Music As Narrative

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For many listeners, some instrumental music, especially in the tradition from Haydn and Mozart through Brahms, invites comparison to drama or narrative.[1] The comparisons are not between individual compositions and individual plays or novels; rather, individual compositions, or genres of composition, are thought to be dramatic or narrative in some more general way. What about the music encourages such comparisons?

In order to think about relations between literary narrative and classic or romantic instrumental music, one might draw on the study

of plot structure or narrative syntax, as initiated by Russian Formalism and continued by later Structuralist studies. This branch of literary theory attempts to generalize about narrative by identifying recurring elements within plots and stating rules for combining them, somewhat as grammarians do for languages. Perhaps the structures that literary theorists have found in narrative resemble the structures that music theorists have found in musical compositions.[2] Perhaps certain literary theorists, by concentrating on structure at the expense of character or representational detail, can help music theorists articulate the shared qualities of music and narrative.[3]

Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, published in 1928, is an important early contribution to modern work on narrative syntax; it can serve here as a model of such work.[4] Propp, working with a corpus of one hundred Russian fairy tales, arrives at an ordered sequence of thirty-one "functions," as a normative succes-

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[2]I am not happy with the normal musicological use of the term "structure," in which it contrasts with something like "meaning," "content," or "expression." For remarks about this, see "Music as Drama" (*Music Theory Spectrum* 10 [1988]), 72-73. But here, referring to other people's views, I use the term "structure" in the familiar, problematic way.

(The notion of "structure" also seems vulnerable in some of its literary-theoretical uses; for argument toward this conclusion, see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981]. Fortunately my task in this paper does not extend to sorting out that issue.)

[3]See Anthony Newcomb, "Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 11/2 (1987). For an extended comparison of ideas from Heinrich Schenker and Roland Barthes, see Patrick McCreless, "Roland Barthes's *S/Z* from a Musical Point of View" (*In Theory Only* 10/7 [1988]). Carolyn Abbate has also explored *S/Z*, with the aim of showing that musical analogies based on structuralist narrative theory are unsatisfying. See "What the Sorcerer Said" (*Nineteenth-Century Music* 12/3 [1989]), reprinted, with considerable expansion, in Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 30-60.

[4]*Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

sion to which individual folktales conform. These functions are general descriptions of plot events, for instance "one member of a family absents himself from home"; "an interdiction is addressed to the hero"; "the interdiction is violated." Not all functions will appear within any one tale; the plot of a story will consist of a selection of functions from among the thirty-one, respecting their fixed order.

Such abstract successions, consisting of general descriptions of events, recall familiar textbook descriptions of musical patterns. A rondo will include various occurrences of a refrain, with intervening episodes; recapitulation of the first episode, creating a sonata-rondo pattern, is optional. Sonata form includes an "Introduction" - "First group" - "Transition" - "Second group" - "Closing group" and so on; some members of the succession are optional, some are not.[5] So tonal music, as depicted by conventional analysis, resembles narrative, as depicted by Formalist and Structuralist writings, in that individual texts consist of identifiable kinds of object arranged in partially predictable patterns. This point of analogy contributes crucially to Newcomb's essay on Schumann's Third Quartet, "Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies."[6]

A music theorist might immediately object to such analogies, in two ways. First, the analogies depend on conventional descriptions of musical form, and much recent theoretical work rejects these descriptions as superficial. Second, more specifically, conventional descriptions of musical form obscure the hierarchical nature of musical structure, its layering of faster and slower instances of similar patterns, and analogies with a theory like Propp's, also non-hierarchical, will not remedy this defect. (It is easy to predict these objections, because they would arise readily from Heinrich Schenker's influential views.)

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[5]Similar patterns occur more locally. On one useful, widely-circulated account of phrase structure in tonal music, a complete phrase moves through stages of "Tonic prolongation" - "Predominant" - "Dominant" - "Tonic"; incomplete phrases may omit part of this sequence. For a clear account, see Marion Guck, "The Functional Relation of Chords: A Theory of Musical Intuitions" (*In Theory Only* 4/6 [1978]).

[6]Cited in note 1.

Both objections can be answered. An analogy between musical and narrative structures need not depend on an acceptance of conventional descriptions of musical formal patterns. Schenker, bypassing the conventional formal types, offers a paraphrase of his own late theory in story-like terms:

> In the art of music, as in life, motion toward the goal encounters obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and, in short, retardations of all kinds. Therein lies the source of all artistic delaying, from which the creative mind can derive content that is ever new. Thus we hear in the middleground and foreground an almost dramatic course of events.[7]

Schenker's remarks suggest the possibility of a generalized plot structure for tonal music; his list of "obstacles, reverses, disappointments," and so on enumerates, informally, kinds of event in musical plots, just as Propp enumerates plot functions in fairy tales.

Further, some theories of narrative, unlike Propp's, hierarchize plot events much as recent music theories, most importantly Schenker's theory, hierarchize musical events. For instance, Roland Barthes distinguishes different degrees of structural importance for narrative functions:

> some constitute real hinge-points of the narrative (or of a fragment of the narrative); others merely "fill in" the narrative space separating the hinge functions.[8]

Barthes calls the structurally crucial functions nuclei or cardinal functions, the others catalysers. Nuclei will be understood as

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[7]*Free Composition*, trans. and ed. by Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), 5.

[8]"Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 93.

following each other to make up a coherent succession even when separated by the insertion of many catalysers; thus, they are roughly analogous to middleground and background events in Schenker's theory.

> Distended, the functional nuclei furnish intercalating spaces which can be packed out almost infinitely; the interstices can be filled in with a very large number of catalysers. (120)

And Barthes emphasizes the role of catalysers in creating suspense, by delaying the appearance of the next nucleus.

Tzvetan Todorov's theory displays a deeper similarity to Schenker's when he observes that plot sequences may be embedded within other plot sequences, with a complete sequence at one level constituting one portion of a higher-level sequence: this account indicates that similar principles govern the structure of sequences at different levels.[9]

Correspondences between descriptions of structure in musical and literary theory may seem promising, but what, more specifically, can they promise? No doubt part of their appeal comes from their conservative relation to technical musical theory. Apparently music theorists need not radically change their habits of thought about music in order to move to wider, comparative contexts: the accounts of music required for the comparisons are already in place.

But the fact that music and narrative both involve a succession of events in a regular order, or that music and narrative structure events hierarchically, does not show that music has a special affinity to narrative. One can illustrate the point by considering a problem that arises for Newcomb's position in "Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies." The essay begins with a general theoretical section, presenting the claim that "paradigmatic or conventional narrative successions in literature and history"

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[9]*Introduction to Poetics*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 52.

resemble "formal types in music" (165). To follow a story, one brings to it an awareness of abstract plot configurations; following a story involves moving between the concrete story as it unfolds and a repertory of abstract patterns that it might instantiate. Following music involves a similar interaction between concrete musical events and abstract formal patterns (166). Here is the problem: according to the comparison that Newcomb sketches, the shared properties of musical structure and narrative could extend equally well to encompass the orderly succession in a number series. But a game in which a computer produced numbers, while an observer tried to match the succession against an established repertory of number lists or generating expressions, would be only remotely similar to storytelling. In general, claims that two kinds of object are closely linked by virtue of a shared structure are risky: it is too easy to describe shared structures across many different domains.

