

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Rest That Remembers: Cadential Delay and Cyclic Recall in Schumann's *Kinderszenen*

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Abstract

Analyses of Robert Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, Op. 15, commonly emphasize recurring thematic cells, poetic titles, and adult recollection. This article approaches cyclic coherence through endings. It defines a closure profile using four score-based variables: cadential state, registral disposition, notated release, and dependence on the next piece. Close readings focus on No. 4, *Bittendes Kind*; No. 5, *Glückes genug*; No. 7, *Träumerei*; No. 12, *Kind im Einschlummern*; and No. 13, *Der Dichter spricht*, while the opening piece supplies a reference for thematic memory. Two adjoining pairs show closure deliberately displaced across a boundary. No. 4 ends on a dominant sonority whose answer arrives as the tonic environment of No. 5. No. 12 stops on subdominant-inflected harmony over a tonic pedal, and No. 13 converts that suspended ending into reflective utterance rather than simply completing a cadence. *Träumerei*, positioned near the cycle's centre, demonstrates a different process: repeated phrase endings revise the weight of arrival from within a single miniature. The findings support a model of *cadential memory*: an ending is cyclically active when its unresolved or overdetermined state changes how the next beginning is heard. Performance implications concern attacca, release duration, pedal clearance, and the difference between preserving continuity and erasing a boundary.

Keywords: Schumann; *Kinderszenen*; cadence; musical memory; piano cycle; performance analysis

1 Introduction

A cycle of miniatures poses a double problem of ending. Each piece must achieve enough identity to stand as a scene, yet the sequence must retain enough incompleteness for another scene to matter. Robert Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, Op. 15, makes this tension audible with unusual economy. Some movements close decisively; others stop on harmonies whose consequences arrive only after a page turn, a release of pedal, or the beginning of the next title.

The work's coherence has often been approached through thematic transformation. Rudolph Reti famously treated *Kinderszenen* as a network of related thematic shapes [3], while later scholarship has considered the cycle's selection history, cultural construction of childhood, and poetic framing [2, 5, 1]. Those approaches identify important connections within and beyond the sounding surface. The present article asks what happens if analysis begins at the opposite edge of a theme: not with its first recognizable contour but with the way it ceases.

An ending can remember because it leaves a task, a resonance, or a formal expectation available to later music. This claim does not require every unresolved

harmony to encode a narrative. It requires a demonstrable relation between the ending state and the next beginning. The relevant evidence lies in harmony, register, articulation, notation, and placement. When No. 4, *Bittendes Kind*, stops on the dominant and No. 5, *Glückes genug*, begins in the corresponding tonic field, the boundary carries a tonal question forward. When No. 12, *Kind im Einschlummern*, avoids a closed tonic ending and No. 13, *Der Dichter spricht*, begins a reflective postlude, the transition turns cessation into a change of speaker.

The article develops the term *cadential memory* for these relations. A cadence has memory when its degree of completion remains perceptually active across a formal boundary and changes the function of a later onset. This definition includes delayed resolution but is not limited to it. A fully closed ending can also become memorable if the next piece reframes its apparent finality. The aim is to connect score analysis with performance decisions at the place where notation alone cannot determine the duration or quality of separation.

2 Source and analytical procedure

The analysis uses the early Breitkopf & Härtel score tradition of *Kinderszenen*, first published in Leipzig in 1839, checked against a public-domain collected edition [4, 6]. The cycle comprises thirteen pieces composed in 1838. Its titles were not simple programmes dictated before the music; their retrospective relation to the pieces cautions against treating every harmonic event as pictorial description. Schumann's well-known characterization of the set as adult reflection on childhood similarly directs attention toward constructed recollection rather than music designed merely for children [1, 5].

Four variables form a *closure profile*. The first is *cadential state*: closed tonic, tonic with residual instability, non-tonic stop, or interrupted process. The second is *register*: whether the last bass and upper voice consolidate or separate the tonal field. The third is *release*: rests, fermatas, ties, pedal implications, and the physical decay invited after the final attack. The fourth is *forward dependence*: whether the next onset answers, contradicts, or ignores the unfinished feature.

The procedure is comparative rather than statistical. It reads Nos. 4–5 and 12–13 as adjacent pairs and uses No. 7

as an internal control in which delayed arrival operates within one piece. No. 1 provides the cycle's initial thematic and tonal reference. The analysis avoids assigning a fixed duration to rests or inter-piece pauses. Instead, it specifies which relations a performance can strengthen or weaken.

An ending is treated as cyclically active only when (i) a score-based feature makes its closure marked and (ii) a later onset changes the listener's available account of that feature. Markedness without later consequence is local colour; later similarity without an active ending is thematic recall of another kind.

