

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

JAMES WILLIAM SOBASKIE

Poetic *Préludes*¹

Brief as they may be, the *Préludes* of Frédéric Chopin never fail to provoke us.² In a review published shortly after their appearance in 1839, Robert Schumann professed disappointment in Chopin's Op. 28, even bewilderment:

I must mention the Preludes as most singular. I will confess that I expected something quite different: compositions carried out in the grand style, like his *études*. We have almost the contrary here: these are sketches, the beginnings of studies, or, if you will, ruins; eagles' pinions, wild and motley pell-mell. But in every piece we find, in his own pearly handwriting, 'This is by Frédéric Chopin'; even in his pauses we recognize him by his agitated breathing. He is the boldest, the proudest poet of these times. To be sure, the book contains much that is sick, feverish, repellent; but let everyone seek for what becomes him. Only let the Philistine keep away!³

Perturbed by their brevity and unconventionality, Schumann considered the *Préludes* to be scraps from Chopin's workbench—fragments with potential that did not achieve

¹ An abbreviated version of this essay was read at the Dublin International Conference on Musical Analysis, held at University College Dublin, on 24 June 2005. I thank Julian Horton and Áine Heneghan, organizers of the gathering, for their kindness and encouragement at that occasion. I also extend warm thanks to Paul Everett and Wolfgang Marx for their assistance and thoughtfulness in refining this essay for publication.

² The first edition of Chopin's *Préludes* was released by the Parisian firm of Adolphe Catelin et Cie in 1839, which published them with no opus number under the title, *24 Préludes pour le piano*. Later that year, Breitkopf & Härtel issued *Vingt-quatre préludes pour le piano, oeuvre 28*, in Leipzig. Out of respect for Chopin's intentions, the French term *préludes* is preferred in this article when referring to Op. 28 as a whole or to this special genre collectively, whereas for simple references to individual preludes the English term is used.

³ Robert Schumann's review of Op. 28 appeared in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* of 19 November 1839. The quotation given here appears in translation in Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, ed. Konrad Wolff, trans. Paul Rosenfeld (New York: Pantheon, 1946), 137–8.

what they should or could. Nevertheless, he admired how they bore Chopin's spirit and style.

Like Schumann, Franz Liszt recognized the preludes' challenges, as well as their individuality. Reviewing Chopin's public recital in Paris in 1841, Liszt asserted:

The *Préludes* of Chopin are quite special compositions. They are not merely pieces, as the title might suggest, intended to be played as an introduction to other pieces—they are poetic *Préludes*, like those of a great contemporary poet which lull the soul in golden dreams and raise it to ideal realms. Admirable in their variety, they contain a skill and substance that are appreciated only after careful study. The music is spontaneous, brilliant and fresh. They have the freedom and spaciousness characteristic of works of genius.⁴

Portraying the *Préludes* as 'special compositions' with 'a skill and substance that are appreciated only after careful study', Liszt perceived Chopin's innovations and promoted the collection as an unique class governed by its own rules.⁵

And like Schumann, Liszt was moved to invoke the metaphor of poetry. Describing the contents of Chopin's Op. 28 as 'poetic *Préludes*', he acknowledged their capacity to engage the imagination, to stimulate expectation, to convey more than their surfaces connote—in short, to provoke aesthetic responses akin to those of verse. Perhaps it is this aspect of Chopin's music that Liszt found most appealing and inspiring.⁶

⁴ Franz Liszt's review appeared in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* on 2 May 1841, following Chopin's recital on 26 April 1841. The quotation given here appears in Franz Liszt, *Frédéric Chopin*, trans. Edward N. Waters (New York: Macmillan, [1851] 1963), 14. The 'great contemporary poet' to whom Liszt alludes in his review most likely is Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), one of the first French Romantics, whose poem *Les Préludes*, from the *Méditations Poétiques* (1820), would inspire Liszt's symphonic poem of the same name (1844).

⁵ Elsewhere in his review of Chopin's performance, Liszt wrote: 'In Monday's concert Chopin had chosen by preference those works farthest removed from the classical forms. He played neither concerto nor sonata nor fantasy nor variations, but *préludes*, *études*, *nocturnes*, and *mazurkas*. Speaking to a society rather than to a public, he could safely show himself as what he is—a poet, elegiac, profound, chaste and dreaming.' Liszt, *Frédéric Chopin*, 14. Reaffirming the poetic character of Chopin's music, Liszt recognized that the composer's individuality was most evident in works without firmly fixed formal expectations.

⁶ The personal relationship between Chopin and Liszt was complex and not always congenial in later years, but their artistic relationship was stimulating and mutually beneficial. Such reciprocal influence among peers is a dynamic creative factor behind much music we consider 'great' and 'historically significant'. In the case of the *Préludes*, this may invite us to consider whether the introspection of these works might represent an inverse response to the extroversion commonly associated with much of Liszt's music. For more on this topic, see my online essay 'Enduring Music', in *Eunomios* (29 June 2007), <http://www.eunomios.org/>.

While many products of the Romantic era may be described as ‘lyrical’, and thus casually linked to the metrical art, there is cause to hold that the connection between music and poetry may be closer in Chopin’s case. Poetry was ubiquitous in nineteenth-century Paris. Produced in great quantity by professionals and amateurs alike, it was recited in the salons, reprinted in the newspapers, reviewed in the periodicals, and read regularly within the Parisian artistic community, if not by everyone in the City of Light. After all, Chopin (1810–49) belonged to the age of Hugo, de Musset and Gautier, each of whom the musician knew, a time when Byron, Keats, and Shelley were still discussed in drawing rooms, an era of *l’art pour l’art* as well as poets in politics. So vital was contemporary poetry in Parisian society that by the middle of the century it had given rise to a new, unique and thoroughly French vocal genre, the *mélodie*, which was distinct in character and performance practice from the German *Lied*, and even different from other French vocal genres of the day, like the *romance*, *chansonnette* and *nocturne*.⁷

Chopin may have been inspired by the example of poetry when composing his *Préludes*, perhaps emulating its capacity for nuance, its power to suggest more than it says, its ability to begin a story without finishing it at the last line or start one in the middle and lead to an inevitable conclusion. While one finds nothing analogous to syllabic patterns, rhyme schemes, alliteration or assonance, there is an unmistakable seductiveness to Chopin’s music, as well as a certain vocalicity, that is reminiscent of poetry. This may begin to explain why we have found the *Préludes* so provocative— and endlessly intriguing.⁸

⁷ While the term *nocturne* may be most often associated with piano music by John Field, Frédéric Chopin and Gabriel Fauré, it also designates a nineteenth-century French vocal form, as attested by the title of Antoine Romagnesi’s singing manual, *L’Art de chanter les romances, les chansonnettes et les nocturnes et généralement toute la musique de salon* (Paris, 1846). Extracts and translations of this handbook appear in David Tunley, *Salons, Singers and Songs: a Background to Romantic French Song, 1830–1870* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002): 250–65. In Chopin’s day, vocal nocturnes were duets for a man and a woman, or occasionally two women, set to romantic and often rather sentimental poetry. For more on this genre, see James Parikilas, “‘Nuit plus belle qu’un beau jour’: Poetry, Song, and the Voice in the Piano Nocturne”, *Polish Music Journal*, 3/2 (2000), http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/PMJ/issue/3.2.00/parakilas.html. Parikilas declares: ‘the vocal nocturne, because it was a shared point of reference between composers and audiences of the piano nocturne, can help us resolve some of the issues that make the piano nocturne so elusive a genre to define’. His study demonstrates that, like Chopin’s *Préludes*, the poetic nature of the piano nocturne, perhaps the most quintessential of Romantic instrumental forms, deserves much more attention than it has received to date.