Perhaps comparisons between music theory and structural studies of narrative can contribute something to an understanding of "music as narrative," but the comparisons do not show why listeners and critics have been attracted to the analogy in the first place. To understand the appeal of the idea of musical plot, it is better to begin from listeners' capacity for interpreting musical events anthropomorphically. Listeners can hear musical successions as story-like because they can find something like actions, thoughts, and characters in music. Newcomb was right, in an earlier article on Schumann's Second Symphony, to associate musical plot with "an evolving pattern of mental states," to stress that "we do well to think of the thematic units partly as characters in a narrative."[10] Musical events can be regarded as characters, or as gestures, assertions, responses, resolutions, goal-directed motions, references, and so on. Once they are so regarded, it is easy to regard successions of musical events as forming something like a story, in which these characters and actions go together to form something like a plot.

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[10]"Once More 'Between Absolute and Program Music': Schumann's Second Symphony," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 7/3 (1984): 234, 237.

Instrumental music consists of a series of events, and the easiest anthropomorphism is to treat those events as behavior, as actions.[11] Once one begins thinking of musical sounds as actions, rather than just events, the notion of plot or narrative is close at hand. Stories are primarily about human actions, and the story-teller's integration of events into a plot reflects the need to understand actions by placing them in a temporally extended context.

Roughly, the relevant connection between action and narrative is as follows. The notion of action is not independent of the notion of *intelligible* action.[12] And when an action requires anything beyond the most routine explanation to render it intelligible, an interpretation will normally situate it within a relatively extended sequence of events. Such sequences, when described explicitly, yield stories. So whenever there is an interesting action, there are stories that can be told about it: the concepts of narrative and of action are made for each other.[13]

To see why listeners and critics have been attracted to analogies between instrumental music and narrative genres, it is

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[11]Another anthropomorphism that would respect the category of "event" is to regard musical events as psychological events or experiences. See Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). This latter way of construing music seems to have more influence on broad generalizations than on detailed descriptions of individual compositions.

In contrast to the musical cases, one would expect that the easiest way to anthropomorphize physical objects, such as buildings, is to regard them as bodies or parts of bodies. For eloquent instances, see Adrian Stokes, "The Impact of Architecture," in *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes*, Vol. 3 (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

[12]This is because actions are distinguished from other events by being intentional under some description, and the ascription of an intention normally implies that the intention goes together with the agent's other attitudes to form the frame of mind of an intelligible person. For discussion, see Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[13]Alasdair MacIntyre emphasizes this point in *After Virtue*, second ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), ch. 15.

helpful to turn, not to the technical vocabulary or abstract formaliza-
tions that preoccupy many theorists, but to relatively unambitious,
blow-by-blow description of individual pieces. Such descrip-
tions—informal, ad hoc, and unforced—promise to reveal much about
the intuitions of listeners. Here, as an example (but also for its own
sake, of course), is a description of the last movement of Beethov-
en's Sonata, Op. 14, No. 1.[14]

The registral motion in the first four measures is startling. The
right hand moves up a seventh, while the bass line, present as the
low notes in the left-hand triplet groups, descends through a
thirteenth, drawing the other left-hand pitches down as well. The
result is a remarkable expansion, with the texture moving from a
close middle-register spacing to a wide spacing with a large gap in
the center. Simply in registral terms, the energetic activity of these
measures seems to lead to an extreme, even untenable position, the
more so since the thick voicing and rapid activity of the low-register
notes contrast so sharply with the right hand's bare octaves.

Harmonic and rhythmic aspects contribute to the sense that
two initially coordinated forces pull apart in these measures. The
upbeat and first downbeat present a tidy structure, moving between
two positions of the same triad, with the approach to tonic pitches
in both parts creating a sense of coordinated motion toward a goal.
The left hand continues down, while the right hand fills a measure

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[14]"Music as Drama" also argues for claims about action and drama by describing
an example, the beginning of Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 95. However, for several
reasons that essay does not make the following description redundant. First, one
might assume that concepts of musical drama or narrative apply most appropriately
to pieces that are "tense" or "stormy" in quality, pieces like the Quartet, Op. 95.
Description of a relatively suave composition will show that story-like qualities are not
restricted to overtly "stressful" music. Second, this movement is a rondo, that is, it
is in a form that lends itself to description by mechanical tabulation of recurrences
and contrasts. But an analysis in terms of dramatic action, with little use of
conventional formal labels, can yield an attractive way of regarding the music. (Thus,
the analysis provides a contrast with Newcomb's approach in "Schumann and Late
Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies.") And third, since the texture of the sonata
movement is not especially dense, one can describe the whole piece without
sacrificing all attention to detail.

with tonic pitches. Then the right hand begins to move up, driving toward the A as though to another goal. The first effect of this is a metrically straightforward voice-exchange involving F-sharp and A. But the right hand remains on A, creating a metrically displaced span while the left hand continues down, and the relation between the two parts is no longer simple, rhythmically or harmonically. It is strange that the right hand stops moving while the left-hand continues down. More specifically, the A never appears as part of a consonant chord, and though the right hand presents it as a heavily emphasized goal, finally it makes harmonic sense only as the seventh in a dominant seventh chord, normally a pitch that is handled with some sensitivity. The repeated octaves, far from being sensitive, are almost strident.

The next four-measure unit begins with a rapid right-hand upbeat figure, descending from the high A down to G-sharp. In a way this resolves the A down by step, with the second expanded to a ninth. But the resolution is not smooth; the upbeat breaks decisively with the rhythm and texture of the previous right-hand music, as though it takes an abrupt, intrusive act to break out of the repeated octave A's. The rapid descent implies eagerness to return from registral isolation to a closer relation with the other parts in the texture; at the same time, the descent copies and exaggerates the previous motion of the bass line, as though granting normative standing to the earlier descent. The upbeat figure conforms neatly to the meter, placing A halfway through the measure and resolving it on the downbeat, in compensation for the metrical sprawl of the octave A's. Meanwhile, three lower parts, explicitly present as lines, join the top line in restoring something like the close spacing of the very beginning. The soprano part descends, with some simple elaboration, in a straightforward $\hat{3}$ - $\hat{2}$ - $\hat{1}$ that assigns the previous dissonant A's the status of an incomplete neighbor; the tenor part repeats the A—G-sharp motion, making the subordinate standing of the A more explicit by enclosing it between tonic triad pitches. The soprano provides a loud doubling of the tenor B, further emphasizing the tonic triad pitches that enclose and supplant A. The bass and soprano parts both move between E and B, stressing the

structural pitches of the previous left hand descent and of the unproblematic right hand opening. The alto part supplies a pleasant allusion to that opening melodic motive, linking the initial stability to this cadence. The two-measure figure repeats, an octave lower, with a slight change to emphasize parallelism with the cadence at m. 4. The repetition contrasts pointedly with the loss of coordination during the first four measures, while the registral descent reenacts the previous left-hand motion. In many ways, then, these four measures make sense as a response to the first four. Troubling features of the opening provide motivation for actions that correct, or compensate for, those features.

