefully.

Example 7.25 is a simple foreground reduction of the first section (mm. 1–30), written almost entirely in actual note values. Only a rather small amount of melodic embellishment has been stripped away, and some of the polyphonic implications of the melody have been realized explicitly.\(^{35}\) Double bar lines are used to delineate both hypermeasures—the hypermeter is four-bar (subdivided \(2 \times 2\))—and an occasional measure group of irregular size (such as mm. 15–19).

The two-measure introduction is critical to the phrase rhythm of the entire section. The opening gesture, a bare double octave on C\# with its second and higher
Example 7.25. Foreground reduction of Chopin’s Op. 48, No. 2

Further, 3 appears on a relatively weak beat, compared to m. 5, and as the goal of a crescendo. Surely the most effective performance of these first two measures would include a slight acceleration up to a1 (the 3) and a corresponding slackening of tempo for the descent itself. The pattern of accenting the third beat melodically, first adumbrated here, is continued in m. 3 and in every odd-numbered measure thereafter until m. 19.

The syncopation in m. 1 also suggests a slight hurrying of the second beat. (One would then relax a moment before starting a new acceleration for the ascent to a1.) Having rushed here, one should do likewise—though probably more subtly—each time the octave leap or one of its derivatives is heard (see the square brackets in Example 7.25). This will help to effect the required overlapping of melodic segments and thus to keep the endless melody going.

The first complete phrase extends from m. 3 to the downbeat of m. 7 and comprises the consonant establishment of 3 and its provisional descent to 1 (f1). The division of this phrase into two subphrases is made obvious by the two-measure repetition referred to above. But the double function of f1 in m. 5—it is simultaneously the end of the first subphrase and initiator of the octave leap connecting the two—covers over the division with an overlap (see the arrow at this point in the example). The end of the entire phrase, though marked by an emphatic descent in
triplet rhythm (the first triplet to appear in the melody), is subverted by both rhythmic and voice-leading means. The voice leading, as shown in Example 7.25, connects $b^4$ in m. 6 to $a^4$ in m. 7; this connection is confirmed by the left hand, which states the same tones an octave lower. Thus the descent to $f^4$ becomes merely a foreground event, superseded by the return of $f^5$. Rhythmically, the use of the figure $\frac{1}{2}$ (m. 7) carries the motion forward in a manner reminiscent of mm. 3 and 5, where the same figure was used in the second half of the measure. (A half note $f^4$ in m. 7 would have ended the phrase more conventionally and more conclusively.)

Even here, where the octave leaps of mm. 1, 3, and 5 are absent, the pattern of motion toward an accented third beat helps to propel the melody beyond the cadence in m. 7. This pattern, which by now is well established, serves consistently to de-emphasize the downbeats of the odd-numbered bars. The accented third beats, on the other hand, are always dissonant; therefore the presence of a longer note there—these accents are mostly of the durational or "agonic" type—cannot stop the forward motion, since the dissonances demand resolution. Thus, although it is certainly clear that each new subphrase (two measures long) ends with the downbeat of an odd-numbered measure, the following subphrase always begins with the same note, leading quickly to a new accent (and a dissonance) on the third beat.

The phrase motions up to m. 19 are readily apparent from Example 7.25. Measures 7–11 describe an ascending fifth from $a^4$ to $c^4$ and a harmonic motion from I to (minor) V. The goal tone, $c^4$, however, is omitted from m. 11, and $g^6$ appears in its place; $c^4$ is nevertheless implied by the previous ascending motion, by parallelism with $c^4$ in m. 9, and as the resolution of the seventh $f^5$ in m. 10. The presence of $g^6$ serves to differentiate melodically between m. 11 and m. 13 (compare mm. 3 and 5); it also foreshadows the $f^4$ that is the melodic goal of the entire section.

The first important change in the pattern of repetitions is the bass passing tone $c^4$ in m. 18 (compare m. 10). This note leads to a $b^6$ harmony of $G^\#$ minor, in preparation for a stronger approach to V of $G^\#$ and a decisive cadence in that key. The renewed approach to V causes an expansion of the four-bar hypermeasure to five bars, an expansion that is significantly clarified by Chopin's dynamics (a crescendo through mm. 18–19, to a forte at the arrival of the cadential $c^4$ in m. 20). Note, too, that there is no third-beat accent in m. 19; this break in the established rhythm pattern also heralds the expansion.

The cadence itself, beginning at m. 20, is sharply distinguished from all that has preceded it by the abruptly slower rhythm of its melody and by the two stenctoral leaps of a fifth that announce its onset. The first of these Fifths is an augmentation, an octave lower, of the falling fifth that was due in m. 19 (to correspond to m. 11); that fifth, $D^4-G^\#$, is present in the eighth-note figuration of m. 19, but its unadorned statement is delayed until the following measure—thus further supporting our assumption of a one-measure expansion and a hypermetrical downbeat at m. 20.

The four cadential measures (20–23)—considered apart from the thematic reminiscence beginning in m. 23—form a hypermeasure (see the metrical numbering in Example 7.25). The $f^4$ and $g^4$ chords on the dominant appear, typically, on the relatively accented measures (the first and third); the final tonic appears, also typically, on the weak, fourth measure.

The thematic echoes in mm. 23–28 constitute a suffix to the opening section; the suffix extends the cadence just reached and gradually transforms the local $G^\#$ minor tonic to $G^\#$ major. Metrically, m. 23—originally a fourth measure—is reinterpreted as the first bar of a new (surface) hypermeasure. Two such hypermeasures are used to bring the cadence fully to rest and to move from the stabilized $G^\#$ major triad—III (V of V) in $F^\#$ minor—to V. In the process, the two-measure introduction is restated (mm. 29–30) without further disturbing the four-bar hypermeter. All is then ready for a repetition of the entire opening section.