3 The opening scene as a memory standard

No. 1, *Von fremden Ländern und Menschen*, establishes more than a familiar melodic shape. Its recurring phrase design teaches the listener to compare endings. The melody's arched motion and accompanimental continuity allow cadential points to sound related without becoming identical. Repetition is therefore a lesson in retrospective weighting: a phrase heard once as arrival can later seem provisional when a similar phrase returns with altered placement.

Reti's thematic account hears variants of the opening idea across the set [3]. Cadential analysis does not replace that network. It asks how the network becomes temporal. A contour can be recognized anywhere; a remembered ending depends on before and after. No. 1 supplies a baseline in which returns are contained within a stable miniature. Later pieces disturb that containment by carrying closure across titles.

The opening piece also establishes G major as a frame to which the end of the cycle can respond. Yet the eventual return to a G-centred space in *Der Dichter spricht* does not simply restore the beginning. Between them, the listener has encountered endings that plead, sleep, halt, and reopen. Tonal return arrives with a changed vocabulary of completion.

4 From pleading to sufficiency: Nos. 4–5

Bittendes Kind is built from short gestures whose repetitions invite the hearing of renewed appeal. The decisive analytical fact is its ending on a dominant sonority rather than a tonic close. Timothy D. Taylor notes both this non-tonic ending and its resolution in the following movement [5]. The title may encourage a pictorial reading—a request awaiting response—but the cross-boundary relation

remains audible without that image.

The final dominant has two temporal identities. Within No. 4 it is a stop: the hands release, the bar ends, and the titled scene has reached its printed boundary. Relative to No. 5 it is preparation. *Glückes genug* begins in D major, allowing the preceding dominant's orientation to be heard as fulfilled in a new piece. The answer is not a single resolving chord appended to No. 4. It is an entire tonal environment with a new metre and character.

This displacement matters. If Schumann had supplied a tonic chord before the double bar, the next D-major onset would confirm a completed state. By withholding the local tonic, he lets a beginning perform cadential work. No. 5 is both independent piece and delayed consequence. The title “Quite Happy” may then be heard not as a label pasted onto consonance but as an excess of answer: the response to the previous ending expands into a scene.

Performance can reveal or obscure this relation. A very long pause after No. 4 makes the dominant easier to reclassify as an enigmatic isolated ending. An immediate attack can make No. 5 sound like the missing continuation and reduce its distinctness. The most articulate solution may be neither extreme. The pianist can permit the dominant's sound to decay while retaining the bodily and attentional tension of incompleteness, then begin No. 5 before that tension becomes a closed silence.

Pedal is crucial even where the score does not prescribe one universal modern realization. Carrying resonance across the double bar would literalize connection but blur the change of articulation and scene. Clearing the harmony while controlling the temporal gap preserves a more productive paradox: the sound ends, but its function does not. Cadential memory is therefore not acoustic overlap alone.

5 *Träumerei*: internal rehearsal of return

No. 7 occupies a central position and has acquired an extensive independent reception. Heard within the cycle, its phrase endings provide an internal comparison for the cross-boundary pairs. The well-known opening gesture repeatedly moves toward cadential articulation, but recurrence alters the scale on which each arrival is judged. A cadence can be locally persuasive while the broader phrase process remains open.

The piece's repetitions do not behave

like exact restatement. Register, spacing, and melodic continuation place familiar material under new retrospective pressure. The listener learns that arrival is graded: a phrase can rest, return, and only later disclose which rest was structural. This is cadential memory contained within one title. The end does not ask the next piece to supply a missing tonic, yet its force depends on having heard earlier endings as provisional versions of the final one.

Such grading complicates the common performance temptation to make every cadence equally expressive. If each phrase end receives the same breadth and release, formal memory becomes a sequence of beautiful stops. Differentiation is more revealing. Earlier arrivals can retain motion in an inner voice or accompaniment; later ones can allow longer decay without losing melodic direction. The aim is not a rigid hierarchy of pause lengths but a perceptible history of closure.

The central placement of *Träumerei* also matters for the cycle. Its self-contained cadential process offers repose after the outward energy of earlier scenes, but it does not end the collection. Subsequent pieces expose that what sounded centrally complete was one mode of remembering, not the last word. The famous miniature becomes a middle, and its independence becomes part of the cycle's play between extract and sequence.