While the strategies of compensation in mm. 5-8 are fairly clear, one might wonder whether they are completely successful. The octave-displaced resolution of the high A does not seem adequate, given the repetitions of that note and the energetic ascent that leads to it. And the low cadence in mm. 7-8, the result of abandoning the right-hand ascent in favor of general downward motion, is a little ridiculous: not just because of the odd sound of low, close piano chords, but because the meek descent and repetition represent such a loss of vigor.

In fact, doubts about the adequacy of the response in mm. 5-8 seem appropriate in light of what happens next. The return to the opening material, starting with the upbeat in m. 8, can be understood as a reaction to this first, inadequate response: since the issues raised by the opening were not fully resolved, the piece raises them again. And the same response begins in mm. 12-14; but it stops abruptly, as though in recognition that the same succession will be even less appropriate a second time. The left hand produces a transposed upbeat figure, of which the most striking feature is perhaps the A-sharp, the first chromatic pitch in the movement, introduced in specific contradiction of the problematic As. The clash between A and B will be resolved in favor of B, and A is replaced by a pitch that tonicizes B and thus contributes to the resolution. Starting in m. 18, the right hand reverses the direction of the sixteenth-note run, imitating the ascending motion up to a but

outdoing it in speed, registral span, and high point, reaching B as a new highest note.

This ascent is a more appropriate acknowledgment of the promising opening of the movement. Further, although it reproduces the registral gap of m. 4, the gap is less upsetting at this point, largely because there is no sense of tension between the parts that are registrally separated. Indeed, the main problem with this second response is that it has drawn the piece away from its opening key. The slow phrases that begin with the upbeat in m. 21 mull over the distance from the starting point, dwelling on E major triad pitches and placing them in relation to the new key; at the same time, the B—Fx—G-sharp figure attempts to establish contact with the opening of the movement motivically, aspiring to create closure in the same way as the alto part in the first response. But finally the piece returns to E major by giving up the A-sharp, moving explicitly back to A, returning to the sound of a dominant with a heavily emphasized seventh. In returning to its overall key, the piece also recovers the clash between A and B, one aspect of its original problem. And so the piece returns, again, to its opening material. . . .

An encapsulation of this sequence of events can emphasize their dramatic or story-like quality:

Two vigorous forces move away from each other, reaching a point of palpable conflict. A compensatory response follows, characterized by cooperation and clarity. But the response is too Meek; the initial problem is posed again, and after a false start with the same inadequate response, a more complex response evolves, more effectively sustaining the energy of the opening. But this vigorous response has lost touch with the opening in important respects. Recovering the original orientation, however, seems to entail the return of an aspect of the original conflict. . . .

The issues that emerge from these opening passages shape the continuation of the movement; the subsequent course of events is fairly clear and can be described relatively briefly. The refrain always occurs, as at the beginning, in two spans, an initial, problematic presentation followed by an innovative attempt at response. The statement beginning at m. 31 follows the half-cadence with A

in the bass—the return that was the reward for the stability achieved in B major, and also its undoing; the A in the bass sounds a bit ominous, and it turns out the return just revives the awkward, coarse emphasis on A. The response, beginning with the upbeat to m. 39, deals with this by finding a way to subordinate the A. Changing mode, the right hand sweeps past the A in m. 40, moving to a new highest note, C, reached in coordination with the meter and with the bottom of the left-hand descent (m. 41). This swallows up the A of mm. 32-34 as an inconsequential event within a larger registral motion from the high B of mm. 20-25. The departure from previous models seems to bring a heady sense of new possibilities; the descending scale material that used to function thematically now figures in a passage that is evidently preparing for something large and remarkable. Beginning in m. 47, the piece moves much more broadly than before. The right hand takes the left hand triplets of the opening, part of a gnarled, dissonant progression, and uses them for easy, open arpeggiations. The slow, even harmonic rhythm and fluid, registrally venturesome arpeggiations give a sense of free activity based on underlying security. Brief tonicization of A minor, mm. 50-54, is undisturbing as an event internal to motion from G major to B minor. A new high point, m. 54, registers awareness of the underlying tonic, and shortly after, the bass moves grandly from B down to E.

Alas, the right hand counterpoint to the bass descent revives the issues of failed coordination between right and left hands and, specifically, an overemphasized A. The bass descent B—A—G—F-sharp—E pairs with registrally exposed right hand pitches B—C—B—A and an "absent" high G. Backsliding, the right hand retrogrades the high register activity of the earlier part of the piece, leaving off at the problematic A. This gives a special tension to the quiet low-register rumblings that follow, with their repeated turn toward tonicization of A minor. Only at the very last minute does the right hand return to high B, approaching it by a very tiny A-sharp. This belated acknowledgement of unfinished upper-register business is elegantly comic, with its three measures of preparation asserting the importance of B in all the active registers of the piece.

But of course the resolution will be undone, again, by the next occurrence of the refrain. The inevitable climb to A is almost fatuous by now. In response, the piece just capitulates: mm. 91-98 borrow the climactic cadential material from mm. 15-21 and settle into A major.[15] The capitulation does not last, though: enharmonic trickery gets the piece out of A, and it moves chromatically back into position for the refrain.

This time the refrain *begins* in an altered form, as though in recognition that its literal repetitions always lead to trouble. But the alteration, syncopation in the right hand, adds awkwardness without averting the move to A; the continuation, starting with the upbeat to m. 113, no longer attempts to resolve the A to G-sharp, repeating the drive to A in the left hand. This passage, mm. 109-120, ends pretty much where it began, with the same chord as in 107-108.

How to respond to this? The final occurrence of the refrain material begins sweetly and quietly, as though to shift the weight toward the later part of the passage, away from the motion to A. Rather than continuous upward drive, there are brief, dreamy fragments. Arrival at A no longer disrupts the meter, and registral placement of the melodic fragments divides the passage neatly into 2 + 2 measures. This calm, unemphatic passage allows for the final vigorous drive through a up to C-sharp (right hand, mm. 128-129), and a voice-exchange that highlights the final substitution of A-sharp for A (mm. 129-130), preparing the final, solid cadence.