⁸ Jeffrey Kallberg’s essay, ‘Small “Forms”: in Defence of the Prelude’, in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 135–58, offers a

Beyond the general association of poetry and prelude, how may the estimations of Schumann and Liszt aid our understanding of Chopin's Op. 28? Are there any shared means at all between the realms of verse and tone?

Much of what has been considered 'poetry' in Chopin's *Préludes* may be attributed to purely musical forms of allusion. Like poetry, music has the power to suggest, to point, to foreshadow the future as well as intimate the ineffable, in many different ways. One type of musical allusion, tonal implication, figures prominently in these beloved piano pieces. Tonal implication arises from hints of forthcoming tonal events, woven within a musical fabric, that elicit expectation, arouse anticipation and inspire imagination. It may emerge from small elements sounding at the surface or emanate from broad gestures unfolding over longer spans of tonal music. Whatever the source, tonal implication provokes aesthetic responses in engaged listeners.

Verbal descriptions certainly can characterize allusive effects in a passage or piece. However, the analytical approach of Heinrich Schenker, with its techniques of graphic representation, can reveal how tonal structures elicit and manipulate expressive expectation. In particular, a concept derived from Schenkerian ideas, precursive prolongation, can illuminate many kinds of tonal implication.⁹ Let us begin by examining several readily perceptible instances from among the more familiar preludes of Chopin's Op. 28, before proceeding to a formal exposition of this construct, as well as to more extended analyses, in order to understand better its contribution to the poetic nature of this music.

♯ Example 1: Prelude in C minor, Op. 28 No. 20, bars 1–4

comprehensive view of Chopin's contributions to the genre and elucidates the innovative characteristics that make them unique.

⁹ I have discussed the concept of precursive prolongation in my chapter 'Tonal Implication and the Gestural Dialectic in Schubert's A Minor Quartet', in Brian Newbould (ed.), *Schubert the Progressive: History, Performance Practice, Analysis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 56–65, and in my article 'The "Problem" of Schubert's String Quintet', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 2/1 (2005), 57–92.

Some examples of tonal implication in Chopin's *Préludes*

Consider the opening of the prelude in C minor, shown in Example 1.¹⁰ Neighbour prefixes appear on the third beats of the treble melody in bars 3 and 4.¹¹ Dashed circles identify the distinctive diminutions, which precede the tones that determine their functional meaning. Dashed lines reveal the harmonic combinations they delay. Within context, these prefixial elements ornament the pitches *f'* and *a♭'*, respectively. Provoking expectation by their dissonance, the ephemeral embellishments announce their objects, creating fleeting effects of tonal implication. Consonant predecessors in analogous positions within bars 1 and 2 serve to prepare for and enhance the expressively dissonant effects in bars 3–4.

In performance, the neighbour prefixes of bars 3 and 4 are often lengthened, ever so slightly, to manipulate the expectations they elicit. Indeed, Chopin's crescendo near the end of Example 1 may be taken as an invitation to savour the evocative power of that brief *b♭'* in the fourth bar, surely the climactic point in the phrase. In much the same way, one might elongate certain telling words in the recitation of verse to enhance their expressive effects. Both neighbour prefixes contribute to the poignantly resolute character of the C-minor prelude's first four-bar span, a quality not sustained in the following phrases, whose trajectories leave listeners with impressions of dissipation and dissolution.¹²

¹⁰ The audio files accessible online for this article (click on the blue icon to the left of an example's caption) were generated from the music examples' Finale notation files, using Finale's 'human playback' feature and its accompanying sound set (the Garritan Personal Orchestra 2.0 Finale Edition), and processed using the Audacity application.

¹¹ Commonly referred to as *appoggiaturas*, melodic adjacencies like these are described by some Schenkerians as 'incomplete neighbour tones'. However, the term *neighbour prefix* efficiently emphasizes the adjacent, subordinate, and prefatory aspects of these affecting diminutions, without suggesting they are deficient or imperfect, and thus is preferable to both alternatives.

¹² The prelude in B minor, Op. 28 No. 6, presents a similar profile. In bars 1–8, three melodic gestures sound in the tenor register, each rising higher than its predecessor, with the last expending its momentum over four bars. A similar sequence, equally earnest, begins immediately thereafter, yet it seems to reach something of an *impasse* in bars 13–14 with the appearance of a C-major harmony—the 'Neapolitan' chord or what Schenkerians call the 'Phrygian flat-II'. An examination of the score reveals that this C-major sonority ushers in an extended elaboration of the dominant that imparts an impression of gradual decline. The best Schenkerian introduction to this work remains Charles Burkhart, 'The Polyphonic Melodic Line of Chopin's B minor Prelude', in Thomas Higgins (ed.), *Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28* (New York: Norton, 1973), 80–8.

The penultimate bar of Chopin's prelude in E major features an even shorter instance of tonal implication. Example 2 reveals that an anticipation appears in the melody of the upper staff at the end of bar 11, identified there by a dashed circle:

♣ Example 2: Prelude in E major, Op. 28 No. 9, bars 9–12

noncoincidence noncoincidence imperfect coincidence noncoincidence **perfect coincidence!**

A mere demisemiquaver, this contextually dissonant diminution, e' , does not represent a suffix of the immediately preceding $d\sharp'$ on the fourth beat of bar 11. Instead, it relates forward to the following e' on the downbeat of bar 12.

As its functional appellation suggests, the prefixial pitch e' in bar 11 of Example 2 anticipates the e' that follows in bar 12. It also briefly elicits our anticipation, an impression corresponding to our perception of its contextual dependency. Upon its articulation, we sense what is coming next, yet must wait a moment. Lengthened in accord with Chopin's *ritenuto*, the allusive e' strengthens the prelude's conclusion. In poetic recitation, a similar effect may be gained by drawing out the final word of a verse.

Beyond its implicative function, however, this anticipatory e' also carries dramatic significance within Chopin's E-major prelude. As the brackets on Example 2 reveal, a dotted-note motif distinguishes the surface of the prelude, where it assumes both single- and double-dotted forms. A total of twenty-eight instances occur. Most often, single statements of the motif appear in the treble or the bass voice. Occasionally, single-dotted and double-dotted statements coincide, as they do in bars 10–11.

However, only once, at the very end of the E-major prelude, do durationally equivalent statements of the dotted-note motif coincide. Example 2 reveals that the dissonant anticipation of bar 11 signals the end of a contextual process that gradually unfolds over the course of the piece, one that contributes a unique form of closure in lieu of an obvious fundamental line descent from the primary tone, $\wedge 5$, in the

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

uppermost-sounding voice. Thus, the brief e', heard just before the close, serves allusive and dramatic ends in this prelude.¹³

Tonal implication may extend over longer spans and create even more emphatic effects. Example 3, which presents the opening of Chopin's prelude in B flat minor, features a dominant prefix in the first bar:

Example 3: Prelude in B flat minor, Op. 28 No. 16, bars 1–4

Presto con fuoco

f

8va

B \flat m: V i

B \flat m: i

While the B-flat-minor prelude does not begin with the tonic harmony, its first sonority announces that the tonic is coming. The compound minor ninth (g \flat '') and minor seventh (e \flat '') sounding above the bass (F') in bar 1 of Example 3 herald and defer to the members of the following B-flat-minor harmony (i) in bar 2.¹⁴ Prolonged by repetition and passing motion, the extended harmony on F' creates an anxious anacrusis, quickly generating suspense before a fermata exacts a slight but tantalizing delay.¹⁵ The dominant's effect is gestural, indeed physical, provoking wonder, simulating momentum, and energizing breathless perpetual motion sustained until the last bar of the prelude. Comparable to a question followed by a precipitous pause, this extended harmonic prefix stimulates curiosity and secures a listener's attention over its several seconds' span at the start of the prelude.