6 Falling asleep and the poet's entry: Nos. 12–13

The final pair radicalizes forward dependence. No. 12, *Kind im Einschlummern*, is centred in E minor but does not conclude with an ordinary tonic closure. Its last harmony is subdominant-inflected over a tonic pedal, an ending often described as open or suspended. The repeated figure thins and ceases without converting cessation into unequivocal harmonic completion. Sleep is not represented by a final tonic equivalent to a closed door; it is represented by the withdrawal of the process that would demand one.

No. 13, *Der Dichter spricht*, follows as a postlude. Its opening chordal texture and G-centred orientation do not simply resolve the preceding sonority as though a missing bar had been supplied. Instead, the new piece changes the level of discourse. The sequence moves from the scene of a child falling asleep to the named act of a poet speaking. Taylor treats the last pieces as an important part of the cycle's aesthetic framing [5];

Daverio's account of Schumann's literary and musical imagination further supports hearing the postlude as self-reflexive utterance rather than a neutral coda [1].

The connection is strongest because resolution is indirect. Harmonic continuity makes No. 13 available as an answer, but change of texture, title, and rhetorical stance prevents the answer from erasing the gap. The listener retains No. 12's unclosed state while entering a new voice. Cadential memory here is not satisfaction. It is translation: what could not close as scene becomes speakable as reflection.

Within *Der Dichter spricht*, chordal writing is interrupted by a freer, recitative-like passage. This internal loosening makes the title's "speaks" audible without requiring the piano to imitate literal speech. Measured chorale-like continuity yields to utterance that seems to find its pacing moment by moment, then returns. The postlude thus contains its own boundary between public form and private address.

At the end, completion is achieved softly rather than asserted. The cycle's return toward its opening tonal world is not a reset. The final stillness carries the memory of No. 12's cessation and of every earlier boundary whose consequence crossed into another piece. The poet speaks after the child sleeps, but the speech does not explain the dream. It acknowledges a distance between experience and recollection.

Performance again determines how much of this relation survives. A concert practice that invites applause after *Kind im Einschlummern*, or a recording track gap long enough to imply completion, weakens the designed pair. An attacca can be appropriate, but it should not make the first chord of No. 13 sound like the last chord of No. 12. A small change of touch, posture, or resonance can preserve the categorical shift while sustaining forward dependence.

7 Discussion: a cycle articulated by unequal endings

The three readings reveal different scales of cadential memory. Nos. 4–5 transfer a tonal answer directly across a double bar. *Träumerei* stages successive

degrees of arrival inside one miniature. Nos. 12–13 convert harmonic suspension into a change of discursive level. These are not instances of one formula. Their common feature is that the status of an ending becomes fully legible only later.

This model complements motivic accounts in two ways. First, it requires temporal asymmetry. A later event can answer an earlier one without the earlier event being reducible to a transformed cell. Second, it values release and boundary as structural parameters. Rests, decay, and the performer's interval between pieces are not empty spaces separating thematic content; they regulate whether a relation is heard as continuation, recollection, or contrast.

The approach also clarifies the cycle's adult perspective on childhood. Recollection is not represented only through tender topics or small forms. It is enacted through belated understanding. The listener repeatedly discovers that a prior ending meant something different from what it seemed to mean at the moment of release. This temporal revision is an analogue of memory without requiring a one-to-one programme.

The finding has implications for editions and recordings. Track divisions are useful for navigation but can imply that every title is equally detachable. Streaming interfaces may insert silence or encourage isolated listening to *Träumerei*. A performance note or edition could identify paired boundaries without prescribing a single pause duration. The relevant instruction would describe a relation: clear the old resonance, retain the unresolved direction.

8 Limits and further work

The analysis is score-based and does not measure listener responses or compare recorded timings. Claims about perception are therefore hypotheses grounded in tonal and formal relations, not universal reports of hearing. Historical pianos, modern grands, room acoustics, and pedalling practice alter decay substantially. The early score tradition also cannot settle every articulation decision.

A follow-up study could annotate a

sample of recordings for inter-piece gap, pedal overlap, final-note duration, and onset character, then test whether listeners identify paired movements under different boundary conditions. Similar closure profiles could be applied to *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana*, or other nineteenth-century cycles. The method would be most informative where an ending's marked state has a specific later consequence rather than merely contributing to a general atmosphere of fragmentation.

9 Conclusion

Kinderszenen is held together not only by what returns but by what endings leave available. The dominant at the close of *Bittendes Kind* lets *Glückes genug* begin as answer; the graded cadences of *Träumerei* make arrival a remembered process; and the suspended close of *Kind im Einschlummern* opens the level on which *Der Dichter spricht* can enter. Cadential memory names this belated clarification. In performance, the rest between pieces is therefore not blank duration. It is where one scene decides whether the next will sound separate, connected, or newly necessary.

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