This description treats the events in the Rondo as a series of actions, repeated attempts to reach a satisfactory state of affairs that requires no further action. The attempts are defeated, repeatedly, because satisfaction involves a return of the opening key *and* opening thematic material, but the thematic material throws the pitch materials off balance. The attempts are not exactly those of the composer or performer, but seem to be best understood as

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[15]Comparison with more conventional procedures can heighten a sense of the oddness of this moment: the cadence is like a wrong-key parody of the recapitulatory moment in a sonata rondo.

behavior in a fictional world created through the music. The Rondo does not encode a story about something completely nonmusical, in the manner of program music. Rather, the goals, actions, and problems of the story are musical ones, and they share only rather general descriptions (for instance, "trying to return to a position of stability") with everyday actions. Though it would be possible to add specifications of agents to the story, it is not necessary to do so, and in fact it seems best to give an account, like the one above, that leaves the determination of character vague. (For instance, one could think of the right hand and left hand parts at the opening as interacting characters, but they could be regarded instead as conflicting forces within a single character; also, each of the two main parts tends to fissure into voices that can be heard as more interacting characters. One could regard the pitch A as an unruly character, but one could regard it instead as a mode of behavior, something that someone keeps *doing*. There is no reason to insist on a resolution of these questions.)[16]

Now one can see a point in turning to analogies between music theory and theoretical studies of literary narrative. Perhaps analogies between musical and literary structures do not reveal a special affinity between instrumental music and literary narrative. But once a link emerges—once one sees that following a composition, like following a play or novel, can involve following a series of fictional actions—then comparisons and contrasts with literary narrative seem more pertinent.

In fact, descriptions like this one can help in understanding why narrative theory adapts itself so readily to descriptions of music. (Even if there is a significant analogy between music and narrative, one might not expect to find that extant *theories* of narrative are helpful in describing the analogy.) The point can be made by returning to Propp—more precisely, to two features of Propp's approach that have been retained in subsequent narrative theory.

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[16]This paragraph summarizes claims that appear in more detail in "Music as Drama."

Plot, in Propp's account, is determined by the succession of events in a story; the distribution of characters within a story, and the personalities of the characters, are less crucial. Further, one can state the constraints on an acceptable plot in terms of rather general descriptions of events in a story, leaving the details to be filled in differently in particular tales. As Propp puts it:

> The question of *what* a tale's dramatis personae do is an important one for the study of the tale, but the questions of *who* does it and *how* it is done already fall within the province of accessory study . . . the number of functions is extremely small, whereas the number of personages is extremely large. (20)

> The functions must be defined independently of the characters who are supposed to fulfill them. In following the enumeration of the functions, one becomes convinced that they must also be defined independently of how and in what manner they are fulfilled. (66)

It is almost as though Propp's method hints at the possibility of narratives in which there are no determinate characters, and in which the events share only relatively general descriptions with the events of everyday life. Narrative theory abstracts from individual narratives in somewhat the same way that instrumental music abstracts from everyday human action.[17]

So narrative theory might contribute to an understanding of instrumental music. It need not do this only by links between theoretical formulations about music and narrative; one can draw on narrative theory in order to reflect on theoretically unambitious descriptions of music like the description of the Beethoven Rondo.

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[17]One could almost claim that music is more like narrative theory than it is like narrative.

For instance, one could draw on writings of Todorov, who proposes the following abstract model of plot structure, defining a unit that he calls a "sequence":

> An ideal narrative begins with a stable situation that some force will perturb. From which results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in a converse direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is quite similar to the first, but the two are not identical. (51)

In the Beethoven Rondo, a tiny example of this structure appears in the first upbeat and downbeat of the passage, while on a larger scale the harmony and register of the first few beats define a state of equilibrium that gives way to the disequilibrium of the dissonance and registral spread. Todorov continues:

> Consequently there are two types of episodes in a narrative: those that describe a state (of equilibrium or disequilibrium) and those that describe the transition from one state to the other. (51)

In the first four measures of the Beethoven, the distinction between equilibrium, transition, and disequilibrium is easy to make, while the smaller structure at the very beginning contains only the essential states of the sequence, with no explicit transitions. Todorov states that "a text almost always includes more than one sequence," (52) and he describes three ways that sequences may combine. One sequence may be embedded within another; that is, one part of a sequence may itself consist of another sequence, embedded within the first. The first upbeat and downbeat of the Beethoven comprise a sequence, but they also constitute part of the equilibrium that initiates a sequence at a higher level. Sequences may be linked; that is, they can follow each other in succession. The Beethoven passage provides a modified example of linking; the sequence that takes up mm. 1-8 concludes with an equilibrium that is not quite satisfactory,

and so perhaps not quite an equilibrium, and this motivates the beginning of a new sequence. The second sequence again reaches, not exactly equilibrium, but a failed attempt at equilibrium. Finally, sequences may alternate or interlace, in which case more than one sequence is in progress at the same time, the parts of one alternating with parts of another. Literal alternation between or among independently developing musical successions (which musicians are likely to associate with Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*) does not occur in the Beethoven Rondo. But the second pitch in mm. 22 and 26, painfully ambiguous between Fx and G, introduces a disequilibrium in relation to the clarity of the preceding pitches; equilibrium is restored by the emphasis on G that begins in m. 38 and the eventual return to G-sharp. This dispersal of a sequence across parts of a piece that also, differently articulated, project other sequences can count, perhaps, as a sophisticated variant of Todorov's alternation.

Such "applications" of narrative theory to a description of music have the same qualities of charm and surprise as many metaphors. It is harder to know whether they can lead to valuable generalizations about instrumental music. Musical scholars have tended to neglect another, more direct approach to thinking about narrative or dramatic qualities of music: one can reflect on descriptions of individual compositions, somewhat in the generalizing spirit of theories of literary narrative, without drawing on any particular literary theory. Music theorists and musicologists have begun to accumulate a contemporary analytical literature oriented toward issues of drama and narrative. What patterns emerge from this material? What are the shared qualities that attract musical scholars to certain works as examples of "music as narrative"? Or, turning to an obvious starting point: what about the Beethoven Rondo might encourage a listener to think in terms of dramatic action and plot? And to what extent does it share plot devices with other compositions?

A first point is negative: the Beethoven Rondo is *not* a difficult or puzzling composition from the perspective of standard analytical

tools. That is, one is not driven to a dramatic or narrative approach by the failure of more conventional approaches. It isworth making this point, because a surprising number of recent studies of musical drama or narrative have focussed on compositions that are formally problematic in some striking way. Newcomb's two essays on Schumann are the most conspicuous instances: in both cases, he writes about last movements that seems to invoke the formal pattern of a rondo finale, and then fail to fit the model. Edward T. Cone, in "Three Ways of Reading a Detective Story—or a Brahms Intermezzo," writes about a piece that delays definition of an unambiguous tonic triad.[18] In "Schubert's Promissory Note," he writes about a piece that falls apart at the end.[19] Brahms's *Tragic Overture*, the subject of a fine essay on musical tragedy by James Webster, resists assimilation to any one common formal pattern, as Webster shows.[20] From these essays, a reader might infer that normal, unproblematic "absolute" music and dramatic or narrative music are "alternatives." That is, a reader might arrive at a transposition of a claim that has shaped many discussions of program music: the claim that music based on the self-sufficient forms of the classic period is different in kind from music based on dramatic or narrative models, and that a listener typically turns to programmatic interpretation only when "purely musical" interpretation fails.[21] This implicit or explicit opposition between composi-

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[18]The essay appears in *Music: A View from Delft* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[19]"Schubert's Promissory Note" (*Nineteenth-Century Music* 5/3 [1982]).