The impression of endless melody in this section of the nocturne is only partly due to the unbroken legato articulation of its melodic line. That articulation is merely a symptom of "endlessness," not its cause. The cause, in this case, is the consistent pattern of overlaps occurring every two measures from m. 3 to m. 19, as well as the extended cadential process thereafter. The overlaps—and thus the seamlessness of the melody—are in constant conflict with the urge of each two-measure segment to find a conclusion. Some of these endings—the one at m. 7, for example—are so definite that the continuation seems almost forced. In fact, if mm. 1 and 3 had not established a pattern of first-beat beginnings to compete with the more obvious and simultaneous pattern of second-beat beginnings, it is doubtful whether the attempt at melodic seamlessness would have succeeded at all. As it is, the tension between repetition/regularity/division and overlap/ambiguity/continuity is relieved until m. 27.

The sarabande-like middle section of the nocturne, which is in $D^\#$ major (the enharmonically respelled dominant of $F^\#$), offers temporary relief from the tensions of the opening section. But when that section is recapitulated, the conflicts are intensified still further. The thematic return occurs at m. 101, in the middle of an ascending bass progression moving from V of V (spelled as $A^b$, m. 99) to V (m. 102); the tonic arrives only at m. 103, in the middle of the phrase. Thus even a major sectional division is evaded, reestablishing the endless melody and submerging further rhythmic conflict. The frustration of non-ending is most dramatic at m. 119, where the final cadence—announced by a two-measure trill on $g^4$ (2) over the dominant—is interrupted by an eight-measure parenthesis. The cadence finally occurs at m. 127; it is extended by a suffix that is essentially a transposition of mm. 23–27.

Resolution of the conflict in the phrase structure—the conflict between first-beat-as-ending and first-beat-as-beginning—comes momentarily at m. 131, the end of the cadential suffix and the beginning of the coda (Example 7.26). But immediately thereafter the same conflict emerges again: the one-measure units that begin with syncopated trills (see the brackets in the example) compete against Chopin's articulation, which stresses the first beats as beginnings of slurs. The eighth rests at the end of each measure support the first-beat stresses, as does the alternation of $f^4$ and $V^\#$ over the tonic pedal. At the end (m. 137) both stresses remain: the high and low notes fall on the first beat, the accented chord on the weaker beat (now the third beat instead of the second). Thus final resolution is never attained; the conflict responsible for the endless melody is itself endless.

I have devoted so much space to Op. 48, No. 2, because it is such a good example
of Chopin’s endless melody, and yet it is relatively simple. It is not a very late work, of course—it is earlier than the A Minor Mazurka. The last two nocturnes, Op. 62 (1846), are considerably more complex—especially the first one in B Major, which is perhaps Chopin’s most breathtaking venture into endless melody. A bare exposition of the opening period will have to suffice for this great nocturne (Example 7.27), along with a very tentative reconstruction of an eight-measure basic phrase (Exam-

While these mysteries lie very close to the heart of Chopin’s late style, in which the rhythmic practices of a lifetime (however brief the lifetime!) reach a peak of complexity and refinement.

In his nocturnes, mazurkas, and études, Chopin adopted the formal and rhythmic conventions of his time, and with them the Great Nineteenth-Century Rhythm Problem. He seems to have conceived the latter as a problem of continuity above all, and he set about solving it by finding means (many of them traditional) to enhance melodic continuity. Those means became increasingly elaborate, although a marvelous suppleness of rhythm was present from the first. By 1845 the qualitative accumulation of rhythmic devices produced a qualitative change, a change that points forward to the dissolution—in the music of Wagner and later composers—of those same conventions that form the foundation of Chopin’s own rhythmic technique. We will follow up that dissolution in the next (and last) chapter.

Chapter 8
Wagner: From Opera to Music Drama

Up to this point, our exploration of musical style has followed the paths of instrumental music more or less exclusively. The additional problems that the setting of a text inevitably creates for musical rhythm have made this restriction seem logical, if not unavoidable. Issues relating to poetic form and expression, whether they involve such technical matters as poetic meter, rhyme, and stanzaic structure, or such expressive ones as symbolism and metaphor—not to mention the whole complex of interrelationships between poetic and musical structures—have been beyond the scope of our inquiry.

Why, then, concern ourselves with Wagner, whose major works are without exception theatrical? (Even the Siegfried Idyll, often described as Wagner’s sole instrumental masterpiece, cannot be understood entirely apart from the stage work from which it derives its name and much of its thematic substance.) If, for historical purposes, we choose to study one composer from the latter half of the 19th century, why not Brahms or Bruckner? Why the “impure art” (the phrase is Debussy’s) of Richard Wagner?

A study of Brahms’s or Bruckner’s phrase rhythm would be fascinating, still more perhaps a comparative study of the two. But Bruckner is a far lesser composer than either Brahms or Wagner, and phrase rhythm is an area in which he is especially weak.

With Brahms the situation is more complicated. Brahms’s rhythm is supremely individual, even idiosyncratic, and not only because of his well-known penchant for hemiola. As is true of many other aspects of his art, Brahms’s rhythmic practice harks back to older models without being a mere copy of any. Baroque and early Classic practices mingle with Schubertian and Beethovenian phrase rhythms; there are even occasional echoes of the 16th century. Simple, folk-like tunes appear alongside, or are penetrated by, immensely powerful and far-reaching rhythmic displacements. The sheer eclecticism of Brahms’s style reflects an intensity of historical consciousness unique among major composers before the 20th century. The inheritance of this consciousness—though not, of course, of the style—are Schoenberg and Stravinsky.¹

In a certain sense, then, Brahms could serve as a logical culmination of our stylistic investigations. But it is Wagner who ultimately seems better suited to occupy