¹³ For more on contextual processes in tonal music, see James William Sobaskie, 'Contextual Drama in Bach,' *Music Theory Online*, 12/3 (2006), <http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.06.12.3/toc.12.3.html>

¹⁴ Schenker referred to harmonic prefixes like this as 'neighbouring-note harmonies'. See Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman [1935] 1979), 26 and Figure 12, as well as page 89 and Figure 100, a4.

¹⁵ Perhaps this is one of the pauses in which Schumann perceived Chopin's 'agitated breathing'.

A similar, though more expansive, effect may be observed in the D-major prelude. A dominant prefix in bars 1–4 serves as an assertive inhalation, energizing what becomes, in essence, a sweeping, surging, 37-bar musical utterance. Example 4 illustrates:

♣ Example 4: Prelude in D major, Op. 28 No. 5, bars 1–5

Molto Allegro

Rea. * Rea. * Rea. * Rea. * Rea. * Rea. *

DM: V ————— I

DM: ————— I

While its surface and structure may differ slightly from what follows, the extended dominant expressed in the opening bars of Example 4 is no more separable from its elided continuation than the wind-up and follow-through of a golf swing or a bowled ball—it contributes to a larger, ongoing gesture that spans the entire prelude.

Of course, Chopin was not the only artist interested in extended anacrustic openings. Nineteenth-century composers found a range of expressive uses for what Edward T. Cone described as an ‘expanded upbeat’, often providing the dominant prefix with substantial prefixial embellishment of its own.¹⁶ We need only compare the beginnings of Beethoven’s piano sonatas, Op. 31 Nos. 2 and 3—one tempestuous and the other humorous—or those of Schumann’s *Fantasiestücken*, Op. 12 No. 2 (*Aufschwung*) and No. 3 (*Warum?*), suggestive of soaring and searching, respectively—for familiar yet contrasting examples. However, Chopin seems to have been especially inspired by the anacrustic premise. The highly contrasting openings of his *Étude*, Op. 10 No. 12, *Ballade*, Op. 23, and *Waltz*, Op. 69 No. 1, as well as the beginnings of several preludes examined in this study, certainly offer compelling evidence of its expressive potential.

¹⁶ Edward T. Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: Norton, 1968), 24. Cone’s complementary concept of ‘structural downbeat’ is discussed on the following page.

Dominant prefixes also may appear within the interior of a piece and may defer to harmonies other than the tonic.¹⁷ The beginning of Chopin's prelude in D flat holds several. As Example 5 suggests, the tonic D-flat major is firmly established in the first eight bars. Hierarchical harmonic analysis and a dotted box reveal that a dominant prefix appears on the last beat of bar 9. There, a dominant seventh on d \flat , preceded by its own dependent diminution—an A-flat-minor sonority on the third beat of bar 9—very briefly embellishes the G-flat-major harmony of bar 10, before the tonic D-flat harmony returns at the end of the bar.¹⁸ Another dominant prefix appears within the last half of bar 11, as the second dotted box in Example 5 suggests. Extended by an immediately preceding six-four sonority in the first half of the bar, the dominant seventh sonority on e \flat draws attention to the A-flat-minor harmony of the following bar.

The dominant prefixes identified in Example 5 tonicize the subdominant (IV) and minor dominant (v) harmonies, the first much more briefly than the second, and may be understood to represent fleeting allusions to other keys within the prelude's tonal frame of D flat major. As the passages unfold, chromaticism provokes curiosity regarding their forthcoming goals. Just as well-chosen and carefully placed metaphors or images in a poem may spark tangential flights of imagination, these transient tonicizations offer temporary transport to new tonal levels and contribute to the 'spaciousness' admired by Liszt.¹⁹

¹⁷ Traditional music theory refers to fifth-related chords that precede harmonies other than the tonic as 'secondary dominants', and some Schenkerians refer to them as 'applied dominants'. However, the term *dominant prefix* emphasizes the contiguous, dependent and anticipatory character of these sonorities, without suggesting they are inferior or afterthoughts, and thus is preferable to both alternatives.

¹⁸ I thank Hugh Tinney for pointing out to me that the fleeting establishment of IV (G flat) at the start of bar 10 in the D-flat-major prelude is not strong enough to convert the subsequent D-flat-major harmony in the second half of the bar to a dominant of that IV. In private communication, he captured the effect of that D-flat-major harmony in bar 10 most succinctly: 'My ears have always heard this chord as simply a reversion to the tonic (I of I) before the more spacious move to the dominant minor, A flat minor.' As Tinney suggests, Chopin's transient tonicization of IV at the start of bar 10 creates a most poetic musical allusion, a harmonic feint, whose brief sidestepping effect serves a broader, more dramatic tonal gesture of moving from the firmly asserted I to the unexpected tonal area of v.

¹⁹ See Schenker's discussion of the D-flat-major prelude in his *Harmony*, where the theorist described these transient tonicizations as modulations to new keys; Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony*, trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese, edited and annotated by Oswald Jonas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1906] 1954), 325–8.

Example 5: Prelude in D flat major, Op. 28 No. 15, bars 1–28

Sostenuto

D \flat M: I V I

D \flat M: V G \flat M: ii V $_7$ I IV I

A \flat m: (V) V $_7$ i i B \flat m:i (V) V $_7$ i
 D \flat M: v ii vi

B \flat m: (V) V $_7$ i
 D \flat M: vi V I V

D \flat M: V I V i

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

One more tonicization appears in the first section of the D-flat-major prelude. Identified within Example 5 by the dotted box in bars 14–16, this one differs from its predecessors in that it does not feature a dominant prefix. However, it *does* possess a forward-facing inclination. More specifically, the first B-flat-minor triad, heard in bar 14, defers to the second, which sounds in bar 16. As a result, this passage bears the character of an anticipation, though on a much broader scale than the common melodic diminution.

There are even more elaborate musical prefixes within Chopin's *Préludes*. Consider Example 6, which presents the beginning of the prelude in G sharp minor:

Example 6: Prelude in G sharp minor, Op. 28 No. 12, bars 1–5

G#m: i V⁶

Within the opening span of this piece, an ascending change of register conveys a distinctive anticipatory impression. More specifically, the initial expression of scale degree $\hat{5}$ in bar 1 defers in context to the octave-elevated articulation heard at the end in bar 5. There, $d\sharp^{11}$ represents the primary tone of the prelude, $\hat{5}$, which sounds in what will prove to be the obligatory register of the composition's fundamental line.²⁰ The appearance of this important structural element over the dominant, in turn, directs attention even further ahead, perhaps in anticipation of a forthcoming articulation boasting tonic support. As in poetry, an expected event may emerge as the harbinger of another, contributing to a much larger feeling of forward flow.

²⁰ Likewise, initial ascents to primary tones represent extended prefixes that defer to contextually superior tonal elements and create effects of tonal implication.

Precursive prolongations

All of the instances of tonal implication discussed thus far arise from a class of tonal prolongations that may be termed 'precurative'.²¹ More specifically, a 'precurative prolongation' consists of one or more contextually dependent tonal elements associated with and preceding a contextually distinguished pre-eminent element at a given structural level. In a precurative prolongation, the initially appearing subordinate elements are prefixial to the pre-eminent element, which functions as an anchoring object. Assuming the model of tonal structure as a representational hierarchy, a perspective proposed by Richard Cohn and Douglas Dempster, then this pre-eminent element is promotable to the next higher level of tonal structure as the precurative prolongation's representative.²²

Precursive prolongations include neighbour prefixes, anticipations, dominant prefixes, initial ascents and arpeggiations, plus elaborated instances of these, as well as those passages and pieces Schenker called 'auxiliary cadences'.²³ They may appear at all structural levels, extend over considerable spans, sound in upper or lower voices and may be contrapuntally combined with other prolongations. The allusive effects of these structures arise from the contextual dependency of their prefixial elements, whose significance derives from their objects, and more specifically, from the expectations that these prefixial elements elicit for their objects.²⁴ All bear the distinguishing trait of prospective dependency.