[20]"Brahms's *Tragic Overture*: The Form of Tragedy," in Robert Pascall, ed., *Brahms: Historical, Documentary, and Analytical Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[21]One source of confusion in this area is that different writers do not share a conception of "form," nor do they agree on what counts as an adequate musical, non-programmatic understanding of a piece.
Richard Wagner's famous essay theorizing about Liszt's symphonic poems gives a classic statement of the position. For an engaging, smart ramble through related

tions that make purely musical sense and compositions that require dramatic or narrative interpretation should be questioned, both for programmatic and for nonprogrammatic music.[22]

A second point is more positive. Much of the description of the Rondo centers on attempts to resolve a problem: how to achieve stability, given that the return of the opening theme brings instability. In general, the medium of tonal instrumental music permits the creation of musical problems and the depiction of attempts to solve them, and this pattern is crucial for the sense of musical events as motivated behavior. Analytical descriptions of problems and

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issues, see Ernest Newman, "Programme Music," in *Musical Studies* (London: John Lane, 1905).

At its strongest, the position is that a literary program can give intelligibility to a piece that would not make any sense without it. This idea is still influential; it surfaces at two points in Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 148-52, 197-216, and shapes Owen Jander's argument in "Beethoven's 'Orpheus in Hades': The *Andante con moto* of the Fourth Piano Concerto" (*Nineteenth-Century Music* 8/3 [1985]; see 205).

An excellent, subtle essay by Arnold Isenberg claims that program music is "libertarian and individualistic" in its forms, but also that "programs and titles . . . are always dispensable." "Music and Ideas," in Isenberg, *Aesthetics and the Theory of Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

[22]One virtue of Leo Treitler, "Mozart and the Idea of Absolute Music" (in Treitler, *Music and the Historical Imagination* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989]) is that it focusses on a formally unproblematic movement by Mozart. Joseph Dubiel, "The First Movement of Mozart's C-Major Quintet" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1980) gives a splendid narration of a sonata form movement.

Recently Abbate, in *Unsung Voices*, and Lawrence Kramer, in *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), Chapter 6, have given new, imaginative arguments for a disjunction between normal musical processes and musical narrative. The arguments depend on narrower construals of the notion of narrative than in this paper; exposition and evaluation of their sophisticated treatments would require a separate, lengthy account.

solutions can occupy various points in the spectrum from technical to emotive or anthropomorphic language.[23]

The problem in the Rondo takes the particular form of an obtrusive pitch class. Other studies of musical drama or narrative have identified similar plot devices based on single pitch classes. In particular, a surprising number of essays that specifically address issues of drama or narrative turn to analyses that focus on the use of the lowered sixth degree (and, sometimes, the enharmonically equivalent raised fifth degree).[24] This observation points two ways. It invites further study, perhaps leading to generalizations about the use of such obtrusive pitch classes; but it also suggests that recent writers may have gravitated excessively toward examples of one particular musical device.

Another aspect of the Rondo, the opposition of two registral forces at the beginning, also encourages animistic description. Similar dualities figure in other discussions of musical drama or narrative. Concertos provide the most obvious instance where a binary opposition contributes to a plot, but other oppositions can also create tension that initiate dramatic patterns of action and

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[23]For a technically-oriented example, consider the quest for a tonic triad in Cone, "Three Ways of Reading a Detective Story." For a more emotively-oriented example, consider Newcomb's account of Schumann's Second Symphony: the beginning of the last movement seems inappropriately frivolous after the sadness of the third movement, as though displaying a state of denial. (I admire Newcomb's account of the course of the last movement, moving toward acknowledgement of sadness; but I find that his account of the third movement is too undifferentiated, depicting the movement as though it continuously presents a single state of mind.)

[24]See Cone, "Schubert's Promissory Note"; Susan McClary, "Pitches, Expression, Ideology" (*Enclitic* 7/1 [1983]); J. K. Randall, "how music goes" (*Perspectives of New Music* 14/2, 15/1 [1976]); Patrick McCreless, "Roland Barthes's *S/Z* from a Musical Point of View" (where the lowered sixth and lowered third degrees function together); Marion Guck, "The Cognitive and the Contextual" (unpublished essay on methodological work of Babbitt and Boretz, with analysis of the slow movement of Mozart, Symphony No. 40). My analysis of the beginning of Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 95 is another example ("Music as Drama"). The treatment of the lowered sixth/raised fifth degree in the last movement of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony inspires Tovey to one of his wilder flights of narration, quoted below.

response.[25] It would be good to find further generalizations about patterns of thought in the construction of musical plots.

An account of instrumental music as a plotted succession of actions may be enough to be interesting; but is it enough to support a significant analogy between music and narrative? There is a potentially confusing ambiguity in the term "narrative" itself. The etymological associations of the word invoke narration and narrators, and one can use the term restrictively in order to retain this link: that is, one can insist that there is no narrative unless there is also narration and a narrator. In that sense, prose fiction is a form of narrative, and a stage-play, for all that it presents a story, is not.

But a broader usage is also current. A painting that depicts a moment in a recognizable story, for example, might be called a narrative painting, even though there is no obvious sense in which a narrator is involved. Barthes, in a long list of narrative genres, includes tragedy, comedy, painting, stained-glass window, cinema, and comic book, along with more straightforward instances of narration such as legend, fable, and epic.[26] In this broader sense, the term "narrative" signals little more than the relevance of a plot in various ways.

If the term "narrative" is ambiguous, then so are questions about the relation between music and narrative. It might be helpful to articulate a less ambiguous question.

Literary theorists have sometimes distinguished between story and discourse in narrative. The distinction, as Seymour Chatman

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[25]On concertos, see Tovey, "The Classical Concerto," in *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1935); McClary, "A Musical Dialectic from the Enlightenment: Mozart's Piano Concerto in G Major, K. 453, Movement 2" (*Cultural Critique* 4 [1986]); Joseph Kerman, "Musical Plots and Concerto Relationships" (forthcoming in *Representations*). Other examples: Webster's discussion of the outer parts at the opening of the *Tragic Overture*; Newcomb's account of two groups of motives in Schumann's Second Symphony; the beginning of Treitler's Mozart analysis; Jander's treatment of violin and piano parts in "The 'Kreutzer' Sonata as Dialogue" (*Early Music* 16/1 [1988]).

[26]"Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," 95.

puts it, is between what is told, and how it is told; or, one could say, between events and their descriptions or depictions.[27] In ordinary prose fiction, the discourse consists of fictitious verbal narration, while the story consists of certain events that, according to the fiction, occurred earlier than the narration. So perhaps one can preserve an important sense of the question of the relation between music and narrative, by asking whether a distinction between story and discourse is possible in music.

One argument might indicate that music has no use for the distinction. In a novel, the distinction between story and discourse is partly temporal: the discourse of a novel evokes a time in which the story is told, later than the time at which the events in the story took place. The difference is shown by the use of a past tense. But, as Abbate has argued, there is no clear sense in which music has a past tense.[28]

To evaluate tHe relevance of this point, one can consider a broadcaster describing, over the radio, events that are taking place; or the deliverances of a prophet. In both cases there is a distinction between the events of a story and the discourse that conveys them, but the discourse may not use the past tense at all, and in neither case do the events of the story precede the utterance of the discourse. The discourse of cinema, with its routine flashbacks and ellipses, provides a more complex example. Use of the past tense is a common, but dispensable, marker of the distinction between events and their descriptions or depictions.

But, more generally, the possibility of temporal differences between the events of a story and the discourse that reports them is an intriguing consequence of the distinction. Gérard Genette, in *Narrative Discourse*, identifies three ways that temporal properties of story and discourse may differ.[29] (1) Discourse may order events

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[27]*Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

[28]See "What the Sorcerer Said."

[29]*Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

differently from their order in the story. (2) Story and discourse may differ with regard to the frequency of an event; that is, an event that occurs once in the story may be mentioned repeatedly, or a type of event that occurs often in the story may be summarized in discourse by a single mention. (3) The duration of the discourse, or, in prose narrative, the implied time of reading, may differ from the time taken by the event in the story; relatedly, the temporal proportions within the descriptions or depictions may differ from those of the events.

These points about temporal relations suggest another descendant of the vaguer question about music and narrative. When music is regarded as a form of storytelling, does it display temporal discrepancies of the sort that Genette has described? Or does a piece simply *show* its story from beginning to end, with no temporal distortions, like a rather simple form of stage play?[30]

Before attempting to answer this question, one should benefit from a warning about the concepts of story and discourse. Barbara Herrnstein Smith has argued that the preoccupation of narrative theorists with temporal discrepancies and, more generally, with the distinction between story and discourse, reveals a naive adherence to dualistic, platonistic views.[31] Theories of narrative, on her view, have dealt with the level of story as though it is a deep structure or underlying reality, to be recovered from the surface or appearance

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[30]We are back to comparisons based on Structuralist literary theory, so it may be appropriate to repeat a point from earlier in the paper. Claims that two kinds of object are closely linked by virtue of a shared structure are risky: it is too easy to describe shared structures across many different domains. If one can describe patterns of temporal manipulation that are common to literary narrative and music, that need not, by itself, constitute a strong argument for a *special* affinity between music and narrative. See Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 48-49.

The argument of the following section is not the argument that Abbate criticizes. I address this question: given that some instrumental music can be heard as fictional behavior, actions and responses—in other words, as resembling drama or prose narrative—does the resemblance extend to types of temporal manipulation characteristic of some literary narrative?

[31]"Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," cited in note 2.

of the discourse. But no such object of study exists: there is no single determinate underlying story to be recovered from a text, no privileged mode of retelling that extracts essential properties from accidental ones, reality from appearance. Rather, retellings or paraphrases, to the extent that they differ from the actual discourse, are constructed by readers or hearers in the service of various interests they happen to have. Formulating a reliable-seeming, well-ordered, determinate story is one possible response to a literary text or other narration. But it might not always be a pertinent response, and no platonic story exists to serve as the goal of correct retrieval.

Smith's arguments are persuasive, and they have a straight-forward application to musical cases. One should not approach a composition with the goal of recovering the unique story that it really tells, under its potentially misleading discursive surface. The question is how a listener might want to respond to a piece: and, in particular, what could happen, in a piece of instrumental music, to encourage a listener to think in terms of a distinction between the discourse of the piece and the story that it tells?

The way to address this question is to consider various descriptions of music. One can start from the description of the Beethoven Rondo. It is in present tense, as though it records the observations of a listener who perceives actions as they take place. In general, when a listener regards instrumental music as a series of fictional actions, there is no definite sense of temporal disjunction between the time of the actions and the time of the listening. The listener's temporal relation to the actions approximates that of the audience at a stage play.[32] Nonetheless, musical temporality is not altogether simple.

In his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on "Sonata Forms," Tovey asks why classical sonatas consist of a series of movements, usually with no overt thematic links. His answer cites a discrepancy between the "time-scale" and the "emotional content" of the individual movements:

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[32]The point is from "Music as Drama."

> The individual movements, while complete as designs, raise emotional issues which each movement is unable to satisfy without the others. The first movement of Beethoven's not inaptly named *Appassionata* Sonata (op. 57) whirls us through an immense tragedy in eight minutes. The movement is irrevocably completed; but our emotional reactions have not more than begun. We need the unutterable calm of the slow movement with its theme rooted to the tonic chord, and its simple and solemn variations in the ancient form of *doubles*. A foreign chord replaces that of its cadence; the vision is broken and the finale rushes headlong to the end of a tragic fate. The whole emotional scheme is perfect; but for one movement to take up the themes of another would be to tell a twice-told tale.[33]

Strikingly, Tovey claims that the sonata consists of two tragedies and a vision. Each of the outer movements, at least, forms a complete story. There is no plot continuation from one movement to the next. The juxtaposition of the movements is not, itself, part of any story. It is a feature of the discourse, introduced in order to provide a satisfying experience for a listener. According to Tovey, then, breaks between movements can imply that a composition persists through a change of story. That is, there is a temporal continuity at the level of discourse but a temporal discontinuity at the level of story.

This first basis for a distinction between story and discourse leads naturally to the question of how to interpret breaks *within* a movement. A passage from Tovey's essay on Beethoven's Eighth Symphony implies an answer. This is his description of the end of the last movement:

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[33]*Musical Articles from the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 230.