Providing a means of understanding the structure and effects of many kinds of musical prefixes, the concept of precurative prolongation reveals itself to be an effective alternative to Schenker's notion of auxiliary cadence. By nature, Schenker's idea is a generative construct that offers a transformational account of musical structure. It

²¹ The adjective 'precurative,' synonymous with 'forerunning', is distinct from that of 'recursive' and the process of recursion, or 'nesting'.

²² Richard Cohn and Douglas Dempster discuss the representational model of tonal structure in 'Hierarchical Unity, Plural Unities: Toward a Reconciliation', in Katherine Bergeron and Phillip V. Bohlman (eds), *Disciplining Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 160–6.

²³ See Schenker, *Free Composition*, 88–90 and Figure 110, for the theorist's discussion of his notion of *auxiliary cadence*. Poundie Burstein's *The Non-Tonic Opening in Classical and Romantic Music* (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1988), and his 'Unraveling Schenker's Concept of the Auxiliary Cadence', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 27/2 (2005), 159–186, address ambiguities associated with Schenker's idea.

²⁴ For more on contextual dependency, see Allen Forte and Steven E. Gilbert, *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1982), 10–17. Professor Forte told me that he believes that he was the first to use the expression 'contextual dependency' in print.

assumes the hypothetical ‘transference’ of forms of the fundamental structure to lower levels of tonal organization, as well as their hypothetical ‘abbreviation’ by the omission of the initial tonic bass. It also admits the possibility of a hypothetical omission of the linear descent in the top voice, in addition to omission of the initial tonic bass. In turn, these postulated processes are held to account for the remarkable diversity of anticipatory spans in tonal music. Applied inductively in analysis, Schenker’s theory of auxiliary cadence may influence structural interpretation through its premises and presumptions in ways that the concept of precursive prolongation does not.

In essence, the notion of auxiliary cadence offers a ‘top-down’ approach to explaining tonal structure. It obliges analysts to interpret anticipatory passages and pieces in terms of five harmonic patterns (V–I, IV–V–I, III–[IV]–V–I, III–V–I and II–IV–V–I) corresponding to abbreviated forms of the fundamental structure. These are understood to provide the basis for what Schenker called ‘synthesis’—the composing-out process responsible for generating anticipatory spans.²⁵ Of course, there is no way to verify whether the chosen pattern actually inspired the music at hand, or even whether the creative process proceeded ‘top-down’, as the theory implies. Thus, any analytical appeal to the idea of auxiliary cadence is conjectural, since the operations of ‘transference’ and ‘abbreviation’ remain hypothetical. On the contrary, the concept of precursive prolongation depends upon no such suppositions.

In addition, analysts may feel forced to make music ‘fit’ one of Schenker’s patterns in appealing to the concept of auxiliary cadence. For instance, Schubert’s *Waltz*, D146 No. 15, and his *Lied, Der Wanderer*, D489, both feature the harmonic pattern vi–V–I. Bars 1–24 of Brahms’s *Intermezzo*, Op. 76 No. 6, features I⁶–V–I. In strict analytic applications of Schenker’s notion of auxiliary cadence, all would be interpreted as instances of the pattern V–I, despite the unique contributions of their initial harmonies. Suppression of those distinctive components, encouraged by the taxonomic nature of the auxiliary cadence idea, obviously is distortive. Of course, the concept of precursive prolongation implies no such categorization or limited number of harmonic patterns. Instead, it portrays a musical prefix in terms of dependency relations.

Further, when Schenker avers that ‘despite the degrees which belong to the forthcoming root, the space up to its actual entrance belongs conceptually to the preceding harmony’,²⁶ he reveals that his theory of auxiliary cadences is founded on his personal idea of the ‘scale step’. These abstract subsuming elements played a far greater role in his *Harmony* (1906) than in *Free Composition* (1935), which suggests that

²⁵ Schenker, *Free Composition*, 88.

²⁶ As note 25.

the notion of auxiliary cadence may not have been fully refined when it was incorporated within that later source. This also underscores the speculative nature of his proposition. Despite its difficulties, however, the notion of auxiliary cadence in no way diminishes the unrivalled illuminative power of Schenker's approach to tonal music.

In contrast, the concept of precursive prolongation, which invokes the Schenkerian ideas of structural levels, voice leading and diminution—all stressed in *Free Composition*—gathers together a wide range of anticipatory elements and structures into a distinctive functional class. Deductively applied in analysis, the concept of precursive prolongation has the advantage of readily describing a wider range of related tonal structures objectively, without introducing questionable supposition. In essence, it offers a 'bottom-up' approach to explaining forward-facing musical spans. Finally, by emphasizing the trait of contextual dependency, the concept of precursive prolongation can illuminate tonal implication.

Example 7 presents some general patterns for precursive prolongations:

Example 7: Precursive patterns

For instance, pattern c) of Example 7 portrays the neighbour prefixes examined in Chopin's C-minor prelude. Pattern a) symbolizes both the tiny anticipation of the E-major prelude and the final transient tonicization cited in the excerpt from the D-flat-major prelude. Pattern b) expresses the registral ascent observed in the G-sharp-minor prelude. Finally, pattern e) depicts the dominant prefixes of the B-flat-minor and D-flat-major preludes.

However, by no means is Example 7 an exhaustive list of precursive possibilities. Its patterns are merely common archetypes. That is, pattern d) betokens both diatonic and chromatic lower neighbour prefixes, while pattern j) represents a range of ascending linear progressions from an inner to an upper voice, including thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths and octaves, as well as initial ascents. Similarly, pattern k) exemplifies initial arpeggiations of every sort. Featuring simple or compound prefixes, precursive prolongations are all end-accented structures, as these generalized graphic models suggest.

Let us examine more extended precursive prolongations in Chopin's *Préludes* to reveal how their effects of tonal implication contribute to the poetry of these works. The following survey will focus on the essential components of larger structures, rather than on subordinate surface detail, to account for musical allusion in Op. 28.

Op. 28 No. 1 in C major

As Example 8 illustrates, Chopin's prelude in C major begins with a modest melodic rise that originates in the rich, resonant, tenor register of the piano. Distinguished by the separately beamed melody that begins in the bass staff, which is echoed an octave above in the treble staff, the gesture seems to gather momentum in bars 1–3 through repetition of its initial neighbour figure g–a–g. A brief, impulsive arpeggiation through the tonic triad follows in bars 3–7, an arc that ascends above middle C and moves to e' on the upper staff.

A precursive prolongation, the initial arpeggiation g–c'–e' shown in bars 1–5 of Example 8, draws attention to the primary tone of the prelude. Scale degree $\wedge 3$ (e') serves that function, articulated and established in bar 5. However, $\wedge 3$ sounds not over the tonic harmony, but the subdominant. Consequently, the setting of that important structural tone creates a tenuous impression because of its contextual dissonance. A descent to scale degree $\wedge 1$ is frustrated shortly thereafter by an interruption that halts progress at scale degree $\wedge 2$ in bar 7. Simultaneously, the arrival of the dominant in bar 7 brings the opening passage to a conclusion in bar 8, alluding to a forthcoming tonal

and thematic return. Together, the elements of bars 1–8, including the initial arpeggiation and the dominant in bars 7–8, create the effect of a first ‘attempt’ at reaching closure, a gesture of potentiality we may take as musically poetic.²⁷ Like the first half of a rhyming couplet, the span directs attention forward to a forthcoming successor that will satisfy expectations.