The idea of Ex. 9 brings back the main theme. This reaches that C-sharp; and now it suddenly appears that Beethoven has held that note in reserve, wherewith to batter at the door of some immensely distant key. Out bursts the theme, then, in F-sharp minor. Can we ever find a way home again? Well, E-sharp (or F-natural) is the leading note of this new key, and upon E-sharp the trumpets pounce, and hammer away at it until they have thoroughly convinced the orchestra that they mean it for the tonic. When this is settled, in sails the radiant second subject again. Now Ganymede is all very well; but the original cup-bearer of the gods is Hephaestus, who is lame, and grimy with his metallurgy in the bowels of the earth. However, he will not be ousted; and so the basses sing the theme too. Straightway unquenchable laughter arises among the blessed gods as they look at him bestirring himself about the house. The laughter has all the vaults of heaven wherein to disperse itself, and to gather again into the last long series of joyous shouts. . . .[34]

This description tells two stories, a story about getting in and out of F-sharp minor followed by a story about Ganymede and Hephaestus. Each story, as Tovey tells it, is self-contained; the stories have no characters in common, and quite different issues arise in the two plots. Tovey has represented the break between two spans of the

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[34]*Essays in Musical Analysis*, Vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 67. Tovey's description raises interesting incidental issues that do not bear on the immediate point. The "laughter" and "joyous shouts" in this story recall "shouts of laughter" in Tovey's telling of the first movement; the repetition quietly asserts a link between the movements. The story of Hephaestus is adapted from the *Iliad*; Socrates cites the story in the *Republic* as an inappropriately frivolous depiction of the gods, the sort of writing that should not be permitted. (Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allen Bloom [New York: Basic Books, 1968], 66 [389a]) By using the story, Tovey sides with Homer against Socrates, and with Beethoven against those who found the Eighth Symphony trivial.

piece as a break between two distinct stories, just as he found two distinct tragic tales in the outer movements of the *Appassionata*.

This suggests a generalization. Points of disjunction within a movement may give the impression that successive events in the piece belong to different stories, rather than succeeding each other in a single plot; alternatively, disjunctions might suggest that succeeding events come from temporally non-continuous parts of the same story. Two kinds of cut can be distinguished: the kind just cited from Tovey, in which complete stories appear in succession, and another kind in which the cut actually interrupts a musical process. A striking example of the second sort occurs in the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 10, No. 1: the first group reaches a cadence, there is a brief pause, and then, with conspicuous textural discontinuity, a new phrase begins on the dominant of a new key; the harmony sounds like a continuation of previous music *in the new key*, as though that key had already been established. A somewhat subtler example appears in the Rondo of Mozart's Piano Quartet in G minor, K. 478. The registrally confined, rhythmically uniform, self-repeating, mostly diatonic material in mm. 16-22 sounds odd after the opening phrases, which are purposeful, registrally active, and fairly chromatic. Mm. 16-22 can easily be heard as a change of story; the return to opening material for a cadence, beginning in m. 22, can be heard as resuming the thread of the previous story after an interpolation.

A comment in Tovey's essay on the Brahms/Hölderlin *Schicksalslied* suggests another context in which a listener might make a distinction between story and discourse. The *Schicksalslied* sets a poem that contrasts the life of the blessed spirits with the predicament of mankind. The poem ends with a description of mankind hurled "year in, year out, down into the unknown."[35] While Hölderlin's conclusion seems pessimistic, Brahms continues his setting with an orchestral postlude, recapitulating music associat-

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[35]Tovey's translation; *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Vol. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 228.

ed with the blessed spirits. Tovey refers to objections that Brahms's setting goes "beyond the mandate of its text," but rejects the view:

> we are apt to forget or ignore the privilege of music to treat the time-direction in a way of its own, retracing the past and grasping the future without regard to the way in which human life is confined to one order of events. Brahms, the last great master of sonata forms, could not be expected to ignore that privilege. (227)

The discourse of a composition, in other words, sometimes returns to the same events, perhaps regarding them in a different light. As Tovey's reference to "sonata forms" indicates, he does not consider the *Schicksalslied* a special case.[36] Similarly, Cone suggests that "formal repetitions are often best interpreted as representations of events rehearsed in memory."[37] Cone, unlike Tovey, seems to introduce a subjective memory, a mind to contain the events of the piece. Tovey does not explicitly psychologize the succession. He mentions no agent that presents these temporally scrambled segments; obscurely, he assigns the privilege to music itself.[38]

Breaks and repetitions are, in a way, indifferent to the character of the events that they relate. Qualities ascribed to the particular events can provide another basis for distinguishing story and discourse: the gestural nature of the events can imply orderings that differ from the order in the piece. When a movement begins with a cadential gesture, for instance, one might regard it as the end

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[36]It is important to notice the generality, for the *Schicksalslied* may not be a particularly good instance of the general claim, and the general claim may be worth considering despite this fact. The immortality of the spirits, in their changeless realm, could easily suggest the repetition as a symbol of timelessness, rather than as two depictions of the same temporally located event.

[37]"Schubert's Promissory Note," 240.

[38]Incidentally, interpretation of repetition as return to a single event raises the possibility of an approach to rondo quite different from that in the analysis of the Beethoven Rondo above.

of a story; the piece might be heard, then, as reaching into the past to show the events that led up to that cadence. Instances are common. The opening of the first movement of Haydn's Quartet, Op. 76, No. 1 is particularly easy to hear in this way because of the treatment of texture: having begun abruptly with thick chords, the piece then shows how such a thick texture might have evolved. More complicated cases are possible, of course. Webster, discussing Brahms's *Tragic Overture*, suggests that a striking theme is " 'unreal,' both in its rhythmic calm and in its impossibly remote key (reckoned from the tonic)." He goes on to suggest that

> the second group which arises out of this transition therefore does not "depict" or "recount" the hero's adventures but rather, continuing a progression of mental states, represents his *memory of past action*.[39]

As in Cone's comment on repetitions, Webster psychologizes the temporal ordering by introducing a subject who recalls the past. Treitler writes similarly of the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 40:

> The last presentation [of the opening theme] is like a reflection or conversation about the theme in the upper strings. . . . It has the quality of a meditation on a remembered past, after the turmoil and before the silence. The presentation is indirect—more a telling about than a telling.[40]

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[39]"Brahms's *Tragic Overture*: The Form of Tragedy," 113-14.

[40]"Mozart and the Idea of Absolute Music," 187. Treitler explicitly presents the passage as an example of the distinction between story and discourse, or, as he puts it, the interplay between two intersecting patterns: the chronological sequence of the events' occurrence, and the order of their unfolding in the telling(186). However, after producing this example the essay promptly reinterprets the distinction between story and discourse in terms of the interplay between, on one hand, "underlying patterns of conventional genres and implicit constraints arising from the grammar of

In comparison to Webster, Treitler seems to retain a delicate ambiguity about the bearer of this memory; even the number of "rememberers" remains obscure, since the same event may be a "reflection," a "meditation," or a "conversation."

A well-known analysis by Jonathan Kramer describes the first movement of Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 135, in terms of these elements of disjunction, repetition, and order-implications of events.[41] In fact, Kramer's analysis is easily recast in terms of story and discourse.

Kramer distinguishes between "gestural-time" and "piece-time." Gestural-time is a product of "out-of-context functionality," the capacity of musical gestures to imply a certain function when considered out of context; cadential quality is a simple example. Piece-time is a matter of the order in which events actually occur in a composition. Kramer suggests that the gestural quality of passages in the quartet movement implies an order different from that in which they actually occur; in other words, orderings in gestural-time and in piece-time are not the same. Further, Kramer notes that the same conclusive cadential gesture appears three times in the movement; as he puts it,

> the movement ends three times, each time utilizing the same gesture to cadence. . . . These three moments do not so much seem to refer to or repeat one another as they seem to be exactly the same moment in gestural-time, experienced thrice.[42]

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style," on the other hand, the actual unfolding of events in the individual piece. This latter concern resembles Newcomb's attention to formal types (though Treitler also distances himself from overly schematic approaches to form), but it seems only loosely related to the narrative theorist's distinction between story and discourse.

[41]The analysis appears in "Multiple and Non-Linear Time in Beethoven's Opus 135" (*Perspectives of New Music* 11 [1973]), and, with revisions, in Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1988), 150-61.

[42]"Multiple and Non-Linear Time," 125; cf. *The Time of Music*, 152.

Again, the repetition is construed as a return, at the level of discourse, to the same part of a story. Kramer's gestural-time, the order that can be reconstructed from the qualities of musical actions, amounts to ordering in a story; piece-time is ordering in the discourse that presents those events.

In terms of Genette's three forms of temporal discrepancy between story and discourse, analogs for differences in order and frequency have emerged; the issue of duration remains.

According to Tovey, the first movement of the *Appassionata* "whirls us through an immense tragedy in eight minutes." Part of the point of the formulation is the discrepancy between the brevity of the movement and the immensity of the tragedy. The description implies a contrast between the pacing of a musical tragedy and of a tragic stage-play, and perhaps also a contrast between the time the movement takes and the time that would be taken by any comparably tragic events in real life.

What remains unclear is whether Tovey's remark implies that the same events could have been presented less rapidly—whether, on his view, Beethoven has condensed an immense span of time into a few minutes, or whether, on the contrary, the tragic events of the story simply take eight minutes to occur.

Similarly, Newcomb has recently described the first movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony as a narrative of "growth through to young adulthood" and "the inevitable loss of gentle innocence and openness to love and the learning of self-protective strategies."[43] That is not a short movement, but an adolescence takes much longer; more explicitly than Tovey, Newcomb implies that the movement is a condensed evocation of a much longer process.

Perhaps these issues arise because a musical process can invite comparison with successions of far greater duration, while not representing those successions. Tovey's formulation, then, could be read as appropriately poised between two ways of understanding

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[43]"Narrative Strategies in Nineteenth-Century Instrumental Music" (presented at "Music and the Verbal Arts: Interactions," Dartmouth, May 1988; forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference), 8.

musical stories. On one hand, the brevity of the musical discourse invites a sense that some more extended succession has been condensed; on the other hand, it is usually hard to imagine, without invoking the banal concreteness of a literary program, what the more extended sequence of events would have been.

A remarkable passage in Schenker's *Harmony* addresses a similar issue. Emphasizing the importance of repetition in musical coherence, Schenker compares motives to characters in a drama, living through various situations:

> These destinies, in drama as well as in music, are, so to
> speak, quantitatively reduced and stylized according to
> the law of abbreviation. Thus it would be of no interest
> at all to see Wallenstein having lunch on the stage
> regularly during the whole process of dramatic develop-
> ment. For everyone knows anyhow that he must have
> lunched daily; and the poet could therefore omit the
> dramatic presentation of these quite unessential lunches
> in order to concentrate the drama on the essential
> moments of his hero's life. In an analogous way the
> composer applies the law of abbreviation to the destiny
> of his motive, the hero of his drama. From the infinity
> of situations into which his motive could conceivably fall,
> he must choose only a few.[44]

Schenker's analogy is curiously imprecise. It is easy to retrieve a sensible musical point: a composer may be aware of many contexts that could be composed for a given motive, but must select only the most revealing for the composition. An exact theatrical analogy is available: a playwright will be aware of many possible situations for the characters, but must select only the most revealing for the play. But the playwright in Schenker's analogy, rather than choosing among imaginary situations, takes an extended sequence of historical events and omits some of them. Quite unnecessarily, the analogy

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[44]*Harmony*, trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), 13.

goes beyond what the ostensible musical point requires. One can read this imprecision as registering Schenker's simultaneous attraction and resistance to the idea that a concise musical succession results from the abbreviation of a longer, more diffuse succession.

Relations of duration between musical discourse and musical stories are ambiguous. When a musical succession invites comparison with a type of non-musical succession that typically lasts much longer, there is a sense of condensation, but it is less vivid or determinate than similar phenomena in prose fiction. But the same can be said of all the categories of temporal discrepancy that have been mentioned. While movements of a multi-movement piece might be heard as separate stories, one might still, sometimes at least, try to integrate them into a single plot. Juxtapositions of self-contained units could create a continuous, episodic plot rather than a change of story. Abrupt shifts of material might indicate cuts between stories or parts of a story; but they could simply constitute strange, surprising events or actions within a continuing story. Repetitions can be regarded as different actions, closely resembling each other, rather than discursive presentations of a single event. A listener is never forced to make a distinction between story and discourse; the examples cited above illustrate contexts where a listener *might* do so. The application of the distinction between story and discourse to music is indeterminate. And, as with the indeterminacy of musical agency, a listener can experience the play of different interpretations within a single hearing.

The indeterminacy has direct consequences for the question of whether music has anything analogous to a narrator. In raising this issue one returns, finally, to the question about the relation of music and narrative in its most etymologically sensitive form.

To the extent that musical surfaces are understood as discourse, as successions of stories or as reordered, repetitious, or condensed representations of the events of a story, there will presumably be some sense of an agency that performs the actions of selecting, reordering, repeating, and condensing, in a time that is distinct from that of the story. But this agency has a strange

impersonality, akin to the silent, invisible intelligence that guides the montage of a film rather than a vividly dramatized speaker like Huck Finn or a moralizing commentator like George Eliot.[45] And this sense of a "narrating" (or "depicting," or "remembering") agent is no more determinate than the distinctions of story and discourse that a listener may introduce in listening to a piece. Musical narrators are the shadows that are cast when a listener plays with the distinction between story and discourse. And there is always the possibility of understanding the music on the model of drama, as the sequential presentation of a world in which the events of the story are perceived directly: in which case, there may be no sense of a narrator at all.[46]

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[45]To the extent that literary narrative depends on a relatively vivid sense of a narrating agent and his or her distance from the events narrated, this impersonality constitutes an important failure of analogy between instrumental music and literary narrative. For related arguments, see Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, and Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*, Chapter 6. However, narrators in literature can also be impersonal, virtually voiceless.

[46]One further twist: even if the distinctions of story and discourse that may create a sense of a discursive agency were more determinate than they are, one would still face puzzles about the reidentification of musical narrators at different times in a piece.