♣ Example 8: Prelude in C major, Op. 28 No. 1, bars 1–12

(arpeggiation: G3–C4–E4)

Agitato

CM: I V₅⁶ I I⁶ IV⁷ V⁷/V

CM: I

V⁷ , I V⁶ I I⁶

—V— , I

A comprehensive view of Chopin’s prelude in C major appears in Example 9:

²⁷ In his explanation of the concept of interruption, Schenker employed these words: ‘The initial succession $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{2}$ gives the impression that it is the first attempt at the complete fundamental line’. See Schenker, *Free Composition*, 36. His reference to an ‘attempt’ here is most telling, and his phrasing inspired what I call the ‘attempt, attempt→achievement’ paradigm.

the sequence of rising sixths that subsequently unfolds in bars 12–21, plus the extension in bars 21–24, expectations elicited by bars 1–4 and 9–12 continue and intensify within this new forward thrust. An impression of purposeful striving emerges in the sixteen-bar span, an effect not unlike poetic enjambment, in which no pause or relaxation occurs midway.

Partial success arises in bars 24–25 of the C-major prelude with the authentic cadence that brings its structural tonic (I) in the bass, as Example 9 indicates. Yet even then, a small amount of uncertainty remains, sustained by the absence of the fundamental line's concluding tone, $\hat{1}$ (c'), until its long-awaited arrival in bar 29. Expected events elicit anticipation via Chopin's carefully coordinated delays.³⁰

In his prelude in C major, Chopin transformed the familiar antecedent/consequent phrase relation into a much grander structural plan that, given its expanded length, musical content, and internal dynamism, represents what might be called the 'attempt, attempt→achievement' paradigm. Indeed, this structural scheme confers an impression of physicality on Chopin's music, evoking a distinctive aesthetic response. The phrase 'poetry in motion', occasionally invoked with respect to elegant movement in sport that is suggestive of ballet, seems equally appropriate to the two energetic musical gestures we hear here, whose generous arcs capture and command attention.³¹ As we will see, other pieces in Op. 28 elaborate this design.³²

³⁰ For a contrasting view of the C-major prelude, see V. Kofi Agawu, 'Concepts of Closure and Chopin's Opus 28', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 9 (1987), 1–17, which identifies three gestures and a formal scheme he calls the 'basic model'.

³¹ See Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

³² Diane Urista compares several recorded performances and published analyses of Chopin's prelude in C major in 'Chopin's Prelude in C Major Revisited: Integrating Sound and Symbol', *Music Theory Online* 13/1 (2007), <http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.07.13.1/toc.13.1.html>, highlighting their intersections and digressions. She concludes with observations pertinent to the interpretation of precursive prolongations: 'When we shift our analytical focus from what we see in the score to what we hear in performances—the expressive, unique subtleties of a performance—we acquire insights other than those perhaps captured in a written interpretation, that is, an interpretation that may have not been as readily apparent in the analyst's imagined performance.... The integration of sound and symbol is an approach that is not so much about getting things right as it is about revealing the interpretive possibilities that lie within a musical passage.' The visual nature of the printed score, as well as analytical preconceptions, can obscure important structural relationships that emerge through sensitive study of music's means and manner of suggestion.

Op. 28 No. 7 in A major

Chopin's prelude in A major beguiles with its fragile beauty, but also teases with its treatment of tonality. Example 10 reproduces the entire composition:

Example 10: Prelude in A Major, Op. 28 No. 7, with harmonic analysis

Andantino

7 ————— 6 ————— 7
5 ————— 4 ————— 5
V ————— I

7 ————— 6 —————
5 ————— 4 ————— (V⁷/ii ii⁸⁻⁷) -V⁷ — I

More a passing *réminiscence* of a mazurka than the real thing, Chopin's seventh prelude embodies a most ethereal, dance-like grace. While we might wish to hear a structural tonic at the outset of this delicate piece, and may even imagine an A-major harmony there, the seventh prelude of Chopin's Op. 28 actually begins with the dominant harmony. As Example 10 indicates, the prelude features an extended dominant prefix at the start, sustaining it, as well as an impression of fluid forward momentum, until bars 7–8.

To declare the sonority in bars 3–4 of Example 10 as the background-level structural tonic (I) would be to overvalue an apparent tonic—actually a six-four sonority—within a contextually superior, composed-out dominant harmony that subsumes most of the span. Indeed, the claim that bars 3–4 represent the structural tonic would situate that essential structural element in the midst of an unfolding phrase—an illogical assumption. Here, a precursive prolongation supports, in effect,

an attempt to reach a satisfying statement of the tonic harmony, which finally is met at the phrase's end.³³

But the A-major harmony in bars 7–8 represents only a qualified success. A glance at the excerpt of the score shown in Example 10 reminds us that bars 9–10 correspond to bars 1–2. A more determined musical gesture, another attempt, immediately begins with that later thematic reprise. Enhanced by registral and dynamic changes, and energized by a chromatic 'breakthrough' in bar 12 (the major-minor seventh sonority on f# is a dominant prefix of the supertonic), the second half of the A-major prelude conveys an impression of gentle yet earnest striving toward a foretold goal. That goal, of course, is a satisfying statement of the tonic harmony, which sounds in the final bar. This prelude, like that in C major, exhibits an instance of the *attempt, attempt*→*achievement* paradigm.

Together, these gestures confer an expansive anticipatory character on the prelude in A major. Example 11 offers a broad view in its upper system. Although pursuit of the initial structural tonic orients bars 1–8, the relative brevity of the A-major sonority in bar 7–8, as well as its extended prefixial diminution, oblige us to consider it subordinate to the final statement of the tonic.³⁴ And while the upper sketch in Example 11 represents the initial expression of tonic using the same symbols as that at the end, the latter A-major harmony predominates.

To highlight this contextual distinction, the lower staves of Example 11 present the pair of precursive patterns that produce the prelude's distinctly end-weighted structure.³⁵ In a manner like that of rhyme, the end of the first phrase portends what the second phrase provides. And together they offer a fleeting aural image of elegance and eloquence.

³³ Chopin's prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 45 (1841), an occasional piece dedicated 'à Mademoiselle la Princesse Elisabeth Czernicheff', offers a contrasting case. Although hints of its precursive opening music re-emerge later, bars 1–5 represent a discrete introduction. Prolonged by a stepwise descent to its counterpart an octave below, c#' represents the structural top voice, while the harmonic progression i⁶–V–i unfolds in support.

³⁴ Edward T. Cone offers a valuable rhythmic illumination of the A-major prelude in *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: Norton, 1968), 39–43.

³⁵ The illustrations shown on the lower staves are not typical of traditional Schenkerian analysis, but merely serve to highlight the precursive patterns integrated within the music.

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

Example 11: Prelude in A major, Op. 28 No. 7, comprehensive sketch

1 3 5 7 9 11 12 13 14 15 16

3 2 1

6 4

(A: V — V I)

A: I V I

Example 12: Prelude in B major, Op. 28 No. 11, bars 1–9

Vivace

p legato

Rea * Rea * Rea

BM: (V) V I

BM: I

Rea * Rea * Rea

3

3

Op. 28 No. 11 in B major

Chopin's prelude in B major also exploits tonal implication to achieve unique expressive ends. As Example 12 reveals, the work begins unaccompanied, with a turn figure about $f\sharp'$ that incites curiosity and invites prediction. A dominant prefix delays the first articulation of the tonic harmony—indeed the tonic pitch class in any form—as well as the establishment of the primary tone, until the fifth bar of the B-major prelude. The anacrustic character of the precursive prolongation in Example 12, whose effect is comparable to that of poetic inversion, engages our attention, drawing us inward and onward. Paradoxically, it also confers a tentative quality on the assertion of the tonic harmony (I) in bars 5–6, which, in turn, influences perception of what follows. Like the initial phrase of the A-major prelude, bars 1–5 of the B-major prelude represents an attempt, a gesture that implies a more convincing successor.

The upper system of Example 13 offers a broad voice-leading sketch:

Example 13: Prelude in B major, Op. 28 No. 11, comprehensive sketch

1 3 5 7 9 11 12 13 14 15 17 18 19 21 23 24 25 27

(BM: V—I)

(BM:I—V—I)

BM: I V I I

Another cadential confirmation of the tonic harmony sounds in bars 9–10 of the B-major prelude, seemingly more forceful than that of bars 5–6. In retrospect, the reassertion effectively enhances the anticipatory quality of its predecessor. Yet simultaneously, and in prospect, that harmonic event in bars 9–10 conveys a hint of hesitancy. As the sketch in Example 13 suggests, the B major sonority in bars 9–10 soon is superseded by another confirmation of the tonic harmony in bars 17–18 at the completion of the fundamental line.

Consequently, a cascade of three tonic arrivals, each surpassing the previous in contextual ‘weight’, unfolds within the B-major prelude. The three systems below the voice-leading sketch in Example 13 portray the precursive patterns responsible for the music’s intensifying effect. The ten-bar passage at the end of the composition, roughly a third of the prelude’s sounding span, serves as a coda, providing a measure of balance to the preceding sequence of increasingly emphatic tonic sonority statements. In verbal terms, the effect of the prelude in B major may be likened to a series of increasingly earnest entreaties whose last convinces through accumulated anticipation and extended emphasis. In formal terms, it represents an expanded instance of the structural scheme heard in the C-major and A-major preludes, a design that may be characterized as *attempt, attempt, attempt*→*achievement*. Thus, tonal implication guides the flow and shapes the form of Chopin’s prelude in B major.

Op. 28 No. 17 in A flat major

With its lilting melody and accompaniment, Chopin’s prelude in A flat major evokes the atmosphere of a Venetian *barcarolle*.³⁶ Tonal implication shapes its buoyant character at many levels. Like the B-major prelude, an extended dominant prefix initiates an impression of determined forward flow within the A-flat-major essay. Example 14 presents the opening measures, along with a hierarchical harmonic analysis:

³⁶ See William Rothstein’s engaging study of this work, ‘Like Falling off a Log: Rubato in Chopin’s Prelude in A-flat Major, Op. 28 No. 17’, *Music Theory Online*, 11/1 (March 2005), <http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.05.11.1/toc.11.1.html>, which offers an admirable example of Schenkerian insights applied to musical interpretation and performance practice.

♣ Example 14: Prelude in A flat major, Op. 28 No. 17, bars 1–10

Allegretto

$\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: (V)}$
 $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}$

$\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}_7$ $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}_7/\text{IV}$ $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: IV}$

$\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}_7$ $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: IV}$ $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}_7$ $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}_7/\text{vi}$ $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: vi}_7$ $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}_7$ — $\left(\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}\right)$ — $\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}$

$\text{A}^{\flat}\text{M: V}$

As Example 14 suggests, the six-four sonority in bars 1–2 represents the dominant, E flat, which then clearly resounds in bar 3. The A-flat sonority on the downbeat of bar 4 is but an apparent tonic, immediately revealing itself to be a harmonic prefix to its successor via its dissonant seventh, $g\flat$ —an applied dominant seventh of the subdominant. Similarly, the A-flat sonority in bar 9 arises within an expansion of the dominant harmony, E-flat major. Consequently, a convincing impression of tonic fails to emerge in this span of the A-flat-major prelude. This gives rise to a most poetic impression of expectancy.

Indeed, the tonic harmony of A-flat major receives no cadential confirmation until bar 18, a fifth of the way through the prelude. Example 15, offering a sketch of that span, reveals that neighbour motion and a preliminary linear descent of a sixth (bars 1–14), nested within a subsuming fifth progression (bars 1–18), sustain the passage's tonic-directed impulse until the cadence of bars 17–18 brings its implied goal. Dwelling on the dominant, the prelude's opening passage generates an impression of momentum, conveyed by music that elicits increasing tonal suspense.

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

Example 15: Sketch of the prelude in A flat major, Op. 28 No. 17, bars 1–18

5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

(A♭M: V ————— V I)
A♭M: I

Example 16 offers a comprehensive view of the entire A-flat-major prelude:

Example 16: Prelude in A flat major, Op. 28 No. 17, comprehensive sketch

A B A' Coda

18 || 19 33 34 || 35 40 41 42 43 44 52 53 54 55 56 57 65 || 67 90

5 4 3 2 1

8 – 7 – 10 – 7 – 10 10 – 10 – 10

A♭: I (♭VI) V (♭VI) V I

While the opening precursive prolongation proves to be relatively short within the framework of the whole A-flat-major prelude, its contribution to the character of the piece and its formal structure is enduring, as Example 16 suggests. A moment after the extended dominant's object arrives in bar 18, contrasting and contradictory chromatic motion ensues, retrospectively diminishing the impact of that long-awaited tonic confirmation. As a result, the prelude in A flat major assumes a distinctly anticipatory quality, oriented toward a more satisfactory articulation of the tonic harmony that finally arrives in bar 65. Its progressive character arises from tonal implication and is similar to effects produced within the A-major and B-major preludes. However the A-flat prelude's greater dimensions, as well as the contrasting music of bars 19–34, render the incorporated instance of the *attempt, attempt→achievement* paradigm somewhat less immediate and intense, yet more cumulative and compelling.

The lower staves of Example 16 capture the precursive character of the A-flat-major prelude. Broadly summarized, an initial tonic arrival in bar 18 elicits a more satisfying one in bar 65. As in the B-major prelude, an extended coda, even longer than the opening section of the composition, provides balance. Avoiding the tonic harmony through much of the first two-thirds of its span, save for the brief instance in bar 18, the A-flat-major prelude cultivates a distinctive impression of fluid motion. Its poetry, then, lies in the evocation of its *topos*, the *barcarolle*, via tonal implication.

Op. 28 No. 18 in F minor

Without question, Chopin's prelude in F minor represents an extraordinary exploitation of the tonal system's allusive resources. An extended example of tonal implication, as well as an intriguing instance of precursive prolongation, Op. 28 No. 18 begins on the dominant of F and avoids confirming the tonic harmony until the very last moment.³⁷ Yet even in the final bar, after a thunderous authentic cadence, complete closure is denied. As we will see, in addition to the absence of an opening statement of the tonic harmony, the F-minor prelude lacks an essential structural feature found in most tonal works.

³⁷ The second prelude of Chopin's Op. 28 is similar to the eighteenth, but more enigmatic, appearing to open in one key and close in another. Schenker recognized the ambiguous effect created at the start of the A-minor prelude, noting (*Harmony*, 251–2) that 'we take, for example, the beginning of Chopin's Prelude No. 2 to be the tonic in E minor'. His sketch of the remarkable work in *Free Composition* (Fig. 110, a3) reveals how a chromatically elaborated minor-dominant harmony on E gradually but inexorably transforms into a major dominant before resolving to the tonic A minor in the final bar. Of the prelude in A minor, Schenker wrote (*Free Composition*, 89): 'This piece is a true prelude: it represents a fifth-progression over V–I only.'

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

The beginning of the tumultuous F-minor prelude appears in Example 17, while the end appears in Example 18. Each excerpt is accompanied by harmonic analysis:

Example 17: Prelude in F minor, Op. 28 No. 18, bars 1–9

Molto allegro

Harmonic analysis for Example 17:

Fm: V⁹

Fm: V

Fm: V^{9/iv}

Fm: (iv) ii^o6

Tonic and mode are signalled in the very first bar of the prelude by the dominant ninth harmony on C, as Example 17 suggests. However, the forthcoming sonority on F in bar 5 does not represent a structural tonic, only an applied dominant prefix to the harmony on B \flat that later arrives in bar 9. In the increasingly agitated chromatic span that ensues, the opening dominant harmony on C remains contextually pre-eminent, undisplaced by any other of equal or greater contextual significance. Reappearing in bar 20, as Example 18 illustrates, the dominant harmony on C defers to the tonic F

minor only at the end. Like the prelude in A minor, the F-minor prelude represents a greatly extended dominant prefix at its highest structural level—a precursive prolongation. In poetic terms, this music may be regarded as an expansive inverted statement whose first real caesura coincides with its climatic end.

Example 18: Prelude in F minor, Op. 28 No. 18, bars 13–21

Fm: (V)

Fm: (V) ————— V i

Closure on tonic comes in the last bar of the F-minor prelude, as Example 18 shows, but this arrival only partially satisfies expectations. The sketch in Example 19 reveals why: Chopin's prelude in F minor has no fundamental line. Instead, the primary tone, scale degree $\hat{5}$, remains firmly fixed at the background level, sustained by neighbour motions in the middleground and supported below by a broad dominant prefix, the chromatic elaboration of which forms the essential substance of the work. The presumption, implied by Schenkerian tonal theory, that complete tonal artworks always and must contain a fundamental line is simply not borne out by Chopin's prelude in F minor.

Example 19: Prelude in F minor, Op. 28 No. 18, comprehensive sketch

(Fm: V ————— V) i
Fm: i

A descending fifth span *does* sound in the tenor register of bars 18–21 within the F-minor prelude, as Examples 18 and 19 indicate. But to regard this abrupt melodic gesture as a fundamental line would be to ask of it that which it cannot give. Lacking individuated harmonic support for the fleeting tones that represent $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{3}$, the sequence c–b \flat –a \flat –g–F in bars 18–21 remains a lower-level strand. To give this brief linear motion background-level status, just to satisfy theoretical prescription, would distort the prelude and disguise its actual effect. Here, Chopin draws upon the principles of traditional triadic tonality, manipulating them—and us—most poetically, to communicate an impression of imperfect closure earned through hard-fought struggle.³⁸

Initial ambiguity and lingering expectation, both elicited by tonal implication, characterize the prelude in F minor. These qualities also distinguish the last work to be

³⁸ Discussing Chopin's prelude in F major, which features a prominent flattened seventh within a tonic arpeggiation in the treble register of the penultimate bar, Jeffrey Kallberg (as note 8, 142–3) offers an observation regarding its hint of irresolution that also illuminates its companion, the prelude in F minor: 'Chopin evoked this quality of open-endedness in order to transform the nature of closure in the short, notated prelude, where previously (and indeed, still, in several of Chopin's Op. 28) full closure had prevailed.... Chopin normally preferred to leave matters somewhat undone at the ends of preludes. And curiously enough, one reason that he may have been prompted to transform the genre in this way was to facilitate one of its traditional generic functions. For when a prelude lacks full closure, it more effortlessly serves "in the guise of an introduction" to another work. In other words, by ending preludes abruptly and incompletely, Chopin allowed for an ensuing longer work to fulfill the closural promise left hanging in the introductory prelude.'

examined in this study, the E-minor prelude. However, as in the F-minor prelude, the means of these effects, as well as their expressive natures, are quite different in what must be the most widely known of all of Chopin's *Préludes*.

Op. 28 No. 4 in E minor

For many young pianists, the prelude in E minor serves as an introduction to Chopin's art, if not the Romantic aesthetic itself, thanks to its modest technical demands and lyrical melody. Indeed, among the pieces in Op. 28 it may be the most likely to be regarded as quintessentially 'poetic' because of its immediate and appealing expression.³⁹ Yet the prelude also represents a conundrum, because its tonal framework is hardly normal, and certainly not simple.

For instance, the very beginning of the prelude represents an unsuspected challenge to anyone who might attempt an analysis of this intriguing work. Example 20 reproduces the prelude's score. Do the opening chords really correspond to a structural tonic (i) harmony? To answer that question, we must examine them in full context.

The rich, resonant, root-position E-minor sonority at the end of the prelude may lead one to regard the tenor-register, first-inversion E-minor chords in the first bar as a complementary expression of the tonic triad. However, the opening simultaneities of the piece surely are contextually subordinate to the root-position dominant that sounds halfway through the piece in bars 10–12. That is, the first-inversion E-minor chords of bar 1 defer to the dominant in the twelfth bar because of the latter's contextual superiority.

Similarly, the first-inversion E-minor sonority heard in bar 13, whose contextual significance pales in comparison to its immediate predecessor in bar 12, defers to the forthcoming dominant in bar 24. Clearly, the lack of a convincing, root-position tonic triad at the beginning of the prelude lends a provisional quality to everything that follows, at least until the final chord.

³⁹ The preludes in E minor and B minor were performed during the Offertory of Chopin's funeral Mass on 30 October 1849. See Liszt, *Frédéric Chopin*, 181.

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

Example 20: Prelude in E minor, Op. 28 No. 4

Largo

p *espressivo*

Em: $i^6?$ (or $V^4?$)

5

10

) **V!**

15

stretto ∞ *dim.* *p*

V

20

smorz. *pp*

V **i**

Schenkerian analysts disagree on significant structural aspects of the E-minor prelude. Example 21, which presents an aligned comparison of analytical interpretations by Carl Schachter,⁴⁰ Justin London and Ronald Rodman,⁴¹ and Edward Laufer,⁴² offers evidence of strikingly disparate Schenkerian views of the E-minor prelude's background.

As the contrasting sketches of Example 21 suggest, the location of a complete, registrally contiguous fundamental line within the prelude proved challenging for all of these observers. Their analyses, which suggest that the fundamental line of the prelude is distributed in different registers—and in diverse ways—all are difficult to correlate with aural experience. Further, they contradict one another in fundamental aspects. In particular, each analyst's assertion of scale degree $\hat{3}$ is questionable. Surely the obscurity or absence of this expected structural element contributes to the prelude's intrigue.⁴³ How might all of these facts be reconciled?

⁴⁰ Carl Schachter, 'The Prelude in E minor Op. 28 No. 4: Autograph Sources and Interpretation', in John Rink and Jim Samson (eds), *Chopin Studies 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 161–82: 167. The interpretation of Schachter's analysis given here does not convey all of its detail, but represents essential structural claims for comparative purposes.

⁴¹ Justin London, and Ronald Rodman, 'Musical Genre and Schenkerian Analysis', *Journal of Music Theory*, 42/1 (1998), 101–24: 103–4. The authors challenge Schachter's 1995 interpretation with their own analytical sketch. The interpretation of their analysis given here does not convey all of its detail, but represents essential structural claims for comparative purposes.

⁴² Edward Laufer, 'On the first movement of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony', in Carl Schachter and Hedi Siegel (eds), *Schenker Studies 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 127–59: 137. The interpretation given here is a composite derived from Laufer's Example 10, which includes expanded and summary views, a) and b), respectively. Careted scale degrees and Roman-numeral harmonic functions are omitted in Laufer's illustrations; the former are added here merely for comparative purposes. However, the text shown below the sketch is drawn from Laufer's original. This interpretation of Laufer's analysis does not convey all of its detail, but represents essential structural claims for comparative purposes. It is curious that only two sentences of commentary accompanies Laufer's graph, given that his interpretation differs considerably from an interpretation already published by his editor, Carl Schachter, and that Schachter's work is not cited.

⁴³ Schenker also engaged Chopin's prelude in E minor, as an analytical sketch reveals. Held among the theorist's papers in the Ernst Oster Collection within the Music Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, the manuscript's call number is JOB 89-25. I thank Robert Kosovsky, Curator, Rare Books and Manuscripts, for his kind assistance. A reproduction and brief discussion of this sketch appears in London and Rodman, 118–9.

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

Example 21: Prelude in E minor, Op. 28 No. 4, comparison of analytical interpretations by Schachter, Rodman/London and Laufer

a)
after Schachter (1995)

1 9 10 12 13 16 18 19 21 24 25

5 5 4 3 2 1

Em: i^6 iv^6 V^7 i^6 iv^6 V^7 (VI) V i

b)
after London/Rodman (1998)

1 5 9 10 12 13 16 17 18 21 24 25

5 4 3? 2 5 4 3 2 1

Em: (i) (iv^4_3) (iv^6) V (i) i V V i

c)
after Laufer (1999)

1 9 10 13 17 19 21 24 25

5 4 3 2 1

(Auxiliary cadence throughout entire Prelude)

tonic arrival

A satisfactory explanation may begin with recognition of the E-minor prelude's precursive foundation.⁴⁴ More specifically, most of the prelude's substance, starting from the very first bar, may be understood to represent a broad composing-out of the dominant harmony. The work begins with what appear to be tonic-E-minor chords in first inversion, yet their true nature emerges midway through the piece with the arrival of the contextually superior V harmony in bars 10–12. In turn, this strong dominant reveals, in retrospect, that the opening first inversion chords represent a contrapuntal sonority—an 'apparent' tonic similar to that in a cadential six-four gesture. This first 'attempt' of the E-minor prelude to reach closure in bars 1–12, engages our attention and urges us to follow the composition's continuing course toward conclusion.

Yet a second attempt to reach satisfactory closure in bars 12–25 also proves imperfect. As Example 22 reveals, the prelude in E minor, like that in F minor, holds no conventional structural descent, no true fundamental line, only a prolonged primary tone.

We may attribute the effect of yearning we perceive in the E-minor prelude to the restless spirit of Romanticism if we wish, but its real source is the lack of a structural closure attributable to an absent initial structural tonic harmony and an absent *Urlinie*, truly poetic omissions. If, as Schenker asserts, 'the fundamental line signifies motion, striving toward a goal, and ultimately the completion of this course',⁴⁵ a convincing traversal of the fifth-span down from the firmly established b' is not to be found here, as Example 22 suggests. Forcing a fundamental line upon the prelude, as if one were obligatory just because it is a tonal composition, hinders recognition of the work's essential effect: denial of conventional melodic closure at the background level, a basic expectation associated with tonal music.

⁴⁴ The precursive nature of the E-minor prelude may be grasped via a practical demonstration at the piano. Using the sostenuto pedal, strike and sustain B before playing bars 1–12, noting how it clarifies the meaning of the passage. In normal performance, we sense the forthcoming B via tonal implication, until it actually arrives in the twelfth bar. A similar effect occurs in the following span, where the B of bar 12 remains in memory, if not in resonance, as bars 13–17 unfold.

⁴⁵ Schenker, *Free Composition*, 4.

Precursive Prolongation in the *Préludes* of Chopin

Example 22: Prelude in E minor, Op. 28 No. 4, comprehensive voice-leading sketch

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Chopin's Prelude in E minor, Op. 28 No. 4. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system covers measures 1 through 13, and the second system covers measures 14 through 25. Above the treble staff, scale degrees are indicated: $\hat{5}$ above measure 1, $\hat{5}$ above measure 13, and $\hat{5}$ above measure 25. Below the bass staff, Roman numerals indicate the harmonic structure: (Em: V) for measures 1-13, iv6 for measure 14, V for measures 15-16, V for measures 17-18, and (Em: i) for measures 19-25. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and slurs, with lines connecting notes between staves to illustrate voice leading.

A simpler view of Chopin's prelude in E minor appears in Example 23. This demonstrates that neighbour motion in the middleground serves to extend the dominant six-four on B in both halves of the work. Its first attempt at resolution leads to the revelation of the dominant as the prelude's initial harmonic premise. The second attempt, more extended and chromatic, achieves resolution through the dominant's deference to tonic at the very end. And the prolongation of scale degree $\hat{5}$ throughout lends a sense of potential not fulfilled within the life of the work, a poetic effect that resonates in memory long after the piece concludes. The effect of attainment created by this instance of the *attempt, attempt*→*achievement* paradigm offers only partial satisfaction. Yet surely it must correspond to Chopin's poetic message.

Example 23: Prelude in E minor, Op. 28 No. 4, summary sketch

(Em: V ————— V i)
Em: i

Innovative preludes

What may appeal most about the *Préludes* of Frédéric Chopin is their ability to engage and intrigue—to provoke us. To Schumann, they represented unexpected ‘ruins’, while to Liszt they reified the ‘freedom’ characteristic of genius, and to each they recalled the poet’s art. Tonal implication figures prominently in many of the preludes, eliciting expectation, arousing anticipation and stimulating imagination in ways that remind us of poetry. Our recognition of its power and our understanding of its means assist in grasping the perceptible, yet often evanescent effects of these masterpieces.

This study, which examines instances of tonal implication in half of Chopin’s *Préludes*, illustrates how the concept of precursive prolongation may aid in illuminating their allusive, poetic natures. It also reveals certain unconventional and innovative tonal structures, which may be understood to arise from the composer’s expressive intent and personal conception of his chosen genre, including greatly extended initial dominant prefixes and works that lack fundamental lines. Among composers whose work drew inspiration from Chopin’s Op. 28, a group that

includes figures as diverse as Johannes Brahms and Gabriel Fauré, the approach demonstrated here would have similar interpretative application.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The intermezzos, capriccios and rhapsodies of Johannes Brahms surely reflect the influence of Chopin's *Préludes*, and several of these piano pieces incorporate remarkable precursive prolongations. Among those that employ precursive prolongations as fundamental structural premises are Op. 76 Nos. 4 and 8, as well as Op. 118 No. 1, which Schenker described as an 'auxiliary cadence'. See his analysis of Op. 118 No. 1 in *Free Composition*, 88–9 and Figure 110, d3. For another approach to this intriguing work, see also Edward T. Cone, 'Three Ways of Reading a Detective Story—Or a Brahms Intermezzo', *Georgia Review*, 31 (1977), 554–74, reprinted in Robert P. Morgan (ed.), *Music: A View from Delft: Selected Essays* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989), 77–93. In Brahms's Op. 76 No. 6, Op. 79 No. 2 and Op. 116 No. 3, extended precursive prolongations form the foundations of opening sections.

The wealth of Gabriel Fauré's piano music—which includes preludes, nocturnes, *impromptus*, *barcarolles*, and a *ballade*—amply demonstrates Chopin's spirit. However, several of Fauré's larger scores feature precursive prolongations as fundamental structural premises that, in turn, generate and manipulate tonal implication over grand spans. See my analysis of Fauré's First Violin Sonata, Op. 13, movement i, as well as my sketches of the 'Offertoire', 'Sanctus', 'Agnus Dei', and 'In Paradisum' from Fauré's Requiem, in James William Sobaskie, 'Allusion in the Music of Gabriel Fauré,' in Tom Gordon (ed.), *Regarding Fauré* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1999), 163–205. Fauré's *mélodies* also draw upon precursive prolongations to enhance textual expression. See my discussions of the early *mélodies* 'Rêve d'amour' (1862) and 'Ici-bas!' (1874) in the essay cited above, as well as my analyses of the much later *mélodie* 'Accompagnement' (1902), in James William Sobaskie, 'The Emergence of Gabriel Fauré's Late Musical Style and Technique', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 42/1 (2003): 101–24.